

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, this morning, of being in the 13th chapter of I Corinthians. And I just love to study myself, and I trust that God has really blessed you with it. This morning, we're going to find ourselves looking at it in a more technical way than we have in the past. And, in a sense, this is very much going to be 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. And so, 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. But we'll just kind of major on some of the fine points of the text, in order to try to draw a conclusion on something that has been a very, very big area of discussion in the church. And that is certain things regarding the perfect thing mentioned in verse 10.

Now, as you know, the chapter is all about love, and the great climax of this chapter comes, really, in verse 8 in the words, "Love never fails." That's really the pinnacle of love. And 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, who had emphasized all the good things, the gifts and the ministries, and so forth, but they had forgotten the one which was the best thing, Paul calls it in 12:31, the "more excellent way," love. And so he makes a major statement on the essence, the character, the qualities of love.

We saw, first of all, the prominence of love in the first three verses, and then the perfections of love in the next section, and then, beginning in verse 8, the permanence of love. And we heard the apostle Paul, last week, tell us that love never fails, love never fails, a tremendous statement. And what he is really saying is that love is the eternal thing. And if it is the only link that you have, really, with eternity, then you'd better major on that in time, because that's 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, and the way that they bragged about their spirituality was by abusing, and overusing, and misusing, and counterfeiting their spiritual gifts. And so Paul draws their viewpoint of gifts into his viewpoint of love and makes a comparison here, to show that the gifts are not the thing that are to be emphasized. Love is, because the gifts are passing and love is forever. That's his major point.

Now, we looked, last time, at that thought 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. And 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. But more close to the meaning that Paul has here is the technical use in classical Greek where the word is used to speak of a flower that withers and decays, and its petals begin to fall off. And what he’s saying is that love is no flower that decays; love never falls, it never fades, it never withers away. It is the one great, eternal thing, the more excellent way.

And better than your assembly being sold out to just teaching or doctrine, better than your assembly being sold out to just 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 and that, in so doing, the world might know that you are, in fact, children of God. So love is the more excellent thing.

Now, to make this comparison with gifts, he draws three comparisons, and 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 I want you to think through this passage with me, because we’re going to look at it in a technical sense to try to solve a rather old problem relative to the meaning of some of these things. And, along the way, I’m kind of excited that you can maybe get a feel for the process that a Bible student uses to come to conclusions.

Now, 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 certain viewpoints to come to the right viewpoint and what the process is for getting to that. Now, 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.

“But whether there be prophecies, they shall be rendered inoperative – ” or abolished or done away – “whether there be tongues, they shall stop by themselves – ” in the middle voice – “whether there be knowledge, it shall be rendered inoperative—” be abolished or be 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. And he’s simply saying, “Gifts are a passing reality; they are not a forever item. They have their time, they have their place. But they are not permanent; they are not eternal.” They’re very essential, believe me.

I daresay that prophecy and knowledge, 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, very essential. But as essential as they are in their time, they are only for time and not for eternity. And the only link you have with eternity is love, and so love should dominate.

Now, we saw last time that there is an interesting distinction made in the use of the verbs with prophecy and knowledge as over against tongues. And in relation to tongues, we saw that the verb that is used in the form that it is used says tongues will stop by themselves. And then we did some discussion as to whether they had, in fact, stopped. And we determined that they had, biblically, three 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. And 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 and their apostolic ministries. And 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, which punishment was carried out in 70 A.D. Consequently, the sign no longer needs to be in existence today. And history, then, corroborated for us that tongues did, in fact, cease until approximately 1900, when this modern movement began.

So we said that tongues have ceased, and the current thing that we're seeing can be explained 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, it says, shall be stopped, or shall be rendered inoperative. And the verb is passive there, meaning something is going to stop prophecy and knowledge. Something is going to halt them, something is going to bring them to an end, and that something is the perfect thing mentioned in verse 10. And we're going to discuss today what that perfect thing is.

Now, this is a very interesting study, because so many people have been so confused about it. And it's been dialogued and kicked around for so much time that I hope we can kind of give you a solution that might be one you could pursue yourself, and study and see that, perhaps, this is maybe the best of all.

Now, prophecy and knowledge haven't ceased with tongues; they are still going on when tongues stops. They're waiting for the perfect thing to stop them. Verses 9, "We know in part, - "that's knowledge " - we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part

shall be done away.” So the partial things, knowledge and prophecy, are going to stop when the perfect thing comes. They’re only temporary. They’re 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 he says the gifts are not only temporary, they’re partial. Look at verse 9 again. “In part,” once; “In part,” twice; verse 10, “that which is in part.” Three times he says, “in part.” Notice verse 12, “I know in part.” Four times he emphasizes the fact that the knowledge we have is partial. *Meros* in the Greek; it simply means “a part of the whole,” not the whole. Gifts are partial.

