

## **Something Better than Super-Natural Sign Gifts**

### **1 Corinthians 13:8-13**

#### **Introduction:**

1. Chapter 13 is well known as "the love chapter."
2. The Corinthian church was a carnal church that was failing to demonstrate godly love.
3. They were extremely self-consumed and it manifested itself in several different ways. One of the areas was the area of spiritual gifts. This was during the Acts time period when all the sign gifts were still operative. Why?
  - As a sign to Israel that God had left Israel and gone among the Gentiles.
  - As a means of communicating divine revelation from God as Israel's kingdom program diminished and the mystery program was being revealed.
4. The Corinthians were totally enamored with the super-natural sign gift program of that time, but it had degenerated into a fleshly, experience-based demonstration.
5. There was an absence of godly love so Paul reminds them (vs. 1-7) what true godly love looks like.
6. But then Paul will show them the superiority of love over the sign gift program (vs. 8-13). The sign gift program was temporary, but love is enduring.
7. There are a lot of different thoughts about this text, so I will handle these verses in a verse by verse fashion as we seek to understand their true meaning.

#### **Verse 8**

1. Notice the contrast, "*Charity never faileth, but...*"
2. Paul proceeds to warn the Corinthians that the sign gift program is not permanent, but rather temporary.
3. When Paul mentions prophecies, tongues, and knowledge, it is clear from the context that Paul is referring to the **gifts** of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge.
4. Paul is clearly teaching that at some point in the future, these gifts will no longer be necessary and operative.
  - The phrases "they shall fail" and "it shall vanish away" are the exact same Greek word and it means "to be rendered entirely idle (useless)."
  - He says that "tongues shall cease" which means "to stop, restrain, quit, come to an end."
  - Charity never fails, but clearly the spiritual sign gifts one day will.
5. The Corinthians were placing great stock in the super-natural sign gift program, but what would they be left with when it passed away? If they didn't possess true love, they would be left with nothing. vs. 2, 3

#### **Verse 9**

1. Notice how Paul narrows his discussion to prophecy and knowledge in this verse. Paul will deal with tongues extensively in chapter 14.
2. It is interesting that the exact same Greek word is used to explain what will happen to the gifts of prophecy and knowledge in verse 8, but when he says "tongues shall cease" he uses a different Greek word. Even the verb tense is different.

- *"They shall fail"* and *"it shall vanish away"* are passive verbs, indicating that the subject (prophecy and knowledge) are the recipients of the action. Something very definite happens that causes them to be rendered idle and useless.
  - When it says tongues *"shall cease"*, this is the middle/active voice indicating that tongues will come to an end in and of themselves as their purpose is done. We will cover this subject extensively in chapter 14.
3. So clearly Paul narrows his discussion to the gifts of prophecy and knowledge in verse 9. We covered these gifts in chapter 12, but let's review:
    - **Prophecy** - the ability to declare divine truth that cannot be known by natural means.
    - **Knowledge** - the supernatural impartation of divine knowledge and information.
    - If a person in the local assembly at Corinth received a word of knowledge from God and then declared it to the local assembly, this would be the exercise of these two gifts.
  4. Why were these two gifts necessary? Paul explains why in this verse. Paul says that at that time (Acts 20 time period), *"We know **in part**, and we prophesy **in part**."*
    - The phrase "in part" means "to get as a section, allotment, division or share."
  5. God gave to Paul revelation for the body of Christ, but He didn't do it all at one time. It came in sections or allotments. **Acts 26:16**
  6. So when Paul writes 1 Corinthians (Acts 20 time period), he knew that he hadn't received all the divine information that would eventually come.
  7. Of course, we know today that much more revelation would come to Paul and he would in turn give it to the church. Paul had only written a few of his 13 epistles at this point.
  8. So Paul makes it clear that at that time they had partial knowledge. They only prophesied **in part** because their knowledge was incomplete.

### Verse 10

1. People make this verse tougher than it really is. Many people argue over what Paul means when he speaks of that which is perfect coming.
2. It is an extremely important issue. If Paul is referring to something still yet future (such as the rapture), then this would mean that we are still missing some divine revelation.
3. This would mean that God's Word is yet incomplete and we do not have all of God's truth. We must depend on men and women to receive words of knowledge from God and declare them to us.
4. Rather, Paul had something in mind that would happen in the Corinthians life-time. What did he have in mind? Let's begin by defining the word "perfect."
  - This word "perfect" means "complete." It is never used in reference to the rapture, Second Coming or heaven.
  - It is often used to describe a person who is spiritually mature and of full age.
5. If taken in context, that which is **perfect** replaces that which was **in part**. So it must be referring to the time when all the knowledge and prophetic truth will be dispensed. No longer will we know **in part**, but complete knowledge will be given.

