

(1 Corinthians) ch.12:22-13:13

by Zac Poonen

The body of Christ is interdependent and all members are necessary, regardless of their gifts or ministries.

Duration: 43:53

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:1

Topics: "Spiritual Gifts", "Christian Love"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of love in the exercise of spiritual gifts. He describes a hypothetical man who possesses impressive gifts such as speaking in tongues, prophesying, and understanding mysteries of Christ. However, the speaker highlights that even with all these gifts, if the man lacks love, he is considered worthless in God's eyes. Love is defined as being concerned about others rather than oneself, and it is characterized by patience and the ability to bear with the faults of others. The speaker encourages the listeners to meditate on the description of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and strive to manifest these characteristics in their lives.

Transcript

Let's turn today to 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 15. In our last study we were considering how there is a possibility that in the body of Christ, because people have certain inferior gifts as they think it, they can have a feeling of inferiority in relation to other members in the body of Christ who have gifts which are more spectacular and in which, in their eyes, is more effective and superior. But this is what Paul is trying to correct.

That in the gift, in the body, there are no gifts which are superior or inferior. All are needed. There are different effects, different manifestations and different ministries and different gifts, but all are needed.

One may be the foot, verse 15, one may be the hand, but both are needed, and the foot need not feel inferior to the hand. The ear need not feel inferior to the eye, verse 16. And likewise, no member can think that he is all that is needed in the body of Christ.

This is what's referred to in verse 17. And I can think, for example, that I am the most important member in the body of Christ. My ministry is the most important.

My gift is the most important. And to correct that, he says, if the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? And this is to deflate the balloon of those who are puffed up with spiritual pride because of

some spectacular supernatural gift that God has been pleased to gift them with. Likewise with hearing.

Somebody can think, no, it's not the seeing, but the hearing, which is more important. Now we see how relevant this is to the situation today, where there are so many people with gifts and ministries who seem to have the feeling that their own gift alone is the most important. And then that leads to a despising of others and other ministries and other gifts.

It says in verse 21, the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you. The teacher cannot say to the evangelist, I do not need you. Neither can the evangelist say to the teacher, I do not need you.

The person who is called to be a shepherd cannot say to the person who has a gift of healing, I do not need you, and vice versa. Neither can the person with a gift of healing say to the shepherd, I do not need you. And the spiritual man is the man who recognizes that however great and however important and however spectacular his gift, he still needs all the other gifts for the body of Christ to be manifested to the world.

For the effective fulfilling of the ministry of Christ's body in the world. And not only that, he goes on to say here in verse 22, on the contrary, he says, contrary to all these exalted ideas that people with spectacular gifts can have, it is much truer, he says, that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. Think of the weaker members of our body, how necessary they are.

Which, he says, in verse 23, those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor. He first speaks of the weaker members, and then he speaks about those members which are not honorable, verse 23, and then he speaks about those members which do not have a good appearance, the poor-looking members. So we have the weak members, the ignoble or common members, the ones without honor, and third, those parts of the body which are not so attractive.

Now when we studied 1 Corinthians 1, we saw how Paul told the Corinthians that God has chosen the weak things, the despised things of the world, to confound the strong and the clever. And here we see the same thing mentioned again. There are weaker members in the body whom God uses.

The weaker members are necessary. Verse 23, those members which are considered common and ignoble, on them we bestow more abundant honor. In other words, we surround it with special honor, or dress it with special honor.

And then the unseemly members, the poor-looking members, also have a deeper beauty in the work that they do. That is the point of the last part of verse 23, which our good-looking members do not require. That type of adornment our good-looking members do not require.

Now when we apply all this to our human body, we can see that there are certain members of our body which are used frequently, like the hand, the tongue, the eyes, the ears, which can come to have a certain honor because they are visible and their effect is seen. The face, for example, is what people admire so much. The features of a person's face is eyes, nose, ears, etc.