You will notice that it is interesting to see that tongues do not appear in verses 9, 10, 11, 12 or 13. They have stopped, and 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. And tongues has, by this time, by the time the perfect thing comes, tongues has stopped by itself; it is not stopped. It is not a passive verb.

Now, verse 9 says, “We know in part, and we prophesy in part.” Now, 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 to you part of what there is to tell about the truth of God. Is that right? I’m limited. I’m limited to what God has revealed; I’m limited to my understanding of what God has revealed; I’m limited by the fact that a human mind cannot understand a superhuman God in fullness.

So at best, preaching is partial. Prophesying, to speak before, is partial. At best, the word of knowledge is partial. To draw out of the Word of God principles of knowledge, that is only a partial thing. 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.

In I Corinthians chapter 8, verse 2, it says...and I think this is a good reminder, and I want to take a minute with it. You know it’s so easy for us to become sort of doctrinally smug and think we’ve got all the answers. We’ve pigeonholed our theology; we’ve got all of the passages that are difficult figured out. But in 1 Corinthians 8:2, it says “If any man think that he knows anything, he knows nothing, what he really ought to know.” Basically, knowledge is limited. And, especially, it’s limited when you think you know everything; then you don’t know anything ‘cause the basic part of knowledge is you can’t know everything.

Going back in the Old Testament, I want to show you that no Christian can have perfect knowledge. You know I think some people may think they do; I think some people may think that I do, you know. They think, “Well, you know, he’s the pastor of the church and he speaks the Word of God, and 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, you know. That's the problem.

But the problem with human nature is that it is fallible, and there are mistakes. And there is a limit to the knowledge which we can apprehend. And I think some Bible teachers maybe need to remember that. I know I do. That you just don't know everything. You may think we do, but we don't, and some Bible students need to remember this as well. Look at Job with me for a minute. And I want to show you a few passages just to help with our humility a little, to understand that there are plenty of things that we don't know. And we're just kind of scratching the surface of this whole aspect of knowing the fullness of the divine nature.

In Job 11, verse 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 are you going to do? It's deeper than the grave; what can you know?" In other words, it's impossible to attain the fullness of the knowledge of God. You can't get that high; you can't plumb that low. It's beyond the capacity of man to fully understand.

And you know, when people ask sometimes, why do Bible teachers disagree or good Christians disagree, it's because...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 and trying to put the pieces together and make conclusions without a fullness of revelation. That's why it's so difficult to systematize things.

But in Job 26:14, this is interesting. He's just had a lot of things said about God and how marvelous God is and how powerful he is, and all the things He did with creation. And he says, "Lo," or behold; an exclamation, or you could say "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 and God's ways and God's truth and God's nature.

Psalm 40, verse 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 them, when I try to program them and systematize them, and offer them back to You, there's something missing." 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 in verse 6, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it." Far beyond us. Well, that's Psalm 139:6. In Romans 11, just to compare with a New Testament word, so that you'll understand that even the New Testament doesn't fill up all the knowledge, it says, Romans 11:33, "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." Now, listen to the next verse. "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 it says in Colossians 2:3, "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 all 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.

Now, I want to hasten to say, that doesn't mean we're having a problem because we are 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, and that is true. You have taught him truth. But it's a long way from algebra, geometry, trigonometry, and calculus. There is so much more to know that your child would never in the world begin to conceive 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 simply means it is incomplete. And we learn more as we grow as Christians, but we don't have it all. May I hasten to add that we have all that we need. Peter said, "You have all things that pertain unto life and godliness." You have all we need. I John 5:20, "We have enough knowledge now that we may know Him and that we may know His Son." I Corinthians chapter 2, "We have the Holy Spirit who teaches us to know the deep things of God." So we know what we need to know. 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, "Well, 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, so God kept it simple. It's so simple that a child can know it. And if God had dumped on us the fullness of all truth...in the first place, it's infinite. If God is infinite then truth is infinite. And if we had an infinite book, it would be ridiculous. It would be a book without a beginning and an end.

And to think that God has condescended to put His truth in this little thing right here, and this is a fat one at that. There are a lot skinnier ones than this. And for somebody to believe that this is all the truth of God, that's hopeless. Oh, there's far more, far more. We haven't begun to even touch the surface. God kept it simple so we wouldn't get confused.

