

Romans #17
Mind Boggling
Romans 8:513

I have given tonight's study a simple title "**Mind Boggling**" because that is what the Gospel is to a lost and dying world.

Arguments and discussions are raging from the White House to the jailhouse on such topics as *Same Sex Marriage, abortion, the death penalty, etc.* And somewhere in the mix of each of these arguments the Bible is going to be mentioned as the bases of their stand. The problem is the lost world will never be able to understand biblical and/or spiritual truths.

In Romans 8:5 simply says, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." Paul put that same truth this way in I Corinthians 2:14 reminds us of this truth, "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

If we are not careful, we are going to allow unconverted human minds to redefine the New Testament Church that God established. If the natural mind does not comprehend the things of the Spirit of God, and the things of the Spirit include divine understanding of God's Word, why is the Church entering into this fruitless biblical debate with unbelievers? Most importantly, why are we backing down from God's Word? The Church must come to grips with the reality that the world will never accept us. We are a mystery!

There are two truths that we as the Church must understand. *First*, we need to continue preaching the Gospel without apology and without shame, and if unbelievers reject Jesus Christ and call us crazy, then so be it. *Second*, we need to face the fact that the epistles were not written to the unbeliever, but to the believer. Marriage as defined between a man and a woman, the Sanctity of life, and the definition of adultery is not a concept the worldly mind can grasp. Unbelievers are supposed to think these teachings are ridiculous! Why? They have no spiritual capacity to receive them, and Paul reminds us these truths are "foolishness" to them.

Listen, the Bible was written specifically to us, this new, unique mystery called the Church. We are the ones who are filled with *God's Spirit*, the Teacher who gives *illumination*, *divine empowerment*, and *comfort*. With the Holy Spirit living inside us, we are alive to God, have the spiritual capacity to comprehend biblical truth; and thus possess the grace to obey God's Word. It takes the Holy Spirit in us to be able to live the life of a worshipper of Jesus Christ. Paul understood this.

In Ephesians 3:36 Paul makes this statement concerning spiritual revelation, "How that by revelation (God) made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote before in few words, whereby, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel."

Paul says that he has received something "by revelation." The Greek word translated "revelation" means "an unveiling, a revealing." The Greek word translated "mystery" means literally means "something we cannot possibly *know*"

without God telling us, something we cannot possibly see without God showing, us."

In other words, Paul received the revelation of the mystery directly from God and relates that revelation to us in his New Testament epistles, but we must then open our hearts in faith toward God and receive His Word directly from Him just like Paul did. It is only by divine revelation that all God has for us is made known to us.

The very creation of the Church and workmanship of God in the Church baffles the natural mind. How can anyone be born again? How can a believer be totally transformed by the renewing of their mind to God's Word, then be conformed into the image of Christ Jesus? **We cannot fathom the mystery of godliness and holiness and perfection in Christ without operating from our spirit.** We must forsake the vain philosophy of our natural mind and trust fully the revelation flowing from the mind of Christ within us.

A mystery is also something that, on the surface, is not only baffling, but which may appear to be ridiculously confusing. The entire concept of the Church is beyond the comprehension of the unbeliever. Unbelievers cannot begin to understand how God could create the Church, and to do so through crucifixion on a Roman cross and resurrection from a Jewish tomb.

And talk about ridiculous, from the Jewish perspective, just what would you think if one of your distant cousins stood up in the synagogue one day and declared that he was the Messiah. Worse yet, later he taught that he would die, and like a seed planted in the ground, rise again bringing a mighty harvest with him? You would say just what they did, "Isn't this Jesus, the carpenter's son? What is he thinking?" **The Jews were not waiting for a Messiah who would be born in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes.** They certainly were *not* looking for someone who came out of Nazareth, the town where Jesus was raised. (They didn't remember that he was born in Bethlehem in accordance with Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah.)

The Jews of that time were expecting a noble king to come riding on a white horse and secure their independence from Roman rule. But this Jesus of Nazareth "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" was an embarrassment to the Jews, who saw Him as a rabblrouser and troublemaker. He could bring great harm to them by aggravating Rome. **If He did not have the supernatural power to defeat Rome, He should just be quiet and stop agitating everyone.** Nothing Jesus did made sense to them, and yet He was amassing an incredibly large following. Finally, the only thing that made sense to them was to cry, "Crucify Him. Get Him out of the way!"

Saul of Tarsus was one of those who held this opinion. He had actually been one of the leaders who believed that all Christians should be eliminated. Acts 7:5860 tells us that he held the coats of those who stoned Stephen. And now here we are reading the Apostle Paul's letter to the Gentile Romans and Ephesians, declaring the very thing he had once considered being not only ridiculous but also dangerous!

