

When the Perfect Comes

1 Corinthians

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 13:10

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Please turn to 1 Corinthians 13. We will shift gears slightly this morning after spending the last few months looking at each one of these phrases about love and the wonders of it and the blessings of it and the power of it. We're going to return now to Paul's arguments in this context and remember, chapters 12-14 is about the extraordinary spiritual gifts that were offered in that time period of the church, especially prophecy, the receiving and giving of God's inspired word, tongue speaking which was the ecstatic declaration of God's word in a language that the speaker did not formerly know and then, of course, the word of knowledge, gnosis, which is what he used here, was a more immediate revelation from God with respect to a particular need in the church, person, event, these sorts of things. So, we're going to relate this to love at the end because, remember as I said some months ago, chapter 13 doesn't just stand by itself, the love chapter has a purpose. Of course, the fundamental purpose is to show that love is far more important than extraordinary spiritual gifts.

I turn your attention your attention this morning, if you'll stand with me, to verses 8-13 of this chapter. 1 Corinthians 13:8-13.

“8 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when the perfect thing,” or completed thing, “comes, the partial will pass away. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 So now faith, hope, and love,” remain or, “abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

May the Lord bless his word to our hearts. You may be seated.

I would love to talk about heaven this morning. I love to talk about heaven and I'm looking forward to going to heaven, I'd rather be in heaven. I love heaven, but unfortunately I don't think this text has anything to do with heaven. The traditional interpretation of this text, of course, if you'll look with me in verse 10, and I will warn

you ahead of time, you are going to have to stay alert this morning, you're going to have to pay attention because this is a very challenging passage of Scripture and the only way we're going to get anything out of it is if we do our homework together. I tried to cull it down with you but you're going to have to stay alert and not go to sleep.

The traditional interpretation of this passage is that the perfect thing in verse 10, teleion in Greek which means "that which is complete in itself." The usual interpretation of this is that that refers to heaven and the consummated state, eternity. Paul's point then would be, that the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, he mentions the three leading ones here: prophecy, tongues and the word of knowledge, will only last until heaven and, therefore, love is the most excellent way. That's the usual take on this passage of Scripture. Of course, most commentators, being very conservative and not charismatically minded, are in the position of then saying, "Well, wait a minute. We don't really want to go on saying that prophecy and tongue speaking and the word of knowledge are going to continue all the way until heaven because we've got Scripture," and so then they want to interpret prophecy with a small "p" to be preaching; tongue speaking I've even heard explained, "Well, that's like the psalm writing and the poetic devotionals of the church"; then, of course, knowledge can simply be ability to counsel or something like this. There have been all kinds of ways to make this line up to where what Paul's talking about here in the perfect thing is heaven.

Paul's analogy, you'll notice the very famous verse 11, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child," is supposedly intended to say that extraordinary spiritual gifts are for children. Love is for men so the contrast, again, is between this life, our infantile state and then the mature state in heaven. But there are some problems with this traditional interpretation. I'm going to mention several of them to you, they'll be directly exegetical and this is all going somewhere extremely important so I call upon you to listen.

First of all, the context. Paul nowhere in chapters 12-14 is talking about heaven. Nowhere, he never even brings it in. Paul is discussing the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit that were operative in Corinth especially and there is no indication anywhere in this text that we can lower case these gifts to normalize them. Prophecy means what? We already looked at this when we studied chapter 12: the authoritative receiving and proclamation of God's word directly without any human medium other than God's directly giving it. Tongue speaking was the ecstatic declaration in human language, it could be understood, it could be interpreted, it's just that the speaker wasn't previously aware of that language or didn't know it and yet, still, it was speaking the word of God. We'll see next week, when we get to chapter 14, that that's exactly what Paul teaches when he says that you've got to have the interpretation of tongues. You've got to have somebody there who understands the language or is given the gift of interpretation on the spot because interpretive tongue speaking is equivalent to prophecy which is God's inspired word and, therefore, if you don't have interpretation, shut up. It's no good. This isn't a private prayer language, this is God's word being communicated to the church. So, the context here: Paul is not talking about heaven, he's talking about spiritual gifts.

Here's the second problem with the interpretation. If you'll notice here in verse 10 with me, "but when the perfect," or completed thing, "comes." If this is going to refer to heaven, that perfect or completed thing is going to have to refer to Jesus, it's going to have to refer to the consummated state in some way. The problem is, it's a neuter noun in Greek. Greek has three genders here: we have masculine, obvious, I guess not so much in our day but it would be obvious if people were normal; feminine, obviously, well, it's not so obvious today, that means not a man; neuter is a class of nouns, it's not masculine or feminine and in Greek it usually was used with respect to ideas, truth issues, virtues, these sorts of things were oftentimes in neuter. So, here we're going to be in a position of saying that Christ is a thing or heaven is a thing. The problem is, nowhere in Scripture are these things put in this way. Christ is not a thing; heaven is not a thing. It would be personal as Paul usually talks about these things – masculine.

