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A1301 – January 6, 2013 – 1 Corinthians 13:8-13
Cessation Of Some Spiritual Gifts

If you'd turn in your Bible to 1 Cor 13. 1 Cor 13 is Paul's famous words on love as the more excellent way, more excellent than spiritual gifts which many of the Corinthians boasted in. However, for several reasons love is more excellent. First of all, in 1 Cor 13:1-3 love is more excellent because it is the proper context in which the gifts must function in order to benefit others; otherwise you are nothing more than a big noisy gong to everyone. Second, in 1 Cor 13:8, love never fails but obviously spiritual gifts do fail, in the sense they will come to an end. The Greek word for **fails** is *pipto* which in this context is the figurative usage which means "comes to an end." Love never comes to an end is how it should be translated. So the word *pipto* here is being used in a duration sense, of a length of time. Love never comes to an end, it just goes on and on and on forever. Put another way, love is eternal. And this makes love more excellent to spiritual gifts because they are not eternal, they do come to an end. Then in 1 Cor 13:13 Paul closes these verses with a similar idea, "But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love." So love abides, it remains, it doesn't go away. The verb abides again emphasizes the duration of the virtues of faith, hope and love. But even then love is the greatest of all. So the point of the chapter is to show that love is the more excellent way by comparing it with certain spiritual gifts and certain virtues and in the end love outlasts them all and this is what makes love the greatest of all, it will never end, but certain spiritual gifts and virtues will end, therefore as wonderful as they may be, they are not as great as love.

I take it verse 8 is making this duration contrast, **Love will never end, 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.** So just from that verse alone you know that love will outlast the gifts of

prophecy, tongues and knowledge. Surely everyone can agree the verse says this. The problem is when will the three gifts mentioned here be outlasted by love? When will the three gifts become abolished, done away with, cease...but love will continue? The short answer is verse 10, **when the perfect comes**. But the identification of **when the perfect comes** is what everyone argues about. What does **when the perfect comes** refer to? That's the issue. And there are seven different interpretations of **when the perfect comes**: two are in the past, 1) The completion of the NT canon, which would be in AD96 with the Book of Revelation; 2) the maturity of the church at the close of the apostolic age, which would be about the same time, the end of the 1st century. (One is in the present) - 3) the death of the believer and his immediate presence with the Lord, so when you die and go to heaven, a very vague idea of the perfect. (Four are in the future) - 4) the rapture of the church, which is still future; 5) the return of Christ, by which is meant the day of the Second Coming, still future; 6) the eternal state, which is after the millennium, also future and 7) when the end times events come, more of a general idea of a future, also still future.

Which one is the correct interpretation? Well, let's look at the English translation **the perfect**. If something is perfect then it is flawless, without defect. So people see this translation and they say the only perfect thing is Jesus Christ. So Jesus Christ is **the perfect**. When He comes at the Second Coming, that's when the perfect comes. But that runs into the problem of **the perfect** being neuter and not masculine. If Jesus Christ is masculine then why isn't the perfect masculine? Why is it neuter? And further, Jesus Christ isn't the only thing that is perfect. 1 John 3:2 says, "When we see Him we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is." So we too will be perfect when we see Him. So the perfect does not seem to refer to Jesus Christ. So some people say **the perfect** must refer to the eternal state, the new creation because that's when the world will be perfect. Now that's true, good and evil will be mixed until the eternal state when they are forever separated. But that would mean the spiritual gifts would still be given through the Tribulation and through the entire Millennium and that would confuse the Church with Israel. But the main problem with all of these interpretations is that they are basing their interpretation on the English translation of this Greek word, **the perfect**, and because that signifies to the English reader something flawless they look to Jesus Christ or the eternal state. The problem is that's not really the substance of what Paul means by this Greek

word. The Greek word is *to teleion* and means “the end” of something, “the completion” of something. A goal or end has been met and sometimes we say when we have reached the end that it is **perfect**, but in the sense of it being complete. Now if you look at the context of verse 8 it’s tied in with verse 9 and verse 9 refers to something partial, incomplete, **we know in part, we prophecy in part, but when the perfect comes the partial will be done away**. So it’s very apparent that Paul’s point with the Greek word *to teleion* is when something is complete, the partial will be done away. And obviously it’s the three gifts that will be done away when this something is complete but love will go on. So the question is what is the something that must be completed before these three gifts are done away? What was incomplete in Paul’s time that these gifts were contributing to and is that still incomplete such that the three gifts are still continuing? Or has it been completed now such that the three gifts are no longer continuing, but have ceased? We know it was incomplete in Paul’s time and we know these three gifts were still being given in Paul’s time. But what about now? Paul expected it to reach a state of completion and when it did then prophecy, tongues and knowledge would be done away with. So what is the something?

