

1CO 13:8-13 "Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears."

I'm often amazed at the lives of Hollywood movie stars. Here are people who have it all, from a worldly stand-point. They've got the Rolls-Royce's, they've got the mansions in Beverly Hills, they've got the Lear Jets, and yet it's not uncommon to hear of some of these people admitting that their lives are still empty. And for those who don't admit it, they're probably lying.

Most of them have dedicated their lives to succeeding and gaining fame and wealth, but once they get to the top they often will conclude that it's not all that it's cracked up to be. I saw a report recently of a number of child stars of the 50's and 60's, most of whom are no longer in show business.

What was interesting is that a number of them essentially had given up on life because they had measured their lives by their careers, not by who they are. The child star who played Dennis the menace struggled for years with the show being canceled, well into his adult years, and just recently came to grips with the fact that fame and wealth, or now the lack of it, doesn't define him.

A good friend of his who played Rusty in the 1950's sitcom with Danny Thomas: I think it was the show, "No Time for Daddy", recently committed suicide. In fact, there is an organization which has been formed as a support group just for child stars, who are no longer working in the business, to help them realize that their fame doesn't define who they are.

To place our hope in the things of this world, or to define ourselves by this world is to miss the most important point which is that nothing of this world will last. Nothing of this world can save, and nothing of this world is worth holding on to so tightly that we don't have a hand left for reaching out and grasping the hand of the Savior.

1JO 2:16-17 "For everything in the world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does - comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and

its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."

The dream of this world is to live forever. Ponce de Leon sought for the fountain of youth, science thinks it's on the verge of actually coming up with a drug to prolong life for many many years. But, since sin entered into this world through Adam and Eve, God did not intend for it to be a place that will last forever, nor is it a place where we will live forever in its present sin-filled cursed form.

In fact, this defines the hope that though this world is passing away, we have the assurance that what Christ accomplished on the cross will secure a world on this earth that will be transformed from a place that is cursed to a place that will take on all of the characteristics of Eden where sin and the curse are removed by God and we who are in Christ will rule and reign with Him forever on the new earth.

2 Peter 3:10-13 ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. ¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ¹³ ***But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.***

Part of the problem in the church at Corinth was that their perspective on life didn't seem to get past the worldly approach to this life. They were still consumed with self and greed and all of those things which divide.

Paul has taken a great deal of effort to remind them that there is only one thing that will last, and one thing that will really make a difference in this world, and that is the love of God which manifests itself in this world. Everything else in this world will ultimately fail, but love never fails, because God is love. He will never fail us.

And so, as we come to our text Paul reminds his readers and us that even spiritual things, which are designed to encourage each other, which are designed by God to build up the body of Christ, and which are designed to help us be conformed in the image of

Christ, have a purpose in this world which will one day no longer be needed.

But maybe we're getting a little ahead of ourselves. After all, we're making an assumption that these gifts found in our text are still in effect today in the church. Some would suggest that these gifts of tongues and prophecy died out with the apostolic age in the first century, which would make this discussion a moot point.

1Co 13:8-10 "Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but *when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.*"

"When that which is perfect comes" or as the NIV puts it "when perfection comes", is what some people point to and conclude that it refers to the completion of the Bible, the perfect word of God, at which point the need for the stated gifts ceased.

Without getting into a lengthy discussion it must be pointed out that if the perfect thing referred to in 1Cor.13:10 is the Bible then we must also conclude that those things which will pass away as a result of its completion cannot be limited to prophecies and tongues as noted in 1Cor.13:8, because in that same verse is knowledge, and all knowledge has not passed away.

Others suggest that the "perfect" or "perfection to come" refers to Jesus. And though it would certainly include Him it seems that the word perfect, which can also be translated completion, is more likely to refer to the completion of all things where Jesus has completed His perfect plan once and for all and all things have come to pass according to His plan.

1Co 13:9 "For we know in part and we prophesy in part....." In other words, we know imperfectly because we are imperfect and we live in an imperfect world. We "prophesy in part." In other words, we prophesy imperfectly for the same reasons.

But when all of God's redemptive plan is completed we will no longer need these imperfect means to walk with God. Why? Well, Paul tells us in 1Co 13:12 "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

Today we see things in the reflection of a sin-filled and sin-affected world and so we see, in a spiritual sense, poorly. But

there will be a time when we will see face to face. In other words, there will be no more dimness of reflection because we will be completed in glory, God's glory.

1Jo 3:2 "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

When will Jesus appear where we will see Him as He is? At His coming in glory where we will be resurrected and meet Him in the air to be with Him forever more.

