Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Permanence of Love, Part 3
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:8-13
Code: 1870

It's a real joy to be together this morning and we have that very special, wonderful privilege of being in I Corinthians 13. I just love to study myself, and I trust that God has really blessed you with it. This morning, we find ourselves looking at I Corinthians 13 in a more technical way than we have in the past. In a sense, this will be very much like a classroom approach.

Many of you are real students of the Bible, and every once in a while, we gear the message to those of you who are the real students. This morning, the rest of you can go along and enjoy what's being said and hopefully, the Lord will speak to you as well. We'll just kind of major on some of the fine points of the text, in order to try and draw a conclusion from something that has been a very, very big area of discussion in the church. That is, regarding the perfect thing mentioned in verse 10.

As you know, the chapter is all about love. The great climax of this chapter comes in verse 8 with the words, "Love never fails." That's really the pinnacle of love. What Paul is saying is that love is the only thing that is eternal. The only link we have with eternity is love. The Corinthians had emphasized the good things, the gifts, the ministries, and so forth, but they had forgotten the one which was the best thing. In 12:31, Paul calls it the 'more excellent way,' love. So he makes a major statement on the essence, the character, and the qualities of love.

We saw, first of all, the prominence of love in verses 1-3, then the perfections of love in the next section. Beginning in verse 8, we see the permanence of love. Last week, we heard the Apostle Paul tell us that love never fails. Love never fails. This is a tremendous statement. What he is really saying is that love is the eternal thing. If it is the only link that you really have with eternity, then you'd better major on that in time, because that is the most excellent thing of all.

To emphasize the priority of love, Paul contrasts it with the thing with which the Corinthians were most concerned, and that was spiritual gifts. They were proud, they had a problem with spiritual egoism. The way that they bragged about their spirituality was by abusing, overusing, misusing, and counterfeiting their spiritual gifts. So Paul draws their viewpoint of gifts into his viewpoint of love and makes a comparison here, to show that the gifts are not to be emphasized. Love is to be emphasized, because the gifts are passing and love is forever. That's his major point.

We looked last time at that thought that love never fails. There are many uses of this term 'fail' in the Greek. I read an interesting one this week where it is used of a bad actor being hissed off the stage.

We could say that love is never hissed off the stage, in the sense that love is never seen as a bad actor. Love is an honored thing. More close to the meaning that Paul has here is the technical use in the classical Greek where the word is used to speak of a flower that withers and decays, and its petals begin to fall off. What he's saying is that love is no flower that decays; love never falls, fades, withers away. It is the one great, eternal thing, the more excellent way.

Better than your assembly being sold out to teaching or doctrine, better than your assembly being sold out to ministering with gifts and so forth, would be to be sold out to love, because the whole end of everything else is that you might love one another. In so doing, the world might know that you are, in fact, children of God. So love is the more excellent thing.

To make this comparison with gifts, he draws three comparisons. I listed them for you on the outline; gifts are temporary, gifts are partial, and gifts are elementary. In those three ways, he shows the comparison between the gifts and love. I want you to put on your academic hat today and think through this passage with me, because we're going to look at it in a technical sense to try and solve a rather old problem relative to the meaning of some of these things. Along the way, I'm kind of excited that maybe you can get a feel for the process that a Bible student uses to come to conclusions.

Very often when I preach, I just give you the conclusion, but today, I thought I'd walk you through the process. You can see how we eliminate certain discussions and viewpoints to come to the right viewpoint, and what the process is for getting to that.

Remember that last time, we discussed the first sub-point under the permanence of love: gifts are temporary. Notice verse 8, "Love never fails." That's the great statement that covers the rest of the chapter. Now he begins to discuss the temporary nature of gifts.

"Love never fails; but whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away [or 'be rendered inoperative, abolished']; whether there be tongues, they shall cease [or 'stop by themselves' in the middle voice]; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away [or 'be rendered inoperative, abolished, done away']."

