Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Permanence of Love, Part 1
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:8
Code: 1868

INTRODUCTION

We've already discussed the first seven verses of 1 Corinthians 13 in our previous study entitled Perfect Love. As we come now to 13:8, we get into the subject of tongues and whether or not this gift has ceased. And as we proceed into chapter 14, we will get even more involved in this subject because it is the theme of that chapter. This is a vital area of information and study that we really need to get a grip on. But in order to do that, we have to spend time carefully examining the biblical evidence. It's difficult to evaluate the breadth and the scope of the Charismatic movement any other way than to go carefully through the Word of God and see how it speaks to the issue of speaking in tongues. In this series, that is what I will endeavor to do.

In 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, Paul says, "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 vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I 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 even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

My, what a great word! This has been a favorite passage of Christians for many, many years--but it also speaks very pointedly to us in the church today. Although we will develop this passage in relation to the tongues issue, Paul's major point is that love is the only permanent thing. The Corinthians needed to hear this because they were so busy fracturing the fellowship over the temporary items and forgetting the one thing that was eternal.

A. The Corruption in Corinth

1. In the City

The Corinthian church existed in a city that was known as the vanity fair of the world. The believers in Corinth were called by God to represent the Lord Jesus Christ and to be a demonstration of His incomparable character. It was a high calling--a calling that could only be fulfilled if they were

submissive to His will. The city of Corinth was mastered by materialism, antagonism, competition, selfishness, hatred, and sexual immorality...just to name a few. And in that environment, the Corinthian believers were to act as salt and light. Unfortunately, they didn't! Why? Because of the corruption...

2. In the Church

The tragedy of the Corinthian church was that the city of Corinth had salted the church instead of the church salting the city. The corrupt spirit of Corinth had permeated the church. It was evangelism in reverse. The Christians there had become carnal, worldly, indulgent, selfish, contentious, vengeful, proud, and compromising. Just about everything that was characteristic of the society had been picked up by the church. In fact, they even perverted their own spiritual behavior into a pagan kind of religion--twisting spiritual gifts away from the Spirit and operating them in the flesh and under the energy of Satan and his hosts.

B. The Correction by Paul

First Corinthians was written by Paul as a corrective. It's strong, firm, and straightforward. And in the middle of it, like a glorious sunset, the Apostle Paul climaxes his thoughts about their particular need by saying, "Here is the brightest spot of all--love." That was the one major thing that was needed in their church. There wasn't any self-sacrificial giving or the washing of each other's feet in that church. Rather, the Christians there resented each other, argued with each other, and shut each other out from their private little groups. They sexually violated each other, sued each other, boasted against each other, deprived each other in marriage, divorced each other, perverted the proper place of women within the church meeting, withheld food from the poor at the love feast, turned the Lord's Table into a drunken orgy, offended each other, and fought each other for prominence in the use of their spiritual gifts.

All of those things were evidence of the absence of the one great thing so needed--love. So Paul writes of love, in verses 8-12, and says, "You'd better concentrate on love because that's what really matters, that's what is eternal. Rather than being so concerned that you get the prominent, showy gifts, and so concerned that you get the chief place of recognition, be concerned about love. Rather than becoming bitter, antagonistic, and jealous because your gift isn't what someone else has, seek to love. Why? Because love never fails."

C. The Crescendo of Love

1. The Particulars Defined

Let's look at the three terms at the beginning of verse 8, "Love never faileth...":

a. "Love..."

The word "love" is defined in verses 4-7. For an in-depth explanation of these verses, refer to the study entitled Perfect Love.

b. "...faileth..."

Love never fails. The word "fail" is an interesting word in the Greek. The common translation of the word is "to fall." Literally it means "to fall to the ground" and sometimes refers to the finality of something falling into decay. For example, it is used to speak of the petals of a flower that drop to the ground from decay. This particular word could also be translated "abolished." So, love will never be abolished or fall to the ground in decay. Love is a flower in which there is no decay. And because love is synonymous with God (1 Jn. 4:8b), it can never cease, because in Him there is no such thing as decay.

c. "...never..."

The word "never" is a helpful word, because in the Greek it has to do with time. What it really says is this: "Love, at no time, will ever fail." I believe that someday, love will be the only thing left. When we get to heaven, 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 to have wisdom granted to us or knowledge 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. Why? Because we'll be just like Jesus Christ. The one thing that will remain, however, will be love--in a dimension we've never dreamed of. We'll be totally involved in the character of God's love as it's manifested through each of us to one another forever.

