

Does the Bible Teach
That
Certain Spiritual Gifts Have Ceased?

An examination of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 and other arguments

By
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BEHIND THIS PAPER

As most of you may know, either from first or second hand information, Parkway Community Church experienced a rather uncommon situation last Sunday (November 5th) when a gentlemen who has never attended Parkway before, spoke in an unknown tongue (i.e. tongues) twice during our second service. This event caught everyone by surprise including the leadership.

In an effort to deal with the situation, Chuck Correia (an elder of Parkway) took the platform and read from 1 Corinthians 14 where Paul states that whenever unknown tongues are spoken in the church they must have an interpretation or the person speaking in tongues should remain silent.

Following this reading from 1 Corinthians 14 and a brief prayer, Chuck, in line with 1 Corinthians 14 asked if there was a corresponding interpretation. At this, a brother from our Parkway family stood up weeping and gave an interpretation. The interpretation (and I will paraphrase) was essentially this: “We must humble our selves, go out and be salt and light in the world.” At this juncture, Chuck asked the one who interpreted the message to pray – which he did. After this the incident ended.

Before we move on to the heart of this paper, you should know a couple of helpful facts. First, the gentlemen who spoke in tongues in our church (who’s name is Elijah) has been reportedly going from church to church in the area doing the same thing. Second, the brother who interpreted the message has had no contact with Elijah (i.e. didn’t know him at all) and has never before interpreted tongues or experienced any such thing. Third, the interpretation given is biblically sound and simply repeats basic scriptural phrases. Fourthly, it should be recognized that his interpretation largely fit with the theme of renewal that we’ve been speaking about. Fifth, the interpretation played a part in one person coming to Christ. Sixth, the issue was handled with Scripture. All of this is said not to make a judgment for or against the authenticity of this event, but to lay out the basic facts for our congregation. We can, however, say that while it is questionable whether it was a direct intervention of the Spirit (for we still do not know enough), it was used providentially by the Spirit to assist one person in coming to Christ.

For the most part, the general feedback from the congregation has been positive expressing the opinion that it was handled biblically and gently. However, while many felt that it was handled well, several others were disappointed because the person speaking in tongues was not rebuked, or prohibited from engaging in what they perceive to be an unbiblical practice. Behind this latter response is a belief or doctrine which holds that certain gifts (miraculous gifts such as *tongues, healing, miracles* etc.) ceased after the death of the apostles or shortly thereafter. With this in mind it is easily understandable why they should express disappointment and concern. After all, if tongues truly ceased in the first century, then what took place on Sunday was not, by logical deduction, true biblical tongues. (It should be said, that those who did express rather negative concerns did so in a godly way. And, in light of their theological perspective, their concern is understandable.)

Behind these divergent responses, are essentially two different beliefs (with some variation) regarding the way in which the Spirit *may* or *may not* work in the church today. On the one hand, you have those who believe that the Spirit no longer distributes certain miraculous gifts (such as tongues) because they have necessarily ceased. This position is closed to the possibility that the Spirit may distribute such miraculous gifts to the contemporary church. On the other hand, you have those who believe that the Spirit *may*, or *does* distribute the miraculous gifts whenever he chooses to do so and is not constrained or limited to impart these gifts only in the first century of the church. This latter position is open to the possibility that the Spirit may distribute these gifts again in the church (beyond the first century).

TWO CAMPS OF THOUGHT

Along these two lines of thinking are two rather dogmatic schools of thought (not that dogmatism is always wrong) regarding the miraculous gifts of the Spirit.¹ Those who believe that all miraculous gifts have necessarily ceased hold to what theologians have called a *cessationist view* – the word cessation taken from the word *cease*. As mentioned above, this view holds that God’s Spirit granted these “sign gifts” during the apostolic area for various transitional reasons (e.g. confirmation of Apostolic authority, confirmation of the message of the Gospel etc.) that were no longer necessary after the completion of the Canon of Scripture (the New Testament). To the *cessationist* (i.e. one who holds that these gifts have ceased), what took place on Sunday at Parkway was obviously unbiblical because these gifts disappeared after the first century.

