

1 Corinthians 13

Sunday 8/21/2011

The relationship between a father and a son is portrayed by the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father. Yet, at the same time, we know that they are all part of the same Trinity. We have talked many, many times about the reason why God transformed Himself into the Son of God. We understand now better how that all works and lays out.

One of the great questions that many people can never figure out is that when God wrote the Bible, He wrote the Bible around His Son. Every writer of every book in the Bible, of course, the Bible is written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God. God made sure that His Son was portrayed in a different way in each book. We have come through the books of the Bible and really focused on how the Lord Jesus Christ is portrayed in each book of the Bible. Yet, at the same time, there are so many things that go along with that.

We have been in this study now, and originally when I first thought about doing it, I thought I could move through it fairly quickly. But now we know that there are so many things here that we just need to stop and see. From where you are at, this is a fairly young church. We have only been here a little over eight years. We started with 12 people, and God has multiplied it to what you see today. We probably have 30 people who are not even here today who are out of town or in various situations.

The thing we built this church on from day one was the Bible. We believe that the Bible is the absolute thing that you and I need in our life, and it covers all the issues that we are going to get into in faith and practice. As you start coming through these books and we start to see how Christ is portrayed, it is really hard not to take the time to lay out for you because so many of you have such a desire to learn the Bible. It is very obvious that as we came through our first Bible Basics class, really our first two, and you did the homework and turned it into me, it was very obvious that many of you, if not most of you, are seriously searching to learn your Bible.

It is my responsibility as we start coming through these books that if there are issues that need to be resolved, and that will help you grow and give you, maybe in a short period of time, a major piece of your Bible, those are the things that I want to deal with.

I. The Troubled Church at Corinth

When we come to the book of 1 Corinthians, we know that Christ is portrayed as Christ our Lord. We also know that the Church at Corinth is the most troubled church in the New Testament. Paul deals with them chapter by chapter, and in many cases, most cases really, there are multiple issues in each chapter that they are really out of touch on. The Church at Corinth has rightly been called the most carnal church in the New Testament. They are a bunch of spiritual babies who can just never get anything right when the Bible comes to it. They have just got all kinds of problems.

They have bloated themselves and puffed themselves up to the point where they have actually got a spiritual hierarchy built within the whole church system. They have set themselves up on

spiritual levels that do not even exist. When I taught you church history a while back, and we took a year and came through church history, you remember the guy I told you about that was out there during the time of the rise of the Gnostics. The Gnostics were a group of people who basically felt that they had a superior spiritual intellect over the common man. Gnosticism was big back in the second, third, and fourth centuries.

One of those Gnostics was a guy by the name of Simon Stylites. Simon Stylites' claim to fame was that he claimed to be more spiritual than other people and claimed to be on a regular basis getting higher and higher in his spiritual knowledge. The truth of the matter is, he did not have enough spiritual truth to put in the left eye of a blind mosquito, but that is beside the point. What he did was, over the course of 30 years, he is our first Christian flagpole sitter. He started out sitting on a pole that was 10 feet high. Over the next 30 years, it went from 10 feet high to 20 feet high to 30 feet high. I am not sure what the final height was before he probably fell and broke his neck.

The problem was this: he was sitting on different levels of poles to show the world how he was gaining higher spirituality with God. At every level of the pole, up the pole, signified that he was closer to God and above the common ordinary people who were walking on the ground. That was Simon Stylites back around 150, 180 A.D. To us, that sounds ludicrous and ridiculous, and it certainly is, but that is exactly what the church at Corinth is doing.

In chapter 1, we found out where they are arguing about who baptized whom. The issue is that if the Apostle Paul baptized somebody and just some common ordinary pastor baptized somebody else, the person baptized by Paul was at a greater spiritual level than the person that was baptized by the ordinary pastor. In chapter 3, they are arguing about who won whom to Christ. The issue there is that if, again, if Paul won you to Christ, then you are spiritually farther along and on a higher spiritual plane than if Joe Schmoe, who was just a deacon or somebody in the church, won you to Christ. They are tagging some kind of spiritual relevance to their experiences. When you start basing your spirituality on experiences, the flesh jumps in, and pretty soon everybody is trying to top the other person's experience. That is what we have in the church at Corinth.

II. Spiritual Gifts and the Character of God

We come to chapter 13, and we are ready to lay this out today because each chapter we have seen the issues. Now, in chapters 12, 13, and 14, we come to three chapters that form a study for us on spiritual gifts. We pretty much laid out and defined from the Bible's standpoint every aspect of spiritual gifts. You should have a good handle on it now. We gave one of the greatest definitions we could ever give you a couple of weeks back that really told you that spiritual gifts form on two basic concepts.

The church at Corinth wanted a spiritual gift. They wanted the power of God. We talked about how the spiritual gifts really represent the power of God, and everybody wants those. But we also saw the other aspect to the power of God was the character of God. You cannot have the power of God in your life without the character of God in your life. This is the problem with the church at Corinth. They are a bunch of spiritual babies. We talked about how they mirror today

what we have in our own Christianity: the Charismatic Movement. They almost exactly are a mirrored image of what they were back in the church of Corinth.

Last week, we started to talk about the issue of speaking in tongues. Last week, I laid out for you the Bible definition of speaking in tongues based on the Word of God. I do not know how you could get a more understandable or easy definition of that concept than we laid out last week. If you do the work, if you really spend the time to get the material, work it out, I have had several people come to my home this week, and we went through it and helped them lay it all out. Every week, if you want to learn your Bible or you want help with something in your Bible, I will spend an hour a week or every other week or once a month with anybody. You do not have to be a member of the church. If you have things that you want to learn about the Bible, my job as pastor is to help you learn those.

This week, I have spent much of my week talking about it. Thursday night, it came up, which was a great thing that we talked about it. That is how you put it all together. If you do the work and you get what I lay out on Sunday morning and then bring it back either to me or what you do not understand, or we clean it up on Thursday night so that you get a handle on it, you are going to have a major portion of your Bible down because you are going to run into this. It is the first issue, as I told you last week, I ran into as a brand new Christian way back in the 70s.

III. The Nature and Cessation of Tongues

We now understand that tongues were always a known language, as seen in Acts 2. We also know that tongues were given to the nation of Israel, never given to the church. They were sign gifts along with healing and all the other sign gifts that are listed for you in Mark 16:16. They were prophesied all the way back in Isaiah 28. We now know that from a Bible standpoint, tongues were never for the church. We now know that there is a 1900-year gap between when tongues ceased back in the book of Acts, and no one in church history spoke with tongues until the modern 1900s Charismatic Movement started in Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles and then at the Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas.