So, Paul says to the Corinthians, "You ought to get a grip on what is going to be around forever, and quit quibbling over that which is temporary."

2. The Problem Delineated

The statement "love never faileth" is often misunderstood and misapplied. For example, some people think that it means "love always succeeds and wins in every situation." They think that if you just love, everything will turn out. Well, I don't think that's what Paul is saying. Let me show you why:

a. Love Rejected

Paul went into a lot of towns and loved a lot of people--but he still got thrown out of almost every one of them. The Lord Jesus Christ loved with an incomparable love--yet the world refused it, rejected it, spurned it, and walked out of His presence into the darkness of a loveless night. The rich young ruler was granted an occasion to sense and feel and receive the love of Jesus Christ--but he turned away from it. That must have been a great disappointment to Jesus, but I imagine His greatest disappointment was Judas. He basked in the sunlight of Christ's love for three years and then turned his back on it. This is true in marriages as well. Many a husband has turned his back on the love of his wife, and many a wife has turned her back on the love of her husband. Love doesn't always win, in that sense. But that is not what Paul is saying.

b. Love Realized

What Paul is saying is this: "Love is eternal. And because it will go on forever, we might as well realize that that is where we need to put our emphasis." That's a great word for the church, isn't it? If we could simplify the whole idea of the church it would be this: Get everybody to love everybody else. Because if everybody loves everybody else, they will be ministering to one another in love, and Christ will be visible in the world. Once that happens, you won't be able to stop the flood of unbelieving people coming to find out what's going on. So, Paul is simply saying, "Love is the bottom line in the life of the church."

As I discuss the Charismatic movement, I'm dealing with it from a theological and biblical perspective, not a personal one. Please understand that even though I might not agree with all of the things that are going on in that movement, the emphasis of 1 Corinthians 13 rings loud in my heart. My attitude (and yours) toward anyone in the fellowship of Christ is to be one of love. I simply want to clarify some issues that perhaps they haven't looked at carefully.

REVIEW

In our previous study of 1 Corinthians 13:1-7 (Perfect Love, tapes GC 1862-1867), I showed you that Paul discusses four different features of love in chapter 13. In that study, we looked at the first two features of love:

I. THE PROMINENCE OF LOVE (vv. 1-3)

II. THE PERFECTIONS OF LOVE (vv. 4-7)

Let's look, now, at Paul's third point:

III. THE PERMANENCE OF LOVE (vv. 8-12)

Notice the statement that begins verse 8: "Love never faileth...." This statement basically sums up the whole issue for the rest of the chapter. Everything else that is said comments, modifies, and does an exposition on that tremendous statement. Love never fails...it lasts! Did you know that hope will come to an end because it will one day be realized? The day will come when there will be no need for hope. Faith, too, will come to an end because it will be actualized. The day will come when we'll have no need for faith. We'll have sight instead. Love, however, will never come to an end. It is the one thing that will go on forever. The Bible doesn't say that God is hope, or that God is faith; but the Bible does say that God is love (1 Jn. 4:8b). So love is as eternal as God. It will go on forever.

Now, in order to make his point about love being permanent, Paul contrasts love with three gifts and shows that: gifts are temporary, but love is eternal; gifts are partial, but love is complete; and gifts are elementary, but love is mature. Those are his three points. Gifts are temporary, gifts are partial, and gifts are elementary; and the contrasting thought that love is eternal, complete, and mature. Let's look, now, at the first point:

A. Gifts Are Temporary--Love Is Eternal (v. 8)

"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 vanish away."

Paul says, here, that three very important gifts are going to cease--prophecy, tongues, and knowledge. They exist for a limited time, in contrast to the eternal nature of love. And though love is indispensable in the use of the gifts, it's going to outlast them.

1. The Context of the Gifts

Paul uses spiritual gifts to contrast love because gifts were highly prized in the Corinthian church. The Corinthians were proud, self-seeking, and self-centered. They were spiritual show-offs--desiring to be in an up-front position. So to them, the gifts were a big deal. They showed off their spirituality by demonstrating their gift. Well, as it turned out, the gifts that they were demonstrating were, for the most part, fleshly or satanic counterfeits. Nevertheless, this is where they put the emphasis.

