

Hope To The End (Part Three)

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 22-Oct-16; Sermon #FT16-06-PM

I will begin this sermon with a bit of review so that we will be closer to the same page and understanding the purposes of this rather long message. My title contains a major key to the message itself. I read an article regarding what the author felt regarding the emotional state of the American people, and basically he felt that the Americans who seem to have an understanding of the seriousness of the times we are coming into, are becoming worn out by the wearisome anxiety, and gradually losing hope because of the way things are now they will never see good times again.

If there is any term that seems to describe the tenor of the times reflected from the comments of these thinking people is that it is hopeless. These people feel that the situation is moving so rapidly in the wrong direction, as far as they are concerned it will not recover. The future was, to those he interviewed, all downhill to them.

Hopelessness describes an evaluation of a situation that gives no reason for expectation of a positive outcome of one's desires. It describes a situation giving no reason to expect success. I then showed you in Part One of this series, from the book of Job, that this is almost exactly what happened to Job when he was hit with his serious trial. I showed you in three fairly long soliloquies that he gave that he lost hope for a goodly period of time.

Does that suggest to you that we might react in the same way as Job did as the pressure mounts from the world in our time? The pressures are not going to ease off on those who are of the Christian belief, they are going to become gradually the ones who receive the most pressure against them. In Daniel 7: 24, it states, in the *King James Version*, that the beast is going to wear out the saints. We must not lose our focus as the pressures climb.

When we got to the end of the allotted time of my message as I was giving Part Two, I reached the point where I stated that we need to begin to be

thankful that God has given us the admonishment contained in the Olivet prophecy. Our responsibility as a son of God is sobering but needful for us, considering the alternative. Remember that prophecy in Matthew 24 was given directly to the disciples by Jesus. He talked to them as though it was going to happen to them.

We too are disciples but we are living in the time of the beginning of the end-time fulfillment of that prophecy. It is though He is speaking directly to us now, and He is. Thus it applies to us virtually in all of its categories.

At the beginning of that second message, I concentrated on what I believe was a major contributor to America's downfall. Very simply, it was bad choices. Of course there was a lot of help in building a situation in which the bad choices were made, but the cause and effect is stated simply in Proverbs 29:18, in which if God's counsel is rejected the people run wild. They feel relieved of the burden of restraining themselves to obey God. Thus lawlessness grew in power and it now reigns supreme in the land. This nation is rapidly becoming a modern Sodom.

The social scene is carnally attractive, but spiritually devastating. Humanism dominates the spiritual life of Americans. Americans have not totally abandoned religion, but they have almost totally abandoned God. There is a major difference between those two. The key word for us regarding the Part Two message is found in Matthew 24:13. We, the ones being spoken to, must endure, which gives a clear indication that some of us are going to go through what the prophecies forecast.

I then stated that no Christian has an absolute promise that he will be taken to a place of safety. I showed you as an example in Revelation 2:10, in Christ's evaluation of the Smyrna church, that they would face tribulation, and that some of them would die as a result of that persecution. Thus the scripture shows us clearly that God does not always intervene to save one of His own. Some have been martyred. It may very well be that eleven of the original apostles were murdered. We know for sure some of them were.

We know that the apostle John was the only one who apparently was not murdered, of the original Twelve. One thing that we have to hang on to is, He always does supply our need while enduring the trial.

In Luke's version of the Olivet prophecy, Luke 21:19 is translated in this way; "In your patience, [perseverance, which means hanging on tightly through a tough period time] possess your souls." He is saying you may live through it if you endure it. He is urging us to not give into the calamities because He never fails His children. Through Luke Jesus is saying, stand firm.

I Corinthians 15:9-10 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

The apostle Paul, despite not having some of the advantages the other apostles had, (1) he persecuted the church, (2) he did not have the pre-conversion experiences with Christ, (3) he seemed to experience during his ministry twice the persecutions the others had, but look at what he accomplished! He grew through all that mess that he was in so many times, and he sets an example for you and me that it can be done.