And, secondly, a sin-defiled, depraved, human mind couldn't...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 the future. So, we have this partial knowledge. It comes through the gift of preaching or prophecy, some of it. People declare to us the Word of God, and people draw out with a word of knowledge, principles in the Scripture, and teach them to us. So these are, in part, contributing to what we know.

Now, let's go back to I Corinthians 13 and look again at verse 10. "We know in part; we 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 – "*katarge*, done away, abolished, rendered inoperative. Same verb 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 "Fantastic. You won't need preaching, because you'll have all the information. You won't need teaching anymore because you'll have all knowledge. You'll have every bit of truth there is. In fact, he goes so far, in verse 12, to say, "We 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 no more books, no more sermons, no more classes, no more Bible studies, no more anything. You'll have it all; you'll know it all. And there will be no more need for the gifts. But you know what there will be? There will be love. That's his 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, get on your academic thought patterns and here we go. And don't bail out here. Stick with it. What is the perfect thing? And then there's a lot of discussion about this, There didn't used to be, frankly. There used to be just a simple thing and then everybody got complicated, and all kinds of possibilities have been entertained in the last 100 years.

Well, let's talk about it. 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, God's Word, God's program, partially. "But someday, face to face," fully "We now know in part," that's the gift of knowledge in his illustration here. But someday we are going to know in the same way that we are known. Incredible!

Now look at that illustration, we see in a glass darkly, or a mirror darkly. The Corinthians would know exactly what he was talking about because there was a trade in the city of Corinth where people made mirrors. And in those days, they made mirrors out of metal. They would take the metal and they would flatten it out. And then they would polish it to a high shine and it would be used as a mirror.

But, of course, if you've ever looked in a metal mirror, you know that it tends to have little wavy places and so forth, so it's somewhat distorted. And, Additionally, when it was kept for a little while it would be prone to decay somewhat. And, consequently, it may become blotched here and there, and marred. So he's saying, "For now, we are looking in a mirror, and it reveals to us a rather vague image and a rather confined image."

When you looking in a mirror...sometimes when you're driving and you're looking in your rearview mirror, I mean all you're seeing is what is made available to you in that little thing. And, sometimes, you start to change lanes, you know, and we've got one blind spot. And all of a sudden, *honk*, and you whip back because somebody is right in that blind spot. And that's essentially what Paul is saying.

There is a vagueness, there is a dimness in what we see, and there are limitations to what we see, prophetically, in terms of our preaching and teaching of the Word of God. And, 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 we are known. That's a fantastic promise. Just imagine. 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, "Well, when's it going to be?" Well, that's what we're going to talk about. I'm getting to it, I'm getting to it. Here are the options. Some people say the perfect thing...and this I'm going to give you, these are all the most popular views, very popular among evangelicals today. And the first one is this. Some people say that the perfect thing has already come. It was the completion of the Scripture. It's a very, very popular view today, the completion of the Scripture. The completion of the New Testament added to the Old Testament, and this is the perfect thing, the Scripture. And when we have this, we see face to face and we know as we are known.

Now, I think this view is weak for the following reasons. Are you ready for this? Number one, I don't think the Corinthians would have thought of that. And 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 Corinthian letter. I don't think that that's the way the Corinthians comprehended the concept of "perfect."

You see, Jesus had said, in Mathew 5:48, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." Where then, in the mind of the Corinthians, would perfection be? Well, in my mind, it would be in Heaven. "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." He was setting the ultimate standard of absolute holiness. That is what I desire for you. And perfection always is the highest level of attainment. Now, I don't think that they would have comprehended it as the New Testament. To them, the perfect thing would be 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 stopped with the Scriptures. Then there's no proclaiming the Scriptures and there's no drawing knowledge out of the Scriptures. Do you see what you've done? Really, 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 other scripture, so that 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 you make the perfect thing the Bible, then prophecy and knowledge stop when the Bible gets here. Then, you've got no proclaiming of it and no drawing truths out of it, in terms of spiritual gifts. And I find that rather hard to understand, since that's what they did in the...in the early...in fact, Peter quotes Paul, and Paul quotes Jesus. And so there was a proclaiming of already-written scriptures going on that was part of both of those gifts.

A third principle, and I think this is really the crux of the issue. If you say that prophecy and knowledge cease at the completion of the Scripture, then you have no proclaiming or prophesying, and no use of the word of knowledge drawing principles out of the Word of God through the entire church age, through the entire Tribulation, through the entire kingdom, or forever. And I find that a little hard to believe. Let me show you why.