It's interesting to realize that in the entire letter of 1 Corinthians (sixteen chapters), there is not a single mention of an elder or a leader of that church. Apparently, no one was leading. In fact, they had come to the place where their whole view of church worship was, "We'll just come together and let the Holy Spirit do His thing and let it all happen." Finally, in 14:32, the Apostle Paul cries out, "...the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." Then in 14:40, he says, "Let all things be done decently and in order." A church can't operate without leaders. God never intended for the

church to be a group of people who get together and do whatever they feel. The church is to have structure and order. Why? Because God is a God of order.

The Corinthian church had no leadership or order. Instead, they had decided to come in each week and fight to see who could be the most prominent. So Paul says, "These gifts that you have exalted, these independent expressions of so-called spirituality are all just temporary--even the true ones...to say nothing of those that are false and counterfeit. However, love will go on forever. Love is the more excellent way."

2. The Clarification of the Gifts

a. The Gift of Prophecy

"...whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away..."

The plural word "prophecies" is making reference to the result of the gift of prophecy--many prophecies. Basically, this gift was the ability to proclaim God's truth publicly. The Greek word for prophecy comes from the two Greek words pro (meaning "before") and phemi (meaning "to speak"). So it literally means "to speak before." Its primary use is "to speak before an audience" (forthtelling), not "to speak before" in terms of time (foretelling). The gift of prophecy, then, was to speak before people, proclaiming the Word of God. The purpose of this gift is indicated in 1 Corinthians 14:3, where Paul says, "But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort." Someone with this gift speaks to build others up, to encourage them to good behavior, and to comfort them in their trouble. That is the gift of prophecy.

b. The Gift of Knowledge

...whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away."

The second gift that Paul mentions is the gift of knowledge. It's called "the word of knowledge" in 1 Corinthians 12:8 because it is considered to be a speaking gift--one that the Corinthians would have celebrated as a public gift. The gift of knowledge is defined as "the ability to observe facts and to draw spiritual truth out of the Word of God." It is the gift of being able to understand God's Word. Seen as a scholar's or teacher's gift, the Corinthians considered it a prominent gift.

c. The Gift of Tongues

The third gift mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:8 is the gift of tongues, or languages. Throughout this series, I will use these terms synonymously so that you will understand that even though tongues is the word that is being used today, the literal meaning of the Greek term glossa is "languages." In a previous message (see Perfect Love, pp. 11-15; tape GC 1862), I gave nine reasons why tongues

always referred to a known language. I'll also cover it even further when we look at 1 Corinthians 14. Briefly, then, the definition of the gift of tongues is "the ability to speak a foreign language that had not been learned by the speaker." Its purpose was as a sign of God's judgment to unbelieving Jews.

3. The Cessation of the Gifts

Verse 8 clearly states that these three very prominent gifts-- prophecy, knowledge, and tongues--are going to come to an end. The question is: When? Well, that's the question I am going to attempt to answer.

a. The Inherent Disagreement

My Pentecostal and Charismatic brothers and sisters in Christ say that none of these three gifts have yet ceased. So their answer to the question of when they will cease is, "In the future." Some of them say that these gifts will cease when "the perfect thing" of verse 10 comes--which they see as future as well. At the other end of the spectrum, I've heard others say that all the gifts have already ceased. They don't believe that there are any spiritual gifts today. Those are the two extreme viewpoints: all the gifts are in effect today or none of them are in effect today. There is also a view that says, "Some of the gifts are now in effect and some of them are not." Well, which view is correct? Let's look at the Bible and see if it can answer our questions. It has a way of doing that.

A weak argument to prove that all the gifts are still in effect

Charismatic people who say that all the gifts are still in effect today, often give the following argument. They say, "There isn't one verse in the entire Bible that says tongues have ceased. So, that settles it for us. They haven't ceased!" Well, they're right about the fact that there isn't a single verse in the Bible that specifically states that tongues have ceased. But do you know what? There isn't a single verse in the Bible that specifically states that God is three in one, either. But He is, isn't He? To argue that something isn't true because the Bible doesn't specifically say it, is weak. And to argue that one needs a specific biblical statement to prove a point is also weak. Why? Because there are many truths in the Bible that are indicated to us by the totality of Scripture rather than any one given statement. For example, there isn't a verse that specifically says, "Jesus is 100% God and 100% man at the same time in an indivisible oneness." But that is the essence of the God-Man character of Christ, isn't it? You say, "How do you know?" Well, we have to piece together all the biblical facts of Christ's character in order to see the whole portrait. So, to argue that tongues haven't ceased because there isn't a verse specifically stating that fact, is not a good argument to use.