Third, please listen closely: the contrast in this passage of Scripture is between incomplete and complete revelation. Notice verse 9, "For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the completed comes." That would be an interesting comparison. Paul is talking about modes of revelation. He says, "Our knowledge now," gnosis, he's still talking about extraordinary spiritual gifts, he's not talking about your knowledge of calculus, he's not talking about your knowledge of US History is incomplete. He's saying, "Our knowledge," the word of knowledge because he puts it in parallel with prophesy, "Our prophesy is partial." The Greek phrase here is ek meros, it means "piecemeal," it means "fragmentary." It doesn't mean that it's not true as far as it goes, but it simply means it's not the whole ball of wax and it couldn't be because one guy would get a word of prophecy, somebody else would speak in tongues, one congregation would have a little bit and another congregation would have a little bit. It was always fragmentary, it was always piecemeal, it was always incomplete. The contrast here that Paul draws in verses 9 and 10 is between incomplete and complete revelation. Not between spiritual gifts and heaven. You have to read that into the text, it's not here.

There's another problem with this text: Greek has another word for "the end." In other words, if what Paul is saying was, "when the perfect comes, when the end comes, then these things will pass away," he would use, if you'll turn with me since you're right there, 15:24, he would use a different word. "Then comes the end when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed every rule and every authority and power." "Then comes the end," that's the Greek word telos; that's a word that means "cessation; termination." The word here, I know I'm asking you to think with me but God didn't give us Reader's Digest, this isn't Entertainment Tonight, he gave us an encyclopedia. He gave us something he wants us to study. The Greek word in our verse this morning is teleion. It's related but it's different: it means "that which is complete in itself." It's not the normal New Testament word for "the end" as in when one age ends and another begins. So, that's another issue here.

A fifth problem here with this is we have an ambiguous coming. If this "end" here or "when the perfect comes" refers to Jesus when he comes, that's a weird way of putting it. Nowhere else in Paul's literature does he ever describe the Second Coming of Christ without using Jesus' names in one way or the other, when Christ comes these sorts of

things, or with descriptive qualifiers that we are really sure exactly what he's talking about. So there must be something in the context of the verses that makes it very clear to the careful reader exactly what Paul is talking about but this would be an ambiguous way of referring to the Second Coming or to heaven if this is what Paul was talking about.

A sixth problem and I'm going to give you several here and I hope you're writing them all down and memorizing them so that you can cross-stitch them for me this week. The child metaphor. Notice there in verse 11, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways." This metaphor, I think, is indicating that at least in Paul's estimation, the church is going to get out of this infantile state soon. In other words, this infantile state of extraordinary gifts is not going to last forever in Paul's way of thinking here but on this interpretation if this is referring to heaven, we should still be expecting the manifestation of these gifts. Maybe the charismatics are right. You don't see a child for long, you grow up. So, the child metaphor I don't think implies a long period until these extraordinary gifts comes to an end.

A seventh problem: the word knowledge. I know I'm getting a little bit technical here but this is important because when you go against some of the greats in history or at least modify a little bit, you've got to give your reasons why. Knowledge never refers to our experience of heaven in the New Testament; it's never used in that regard. It's always referring our present understanding of things so I can't see how that refers to heaven, particularly verse 12, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known." That word "knowledge" usually refers to our present experience of things on earth.

Here's a bigger exegetical problem, look with me in 2 Corinthians 3:18, another Corinthian letter. We'll read it and I think you'll see it yourself, starting with 3:14, "But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts." Talking about the Jews. "But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." Do you see 2 Corinthians 3:18? The word here in Greek is very interesting, it's very close to face to face, the same thing in 1 Corinthians 13. Paul says that in Christ we already see face to face. The veil has been taken away and we're right there. We have an unveiled face. We have a direct, if you will, by faith, connection understanding of things. So, according to 2 Corinthians 3:18, we already see Christ face to face.

A ninth issue and then we're going to get more into the text here after a couple more: he says, "But we now see in a mirror dimly." The traditional interpretation means that right now we're seeing a mirror dimly. That's what we have to assume this text means. Right now, when we open this Bible, it's a dim mirror. It's a dim mirror. That's what it would have to mean. The problem is, I think you're going to have a hard time proving anybody

who knows the Bible, that the Bible's self-assessment is that right now we're seeing in a mirror dimly. We just read 2 Corinthians 3:18, we see Christ unveiled. Somebody came to Jesus and said, "Master, what good thing should I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said, "What does the Scripture say?" The Psalms, even in the Old Covenant, "The entrance of your word gives light and understanding to the simple." So, I don't think "mirror" and "dimly," the words enigmatically refer to our present understanding of things. What does it refer to? Our fragmentary knowledge if we were living in the age of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit. Mirror refers to incomplete revelation like the Corinthians had, their present state of things.