To the Jews, tongues were a language. We studied it last week: the Jews had gone into captivity in 606 BC with a deportation of the nation of Israel, and for 400 years, they had been scattered. Many of them had lost their native tongue and lost their language, which was Hebrew. So when God regathers them, He gives the apostles, and this is why you have 18 nations listed in Acts 2, that shows you that these are people and Jews in different nations who have lost their native tongue, that they hear the marvelous works of God in their own language. That is what tongues really was.

Today, we want to begin chapter 13, and we want to look at some things. I warn you already, chapter 13 has 13 verses in it. This is not a very good place to lay down your basis for speaking in tongues. This chapter has been called the Great Love chapter, and it is called that because you will see in a moment in verses 1 through 8, it lays out the love relationship that Christ has for the believer, and it shows us that that is the same relationship that you and I should have with each

other. That is obviously what the Church of Corinth is doing with it today as you read that passage.

You have heard me say many, many times, based on Proverbs 27:1, that you have to have a balance in everything that you do.

Proverbs 27:1

Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

The Bible says in Proverbs 27:1 that a false balance is abomination in the sight of God, but a just weight is His delight. I think balance is probably the hardest thing that a Christian has to get and a Christian has to keep. We have to have balance in everything in our life, and when you finally get a balance, then you have to balance the balance that you just balanced. It is always an issue, and that is the importance of it. An out-of-balance Christian will always have some problems. You will find that they get out of balance in many things. Many times, your emotions get out of balance. Many times, your doctrine gets out of balance. It is all of those things, and yet you see out-of-balance churches.

You have some churches that all they do is teach all the time, and they never preach. That is out of balance. Then you have some churches that preach all the time but they never teach. That is out of balance. The Bible teaches that we need to have a balance in what we do. You have to preach, and you have to teach, and you have to mix it up, and that forms the balance.

The modern-day Charismatic movement again follows right in the footsteps of the church at Corinth. We hear a lot today about "God is love," and Charismatics are big on love. The world, the secular world, the liberal Christian world, teaches the aspect of "God is love" in everything. They teach that God is such a loving God that there is no hell, that there is no judgment, that how could a loving God ever send anybody to hell? You see, there are the two perspectives. The liberal gets over there and says, "How in the world could God ever send anybody to hell?" But in reality, I look at the same thing and I ask myself, "How could God ever want to take anybody to heaven?"

You see, the bottom line is that they lose the concept of God. Somebody says, "God is love." I asked a person one time if they knew where that term came from, and they said, "Well, it is in the Bible." After about 30 minutes of trying to find it, they never found it, and I told them that the concept "God is love" did not ever start in the Bible; that came from Gandhi. That was his famous saying.

The Charismatic and the people who step outside, they take the love of God so far. I know God loves us, and He is a loving God; there is no question about that. But they take it and get it out of balance, and it leads to the teaching that you find today, that it was in the church in Corinth, that everything good that happens to you in your life is of God, and everything bad that happens to you in life is of the devil. That is totally out of balance. If you want to find a real case study on that, study the book of Job. Better yet, you can study every character in the Bible. The devil cannot do one thing to you that God does not allow him to do. In fact, when you study Job and all that Job went through, when you go back there, when you look at the first introduction where

God and the devil are talking about Job, it was not the devil that brought Job's name up; it was God that brought Job's name up.

We lose that concept, and we get a misapplication of what God's love really is. Simply put, and you need to understand this because this is a very practical approach to this chapter as we start to get into it: a God who is all love is a perverted God. Love without hate is not real love. We have talked about how everything in the Bible is a contrast. You do not go three chapters or three verses before you find light versus darkness. If you love cleanliness, then you hate dirt. If you love your wife and your kids, then you hate anything that will ever try to hurt them. You cannot have a love without hate; it is a perverted concept of love.

The Bible says in Psalms 18:30:

Psalms 18:30

As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him.

God is a perfect God. Then it tells us in Psalms 139:22 that God hates with a perfect hatred.

Psalms 139:22

I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.

God loves with a perfect love, and God hates with a perfect hatred. Every Christian thinks that hate is a bad thing. It is out of balance, but when you put it in the balance of the Word of God, hate is a God-given emotion. You ought to hate sin in your life. You ought to hate being out of fellowship with God. You ought to hate the evil that is in this world that wants to destroy everything that goes on. You ought to hate unrighteousness. You ought to hate the time that you spend out of fellowship with God.

We talk about the love of God, and I know God is a God of love; there is no question about it. I know that God loves, and God is a great God, and His mercy and His greatness go on forever. I understand that. But what you have to understand when you start to get into chapters like this, this great love chapter, is the love of God. Where does that start? I love my dog. I love my kids. I love this. I love that. But where does that love really start? The love of God, where that is rooted, is in God's holiness, and you have to see that. All of God's love for you and for me rests in God's Son.

God cannot love you and me apart from Jesus Christ. Do you realize that? Do you realize that the whole process of salvation, the whole concept of spiritual circumcision, is separating your flesh from your soul and then God sealing your soul with the Holy Spirit of God and Jesus Christ living inside you this morning? Do you understand what that whole process is about? It is about that if God did not do that and did not put the Holy Spirit of God, Jesus Christ, inside you, God could never love you.

In the Old Testament, when God went through the nation of Israel, everything in that camp had to be absolutely taken out that was against anything that was holy with God. That is why back in

the Old Testament, when people had problems or they broke the law, they had to go outside the camp for a number of days. They could not stay in the camp because God cannot fellowship with anything that is unholy. That is why the only way that God fellowshiped with the nation of Israel in the Old Testament was down through the leaders that He built a perfect relationship with. Most people do not even know that. If you were average Joe Blow in the nation of Israel, God did not come down and have a relationship with you. He had a relationship with you through the man that He put that would be the one that would take the message of God to the people. Just by a wild stroke of coincidence, every one of those men in the Old Testament are a type of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament, the only way God can fellowship with you and me is through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why He put Him inside you today if you are saved. Because God's love starts and is rooted in the death of His Son on Calvary's cross and His perfect sacrifice. God loves holiness. God hates sin. The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. There is a contrast between the two. John 3:16, that famous verse we all know, makes it clear that apart from God's Son, God loves no man. This is why you have the doctrine of the advocacy of Jesus Christ, the doctrine of propitiation, the doctrine of reconciliation. I gave you before on a Thursday night the 12 doctrines that go along with the day you got saved, and all of them basically say a different aspect about the same thing. God cannot love you apart from loving you through His Son.

