

I Cor. 13:13; John 14:18-24; The Greatest Gift I. Faith II. Hope III. Love

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, what is the greatest gift that you have ever been given? Children, if I were to ask you what is the best gift you have received, I imagine that this gift would still be important to you- and it would still be around. Great gifts last- they do not wear out or break- but the best gifts remain a part of our lives for many years. Well, today we are going to consider the greatest gifts- the best gift that we have received- and that gift is love. In the closing of chapter 13 we find that there are three things that remain- three that endure. These three stand the test of time and have a permanent value in our lives. Faith, Hope and Love! Now we have been considering various aspects of love- what love does and what love does not do. And last week we saw that various works or ministries within the church are not permanent. Spiritual gifts are good but they are passing- speaking in tongues, the gift of prophecy- these do not last forever. Partial knowledge and immature reasoning do not endure. But these three- faith, hope and love do endure! So today we see that Jesus Christ reveals that the greatest gift is love by giving that love to us!

I. Faith

Of the final three- the three that endure and remain- faith is the first in our list. Now we know what faith is- faith is a belief- a trust and dependence on someone- knowing that they are reliable and trustworthy. True faith is a knowledge, conviction and assurance as LD 7 says. By the Spirit's work within us we come to understand that everything God has revealed in His word is true. True faith is a steadfast faith- an abiding and enduring faith. Faith believes although it does not now see! It is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not yet seen as Heb. 11 says. Faith is a gift of God- a work of Christ's Spirit that He produces in our heart by the means of grace. Faith is the instrument of our salvation- the manner in which we are joined to Christ and share in His blessings. But what happens to our faith when the perfection comes? Well- faith is by its definition built on what is not now seen. What happens when we see? What remains the same in our faith is the object of our faith! The imperfect aspects of our faith

will be done away with- but the confident reliance on Jesus Christ will still remain! Currently we walk by faith and not by sight as II Cor. 5:7 says- but one day we will walk by faith and sight! Faith matures into sight. The end and goal of our faith will be received- the full salvation of our soul having been attained! We will see Him clearly- no longer from afar- but that will not disrupt our trust in Him- rather we will see how truthful and trustworthy He truly is! And what will happen to our faith- but that our faith and trust- our belief in Him will grow because He will prove how trustworthy He is! He is faithful, and He will do it! But when we compare faith to love- we know that we can have faith without love- as v. 2 says. Faith without love is a dead faith- there is no heart and soul in faith without love! But a faith filled with love is a heartfelt faith. Faith needs to work through its love- by way of its love!

II. Hope

And what of hope? Well, hope is a looking forward to something with certainty! Hope is that which looks beyond the present trials to the future, promised blessings. Faith and hope are directly connected- as I Thes. 5:8 says- put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Hope focusses on the good- the greater things that are certain to come because they are promised! Hope is a gift of God as Psalm 119 says- God causes us to hope! Psalm 42 says- why are you so downcast oh my soul, Hope in God! Or as Psalm 147 says, the LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love. Hope is the light that gets us through the dark valleys. As we found in v. 7- love hopes all things, believes all things. But what happens to hope when the one we have hoped in is seen? When the glory and bliss we hope for are experienced? Well, on the one hand we will not have to hope for the blessings and glories of heaven because we will have already received that which we hoped for! But on the other hand, the joys that we first experience will give way to greater and fuller blessings! When we have been there 10,000 years- we can still hope for greater blessings and joy because His treasures will never run out- and His blessed wine will never run dry! As Rom. 5:5 says, hope does not put to shame, because

God's love has been poured in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us! God will not defer our hope forever as Prov. 13 says. He will not keep us at arms length in order to keep our hope alive! No, He will give what He has promised! But in each blessing we receive, our hope will be kindled, because there is the eager desire for more of that which has been promised! Hope creates in us a capacity to receive and also yearn for higher and greater gifts! Like faith, hope is a certain expectation. But hope is a certain expectation in something Good that God has promised! Hope develops into fruition one day!

III. Love

And finally- we come to love! It is fitting that this chapter concludes with the Word that has been our focus these last 2 months. Love is the greatest- Love is the best and the strongest of these three! Of Faith, Hope and Love- it is love that is the most vital and most enduring! There are aspects of faith and hope that are linked to this word- because both faith and hope long for perfection. But love will remain! Love is superior because it is through love that we can be the best blessing to others. Everything earthly will fade away- but love will remain ever growing greater! As Rom. 8:39 says, nothing can separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus! We have received this love- the manner of love the Father has given us- so that we might be called sons of God! In His love He has saved us, so that we can show His kind of love to others! Love is the selfless desire for the good of others that moves us to sacrificially serve and support them! Love is not only an affection, it is a sanctified action! God gives us His love because He loves Himself and His glory- and the way in which we give Him glory is by both receiving and extending His love! God gets the most honor and glory by loving us- and moving us to love Him and serve Him who is the beloved One! Love is the greatest gift within the church because it is the most needed- and the most useful! Love is the mother of all Christian virtues. It is the fruit of the Spirit and the greatest of these! Without love we can do, we have, we are nothing! But with love, we can be true servants that benefit and bless God's people! It is love that produces pure faith and ardent hope!

How then, is love the best- the greatest and most lasting. Love is, first of all, the best because it is love that makes us most like God! Love is not only an attribute of God- God is love! God is and has love! God does not need to believe- or to have hope- but He does love! In Love He predestined us- in Love the Father sent His Son! God is love as I John 4 says, and if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us! Love is the clearest way that we reflect God- and it is the most expressive way to display God who dwells within us! As John 16 says, the Father loves you because you love the Son- and because you have believed that He came from the Father. In love we get to be the most like God! The second way in which Love is the best is that love is both the summary and the fulfillment of the Law! Love is the summary of the God's commands- and it is also the summary of the Christian life! This love is all consuming- as we love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength! As we read from John 14, if you love the Son you will keep His word, and the Father will love you and will come and make His home with you. Loving God above all and loving our neighbor as ourselves is our calling! For us, we have a faith working through love as Gal. 5 says. And the third way in which love is unique in that it extends blessings to others. Love not only benefit those who give it- but also those who receive it! Love serves and supports the body, extending the benefits and blessings to those who receive it!

To conclude, since love is so vital- so necessary for the present and future life- we must learn to pursue it! As 14:1 says, seek love- pursue it, run after! Grow in your appreciation of the love of God that has been given to you- and eagerly desire to show that love to those around you! Augustine said that because you believe you hope, and because you hope you love! So seek this kind of love in your life! As we now approach the Lord's Table, the love feast which is a foretaste of our wedding supper of the Lamb- we come together with a heart filled with love! We partake in unity and love with one another- and with our host Jesus Christ! Our love for one another and for Him will ever grow- because Love is the greatest gift! Love will never fade- or grow old. It's flame will never die! Let us love others as our God loves us!