Then one more: if this was referring to heaven, look at verse 13 now of 1 Corinthians 13. It's very difficult to understand. "So now faith, hope, and love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love." In a traditional interpretation, I'm not making this up, there'll be faith and hope in heaven. You have to assume that because if Paul is saying here that now is the fragmentary, the incomplete, etc. etc. then, because he clearly changes gears, faith, hope and love are going to be in heaven. Love is the greatest but there'll still be faith and hope which is a problem. So, let me tell you what I think this passage means and fortunately I'm not alone in this. There have been some great men in the history of the church, I'm not one to drop names but I'll mention just a couple you'll probably know: Benjamin Warfield held this position, Morton Smith and his recent systematic theology held this position and most Bible scholars are re-examining what this particular text means. Let me tell it to you in one sentence: when the Bible is finished, the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit are over with. When the Bible is finished, the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit are over with and I want to give you what Paul says in order to establish that. Look in verse 8, he says extraordinary spiritual gifts are temporary, "Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease." By the way, this is a real interesting word here, τ in Greek, it's a future middle. When it's put in this way, it means tongue speaking will stay down on their own which, interestingly, is exactly what happened historically. By the end of the second century, it was pretty much over with and, of course, we know people are trying to revive this today but Paul says their voice will stay down on their own. It's a middle voice here and then he says, "knowledge will pass away." So, the simple point of verse 8 is the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit are temporary. The extraordinary gifts of the Spirit are temporary. Tongues, prophecy, word of knowledge. We have to read these in the context of chapter 12 where they're defined.

Secondly, verse 9, extraordinary spiritual gifts are piecemeal, they are incomplete, they are fragmentary. He says, "For we know in part and we prophesy in part." This is very straightforward: these extraordinary gifts served a useful purpose, they revealed God's will and purpose and love for the church but they're incomplete. It's interesting that the Pauline school of Hebrews 1:1 uses a very similar idea here. I don't have a problem with you saying, "We're believing that Paul wrote Hebrews." Many in the early church did but if you want to look at Hebrews 1:1 with me, you'll see here a very similar idea and even our word is here. "Long ago, at many times and in many ways," there is a form of our word *meros* again, "God spoke to our fathers by the prophets." The same idea, it was bits

and pieces: Abraham got a little, David got a little, Jeremiah got a little, Nathan a prophet got a little. It was bits and pieces; it was in various places.

Notice here, “but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.” There is clearly a difference between the past and now that Jesus has come. No more fragmentary revelation, it’s completed in Jesus which I think is exactly what Paul is doing in Corinth. Paul is saying, “Hey, you know, it’s great to speak in tongues.” I’ll just call some names out so that we’ll get it. “Hey, it’s great Jake had that word of knowledge. We needed it right then and there. It’s great that Bobby prophesied so that we would understand God’s will. It’s great, but guess what? It’s all over the place. It’s fragmentary; it’s not complete. It’s not fitting for the permanent use of the church and the permanent needs of the church.”

Verse 10, he moves right ahead, “but when the perfect,” or completed, you can go either way with that, “when the perfect,” or completed thing, “comes, the partial will pass away.” So, whatever the perfect thing is, it’s in contrast to the partial things, these extraordinary gifts that are piecemeal: tongue speaking, prophecy, word of knowledge. Well, what is Paul talking about? By the way, notice in verse 10, it’s interesting, he doesn’t mention tongues again. This is the second time Paul has slighted tongue speaking. I don’t want to make too much of this but remember this was the gift par-excellence in Corinth, tongue speaking and this is the second time now that when you would think that he would repeat it, Paul doesn’t even mention it, I think to humble their pride and to remind them that prophecy and knowledge are infinitely more important.

So, what does this verse mean? Well, it simply means that the extraordinary gifts will pass away when the perfect or the completed thing comes. Remember, I already told you that the perfect, the completed thing is a neuter noun. It means “that which completes; that to which nothing can be added,” is a frequent use of the word in Greek literature. The perfect or completed thing, look there with me in verse 10. By the way, God gave this to you so don’t go to sleep because if you understand as I believe this text correctly answers a huge issue that’s dividing the church today. A huge issue. The perfect, the completed thing is set in obvious contrast to the partial revelation of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit. So what is it? Put this in your margin: the perfect, the completed thing refers to the completed revelation of God. What’s the opposite of incomplete revelation? Completed revelation. What’s the opposite of piecemeal, fragmentary revelation? Non-piecemeal, non-fragmentary, everything you need revelation. So, I believe that this verse is simply telling us that when the completed revelation of God hits us which is referring to the New Testament which together with the Old is the complete word of God, the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit become unnecessary which is exactly what happened historically.