Now what he's doing here is taking the gifts as a composite of all the gifts. The most significant gift was prophecy, the least significant gift is tongues or languages, and one representative of the middle would be knowledge. So Paul is simply saying, "Gifts are a passing reality; they are not a forever item. They have their time and their place, but they are not permanent or eternal." They are very essential, believe me.

I daresay that prophecy, and the word of knowledge, and the gift of languages (the ability to speak a foreign language unknown to the speaker, in the days of the early church) were tremendously important. They were essential. But as essential as they are in their time, they are only for time and

not for eternity. The only link you have with eternity is love, and love should dominate.

We saw last time that there is an interesting distinction made in the use of the verbs with gifts of prophecy and knowledge over against the gift of tongues. In relation to tongues, we saw that the verb that is used in the form that it is used says that tongues will stop by themselves. Then we had some discussion as to whether they had in fact stopped. We determined that they had three biblical purposes; number one, the purpose of tongues could be seen as revelatory. In other words, God was actually revealing His word through that gift on occasions. We determined that the revelation has already been given, "Once for all delivered to the saints," so that purpose for tongues would have ceased.

Secondly, we saw that tongues was also a confirmation, a wonder gift, confirming the apostles and the prophets in their apostolic ministries. Since there are no longer apostles and prophets, as we have seen from Ephesians 2:20, that part of the gift of tongues had no further need to exist because there is no authenticating of such men today.

Thirdly, we saw from the New Testament that tongues was a sign of judicial punishment on the covenant people, Israel. That punishment was carried out in 70 A.D., consequently, the sign no longer needs to be in existence today. History, then, corroborated for us that tongues did, in fact, cease until approximately 1900, when this modern movement began.

We said that tongues have ceased, and the current phenomenon that we're seeing can be explained in other ways than as the gift of languages or tongues in the New Testament. But in contrast to the cessation of tongues, we realized that prophecy and knowledge shall be stopped, or shall be rendered inoperative. The verb is passive there, meaning something is going to stop prophecy and knowledge. Something is going to halt them, bring them to an end. That something is the perfect thing mentioned in verse 10. We're going to discuss today what that perfect thing is.

This is a very interesting study, because so many people have been so confused about it. It has been dialogued and kicked around for so much time that I hope we can find a solution that you can pursue yourself, study, and find that it is the best of all.

So, prophecy and knowledge didn't cease with tongues; they are still going on when tongues stops, and they are now waiting for the perfect thing to stop them. Verses 9, "For we know in part [that's knowledge], and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." The partial things - knowledge and prophecy - are going to stop when the perfect thing comes, because they're only temporary. Now, they are important. In fact, they're essential. But they're only part of time, not eternity. So Paul says they're temporary.

The second point, and this is where we'll get into the perfect thing, is that the gifts are partial. Look at verse 9 again. 'In part' is repeated four times in verses 9, 10, and 12. Four times, he emphasizes the fact that the knowledge we have is partial. Meros, in the Greek, simply means 'a part of the whole,' not the whole. Gifts are partial. You'll notice, it's interesting to see that tongues do not appear in verses 9-13. They have stopped. The only things that will be around when the perfect thing comes are prophecy and knowledge, in Paul's illustration here. There will be other gifts, of course, but the ones that Paul refers to here are prophecy and knowledge. By the time the perfect thing comes, tongues will have already stopped by itself; it is not stopped. It is not a passive verb.

Verse 9 says, "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part." That's true. At best, and I may study diligently and do everything I can to preach to you the Word of God; but at best, I can only preach a part of what there is to tell about the truths of God. Why? Because I'm limited to what God has revealed, I'm limited to my own understanding of what God has revealed, and I'm limited by the fact that a human mind cannot understand a superhuman God in fullness. So at best, preaching (or prophesying, which literally means "to speak before") is partial.

At best, the word of knowledge is partial. The ability to draw principles of knowledge out of the Word of God is only partial. There is no way that we can know everything there is to know. In fact, I used to know everything when I came out of seminary, but I've been losing it along the way.

