

November 28, 2021

Love Can Never Be Conquered

1 Corinthians 13:7

Love is the principle thing

The problem in Corinth is that although they excelled in the use of spiritual gifts, they practiced them without love. They didn't have a spiritual gift problem so much as they had a love problem. That's why Paul tells them at the end of ch. 12 in v.31 "But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you still a more excellent way." And then instead of immediately telling them what those higher gifts were—*namely* those gifts which are most useful to the building up of the Church—he interrupts his discourse to teach them what love is. That is *the more excellent way*—to earnestly desire the gifts of the Spirit *for love's sake*. The spiritual gifts were given so that we can love God and each other better. That's why they exist. The Big Idea of ch. 13 is that love is the highest, best, most excellent, most desired, most invincible, most everlasting thing. Paul illustrates this in v.1-3 by showing that without love, all the other gifts are nothing and worthless. In v.4-6 he shows that love is the source of every other virtue: patience, kindness, contentment, humility, putting other's first, having righteous anger instead of sinful anger, forgiveness, rejoicing in truth *all come from love*.

Unconquerable love

Now as we approach v.7 Paul begins a new train of thought. Not only are all things worthless without love (v.1-3), not only is love the source of every other virtue (v.4-6), but love can never be conquered, v.7 "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Note that Paul is talking about how love is unconquerable *in this life*. Once we get to v.8 Paul shows us how love will never end in Heaven. But here in v.7 he is clearly talking about this age. How do we know? Look at v.7. "Love *bears* all things." Will we have to *bear* anything in the age to come? No. "...In [His] presence there is fullness

of joy; at [His] right hand are pleasures forevermore" (**Psalm 16:11**). Clearly he means that love bears all things *now*. Next he says "Love *believes* all things." Will we have to *believe* in the age to come? Certainly not in the same way we do *now*. Now we walk by faith not by sight (**2 Cor. 5:7**), but then we shall see Him as He is (**1 John 3:2**). Next, he says "Love *hopes* all things." Will we have to *hope* in the age to come? No. "For who hopes for what he sees?" (**Romans 8:24**). Clearly he means that love hopes all things *in this age*. Finally, he says "Love *endures* all things." Will we have to *endure* anything in the age to come? No. "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (**Revelation 21:4**). So clearly Paul means that *in this age* love does all these things. Which means that love cannot be conquered. In this verse, Paul is teaching us "the lasting and abiding nature"¹ of love. Whatever opposition it faces, whatever it is assaulted with, it cannot be defeated.²

Why do we celebrate Christmas?

The most immediate proof of this is the first coming of Christ. What do we celebrate at Christmas? The undefeatable, unconquerable, invincible love of God. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son."³ Nothing could conquer the unconquerable love of Jehovah. Not the fall of mankind. Not the disobedience of our first parents. Not your unfaithfulness. Not the vicious works of Satan. Not death. Not hell. Nothing. Love is the reason God sent Christ into the world, and that love could not be overcome. Beloved, as a born again Christian, that same love now dwells in you. Which means that God has set up His post in your heart. And though you and I have much remaining sin and corruption, He will not retreat from His post. You have a principle of love within you, that does not rely on your own strength or wisdom. It is a principle

¹ Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprinted 2013), pg. 286

² Love is a flame that cannot be conquered though a hurricane engulf it. It is a flake of snow that cannot be conquered though it be swallowed by a burning volcano. cf. Song of Solomon 8:6-7

³ John 3:16

that when unleashed will bear with the failings and sin of others, that will believe and hope in the promises of God though it is black as night, and that will endure even the flames of martyrdom if put to the test. Love can never be conquered.

The Big Idea...

Love can never be conquered, therefore all Christians are enabled to bear,
believe, hope, and endure all things

- ★ Our Doctrine
- ★ Our Duty
- ★ Our Delight

I. Our Doctrine

Chiastic structure

Paul presents v.7 in a literary structure known as a chiastic structure. “A [chiastic structure] is a literary device in which a sequence of ideas is presented and then repeated *in reverse order*.⁴ So imagine a pyramid laying down on its side. The ideas are presented walking their way up to the peak of the pyramid, and then they walk their way back down the other side mirroring the previous truths. So in v.7 the mirror truth of “love *bears* all things” is the last clause “love *endures* all things.” The mirror truth of “love *believes* all things” is “love *hopes* all things.” So the effect is that the believing and the hoping is what gives the fuel for bearing and the enduring.⁵ In other words, the chiastic structure helps us to

⁴ Source: <https://www.gotquestions.org/chiasm-chiastic.html> accessed March 2, 2019

⁵ Roy E. Ciampa & Brian S. Rosner, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), pg. 5

see cause and effect. Because love believes *all things*, it can therefore bear *all things*. Because love hopes *all things*, it can therefore endure *all things*.