The other camp, which can be equally dogmatic, asserts that God is still distributing **all** the gifts (including the miraculous) to the church today. Those who hold to this view have been labeled “charismatic”.² Those in this camp go beyond the possibility that the Spirit *may distribute* the miraculous gifts today, to the Spirit *does distribute* the miraculous gifts today. Thus, they actively seek and exercise these miraculous gifts. This camp would have (most likely) approved of Sunday mornings incident as an authentic expression of the gift of tongues.

Between these two camps of *cessationists* and *charismatics* is a vast and growing majority that finds themselves somewhere in the middle.³ This group cannot accept the dogmatic notion that the miraculous gifts have necessarily ceased altogether after the first century, yet they cannot go so far as to say that God must necessarily distribute every gift to every generation and local body of believers. This group is largely composed of those who are open to the possibility that God may and sometimes does distribute these miraculous gifts today, but cautious about embracing what is currently going on in the charismatic arena.⁴ Some have labeled this the *open but cautious* position. This third group would be open to the possibility that the incident of speaking in tongues on Sunday was real, but cautious to embrace it as such without thorough inquiry and careful discernment.

THE CENTRAL FOCUS OF THIS PAPER

This brings us to the central purpose of this paper. What does the Scripture actually teach about the miraculous gifts? Did they cease after the first century? The Scripture, which is the churches highest and supreme authority, should be the ultimate determiner of this question. To this end, we would like to look at the only explicit statement in Scripture which speaks of certain gifts ceasing, 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. *Cessationists* have used this text repeatedly to prove that the gift of tongues (and by extension other miraculous gifts) has necessarily ceased. If this is, in fact, what this text teaches, then the

¹ It should be noted that in one sense all gifts are supernatural in that they are made effective by the supernatural enablement of the Holy Spirit. Here, however, I use the word “miraculous” to denote the gifts that are obviously more extraordinary.

² The word “charismatic” is taken from the Greek word *carismata* “charismata” which means “gifts”.

³ See Wayne Grudem’s comment in his *Systematic Theology*, p. 1031. This book is available for check out in the church office for further study.

⁴ Though again, in all fairness, charismatic churches range from cautiously balanced (such as Calvary Chapel) to wildly eccentric (Sunday morning TV).

miraculous gifts (specifically tongues) are not for today and should be prohibited. If, however, this text does not support the cessation of gifts after the apostolic period, then there should be a humble yet cautious openness to the *possibility* that God's Spirit *may* distribute these miraculous gifts in accordance with his sovereign will.

It should be clarified that the **only** question this paper will endeavor to answer is the question of whether the gifts have necessarily ceased after the apostolic era. Other important questions – such as: 1.) what exactly are tongues, are they actual languages with content, structure and meaning, or nonsensical babble; 2.) what exactly is the New Testament gift of prophesy, is it simply teaching, authoritative revelation equal to that of Scripture or is it revelation of an inferior order – will have to be explored and answered at a later time. For our current purpose, however, we will explore this one central question, namely, *does 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 teach that tongues (and by extension the miraculous gifts) have necessarily ceased?*

1 CORINTHIANS 13:8-13

1 Corinthians 13:8-13 (NAS)

*8 Love never fails; but
if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away;
if there are tongues, they will cease;
if there is knowledge, it will be done away.*

*9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part;
10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.*

*11 When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child;
when I became a man, I did away with childish things.*

*12 For now we see in a mirror dimly,
but then face to face;*

*now I know in part,
but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.*

13 But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

General Context

Before looking carefully at what this text teaches with regards to the ceasing of particular gifts, two things should be noted. First, the arrangement of the verse above reflects a breakdown of Paul's thought for the purpose of showing the continual contrast between present and future, the imperfect (or "in part") and the "perfect". Second, the detailed argumentation of Greek grammar will not be discussed in the body of the paper but in the footnotes – lest readers get lost (not to mention bored) in the finer points of grammar.

To begin with, it will be helpful to understand the context of chapter 13 and specifically verses 8-13. This chapter on the superiority of love is sandwiched in between two chapters that discuss the problems, priorities, and purposes of spiritual gifts. The Corinthian church was zealous for the gifts, and often times exercised them for personal and selfish reasons rather than the greater purpose of edifying the body (read chapter 14). Thus, in the larger context, Paul, without undermining the importance of spiritual gifts, is correcting an overemphasis and selfish exercise of them (especially tongues).