But there are so many other members of the body which are unseen. Consider, for example, the liver, and the kidney, and the heart, and many other internal organs, like the stomach. These are not visible, and even if they were visible, they are not very attractive.

They are very delicate, easily injured. That is why God has protected them inside the body. The hand can take injury and stand it, but some of these internal organs, if they were subjected to the same forces that act upon a hand, they would be injured beyond repair.

They are weaker in one sense. They are hidden. They are not so attractive.

If you look at them, if you take it out and look at them, not so attractive as a human face. Yet, they are so necessary. In fact, more necessary.

And they have more abundant honor, in the sense that when something goes wrong with some of these internal organs, it's a much more serious problem than an injured hand or an injured foot. We know that. And so God has composed the body, verse 24, in such a way as to give more abundant honor, it says in verse 24, to that member which lacked.

This is God's way. He has given more honor to the member who lacks a gift. An apparently spectacular gift.

It doesn't mean that the liver, because it's hidden and more tender, is not as important as the hand. Every part of the body of Christ is important. For example, in the church, the sisters may have a less obvious ministry, a less public ministry than the brothers.

But that doesn't mean that their ministry is not important. The liver is not seen. But it does a fantastic job.

The heart, for example, keeps on pumping day and night. It works even when the eyes and the ears and the hand and the legs have stopped functioning, as it were. It keeps on functioning.

And there are people in the body of Christ like this, constantly working away in prayer and in hidden ministries, and thus the body functions. So no one should despise His gift because it is not manifest publicly. There are many members of our body, He says, which are poor-looking.

Unseemly, it says in verse 23, which means they are not something that we would like to uncover and expose, and yet they have a very important function. And so it is in the body of Christ also. Members that don't look so attractive when they stand on a public platform, but yet having a very important function to fulfill.

That is to encourage anyone who feels discouraged that he doesn't have a spectacular gift or that he doesn't stand on a pulpit often enough. In fact, God has given him more honor. If he would only exercise his gift, if he would not bury his gift like the man who got one talent did, then he can do an effective ministry, fulfill an effective ministry in the body of Christ.

And it says here the purpose with which God has made it like this in the body is, verse 25, that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. So here is a solution for all the division that there is in the body of Christ. What is it? Esteem the members that are weaker.

Esteem the members that are common and ignoble. Esteem the members that are unattractive and less gifted. It's not easy to find a church where people with less gifts are esteemed.

That's a sad thing. And that's why there is so much division. The common people, the poorer believers, esteem them, and then there won't be any division.

And if there is division in the body, examine yourself and see whether in your church the weaker members are esteemed, whether the ignoble, poorer believers are esteemed, whether the less gifted ones are esteemed, or whether you only give honor to the gifted believers, to the ones who are rich, who have a high position, the clever, intellectual ones. Well, no wonder there is division because that is part of God's judgment on a church that does not appreciate all the members of the body of Christ. God desires all members in the body of Christ to be esteemed.

He has so composed the body, it says in verse 24, giving more abundance and honor to that member which lacks, so that there should be no division in the body. Unity is a gift of God in the church. And he gives it to those who follow his laws.

And one of his very important laws, mentioned here in verse 22 to 25, for unity, is esteem the weaker members, the common members, the poor members, the unattractive members, unattractive in terms of eloquence or speech, less gifted members, less beautiful, less attractive, hidden members, value them, esteem them, give them equal value in the body of Christ, perhaps not equal ministry, but equal value, and then there will be no division. The members should have the same care for one another. This is God's will, that every member should have a concern for the other members of the body of Christ.

So he comes to the fruit of the spirit now. It's no use exercising the gifts if we don't have care and love for one another. If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it.

If your left hand is injured, your right hand does something about it, is not jealous of it or proud of it. The fact that it itself is not injured, it helps in the healing of the left hand. Every member of the body works towards the healing of any injured part.

And if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. There is no jealousy in the human body. If a crown is put on the head of a king, the whole body rejoices, and so it should be in the body of Christ.

