

## INTRODUCTION

- We come, once again, to our study of 1 Corinthians
- Please take your Bible and turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 13
- We have seen what love is, what love is not, and the love that is produced for the truth
- Now we're looking at the permanence of love as it is seen in verse 8
- Paul contrasts love with prophecy, knowledge and tongues
- He says those gifts will end but love will go on forever
- Listen to what he says in verses 8-13 say:

*(8) Love 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.*

*(9) For we know in part and we prophesy in part;*

*(10) but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.*

*(11) 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.*

*(12) For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.*

*(13) But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

- We have been studying this great chapter on love
- We have been learning that the negative features that are not love is what marks the lives of the Corinthians
- They were seeking the more prominent showy gifts without love
- Paul shows in the first 3 verses what that looks like: "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (v.1).
- Without love we are "nothing" (v.2) and even the greatest of sacrifices in giving your body in martyrdom, without love, it "profits [you] nothing."
- Now we come to the point of the entire chapter
- It's found in the first sentence of verse 8, "Love never fails."
- Everything from that point is to show how love never fails and how everything else is temporal but love is eternal
- Let's look at verse 8 and first notice...

## LESSON

### I. The Terms (v.8)

- Love (agape) noun
  - It refers to an “unconditional, sacrificial act”
- Jesus said in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."
- 1 John 3:16 says, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."
- Love is laying down one's life
- Love is also meeting a need
  - After Jesus washed the disciples feet, He said in John 13:34, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."
- That act of love demonstrated humility, selflessness, and compassion.

*J.C. Ryal writes, “Love is the grand secret of the right behavior towards our fellows. Those who love their neighbors will scorn to do them any willful injury, either in person, property or character. But they will not rest there: they will desire in every way to do them good; they will try to promote their comfort and happiness in every way; they will endeavor to lighten their sorrows, and increase their joys” (Matthew).*

- Never (oudepote) adverb

- It comes from oude (not even) and pote (at any time)
- In English we would say "at no time"
- This is a time word (MacArthur)
- It speaks of finality
- It's used in definite negative statements
- Love "at no time" will ever fail
- Fails (pipto) verb (pres.act.ind.)
  - It means "to fall" (Vines)
  - Literally, "to fall to the ground" (MacArthur)
  - It is used of things "falling" into ruin (Vines) or "decay" (MacArthur)
  - It's used of stars falling from heaven - (25) **AND THE STARS WILL BE FALLING** from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. Mark 13:25 - NASB
  - It's used of flowers that fall or fade
    - James 1:11 says, "For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.
    - Peter says in 1 Peter 1:24, "For, 'ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF'".

- It could be translated "to be abolished" (MacArthur)

*Perhaps the simplest translation would be love never fails, love never falls, love never drops to the ground in decay.*

*Love is a flower in which there is no decay.*

*Love can never cease because it is synonymous with God.*

*And in Him there is no such thing as decay.*

*“Love, at no time, will ever fail.” Never.*

*Someday, in fact – I think when we get to Heaven, love will be the only thing left.*

*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 wisdom to be granted to us.*

*We won't need any more knowledge to be 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, because we'll be just like Jesus Christ.*

*But the one thing that will remain will be love.*

*And in a dimension we've never dreamed, we'll be totally involved in the character of God's love manifest to each another forever.*

*And so, he says to the Corinthians, "You ought to get a grip on what is going to be around forever, and quit quibbling over the stuff that's temporary."*

*(John MacArthur, <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1868/the-permanence-of-love-part-1>)*

Now, in order to make his point here about love being permanent, Paul contrasts love with three gifts.

And he makes a very clear contrast to show that the gifts are temporary and love is eternal, that gifts are partial and love is complete, that gifts are elementary and love is mature (MacArthur).