I told you this before, there are two books in the Bible that mention these in the New Testament: Acts, 1 Corinthians, early books. When you get to the end of Paul’s corpus, 2 Timothy, what do you get? “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, proper for doctrine, for correction, reproof, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be complete,” or perfect, “for every good work.” The word there is *artios*, it’s not the same word here but the word there still means, it’s still a legitimate Greek word for

“complete; proficient; capable; sufficient.” Everything one needs is now found in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

Verse 11, moving right along. Extraordinary spiritual gifts, Paul says, are for the church in her time of infancy. I really do think, the more I have studied this, “When I was a child, I spoke,” I think that refers to tongue speaking, “I thought,” I think that probably refers to prophecy because it’s a word there that means aspire, and “I reasoned,” I thought, very similar to knowledge. So I think what Paul is saying here is that tongue speaking, word of knowledge, prophecy, these are infantile gifts. “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.” That’s not to impugn or to speak evil of these spiritual gifts but it’s for children, it’s for the church in her state of infancy which did not yet have the completed revelation of God. Now that she has that completed revelation, she’s an adult. She’s mature, just like Paul teaches in 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

So, as glorious as the spiritual, this is going to fly in the face of what we think today. We’ve had from time to time some charismatic brothers and sisters and they come here and are like, “Man, this is so boring. Nobody is speaking in tongues. Nobody is just standing up with an oracle from God.” But Paul says, “You know what? That’s for children. Real men, real women,” let’s not be pejorative to our charismatic brothers, they have the completed revelation of God. They no longer need the piecemeal. They no longer need the fragmentary. We don’t have to get Gerber peas anymore or First Bites or First Chews or whatever they’re calling them now because we can have t-bone steak. I guarantee you put before man, “Do you want some smooshed up something?” It looks like it could have been carrots a hundred years ago, or “Do you want a filet? Or do you want one of Bobby’s dinners.” It’s going to be obvious what you’re going to pick, “I want real food.” That’s what Paul is arguing here. He’s like, “You’re all wrapped up in these extraordinary gifts and,” he says, “they have their place.”

Next week we’re going to get into chapter 14 and he’s got all kinds of rules for their regulation. They have a place if you do them right. They were revelatory of God’s will but they pale in comparison to adult life in the body of Christ. In fact, I think the reason in our day and age we’re seeing a resurgence of interest in charismania and tongue speaking and this guy’s an apostle, and this guy’s a prophet, is because we have reverted to immaturity. When the church has had her feet firmly grounded in Scripture, has loved Scripture and has loved preaching and families have done whatever it took to get to the preaching of God’s word, you didn’t have any of this foolishness going on in the church because when you’re an adult and you’re eating strong meat, you don’t want to open a can of Gerber. That’s not what you want to do. So, there is a reason why there is a resurgence of this and it is because of our lack of appetite now and ability to handle the word of God.

Here’s the problem, even though now, the more I study it, it’s no problem at all. It’s the confirmation of the thesis, verse 12, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” Of course, you’ve been trained to think heaven. Well, come with me to Numbers 12 because

Paul is quoting here from Numbers 12, there is no doubt about it, or at least referring to it very clearly. Basically, I think, the point of verse 12 is that extraordinary spiritual gifts: tongue speaking, prophecy, word of knowledge, are dark shadows. The word here means enigmatic. Remember, it looks like enigmatic in English. The complete revelation is face to face. In other words, I would say plainly that the Bible is face to face.

Notice here Numbers 12:6-8. Let start reading in verse 1 so that we can get context, “Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman.” I’m not going to get into that. “And they said, ‘Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?’” There you go, “We’ve got revelations too.” “And the LORD heard it. Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth. And suddenly the LORD said to Moses and to Aaron and Miriam, ‘Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting.’ And the three of them came out. And the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the tent,” the tabernacle, “and called Aaron and Miriam, and they both came forward. And he said,” now listen closely, “‘Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth,’” the actual Hebrew here can be “face to face,” “clearly, and not in riddles,” not in enigmas, “and he beholds the form of the LORD,” the Shekinah glory, “Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?’ And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them, and he departed.” Of course then, Miriam is struck with leprosy after this.

You notice the contrast: God gave his word to the other prophets in the Old Testament, of course, in Moses’ day but it was dark. It was visionary; it was enigmatic; it was riddled like at times. They gave the word but it wasn’t complete. Those with Moses, he spoke with Moses face to face. Now, some people say, “So what does that mean? Face to face?” Well, in a nutshell, it is a superior mode of the communication of God’s word. There was kind of a distance between God and the prophets, with Moses it was more immediate. It was more face to face; there was no doubt in Moses’ mind what God was saying to him that this was the word of God. With the prophets, it could be a little bit hazy at times, it was a little bit uncertain.

