

Chapter Four

“¹ Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become *as* sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. ² And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. ³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. ⁴ Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, ⁵ Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; ⁶ Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; ⁷ Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. ⁸ Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall fail; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall vanish away. ⁹ For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. ¹⁰ But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. ¹² For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. ¹³ And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these *is* charity” (I Corinthians 13:1-13).

To review for a moment, the three important truths from I Corinthians chapter twelve are that there:

(1) “are diversities of gifts” (*charisma*). Not everyone had the same spiritual gifts. It should not be expected that everyone possess each gift. In fact, that expectation would be unscriptural.

“^{29b} *are* all workers of miracles? (No!) ³⁰ Have all the gifts of healing? (No!) do all speak with tongues? (No!) do all interpret” (No!) (I Corinthians 12:29b-30; I have added the word No! after each question to show the intent of the questions.)?

(2) According to I Corinthians 12:5, there “are differences of administrations.” Not everyone had the same ministry in the local church. The idea is that not everyone has the same job (although there are some things everyone is commanded to do). Everyone is not an Apostle. Everyone is not a preacher (“prophet”). Everyone is not a Pastor/Teacher.

“*Are* all apostles? *are* all prophets? *are* all teachers” (I Corinthians 12:29a)?

(3) According to 1 Corinthians 12:6, there “are diversities of operations.” Although God never changes (character, nature and attributes), His operations do change. These changes are called “dispensations.” In 1 Corinthians chapter thirteen, this is what the focus is on. It is known as the doctrine of *historical transition*.

Sign gifts were for this time of historical transition between the dispensation of Law and the dispensation of Grace. Each of these dispensations is one of God's "diversities of operations." There were a number of changes in operations between these two dispensations. Sign gifts were to make this time of transition evident and to prove that what was being done was of God.

1. Old Testament believers looking forward to the coming of Messiah needed to know of Jesus and trust in His once for all sacrifice in order to become part of the Church (which transition was evidenced by the baptism with the Holy Spirit).
2. There was a transition from the local synagogue to the local church.
3. There was the transition from government of the Old Testament priesthood to congregational polity administered by local Pastors called by God.
4. There was a transition from the Temple sacrifices that looked forward to the coming Messiah, now abrogated in that the sacrifice of Jesus fulfilled them.
5. There was the abrogation of Temple worship in that the believer's body becomes the Temple of The Holy Spirit and the believer is given direct access to the Throne of Grace because of the mediatorial work of Christ.
6. There was the transition from the Passover celebration that looked forward in anticipation to the coming of the incarnate Lamb of God to the Lord's Supper that looks backward in remembrance of the completed sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

This new dispensation and the New Covenant is expressed by the words "under grace" in the Bible. The dispensation of the Law is expressed by the words "under Law." The believer is now under the New Covenant and dispensation of grace.

The focus of 1 Corinthians chapter thirteen is on what will continue in the operations of God through the Holy Spirit beyond this *historical transition* and what will not. "Charity" (love: that from which all fruit of the Spirit comes) is the one operation of the Spirit of God which encompasses all of His workings and characterizes all genuinely spiritually "born again" children of God. Therefore, the continuing sign or evidence of the new covenant relationship with God will be that characteristic of love (self sacrifice; 1 Corinthians 13:1-7), not "prophecies," "tongues," and special revelatory "knowledge."

³⁴ A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. ³⁵ By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35).

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, ²³ Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death. ¹⁵ Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. ¹⁶ Hereby perceive we the love *of God*, because

he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. ¹⁷ But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels *of compassion* from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? ¹⁸ My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. ¹⁹ And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him” (I John 3:14-19).

Why are prophecies, tongues and special revelatory knowledge called sign gifts? They are sign gifts because they were for a sign to those of the Old Covenant and the dispensation of the Law that a new covenant was now in place. There are three portions of Scripture in the book of Acts that relate to three different groups of believers (although every occurrence of tongues was in the presence of Jews). The first is recorded in Acts 2:1-6 and it was for the Jews in 33 A. D.

“¹ And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. ² And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. ³ And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. ⁵ And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. ⁶ Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language” (Acts 2:1-6).

Pentecost was the birthday of the Church. It was at this moment in time that the Holy Spirit came into the world to begin forming the “body” of Christ. The visible evidences of the coming of the Spirit were necessary to give signs to unbelieving Jews that their Messiah had come and that this was the beginning of the new covenant (1 Corinthians 1:22 and 14:22).

The second is Acts 8:5-25 and it records the miracles of Philip at Samaria (this is not a Samaritan Pentecost, there were no cloven tongues of fire or mighty rushing of wind) in 34 A. D. The coming of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the new covenant was made evident to the Samaritans (a group of half breed Jews; 2 Kings 17:24) who had not believed on Jesus before Philip came. This was to visibly show God’s union of these two groups (which had hitherto despised one another) in the body of Christ. The reason for waiting for the Apostles and the laying on of their hands was to show that the authority of truth was centered in what the Apostles taught (and no one else).

