



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 13:8-13

“Unchanging Endless Love”

TRANSCRIPT

-- class with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are indeed thankful to Thee for the privilege that is ours again this evening to open the Scriptures, to think the things of the apostles after one of the great ones, the Apostle Paul. We thank Thee for this marvelous letter to the Corinthians that the apostle wrote which we have been studying. And as we have gone along, Lord, we have learned things. We have gone over things that perhaps we had forgotten. We've come again to love this epistle for what it tells us concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and concerning the kind of ministry that the Apostle Paul carried out.

And we thank Thee for those Corinthian believers who are now in Heaven who gave their testimony in that great city that made it possible for others, for a period of time, to enter the body of Christ through faith in Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for Paul and his ministry. We pray Thy blessing upon him and others as he -- who are ministering the word of God in lands that are far away from us.

We ask Lord that Thou wilt be with us as we study this evening, help us to understand this 13th chapter of the Epistle to the Corinthians.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Now, tonight we are turning to the last section of chapter 13, and we’re looking at verse 8 through verse 13. And our subject is “Unchanging Endless Love.” And I’m going to read first verse 8 through verse 13, and then we’ll have an introduction to our study and plunge in to verse 8 through verse 13. The apostle writes in verse 8:

“Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love.”

The Corinthians, so we learn from the earlier words in this epistle and in this chapter, focused on a triad of actions: prophecies, tongues, and knowledge. I guess you could not -- you wouldn’t call knowledge an action but, nevertheless, an activity. Now, Paul focuses on a superior triad and it is, as you can see from what we have read: faith, hope, and love. Paul’s triad for all eternal importance, “but the greatest is love,” a property of God himself. You only have to think about this: that God is not said to be faith; he’s not said to be hope absolutely; he is said to be love. We know, of course, that faith expresses itself in love; Paul tells us that in Galatians chapter 5, but the text says that God is love, not God is faith, not that God is hope.

Now, the apostle has spoken of the indispensability of love in verse 1 through verse 3, and then in our last study, last week we looked at the nature of love in verse 4 through verse 7 characterized by so many verbs. That was a very interesting thing to think about what love really is and how the apostle defines it by verbs not nouns. Verbs.

We noted that. “Love suffers long; is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own; is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” In other words, love is expressed in the things that we do, not the things that we think about, reason about, but the things that we do.

We often say when people say they believe certain things, “Well, we would like to see that faith that you affirm in action.” Well, that is what Paul does. He lays stress upon the fact that the nature of love is activity; the accomplishment of the things that are set forth in verbal form. Well, now he’s going to conclude on the note of the endlessness, endlessness of love.

And so in verse 8 in the first short sentence, three words in my text, “Love never fails.” Now, the translations differ a little bit here, and I’m going to make a slight change. If you have the Authorized Version, your text has “love never fails”. The New International Version also has “love never fails.” The New King James Version, which I’m reading from, says “love never fails.” Now, that suggests the idea of the reliability of love: it does not fail. But I think that if you’ll look at the context, that’s not really the precise force of the context. The context is that love abides and so I’m going to translate it as other versions have translated it as “love never ends.”

Now, of course, love never fails could mean that. Love never fails. It never wears out. It’s not the old cars that we have. Well, it failed, or, my battery or whatever it might be that I have, we say it failed, and we mean it -- we mean that it came to an end. So let’s think of this as love never ends because at the end, remember, he will say and now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. So love never ends. Love does not end; that is, it does not belong to this age only.

Love is not something we practice here now and when the Lord comes, or when we enter into his presence love passes away. Of course if we had thought about that, we

would agree with that. But that is what Paul is saying. It does not end. Love belongs to the ages -- not simply to this age but to all of the ages. Those ages that Paul talks about in Ephesians chapter 2 in verse 7 when he talks about the ages to come, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace and his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. The ages to come are the ages of eternity expressed as the ages that are to come.

