

SPIRITUAL GIFTS, Part 4

Some denominations argue that all the spiritual gifts are still active, but as we have seen, if we honestly look at Scripture, that does not appear to be the case. Some of these gifts served specific purposes that were valid only during the first century apostolic period. Furthermore, there is a passage we will look at now that clearly states these more spectacular spiritual gifts did indeed cease.

The Abolition of the Temporary Spiritual Gifts

Last session we were looking at Paul's first letter to the Corinthians where he speaks about these spiritual gifts. We saw how Paul took the position that even if you have one of these gifts, if you don't have love, you have nothing. The "love" Paul is referring to is God's own love experienced by the believer as part of the Fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). (I will have much more to say in this in a later lesson, but for now, this will have to do).

1 Cor. 13:2 And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

Paul then contrasts the permanent value of love with the temporary value of the sensational spiritual gifts.

1 Cor. 13:8 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

Paul begins verse 8 "Love never ends..." by connecting the temporal adverb *oudepote*, "never, not at any time," with the present active indicative of the verb *pipto*, "to fade out, become invalid, to cease." In this case *oudepote pipto* means that love never ceases, while *katargeo* and *pauo* (they will cease) affirm that prophecy, tongues, and knowledge do cease.

Tongues with its verb *pauo* is not used again after verse 8, while prophecy and knowledge and their verb *katargeo* appear again in 1 Corinthians 13:9. Why? Paul was differentiating between the gift of tongues and the gifts of prophecy and knowledge. Prophecy and knowledge had a different purpose than tongues and would cease at a different time.

The termination of tongues is denoted by *pauo*, which is in a different voice than *katargeo*, the abolition of prophecy and knowledge. In the indirect or dynamic middle voice the verb *pauo* means “to cease on its own,” or to “terminate” on its own without an intervening agent. Tongues would be phased out when it was no longer necessary to warn the Jews of the impending fifth cycle of discipline or to herald the dawn of the Church Age. The spiritual gift of tongues began on Pentecost but would cease by the time the Roman Legions under Titus destroyed Jerusalem in August of AD 70.

Katargeo in the passive voice signifies that something, an intervening agent, would act upon the gifts of prophecy and knowledge to render them inoperative in the future. That agent, found in 1 Corinthians 13:10, is “the perfect.”

1 Cor 13:9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when **the perfect** comes, the partial will pass away.

Therefore, the gift of prophecy and knowledge, in contrast to tongues, would cease when the perfect, which is the intervening agent, comes.

The future tense of *katargeo* and *pauo* indicates that the cessation of tongues, prophecy, and knowledge had not yet occurred when Paul wrote around this AD 56. These miraculous gifts of tongues, prophecy, and knowledge were foundational to the early Church. After the death of the apostle John, and the entire canon of Scripture had been revealed and reduced to writing. The foundation was complete. Any further attempts to add to scripture were prohibited (Rev, 22:18). In the post canon era of the Church miraculous gifts were no longer necessary to reveal the truth. We have the complete revelation of God in our Bible.

1 Cor. 13:9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part;

The retroactive progressive present tense of *ginosko*, “For we know,” denotes a developing knowledge that started in the past with the beginning of the Church Age and continued up to the present time of Paul’s writing (AD 56). The spiritual gifts of knowledge and prophecy only provided revelation “in part,” which comes from the Greek *ek merous*. When First Corinthians was penned, just four New Testament books

existed. Therefore, only a partial revelation of the mystery doctrines of the Church Age was available in writing to the Church. Revelatory gifts were still required to provide never-before-revealed doctrine to the new Church.

1 Cor. 13:10 but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.

Verse 10 stipulates that these “partial gifts (*ek merous*) of prophecy and knowledge “will be done away” (passive voice of *katargeo*, repeated from verse 8) “when the perfect (*teleion*) comes.” The question is, “What is the nature of the ‘perfect’ that terminates these gifts?”

If as the charismatics believe, the perfect is either the Second Coming of Christ, the Millennium, or the perfection of heaven, then prophecy and knowledge would still be operative for the entire Church Age and beyond. But does *teleion* refer to any of these future events?

