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THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY
by Paris Reidhead

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Summary: In 'Through a Glass Darkly', Paris Reidhead emphasizes the importance of love and the presence of Christ in the believer's life as the foundation for spiritual growth and church unity.

Duration: 38:36 Topics: "Faith"
Scripture References: 1 Corinthians 13:1

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DESCRIPTION

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In this sermon, the speaker addresses different groups within the church who prioritize different aspects of their faith. He emphasizes that God is not glorified by our works, knowledge, or eloquence, but rather by our love. The speaker shares a personal experience of receiving a letter focused on the soul of a relative, but expresses sadness that love was not the primary motivation behind it. He concludes by reminding the audience that God's love for us is not based on our abilities or worthiness, but on His own nature, and encourages them to grow in Christ and reject worldly wisdom.

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CONTENT

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...through a glass, darkly, but then, face to face. Now I know in part,
but then shall I know, even as also I am know. This thirteenth chapter,
that is called the Love Chapter, could well be called the heart of the Christian life, sets forth before us the priority in the things of God.

It begins, as we saw last week, by informing us of that which God does

not consider important. Coming to the Lord Jesus Christ, we are born as babes. A babe is a lovely thing, but it requires nourishment and teaching and tender care in order for that babe to develop into the life that is hidden in it.

And consequently, when you are born of God, you are not only born a babe in Christ, but you are an adult in sin. And there is, therefore, the double responsibility. You must do two things.

You must grow up in Christ and grow down in the wisdom of this world. It's so much easier for a baby, because he's just growing in one direction at a time. But it's so difficult for us.

We have so much to unlearn. We have so many thoughts and plans and motives and standards of judgment that are so totally wrong, so absolutely wrong. First Corinthians is dealing with a church of people that were wise in the wisdom of this world, and transferred the wisdom of this world into the church, and nearly ruined the church because of it.

The wisdom of this world can be described from James, the third chapter. You need to see it in order that you can detect what is from above and what is from beneath. Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

But notice now, but if you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, do you remember what was in the church at Corinth in the first chapter? There was division. I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas, I am of Christ. Envying and strife, and they were wise, but their wisdom was not the wisdom from above.

It was the wisdom of this world. Paul says, or James says, if you have bitter envying and strife in your heart, glory not, lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly and sensual and devilish.

Now my dear, that's all we had. When we came to Christ as adults, as you did, the only kind of wisdom you could bring to the church was that which was of you and of this world, which was earthly and sensual and devilish. Now can you ask, can you answer the question, how can God

sanctify something that has its origin in Satan? He can.

The wisdom that descendeth from above. Now he describes the contrast in the seventeenth verse. The wisdom that descendeth from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits without partiality, without hypocrisy, and the fruit of peace is sown, the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

Paul was dealing with a church where the wisdom was the wisdom of the world, where strife and bitterness had come, where there was great heartache in the part of the Apostle, great grief on the part of God, and of course the testimony to the community was practically gone. Now he's corrected, he's rebuked, he's reprovved, he's said all that he could say in kindness and in fairness to this people, and he's offering them a more, a better way, a more excellent way. He's offering them the Lord's way, the wisdom that's from above.

What is this more excellent way? Well, he said it's not by honoring eloquence, remember? What they said, Apollos, the Silbertong orator, we want Apollos to be with us, he's our man. He said it's not what you say or how well you say it. Paul was wise, knowledge, Paul was the one that had insight and understanding, had them all mysteries and secret lore.

It was a group that said what we want is knowledge, we want truth, we want to be instructed. Paul, then the Holy Spirit says, wait, wait. The words that are spoken by the eloquent are just a fragment of the truth, and the knowledge that is imparted by the teacher is just a fragment of the truth.

Then there was another group in the church that said, we're the practical souls. We're the one that want to get the job done, never quite defining the job, but always wanting to get it done. We're the one that want to get on with the job.

We're the one that want to turn mountains over and feed the hungry and give sight to the blind and feed and die. We're the workers. Paul said,

wait a minute, God's not glorified by your activity.

He's not glorified by your works, not glorified by what you say, not glorified by what you know or what you do. He's only glorified by what you are, by what you are. And we're back right to this same place, that the more excellent way is that way of God.

The way of man is to achieve eloquence, the way of man is to achieve knowledge, the way of man is to achieve success in activity, and the way of God is to be something. God's far more interested in you than what you say or what you know or what you do. Now, I'm not in any sense wanting to be misunderstood that I'm discounting these things.

