



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 13:1–3

1 Corinthians

“The More Excellent Way: The Indispensability of Love”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee again for the opportunity that is before us. We thank Thee for the Word of God. We thank Thee for the way that Thou hast in marvelous, lovingkindness preserved it for us, and we have the opportunity to study it. And not only that, but we have the confidence that, as we look to thee the Holy Spirit, the second person of the eternal Trinity will guide us in understanding it. And since he is the author of the Scriptures, we know that we have the inspired, completely accurate interpreter of the Word of God. We ask, Lord, that Thou wilt give us submission to him as he takes of the things of Christ and shows them to us in the ministry that our Lord promised that he would have for us.

We thank Thee for each one present. We pray Thou blessing upon them and upon their home and their families. We pray for our country, the United States of America, and ask Thy blessing upon our leadership, the president, and others associated with him in the government of this large and significant country.

We ask, Lord, that if it should please Thee there may be a growth in the interest of the Word of God. We pray that Thou wilt bless the ministry of the Word of God as it takes place through the days of the week and especially on the Lord’s Day. And we pray Thy blessing upon the ministry here, upon those who minister the Word. We pray for Dan Duncan and Wilford and Randy and the Sunday school teachers and others who minister the Scriptures in Believers Chapel. We thank thee

for Thy hand upon us. We pray that Thou wilt bless with regard to the future, preserve us for a significant kind of ministry until our Lord comes.

We thank Thee for the hope that we have. And now, Lord, as we turn to the Word, we pray that thou wilt be with us in our study.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] We are turning to one of the great chapters of the Word of God, 1 Corinthians chapter 13. Everyone knows this chapter is the chapter that has to do with Christian love, divine love, or simply love. And tonight we are going to look at the 1st three verses and our subject is “The More Excellent Way: The Indispensability of Love.” And I would like to read the first three verses. These are the verses that we will seek to expound in our study.

The apostle writes, and remember he has just said in the last sentence of chapter 12, “And yet I show you a more excellent way.” He seemed to suggest by this that if we had to choose between the gifts that are given by the Holy Spirit and Christian love, that Christian love is the more excellent goal for Christians. Fortunately, we don't have to make that choice. We have been given spiritual gifts, and we also are given an insight into Christian love, and we are also given in the gift of our Lord Jesus Christ the one who is love himself, and so we don't have to make that decision. But if we had to decide between them, the apostle gives the priority to Christian love. He writes now in chapter 13:

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or clanging 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, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.”

Now, in verse 3 there is a very significant difference of opinion, a difference of readings in the original Greek manuscripts. My text that I just read says, “And though I give my body to be burned,” but it is possible also to read, “And though I give my body that I may boast.” We’ll talk about that later on, but my text has, “I give my body to be burned,” and that’s the reason for the difference if you have some other different reading.

The question that immediately comes to us as we look at this chapter is what is life’s *{summum bonum}*? What is the highest good for which individuals should strive? Now, the answer may be found here. And it’s very interesting to note that some things that we think might have acclaim for the highest good do not stand up to Christian love. We know it’s not knowledge, for Paul writes, “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, but have not love, I am nothing.” And so the greatest good is not knowledge. And I think also, since he mentions faith in verse 2, that we can say the greatest good is not faith.

Now, Paul is not like many of us; he doesn’t recommend a strong point. If I were to say to you, “What’s the most important thing in the study of the Scriptures?” I might say—I don’t know what I would say, but I might say it’s that you understand systematic theology. And someone would say, he says that because he spent a lifetime looking at systematic theology and so that’s his strong point. But what about those other things that are not his strong point? Now, you needn’t talk about those. There is a long list of those, of course. But one thing I like about Paul is that he does not recommend his strong point. He was not—if you look back at his history, he was not a man who was characterized by love.

Listen to what the Scriptures say about him. In chapter 9 in verse 1 of the book of Acts, we read, “Then Saul, still breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest.” And we further read, “And asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem,” and so on.

We read in chapter 9 in verse 13, these words about the apostle, “Then Ananias answered, ‘Lord I have heard many things about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem.’”