b. The Important Distinctions

According to verse 8, we know that all the gifts are going to cease sometime. They're all going to be rendered inoperative. But if you look at verse 8 a little closer, you'll discover some very important distinctions that the Apostle Paul and the Holy Spirit make between tongues, prophecy, and knowledge. The different Greek words that are used indicate that tongues will cease at a different point in time than prophecy and knowledge. This is a very important point. Let me show you why I say that.

1) The Different Words Used

a) Katargeo

At the beginning of verse 8 it says that prophecies "shall be done away." Other translations say "shall be rendered inoperative," or "abolished." At the end of verse 8 it says that knowledge "shall vanish away." Those two phrases describing the cessation of prophecy and knowledge, are the same Greek verb, katargeo, which means "to be made inoperative." This is not the verb, however, that is used in reference to the cessation of tongues. That's a totally different word:

b) Pauo

Now there is a purpose in the mind of the Holy Spirit for making a distinction with these two terms, and I want you to understand what it is. Knowledge and prophecy will be rendered inoperative, but tongues "will cease." This is indicated by the use of a different Greek verb--pauo--which means "to stop."

So, the first distinction that is made in verse 8 is the use of two different Greek words to describe the cessation of prophecy and knowledge, and the cessation of tongues. The second distinction in verse 8 is...

2) The Different Voices Used

a) Passive Voice

The verb katargeo, in describing the cessation of prophecy and knowledge, is in the passive voice. The rule of grammar states that when a passive verb is in a sentence, the subject receives the action. So in the case of prophecy and knowledge, something will act upon them to cause them to stop. You say, "What is it that's going to do that?" Well, look at verses 9-10: "For we know in part [the gift of knowledge], and we prophesy in part [the gift of prophecy]. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away [Gk. katargeo]." So, what is it that's going to come and stop prophecy and knowledge? The "perfect thing." We'll identify what that is in a future lesson. Also

notice that tongues do not appear in verse 9. Why? Because only prophecy and knowledge are stopped by the "perfect thing."

The verb relative to tongues is not in the passive voice. It is in the ...

b) Middle Voice

The verb that says tongues will cease (pauo) is in the middle voice. Let me show you the differences in the active, passive, and middle voices. In the active voice we would say, "I hit the ball." In the passive voice we would say, "The ball hit me." And in the middle voice (if English had a middle voice) we would say, "I hit myself." In other words, the Greek middle voice is reflexive, indicating that the subject is acting upon itself. The middle voice also indicates intense action on the part of the subject. Literally, then, verse 8 says, "Tongues will stop by themselves." That's the meaning that the middle voice gives to the verb pauo.

The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses the middle form of pauo fifteen times to translate the Hebrew word which 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.

c. The Inevitable Deduction

The gifts of prophecy and knowledge, then, are going to continue on until the "perfect thing" comes and stops them. The gift of tongues is going to stop all by itself. That's what has to be deduced when one looks at the Greek.

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE MODERN TONGUES MOVEMENT

I. AN EVALUATION OF THE CESSATION OF TONGUES

Now, if tongues are going to stop by themselves, the next question is: When? Well, after spending seven years studying this question and reading all sides of the issue that are in print, and after spending many hours discussing it with Charismatics and trying to evaluate it from their perspective, I am convinced, beyond all reasonable doubt, that tongues ceased in the Apostolic Age nineteen hundred years ago. And I also believe that the word pauo indicates that once tongues stopped, they stopped for good. Let me show you why I say that:

A. The Reasons Why Tongues Ceased in the Apostolic Age

1. The Gift of Tongues Was a Miracle Gift, and the Age of Miracles Ended with the Apostles.

a. The Periods of Miracles

Now, I'm not saying that God doesn't do wonderful things. I'm not saying that God doesn't heal. And I'm not saying that God doesn't act providentially to put together things that would be humanly impossible. However, throughout God's redemptive history, there have only been three distinct periods of time that miracles were prominent. And in each of these periods, the miracles were for the specific purpose of confirming God's Word. These three periods were the period of Moses and Joshua (1441-1370 B.C.), the period of Elijah and Elisha (870-785 B.C.), and the period of Christ and the Apostles (A.D. 28-90). Between these periods of miracles, each of which lasted approximately seventy years, there were long periods of time where miracles either did not happen at all or happened very infrequently. The few miracles that did occur between the specific periods of miracles could in no way be considered to be the norm.