So, what do we do with this? Well, can face to face refer to heaven? Look at Exodus 33:11. I maintain that it does not and it cannot. Exodus 33, verse 11, 20 and 23. Remember, this is not terribly earlier than what we’ve just read but remember Moses wants to see the Lord. Exodus 33, beginning in verse 7, “Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses.” We already saw from Numbers that means mouth to mouth or face to face. “And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his

tent door. Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.”

Keep reading, “Moses said to the LORD, ‘See, you say to me, “Bring up this people,” but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, “I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.” Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.’ And he said, ‘My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.’ And he said to him, ‘If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?’ And the LORD said to Moses, ‘This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.’ Moses said, ‘Please show me your glory.’ And he said, ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name “The LORD.” And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.’ Please notice verse 20, “But,” he said, ‘you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.’ And the LORD said, ‘Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back parts,” kind of an interesting idea, “but my face shall not be seen.””

So, please note this: on the one hand Moses is said to have seen God face to face but on the other hand God said, “You can’t see my face. You’ll die.” For one thing, God didn’t have a face like we do. I think by face here we have to understand some more immediate manifestation of the incredible majesty and glory of God. So, on the one hand, God talked to Moses like that but on the other hand, Moses couldn’t see him. What’s the point? Well, they’re talking about two different things. When it says that the other prophets spoke enigmatically, unclearly, and Moses, God communicated with him face to face, it means direct revelation, unmistakable revelation, revelation that was complete in itself. But notice even in that statement, Moses didn’t see God face to face.

My reason in going through all of this is simply to say this: face to face cannot refer in 1 Corinthians 13 to heaven because we’re not going to see God’s face in heaven. It’s clearly forbidden. Now, we’ll see Jesus all day long and can hug him and kiss him and all these sorts of things but keep in mind, he’s our Mediator. We can’t see the face of God and live in his majesty and glory. Even the little enigmatic visions of it in Scripture, Isaiah, a holy man for all we know, and he’s completely unhinged by the sight of just an inkling of the majesty of God. So, we need to get over this, “We’re going to see God’s face in heaven.” No, we’re not. Our joy is not going to be diminished but the glory of God is always going to be mediated through the person and work of Jesus Christ to us. Always. Even the angels in heaven cover their face, so says Isaiah the prophet.

So, how are we wrapping all this up in 1 Corinthians 13? Well, it's very simple: face to face is a superior mode of revelation. Let me put it in Southern and if I'm right and I believe I am and I believe Warfield was right and I believe Morton Smith was right and all these others who talked about this: this Bible is seeing God face to face. That's Paul's whole argument. "You've got all these extraordinary gifts, one person is prophesying, one person is speaking in tongues, one person is having a word of knowledge and that's great but that's like the riddles, that's like the enigmas of the Old Testament prophets and right now, there is not a completed New Testament, this is what we have. But when the completed thing comes, when the completed Scriptures of God come, you're going to have a mode of revelation that's just like what Moses had face to face." It's very clear. It's not uncertain. We know where it comes from. It's complete in and of itself and that's Paul's testimony. Paul's closing imprimatur as the apostle of the Gentiles in 2 Timothy was what? "This is what makes you complete for every good work to which nothing else ever need be added."

Now, I already read you 2 Corinthians 3:18 but let's relate this a little bit more to Jesus because you'll notice and if you want to look back to it with me, I'm going to read the verse again. I think it's important to see the connection of this to his coming. "And we all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another for this comes from the Lord who is the spirit." And then in Hebrews 1:1, I'll just quote it to you again. We read it, "God who in sundry times and ways spoke to the fathers by the prophets has in these last days spoken to us by his Son." Okay, the reason the completed Scriptures are so completed, so superior if you will, to the fragmentary revelation of tongue speaking and prophecy and the word of knowledge is because of their connection to the person and work of Jesus. You see, fragmentary revelation is fine as long as Jesus has not yet come but now that Jesus has come and accomplished salvation for us, there is going to be a completed revelation from God because he is the absolute word of God. He is the final word. He is the all-sufficient word. He is the perfect word. He is the saving word. He is the powerful word. And so Paul clearly understood that the coming of Jesus means that we're going to have a completed New Testament that shows the finality of Christ just like we had a completed Old Testament that pointed to his coming and together this is going to be our face to face revelation from Almighty God. It will be sure. It will be superior to tongue speaking, word of knowledge and all of these sorts of things. It's not going to be enigmatic. It's not going to be partial. We don't need anything else. I don't need to see God in my spaghetti. I don't need to see him in my corn flakes. I don't need to wait for a tickle down my spine. I have God face to face. We've got to get over thinking tete-a tete like this. Face to face means complete revelation.

