

First Corinthians 13

Aristotle's Virtues and Vices from Nicomachean Ethics <http://pages.interlog.com/~girbe/virtuesvices.html>

1 Cor. 12 ends "I will show you the more excellent way."...building anticipation for ch. 13

αγαπη (**agape**) was the Greek word used in the LXX (Septuagint) for God's love.

- **Eros** Greek for love found in passion
- **Philia** = Greek word for friendly love or affection

Aphrodite, Greek goddess (same as Venus, Roman goddess) was the goddess of love. Aphrodite was the patron deity of Corinth with a temple on the Akrocorinth.

In life anything without love is nothing.

Love by itself is everything.

Love is the very nature of God. Love is more than a character of God.

1 John 4:8, 16 uses "love" to refer to God as no other moral character trait is used.

Compare 1 Cor. 13 to Romans 8:31-39 and 2 Corinth 11:19-29

Three sections:

13:1-3 – The Necessity of Love

13:4-7 – The Character of Love

13:8-13 – The Eternal State of Love

The Gifts mentioned here:

- tongues
- prophecy
- fathom all mysteries (word of wisdom?)
- knowledge (word of knowledge?)
- faith (gift of miracles??, gift of faith??)
- giving (gift of helps?)
- martyrdom (gift of faith??)

The gifts mentioned here basically fill four areas:

1. Ecstatic speech (tongues) – receiving revelation
2. Teaching (prophecy, fathom mysteries, knowledge) - teaching revelation
3. Miracles (faith) – demonstrating God's power
4. Service (giving money or giving life) - serving God's purpose

What follows with the word "if" are three conditional sentences.

Paul does not apply these warnings to others or to the Corinthians, but to himself: "If I..."

13:1

Tongues of men speak of natural languages.

Tongues of angels might refer to ecstatic utterances. Paul is not just being creative with his words here. Some say "tongues of angels" refers to eloquent speech. This is true in some

cases but not in the context of ch. 12-14 here. Tongues are in the chapter before and is the topic of the following chapter. In addition, if “tongues of angels” means eloquent speech then “tongues of men” must refer at least to speech that is less than eloquent. In the worst case “tongues of men” would refer to barbaric, incoherent speech. In context, tongues of angels are the tongues of chapter 12 and 14.

“**gong**” is from “chalkos” and means copper, brass, bronze.

“**resounding**” is “echon” the present active of “echew” and means “to sound, to ring, to echo, to roar.” Literally means “echoing bronze”. These two words combined refer to a hollow echoing groaning noise.

“**cymbal**” is “kumbalon”. Cymbals were used by Jews in their worship services but were even more popular in heathen ceremonies.

“**clanging**” is “alaladzon” and refers to a loud sounding, a clashing. It is used to identify a war cry or a triumphal shouting.

13:2

- Prophecy,
- Fathom mysteries,
- Knowledge,
- Faith

These gifts focus on the area of communicating information or instruction.

In other words, if you have full understanding of God’s word or revelation but do not have love it is worthless.

Mountain moving faith – a reference to Jesus teaching:

Isaiah 54:10; Mark 11:22; Matt. 17:20; 21:21

13:3

These are administrative or service gifts.

Both are giving – again reference to Jesus’ teaching in Matt. 19:21 and Lk. 12:33, “If you want to be perfect sell everything and give to the poor”:

1. Possessions to others.
2. Life for cause of Christ

One of the focuses in this verse is the extreme level of service:

1. “I give all I possess” – all of your possessions
2. “I surrender my body to the flames” – all of your life

Extreme acts do not prove love.

So, love could be demonstrated without “all” or extreme being involved.

Notice:

Verse 13:1	“I produce nothing”
Verse 13:2	“I am nothing
Verse 13:3	“I gain nothing”
Ver. 13:1-3	The gifts themselves are still valuable

The point is not to force a choice between gifts or love.
Love is in a completely different category than the gifts.
The gifts should be used but the motivation for seeking the manifestation of the gifts is love.

Jewish writing shows that they believed angels to have their own language and through the Spirit a Jew could speak these languages.
In the Jewish book “Testament of Job” the daughters of Job spoke “ecstatically in the angelic dialect.”

