

### Keeping Spiritual Gifts In Perspective – 1 Cor 13:8-13

Reickard's; 1 Cor 13:8-13 (p960); We're finishing up our study of the famous love chapter this weekend . . .

But as I mentioned last week, Paul's intent goes far beyond just talking about love. He's in the middle of addressing the issues of spiritual gifts, and pauses to make sure we're keeping it all in perspective.

To make sure we understand the importance of love, and the prominence of love, when using our gifts (1 Cor 13:8-13)

*8 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

Key to keeping spiritual gifts in perspective, is realizing that love is far superior. That's the main thrust of Paul's argument here; Starting with the fact that . . .

#### Love never ends (v8a)

Have you ever heard of "before and after" **sayings**? Like on Wheel of Fortune?

Phrases like – *Ceiling Fan Appreciation Day; Comedy Routine Maintenance . . .*

*Study Hall of Fame; Under the Weather Bureau*

They make some sense when taken as a whole, but they're really two compound thoughts, joined by a single word.

And that's kind of what the phrase, *love never ends* in v8, is to ch13 \*\*\*\*\*

It links the first part with the second; It's a summation of all that Paul has just *said* about love – while establishing the basis for a contrast that he's *about* to say.

On the one hand, that love is crucial for our lives right *now* – that's the before part . . .

And on the other, it lasts forever; It has staying power; It persists; It never ends.

By its very nature, true love, God's love, keeps on.

- And no wonder, b/c God *is* love the Bible says (1 Jn 4:8)

And since *he's* eternal, love must be also; That's why the psalmist can say over and over again – the steadfast love of the Lord, *endures forever* (Ps 136)

All of which caused Frederick Lehman in 1917, to write one of the most powerful hymns

I know of, about love (**The Love of God**)

*The love of God is greater far / Than tongue or pen can ever tell;*

*It goes beyond the highest star, / And reaches to the lowest hell . . .*

*When years of time shall pass away, / And earthly thrones and kingdoms fall . . .*

*God's love so sure, shall still endure, / All measureless and strong . . .*

*O love of God, how rich and pure! / How measureless and strong!*

*It shall forevermore endure / The saints' and angels' song.*

That's the love to which Paul refers; The love of God that's been poured into our hearts through the HS who's been given to us (Rom 5:5)

Making it our song as Lehman says, our heart's cry – for all eternity \*\*\*\*\*

B/c *love* will be for all eternity; It never ends.

### But some gifts will (v8-12)

If you're going to keep spiritual gifts in perspective, it's important to keep in mind that though love never ends, some gifts will.

#### • Like prophecy, tongues, and knowledge

Which he's explicit about in v8 – *As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.*

And again in v10 – *the partial* [or the imperfect, referring to some of the gifts] *will pass away*; Indicating their temporary nature.

They're useful now, very much so; But that won't always be the case.

There will come a time when a prophetic, spontaneous thought from God, will no longer be needed; A time when speaking in tongues will no longer be heard.

A time when a *limited* knowledge of God and his ways, will give way to a *vast* knowledge of God and his ways.

As opposed to love – some gifts like prophecy, tongues, and knowledge, will end . . .

#### • B/c they're **child's play**

The gifts we have now, as good and as helpful and necessary as they are – are child's play compared to the ways of eternity; And they're going to cease.

That's the point Paul makes with the analogy in v11

*When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child* [it was all child's play]. *When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.*

I stopped doing the things I used to do.

Now, this is *not* a commentary on the supposed childishness of speaking in tongues as some people say; That would fly in the face of ch14, where he says that tongues . . .

Though not preferred, can be useful if accompanied by an interpretation.

Nor is this verse meant to be a commentary on our maturity; Or lack thereof.

And used as a proof-text when your husband acts like a little kid, or your wife throws a baby fit.

Rather, Paul uses the analogy to illustrate the point of v9-10 – that imperfect things like spiritual gifts, will eventually pass away just like the childish things of growing up.

*For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.* The imperfect will pass away.

Our current ways of talking and thinking and acting as we serve God and bless others, will no longer be used.

B/c when you get right down to it, they're child's play when compared to the ways of eternity.

The way things will be when the earth is *full* of the knowledge of the Lord (Is 11:9)

Some gifts will end b/c they're child's play, and . . .

#### • B/c they're **no longer needed**

For instance, the partial way of understanding, the imperfect way of perceiving things that's currently at our disposal – will give way to the complete/*perfect* way of knowing.