This is a good reminder. It is so easy for us to become doctrinally smug and think that we have all the answers. We've pigeonholed our theology, we've got all the difficult passages figured out. But in I Corinthians 8:2, it says, "And if any man think that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know." Basically,knowledge is limited. It's especially limited when you think you know everything; then you don't know anything. The basic part of knowledge is that you can't know everything.

Going back in the Old Testament, I want to show you that no Christian can have perfect knowledge. I think some people may think they do; I think some people may think that I do. They think, "Oh, he's the pastor of the church and he speaks the Word of God. He's got all the knowledge." I don't. It's very limited, and I'm the first to admit that I make mistakes. The only problem is that I don't know where they are, because I don't have enough knowledge to know when I'm right and wrong; that's the problem. The problem with human nature is that it's fallible. There are mistakes and there is a limit to the knowledge that we can apprehend. I think some Bible teachers may need to remember that. I know I do. We just don't know everything; we may think we do, but we don't. Some Bible students need to remember this as well.

Look at Job with me for a minute. I want to read a few passages to help with our humility a little, to understand that there are plenty of things that we don't know. We're just kind of scratching the surface of this whole aspect of knowing the fullness of the divine nature. In Job 11:7, it says, "Canst

thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" In other words, can you ascertain perfect knowledge of God? "It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? Deeper than the grave; what canst thou know?" In other words, it's impossible to attain the fullness of the knowledge of God. You can't climb that high or plumb that low. It's beyond the capacity of man to fully understand.

People often ask how Bible teachers or mature Christians can disagree. It's not because we disagree on the basics that are clear, it's because all of us are dealing with limits in our knowledge. We're trying to put the pieces together and make conclusions without a fullness of revelation. That's why it's so difficult to systematize things.

The next passage is interesting, because he's just heard about God and how marvelous God is and how powerful he is, and all the things He did with creation. Job 26:14. He says, "Behold!" or 'wow' in the English. "These are parts of His ways; but how little a portion is heard of Him! But the thunder of His power, who can understand?" It's just beyond you to grasp the fullness of God's power, God's ways, God's truth, and God's nature.

Psalm 40:5. "Many, O LORD, my God, are Thy wonderful works which Thou hast done, and Thy thoughts which are toward us." Now, this is good. Many wonderful works, God, You've done. Many wonderful thoughts. "But they cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee." In other words, "When I try to catalog and systematize them, and offer them back to You, there's something missing." Then he says,"If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered." Systematizing God is very difficult because we don't have all of the information.

In Psalm 139:6, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it." The knowledge of God is far beyond us. To compare with a New Testament word, so that you can understand that even the New Testament doesn't fill up all the knowledge, it says in Romans 11:33-34, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been His counselor?" His ways are past finding out.

You say, "But when you know Christ, don't you get it all?" No, because in Colossians 2:3, it says, "In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Even to know Christ is to know that wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him. Not everything has been revealed. Just because I know Christ doesn't mean I know everything. It's all in Him but let's face it, it's hidden, much of it.

So we have to remember that we're always dealing with a part of the truth in terms of its total. I want to hasten to say, that doesn't mean we're having a problem because we're in error. To say we have partial truth does not mean we have error. It simply means that we don't have all the truth there is.

For example, you might teach your child that two and two is four. If you do, you have taught him truth. However, it's a long way from algebra, geometry, trigonometry, and calculus. There is so much more to know that your child would never be able to conceive of when all he can apprehend is two plus two equals four. It doesn't mean the knowledge is wrong, it doesn't mean it is unreliable, it is simply incomplete. As we grow as Christians, we continually learn more and more, but we don't have it all.

May I hasten to add that we have all that we need. Peter said that God, "Has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness." In other words, we have all we need. I John 5:20 says that we have enough knowledge that we may know Him and may know His Son. I Corinthians 2:12 says that we have the Holy Spirit who teaches us to know the deep things of God. So we know as much as we need to know to know what God wants us to know to do what God wants us to do. But we don't know everything. We're just a bunch of students trying to get a hold of the basics.