So love never ends; it persists throughout all of human existence here and on into eternity. That’s really a thought that we really would profit, I think, from exercising our minds about. Love is something that continues. And when we pass out of this life into the life in the presence of the Lord, it is love that continues. It’s the Christian love to which he is talking, of course, primarily. It belongs to the ages. So it’s what we might call the vital spirit of the Christian religion; the love of God as expressed in the word of God.

Now, we’re not talking about sentimentality. We’ve talked about that a lot, but I repeat it again because there are some who are here tonight who have not been here. We’re talking about love as it is defined in the Bible; a sacrificial kind of love exemplified in the ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and exemplified in our lives when we follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It’s the vital spirit of the Christian religion or the Christian faith; the supreme expression of the life of the body of Christ.

We’re inclined to turn to the discussion of love and treat it as if it were some kind of philosophy or some kind of moralism or some type of moral thought because love is something the world talks about. It’s not simply Christians who talk about love. Paul is not, as one of the commentators have said, a moral idealist, detached from the setting of historical Christianity. He’s not discussing love as if a philosopher might discuss it in a philosophy classroom or as a psychologist might discuss it. He’s talking about love within the context of Christianity.

And when he talks about it in the context of historical Christianity and speaks so gloriously a word of love, he’s talking about the love manifested in the life of Jesus Christ and that is to be manifested, ideally, in the life of the followers of Jesus Christ. For example, back in chapter 8 in verse 11 of this epistle, he has said, “And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?” And you know, of course, he repeats that statement elsewhere in similar statements. He’s thinking of love in the context of historical Christianity.

So we’re not to think about philosophy; we’re not to think about psychology. We are to think about the kind of love that was exemplified in the life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; the kind of sacrificial love, in his case, that went to the cross at Calvary, gave himself up under the direction of the Father and the Spirit that you and I might have eternal life.

In other words, it’s what someone has said is the love that is enshrined in the very heart of God himself, defined and exemplified in what Jesus Christ was and did. It’s eternally valid declaration of what divine love is.

Judaism did not know anything of this, generally speaking. Of course, I am not talking about those Jewish believers who turned to the truth given by the prophets. They, of course, knew something of this, but Judaism itself as a religion has not known any of this. They’ve, in fact, protested against it. And, therefore, Judaism, which was repelled by the divine initiative and salvation and by the work of Jesus Christ, does not know what this means. It’s very interesting that some rabbis who studied the New Testament have said that as they read through the New Testament, they found a whole lot that was the same, but one thing they found that was different was the ministry of Jesus Christ in Christian love giving himself for others. And some of them even said that they did not find that in Judaism.

So what we’re thinking about then is God’s free, full love which is the start and the source of everything that is pleasing to him in life. The love of one Christian for

another is the outcome of our love for the Lord God. And our love for the Lord God is the outcome of the love of Jesus Christ for us. Everything begins with God, and the love that we have is something begun in our hearts by him when we did not respond or would not respond. And as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit within our hearts and the fact that he has brought us to the knowledge of himself; as a result of that, that love implanted in our hearts by the Lord Jesus Christ is that by which we, in turn, love others.

So Christian love then is the sacrificial kind of love and is the kind of love expressed most fully within the circle of the living union of Jesus Christ, God the Father, the Holy Spirit of course, and the church of Jesus Christ. It is brotherly love in that sense.

So love never ends. One of the -- one of the men who has written about this point -- not in a commentary -- wrote a book *Greek Ideas and Modern Life* said this, “On the Christian view, the best thing in life, the highest thing in man that can be possessed and enjoyed by the most obscure, insignificant and humble of mankind, we are too accustomed to this idea to be surprised by it, but without the life of Christ, it would have seemed fantastic.” The idea of talking about sacrificial love apart from Jesus Christ would have seemed, he contends, a fantastic thing.

