

## From Partial to Perfect

*1 Corinthians*

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**Bible Text:** 1 Corinthians 13:8-13

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1 Corinthians 13 is where we are this morning. 1 Corinthians 13. And we read beginning with verse 8 down to verse 13. The Bible says,

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.

Let's bow together for prayer.

*Father, I thank You for the privilege that is mine this morning to be able to share from Your Word. My desire, Lord, is to handle Your precious Word in a way that is fitting, in a way that pleases You, in a way that is good for Your church. And I confess, Lord, that apart from Christ I am absolutely and completely inadequate for such a task. And so, I ask that in Christ this morning, Lord, You would strengthen me and give me the ability that I need to do the job this morning, and that it would be pleasing to You. Lord, please grant that this morning that as we hear Your Word taught, preached, that Your light would break in upon our minds and hearts. That we would be able to see the things that we discuss. That we would be able to grasp these things, and that, Lord, You would change us with what we hear. Lord, may Your Spirit who is the Author of these words be at work in the declaring of them to do Your work in our hearts, a work that will stand the test of eternity. We ask You for this this morning in Jesus' name. Amen.*

One of the hardest things for us to get in the Christian life is the proper proportion of things. To be able to see the various truths that are set forth for us in Scripture and understand those truths in such a way that we hold to those various truths each one in its proper proportion. It's difficult for us. Sometimes people like to talk about this issue using the word balance. They'll say, "You know, we need to learn balance in everything."

In my early years in the faith, I grew up in a church where that was talked about a lot. In fact, there was a verse that was often quoted out of its context. It would often be quoted, "A false balance is an abomination to the Lord." Which has absolutely nothing to do with what we are talking about. That had to do with measures, right? Honesty in business. If you falsify the scales, then that's an abomination to God.

But that verse was used, and preachers would talk about, "It's an abomination to be out of balance on things, and so you have proposition A, and you have proposition B. And what we need to do is not stand over here in the extreme, or stand over here in the extreme, but we need to find the middle ground. We need to find the balance in everything." I don't like the word balance to talk about what we are talking about this morning. I like the word proportion, because we are not called to find the middle ground between every pair of ideas. Rather, what we are called to do is to think precisely. Let me illustrate. We are taught that we have responsibilities to the Lord in the here and in the now, right? I mean, I have responsibility as a husband. I have responsibility as a father. I have responsibilities in this world, in this life, in terms of work and in terms of managing resources, in terms of friendships, relationships of all kinds. I have responsibilities here, but I'm also taught in the Word of God that I am to see myself as a pilgrim. I am a citizen of heaven. There is a sense in which I am merely passing through.

So the question is, what am I to be devoted to? Am I to be devoted to my responsibilities in the here and the now, or am I to be devoted to my responsibilities as a citizen of heaven? Am I to view myself as a pilgrim? What's the answer? Both, right? It's not, "Well, now over here is citizenship in heaven, and over here are earthly responsibilities, and let's strike a balance between the two." No, that's not the idea. The idea is, "Let me be fully committed to everything that those truths about being a pilgrim represent. Let me be fully committed to my citizenship in heaven, and, at the same time, be fully committed to everything the Word of God teaches about my earthly responsibilities." It's not striking some middle ground between the two. It's understanding the two in their proper place and being fully committed to both at the same time.

Another example. The Lord Jesus tells us that without Him we can do, what? Nothing. So, I am taught to live my life fully dependent upon the Lord. I'm also taught that I'm to give myself with all discipline and with all diligence to work out my own salvation with fear and trembling. So in the Christian life there is effort, right? You don't just sit back and do nothing. No, Paul, speaking of his own ministry, said that he worked harder than anyone. So I am to be giving full effort. I'm also taught that I'm to be fully, completely dependent on Christ. Which is it? Am I to be dependent on the Lord, or am I to be working hard? What's the answer? Both! It's not finding a middle ground between depending on the Lord and working hard. It is understanding what the Bible teaches about dependence and being fully committed to that kind of dependence even as I understand what the Bible teaches about work, and labor, and discipline, and diligence, and being fully committed to all that the Bible teaches about that at the same time. In fact, you could say this, "I'm to work hard, all the while being completely dependent upon the Lord." It is dependent effort. Getting things in their proper proportion. Understanding things precisely, accurately.