You say, "John, why didn't God give it all to us?" Well, I think, for one thing, the human mind would never be able to conceive of it all, so God kept it simple. It's so simple that a child can know it. In the first place, it's infinite. If God is infinite then truth is infinite. If we had an infinite book, it would be ridiculous. It would be a book without a beginning or end. To think that God has condescended to put His truth in this book right here, and to believe that He put all His truth in this one book, that's hopeless. There is far more! We haven't begun to even touch the surface. God kept it simple so we wouldn't get confused.

Secondly, a sin-defiled, depraved, human mind couldn't deal with ultimate truth in its whole unless it was a perfect mind. So, since it isn't perfect, God didn't bother to give it all to us. Someday, when we get a perfect mind, we'll get all the truth. But that's in the future.

So, we have this partial knowledge. Some of it comes through the gift of preaching as men declare to us the Word of God, and some of it comes as men draw out principles in the Scripture with a word of knowledge and teach them to us. So these are, in part, contributing to what we know. Let's go back to I Corinthians 13:10 again. We know and prophesy in part; we don't have it all.

"But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away," katargeo, abolished, rendered inoperative, the same verb as in verse 8 because that's what he's trying to say. Prophecy and knowledge are connected to the perfect thing because he uses the same verb that stops them. The perfect thing will render them inoperative.

You know, when the perfect thing comes, Paul says it will be fantastic. We won't need preaching, because we'll have all the information. We won't need teaching anymore because we'll have all knowledge. We'll have every bit of truth there is. In fact, he goes so far in verse 12 to say, "For now

we see in a mirror, darkly; but then, face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known."

Imagine! There's coming a day when we won't need books, sermons, classes, or Bible studies. We won't need any of those things because we'll have it all and know it all. There won't even be a need for the gifts. But you know what there will be? There will be love. That's Paul's whole point. There will be love.

Now what about the perfect thing? What is it and when does it come? That's what we're going to study. Now put on your academic thought patterns. Don't bail out; stick with this. What is the perfect thing?

There is a lot of discussion about this, but there didn't used to be. Frankly, there used to be just a simple thing, then everybody got complicated and all kinds of possibilities have been entertained in the past 100 years. Let's talk about them. First of all, looking at verse 12, I just want to remind you that whatever the perfect thing is, it is something that is really perfect because it says, "We see in a mirror darkly." That's prophecy; we now see. We can perceive what God is doing, His Word, His program, partially. "But someday, face to face," fully. "We now know in part," that's the gift of knowledge in his illustration. Someday we are going to know in the same way that we are known. It's incredible!

Now look at that illustration of seeing in a mirror, or a glass, darkly. The Corinthians would know exactly what Paul was talking about because there was a trade in the city of Corinth where people made mirrors. In those days, they made mirrors by flattening out a piece of metal and polishing it to a high shine and it would be used as a mirror. Of course, if you've ever looked into a metal mirror, you know that it tends to have little wavy places, so it's somewhat distorted. Additionally, after a period of time, metal mirrors are prone to decay. Consequently, it may become blotched and marred. So Paul is saying, "For now, we are looking in a mirror, and it reveals to us a rather vague and confined image."

When you look in a car's rearview mirror while you're driving, the information available to you is limited by the small size of that mirror, isn't it? Sometimes you begin to change lanes, only to be startled by a loud honk from a car that you hadn't seen. You hadn't seen the car because it was in your blind spot. That's essentially what Paul is saying here in verse 12.

There is a vagueness, a dimness in what we see. There are limitations to what we see in terms of our preaching and teaching of the Word of God. Also, our knowledge is limited. But there's coming a day when we will see, without a mirror, face to face, the real picture and we will know, without any limitations, the fullness of knowledge in the same way that we are known. That's a fantastic promise. Just imagine the day when we will know everything and see everything the way it really is. I'm

excited about that, aren't you?

You say, "When is that going to be?" That's what we're talking about; I'm getting to it. Here are the options, the most popular views among evangelicals today. The first one is this: some people say that the perfect thing is the completion of Scripture and has already come. This is a very, very popular view today. It is the completed New Testament added to the Old Testament; the perfect thing is the Scripture. So since we have this, we see face to face and we know as we are known.