So it is very clear that the apostle was not a man of love. In fact, another place says Paul was the kind of man who “breathed out slaughterings.” So he wasn’t recommending his strong point. He was a man, himself stained with blood, but he commends love.

He is not alone in that because, in commending love, he has great company. There is Peter. In 1 Peter chapter 4 in verse 8 we read these things by the Apostle Peter, “And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins, (notice) above all these things.”

John the apostle, in 1 John chapter 4 in verse 7 writes these words, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He, who does not love, does not know God for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, but God sent his only begotten son into the world that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us, and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

And so on down to verse 17 or 18, “Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the Day of Judgment; because as he is, so are we in the world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because he first loved us.”

Our Lord Jesus says much the same thing in Matthew chapter 22 in verse 36. Looking back over the Old Testament and the greatest commandment, we read these words from our Lord, Matthew chapter 26—I am sorry chapter 22, verse 36 through verse 40, we read these words, “Teacher what is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

We have some other things that are interesting in which it seems to suggest that others believe that love was the greatest thing. In Romans chapter 13 in verse 10, Paul writes, “Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” And then in Galatians 5:14 the apostle writes these words, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in the—you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

And finally in Colossians 3:14 Paul makes a further statement with reference to it that I think is worth pondering in Colossians 3 verse 14 he writes, notice the first few words, “But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.” So you would gather from this that the Apostle Paul, our Lord, the Apostle Peter, and others thought that love stood at the top of the virtues that characterize the fruit of the Spirit or the Christian life. So when we read here in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 things that have to do with this very point, we should not be surprised. This is truly a more excellent way.

Now, all Bible teachers, who have been around very long, will give us instruction in the kinds of words that the Bible uses to express love, and generally it's summed up this way: that in Greek, considering both New Testament and Classical Greek, there are three significant words for love. One, the word *{eros}*, not found in the New Testament, but it's the word from which we get the English word “erotic.” And so you are not surprised, I am sure, to know that that's the word that refers to love that is passion and frequently lust. Not surprisingly, it's not found in the New Testament, not that it's not an important word, not that it could not be in certain places used, but it is not.

A second word is *{philia}* from the word *{phileo}*, it means to love in the sense of have affection for. And this *{philia}*, that kind of love, is the love of affection; the kind of love that a person might have for someone who has common interests with the other person. They may love one another, have affection for one another because of the experiences of life, they love the same things, they both like to sit down in front of the TV screen and look at football games and that kind

of builds up the type of affection that a good friend has for another one. That word is found in the New Testament.

The other word, which we hear so much about in Christian circles, is {*agape*} love. This is the love of decision of will. It's the love that expresses itself in sacrifice and self-denial. It's the kind of love that treats the person that is the object of it as the one whom the individual wishes to have the best of everything that is good. Sacrificial love, the kind of love that a man has for his wife if he truly loves her, or a mother has for her children, or that two individuals may have for one another to the extent that one is willing to sacrifice one's well-being for the other, the kind of love that desires the greatest good for the object of my love and affection, the greatest good of that person. I gather that if we were to look, and many have said this—that if we were to look for the visible illustration of Christian love, it would be, of course, our Lord Jesus Christ, because what he has done is precisely that, he has loved us and given himself for us.

And as we in the Lord's Supper Sunday night, as I stood up and said just a few words, in Revelation chapter 1 the statement is made that “he loveth us,” present tense used in that remarkable verse which one of our great New Testament textual critics discovered as he was reading, discovering that that is the only place in the New Testament in which the verb to love is found in the present tense. And so having found it he said, “All of my studies of the Greek language would be justified with this one discovery that our Lord not only has loved us but continually loves us.”

Well, that is the love of self-sacrifice. If you want a visible picture of it, it's the picture of our Lord and his ministry. I know that Bible teachers frequently turn to John chapter 21, verse 15 through verse 17 because that is the passage in which two of these words that are found in the New Testament {*philia*} and {*agape*} are found. But Bible students have made so much over this that I'm not sure that it would be wise for anyone to say anything about it.