They're all right in their place, as long as they're considered properly in the right perspective. But you've got to realize that what Paul is saying by the Spirit of God to the church at Corinth, he's saying to you, rest not in your abilities. Be content not with your activities.

Find no consolation in your honors and your responsibilities. The only criteria that should bring any consolation to your heart is, is the fruit of the Spirit in your life in that manner and that degree that glorifies God. Let's put first things first.

Let's recognize the more excellent way, as we read in the first verse of the 14th chapter in concluding the reading, make love your aim. This is the paramount thing. Now, this love is not some human sentimentality, not some slushy, soapy type of thing that can be merely the outflow of a superficial desire to ingratiate oneself.

No, that's not what he means by love. This is the love of God which is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. All the difference in the world between this love and that type of thing that passes in some quarters for culture.

No, no. This is the love of God shed abroad in the heart. This is God by the Holy Spirit reproducing in you his own character.

It's not an affectation. It's an impartation of the life of God in your heart. And we understand that this love is to be produced by the presence of the lover himself.

Our Lord Jesus said, if you abide in me and I abide in you, you will

bring forth much fruit. And if Christ can take up his lasting habitation in our hearts through faith, then we will be rooted and foundationed in love. You understand, of course, that the foundationing is terribly important.

The purpose of a foundation is to be so securely anchored as to withstand the storm, and storms will come. But when Christ is in you, filling you, possessing you, controlling you, living his life through you, then your strength isn't in your determination, but it's in his presence. It's Christ in you that becomes the foundation to your life.

Oh, what happens to character? You know, you do not discover character until pressure comes. You never discover what you are until you're put in difficult situation. As long as you can control your environment, as long as you can have everything your own way, as long as you can pave the road ahead of you and put head guardrails on the side of you, then it's easy to live in the environment which you control for yourself.

But you just let the road drop away, and the fences go, and the wind blow, and the flood come, and you discover your character. Character is not the way you appear to your fellows. Character is what you are when everything in which you've had confidence is gone.

Someone says character is what you are in a dark room alone when nobody's watching. Character is what you are in the midst of the tornado, is what you are in the midst of the difficulty, the thing when everything is disrupted and torn. Then, what are you? Are you the same?

Is there the same poise? Is there the same calmness? Is there the same joy? Or does bitterness come, and does surliness come, and does antagonism and animosity come? Do these things rise up? This self-indication and self-defense, are these the things that come up out of your heart, proving that the other was of the near, rather than the deep

in-work character of God wrought by the Holy Ghost? And understand, of course, that when Christ is in you, in that manner and measure in which

he died to make possible, possessing you, filling you, controlling you, living his life in you, then the wind isn't going to make any difference, because it didn't make any difference to him.

And you will stand, not because of your purpose, but because of his presence. You take a gunny sack and try to prop it up and put sticks around it and tie it and suspend it, and the wind will just whip it

around. But if you can fill that same sack with corn and stand it there,
let the wind do what it will, there's something inside of it that holds
it up.

When you are filled with the fullness of God and Christ has taken up his
lasting dwelling place in your heart through faith, then the fruit of the Spirit does not depend upon the congenial circumstances in which you
find yourself, but upon the presence of the one who was the same even in
the midst of the agony of the cross. And thus we recognize that this fruit is not something that we come by a self-improvement program or a self-education program. It's something that comes because a person has been invited to do in us what we never could do by ourselves.

It is the fruit of the presence of Christ. It's the revelation of the presence of Christ. It's the unveiling of the fact that Christ is in me,
Christ is in you, doing what we could never do.

Because the very opposite of the fruit of the Spirit is what we are and
what we will ever be. We'll never change. He hasn't found any way to improve us.

But oh, when you're rooted and foundationed in love, when Christ has taken up his lasting dwelling place in your heart through faith, then you can face the storm and the tornado and say into the very teeth of it, Lord, you know I can't stand even when there isn't a tornado, and certainly not now. But this isn't going to frighten you, and this isn't
going to perplex you, this isn't going to disturb you. You're enough for
it.

I'm not, but you are. We understand the nature of this love. It's the love of God shed abroad in the heart because of the presence of God in the heart.

There's no way that I know of that you can perform mental gymnastics and
spiritual calisthenics to put the muscle on the bones of your ego to make you this kind of a Christian. It just doesn't come that way. It's imperative that you should recognize that there's only one way, and that
is to invite him to do for you and through you.