I think this view is weak for the following reasons. Number one, I don't think the Corinthians would have thought of that. Remember, Paul was basically writing to a group of people to get a message to them that they would understand. We are really eavesdropping on the Corinthians' letter. I don't think that the Corinthians would have comprehended the concept of 'perfect' in that way.

You see, in Matthew 5:48 Jesus had said, "Be perfect, even as your Father, who is in heaven, is perfect." In the mind of the Corinthians, then, where would perfection be? In my mind, it would be in Heaven. Jesus was setting the ultimate standard of absolute holiness. That is what I desire for you, and perfection is always the highest level of attainment. I don't think that the Corinthians would have comprehended it as the New Testament. To them, the perfect thing would have been to be like Christ, or to be like God, to be fully matured.

Secondly, if you make the perfect thing the Scriptures, then prophecy and knowledge stop with the Scriptures. Then there is no proclaiming the Scriptures and no drawing knowledge out of the Scriptures. Do you see what you've done? You've eliminated one of the manifestations of those gifts.

For example, even while Scripture was still being written, the writers of Scripture were preaching from other Scriptures. So prophecy is something that is a proclamation of revelation. Sometimes the prophetic gift was revelatory, but sometimes it was reiterating what had already been revealed. So if the perfect thing is the Bible, then prophecy and knowledge would have had to stop when the Bible was completed. Then, you'd have no proclaiming of it and no drawing truths out of it, in terms of spiritual gifts. I find that rather hard to understand since that's what they did. In fact, Peter quotes Paul, and Paul quotes Jesus. So there was a proclaiming of already-written Scriptures going on that was part of both of those gifts.

The third principle, I think, is really the crux of the issue. If you say that prophecy and knowledge cease at the completion of the Scripture, then there is no proclaiming, or prophesying, and no drawing principles out of the Word of God through the entire Church Age, through the entire Tribulation, through the Kingdom, or forever. I find that a little hard to believe. Joel 2:28 says that in the Kingdom, young men and daughters will prophesy. What follows the Church Age? The Tribulation. What follows the Tribulation? The Kingdom. In the Kingdom, there is prophesying (Joel

2 and Acts 2). So, if there is prophecy in the Tribulation and in the Millennial Kingdom, has prophecy ceased? No. There is still yet a future for prophecy. To say nothing of the proclaiming and the teaching going on throughout the Church Age.

Those that hold to this view say, "Well, the gifts of prophecy and knowledge stop and then start up again." But that can't be true for two reasons. First, the verb used in I Corinthians 13:8 means 'to be abolished,' and second, if these gifts start up again, it would destroy Paul's whole point. He's simply saying, "Some things stop and they're done, but love is forever." His contrast isn't, "Certain things come and go, but love is forever." That's a weak contrast. His point is the strong contrast of, "Some things stop, but love goes on forever."

Another point; I don't think it's the Scripture is because it can't explain 'face to face.' Now I ask you: you own a Bible and I own a Bible, but have you ever seen God face to face? No. In fact, we haven't even seen the one who reveals God, the Lord Jesus Christ. In I Peter 1:8 it says, "Whom, having not seen, you love." Having a Bible doesn't mean that we've seen God face to face. Now, someday that will happen, when we go to heaven, and when God's glory fills the new Heaven and the new Earth and shines out of the midst of the Holy City. Then we'll see His glory, but it hasn't happened yet.

Further, if you interpret the perfect thing as Scripture, I don't think you can explain the statement, "I shall I know even as also I am known." Because I have a Bible, do I know God as well as God knows me? No. God knows me perfectly, but I only know Him in part. Even though I have a Bible, I don't know all there is to know about God. Paul says I shall know as I am known.

In John 10:15, Jesus says, "As the Father knows Me, even so know I the Father." I can't say the Father knows me and I know the Father in the same sense, can I? No. It's limited. From these simple thoughts: the fact that it would have had an obscure meaning to the Corinthians; it ends prophecy and knowledge long before the Kingdom and the Tribulation, where they do appear; it can't explain 'face to face'; and it can't explain 'then shall I know even as also I am known.' All of those make me believe that you can't say the perfect thing is the Scripture.