You say, "Well, what does this have to do with 1 Corinthians 13:8-3?" Well, throughout this entire section, God, through the Apostle Paul, has been telling us about the priority of love. Without love everything is empty: without love preaching is empty; without love faith is empty; knowledge is empty; without love sacrifice and work is empty. We can do nothing; we are nothing; we accomplish nothing without love. And then he goes through and he describes for us what love looks like in action. And if we aren't careful, we could understand him to be teaching us that, in a sense, nothing else really matters, that all that matters is love. And do you know what, folks? There are many people who hear the Apostle Paul that way, aren't there. "If we love, then we are satisfying God's requirements for us. I mean, who really cares about doctrine? Doctrine is not important. Love is important. And you know, if we really love, then all the concern that we might have, for example, about spiritual gifts. I mean are we really to be concerned about spiritual gifts, because after all isn't love the most important thing?" So it's love versus spiritual gifts, or love versus sound doctrine. If you hear Paul to be saying that nothing else matters but love, you have not heard him correctly. That is not what he is teaching here.

He wants us, God wants us, to hear everything he said about love and to be fully committed to it, but at the same time understand spiritual gifts are important and understand what the Bible teaches about gifts, what God says to us about gifts, and be fully committed to those truths about spiritual gifts while we're fully committed to these truths about love. In fact, I'll put it to you this way: it is because spiritual gifts are important that what he has said about love is so important, because these gifts are meant to operate in the love of God. If love is not present, then the spiritual gifts are being perverted. It is because the gifts are necessary, it is because the gifts are important, that we dare not ignore the matter of love, because if we are not walking in the love of God, then these gifts will be nullified, perverted, twisted, not used as they are meant by God to be used.

So it's not, strike a balance between the two, it's understand both in their proper proportion and be fully committed to both. He's told us about the priority of love, but now notice he puts this in perspective in verses 8 through 13 as he returns to the subject of spiritual gifts. In fact, we're going to get to this tonight. Just look at chapter 14:1 where he says, "Pursue love," but, or "and earnestly," at the same time you see, "desire the spiritual gifts." "Don't understand me," he says, "don't understand to be saying gifts aren't important. No, earnestly desire love, and at the same time desire the spiritual gifts." And we'll deal with that this evening, but he returns to this theme in verses 8 through 13.

And so this morning, I want to wrap up the thirteenth chapter by pointing out three things concerning spiritual gifts in light of what he has taught us about love. The first thought this morning is this: the spiritual gifts are necessary. Now, you remember what the spiritual gifts are, right? A God given ability for ministry that's unique to each individual believer. Every believer has a spiritual gift. One. But it is multifaceted. It is many colored. If you look at the gift lists found in the New Testament, those represent categories of giftedness and the Lord has taken and blended together in each individual believer a unique ability for ministry. It's not something that you have by nature. It's not

something you were born with. We're not talking about talents. It's something imparted to the believer at the point of conversion. These are gifts assigned by, distributed by, the Holy Spirit. He comes into a life with His presence also as a gift in this for ministry.

These gifts are necessary, because of our current condition. He's not saying, "Love is important. Forget the gifts." No. gifts are necessary right now. They are necessary right now. Why? Because of our current condition. You say, "Well, what is our current condition?" Look at the verses. "Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away." We know in part. We prophesy in part. There's coming a day when the gift of knowledge will no longer be necessary. There's coming a day when the gift of prophecy, or proclamation, will no longer be necessary. When will that day arrive? It will be at the time when we are perfected. When the perfect comes, the partial will pass away, which says that these gifts belong to this time when we are not yet perfected.

