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The Permanence of Love
13: 8-13

The permanence of love DIG: Why will the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge cease? How does history, theology and the Bible teach us that tongues ceased in the aposotolic age. Why is Yeshua Messiah the Perfect that will come? What will happen with prophecy and knowledge when we see Yeshua face to face? Why is love greater than faith and hope?

REFLECT: How have you experienced the difference between, "I love you if . . ." and "I love you because . . ." and true agape love? What is only partial in your life right now that you look forward to being permanent when Yeshua returns? What do you think it will be like when you see Yeshua face to face? To experience true, unconditional love. What will you say to Him?

When the Lord returns, when the Perfect comes, the spiritual gifts will pass away.



As **Paul** continues, **he** has one final verb for **love** – **Love never falls** (Greek: *pipto*, meaning *to fall*). By using this verb, **Paul** wants us to be sure of one thing, namely, that there will never be a situation in which **love** is the wrong way to act by causing us *to fall*. Sometimes, admittedly, we may need to act with what is called "tough love," but this, too, is a form of **love** that seeks to change another person out of

deep concern and compassion for that person's growth and well-being. If we act in **love**, we will never stumble and **fall down (13:8a).**

Elizabeth Barret Browning (an English poet of the Victorian era, popular in Britain and the United States during her lifetime, 1806-1861) wrote a poem entitled "I Loved Once," in which she writes, "**Love** looks beyond the bounds of time and space, **Love** takes eternity in **its** embrace." **Love** is deathless. It is never defeated, never disillusioned, never disappointed. Physical love (Greek: *eros*) that is mere passion burns like a stack of **wood, hay** or **straw (3:12),** and is soon consumed. That is the reason there are so many divorces today. It is not the kind of **love** that holds two hearts together. **Love** is eternal. It is permanent.

God's love is that kind of **love**. How wonderful that is! **His love** "looks beyond the bounds of time and space and takes eternity in **its** embrace." **Messiah** never stops **loving**. The only unpardonable sin is the rejection of **the Spirit (Luke 12:10).** Family members may be unbelievers, but **Yeshua** still **loves** them. Maybe someone you know has committed a great sin, but **He** still **loves** them. You cannot keep **Messiah** from **loving** them or you. You can put up an umbrella to keep yourself dry, but you can't stop the rain from falling. Neither can you stop **God** from **loving** – regardless of the umbrella of sin or unbelief that anyone is under.[429]

Paul now returns to **the gifts** of **the Spirit**. **He** cites three specific examples – the **three** that had created the most problems in **Corinth**: **prophecy**, **tongues**, and **knowledge**. And following a common rabbinic pattern of comparing the two worlds, teaches that **love never ends, but prophecies will pass, tongues will cease,** current **knowledge** of **the Word will pass (13:8b).** Each of these **gifts** will eventually **cease** and disappear, but **love** will continue.

History, theology and the Bible teach us that **tongues ceased** in the apostolic age. As John MacArthur teaches in his book *Charismatic Chaos*, the contemporary charismatic movement does not represent a revival of biblical **tongues**. It is a delusion similar to the practice of counterfeit **tongues** at **Corinth**. What evidence is there that **tongues** have **ceased**?

First, tongues were a sign gift that ended with the apostles. The last recorded miracles in the B'rit Chadashah occurred in late 59 AD with the healings on the island of Malta (see the commentary on **Acts, to see link click Db – The Storm along the Shore of Crete**). From then until **John** finished the book of **Revelation**, no miracle was recorded. Miracle gifts, like **tongues** and **healing** are

mentioned only in **First Corinthians**, an early letter written in 55 AD from Ephesus. The next two letters, **Romans** (57 AD) and **Ephesians** (60 AD), both discuss **gifts** of **the Spirit** at length, but there is no mention of the miraculous **gifts**. By that time miracles were already looked upon as something in the past **(Hebrews 2:3-4)**. The apostolic authority and the apostolic message needed no further confirmation. Before the first century ended, all the B'rit Chadashah had been written and was circulating through the churches. The sign **gifts** had **ceased** to serve any purpose. And when the apostolic age ended with the death of the apostle **John**, the signs that identified the apostles had already become moot.

For those who say that all **the spiritual gifts** of the past are still in effect today, I will call your attention to **Exodus** (see the commentary on **Exodus Ew – The Appointment of Bezalel and Ohaliab**) where **ADONAI singled out Bezalel and Ohaliab and filled them with the Spirit of God** with the spiritual gift of being able to work with **gold, silver, bronze, cutting precious stones to be set, woodcarving and every other craft.** So, if none of the gifts have **ceased,** we would find people in every congregation with **the spiritual gift of artistry**. But we don't. I have never heard of anyone, ever claiming **the spiritual gift** of working with **gold, silver** or **bronze**. Not only that, this giftedness is nowhere to be found in the lists of **spiritual gifts** in the B'rit Chadashah. Why? Because **it** too has **ceased**.