Differential diagnosis

Let's clearly state what Paul is *not* saying. By *all things* Paul *only* means those things that we *ought* to bear, believe, hope, and endure. So **first** of all, love *does not* bear or endure injustice. How foolish would be to argue against Dietrich Bonhoeffer's attempt to kill Hitler in WWII because after all "love bears and endures all things." That type of thinking is superficial at best and demonic at worst. Love is not passive towards evil but seeks to overthrow it and transform it to righteousness.⁶ **Secondly**, when Paul says that "love believes...[and] hopes *all things*" he does not mean that love believes or hopes in lies or false doctrine. Love is not naively gullible or ignorantly optimistic. Love believes and hopes only in those things that God has revealed as true. Therefore Paul is not saying that love bears with injustice nor does it believe lies. So then what are the *all things* that love bears, believes, hopes, and endures? To answer that we must look to the Lord Jesus Christ.

What did Jesus bear?

What did Jesus bear and endure? Let's take those one at a time. What did Jesus *bear*? He bore the awful weight of sin for sinners. To *bear*⁷ means to cover. In the OT, the *covering* on the Ark of the Covenant was called the mercy seat. This mercy seat—this covering—was where the blood was sprinkled for the sins of the people. But Jesus is the true and better mercy seat, the God-man sent from Heaven. His great love is what has covered all our sins. "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole

⁶ Proverbs 24:11-12 "Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, "Behold, we did not know this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?"

⁷ Paul used this same Greek word earlier **9:12** when talking about the right he had as an apostle to be supported by the Church. But he said "...we have not made use of this right, but we *endure* [same Greek] anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ."

world" (**1 John 2:12**). That is what true Christian love does. **1 Peter 4:8** "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love *covers* a multitude of sins." Love seeks to cover over the sins of others even at our own cost. Just as Christ bore our sins upon the tree though it cost Him everything, so love bears with the failings of others.⁸

What did Jesus endure?

To *endure* is closely related.⁹ What did Jesus endure? The infinite wrath of God. John MacArthur says the word *endure* is "...a military term used of an army's holding [its] position at all cost."¹⁰ To endure is to stand your ground even when everyone else and everything else retreats. Beloved that is what Christ did! He endured the cross despising its shame *though* all Heaven and Earth forsook Him. He stood His ground. That's how true Christian love is to love, it endures even when all other worldly loves fail, even when all circumstances say to give up.

What did Jesus believe and hope?

Alright then, what about this second set—"love *believes* all things [and] *hopes* all things?" What did Jesus believe and hope? Some commentators take these two verbs to mean that love is not suspicious of others, or that love believes the best about others, or that love always gives the benefit of the doubt to others. Now of course this is absolutely true. But I don't think that's Paul's main object.¹¹ One commentator puts it like this "This is not about [believing]

⁸ Romans 15:1

⁹ It answers *how long* love bears.

¹⁰ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 1 Corinthians*, (Chicago, IL.: Moody Publishers, 1984), pg. 355

¹¹ This was not Jesus' practice. John 2:23-25 "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man."

those around us, but [believing] the One who calls us to love others..."¹² It's not about hoping for the best *in men*, but about having our hearts set on the hope that God has called us to.¹³ That's *what* Jesus believed and hoped in His entire ministry. He constantly put His trust and hope in God's Word. He confessed that Scripture cannot be broken (**John 10:35**). He confessed that 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (**Matthew 4:4**). Jesus whole life of love was directed and fueled by the Scripture. "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (**John 4:34**). Likewise true Christian love, the kind that bears all things and endures all things—this love—believes all that Scripture says, and places all its hope in the enduring Word of God.