So, verse 13 then makes sense. He says, "So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love." Paul is drawing an analogy. Paul is saying that just like extraordinary gifts do not compare in glory and finality with the completed revelation of God, so faith and hope as wondrous as they are, do not begin to compare with love. They are all great, we have them all, but love is still the greatest of all. So, Paul is drawing an analogy here to get back to kind of the capstone for the chapter. The reason he talked about love is because love is superior in the triad of Christian grace. Faith, hope and love

and love is the best, therefore, since the Corinthians were practicing schism and pride and arrogance and ego in their exercise of spiritual gifts, they are way down the chain. They are babes. They are infants in Christ. Love should reign supreme especially since the extraordinary gifts are going to give way to the completed revelation.

A modern analogy and this is going to fly in the face: if somebody came in here and we were in here and somebody started standing up and speaking in tongues and everybody is just vibrating. And some simple guy stood up and he started reading a verse in the New Testament, our normal inclination would be what? "Oh, that guy who's speaking in tongues, that guy who's prophesying he is so much better. Don't give me that boring book." Again, baby talk versus face to face. You want God to speak to you like a child or do you want God to speak to you like a man and a woman? Because now that the completed has come, the Scriptures, we don't need any more baby talk. We have everything we need.

Now, what shall we do with this? Let me draw a few applications for you: 1. I believe this passage pronounces a definitive termination for what we think of as the charismatic gifts of the Spirit: tongue speaking, word of knowledge, prophecy, for the simple reason that we don't need them anymore. Now, what's going on out there then? I mean a lot of African Christians are charismatic and there is a lot here in this country? I don't know. I don't know why I'm called upon to have to give an answer as to what it is. I'm sitting in traffic, the children are asking me, "Daddy, was is it?" I don't know. Why do I have to tell you what it is? All I know is we're sitting and all I can tell you is, this stuff is going on in the church. But I'll tell you at one level the reason why is because we don't like face to face and so we'd rather have gibberish. In general, throughout the church, there has been a revolt from maturity. We don't want to be mature men and women and young people in Christ. We want babyish. We want baby talk.

Do you know how I know that? I'll tell you a few reasons: 1. because we prefer television to books. That's a sign of infancy in your life. I'm just telling you, I love you but you need to understand: picture books are for children. The fact that there are moving pictures and are really sophisticated is beside the point. God is not a caveman picture on the wall God, he is a speaking God. Secondly, we can see it in our churches. "Give us pictures. I need to see it." Well, God says, "No, you don't." He says you need to hear it because the main thing for me is not the visual effects and we've studied this a lot in Deuteronomy on Sunday nights and I know most of you don't come for one reason or another, but the point here is that you remember when we were talking about Mount Sinai with all the visuals Moses emphasized but you heard the voice. The important thing was the hearing. It wasn't the seeing, it was the hearing. Plus we have our living images of God in the sacraments. That's where we have them primarily. Now, of course, nature as well but primarily the sacraments.

The point here is: we in the church today, we're babies and I think that's one reason why we've had a return to these charismatic gifts is because we're babies. Let's talk a little bit more about ourselves. The second application: first application is you can't get all that other stuff we talked about without first saying no more charismatic gifts. We don't need

them, we have the completed or the perfect thing. 2. We'd better make sure we give heed to this Scripture. Come with me to 2 Peter 1. We'd better make sure we give heed to this Scripture. One of Calvin's earliest teachers, Jacques LeFevre, in Paris, he was the first one to translate the whole Bible into French and that was in the 1520s and he was one of Calvin's first teachers and he told Calvin, he said and Calvin heeded this, "Search the Scriptures. Give yourself up completely to the study of Scripture."

2 Peter 1:16, "For we did not follow cleverly devised fables or myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,' we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain." This is great, transfiguration. I'd have loved to have seen that but that's what Peter says, "And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Peter says it's great seeing, it's much better hearing and heeding the word of God.

So, for us, we need to make sure we heed Scripture and this isn't just a general call, make sure you're putting in your thirty minutes a day, make sure you're putting in your sixty minutes a day. Do you want your experience of God to be more than it is? And you didn't think seriously about this because living in the culture in which we live in particular, where everything is visual, when everything is materialistic, when everything is designed around my convenience and it's all about me. The realities of heaven and of Christ and of grace are going to be choked out of your life. Of course, when you add to that our own trials: you've got kids in school, you've got mommas raising babies. You've got all these things and it's real easy to lose perspective that's why you have to keep coming back to God face to face. That's why you have to keep coming back to the Scriptures and you have to let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. You have to meditate upon God's word because this is God speaking to you.

