

Message #60**I Corinthians 13:8-13**

The greatest person in any church is the one doing his or her very best to demonstrate those 15 qualities of agape love. In the mind of God, it is not one's spiritual gift that determines greatness, it is not one's sacrifice that determines greatness and it is not one's knowledge that determines greatness.

I Corinthians 13 is the great love chapter of the Bible. In verses 1-3, we learned of the priority of God's agape love. In verses 4-7, we learned of the particular qualities of God's and now in **verses 8-13**, we learn the permanence of God's agape love.

BELIEVERS IN GOD'S CHURCH, WHO ARE THE GREATEST IN GOD'S JUDGMENT, ARE THOSE WHO DEVELOP IN THE QUALITIES OF GOD'S AGAPE LOVE.

It is possible for one to have a superior spiritual gift. It is possible for one to have a superior level of faith. It is possible for one to have a superior level of hope.

POINT #1 – Agape love NEVER fails. **13:8a**

The word “fail” is a word that means agape love will never fall down. To state the point antithetically, agape love will always stand. In fact, the Apostle Peter said that these qualities will automatically guarantee that the believer will not be “useless” or “unfruitful” in this life (II Peter 1:8), and will be highly honored in the next life (1:11).

POINT #2 – Certain speaking gifts will cease. **13:8b-d**

Paul lists three speaking gifts that were all temporal that would all pass off the scene. The purpose for listing these gifts is: 1) Because the Corinthians thought so highly of these gifts; 1) Because they needed to think more highly of love.

Gift #1 - The gift of prophecy. **13:8b**

The verb “they will be done away” is a key verb in this section. It is used twice in this verse, once in **verse 10** and once in **verse 11**. It means to make idle or inactive, to abolish. Gerhard Kittel says it means to make completely inoperative or to put out of use.

The verb is passive, meaning that God is the outside agent who Himself will abolish this gift of prophecy. No man will have anything to do with the cessation of this gift. Paul says the greatest thing a person can devote himself to is the development of God's agape love because at some point in the future, God will abolish this gift or prophecy but He will not abolish His agape love.

When God completed the inspired Scriptures, there was no further need of this gift and we clearly know from Rev. 22:18 that no longer does one receive direct messages from God, and great judgment will come to one who thinks he does.

Gift #2 - The gift of tongues. **13:8c**

The verb “cease” is one that means to cease or leave off. This particular verb is middle voice, meaning God has built into the gift of tongues a time element of cessation in and of itself. In other words, God designed the gift of tongues with an automatic stop device. The implication is God has built into tongues an automatic shut off so that when it is no longer needed, it will automatically stop.

We know that when Paul wrote I Corinthians, the gift of tongues was still operative. We may recall he wrote the book somewhere near the year A.D. 56. It is important to observe that books written after the year A.D. 60 have no mention of tongues at all. This would seem to suggest that by this year, tongues had shut itself down.

Gift #3 - The gift of knowledge. **13:8d**

The verb “will be done away” is passive, meaning that at some point in the future, God will abolish the gift of knowledge. This is specifically referring to the gift of knowledge in which one had a supernatural ability to know special things about and from God. It is expected that every believer will grow in grace and knowledge throughout all of the Church Age; however, the knowledge referred to in this passage is one of extra revelation and information other than is found in the Bible.

POINT #3 – Certain speaking gifts are limited. **13:9-10**

The purpose of these two verses is to show how limited these gifts were when compared to agape love.

Limitation #1 - These gifts are limited in their information. **13:9**

The words “in part” mean that when the gifts of prophecy and knowledge were operative, they were only able to give a portion, a share or a part of the whole revelation of God.

Limitation #2 - These gifts are limited in their duration. **13:10**

These two “in part” gifts would be “done away” WHEN “the perfect comes.” A critical key to this is the word “perfect.” It is a word that means to be finished or completed (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 442).

Paul’s point was that when something was finished or completed, when something reached its end, these temporal gifts would be done away.

Limitation #3 - These gifts are limited in their illumination. **13:11-12**

(Implication #1) - These gifts could not develop a person from infancy to maturity, but something would come that eventually would. **13:11**

One must ask what it is that is able to take one to spiritual maturity. What is it that is able to cause one to grow? According to the Apostle Peter, the thing that could take one from infancy to maturity is the Word of God (I Pet. 2:2). According to the writer of Hebrews, the thing that could take one from infancy to maturity is the Word of God (Heb. 5:12-14). According to the Apostle Paul, the thing that could take one from infancy to maturity is the Word of God (Eph. 4:15). Partial knowledge and partial prophesy would only produce partial development, but when the Word of God was completed, every believer could go from infancy to maturity, from being a child to being a man.

(Implication #2) - These gifts could not evaluate a person like something eventually would. **13:12**

At the time Paul wrote I Corinthians, very few books of the Bible were in existence and the partial gifts enabled people to hear the truth of God, but it was like looking into a mirror darkly. Until the Scriptures were completed, a person really could not see himself as he really was seen and known by God.

There have been at least five views as to what is meant by the “perfect”:

View #1 - The Rapture.

View #2 - When the Church reaches maturity.

View #3 - When we all get into eternity.

View #4 - When Christ comes the second time.

View #5 - When the Bible is completed.

Reason #1 - Because the noun “the perfect” is neuter, literally “that which is perfect,” not masculine “he who” is perfect. If Paul had Jesus Christ in mind, he would have used a masculine noun rather than a neuter. “The perfect” refers to the completion of something rather than to some person.

Reason #2 - It makes sense in view of the two revelatory gifts mentioned in **verse 9**. The thing that would eliminate the need for the gift of prophecy and the gift of knowledge is the completed Scriptures.

Reason #3 - It is consistent with how a person comes to maturity and develops from a child into a man by the Word of God (I Cor. 3:1-2; I Pet. 2:2; Heb. 5:12-13).

Reason #4 - It makes sense when the gift of tongues eliminates itself. The gift of prophecy and knowledge was needed until the Bible was completed; tongues were not. It could pass off the scene by itself as soon as sign gifts were no longer necessary to establishing apostolic authority and truth.

Reason #5 - It makes sense because it is the Word of God that does reveal “face-to-face” what a man truly is in the sight of God. Any person who will look into the Bible will have his soul cut open (Heb. 4:12). God’s Word will show exactly where a person is in his relationship with God.

POINT #4 – Agape love is the greatest. **13:13**

The greatest in any church is the one who loves at God’s agape love level.