## **II. The Contrast (vv.8b-13)**

- With "Prophecy" and "knowledge" (v.8b)

- Both are mentioned in verse 2
- Both are part of the list in chapter 12, verses 8-10
- Prophecy is the Greek word propheteia
  - It comes from pro (before) and phemi (to speak)
  - It means "to speak before" an audience and is the gift of preaching, of proclaiming the Word of God
  - 1 Corinthians 14:3 says, "But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men."
- Knowledge is the Greek word gnosis
  - It, like prophecy, is a speaking gift
  - The gift of knowledge is giving new truth, new revelation
  - It was used this way in the beginning but has ceased because the Christian faith has been once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). The body of Christian doctrine is complete" (Believers' Bible Commentary)
  - "In a secondary sense,...the word of knowledge may still be with us" (BBC) as "utterance supernaturally imparted of truths already revealed" (JFB).

Paul says of both prophecy and knowledge..."they will be done away"

- "done away" is the Greek word καταργέω (katargeo)

- It means "to reduce to inactivity," "to abolish" (MacArthur) or to *set aside; wipe out*" (Logos)
- Both times that Paul uses this word in this verse it means "to be or become idle, inactive, inoperative, or useless" (Logos)

*The gifts of prophecy and knowledge one day will be made inoperative.*

*Both forms of this verb in verse 8, as well as its form in verse 10, are passive; that is, something or someone will cause them to stop. That something is the coming of "the perfect" (v. 10).*

*MacArthur, John F., Jr. [1 Corinthians](#). Chicago: Moody Press, 1984. Print. MacArthur New Testament Commentary.*

- With "Tongues" (v.8c)
  - This is the Greek word glossa which means, "languages" (Acts 2)
  - "This term always refers to a known language" (John MacArthur, Tongues, p.16)
    - It can refer to the physical member, the tongue (Lk.16:24), but for the most part, when used of speaking, it refers to a known language
    - Webster's dictionary defines "tongues" as a "language" as well as the Scriptures
    - 1 Corinthians 13:1 uses it as the "tongues of men and of angels"
  - It was also an unlearned language by the speaker
    - In Acts 2:6-11 says, "(6) And when this sound occurred, [the sound like a violent rushing wind) the crowd came together, and were bewildered



because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. (7) They were amazed and astonished, saying, “Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? (8) And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? (9) Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, (10) Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, (11) Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.”

- That was the true gift
- Tongues as it is used in chapter 14 referred to both a known language and gibberish but gibberish is not a language

Paul says of tongues...

- "They will cease"
- "Cease" is the Greek word *pauō*
- It means “to stop, to come to an end.”
- Unlike *katargeō*, this verb here is technically in the middle voice, suggesting that tongues “will stop” or will “come to an end” on their own (Ciampa, Roy E., and Brian S. Rosner. [\*The First Letter to the Corinthians\*](#). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010. Print. The Pillar New Testament Commentary.)
- The cause comes from within; it is built in
- God gave the gift of tongues a built-in stopping place

- The LXX uses the middle form of pauo 15 times to translate the Hebrew word that means “to complete,” “to stop,” “to finish,” “to accomplish,” “to end.” It has a finality to it. And the reflexive middle voice gives it the idea that it ends all by itself.
- “Like a battery, it had a limited energy supply and a limited lifespan. When its limits were reached, its activity automatically ended. Prophecy and knowledge will be stopped by something outside themselves, but the gift of tongues will stop by itself. This distinction in terms is unarguable. (MacArthur, John F., Jr. [1 Corinthians](#). Chicago: Moody Press, 1984. Print. MacArthur New Testament Commentary.)
- The question of the three gifts is when will they stop?
  - Prophecy and knowledge cease when the perfect comes
  - Tongues cease on their own
  - Do we have anything in history to indicate tongues ever ceased? Yes!
  - History records that the gift of tongues ceased in the apostolic age
    - The first revival of tongues within the confines of the evangelical church of Jesus Christ since the apostolic age was 1901. Where had it been for 1800 years? Does 1 Corinthians 13:8 say that tongues will cease and start back up again. No. Tongues ceased – never to begin again. Their purpose was accomplished.
  - The post-apostolic Fathers were the church leaders who lived immediately after the apostolic age. If you study their writings, you’ll discover something significant – they don’t discuss the gift of tongues.
  - Cleon Rogers wrote, “It is significant that the gift of tongues is nowhere alluded to, hinted at, or even found in any writings of the Post-Apostolic Fathers” (The Gift of Tongues in the Post-Apostolic Fathers).