It's not like the preacher that I heard last week, a woman preacher saying on the radio, "Listen for the word of God." Instead, it's listen to the face of God because here it is. Here it is. Our God is a speaking God and when you read the Scriptures it is the same thing, of the same authority and of the same reality if you believe the promise of God, as Jesus standing right here on this stage and reading and speaking to you. It's the same thing. It's the same thing but we don't have that view of Scripture. We muddy it. "My own people are not sure what it means." Study it more.

We're already told in Scripture that some things are going to be hard to understand. We're already told that we're going to have to compare and put Scripture together with Scripture and do these things. You might say, "Well, I don't have time for it." Well, you may not have time for it but you're going to have to be content then at some level with a less than as much as it could be fellowship with God because God is a speaking God and

he is going to reveal himself to you by his Spirit as you study this truth. That's it. That's one of the reasons why I love these verses in 1 Corinthians so much because they bring me right back to this high view of Scripture and that's just not to go against the liberals, that's because it's my life and that's because what a privilege to now in the age where we don't have to listen to baby talk but we have the completed word of God.

I hope you're reading it. I hope you're meditating upon God's word. I know there is some bad stuff going on out there in the world but when hasn't there been? It's just that we know a lot more about it perhaps today because of our media outlets. Neil Postman talked about information desensitization. We hear so much about stuff that it just has a cumulative impact. The government thrives on making you feel like there are a lot of problems. I was just thinking yesterday about the water thing. Boy, how does this fit into what...there's a drought and it's really bad and you can't water flowers, try to flush your commode once a week if possible and we could go on and on here. There is not a lack of water. There is a lack of competence at the government and bureaucratic levels which is true throughout government. Government thrives on making you feel afraid. Why? So you'll trust it more. Modern elections, they want you to feel like this is important. This is not important. Look at these three candidates. Let's elect Caleb Harper. I promise you at six years old, he will have more confidence to run the country. What's the point here? They are wanting to sidetrack you. You see, where can you go to get ballast in this day in which we live? Where can you go to get an anchor? It's right here. It's right here.

I wonder at the end of your life imagine yourself 40 years down the road, 30 years down the road, some of you maybe three days and you think back and you have that one thought, "I wonder how much time I spent entertaining myself," as if it was a divine right and then I compare that to the time that I could have spent with my God. I wish I could have watched more movies. I wish I could have done more fun things. I wonder if you're going to look back and you're going to have regrets and say, "You know, I didn't have a lot of time but I had time." God never puts his children in a place where they don't have time to do their duties. Now, his children can certainly lose the time by mismanagement and infatuation with the things of this life but, to me, the cash value of this passage is: we must heed these Scriptures, love these Scriptures, meditate upon these Scriptures, read these Scriptures, memorize these Scriptures, talk about these Scriptures.

Just for your own information which I'm sure you already know: that is how we got the last major reformation. It was nothing else. It was not media. It was not people announcing that there's going to be a revival here. There wasn't a group of leaders saying, "We discovered the new way. We've got a new theology. Follow us. Look at our books. We put out 30 a month," which are not worth reading. It was none of that. What was it? It was Christians in the pew who were hungering and thirsting for the word of God, who would go out in the fields and listen to it being preached, who would hide copies of it. You know, they found copies in France throughout with the Bible and Calvin's Institutes bound together in barns, hidden under hay lofts from 4-500 years ago because people would sneak out so they could have the Bible in their own language and they could have Calvin to help them get through and understand because that's why he wrote the Institutes. It was believe it or not, we look at it today and it's like oh. It was the

catechism for beginners in that particular day. That's how we're going to get reformation. We're not going to get reformation with electronic preachers. As a matter of fact, that's deformation. That's reverse from maturity. We're going to get reformation when you and you talk to other people and other churches and we get serious about the word of God because God's word is his power unto salvation and nothing else.

One other little thing, the Corinthians were bickering with each other, weren't they, about their gifts? "I've got prophecy. I've got this and that and the other." Well, we've got to be careful we don't commit the same error now that we've got the completed thing. What I mean by that is this: we know, of course, that there is a variety of different Christian theological traditions that are out there. We've got Baptist; we've got Presbyterian. I don't have to tick them all off for you but we need to be very careful that now that the perfect thing has come, that when we speak the truth, we're not doing it from party spirit, we're not doing it from sectarianism, we're not doing it from arrogance but we remember Paul's admonition to Timothy, "Speak the truth in love." It is unfortunate that the Bible which is face to face at many levels, has created so much antagonism among those who profess to be its friends. There is room for disagreement; we're not all going to see things the same way particularly on secondary and tertiary issues and so that's one of the reasons why the reformer said, "You never divide over these things." But we need to make sure that you may have your particular doctrinal thing and you may hold onto it but you dare not do it arrogantly and you'd better not do it by speaking evil of other people. You have to call a spade a spade when it comes to truth and falsehood and we can't let God's word be trampled in the dust but the point here is that love must, the superiority, the more excellency of love must still dominate our outlook and how we speak that truth.