I was reading something Gordon Clark said about it in his little book on 1 Corinthians. And in it he made reference to these words for love, and then he said John 21 is a passage in which both {*philiao*} and {*agapao*} occur. And this is what he said, “Many sermons have subjected the occurrence

of these words together to ingenious torture.” What he meant by that was that exegetes, because this is a very difficult distinction to draw—and in fact, many think it cannot be drawn, that ultimately {*philia*} and {*agapao*} may mean the same thing—and he suggests that Bible teachers have given so many sermons trying to distinguish them that what they’ve done is really to torture the text. So we’ll leave it with that and say that it is very difficult to distinguish between the two words. But now that doesn’t mean it’s not possible for us to say anything about love as it is found in the New Testament.

Now, we have a great chapter, and I am going to try to go through it now dealing with the clauses as they come up. And, first of all, he speaks of love and the gift of tongues. In verse 1, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.”

Now, remember he’s not saying that love is a substitute for the spiritual gifts. We still have the spiritual gifts. It’s perfectly proper for us, and we are exhorted to seek the spiritual gifts. That’s what he just said, earnestly desire the best gifts, in verse 31 of the preceding chapter. He’s not saying love is a substitute for it. If that were so, then we could say love is more important than the apostles, more important than the prophets, and that, of course, is not true. It was the apostles who, under the inspiration of the Spirit, have given us this marvelous New Testament. So it is not a substitute, but it is a pastime, a seeking of love that is greater than the seeking of gifts.

In one sense, we don’t have to seek gifts because the Bible tells us every one of us has a gift. So we do have a gift, and we are responsible to administer it. But it is proper for us to have a desire for spiritual gifts, and maybe in the discovery of new gifts that may have been given to us that we had not known were given to us by virtue of fulfilling what he says in verse 31, “earnestly desire the best gifts.”

So now he says, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels.” Obviously he is talking about the gift of tongues, the gift of speaking in tongues. And he talks about the tongues of men and of angels. It is true, of course, that the way in which a person expresses himself is very important in his life and in his public ministry. But one’s diction is not comparable to the depth of

his heart. There are people who cannot say words very professionally, but whose life comes through in their language. And one senses that the person has come through all of the words, may not be the kinds of words that Emily Post or some other arbiter of fashion and style and diction might approve of, but the person comes through, and the person as a loving, truly loving person comes through, and frequently those words have more effect than the person who speaks in perfect diction with the ideal accent, like I do. [Laughter] That southern accent, isn't that marvelously stylish? [Laughter]

No, we know the point we are trying to make here, that it is important to realize that there is something way we talk, it's what we are spiritually that is the important thing. As a matter of fact, the depths of our heart determine the power of our expression. One interesting thing is that love is really a language universally understood. It's universally literate, someone has said. If a person really has true affection, it will shine through, and the words are not nearly as significant as that which comes through, sometimes in spite of the words.

But Paul says, “tongues of angels.” What does he mean by “tongues of angels”? Well, one of the authors has said it's not clear whether either Paul or his readers thought their gift of tongues were the dialects of angels. A few interesting Jewish parallels might make this possible, but Paul may be writing hyperbolically to draw sharp contrast with love itself. And my friend, a former colleague of mine, in a theological institution in Chicago said, “I suppose a pedant”—a pedant means me and other theology professors—“a pedant might argue that they cannot be the tongues of angels because in that case it would be silly for tongues to cease when perfection comes.” And the chapter later on says, perfection—“Tongues will cease when that which is perfect comes.” It would be silly for tongues to cease when perfection comes since that's precisely when we are more likely to encounter angels. And so we ought to know how to talk to the angels.

So what does he mean then by tongues of angels? Well, the chances are he simply is speaking hyperbolically. And he is simply saying, though I speak with the tongues of men or even if it were possible, the tongues of angels, but if I do not have love, I've become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. So the judgment I have become a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal is designed to show

us that if we do not have love, and we have a gift then we are sounding brass or clanging cymbal. This judgment is meant to be startling, and that’s precisely what it is. Not simply, incidentally, does he say the tongues that we utter—that is, the languages that we utter—not only are they sounding brass and clanging cymbal, but *we* are. Notice the text says that we have become, we have become—I have become, Paul says, sounding brass or clanging cymbal. So if I have marvelous diction, but I do not have love, it’s not that my language is clanging cymbal and a gong, but it’s *I* that become that. So what he wants, of course, to do is to startle us to make us see how important, in his mind, love truly is.