We need the gifts, because we are not yet perfected. We're saved. We are new creations in Christ Jesus but we are not yet fully sanctified. We are living right now in a way that we will not be living one day. In fact, there's a sense in which we can say that right now we are living our lives away from the Lord. We need to again think precisely and carefully. We know that God is omnipresent. We also know that He has personally taken up residence in the believer. In that sense, as Jesus said in Matthew 28, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." We are with the Lord this morning. He is with us. He is in us. He is not far from us in that sense. But there is a sense in which He is away from us. There is a sense in which we are living our lives right now away from the Lord.

You say, "Well, can you give me some Bible for that?" I can. 2 Corinthians 5:5. Paul writes, "He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee." Right? The Holy Spirit, He is a down payment, as it were, a first taste of all that we're going to have one day in the future. Verse 6, "So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord." In what sense are we away from the Lord? Physically. In what sense are we away from the Lord? In the sense of sight. In the sense of what we can touch, what we can hold onto, what we can see with our eyes. In that sense, we are living our lives right now away from the Lord. We're living in an age, in a time, where our relationship with God is a faith relationship. And by the way beloved, let me just say as a quick side note: where people get into trouble, where people end up in heresy, is when they do not want to acknowledge that fact, and they want to turn our walk with God right now into something that is entirely sensual. They talk about seeing the Lord, and hearing the Lord, and feeling the Lord. And of course, there is a sense in which we experience the presence of God, but right now we must acknowledge that the walk that we have with God is not a sight walk, it's a faith walk.

2 Corinthians 5:7 goes on to say this, "For we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord."

You see there is a sense in which we are not home yet. We are away from the Lord. We are not at home because we are in this unredeemed body. We have not yet arrived at the day of the resurrection when the new us will be met with a new physical condition that will then last forever. Flesh and blood will not inherit eternal life. The body that we know now is not the body that we will be in for the rest of eternity.

Verse 9 says, "Whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please Him." We have an ambition that never changes. Our ambition right now is to please the Lord, and one day when we see Him face-to-face our ambition will be to please Him. Peter acknowledges this same reality in the book of 1 Peter 1. In verse 7 he writes this, "So that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." You see, there is coming a day when our Lord and Savior will be revealed to us in a way that He has not yet been revealed to us. There is a sense in which we have seen Him, but we have seen Him with the eyes of faith. One day we will see Him face-to-face.

Peter goes on to write in verse 8, "Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." How have our souls been saved, and how will the outcome one day be realized? It's going to be, and it has been, on the basis of faith. One day we will see the One whom we love, the One in whom we have believed, the One in whom we rejoice right now with joy inexpressible and full of glory, but one day we will see Him, but not right now. Right now we are living in an age of imperfection. We are not yet perfected.

By the way, this should also allow us to be humble and patient as we grow in our Christian experience. You know, Wesley believed that it was possible to be perfected on this side of heaven. He taught perfectionism. He said that he himself had not arrived at it, but he thought it was possible to have an experience post-conversion that would catapult a person to the point of basically not willfully sinning anymore. He didn't quite teach sinlessness, but he taught that you get to the place where you just never willfully sinned anymore. Well, the book of 1 John teaches just the opposite. That someone who knows the Lord is someone who confesses their sins. That means that you're aware that you do sin. No, this isn't the age of perfection. It's not here yet.

Or there is another way that we could describe this time that we're living in. Remember, we're talking about why we need spiritual gifts right now, because we're not yet perfected. But here's another way to say it: it's because we are living in a time where things are partial. Things are partial. He says in verse 9, "For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away." We know in part. We preach in part. There is a day coming when the perfect comes the partial is going to pass away.

He says in verse 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. For now," for now

you see in this age, "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." In what way are we living in the partial? Well, we are partial in our perceptions, in what we can perceive, and in what we can see. He says, "We see right now dimly." The word right there is enigma. It's a word that speaks of a riddle. That is, we see in a blurry fashion. "Dimly," he says. Now, we see in a mirror in a blurry kind of way.