Let me give you a second view. Others say it is the rapture of the church. It is very common, and it may be the one you have heard of. This is a good offering; I think I believed it for a while. But I think this view is also weak because, like the first view, it can't explain why prophecy and knowledge are going on in the Tribulation and the Kingdom if they cease at the Rapture. In fact, it's even more complicated.

Some people say, "All this will cease at the Rapture." So until the Rapture, there is prophecy and knowledge going on, and the Rapture comes, and they end. You know what happens? Immediately, in the Kingdom, they start all over again. That wouldn't make any sense at all. If they end, they end. So if you say it's the Rapture, how do you explain Revelation 11, where there is prophecy going on?

How do you explain the Millennial Kingdom where there is prophecy and teaching going on all over the earth in every corner of the world? All over the world, for 1,000 years, everyone is teaching! I'll show you that in a few minutes. So it doesn't seem to be the Rapture.

The third one is a newer one, and this is one that many popular Bible teachers have been teaching. It is the view that the perfect thing is the maturing of the church. When the church reaches its maturity; that is, when everyone is in and the body is complete, that's the perfect thing. Well, that is simply another way of identifying the Rapture, because when everybody's in the church and the body is complete, what happens? We leave. That's it. What would there be for us to do? There wouldn't be anyone else to win; the church would be complete. That is basically that view. The reason they say it's the body maturing rather than the Rapture is because they take the word 'perfect' as meaning maturity. But it still has the same problem. If prophecy and knowledge cease when the church is mature and taken out of the world, then again, how do you explain prophecy in the Tribulation and in the Kingdom?

Teleion, here, is in the neuter. But when it is used in connection with the Rapture and the Second Coming, the forms are always feminine. If you are a Greek student, there is a little difference there that is interesting to study if you have some time.

One offering is the completion of the New Testament, the second, the maturity of the church, the third, the Rapture. The fourth is the Second Coming. Some say it is when Christ returns, that's the perfect thing. Christ is the perfect thing. The problem is that it is neuter, and Christ isn't a thing, He's a He. It should, therefore, be masculine: telios. Again, if Christ comes and ends prophecy, then why, immediately after He comes and sets up His Kingdom, eoes prophecy start up all over the world? It just doesn't seem to make any sense. The Kingdom is going to be loaded with teaching and preaching.

I was reading an interesting thing this week. There is a Bible student that takes the view that it is the Scripture; Scripture comes and prophecy and knowledge cease. But you see, they are just symbolic of gifts. If you're going to take that view, then you'll have to take the view that when the canon came, all the gifts stopped. Really. Because these are just representative. There are some who have taken that view, as I told you last week, because they realize that. That's the problem. So this fellow says that when the Scripture was done, prophecy and knowledge ended.

Further, in another book, he said this. "Doubtless, there will be an unparalleled teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Millennial Kingdom." I thought that was interesting how he could have all those things stop at the time of the New Testament completion in 96 A.D. and yet have a whole teaching ministry going on in the Kingdom. He says in one breath that they had stopped, and in the next that they were going on in the Kingdom.

Let me draw this to a conclusion. There will be teaching and preaching in the Kingdom, believe me, a tremendous amount of it. We could go on and on forever, but let me show you some passages out of Isaiah and Jeremiah show you what I mean.

You'll find this interesting. We're in the Kingdom here, and if you read this entire chapter, it will be abundantly clear to you. He talks about all the wonderful things that are going to happen earlier in the chapter. In Isaiah 11:9, talking about what will happen during the 1,000-year reign of Christ on the earth after the Second Coming, it says, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." Somehow, some way, in some manner, the entire globe is going to be engulfed in knowledge, instruction, teaching, and preaching. It's going to be dominating.