Teleion

This substantive, which is an adjective used as a noun equivalent, has several meanings: “perfect, completed, mature.” “Perfect” has a qualitative connotation describing something that lacks any flaw, an idyllic or utopian state. “Mature” or “completed,” however, carries a quantitative connotation, describing the conclusion of a process, a whole instead of a part.

If the qualitative meaning, “perfect,” is assigned to *teleion*, then it would refer to the ideal condition that will exist following the Second Advent of Christ. This would mean that partial knowledge communicated by prophecy and Scripture would continue throughout the Church Age and be replaced by “perfect” knowledge when the believer is face-to-face with Christ in the Millennium or in heaven. Though it was common for Greek philosophers to use *teleion* in a qualitative way to refer to a perfect man or ideal state, this meaning is foreign in Scripture.

In contrast, the use of *teleion* and its cognates in the New Testament refer to the quantitative meaning, as in completed or mature (1 Cor. 2:6; 14:20; Eph. 4:13; Heb. 5:14; James 1:4). Since the immediate context of 1 Cor 13:9 focuses on the partial or incomplete nature of revelation through prophecy and knowledge, *teleion* in verse 10 must be understood in the quantitative sense of God’s “completed” revelation of doctrine.

Since *teleion* is in the neuter gender, it cannot refer to the coming of the person of Jesus Christ, a masculine noun. Therefore, both context and grammar eliminate the qualitative meaning of “the perfect” as the return of Christ, the Millennium, or heaven as a possible interpretation of *teleion*.

We conclude that “the perfect” refers to the complete revelation of the Canon of Scripture. Once the whole Canon was in writing (complete), the gifts of prophecy and knowledge that had gradually revealed portions of the mystery doctrines would be terminated because they were no longer needed.

First Corinthians 13:11-12 are illustrations of the partial and the complete related to “when the perfect comes” in verse 10.

1 Cor. 13:11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

In this analogy the “child” represents the precanon era of the partial knowledge then available to the infant Church. Just as a child cannot speak, think, or reason as a mature adult, so the precanon church did not have the entire realm of doctrine in writing. The sensational gifts were an interim state of affairs in order that the precanon believers could understand some of the doctrines not yet reduced to writing and execute the unique spiritual life. But when he becomes a man (complete Canon of Scripture) the childish things (partial knowledge gifts) will be put away.

The second illustration also describes the partial nature of precanon prophecy.

1 Cor. 13:12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

“Now” is *arti* in the Greek, an adverb of time that refers to the immediate present of the Apostle Paul at the time of writing – the precanon age. Therefore, in this verse the “now” corresponds to the precanon, “know in part” (1 Cor. 13:9), in contrast to the postcanon “when the perfect comes” (1 Cor 13:10). When Paul wrote, Christians were totally dependent on the

apostles' and prophets' revelatory gifts for learning doctrine to live the unique spiritual life of the Church Age. But he saw a time in the future when believers would have the entire realm of mystery doctrine to objectively know himself as never before and become spiritually self-sustaining.

Paul uses the mirror analogy to illustrate this principle. In a mirror a person looks at a reflection of himself. The believer who looks in "a mirror dimly" (the dim mirror being the incomplete canon of scripture) cannot see himself clearly. But the believer who gazes "face to face" into an unclouded mirror (the complete revelation of Church Age doctrine) is able to see and evaluate himself "fully" in relation to the absolute standard of God's Word. From the Word of God in his soul, the believer has a clear image of himself as he truly is in the light of the truth. With this objectivity he establishes new priorities, revamps his scale of values, and gives top priority to his intake of Bible doctrine. Therefore, when Paul says, "Now I know in part, but then I shall know fully," he is referring to the partial revelation, incomplete doctrine, in contrast to complete revelation, the entire Canon. Just as God has known us perfectly from eternity past, we can know Him fully as He has revealed Himself through His complete word.

1 Cor. 13:13 So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

In conclusion Paul reiterates the performance of love. *Nuni*, "now," is a different adverb than the "now" (*arti*) of verse 12. In *nuni* the idea of time is weakened, indicating not the specific time of Paul, but the broader scope of the Church Age in general. That word "abide" is the Greek *meno* and can mean live, remain, dwell or continue. Faith, hope, and love continue (or remain).