To answer that question you have to look at the three gifts mentioned because they were essential to completing whatever it was that was only partial at the time. So let’s go back to these three gifts? What are they all about? Fortunately we’ve already know about them from 1 Cor 12:8 and 10 where Paul mentioned them previously so let’s briefly review them and then we’ll be able to identify what they were necessary to complete.

The first gift is **prophecy**. Paul says **prophecy...will be done away**. What’s prophecy? The prophet was a believer who received direct verbal revelation from God. God revealed Himself verbally to the prophet. Then the prophet would transmit what God said to others so they would have the word of God. So the prophet was the channel through which God revealed Himself verbally to man, in language, speech.

The second gift mentioned is **tongues**. Paul says **tongues...will cease**. The tongues speaker was a believer who received the supernatural ability to speak in a language he had never learned. God the Spirit supernaturally put the foreign language in the mouth of the tongues speaker. So again this is a revelatory gift. And every mention of the use of this gift in the Book of Acts

shows that the speaker spoke a foreign language that communicated something to the hearers that could be understood. So the tongues speaker was another channel through which God revealed Himself verbally to man.

The third gift mentioned is **knowledge**. Paul says **knowledge...will be done away**. The full title for this gift is given in 1 Cor 12:8 as “the word of knowledge.” So clearly again it has to do with words and so it is a revelatory gift. The gift of knowledge was the ability to know something beyond all human capability, something you had never investigated, something you had never studied. And how did you know it? Because God revealed it to you in verbal language.

So there are your three gifts Paul mentions and what do they all have in common? They are revelatory gifts. They all relate to God revealing things through language, speech, words. Now why does God reveal things through language? So that they can be written down and transmitted to people, so people can know Him, so they can know truth. We can know Him through creation, that’s general revelation, and general revelation is clear, it undoubtedly testifies to the God of creation but general revelation is not propositional statements. Special revelation, God’s word recorded in the Bible in propositional statements is what these three gifts were involved in, writing the word of God. So what were these three gifts given in order to complete in Paul’s? Answer: the NT canon of Scripture. They already had the OT. That had been written down and preserved by OT prophets during the time the OT canon was open. But the OT canon closed with Malachi who the Jews called “the seal of the prophets” because he was the last prophet of the OT canon. After him they recognized there were no living prophets. And so between Malachi and Matthew God was not speaking verbally to men. There were no living prophets. How do I know that? Because the Jews themselves said so in 1 Maccabees 4. Now I’m going to quote from their writings. They wrote this about 164BC. The Greek ruler Antiochus Epiphanes IV had gone into the Promised Land and desecrated the temple by setting up an idol in the temple, an abomination of desolation, but there were a group of rebels called the Maccabees and when their leader, Judas Maccabee came along and recaptured the Temple they had to cleanse out the idols. And the text says, “So he chose priests of blameless conversation, such as had pleasure in the law: ⁴³Who cleansed the sanctuary, and bore out the defiled stones into an unclean place. ⁴⁴And when as they consulted what to do with the altar of

burnt offerings, which was profaned; ⁴⁵They thought it best to pull it down, lest it should be a reproach to them, because the heathen had defiled it: wherefore they pulled it down, ⁴⁶And laid up the stones in the mountain of the temple in a convenient place, *until there should come a prophet to shew what should be done with them.*” Read that last part again, 164BC, until there should come a prophet. There was no prophet. God wasn’t speaking for 400 years between your OT and NT. So when Christ comes all you have is the OT but the NT starts coming and to write it God gave spiritual gifts of **prophets, tongues and knowledge**. If we had lived then we would have seen the NT in formation, gradually piece by piece. 1 Corinthians was a piece, before it the piece called the Book of James had come, Matthew had come, Galatians had come, 1 and 2 Thessalonians had come, but Ephesians had not come yet, Philippians had not come yet, Hebrews had not come yet, Romans had not come yet, most of the NT had not come yet when Paul wrote this. So the NT was coming little by little, bit by bit, but it was only partial at the time, that’s what verse 9 is all about. We know in part, we prophecy in part; they didn’t have a complete NT canon, they had a partial NT canon. So what is Paul saying? These revelatory gifts will be given until the NT canon is complete, at which time they will be done away because they will no longer be necessary. When was the NT canon complete? When the Book of Revelation was written. What year was Revelation written? AD96. So when were these gifts done away? AD96. God is no longer speaking audibly to the human race, apart from the Scripture, just like the time between the testaments when there were no prophets. Today there are no prophets, tongues speakers or people with the gift of knowledge. Those gifts were given to write the NT canon. Since it is complete and closed then those gifts are no longer being given.

