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Conducted by  
Alf Marsden

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**"In 1 Cor.13, Paul says, "Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love". Why is love greater than faith?"**

The sister who asked this question further added, "Surely, a true faith in Christ would produce the love which may, in some cases, not be truly felt at the time of baptism". I trust, as we study this question, that we shall be able to say something to prove that in our Christian lives, and perhaps prior to our Christian beliefs, love is paramount.

In the first place, we must not confuse the Biblical concept of love with the type of eroticism which we now find in novels, plays, and television programmes. Furthermore, as our brother James pointed out in his Editorial in the May issue, high churchmen are now confusing the issue by condoning - and in some cases participating in - a type of "love" which the Apostle Paul, particularly, condemns as unseemly. Yet most of these churchmen would contend quite vehemently that they have faith in God and His Christ. So even though Paul place love last of the three attributes, he nevertheless says it is the "greatest". Let's see

if we can find out why he says that.

### THE GOSPEL

One of the great dangers is that if the Gospel message is given as a textually based set of instructions to which people must be obedient, then maybe they will obey for the wrong reasons. Almost invariably, when we conclude our Gospel messages, we state the terms of the Great Commission which Jesus gave to His Apostles, "Go ye into all the world... he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; he that disbelieveth shall be condemned". If, as I say, the message has been comprised of scriptural texts as to why I should be baptised - and many are - then it is quite likely that the invitation will come over as a command which must be obeyed. Well, the command has to be obeyed, of course, otherwise Jesus would not have stated it, but we have to ask ourselves, "Is the response because the command has to be obeyed, or is it because the candidate, out of a heart of love for the Saviour, wants to obey any command which He may give"? I suppose another way of putting it, from the questioner's point of view, is "Will the obedience of faith in Christ produce the love which is necessary, or is the love of Christ which produces the initial faith in Him"? Personally, I am convinced there is a difference.

### EMOTION

To have faith in someone - as a business-man might have faith in a financial analyst - may produce a feeling of satisfaction toward the person when he delivers the "goods", but not necessarily a feeling of love. The rationality of scriptural argument may be very convincing, but unless the conviction has the added dimension of the emotion of love, it is very possible that the response may not be as genuine as it should be. It is my understanding of scripture which leads me to believe that a person should not come to Christ merely for the satisfaction of acquiring something which he couldn't acquire for himself. He must look for a faith which will produce the result that he wants, but rather he must look with a heart-felt love to the One who produces the result, and who will engender within him such a faith as will move mountains. You see, we must look beyond the command and see the loveliness of the Person who gives the command; it is faith in the One who stands behind the command, and not solely faith in the command itself. If that had always been so in many "conversions" I have seen in my Christian life, then I will stick my neck out and say that many who have fallen away would not have done so. What is it, then, which moves us emotionally to have true faith in the Christ?

### "LOVE NEVER FAILS"

"Come on, Alf Marsden", you may say to me, "Haven't you read about the numbers of married people who are being divorced these days? Their love has failed". I would reply by saying, "It all depends upon what sort of love their love was initially". The truth of love, to my mind, is exemplified by its *quality* and *durability*. When a man and woman marry, they not only affirm their love for each other; they also pledge it, "As long as ye both shall live". Many pledge before a God in whom they do not believe. One wonders how long the clergy who conduct such marriages can condone this travesty of so-called marital "love". This is some sort of carnal love asking for the blessing of a God who abhors carnality. We dare not compare this with the sort of love which the Christian should have towards his Lord.

It is true, of course, that a love which a Christian can have for God can fade and fail, but if that happens, then it is a failing of love on the part of the person and not on the part of God. God's love can never fail. Why is this so? The elementary answer which every child of God should know is that God "is" love. That which "is" can never be taken away, even when punishment and retribution are necessary. Does a parent love less because the child has to be punished? "But", you say, "How can One who is all love sit back and allow such atrocities to take place as we see in the world today"? Man's inhumanity to his fellow-men

has always been, and always will be, present throughout the world. We must, however, understand that human retribution is not like Divine retribution. Have no fear; God will exact retribution at the end. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord". In the meantime, men will continue to inflict pain, injury, and death on their fellow-men. That is not a measure of the lack of action on the part of a God of love, but it is a measure of the extreme action of Satan in the hearts and minds of sinful men who perpetrate such things. We must not blame God: we must fight sin. Out of His great love God has always done just that, and I'll tell you how.

### GREATER LOVE

God is the eternal Spirit. We know, however, that spirit, of itself, does not have physical substance. We also know from the Bible that salvation demanded a physical death, and the shedding of sacrificial blood. How was the Eternal Spirit to accomplish this? Only by coming to earth in the flesh, and offering Himself as the sacrifice for sin. He did this in the Person of Jesus, His Christ; as Paul says, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself". 2 Cor.5:19. The Bible also teaches, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends". John 15:13. As the ignoble spat in His holy face, remember, "God was in Christ". As they pushed down the crown of thorns upon His brow, remember, "God was in Christ". As the "created" had succumbed to the wiles of Satan, remember, "The Creator in the Person of His Christ suffered all the pain, humiliation, and indignity that the ones He was saving could heap upon Him". How undeserving was wayward and perfidious man. How gracious and loving is the creator.

The evidence of love is plain for all to see. John says, "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him". 1 John 4:16. If we want to get to the heart of the Gospel, we go with John, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us". He demonstrated that love by sending His Christ into the world to save us. It is love that draws us; it is faith through love which holds us; it is the hope engendered by a loving faith which sustains us.

"Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love". Faith is great, but it is loving faithfulness of God which is greater. I believe that is why Paul, looking at the tragedy of sinful man, and knowing the blessedness of salvation, could say, "but the greatest of these is love".

(All questions, please, to Alf Marsden,  
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