What do we see in a blurry kind of way? Well, you can see that the emphasis is on relationship, isn't it? He's talking about our knowledge of God. He's talking about our knowledge of Christ because he says, "Right now we see in a mirror dimly, but then" we're going to see what? What does he say? "Face-to-face." Right? Face-to-face. So this has to do with our view of the Lord. This has to do with our walk with God. Right now we're walking with God in a partial kind of way, in a way that leaves us with a dim, blurry perception of things. But one day we're going to see things clearly. As if, looking not in a mirror, but now face-to-face. There's a change coming. In fact, he describes it further by saying, "Right now I know in part, then I am going to know fully, even as I have been fully known."

You see, God doesn't know me in a blurry kind of way, God knows me perfectly. He knows me fully. And one day, my relationship with Him will not be a faith relationship, it will be a sight relationship. It will not be a partial relationship, it will be a kind of knowledge that represents the kind of knowledge He has of me. It's not to say that I'm going to know everything that God knows. I'll never be omniscient. He's simply demonstrating that my knowledge of things will change from something partial and dim to something that is face-to-face.

What are we looking at? We're looking at the glory of God. Now, think about this: where do you see the glory of God? Right now, we are not perfected. We have partial knowledge. Our preaching reflects that partial knowledge. We see things as if looking into a mirror, and it's somewhat of a riddle. It's somewhat of an enigma. What are we looking at? Well, the answer of course is Scripture. If our walk with God is a faith walk, and it is, where do we get the right information about God? Where do we get the knowledge from about God that we have? Where do we see His glory reflected? The answer is, His Word. That is, God has designed, right now, that we walk with Him, not in a sensual way, but in a scriptural way. That's His design. He could have made Himself known to us in any way He wanted but right now, He is making Himself known to us through His Word.

Think about the gifts that he mentions here. Where do they operate? He's not just talking about knowledge in general, because knowledge isn't going to go away. In fact, knowledge will be increased in heaven. No, he is talking about the gift of knowledge. Where does the gift of knowledge operate? It operates in the realm of teaching, proclaiming, applying God's truth. Where does the gift of prophecy operate? The gift of proclaiming. If you take prophecy in the most general sense, the ability to stand before an audience and declare the truth of God, where does that gift operate? It operates in the realm of Scripture. To know the Word of God, to understand the Word of God, to declare

the Word of God, to apply the Word of God. Right now, in this imperfect state, in this partial state, we still need those gifts, because this is how God has designed that we walk with Him, by the knowledge of His Word.

Now, we've got to be very careful here, because people have grossly misunderstood this. Does that mean when it says that we look into a mirror dimly, and we think about the mirror of God's Word, does that mean that what we have in Scripture is not really trustworthy? Well, put it in another way: does that mean that we can't really understand Scripture? Are we going to believe something because we've carefully studied the Word of God, and then one day in heaven, when it is no longer a faith relationship, now it's a sight relationship, are we going to discover that the things we learned down here, right now, that they were all wrong? You know, there are people who sort of present it that way, don't they? "Well, we study the Bible, and we go to church, but one day we are all going to be just completely shocked by what we discover there in comparison to what we've talked about here." Let me just say to you, beloved, that is a false point of view. Every word of God is pure. Every word of God is tested. Every word of God is trustworthy.

What we find in Scripture tells us the absolute truth about God. Everything that he has revealed in the pages of His Word, every one of those things is absolutely accurate. You're not going to arrive in heaven one day and find out that what His Word said wasn't exactly the way it is. No, it's more like this: have you ever had something described to you in absolutely accurate terms, but you still didn't have an appreciation for it until you were there and did it? For example, and I didn't gather my facts this week. I thought about doing it, but then I forgot about doing it but I thought about gathering all the facts about the Grand Canyon. Alright, I don't know them. Maybe there's someone here who could fill us in. How deep it is at the deepest point. How wide it is at the widest point. We could describe how it looks visually and all the rest. Now, how many of you have been to the Grand Canyon, would you raise your hand? Okay, now let's do it the other way, because there's too many that way. How many have not been to the Grand Canyon? Oh, okay, we're split down the middle. Here's my point, as my point falls to the ground: how many of you had read about, heard about, the Grand Canyon before you went there, let's do it that way? Now, how many of you would say that though you heard it accurately described, you read about it, you knew what it was like, you didn't fully appreciate it until you saw it? Now listen, that's what he's talking about.