Now, there is something else we might think about here. John Calvin has an interesting statement about some in his day who said things about love never faileth that might be of interest. It appears that some in Calvin’s day had said that since love abides - - since faith, hope, and love abide -- that evidently the saints in heaven love and hope and have faith. And so if the saints are alive in heaven, then would not the saints, as they speak, the saints had rest, would not they, therefore, pray for those on earth? And is it, therefore, not a biblical doctrine since faith abides, hope abides, love abides that the saints in heaven would pray for those down on the earth?

Calvin vigorously attacks this inference as if it were harmful to believe in such a result of love. The inference is, of course, far from the context, and, so far as we know, the Scriptures never do say anything like that. In other words, so far as the Bible is

concerned, there’s no support for the idea that the saints pray for us and that includes the virgin mother as well. It’s very clear from the Bible’s teachings, so far as the Bible is concerned, that when we pass from this existence, we do not pray for anyone upon the earth. So we’ll leave it with that. We’re going to come back to the question of abiding.

Now, with verse 8B, that is, the next sentence of verse 8, the apostle talks about the brevity of the age of spiritual gifts. Listen to what he says in verse 8:

“But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part.”

Incidentally, we have mentioned that knowledge is not intelligence. All Christians, of course, should have knowledge. But knowledge here in 1 Corinthians is a gift, a spiritual gift. It’s not something that every Christian has, or should have; whereas every Christian should have understanding of the word of God. This is the gift of knowledge. And we talked about it and said something like this: that while the gift is mentioned, no explanation is really given of what it is. It’s been used a lot today in the charismatic movement for a person standing up in the meeting and giving what sounds like a prophecy. It’s often called a word of knowledge, that is, something has come to his mind that is going to happen and so he stands in a meeting or expresses it in another way that something is going to happen, and it’s called a word of knowledge. But we don’t really know, specifically, what the gift of knowledge is.

So knowledge -- and since this is in the context of gifts -- we’ll say it’s not general knowledge, not intelligence. It’s a special illumination without the Scriptures, a kind of temporary necessity; I suggested. That is, in the early days if this were, for example, the church at Corinth in the year, say, 65 AD, no one would have the Bible as we have it. Of

course, a lot of the New Testament would not have been written. They would not even have the Old Testament handy, such as you do.

And so in the meetings of the church, when the meetings were carried on there were people with spiritual gifts who were teaching or instructing; guiding by the Holy -- guided by the Holy Spirit. It would be very useful for certain situations for someone to have a gift of knowledge by which, for example, disputes might be settled, about what Scripture as they knew it might teach or about difficulties that occurred between individuals about the right and wrong of it, would be very nice to have someone who had a gift of knowledge who could stand up and one would have confidence in them as a result of their doing this that they were given the mind of the Lord in difficult situations, in doctrines, and otherwise. That, evidently, is what is meant here by the gift of knowledge because knowledge in the sense of understanding, of course, continues, hopefully. At any rate, he says here in verse 8B, “But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; (they will be done away) whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will (be done away with). For we know in part and we prophesy in part.”

So you can see that what Paul is saying is that prophecy, tongues, and knowledge are transient gifts. That is, they are not permanent. Notice it carefully again, “whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part.” So prophecy, tongues, and knowledge are transient gifts.

Now, in verse 9, he says “*For* we know in part and we prophesy in part.” That, of course, may explain to us why these verses are transient gifts; because they have to do with the stage of ministry of Scripture in which things had not been fully revealed. But in verse 10, he goes on to say, “But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.”

Now, I think that when that which is perfect has come is a very important statement by the apostle. The time of the coming is crucial in the view of some Cessationists, for example, those who believe that the miraculous gifts have ceased. When is this perfect to come? When has it come? When that which is perfect has come. There are those who believe that this is a reference to the closing of the Canon of Scripture. In other words, when the closing of the Canon came to pass, then, of course, as he says, “then that which is in part will be done away.” So at the closing of the Canon -- we’ll just say the closing of the New Testament Canon at the end of the 4th Century, about 397 A.D. at the Third Council of Carthage -- then, at that time and thereafter, these particular gifts are no longer. When that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away and that would include knowledge and tongues, as he said, and prophecies.