Like Paul says in v12b – *Now I know in part; then I shall know fully*

When the perfect comes as v10 says – the partial ways of knowing, will no longer be needed; B/c we'll already know fully.

And *see clearly*; Spiritually speaking; We'll see clearly

Look at v12 again – *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face*

As good as we see the things of God sometimes, Paul says it's *nothing* compared to what we'll eventually see

It's like the difference between looking at someone in a dim bronze mirror, like the Corinthians were known for, and looking at someone face to face (rearview mirror)

Or having to go through life backwards, b/c the only way for you to “see,” is in a rearview mirror; Or having to teach like this (turn around with mirror)

And imagine if you had to look at me the same way – with your *own* mirrors; In which case the seats in here would be facing the opposite way

And what if you had to drive this way – facing backwards in your car, while driving forward, using only your mirror

That's what it's like for us right now, concerning the things of God – we see dimly

But there's going to come a day Paul says, when all that will change

When we'll go from an indirect, and incomplete, and distorted view of life/godliness . . .

To a perfect, panoramic, crystal clear view

In which case, our spiritual gift mirrors, will no longer be needed

And all of that will happen – we'll know fully, see clearly, and understand completely . . .

#### • **When Christ returns**

That's when some of the spiritual gifts will pass away – when he comes again

V10 says – *When the perfect comes*, that is, the perfect means of knowing him and relating to one another, the imperfect gifts will cease to function

The question is, when *is* that?

And the answer, is when we see *face to face* like he says in v12 – *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face*.

Referring, to seeing *Jesus* face to face; B/c it's the same phrase and the same verbiage used in the OT, to see God personally

And we know from the NT, that will happen when Jesus comes again – we'll see him personally, face to face

So the flow of thought, starting in v10, goes like this

*When the perfect comes, the partial* [the spiritual gifts we currently have] *will pass away* – they'll cease to function

And then he gives an analogy in v11 to illustrate that point . . .

And then returns to the point in v12, with a reason – *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully*

When shall we know fully? When we see God; That's when the perfect comes – *then*

So the *then's* of v12, answer the *when* of v10

They can't refer to something in v11, b/c those are things Paul speaks of in the *past* tense

While v12 is speaking of something in the future – *then I shall know fully*

So *when the perfect comes*, refers to the perfect way of knowing and speaking and serving – when Christ returns

That's when the partial will pass away, and some spiritual gifts will cease to function

It's like a candle in a **dark room** (Lights Out; Black Screen)

Imperfect and partial in filling this place with light – it's still needed and useful for finding my way; But when the **lights** come on, when the light of the *world* returns . . . The candle is no longer needed; And neither are the gifts; They cease at that time\*\*\*\*\*

- Including tongues; It's not different for tongues, than it is for prophecy and knowledge Which some people advocate, based on the type and tense of the verb *cease* in v8, and the lack of tongues being mentioned in v9  
On that basis, some people say that tongues already ceased by themselves  
At a totally different time, and for totally different reasons than prophecy and knowledge  
That's called the **Cessationist Position** – the belief that tongues have already ceased

Which I don't think is correct for 5 reasons:

1. It divorces tongues from the rest of the passage  
Essentially saying that Paul's comments after v8, have nothing to do w/ tongues  
Which is a dangerous method of interpretation when there's nothing in the text to warrant it
  2. It ignores the literary constraint in v9  
IOW to say that tongues ceased at a time different from prophecy and knowledge b/c it's not mentioned in v9, ignores the awkward nature of including it  
Including a phrase like “speaking in part,” alongside knowing in part and prophesying in part; It doesn't make much sense  
What does it mean to “speak in part” when it comes to tongues? Nothing really  
So I think Paul leaves it out for literary and logical reasons, not theological ones
  3. “Knowing in part” in v9, could very well *include* the nebulous nature of tongues  
Where you don't really *know* what's being said; Therefore you know in part  
In fact, that's what Paul does with prophecy in v12, where he says – *Now I know in part*  
Just b/c he didn't mention *prophecy* there explicitly, doesn't mean he's all of a sudden leaving it out, or intending that something different is going to happen with that gift  
So it's likely that Paul had tongues in mind in v9 as well, especially having just mentioned it in v8
  4. The verb tense of *cease* doesn't allow for a cessationist position  
Some people say that the type and tense of the verb *cease* in Greek, indicates a self-imposed stopping, totally apart from an outside force  
IOW tongues ceased all by themselves, b/c they had a built-in battery life so to say, and when it ran out, they stopped
- The problem is, that once again divorces tongues from the context – saying that there's nothing acting on them to make them stop, like the return of Christ in v12  
Not only that, but such a conclusion, that tongues ceased by themselves, runs totally contrary to the rules of grammar for Greek verbs of this sort . . .  
And, it's inconsistent with the way the *same* verb is interpreted in Lk 8:24, where Jesus was in the boat, and it says that the wind and the raging waves *ceased*  
Does that mean they stopped all by themselves? No, Jesus rebuked them  
That's what caused them to cease; Just like his return causes tongues to cease  
So the verb tense of *cease* doesn't support a cessationist position