What this great chapter (chapter 13) does is show the indispensability and superiority of love. As Paul so eloquently writes, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have

become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.” In effect, he is reminding the gift-obsessed believers of Corinth that without the foundation and motivation of love, these gifts are worthless.

When we get to 13:8-13, Paul continues to show the superiority of love by contrasting its eternal permanence to the temporal nature of the spiritual gifts. In essence he is saying, “You think that gifts are so important. However, the gifts that you are so desperately seeking are insignificant in comparison to the superiority of love. Love will last through eternity, but the gifts, which you are so excited about and zealous for, are of temporal and of an incomplete nature. They will pass away.” This is not to suggest that spiritual gifts are unimportant (as Paul in 14:1 tells them to “eagerly desire the gifts”) but that they are far less important than the priority of love.

In this way, Paul demonstrates that love, which is permanent, is far superior to the temporal significance of gifts. These gifts will pass away at some point. It is here, in this context that we come to our central question regarding the cessation of gifts. The question is not “will the gifts cease” but “when will the gifts cease”. For the passage clearly teaches that they will “pass away” or “cease”. All parties agree on this point. Where the disagreement and controversy lies is in the “when”.

On a side note, it should be recognized that nearly all the spiritual gifts, if not all, will ultimately disappear. Once the resurrection takes place and we experience perfection and direct fellowship with God there will be no more need for spiritual gifts.⁵ Preaching, teaching, exhortation, and so on, will not be needed any longer. For, we will have perfect (not exhaustive) knowledge, perfect lives and hearts. Sin will be done away with negating the need for spiritual gifts.

The Verb “Cease” in Verse 8

Before we consider the “when” of the passage, it will be helpful to focus our attention briefly on the 3 spiritual gifts referred to in verse 8 and the verbs that accompany them. The reason for this is that some have argued that while all three of these gifts cease, they cease at different times.

For example, John MacArthur (a popular proponent of *cessationism*) argues in his commentary on 1 Corinthians that while the gifts of prophecy and knowledge are done away with at the eternal state⁶, *tongues* disappears earlier (i.e. at the close of the apostolic age). The basis of his argument is essentially threefold: 1.) the difference in verbs used in verse 8, namely “done away” verses “cease”⁷; 2.) the fact that the verb “cease” is in the middle voice (see footnote 12 for meaning of middle voice); and 3.) the fact that the gift of “tongues” is missing in verse 9 while “knowledge” and “prophecy” are present.

First, it should be observed that while the verbs are different in verse 8 (i.e. prophecies and knowledge will “pass away” while tongues will “cease”) they are close synonyms suggesting Paul is not intending to draw special significance to tongues.⁸ Further, must Paul utilize the same word three times in a row or is he free to use stylistic variation to avoid redundancy? Paul often times uses different words to

⁵ The gifts function to edify a body of believers who live in this present sinful age. It is because we are still battling with sin and the world that teaching and exhortation is needed. It is because people are lost that we need a gift of evangelism. It is because people are sick that the gift of healing exists. Spiritual gifts presuppose a sinful world.

⁶ John Mac Arthur, *1 Corinthians*, P. 365-66.

⁷ In Greek these words are *katargew* and *pauw*.

⁸ The definitions of these words in Greek-English Lexicon by Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich and Danker (BAGD, pp. 417 and 638) are as follows: *katargew* (pass away) is defined as “make ineffective, powerless, abolish, wipe out, set aside, do away with,” and “bring to an end”; *pauw* (cease) is defined as “stop, cease, have finished, be at and end, come to an end”. Conveniently enough, MacArthur’s commentary only takes note of the different definitions.

express the same meaning⁹ presumably for the same reason we would avoid overusing a word. As Carson correctly comments, “this view assumes without warrant that the switch to this verb is more than a stylistic variation.”¹⁰

Gordon Fee, in his well-respected commentary on 1 Corinthians makes the same basic point that this interpretation imports special significance to “cease” and, “misses Paul’s concern rather widely. The change of verbs is purely rhetorical; to make it otherwise is to elevate to significance something in which Paul shows no interest at all.”¹¹

The fact that all three of these phrases are parallel grammatically would also lend support to the interpretation that Paul was simply saying the same basic truth three different times in slightly different ways using three different gifts. A natural reading, as well, would tend toward this interpretation. Paul’s basic point is that these gifts, which are simply representative of all spiritual gifts, are going to cease at some point. To conclude that tongues cease earlier than prophecies based upon a mere word change (a close synonym at that) is to read too much into the passage.