Let me make Paul's reasoning clear. If God ordained this for him to endure as he labored under God's direction, then God would supply all he needed to accomplish within the trials—and He did. I do not think he was bragging when he said that he accomplished more than all the others.

We will bring this forward in time, to us, to look at what lies ahead.

Revelation 12:4-6 His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. And she bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and to His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

At this point in the vision, the woman mentioned in verse 4 is Mary, Jesus' birth mother, not the church. The church did not give birth to the Savior, the Savior gave spiritual birth to the church. The church did not begin until He later formed it. However, in the proper interpretation of the vision, the woman quickly morphs into the church, fleeing for its life, to a place, in a war-torn world, where she is provided for. We find here in verse 13,

Revelation 12:13-17 Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the women, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have that testimony of Jesus Christ.

These verses are a more specific reflection of verse 6. The woman, who morphed into the church, receives divine help, as shown by the mention of two wings of a great eagle. However, never forget the literal reality. These two wings of a great eagle is a bit of a hyperbole from God. When He brought Israel out of Egypt, He also said He did it with two wings of a great eagle, but they walked out.

What I am saying is, the literality of some of these verses has to be delved into so that we understand them more accurately and clearly. So that hyperbole is indicating that even though Israel walked out, they had divine help, and as this woman is taken to a place of safety it is going to take divine help for that woman to get to the place of safety. It is not going to be a Sunday afternoon stroll in the park. The indication is that of fleeing for one's life. But there will be intervention, we can be assured of that.

The woman remains, according to this, in safety a time, two times, and a half time. In a way, you have to go back to verse 6 and pick up the one thousand two hundred and sixty days, and compare it with the time, the times, and half a time. Biblically that is three- and one-half years, and that is exactly the same amount of calendar time as one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Both of those figures from Revelation 12 coordinate exactly with the amount of time the two witnesses preach, you can pick that up from Revelation 11:3. And also with the total length of the tribulation and the Day of the Lord.

What this does is it nails down when the last half of chapter 12 occurs. We are looking at a time element here. Also note in Revelation 12:17, when the dragon realizes he cannot destroy the woman who fled, he leaves off and goes back to some other area of the earth to make war against Christians. What does that prove to you? Not every Christian is going to be in the place of safety. That is very clear. Some of us may have to go through Matthew 24.

I am doing this to build my case for what we have to do in the time that remains in our lives, and that is to get ready. God's decision is going to be the one that matters in regard to whether we go to a place of safety, or whether we remain to live through the persecutions of the Matthew 24 fulfillment. So the conclusion is clear.

There is some hope for us. Turn to the book of Zephaniah for a rather obscure verse, but true.

Zephaniah 2:1-3 Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together,
O undesirable nation, before the decree is issued, before the day
passes like chaff, before the Lord's fierce anger comes upon you,
before the day of the Lord's anger comes upon you! Seek the Lord,
all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek
righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in
the day of the Lord's anger.

The best that God will permit within this verse is, "it *may* be." He is not guaranteeing it. The "undesirable nation" at the time this prophecy was originally given is Israel. Most specifically Judah. However, the principle

within it is sharp and to the point. In the intervening time, the church, according to Galatians 6:16, has become the Israel of God. Therefore, at the end time the *church* has become the “undesirable nation” that is persecuted by the world. Israel is still the one that is receiving the persecution, but this time it is the undesirable nation that is the church.

This series of verses is a call to those who are living at the time of the Lord’s anger, who are being persecuted by the world. Therefore, this series of verses is a call to those Christians alive at that time and striving to retain their attachment to God and to the church. These verses are a call to repentance. If we sincerely do repent we have hope that we will be hidden from the days of His wrath against the nations.

We have to be aware of what is going on in the world as best we possibly can, take the warnings that are given in the Matthew 24 prophecy, and as we see things unfolding we better take steps to make sure that we are doing all we can to please God. There is no doubt from the information that we have already covered during these three messages, that if God chooses that course for us we must be spiritually ready, as prepared as possible for the tribulation, and the Day of the Lord’s onslaught. Therefore, we must be preparing. I hope that I have given you enough evidence that God is warning us, He is admonishing us, do not feel as though you have a bound-and-gagged escape of the place of safety.