Secondly, the gift of tongues was intended as a sign to unbelieving Isra'el (see **Do – Tongues are a Sign**)**.** They signified that **God** had begun a new work that encompassed the Gentiles. **ADONAI** would now speak to all nations and **languages**. The barriers were broken down. And so, **the gift** of **languages** symbolized not only the judgment of **God** on a disobedient northern kingdom of **Isra'el**, but also a blessing of **God** on the whole world. **Tongues** were a sign of transition between the Dispensation of Torah (see the commentary on **Exodus Da – The Dispensation of the Torah**) and the Dispensation of Grace (see the commentary on **Hebrews Bp – The Dispensation of Grace**). With the establishment of the Church, a new day had dawned on the people of **God**. But once the transition was made, **the sign** was no longer necessary and **the gift** of **tongues ceased** to exist.

Thirdly, history records that tongues did cease. Again, it is significant that **tongues** are mentioned only in the earliest books of the B'rit Chadashah. **Paul** wrote nine books after **First Corinthians** and never mentioned **tongues** again (see the commentary on **Galatians Ae – Dates of Books in the B'rit Chadashah**). **Peter** never mentions **tongues**; **James** never mentions **tongues**;

John never mentions **tongues**; and neither did **Jude**. **Tongues** appeared only briefly in **Acts** and **First Corinthians** as the new message of the gospel was being spread. But once the Church was established, **tongues ceased**.

Chrysostom (347 to 407 AD) and Augustine (396 to 430 AD) – the greatest theologians of the eastern and western churches considered **tongues** obsolete in their day. Chrysostom stated categorically that **tongues** had **ceased** by his time. Writing in the fourth century, he described **tongues** as an obscure practice and as a result of "their cessation . . . no longer takes place." Augustine, in his comments on Acts 2:4, wrote, "In the earliest times **the Holy Spirit** fell on them that believed and they **spoke** in **tongues**. These were **signs** adapted to that time . . . then it passed away."

During the first five hundred years of the Church, the only people who claimed to have **spoken** in **tongues** were followers of Montanus. He was a second century heretic from Phrygia who believed he was a prophet sent from **God** to reform Christianity through self-denial, speaking in **tongues**, and continued prophetic revelation. His teachings were divisive because he and his followers believed themselves to be the only true church. Montanus and his followers claimed to receive revelation from **God** that added to **the Word** spoken by **Messiah** and the apostles. He taught that **God's** kingdom would be set up in his own village of Pepuza in his lifetime, and that he would have a prominent role in it. Those and other false prophecies were among the reasons why the rest of the Church considered his movement heretical.

Apparently no other **tongues-speaking** was practiced in the Church until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when it appeared in several Roman Catholic groups in Europe. A group of militant Protestants in the Cevennes region of southern France began to prophesy, experience visions and **speak** in **tongues**. The group, sometimes called the Cevenol prophets, are remembered for their political and military activities, not their spiritual legacy. Most of their prophecies went unfulfilled. They were rabidly anti-Catholic, and advocated the use of armed force against the Catholic church. Many of them were consequently persecuted and killed by Rome. At the other end of the spectrum, the Jansenists, a group of Roman Catholic loyalists, who opposed the teaching of justification by faith, also claimed to be able to **speak** in **tongues** in the 1700's.

Another group that practiced a form of **tongues** was the Shakers, an American sect with Quaker roots that flourished in the mid-1700's. Mother Ann Lee, the founder of

the sect, regarded herself as the female equivalent of **Yeshua Messiah**. She claimed to be able to speak in seventy-two different languages. The Shakers believed sexual intercourse was sinful, even within marriage. They **spoke** in **tongues** while dancing and singing in a trancelike state (see **Ce – The Pagan Background of Counterfeit Spiritual Gifts**).

Then in the early nineteenth century, Scottish Presbyterian pastor Edward Irving and members of his congregation practiced **speaking** in **tongues** and prophesying. Irvingite prophets often contradicted each other, their prophecies failed to come to pass, and their meetings were characterized by wild excess, much like the church at **Corinth**. The movement was further discredited when some of their prophets admitted to falsifying prophecies and others even attributed their "giftedness" to evil spirits. This group eventually became the Catholic Apostolic Church, which taught many false doctrines, embracing several Roman Catholic doctrines and creating twelve apostolic officers.

All of those supposed manifestations of tongues were identified with groups that were either heretical, fanatical, or otherwise unorthodox. For over 1800 years, the gift of tongues, along with other sign gifts, was unknown in the life and doctrine of the Church.

Then, around the turn of the twentieth century, **tongues** became a major emphasis within the holiness movement, a large section of which developed into modern Pentecostalism. The charismatic movement, which began in 1960, carried the practice of **tongues** beyond traditional Pentecostalism into many other denominations, churches, and groups, both Catholic and Protestant, filling the void in true spiritual living with false experience.

