

Love – Part 6: Love Is the Final Word

1 Corinthians 13:8-13

Here we cover the final six verses of our passage.

Passage:

1 Cor. 13:8-13 – ⁸Love never fails; 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. ⁹For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; ¹⁰but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. ¹¹When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. ¹²For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known. ¹³But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

<13:8> Ἡ ἀγάπη οὐδέποτε πίπτει· εἴτε δὲ προφητεῖαι, καταργηθήσονται· εἴτε γλώσσαι, παύσονται εἴτε γνώσις, καταργηθήσεται. <13:9> ἐκ μέρους γὰρ γινώσκομεν καὶ ἐκ μέρους προφητεύομεν· <13:10> ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ τὸ τέλειον, τὸ ἐκ μέρους καταργηθήσεται. <13:11> ὅτε ἤμην νήπιος, ἐλάλουν ὡς νήπιος, ἐφρόνουν ὡς νήπιος, ἐλογιζόμην ὡς νήπιος· ὅτε γέγονα ἀνὴρ, κατήργηκα τὰ τοῦ νηπίου. <13:12> βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι' ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι, τότε δὲ πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον· ἄρτι γινώσκω ἐκ μέρους, τότε δὲ ἐπιγνώσομαι καθὼς καὶ ἐπεγνώσθην. <13:13> νυνὶ δὲ μένει πίστις, ἐλπίς, ἀγάπη, τὰ τρία ταῦτα· μείζων δὲ τούτων ἡ ἀγάπη.

NIV – ⁸Love never fails. **But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.** ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. ¹¹When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. ¹²Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. ¹³And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Weymouth – ⁹For our knowledge is imperfect, and so is our prophesying; ¹⁰but when the perfect state of things is come, all that is imperfect will be brought to an end.

Break It Down:

Remember that every instance of the word “love” is the Greek word “agape.”

And second, note that while in English love is defined in terms of adjectives, in the Greek, each of the words are verbs. The focus of the passage is about behavior.

<http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/sg1868.htm>

Love never fails –

What does this mean? Fails at what?

1601 πιπτο pipto {pip'-to}; v

AV - fall 7, fall off 2, be cast 1, take none effect 1, fall away 1, fail 1, vr fallen 1; 14

1) to fall out of, to fall down from, to fall off

2) metaph.

2a) to fall from a thing, to lose it

2b) to perish, to fall

2b1) to fall from a place from which one cannot keep

2b2) fall from a position

2b3) to fall powerless, to fall to the ground, be without effect

2b3a) of the divine promise of salvation

As much as we sometimes wish it were true, this verse does not say that love will always succeed or win. In the context of what comes next, the meaning of this is clear. Of all of these things that will go away, love will never go away.

Love will never be abolished.

“I believe that someday, love will be the only thing left. When we get to heaven, we won't need teaching anymore because we'll know everything. We won't need preaching anymore because we'll have already responded in obedience to everything. We won't need to have wisdom granted to us or knowledge imparted to us. We won't need anybody to hold us up, or help us, or rebuke us, or exhort us, or encourage us, or pray for us, or do anything for us. Why? Because we'll be just like Jesus Christ. The one thing that will remain, however, will be love--in a dimension we've never dreamed of. We'll be totally involved in the character of God's love as it's manifested through each of us to one another forever.” - MacArthur

It's clear from the next phrases that there will be a time in the future (from Paul's perspective) when spiritual gifts will no longer exist. Some believe that the different verbs / voices attached to the different gifts in verse 8 justifies a (theological) position that tongues were on a different time line and ceased to function at the end of the apostolic age and therefore are no longer a possible spiritual gift. In fact, there are also some others who use this verse to prove that all of the spiritual gifts have ceased.

Prophecies will be done away –

2673 καταργεο katargeo {kat-arg-eh'-o}; v

AV - destroy 5, do away 3, abolish 3, cumber 1, loose 1, cease 1, fall 1, deliver 1, misc 11; 27

- 1) to render idle, unemployed, inactivate, inoperative
 - 1a) to cause a person or thing to have no further efficiency
 - 1b) to deprive of force, influence, power
- 2) to cause to cease, put an end to, do away with, annul, abolish
 - 2a) to cease, to pass away, be done away
 - 2b) to be severed from, separated from, discharged from, loosed from any one
 - 2c) to terminate all intercourse with one

Tongues will cease –

3973 παυο pauo {pow'-o} a root verb ("pause");; v

AV - cease 12, leave 2, refrain 1; 15

- 1) to make to cease or desist
- 2) to restrain a thing or person from something
- 3) to cease, to leave off
- 4) have got release from sin
 - 4a) no longer stirred by its incitements and seductions

Not only is the word different, the voice is middle instead of passive. Literally, it says tongues will cease themselves or will cause themselves to cease.