And when will that happen? On the last day.

John 6:39 ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

And so as Paul says in 1Cor.13;12 "Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

Our knowledge is partial or imperfect, our wisdom is partial or imperfect, our gifts, such as tongues and prophecy, is partial in that it's imperfect. But when perfection comes or is completed, when we see Christ face to face at the resurrection, we will no longer need the imperfect to commune with our glorious Lord.

Therefore, all that God gave to the church for its edification and its ability to know Him and love and serve Him are very much in need today and are still in effect for precisely the same reasons that they were needed in the first century, albeit imperfect in the sense that they are used in and with imperfect vessels.

The gift of prophecy and tongues is with us today because the Spirit of God, who gives good gifts, is with us today.

But, if Godly spiritual things have a temporal purpose, how much more temporal are those things of the world which are destined to burn? That which lasts for eternity is where we need to be investing our time, our efforts and our lives, is Paul's point.

Paul is using temporal spiritual gifts from God as a contrast to the eternal plan of God coming to fruition. Simply because something is spiritual does not necessarily make it everlasting. The gift of prophecy was never meant to be an eternal gift. It was meant to be used in this world where Christ's church needs to be encouraged and built up for the work we are called to perform for our Lord here in this present world.

Unfortunately, many of the Corinthian believers were placing so much emphasis on this particular gift that they lost sight of the better gift of love which would never come to an end. And so, even a good thing, like a spiritual gift from God, can be used in such a way that actually gets in the way of the better gift because of the hardness of man's heart.

The same is true of the gift of tongues. You would think that among some groups that tongues is the ultimate in gifts and that not to speak in tongues is the equivalent of not being saved, which in fact, among some "Christian" groups, is the case.

Some of them conclude that if you don't speak in tongues you don't have the Spirit of God which, whether they realize it or not, is saying you are not saved, because no one can be saved who doesn't have the Spirit.

The gift of tongues is meant to be used in this world to edify the body of Christ and bring glory to God, but there will be a time in which tongues will no longer be needed in this way.

The same is true of knowledge. What we're doing this morning is an exercise in gaining knowledge about our God. And that's the kind of knowledge Paul has in mind. In fact, we are instructed by our God to always endeavor in gaining this kind of knowledge so that we might better know God, and grow in Him, and better represent Him as we take this knowledge and walk in it in the power of the Spirit to the glory of God.

But there will be a day when this pursuit will be advanced as we will have a knowledge of God that will be complete in one sense where we no longer need imperfect teachers to instruct us because Christ Himself will be our instructor as we continue to learn of Him at His feet for eternity.

And so, when God's perfect plan is completed in glory the gift of prophecy would be useless, since the gift of prophecy is used by

God today to reveal His presence in a veiled sort of way. In glory the veil will be taken down completely.

The gift of tongues is a gift given by God to some of His people to raise their voices in praise and adoration and prayer to God where their minds are not understanding the language and yet their spirits are edified. How useful will this be when we'll be in the very presence of God and we can praise Him directly in the language we will use for eternity?

Paul is not putting down any of these gifts. He's simply trying to give us an eternal perspective on life and the things in life which are designed to bring glory to God, even the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But as I've said before, if we put the gifts ahead of the gift giver then we've misplaced their importance. And that's what the Corinthians have done.

How this comes over to Christians in the twenty first century is that we too can be so consumed with the means of knowing and serving God that we lose sight of the fact that as important as the means are, they are not a substitute for actually knowing God.

What I mean is this. We are instructed to seek God in His word, for example. This is vital in our growth and ability to know about our Lord and His will. But what can happen is that we can get so caught up with the book which God gave us, and the words in that book, to the point where the process of being in the book gives way to a real living relationship with the one who wrote it.

How many times have we been tempted to think that if I don't get in at least three chapters each day from God's word then I've disappointed my Lord, and so if we miss them one day we make it up the next by reading six.

What Jesus is saying to us is, don't just read the word, come to My word with the express purpose of hearing from Me, who is in heaven, and who has given you My Spirit, so that you can have My fellowship and My peace today, as you show the world this eternal relationship.

The same is true in the way we worship our Lord, for example. Why do we come out on Sunday mornings? For many Christians the answer is varied: we come out because we're supposed to, or we come out to hear a sermon. Others come out to hear the music, or maybe they come out to simply get a good feeling for the week.

I've known Christians who come out because it's the one time during the week where they can meet with their friends. All of these reasons may have some legitimate significance as to why people come out, but it would be very easy to lose sight of the fact that the reason we come out is because God has called us to come out into His presence.

