

When Will the Spiritual Gifts Stop?

" 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." 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 (NKJV)

Spiritual gifts were promised by the Lord to believers; were administered by the apostles; and were for a limited time (Mark 16:15-18; Acts 8 & 19; 1 Corinthians 13). We also know that there were nine such gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4-11); and 1 Corinthians 12 discusses the use of these gifts. But the purpose of this article is to answer the question, "How can we know WHEN these spiritual gifts will cease or be done away with?"

In 1 Corinthians 13:8, Paul stated that "love never fails." But he says that the gifts of "prophecies," "tongues," and "knowledge" would "cease" (NAS) or "would be done away." (NAS) And this would happen "when that which is perfect is come" (v.10). The question is, however, has "that which is perfect" come; and consequently, have the spiritual gifts been done away?

A Brief Study of the Greek Words We Want to Notice

In the New American Standard Version, the translators say that both the gifts of prophecy and knowledge would be "done away." The KJV translates it that the prophecies "shall fail" and knowledge "shall vanish away." In the original, however, the same Greek word, *katargeo*, is used for both. In both the KJV and the NAS the phrase "shall cease" is used in reference to the gift of tongues. That is because it is translated from a completely different word, *pauomai*.

The word for "fail," *ekpiptei*, ("love never faileth") is another totally different word, yet. So, then, what we have is this: The gifts of prophecies and knowledge will *katargeo* (translated as "fail," "vanish away," "be done away"); but the gift of tongues will *pauomai* (translated "cease").

In the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* we are told that the word *katargeo* means: a) to condemn to inactivity, b) to destroy, c) to remove from the sphere of activity, d) religiously, to make completely inoperative.

Let's look at some other places where this word is used in our Bibles: Death is to be "abolished" [*katargeo* meaning destroyed], in 2 Timothy 1:10 and 1 Corinthians 15:26. Also, we have been "discharged" [*katargeo* meaning removed from] from the law, in Romans 7:6. Also, the Old Testament law was "done away" [*katargeo* meaning made completely inoperative] in Christ in 2 Corinthians 3:14 and by Christ in Ephesians

2:15. Notice that when Christ died on the cross the Old Law was done away. So then, while it could still be read in Paul's day as well as ours, its activity is gone, being no longer in force! In the same way, when "that which is perfect comes," the need and purpose for the gifts of prophecy and knowledge would be gone; when the divine revelation was complete, these gifts would stop via inactivity.

Katargeo indicates coming to an abrupt end when the need has expired.

The word *pauomai* ("to cease"), used concerning the demise of the gift of tongues, means something somewhat different. This difference, however, tells us something about how this spiritual gift was to stop. In the *Arndt-Gingrich Lexicon* we are told that the word *pauomai* means "to stop oneself."

The gifts of prophecies and knowledge had to be done away with (come to an abrupt end). But the gift of tongues would stop by themselves. Prophecies and knowledge would be "done away with" in the same way that sacrifices of the Old Law were "done away with." Paul said, in Ephesians 2:14-15, "For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing [*katargeo*] in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace...." How was the Law done away with? By something better taking its place!

The gifts of knowledge and prophecy would be done away with "when that which is perfect is come."

Consider the Context of 1 Corinthians 13:8-10

This context begins in 1 Corinthians 12:1 and ends with 1 Corinthians 14:40. Chapter 12 deals with the diversity of spiritual gifts. In 12:31 we are introduced to the quality of love in contrast with spiritual gifts. In verse 31, Paul told the Corinthians, "But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way." Then in chapter 13:1-3, he points out that "love" is more important than the spiritual gifts of tongues, prophecies, and knowledge. In verses 9-10, Paul contrasts that which is "in part" and that which is "perfect." He says now we know "in part" and we prophesy "in part," and then tells us that which is "in part" shall be done away with and replaced by "that which is perfect." And then in verse 12, he says, "I shall fully know as I am fully known." Let's look at the two Greek words that are translated as "in part" and "perfect."

"In part" is translated from the Greek *ek merous*, meaning partially. Paul knew God's will partially through the spiritual gifts. Later, Paul would know fully or completely when all the parts are put together. Look at 1 Corinthians 12:27 where Paul speaks of "members in particular." (*ek merous*); i.e. each person who had a gift was only a part of the whole.