How does God even muster enough strength to want an unsaved person and deal with him? How does God do that? If God is holy, and He is, and God is a righteous God, and He is, how does a righteous God who is holy, who could not even be around anything that is sinful because of His holy nature, ever come to you and me when we were in an unsaved state? How could He ever do that? The answer to that is He does that in Christ. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, God put all blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. When God looks at you and me unsaved, He looks at us through the blood of His Son in anticipation that you will accept that, and that is the only way God can fellowship with you. That is what the Bible teaches. John 3:36 says that if you are an unsaved man or a woman here today apart from Christ, the sinner, you are already abiding in God's wrath. There is nothing personal to it. It is holiness versus unholiness. You have to keep this all in mind when you talk about God's love because when you get into this chapter, you have to see some things.

IV. The Preeminence of Charity

I want to begin reading here in chapter 13, and I want to pick it up in verse 1.

1 Corinthians 13:1-8

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

Let us pray. Father, we thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus, and we come to this passage today in chapter 13, and Lord, we seek Your guidance on it. Help us to learn today. These are good people who have come here today because they want to learn Your Word. Lord, if they have come to learn it from me, they are in bad shape today, Father, because if You do not open up our hearts and open up our minds and open up our tongues and teach us through Your Word, if the Holy Spirit of God does not illuminate what needs to be said today and carry it to the hearts of God's people, then I have nothing that I can say. I pray for these good people today that You will help them grasp the Bible. We are not here just to entertain. We are here to learn. We are here, Father, because we know that You have given us a job to do as a church. Our job is to take the Word of God and translate that into our own hearts for a work for God. Father, I pray that You will take us today and lead and guide us into all truth. We will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name for the sake we ask it. Amen.

There are some things here that we need to get clear in light of what we have already talked about in weeks gone by. I mentioned this to you Thursday night: this chapter, as well as the book of 1 Corinthians, was written in about 57 AD. That would be around Acts 20. The idea that the Day of Pentecost had something to do with the church, the idea that Pentecost was something that we are supposed to carry through in the church, I think we probably nailed this subject very clearly Thursday night when I took you back and showed you the feasts back in the Old Testament and showed you how they do nothing for the church, but they really represent the history of the nation of Israel.

The first three feasts represent the Old Testament. The Feast of Weeks represents the 400 years. The Day of Pentecost represents the first coming of Christ. Then you have no feast in the fourth, fifth, and sixth months, and that represents the church age. Then you have three feasts toward the end there, and they all represent the nation of Israel. You have the Feast of Trumpets; that is the regathering of Israel in 1948. You have the Feast of Atonement; that is the tribulation period where Israel atones for their sins against God. Then you have the Feast of Tabernacles, which deals with the second coming of Christ. So it ought to be clear now that the Day of Pentecost was never, ever, under any circumstances, not in any church scenario in the New Testament, for anything.

When you come to Acts 1, you are in a series there from chapter 1 to chapter 7 that strictly deals with the nation of Israel. No one in any church is or has been told to observe the Day of Pentecost. This here is 21 or 22 years past that day of Acts 2. We are deep into Paul's ministry. This takes place during his third missionary trip. The next chapter, he goes down to Jerusalem, and he is put in jail, and his ministry is over, basically. This church has taken what was once given to the nation of Israel and now has tried to bring it into the church.

This form of heresy is not new. We saw it in the book of Galatians. In the book of Galatians, we have a group that are called the Judaizers. The Judaizers in the book of Galatians were a group that went in, and they went into this New Testament church, and they said, "Oh, man, you are a New Testament church. That is great. You believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Amen. That is good. But for the church, you not only have to believe in Jesus Christ, but you have to keep the Old Testament law." Paul takes them to task, and that is where he talks about if any man preaches another gospel. That is exactly what they were doing. They were saying that, in the book of Galatians, you have to believe in Jesus Christ, and you have to keep the law, too. We know from the Bible that when Jesus Christ came, He fulfilled the law. I cannot keep the law. I do not have to keep the law. Christ kept it for me.

We see that this is not new, that churches are getting into problems that are heresy. This is what the church at Corinth has done. They have taken tongues, which was once given to the nation of Israel. Look at verse 1. It pretty much states it for us.

1 Corinthians 13:1

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

We have seen two things. They have done two things with it. First of all, they have taken the tongues of men. That would be the tongues of Acts 2, which were never given to the church, and they brought them into the church. If that was not bad enough, they have now developed some kind of tongues of angels. In the modern charismatic movement today, that will be the gibberish that you talk about and hear them saying in some unknown language that is just a bunch of gibber jabber. They call it a heavenly language. They call it a tongues of angels. They basically say, "Well, that is a heavenly language between me and God."

This goes today just like it did back here because what the church of Corinth is doing, it was not enough that somebody got up and began to speak in tongues that they should not have in another language. Somebody had to top that. So the way that you top that is by having a language that you and God only speak in, and you exclude everybody else. Then you can say whatever message is the better message shows the more spirituality the person has. That is what they are doing. Whatever comes at a place where they are speaking in some unknown tongue, some gibberish, nobody can understand, and then claiming that tongues was never anything in your Bible anywhere. I will give you \$60 million if you show me where tongues is anything but a known language. It is not in there. Tongues were always a known language.

This is what the church of Corinth is doing. Again, they have formed a new unknown tongue, a spiritual plateau that certain ones get. We have got a whole bunch of Simon Stylites here. This great unknown tongue only between me and God, and I get some great message from God that you have to depend on me for me to give it to you. That is a problem. The reason that we get into higher education when it comes to the Bible, the minute a man tells you, "You have to understand Greek and Hebrew to learn this Bible and know this Bible and have really a relationship with God," you are dealing with the same issue, just in a Baptist circle now.

May I make a statement to you and just get it out of the way? The Greek and the Hebrew will do you nothing for this Bible. The Greek text that most pastors use today, do not kid me about it, the Greek text that most pastors use today to tell you what the words mean are not even the Greek text that this Bible came from because nobody uses that Greek text anymore. Do not kid me about it. If you want to talk about Greek text, I will stay up all night with you. I have been down that road many, many times. When you have to depend on me standing up here and telling you that this way, and you read a passage and you try to lay it out, and I tell you what that word really does not mean that, and then you have to come to me so I can tell you what your Bible really means, you just threw the Holy Spirit of God out the window. You do not need me.

Somebody said one time, "You have to have the Greek and Hebrew to understand the Bible." I said, "Well, if that is true, do you realize there is less than one millionth of 1% of the world's population that speaks the Greek and the Hebrew of the Bible fluently enough to do it?" So you are telling me that is Gnosticism right there. Get some stupid little pastor that goes around and gets a few Greek lexicons and things up Greek words and thinks he is going to impress somebody. God wrote a book that every idiot on this planet could grasp if you just got the determination to get in it and read it and study it. You let somebody else become your Holy Spirit.