Suffering together, rejoicing together. If only we would see this, Christ's body could again fulfill an effective ministry in our world, in our day. Let's turn today to 1 Corinthians, chapter 12, and verse 26.

We were considering in our last study how in the body of Christ, if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it, and if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. And this is a fairly good test of how closely we are connected to the head, even Jesus Christ. It does not say, notice carefully in verse 26, that if one member suffers, all the members should suffer with it.

This is not an exhortation, but a statement of fact. There is a difference between an exhortation, which is telling us what we should do, and a statement of fact, which tells us what is a fact in the body. In our physical body, we know it's clear that no member is jealous of the honor given to another member, and no member rejoices when another member is suffering.

It suffers with it. How is it, then, that in the body of Christ, a believer can sometimes feel jealous when another believer is honored or has a greater gift? Or how is it that when another believer suffers, that we don't suffer along with him? There is a reason for this. We can learn something from the human body, too.

When a part of the human body has lost its connection with the head, say the right hand has become paralyzed, and it's unable to respond to the commands of the brain, then it can no longer sympathize with a wounded member. As long as it is not paralyzed, it can help to bring healing, help to put medicine on top of an injured part of the body. But when it is paralyzed, it cannot do it.

And so it teaches us that when we do not suffer with another believer who suffers, that proves that our connection with the head is partially or totally paralyzed. There's a total disconnection, or a partial disconnection, of our joining with the head. Likewise, if there's jealousy in us when another believer is honored or has a greater or a more spectacular gift or ministry, that clearly proves there's something wrong in our connection with the head.

Because no properly connected member of the human body can ever fail to sympathize with a suffering member or rejoice with an honored member. This is a simple test by which we can find out how good our own connection with our head, even Christ, is. Now, you are Christ's body, he says in verse 27.

This is speaking about the local body of Christ. In Ephesians, he speaks about the worldwide body of Christ of which we are all members, and some members have died and gone on into glory, some are yet to be converted. But here it speaks about the local body of Christ.

And that is a group of believers in one locality who are to express Christ's body and its functioning and its ministry and its principles to the world in that locality. You are Christ's body and individually members of it. Every local church must be an expression of the body of Christ and it cannot be so unless it has the gifts.

We can say that if a church does not have the gifts of the Spirit, it is like a body that has no sight, no hearing, no tasting, no smelling, paralyzed and weak. Living, but paralyzed and blind and deaf. That is how it is, apart from the gifts of the Spirit.

It is not enough to have life. A paralyzed, blind, deaf, dumb person can have life, but he cannot fulfill any ministry. And it is not enough to say that we are born again, that we have been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Is there an effective local body of Christ functioning where you are? Every one of us must be a part of a functioning local body of Christ where every member is exhorted to fulfill his gift, where the gifts of the Spirit are in operation and where there is a manifestation of the body of Christ. In Jesus Christ there was fruit and gifts and so must it be in every local expression of Christ's body in every part of the world. Then it says in verse 28 about the leadership that God has appointed in the church and the other gifts.

God has appointed in the church first apostles. Apostles are those whom God has sent with a specific function to fulfill. We can say that they are elder brothers to the elder brothers of the local churches.

Elder brothers to elder brothers. And these are the ones who have authority over local churches, particularly over the ones they have established themselves and who have usually a roving ministry over a wide area. The specific calling and anointing from God for this.

Prophets are those appointed in the church to rectify wrong situations, to expose the problems in a particular church which may not be evident to others. These are people who have insight. They were called seers in the Old Testament.

People who can see through the superficial and the veneer of religion that covers a lot of Christianity. Prophets and who speak fearlessly. The most unpopular gift in the body of Christ.

Prophets. Because they speak the truth with a sword and it hurts usually. Third, teachers.

Those who reveal the hidden mysteries of Scripture and expound Scripture such that we get light on difficult passages and expound the full counsel of God. Now notice, in the church, the most important

ministry is the ministry of an apostle. Not of a miracle worker or a healer.

