

Why Many Do Not Understand

God Must Open the Mind

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I am going to talk about words at the beginning of this sermon. As I give you the definitions, I want you to think of what the words might be. Sorry to all of you who do not like stock-car terminology and examples, but here is the first one:

1) Refers to the relationship from corner to corner of the weight of the race vehicle. Increasing the weight on any corner of the vehicle affects the weight of the other three corners in direct proportion. Weight adjustments are made by turning weight jacking screws mounted on each corner with a ratchet. Typical adjustments for a loose car would be to increase the weight of the left rear corner of the vehicle which decreases the weight of the left front, and right rear corners, and increases the weight on the right front corner. A typical adjustment for a tight vehicle would be to increase the weight of the right rear corner, which decreases the weight of the right front, and left rear, increasing the weight of the left front.

For most of you it went right over your heads. If you are a real stock-car enthusiast you would have known that this is the explanation for the term "wedge." It is just like putting a wedge under your desk or something. However, those who are absolutely ignorant, or who do not care a whit about such things, or are mechanically challenged and disinclined, probably had no idea what I was describing. And that is fine. You do not have to know those things.

This ignorance of very specialized material actually happens a great deal of the time in our world. We live in a world where knowledge is increasing by leaps and bounds, doubling about every year. And because of this increasing knowledge people have to be very specialized in what they learn and what they know as well as they can.

Let us try another one. I will leave stock-car racing and go to another field.

2) A network constructed by using public wires to connect nodes. For example, there are a number of systems that enable you to create networks using the internet as the medium for transporting data. These systems use encryption and other security mechanisms to insure that only authorized users can access the network, and that the data cannot be intercepted.

For those of you who consider yourself somewhat computer geeks, you know what this means. This is what is called a "virtual private network," or "VPN."

Unless one is schooled in the various acronyms and specialized lingo of the internet world or computing (not to mention educated in how all of it works together), this sort of thing, like the stock-car example, goes right over your head. "It is all 'geek' to me!" I like to say.

One last example before I bore you to sleep.

3) This organic substance is made by fusing myeloma cancer cells (which multiply very fast) with antibody producing cells, and then spreading the resulting conjugate colony so thinly that each cell can be grown into its own separate colony (cloning). In this way one gets whole batches of the same antibody which are all specific to the same antigen.

Those of you who love medical science and biotechnology would know this as "monoclonal antibodies."

Biotechnology is another growing field of knowledge in our world. Most of us have no clue as to what it all means beyond simple things that maybe we can gather from the news or by watching a television program. We know terms like cloning, antibodies, stem cell, DNA; but, beyond that, if we were put on the spot we would probably be hard pressed to explain even these terms beyond their simplest means—or only vaguely.

This exercise has had a purpose. Few of us know these terms because we have not been initiated or educated into their mysteries, as it were. We have not been instructed in them, and most of us have no interest in them either. We have not been inspired by a person or some experience to actually go into those areas and search them out. We have not been inspired in any way to commit these terms into memory and make use of them in our lives like a career.

Thus, most of us are not NASCAR crew chiefs. We do have some computer professionals, but very few. And, we have very few biotechnologists among us. It is simply because we are either not inspired, educated, or do not care about these things. But we are true Christians. I emphasize "true" because we know and practice the truth that is revealed to us by Jesus Christ, and it is built upon the foundation of the apostles

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and the prophets, as it says in Ephesians 2:20.

Truth is available in the pages of the Bible. It has been there for over 1900 years. It has been there in various languages, and has been translated into hundreds, if not thousands, of them, and is readily available cheaply for all. All it takes is the ability to read. Even then you do not necessarily need to read because you can have it read to you (books on tape or CD for your car, or a few clicks on your computer and listen from the internet), or you can have it preached to you (live sermons, Bible studies). It is not difficult to read or hear the Word of God in this day and age.

Many have studied into it. Millions claim to know the Word of God. Most of those millions have read the Bible from cover to cover. Many of them take devotionals every day. Many of them (i.e. Catholics) attend Mass every day. Many of them tune into religious radio which is available in most every market in the United States where you can hear the Word of God preached. It is out there. It is not hidden.

But, so few really understand it and most, actually, not only do not but cannot understand it. That is the startling statement. Why? Why do the finest minds in this world, many who would consider themselves to be Christian, not understand the simple truths of God's Word? Why do they fail to grasp how the words of God go together to form the gospel of the Kingdom of God? What keeps people from understanding the truth?

