



1 Cor 13:8-13

Don't Be Satisfied with Less Than Perfect

8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.

9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away 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 just as I also am known.

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

Up until now, Paul has been speaking of how much more important Love is than the gifts of the Spirit, and how without love the gifts themselves are nothing. Now having defined true Christian love, Paul moves on to discuss another way that love is so much superior to the miraculous gifts like tongues and prophecy that the Corinthians craved, namely the permanence of Love.

All of the spiritual gifts are things that were adapted to our time here on earth, they were all necessary and important for a time, but they are passing. There will be no need for tongues, or prophecy or healing in heaven. But love on the other hand is divine, it is of the essence of God. God gave the gift of tongues, but he nowhere calls himself "Tongues." We don't read in the Bible that God is Tongues, but we do read in 1 John that "God is Love." It is not all that God is, but it is part of His very nature, and therefore it will go on for all eternity. God's love will abide as will the eternal love of God for His people, and their Love for Him. Eons after the need even for scripture is gone, Love will remain.

Paul therefore is telling the Corinthians that their priorities are essentially out of whack, what they consider to be of paramount importance – the spiritual gifts – are actually transient things that will pass away, and by contrast the very thing that was most enduring and most needed in their congregation – LOVE – was considered of little importance.

Paul strives to show them patiently that it was always God's plan that the spiritual gifts they considered most important would be superseded. That as God's plan for the church developed, even things like prophecy and tongues would pass away as the need for them ended and something more perfect came in.

For instance, as exciting as Tongues and Prophecy were they were imperfect, they weren't full or complete, and they always had to be carefully tested to ensure their truth. In fact, without interpretation as we shall see, the gift of tongues had no power to edify.

Now the purpose of Prophecy and Tongues was to provide not only a miraculous authentication of the truth of the Apostolic ministry during the foundation of the truth, it was designed to build up the canon of scripture. Once that process of laying the foundation and building the canon had been completed with the giving of the last book of the bible. That which was perfect had come, once the church had the bible they had a revelation that was full and inerrant and perfectly trustworthy in all that it taught. and therefore Paul could declare in *2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

If you have the Scripture you have everything you need to know for faith, life, and practice. That which was perfect - **scripture** - had come, therefore that which was in part – **tongues and prophecy** – ceased.

Paul says, you should expect that, it is God's way of progressively growing as with a child. You start out speaking childishly and understanding childishly, that doesn't mean that your speech and understanding is *wrong* it is just *less perfect* and gradually you grow and move beyond those things. Peter Pan may sound sweet in a story, but in an actual life, never growing up is a disaster. In the church as well, the idea of *not* outgrowing the things of the infancy of the church would be a disaster and having part of the church addicted to the things of its infancy inevitably causes friction within the body of Christ.

But you and I need to remember that even the need for scripture and teaching and the ministry of the church the way it is here will someday be superseded. When Christ returns, and the world is judged, and the new age of eternal life in the new heavens and the new earth dawns we will no longer, for instance, have need of the Sacraments, because what they point to will have been realized and completed. Additionally, believe it or not, you won't need your bible in heaven, because there your knowledge of God's will, will be made perfect. All things that need to be known by God's people will be known.

Imagine it, no more flipping around looking for Micah or Amos, no more arguing over whether the KJV is superior to the NASB. And in heaven, our understanding of things will reach a level of fullness we can never have here.

Have you ever had the experience of hearing something described, perhaps in great detail, and you file away an idea of it what you think the place or the thing would be like if your were there or you had a chance to see it up close, and then later on you actually have a chance to see that thing or that place yourself and you realize that the reality of it beggars the description.

What I mean is the way that for instance, the Queen of Sheba heard reports of the awesome wisdom and wealth that God gave to Solomon, but when she had actually visited him she was compelled to declare: *"It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. However I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard."* (1 Kings 10:6-7)

I've had that experience myself. For instance, as a child I heard descriptions of the Grand Canyon, I even saw pictures of it in books, and I had an image in my mind of what it looked like. But when I was in my teens I finally got the opportunity to visit it, and I recall us driving up to the overlook, and I'd

been sleeping in the van and I got out and suddenly I see stretching away as far as my eye could see this amazing series of giant snaking canyons as though an immense hand had cut them out of the earth. I remember just thinking WOW.

Or for instance, many of you have heard of the Northern Lights, the Aurora Borealis. The colored lights in the sky caused by the action of the Solar wind hitting the Earth's magnetosphere where it is strongest over the poles. I'd heard of that too, and I'd seen pictures of it. But one evening in Scotland while I was at University, I saw the Northern lights, and I don't mean afar off in the sky. I mean all around us on the ground – this amazing red and green light everywhere. I will freely say that the books and the pictures didn't convey an iota of it, and unless Christ comes back before I pass away, don't expect to see a natural phenomenon like that again in my lifetime.

The description of some things, no matter how good, can only convey a tiny portion of the reality, the merest insight. Heaven and Hell are both like that, though the descriptions we have of them in the word of God are great, they only convey to us a mere fraction of the reality. Our experience of the reality of heaven will beggar even those sublime descriptions of it we have in scripture.

As Paul says, speaking of time here we know in part, we prophesy in part. The Christian's view and knowledge of that which is to come is still shadowy, and here on earth we are living in what CS Lewis called "The Shadowlands" – the place where we see dim reflections of the glory that is to come.

The best part of this will be that we will know our Savior perfectly in glory. We will know Him then as well as HE knows us now. We don't even really know ourselves here on earth. Our perception of Christ he likens to looking at our own image in a mirror. We have gotten used to the high quality of image we see in modern mirrors. In our day mirrors consist of a thin layer of aluminium deposited on a sheet of glass. They are back silvered, where the reflecting surface is viewed through the glass sheet. This type of mirror reflects about 80% of the incident light. The "back side" of the mirror is often painted black to completely seal the metal from corrosion.

But mirrors at Paul's time were of polished metal, usually copper, the more expensive ones were pure silver and very few could afford those. They saw only the outlines of their image, blurred and indistinct. The image was an *enigma* in the Greek. Even our own mirrors cannot show us the totality of our own image, you don't see yourself as you are, and the image is two dimensional and incomplete. Our best perceptions of our savior here on earth are like that. This should make us *long* to be with Christ. {example of a soldier deployed with only a photo of his loved ones}.

Applications:

1) have got our priorities wrong or right? The Corinthians lusted after the things of time, but at least they wanted *spiritual gifts* sadly most men don't even make things that important their priorities. As Jesus said, "Luke 12:34 "For where your **treasure is**, there your **heart** will be also."
The bible doesn't say, forget about temporal concerns, but it advises us NEVER to put them above eternal ones.

What are your priorities, that will tell you what your treasure is.

2) Necessity of Christian Growth.

3) Above all gifts is faith, hope and love as Heb.11:1 tells us

faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

And there is one sense in which faith and hope in one form will cease when we see the things hoped for, but even in heaven as Hodge puts it: ***There will always be room even in heaven for confidence in God and for hope of the ever advancing and enlarging blessing of the redeemed.*** They will continue forever.

But never forget that the greatest and most important of these gifts is LOVE. If we do not Love Christ we don't know HIM. And if we don't know Jesus, we are yet in our sins.

My prayer for all of you is that you might love Christ and know the love of Christ a love that has no end and which grows to completeness and so I close with the prayer of Paul –

Eph. 3:14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,

17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height

--

19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.