Many charismatics defended as biblical the modern **tongues-speaking** as part of the latter-day signs spoken of by **Joel (Joel 2:28-32)**, and quoted by **Peter** in **his** speech on Shavu'ot **(Acts 2:17-21)**. But it is clear from a careful examination of those passages that the **prophecy** does not apply either to Shavu'ot or to modern times. From earlier in **Joel 2** we see that the time referred to is the Second Coming of **Yeshua**, when **the Lord will remove the northern army far from Isra'el (Joel 2:20),** just before the Messianic Kingdom is established and **ADONAI's chosen people** turn to **Him (Joel 2:21-27)**. It is only **after this (Joel 2:28)** that the miraculous signs in the heavens and on the earth will appear.

There was no blood, columns of smoke, darkening of the sun, or changing of the

moon to blood associated with Shavu'ot (see the commentary on **Acts An – Peter Speaks to the Shavu'ot Crowd**). Nor have any such things happened in modern times. **Peter** was not saying that Shavu'ot completely fulfilled **Joel's prophecy**, because obviously it did not. **He** was saying that the limited miraculous **signs** that had occurred shortly before **he** began **his** speech (see the commentary on **Acts Al – The Ruach Ha'Kodesh Comes at Shavu'ot**) were a glimpse of much greater and far-reaching **signs and wonders** that would come **in the last days (Acts 2:17)**. There is simply no biblical explanation here for the modern reappearance of **tongues (languages)** or any of the other miraculous **sign gifts**.[430]



For our current **knowledge is partial, and our prophecy is partial.** That the present function of the spiritual **gifts** is incomplete, and that something more significant will come, is seen in Paul's words **but when the Perfect** (Greek: *teleion*) **comes.** Here the incomplete state in which we now live forms the contrast. At that time in the future, there will be no need for such **gifts** because **they** are for this world only**, the partial will pass away** (Geek: *katargethesontai*, meaning *to be abolished* or *to be rendered inoperative*)**.** In contrast to **love**, **the** spiritual **gifts** have a built-in obsolescence. **They** are not permanent and do not get perfected. **Prophecy** and our current partial **knowledge** of **the Word** will be brought to an end and be replaced with a **perfect**, or complete **knowledge** of **the living Word, Yeshua Messiah**. *Katargethesontai* makes it clear that these **gifts** do not flow into something new, like an onramp connecting to a freeway. **They** reach a dead end. So, **when the Lord** returns, **when the Perfect comes, their** function will end **(13:9-10)**.[431] To cite the marvelous imagery of Karl Barth (1886-1968), "Because the sun rises, all lights are extinguished."[432]

Take **knowledge** for example. We are now able to **know** only in a **partial** and incomplete way; now we have only partial **knowledge** of **God's** will and **God's** Word. No one on earth can understand **His** Word perfectly. But when we are fully in

His presence, **seeing Him face to face (3:12)**, this current or **partial knowledge** will be replaced by **perfect** or complete during the Messianic Kingdom (see the commentary on **Revelation Fh – The Dispensation of the Messianic Kingdom**).[433]

Paul elsewhere described the purpose of **gifts** by an illustration employing the imagery of growth and **maturity**. According to **Ephesians 4:11-16**, **the gifts** were to be used to bring the Church from a state of infancy to adulthood. The word translated **mature** in **Ephesians 4:13** is the same word translated **perfection** (Greek: *teleion*) in **13:10**. Such a state will obviously not exist until **Messiah's** Second Coming.[433] **When I was a child, I spoke like a child, thought like a child, argued like a child; now that I have become a man, I have finished with childish ways. Paul** is here illustrating what will happen **when the Perfect comes**. In our earthly lives, all believers are like children compared to what we will be when we **see Yeshua**. A city like **Corinth**, famous for its bronze **mirrors**, would have particularly appreciated **Paul's** final illustration. **For now, we see in a mirror dimly.** In our present state we are not capable of **seeing** more. **But** when we enter into our **Lord's** presence, **then** we will **see Him face to face. Now I know partly; then I will know fully, just as God has fully known me (13:11-12).**

But for now, three things last – trust, hope, love (13:13a). The formula of "three great things" is common in Jewish literature. The same **three** appear in **Colossians 1:4-5**. Compare **Micah 6:8**, and this example from **the Oral Law** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ei – The Oral Law**): **Rabbi Shim'on ben-Gamli'el said, "The world is sustained by three things: judgment, truth, and peace, as it is said in the TaNaKh: Execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates (Zechariah 8:16)" (Avot 1:18).**[435]

And the greatest of these is love, not only because **it** is eternal, but because even now in this life, **love** is **supreme (13:13b). Love** is already the greatest, not only because **it** will outlast **trust and hope**, beautiful and necessary as **they** are, but because **love** is inherently greater by being most **God**-like. For **God is love (First John 4:8).**[436]