The central focus of this dispensation would be love – divine love produced in the believer by the Holy Spirit and expressed through doctrine resident in the believer's soul defined by the unabridged mystery doctrine revealed in the completed Canon. "Now" faith hope and love, not the temporary spiritual gifts, continue for the entire postcanon Church Age.

Clearly, in these verses Paul has made a solid case for the termination of certain temporary spiritual gifts and why they were needed only temporarily.

Back to Tongues

Before we analyze the fourteenth chapter of First Corinthians we need to remember that the Corinthian church was engulfed in carnality and confusion reigned. Under these circumstances it was impossible for the Corinthians to understand the proper use of *glossolalia*. To correct them Paul contrasted the gift of tongues with the gift of prophecy to punctuate the priority of “renovating the thinking” (Rom. 12:2) with Bible doctrine. He stressed the issue that the spiritual life was not speaking in tongues, but edification for spiritual growth. This was the thrust of his scathing rebuke in the fourteenth chapter.

Three of Paul’s main points must be kept in mind.

1. The gift of tongues is not primarily given to benefit believers but was intended by God as a sign to unbelievers (1 Cor. 14:22a). This indicates that tongues was a gift, like evangelism, that would normally operate outside the local church where unbelievers congregate, not in worship service or Bible class to edify believers.
2. The Corinthians have already been told that tongues would cease, so its days were numbered (1 Cor. 13:8). Therefore, the commands of chapter 14 (vs. 27-28) act as a warning of the danger of ignoring edification.
3. Paul never commended speaking in tongues. Instead, he repeatedly contrasted the ineffectiveness of tongues for edification with the effectiveness of prophecy, a gift that brought spiritual growth to believers by communicating mystery doctrine. Tongues was detracting from, rather than enhancing, the spiritual life of the Corinthians.

1 Cor. 14:2 Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. ²For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. ³On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. ⁴The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church.

Confusion begins when the English versions of the Bible translate *pneumati* of verse 2 as “his spirit” or “the spirit.” Neither the KJV, or the ASV, or the NAB include “his” in the translation because it is not in the original text. Some other versions do. Neither is the definite article “the” found in the original Greek as is in the KJV and the ASV but not the NAB translation. The absence of the definite article in the Greek signifies a noun of the highest quality. Therefore, “Spirit” in the context refers not to the human spirit but to God the Holy Spirit who empowers *glossolalia*.

When a believer, during the apostolic era, legitimately spoke in tongues by means of the filling of the Spirit, the speech could be either understood by a foreigner who spoke the language or interpreted by another believer with the spiritual gift of interpretation. If the speech could not be interpreted, then whatever was said would be incomprehensible “mysteries”. So, Paul sarcastically states that God was the only one who could possibly understand what was being said. Later in 1 Corinthians 14:9 Paul calls this uninterpreted speech “speaking into the air,” an idiom for words without meaning to any human.

In verses 2-4 Paul rebukes the Corinthians for their infatuation with tongues rather than appreciation for prophecy. The gift of prophecy disseminated vital mystery doctrine to the entire assembly of believers. The gift of tongues declared only the Gospel in Gentile languages. The gift of prophecy edified and therefore matured, exhorted, and comforted the believer.

The statement “one who speaks in tongues edifies himself” does not commend the private use of tongues because that would be in direct contradiction to the purpose of all spiritual gifts. God the Holy Spirit sovereignly bestows spiritual gifts, not for self-edification, but “for the edification of the church (Body of Christ)” (1 Cor. 14:12). However, the tongues speaker was personally edified along with the rest of the congregation by the interpretation of his speech and by visible proof of God’s power and grace in bestowing upon him a miraculous, albeit temporary, spiritual gift.

1 Cor. 14:5 Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

This verse confirms a legitimate function for tongues in the local church of the pre-canon era. Tongues primary purpose was to present the Gospel to visiting unbelievers who spoke a foreign language. All effective witnessing communicates the doctrines of hamartiology, soteriology, and Christology. Certainly these doctrines were edifying to the church when they were understood by the congregation through an interpreter.

1 Cor. 14:7 If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played?

Paul compares musical instruments that produce no melody, only a cacophony of sounds, to *glossolalia* when there is no interpretation. Note that this is also an analogy to the former pagan rites of the Greek believers in Corinth, which produced no spiritual results.