They come further down. First, second and third are apostles, prophets and teachers. And we must never forget that a miracle worker and a man with a gift of healing must function under apostles, prophets and teachers if he is to build the body of Christ.

Otherwise he will only build his own ministry like an eye saying the eye is everything or a ear saying that the ear is everything. That is a tragedy when a person with a healing or evangelistic gift launches out on his own. In the church, God has appointed a particular order.

And that is first, apostles. Second, prophets. Third, teachers.

Notice, it's gifts of the word of God that come first. Apostles are those who proclaim the doctrine. Established churches are on the word.

Prophets are those who proclaim God's word. Teachers are those who expound God's word. Gifts of the word are given pre-eminence by God himself in the church.

And it's a carnal, soulish, immature believer who changes the order God is appointed. Consider your own life, dear friend. Whom do you consider to be the most outstanding minister of God? A miracle worker or a Bible teacher? If you think a miracle worker is greater, that shows that you are immature and carnal and not knowing the scriptures.

Because the word of God says, God has appointed teachers before miracle workers. And above teachers, he's appointed prophets. And above them, apostles.

They are all equal in the sense of acceptance before God, but for the sake of a particular ministry, the apostles come first, then prophets, then teachers. And after that, those who have the gift of miracles, then gifts of healings, and then helps. Helps are those who help others spiritually, physically, financially.

The gift of helping people, shepherding them, leading them on, encouraging them, visiting them. The gift of a shepherd. And administrations.

This is to see that all things are done decently and in order in a church. God is not a God of confusion, and he places no premium on inefficiency and confusion in a church. And therefore he gives to some the gift of administration, so that things can be done smoothly, efficiently, and well.

And then various kinds of tongues. Miracles and healings are usually associated with the evangelistic ministry. And when we compare 1 Corinthians 12, 28 with the gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4, 11, we see apostles, prophets, and teachers in Ephesians 4, 11, and also here.

But the order of importance is not given in Ephesians 4, 11. Here the order of importance is given. God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, and then, we could say, evangelists.

That is, those who have the gift of miracles and gifts of healings, which is primarily in the evangelistic ministry, and then helps and administrations, which is primarily the shepherding ministry, or the shepherds, who are those who help people by encouraging them, visiting them, and who administer the affairs in a local church. And then various kinds of tongues. This is a gift which every believer can have.

Jesus said in Mark chapter 16 that one of the signs which would follow those who believe would be that they speak in new tongues. That is very clear in Mark chapter 16. We read there in verse 17.

These signs will accompany those who believe. They will speak with new tongues. And various kinds of tongues refer to the gifts which every believer can have.

And so we see here the order. First apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, shepherds, and all other believers fulfilling their function. Now, all are not apostles.

That's clear. Verse 29. All are not prophets.

The Holy Spirit distributes severally as He wills. All are not teachers. All are not workers of miracles, are they? And all do not have the gifts of healing.

He's speaking about ministries in the church. And all do not speak with tongues in the church. They do not.

And all do not interpret in the church. No. In the church there is a variety in the gifts and in the exercise of these gifts.

And each one must be willing to receive that which God has been pleased to give him. Now he says, in conclusion, earnestly desire the greater gifts. It's perfectly right to desire the gifts which have most use in the body of Christ.

And he says, in conclusion, I show you a still more excellent way. That is the way to exercise these gifts. And that is in love.

Many people take 1 Corinthians 13 all by itself. But we must remember, 1 Corinthians 13 is, as it were, the conclusion to 1 Corinthians 12. He's telling us how to exercise the gifts of the Spirit.

Not as a substitute, but as a more excellent way to exercise the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Let's turn today to 1 Corinthians chapter 13. In our last study we considered that 1 Corinthians 13 was really a continuation of 1 Corinthians 12.