Somebody says, "Well, you believe the Bible is the Word of God in English." That is right. "What about all the people in the world who do not speak English?" What about all the people in the world who do not speak Greek or Hebrew? Any man who tries to tell you that you have to get the Bible from him, that he has the key because he knows... Have you ever been in a foreign country where everybody spoke the language and you did not? Have you ever noticed how you just came back from Turkey? Do you speak Turkish? No. They are all sitting around, and they talk in English with you for a little bit, and then you have some kind of business deal you are doing or something. Then they all break into their gibberish, and you are wondering, "Are they going to kill me? Are they going to send me home? Are they going to take the deal? What is going on?"

Any time anybody holds anything over you, they have the advantage of you. That is the thing about Bible-believing Christianity. We are all in the same playing field. I may be a little farther. There are no experts when it comes to the Bible. There are no scholars when it comes to the Bible. The quicker you learn that, the better off you are going to be. Somebody says, "Well, he is a Bible scholar." That is like a brontosaurus, is it not? What is a Bible scholar? He is an expert in the Bible. I have learned after 40 plus years, there are no experts in the Bible. We are all students. We are just on different levels, but do not take it past the student level. You will get an attitude of

pride that you think you are better than somebody else. I tell you all the time, if God can teach me the Bible, He can teach you the Bible. If I can learn it, anybody can learn it.

That is what they have done in Corinth. That is what Christians always do. They set up some kind of system that keeps you under their control. Every time you want to move up the next level, they beat you down because they have the language or the message from God that tells you you should not do that, that you cannot even understand it. The Church of Corinth are a bunch of spiritual babies. How many times did Paul say they are puffed up, a bunch of Pharisees who have again misused and abused the clear teaching of the Bible to get themselves as some kind of super spiritual individual? The word "charismatic" itself, it means "gifted one." It comes out of the old Gnostic mindset with Stylites, the first, second, and third century, that somebody that is a charismatic is gifted. They have a greater relationship with God, closer to God. So God speaks to them in some heavenly English, and all you poor idiots out there have to depend on them.

They have taken what in 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul listed in the order of their importance, he put tongues number eight. Now they have elevated it to number one and made it the most important thing you can have in a church when it is not supposed to be in this church at all.

V. Charity: The Character of God

In verse 1, we begin to see what I said last week. He says in 1 Corinthians 13:1, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." You see, "have not charity." You find charity eight times in this chapter. Before we get through this morning, you are going to understand how important charity is, and more important, you are going to have a Bible definition of it.

The tongues of men and angels, that is what they are putting the emphasis on. That represents the power of God. It is just what I said, they want the power of God, but charity represents the character of God. They have the power of God; they have no character of God. I will tell you right now, you will never have the power of God in your life until you first get the character of God, because just like God's love is rooted in holiness, so is God's power in your life. The Bible says, "Be holy, for I am holy." They want the power of God, but they lack the character of God. Paul says, "You are like a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." You are just a bunch of noise, no melody to it, no harmony to it, just noise.

What else do you need to see here? If your Bible, when it comes down through here, when it says "charity," if your Bible says "love," you have the wrong Bible. All the new translations change that word and change it to "love." I will tell you why they do that. First of all, they get the different Greek text that the King James Bible came from. So the Greek text that they get it from, which is the Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, the Roman Catholic manuscripts, it does have the word "love" in it. So they take the word out because we are all about love today. Then you get into the "agape love" and the "philo love" and all that stuff. It is just a wonderful little thing. We can sit around and sing "Kumbaya" and roast marshmallows. When that text was very popular back in the Dark Ages, they held hands singing "Kumbaya," "Ave Maria," and they toasted Christians over the open fire. That is where that text came from. Of course, I am sure you know that.

You are going to find that all new translations change the word "charity" and make the word "love." Love in the 20th and 21st century has many, many, many meanings. It is like the book of 1 John. I do not think I ever picked up one commentary in my life have I ever read, and I probably have been two, 300 on the book of 1 John that men wrote about. Every one of them says that the theme of 1 John is love. But when you start to read the book, you find that that is not what the theme of 1 John is. I do not know how you could read 1 John and find 27 times in five little chapters, he uses the word "to know" or "knowing," "to know God," "to know of God." How in the world could you read that and see 27 times the keyword there is "know" or "knowing" and then come up with a word that the theme is love, unless you are just a 20th-century apostate Christian?

That is exactly what we do with the word "love" today. That is exactly what we do with God. The writers, the commentators on 1 John, tell you the theme is love and never get to the point that the theme is knowing. I will tell you why: because that is what modern 20th and 21st-century Christianity does. You try to love God before you know God. We fall in love with everything. I tell my kids all the time, they say, "Well, I love that dress." Why do you waste time loving something that cannot love you back? "I love those shoes." As Christians, we should never love inanimate objects. There is no point to it. It suggests that we do not understand the definition of love. "Well, I love that car." "Well, I love this house." "Well, I love this restaurant."

We take the word "love" and we use it for everything. Most of the time, the way we use it, it means nothing about anything because the thing that we are loving cannot love us back. You love your shoes when they are new, but when their soles wear out, you throw them away. You do not love them anymore. You love your car when it is shiny and new, but after 100 plus thousand miles, you trade it in, and you do not love it anymore. You love your house, but after 18 or 20 or 30 some years, the plumbing goes out, pipes get clogged, drains start to back up. You sell and buy a new bigger one. You do not love it anymore.

So you get married, and after 20, 30 years, five, 10 years anymore, you do not love them anymore. So you get a new one just like you did the house, just like you did the car, just like you did your boat, just like you did everything you do. That is 20th-century American Christianity. That is why somebody can come down to church and get saved, come to church two or three weeks, then you never see them again. We fall in love with God, and you fall out of love with God. Unless you learn to love God first, and you learn to love Him, and you get to know Him first, because to know Him is to love Him, it does not mean anything.

That is why people who get married, in two or three weeks after meeting somebody, in most cases, it does not work. Sometimes it does, but most of the time it does not. That is why when we go through life and everything that we do, we are impulsive. We want to have it now. We see something in the window. "Oh, I have to have that. I love it." When you get it home two weeks later, you have seen something else you love now, so you do not love that anymore. We do the same thing with God. That is why some of you do not love Him today like the day you got saved. It is the exact answer. That is why some of you are cold, hard, and indifferent to the things of God today. It is the very answer. You never learned how to love Him. You fell in love with Him.

Then what? Everyone else came along, and you fell out of love with Him. You never learned to know Him. That is why the theme of 1 John is not love. The theme of 1 John is knowing.

