
INTRODUCTION

As we have discussed in previous lessons, the Corinthians of Paul's day were obsessed with spiritual gifts that often would convince the unbeliever that our God not only existed but that He had power beyond human abilities. As a result, many Corinthians got carried away with the gifts given without examining their hearts for motive. As a result they failed to see that their actions were not driven by love or a desire to please God. Without love their greatest achievements could never truly glorify Him. In our previous lesson we found out that where gifts may come to an end, love will never fail. ⁸ *Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.* Our next set of verses will tell us why.

1 Corinthians 13:9-13 (NKJV)

⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part.

¹⁰ But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

¹¹ 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.

¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

¹³ And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love.

⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part.

Through a special gift of knowledge, some Corinthians had supernatural insight to spiritual matters. Other Corinthians were empowered to prophecy. But the knowledge and the prophetic utterances were only part of what God knew of the situation. Anyone blessed with either gift should have known they didn't know it all! A young disciple once told his master that he was ready to strike out on his own. The master asked the disciple how he came to that conclusion. The disciple said "Master you've taught me everything you know!" The master quickly corrected his disciple and replied, "No, I've taught you everything YOU know!"

¹⁰ But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

The word "*perfect*" can be translated to mean "mature" or "complete", depending on the context. (Look at Matt. 5:8, 19:21, 1 Cor. 2:6) As a rule, something that is partial or incomplete can be discarded when the entire thing or the complete thing comes on the scene. For example, if I was given an electronic copy of a few pages from a book on the subject of the Holy Spirit, I could get rid of the copies once I purchased the entire book for myself. The next verse tells us why this principle is important.

¹¹ 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.

Some of the things a small child will explain in very simplistic terms can cause us to reflect and laugh a little. My grandson once said, "I would like to have some peace and quiet, not peace and noise." As we've matured we've realized that our child-like simplistic ways of looking at things change as we gather more information, experiences and knowledge. Our Christian walk will mature with the more information (fed by our pastors and teachers), self-study, and prayer is increased.

¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

Now Paul applies the principle of maturity to the use of spiritual gifts. Paul compares the use of spiritual gifts of that time to looking into a mirror. Mirrors weren't that great back then. They weren't made from glass, but from highly polished metal which didn't reveal a sharp image of the one looking into it. Gifts act in the same way as a Corinthian mirror. We can only gain a less than complete picture of the things that God knows. This isn't because the Holy Spirit couldn't give us a complete picture; it is just our inability to understand what we've seen after we've seen it. Paul says that at some time in the future we will understand as well as we know ourselves. Some theologians say that Paul is thinking of the second coming of Christ when we will "see Him as He is" (1st John 3:2). In either case, the point is that the gifts we hold so dear are only temporary and love is not one of them! This thought is better brought out in our next verse.

¹³ And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Both faith and hope are critical parts of a Christian life. But both of these will not be needed when we reach the other side other by death of this body or by the rapture. In heaven we will have what we hope for now. *"hope that is seen is not hope" (Romans 8:24NKJV)*. Our faith will be replaced with evidence that is seen. *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1*). However, love will still be a part of the heavenly scene. *And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. (1st John 4:16 NKJV)*