It's unfortunate that there is a chapter division here. If we want to understand 1 Corinthians chapter 13 in its context, we must always see it where the Holy Spirit has placed it, in between chapters 12 and 14. That is so simple that even a child can understand, and yet it is so often misunderstood.

There are many who are against the gifts of the Holy Spirit, who take 1 Corinthians 13 right out of its context and study it all by itself. Well, you can go astray if you study it all by itself, apart from its context. We do not take page 13 out of a 16-page letter and try to understand it apart from all the other pages of the same letter.

Here is a letter Paul has written to the church in Corinth with 16 chapters in it. You cannot take chapter 13 out and study it by itself. Particularly, you cannot separate it from chapter 12 and chapter 14, because in the last verse of chapter 12 he says, I show you a still more excellent way.

Concerning what? Concerning the way to exercise the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And remember, chapter 13 does not come before chapter 12. He speaks about the gifts first in chapter 12, and then tells us how to exercise the gifts in chapter 13.

He is not talking about a substitute for gifts in chapter 13. Now, some people read chapter 13 as though Paul was cancelling out everything he said in chapter 12 by what he says in chapter 13. One has to be really foolish to believe that.

If Paul was trying to cancel out everything in chapter 12, he would not have written it at all, or he would have torn it up after he wrote it. No, the Holy Spirit has made no mistake in putting chapter 12 before chapter 13. And therefore he says, I show you a still more excellent way to exercise the gifts.

And now he's talking about the gifts again, chapter 13. He has spoken about the gifts, and he tells us in the first three verses about how these gifts can be used in a wrong way. If I speak with the tongues of men and angels, it's a fantastic gift to be able to speak in a language one has not learned, and the spiritual excitement and ecstasy and thrill one receives.

It can be the tongues of men that we have not learned. It can even be a heavenly language, the tongues of angels. But if I do not have love, he says, I'm just a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

This is very true. That one who speaks in tongues but does not have love is really a noisy gong. To get up in the church and beat a loud gong or clang a loud cymbal will make everybody just shut their ears with pain.

And that's the meaning here. To get up in the church and speak in tongues without love is going to cause everybody to shut their ears in disgust and pain, and you can't blame them for doing it. In the same way, if you have the gift of prophecy, and that is a fantastic gift.

It goes on in chapter 14 to say it's the best gift of the Lord. The prophet has been appointed second in the church. But you can have the gift of prophecy.

Not only that, you can understand all the mysteries. There are many mysteries in the New Testament. The mystery of godliness, Christ coming in the flesh, the new and living way, the mystery of the church as the bride of Christ.

Ephesians 5, you can understand all the mysteries. The mystery of iniquity in 2 Thessalonians 2. And you can have all knowledge so that you can expound Scripture as a wonderful teacher of God's word. And you can have all these gifts.

And you can have all faith. This is supernatural faith that moves mountains and stills storms. But if you don't have love, you are nothing.

Very important to see this. That all the gifts become valueless without love. And further, here is something that can look as an expression of love, but yet can be deceptive.

I give all my possessions to feed the poor. We can learn that generosity is a good thing, and giving is a good thing, and we can start giving. And yet in our giving there may not be love.

We can give like the philanthropist gives out in the world in order to get a name for himself. His giving may not be secret. Or his giving may be with the spirit of a benefactor.

If we give, making people dependent on us, making people grateful to us, connecting people to us instead of to the head. Again, we are using our gift of money. Here it's speaking about money which I can give to others.

Even that's a gift. And I give it, and if I don't have love, all that I've given is worth nothing. It profits me nothing.

I'll have no reward in eternity, because that gift was not given in love. That teaches us that even the gifts we give to God and to others, the value of it is determined by the motive, not by the amount of the gift. Very important for those who give to God and to others to bear in mind.

And further, if I give my body to be burned as a martyr, I sacrifice and go out to some difficult place to serve the Lord, and I give my body to be burned as a martyr at the stake, and yet I may not have love. It may be for human glory. It may be for my personal satisfaction.

