

“Love Never Faileth ...”

“... but whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know fully even as also I was fully known. But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:8-13).

The apostle, in this passage, sheds great light on the temporary state of prophecies, tongues, and knowledge versus the enduring and permanent nature of love, which never faileth. The apostle is not to be understood as saying that the object toward which “love” is directed will always succumb to loving overtures. However a strong man may manifest love toward his fellow humans, some will never be appreciative or touched by that demonstration. After all, God loves us with love to its perfected degree yet most refuse His love. While we all understand that love never fails in that he who loves is profited, blessed, that is not the apostle’s point. “*Love never faileth*” in that these qualities of love will continue on and on. That this is the apostle’s purpose can be seen in his comparison with those things that will fail or not continue. Prophecies will be done away; tongues will cease; knowledge will be done away, yet love will continue.

Having named in these verses three of the spiritual gifts he cites in 1 Corinthians 12:3-10, as well as adding a fourth in vs. 2 (faith), the apostle, in citing four of the nine supernatural gifts, must be understood as including ALL these gifts in his assertion that they shall cease or be done away. He thereby indicates that there was a future time in which there would be a cessation of miracles. In view of the strong impact the charismatic movement has in our present age, one cannot overemphasize the necessity of knowing the time when love shall continue, yet prophecies, faith, tongues, and knowledge will pass away.

Barnes, a respected Bible scholar, develops, to an extended degree, his position that the era to which Paul alludes is man’s final state in heaven. And while he is not specific in affirming that tongues and prophecies will continue to our world’s end, that conclusion can be legitimately drawn from his writing. On the other hand, other Bible students, just as scholarly as he, point to a period of time before our Lord’s return as the time when spiritual

gifts would cease but love would continue. Who is correct and can we be certain of the proper conclusion?

Some objections can be dismissed as failing to address the issue. For instance, some insist that these gifts continue today, "triumphantly" asserting, "We still 'know' today, therefore the times when gifts should cease has not yet come." But this begs the question. There is an adage which says "that which proves too much, proves nothing." Would he who argues that since we still "know" today, that therefore knowledge has not passed away, assert that in heaven no one would know anything? Certainly not. The apostle's words "when that which is perfect is come ... then shall I know fully even as also I was fully known" makes it clear that whether it is during "time" or "eternity" when prophecies, tongues, and knowledge would pass away, some form of knowledge would continue (1 Cor. 13:12). The "*knowledge*" which was to pass away was not conscious awareness; that "*knowledge*" which was to "*pass away*" was a reference to supernatural knowledge which came through laying on of the apostles' hands.

The apostle tells us when knowledge and prophecies will pass away: "*When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away*" (1 Cor. 13:10). So, what is "*that which is perfect*"? Jesus Christ?

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