I'm prepared to agree that it takes a long time for us to come to the place that we admit that spiritual calisthenics aren't sufficient. We'll

wear ourselves out trying, but sooner or later God's going to let the winds blow sufficiently strong that our little sack will tip over and our strings will break and we'll say, Lord, I'm desperate. In our desperation, we'll allow him to do what he wanted to do without getting us into the desperate corner.

But I don't know how it might appear in your eyes, but in mine it appears worthwhile, whatever the cost may be, to allow him to be to us all that he wants to be. Now, this then is that which is of the greatest priority, that we should have Christ in us, living his life through us.

And these other things then are just the outflow of his presence.

Now, the Lord Jesus, the head of the church, gave to his church gifts. We find that for a describes nine gifts of the Spirit, declaring that each one of these gifts, or some gifts, were to be given to every believer, that every member of the body of Christ would have a ministry

and a contribution to make for the spiritual welfare and blessing of the

body and for the work of the body, that no member is without its contribution. But you see, it's quite frequent that we find people becoming more interested in the gift than they are in the giver.

And this is what's happened. They were toying with the gifts and playing

with these abilities and making them an end in themselves. And the more

excellent way was that they let Christ fill the horizon of their hearts

and the circumference of their love, and their great concern be simply to let him do through them what he wanted.

And so he isn't saying the gifts aren't important. If anyone were to read this thirteenth chapter and say, well, you see, the gifts were abused and therefore they were no longer to be here. Why? Because they were abused.

And Paul is saying love instead. No, it isn't love instead. It's love first.

Love first, not instead. There's no substitution here. There's simply a right relation established.

And the gifts of the Spirit were all to be administered, but as I pointed out the last time I spoke to you, find their strength against the thumb, against the fruit of the Spirit. Now, the provision that Christ made was that these gifts, these nine gifts we read in 1 Corinthians 12, were to compensate to his church for the loss that was sustained by man in sin. For instance, the languages.

What are there, 3,500 languages? 3,700 languages? Something like that in the world today. Tremendous number. And so there was the compensation in language.

There was the compensation in wisdom. The compensation in knowledge and in strength and in power. All of these gifts of the Spirit were compensations that the head of the church gave by the Holy Spirit to the church for the well-being of the church and the ministry of the church.

Just as simple as that. But as I say, they made the gifts and ended themselves, and they were brought under censorship. Now, the problem that has arisen, the provision was for the benefit of the church, but the problem was this, that today at least we face this, that there are those who say that the gifts of the Spirit no longer belong in the church today.

And there are two explanations given for this. The one is that the gifts of the Spirit were only used as long as Christ was witnessing to Israel. But at the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., all the supernatural ministries which were important for his ministry to Israel were removed and were no longer therefore validly in the church.

The second proposition is that the gifts of the Spirit all ceased at the completion of the canon, and that the scripture completed is that which we would call the more perfect that has come, and since it has come they were not needed. Now, these are the two attitudes that are taken by some. I deal with the first one first, and that is that there's absolutely nothing in the scripture that indicates the completion of the witness to Israel, nor is there anything to indicate that the witness to Israel has ever ceased.

I believe that the witness of the Israel is continuing until today. In fact, my heart was greatly overjoyed, filled with joy last night at the annual Hebrew-Christian Alliance dinner when some 300 were gathered, and over a hundred of them were unsaved Jewish people of our city that listened to a clear testimony of the grace of God. I don't believe the witness to Israel has ever ceased or that he's withdrawn the word to the Jew first.

I don't believe it. I believe the continued testimony is to go on. So I would simply say that there's no scriptural grounds for ever for whatever for this.

Then the second, which would be the completion of the canon, marks the completion of the use and validity and place of the gifts of the Spirit, seems to me to be obviously false. Let me just read a little of what it says here. Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail.

Whether there be tongues, they shall cease. Whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.

Now to my knowledge, we haven't dispensed to the necessity of knowledge. It still seems reasonably important. Do we have understanding and truth? And there are a great many things we need to know and see.

Then the next thing we find is in the twelfth verse, we now see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. I do not know of any that have seen the Lord face to face. We see him by faith and we will one day see him face to face, but I don't understand that it's come with the completion of the canon of the Scripture.

And then we find also we know in part. We haven't ceased to know in part, even though we have the Word, because there's infinitely more beyond the Word than the Word itself. The Word is not the totality of the revelation concerning Christ.