I believe that the miracles that occurred in the time of Christ and the Apostles were simply foretastes of "the powers of the age to come" (Heb. 6:5). The "age to come" refers to the millennial Kingdom, not the Church Age. So, at certain intervals in God's redemptive history, He cut a little hole in the coming Kingdom and let some of its character leak out--little tastes of what was to come. It was never God's intention, however, to let miracles run riot throughout all of redemptive history...not at all.

b. The Passing Away of Miracles

The last recorded miracle in the New Testament occurred around A.D. 58 with the healing of Publius' father (Ac. 28:7-10). From that date to A.D. 96, when John finished Revelation, there is no record of any miracle occurring. The miracle gifts, like tongues and healing, are mentioned only in the older book of 1 Corinthians. When the gifts are discussed in later books like Ephesians and Romans, there is absolutely no mention of these gifts. So God, in His wonderful design, had a wonderful purpose for miracles.

c. The Purpose of Miracles

The Apostles were a part of a miracle age of confirming His Word. They were involved in offering the Kingdom to Israel and giving them a taste of the miracles and powers of the age to come--letting them sample the Kingdom. This is what the writer of Hebrews was talking about when he basically said to his Jewish readers, "When you have turned your back on the Kingdom which you have sampled, there isn't any hope for you. It's impossible for you to be renewed again to repentance once you have tasted of the powers of the age to come and turned your back on them" (Heb. 6:4-6). Once Israel turned its back on God, He turned from Israel to the Gentiles. At that point, the purpose of those miracles as a sign to Israel had ended. That's an important truth to understand!

A text that is vital to our thinking is Hebrews 2:3-4. The writer of Hebrews was writing to Jewish people who had come to a head knowledge of Christ and were deeply considering whether or not they would come to Christ as their Savior and Lord. In other words, they were riding the fence. So he says to them, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him [the Apostles], God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with diverse miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit...."

Notice that the writer of Hebrews uses the past tense in verse 3 when he says that the gospel "was confirmed." By the time Hebrews was written (as early as A.D. 68), the gospel, or doctrine of salvation, had already been confirmed by signs, wonders, diverse miracles, and gifts of the Spirit--supernatural manifestations proving its divine origin. It's interesting to me that even by this time, the writer of Hebrews viewed these confirming miracles as something in the past.

My point is this: I believe that God is a God of miracles. I believe that God can do whatever He wants, whenever He wants. And I'm excited when He does! However, the constant dialogue that I'm hearing about the massive outbreak of miracles in our day doesn't fit the biblical pattern. Why? Because we're not in the Kingdom.

Let me add a second reason why I believe the gift of tongues stopped in the Apostolic Age:

2. The Miracles Gift of Tongues Was a Judicial Sign to Israel Because of Their Unbelief.

In 1 Corinthians 14:21, Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11-12 and says, "In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear Me, saith the Lord." In this prophecy to Israel, God was saying, "Israel, I have spoken to you in clear words, but you haven't listened to Me. So, as a sign confirming your unbelief, I will begin to speak to you in a language you won't be able to understand." The gift of tongues was part of God's judicial act of telling Israel that He was turning aside from them to the church. He had offered them the Kingdom, but they had refused it. They had refused and executed their King...their long-awaited Messiah. So, as a judicial sign of Israel's covenant violation, God spoke to His people with other tongues and other lips. We'll discuss this point in great detail when we look at 1 Corinthians 14.

The gift of tongues had a primary significance to Israel. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 14:22, Paul says, "Wherefore, tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not...." The gift of tongues was never intended for Christians; it was intended as a judicial sign to Israel. So, once God's judgment had fallen on Israel, the gift of tongues would have no significance at all. Well, God's judicial act against them came in A.D. 70 when Titus Vespasian, the Roman conquerer, swept down and destroyed both the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. At that point, Judaism, for all intents and

purposes, came to an end. And the gift of tongues, which was a sign to unbelieving Israel of God's judicial act against them, also came to an end. Why? Because it was no longer needed.

