

## **The Lasting Longevity of Love**

### **1 Corinthians 13:8-13**

Introduction: This topic is very difficult theologically, and very emotional sociologically, in the life of the church. Since the early first century and teachings of Montanus, to the present day and the teachings of Benny Hinn and others, the movement of Charismaticism, Pentecostalism, Signs and Wonders, Vineyard, Fourth Dimension, have caused the church to wrestle with the Scripture, looking for a definitive statement as to theological truth and precision. This morning I can only hope to give a brief outline of some of the issues involved, and postulate a possible solution to it. It will in no way be complete, but it will at least be a start. Whenever dealing with an emotional topic like this, in which people have already made up their minds, there is always a chance of offending, or at least irritating. Neither is my goal, but it may be the outcome. If so, please forgive me in advance, and see me afterwards. The goal is not to offend, but to affirm the teaching of the Word of God.

#### **I. The Preeminence of Love :1-3**

#### **II. The Perfections of Love :4-7**

#### **III. The Permanence of Love :8-13**

A. The Principle of Permanence Confirmed :8a

**LOVE**

B. The Principle of Permanence Contrasted :8b-12

1. That which is passing :8

Three gifts (revelatory in nature):

a. Prophecy will be done away – future passive καταργεω

β. Tongues will cease – future middle voice παυω

c. Knowledge will be done away – future passive καταργεω

The Middle Voice of 1 Corinthians 13:8

What is the force of that statement of Paul “As for tongues, they will cease” in First Corinthians 13:8. The verb is found to be in the middle voice. Does this have any impact or influence concerning our exegetical options as to the meaning of the text? Is it true that New Testament Greek has abandoned the classical use of the middle voice in which the subject is acting in relation to himself or itself in some way? Bill Mounce (William Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids,

1993, p. 224) writes: “Many grammars say the middle is “reflexive,” but we are uncomfortable with the term. The “direct reflexive” was common in Classical Greek but not in Koine. The only one in the New Testament is at Matt 27:5, but Moule (*Idiom Book*, 24) disputes even this one.”

One wonders what led to the uncomfortable state of Mounce through the voluminous grammars that present a view that leads to his agitation. It appears that dogmatics and theological assumptions or bias may play a role in his discomfort. In another footnote he writes:

A good example of the problems caused by assuming that the classical use of the middle is always present is found in 1 Corinthians 13:8, where Paul says that the gifts of tongues “will cease” (pauvsontai). It is argued by some ... Paul is saying the gift of tongues will cease in and of itself. Regardless of one’s views on the topic of spiritual gifts, we feel this is an incorrect use of the middle. It assumes that the middle here has the classical usage, even though *BAGD* lists no self-interest meaning for the middle of pauvw. And when one looks at the other eight occurrences of the verb, it is seen that the verb is a middle deponent and not reflexive. The best example is in Luke 8:24, where Jesus calmed the sea. “Jesus rebuked the wind and calmed the water, and *they ceased* and became calm” ... The wind and water certainly did not “cease” in and of themselves. The middle of this verb does not designate “self-interest”; it is deponent (deponent means the verb is middle or passive in form, but active in meaning).

But does this argument by Mounces fit all the facts? What do the other grammarians have to say? In *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* p.420, Dan Wallace my former Greek grammar teacher, puts the facts in a different light than those that deny the force of the middle voice in the New Testament and especially in 1 Corinthians 8:13. Wallace writes:

One’s view of the nature of NT Greek has strong implications for this use of the middle voice. If one thinks that NT Greek has abandoned the rules of classical Greek, then h/she would not put much emphasis on the force of the middle voice in a given passage. Moule, for example, argues that “as a rule, it is far from easy to come down from the fence with much decisiveness on either side in an exegetical problem if it depends on the voice” (Moule, *Idiom Book*, 24).

However, if one thinks that the NT Greek has, for the most part, retained the rules of classical Greek, then he/she will see more significance in the use of the middle voice. On this side of the fence, Zerwick writes: “The ‘*indirect*’ use of the middle voice ... especially shows the writer to have retained a feeling for even the finer distinctions between the sense of active and middle forms” (Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, 75).

It is our contention that a careful examination of the usage of a particular middle voice verb in Hellenistic Greek will shed light on how much can be made of the voice. What is frequently at stake, grammatically speaking, is whether the middle is to be considered indirect or deponent...”

It is often in the fine points of grammar studies that facets and facts concerning meaning are discovered. It is true that to make a defense of a doctrinal position only on grammatical grounds is not the safest of positions. However, the use of the Granville Sharp rule and Coldwell’s Construction and their aid in determining the deity of Jesus is a welcomed grammar fine point that the Church is grateful to have and grateful to grammarians for detailing its use. In discussing debatable and exegetically significant texts, Wallace p.422 has this to say about 1 Corinthians 13:8 and the grammar:

If the voice of the verb is significant, then Paul is saying either that tongues will cut themselves off (direct middle) or, more likely, cease of their own accord, i.e., “die out” without an intervening agent (indirect middle). It may be significant that with reference to prophecy and knowledge, Paul used a different verb (katargevw) and put it in the *passive* voice. In vss. 9-10, the argument continues: “for we *know* in part and we *prophecy* in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial shall be done away {katarghqhvsontai}.” Here again, Paul uses the same passive verb he had used with prophecy and knowledge and he speaks of the verbal counterpart to the nominal “prophecy” and “knowledge.” Yet he does *not* speak about *tongues* being done away “when the perfect comes.” The implication *may* be that tongues were to have “died out” of their own *before* the perfect comes. The middle voice in this text, then, must be wrestled with if one is to come to any conclusions about when tongues would cease.