It's just the partial revelation necessary to see us safely from earth to heaven. So I would suggest to you that anyone that would use 1 Corinthians 13 as the means of explaining that all of the equipment that the Lord Jesus gave to his church was to be withdrawn would be standing on extremely thin ice and exegetically unsound and incapable of defending the argument. It just isn't what it says.

It does say, however, that the gifts of the Spirit and the ministries that he gives are for a period of time. That period continues. They are to be useful and they are greatly needed today in their proper place and balance and order.

But having said this and having given this Word that is here, may I then take the theme and apply it to your heart. We now see through a glass darkly. And were it to be that in this church we were ideally a New Testament church with all of the ministries and abilities, with all the glory of Christ in the church, we would still be subject to the same temptations that occurred in the first church at Corinth.

And we still would be vulnerable to the possibility of sin and grieving the Lord. And we would still be in desperate need of the fruit of the Spirit. And so rather than to spend our time defending, proving, or seeking to reestablish the gifts of the Spirit by any human natural means, may I suggest to you that we obey the injunction of 1 Corinthians 14.1, make love your aim.

The great need today in this church and in all churches doesn't seem to me to be at this particular juncture for a greater display of supernatural power. That is important. But the great concern upon my heart is for a greater revelation of supernatural grace, the fruit of the Spirit.

I believe that if we will make this our primary concern, to be the kind of Christian that is described here, we can trust into his sovereign hands for his own appointed time of return, the gifts and the ministries of the Spirit. He makes this abundantly clear. He says, make love your aim.

Make love your aim. It is truly said, the world is dying for a little

bit of love. I had a telephone call this week from a party that I've conversed with on the phone but have never seen, writing to a relative shortly to be married.

The letter was sent to me and I had the opportunity of reading it. It was a good letter, had scripture verses, had an exaltation for the relative to come to Christ. When I put the letter down, having read it, my heart was so sad because the aunt was interested in the soul of the niece.

That's not enough. The Lord Jesus Christ, my friend, is not a hobbyist that makes a hobby of collecting souls. He loves people.

There's a difference. There's a difference. Just this week I read something in a secular magazine as I was riding on the airplane that moved me.

I sat with my head against the window on the pillow, shielding myself from anyone that might have been embarrassed seeing a man's tears in his eyes. But I was moved as I read this thing in a secular magazine and the paragraph that struck me so was the instructions an older man gave to a young woman. She asked the question, how do I become a writer? And he said, learn to care and learn to work at caring.

And you'd ask me, how can I become a witness for Christ? How can I become an effective Christian? I'd have to give you the answer. There's nothing further. Oh, dear heart, learn to care.

Learn to care. You can't love souls. You can only love people.

People. People of problems. People of difficulties.

But people are losing their minds and losing their health, even in the church, because they don't feel that embrace of love that was intended to be in the very atmosphere of the church. As I've been studying in preparation for these Wednesday evening meetings, there's been that slow change that the word always makes in the heart. And I testify to you this morning that I think we're sadly lacking.

I think so much of our preaching has been the eloquence of men standing before people preaching at people. I think so much of our ministry has been merchandising words that's gone out, and ideas and doctrines, and exhorting people to activity. The very thing that 1 Corinthians 13

says
isn't enough is comprised so much of it.

But when I read of the first church, I discover that they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, because they continued steadfastly in fellowship, and steadfastly in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And of them, it was said by those outside, behold how they love one another. There was the fruit of the spirit.

You are not perfect. But my friend, you're not helping your imperfections by criticizing somebody else and pointing out theirs. Do you know why people gossip? Do you know why people injure with their tongues? Because of insecurity.

They know they aren't what they ought to be. I've been thinking back of my experience in Africa when I was driven and tormented by this terrible pressure to prove that everybody was a stuffed shirt and a hypocrite. I know why.

I wasn't what I ought to be. And the only consolation I had was to prove that nobody else was what they ought to be. And if I could do that, you see, if I could be a little balloon pricker and just make everybody come down to my size, then I was content, or a little content, where I was.

It wasn't that I was vicious, it was just that I was so completely frustrated as to how I could be what I ought to be, and the only way was to prove nobody else was. And that's exactly why you're troubled by gossip and by backbiting and by whispering. You're troubled by bitterness in your heart.

You're troubled by imaginations. You're troubled by unkindness. Do you know why? Because you aren't what you ought to be.