Obviously, my introductory examples fall short. They fail because they reflect physical facts, truths, and things that you could prove by experiment. You can take a car out on the racetrack and start messing with the wedge; and you could figure out how to tighten a car or loosen a car to win the race. It is rather scientific—so many pounds of pressure on one rear wheel will make a difference.

You can do the same thing with putting together a virtual private network with a bit of education, a bit of money and resources, and set one up and see it work. You can do the same thing with an education in biotechnology—get your biology degree, and start working for a firm. Then begin to put together monoclonal antibodies so that you might be able to start a field test that doctors and missionaries could take into the wilds and be able to identify whether a certain disease is present or not. This procedure is used this way (in some cases) to produce test kits to identify certain things. It will react in one certain way, and that is what monoclonal antibodies do. They look for one specific illness. So we can do that with these things.

But the Word of God is far different. Some of it can be proved by living it. But other parts

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of it are not quite so scientifically provable. There is an element of faith involved. Biblical truth is spiritual. This explains, in large part, why so many people do not understand it. But this is only the beginning of it.

One cannot learn true Christianity simply through study because most people lack the vital component that opens up understanding. If it were like mechanics, computer science, or biology, there would be billions in the church of God. If you were able to go out and say, "Look! Here is God's Word. I want you sit here and study it for a year. I want you to do this experiment like this..." everybody, if it were possible, would at the end of that year be baptized and converted.

But it is not as simple as that. It cannot be. We have proof that there are not billions in God's true church. As a matter of fact a simple look at Revelation 14 shows us that God Himself says that the first resurrection will contain only 144,000. Those are the ones who have made themselves pure—they are virgins before God. And that is it. Billions of people living on this earth throughout the history of mankind, and only 144,000 will God have to show for it. This is not saying anything against God, obviously, because He planned it this way.

If we know this, it is clear. If we know that there are only going to be 144,000 in the first resurrection, it is plain that, at the root, spiritual understanding is not a matter of human intellect. If it were a matter of human intellect people would be converted right and left. People are smart. God made man to be intelligent. Sometimes it is shown in different ways. But, the vast majority over time has the intellect to be saved.

There is something else. There must be a logical spiritual reason why many do not understand it. Let us begin in the Bible in Matthew 11 and we will read Christ's own words directly. This is just after He had upbraided Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum for not changing when they saw what was done in them.

Matthew 11:25-26 At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.

That there is the reason! God has deliberately hidden these things. He is talking about the truth that Jesus was preaching, the truth about God's way of life. The wise of this world, the prudent, the powerful, have been set aside for now. The truth has been put off limits to them.

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In His day the learned Pharisees, scribes, members of the Sanhedrin, the lawyers, Sadducees, and the priestly classes—they were all the wise and prudent among society at that time. Yet, how many times do we come across places in the gospels where He is actually arguing with them? They are baiting Him with questions. They are trying to test Him. They are trying to get Him to admit sin. They are trying to get Him to *commit* sin! They were hostile to Him.

It was the simple people of the time, the ones He calls here, "babes," who did not have stature in society who followed Him. They took what He said to heart, and saw a great hope in it. And so, it seemed good to the Father to do this.

Today it is the same thing with the intellectuals, the politicians, the captains of industry, the heads of think-tanks, the powerful, and even theologians with "alphabet soup" degrees after their names, who have studied not only history, but languages and even the Bible. They cannot understand either.

Yet Joe Schmoe from Kokomo is chosen by God and He gives him advanced knowledge of the truth which would astound the theologian if he knew it. There is something about the way that God works that makes this possible. A simple person of average intellect could know something and understand it better than the most learned theologians.

The following is a section on eight parables of Jesus in two different locations, one to the multitudes, and the other to His disciples alone. They are put together in one place by Matthew for a specific reason. And after the first parable, before the second, they ask Him a question,

Matthew 13:10-11 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

It has been withheld.

Matthew 13:12 "For whoever has, to him more will be given, ...

That is encouraging, too, since God has chosen to give things to us, and He says that He is going to continue to give to us more and more.

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Matthew 13:12 ...and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

You can understand this in terms of people who perhaps have a glimmer of what it is, but they do not respond to it, and then it is gone. Even what they have will be taken away.