Look at Isaiah 12:3-4. He is still talking about the Kingdom. "Therefore, with joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation." If there's going to be salvation in the Kingdom, there's going to have to be proclamation in the Kingdom as well, because you have to hear the message before you can believe it, "Faith comes by hearing about Christ," Romans 10:17 says. "And in that day shall you say, 'Praise the LORD, call upon His name, declare His doings among the people, make mention that His name is exalted.'" In other words, God is calling on Israel to preach and proclaim His name in the Kingdom, to bring people to salvation.

We could study Jeremiah, Micah, Habbakuk, but we'll stick around for a minute in Isaiah. Isaiah 29:18. He's talking about what will happen in the Kingdom, blessing after blessing. "And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness." In other words, there's going to be instruction in the Kingdom. No longer will people be deaf and blind to it. The instruction will go on, and it will be carried out effectively.

Isaiah 30:20-21. "And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers. And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' when you turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." In the Kingdom, there are going to be teachers all over the globe, and they're going to be saying, "Don't do that! Don't go that way, go this way." God is actually going to have emissaries all over the world directing people in the way they are to walk and in the way they are to go during the time of the Millennial Kingdom. There will be tremendous involvement and instruction during the Kingdom.

Isaiah 32:3-4. "And the eyes of those who see shall not be dim, and the ears of those who hear shall hearken. The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly." There will be knowledge, understanding, and the apprehension of information and truth so that people will be led to righteous behavior as well as to salvation.

Isaiah 41:20. Were in the Kingdom again, "That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it." Another element is that, in the Kingdom, information will be dispatched in order that people might know the truth about God.

Isaiah 2:2-3. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths;' for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." God's Word will literally proceed from Jerusalem out to the world.

There are going to be teachers all over the place, proclaiming and preaching and speaking. As Joel said, "Your young men and daughters will prophesy." The word of knowledge, the word of wisdom, the gift of teaching. I believe all of those things, in some manner, will be functioning in divine energy in the time of the Kingdom. Isaiah 29:24 says, "Your people shall learn doctrine." The Kingdom will be loaded with Kingdom teachers and preachers.

Jeremiah 23:4, here we are in the Kingdom. "And I will set up shepherds over them who shall feed them." Just that statement. What does a spiritual shepherd do to feed his flock? He gives them the Word. So it is clear to me, and I haven't even begun to scratch the surface, that there is teaching and preaching in the Kingdom.

Now, if there is going to be teaching and preaching in the Kingdom, and the gifts are going to be operating in the Kingdom in some sense, then those gifts haven't ceased. And if they haven't ceased yet, then the perfect thing hasn't come. That leaves us only one other possibility. Someone came up to me this morning and said, "Where should I go for support for this position?" I said, "There's nowhere to go, really. This is a position that I couldn't find in any books, but this is what I believe." I checked it out with a couple of people that I trust who are experts in theology beyond me, and I found agreement, which was kind of exciting.

I believe there is only one possibility for the perfect thing. That is the eternal state. It is the eternal new Heaven and new Earth that begin at the end of the 1,000-year Kingdom. That fits everything, because that's Heaven. What Paul is really saying in I Corinthians 13 is, "You're going to need these spiritual gifts while you're existing in time, but love is all you'll need for eternity." That's the contrast; it is a contrast between time and eternity.

Let me give you several reasons why I believe this. This view allows for the neuter use of to teleios, for you Greek students. It is the perfect thing; not a person, but a thing. The thing is Heaven (or the

eternal state). It allows for prophecy and knowledge in the Tribulation and the Kingdom. One day, when we go to Heaven, we won't need preachers and teachers and Bible studies and classes. Why? Because we will be perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect.

Thirdly, this is the view that fits the context of I Corinthians 13 best. Paul is saying that the gifts are important, but they are only for time, love will go on throughout eternity. What Paul was saying is, "These things will only go through time, but love will go on for eternity." The contrast loses itself if these things only last through the canon, or the Rapture, or the Second Coming, because time isn't done yet. He's trying to contrast what is temporal with what is eternal. The whole point is to show that love is the only thing that is eternal. Not that love is the only thing in the church age. Not that love is the only thing in the Tribulation; not that love is the only thing in the Kingdom, but that love is the only thing that goes through eternity. His contrast is weakened if you make it anything short of eternity.