It may be legalistic without love in it. It profits me nothing. Now, put all these together.

Supposing you saw a man who had all these qualities mentioned in the first parts of verses 1, 2, and 3. What would your opinion about him be? Just picture a man as I'm about to describe now, a man who speaks in beautiful tongues, verse 1, the tongues of men and the tongues of angels. And, in addition to that, he can also prophesy, such that the secrets of your heart are made manifest, prophesy even concerning the future, and one who has understanding about all the mysteries about Christ coming in the flesh in the new and living way, who has knowledge so that he can expound the Scriptures beautifully, who has faith to remove mountains and still storms and solve difficult situations that confront the church. And on top of that, this man is also extremely generous to the poor.

He gives all his money, all his possessions to help the poor, and finally, this man gives his body to die at a stake. I think there are very, very few believers who could think that such a believer could be carnal. And yet, a man can do all this, be a man such as I've just described, and if he lacks love, this man is zero in God's eyes.

When he stands at the judgment seat of Christ, he gets zero for all his speaking in tongues, for all his prophecy, for all his knowledge of mysteries, and having knowledge and faith, and even for giving all his money away and giving his body to be burnt. Think of the tragedy of it, that a man can have all this and be in the eyes of a multitude of carnal believers, such a great man of God, and end up getting zero in God's eyes. That teaches us that everything is valueless without love.

Love is the thing that gives value to every one of these gifts. You can have a small gift and have love, and that will have greater value than having all the gifts and no love. Let's never, never forget this.

Love means to be concerned about the other person, not about oneself. And that's where the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit get linked up. The fruit of the Spirit is love, primarily, followed by joy, peace, etc.

And he describes this love in verse four onwards. Love is patient. The number one characteristic of love is patience.

That means it can bear with the failings and faults of other people. Remember, the number one characteristic of love is not giving money or any other thing. It's not going out as an evangelist or a full-time worker or as a missionary, but being patient with those who are around you, your fellow believers and with other human beings.

Second, love is kind. And that is in the words we speak to others. There's a kindness and a gentleness in the words we speak, not a harshness, Constant scolding is not the mark of love.

Parents say they love their children, but if they constantly scold them, they do not love them. Love is kind. Love is not jealous.

If you love a brother, you will never, never feel jealous of the fact that he has a better gift than you, a better ability, a better house, a better vehicle, a better family or better anything. There can never be jealousy for anything but a real, sincere rejoicing that that person has something better than you, either spiritually or materially or physically. Love does not brag and is not arrogant.

Love does not show off, either by letter or in one's testimony or in any other way. Love does not seek to show that I am better than you. And it's not arrogant.

It does not lift itself up above other believers, seeking to take on a title, that I'm not an ordinary brother, but one with a title. One needs to avoid all titles in Christendom, because love does not take such titles in arrogance. Love does not act unbecomingly, means love is not rude or discourteous.

Love is not a busybody in other people's matters. Love conducts itself courteously and becomingly. And here's a great mark of love in the middle of verse five.

It does not seek its own. All seeking of one's own can be called lust. When I desire something from another person for myself, it is lust.

When I desire to give myself to that other person, that is love. A fundamental difference between love and lust is not provoked, it's not offended by what other people do or don't do. If I really love, I'll never be offended.

I cannot be provoked to anger or irritation or any such thing where I love. Love does not take into account a wrong suffer. It does not keep a list of all the evils that other people have done to me.

When we keep a list of the evils that other people have done, we know that we don't love them. It does not keep such a list. It does not rejoice in unrighteousness.

This is a pure love, but rejoices in the truth. It does not feel happy when people are in sin. It wants people to be free from sin.

It bears all things. Everything that another person does, hurts, injuries, wrongs, it can bear. Believes all things means it has faith that there's something good there.

There must be a good reason with which that person did it even though I cannot understand it. Hopes all things means it has hope even for those who are really depraved and fallen. Endures all things comes back to the first thing, patience.