It’s not easy to show that. As far as I can tell, there isn’t anything in the context that suggests the Canon. The chances are that the Corinthians who read this and who would have been students of this particular epistle wouldn’t necessarily even know there would be such a thing as the closing of the Canon. What Canon they knew about had to do with Old Testament writings, so they did not know about the New Testament Canon, so far as we can tell, and weren’t prepared for that.

It might also suggest in the light of verse 12, (But now we see --) “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. If that “them” is a reference to that which is perfect, as it would seem to be, when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away, it would suggest that when the Canon was closed, then these individuals knew more even than the Apostle Paul knew because he speaks about knowledge being dimly grasped at this time.

So I confess I have doubt about when that which is perfect has come being a reference to the closing of the Canon. That seems very unlikely to me. What that which is perfect has come seems to me to refer to is the second coming of our Lord; the advent

of our Lord. When that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. And we cannot look for that finally until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Question then is raised: well, then have the gifts ceased? Well, the possibility exists that the gifts might be given. We, of course, would not suggest that God could not give the gifts. And then the light of the fact that they are sovereignly given, then that’s an impossibility from just looking at what the text has to say.

But we talked about this the other night, and I’d like to make the point again: that it seems very clear from history that from the time of the apostles and those that the apostles taught; perhaps, those that taught who went on for a while after the Apostle Paul. For example, Timothy and others like him who had been taught that when that age came to an end -- the apostolic age plus the age of those taught by the apostles. From that time on, history does not give evidence of the giving of gifts as they were given in the ministry of the prophets. Some of the prophets in the age in which they did miraculous gifts like Elijah and Elisha, for example, of Moses and apostles from that time of the apostles passing away, those gifts have not been given, as far as history is concerned.

Now, some of you in the audience know that I believe in the sovereignty of God. Now – thank you. Thank you for smiling and laughing; that tells me a lot. That tells me that you really have heard me say this. Not necessarily that you have gotten it, but you have heard me say it. If it is true that God is a sovereign God and does his will – Martha and I were reading this morning in the Book of Daniel, and we were in Daniel chapter 4. And in Daniel chapter 4 in verse 35, we happen to have a text that bears on the point. And I hadn’t thought about this, but this morning when we read it, I confess, I did think about it. But listen to what we read from Nebuchadnezzar:

“All the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and *among* the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’”

So if it’s true that God is a sovereign God, and if it is true that history does not give us the outpouring of gifts as in the days of the apostles or the prophets or of our Lord, then what does that tell us about the will of God? Well, it tells us that it was not God’s will that those gifts be given. If it was his will that they would be given, they would be given even though men might be disobedient and not responsive. They would have been given. He is sovereign. He does in heaven and on earth, according to his will; but they have not been given. I know that there are some who will say, “Yes, but we think they have been given.”

And of course, we can do nothing more than to say, “I do not think that what you call the giving of gifts can be compared with the gifts that were given to Moses and the signs and wonders he performed in Egypt or the signs and wonders that Elijah performed -- and Elijah performed and our Lord Jesus Christ performed and that the apostles performed. Tested by those signs and wonders, what is claimed today does not measure up.

Now, let me also say this: it’s certainly possible for certain things to transpire that would be harmonious with such an outpouring; that is, individual cases. We do not deny that God answers prayer. We have it in the Scriptures that we are to pray and we may expect a miraculous -- something that we see as miraculous to happen. As a matter of fact, we have specifically in the Bible instructions in the last chapter of James for what we are to do if we desire healing. We are to call for the elders of the church. We are not to attend a healing meeting. Call for the elders of the church.