I'll give you a case in point: you're talking about predestination to somebody who doesn't believe in it, somebody that professes to be a Christian and so you're going along and you're giving your verses and they're giving their counterpoint and what not. You start getting a little bit agitated. "I mean, why can't you see it? Why can't you see I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy. Why can't you see that?" And you start getting more agitated, more agitated. Well, yeah, sometimes it's hard to deal with recalcitrance, people who just absolutely steadfastly refuse something that's printed black and white in Scripture but let me suggest to you that you remember that if you understand certain doctrines of Scripture that are difficult, it is because God had mercy on a wretch and, therefore, you're thankful for it and, therefore, we are to contend earnestly for the faith given once for all for the saints, Jude 3, but always to do it against the backdrop of a crucified Savior of love and of sacrifice. That's a powerful combination: commitment to truth, this is God's face to face revelation to us but I'm going to do it against the backdrop that I have no ultimate boast except Christ and him crucified.

So, if I'm talking to somebody and they don't agree with me, that's okay. My goal is, at least I'm going to present the truth to him, I'm not going to make it a personal thing, you know, you're going to hell if you don't believe in predestination, curses we all know. People may talk like they don't believe it but everybody prays like they do so a lot of times people's profession is a lot worse than their practice but the point here is that we need to make sure we practice the truth in love. Practice the truth in love.

It's been on my mind a lot lately, I've got a conference coming up this weekend dealing with Calvin. He one time put out a call and I thought, "Boy, wouldn't it be great if we could do that today." He wrote a letter to Crander in England. He made another letter of Bootser and the other guys in Reformation. He said, "You know, we really do all need to get together. We need a conference of learned men and pastors who will talk and share what they believe, iron out their differences as far as they can in accordance with Scripture because our churches must be unified." They must be unified.

Granted, there are some groups with whom we will probably not be able to have external unity in this life. There are just too many differences between us but let us make sure that that difference is because we don't see eye to eye on the face to face and not because we were mean and nasty and narrow and bigoted and prejudiced and sectarian and just generally jerks. Let us make sure we love the truth of God and hold it without wavering, without flinching and I trust you all will earnestly evaluate this morning even as I have myself. Earnestly evaluate: how much do I really love the Bible, God's word? How much am I reading it? When I read the Bible, am I looking for stuff to beat people over the head with? Or am I reading the Bible because it's the manna and I need it and I need to be beaten over the head? So for others on one level, but I need it. Is that how we're treating the Bible? Do you treat the Bible as, "Well, this is my devotional. ?? or slay me before your knife as we said before. Before your voracious life giving sword, just pierce to the dividing asunder of my soul and spirit. Judge the thoughts and intents of my heart. That's what meeting face to face with God does in his word.

Let's pray together.

Merciful Father, we come before you and pray that you would help us to embrace your word and love it. We thank you for the better age in which we live than even these Corinthians brothers and sisters did in that we have the completed revelation that you have for us. We praise you for your love and your kindness and your goodness and we pray that you would subdue our hearts to teachableness so that we might love your word and cling to it. We confess to you that we have no other foundation than to build our lives upon your word. All other foundations are sinking sand.

Lord, we pray that as we are in your word, you would grant us some fruits of that, not simply personal fruits but just a collective ability to see more clearly about the age in which we live, to understand how to live for you and how to defend your truth and at the same time to do so with true love and a desire to do other people good.

Father, please forgive us and have mercy upon us that we have not loved your word and meditated upon it. How often we confess, that as your children, we've just wandered off and done whatever we wanted to do rather than live by every word that comes from your mouth.

Father, we do pray also that you would bind your church into one. We know, Lord Jesus, that you pray that the church would be one: one in truth, one in sanctification, not

necessarily one in organization but one, of one mind and we pray that you would bring us to it. We confess to you that we feel your heavy hand of judgment when we see the church is fragmented, when we see everybody dividing over minutiae, when we see major denominations considering just huge violations of your word that makes any thought of union with them right now absolutely impossible.

Lord, we pray that you would have mercy upon us. We pray that you would cause your people who love you that they would be in your word and they would read it and study it and long for it and not listen to those who won't bring it to them and seek out pastors according to your heart and teachers who will give people the whole counsel of God without fear or flinching or holding back.

Father, we thank you for your mercy to us. We confess to a man, to a woman, to a child that we are sinners, that we are justly deserving your displeasure and are without hope except for your sovereign mercy and our only hope is in your name, your name of love, your name of grace, your name of faithfulness and mercy. We pray that you would receive us now and cause the word that we have heard and read this morning to bear fruit in our lives a hundredfold, Father, if at all possible and we know it is with you. We'll take sixty or thirty but we pray that your word would bear a rich harvest in our lives. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.