It can endure everything that other people do to it. Back to patience. And then it says love never fails.

Notice how love begins with patience, ends with patience, and all the other qualities in between. If we have this, it will never, never fail. Let's turn today to 1 Corinthians chapter 13 and verse 8. Verses 4 to 7 which we considered last week are a very important description of true love.

And I would encourage everyone of you to take those verses and meditate on them for some length of time and see whether the type of love which we claim to have fits in with the type of love described in verses 4 to 7. The love of God has these characteristics. Human love does not. The love of God will have all these characteristics.

Human love may counterfeit some of them but if it is divine love, all these characteristics mentioned in verses 4 to 7 will be there. And then love will never fail. The love of God never fails.

And when the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, as it says in Romans 5.5, these characteristics will be manifested in us. These are not for us to produce. It is for us to recognize that in our flesh dwells no good thing.

Therefore we cannot produce this love. But to be willing to go the way of the cross, to die to ourselves, and to seek from God that supernatural partaking of the divine nature through the Holy Spirit so that this love is manifested through us, so that if we see our lack, we can turn to God and ask Him to give us this love. And to those who seek God like this, they will receive.

This love never fails. And when we have it, even if we don't have spectacular gifts, we shall stand triumphant till the end. It is love which endures till the end.

Endures all things and endures till the end. Again he speaks about gifts. If there are gifts of prophecy, verse 8, they will be done away.

There is no need for prophecy in heaven because nobody needs encouragement or exhortation or challenge or rebuke there. There is no need to foretell the future when we get to heaven. No.

If there are tongues, they will cease. The gift of tongues is to enable us to communicate with God in a world full of pressure and where there are so many difficulties in our communication with God because of our flesh. Our contact with God is so imperfect.

And to help us in that imperfection, God gives us the gift of tongues. In the Old Testament, people did not have this gift because it was not possible to have fellowship with God because the veil was not rent. In the Old Testament, it was not possible for them to have fellowship with God in the spirit like we can have today.

But now that the veil has been rent and a more open fellowship with God is possible and yet the flesh is still there, God gives this gift to enable us to commune with Him more freely so that our spirit can express itself. But when we get to heaven, there is no need for that. Our communication with God will be perfect and therefore there will be no need for speaking in tongues.

And this possibly is one reason why Jesus Himself did not speak in tongues. There was no need for it because His communication with the Father was always perfect because His whole life was completely unhampered and uninhibited by sin. Though He had our flesh, yet because He had never sinned, His mind was clear whereas our mind has been defiled by sin.

And this is why we need the gift of tongues. But in heaven, we will not need it and so tongues will cease. And knowledge, that will be done away with too.

There is no need for knowledge in heaven. There is no need for Bible teaching there. There is no need for scientific knowledge or any other type of knowledge because our knowledge will be perfect.

So prophecy, tongues and knowledge will all be done away with one day because what we know today is in part. And that's a very humbling thing for us to recognize and it's good for us to recognize it that the best among us know only a fraction of the whole of truth. Let's never forget that.

Our entire knowledge is only a fragment of all the knowledge there is in the universe. How stupid then to be dogmatic and arrogant. in these matters.

We prophesy in part which means that even when we prophesy a prophetic word it's only a small part of the whole truth. But when the perfect comes the perfect is when Jesus returns to earth the partial will be done away. It is only then that the partial will be done away and verse 10 clearly teaches that until Jesus comes prophecy, tongues and knowledge verse 8 will exist.

For these things are necessary for this intermediate period. When the perfect comes then and then only will the partial be done away with. And every one of us will acknowledge if we are honest that we haven't become perfect yet.

Paul himself said I've not yet become perfect but I'm pressing on to perfection. And when that perfection is attained then and then only will the partial be done away with. And therefore it is wrong to think that there will be no prophecy in this age or no tongues or no knowledge.

