

# The Abiding Permanence of Love – *1 Corinthians 13:8-13*

**Introduction** – “Love never fails,” and “now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” bookend this paragraph. The character, permanence, manifestation, and outworking of Spirit-wrought love is what dictates everything else in the Christian’s life and in the church. Corinth must understand the primacy of love over the gifts. Paul is not condemning the gifts; they are appropriate in their place and in that transition period of the church. He is not condemning the gifts; he is relativizing them. A simple outline of this passage is: the word-gifts will cease when that which is fully complete has come (vv8-10); we naturally put away the partial when the complete has come (vv11-12). However, faith, hope, and love will remain and abide, and love in the greatest way (v13). But this begs some questions...questions that need to be answered in our day when we find ourselves in a schism over the so-called charismatic gifts.

**Review: The Revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ (1:7) - The Corinthians (and that generation) were “eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v7) so that they would be “blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v8).** Most modern commentators now consider this language as referring to the final judgment when Jesus returns at the end of this age. And that may be, but I think the context begs something more. Both the “day of the Lord” and “the revelation” of Jesus are mentioned in another passage: Luke 17:22-36, which is a parallel passage to Matthew 24, the great discourse on the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple for rejecting Jesus as Messiah, promised to take place in their generation (Matt 24:34). This church had separated itself (or been separated from) the old covenant building (synagogue) and its faith-practice (Jerusalem-temple-worship) because they worshipped the One that Jerusalem had rejected. It was primarily the Jews who were persecuting them (and throughout this first generation) and they were awaiting their promised vindication.

**The Partial and the Perfect; Corinth’s Present and Future** – Corinth needed to be careful not to make too much of the word-gifts because they wouldn’t be around for very long. The word “perfect” (v10, or complete, or mature) and the word “then” (v10, 12) are not referring to the end of the Christian age, but to the end of the old covenant age when Christ is vindicated through the destruction of Jerusalem and the final completed canon of God’s Word is “perfect.” In v8, in contrast to love which never falls away, prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will be done away with. These are the partial ways of knowing God’s will, and once the perfect (mature, complete) has come, there is no more need for them (vv9-10). The word, “perfect” or “mature” is used again in 14:20, where they are urged to be “mature” in their thinking.

Paul then gives the example of a child growing to maturity (v11). The time prior to the “perfect” is likened to the time of speaking and understanding in childish ways. This is not an image used for our mortal lives in other parts of Scripture. Gal 3:23-4:7 describes the coming of the fulness of the gospel, from being children under the old covenant and under guardians to becoming sons or adults under the new covenant.

Paul describes the process of “becoming a man” also as being likened to seeing “face to face,” that is, without mediators (vv11-12). This was Jacob’s experience as well as Moses’s and so it does not have to refer to after we go to heaven (Gen 32:30, Exod 33:11). “Knowing in part” appears to apply to the time of the old covenant as contrasted with the fullness of knowledge in the time of the New Testament (1 Pet 1:10-12, Heb 1:1-2, 8:11-13). So, the word-gifts would go away when the completed Word was finished. New King, new temple, new covenant, new and final Word.

**Abiding Faith, Hope, and Love; and Another Reason This is Pointing to Post 70AD and not the Final Days of the Christian Age** – Faith, hope, and love will abide after this. After what? At Christ’s final coming we will not need abiding faith and hope, for all will be fulfilled. So this is talking about our age – the time when we have all of God’s Word, no partial word-gifts, but faith and hope and love abide. And the greatest of these is love because (1) love is the great Christ-marker in us, and (2) love will abide even into the final eschaton.

**First Implications** – We do not need tongues or prophecies or gifts of knowledge because we have something greater, more powerful, more intimate in our walk with God. We have His full, completed, Holy-Spirit inspired Word (2 Pet 1:19-21). It is profitable for everything in life (2 Tim 3:16). Live in the maturity of God's completed word so that we become a mature man (church) in Christ (Eph 4:13). Hunger for and eat the Word (1 Pet 2:1-2). Look into it and then do as it says, submitting yourself to the Scripture as to the Lord (James 1:22-25). Have you considered the Bible Reading Challenge for this Summer – a great place to start, recharge, and reset this most important discipline.

**Second** – Understand the flow of Biblical history so that you can understand this important transition. How did the Old Testament look forward to Christ in shadows, and how is it that we now are the new Israel? How did this change the world? When Jesus left, He said that He would send the Spirit to teach us all things (John 16:12-13); what was He referring to? In addition, what were the purposes of the gift of tongues? The next chapter will deal with this in more detail.

**Finally** – What this message is declaring is that the charismatic movement is wrong on these issues. But we must be loving and patient with our brothers and sisters. We must all grow out of many immaturities that should be put away. Remember, Love is patient and kind, is not provoked, and hopes all things for one another.

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*Dave Hatcher – May 24, 2019*