It’s possible and probably likely that he refers when he says sounding brass or clanging cymbals to the Greek mystery cults and the rights that they went through in a city like Corinth. In the city of Corinth, Dionysus, the god of nature, specialized perhaps in wine and thus came to be known as the god of wine, but he was really the god of nature, and Cybele, goddess of wild animals. Cybele would have been the goddess of nature. Cybele—I guess Rush Limbaugh, if he were to know about Cybele or wanted to say something about Cybele, he would say that Cybele was the ancient, mythical, environmental wacko. That’s one of his favorite expressions, the ancient environmental wacko. Well, Cybele was the goddess of nature and the celebrations that took place in the worship of the Greek gods were loud and very, very difficult to take. For example, in the case of both, one of the things that I read said they were neither melodious, their sounds, nor capable of producing harmony because they did use big brass instruments. The sounding brass and clanging cymbal were exactly what they used in their rights up and down the streets. And one of the authors said that both of these instruments beat out a heavy monotone and caused as much offense as constantly barking dogs. So Paul looked out over the experience of the Corinthians, and he was trying to describe what it meant for a person to have language and talk and not have Christian love, and that’s what he’s like.

I don’t know enough about modern music to know if there is a parallel. But I do know that the kind of music that I think is modern music certainly sounds like the beating out of a heavy monotone, and it certainly gives, to some at least, as much offense as constantly barking dogs.

Now, Martha and I went on a seven-thousand-mile trip this past month. And we didn't know what we were getting into in one place because I had forgotten in making reservations in Victoria, British Columbia, that the British Commonwealth Games were being held then. And that city, a beautiful city, on Victoria Island has I think about thirty-five thousand people, officially, around in the area there are two or three hundred thousand people, but in the city itself, it was that. And there is one famous old hotel there that if you can possibly stay in it, you are supposed to stay in it. I called a friend of mine who had a ministry there—I may have told you about this. It's still on my mind. I called my friend and said, “Where should I stay?” And he said, “Well, everybody who goes to Victoria stays at the Empress Hotel.” And so I made the reservation at the Empress Hotel because I love my spouse. And I knew she would like that. It would help her to get over the fact that I'm a country—Southern country bumpkin.

So anyway we went there, but we did not realize that there would be thirty thousand athletes from all over the British Commonwealth in this town of thirty six thousand official population, and that they would take up residence right down on the water partially in front of the Empress Hotel. And the music was just what thirty thousand young people would love, and it went on for hours. And it beat out a heavy monotone and caused as much offense to some people as constantly barking dogs. It was almost like I had a preview of the city of Corinth and the Apostle Paul's experience. But we survived it.

Now, Paul then is letting us know that the gift of tongues cannot possibly compare with Christian love. The gift of tongues, that's like a heavy monotone, constantly barking dogs if—if not with—if it is not accompanied by Christian love. Now, obviously if you or anyone else or a church is a church that specializes in, makes preeminent speaking in tongues, they fall under the apostle's criticism. Tongues are spiritual gifts. We'll talk about them when we get to chapter 14. But, nevertheless, love is more important. And if we do not have love, we become sounding brass and clanging cymbal.

Now, secondly, having spoken of the gift of tongues, evidently, in verse 2 he talks about love and the gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and faith. 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 but have not love, I am nothing. Now, I want you to know, if there was someone alive today, just a human being such as you and I are, who could remove mountains, there would be no question that he would be on top of the human pile at the present moment, wouldn't he? But what does Paul say? If I should have that power and I don't have love, I am nothing, nothing.

So, again, he's playing with these hypothetical superlatives, thinking of a person who has the gift of prophecy, who understands all mysteries, all knowledge, and all faith to remove mountains, but he has not love. He's nothing. Isn't that striking? All of those great things that we would think so much about, they are nothing in comparison with Christian love. When a person has Christian love, think he has all that is sufficient to make him superior to all of these gifts that we carnal Christians so prize. We've got our priorities backwards so often.

