

“Without Understanding”

by Wayne Goff

In the list of vile sins committed by the “*debased mind*” that has rejected the knowledge of God is the word translated “*without understanding*” [KJV] or “*undiscerning*” [NKJV]. The Greek word means *literally* “not knowing.” It appears five times in the New Testament, twice in Romans 1. Let’s take a look at this word in the New Testament.

Romans 1:21, 31

Those who *purposefully* reject the knowledge of God in their minds must look elsewhere for their world view and values. There is a hodgepodge of choices and none of them make sense. Man may choose to *deify himself* and choose religions like humanism, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc. Man may choose to *simply deny God* and thus have atheism, evolution, and the acceptance of “eternal matter” as his belief. In other words, a *purposeless universe and existence*. Others have deified the *creature* rather than the Creator and worship *animate or inanimate objects*. Thus their religion is a *substitute worship*, but worship nonetheless. Now add **anything** else to the list and see if it makes sense.

This is exactly what God is telling us through the apostle Paul: rejecting God’s existence and purpose in life, man “*became futile in (his) thoughts, and (his) foolish heart (was) darkened*” (v. 21). The word “*foolish*” here is the same Greek word translated “*undiscerning*” (v. 31). Mr. Thayer explains that “*... a wicked man has no mind for the things which make for salvation: Rom. 1:31.*” In the Hebrew Old Testament, this man is called “ungodly.”

Adam Clarke said of this foolish thinking and vain reasoning: “This certainly refers to the foolish manner in which even the wisest of their philosophers discoursed about the Divine nature, not excepting Socrates, Plato, or Seneca. Who can read their works without being struck with the vanity of their reasonings, as well as with the stupidity of their nonsense, when speaking about God? I might crowd my page with proofs of this; but it is not necessary to those who are acquainted with their writings, and to others it would not be useful. In short, their foolish, darkened minds sought God no where but in the place in which he is never to be found; viz. the vile, corrupted, and corrupting passions of their own hearts. As they did not discover him there, they scarcely sought him any where else.” [Clarke’s Commentary, vol. VI:p. 43]. One should beware of putting God out of his mind. It has dire, sordid consequences.

Romans 10:19

“*But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: ‘I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation.’*”

In this passage Moses and Paul are referring to the Gentiles as “*a foolish nation.*” In the context, they are referring to that state of idolatry and ignorance described in Romans 1. Ironically, the idolatrous Gentile people would turn to the Gospel and provoke the Jewish people to jealousy! But so long as Gentiles remained in idolatrous ignorance they would be considered “*foolish*” and “*without understanding.*”

Matthew 15:16; Mark 7:18

Jesus rebuked His disciples for being “*without understanding*” when Peter asked the Lord to explain the simple parable of verse 11 “*Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.*” Food that goes into the stomach and is then eliminated is not nearly as harmful as things that proceed out of the mouth, from the heart. Evil thoughts are more dangerous than fatty foods (vv. 15-19)! For Jews who practiced religious dietary regulations, this was something of a new idea. In fact, Peter had a vision in Acts 10 based upon similar ideas to help him understand that Gentiles were now accepted by God through the Gospel!

This instance of being “*undiscerning*” would be cured as the disciples learned more of these spiritual truths. You and I should never be without understanding as a result of a lack of effort! Spiritually, what you **don’t know** can hurt you!

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