Do you have a plan of attack to meet the need? We have been admonished. It is very clear, no absolute promise to go to the place of safety. That is going to be God’s call. What we have to do is take advantage of the time that we have, beginning right now, to make sure that we are ready and that we might receive the escape that He is willing to give to some.

I am going to give an illustration of determined preparation for a major event in one person’s life. By way of radio I heard Simone Manuel, a young woman from Texas, who attends Stanford University, being interviewed. Simone Manuel won four gold medals at the recent Rio de Janeiro Olympics, she is a swimmer. Probably the most precious to her is the individual gold medal in the 100-meter sprint as a swimmer, in so doing she set a new world record. The other gold medals came from relay events that were all team efforts. She did very well in them too, they got three other medals. Listening

to her being interviewed I concluded that this young woman virtually gave up her life for at least a year. She was already a good swimmer when that year began. The interviewer asked her of her training routine. First of all she said she gave up school entirely, one year of college at Stanford. Collectively she swam a minimum of 22 miles each week, as a swimming sprinter even her practices were not merely a matter of pacing herself so that she could put on a burst of speed at the end, some of that was involved, but, she did more than that.

In addition to swimming she was also doing normal daily routines of push ups, sit ups, chinning herself, curls, knee bends, and a host of other exercises so that no part of her body, skeleton or muscles, were neglected. Her diet was very strictly regulated, and they trained her brain too. There was to be no fudging on anything, and all the while she was constantly evaluated by her swimming instructor, so her swimming technique was as close to perfection as the two of them could make it.

I was impressed not only by her rigorous discipline but also by the fact that her mind was so bright. She was a delight to listen to. All that discipline in no way turned her into a robot. The first major challenge she faced was deciding whether the goal was worth the effort to her. If she could not get passed that the coach was not going to coach her.

We too must decide first whether what we seek is worth the effort. I am not urging you to go in such strict disciplinary measures as she did, you have a life to live that she did not have. She could give her whole life in that time to doing that. We too must go through some of that routine. I do not mean the exercises, but of deciding whether or not the Kingdom of God means that much to us, that it is a goal that we will constantly keep in mind.

I Corinthians 10:1-13 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. [The Israelites all dropped out as they were going along.] Now

these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. [they had distractions] As it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” [The Promise Land was not all that deeply ingrained into their minds.] Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor murmur, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as in common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Being free sounded great to the Israelites who woefully underestimated the cost of liberty. That is where we are headed, full liberty under Jesus Christ. What we see here is this: *liberty is not free*. That is a biblical truth. Liberty is very costly, because it costs us the dedication of our life to a goal we cannot yet see. That, brethren, is not easy. Liberty can be lost by giving it away, by giving up, which so many Israelites did. So there is a conclusion, we must be devoted to Christ’s cause in order to meet what is required of us by Him. The Israelites did not, they were like so many Americans who seem to get things freely from the government, they will not go to work. There is something that keeps them back from committing themselves to standing up and doing what is required of a citizen of the United States of America.

We have to do what we do as a citizen of the Kingdom of God. As we are marching toward the beginnings of the fulfillment of the Matthew 24 prophesy, we have to evaluate whether or not we want to commit ourselves to making it, to a disciplined program that we will not allow to be broken into by our carelessness in some way. We are going to have to understand that as time goes by our involvement in the Kingdom of God becomes increasingly greater. I do not know how far off the time is, but it becomes really more urgent each day.

Jesus, as our Chief Shepherd, is persuading us to choose. This is the first thing we have to do, to choose on the basis on whether the goal is worth it. So, it pays us to learn as much about the goal as we possibly can, let it fill our mind. Question what the verses say, go from place to place in the Bible and come to understand more clearly what it is that we are being offered. If Jesus is persuading us, not one of us will be able to accuse God of not giving us the chance to make seeking His Kingdom the top priority in our life.