- Clement of Rome (A.D. 88-97) wrote a letter to the Corinthians in A.D. 95 discussing their spiritual problems. He didn't mention tongues, because apparently the gift had ceased. The gift of tongues, then, wasn't an issue by A.D. 95.
- Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165) was a great church Father who traveled throughout the churches and wrote many things defending Christianity, but he never mentioned tongues. He made lists of spiritual gifts that did not include the gift of tongues.
- Origen (A.D. 185-253) was a widely read scholar without equal in the minds of some. In all the volumes he wrote, there is no mention of tongues. And in his apologetic against Celsus, he explicitly argued that the signs of the apostolic age were temporary and that no contemporary Christian exercised any of the ancient prophetic gifts.
- Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407) was perhaps the greatest of all the ancient Christian writers.
- In his Homilies on First Corinthians, he makes the following comment on chapter 12: "This whole place is very obscure; but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur, but now no longer take place" (Homilies on First Corinthians," The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol.12).
- In other words, by the end of the 4th century Chrysostom indicated that because tongues didn't exist anymore, the gift was difficult to define or understand.
- Augustine (A.D. 354-430) made the following comment on Acts 2:4 "In the earliest times, 'the Holy Ghost fell upon them that believed: and they spoke with tongues,' ...These were signs adapted to the time. For there behooved to be that betokening of the Holy Spirit...That thing was done for a betokening, and it passed away" ("Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John," The Nicene and Post-Nicene Father, Vol.7).

- “The greatest theologians of the ancient church considered the gift of tongues a remote practice. By the fourth century they didn’t understand what it was anymore.”

The last contrast is...

- With "the perfect" thing (vv.9-12)
  - Gifts are partial
    - We know in part and we prophecy in part (v.9)
    - When we were children we spoke and acted like children (v.11)
    - We now "see in a mirror dimly"...Now I know in part"
  - "When the perfect comes, the partial will be done away" (v.10)
    - Partial is speaking and acting like a child (v.11)
    - Perfect is becoming a man (v.11)
    - Partial is seeing in a mirror dimly (v.12)
    - Perfect is seeing "face to face" (v.12)
    - Perfect is knowing "fully just as I also have been fully known" (v.12)
    - Partial is "faith and hope"

- Perfect is "love"
- "The greatest of these is love"
- Paul says prophecy and knowledge will be done away when the perfect comes
- What is the perfect that is coming?
- There are 5 views:
  - The completion of Scripture
    - This idea would have been meaningless to the Corinthians
    - Nowhere in this letter does he mention or allude to such a scriptural completion
    - The Corinthian believers would have taken Paul's meaning in the plainest and simplest way: as a reference to spiritual and moral perfection, the perfection to which the Lord calls all of His people: "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48)
    - Paul was speaking of completed holiness, of our one day actually becoming what God now counts, or reckons, us to be
    - If the perfect refers to the completion of Scripture, then prophecy and knowledge have already been stopped, and all believers since that time would have been without benefit of two of the most important gifts for proclaiming, interpreting, and understanding Scripture
    - The gift of prophecy was only partly used for revelation
    - In most cases it was used for proclaiming and interpreting what already had been revealed

- The church would be in dire straits if the gifts of knowledge and prophecy had ceased with the completion of the New Testament
- We know, furthermore, that prophecy will be active in the Kingdom age. At that time the Lord says, “I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions” (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17)
- Prior to the kingdom, during the Tribulation, God will raise up two great prophetic witnesses who “will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth” (Rev. 11:3)
- Still another reason the perfect cannot refer to the completion of Scripture is found in Paul’s statement that we will see “face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12)
- Scripture gives a wonderful and reliable picture of God, but it does not allow us to see Him “face to face.”
- Peter speaks of the many believers even of his own day who “have not seen Him” (1 Pet. 1:8)
- The Bible does not give a “face to face” vision of God
- No Christian, before or after the completion of the New Testament, has known the Lord as he has “been fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12)
- We love the One whom we have not seen
- Nor is it possible that prophecy stopped after completion of the New Testament and will resume during the Tribulation and the Kingdom
- In the first place the verb *katargeō* means to be abolished completely and finally, not temporarily