13:4

1. “Patient” –
2. “Kind” –
3. “Does not Envy” –
4. “Does not Boast” –
5. “Is not Proud” –
6. “Is not Rude” –
7. “Is not Self-seeking” –
8. “Not easily Angered” –
9. “Keeps no record of wrongs” –
- 10 “Does not delight in evil but rejoices with the Truth” –
- 11 “Always Protects” –
- 12 “Always trusts” –
- 13 “Always Hopes” –
- 14 “Always Perseveres” –

The list has:

1. Two positive (one pair)
2. Eight negative (four pair)
3. Four positive (two pair)

“Patient” (“macrothumia”) is long-suffering, long-tempered”. It is patient of pain and injury without paying back. This is a passive response to people. It is God’s attitude toward mankind in Romans 2:4 along with God’s kindness. This word is saying that it takes a long time before breaking out into action which is understood to be passion.

“Kindness” (“chresteuetai”) is the active side of patience. It means to be useful, to be kind and gracious, to show well-disposed service to others. This is active goodness

“Envy” means “fervent, to boil with envy, to be jealous.

“Boast” means to brag, to boast, one who talks a lot and acts presumptuously. Main idea is ostentatious or flamboyant. It is self-center behavior.

“Proud” means to puff up, to expand yourself like a pair of bellows. This is a result of the one before, boasting. “Love builds up” but “knowledge puffs up” in 1 Cor. 13:4. “Puffs up” is a direct reference to “proud.”

13:5

“Rude” means “unbecoming”. It is to behave indecently or in a shameful manner. Tact is lacking and people are embarrassed. Refers to shaming people.

“Self-seeking”

“Angered” means to be irritated, promoted to anger, to be touchy. This is a result of the one before, self-seeking.

“Record of wrongs” is literally “does not reckon the evil”. “Record” is a word that means to credit someone’s account. Love is not keeping score. It means “does not think about it” or “does not take notice.”

13:6

“Does not delight in evil” and “Rejoices with the truth”

Here the rejoicing is in the truth not in evil.

Evil and Truth are two sides of the same reality.

13:7

“Always” or **“in everything”**

“Protects” means to cover as does a roof. It has the idea of protecting like a roof and also enduring (holding up) like a roof.

“Trusts” or **“believes”**. This means love never loses faith. This does not mean love believes everything nor does love trust everyone.

“Hopes” projects love into the future.

“Perseveres” is “hupomenei” which means to endure and to bear patiently not in passive defeat but in blazing hope.

First Corinthians 13:8-13

When did tongues and the sign gifts cease?

1. **At the end of the book of Acts** – “The sign gifts, tongues, prophecy, the gift of healing, etc. were operating all through the Book of Acts, and these gifts are mentioned in the letters that Paul wrote during the Acts period. But when we turn to the letters written after the Book of Acts—the 4 Prison Epistles, and the 3 Pastoral Epistles, we find that the sign gifts either aren't mentioned at all or we see—as with the gift of healing—that they were no longer operating in Paul's life. What he could do in Acts 28, he could no longer do in Philipians, or in 1 and 2 Timothy. He could heal all the sick on the island in Acts 28:9, but he couldn't heal any of his closest co-workers—Timothy, Epaphroditus, Trophimus—after the close of the Book of Acts. The answer: The sign gifts ceased at the end of the Book of Acts. There is no record in Scripture of any of the sign gifts operating in any of the letters that Paul wrote after the end of the Acts period, and it is clear that the gift of healing had ceased since Paul could no longer heal even his closest co-workers after the close of the Book of Acts
2. **70 AD** - “Tongues were a warning sign to Israel of coming destruction.....Israel was destroyed and scattered in 70 A.D. The warning sign, tongues, must then cease!”
3. **96 AD, At the Completion of the Canon of Scripture** - It is also commonly argued that the "perfect" thing in I Corinthians 13 must refer to the canon of Scripture because Church historians generally state that these gifts completely ceased to operate prior to the Second Century, A.D.. These arguments generally rely upon a quotation from St. Augustine to this effect. *AND ALSO:* “A certain level of maturity has been reached once the N.T. canon has been completed and is in hand, and so the result is almost the same as that of [the completion of the New Testament canon view]. Yet Paul expected an imminent return of Christ and could not know, humanly speaking, that there ever would be a complete N.T. canon of 27 books before Christ returned. Hence, he was guided by the Spirit to use the more general language of maturity to allow for this.”
4. **98 AD, At the Death of the Last Apostle, John** –
5. **When the Young Church Reached Maturity** – “And what were the childish things that Paul had in mind that would be put away when that which is perfect or complete had come? Well, it should be obvious to any reader that he was speaking of the early gifts of tongues, prophecy and special revelation knowledge given to the members of the infant church during the apostolic age.”
6. **367 AD, When the Cannon was recognized** –
7. **Christianity Fully Founded** -
8. **When We Die and Go To Heaven** – “This will occur when we pass from this life and enter God's glorious presence in Heaven.”
9. **Love is the “perfect”** – When we live in perfect love the gifts will cease.
10. **When Jesus Returns**

First Corinthians 13:8-13

Paul is correcting the Corinthian definition of “spirituality”

This includes redirecting the purpose for charismata (even tongues) as a function of love not on selfish purposes as outlined in 13:1-7

Love characterizes God's purpose and ways both now and in the future.