When people, for example, say, come to our meetings and healing will take place, it seems to me that they are themselves out of harmony with the word of God. If they were inviting men to come to the elders, for the elders to pray for them that healing may happen, that would be in harmony with the instructions given in the word of God. But healing meetings as such, the New Testament does not really know such meetings. So we

don’t deny that healings -- call them miracles if you like -- or a sign may occur. But the occurrence of a sign or the occurrence of a healing is not the same as the outpouring of miraculous signs that occurred in the days of the apostles. It’s different.

So coming back now to our text, the coming of that which is perfect, it seems to me, is very clearly the Lord’s coming and that the possibility exists for such answers to prayer that might be called a work of God in behalf of those for whom you and I pray. And we certainly should pray. Pray for those who are sick. Pray for those who are in difficulty and in trial. Pray for them that God will meet their needs. We look for that. We don’t deny the things that we should be involved in when we deny the outpouring of gifts as in the days of the prophets, our Lord, and the apostles. So the possibility of healing exists. But the sovereignty of God and the history, as well as experience, I think argue for the cessation of the gifts.

Now, we have in verse 11 or 12 something rather interesting because it is an illustration -- I call it Pauline illustration. In fact, it’s an illustrative parenthesis in his thought here. He’s just said, “but when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.” And so the argument was -- is the coming of that which is perfect the completion of the Canon or the second coming of Christ? I’ve said to my mind that it seems that it must be the second coming of Christ. Verse 12 says, “for now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face.” And that surely did not take place at the close of the Canon. This is a reference to the second coming of Christ then.

But then Paul says, “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I (have) become a man, I (have) put away childish things.” Now, if this is an illustrative parenthesis -- that’s not my expression. That’s the expression of a commentator and other commentators who are not really talking about this debate at all when they say that. This is an illustrative parenthesis of what Paul is talking about. He’s talking about three gifts. When I was a child, I spoke as a child; I understood as a child; I thought as a child. Three statements that correspond to the three

gifts: knowledge, tongues, and prophecy. They fit very well, those three things. And so I think that these verbs refer to the three gifts that he’s just mentioned. They -- the things that he describes here are things that a child undertakes. When I was a child, I spoke as a child; I understood as a child; I thought as a child. They represent in the unfolding of the divine revelation what someone has called the puerility -- puerilities of childhood; that is, the things that characterize a child’s life. These three gifts: knowledge, prophecy, tongues. They are the things that characterize childlike life.

Now, the Corinthians, we are told back in chapter one in verse 7, were individuals who had all the gifts. Remember in Chapter 1, verse 7? Paul says, “so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Having gifts, of course, is no sign of maturity. Because if there was a church that was immature, it was the Corinthian church. And yet, Paul says you come behind in no gift. They had them all. But they were an immature church. In fact, in the history of the Christian church, what was the age of the Corinthians? How would you define the age of the first century, for example? It was the childhood of the church. That’s when the church was engaged in the things that mark children’s activity. I was a child, I spoke as a child; I understood as a child; I thought as a child. So knowledge, prophecy, tongues are the gifts that characterize the immature stage of the church.

Then Paul says, “When I became a man, I put away childish things.” I think this illustration is so interesting because it suggests that inadequate knowledge that characterizes the early stage of the Christian church. Because after all, the teachers of the word of God, the students of the word of God have been studying now for 1800 years, almost 1900 hundred years entirely. And what we have now is one well-known student of the word of God says is that we have the fathers today and not the fathers in the beginning. We called the church fathers, those that came along in the first and the second and third centuries, we called them the church fathers. But this individual who was a head of a theological institution in Europe said, “We really ought to call them the

children and -- not talking about this at all -- but we ought to call the church today the fathers because they’ve studied the word for 18- or 1900 years. He said that around the turn of the 20th Century.

So anyway, what we have here then is an illustration. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. What is the implication? Well, the implication seems plain to me that knowledge, prophecy, and tongues are those gifts given in the early stages of the Christian church. They characterize our childhood. And in fact, the things that we know when we are children, we all know when we grow up they become quite a bit different.