He has made it clear that He desires for us to gather together to come out to meet Him, to thank Him, and to worship Him for this gift of eternal life He purchased for us through His Son at the cross.

And so, when we sing these songs on Sunday morning, for example, it's not so that we can hear ourselves, or to simply be part of a larger crowd which may or may not be able to carry a tune. It's to take the words which someone else wrote down and to make them a part of our present experience as we convert those words to our hearts and now make them ours in the form of a prayer or praise.

It's essentially coming before the throne of God and laying our hearts before Him with the means we have in the form of a worship song. Simply singing a worship song is not necessarily worship. But coming before God to worship Him with a worship song is. This is the epitome of love never failing. This is why we can make a joyful noise and still be able to worship the Lord.

It's not just about carrying a tune, it's about coming before our God with the understanding that He is there to receive us and our praise as it comes from a heart which is thankful and grateful.

One day all of the imperfect means of knowing God and serving God will come to an end. One day we may be able to sing like Pavarati in glory. But in the mean time we must use the means God has made available and use them with this understanding that the means are not the end; Christ is.

1CO 13:10 "...but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears."

We've already addressed this but I would like to say that for those who believe that the perfect or perfection or completion that Paul is addressing here means the completed word of God, and for that reason prophecy is no longer needed, I would just say that they misunderstand the "gift of prophecy."

In my study on this gift in the book of Romans I go into some detail as to what this gift is and what it is not, and one of the things that it is not is the means by which special revelation was given to the church. That was through the special apostolic office as the apostles were moved by the Holy Spirit as the God-breathed words were given to them from the Lord.

This is why we are **not** gaining new "special" revelation today. God's word is complete, neither to be added to, or taken away; but how many Christians in the world can say with confidence that they've learned everything about God from His word? Knowledge continues.

And so, if the perfect has not come then prophecy, tongues, knowledge and the rest of the gifts of the Spirit continue to the time when the perfect does come which, as we saw earlier, is the time in which God's perfect plan comes to fruition when, ultimately, the new heavens and the new earth will be issued in.

And so, the gifts of the Spirit will still be in effect, to whatever degree. There will still be Christians in this world who will be using the means God gave to know Him and worship Him and learn of Him as the body of Christ is edified and built up right to the end.

Part of Paul's thought here in the last part of chapter 13 is to put into perspective this spiritual life we have in Christ and not get so puffed up thinking that in the utilization of these gifts that somehow we've arrived. None of these things are meant to be viewed like that.

It's like trying to compare the things we used as children with being the equivalent of the life of an adult. Who in their right mind would suggest that playing with a rattle in a playpen is the same as wielding a pen in the writing of a musical score for Broadway?

Who would ever think that playing cowboys and Indians is the equivalent of preparing a strategic battle plan for something like Desert Storm? One may be in preparation for the next, but they are nowhere near each other in scope or operation.

Paul is saying that this is true in the spiritual life. Spiritually speaking we are babies learning how to crawl, from an eternal perspective. How do you compare using something as temporal as

speaking in tongues with actually joining with the host of heaven in God's very presence praising His holy name forever?

How can anyone boast of his spirituality in such a way as to say that there is nothing more I can learn, there is nothing more I can experience, or there is nothing more in store for us in this present world as far as our relationship with Christ is concerned? This is why Paul uses the analogy he does.

1CO 13:11-12 "When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. 12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

Paul is not suggesting that this present life in Christ is "baby life" which is some sort of goo-goo, gaa-gaa insignificant past time until we get to heaven. His point is that the best is yet to come and not to think of this present life in Christ as the end all. We're just beginning to experience this awesome life in Christ and we should use this life to its fullest to learn and grow and become mature believers to the glory of God.

These Corinthians became comfortable in their walk thinking that simply because they were practicing spiritual things, albeit in the flesh, that they had arrived, and that they were the supreme example of what it meant to be a Christian. This sort of thinking lends itself to not actively pursuing the things of God. Why pursue them if you've supposedly got them all?

Paul is saying that no one has arrived, we're all still pilgrims as we walk with Christ. It is childish to think that our present experience with Christ is the ultimate expression of what it means to be a child of God. Our present experience with Christ has only just begun.

And so, Paul is saying that when I was a child I used to talk and reason as a child, who thought the world revolved around me. Remember when you were kids? I remember my older sister playing dolls and making me a part of her world.