Matthew 13:13-15 "Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with *their* eyes and hear with *their* ears, Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.'

This is the specific prophecy aimed at Israel. And we see what happened if we would go into the epistles of Paul where he explains what has happened to Israel at this time. They have been hardened for now, saved for a later time in the future.

Matthew 13:16-17 "But blessed *are* your [His disciples] eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; "for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous *men* desired to see what you see, and did not see *it*, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear *it*.

In this case they were just born too soon. His own prophets and righteous men had inklings of things to come and they desired to see it, but God withheld it from them until the coming of His Son.

And so He is saying that since Jesus has come, and Jesus has preached these things, and explained these things to us, we know far more than even the prophets and righteous men of Old Testament times. Jesus has put all the truth in context, and given us a great hope, and opened up understanding that was beyond them. Remember He told Daniel, "Shut up the words, and seal them, until the time of the end." It was not going to be revealed what He meant until the time of the end.

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And so, we have a great blessing because God has chosen to give us, as he says here, to "know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." It was a choice made by God the Father to open up our minds, specifically; and He gave it as a gift to us. But to others, as He says in Matthew 10, He has deliberately hidden it for His own purposes.

Even here in this particular chapter we can understand how this works. Parables are only clarified and plain to those who understand the symbols and the truths of the Kingdom of God. Otherwise, they actually work to obscure the truth to those who are not being called at this time.

It keeps them in the dark. As He says here, they are purposely kept in the dark for a reason. They are kept in reserve for a better time when they will understand. It has not been done spitefully on God's part, but in love so that they will ultimately be saved.

We have already come across, just in these two sections, two key principles. The first was found in Matthew 11 where Jesus said that God reveals His truth to whom He wishes, with special emphasis on the word "reveals." Thus, the revelation of truth is highly selective on God's part. He does not open it up to the whole world. He does make available His Word to the whole world, but He does not open up the *understanding* of it to the whole world. He is highly selective about whom He chooses to reveal the truth to.

It is a matter of disclosing understanding in a miraculous way. The knowledge is there. Anybody can go into the Bible and peruse every paragraph, every sentence, and even every word if they want to. And some have done this and have produced extraordinary works. But, there is something missing in them. They may be able to get the details out of a portion of scripture that none of us would be able to dig out.

But, when it comes to putting it all together, they miss the mark. Remember the old saying, "You cannot see the forest for the trees." There is a certain amount of understanding that God withholds. It is amazing that He chose us, to open our minds, and to give us the keys that allow us to see it all. He is very clear in His Word that this is what He does. John 6:44 says that God has to choose us, and draw us to Christ. It is to those people that He gives this knowledge by revealing certain things to them.

Now the second thing that we learned is from Matthew 13. Jesus admits that His teaching contains mysteries, that is, His teaching contains special knowledge given to only those who are the called. Now these mysteries are written plainly in God's Word. But, without God's interventions they cannot be put together properly. Obviously there is some overlap between these two points. Let us use the parables again.

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The parables seem to be simple stories that teach various spiritual truths. And that is how most people approach them. In fact, most folks approach them separately. They will take this parable and explain it. And then they will go to another and explain that. But, they miss how the two parables go together. That is especially clear here in Matthew 13.

These parables are all on one subject (Matthew 13). It says specifically that these parables are about the Kingdom of Heaven. Most people take these parables and apply them physically. But they miss the spiritual component. Or they might miss how they help them toward the Kingdom of God. Or they miss the prophetic angles that are there in them. Or they miss how they fit into the whole organization of the entire book or chapter.

I personally did a series of sermons on the parables of Matthew 13 in 1997 [see tape Numbers 302, 307, and 309] where I showed that they are in a certain order, put together in a certain way, to bring out certain truths to help us through this time right now to reach the Kingdom of God so that we will not be dismayed when certain things happen within the church of God.

For instance the one that got people quite upset at the time was the parable of the mustard seed. I explained that in a way that people rejected at first because they did not understand that God's symbols are consistent. And when God says something like the mustard growing into a tree, He was telling us that something had gone wrong.

Mustard does not grow into trees. Mustard is a green herb related to cabbage and broccoli, whose seeds can also be ground into a condiment. If it grows into a tree and the birds of the air (another consistent symbol in God's Word) can lodge in those branches, then God is telling us that something has gone wrong.