All these three mentioned in verse 8 will be done away with only when the perfect comes. Until the coming of Jesus God will continue to exercise these gifts in the church. There will be prophecy, tongues and knowledge.

In that day I shall be fully mature. And he uses an illustration from our physical growth. He says 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. And so we can say there is a sense in which all these things are for our limited use when we are here on the earth. He's trying to compare love and gifts.

He says gifts are something like the toys a child plays with. There's nothing wrong with it. There's nothing wrong with a child playing with toys.

It's the right thing to do. But when we come to maturity and the full grown stature of Christ we will not need the toys anymore. Grown up people do not play with toys.

Love we will still need. But not prophecy, tongues and knowledge. This is for this period when we are as it were immature compared to our full grown stature in eternity.

Now none of us come to that fullness of stature here on earth. And in order to help others we still need the gifts as long as we are here on earth. Because the whole church has to come to maturity.

Another picture he uses in verse 12 is of looking into a mirror. He says we see in a mirror now darkly. Not clearly.

The mirror itself is dark. And we cannot see clearly everything. And that's good for us to acknowledge that there are many truths which we don't understand clearly.

But then in that day when Jesus comes we shall see face to face. Then everything will be clear. Now all the knowledge I have is only in part.

But then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known. God knows me fully. But in that day only will I know everything fully about myself, about others, about the universe, about God's purposes.

All that I know now is only a small part of the whole truth of God. And that's also a very important thing for us to understand that everything I know is a small fragment. My knowledge is incomplete.

All I know is a little fraction of the truth. But the time comes when I shall know fully just as God knows me. And therefore, Paul says all these things are necessary but let's not forget our priorities.

Now abides, he says in verse 13, faith, hope and love. These three. We understand faith, trusting God.

We understand hope, the hope that we shall be like Jesus when we see Him face to face and know everything that God knows. And love. We understand that too.

It's been described in verses 4 to 7. But he says the greatest of these three is love. Faith is not the greatest even if it can move mountains. Hope is not the greatest even though it looks forward with tremendous confidence to the future.

It is love which is the greatest. Now and in eternity. Now Paul had just mentioned in verse 11 that the full grown man is the man who is perfect in love with the same perfection that Jesus had that fullness and completion which we do not arrive at here on earth.

There is a perfection of love on earth described in 1 John 4 which is just the fullness according to our capacity like the fullness of a cup. But our capacity has to increase. To the fullness of the stature of Christ.

And that takes time. And that perfection comes only when Jesus comes again. And that is the full grown manhood referred to in verse 11.

Meanwhile in a sense we are children using things as children not having the wisdom that Jesus has now. What shall we say then? There is the danger of thinking that therefore gifts are not necessary. Love is the main thing.

And to correct that he says again chapter 14 verse 1 we could say it is a conclusion till chapter 13. Therefore what shall we say? Pursue after love and nothing else? No he says. Pursue after love but earnestly desire spiritual gifts.

In other words keep on pursuing after love while you set your heart on the gifts of the spirit. As J.B. Phillips says while we are seeking for the gifts of the spirit also pursue after love. That is the whole point.

So we see chapter 12 and chapter 14 linked up along with chapter 13. And then we understand chapter 13 in its proper context. That he is describing love and showing us the way in which we are to exercise the gifts of the spirit.

Showing us that one day we shall no longer need these gifts when we are fully grown to the fullness of the nature of Christ and the perfect has come and we see face to face and stand up there in glory with the Lord. Meanwhile we are to desire spiritual gifts because we cannot build a church without it but we are to keep on pursuing after love while we set our heart on the gifts of the spirit. This is the balance of scripture.

To be imbalanced is to just take one phrase in chapter 14 verse 1 either pursue after love or the other part desire earnestly spiritual gifts. And the tragedy is we have groups in Christendom choosing this or that. But Jesus, what did he have? He had love and the gifts of the spirit and thus he could fulfill God's will on earth.

And so too we need both in the body of Christ today.

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