The rebuttal of MacArthur’s second and third reasons for this interpretation will be discussed in the footnote 12 for obvious reasons (too much Greek grammar!).¹²

⁹ A good example would be 1 Timothy 3:1 where he uses two different words with the same meaning to describe the same desire for the office of elder. Here it would seem that Paul simply chose an alternative synonym.

¹⁰ D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit – A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians, 12-14*. p. 66

¹¹ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 644

¹² MacArthur’s second reason for asserting that tongues will “cease” earlier than the other two gifts of verse 8 is that “cease” is in the middle voice. (unlike English which has only and active and passive voice verb, Greek has a middle voice). Regarding this middle voice MacArthur comments that, “this verb is here used in the Greek middle voice, which, when used of persons, indicates intentional, voluntary action upon oneself. Used of inanimate objects it indicates reflexive, self-causing action” (*1 Corinthians*, p. 359). Based on this interpretation of the middle voice he concludes that tongues “have a built in stopping place. . . ‘that gift will stop by itself’” (*1 Corinthians*, p. 359). He then makes a major leap, based upon this, to assert that tongues “have ceased at an earlier time” (*1 Corinthians*, p. 359). In response to this we must first note that while the middle voice in Classical Greek (Greek from centuries before Paul) did use the middle voice to denote reflexive action (doing something to oneself or “tongues ceasing themselves”), in the common Greek of Paul’s day it had largely lost its reflexive significance. In fact, most advance Greek grammars point out that the reflexive middle largely disappeared in Paul’s day making it rather rare. For example, Nigel Turner comments in his Grammar that “. . . in our period there is not always any significance in the writer’s choice of middle or active, and the reflexive middle in the NT is relatively rare” (Grammar of the NT Greek, *Syntax*, Vol. 3. p.54). Elsewhere he writes “. . .Hellenistic Greek will as soon use the active with a reflexive or personal pronoun in order to express a reflexive idea (Ibid. p. 54).” Other grammars concur with this. Further, in Luke 8:24 the same word translated “cease” (middle voice) is used to describe the wind ceasing at Jesus’ command – which it does, but not by itself (i.e. not reflexive), but by Christ’s word. Furthermore, this verb “cease” prefers the middle tense. In fact, every occurrence of this verb in the NT (15 occurrences in all) is in the middle voice except one (1 Peter 3:10). All this to say that MacArthur’s interpretation of the middle voice is unjustified and stands on weak grammatical ground.

His final support for tongues ceasing earlier than either prophecies or knowledge is because it is wholly missing in verse 9. Based upon this MacArthur says, “The cessation of tongues, however, is not mentioned in relation to the coming of the perfect [vv. 9-10]. They will have ceased at an earlier time (*1 Corinthians*, p. 359).” Again, should we think that because Paul left tongues out of verse 9 that he didn’t imply it? Must he rewrite everything a second time or would it have clearly been implied. For, as Carson shrewdly points out, if this method should be carried over into verse 12 where the gift of prophecy is absent (*Showing The Spirit*, p. 67) then it would appear that prophecy disappears earlier as well (which is contrary to MacArthur’s interpretation).

The point of all of this is to say that the best interpretation is the natural one. The gifts will pass away at a future time. To isolate and interpret tongues in a different sense than the other two simply lacks any solid foundation of evidence. Thus, tongues along with prophecies and knowledge will cease at some future point. Now (if you’ve been following the fine print, we shall return to the question of “when” (top of this page).

When Will The Gifts Cease?

Here we come to the crux of our question, “when”. Paul indicates rather clearly that the spiritual gifts will cease “when the perfect comes”. Again look at verse 9-10.