But from the standpoint of Paul in 1 Corinthians, verse 9, **For we know in part and we prophecy in part;** they didn’t have the complete NT canon. But Paul projects it would be complete, verse 10, **but when the completion comes,** that’s the completed NT canon, then what? **the partial will be done away,** that is, the revelatory gifts that gave rise to the NT canon will be done away. But what will never be done away? Love. Never forget it, love will never end. That’s what makes love so superior to the spiritual gifts, it will outlast them all. And it’s the people today who say these gifts like tongues are still continuing that say we aren’t loving because we don’t recognize their gift. And yet Paul says those gifts are done away with in

conjunction with the completion of the NT canon. And so if you think you are speaking in tongues then the only tongues you could be speaking in are pagan tongues, like the tongues of 1 Cor 12:2 which are spoken by every pagan cult in the world. But you're not speaking biblical tongues because when the canon was completed then tongues and other gifts that gave rise to the canon did come to an end.

Now Paul is going to use two metaphors to illustrate by comparison this truth in vv 11 and 12 and you have to stay strictly with the metaphors so you follow, but his point is the same. In verse 11 the example of growing from a child to a man and in verse 12 the example of the difference between looking at yourself in a dim mirror and looking at yourself face to face. The point is to illustrate that when something partial becomes complete, the partial is done away with. Put in context, when the NT canon was partial these three revelatory gifts were active but when the NT canon became complete, the three revelatory gifts that gave rise to the NT canon would be done away with. It's just that simple, their purpose would have been met and there would be no more need for them, so they would be done away.

So 1 Cor 13:11, the first example, growing from a child to a man. Paul says, **When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.** This contrast shows the difference between being partially mature and being fully mature. The Greek word translated **child** means "a simple-minded, immature person." When Paul **became a man** he abolished **childish things**, meaning he put those immature ways behind him. In the same way, when the NT canon was only partial and in formation these revelatory gifts were necessary, but when it was complete the revelatory gifts that gave rise to it were done away. In fact, the exact same Greek word is used in verse 13 of doing away with childish things as is used in verses 8 and 10 of prophecy and knowledge being done away.

Then, 1 Cor 13:12, the second example, and this one is much more profound, it has a little extra *umph* to it, it's something of an explanation of the prior example because he begins with the explanatory *gar*, **for**. **For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face;** the contrast shows the difference between looking in a **dim mirror** vs looking into a clear mirror, **face to face**. The dim mirror was a polished bronze mirror of the ancient world, famous in

Corinth, not comparable at all to the mirrors we have today and so when you looked in one you would only see a partially accurate reflection. And what would you see a reflection of? If you are holding a mirror and looking into it what would you see? Yourself. So you are looking at yourself in this illustration and since you are looking at yourself in a low quality metal mirror then you would see only a partially accurate reflection of yourself. Accurate insofar as it goes but only partial because of the low quality of the mirror. But the contrast is the time when you would **see...face to face**. And to stay consistent with the metaphor, to see **face to face** must mean to see yourself in a clear mirror, to see yourself as you are. People say, well this means to see Jesus face to face but that's mixing metaphors. Jesus is not in the context, the context is looking at yourself in a mirror, not looking at Jesus, you are looking at yourself and so to see yourself **face to face** simply means to see yourself in a completely accurate way, as you are, like you would look in a clear mirror. And since this is only a metaphor explaining what he already said in vv 8-10, then Paul is saying that when the NT canon was only partial we could only see in part who we are because of the incomplete revelation, but when the NT canon was complete then we would see ourselves fully because we would have a full and clear revelation of who we are.