In the sermon I gave one week ago on the Sabbath, in that sermon Amos said to those Israelites, “Do not seek Bethel, do not seek Beersheba, do not seek Gilgal, seek God!” That is our aim. We too are going to need a well-rounded routine fitting what our goal is. Just like Simone Manuel sought out help from swimming instructors for what she needed to do for what lay before her. The man who said he would train her and would be her coach, he laid it right on the line as to what he was going to do and then they worked out the program between them. She was not under a dictator, they worked out something *together* that would be good for the two of them to give their lives over to. He turned out to be an excellent instructor. He was hard on her but nonetheless she won.

I Corinthians 9:24-27 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

This disqualified thing kind of reminds you of the next chapter where so many Israelites fell by the wayside as they were on the course.

What is Paul’s overall advice? We are to go all out within the scope of our life and strength of our calling. A little bit clearer translation where he says, “Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.” It is the thing about running with uncertainty that I am aiming at. That can easily be translated into much clearer English as “I run in such a

way as to not lose aim.” There are two possible ways to understand this. First, modern science has discovered that it is entirely possible that a person can become so hooked during a training program, he can lose sight of the reality of why he is doing it.

Here is why: Modern science has discovered that exercise actually has a mild drug affect to which one can become mildly addicted. That is losing the aim to become addicted to something. It has lost its purpose; you do not want that to happen. Way back then the apostle Paul knew that people could go into training programs and lose sight of the why they were doing it. So we have to be careful.

The second possibility is much stronger, especially at the time in which he wrote this, but it is nonetheless attached to the first possibility. In “not losing aim,” Paul is saying be disciplined and self-controlled at the same time. Do not lose your focus, the goal always has to be before us, it is not allowed to deteriorate into something we just do because we are hooked on the routine rather than the purpose.

We prepare in order to please God and to glorify Him at the same time. Therefore for the first step in what I am telling you here is: first decide whether the goal means enough to you that it is really worth doing it. The second step is: once you get into it do not allow the routine to cause you to lose your focus.

Philippians 3:13-14 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore we can understand that Paul was saying, nonetheless, we must run the race that we may win with determination. He is also saying at the same time, that a good balance is required. *Race* is a figurative term for our walk with God, and we must make critical and carefully understood choices regarding what God says here but reveals more energy is being expended.

We do not run to lose, but as he exemplifies here, we do not run for salvation but for the prize or the crown. Salvation is a free gift we most assuredly do not under any biblical circumstances deserve. We deserve death regardless of how energetically we discipline ourselves. Salvation is not in the discipline, it is an *aid* to help us keep focused. However, God makes clear notation in His evaluation of the efforts one makes, and rewards accordingly based on what has been given in abilities.

I want you to be encouraged that God is with us in the discipline that we have set for ourselves. We also have to understand at the same time the discipline is not going to earn us any kind of salvation.

Luke 12:48 “But he who did not know, yet committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.”

I want us to understand that each and every person is judged individually. When we run in races we are competing against someone else, that is a carnal thing. But in the race that we are involved in we are being evaluated only against ourselves and what we do within what has been given us.

I mentioned when I gave that illustration regarding Simone Manuel’s training for the recent Olympics her every activity during the training was focused on swimming as fast as she could for 100 meters, which is roughly 110 yards. There also exists within the dynamics of swimming, a number of particulars that an untrained observer would never see, She and her instructor were well aware of them and they took action to remove them. Special attention had to be given to overcome those minute flaws because if she habitually did some minute detail wrong as she was competing, it literally slowed her down a fraction of a second. That is how closely they were observing her training so that any flaw that might have been there they got rid of it.

Very special attention had to be given to overcoming those minute flaws, because she would be slowed down. She had to overcome that flaw or she significantly lessened her chances of winning. In a swimming race like that a

significant amount could be one second. The outcomes in the four races in which she won gold medals showed that she either overcame many of those flaws, or made significant progress in doing so.