In Joel 2...don't turn to it. We saw this last week. In Joel 2, it says that "In the kingdom, your young men shall," what? "prophesy, and your daughters shall prophesy. Now listen. Church age. What follows the church age? Tribulation. What follows the Tribulation? The kingdom. In the kingdom, you've got prophesying, Joel 2, Acts 2. Well, you say, "What about the Tribulation?" What happens in Revelation 11?

Immediately after the Rapture, God raises up two prophets. Remember them? Two prophets, Revelation 11. Read it. You have prophecy in the Tribulation; you have prophecy in the millennial kingdom. And I ask you the question; has prophecy ceased? No. There is still yet a future for prophecy. And I reminded you, last time, that the verb means "to be abolished." It doesn't mean to stop for a while and start up again. Prophecy will stop.

Now, if you say it stopped at the close of the New Testament, then how do you explain the prophecy going on in the Tribulation and the prophecy going on in the kingdom, to say nothing of the proclaiming going on all through the church age. And the word of knowledge is people draw principles out of the Word of God, teaching. It's very difficult. Well, they say, "It stops and then starts again."

Well, but you can't do that because, number one, the verb means to be abolished. And the second element is that you destroy Paul's whole point. Paul is simply saying, "Some things stop and they're done; love is forever." He doesn't...his contrast isn't, "Certain things come and go, but love is forever." That's a weak contrast. "Some things stop, but love goes on forever." That's a strong contrast. That's his point.

Another thought. 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, have you ever seen God face to face? No. In fact, I haven't

even seen the one who reveals God, the Lord Jesus Christ. And in I Peter 1:8 it says, "Whom, having not seen, you love." Having a Bible doesn't mean that I have seen face to face. It will happen. It will happen someday when we go to heaven, and 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.

And, further, if you take it to be the Scripture, you can explain the statement, "I shall know as I am known." Because I have a Bible, do I know God as well as God knows me? Do I? No. God knows me perfectly; I know Him in part. Even though I have a Bible, I don't know all there is to know about God. He says, "I shall know as I am known." In John 10:15, Jesus says, "The Father knows Me, and I know the Father." I can't say, "Oh yes, and the Father knows me and I know the Father, too," in the same sense, can I? I don't. It's limited.

So, from these simple thoughts, the fact that is an obscure...it would have an obscure meaning to the Corinthians, the fact that it ends prophecy and knowledge long before the kingdom and the Tribulation, where they appear, the fact that it can't explain "face to face," it can't explain "know as I am known," just makes me believe that it...you can't say the perfect thing is the Scripture.

Let me give you a second one. Others say, "Well, it's the Rapture of the church." And this is most common. This may be the one you've heard of. "It's the Rapture of the church." And this is a good...it's a good offering. I think I was there for a long time on this point, the Rapture of the church. But I think that's weak, also. And the reason it's weak, and I'm going to build on the last point. The reason I...it is weak is basically because it, also, can't explain why you have prophecy and knowledge going on in the Tribulation and the kingdom if they cease at the Rapture. In fact, it's even more complicated.

There's some people say, "No. All this will cease at the Rapture." So until the Rapture, you've got prophecy and knowledge going on. And the Rapture comes and they end. And 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 make it the Rapture, then how do you explain Revelation 11, where you've got prophecy going on? How do you explain the whole thing in 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 1000 years, everyone is teaching. And I'll show you that in a few minutes. So it doesn't seem to fit at the Rapture.

The third one, and this is the kind of the newest one. And it's...many popular Bible teachers have been teaching this, that the perfect thing is the maturing of the church. When the church reaches its maturity, that is, when everybody's in and the body is complete, that's the perfect thing. Well, that is simply another way of saying the Rapture, because when everybody's in and the body is complete, and the church is complete, what happens? We leave, right. That's it.

I mean, what would there be for us to do? There wouldn't be anyone else to win if the church was complete. That is basically that view. But the reason they make it the body maturing rather than the Rapture is because they take the word "perfect" in terms of meaning maturity. But it still has the same problem. Because if prophecy and knowledge cease when the church is mature and taken out of the world, then again, how do you explain prophecy and knowledge in the Tribulation end in the kingdom?