So you figure that if you can prove they aren't, why, you're better than they are. Wait a minute. Wait a minute.

Let me show something to you in closing. God didn't save you because you could talk fluently. God didn't love you because you had a good brain.

God didn't set his affection on you because you were a hard worker. My friend, there wasn't anything in you to make God love you. God's love didn't spring out of what you were, but out of what he is.

And he loved you in spite of what you were, not because of it. Now listen. If the king of kings and the lord of lords loved you when he knew the very worst about you, that's all the status you need.

A child of God, born into the family of God, washed in the blood of God's dear son. This is my status. No, I'm not what I ought to be, but he died so that I could be.

I haven't appropriated all that he provided, but he made the provision.

I don't need to run you down. I've seen my own heart.

I don't need to criticize you. I've got a glimpse of myself. But you see, turn your eyes upon Jesus.

Look full in his wonderful face, and the people of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace. And there it is.

And

the promise of the problems and the difficulty and the friction all disappears.

And you get your eyes right, get your perspective and your view, and you

look off unto Jesus and away from your brethren. Your neighbors can't help you. If you prove you're the best one in this church, you haven't proved anything.

That isn't very good. See, there's no satisfaction there. It isn't to be

the best one here, but it's to be like Christ.

Get your eyes on the Lord. Jesus. Because all fullness is in Christ and

all provision is in Christ.

And let the others join you in looking at unto Jesus. Make love your aim. Make love your aim.

There it is. And then this love shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost is going to reach out and learn to care. And then it's going to work at caring.

The only one that can care about anyone else is the one that's lost sight of himself. Do you know why so few, perhaps, are able to open their hearts to reach out for others? Because they've got so many personal problems that have never been solved. They haven't time.

There's only one way to solve them. Look off unto Jesus, the author, the completer, the finisher of your faith. Your wholeness as a person, your completeness as a person doesn't come from what you say or have learned or have done.

You know, we live in a society that builds all of its acceptance on achievement. The only place that doesn't work is with God. And he doesn't accept you because of what you've done.

He just accepts you because of what you are and because he loves you. And you don't need to put on, you don't need to make believe, and you don't need to pretend. You can just face yourself honestly as you are and come to the Lord Jesus and know that he's made everything, every provision to make you what you ought to be.

And then you can rest. And you get your own problems in his hands, and then you have room to care for others. Well, may the Lord help us a little.

Let's pray. Truly, our Heavenly Father, we've so caricaturized the Lord Jesus. We've given the impression to the unsaved that Christians are brilliant people.

Christians are loquacious, talkative people, active people, and wise people. And we know better, Lord. We know better.

Oh, Father, the world has been dying to see the love of the Lord Jesus.

They read about it in the Word, and they find he was tender and compassionate, and he had time to stoop to the lowest and minister to the highest. And they hear we belong to Christ and we're his, and they come to us expecting to find warmth and acceptance and love.

They find brusqueness and preoccupation and self-interest. And we've just so misrepresented the Lord Jesus. Father, draw us out of ourselves.

Draw us out of our preoccupation with the inconsequential. Bring us to the place that we know we're not accepted with each other or with thee because of what we've done, but just because of what we are. And then bring us to the place that we can realize that you've loved us when you've known the worst about us, and that all of us had to come in on the very same door, bankrupt, hopeless, helpless sinners.

And there's nothing any better in any one of us than all the rest of

us.

We're all sinners saved by grace. And we stand on the same threshold and that we can accept one another as we are and know that thou hast begun a good work in us and will perform it until the day of Christ.

Oh, Father, let the love of God be shed abroad in our hearts. And give us, Father, such complete deliverance from ourselves that we can learn to care for others. And work at caring.

May thy spirit continue to work with us. We sense thy presence. We know thou art here.

We're going to stand in a minute. Remain with your head bowed. We're going to stand with a minute.

I'm going to pronounce the benediction. Then I'm going to ask you to do something. I don't want anybody to talk to anyone else until you get outside the door of the sanctuary and then talk quietly.

I'm sure the Holy Ghost is making some impressions on our heart. Let's not fritter them away in idle conversation. If you have something you must say, you can say it in the hallway in a subdued voice.

But please don't anybody, unless it's necessary, talk to anyone else. Let God say something and listen to him. Let's stand for the benediction.

Now unto him that is able to keep us from falling and to present us before his glory of his presence with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be dominion and majesty, power and praise now and forever. Amen.

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