Charismata are one of God's methods of manifesting his love now, but not in the future.

These verses do not condemn the gifts but places them in perspective of eternity.

First Corinthians 1:7 says, “Therefore, you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.”

Paul says “Pursue love” (14:1, “Follow the way of love.”) since love is the character of God now and forever but since we are living in this present age you should “eagerly desire spiritual gifts.” (12:31; 14:1)

In other words, God’s eternal character of love is manifested today when we manifest spiritual gifts.

13:8

“Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.”

“Love never fails”

- 1) This could be the closing of the previous verses and mean “Love is never defeated, never brought down and persists even when faced with opposition”
- 2) This statement “Love never fails” could be starting a new paragraph which will contrast the three verbs that follow:
 - i. “pass away” (13:8)
 - ii. “cease” (13:8)
 - iii. “remain” (13:13)

In this second case it would mean: “Love never comes to an end or becomes invalid like the charismata”

Paul is still focused on charismata and lists three of them here.

We are living between the times as is described in 1 Cor. 15:20-28

“they will cease” “katargethesontai” or literally “they will be abolished”

- future indicative passive
- means “to render inoperative, to make ineffective or powerless”
- the passive voice means “they will be made to stop by someone or something else.”

“they will be stilled” “paucontai” or literally “they will cease”

- future indicative middle
- means “to cause to rest, to cause to cease”
- the middle voice means “they shall make themselves cease or automatically cease of themselves.”

“it will pass away” “katargethesetai” or literally “it will be abolished”

- same as above only singular

13:9

“For we know in part and we prophesy in part.”

“in part” “merous” or literally “For in part”

- means “in part, partially”
- The gifts are a part of the work of the church that leads to the completion

13:10

“but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.”

“comes” “elthe”

“perfection” “teleion” or literally “perfect thing”

- “teleion” can mean “end, fulfillment, completeness, maturity”
- “teleion” is contrasted with the phrase “in part” which would tend to make the correct translation of “teleion” the counter side of “part” such as “whole”, “full”, “complete”

“imperfect” “to ek merous” or literally “the thing in part”

“disappears” “katargethesetai” or literally “will be abolished”

- same as above
- future, indicative, passive

“perfection” can hardly refer to the completion of scripture or the recognition of the canon since the Corinthians would not have understood this nor would have Paul.

13:11

“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.”

“child” “nepios” or literally, “an infant”

- means “infant, child, minor”

“I put childish ways behind me”

- These childish ways were appropriate for the child
- These include a child's:
 - Thoughts
 - Interest
 - striving
- “put. . .behind me”

There is no negative connection here with tongues, talking, and childish. Notice Paul talks in tongues more than the Corinthians.

13:12

“Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

“gar arti de esoptrou en ainigmati”

“For yet through a mirror in a riddle”

A mirror represent clarity and self-recognition in Greek literature.

Mirrors in the ancient world were made of polished metal.

Corinth was famous for the mirrors they produced.

There is a Greek legend of placing a mirror into a spring of water at the temple of Demeter and then looking in the mirror to see if a sick person would recover.

“**a riddle**” “ainigmati” means “riddle, an indistinct image”

- This means in a riddle or figurative way.
- See Numbers 12:8

“**face to face**” “pros” which means “before or facing”.

- Here it means “face to face.”
- “face to face” is a biblical idiom for direct personal communication as in Genesis 32:30 and Numbers 12:8

First John 3:1-3 “when he appears” or “when it is manifested”

13:13

“And now these three remain: faith hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

Basic Views:

2. **Concentric Cessationists** believe that the miraculous gifts have indeed ceased in the mainstream church and evangelized areas, but appear in unreached areas as an aid to spreading the Gospel (Luther and Calvin, though they were somewhat inconsistent in this position).
3. **Classical (or "Weak") cessationists** assert that the "sign gifts" such as prophecy, healing and speaking in tongues ceased with the apostles and the finishing of the canon of Scripture. They only served as launching pads for the spreading of the Gospel; as affirmations of God's revelation. However, these cessationists do believe that God still occasionally does miracles today, such as healings or divine guidance, so long as these "miracles" do not accredit new doctrine or add to the New Testament canon. Richard Gaffin, John F. MacArthur and Daniel B. Wallace are perhaps the best-known classical cessationists. Articles on this view can be found here: [link](#)
4. **Full Cessationists** argue that along with no miraculous gifts, there are also no miracles performed by God today. This argument, of course, turns on one's understanding of the term, "miracle." B. B. Warfield
5. **Consistent Cessationists** believe that not only were the miraculous gifts only for the establishment of the first-century church, but the so-called five-fold ministry found in Eph. 4 was also a transitional institution (i.e., There are no more apostles or prophets, but also no more pastors, teachers, or evangelists).