Then he extends the metaphor by saying **now I know in part** [speaking of knowing himself], **but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known**. The contrast once more is between **now**, when Paul wrote this in AD56 and **then** when the NT canon would reach *to teleion*, the completion. And already hinted at but now made clear, Paul says **now I know myself only in part, but then I will know myself fully just as I also have been fully known**. Now Paul is talking about looking at yourself in the mirror of the NT and only knowing in part who you really are before it was complete, but when the NT canon was completed then we would know yourself fully even as you are fully known, that is, known by God. So the reason the NT canon had to be completed before we could know fully who we are is simply because the NT canon is where God explains to us who we are. If you only had part of the NT you could only know part of who you are. But if you have all of the NT you can know all of who you are.

The NT tells you that you are a child of God, regenerated, indwelt, baptized, sealed, spiritually gifted and seated in the heavenly places in Christ. And yet

you could not have known that you were sealed until Ephesians was written, you could not know about regeneration until the Gospel of John and Titus were written. You simply could not know all of who you are until you have all of the NT because that is where God is telling you who you are.

Now, a brief aside; if we could not know who we are until all of the NT is written then we are not Israel because Israel is known in the OT. So this is just another evidence that the Church is not Israel. Israel didn't have all these things, the Church is not Israel.

Now that the NT canon is complete you can know exactly who you are by studying the NT. In an age when people are searching for who they are, we as Christians can know exactly who we are simply by studying what God has revealed about us in the NT. But when Paul was living in AD56 he didn't know all of who he was, he only knew parts because the NT canon was only partially revealed, bit by bit and piece by piece. But now we can know exactly who we are, even as God knows who we are.

Now it bothers some people to think that they can know who they are in the same way that God knows who they are because God is omniscient and obviously we are not omniscient. So how can this be? Do we become omniscient? No, that's not the point. The point is simply that the completed NT canon tells you who you are, it reveals all there is to know about who you are as a Church age believer. It tells you that you are child of God, that you are regenerated, indwelt, baptized, sealed, gifted by the Holy Spirit, seated in the heavenly places in Christ and much more. And so if you study these NT doctrines that are revealed in the NT canon then you come to know yourself fully just as you have been fully known by God. It means you know yourself insofar as God has revealed who you are which is a replica of His knowledge of you.