The Key in the Context is the Word "Perfect"

"Perfect" is translated from the Greek *teleion*, meaning, according to *Thayer's Lexicon*, "brought to its end, finished; wanting nothing necessary to completeness." In the *Arndt-Gingrich Lexicon* the word is described as, "having attained the end or purpose, complete, perfect." It is important to note that this word is an adjective and not a noun. Some have taught, in error, that "that which is perfect" refers to Jesus. But even in our English language we never refer to a person as a "that." In Greek or English "that" is neuter gender. Christ is not referred to as "that" but as "Who." The key to understanding this passage properly is in the proper understanding of the word "perfect." Let's look at some other New Testament uses of the Greek word *teleion*:

(1) Jesus commanded us not to be respecters of persons in loving our friends and hating our enemies (Matthew 5:44-47), but to be complete or "perfect" [*teleion*] like our heavenly Father (v. 48) in loving friends and enemies alike.

(2) Jesus said that the rich, young ruler could be "perfect" [*teleion*] if he would "go and sell your possessions and feed the poor...." (Matthew 19:21).

(3) Paul said that his preaching was wisdom among those who are "full grown," or "perfect" [*teleion*] (1 Corinthians 2:6)

(4) Paul urged the Corinthians to be "men" [*teleion*] (i.e. "full grown" or "perfect") instead of babes (1 Corinthians 14:20).

(5) In Ephesians 4:13 we read that the body of Christ is to be built up unto a full-grown, "mature" [*teleion*] man.

(6) When Paul wrote to the Philippians he said (3:15) that some of the Christians were "perfect" [*teleion*].

(7) Epaphras prayed that the Colossians would stand "perfect" [*teleion*] in the will of God (Colossians 4:12).

(8) The Hebrews were chided for not having progressed to the solid food aspect of the Word of God which is for grown, "mature" [*teleion*] men,

described as those who have their senses exercised to discern good and evil (Hebrews 5:14).

(9) James describes the law of liberty as the "perfect" [*teleion*] law. (James 1:25)

Now let's look at "that which is perfect" in its context: 1 Cor. 13:9-12, "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with 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 fully just as I also have been fully known."

"That which is perfect" is the completion of that which is in part. We know "in part" and we prophesy "in part" refers to the proclamation of the gospel by divine will as the apostles were teaching by the use of spiritual gifts. When Jesus promised to guide the apostles into "all truth," (John 6:13) it was not done all at once. During the first century these inspired men were each revealing the parts of the whole gospel as the Lord was revealing it to them through the Holy Spirit via spiritual gifts. It was not until almost the close of the first century that the whole had been revealed.

Paul gives us an illustration. When a child grows up (matures) and becomes full grown, he puts away that which is childish. "I spoke as a child" – means he had immature thoughts and ideas; "understood as a child" means he was lacking in knowledge; "I thought as a child" means his reasoning based upon limited knowledge and understanding. He compared it to trying to see one's face in a dark and smoky glass compared to the reality of face to face.

Conclusion

The purpose of spiritual gifts was both so that the ones who were preaching the gospel would have the exact message from God to proclaim, and that the ones who were the listeners would know this revelation was from God and not man (read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5). Paul said that his "message and preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."

Don't ever wish you could go back to that time when they had spiritual gifts. Don't ever think that we have less than they did then. We have the perfect revelation from God. Desiring "spiritual gifts" is to desire to go back to glimpsing through the "dark glass."

Spiritual gifts ceased because their need ceased. Some died instantly. The spiritual gifts of prophecies and knowledge were "done away" [*katargeo*]. When God finished His gospel to us there was no more need for those spiritual gifts. These spiritual gifts stopped because God stopped revealing. His message was complete. Some spiritual gifts lingered for awhile and died of their own accord. The spiritual gift of tongues would "cease" [*pauomai*], or stop by itself. One would assume that when the last person died who had the spiritual gift of tongues, that spiritual gift died also.

Spiritual gifts were never meant to last forever. While the church was in its infancy, they were needed. But the church became full-grown. God, as in all of those things He created miraculously, gave the church all that it needed to continue to reproduce after itself. That's why today, when you plant the "seed," the word of God (Luke 8:11) in fertile soil (the heart of the honest man, Luke 8:15) the fruit that is produced is simply a Christian.

In closing, let me also mention that we can know that spiritual gifts (the nine spiritual gifts of our context beginning in 1 Corinthians 12) are no longer in force today because the only way that they could be passed to another is by the laying on of the apostle's hands. In Acts 8, Philip, who was not an apostle, had to have apostles come from Jerusalem to lay their hands on the Samaritans so that they could receive spiritual gifts. (Look especially at vv. 17-19). Also, read Acts 19:1-7. Since there are no living apostles it should be obvious to all, based upon these passages, that spiritual gifts were never intended to last past the first century, and are certainly not active today.

I am thankful that we live in the age of the "still more excellent way"
"But now abide faith, hope, love -- these three; but the greatest of these is love."

By David A. Beck from *Expository Files*, July, 1994