When the Apostles passed out of history (historical transition), their authority was established in the written and inspired Word of God (inscripturalized) and the laying on of hands to signify the giving of the Holy Spirit ended with them (according to Scripture, this practice did not even continued throughout their lifetimes).

The third is in Acts 10:1-48 (verses 44-48; 41 A. D.) and records the visible evidence to the Jews (Acts 10:45) that the Gentile believers were united with the Jews and Samaritans into the “body” of Christ (this was not a Gentile Pentecost,

there were no cloven tongues of fire or mighty rushing of wind). Cornelius was a Gentile believer in the Old Testament sense (Acts 10:1-2). Therefore, he was a Gentile proselyte to Judaism. However, the central reason for what took place at Caesarea was to show the Jews that Gentiles were joined with them in the body of Christ in the Church Age dispensation (Acts 10:45).

“¹² For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also *is* Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (I Corinthians 12:12-13).

“²⁶ For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26-28).

Tongues were the least of the sign gifts. The use of ordinal numbers in 1 Corinthians 12:28 places tongues at the bottom of the list according to the order of importance. There came a time when the sign gifts ceased.

“⁸ Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall fail; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall vanish away. ⁹ For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. ¹⁰ But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. ¹² For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. ¹³ And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these *is* charity” (I Corinthians 13:8-13).

Tongues are recorded in I Corinthians written around 54 A. D. Even the second epistle to Corinth (written about a year or so after the first epistle) makes no mention of the sign gifts.

Romans is the next epistle written around 58 A. D. By this time there is no mention of tongues or sign gifts or in any other of the epistles (not mentioned in the gifts of Romans 12:3-8). “Charity” will never end throughout the Church Age (1 Corinthians 12:8). However that is not true of prophecies, tongues and special revelatory knowledge.

Prophecy is the declaration of divinely revealed truth. In this case, the emphasis is on the revealing of the truth by God, not its declaration. If prophecies continued, we would have a continually expanding Bible. This is not the testimony of Scripture. Once the last book of the Bible was recorded, prophecy ceased.

“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:” (Revelation 22:18).

The words “they shall fail,” “vanish away” (I Cor 13:8), “done away” (I Cor. 13:9), and “put away” (I Cor. 13:11) are all translated from the same Greek word *katargeo* (kat-arg-eh'-o) which means unemployed, to deactivate power, to cause to cease, put an end to, do away with, annul, or abolish.

“Knowledge” refers to special revelatory knowledge, although not to inspiration. It refers to the revelatory knowledge of hitherto unknown spiritual mysteries. God will not reveal things apart from His Word after the New Testament Scriptures were completed.

Tongues will “cease.” The word “cease” is from the Greek word *pauo* (pow'-o) meaning to make to cease or desist. The verb is in the middle voice meaning that “tongues” will run their course and come to an abrupt end. Verse 9 gives the basis for understanding verse 10. Prior to the completion of the New Testament Scriptures (the inscripturization of Apostolic teaching), revelation was incomplete (“in part”) and the sign gifts continued. Once the New Testament (“that which is perfect”) was completed, sign gifts were no longer necessary to faith (Romans 10:17). Today, God’s Word is sufficient (the context of I Cor. 13:11-13 and the fact that “perfect” is in the neuter gender makes the completion of the New Testament Scriptures the obvious intent here).

Chapter Four

Questions for Discussion

1. Answer the following Scripture questions from 1 Corinthians 12:29b-30. “29b *are* all workers of miracles? _____ 30 Have all the gifts of healing? _____ do all speak with tongues? _____ do all interpret? _____”
2. Answer the following Scripture questions from 1 Corinthians 12:29a. “*Are* all apostles? _____ *are* all prophets? _____ *are* all teachers?” _____
3. Explain the doctrine of *historical transition*.
4. How do the different dispensations from the next page relate to what Paul refers to as “diversities of operations” in 1 Corinthians 12:6?
5. List some of the changes in “operations” from the dispensation of Law and the dispensation of Grace (Church Age). Six are given.
6. What was the purpose of *sign gifts* in the transitional period between the dispensation of Law and the dispensation of Grace?
7. According to 1 Corinthians chapter 13, John 13:34-35 and 1 John 3:14-19, what will continue and be the evidence of the baptism with the Holy Spirit after the historical transition from the dispensation of Law to the dispensation of Grace? Discuss this fully giving Scripture to support your answer.
8. Read Acts 2:1-6, 8:5-25 and 10:44-48. Discuss why prophecies, tongues and special revelatory knowledge are called *sign gifts*?
9. What does the use of *ordinal numbers* in 1 Corinthians 12:28 signify about the importance of the *sign gift* of tongues?
10. What does the absence of the mention of *sign gifts* in 2 Corinthians and the epistle to the Romans reveal about their cessation?
11. The words “they shall fail,” “vanish away” (1 Cor 13:8), “done away” (1 Cor. 13:9), and “put away” (1 Cor. 13:11) are all translated from the same Greek word *katargeo* (kat-arg-eh'-o). What does this word mean?
12. How does 1 Corinthians 13:9 (along with 11-13) give the basis for understanding 1 Corinthians 13:10?