So, again, the condition with the conclusion. And though, or and if I should have the gift of prophecy. Prophecy and mysteries together suggest—well, it suggests to me knowing Paul because he uses the term “mystery” to speak of God's dealings, particularly in this age, the age in which he is ministering to Gentiles, bringing them into the body of Christ on an equal standing with Israel because that's the whole point of the present age. One does not have to become a Jew to enter into among God's people. That's the point of the book of Acts, Acts chapter 10, Acts chapter 13, and so on. And Paul calls it a secret that was not known in ages past. They didn't anticipate, not that the Gentiles wouldn't be saved, but that they could be saved without becoming Jews. That's what they had a problem with in the opening chapters of the book of Acts which describes the early history of the Christian church. Paul talks about it in Ephesians. He talks about it in Romans. Mysteries—all mysteries to understand what is he talking about? He talks about it in Romans 16 in a very important text. He talks about it in Ephesians 2 and particularly Ephesians 3 starting at Ephesians chapter 2,

verse 12 through chapter 3, verse 12 of Ephesians. Very significant to understand what he’s talking about. Then even in 2 Thessalonians 2, this mystery that characterized Paul’s ministry.

What was the mystery about? Well, it was in an interpretation of the significance of the present age eschatologically. So when he says, and though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries, all of those mysteries, relationship between Jews and Gentiles, and the body of Christ, and the significance of this age, and all knowledge and all faith so as to remove mountains. What I suggest that he is saying is if a man should have a perfect understanding of the eschatological situation of the church in the flow of redemptive history—let me say that again. I just made it up on the spur of the moment. It sounded good. The eschatological situation of the Christian church in the flow of human history, if he could understand that, but if he didn’t have love, what does Paul say? I am nothing. I am nothing. I would not, for one moment, say we should not understand those things. In fact, I give myself to that in my own personal study constantly; try to. If I’m doing anything special, it’s that, eschatology. But if I should have perfect understanding of the situation of the Christian church in the flow of history and also in connection with the eschatological hope, if I should have all of that and I don’t have love, I’m nothing.

So when I hear individuals come on the TV screen and talk about the things that are going to happen in the future and how significant they are the, televangelists, it seems to me, offend this especially, but the radio evangelists, the radio Bible teachers do too, they give us the impression that it is more important to know those things than it is to understand Christian love. And the apostle has a word for them, those—and for us, those things are important but there is something more important in the Christian life. Love is greater than faith. It’s greater than prophecy. Someone might say, “Why is it greater than faith?” Well, because the end is greater than the means. We are not discounting faith. That’s very important. But faith is a means to the possession of an end. And the end is the important thing. So I am nothing.

Now, I want to say this: Paul doesn’t speak of saving faith, he’s talking about the faith to remove mountains. So he’s not talking about saving faith. Obviously, a man must have saving faith to

enter into the Christian life before there can be any love. So when he says, and have all faith, he’s talking about faith as a Christian experience. The New Testament tells us that there are different scales of Christian experience, doesn’t it? Our Lord talks about people who have no faith, and then he talks also about those who have little faith, and he talks about those who have great faith. So faith is a virtue in which there are degrees. It’s one of the fruits of the Spirit. We usually translate it faithfulness. And there is a slight difference between them. We don’t have time to go into that. But, nevertheless, what he is talking about here is faith in the Christian experience. And though I have it all, I’m nothing.

Now, notice—you know, one thing about the Bible, the Bible is such a great book. The reason is obvious, it’s inspired. There isn’t any other book inspired that I know about. *The book of Mormon*, you ever read any of *The book of Mormon*? You don’t have to read in that but a few pages and know this is not an inspired book. The only time it seems to be inspired is when it’s copying Scripture. You know, you read something and you say, “That sounds pretty good. Well, that’s exactly what Paul said,” or, “That’s exactly what somebody else said. This book is an inspired book.”

But Paul says if I have all this—I have to go back over that text to get that phrase that came out of my mouth. If I should have perfect understanding of the status of the church and the history of redemption—that’s not quite it, but that’s close—in the history of redemption, and I don’t have love, then he says—notice what he says. He does not say, I am no one as if I don’t belong among the great teachers of the Word of God, Isaiah and others, I’m no one. No, he says, I am nothing, nothing, a zero. That’s what I am, a zero, nothing. The Greek text says {*outen*} not {*oudeis*}. Not, no one—nothing. Couldn’t be worse than saying he is nothing if he doesn’t have love. This is Paul talking; this is not S. L. Johnson. So, nothing.

