

## I CORINTHIANS 13

The last verse in chapter 12 must be considered with chapter 13. In it Paul tells the Corinthians to covet or earnestly desire the best gifts. Some of the Spiritual gifts were greater than others and the best, not the least, should be desired. But, Paul then says that he is going to show a better way than all of the Spiritual gifts, even the best. That is an introductory remark for chapter 13.

It must be remembered that the subject under consideration in chapters 12, 13 and 14 is Spiritual gifts. While this chapter is about love, is it about love and its relationship to Spiritual gifts.

The word "charity" is used eight times in this chapter and is a translation of the Greek word *AGAPE*. This word is a noun and in the New Testament is translated "charity" 27 times and "love" 86 times. The verb form is *AGAPAO* and is translated "love" 135 times. This word symbolizes the highest form of love and is used in John 3:16 to express God's love to the world.

Paul begins this chapter speaking of the Spiritual gifts. He says, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels..." "Tongues" means "languages," so men have languages and angels have a language. If Paul had the Spiritual gift of tongues so that he was able to speak all of the languages of men and angels but did not have love to go with it, then his gift would be worthless.

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In verse two Paul enumerates four more of the Spiritual gifts, the gifts of prophecy, wisdom, knowledge and faith. No one in the New Testament ever had the gift of wisdom in such a way as to understand all mysteries. Nor was there anyone who had the gift of knowledge so as to have complete knowledge. And, not one person ever had the gift of faith in such measure as to move mountains. But if there had been such a person, without love he would have been nothing in God's eyes.

Love is greater than any of the Spiritual gifts. Many people seek Spiritual gifts, like speaking in tongues, when they should be seeking the greatest of all, love.

Love is described down to verse 7. Verse 8 again picks up the discussion of Spiritual gifts. Love never fails, it will survive everything, it will never come to an end or become ineffectual. But, where there be prophecies, or the gift of prophecy, it shall fail. The word used to describe prophecies failing is the Greek *KATARGEO* and is translated in the New Testament as: abolish; become of no effect; bring to nought; cease; come to nought; cumber; deliver; destroy; do away; fail; loose; make of none effect; make void; make without effect; put away; put down; to be done away; vanish away. It is obvious that the time was coming that the gift of prophecy would come to an end.

A similar thing is said of the gift of tongues. It is said that they shall cease or stop. And, the same is

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told of the gift of knowledge. It shall vanish away. "Vanish away" used concerning the gift of knowledge is the same Greek word as the word "fail" used about the gift of prophecy.

It is clear from this passage that the Spiritual gifts were not considered permanent but that the time was coming when they would no longer be in effect. The problem is, when was, or when will be the time when they will cease?

Verse 9 says that "we know in part, and we prophesy in part." The word "part" is the Greek word *MEROS* and means: a part; portion; division; piece; fragment. The gift of knowledge gave a man only a part of the whole. Likewise, the gift of prophecy did not give any one man everything, but only a portion.

"But," Paul says, "when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." The word "perfect" used in this verse is the Greek word *TELEIOS* and means: brought to completion; fully developed; complete; entire. As opposed to the parts, that which was whole or complete was coming. When the thing that was complete arrived, the parts were no longer needed. No longer would there be fragments but the whole.

Today, those who would claim the Spiritual gifts, and especially speaking in tongues, take the "that which is perfect" to mean Christ, that is, His second coming. That way all of the Spiritual gifts would remain in force until Christ comes back. That would mean that we still have the fragments,

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the parts, but not the whole or complete. One problem with that view is, the Scripture says "that which is perfect." This is neuter gender. If Paul had been referring to Christ he would have said "when he that is perfect," which would have been masculine gender.

Paul now uses a personal illustration to drive home his point. He said that when he was a child he spoke like a child, he understood like a child and thought like a child. Children do not speak, understand or think like an adult. When Paul became a man, he put away his childish things. He no longer spoke, understood or thought like a child. His meaning is obvious. While the church was in its childhood, that is, while it still had the parts and not the whole, it behaved differently than it did when it became an adult, that is, when it had that which was whole. Paul is referring to the Spiritual gifts as "childish things" that would be put away when "that which is perfect is come."

In verse 12 Paul uses an illustration of a mirror. (The word "glass" here means a mirror.) Mirrors in Paul's day were not made of glass, like ours, but of polished metal. These mirrors did not have the clarity of glass mirrors. They were often "dark" and details were difficult to see. It would be a lot different to see a friend's face in one of these mirrors than to see him face to face. While the Spiritual gifts were still operational, it was like looking at someone's face in a dark metal mirror. When "that which is perfect" came the image was

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no longer dark, but was as clear as looking face to face with someone.

As Paul was writing, he said he only knew in part, he did not have the whole picture, his understanding was not complete. The "part" in this verse refers back to verse 9 where he said that the gifts of knowledge and prophecy were only fragments of the whole. "But then," when that which was perfect came, Paul knew as he was known.

It is evident that all nine Spiritual gifts found in I Corinthians 12:8-10 are not in force today. A lot of people claim to have received the gifts of tongues but where are the others? Where are those with the gift of wisdom who are able to give us the answers to our perplexing problems? Where are those with the gift of knowledge who could explain some of the mysteries of Ezekiel? Where are those with the gift of faith who could move mountains? Where are those with the gift of healing who could lay hands on the sick and have them made whole? Where are those with the gift of miracles who could be bitten by a poisonous snake without harm. Where are those with the gift of prophecy who could receive a revelation from God and add another book to the Bible? Where are those with the gift of discerning of spirits who could distinguish between true and false teachers? Where are those with the gift of interpretation of tongues who could interpret languages he has never studied? There must either be all of the gifts or none of the gifts and since there is no widespread

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evidence of all of the gifts then it must be concluded that there are none today.

What then was the "that which is perfect" Paul spoke of? That thing that would be the whole and would do away with the fragments? That which would make things clear to us, like looking face to face? There is only one thing that would meet these qualifications, the Word of God. In Paul's day the New Testament was in the process of being written, so knowledge was limited, like looking into a dark mirror. There was need of prophets in the churches to give God's Word to the people because the people did not have the written Word. There was the need of the gift of discerning of spirits because the people did not have the New Testament to check out every teacher who came through. There was a need of the gifts of wisdom and knowledge because there was no New Testament to give them. There was a need of the gifts of healing, miracles and tongues to prove to an unbelieving world that the words of the prophets were really the words of God. Now that we have the written New Testament, the whole, we have no need of the parts. We look to the Bible for our wisdom and knowledge. We prove what we believe and teach by the Word of God. Nothing else is needed.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (II Timothy 3:16-17) The Word of God

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completely equips us with everything we need to be all that we can be for God.

Paul leaves the discussion of love in relation to Spiritual gifts by saying that the Spiritual gifts were going to pass away but faith, hope and love were going to remain. And, he marks the greatest of the three as love. Love should be desired and sought above any Spiritual gift.