

The Priority of the Love Oriented Life

I Corinthians 13:8-13

Intro:

1. How do you relate to Pentecostals?
 - a. **ILL: My scriptural orientation as a civilian minister & then as an Army chaplain with Pentecostals.**
 - b. Were the Pentecostals right?
2. Three possible decisions we had to make as a chaplain family:
 - a. Not treat Pentecostals as Christians.
 - b. Treat them as Christians but not really believe it. (deceitful, hypocritical)
 - c. Genuinely accept immersed Pentecostal believers who committed themselves to the Lordship of Christ.
3. In order to come to this conclusion, we had to wrestle with **v8 & v10: Where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. . . when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.**

I. Traditional Christian Understanding

- A. Supernatural spiritual gifts passed away by the end of the First Century!
 1. They had been originally received through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.
 - a. **ILL: Demonstrated on the Day of Pentecost (Act 1:5, 8 & 2:1-11).**
 - b. **ILL: Experienced by the Household of Cornelius (Act 10:1-11:18).**
 2. They were passed on from the apostles to the disciples through the laying on of hands. **ILL: The Disciples in Samaria (Act 8:14-17).**
 3. When the apostles died & those to whom they laid their hands died - the supernatural spiritual gifts ceased.
- B. So - **perfection in v10** = the full establishment of the church worldwide by the end of the first century.
 1. The lack of historical evidence: the main non biblical Christian & non Christian documents, after the first century, have the mention of these gifts noticeably absent.
 2. Bro. Al Young has written very scholarly biblical expositions defending this position.
 3. Linda & I grew up entrenched in this position.

II. The Generally Accepted Pentecostal Understanding

- A. Supernatural spiritual gifts are in existence today & will continue until the Lord comes again.
 1. A Pentecostal might say:
 - a. "I know these gifts exist today because I have personally experienced one or more of them!"
 - b. "I have been personally baptized in the Holy Spirit & experienced something similar to what was experienced during the first century!"
 2. How might you respond to that?
 - a. We decided we did not have the right to question another person's personal experience.
 - b. They are the experts on what they experienced.
 - c. God may provide personal miraculous acts whenever He chooses - after all, He is God!
 - d. But - we do have a responsibility to judge what **they were taught** about that experience!
- B. So - **perfection in v10** = heaven - what we will experience after this life is over!
 1. **v11** - In this life we are immature like children, in the next life we will be mature!
 2. **v12** - This earthly life is **a poor reflection as in a mirror** - in heaven we will understand everything clearly & not need the spiritual gifts!

III. My Personal Understanding

- A. Supernatural spiritual gifts, if they exist at all, should be the first of 2 or more steps involved in reaching maturity in Christ!
- B. What role might supernatural spiritual gifts play in your own spiritual development?
 - 1. Maybe God might use a spiritual gift to get you jump started into your spiritual life.
 - 2. But the time must come when your trust in God becomes so certain that you no longer need the gifts.
 - 3. Your love oriented life can take over & these gifts can pass away!
- C. What role supernatural gifts might play in your Christian witness.
 - 1. Prophecy, tongues or supernatural knowledge might demonstrate to a purely secular person the reality of God's existence. **ILL: Tongues heard in perfect Mandarin.**
 - 2. Some might get enough of a glimpse of the supernatural to wet their appetite for spiritual things.
 - 3. But the most successful witness is the testimony of the change from a secular life to the love oriented life!
- D. An example of a powerful life testimony. **ILL: Barker's testimony.**
 - 1. Their trust in the Lord in spite of their world caving in was much more powerful than listening to an unknown tongue or seeing some miraculous healing.
 - 2. The testimony of a changed life must replace the testimony of a life only of spiritual gifts.
- E. This explanation fits the biblical context better than the first two.
 - 1. **I Corinthians 12** explains that although the spiritual gifts differed from one another, none was more important than the others.
 - 2. **I Corinthians 13** explains a more excellent way than using these gifts! (**I Cor 12:31**)
 - 3. **I Corinthians 14** states that if you are going to continue with spiritual gifts, at least exercise the ones which will build up the community of believers the most!
- F. So - **perfection** in **v10** = the spiritually mature life, the love oriented life.
 - 1. **v11** is not saying spiritual gifts are childish, only that they should be put away after their purpose has been fulfilled.
 - 2. When you grow physically, your body changes physically & mentally & you adjust to the stage of life you are in at the time.
 - 3. When you grow spiritually, your life of love should replace those gifts that become so insignificant in comparison.

God's goal for you is to have a love oriented life!

It's to be vibrant & obvious to others.

Your spiritual gift should push you in that direction.

If it becomes only an end in itself, discard it!

The Apostle Paul said, "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Phil 3:14)

Your goal is to have a love oriented life!