That is why when you come down through 1 Corinthians 13, you do not change the word "charity" to the word "love." The word "charity" is the epitome of the word "love." Charity is the purest form of the word "love." The Bible carries definition for these words within the Bible itself. I have found it just so true. I have found that most of God's people who say they love God, they really do not as far as God is concerned. We live in a dream world of Christianity for the most part. I know that that maybe is not true with most of you here, but it is true when I am over. I have been in this business for a lot of years. If there is anything I learned about real basic love that is true love, it always associates itself with the object in question.

John 14:23

Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

God's love, real love, is associated with the Word. Do you love Him this morning? How much time have you spent in His Word this week? "Oh, I love Him. I love Him. I love Him." Really? What time did you chalk up in the old black book this week? "Well, you do not understand how busy I was." No, neither does God. We live in a very cheap Christianity, a dream world in our own minds because we think the word we have for the definition of love, I guarantee you, it is not the same one He has.

John 14:15

If ye love me, keep my commandments.

He said it one time over there, in Luke 6:46, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" How do you love God and continue to live your godless, worldly lifestyle, and then you continue to talk about how much you love God? It may work in your brain cells in 21st-century Christianity, but it does not work with God. That is where the Church of Corinth was. See where they were. This is the whole concept that we have got. The word "charity" in your King James Bible is the purest form of the word "love." God loves in a perfect love. God hates in a perfect hate. So when God talks about the love that He has for you and the love that you and I have for each other, it means God's unconditional love. Love without expecting anything back. Love without any ulterior motive.

An example of that that you all should know is Christ's love for us. Day by day, unconditional. Even when we are unlovable, He still loves me. That is real Christian love. Real Christian love is based on one concept, and it is the concept of charity.

We have all been down at the plaza or gone to someplace. You go anywhere now. You see these guys out there? Homeless. Need food. Need help. I never saw one that said, "Need work." I do not know if you know this or not, but this is a syndicated thing. They probably make more money doing that than you do going to work. They all wear dirty clothes, and they all look like they are scraggly and all that, but they all have \$400 cell phones if you just follow them around

long enough. My point is this: I am sure there are people in this world who need handouts. When I drive down there and I go down wherever I go, and I see a guy on the street corner down there panhandling, or now they are even in Raytown, and you go to the grocery store, and somebody will come out and tell you a sad story. They will try to ask you for just a couple bucks.

I was one night about 11:30 at night. Somebody came to my door. I looked out the door; there was some young guy out there, and I did not know what there was. I opened the door a little bit, and he says, "Hey, I am not going to hurt you or anything. I just got back from Iraq, and I just do not have any money for a place to stay, and I just saw your light was on, and I just thought maybe you could give me a handout." I gave him five bucks.

Two weeks later, I see the same car out front. He is going to the neighbor across the street. What are you going to do? I look at those things. I think, "I gave him that five dollars out of the goodness in my heart, and that is how I deal with it." I gave it to you. It is between you. If you want to shame me, that is fine. I took the gamble. I lost. The bottom line is this: it is between you and God. But I never look at those things or never think of those things or never drive down the road to go in some place to see somebody on the road working their handout that I think to myself, "I was standing on the street corner of life when God gave me the handout of salvation." That is me on that corner. That is me so many years ago that I was standing there with my sign up. I was not just homeless. I was hopeless. I was not just homeless and hopeless. I was helpless. I stood on that street corner, and God drove up to the light, and by the grace of God, the light turned red, and He gave me a handout. That is charity. That is charity. That is why it is not the word "love." It is the word "charity" because charity carries with it the purest form of God's love, and it is based on one concept: God unconditionally giving His Son to die on the cross for you and me, and that love He had for us through His Son, and based on God giving it to me unconditionally and to us, that we give our love back to Him unconditionally. It is just that simple. God gave me charity.

Love that does not give is not real love. You cannot always take in life. One of my daughters sent me a thing on a website of a huge church here in Kansas City. I will not tell you who it was. It was funny because it was a thing that "How do you get married in this church?" The first thing you have to do is you have to have your tithe record checked. Make sure you are tithing. I think you have to tithe. I am not against that, but I do not think that that ought to be a prerequisite to get married in the church. The second thing is a pastor had to be assigned to you to find out what ministry you are really involved in because you cannot get married in the church if you are not tithing and then you are not ministering in the church. I think you ought to be in ministry.

When we first started our church, Carrie got married, and because of our history, she wanted me to marry them, and I said, "Absolutely, I will." I had never met Marion. Marion was somebody that I met him the first time. I said, "Yeah, I would be glad to marry him." Once we spent some time together talking about marriage and helping, he said that would be fine, and Marion and I kind of hit it off right out of the thing. That was almost eight years ago. Marion came to church that next Sunday, has never left since he has been back that Sunday. Why? Because someone was willing to marry them without any kind of restrictions. I look at marrying people as a ministry like anything else. I do not know how many people I have had in my church over the years that

came to church because I was willing to marry them when nobody else would. I may not like the situation they are in, but I will take about any situation you are in if you give me three or four times to sit down and talk about the Bible and marriage and put it all together because I will get you sooner or later. If you are gettable, I will get you. He is just a great story of that.

You had to have tithe, and I guarantee you Marion tithes. I guarantee he does. I never told him one thing about tithing. He figured it out because he came to get in the Bible. One of those things where we just talked about things, and we had a fun time together, and he has been to church ever since. So you have to tithe, and you have to be in ministry, and then after you pass those two hurdles, if you want to use the main sanctuary of the church, it costs you \$700. Then if you want to have a smaller room, it is another \$300.

My point is this: if you go to a church and you support that church, you just cannot keep taking from people all the time. You just cannot. You have to give something back. You have to give something back. You do not nickel and dime and squeeze them out of people every time they do something. We have a bookstore back here. That bookstore is so far in the red it will never see the daylight of green. I see somebody back there looking at something, it is a first-time visitor, and I say, "Yeah, it is a good book. Here, go ahead and take it." If you all stand back there waiting for me to come back today, I am not coming today. So, somebody comes up and says, "Well, if someone does not have a Bible, here, give them a Bible." You have to give back.

You know this is true. Anybody that has been married three or four years, you know by now to make a marriage work, you both have to give to it. When you get married, you do three things. You give in, you give out, you give up. It is that simple. If you do not do it, and it is all your way and take, take, take, take, take, you will see the judge. Many of God's people, they say they love God, and they never give a dime back to the very work that God used to save them. I have seen it all my life.

2 Corinthians 9:7-8

Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:

You wonder why you do not have anything? Because you do not give anything back to God. That is why. Somebody says, "I cannot afford to." You cannot afford not to. Real biblical love, real love, always has giving with it.

My favorite verse, 1 Corinthians 8:3:

1 Corinthians 8:3

But if any man love God, the same is known of him.