Birds of the air throughout this whole chapter are demons. If the church, which starts out as a small mustard seed, becomes a tree and allows demons to nest in its branches, something has gone wrong in the church of God. We are supposed to take heart that this is all part of God's plan. He allowed it to happen that way. This is an outgrowth of that type of situation. Human nature will cause an organization to grow corrupt over time.

The same thing with the parable of the leaven. Where in the Bible would leaven be considered a good thing? Nowhere. And so, it is not a good thing in Matthew 13 either. God is consistent.

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God says that there is a woman out there who has infused the church of God with leaven. And it is affecting our service to each other. That is what the three measures of meal represent. This is the meal offering. And it is very sad here in verse 33—"until all was leavened."

What we have here is revelation from God about His church, and how sin still lives in it, and how we have to be wary and be aware. We have to be watching for these things so that they do not occur to us, or around us, as much as we can help it.

Of course, later on, He gives more encouraging parables in this chapter about how much God gave up for us, about how much He was willing to do so that we would be His treasure, and that He would sell everything in order to buy us. It is not all bad things. There is good news too.

Getting back to my thought after going through all that digression, these things are not understandable to the average person. They do not make sense to them when put into those contexts, because they have not been given the keys to open up their understanding. So there are mysteries. You cannot understand them until God opens up your mind and reveals the answers. Usually it takes time. It is not something that God does as soon as you are baptized and makes you to understand everything. It is something that is revealed throughout one's conversion.

Now, just think about this: Is there any doubt that God has withheld vital information or has hidden the keys of understanding to all those pointy heads out there who are currently drooling over the gospel of Judas?

These are people who have, for years, studied the Bible, studied Christian history, and done all kinds of research in these fields, and then somebody translates the "gospel of Judas," and suddenly this is a huge revelation? And, they accept this as a valid second century expression of Christianity? This is so ridiculous.

Here is a "gospel" (It is not good news.) which purports that Judas was the most favored disciple, the one to whom Jesus gave certain secret information to and whom Jesus chose and asked to betray Him because it was an honor to do so because he was the one with the spiritual wherewithal to do this great act.

Now, do any of these things square with the four gospels received by the church of God as authoritative? No!

In every one of those four gospels, Judas is the one *who does not understand* even the

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first things. He is not keeping up with the rest of the disciples. He is a thief, stealing from the money bag of the group. And, he just does not understand at all what it was that Mary did to Jesus when she anointed Him for his burial. He thinks that the perfumed oil should have been sold and the money given to the poor (actually traveling through his money bag so he could pocket some of it).

He was the one who made a deal with the Jews to betray Him. He received the 30 pieces of silver. He is the one who betrayed Him with a kiss. He is the one who became remorseful, threw the money down, and hung himself. Are any of these things good things? Are these the acts of a righteous man? Judas is shown to be a thoroughly carnal man in the four gospels. But, in the "gospel of Judas," he is the hero!

Has God withheld vital understanding from these biblical scholars? Most certainly He has. Their minds and understanding have been darkened due to their intrinsic hostility to God (Romans 8:7).

The same could be said for the "Da Vinci Code" and those folks going nuts over it. The same could be said for those out there who enjoy biblical archeology. But the big thing, these days, is minimalism. They minimize what happened in the Bible and maximize what they dig up and their interpretations thereof.

So the Bible, if anything, is only a crude guide to history. Maybe—according to some of these people—some of these finds can verify the biblical text, but you should never use the Bible at all. It is as (Oh, how do they put it?) these were texts written with a specific political purpose and not to be trusted, because either the Levites did it in order to gain political power or the kings did it in order to keep their power, or what-have-you. They are treating the way of things today back upon those more ancient times.

It is very clear that once you read these things or see them on the news that God has certainly withheld certain vital information from these people. Otherwise, they would be putting things together differently. We can see that in Romans 1:18-25. My dad went over this a few weeks back, and obviously what I have been saying has overlapped what he had said.

I felt inspired to continue with this subject for a number of reasons. I hope that it is helping you. I hope I can, in the next few verses, really expand your idea of what is going on here.