Now, when I was a child, I used to go out -- I can remember doing this, and I’m sure all of you can, too -- I would go out certain times of the year my father would say, “There’s going to be an eclipse” or something like that and we’d go out and we’d look. And we’d look up there, and we’d see the stars, and we’d see the moon. But now my knowledge of the moon has been enhanced tremendously since 1969 when Neil Armstrong landed on the moon. And I got look via a TV screen of what the moon surface was like. Why, my knowledge had a tremendous accretion of new knowledge at that moment because I had no idea of what the moon was like as a little child looking up and seeing the moon in the sky. It was tremendous growth and knowledge.

Well, Paul is saying something of the same thing. He’s just saying when I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; (but when I have become a man) but when I became a man (or when I have become a man), I put away childish things. And he’s talking about these gifts that he says in effect: these are gifts that characterize the immature time of the Christian church. So when that which is perfect has come is the coming of our Lord, in my opinion.

I had an interesting experience just yesterday. I was going through some old notes of mine, and I ran across a note on the exegesis of the Greek text of 1 Corinthians, and I had a little -- sometime I will put illustration and then a colon and then what it is --

and when I first started doing that, I made some mistakes because I didn’t give enough information. I would say “illustration: man and dog” but then 10 years from them, what in the world does man and dog mean? So now, I have illustrations, and I write them all out, you know. I have all these pages. They’re just illustrations I want to keep a record of. And so I didn’t have an idea of what this meant but what I had written in my notes was Bing Blauvelt baby talk.” So I thought, Well, I’ll just call Bing Blauvelt. Now, mind you, he graduated in 1953, that’s 40 years ago. He was in my class.

So I called him and I called him by his real name: Livingston, because one note just had L. Blauvelt. Later on, I saw Bing Blauvelt. I should have called him Bing. He would have really been surprised. But I said, “Livingston.”

He said, “Dr. Johnson, I haven’t heard from you in a long time.” I didn’t tell him that it was 40 years, but it was. Maybe he came back and it wasn’t quite 40.

But I said, “I’ve got something in my notes of 1 Corinthians chapter 13 about speaking in tongues, and it’s Blauvelt then “baby talk”. Now, what was that? And he stopped. He said, “Dr. Johnson, I haven’t the slightest idea what that is.” That made me feel good. Here’s a man that much younger than I am, who’s had a Christian ministry -- he’s still in ministry -- and the poor fellow’s memory is already going. So he couldn’t remember, and I cannot remember except that I think it had to do with the fact that a person who was involved in the tongues movement was talking about speaking in tongues and described his own speaking in tongues as baby talk. That is, the kind of language of tongues when it’s not a real language sounds like baby talk, and that’s what he called it. And in fact, even went so far as to say when a person is beginning to speak in tongues, “Come on, come on. Let’s the -- baby talk, baby talk. Well, you can see I’m not too used to doing that, but I think that’s what it is. Anyway, it’s the time of immaturity.

Now, Paul goes on to say in verse 12: but now we see in a mirror, darkly, but then face to face. That word in my text now we see in a mirror, dimly is an expression

that means in an “enigma,” literally. It’s the word from which we get the English word enigma. Whenever I hear enigma now, I think of Winston Churchill. Winston Churchill said during the course of World War II to Parliament one time, “I cannot forecast you the action of Russia. It’s a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” I never have forgotten that. That’s typical Churchill. It is a riddle -- what’s going to happen in Russia. It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.