The first martyr of Christianity

So let's illustrate this in the life of Stephen, Christianity's first martyr. Remember that Stephen was lied about. False witnesses came forward and said that he had blasphemed God, and consequently he was put on trial for his life. How did Stephen's love remain unconquerable in the face of such opposition? How did he bear the ridicule of those he witnessed to? How did he endure being stoned to death? How could he love his enemies so much that he prayed as the rocks were flying "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (**Acts 7:60**)? Because his love was fueled and empowered by the Word of God. Go back and read Acts 7. Stephen spent 50 verses retelling the Scripture to His enemies. He believed all the Scripture said, and as a result he hoped in all the things the gospel promised—that even these men who hated him and who hated His Christ could be saved. And that believing and hoping was the fuel for his bearing and his enduring. And here's the thing: only Christians have this type of unconquerable love.

¹² Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 650

¹³ "This is not about hoping for the best in those around us. It is about maintaining the hope set before us by the One to whom we have entrusted our lives and our futures, and being empowered by that eschatological hope for our future to take the risk of loving those around us in the present." *Ibid*

Doctrine: Love can never be conquered

And so we arrive at our **main doctrine** this morning: *Love can never be conquered, therefore all Christians are enabled to bear, believe, hope, and endure all things.* Consider four reasons *why* true Christian love cannot be conquered.

Reason #1: True Christian love cannot be conquered because it is not *from* this world

1 John 4:7 “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is *from* God...” Notice he said “...love is *from* God.” The Greek word is ἐκ *ek*, it is a preposition denoting origin. Love’s origin is God. Love didn’t come *from* the angels. Love didn’t come *from* the philosophers. Love certainly didn’t come *from* evolutionary theory.¹⁴ Love is from God. Now who or what can overthrow anything that comes from God? Who can swallow up the sea? Who can bring down the mountains? Who can put out the fire of the sun? So it is with the unconquerable power of love.¹⁵ **Ecclesiastes 3:14** “I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him.”¹⁶ That’s the **first reason** true Christian love cannot be conquered: because it is not an invention of man, but it comes from the omnipotent and eternal God.

Reason #2: True Christian love cannot be conquered because it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit

Galatians 5:22 “But the fruit of the Spirit is *love...*” The reason why a Christian can love while bearing and enduring great difficulties is because he has

¹⁴ In fact, there is no such thing as love in a purely materialistic universe. According to the materialist’s own principles there is no such thing as sin or righteousness, love or hate. Matter is all there is. Even naturalists admit this. One famous naturalist Rodney Brooks said that a person is merely “a big bag of skin full of biomolecules.” He says it is hard to think like this. But “when I look at my children, I can, when I force myself,...see that they are machines.” Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity From Its Cultural Captivity*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway 2005)

¹⁵ **Song of Solomon 8:6-7** “...love is strong as death... Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.”

¹⁶ “For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?” **Isaiah 14:27**

been born again by the Spirit. There is a counterfeit type of love that fails under trials. Think of King Saul in the OT, or Judas the betrayer. The love that these men seemed to have at first was a work of the flesh. Their ‘love’ endured for a little while, but when others got in the way of their agenda their love was proved to be counterfeit.¹⁷ But when the Spirit of God regenerates a man or a woman or a child, they are made partakers of the divine nature (**2 Peter 1:4**), they have escaped the corrupting power that is in this world. Their love cannot be choked out because it is a product of the Third Person of the Trinity. **Romans 5:5** “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” That’s the **second reason** true Christian love cannot be conquered: because it is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Reason #3: True Christian love cannot be conquered because it is *not* a means, but the end of all things

Paul’s whole point in **1 Corinthians 13** is to contrast all the spiritual gifts with love. The spiritual gifts are *means* to an end. They all serve a higher purpose than themselves. Paul makes this point abundantly clear in ch.14 where he says no less than 8 times that these spiritual gifts are *means* to build up the church. There’s coming a time when these means are not all necessary. Paul says in in v.8 that many of these gifts will pass away. Why can simply pass away? Because they are only means to an end. But love is *the* end. Love is not a servant of any other master. To love the LORD our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves is the ultimate design and end of this universe. There is no higher end. That’s the **third reason** true Christian love cannot be conquered: because it is not a *means*, but the end of all things.

¹⁷ The same thing is true of Demas, one of Paul’s fellow missionaries. He eventually abandoned the mission. **2 Timothy 4:10** says “For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me...”

Reason #4: True Christian love cannot be conquered God has promised to uphold it

Listen to these precious and very great promises that belong to all who put their trust in the Lord.

Isaiah 46:4 “...even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.”

Jeremiah 32:40 “I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that *I will not turn away from doing good to them*. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.”

John 10:27-28 “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.
²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”

John 6:37-39 “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me *I will never cast out*. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, *that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me*, but raise it up on the last day.”