Now, finally we want to look at the last, love and charity. The Authorized Version’s word, love and charity and martyrdom, verse 3, “And though I bestow my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.” Now, you can see, of course, he has passed from the gift to acts that seem to be expressive of love. Gifts—now acts. The

acts are restoring my goods to feed the poor, giving my body to be burned. Two conditions are expressed, one expresses charity or love and the other martyrdom.

Look at the first, and though I bestow—that’s a word, incidentally, that’s derived from another little word found in the New Testament that means something like a morsel. And so it means to dole out one’s possessions bit by bit. It’s like a person who has a lot of money and he decides he’s going to give his money to the poor. He doesn’t do it all at once, but he is constantly engaged in being a charitable giver. So Paul says, “Though I feed with small morsels the poor, and though I give my body to be burned and have not love, I am nothing.” Charity, it cannot compare with love.

Now, there is a bit of a problem with the second one. I think we could understand that. But Paul also says in verse 3, “And though I give my body to be burned.” It’s very difficult to know whether this should be translated, though I give my body to be burned, or whether it means, that I might boast. The great texts have two significant variants. Let me pronounce them for you: {*kow-chay-som-ai*, *kow-kay-som-ai*. *kow-chay-som-ai*, *kow-kay-som-ai*}. You can see how close they—closely they sound to one another. {*kow-chay-som-ai*} to be burned. {*kow-kay-som-ai*}, that I may boast.

So you can see how a person looking at this and copying it would say if Paul—if the manuscript he was looking at had, “Though I give my body to be burned,” you would say surely Paul is not talking about giving his body to be burned. Oh, he meant to say all right {*kow-kay-som-ai*}, and the scribe who was listening to Paul didn’t hear him correctly and put that I may boast. I can understand that. A person giving himself, giving himself away in order that he might boast like a Japanese kamikaze pilot. You remember the kamikaze—well, I remember the kamikaze pilot. Poor Dan Duncan doesn’t remember him. He was too young for that. And some of the others of you and a few of you I look out, you remember the kamikaze pilots. You know what kamikaze means? You didn’t know I was a Japanese student, did you? I’m not, so I looked it up. Divine wind. And I still remember the sense of fear and trepidation when I would read in the papers about kamikaze pilots who determine to take their planes with their loaded explosives and land them on our ships in the

Pacific. Giving themselves up because they felt that they would be making martyrs of themselves, and they would be honored throughout time by virtue of what they were taught by the Japanese religion.

So Paul then may be saying, it's difficult to know, “Though I give my body to be burned like that, but have not love it profits me nothing.” Or it could be, “Though I give my body as a sacrifice that I may boast, I'm nothing.” So I am not sure about this. There are some that could argue this in more detail, but most of you wouldn't follow because it's something I spring on you on the spur of the moment. You would not expect that.

The manuscripts that we have those that are generally recognized as a bit better than the others are those that have boast. I give my body that I might boast. But the decision may not be simply that. It may be something more internal, and so I'm not sure. But one thing I do know, the sacrifice involved for reasons of pride or glory is what Paul is talking about. Though a person gives himself in great sacrifice to win glory for himself, to win fame for himself, but if he has not love, as he says here, it is—“it will profit me nothing.” So what he's saying is this: self-interest exists in almost everything we do. A person may give himself to be burned in order to gain glory for himself, but that's not to gain glory for God, it's to gain glory for himself. Or if he gives himself that he might boast, it's obvious that's not the kind of sacrifice that's not without self-interest either.

We live in an age in the political atmosphere and the religious atmosphere and almost every kind of atmosphere in which any of us live self-interest. Self-interest always rears its head because of our sin. In our public life, our political life, we have one man falling, required to resign. Another man falling, required to resign. It doesn't make any difference whether they are white or black or rich or poor and their background, self-interest. Self-interest because we are sinners. We are sinners. And so Paul is talking just about that. There is something more significant than these sacrifices. Sacrifice for reasons of pride and glory, we know those are worthless. Paul says, if one does not have love, the greatest kind of sacrifice is worthless. It profits me nothing.