Knowledge will be done away –

Here Paul uses the same verb and voice as was used for prophecies earlier in the verse.

While some may wish to read into the verbs used by Paul here something that supports their particular dogma, that is likely reading more into it than is appropriate.

FOUR METAPHORS –

What follows is Paul using four metaphors to express the difference between our current situation and what is to come.

In part vs. perfect –

3313 μερος meros {mer'-os}; n

AV - part 24, portion 3, coast 3, behalf 2, respect 2, misc 9; 43

- 1) a part
 - 1a) a part due or assigned to one
 - 1b) lot, destiny
- 2) one of the constituent parts of a whole
 - 2a) in part, partly, in a measure, to some degree, as respects a part, severally, individually
 - 2b) any particular, in regard to this, in this respect

Now we know and prophesy in part.

5046 τελειος teleios {tel'-i-os}; adj

AV - perfect 17, man 1, of full age 1; 19

- 1) brought to its end, finished
- 2) wanting nothing necessary to completeness
- 3) perfect
- 4) that which is perfect
 - 4a) consummate human integrity and virtue
 - 4b) of men
 - 4b1) full grown, adult, of full age, mature

This word does not mean perfect in the sense that we usually use the word (without flaw), but instead it means to be complete (or sometimes mature).

Heb 5:9* And having been made **perfect**, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,

What is Paul talking about when he talks about “the perfect” coming?

Some say the closing of the canon, the mature church, the rapture, the second coming. But it is most likely the “eternal state” or **heaven**.

At that time, the partial, i.e., the spiritual gifts, will be done away.

Coming of age –

3516 νεπιος nepios {nay'-pee-os}; adj

AV - child 7, babe 6, childish 1; 14

- 1) an infant, little child
- 2) a minor, not of age
- 3) **metaph. childish, untaught, unskilled**

In metaphors, this word just means being childish. I.e., spiritual gifts are a childish substitute for what is to come.

435 ανερ aner {an'-ayr}; n m

AV - man 156, husband 50, sir 6, fellow 1, not tr 2; 215

- 1) with reference to sex
 - 1a) of a male
 - 1b) of a husband
 - 1c) of a betrothed or future husband
- 2) **with reference to age, and to distinguish an adult man from a boy**
- 3) any male
- 4) used generically of a group of both men and women

When we are in heaven, we will experience a spiritual state that is as different from the best of our current spiritual experiences as a man is different from a little child.

The mirror –

2072 εσοπτρον esoptron {es'-op-tron}; n n

AV - glass 2; 2

1) a mirror

1a) the mirrors of the ancients were made, not of glass, but steel



Mirrors in the biblical times were made of polished metal, most often bronze. (They did not have stainless steel!) The image reflected from even the best mirror was poor. And over time, the mirror would develop a patina that caused the image to be less and less clear.

When we are in heaven, we will experience a spiritual state that is as different from the best of our current spiritual experiences as a reflection of a person off of a polished bronze flat would have been different from seeing them face to face.

Reprise of in part vs. fully known –

1097 γινωσκο ginosko {ghin-ocē'-ko}; v

AV - know 196, perceive 9, understand 8, misc 10; 223

1) to learn to know, come to know, get a knowledge of perceive, feel

1a) to become known

2) to know, understand, perceive, have knowledge of

2a) to understand

2b) to know

3) Jewish idiom for sexual intercourse between a man and a woman

4) to become acquainted with, to know

Here we have two words that mean to partly understand and one word that means to understand fully.

1921 επιγινωσκο epiginosko {ep-ig-in-ocē'-ko}; v

AV - know 30, acknowledge 5, perceive 3, take knowledge of 2, have knowledge of 1, know well 1; 42

1) to become thoroughly acquainted with, to know thoroughly

1a) to know accurately, know well

2) to know

2a) to recognize

2a1) by sight, hearing, of certain signs, to perceive who a person is

2b) to know i.e. to perceive

2c) to know i.e. to find out, ascertain

2d) to know i.e. to understand

When we are in heaven, we will experience a spiritual state that is as different from the best of our current spiritual experiences as getting the gist of something is different from understanding something fully. It is like the difference between a person who takes a beginners' class in a topic versus one who has a Ph.D. in the subject.

Summary of the metaphors:

Heaven is going to be more awesome than we can even understand.

When you were a child, you had an idea of what it was going to be like when you became an adult. How accurate was that? _____

What are the implications of the fact that what we know right now is “in part”?

We have taken Christianity 101 and some barely passed. When we are in heaven, we’ll get our Ph.D.

Conclusion: The Preeminence of Love

Paul tells us that spiritual gifts will go away. Therefore, don’t get so proud about them, and definitely don’t let them get in the way of love. And then even in the realm of the greatest of all of the spiritual qualities, faith, hope, and love, very practically, love will supersede them all.

Both literally and spiritually, love is the final word.