People give things to people they love. That is just the way it is. I heard a pastor say one time, and it is a great illustration. Let us say my wife asked you and your wife out for dinner. You are

all excited. "Oh, Pastor Bob, Bob is coming to take us. We are going to go out to dinner together." You are all excited about it. We go down in the plaza, and we go down there to Ruth's Chris or someplace, whatever it is. A nice fancy place. We are sitting down there, and we are having a wonderful meal. We are talking about, "Well, I just love the church, Bob." "Well, I am glad you do. We are glad you are here." "Oh, we just learned." "I am glad it is because we are always here. We have a great time."

Dessert time comes, and I said, "Order whatever you want." They said, "Wow, man, this is so great. What pastor in any city would take people out and just take them to someplace like this and just sit down and just talk and pay for the meal? It is absolutely incredible." You are sitting there, and your wife and you are blown away. So we are down. We drink our last cup of coffee, and my wife looks at me, and she says, "Are you ready, honey?" I said, "Yeah, I am ready." I said, "You folks had enough?" "Yeah." "Do me a favor. My wife is going to pretend like she is going to the restroom. She is going to go in the restroom and hang out for just a little bit. So why do not you go with her? And Tom, why do not you go over here, and that big glass case, they have all the fish and lobster, and just go kind of stand up there like you are looking at it. I am going to go to the men's room. Then you slip out, you go out with my wife, and then once you guys are clear, I will come back in and make sure everything is still going good, and I will meet you out there, and we will get out of the lot. Okay, go."

You go ahead and do it because you are too embarrassed not to. But I guarantee you on the way home, you are not going to be, "I cannot wait to hear that man preach tomorrow." You are going to be shocked. You are going to be disillusioned. You are going to say, "I cannot believe it. His wife was part of it." Yeah, she has got this thing down. She has done this a lot. It was so nonchalant. It was not like, "We feel bad about this," or "Our church is broke. We do not have any money." It was, "You go do this." They have done this several, several, several times before. You probably would not even come back to church again. Some of God's people come to the churches of God. They get sirloin steak every Sunday morning and Thursday night. They get everything that they want and get everything that they need. They walk out of here and never pick up the tab one time. That is a good illustration. If you love God, you are giving things. It is just that simple. You do not look for anything back.

I think the greatest damaging thing that ever happened to American Christianity is taking your giving record on your income tax. We are the only country that does that. I think it takes a lot of reward to the judgment seat of Christ because people do things to get something back. Biblical love is charity. The love that modern-day Christianity has today puts out a worldly, sensual, fleshy love that has nothing to do with the Bible. The mood for God is set by music, lights, praise singers, praise bands, smoke, laser shows. You cannot have a power of God without the character of God and charity. Charity. Giving of everything that you have based on God giving everything that He had for you is the only thing that works. That is why charity is the number one characteristic of God: it is giving. That is what he is saying. He is saying here, you can speak in 10,000 tongues 24/7. But if you do not have the charity to give back what God has given to you unconditionally, you do not have anything.

VI. The 16 Characteristics of Charity

You are going to want to mark verses 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 coming down through here because now he begins to define for us what charity is. Now he begins to list for us the character qualities of charity. It is quite impressive. Charity in your heart and my heart based on the right heart attitude. There are 16 characteristics of charity here, and this will define for you what charity is. When you put in this context, you see why changing the word to "love," you lose all of this.

1.) Charity suffereth long.

That is not just patience. That is suffering a long time with somebody. That is not just putting up with the suffering that we put up with for the world because we love God. That is included in that obviously. But that is putting up with people you deal with. When you start to deal with people in a church or you start to deal with God's people anytime or young Christians, you have to have the ability to suffer a long time with them. Some people pick it up quick. They get it and move out right away. Some people take them forever to get it, and some people never get it. It is just that simple. Longsuffering is one of the fruits of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22. He says, "longsuffering, forbearing one another in love."

I never give up on people. I take a lot of flack over my years because I go, but some people say, "too far with people." I just do that based on the fact that I just cannot get past the fact how far God went with me. The first 21 years of my life, I was an absolute mess, and pretty much a mess after that, except I was God's mess after that. God never gave up on me. Somebody said, "Well, you went with so and so forever and ever and ever, and then they just wound up hosing you." That may be true, but you forgot that that is the business we are in. The business I am in is to do what is right without any condition. If you want to hose me, that is okay. At least I sleep at night knowing that I did exactly what God wanted me to do. I take great comfort in that. I just cannot get past the fact of how much God put up with me.

In dealing with people, I follow one simple, crucial concept: I never take it personal. I do not mean this in a bad sense, but that if I am a professional, and I do not mean a professional in the sense of a professional that is cold-hearted and indifferent, I mean, a professional as somebody that understands the business that he is in. I know I am in the business to take it on the chin for Jesus Christ. I know that when people leave this church and they get mad at me, they are not really mad at me. How could you be mad at me? I do not take it personal. Why? Because I know you are not really mad at me. Your problem is with God. It just so happens that I stand up here every Sunday and every Thursday, and I preach what God says to you that you do not want to hear. You cannot get to God, so you get to me. I can deal with that. I am a professional. That is my job. My job is to take the hits. That is your job too, if you ever figured it out.

I do not take it personal. Somebody says, "Well, I do not like you." I understand. There are times I do not like myself. I do not take it personal. In the ministry and dealing with people, you have to suffer along with them, and some of them are going to be very ugly people at times. They are going to do things that hurt you at times. They are going to go out of the way to do things that hurt you at times. The bottom line is, if you do what is right and your God is in your life, and you

are doing it by the Word of God, nobody is ever going to hurt you. Nobody is going to take from you. Nobody is ever going to destroy you. My whole life, I have been in hot water so long, I have been hard-boiled. I get to the point where you just do not take it personal. You realize that there are certain things that come along with standing in that pulpit and preaching the truth to people who do not want to hear the truth, and sometimes it takes longer for some to get it than others. Some of you just grab it like that and run with it. Some of you fumble around, and it takes you a while to get it all figured out, and some of you, bless your hearts, you never get it figured out.

2.) And is kind.

Let me ask you a question. Has anybody ever done you wrong in life? The answer is yes. Has anybody ever done you wrong in this church? The bottom line is long-suffering, and he says, "be kind." Be kind one to another. 1 Thessalonians 5:15. Another great verse. It says:

1 Thessalonians 5:15

See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.

"Render." What a great word that is. You do not render evil for evil. That is not the business we are in. Never to take it for the Lord. When somebody screws it up, messes it up, even if they do it on purpose. My God, how many times in my life before I ever got it plugged together, and I still do, give God the short end of the stick every day of my life. But you see, that is charity. God should have given up on me a long time ago. That is why I just cannot give up on somebody. To give evil for good, that is of the devil. The human side is to give good for good. But to give good for evil, that is charity. That is godliness. That is long-suffering.