5. Grammatically speaking, tongues are included in the sense of v9-10

B/c v9-10 begin w/ the word *for* – indicating it's the reason for what was just said in v8  
Namely, that prophecy and knowledge will pass away, and tongues will cease – *for*, or  
b/c, they're partial, and when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away  
The word *for* indicating that what follows, is the reason for what precedes – *all* of what  
precedes; B/c there's nothing in the text that excludes it (**Summary**)

5 reasons for why the spiritual gift of tongues will cease at Christ's *return*, just like the  
other gifts

- That doesn't mean however, that we should be breaking out in tongues every time you  
turn around  
Especially since it's a lower gift, and prophecy is *preferable* according to ch14  
So much more preferable, that Paul says he'd rather speak 5 intelligible words, than  
10,000 unintelligible (14:19)  
That's one of the reasons we agree around here to use them only privately, in personal  
prayer if you have that ability

Not only that, but the frequency of tongues in general, whether here or around the world,  
should match the diminishing frequency in the book of Acts and the rest of the NT . . .  
Where its use was talked about less and less, if at all, and presumably decreased  
So 2000 years later, our practice should reflect the same, and even more so

Nonetheless, the Bible doesn't support the conclusion that the gift has completely ceased  
Only that it *will* cease, just like the other gifts, at Christ's return

### **Leaving faith, hope, and love (v13a)**

That's v13 where he says – *So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three*  
*Now* as in, this is the conclusion . . .  
And *now*, as in they presently continue to abide; They currently remain  
And *will* remain

But why he includes faith and hope here all of a sudden, we can't be sure  
It's probably b/c they were so often lumped together in the NT . . .  
And they encompass the whole of our Christian existence  
What's the Christian life all about? Faith, hope, and love  
Faith in Jesus, hope for eternity, and love for all

I think that's why he includes them, and I think the implication is that they all 3 remain  
into *eternity*; That all three will be operative for all time  
As long as there's a dependence on God and trust in him, which there will be for all  
eternity – *faith* will abide  
And as long as there's a confident expectation of future blessing, which there will be,  
even when we've been there 10,000 years – *hope* remains  
That's why *faith, hope, and love abide*

### **The greatest of which is love (v13b)**

And Paul doesn't give us much to go on here, either  
But I think he says so, b/c while love is crucial to the other two, it stands alone by itself

Think about it; *Faith* without love is shallow; It's sterile; Passionless

IOW if love isn't involved, faith may be useful, but who really cares?

For instance, I have faith that this stool will support me, but I'm not drawn to sit on it  
Why? B/c I don't love it

As opposed to the recliner in our living room, that I can't wait to sit on, b/c I *do* love it  
I have faith in both, but could care less about the stool, b/c there's no love there

Love makes faith attractive; Especially if the object of your faith loves you back – like  
Jesus does us; So love is greater b/c faith without love is bland

- And *hope* without love, is weak  
If I'm in the middle of a battle, an armed conflict, I might very well hope to see another  
day, just to live; And that might carry me through  
But if I hope to see another day full of *love*, another day filled with the love of my wife  
and family and church – that's a different story  
In that case, my hope's nearly unshakable  
B/c just like faith, the hope of *love*, the hope of a life *filled* with love – is far more  
attractive, and far stronger, than hope without it

- But love, love stands alone – neither diminished in the absence of faith, nor lacking in  
the absence of hope (**Summary**)  
It stands alone, and never ends  
All of which makes love the greatest virtue, the greatest moral good, in all the world  
Keep *that* in perspective

Pray – God, root us and ground us in love

And help us to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height  
and depth of it – so that we can show it to others

We're thankful for your gifts Lord, but we long for the perfect

That time when we can rest in your knowledge and your love, face to face – rich and  
pure, measureless and strong, and enduring forevermore