Another one. I believe this is the only view that explains the phrase 'face to face,' because the only time we will ever see the Shekinah glory of God manifest is when we are in Heaven; that's the only time. Revelation 21 and 22 describe the eternal state (the new Heaven and new Earth); it says that the new Jerusalem descends and God makes a new Heaven and a new Earth, and therein the glory of God is manifest. That is the Heaven of eternity; that is where we see God. That's where we will see His glory. It provides to me the only explanation for that.

You say, "What about in the Kingdom? Won't all believers see His glory in the Kingdom?" No. Do you realize that, in the Kingdom, there will be believing people living on Earth who are still in their physical bodies while the New Jerusalem (where the glorified saints of the church will be living) is suspended over the earth? We may be able to come and go, but God will dwell in the New Jerusalem, so the people on Earth will not see His glory. They will see His Son manifest on the Earth. So the idea of 'face to face' isn't fulfilled until the Kingdom ends and all of it is engulfed in the eternal heavens, and God's glory is manifest to all the saints who by then are glorified.

Further, this is the only view that explains the statement, "We shall know even as we are known." The only time I'll know as much as there is to know is when I'm in Heaven, right? Only then will I have perfect knowledge because I'm like Christ. So, historically, the perfect thing is the eternal state. That's historically.

Listen, this is really exciting. Personally, we enter the eternal state whenever we go to be with Jesus Christ. If I died right now, "Absent from the body, present with the Lord," and, "I shall be like Him; for I shall see Him as He is." That's the eternal state for me. If I live until the Rapture, that's when the eternal state begins. Historically, it is in the new Heaven and the new Earth, when all the saints of all the ages are all glorified and made perfect. That's the historic part. The personal aspect of the eternal state is the same kind of perfection that comes the moment I go to be with Christ. The minute

I enter His presence, there is no longer any need for teaching, preaching, Bible study, classes. Why? Because we will have instant knowledge and instant sight. That's what he's saying. This is the only view that fits the context.

Paul adds a further note. In verse 11 he says that gifts are elementary. "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. When I reached maturity, or perfection."

Now I think verse 11 is Paul saying, "When I reach my maturity in Christ is when I see Christ and I'm like him." You see, for a Jewish boy, maturity wasn't a process, it happened the moment he had his Bar Mitzvah. The day before his Bar Mitzvah, he was immature; but once he had his Bar Mitzvah, he was mature, a son of the law. So Paul is saying, "I'll deal with these elementary things until I have my spiritual Bar Mitzvah. But when that happens I'll be like Jesus, and I'll be able to put those childish things away. When I get to Heaven, there won't be any more preaching or teaching for me. I'm just going to enjoy God without going through the work." Gifts are elementary.

Well, if gifts are limited to time, and love is forever, where should we major? On love. So, Paul sums it up in verse 13 with a statement on the preeminence of love. "And now," right now, in time, temporal, in this time, on the Earth, in the segment of time, there are three good things, "Faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

Do you know why love is greater than faith and hope? Because faith is going to come to an end. Right now we walk by faith, not by sight; but someday we'll walk by sight, not by faith. The same holds true for hope. Right now we hope; but Paul says in Romans 8, "That which is seen, we don't hope for." And some day we'll see and there won't be any hope. So, both faith and hope are going to disappear, and what's going to be left? Love. That's why Paul says, "The greatest of these is love."

Your gifts, your abilities, your ministries, your talents, your faith, and your hope - all of these things are important. But they are for time. Love is forever. The point, then, is this: you'd better learn to love here, because it's the only link you can have with eternity. That's how important love is in the assembly of believing people. The response to it all, I Corinthians 14:1, is this: "Follow after love." That's the more excellent way. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for our fellowship this morning and for that love which You have given to us in Christ. Because of it, we can love You back in return. Father, minister to us today through the love of Your people and the love of the Spirit of God, that we might truly love others as You have loved us. May the world see You in us that You might be praised. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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