Romans 1:18-25 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in

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unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Paul is saying, as we have learned, that nature plainly screams out the existence of God. People sometimes stop here and say that nature shows us that God exists, but Paul goes further than that. Nature screams that not only is He is Creator, but His invisible attributes (what we can see out there in the universe and nature, all of which God created) tell us about God—not just that He created, but that He is a God of order, and He is a God who plans things, and has a purpose. He designs things so that they work properly. He is a God who desires cooperation. He is a God of love, mercy, and faithfulness. He loves beauty. He has a sense of humor. He has huge amounts of power. And we can go on and on.

The creation is a witness not only that God is, but everything about Him. And do you know what Paul says here? He says that because all of this is smack dab in front of our faces, they are without excuse. They should know it. It is hard to miss. It is impossible to miss.

Brian Wulf was talking about the butterfly in the sermonette this afternoon. A simple study of the butterfly should prove to anyone that God exists, and that He has other characteristics that come out in the life of the butterfly. Such things as, when the caterpillar goes into its chrysalis or cocoon, and morphs, and emerges as the adult. There is a story which goes around in the email, that if you take the adult out of its cocoon/chrysalis without allowing it to struggle to get out, it will die. The actual struggle of coming out of its cocoon/chrysalis actually gives it strength to emerge, fly off and start the cycle all over again.

We know these things. And they should shout at us that this sort of thing just could not

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evolve. That species of butterfly would have died out long ago if such a thing as evolution were to actually work. But it did not die out. It was created that way. God created those properties within it.

We should see in every part of nature God's hand at work. Beyond that, God's attributes are exposed. But, he says in verse 18 that man has deliberately, sinfully, and inexcusably stifled this knowledge. They have suppressed it. They have put it down. They have hidden it.

And what is the result? Paul tells us the result also. He says that it is futility, foolishness, darkness, corruption, uncleanness, deception, idolatry, among other things even worse. Paul leads up to a crescendo saying that these people, because they have done these things, have put themselves under judgment. And if we agree with such things also, we will come under judgment too. We did not get to read that, but it is in verse 32.

Paul is saying that though these people may be worldly wise, they are spiritually foolish, debased, and in the end they are spiritually ignorant.

I mentioned archeology a moment ago. What about paleontology? A world renowned paleontologist, despite all of his technical knowledge of fossils and scientific explanations of evolutionary theory, is, in God's mind, a fool—simply a fool to ignore and reject the literal mountains of proof of creation, and its Creator.

He says that right here, "professing to be wise, they became fools." Tragically, this describes all but a very, very few of the earth's entire population, believe it or not. It is not just the world renowned paleontologists, or archeologists, or historians, but it is all of those, as Paul says, who do the same, and approve of those who practice such (verse 32 again).

All of those people who have meekly (and I do not use that in a good Christian sense) followed the evolutionary theory are just as foolish as those who propound it (that is what God says) because they are all going down the same path together.

If we go to I Corinthians 1:18, we will spend the rest of our time pretty much right there, except for a final scripture. Paul had to explain something along this line to the Corinthians, and he takes about a chapter and a half to do it. We are going to go through the whole thing. We will be reading this in sections. The first one is found in verses 18 through 25.

I Corinthians 1:18-25 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those

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who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where *is* the wise? Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Paul sets up a dichotomy. On the one hand are the believers, or the faithful. On the other hand are the unbelievers, or the unfaithful. We can even call them the called and the uncalled. But he makes it a clear bifurcation. He splits them into two groups.

Now to the uncalled, what we preach makes no sense whatsoever. It is foolishness to them. There might be many reasons why they consider it this, but that is, in the end, what they call it. It is foolishness. It is dumb. It is simple. On the other hand, to the called it not only makes sense, but it is the very means to salvation. That is what Paul says in the first verse:

I Corinthians 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

This foolish message that true ministers of Christ preach is seen by one group as total foolishness, and by the other as the very thing that will save them. This is how far apart these two groups really are. They are at opposite ends of the spectrum. Paul is saying, "Why is this?"

People have different reasons for thinking that the true gospel is foolish, or irrational. They probably would not put it in terms of foolishness, but they would think of it as irrational. Or maybe, they just think of it as simply being unappealing to them. Or perhaps, they think of it as fantasy, far fetched, too good to be true, utopian, or not based in reality.

Paul, then, goes on to explain what happened in his day. He says that the Jews scoffed

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at the gospel because the law very plainly says that a man who has been hanged is cursed. And so they could not understand how Jesus, who was hanged on a stake and crucified, could be the Messiah. The Messiah was far from being cursed. The Messiah was wonderful. He was pure. He was God's Chosen One.