What we have in the Word of God is absolutely accurate, but, beloved, there is a difference between seeing something by faith and seeing something with sight and what we are going to find one day will blow us away. Not because what we knew here wasn't true, but because we had no way to fully appreciate the height, and the depth, and the breadth of what was being described to us. We have nothing to compare it to. Folks, this isn't heaven and we have nothing with which we can compare accurately and rightly what the Bible describes for us in terms of our future. Right now, we see the best we can, and these gifts, the gift of knowledge, and the gift of proclamation, these things are necessary because right now this is how God has chosen that we will relate to Him on the basis of

faith and we find these truths in His Word, and these gifts are necessary to operate in this partial and imperfect age in which we are living.

You say, "Well?" Now, we come to our second point this morning. You say, "How long then will these gifts go on?" They will only go on as long as they are necessary, until the end of the age that they were designed for. When will they no longer be needed? When the perfect arrives. When the perfect arrives, knowledge will be done away. When the perfect arrives, prophecy will be done away. Now, people have asked, "What is the perfect?" I think it's clear what the perfect is. He tells us what the perfect is. We see it in verse 12, "For right now we see in a mirror dimly, but then," you see when the perfect comes, how are we going to see? "Face-to-face." What's he talking about? He's talking about when faith becomes sight. He's talking about the eternal state. He's talking about when all that we've read about, and all that we've studied about, and all that we've preached about, we now fully realize in our experience. That's the perfect. And when the time comes that we see Him face-to-face, we won't need these gifts anymore. The purpose will have been fulfilled, and the need will no longer be present.

In fact, there's another way we can describe the age we're living in: it's imperfect; it's partial. We can also say it's our spiritual childhood, because that's the illustration that he uses in verse 11. He says, "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." I'm sorry. I just had a humorous thought here. You know, there are a lot of men who can't say that, right? "When I became a man, I gave up childish ways." My wife would say, "Amen." There are a lot of men who can't say that. Now, right now is like our spiritual childhood. It's training time, and though we may not understand all the reasons for it, I don't know about you, but sometimes I wonder, "Why a training time, Lord? Just take us on to be with You." But His wisdom is perfect. He knows what He's doing. And right now it's like our childhood but one day, it's going to be adulthood, and we will have fully matured. We will have grown up. No longer partial, but perfect will have arrived.

Now, his whole point through this whole section is, love belongs to both states. Love belongs to this age. In fact, that's how the gifts are meant to operate. And love will go on throughout the eternal state, but gifts, spiritual gifts, do not belong to both states. Spiritual gifts are for now. When the need for them has come to an end, they will pass away. They belong to our spiritual childhood and then we will be fully matured, fully perfected, and they will have been done away with.

Now, we come to a very interesting question that relates to the gifts. That is, why does he deal with tongues differently here? Notice verse 8, "As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away." Prophecies will pass away. Knowledge will pass away. He uses the same Greek word translated "pass away." He uses a different Greek word when he talks about tongues and he says they will cease. A different word. Not only is it a different word, it's in a different voice. When he says that prophecies will pass away, it's in the passive voice. When he says that knowledge will pass away, it's in the passive voice. When he says that tongues will cease, it's in the middle voice. Passive voice means this: something is going to come along that

will do away with prophecy. Something is going to come along that is going to do away with knowledge.