Here are our marching orders from our Commander in chief, Jesus Christ. It is interesting to think of this responsibility that He gives here in relation to the times it appears in. Some of that time may very well be during the tribulation, maybe even when some of the persecutions are going on. We do not know.

Revelation is an end-time book. Virtually everything in it pertains to the time of the end. We are going to look at the letters, the evaluations that Jesus Christ gave to those seven churches in chapters 2 and 3. I think you understand, as we approach the time of the end, those churches exist right now. I do not know exactly who they are, but from the book itself that it pertains to the end time. It does not pertain to the first century, it pertains to now. Christ is giving these evaluations so that we will see what those first century churches were like. He picks up the evaluation of them and He puts it in the names of those first century churches, but we have got to see between the lines here and understand that He is talking about the existing Christian churches at the time of the end. This applies to us every bit as directly as Matthew 24, does.

Revelation 2:7 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. [Ephesus] To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

Revelation 2:11 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. [Smyrna] He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”

Revelation 2:17 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. [Pergamos] To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which none knows except him who receives it.”

Revelation 2:26 “And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations.” [Thyatira]

Revelation 3:5 “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” [Sardis]

Revelation 3:12 “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.” [Philadelphia]

Revelation 3:21 “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” [Laodiceans]

Did you notice what word appeared in every case? Did you notice what our marching orders are through this whole ordeal, since we have taken on the challenge of preparing for the Kingdom of God? We must overcome! That is why I mentioned about Simone Manuel and how carefully they evaluated every aspect of her swimming and her body so that they could get rid of any minor imperfections that might have been in her stroke, kicking, pace, her hands cupped right, feet, what kind of condition was she in in any part of the race. Do you get the point?

Our Commander in chief says, we have to overcome even the little things. That is what He desires of us.

What should we absorb ourselves in in order to please and to glorify God and thus overcome? The answer is the most basic of all virtues, There are three virtues, or qualities, within our relationship with God and each other that need to be emphasized all at the same time. They are ever in need of strengthening because the use of them is not often done in perfection. A

reality exists in our relationship to each other, they cannot be truly be separated and yet they are so tightly linked to our salvation. Here they are: Faith, hope, and love.

Every one of us knows they appear in I Corinthians 13:13, but this triad of virtues is so important as linked together, not just in I Corinthians 13:13, but 11 other times just in the epistles. Twelve times they are linked by the apostles. Faith, hope, and love. There is something about those qualities that they stand and they fall together. They have to be worked on together as if they were almost one.

Twelve is a significant biblical number. That alone should purposely draw our attention. I am not saying they are as conveniently linked as the combination appearing in I Corinthians 13:13, but in other locations they are still linked within the same brief paragraph. They never get very far from one another. It shows a relationship to each other.

Such strong emphasis by God ought to impress you about how important they are to Him concerning our salvation. He is essentially saying to us, we might not make it to the Kingdom. We have to have a development of all three of these.

In order to grasp the relative value of these superb virtues, it is best to go back with me to I Corinthians 13.

I Corinthians 13:11-13 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

I wanted to begin in verse 11 to catch Paul's emphasis regarding why these three are so important to the Christian life. With these verses he is building toward a conclusion through multiple illustrations so that we get it.

In verse 11, understand that his overall aim is above all to exalt love. Along the way to exalting love, he brings faith and hope into linkage with love. Part

of the reason he does this is because, without faith and hope, love would have an extremely weak foundation. One author I read said, maybe it would not even exist, in terms of being expressed in the lives of humans. He begins here by making an analogy between what one expects of a child compared to what one expects from an adult.

The thought patterns of a child are immature. We grasp that, we expect that, because that is way a child is. When a child enters adulthood, everything takes on more meaningful dimensions. The thought here is, as to our spiritual development we are still very much immature compared to what we will be when we are changed and fully in the Kingdom of God. Therefore, we are to realize that even yet we are still pretty much children spiritually.