What Paul says here in verse 12, for now we see in a mirror, dimly; in an enigma. What he’s doing is he’s relying on a passage in the Old Testament. It’s a passage in – let’s see where it is. I had it in my notes. It’s in -- [Hmmm] -- it’s probably here in my -- the Bible here. And for the moment -- this is very embarrassing that I should forget this when I have just been talking about my friend who has forgotten some things. That would be very bad, wouldn’t it? So I’ll just turn to Numbers and see if that’s not it. It’s in Numbers, I believe it’s about chapter 12. Let me see. Do you know? My memory has returned. Verse 8, Numbers chapter 12, verse 7,

“Not so with My servant Moses; He *is* faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, Even plainly, and not in dark sayings. (In the Greek translation of the Old Testament: not in enigmas; dark sayings; riddles.) And he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?”

So Paul says, now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

And finally in verse 13, “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love.” The superiority of love. Why contrast love and faith and hope and not love with the gifts? Why does he say, “now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love?” Why has he forgotten about gifts? Well, he wants to exalt love supremely, and so he says and now abide faith, hope, and love.

Now I want you to notice he says abide; that’s present tense. And now abide faith, hope, love. Think of that. We know love abides. God is love, of course. Love abides. Love, we have seen, is the quality necessary for the effectual exercise of any gift. For a man who’s a Bible teacher and there’s no manifestation of Christian love in his life at all, most of us are not going to give him the attention that he should have or that he might have. Love is the quality that is necessary for the effectual exercise of gifts given sovereignly as he will say in chapter 14, verse 1, “Pursue love, and desire spiritual *gifts*. As he said in chapter 12:31, “Earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show unto you a more excellent way. That is love.”

But now faith, hope, and love, all three of them abide. Isn’t that interesting? Faith abides. Hope abides. Love abides. That means that when we get to heaven, there will be the exercise of faith. There will be the exercise of hope. There will be the exercise of love. But now, of course, I guess we’d have to be careful about what we say here, and I think that it’s been said very well by a commentator – better than I could probably say it. He says, “It’s important for us to remember that eternal blessings are not like a bag of gold pieces which are received once and for all. The permanent essence of the creature is to have nothing of his own but to be eternally hopeless and poor. Every instant it must take possession of God by faith which grasps the manifestations which he has already given and by hope which prepares to lay hold of his new manifestations. In other words, the Christian life is a life of the revelation of God, the response of faith to it. The Christian life involves hope and the word of God. We see the promises of the word of God and we hope and come into the possession of them.

So the same procedure is followed in heaven. Christian love is exercised for eternity. But at the same time, we exercise faith. That is, as God unfolds new revelation to us in heaven, for it’s infinite, remember? God is infinite. We’re going to learn forever about him. As these unfoldings of divine truth come to us, we will respond to them. We’re not going to say, “I don’t know whether that’s true or not,” as we do now. We’re

not going to turn away and reject them, but we are going to be so transformed by the presence of the Lord, our old nature having been eliminated from our existence that when new revelations come, we automatically exercise faith in them. And when new revelations of things in the future are given to us, we respond immediately and hope for them. You get the point. In other words, faith, hope, and love are part of the existence of the Christians in heaven. Put it this way, I’ll read what my man has to say, “The permanent essence of the creature is to have nothing of its own; be eternally helpless and poor. Every instant it must take possession of God by faith which grasps the manifestations which he has already given and by hope which prepares to lay hold of his new manifestations. It is not once for all, it is continually; that in eternity faith changes into vision, and hope into possession.” These two virtues, therefore, abide to live again unceasingly, just like love. All three abide: faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love.

We might suspect that because love is an expression of the nature of God, whereas faith and hope are not. If God hoped, he wouldn’t be God. But we hope, but God doesn’t hope. So love is the greatest of them. The text really says *is* greater using the comparative but in the Greek language, occasionally the comparative is used for the superlative, and that’s the instance of it.

So these virtues abide and the process by which we have come to understand truth and enter into truth continuous in heaven with this proviso is no possibility of failure. We are introduced to a procedure by which we live throughout eternity of believing and hoping, and, above all, of loving. As a matter of fact, love is the greatest because we read up here in the earlier part in verse 7, love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things.” Those are expressions of love.