So how could a crucified Man who was cursed under the law be the Messiah? And so, they rejected Him out of hand.

Another reason, they said, was that Jesus did no great sign to reveal His power as the Messiah. What they were looking for we know from history. I believe it may have been about 45 BC that there was a man named Theudas who came along and eventually had 30,000 followers because he claimed to be the Messiah. The reason why they followed him is because he told them that he would lead them to the Jordan where he would then open up the waters, and they would cross over. That is the type of sign that the Jews were looking for. Theudas never did that.

There was another man (whose name escapes me) who was able to get about 20,000 or 30,000 followers, and he said to follow him to the Mount of Olives where he would then give the command, and the walls of Jerusalem would fall down. These were the types of signs that they were looking for.

Now, Jesus comes and preaches throughout all Galilee, Samaria, and Judea, and has large crowds following Him. But what does He do? Well, He just heals the sick, casts out demons, and He does it individually to certain ones as signs of His Messiah-ship, but they do not think of them as signs. They are not big enough!

He says that the real sign of His Messiah-ship is that He was going to die, and be raised back in three days. And He did, but they would not accept that. That was not big enough for them because what they were looking for was a sign that would push the Romans right out of Palestine and return the Jews to power. And so, they rejected Jesus. He had not done a sign worthy of Messiah!

What Paul and all the other apostles preached in terms of the cross—that Jesus did indeed die on the stake, was buried for three days and three nights, and rose to glory—meant nothing to them.

The Greeks, on the other hand, rejected it for more philosophical reasons. They thought that God becoming human was impossible. Not that it was not physically possible, but they thought a god would never give up his godhood to become a man. They believed in dualism. There was spirit, and there was flesh. In the spirit was purity, and power, and

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all those other good things. But in the flesh was carnality, and corruption, and all those bad things.

They thought that one who was a spirit would never deign to become a human being. That was foolishness! Why would a god do that? And so, they just rejected it out of hand as being illogical and stupid—foolish.

They also thought that the gods were apathetic. The actual meaning of the Greek's term is "without ability to feel." They thought the gods had no emotion. They lacked human emotion. For Christ to suffer for mankind voluntarily would have been strange and even blasphemous within their concept of what a god is. Gods do not feel like humans, and gods do not feel for humans. What god would sacrifice himself for sinful, fleshly, corrupt flesh? So, they mocked Paul and the message that he preached.

Let us bring this forward to our own time. What do people in this day and age consider foolish? Let us take the Protestants first. Among today's Protestants is the notion of Christian liberty. Now that is a true principle of the Bible. We have been freed. Paul, in Galatians 5:13, tells us about Christian liberty, that we have been called to liberty: "Do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh." This is a true subject. It is there.

What are we freed from? Do you know what the Protestants will tell you? They say that we have been freed from that old law. So now we are not under any law, but under grace.

Do you know that is not what the Bible says? Not at all. That is a lie! We have not been freed from the law! We have been freed from the Old Covenant. But, that is not the law that we are talking about here. God's law is holy, and just, and good. It is eternal. It exists outside covenants, because it is God's very way of life. It defines His code of conduct.

Do you know what the Bible says that we have been set free from? Sin! Christ came to save us from our sins. All the law does is to tell us what sin is, and what righteousness is. The law is not a curse. We come under a curse when we break the law. You see, Protestants believe that since Christ set us free, we should voluntarily put our selves under bondage again, but that is totally wrong-headed. They got it all wrong from the very beginning.

As I said, Christ came to set us free, not from the law of God, but from sin. He did this through His amazing sacrifice. And now, because of that priceless gift that has been given to us, which we do not deserve but only have because God has graciously given it

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to us, we are now obligated to obey Him as Redeemer, as Lord, and Master! Yes, Master as in slave/master.

Because of the sacrifice that He did for us (out of His love for us, to clean us up, and give us an opportunity to have a relationship with Him and with His Father), He now owns us body, mind, and spirit just as a slave is wholly owned by his master.

This should be a memory scripture:

Romans 6:18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Righteousness is defined by God's law. This is Godly wisdom, but it is foolishness to those who have not had their minds opened to the truth. They consider what Christ did to free them from all restraints, and that is a devilish lie. They might not say it that way, but that is what they think, and that is really what they do.