Now spiritually we have little that we can brag about, considering what he wrote before these verses. He is gently telling them that the squabbles that involve the membership there in Corinth are childish. They are not worthy of a maturing Christian. He is telling them that they had narrow and imperfect views of what is truly important and they were fixing their attention on things of little value in relation to the eternal program into which they had been called.

What is more important to us—the Kingdom of God, or whatever? That is practically what he is saying. These people were fighting with one another, that is childish, you need to grow above that, is what he is telling them. He is not belittling childhood, or childhood characteristics, but at the same time letting them know that when one leaves childhood and enters adulthood, more is expected because of our range of experience. Experiences changes with time into different views. That is the difference between children and adults.

An example of this is: About two years ago Richard and I visited Pittsburgh, which is the birthplace of both of us. However, when I went to Ambassador College, the whole family moved out there. Richard was just 2 or 3 so he has no real experience in the Pittsburgh area. While Richard and were there, I visited with a cousin of mine, and we went all over the Pittsburgh area. One of the places we went by was the elementary school I attended, grades 1-8. When I was a kid that school was a big huge building and the play yard around it was like two or three football fields. When I looked at it as an

eighty-one year old man, the school seemed small. We almost drove by it before I recognized it. Things change as years go by, as we move into adulthood.

This is important to understand. The central theme of this first illustration that he is giving there is he doing this to help them understand the massive change that is going to take place in us when the resurrection comes and God gives us fully of His Spirit.

They also needed to understand that this kind of recognition was very important to their salvation. They needed to understand God's calling and purpose more thoroughly to become like an adult in order to better prepared for working under Christ. These people could not afford to allow their understanding and usage of God's truth to remain childish. Verse 12 adds another illustration taken from real life at the time in history that portrays our present understanding as compared to what it will be in maturity in the Kingdom of God.

In the *New King James Version*, verse 12, the word "dimly" appears. Some translations use the term riddle, or indistinct. Regardless, each term indicates we see things now but not clearly. The riddle may involve truth, but because we cannot discern the intent clearly, we can be easily misled if we are not spiritually sharp enough.

Thus he is saying that one's reflection in a mirror cannot be compared with the reality of what one sees in real life, but an even greater clarity will come in the resurrection. These illustrations are all being turned in one direction. He is telling these people to allow themselves to grow up and to make efforts to grow up because something is coming that is so great it should not in any way be ignored.

He is essentially saying that our human minds, as they are at this time, unable to grasp the full meaning of God's truth. But in the future God will grant us perfect knowledge so as to grasp it in its fullest.

I Corinthians 13:8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.

Why do you think he used those terms prophecies, tongues, and knowledge? It was because that is what they thought was real spirituality. What he is telling them a little later is this stuff is childish, yet they are squabbling over who was the best speaker. It really puffed them up. Those three things are what they thought was important, but Paul said that is childish.

Back in verse 8, he named three spiritual gifts—prophecies, tongues, and knowledge, and they are good—that though admirable are not in the category of what he will name later, because they have an end and will fade into non-existence. Why will they fade away? Because they will reach a time when they are not needed. All three of these quite useful spiritual gifts can be used within the church, however, prophecies come to an end when they are fulfilled, and thus useless, their usefulness is temporal. Tongues are indeed a service but the time is coming when we will all speak the same pure language so we have no need for other tongues. Knowledge grows and with that growth changes occur and sometimes set aside as no longer of any value anymore. Spiritual gifts as these three are not of eternal value.

He is gently nudging them to not allow things to remain as they are because other things are far more important. In every illustration Paul is urging us to look forward to what is coming in the resurrection. He even uses the phrase in verse 12 “face to face” in a clear reference to following the resurrection. Therefore, he sets them, those three very high goals to shoot for in their present state—faith, hope, and love. We need it now and he is going to tell us we are going to need it forever.

He is clearly differentiating the spiritual values of faith, hope, and love, from prophecies, tongues, and knowledge. The *Revised English Bible* translates the first phrase in verse 13, as “There are three things that last forever.” The Phillips translation renders it as, “we have three great lasting qualities.”