13:9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

According to Paul, the spiritual gifts that he and the Corinthian believers were experiencing were “in part” or “imperfect” (NIV). Here it is helpful to observe how Paul beginning in verse 9 begins to contrast the incompleteness of the present time with the perfection of the future. He does this through various descriptions:

PRESENT NATURE OF GIFTS	FUTURE TIME OF DISAPPEARANCE
Know in part, prophesy in part (v. 9)	When the perfect comes the imperfect will disappear (v. 10)
Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror (v. 12)	Then we shall see face to face (v. 12)
Now I know in part (v. 12)	Then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known (v. 12)

Paul describes the gifts in the present tense in various ways (see present category above). The point at which these gifts disappear will be, from Paul’s vantage point, still in the future –when “the perfect comes”, or when he sees “face to face” or when he has full knowledge. Here Paul gives a definitive time when they would cease.

To answer our central question, we must ask what the “perfect” (v.10), the “face to face” (v.12) and the “know fully” refers to. For in doing so, we will come to the conclusion of “when.”

Christians have interpreted the phrase “when the perfect comes” (v. 10) in three basic ways. One of the popular interpretations is that the “perfect” in verse 10 refers to the completed New Testament canon (i.e. the 27 books of the NT). According to this interpretation, when the canon of Scripture was completed, the imperfect revelation (i.e. the inferior revelation of “prophecies”, “tongues” and “knowledge”) disappeared because they were no longer necessary.

It must be said that this interpretation of the “perfect” as referring to the completion of the NT canon is highly unlikely for the following reasons.

First, it is highly unlikely that the Corinthian believers would have envisioned the completion of the New Testament canon when they read the words, “the perfect” – especially when connected with such phrases as “face to face” (v.12) and “know fully” (v.12).

Second, in opposition to this interpretation Martyn Lloyd-Jones rightly asserts that this interpretation:

...means that you and I, who have the Scriptures open before us, know much more than the apostle Paul of God’s truth.... It means that we are altogether superior...even to the apostles themselves, including the apostle Paul. It means that we are now in a position in which...”we know, even as also we are known” by God...indeed, there is only one word to describe such a view, it is nonsense.¹³

Thirdly, Paul’s words express the fact that he would experience this event, for he says, “then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (v. 12). In light of his shift to the first person singular “I”, it is reasonable to assume that Paul expected to experience one day the fullness of knowledge. Well, he died

¹³ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Prove All Things*, p. 32-33. This citation is taken from Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*, p. 1038.

decades prior to the completion of the New Testament Canon falling far short of this anticipated experience. If, however, he was referring to the consummation of the kingdom at the return of Christ, then the first person makes perfect sense. For, in his resurrected state he would “know fully” just as he is “fully known” (v.12).

Fourthly, while the meaning of “perfect” may be made, with some stretching, to refer to the Scripture (e.g. Psalm 19:7), it is hard to reconcile this view with the phrase “face to face” (v.12). This phrase is used repeatedly in the Old Testament to refer to a theophany – or, a meeting with God.¹⁴ For the above reasons (though this does not exhaust the problems associated with this interpretation), it seems that the “perfect” does not refer to the completion of the New Testament canon.

A second interpretation, which runs into similar problems, outlined above, understands the “perfect” to refer to the maturity of the individual or church body. That is, when the church matures, the gifts will cease.

While the word “perfect”¹⁵ in the New Testament can and often does refer to Christian maturity (e.g. 1 Corinthians 14:20), the context would argue against it. That is, the maturity of the church is hard to square with the phrases “face to face” or the personal assertion of Paul that “I shall know fully” (v. 12). This interpretation implies that Paul himself and the early church were immature and that the church at some later time grew to maturity. Aside from the fact that history argues against this view, it does not square with the fullness of knowledge that Paul anticipates.

The third interpretation of the “perfect”, which I find the most convincing and probable, is that it refers to the coming of the Kingdom of God in fullness at the return of Christ when we will be made perfect. Or to put it differently, “the perfect” refers to the circumstances brought about the dawning of the new age of the Kingdom. All of these are part and parcel with the coming of Christ.¹⁶

This view fits well within the context and with the other phrases. According to this view, the phrase “face to face” refers to our direct access to the face of Christ or God (see Revelation 22:4). We will no longer know or see God indirectly as through “a poor reflection” of a mirror, but “face to face”. This takes the phrase literally signifying our final and everlasting encounter with God.