6. As Paul penned his last prison epistles, he fulfilled (finished) the Word of God.  
**Colossians 1:25**
7. Some of the very last words Paul wrote were **2 Timothy 3:16-17**. The Scripture is now complete and is able to make every believer complete and fully mature, thoroughly furnishing us with everything we need. We lack nothing!
8. We no longer know **in part** because that which is perfect (complete knowledge) has now been given.

### Verse 11

1. Paul is using an illustration to drive home the point that the sign gift program is temporary.
2. When you are in childhood, you are not able to understand, reason, and think as an adult. But typically this is not a permanent mental and emotional state.
3. As you mature in years, you gain more knowledge and you are expected to quit acting as a child and begin to think and act as an adult.
4. The sign gifts were given during the infancy and childhood stages of the early church, when God's revelation was incomplete. The Corinthians were babes in Christ (3:1) and were totally enamored with these sign gifts as a child is with a new toy.
5. As a child eventually "puts away" childish things, the Corinthians would one day be putting away the sign gifts. They would be rendered inoperative when God's complete knowledge and revelation was dispensed.
6. Therefore, they must learn to walk on the more mature basis of faith, hope, and love, which we will see in verse 13. The sign gifts will be put away as a man puts away childish things, but love never fails and abides forever.

### Verse 12

1. The Bible is likened to a mirror in Scripture (**James 1:23-25**). A clear, clean mirror reveals to us our true state and let us see ourselves as we really are.
  - If my face is dirty, or there is a spot on my shirt, etc., the mirror provides me with the information, light, and knowledge I need to make the necessary changes.
  - In Bible days, it was not unusual for people to just use a piece of polished metal of some sort as a mirror. Of course many times, it did not give the clear reflections that our mirrors do today. It would be very dark and shaded.
  - **Illustration:** Ever look into a mirror that was hazed with fog or steam? You may be able to see yourself, but not clearly.
2. This was the state of the early church. They had **part** of God's Word, but not all of God's revelation. This is why Paul says, "*For now we see through a glass darkly...*"
3. But this was not a permanent state. Paul goes on to say, "*But then face to face...*"
4. When the full revelation was finally given, no longer did Paul know in part, but full knowledge was given, and the Corinthians knew God's truth just as fully as they knew Paul when seeing him face to face.
5. The issue in verse 12 is one of clarity. The maturity of verse 11 can now take place because of the full light that has been given (vs. 10, 12). Paul knew that one day

things would be made crystal clear. The revelation was soon to be complete (**Colossians 1:25**), and the haze would be lifted.

6. If "*that which is perfect*" is referring to some future time in heaven or the future kingdom, then this would mean that spiritual maturity could **not** be achieved right now on earth. We would be locked into the childhood state of verse 11, continuing to know **in part** and seeing through a glass darkly.
7. This is not what Paul taught. Paul affirmed that spiritual maturity could happen right now on earth. **Ephesians 4:13-15; Colossians 1:27-28; 2 Timothy 3:16-17**
8. No longer do we see through a glass darkly and know in part, but rather we have face to face clarity and knowledge through God's completed Word. What makes believers perfect and takes away partial knowledge? The authority of God's written Word!
9. If a preacher tells you that he has a word of knowledge or special revelation from God, you can simply answer that you no longer see through a glass darkly, but you have God's completed Word. You will do well to ignore and disregard him.

### **Verse 13**

1. Paul concludes the chapter, "*And now abideth...*"
2. There are three things that are going to last past the infancy and childhood of the church, and into adulthood. The three things are not the gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues. That much is clear from the context.
3. It is faith, hope, and charity. When Paul says that charity is the greatest, he doesn't mean that it is more valuable than faith and hope. It is the greatest in the sense that it is the crowning issue. It is the basis and source of everything else.
4. These three things are designed to bring fullness in the life of a believer. They represent true spiritual maturity. **1 Thessalonians 1:3**
5. The Christian life is to be empowered by faith, sustained by hope, and motivated by love.
6. The Corinthians had it all wrong. They thought that spiritual maturity was manifested through use of the sign gifts. Paul sets their thinking straight, and he says, "No, these sign gifts will one day be rendered useless, but faith, hope, and charity will abide." This is where their emphasis needed to be. It is something better than the sign gifts.