Well, another view, and there others I could give you on the Greek...but I won't bother with them...on whether it's neuter or feminine, and so forth. *Teleios*, incidentally, when used in connection with the Rapture and Second Coming, the...I should say *teleios* here is in the neuter, but the forms are used with reference to the rapture in Second Coming, for you Greek students, are always feminine. And so, there's a little difference there that's interesting to study if you have some time.

But the fourth offering. One is the completion of the New Testament, the Rapture, the maturity of the church. Some people say, "No, the perfect thing is the Second Coming, the Second Coming when Christ returns, that's the perfect thing. Christ is the perfect thing. He is coming, but the problem is it's neuter, and Christ isn't a thing. Christ is a He, and it should be masculine, *teleios*. And again, if Christ comes and ends prophecy, then how come immediately after He comes, he sets up His kingdom, and prophecy starts all over the world? It just doesn't seem to make sense. The kingdom is going to be loaded with teaching and preaching.

An interesting thing I was reading this week. There is one Bible student that takes the view that it is the Scripture. Scripture comes and prophecy and knowledge ceases and so forth. But you see, they're just symbolic of gifts. And if you're going to take that view, then you're going to have to take the view that when the canon came, all the gifts stopped, really, because these are just representative. And there are some who have taken that view, as I told you last week, because they realize that. That's the problem. So, anyway, this fellow said, "Well, when the Scripture was done, prophecy and knowledge ended."

And then, further, in another book...and I looked a long time to find this statement because I thought it was interesting. 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. When he had said in one breath they stopped, and in the next breath, 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. And I could...we could go on and on forever, but let me just take you to Isaiah and give you a few scriptures to show you what I mean. Isaiah 11. Now, watch this. You're

going to find this interesting. Isaiah 11:9. We're in the kingdom here, and if you were to read the whole chapter, it would become abundantly clear to you.

He talks about all the wonderful things that are going to happen earlier in 11. And in verse 9, "They shall not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain." This is what's going to happen in the 1000-year reign of Christ on the earth after the Second Coming. "or the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Listen. Somehow, some way, in some manner, the entire globe is going to be engulfed in knowledge, in instruction, teaching, preaching. It's going to be dominating.

Now look at chapter 12. Further, he's talking about this kingdom. Verse 3 of chapter 12, "Therefore, with joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation." There's going to be salvation in the kingdom. And if there is salvation in the kingdom, there's going to have to be proclamation in the kingdom, because you have to hear the message before you can believe it, "Faith comes by hearing a speech about Christ," Romans 10:17 says. "In that day shall you say, 'Praise the Lord, call on His name, declare His doings, 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.

The 29th chapter of Isaiah...and we could study Jeremiah, we could study Micah, we could study Habakkuk, but we'll stick around for a minute in Isaiah. Isaiah 29:17, and he's talking about what will happen in the kingdom, blessing after blessing. But verse 18, "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. No longer will people be deaf to it; no longer will they be blind to it. The instruction will go on, and it will be carried out effectively.

The 30th of Isaiah, verse 20. "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 ye in it,' when you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left." Listen. 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 this 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 the way they are to go during the time of the millennial kingdom. Tremendous involvement and instruction here. The 32nd chapter of Isaiah, verse 3, "And the eyes of those who see shall not be dim, 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, there will be understanding, there will be the apprehension of information and truth to lead people to righteous behavior as well as to salvation.

Isaiah 41, verse 15 to 20. We won't read them all, but just verse 20, Isaiah 41:20. "That they may see – " Again, we're in the kingdom " – and know, and consider, and understand." Another element. In the kingdom there will be those things helping people to see and know and consider and understand. There will information being dispatched in order that people might know the truth about God.

In Isaiah 2:2 and 3. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, the mountain of the Lord's house will be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. many people shall go and come...or go and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob,' listen, "and He will teach us 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. And as Joel said, "Your young men and your daughters shall 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. There is one statement in the prophets that says, "And your people shall learn doctrine." Your people shall learn doctrine. The kingdom will be loaded with kingdom teachers and preachers.

Just one other passage and then we'll go on. But I want you to get this. Jeremiah 23:4, here we are in the kingdom. "And I will set up shepherds over them who shall feed them." Just that statement. And 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, listen to me. 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 they haven't ceased. And if they haven't ceased yet, then the perfect thing hasn't come. Now, that leaves us only one other possibility. And someone came up to me after this morning and said, "Where should I go for support for this position?" And I said, "Well, there's nowhere to go, really, because this is a position that I think is just kind of...well, I don't know. I couldn't find in any books, but this is what I believe." And I checked it out with a couple of people that I trust who are experts in theology beyond me, and found agreement, which was kind of exciting.