The dominant opinion among NT scholars today, however is that pauvsontai is not an indirect middle. The argument is that pauvw in the future is deponent, and that the change in verbs is merely stylistic. If so, then this text makes no comment about tongues ceasing on their own, apart from the intervention of “the perfect.” There are three arguments against the deponent view, however. First, if pauvsontai is deponent, then the second principal part (future form) should not occur in the *active* voice in Hellenistic Greek. But it does, and it does so frequently. Hence, the verb *cannot* be considered deponent. Second, sometimes Luke 8:24 is brought into the discussion: Jesus rebuked the wind and sea and they *ceased* (ejpauvsanto, aorist middle) from their turbulence. The argument is that inanimate objects cannot cease of their own accord; therefore, the middle of pauvw is equivalent to a passive. But this is a misunderstanding of the literary features of the passage; If the wind and sea cannot cease voluntarily, why does Jesus *rebuke* them? And why do the disciples speak of the wind and sea as having *obeyed* Jesus? The elements are personified in Luke 8 and their ceasing from turbulence is therefore presented as volitional obedience to Jesus. If anything, Luke 8:23 supports the indirect

middle view. Third, the idea of a deponent verb is that it is middle in form, but *active* in meaning. But *pauvsontai* is surrounded by *passives* in 1 Cor 13:8, not actives. The real force of *pauvw* in the middle is *intransitive*, while in the active it is transitive. In the active it has the force of stopping some other object; in the middle, it ceases from its own activity.

In sum, the deponent view is based on some faulty assumptions as to the labeling of *pauvsontai* as deponent, the parallel in Luke 8:24, and even the meaning of deponency. Paul seems to be making a point that is more than stylistic in his shift in verbs ...”

It is clear that this verse including the verbal nuance of the middle voice, does not tell us when tongues will cease, but it certainly gives credibility to a view that sees this text as potentially answering the question of the perpetuity of tongues.

2. That which is partial :9

Two gifts (notice the reversed order- prophecy and knowledge :8):

- a. What we know in “part” - μερους
- b. What we prophesy in “part” - μερους

3. That which is perfect :10

a. The Identity :10

(1) The word τελιος or τελειον means “perfect” or “mature”.

- (a) Option 1: τελειον means “perfect” and refers to the second coming. Since that appears to be the issue in verse 12 when we see him face to face.
- (b) Option 2: τελειον means “mature” or “complete” and refers to the partial maturing of the body accomplished by the end of the canon or complete maturing at the Parousia, i.e., second coming- beginning with the rapture and then the final coming. (Matt 24)

(2) Why τελειον does not mean “perfect”.

- (a) The use of the word τελιος does not mean absolute perfection, as in Greek philosophy, or the perfect man. This is evidenced in Paul’s use as he uses it figuratively to refer to a grown man (1 Cor. 2:6; 14:20; Phil. 3:15; Eph. 4:13; Col.

1:28; Heb. 5:14).

- (b) In 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, the word “perfect” is a qualitative word and unsuitable in light of the comparison made with “part” or “partial.” Hence, a better word would be “whole” or “complete” as being the opposite to “partial.”
  - (c) The illustration in verse 11 is a comparison between a child, νεπιος, and a man, ανηρ.
  - (d) The terminology in 13:12 is an allusion to the different degrees of revelatory understanding, not perfection or the freedom from imperfection. Hence, in verse 12, “we see...I know...” correlate with the gifts of prophecy in knowledge, and their limited insights, compared with the complete understanding that will prevail in the future. Hence, this is quantitative, not qualitative. Therefore, τελειον must have the same quantitative connotation.
- (3) The reasons why τελειον must be translated as “complete” or “mature.”
- (a) Along with the other usages of the term referring to a comparison between a child and a man (1 Cor. 2:6; 3:1; 14:20; Eph. 3:13-14), we find also in 1 Corinthians 2:6 Paul speaks of imparting wisdom to the mature, but the obstacle he finds is that this readers are infants, 3:1 νεπιους. (NB. The rulers are “Passing away” same term as in 13:8) A similar situation is found in **14:20**. Children compared to mature!
  - (b) The parallel between 1 Corinthians 12-14 and Ephesians 4:1-16 – both passages teach a gradual maturing of the church through the present age. This is highly likely in light of the fact that Paul was in Ephesus while writing 1 Corinthians. He probably was teaching the Ephesian church the same principles he wrote to the Corinthians – notice the similarities:
    - (i) All seven unifying influences listed in Ephesians 4:4-6 are found in 1 Corinthians 12-14, i.e., one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one baptism, one God, one Father of all.
    - (ii) Emphasis on the unity of the body is found in both passages (1 Cor. 12:4-6, 11-13, 24-26; Eph. 4:3, 13). Also includes the diversity of body members (1 Cor.

