

SPIRITUAL GIFTS: ARE THEY AVAILABLE TODAY?

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant” (1 Corinthians 12:1). The spiritual gifts in this passage are the miraculous powers, such as prophesying, speaking in tongues (other languages), healing the sick, and raising the dead. Are such gifts still available to people today? We must not be ignorant concerning this important matter. Therefore, let us search the Scriptures for the truth about spiritual gifts.

The Bible teaches that miraculous gifts were needed for a specific purpose and for a limited time. They were to confirm the Word until the revelation was completed in written form. Then they would vanish from the scene. Paul proves this in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. Let us study these verses carefully. *“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 fact 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.”*

Notice again Paul’s words in verse 8: *“Love never fails. sBut whether there are prophecies, they will fail, whether there are tongues, they will cease, whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.”* Clearly, the reference here is to the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts would pass away. In verse 9, Paul continues: *“We know in part, and we prophesy in part.”* These early Christians were in the infant stage of their development as the church. The written revelation from God was not complete. Spiritual gifts were needed to guide the church. However, Paul, in verse 10, predicts: *“But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.”* Whenever *“that which is perfect”* came, the miraculous gifts of the Spirit ceased.

We must know what “perfect” refers to in this text. Then we may know whether or not “that which is perfect” has already come. The word “perfect” means “complete” or “whole.” The phrase, “that which,” indicates the word “perfect” refers to something, not someone. Yet, some apply this to Jesus Christ. They say these miraculous gifts were designed to continue until the Lord comes again. Since the Lord has not come again, they believe the gifts of the Spirit continue. This cannot be true. Paul did not write “when He who is perfect has come.” He said “that which is perfect.” Paul’s words do not fit the context if we apply them to Jesus. Also, we must remember that the word: “perfect” literally means “complete” or “whole.” It does not refer to sinless perfection, but to maturity, or completion. That is its meaning in the original language of the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 13, the completion of the New Testament is under consideration.

There is something else in 1 Corinthians 13:13 which clearly shows that “perfect” cannot refer to Christ’s second coming. Hope will no longer exist when Christ comes again. Remember, Paul wrote: *“And now abide faith, hope, love these three.”* In other words, faith, hope and love will abide after that which is perfect is come. Now, when Christ comes again, will hope continue? Will we still be hoping to see our Lord once He has come again? Of course not. He will be with us!

Therefore, ***“That which is perfect”*** in 1 Corinthians 13:10 cannot refer to Christ.

Notice another of Paul’s statements about hope in Romans 8:24: ***“For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?”*** Hope that is seen is not hope. When I have seen that which I have hoped for, it is no longer hope; it has become reality. So Paul asks “... for why does one still hope for what he sees?”

Here is a summary of Paul’s inspired argument showing ***“that which is perfect”*** cannot refer to Christ’s second coming. Paul states that hope will continue after ***“that which is perfect has come”*** (1 Corinthians 13:13). However, there will be no hope for Christ’s coming after He has come (Romans 8:24). Therefore, ***“that which is perfect”*** cannot refer to Christ and His second coming.

In 1 Corinthians 13:11, Paul uses the illustration of the child who grows to the full-grown man. Paul was showing how the infant church was to grow to completion or wholeness with the completed written revelation given by the Holy Spirit. The Bible itself claims to be all-sufficient. Why do we need miraculous gifts now that the Bible is complete? We are now in the time Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, predicted would come. The fact that the Holy Spirit is not operating directly and miraculously today does not mean God is not active in the lives of His people. The providence of God is promised in the Scriptures, and it is present with His people today. God answers prayer **through His providence. God can and does overrule in matters, through natural means, without the need for a direct, miraculous operation of His Holy Spirit. The Spirit influences today by means of the inspired Word!**

The Word of God is all-sufficient to produce obedient faith. *“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name”* (John 20:30,31). The ***“perfect”*** Word provides all we need to know, and the providence of God is promised to us as we make our way toward the eternal home of the soul.