Middle voice is reflexive. Tongues will cease on their own. Now there are some who would say that we make too much of that. That this is just a stylistic difference. And by the way, beloved, there are stylistic differences in the New Testament where he uses a different word, he uses a different voice, and it's variety. We do that in our own conversation, don't we? We'll say the same thing but a different way. And they will say, "Well, you're making too much of this. His focus here isn't on tongues anyway." And I would agree his focus is not on tongues, but there is a focus on tongues, because he's going to deal with it intensively in chapter 14.

I think there is something to this, because notice the next statement he makes. Verse 8, "As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away." Verse 9, "For we know in part and we prophesy in part." What's missing? We know in part. That's the gift of what? Knowledge. We prophesy in part. What gift is that? Prophecy. What's missing? Tongues. You had three in verse 8. You have two in verse 9. And he says in verse 10, "But when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away." When the perfect comes, prophecy will pass away. When the perfect comes, knowledge will pass away. He doesn't mention tongues again, because, if we're right in our understanding of the middle voice there in verse 8, tongues will have already stopped on their own before the perfect comes. Before the eternal state, tongues will have already ceased.

Why would tongues cease before knowledge and before prophecy? Well, just stop and think about it: when will all of the gifts cease? When will any of the gifts cease? When their purpose is finished, right? When will the gift of prophecy cease? When its purpose is done. When will the gift of knowledge cease? When its purpose is done. Listen, if you have some gifts that stop at the eternal state because they are not needed anymore, well, what if you have a gift that is not needed anymore. We just haven't arrived at eternity yet. Is it possible that because it isn't needed anymore it will cease before the eternal state? If gifts stop when they're not needed anymore, then what if they're not needed anymore at about A.D. 70? Is it possible that they would stop when they're not needed? Folks, let me tell you something. The Word of God already demonstrates that there are some gifts that stop before the eternal state, because they are not needed anymore.

You say, "What gift is that?" Well, don't forget that, not only has God given individual gifts to men, but He has given gifted men to His church, has he not, Ephesians 4? Who are those gifted men given to the church? Look over to the book of Ephesians. Ephesians 4:11. Back up to verse 9, "(In saying, 'He ascended [Christ],' what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he [Jesus] gave the apostles." Now, he's not talking about individual giftedness now. He's talking about gifted men. The men themselves are the gifts. "He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastor teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the

knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood." You see the goal is always maturity in Christ. Christ-likeness. Jesus gave apostles. Well, let me ask you.

Do we still have apostles today? There are some that would say yes? Is it right to believe that? Are there men today on this earth who can rightfully be numbered with the twelve? What do you think the answer is? No. Well, why did God stop giving apostles? Because their purpose was complete. The apostles and the New Testament prophets, which don't exist anymore either by the way, the apostles and the New Testament prophets the Bible tells us were for the foundation of the church. Through those men, God gave the New Testament revelation, which has now been preserved for us, captured for us, in the Bible, in the New Testament.

When God was done laying the foundation of the church, the apostles and the prophets, and, if you view evangelists the way I view evangelists, I would include them in this number as well, those three gifted men ceased to be given to the church, and now you have pastor teachers. Because the evangelists were not guys with five suits and twelve sermons who traveled around to the churches, the evangelists were men like Timothy and Titus who went with the apostles and were given special authority to go back to these places where churches had been established and establish elders and all the rest. They were involved in the first churches being founded as the New Testament revelation was coming into being. But whether you agree on the evangelists or not, we can agree that there are no apostles in the same sense today. Why? Because their purpose is done. So that when the purpose of the gift is finished, it ceases.

Look back at 1 Corinthians 13. We will not get into it this morning or this evening, because one of the things that I'm committed to is we want the emphasis of the passage to be our emphasis. We are going to get into tongues, Lord willing, in two weeks. But then I'm going to strive to demonstrate that the purpose of the gift of tongues, which was a gift of languages, an ability to speak in known dialects that you had not previously known, so a supernatural ability to speak in a language that you did not know, but the purpose of that gift was a sign and it was a sign of judgment to unbelieving Israel and a warning to the Jews that they had missed their Messiah. And at the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. that warning was no longer needed. It was clear. And when that purpose was complete, the gift ceased on its own. Middle voice. Reflexive action. Tongues will stop on their own.