12:14-26; Eph. 4:11).

- (iii) The noun “part,” μέρος in both passages depicts singular or individual members of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:16).
- (iv) The corporateness of the body (1 Cor. 12:27a; Eph. 4:15-16). This combines with an individualistic focus as well (1 Cor. 12:27b; Eph. 4:4, 7, 16).
- (v) The general subject in the discussion in both Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12-14 is spiritual gifts.
- (vi) The figure representing the church is the human body, as is Paul’s custom when speaking about spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:4; 15:16; Rom. 12:3-8). Both passages include edification of the body (1 Cor. 4:12, 26; Eph. 4:12, 16).
- (vii) The concept of the growth from childhood to adulthood is seen in Ephesians 4:13-14 as well as 1 Corinthians 13:11. Also 14:20
- (viii) The comparison of mature man and child is found in Ephesians 4:13-14 as well as 1 Corinthians 13:10-11.
- (ix) Love is the overarching quality in terms of growth (1 Cor. 13:1-13; Eph. 4:15-16).

Conclusion: It seems that the concept in Paul’s mind is not one of perfection at the end, but moving from childhood to mature adulthood, given the word that is chosen and the growth illustration that is used. This concept is portrayed even more in verse 11.

b. The Illustration :11

Child versus Man

Speak –Think–Reason. All imperfect tense Past action  
(Spoke, Thought Reasoned)

Verse 11 is illustrating the growth from infancy to maturity, as seen from verse 10. It also anticipates verse 12, at a time of future maturity and/or completeness.

Many would say that Paul has in mind that the coming of maturity is parallel to the Parousia, or the coming of the Lord, i.e., perfection. However, in Philippians 3:12, Paul views himself as incomplete in his current state, as an adult. In fact, in the next verse in 1 Corinthians 13:12, he disclaims such a complete state by noting that at present he is among those whose present situation is obviously conspicuous with limitation. The fact of this state of incompleteness in Paul as an adult negates any possibility that he intends his adulthood in verse 11 to correspond to the state of ultimate completion in verse 12.

c. The Ideal :12

The ideal that Paul has in mind is two-fold. First, the maturing of the body of Christ will be accomplished once the New Testament is complete and the body utilizes the revelatory resource that God has provided. Up to this point, the Corinthian church, and all churches in the New Testament, were depending upon the apostles and prophets giving sporadic but inspired revelation from God. Once the New Testament canon would be complete, the revelation would be full, and the church would have a standard by which to answer all doctrinal and theological questions. Hence, Paul's illustration for the ideal is that in the present we look in a mirror dimly, perhaps referring to the bronze mirrors produced at Corinth which were opaque at best. But at a future time, we would see him face to face. This may be an illustration of seeing someone comparing a poor quality reflective mirror, with the face to face clarity. The second fulfillment of this would be found at the Parousia, when we would see Christ face to face and be fully known by him. Hence, what Paul is envisioning is the reality that revelatory gifts were gradually ceasing as the apostles and prophets gave revelation that would one day become enscriptured. Just as the miraculous gifts ceased before the first advent, i.e., 400 years of silence from the last prophet to the coming of Christ, so too revelatory gifts in the church would cease before the second coming of Christ. However, Paul is assuming the possibility of Christ's second coming could be very soon, perhaps even in his own lifetime (1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:15-17). If this did happen, then the maturing of the body, in its complete sense, would take place. Hence, the partial maturing of the body would come about because of the completion of the canon to guide the church for however long it waited for Christ's return, the complete maturing of the body would take place at Christ's actual return. Paul did not know which would come first, but wrote in a way and with a style that would be compatible for either possibility. Hence, the first century church was in the process of maturing, i.e., through doctrinal and theological canonization of what was to be our Bible, and awaiting the ultimate

completion at the coming of Christ. Rapture-Resurrection. (I Thess 4-5)

C. The Principle of Permanence Clarified :13

**LOVE**

In light of the temporary nature of prophecy, tongues, and the gift of knowledge, love was eternal. Paul accomplishes a two-fold contrast by showing love is greater than faith and hope, and that love is obviously greater than the partial and the time-terminated gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge.

Summary

We know that not all gifts remain operational. Eph 2,4 Apostles and Prophets are the foundation.

We know that not all believers have been given all gifts. I Cor 13:28-30

We know that during the first early years of the church that began in Acts 2 that there was only the OT and that the Lord was producing the NT to guide the church through the writings of the Apostles and the words of the Prophets.

The revelatory gifts and the sign gifts were temporary in nature for a special purpose for the beginning of the church.

The Corinthians were misunderstanding and misusing the purpose of Gifts for their own glory much like they did with other issues in the church.

Paul as a good pastor is Feeding Leading and Protecting this local church and the universal church.