A third reason why I believe the gift of tongues has faded is:

3. The Gift of Tongues Was Inferior to the Gift of Prophecy

When tongues were interpreted, they had the ability to edify. In 1 Corinthians 14:5, Paul said when tongues were interpreted they would have some edifying capacity. Uninterpreted, tongues were a sign against Israel; but to give it some meaning in the church, they had to be interpreted. However, this potential for edification was not its main purpose. Once Israel had been judged, the purpose of tongues as a judicial sign ceased. I've heard people say, "Even though the gift of tongues is no longer a judicial sign, it still has the potential to edify the church." Well, that is unnecessary, because the gift of prophecy is far superior to the gift of tongues as an expression of edification. First Corinthians 14:1 says, "Follow after love, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy." In fact, in chapter 14, Paul proves that the gift of tongues is an inferior means of communication (vv. 1-12), an inferior method of praise (vv. 13-19), and an inferior method of evangelism (vv. 20-25). In verse 19 of the same chapter Paul says, "...I had rather speak five words with my understanding...than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." So, there is no reason to exalt the gift. It has no continuing edifying purpose that can't be better accomplished by prophecy (preaching). That's the point of chapter 14.

The fourth reason why I believe that the gift of tongues has ceased is:

4. Speaking in Tongues Was Rendered Useless When the New Testament Was Complete

Another characteristic of the gift of tongues was that when a person spoke in tongues and had it interpreted, it was a direct revelation from God. Well, has direct revelation from God ceased? Yes, it has! Is there any more to the Scripture than what we now have? No! In fact, at the end of the last book of the Bible, the Apostle John wrote, "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18). So tongues, as a revelatory source, ceased to have the meaning that they had in the infancy of the church--when God was giving revelations before the revelation was complete.

Hebrews 1:1-2 says, "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son...." In these last days we have been given the Word of the Son--the New Testament. That's it, folks. There is no further revelation!

The fifth reason that I believe speaking in tongues has ceased is:

5. Tongues Are Only Mentioned in the Earliest New Testament Epistle

It's so interesting to me that 1 Corinthians is the only Epistle where the gift of tongues even appears. Paul wrote at least twelve other Epistles and never even mentioned it again. Peter never mentioned it; James never mentioned it; John never mentioned it; and Jude never mentioned it. The gift of tongues disappeared. Even though it has always been the mystical dream throughout history that God would give a private revelation of Himself to each individual, it hasn't happened. God gave His Word and then authenticated it. What we now have is "the faith which was once [for all] delivered unto the saints" (Jd. 3b). Revelation has ended, beloved. Tongues as a revelatory, sign, edifying gift has ceased to have any function.

Now, 1 Corinthians 13:8 says that tongues will cease, right? That's not even a point to argue about. And we've already seen that the word pauo in verse 8 has a sense of finality to it--meaning that once tongues stopped, they would never start up again. So, an important question to answer, then, is this: Since the Apostolic Age, has the gift of tongues ever ceased? Well, the sixth reason why I believe the gift of tongues has ceased is this:

6. History Records That the Gift of Tongues Ceased in the Apostolic Age

Did you know that the first revival of tongues within the confines of the evangelical church of Jesus Christ since the Apostolic Age was in 1901? Where has it been for eighteen hundred years? Does 1 Corinthians 13:8 say that tongues will cease and then start up again? No. Tongues ceased...never to start up again. Their purpose was accomplished. This is supported by...

a. The Significant Obscurity of Tongues in the Writings of the Early Church Fathers

The Post-Apostolic Fathers were the church leaders who lived immediately after the Apostolic Age. If you study their writings, you'll discover something very significant--they don't discuss the gift of tongues. Cleon Rogers, a scholar and missionary, 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 Church," Bibliotheca Sacra, 122:134).

Let me give you some examples:

1) Clement of Rome wrote a letter to the Corinthians in A.D. 95 discussing all of their spiritual problems. He didn't even mention tongues, because apparently it had ceased. So when the true gift ceased, their abuse of it ceased. The gift of tongues, then, wasn't even an issue by A.D. 95.

2) 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 even made lists of spiritual gifts that do not include the gift of tongues.

3) Origen (A.D. 185-253) was a widely read scholar without equal in the minds of some. In all of the volumes that 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 prophetical gifts.