Our final point this morning is this. First of all, the gifts are necessary for this imperfect partial age that we're living in. Second, the gifts will only be necessary until the end of the age that they were designed for. But third, love is greater than anything that belongs to this age by virtue of its ongoing existence. Notice how he wraps up chapter 13. He says, "So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love." How is love greater than faith? You can't have love without faith, right? So in what sense is love greater? He says, "The greatest of these three is love." In what sense is love greater than faith? He doesn't mean greater in every way. If you hear it that way you've misheard him. He's not saying greater in every way. He's saying, "Greater in this way."

Exactly what he's taught throughout chapter 13. It's greater in this way. It belongs not only to this age, but also to the age to come.

What is faith? It is taking God at His Word. Right now, we walk not by sight but by what? Faith. We believe God's Word. We know God by the means of His Word. The indwelling Spirit allows us to know God through the Word that has been given. One day, beloved, it's not going to be faith. It's going to be sight.

What is hope? Hope is continuing to believe the Word of God throughout all the difficulties, throughout all the challenges, throughout all the tests, you continue to hold onto faith. You set your focus on your future. You walk through this pilgrim life all the while believing what God has revealed to you. That's hope! It's a sure expectation of what God has promised. But one day, we're not going to need hope, because hope will be realized. Everything we've been promised, everything we've looked forward to, everything we've set our heart on, it will then become our experience. We will then know as we've been known. We will then see face-to-face.

There's faith. There's hope. And then there's love. And when faith has become sight, and when hope has been realized, we will still love the One who has redeemed our souls and love His family. And love will go on forever. And in that sense, it is greater, and that's why it must have the priority, because without love faith and hope are perversions. And so are the gifts. So it's not, love or gifts. Let's find the middle ground. No, it's love and gifts, but each in its proper place, believing everything the Bible tells us about love, and everything the Bible tells us about gifts, and being fully committed to both.

I close very, very quickly with these exhortations. Do not minimize the things that belong to this present age. When you've done that, you're out of proportion. Your job is important. Being a husband is important. Being a father is important. Responsibilities you have in the ministry are important. Do not minimize the things that belong to this present age. It was the Apostle Paul who wrote, "If a man won't work, don't let him eat." You can't have an over realized eschatology where you want to live right now as if Jesus is coming tomorrow. He may, but He may not. Don't ignore present responsibilities.

But second, don't divorce the present or exalt the present above that which will endure throughout the eternal age. Don't live your life now in a near sighted fashion forgetting that eternity is coming. Don't divorce the now from forever. So take your present responsibilities seriously, but live them out in view of your future. And always keep the future in a place of priority, because that is forever.

Finally, through it all we must pursue and make love our priority. What do I focus on as a husband? Love. What do I focus on as a father? Love. What do I focus on as a pastor? Love. As I go to work every day, if you go to work every day and work for someone who's an unbeliever, what should you focus on? Living your life out, loving the Lord, loving them, being an example of the love of Christ.

Let's bow together for prayer.

*Our Father in heaven, we thank You that though we live now in the imperfect and in the partial, everything you've given us in Your Word is absolutely trustworthy. Lord, we know that if we rightly divide it and arrive at the meaning that You intended when You gave it, that what we have discovered here will be just as You described it when we're at home with You. But Lord, it will amaze us, because what we've seen by faith, we will then know by sight. And what we've known in part, we will then know fully. Lord, help us to keep things in their proper place. Help us, Lord, to be a people who do not ignore the present, but who live in light of the future. Help us to be a people, Lord, who fully depend on You but work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Help us, Father in heaven, to be fully obedient in every aspect of our lives. We will thank You for this. Lord, I also pray for anyone here this morning who is not a person of genuine faith, who doesn't know Your Son in a saving way. I pray that even today, Lord, they would have a hunger and a thirst to know you, the living and true God, through faith in Your Son Jesus. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*