One of the great missionaries to the Indians in the United States was an Englishman. His name was John Eliot, came over from England to Massachusetts’ colony. He labored for about 50 or 60 years among the Indians there, learned the English

language – the Indians’ language and was responsible for leading many of them to the knowledge of our Lord. At the close of the 17th Century, he was an old man of over 80. I have a sympathy with him. Worn out by his missions to the Indians of New England and at last conscious that his faculties were failing, he said to have remarked, “My understanding leaves me. My memory fails me; my utterance fails me; but I thank God my charity holds out still.” The love is the love of Christ. The greatest force in the universe is the love of God. There’s no doubt about it. You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet he became poor for our sakes. That’s the story of the ministry of our Lord very succinctly: the ministry of ultimate Christian love. May it be the dominant force in our lives.

And I want to tell you one last story. Samuel Chadwick was a Christian man, now in the Lord’s presence. But he told a story that Graham Scroggy has reported in one of his works. He says that one day in the Leeds Station in England, Samuel Chadwick, a friend of his, went into the waiting room and there was a man in the room. He was leaning against the mantelpiece -- and those of you who have been over in Britain, you know that those stations sometimes look like a large home with mantelpieces in them. He was leaning over against the mantelpiece and seemed in distress, and so Mr. Chadwick went up to him and observed that he was weeping. He said, “My friend, are you in trouble?”

He said, “Well, not exactly.”

“Well, what’s the matter then?” said Mr. Chadwick.

“Well,” he said, “my brother and I had saved a bit of money and we thought we would start a business, so he went to Crosley’s (a name of a company), and we bought a gas engine and put it into our little workshop to run it. After working for about two years, we realized that we were losing money; that the engine was not powerful enough for the task that we had thought to use it for. And so we decided to go back to Crosley’s and explain the situation.” He said, “We came. We told the person we saw what

happened and that we were losing money and that the engine was not powerful enough and asked what could be done.”

“You got the engine you ordered, didn’t you?” the man said.

And he said, “I said, ‘Yes.’”

He said, “I’m afraid we cannot do anything else.”

They left the office and on the way out, they met Frank Crosley, the owner. He said they addressed him and told him the story, and he took them back into his office. He got all of the particulars from them and said, “Now I will put an engine into your workshop adequate for the purpose. And if you let me know what you have lost in that inadequate machine for the last two years, I will refund it to you.”

The man began weeping again as he told the story and he said to Mr. Chadwick, “Sir, I’ve seen the likeliest person to Jesus Christ.”

Well, the kind of love that we are to exhibit in Christianity is the love that has as its example the ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians chapter 8 in verse 9, the text that I referred to is an illustration. He who was rich became poor that we by virtue of his poverty might become rich. Christian love within the context of the Christian church is the love that was manifested by divine initiative in our lives to turn us from our wickedness, to turn us from our sin, to turn us from our rebellion when we had no idea of turning away from it, but God so worked by divine omnipotence in our lives, transforming our wills into -- from rebellion against him and to harmony with his will, drawing us to Jesus Christ -- that’s what he calls it. No man can come to me except the Father which has sent me draw him; having been drawn to him and by God’s ministry through the Holy Spirit brought to trust in him. That’s the essence of Christianity. And the Son of God is the great illustration of what God is like and what Christianity is like and what you and I and the Christian Church should be like as well. May the Lord help us to respond to that favorably. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these magnificent statements of the Apostle Paul. We thank Thee, Lord, for prophecies and for tongues, knowledge, the gifts. They have served their purposes well. We know that coming from Thy hand, they were necessary; they were gifts of love to us. We thank Thee particularly for the implantation of eternal life within our hearts, and we thank Thee for the love of God that we have come to know. The love that the apostle says has been poured into our hearts, through the Holy Spirit given to us. Enable us, Lord, to be responsive and to love as thou wilt have us to love.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.