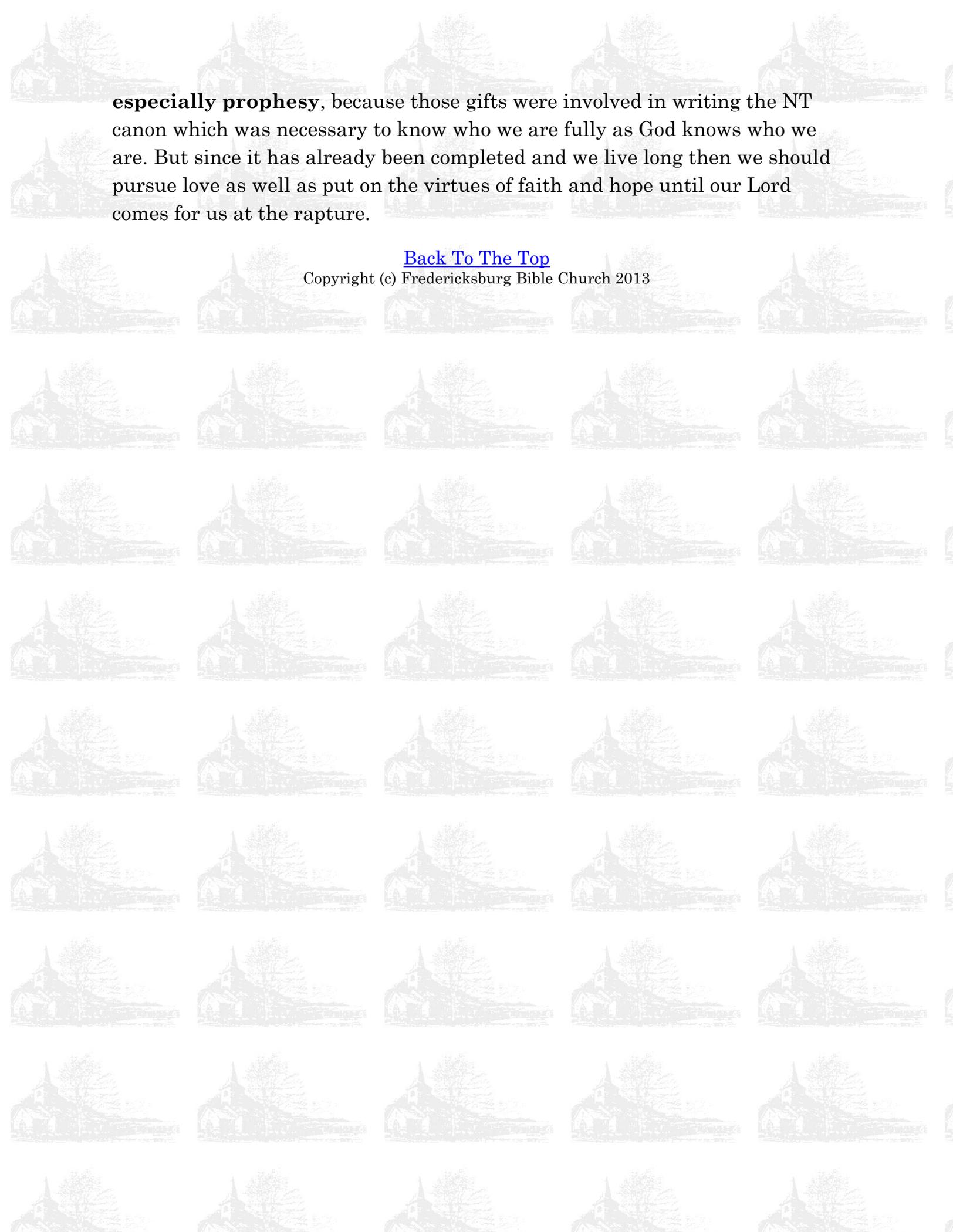
So you see it was necessary that the NT canon be completed so that we could know fully who we are just as God knows who we are. Otherwise, in all truth we don't know who we are. But we can know ourselves as we are which is as God knows us.

But now, verse 13, and this is a logical conclusion, **But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.** Now if all

three of these remain how is it that love is greater than faith and hope. Faith and hope are very wonderful Christian virtues, how is it that love is greater than them? They all abide for the present age, but why aren't they equal? Answer, because once more, faith and hope will come to an end but love will never end. When will faith and hope come to an end? When Jesus Christ returns at the rapture. At that moment faith will give way to sight and hope will give way to attainment. The Scriptures say that while we are absent from the Lord we walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor 5:7-9). So when we are with the Lord at the pre-trib Rapture then our faith will give way to sight and yet love will go on forever. As for hope, the Scriptures say, in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see," which is our resurrection body, the redemption of the body, then "with perseverance we wait eagerly for it" (Rom 8:24). And when we attain our resurrection body our hope of receiving it will give way to actually possessing it. We won't hope for it any longer, we will have it. And so hope will give way to attainment and at that time the only thing that will remain is love. And that is why **the greatest of these is love**. Love will go on forever.

Now putting all these things together in summary; what Paul has taught is that love is greater than the revelatory gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge as well as the Christian virtues of faith and hope because love will outlast them all. The revelatory spiritual gifts would be done away with when the completion of the NT canon came. Since the canon was complete in AD96 with the writing of the Book of Revelation then these three revelatory gifts are no longer being given, they were foundational for the church and once the foundation was laid there was no necessity to continue to give them. Now we can know exactly who we are by studying the NT. Two metaphors illustrated these same truths, growing from a child to a man and putting childish things behind and looking at yourself in a dim mirror versus looking at yourself in a clear one. Finally, faith and hope will abide until the pre-trib Rapture when faith will give way to sight and hope will give way to attainment. At that time only love will remain and that is why love is the greatest.

So then, 1 Cor 14:1, **pursue love, yet desire earnestly the spiritual, but especially that you may prophesy**. Pursue love because love continues forever. But if we were living at the time Paul wrote this then we should also **desire earnestly** the revelatory gifts of tongues and prophecy, but



especially prophesy, because those gifts were involved in writing the NT canon which was necessary to know who we are fully as God knows who we are. But since it has already been completed and we live long then we should pursue love as well as put on the virtues of faith and hope until our Lord comes for us at the rapture.

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