Further, it makes sense of Paul’s anticipation of knowing “fully even as I am fully known”. For in his resurrected state he would experience, not complete knowledge of God (for that would require omniscience), but perfect knowledge of God (as in unflawed, unhindered and direct).

Finally, this fits well into Paul’s overall point. After all, his point is to show how permanent love is compared to the temporal gifts. The gifts of the Spirit are God’s gracious but temporal means of building the body during this present age. However, this present sinful age will come to an end. And, at that time, so will the gifts of the Spirit. But, his love will endure forever (awesome thought!).

To answer the question of “when will the gifts cease” – the best interpretation of the passage supports the time of the second coming of Christ and the consummation of the kingdom. This being the case, one cannot support a cessationist view of the gifts with these verses. In fact, it would imply the opposite, namely, that they will cease to exist when Christ comes. Thus, it is clearly possible, biblically at least, for someone in our day to receive the gift of tongues or healing. Or, at least, this verse implies that this can happen.

¹⁴ See Genesis 32:30; Judges 6:22; Deuteronomy 5:4; 34:10; Ezekiel 20:35 and Revelation 22:4.

¹⁵ *telion* in the Greek

¹⁶ D.A. Carson, Gordon Fee, and Wayne Grudem and others hold this view.

By the same token, however, we must not assume that God's spirit necessarily grants every gift to every generation and to every body of believers. For this too, is to go beyond the text. As Carson correctly cautions regarding this interpretation:

“This would not necessarily mean, of course, that each contemporary claim of a particular gift is valid. Nor would it necessarily mean that a charismatic gift or gifts could not have been withdrawn earlier than the Parousia [Second Coming]. But it does mean that Scripture offers no shelter to those who wish to rule out all claims to charismatic gifts today.”¹⁷

OTHER CESSATIONIST ARGUMENTS CONSIDERED IN BRIEF

In addition to 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, cessationists have offered other inferential arguments in favor of the gifts having ceased in the first century. Let us consider the major ones briefly.

1. ARGUMENT #1: The Purpose of the sign gifts or the “miracle age”¹⁸ was to confirm the authority of the Apostles and the Gospel message. Once this was accomplished, the sign gifts ceased.

This argument while certainly true in part (see Acts 2:43; 4:30; Hebrews 2:4), fails to take into account that there were many who were not apostles who also performed miracles and wonders. For example, Stephen the deacon performed signs and wonder in Acts 6:8. The believers of Galatia (non-apostles) are said to have performed miracles as suggested by Paul's words in Galatians 3:5 where he says, “does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law...”. Moreover, a natural reading of 1 Corinthians 12:9, would suggest that the gift of healing was in operation in the life of the Corinthian church (again, non-apostles). The point to be made is that while the apostles and their message of the Gospel was accompanied by a great concentration of spiritual power unequaled in the following centuries, there were also ordinary believers who exercised, perhaps to a lesser degree, miraculous gifts. Thus, the miraculous gifts, by witness of the New Testament, were not exclusive to the apostles.

2. ARGUMENT #2: Tongues are an inferior way of communication and edification.

This argument is also a true evaluation of tongues. Paul himself refers to it as inferior when he establishes the gift of prophecy as greater than the gift of tongues because of its edifying value (1 Corinthians 14:5). This fact is a given in light of Paul's words. However, simply because one gift is inferior in its edifying effect to another does not necessitate that it cease. What if we applied this principle of the other gifts? Moreover, Paul's argument seems to indicate that while tongues without interpretation is unedifying, if it is interpreted (which it must be in the assembly), then it is edifying.

3. ARGUMENT #3: Miraculous gifts are mentioned only in a few places in the New Testament and only in the earliest books implying that they ceased during the later part of the first century.

The fact that the miraculous gifts and signs and wonders are mentioned only in the earliest New Testament books (chronologically) is true. However, to argue from the silence of the other books of the New Testament is a weak argument – especially in light of the fact that most of the books of the New

¹⁷ Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, p. 70.

¹⁸ MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, p. 360.

Testament dealt with specific problems (or were occasional in nature). In light of this fact it is not surprising that miraculous gifts are not mentioned in some of the later books. The churches addressed in those books may not have been struggling with the same problems as the Corinthian church or they were of secondary importance to other issues. After all, if the Corinthian church had not experienced a problem with the gifts, one wonders if Paul would have addressed it at all. All this is to say that one should not place too much confidence in an argument from silence.