Romans 8:30-31 “And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.
³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”

Now because God has sworn that the soul of a Christian cannot be conquered by sin, death or the devil, then it follows that neither can true Christian love be conquered. **Philippians 1:6** says “And I am sure of this, that he who began *a good work [love]* in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

That's **fourth reason:** love cannot be conquered because God has promised to uphold it and He never lies.

Therefore true Christian love can never be conquered *because* 1) love comes *from* God; 2) *because* love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit; 3) *because* love is not a means to a higher end, but love is the end of all things; and 4) *because* God has promised to uphold the grace of love in the soul of every Christian. That's our doctrine.

II. Our Duty

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1. Consolatory Use

Our **first duty** is to *comfort* ourselves. Beloved consider that because you have been born of God you have the same Spirit of love that Stephen had. You can do what no *mere* worldling could ever do, pray for the salvation of those even putting you to death. You possess a treasure that is worth more than all the riches in the universe. And God is actively upholding and supporting that love. Your supply is endless. You are not left to love from the shallow well of your own heart. God has given you an infinite spring from which to love others with. You'll never diminish the supply of that spring. It is a spring of love that continues to overflow to all eternity. And the more you drink, that is, *the more you love*, the greater your capacity will be to love.

The growing love of the Apostles

Consider the apostles how they continued to grow and grow in their ability to love others. Peter's love at first was a very restricted. It seemed to be restricted to Jesus and the other 11 disciples. When Jesus ascended into Heaven—his love grew—he willingly suffered jail multiple times in order to preach the gospel to his country men. Later, his love grew to include the Gentile world when the Spirit led him to Cornelius' house. Peter's love continued to

grow until he was finally crucified like his Master, because he wouldn't stop preaching the gospel out of love for the lost. Or consider the Apostle Paul. He began as a persecutor of the Church, but when the Lord gave Him the new birth, He instantly loved the Church. And he suffered all things out of love for her. He said "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies."¹⁸ He told the Corinthians "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls" (**2 Corinthians 12:15**).

The power of love

Dear congregation, if you've been born again, that same type of love dwells within you. You have been given the gift of love that will enable you to bear with all the failings of others. Are you in a hopeless marriage? Love will enable you to bear it, love will cover a multitude of sins. Are you near the end of your life? Love will enable you to endure. Look to Him, the object of your love, and rest contently that all your days are numbered in His book and all your tears are stored up all your tears in His safe keeping. Don't you see? Because God's love has been poured into your heart through the Holy Spirit there is nothing that can conquer you in this life.

2. Experimental Use

That brings us to our **second duty: examination**. Loved ones, are you drawing on this Divine unconquerable love in your daily life? Or are you drawing on your own fleshly type of love? How can you know the difference? Well, Divine love bears with the failings of others. Fleshly love, on the other hand, relies on feelings and gives up if it means facing opposition from others. Divine love endures—it stands its ground—when everyone else deserts their post. But fleshly love quits when things get tough.

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 4:8-10

So test yourself: does your love for others *bear up* when they fail you? Or is your love conditional on their performance? We can know we are drawing on Divine love if we are quick to cover the faults of others. How quickly do you cover the faults of others?

Does your love stand its ground even when all else fails? Or does your love desert when the going gets tough? Is your love willing to take risks and carry burdens? Or is it an *every-man-for-himself* type of love, only interested in self-protecting, and self-preserving?

Boys and girls, what type of love are you loving others with? How do you love your brothers and sisters? Do you love them even when they fail you or are you quick to tattle on them to mom and dad? Do you endure the shortcomings of your parents and pastors, or is your heart becoming hard towards them?

3. Hortatory Use

That brings us to our **third duty: exhortation.** Perhaps you are ready to give up. Loving your spouse seems *hopeless*, there are no returns. Loving your Church is *hopeless*, nothing changes. Loving your prodigal child is *hopeless*, there is not even a spark of light. Whatever the situation, perhaps you are starting to feel hopeless. Hopeless people are loveless people. The Devil is so hateful *precisely* because he has no hope. So where do you find hope? In the Word of God. Moses endured because He saw Him who is invisible (**Hebrews 11:27**). Beloved the way you endure is by going to the Scriptures. “The law of the Lord is perfect, *reviving the soul*; the testimony of the Lord is sure, *making wise the simple*; ⁸the precepts of the Lord are right, *rejoicing the heart*; the commandment of the Lord is pure, *enlightening the eyes.*”¹⁹ You want to find hope? You want to find that unconquerable love that will *bear all things* and *endure all things*? Then go to the source of love, *the Word of God.* Read the Word. Study the Word. Memorize the Word. Meditate on the Word. Pray the Word. Sing the Word. Plead with