3.) Charity envieth not.

This is the main issue in 1 Corinthians 8:3 that has led to the problems in the church at Corinth. God's people being envious. Why do we get envious of people? The Bible says in 1 Timothy 6:6 that:

1 Timothy 6:6

But godliness with contentment is great gain.

That is a great verse. You need to put that on a 3x5 card. Why do people get envious of other people? First of all, because they are not satisfied with what they have. Why is that? Because second, they are not satisfied with who they are in Christ. That is why. You cannot be satisfied with where you are at in Christ, know that God is in your life, have God in your life, be operating and doing things for God and be envious of anybody. Because in that case, you are glad when something good happens to somebody. You do not think, "Well, why did not that happen to me?"

4.) Charity vaunteth not itself.

5.) Is not puffed up.

To vaunt something is to lift it up. We are not to lift up ourselves. You see a lot of people like that in Christianity. You see pastors and people who just want to be the center of attraction for everything, and they want everything. They do not want to give anything back, but they want everything their way. We are not to lift up ourselves, but we are to lift up Christ. John 12:32. He said, "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me."

It is so easy to see the difference between when God establishes a man's ministry and when that man establishes it himself. I have seen young men all my life that want to establish ministries and do not want to do what is right and pay the tab to get it done. How do they build a ministry? They build it by criticizing somebody else who built a ministry. That is the way it works. They lift themselves up by tearing somebody else down. It is not how it works, not how it works in the Bible anyhow. It leads to being puffed up. It leads to pride. It leads to an unteachable spirit.

6.) Doth not behave itself unseemly.

When a man loves God, his behavior is not improper. Some of God's people live one way on Monday through Saturday and then something else on Sunday. You do not have to be in this church very long to find out that there are people within our own midst who really behave unseemly. They will not be appreciative when you do something for them. They live like the world on the outside to show up on a Sunday morning. It is true in any church. It is just the way it goes in life. Some of God's people live one way Monday through Saturday and then show up on a Sunday morning. It is just everything. There is just one to pretend it is fine. It does not matter that they live like the world. They curse. They do this. They do that. They do all the things the world does.

Let me tell you something. There are some people you work with probably that you could never get to come to this church or any other church simply because of the unchristian behavior you display Monday through Saturday, and you do not even know it. They watch what you do. Someone says, "No man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." How many times have you done something nice for somebody and tried to help somebody, and they were unappreciative of it? How many times did you try to help somebody, and all you got back from it by doing it was how stupid and how selfless they are and how all they care about is themselves? It is the way it is. Do not let that take away from you what God put in your heart to do because charity does not look for nothing back. She simply does it because it is the right thing to do. That is how it works.

7.) Seeketh not her own.

Notice the word "her" here. That will go back to Proverbs. All through the book of Proverbs, wisdom is likened to a female. The virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 is a picture of the church with the wisdom of God, and she is doing the things of the ministry. If you love God, you will put others first, and you will put yourself last. God first, others second, you and me last.

2 Corinthians 8:9

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

The Bible says the first shall be last, and the last shall be first.

8.) Is not easily provoked.

9.) Thinketh no evil.

You can tell a lot about a person by what they get angry about. I have seen situations between God's people that I think are horrendous. I have seen people over the years, I have seen Christians that could not work out a marriage and could not get the thing to work, and that is bad enough. My thing is, if you cannot make it work, and you try to make it work, and you cannot make it work, then you ought to try to at least be friends when it is done. But I will tell you what, I have seen some over the years, I have seen some of the most horrendous behavior in women and men, ex-spouses going after each other and hating each other and vindictive about each other and revenge, and they do this simply for the purpose of hurting or getting even with that person. I look at that thing, and I say to myself, "Is that what Jesus would do?" No, that is what the flesh does. Those are not the characteristics of Christ.

I have seen people in relationships, and the relationship, they never got married, the relationship did not work out, and whatever. So they get an attitude about it. Instead of looking at it and saying, "Well, if God is really in control of my life, and God is really in charge, and God is taking this thing out, then be satisfied with that." No, no, no, they just go out and trash each other down the road of life, and they wonder why everybody around them says, "Wow, I do not want to go to your church. If that is the way Christians act." Not easily provoked.

Here is a good one, you want this on a 3x5 card? "Thinketh no evil." That is a good one. Now you take that home and work on it for a while. You take that the next time somebody does you wrong, and your first thought is to think how evil they are or how terrible they are or how worthless they are or how you cannot stand being around them. You say, "Where does that come from?" That comes with the way God thought about you the first time He saw you. If it was not for Christ, God would not have anything to do with any of us, and we need to look at people sometimes through Christ. That is charity. Thinketh no evil.

I have something I always try to do, and I get a lot of flack for this over the years too. I always try to focus on the good in people and not the bad. We all have bad. I could find something wrong with every one of you. If I wanted to, you could find something wrong with me. But what profit does that do? If you are here this morning, that says something. If you want to learn the Bible, and you are here on Thursday night, that says something. If you are doing your work and you are getting into the Bible, and you are on your Bible basics and want to get involved in ministry and want to do something, that is a statement. Why am I going to not take the good and focus on that and cultivate that? Why am I just going to focus on a negative in your life and look at all the things that I do not like about you? If God would have done that with us, we would all be in hell this morning. This is charity. This is why you never change that word to "love." You can fall in love and fall out of love real quick, but you cannot charity. Thinketh no evil.

I told you before, I do not care what you have done in life. I do not care where you have been, what you have come from, or whatever you are at. All I care about is where you are at now and

what you want to do. The Bible says, "thinketh no evil." Now what do you do with that? It drives me crazy. People, all they do is just talk about the negative in people. They cannot find one good thing about anybody. It is always the negative. Every time you go around them, it just drives me nuts. It drives me nuts because all I see is when God looked at me and you, that is exactly what He saw, and He gave me the handout of charity. You have got to try it sometime. Maybe you need to take a look at yourself.

10.) Rejoiceth not in iniquity.

If you love God like you should, then you are not happy when a brother or sister falls. There are times that a pastor will lose his church because of some bad judgment or sin he made in his life. I never laugh at those things. I never make fun of those things. It always bothers me. Maybe the guy was stupid and made some bad choices. That is fine, but the bottom line is this: I look beyond that. Any time that happens, it is the cause of Christ that suffers. It brings reproach to Christ's name. That is the most terrible thing about it. We are all human. We all make mistakes. We all deserve what we get, but Christ does not deserve the bad rap that He gets. Sometimes He gets the rap because of some of the dumb things that we do.