What is Paul saying? His conclusion is, the reason faith, hope, and love are the greatest of all virtues is that they are eternal qualities. Other things pass into non-usage, they end. Are there any other qualities that are on the same level of importance to our salvation and glorification of God? Paul is saying (I will put it another way), no other combination of virtues even comes close to being compatible to faith, love, and hope within salvation's context. All

three of these are the great generators of what we do with our lives on a day-to-day basis. All three are motivators of good conduct. All three are motivators to us to truly seek God, and to glorify Him by our love.

I want to first to consider faith's place in the triad of qualities for two reasons. First, Satan has struck very hard during our lives at God's very existence. He has done this by means of such concepts as evolution, humanism, which has been growing in its domination of the Western world's religious system. It is built on a foundation of the non-existence of God. If there is no God, then faith in Him absolutely cannot exist. Humanism is a major fruit of not believing, and its influence is very great, even among those who retain some knowledge of God. Their fear of Him is unfocused and shallow, striving to be obedient to Him is weak and sporadic or even non-existent. We will show faith's importance just with one verse.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.

Faith can lead us to salvation. Without faith there is no salvation possible for lifting mankind out of its degraded state. Life will simply be lived at this mediocre level and then death occurs with absolutely no future, because God gives eternal life as His gift. But we cannot get to God unless we believe in Him.

Why is faith so important?

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

First, do not misunderstand what this verse is saying. This is not a definition of faith> The verse is telling us what faith *does* (there is a difference there), what it accomplishes in behalf of those who have it. That is why it so important to us. Note the word translated into English as "substance." Faith is the substance. The Greek word under that is *hupostasis*. *Hupo* is a prefix meaning "under," *stasis* means "a standing." Therefore, the Greek term *hupostasis* literally means "a standing under." Faith is a standing under. *Hupostasis* indicates a means of support, that which is set under a foundation or as a beginning, because a foundation is set before anything is built on it,

The Greeks use *hupostasis* in a figurative sense in the same manner as the English use the term “essence” or “substance.” That which makes something what it is. It indicates something fundamental nature, it is reality.

Faith is literally belief. Literally conviction, literally confidence, literally certainty. But what faith does is it provides the foundation, it supports, it stands under one’s conduct, what one does with one’s life, or in this case being taught or illustrated by the writer. Faith is the foundation of what we believe. It stands under.

I will tell you right now that without faith for the other virtues to stand on, there would be no hope because if there is no God you cannot have faith. There has to be a God first, and you have to believe in Him, and you have to develop that into a conviction, then you have hope that is motivating you to do what you do. The combination of faith and the combination of the motivation of hope, because we begin to desire what it is that God so generously wants to give to us—eternal life, salvation, a wonderful attitude, gifts, healings, you name it.

We do it first because we believe He exists. We do it second, because we believe what He says, and we have the hope because we believe. Are you beginning to see the place that faith plays in our salvation? The same thing is true of love, its foundation is faith. Without the faith we would not love God, because we would not believe He exists. We would not believe what He says, we would not love one another because He says to do it.

Faith is the foundation and the other two are built on that foundation. Hope gives us that which lifts up our eyes to the things that can be accomplished, and the love enables us to give our love to God back to Him and to one another. And we do it because He says so, and we do it because we believe what God says.

In a way it is so simple. These three are so great they are going to be eternal, just like us, just like our Father. There will always be a need for faith, hope, and love. The greatest He says, is love, because what does love do? It enables relationships to grow and to prosper. The greatest relationship is going to be with God. There would be no love for God unless we believe that He was there. Are you beginning to see it? It is so simple. These three work

together, they are like one. The others are needed in order to give the strength of all three. Anything else is almost minor by comparison.

Overcome. Overcome what? What to grow in? Well, Jesus gave us our marching orders there in Revelation 2, in the letters to all the churches. Those who overcome because they have faith, are going to exercise the hope that God puts before them and they are going to love Him and each other. Those are the three things that we need to take care of in this time as we prepare for the fulfillment of Matthew 24.