But everything seemed to become real in this fantasy world. My sister would set the table and invite the other guests who happened to be her dolls. She would have these conversations with them and pour them tea and pretend that they talked back. I guess I was supposed to be her imaginary sister since she made me wear those

little plastic high heels with the stretch strap across the front.
Come on, I was two.

For children this is a world filled with fantasy. But children must grow up and become real parents with their own children in a real world. Paul wants us to understand that a life with Christ is not a fantasy world where we need only show up at the tea party on Sunday mornings or midweek and play the role of a Christian.

Being a child of the living God is not meant to be played at. It is real and significant and has everlasting consequences as we go out in this world and represent Him faithfully. To play with it as a child plays at his games is to miss the most important aspect of what it means to be an ambassador for Christ.

Now, granted we don't come into the kingdom of God as mature believers. We all start out as children. It takes time to grow and mature and use the gifts God has given us. But there comes a point in time where this new life in Christ must become bigger than ourselves.

It must take into consideration others and their needs. It must take into account how we use our gifts in such a way as to promote Christ and His kingdom, and begin to get away from the notion that we keep this gift to ourselves.

And so, for Paul, he is reminding us that, like children, who once thought this way, we must begin to grow up and put away these childish things, knowing that there is a way to look at life and that is through God's eyes. And with God the eternal is always in mind.

1CO 13:12 "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

What does Paul mean by the expression, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror"? Well, in the days of these Corinthians their city was actually one of the main manufacturers of mirrors.

But in those days a mirror was made out of polished brass or silver. There was no way to get a true reflection. But this would have hit home with these believers in Corinth because it would have reminded them that despite how well they thought they saw and understood the things of God, there was much more to see one day, and not to be too comfortable with a poor image, but to long for the face to face encounter with Christ.

What this does is to force us not to look at our present world and experience as the only thing we get. To consider our present situation and conclude that this is all we have is really to lose sight of the future hope we have. This is what Paul meant when he wrote to the Romans.

ROM 8:24-25 "For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."

Paul is telling the Corinthians to keep their hope alive. If their hope is in what they presently possess or experience, then they have a false hope, because our hope is not in this world. Even with all of the spiritual blessings we possess in Christ today, it is only a taste of what is to come.

I long for the day when I see Jesus face to face. I long for the day when every tear will be wiped away, where there will be no more weeping or disease or pain. I long for the day when sin and the curse of sin will be a thing of the past. But more than that I long for the day when I get to kneel in the presence of the one who purchased me and gave me an eternal inheritance in Christ.

It's when we **don't** long for these things that this world becomes more and more palatable, and we become more and more susceptible to the things of this world. Paul would say that we need to grow up and away from such thinking so that we can be more effective servants for Christ and be less susceptible to losing heart when this world disappoints us.

HEB 12:2-3 "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

It is this attitude that allows us to go forward. But this attitude only goes forward when it has a reason and a motivation to go the distance. And that reason and motivation is something outside of ourselves which has now been made a part of our lives in Christ. That reason is love. His for us, and ours for Him.

1CO 13:13 "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

Faith and hope hang on love. Faith and hope come from love. It is the love of Christ for us which enables us to understand and long

for this love which has been extended to us as we embrace this hope by faith.

There is no hope if there is no love. And by love I mean, not just the action of love, but the source of love who is God Himself. What Paul is doing here is showing us that because God is love we have hope. And because God is love we have a faith which looks to Him for life. He is our hope.

And it's when we put all of this together that we begin to understand that our salvation is bigger than this world. It is bigger than our own experience. It is a promise that we have come into a personal relationship with the Creator of the universe who loves us and wants to use us in His kingdom which extends into eternity.

But this eternity extends for all people whether they know Christ or not. A child may not be concerned for the welfare of others, but adults should know better and they should appreciate the truth of what this world has to offer and what Christ has to offer.

If we love Christ, then we must love people with the truth. Our love in Christ must point them to hope and faith that they too may know what it means to embrace God who is love.

The gift of tongues will one day cease. The gift of prophecy will one day cease. This world will one day cease. Do we want to focus so much on the things that will one day cease that we miss out on the most important aspect of life?

We are most certainly in this world, but we are not of this world. This world is not our home. We're just renting space.

Philippians 3:20-21 ²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Philippians 4:1 ^{NAU} Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

But until we do go home we need to be loving God above all and our neighbors as ourselves and stand firm in the truth of God's word as we give them the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior, and that there is no other name under heaven by which men must be saved.

It's really that simple. The world is vying for our attention and our lives. Don't let the world dictate to you, set your heart on Christ and His will.

COL 3:1-4 "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

Our hope, our life, our all in all. May Jesus Christ be praised!