4. ARGUMENT #4: The witness of early church fathers unanimously reflects the view that tongues have ceased.

John MacArthur makes this argument saying, “The historians and theologians of the early church unanimously maintained that tongues ceased to exist after the time of the apostles.”¹⁹

While this statement is generally true, it overstates the point. For, while there is not much discussion in the early church fathers about the miraculous gift of tongues, there is evidence within the writings of the early fathers that other miraculous gifts (which MacArthur would say also ceased) did continue on. For example consider the excerpts from the following church fathers:

Irenaeus (lived 130-200 AD) *Against Heresies* 1.409

Wherefore, also, those who are in truth His disciples, receiving grace from Him, do in His name perform [miracles], so as to promote the welfare of other men, according to the gift which each one has received from Him. For some do certainly and truly drive out devils Others have foreknowledge of things to come: they see visions, and utter prophetic expressions. Others still, heal the sick by laying their hands upon them and they are made whole.

Tertullian (lived 150-212 AD) *To Scapula* 3.107

[In defense of Christianity Tertullian says] How many men of rank (to say nothing of common people) have been delivered from devils and healed of diseases! Even Severus himself, the father of Antonine, was graciously mindful of the Christians; for he sought out the Christian Proculus, surnamed Torpacion, the steward of Euhodias, and in gratitude for his having once cured him by anointing, he kept him. . . .

Origen (lived 185-254 AD) *Origen Against Celsus* 4.397

And the diviner method is called by the apostle the “manifestation of the Spirit and of power:” of “the Spirit,” on account of the prophecies, which are sufficient to produce faith in any one who reads them, especially in those things which relate to Christ; and of “power,” because of the signs and wonders which we must believe to have been performed, both on many other grounds, and on this, that traces of them are still preserved among those who regulate their lives by the precepts of the Gospel.

And there are still preserved among Christians traces of that Holy Spirit which appeared in the form of a dove. They expel evil spirits, and perform many cures, and foresee certain events, according to the will of the logos (1.415).

In short, the historical argument is not quite as convincing as some assert. Rather, there is some evidence that certain miraculous gifts were in operation during the period of the early church fathers.

¹⁹ John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, p. 361

CONCLUSION

The central question of this paper was, *does 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 teach that tongues (and by extension) the miraculous gifts have necessarily ceased?* The answer to this question, in light of the exposition above, is no. The Bible does not teach that the miraculous gifts have necessarily ceased. Furthermore, the secondary arguments supporting the cessation of miraculous gifts are not convincing enough to stand dogmatically on a position that would silence certain commands of Paul such as “do not forbid speaking in tongues” or “do not despise prophetic utterances”. We believe that holding to the *cessationist view* of the spiritual gifts (which is a safe position) is to stand on a “doctrine” which does not have a biblical foundation and *may* prevent us from acknowledging the possible work of the Spirit, should he distribute these gifts to the present generation. This position allows us to remain humbly *open* yet wisely and biblically cautious. Our intent is to be true to the Scripture by standing firmly on what it clearly teaches. If the Scripture does not place the Holy Spirit in a cessationist box, then we believe we shouldn’t either.

Again, it should be reaffirmed that our direction at Parkway Community Church is no different than it was any number of weeks, months or years ago. Our resolve is to make the glory and supremacy of Jesus the center and mission of our church, not extraordinary gifts, programs, numerical growth, music or facilities. Further, we are resolved to keep God’s word the foundation stone, ultimate guide, supreme test, highest authority and standard for all life, faith, theological reflection and practice. Finally, we are resolved, by faith in God’s enabling grace, to seek what is best for the spiritual well being of our church family.

For the sake of clarification, it should be remembered that our intent in this paper is not to validate or embrace any current form of charismatic expression, but to lay out before our congregation our position on this particular issue and its biblical justification. We will proceed according to the Word of God.

To The Glory of Christ Alone

Your servants,

The Pastors & Elders of Parkway Community Church

We welcome any questions or responses (mail, phone or e-mail @ info@parkwaycomchurch.org)