4) 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, edited by Philip Schaff. New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1888). In other words, by the end of the fourth century, Chrysostom indicated that because tongues didn't exist anymore, the gift was hard to define or understand.

5) 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 spake 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 Fathers, vol. 7, edited by Philip Schaff. New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1888).

So, the greatest theologians of the ancient church considered the gift of tongues a remote practice. By the fourth century they didn't even understand what it was anymore.

b. The Supposed Occurrances of Tongues Since the Apostolic Age

1) Outside Mainline Christianity

a) Montanus and Tertullian

During the period of the early church fathers, the only people in the church who were reported to have spoken in tongues were the followers of Montanus and Tertullian. In the middle of the second century, Montanus, a pagan priest who had been recently converted to Christianity, announced to everyone that he was the spokesman for the Holy Spirit. Believing that Christ was soon going to set up the Kingdom with headquarters in his home town of Phrygia, he tried to justify speaking in tongues as an occurrance of the end of the age. He was accompanied by two female priestesses, Prisca and Maximilla, who also spoke in ecstatic speech. Montanus was thrown out of the church as a heretic.

Tertullian, a disciple of Montanus, advocated speaking in tongues as well. He lived from A.D. 150-222.

Let me add that there are other occasions of tongues, or ecstatic speech, during this period--but not in Christianity. Tongues were characteristic of pagan religions (e.g., the priestesses of Delphi, pagan witch doctors, and various seers), but they were not present in Christianity.

After Montanus and Tertullian, the next eruption of tongues within Christianity wasn't until the late seventeenth century in a group called...

b) The Cevenols

The gift of ecstatic utterance was claimed by a group of persecuted Protestants in southern France around 1685. They believed that their little children, who knew only the local dialect, were able to speak in perfect French while in a trance. The group was soon discredited because of their night raids and military reprisals against their enemies. And because all their prophecies went unfulfilled, they were branded as heretics and not considered to be a part of mainline Christianity.

c) The Jansenists

Around 1731, a group of Roman Catholic reformers, called the Jansenists, were holding night meetings at their leader's tomb, during which they supposedly spoke in ecstatic languages.

d) The Shakers

The Shakers were the followers of Mother Ann Lee, who lived from 1736-1784. She regarded herself as the female equivalent of Jesus Christ--God in a female body. She founded the Shaker community in Troy, New York, and claimed that she had received a revelation from God that sexual intercourse was corrupt...even within marriage. It is said that in order to teach her followers to mortify the flesh and to resist temptation, she instituted the practice of men and women dancing together in the nude while they spoke in tongues.

e) The Irvingites

About 1830, Edward Irving started a little group in London known as the Irvingites. This group began to speak in tongues, but was soon discredited for several reasons: Their revelations contradicted Scripture, their prophecies went unfulfilled, their supposed healings were followed by death, there were rumors of immorality, and some of the leading members were accused of fraud.

Now, all of these groups which supposedly spoke in tongues were not a part of mainline, genuine Christianity. They were all "offbeat." At the start of the twentieth century, however, speaking in

tongues moved...

2) Within Mainline Christianity

a) Pentecostalism

The first time tongues became part of mainline Christianity since the Apostolic Age was in 1901 at Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas. Agnes Ozman received what she called "the baptism of the Holy Spirit" accompanied by speaking in tongues. The practice became part of the Holiness movement of the church in America. In 1906, speaking in tongues came to Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California. Out of these two events in 1901 and 1906, grew the mainline Pentecostal denominations that many of our brothers and sisters in Christ are a part of today. Unlike many of their predecessors, Pentecostals believe the Word of God and preach the Word of God--and for that we praise Him. But this particular movement within mainline Christianity didn't begin until the start of this century.

b) The Charismatic Movement

In 1960, in Van Nuys, California, the modern Charismatic movement (which is tongues outside of mainline Pentecostal denominations) began in an Episcopalian church. It soon spread across mainline denominations of all kinds.

Now, I pointed all of this out to show you that the true gift of tongues is not something that has gone on throughout history. The Holy Spirit, through the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:8, said that the gift of tongues would cease. Well, it did cease! And there's no reason to believe that it has come back again. People always say to me, "John, if the gift of tongues hasn't come back again, what is it that we're seeing today? How do you explain it?" Well, I'll answer that question in our next lesson.