But I believe there is only one possibility for the perfect thing, and that the perfect thing is the eternal state. It is the eternal new Heaven and new Earth that begins at the end of the 1000-year kingdom. And that fits everything, because that's Heaven. And what he's really saying is, "You're going to need all of this stuff for time, but you're only going to need love for eternity." And that is the contrast; it is a contrast between time and eternity.

Now, I'll give you several reasons why I believe it. It allows for the neuter use of *teleios*, for you Greek students. It allows for that neuter use. It is the perfect thing; not a person, but the thing, and the thing is Heaven. It allows for prophecy and knowledge in the Tribulation; it allows for prophecy and knowledge to go on in the kingdom. But one day when we go to Heaven, we won't need preachers and teachers and Bible studies and classes. Because we will be perfect as our Father – where? – in Heaven is perfect.

And I'll say, thirdly, I believe this is the best view because it fits the context of I Corinthians 13 best. Paul is saying there are...these things are important, but they are only for time. Love is for eternity. So what he's really saying is, "These things will only go through time, but only love will go through eternity." The contrast loses itself if it only...if these things only last till the canon, or the Rapture, or the Second Coming, because time isn't done yet.

And he's trying to contrast what is temporal with what is eternal, the whole point of which is to show that love is the only thing eternal. It's 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. And his contrast is weakened if you make it anything short of eternity.

Another one. I believe it's the only way to explain "face to face," because the only time we will ever see God's Shekinah glory manifest is when we are in Heaven; that's the only time. In the eternal state, the new Heaven and new Earth, Revelation 21 and 22 describe it. But 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, "Well, what about in the kingdom? Won't the whole world of believing people see His glory in the kingdom?" No. Do you realize that in the kingdom there will be believing people physically living on Earth. But the New Jerusalem, where the glorified saints of the church will be, is suspended over the earth?

And we may be able to come and go, but God will dwell in that New Jerusalem, and the people on Earth will not see His glory. They will see His Son manifest, right, 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, it is the only view that explains the statement, "To know as we are known." The only time I'll know as much as there is to know is when I'm in Heaven. Isn't that right? And I have perfect knowledge and I'm like Christ. So now watch. Historically, the perfect thing is the eternal state. That's

historically. Now, listen to this. This is really exciting. Personally, you enter the eternal state whenever you go to be with Jesus Christ. If I die now, “Absent from the body,” what? “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 part is that same kind of perfection comes the moment I go to be with Christ. So that the minute I enter His presence, no need for teaching, no need for preaching, no need for Bible study, no need for classes. Why? Instant knowledge and instant sight. That’s what he’s saying. Fits the context.

Now, Paul adds a further note. He says gifts are elementary in verse 11. I’m just going to briefly mention it. “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 what Paul is simply saying is “That when I reach my maturity in Christ is when I see Christ – ” right – “and I’m like him.”

You see, for a Jewish boy, maturity wasn’t a process, it was an instant. It was Bar Mitzvah. One day you weren’t mature. You had your Bar Mitzvah, you were mature. You became a son of the law. Paul says, “I’ll deal with these elementary things until I get to my spiritual Bar Mitzvah. And when I hit my spiritual Bar Mitzvah and I’m like Jesus, I put away all these things.” Paul says, in essence, “When I get to Heaven, no preaching for me, no teaching for me; I’m just going to enjoy. No more working to do that. Gifts are just elementary.

Well, if gifts are time and love is forever, where should we major? On love. And he sums it up in 13 with a statement on the preeminence of love, tremendous statement. “And now –” what do you mean now, Paul? Right now, in time, temporal, in this time, on the Earth, in the segment of time – “there are three good things. Faith and hope and love. But the greatest of these is,” what? “love.” You know why it’s great. You know why it’s the greatest. Because faith is going to come to an end.

Right now we walk by faith and not by sight; but someday we’ll walk by sight and not by faith. And 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, faith is going to go, and hope is going to go, and what’s going to be left? Love. And so he says, “The greatest of these is” what? “love.”

Your gifts, your abilities, your ministries, your talents, your faith, your hope, all of these things, as important as they are, are only for time. But love is forever. And the point is, 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 the believing people. And the response to it all, chapter 14, verse 1 is this. What does it say? “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, and because of which we can love back in return to You. Father, minister to us today through the love of Your people, the love of the Spirit of God, that we might truly love others as You have loved us, that the world see You in us that You might be praised. In Jesus' name, amen.

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