11.) But rejoiceth in the truth.

I love truth as long as it does not point it at me. Paul said one time in Galatians 4:16, "Have I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" I am telling you right now, you look out for any man who does not rejoice in hard preaching and in your faith teaching or the Word of God. There are seven things in that Bible that the Bible says that they rejoice over in heaven. You ought to make those seven things the things you rejoice over in heaven, and every one of them has to do with truth.

12.) Beareth all things.

You have to bear some things in your life, do you not? We have to bear our kids growing up. We have to bear issues in life. We have to bear through marriage and problems and the potholes of marriages, issues with our job. We have to deal with issues and bear things with people you work with. This is what Romans 15:1 says:

Romans 15:1

We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

13.) Believeth all things.

That is Bible principles. You encourage yourself in the Word of God. That is why I keep putting you down to get the biblical principles down. Biblical principles, believing all things, will help you bear all things.

14.) Hopeth all things.

That is the promises. There is a difference between a principle and a promise. A promise will always be a principle, but a principle will not always necessarily be a promise. When he says, "hopeth all things," that is the promises of God you hang on to.

15.) Endureth all things.

Where believing all things helps you bear all things, hoping all things helps you endure all things. A Christian who loves God will endure everything the world, the flesh, and the devil throws at him. He is called to endure the persecution and tribulation, 2 Thessalonians 1:4. He is called to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, 2 Timothy 2:3.

This is what Paul meant when you look at these 16 characteristics. Now you want to go back and look at 1 Corinthians 12:31. Remember, we talked about this a couple of weeks ago in that last verse in that chapter 12, where he says, "But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way." Now you know what the more excellent way is. The more excellent way above all the gifts is charity. Charity is the greatest single gift that you and I can have because charity is the character of God. You will never have the power of God in your life to do anything for God until you first get the character of God in your life, and that is what is missing in the church at Corinth. So they are doing the same thing that most people do. They are manufacturing their own spirituality by setting up tongues and unknown tongues and arguing about who baptized whom.

VII. The Temporary Nature of Gifts and the Enduring Nature of Charity

Look at verse 8 here. We have to close here.

1 Corinthians 13:8

Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

This is really the key verse to the whole chapter. Charity never fails, but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. This verse clearly tells us that the temporary gifts given to the apostles in the early book of Acts, like we have already saw, they are only temporary. In time, they will cease. But the character of God, charity, will never cease. It will never fail. Charity is something that you have to have and I have to have in my life before we ever get the power of God, no matter what it may be. The Church of Corinth cares nothing about the character of God. They just want the great power of God. They want to be able to speak in tongues.

I want to explain verses 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 to you because this is in this chapter, and there are two schools of thought on this, and I want to give them both to you, and then I want to show you how it probably lays out.

1 Corinthians 13:9-13

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

When I was a child, I spake 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 through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

There are two teachings on this passage, and I am going to give them both to you very quickly. I have them both in my Bible. I think you ought to put them in yours, and then I will tell you what you are probably dealing with here. Verses 9 and 10 say, "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." There has been a lot of controversy over the years of what that exactly refers to when it says, "when that which is perfect is come."

One school of thought teaches that "when that which is perfect is come" is the Word of God. All these things in the early church in Acts 1 through Acts 7 and beyond were to Israel, were temporary, and they were not complete because they did not have the completed Bible. So you have God giving prophecies through individuals, and in time, once the Word of God is complete, those prophecies will not be any good anymore; they will fail. Tongues were used because they did not have the complete Word of God, and the tongues would cease. The knowledge they have would be the knowledge that deals with Israel around the first coming of Christ there, and that would vanish away. Of course, the first standard teaching is that in light of the early book of Acts up to about 90 A.D., there was no complete Bible. When the Word of God came to be complete, the churches got the Word of God, then everything that was done in part because all they had was an Old Testament was done away with, and now everything was complete. That is what they teach when "that which is perfect is come."

The second teaching on it is that "that which is perfect is come" is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even though as he goes down through there, we have the Bible, we still do not know it all. Verse 12 says, "For now we see through a glass, darkly." Verse 11 says, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." But when Christ comes back, we grow up unto Him, and therefore, "then shall I know even as also I am known." So you have two ideas on it. One of them is the fact that it is the completed Bible. The other one is that it is Christ.

Personally, I think that when you come to many places in the Bible, we already know that there are three applications of Scripture. You have a historical application, you have a doctrinal application, that will be its prophetic teaching, and then you have a practical application. I think that applies here. I think historically this actually happened. The church at Corinth was in this time period, and they are dealing with all these issues. Doctrinally, I do believe it is dealing with the coming of Christ as it pertains to the nation of Israel, if you saw in Acts 1 and all the issues concerning that. Doctrinally, inspirationally, I also believe that it deals with the Word of God. You cannot separate that when Christ comes back that He is the Word of God, Revelation 19. So I think probably you have got a dual application there, which you find many, many times in the Bible, and that will be like a fifth or sixth level of understanding your Bible. But there are places

in the Bible where you actually have a dual application, a couple places back in Ezekiel and other places.

Be that as it may, the Bible teaches that in all Scripture there is a historical application as to history, there is a doctrinal application or a prophetic application to the future, and there is a practical application to your life and my life every day. I think it fits into that aspect. The bottom line is the thing, and I would put both of those in your Bible because I think that is the way it probably lays out, but the bottom line and the thing that I want to really leave with you today is the greatest gift that God gives us is the gift is given by God to every man, and that trumps all else and all the gifts that we get, and that is charity.

Charity is unconditional giving to others and God based on our unconditional getting from God everything that He has given to us. It is easy in the world that we live in to lose sight of all that God has done for us. It is easy in the world that we live in with tough times to think that we cannot get along without giving back to God. We have to have that. The truth of the matter is, I am telling you right now, that verse says God will always make all sufficiency in your life. It is part of the spiritual growth process of coming to trust God in everything that you do. The character of God is giving, and charity is unconditionally giving for you and for me to God first and to each other second that we accept each other where we are at. It does not mean you are not going to have problem people that you do not have to deal with in a disciplined fashion as laid out in the Bible, but I am not talking about that. That is a rare and an exception. I am talking about every day in our lives with the people that we rub shoulder to shoulder with in our church and people that we know and work with. We have to accept them where they are at. I would love all of you to be higher down the ladder spiritually than where you are at. But that is not realistic. Instead of standing around and complaining that you are not, I choose rather to get involved in your life to help you get there. That is what we need to do. That is a great chapter. Next week, we will get into chapter 14, and we will really begin to take some things apart, and we will put this whole thing together in this three-chapter package.

Let us pray. Father, we do thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. We do love You. Thank You for all that You do.