¹⁹ Psalm 19:7-8

God as Jacob did, ‘God I will not let you go, I will not let go of Your Word until you bless me, until you restore my hope, until you restore my love.’ And then wait on Him. “Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!” (**Psalm 27:14**). Dear congregation, there is no other *source* of love. You cannot love with unconquerable love apart from going to the Word. Every other well is shallow and empty. But God promises that if you go to His Word it will not return void. “...My Word be that goes out from my mouth... shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (**Isaiah 55:11**).

So those are our three duties. **1)** We can *comfort* ourselves knowing that God has given all Christians an unconquerable love through the Spirit. **2)** We must *examine* ourselves to see where we are not drawing from this Divine love. **3)** God tells us to *come to His Word* where our faith and hope can be renewed.

III. Our Delight

How the saints have tried to conquer God's love

As we close, I want you to consider how humanity has constantly provoked God to hate. Our first parents provoked Him. He told them that if they disobeyed Him and didn't cherish His commands, that they would surely die. They disobeyed Him, they scorned His love. Yet instead of destroying them, what did God promise them? That He would send One who will slay the serpent and rescue them. God's love towards humanity was not conquered.

Israel constantly provoked God to hate her. The one nation on earth that God set His affection on in ancient times. The one nation that God delivered with a mighty hand out of Egypt. Yet they killed his prophets, and turned to other gods, and abandoned His law. But what has God promised? That a future day is coming when He will pour out such abundant mercy on them so that all of

Israel will turn to the Messiah and live (**Romans 11:25**). God's love toward Israel has not been conquered.

David provoked God to hate him. God anointed him as king, delivered him from the hand of Saul, gave him wealth and success in battle, gave him all the house of Israel and Judah. How did David repay Him? By stealing another man's wife, and murdering the man. But instead of putting David to death, He forgave him, and restored him. God would save His punishment for another. God's love for David was not conquered.

Consider how the world continues to provokes God to hate. Though the Heavens declare the glory of God.²⁰ Though God's eternal power and divine nature is clearly perceived in the things that have been made, the world refuses honor Him or give thanks to Him.²¹ Yet what does God promise? That one day the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (**Isaiah 11:9**), that all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord (**Psalm 22:27**). God's love for this world has not been conquered.

Consider your own life. Consider how you have provoked the Lord to hate you. What great sins did you commit before you were born again? What darkness did you walk in? How selfish you, living only to please yourself with no thought of God in your heart. But consider how you have provoke Him to hate you since you've been a Christian. How many times have you been unfaithful to Him? How many times have you committed spiritual adultery whoring yourself out to other lovers? Yet what has God promised you? "I will never leave you nor forsake you."²² Why can God promise you that? Because everything that you have done that would cause God to hate you has already been punished in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the great hope we are reminded of

²⁰ Psalm 19:1

²¹ Romans 1:19-21

²² Hebrews 13:5

during Christmas. **Galatians 4:4-5** “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to *redeem* those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” When Jesus Christ came into the world, He fulfilled all righteousness *for you*, He was punished *for you*, He died *for you*, and He was raised from the dead *for you*. What that now means is that nothing can separate you from His unconquerable love. “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” That’s what was promised to you, sealed to you the moment you first believed. You can never conquer God’s love. Though you sin against Him, He loves you still. He will bear with you, He will endure. He will never leave you nor forsake you.

But perhaps you are here this morning and you’ve never trusted on Jesus Christ. You’ve never called upon the name of the Lord. Dear friend, you are still provoking the Lord to hate you. Your sins have separated you from God, which means you are under a curse. The wages of sin is death. The soul that sins will die. Don’t you know what the message of Christmas? That Jesus came into the world as a baby. He wasn’t born to amass wealth. He wasn’t born so that he could build an empire and be successful. He was born into this world so that He could die as a curse for sinners. The curse that hangs over you can be removed through forgiveness in His name. “...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”²³ If you trust in this Savior, you will be given a love that is unconquerable, a love that bears all things, believes all things, and hopes all things and endures all things.”

²³ Romans 10:9