What made the difference in Paul's life? Revelation. On the road to Damascus, his natural eyes were blinded while his spiritual eyes were opened. Paul's spirit had been illuminated by the truth concerning the grace of God, and this *revelation* caused a complete conversion in his life.

Can you imagine God whispering in your ear the meaning of a mystery, and then when you proclaim that meaning, everybody thinks you're crazy? That's the situation in which Paul found himself. People generally thought he had lost his mind when it came to talking about a crucified Messiah and a resurrected Lord. **In addition to that, the people who knew Jesus best the Apostles also questioned Paul because of his past.** As a result, Paul was often an isolated and controversial figure in the early Church. He was called by God to preach something for which he had very little Old Testament validation. Because the Church was a mystery from ages past, God had only hinted about its existence in the Old Testament.

Let's look at some of the mind-boggling aspects of the mystery of the Church, which Paul brought to us by way of revelation from the Holy Spirit. The life of Jesus Christ Himself was a mystery hid in God, and something our natural mind cannot comprehend. How can a young virgin girl conceive and bear a child and still be a virgin? **How can the death of one man qualify to pay for the sins of the entire human race?** How can someone die, be buried, and then come back to life in an immortal, corporeal body? Who is this resurrected Lord who takes the time to remove His grave clothes and leave them neatly folded in the tomb?

So here was Paul, sent to the Gentiles to preach something no one had ever heard before - including the Jews. To make matters worse, there was very little Old Testament Scripture to confirm what he was teaching. Yet there can be no doubt that Paul understood and skillfully and powerfully delivered the message of the mystery, the revelation of the Church, the body of Jesus Christ. **And how did he do that?**

Ephesians 3:7-8 says, "I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." **Paul received the revelation of the mystery from God and delivered that message to the Gentiles the same way he received salvation: by grace, through faith.** His faith and trust in God opened his heart to receive the vision of this unique new entity called the *Church*. Then, filled with a passion to see this glorious Church raised up, he marched out to proclaim it to the world and become one of God's master carpenters. In verse 7, Paul is referring distinctly to the moment when he was saved on the road to Damascus when he says; "I became a minister... by the effective working of his power." It was the grace of God that *saved* him, it was the grace of God that gave *called* him, and it was the grace of God that *enabled* him to fulfill his calling.

Then Paul continues by calling himself "the least of all saints." He is saying, "Yes, I have been given this awesome responsibility to bring the revelation of the mystery, the understanding, of who and what the Church is, to you Gentiles. But just in case you start thinking I'm so much smarter and greater than you are, I want you to know that I received this call and this revelation the same way you did: by grace, through faith. And the supernatural power that is working in me is also in you."

In 1 Corinthians 15:9 he says, "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." He follows with this statement in I Timothy 1:15, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."

Paul's attitude of humility was the key to his receiving the revelation of the Church. His very life illustrated the essence of the message he carried: the grace of God was so limitless that He offered salvation even to His worst enemy, Saul of Tarsus. **The Christian *killer* became a Christian *preacher*.**

Ephesians 3:5-6 says, "Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." Paul said it this way in Romans 8:16-17, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ..."

Few of us today can begin to comprehend the intense hatred that the Jews had for Gentiles in the time of Paul. If a Gentile sat at the table with a Jew, the Jew would break his plate, get up, and leave. **Even the idea of breaking bread with a Gentile was mindboggling to a Jew.** **So intense was the dividing line between Jew and Gentile, we witnessed Jesus' refusal at first to even speak with the Syrophenician woman in Mark 7:24-30.** Yet now Paul is asking Jews and Gentiles to sit down at the same communion table and to partake of the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ. **Can you see the incredible act of humility it took for Paul to carry out his calling?**

It is little wonder the Jews in Paul's time didn't know what to think. God had broken all protocol in saving the Gentiles. He had broken the generationsold "**religious etiquette**" in calling for these formerly heathen believers to be filled with His Holy Spirit. **A humbling message, to be sure, for a Jew with the heritage and background of Saul of Tarsus!** **But Paul the apostle realized that he was one of the Master's servants going into the highways and byways, compelling guests to come to the table and share in communion with the Lord and with one another.** He knew the Gentiles, who once would never have been allowed near the holy things of Israel, were now being invited by the Holy One of Israel to have intimate fellowship with Him.

Delivering the mystery of the Church was a monumental responsibility, a mind-boggling and an allconsuming task. We are a spiritual body born from God through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. **We are the coming together of Gentile and Jew, bond and free, male and female.** **We are citizens of heaven who operate on earth according to our spiritual position, transcending and overcoming our natural conditions.** We are a holy nation, a peculiar people, set apart exclusively for God's use.