Do they keep the Sabbath? That is a law which runs from Genesis to Revelation. But, they do not keep the Sabbath. They feel themselves free from that law. They get all over the homosexuals for being such perverts (and they are). Yet, born-again Christians and the Protestant world have this country's worst record of adultery and divorce. What makes one worse than the other? I think that they are pretty much on par with the rest of the country (non-Christians) regarding divorce.

The law of God says do not worship idols, or bow down to them, or make graven images. And yet, most of them wear one around their neck! It happens to be the very thing that their Savior died upon! They glorify that! They do not realize what He did and what He went through. That is not what Paul meant when he talked about glorying in the cross of Christ.

We could go through every one of the ten commandments like this. This country is full of the breaking of the tenth one—covetousness. We are the most materialist people on the earth it seems. Always trying to "keep up with the Joneses." Always looking to see who has the most "toys." Look at our debt! We are enslaved to it. I do not need to go through any more. I think you get the idea.

To say that we are free from the law is the devil's work. And we, as a nation, are paying for it. The curses of Leviticus 23 and Deuteronomy 28 are upon us.

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We will go on, now, to I Corinthians chapter 1, verse 26:

I Corinthians 1:26-31 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."

We all know how true this is. We are not the great intellects, or the powerful, or the wealthy, or the elites, but, rather, we are the plain, the simple, the poor, and the weak. It does not seem to follow that we should be privileged to know what the great do not know. But this is how God Himself has caused it to be. Just like Jesus has said, "So it pleased Him..."

He has done this, as it says above, "for His own glory," so that no one will be able to come before Him and say that he achieved salvation on his own. He decided to use "the scum of the earth," or as we used to say, "the cream of the crud," to show and witness to the whole world that the only way that it can be done is through His Son Jesus Christ with the gifts that He is willing to give.

Verse 30 is the key in this passage. It says, "we are of Him..." which means that we are selected or chosen especially by Him. We are of God. We are His. We are His possession, and He has called us to be in Christ Jesus. We are to be as if we are in His body. We are in Him as part of His church. Christ is the head; we are the body. That is the only way that things can happen. If we are chosen by God and put in Christ, this is the only way that understanding will come to us.

Being in union with Him makes all the difference. That is the answer to the question, "Why do most not understand?" They are not in union with Him.

Being in union with Christ (being on the same page, being of the same mind, having the same goals and purposes) is what opens up true wisdom from God to us. Because, Christ is that wisdom. It says in the above, "He became for us wisdom from God." There is no spiritual truth that is not bound up in what Christ is. That is why He is our example.

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He is the One that teaches us. He is the Example that we follow. He is the One who gives us the strength. He is the source of all the other gifts that come our way besides the understanding.

We can possess true righteousness, sanctification, and redemption only through Him. There is no other means that will work. You cannot have any of these things, and certainly not salvation, by any other way. That is what Acts 4:12 says, that only through the name of Jesus Christ can we be saved. It is not just speaking that name out loud. That is not what that means.

There is no other means. Only through Jesus Christ do we have the power to come to salvation. Let us go on.

I Corinthians 2:1-5 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Paul says that he decided and determined (made up his mind) to preach the gospel plainly, without the frills of learned discourse, or fancy rhetoric like the Greeks in Athens would do. He simply preached the truth and let God's Spirit work. That is what Paul means here, that he came not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power.

He preached the truth, he made it plain, and then God's Spirit took up the task. We could say that the demonstration of power that he is talking about here could be things like healings and miracles, but to my mind it is more likely that he means the work of God's Spirit to bring people to salvation; to work on their minds, and to bring enlightenment and understanding to change their lives.

Many of these people were, perhaps, slaves. But, he brought the gospel. And when he allowed God's Spirit to do the work, many of these people were called and their lives changed dramatically. No longer was their slavery such a burden to them, because now they were slaves of God, and they had a hope, and they changed their lives, and they became saints.

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So their faith, then, was in what God had worked through His Spirit to bring about growth and repentance in them. And not in any sort of high-falutin' (high-minded) speech, or even in signs and miracles. Their faith was in the truth, and, of course, in God Himself. They believed, and that changed everything because the Holy Spirit began to work in their lives.

