

To Be Continued...

The Holy Spirit & His Gifts

First Corinthians 13:8-13

When it comes to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, cessationists and charismatics 100% agree on one thing: One day the gifts will cease.

We just don't agree on the day.

To bring you up to speed, if you haven't been following this series:

- Cessationists believe certain gifts of the Holy Spirit have already ceased to function in the church.
- Continuationists believe all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit will continue to operate until the coming of The Lord.

Paul is going to tell us, in these verses, exactly when the gifts will cease.

1 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.

The first seven verses highlighted love. Love is the way all the gifts must operate. Anything selfish, or self-centered, cannot be a genuine manifestation of God the Holy Spirit.

Remember that Paul was writing to correct the misuse, the abuse really, of the gift of speaking in tongues. The way the Corinthians were doing it lacked love.

"Love never fails" means, first of all, that their activities, as bad as they were, would not defeat God's love. The church will go on, move forward, despite the bad behavior of its members at times.

Second of all, "love never fails" means that it will still be the way of things in the future, in eternity. It is permanent; the gifts are not.

Why single out these three gifts of the Spirit?

- "Tongues" and "knowledge" were especially troublesome in Corinth, so you've got to mention them that there be no confusion.
- "Prophecy" is a gift Paul will talk a lot about in chapter fourteen. Perhaps he wanted to head-off any criticism that he had a 'favorite' gift that was coloring his thinking.

There is nothing wrong with these gifts or with the truth they convey. In fact, they are necessary for the church. *It's just that one day they will be unnecessary!*

When will that be?

1 Corinthians 13:9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part.

"In part" means *incomplete*. It's a reminder that believers, and that the church comprised of believers, is an on-going project of the Lord's. We are not complete; but we will be.

1 Corinthians 13:10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

There is almost no argument anymore among serious scholars about what Paul meant when he said, "when that which is perfect has come." He was talking about eternity. He was describing the day you are translated or transformed into your glorified body, taken to Heaven, and see Jesus face-to-face.

John MacArthur is at the head of the cessationist movement. He is sometimes accused of teaching "that which is perfect" is the Bible; and since the Bible is now complete, certain gifts are unnecessary and have ceased.

He does **not** teach that. Here is his teaching:

The "perfect" is **not** the completion of Scripture, since there is still the operation of those two gifts and will be in the future kingdom (cf. Joel 2:28; Act 2:17; Revelation 11:3). The Scriptures do not allow us to see "face to face" or have perfect knowledge as God does (1Corinthians 13:12).

The "perfect" is **not** the rapture of the church or the second coming of Christ, since the kingdom to follow these events will have an abundance of preachers and teachers (cf. Isaiah 29:18; Isaiah 32:3-4; Joel 2:28; Revelation 11:3).

The perfect must be the eternal state, when we in glory see God face to face (Revelation 22:4) and have full knowledge in the eternal new heavens and new earth. Just as a child grows to full understanding, believers will come to perfect knowledge and no such gifts will be necessary.

In eternity:

- You won't need the gift of prophecy because the Lord will be speaking to you directly.
- There will be no unknown languages that need interpreting.
- The word of knowledge, by which the Lord supernaturally reveals to you something you could not have known, will vanish away because you will know everything!

OK, so why do guys like MacArthur say certain gifts - like tongues and prophecy - have, in fact, ceased?

In his own words:

Though we are told here that all three gifts would someday cease to exist, two different verbs are used to indicate their cessation. Prophecy and knowledge will be "done away," whereas tongues will "cease."

Done away... means *to reduce to inactivity, or to abolish*. The gifts of prophecy and knowledge one day will be made inoperative...

Cease... means *to stop, to come to an end*... The cause comes from within; it is built in. God gave the gift of tongues a built-in stopping place... Like a battery, it had a limited... lifespan.

OK, but when was tongues set to run out of juice? There is no passage in the Bible to substantiate a particular time tongues would cease, so all the arguments as to when it supposedly did cease are extrabiblical, logical, or theoretical.

MacArthur says, "it is **reasonable** to believe that tongues have ceased because their use is mentioned only in the earlier New Testament books. Most of the books, in fact, do not mention it."

His argument is based on what seems "reasonable" to him. At least he's honest; it's reasonable - but not necessarily biblical.

Not all scholars would agree that you should base such a tremendous, far-reaching conclusion on a verb or its tense. Gordon Fee, a renowned scholar in his own right, says,

[Some] have argued that the change of verbs with tongues has independent significance, as though this meant tongues might cease before prophecy and knowledge... [but] just as one can scarcely distinguish between "cease" and "pass away" in English, when used in the same context, neither can one distinguish between [the Greek words used] in this context.

In other words, Paul was not making a huge announcement about the cessation of a gift by choosing that particular verb. He just wasn't; or, at the very least, we cannot say without a doubt that he was.

The gifts will cease in eternity, when they are no longer necessary. Until then, they are needed.

Two illustrations help you get a grasp of the change from earth to eternity.

1 Corinthians 13:11 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.

Paul compared our change from earth to eternity to the change from childhood to adulthood. I don't think, however, he was describing the gradual changes as we grow. The way he worded this sounds more immediate.

Paul was perhaps thinking of his bar mitzvah. One moment Paul was still considered a boy; the next he was considered a man.

It will be a spiritual bar mitzvah, in a sense, when we go to be with the Lord! Whether through death and resurrection or the rapture, we will be *immediately* matured. Then the gifts, as precious and important as they are on earth, will seem childish by way of comparison.

The second illustration is the mirror:

1 Corinthians 13:12 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.

The mirrors in those days were made of beaten and polished bronze. No matter how well crafted a polished bronze mirror might be, it was really crude in giving a proper representation.

That's how we currently see spiritual things - only partially. Yes, we have everything we need for life and godliness in God's Word. But it is still not the same as being with Jesus. In Heaven we will see Him face to face. And we will know Him perfectly, even as He knows us perfectly today.

1 Corinthians 13:13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

The Bible says that we walk by faith, not by sight. Thus “faith” is only necessary for our time on earth. In eternity faith will become sight when we see Jesus.

Our blessed hope is the coming of the Lord! Thus “hope” is only necessary for our time on earth. In eternity hope will become reality when we are with Jesus.

“Love” does not have the same temporary quality. It will go on for eternity as the context in which we exist.

The Holy Spirit produces this love. Since He indwells us **these characteristics are not only possible, they are normal. Love is the normal Christian behavior.**

If I am falling short in love in one or more of these ways it isn't a matter of my trying harder but of realizing I am refusing to yield to the indwelling Holy Spirit. These are the qualities that ought to characterize my life simply because the Holy Spirit indwells me. I don't learn how to do them; He produces them when I get out of the way of His work.

The love we've been examining was so amazing, so different, that an entirely new word had to be coined to capture its essence. It is the Greek word *agape*.

According to Alan Redpath we get our English word 'agony' from *agape*. “It means the actual absorption of our being in one great passion.”

Here is a simple way of challenging yourself. What are you **really** passionate about?

When Jesus is your one great passion there will be *agape* overflowing from you all over the place!