Interesting Statements that I do not feel are scriptural:

- “It is remarkable to me that people can read 1st Corinthians chapters 12 through 14 and come away and say that Paul was encouraging the use of tongues rather than trying to wean the infant church of the Apostolic age away from the use of tongues and prepare them for the time that they would cease.
- “The Day of Pentecost: The disciples spoke these languages without ever having learned them. I have heard it said that after a very young age if a man learns another language, he speaks that language with an accent. Yet these men were amazed that the disciples, who were all Galileans, spoke their native languages as though they were the disciple’s own language.
- “Current observation confirms that the miracle of tongues has ceased. If the gift were still available today, there would be no need for missionaries to attend language school. Missionaries would be able to travel to any country

and speak any language fluently, just as the apostles were able to speak in Acts 2. As for the miracle gift of healing, we see in Scripture that healing was associated with the ministry of Jesus and the apostles (Luke 9:1-2).

- “The reasons stated above are evidence that the sign gifts have ceased. According to 1 Corinthians 13:13-14:1, we would do well to “pursue love,” the greatest gift of all. If we are to desire gifts, we should desire to speak forth the Word of God, that all may be edified.

All of these agree that ‘tongues have ceased’ but I tend to disagree with their logic and conclusion:

a. John Chrysostom (c 347-407) Concerning the spiritual gifts of 1 Corinthians: “This whole place is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to, and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place” (“Homilies on 1 Corinthians,” Vol. XII, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Hom 29:2).

b. John Calvin (1509-1564) “...the gift of healing, like the rest of the miracles, which the Lord willed to be brought forth for a time, has vanished away in order to make the preaching of the Gospelmiraculous for ever” (Institutes of the Christian Religion, Bk IV:19, 18).

c. John Owen (1616-1683) “Gifts which in their own nature exceed the whole power of all our faculties, that dispensation of the Spirit is long since ceased and where it is now pretended unto by any, it may justly be suspected as an enthusiastic delusion” (Works IV, 518).

d. Thomas Watson (c 1620-1686) “Sure, there is as much need of ordination now as in Christ's time and in the time of the apostles, there being then extraordinary gifts in the church which are now ceased” (The Beatitudes, 140).

e. Matthew Henry (1662-1714) Speaking of the ‘gift of tongues,’ he said, “These and other gifts of prophecy, being a sign, have long since ceased and been laid aside, and we have no encouragement to expect the revival of them; but, on the contrary, are directed to call the Scriptures the more sure word of prophecy, more sure than voices from Heaven; and to them we are directed to take heed, to search them, and to hold them fast ...” (Preface to Vol IV of his Exposition of the OT & NT, vii).

f. Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) “Of the extraordinary gifts, they were given 'in order to the founding and establishing of the church in the world. But since the canon of Scriptures has been completed, and the Christian church fully founded and established, these extraordinary gifts have ceased” (Charity and its Fruits, 29).

g. George Whitefield (1714-1770) “... the karismata, the miraculous gifts conferred on the primitive church ... have long ceased ...” (Second Letter to the Bishop of London, Works, Vol. IV, 167).

h. James Buchanan (1804-1870) “The miraculous gifts of the Spirit have long since been withdrawn. They were used for a temporary purpose” (The Office and Work of the Holy Spirit, 34)

i. Robert L. Dabney (1820-1898) “After the early church had been established, the same necessity for supernatural signs now no longer existed, and God, Who is never wasteful in His expedients, withdrew them ... miracles, if they became ordinary, would cease to be miracles, and would be referred by men to customary law” (‘Prelacy a Blunder,’ Discussions: Evangelical and Theological, Vol. 2, 236-237).

j. Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) Speaking of the office of the apostles, “an office which necessarily dies out, and properly so, because the miraculous power also is withdrawn” (Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit 1871, Vol. 17, 178).

k. Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921) “These gifts were ... distinctively the authentication of the apostles. They were part of the credentials of the apostles as the authoritative agents of God in founding the church. Their function thus confirmed them to distinctively the apostolic church and they necessarily passed away with it” (Counterfeit Miracles, 6).