1 Cor. 14:8 And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle?

Likewise if the bugle, the primary means of communication on the battlefield before radios, produced only discordant notes who would respond to the call to arms. “Indistinct sounds” or “uncertain voice” as seen in some translations is analogous to the confusion of uninterpreted tongues.

1 Cor. 14:9 So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air.

For his final illustration Paul turns to linguistics.

1 Cor. 14:10 There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, ¹¹ but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me.

Paul uses *phone*, voice – sound of uttered words or speech here translated “languages,” to mean a true language, not unintelligible babble.

1 Cor. 14:12 So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

This mandate summarizes the absolute priority of edification gifts beneficial to the entire church.

1 Cor. 14:14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful.¹⁵ What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also.

When Paul says, “If I pray in a tongue,” this is setting up a hypothetical situation. “If” is in the third class hypothetical condition in the Greek. The Holy Spirit produces tongues in the believer, therefore, if he prayed in tongues he would not be praying at all, but the Holy Spirit would be praying and bypassing the human mind. The believer would never know what was prayed or if the prayer was answered. Without the believer’s participation there is no comprehension or spiritual benefit. The believer’s volition and mentality must always be engaged to advance in the spiritual life.

Throughout the Scripture rational content is underscored and crucial to edification and spiritual growth (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23). Any instruction without rational content and meaning eliminates the ability to present divine viewpoint. If you can’t understand it, believe it, turn gnosis into epignosis and make it available in the soul for application, then it does not glorify God.

1 Cor. 14:19 Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Can’t get much clearer than that. Just “five words” of doctrinal instruction is better than “ten thousand words” spoken in tongues. *Glossolalia* is not an effective means of communicating doctrine necessary for spiritual growth.

Paul saw the gift in its proper prospective, and he also had the occasion to use the gift in its proper context to a greater extent than the Corinthians.

1 Cor 14:18 I thank God, I speak with tongues more than you all...

Frequent contact with Jews throughout the Roman world in his missionary journeys, with the linguistic barriers he encountered, made the gift of tongues a necessity for him. Yet Paul himself refused to use the gift “in church.” He did not prohibit speaking in tongues, but his statement was so restrictive that, in effect, Paul discouraged the use of tongues in the assembly except in the rarest of circumstances.

1 Cor. 14:21 In the Law it is written, “By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.” ²² Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. ²³ If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds?

The word for “outsiders” is *idiotes* and, in this context, refers to a visitor to the church who is ignorant of doctrine. If all in the congregation spoke in tongues complete chaos would reign and the unbeliever would regard such a service as an asylum of lunatics. No church service should resemble the disorderly clamor of pagan mystery religions.

1 Cor. 14:27 If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. ²⁸ But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.

The third class condition “if” recognizes the possibility that this could happen (in the pre-canon era), but no more than three were permitted to speak, and then only if an interpreter were present for the benefit of the congregation.

The phrase “let him speak to himself and to God,” appears to approve the private use of tongues without an interpreter, but it must be understood in the light of Paul’s assertions in verses 2, 9, and 12 of Chapter 14. Remember, Paul clearly states that spiritual gifts are for “the edification of the church” (v. 12), not individual edification. Therefore, Paul in verse 28b is once again reprimanding any Corinthian believer for speaking “mysteries” (v. 2), words without meaning to himself.

1 Cor. 14:29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. ³⁰ If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. ³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, ³² and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. ³³ For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints...

Paul uses these verses to further clarify the proper and disciplined approach to worship. It was not to be the rowdy and boisterous service resembling the pagan rituals of their former religions. Worship should be disciplined and edifying to the congregation, so that they can take in doctrine and advance spiritually.

1 Cor. 14:34 the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. ³⁵ If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

The prohibition here has a direct relation to the problem Paul is dealing with, namely speaking in tongues. But first we must look back at chapter 11:3-10 to pick up on the context.

1 Cor. 11:3 But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. ⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, ⁵ but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven.

Note that 11:5 seems to say it is acceptable for women to pray and prophecy in church as long as they are veiled. But 14:34-35 says that women must keep silent in church. This seems to be a contradiction. In both verses one principle is clear: that women are to be under the authority of the man and never usurp that authority. While the Greek *kephale* can mean a literal head on a person, in the context it refers to an authority. For man the “head” or authority is Christ, and for the woman her authority is her man as per 1 Corinthians 11:3. A related verse is found in First Timothy.