C. T. Studd was one of the great missionaries, sold everything he had, gave away everything he had, then gave himself to the Lord’s work and now we read about C. T. Studd. We marvel at the marvelous dedication of this man of God. He had his human faults, but you couldn’t help but thank God for this man. One of the great athletes of Great Britain, gave himself to the Lord, gave himself totally to the Lord and had a marvelous ministry because he not only gave himself in sacrifice, but he also had a heart of love for the lost.

In the city of Athens—and many think that this particular thing may have caused Paul to write this—that there was a famous monument called the Indian’s Tomb. There an Indian had burned himself in public on a funeral pyre and had caused to be engraved on the monument the beautiful inscription {[indistinct]}, *an Indian from Barbosa, according to the traditional customs of the Indians made himself immortal and lies here*. Burned himself to death. Paul may have had that in mind. But whether he did or not, it’s still true, though I bestow all by goods to feed the poor, though I give my body to be burned and have not love it profits me nothing.

Look at those three statements. Verse 1, “I have become sounding brass, clanging cymbal,” I guess I could say I give out nothing. No real good sweet melody. He gives out sounding brass, clanging cymbal. That’s evidently the kind of response we have among the saints. Though we speak with tongues and we do not have the Christian love that Paul is talking about, this is the way we actually come over to the other saints, sounding brass, clanging cymbal. I hope I don’t come across like that.

In the 2nd verse he says, “Though I have all these gifts so that I could remove mountains even, and I don’t have love, I am nothing.” I would like to think of that as nothing in the sight of God.

And then here in verse 3, “Though I bestow my goods to feed the poor, though I give my body to be burned, but if I do not have love, I gain nothing,” my sacrifices don’t really count.

One of the greatest missionaries that the church ever had was David Livingston. If you go to Scotland and you go up into the country a little bit, you can come to a little town where you can enter

the place, go in the little home where David Livingston grew up. And the name of David Livingston is great in missionary annals, because he was one of the first to ever go out into central Africa.

I just want to read you a little something about him. Someone is writing about him and says, “It’s the man who is the missionary. It’s not his words, his character is his message.” Now, there is something I would say with regard to that. His message is if anything more important than the man, but he’s trying to make a point and I think it is a valid point. His character is his message. In the heart of Africa, among the great lakes—this is done many years ago, many decades ago—I have come across black men and women who remembered the only white man they ever saw before, David Livingston. Because that’s what he did. He went into Africa where no white man had been for the sake of Jesus Christ.

He said, “And as you cross his footsteps in that dark continent, men’s faces light up as they speak of the kind doctor who passed there years ago. They could not understand him, that is, when he began his ministry, but they felt the love that beat in this heart.”

Punch magazine said, with reference to him when he died, these words, “He needs no epitaph to guard a name which men shall praise while worthy work is done. He lived and died for that which is good. Be that his fame. Let marble crumble. This is living stone.” Well, in the final analysis, that’s it. Just like that, a man of God. We sing in Believers Chapel, a hymn. I’m just going to recite the stanza of it and ask that it be not only my petition but yours and all of ours: “Love divine. All love’s excelling joy of heaven to earth come down. Fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown. Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love thou art. Visit us with thy salvation, enter every trembling heart.” Charles Wesley certainly wrote a great hymn when he wrote that. And my prayer is that I may have the experience of knowing what it really means to know him who is love and to experience the love of our Lord Jesus Christ in some depth. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, how marvelous are these words that the apostle has written which the saints of God have studied down through the centuries. There is no chance that we should ever add

anything that countless godly men have given us through the years as they’ve sought to plumb the depths of something that we cannot plumb. But, Lord, touch our hearts.

We thank Thee for the gifts that Thou hast given to us, but we desire this love of which the apostle speaks, not the love that the world speaks of, something far deeper, something far more significant, something that reminds us of our marvelous Lord Jesus Christ and his love for us. Give us, Lord, some of that. We remember that he has said to us that the one who loves keeps his commandments. O God, so work in our hearts that we, too, may keep his commandments.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.