Let me say this in closing. I have some dear friends who speak in tongues, and they will continue to be my friends. I will always love them. In fact, I have less of a problem with them speaking in tongues than I do with gossiping that goes on in a language that everybody understands. But God has called me to teach His Word, and I have to teach it the way it is. I know that the theme of 1 Corinthians 13 is love, but love must be exercised within the confines of the truth. And that's what I am attempting to do.

Focusing on the Facts

1. How would you describe the city of Corinth as it existed in Paul's day?

2. What was the overall tragedy of the Corinthian church? What were some of their specific problems?

3. All of the problems in the Corinthian church can be attributed to the absence of _____.

4. What does Paul mean by the statement in 1 Corinthians 13:8, "Love never faileth..."? How do we know that it doesn't mean, "Love always succeeds and wins in every situation"?

5. What three spiritual gifts does Paul contrast with love, in 1 Corinthians 13, to illustrate the permanency of love? Why did he use spiritual gifts to make his point?

6. How would you describe the leadership of the Corinthian church?

7. What is the definition of the gift of prophecy? What is the purpose of this gift?

8. What is the definition of the gift of knowledge? Why was this gift considered important by the Corinthian church?

9. What is the definition of the gift of tongues? What was its purpose?

10. What is the future of the spiritual gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:8?

11. What are the three basic views of when the gifts of 1 Corinthians 13:8 are going to end?

12. First Corinthians 13:8 makes a distinction between how the gifts of prophecy and knowledge will cease and how the gift of tongues will cease. What is the difference in the way these gifts will cease and how does verse 8 show this distinction?

13. According to 1 Corinthians 13:9, when are the gifts of prophecy and knowledge going to cease?

14. When did the gift of tongues cease? What are the six reasons which prove that the gift of tongues ceased at this time?

15. How many periods in history could be considered as special periods of miracles? What was the purpose of the miracles in each of these periods? Who were the key figures representing each of these periods?

16. The miracles that occurred during the time of Christ and the Apostles were a preview of what future time in history?

17. What important truths regarding the miraculous sign gifts are taught in Hebrews 2:3-4?

18. What did speaking in tongues signify to unbelieving Jews?

19. According to 1 Corinthians 14:22, the gift of tongues was primarily intended for what group of people?

20. What happened in A.D. 70? Why is this important to a discussion of the gift of tongues?

21. How were tongues able to edify the church? When did this capacity for edification cease? Why did it cease?

22. What spiritual gift was superior to the gift of tongues in its ability to edify the church? What is Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 14:9?

23. Why did God give direct revelation to the early church? When did He stop giving direct revelation? Why?

24. What's significant about the fact that the gift of tongues is only mentioned in the early Epistle of 1 Corinthians?

25. How do we know that the gift of tongues was not prevalent in the postapostolic church?

26. From the first-century church to 1901, did tongues occur within mainline Christianity? What were some of the groups during this period of time that claimed to speak in tongues?

27. Since the Apostolic Age, when did speaking in tongues become part of mainline Christianity? What major denomination was started at that time?

28. When did the Charismatic movement start? How does this movement differ from Pentecostalism?

Pondering the Principles

1. What effect was the church of Corinth supposed to have on the city of Corinth? What effect did they have? Why? What are the ways our society is similar to the Corinthian society? What are some of the specific ways that you see the modern church affected by our society? Are there any areas in your own life that are being influenced more by the world's perspective than by God's? If so, what are they? What's the best way to combat the negative influence of the world? (see Ps. 119:9, 11; Rom. 12:1-2; Col. 3:16a) On the one hand, commit yourself to remove those things in your life that do not support God's view of life as revealed in His Word. On the other hand, commit yourself to spend more

time reading and studying His Word, and being more involved with those in the body of Christ (Heb. 10:24-25).

2. Even though the main discussion in this lesson was on the gift of tongues, what is the emphasis of 1 Corinthians 13? When was the last time that you demonstrated love to another Christian who has a different doctrinal persuasion than yourself? Think of someone you know who is a Christian, but who holds a different view than yourself in the area of spiritual gifts. Now think of a specific way that you can love them by exercising an act of self-sacrificial service on their behalf. Remember, even though doctrinal differences may arise between members of the body of Christ, we must still show love to one another. However, this does not mean that we are to ignore doctrinal error. First Corinthians 13:6 says that love "rejoices in the truth." So one aspect of loving one another is to strive for doctrinal purity by pointing out doctrinal error...not by ignoring it!

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