

Parson to Person

1 Corinthians 13

(The Greatest: Love) Part 4 and 5

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 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. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will 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, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:1–13).

“Love never fails” should be understood as “love (agape) will never come to an end.” “Love (agape) is constant.” “Love (agape) is consistent.” Moreover, we might correctly suggest that “love (agape) is perfect.” Therefore, Paul makes the case that (agape) love is enduring but many other “gifts” are not. He wrote that *“prophecies...will fail; ...tongues...will cease; [and] ...knowledge...will vanish away”* (vs. 8) when *“that which is perfect has come”* (vs. 10).

That Which is Perfect

Arguments have been made concerning the meaning of *“that which is perfect”* and when it came, or, if it has not yet come, when it will. There are several opinions and each must be examined.

Opinion 1—The Canonization of the Scriptures

Some suggest that the *“perfect”* is the completed and approved canon of Scripture—both Old and New Testaments. It is believed that the New Testament gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) along with all the epistles were written between 49 A.D. and 95 A.D. It is also believed that the “compiled collection” was recognized just after the death of John (believed to be sometime just after 98 A.D.) but officially approved as inspired texts (canonized) in 397 A.D. However, one must then defend either the late first century or late fourth century as the climactic *“perfect”* and, thus, the

end of the “gifts of the Spirit” (specifically mentioned: prophecy, tongues, knowledge) in order to make their case.

The fact that many of the gifts of the Spirit predate the Church Age should call the attentive Bible student to reconsider the cessationist position from this context. Varieties of tongues, wisdom, prophecy, knowledge, faith, etc., all comfortably rest in the Old Testament beginning in Genesis and throughout the Old Covenant Dispensation. Moreover, miracles, healings, prophecy, etc., will occur during the Tribulation and Millennial Reign of Jesus. Therefore, the “*perfect*” cannot be now, in the Church Age, even though we have a canonized Bible.

Opinion 2—The End of the Church Age

It is pretty clear that the end of the Church Age (signified by the Rapture) cannot be the “*perfect*” as the result of prophecy, miracles, etc., occurring during and throughout the Tribulation and Millennial Reign of Jesus.

The Church will be perfected at the rapture but the Church is not “*the*” “*perfect*.” “*The perfect*” in Greek is a singular neutral gender adjective—not a noun. “*Perfect*” describes a condition or state of being.

The end of the Church Age and/or the Rapture of the Church cannot be supported as the “*perfect*.”

Opinion 3—The Second Coming of Jesus

The Second Coming of Jesus (at the end of the Tribulation) will, with certainty, end the spiritual disciplinary judgment of Israel. This is the time when a “finishing of the transgression” will occur (see Daniel 9:24) and the spiritual blindness she presently endures will be removed (see Isaiah 6, Matthew 13:14–15, Romans 11:1–12, then Zechariah 12:10, 13: 1, Ezekiel 39:25–29, etc.)

Some might correctly suggest that supernaturally inspired/manifested tongues will cease at that time—for tongues are (among other things) a sign of judgment against unbelieving Israel (see Isaiah 28:11–12 and 1 Corinthians 14:20–22).

The confusion of tongues at Babel was also a supernatural sign—as a Divine Worldwide Judgment demonstrating God’s divine displeasure with disobedient man. The gift of tongues is different than that which occurred at Babylon—yet similarly *supernaturally inspired*. The gift of tongues is temporal—and thus will come to an end.

Communication will continue.

Opinion 4—The Millennial Reign of Jesus

During the Millennial Reign of Jesus, the curse will be restrained—but not removed. This alone should suggest that the Millennial Reign of Jesus is not the “*perfect*.”

During the Millennium, prophecy will continue (see Joel 2:28), but *false* prophets will be restrained and cut off (see Zechariah 13:2–4). Miracles will be the norm (see Isaiah 35:5–10), but Satan will be bound (see Revelation 20:1–3). Life will be extended (see Isaiah 65:20), but death will still occur (Psalm 2:9–12).

After the 1000 years, Satan will be released from his prison “*for a little season*” and a climactic war will occur (see Revelation 20:7–10).

It is impossible to suggest that the “*perfect*” is the Millennial Reign of Jesus.

Opinion 5—The New Heaven and New Earth

It is best to suggest that “*that which is perfect has come*” refers to the New Heaven and New Earth.

In the New Heaven and New Earth there will be no more curse (see Revelation 22:3), no more pain, no more sorrow, and no more tears or crying—for the former things will have passed away (Revelation 22:4).

Conclusion

We cannot accept the argument that the canonization of the Scriptures is the “*perfect*”—nor is there perfection any time during the Church Age, the Tribulation, or the Millennial Reign of Jesus. The “*perfect*” must be the New Heaven and New Earth.

It is only in the New Heaven and New Earth that supernaturally inspired “*prophecy will fail*” (come to an end and be rendered inactive)—because there will be no need to predict the future. Supernaturally inspired and manifested tongues will cease (be stopped and finished)—because the curse is removed, all judgments will have ended, and communications will thenceforth go unhindered. Finally, during the New Heaven and New Earth supernaturally inspired “*knowledge will vanish away*”—because, as Paul put it, “*then [we] shall know just as [we are] known*” (vs. 12).

I love you all,
Pastor Paul