1 Tim. 2:12 But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness.

Three possible conclusions can be drawn from all this:

1. Women can lead prayer and prophesy in church as long as their heads are covered, but they cannot speak in tongues.
2. Women cannot lead prayer, prophesy, or speak in tongues in church but they can outside as long as men are not present.
3. Women are not given the spiritual gifts of prophesy and tongues for use inside the church or outside, nor are they allowed to lead prayer in the church or in mixed gender groups.

Women are not to have authority over men in the church or in the family (1 Cor. 11:3-5; 14:34-35, 1 Tim. 2:12; Eph. 5:22). Prophesying or speaking in tongues are edification gifts that if exercised by women in the local church would place them in authority over the males in direct contradiction to Scripture. Likewise, women are not allowed to lead prayer in the local church because it also places them in a position of authority over the men. That would exclude number 1 as a possible conclusion.

Commentators are all over the place on the last two, but I would have to place my money on number 3, mainly on the strength of what Paul says in verse 36 which indicates that women do not have the gift of prophesy at all.

If this admonition against women speaking in tongues were heeded today, much of the present day tongues movement would be eliminated. Women seem to be the worst offenders in the modern confusion of tongues.

The word “speak” in 14:34 is the same word used in verse 28 where men are in view; therefore it cannot mean mere “chatter” which would disturb the church service. The purpose of this entire section on speaking in tongues is to curb the wrong use of the gift. Verses 27-33 give instruction for men on the matter of speaking in tongues. Verses 34-36 are directed at women exercising the gift of tongues.

If any women wanted to take issue with Paul over this, he would simply ask one question.

1 Cor. 14:36 What? Was it from you that the word of God went forth? or came it unto you alone?

His question might be rephrased, “Which book in all the inspired Scriptures was written as the result of the Holy Spirit revealing to the woman?” The answer is, “No Scripture in the entire canon of Scripture can be attributed to revelation from God to a woman.”

It seems quite clear to me that women do not have the gift of tongues or prophecy, or any other edification gifts, except that they are permitted to teach other women and children. Some would take issue even with the former. But we do know for sure that it is a mistake for women to speak in tongues in the local church. That much is quite clear.

Paul closes his comments on tongues with a warning to the Corinthians and their wild and uncontrolled pagan-like services.

1 Cor. 14:40 But let all things be done decently and in order.

After examining the chapter carefully it is clear that Paul was discouraging and almost dissuading the Corinthians from speaking in tongues, especially in the local church. He did everything but forbid it. He did his best to return order to the worship of God in the Corinthian church. Evidently, he had some success. Paul only mentioned tongues in his first epistle to the Corinthians. He never mentioned tongues in his later letters. Four decades later Clement of Rome wrote a letter to the ever-wayward Corinthians about problems they were having then, but tongues were not mentioned.

Paul would not live long enough to see the fulfillment of tongues-warned judgment on Israel when Jerusalem fell to the Roman Legions of Titus in 70 AD and tongues cease to exist. Once Israel went out under the fifth cycle of discipline and was destroyed as a nation there was no longer a need for tongues as predicted in 1 Corinthians 13:8 “whether there be tongues, they shall cease.”

The gift of tongues is only mentioned in the books written in the early part of the pre-canon era. Most books do not mention it at all. James, Peter, John and Jude make no mention of it. There is no mention of tongues in the book of Acts after 19:6, which is well before the fall of Jerusalem. It

seems clear from the New Testament record that tongues ceased to be practiced well before the end of the apostolic age. No place in the Scriptures is it commanded or enjoined on believers as a responsibility or spiritual exercise.

Tongues officially ceased when Jerusalem fell in 70 AD. The other specialized and temporary spiritual gifts faded out as the Church Age became established and the New Testament Canon of Scripture was put in writing and disseminated. Miracles and healing probably went first, followed by knowledge and discerning spirits, then tongues when Jerusalem fell, and finally prophecy and apostle when John wrote Revelation and he, the last of the apostles, died. All believers then had “the perfect,” the completed revelation of God, as opposed to “that which is in part,” the specialized and temporary spiritual gifts designed to fill the informational void of the early apostolic era. With “the perfect” there was no longer a need for “that which was in part.”