I Corinthians 2:6-8 However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery [notice again], the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Paul goes on to say that even though he preached the truth simply to them, as they matured he would preach to them deeper things and wisdom. The truth of God is not just simple platitudes. There are things in God's Word, as we learn more, and experience more, that broaden and deepen our understanding of God and His way of life. And these things, as we go through our Christian lives, are continuously revealed. When God deems that we have matured to a certain point spiritually, He opens up another vista for us to pursue.

This means that when we are baptized we do not know everything. In fact, we know very little. But, there is always that hope of more and more as we grow. That is why Peter admonishes us in II Peter 3:18 to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There is more out there.

It is like Ezekiel's vision in chapter 47 in which the water gets ever deeper as he walks further out into it. That water can be a symbol of God's Word. And, as we get deeper into God's Word, the depth of knowledge increases exponentially until it is over our heads.

We could say that Paul is saying that there is something in God's Word for all levels of intellect and growth. We will never reach the bottom!

I Corinthians 2:9-11 But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?...

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Men can only know human knowledge because God gave man a spirit to understand those types of things. It separates him from the animals.

I Corinthians 2:11 Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

You see, unless God injects His Spirit into us, the things that God wants us to know are beyond us. They are incomprehensible to the human spirit. But, once God gives us His Spirit it allows us to understand the things that He knows and understands.

I Corinthians 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

He has opened all these things up to us through His Spirit. They are free for the taking. We have to desire them and pursue them!

I Corinthians 2:13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

Our physical knowledge is not going to give us a great deal of help. What we think we know is not going to help us in spiritual matters because we have to learn to compare spiritual things with spiritual things, and not leave them on a physical level like we did before. These things have popped up, you might say, to a whole new level. They are only comprehensible through His Spirit.

I Corinthians 2:14 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.

It takes God's Spirit to pry them out.

I Corinthians 2:15-16 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he

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may instruct Him?" [And the answer is...] But we have the mind of Christ.

What Paul is saying is that no human has known the mind of the Lord without God's Spirit. Maybe I should have said it this way: No human with just the spirit of man has been able to understand God's mind. But, we have the mind of Christ. That gives us the ability to understand the mind of God.

This section wraps up Paul's thought and explains why most people do not understand the true gospel of God. And of course, that is this very simple but profound truth, which is in itself one of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, that only those who have received the Spirit of God have the authority and the ability to comprehend spiritual matters.

People can naturally understand it in part, just because of their natural God-given spirit of man that has the intellect, but they cannot put all the pieces together to come up with His purpose, and the means of salvation. They just cannot do it on their own. It is impossible. It takes the mind of Christ in us to put those pieces in the right order. This only happens if Christ is living in us by means of His Spirit. Otherwise, the truths of God are, in the end, meaningless to the person.

Let us conclude in Luke 24:44. This is Jesus appearing to His disciples:

Luke 24:44 Then He said to them, "These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me."

Now I get from this passage that this is only a summary statement of what He told them. The reason why I know that is in verse 45:

Luke 24:45 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

He gave them a very detailed sermon, proving to them from the scriptures, and opening their understanding by His Spirit. Why?

Luke 24:46-49 Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and

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that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. "And you are witnesses of these things. "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you"

That is as far as I want to go. He says that He is going to give them His Spirit in just a few days in Jerusalem. The reason why He opened their minds to understand the scriptures and how they go together concerning Him was so that they could go out and do the job that He had given them to do. This included the crucifixion, and the resurrection, and that people need to repent and change, and that their sins can be forgiven, and that these things need to be known around the world as a witness. It still works like this today.

As a disciple of Christ, we have had our minds opened to understand the truth of scripture by Him personally. It has not been in a room with eleven other men, but it has been done individually and personally with each of us in the church of God.

Then, we can comprehend the why's of God's acts, and the why's of our part in the salvation process. The understanding and the power to follow through in what we have learned comes through God's Spirit which He freely gives to us upon belief, repentance, and baptism.

Tomorrow begins the third week in the count toward Pentecost, the day in which we commemorate each year the giving of the Holy Spirit to the church of God. This invaluable understanding is something we need to think about during this time.

Why were we called? How much do we appreciate what we have been given? We have been given a rare and precious gift of spiritual comprehension, something that is unavailable to millions of other people, yet freely accessible to us, the weak of this world, the base, and the poor.

Yet, we are the richest of all. And, the most powerful. And the most blest. As the giving of God's Spirit has made us saints of God and Jesus Christ, please make good use of this priceless gift you have been given.