- In the second place, an interruption of prophecy would not fit Paul's point here, which is to show the permanency of love over the temporariness of gifts. (MacArthur, John F., Jr. *1 Corinthians*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1984. Print. MacArthur New Testament Commentary)

- The rapture

- Many interpreters hold the coming of the perfect to be the rapture of the church
- But if knowledge and prophecy have been permanently done away, they could no more be resumed after the rapture and during the Tribulation or the Kingdom
- Paul makes it clear that once those gifts end, they will end permanently
- But they appear to be operative in both the Tribulation and the millennial Kingdom. (MacArthur, John F., Jr. [\*1 Corinthians\*](#). Chicago: Moody Press, 1984. Print. MacArthur New Testament Commentary)

- The maturing of the church

- A relatively new interpretation is that the perfect refers to the maturing, or completion, of the church
- It is true that *perfect* often has the meaning of maturity or completion
- But such a completion would amount to the rapture, which this view eliminates
- When the Lord's work with His church is completed, He will rapture it; and we are still left with the question of prophecy during the Tribulation and Kingdom. (MacArthur, John F., Jr. [\*1 Corinthians\*](#). Chicago: Moody Press,

1984. Print. MacArthur New Testament Commentary.)

- The second coming
  - Some believe the perfect refers to Christ's second coming
  - But perfect is neuter in the Greek (teleion), eliminating the possibility that it relates to a person. In addition, that view also has the problem of the reappearance of prophecy, and the widespread preaching and teaching of the Word, during the Kingdom period
  - “For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9) and “on that day the deaf shall hear words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see” (29:18; cf. 32:3–4)
  - Jeremiah tells us of the shepherds whom the Lord will raise up to tend His people in that day
  - ““They will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified, nor will any be missing,’ declares the Lord” (Jer. 23:4). The Kingdom will have an abundance of preachers and teachers. (MacArthur, John F., Jr. 1 Corinthians. Chicago: Moody Press, 1984. Print. MacArthur New Testament Commentary. The eternal state).
- The eternal state
  - By process of elimination, the only possibility for the perfect is the eternal, heavenly state of believers
  - Paul is saying that spiritual gifts are only for time, but that love will last for all eternity. The point is simple, not obscure
  - The eternal state allows for the neuter form of the perfect and allows for the continuation of knowledge and prophecy during the church age, the Tribulation, and the Kingdom



- It fits the context of Paul's emphasis on the permanence of love
- It also fits his mention of our then seeing "face to face," which will come about only with our glorification, when we will be illumined by the very glory of God Himself (Rev. 21:23)
- Finally, only in heaven will we "know fully just as [we] also have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12)
- The eternal state begins for Old Testament believers at the first resurrection, when they will be raised to be with Him forever (Dan. 12:2)
- For Christians the eternal state begins either at death, when they go to be with the Lord, or at the rapture, when the Lord takes His own to be with Himself
- For Tribulation and Kingdom saints it will occur at death or glorification. (MacArthur, John F., Jr. 1 Corinthians. Chicago: Moody Press, 1984. Print. MacArthur New Testament Commentary).

## **CONCLUSION**

- When the perfect comes we will have no more need of knowledge or wisdom, preaching or teaching, prophecy or interpretation
- We will not even have need of the Bible
- We will no longer need the written Word because we will be eternally in the presence and full comprehension of the living Word (MacArthur, John F., Jr. [1 Corinthians](#). Chicago: Moody Press, 1984. Print. MacArthur New Testament Commentary).
- Gifts, ministries, faith, hope, patience, all one day will cease to exist because they will cease to have purpose or meaning

- But in that perfect day, when we see our Lord “face to face,” love will for us be just beginning
- But our showing love, practicing love, living love *now* are of utmost importance, more important than having any of the other virtues or gifts, because love is the link God gives us with His eternal Self (MacArthur)
- If you don't have God's love living in you right now it's because you're not a true follower, a Christian
- I urge you to repent and turn to Christ who alone can save you
- His love will be given you by the Holy Spirit and will transform your life from the inside out
- Let's pray
- Lord's Supper