

IN RESPONSE - 1 CORINTHIANS 13:8 (CON'T), LESSON V

by Dennis Prutow
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We are wrestling with the anomaly presented by the standard interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8.

Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.

If the *perfect* to which Paul refers is heaven (1 Corinthians 13:10), then the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge are normative for today. They did not cease upon the completion of the apostolic age. I have found no standard commentary which speaks to this issue. It is my hope to show the *perfect* to which Paul refers is the perfection of Scripture. To do this, it is necessary to review the ground we have covered and then to look at the original purpose for tongues, prophecy, and special knowledge.

Paul is laying before us "the more excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31). It is the more excellent way of love. In 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 he tells us people may possess many fine qualities and seemingly divine, supernatural spiritual gifts and not have the love which denotes true Christianity.

Then in verses 4-7, Paul gives us a description of love. You will recall we spent considerable time looking at the definition of love assumed by Paul as he gives us this profound and insightful description. We also took time to look at the power of love as found in the Holy Spirit. Putting these three components together, we saw [1] the *power* of love (Ezekiel 36:26-27) undergirding [2] the *conduct* or *definition* of love (1 John 5:3) worked out [3] in a particular *manner* and having a particular *character* (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

This love, *empowered* by the Spirit, producing particular *conduct* carried out in a particular *manner* is the more excellent way. On the other hand, prophecy, tongues, and special knowledge cease. To understand why, we turn to the original purpose for these gifts.

We begin by looking at Acts 2:1-4.

And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing

wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

Exactly what were these tongues spoken by the apostles? Verse 11 gives us the answer. Those listening to the apostles exclaimed, "We hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God." Yes, these tongues were understandable languages.

And what was the purpose of these tongues? The same question was asked by those listening to them. "What does this mean?" (Acts 2:12). Then Peter boldly responded.

Men of Judea, and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give heed to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: 'And it shall be in the last days,' God says, 'That I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams (Acts 2:14-17).

These tongues were a manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

We see a similar thing take place when Peter preaches the gospel in the household of Cornelius.

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, 'Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?' (Acts 10:44-47).

How did Peter and his cohorts know the Holy Spirit had come upon the Gentiles? Cornelius and his household spoke in tongues just like Peter and the others had done. They received the Spirit "just as we did," said Peter. And so tongues *was* a sign, an evidence, of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Do we need the special gift of tongues *today* to indicate to us the presence of the Holy Spirit? In response, I direct your attention to the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:20. "So then, you will know them by their fruits." In our day, is it special *gifts* which denote Christianity or is it *fruit*? Christ tells us it is *fruit*, above all else, which defines the Christian life. And the chief fruit of the Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22).

People may possess special gifts. But as we have already seen, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, such gifts are no sure sign of the saving presence of the Spirit. In addition, Paul tells us tongues, prophecy, and special knowledge will cease. As sure signs of the presence of the Spirit, these special gifts are undependable. Rather, the fruit of love is the great and abiding manifestation of the salvific presence of the Spirit. We should therefore spend less time analyzing our *gifts* and worrying about our *gifts* and spend more time cultivating the *fruit* of love.

Finally, what do we have *today* which *thoroughly* describes what the Holy Spirit in a human life looks like? What do we have which *thoroughly* describes the fruit of the Spirit? We have the Bible. And is this description adequate for our use within the church today? Of course it is. The Bible is a *perfect* description of love. And since we have the *perfect* Word of God, we no longer need the signs of prophecy, tongues, and special knowledge. It is my hope to show that 1 Corinthians 13:9-13 bears out this interpretation.

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IN RESPONSE - 1 CORINTHIANS 13:9-10, LESSON VI

by Dennis Prutow

First Corinthians 13:8 tells us love never fails, never ceases, never comes to an end. In contrast, special knowledge, prophecy, and tongues do cease.

Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.

It is my position that these special gifts ceased to be normative signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit when the perfection of Scripture was given to us through the apostles. Today, the directions and descriptions of Scripture are normative. But 1 Corinthians 13:9-13 seems to contradict my position so plainly. How can I hold to it? Let me explain.

Verses 9-10 support the view I have been presenting. "For we know in part, and we prophecy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away."

Note first of all the connection between verses 8 and 9. They are connected by the little word "For." This word indicates we are now being given the cause or reason for the cessation of the special gifts.

It must also be understood that the knowledge and prophecy spoken of in verse 9 is the same knowledge and prophecy spoken of earlier. Verse 2 says, "And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge..."

Now this prophecy and special knowledge, says Paul, is partial. Paul says when the prophets speak, their words give only a piece of the picture. And Paul admits this of his own prophecy. For example, when the ancient prophets spoke concerning the future coming of Christ and the salvation He would bring, all the details were not forthcoming. Each prophecy gave a partial picture. The apostle Peter explains the reaction of the prophets in 1 Peter 1:10-11.

As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted

the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.

You see, the ancient prophets "made careful search and inquiry" as a result of the words they received. They did not "know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating." The prophecy each one received was "in part."

Verse 10 tells us "the partial will be done away." The word Paul uses here means *to set aside* or *abolish*. It is the same word used in verse 8. "If *there is knowledge*, it will be done away." And what is it that is to be done away? It is prophecy, knowledge, and tongues. More fully, it is the special gifts mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10.

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.

Dependence upon the presence of these gifts as signs of the Holy Spirit in your life is dangerous. First, the presence of such gifts does not guarantee a person is born again. Paul is emphatic.

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

Second, these gifts are partial. What we may derive from them is partial or in part. Third, these gifts are to be done away and supplanted by the perfect.

We are brought back to the question of the perfect. What is it? Verse 11-13

seem to indicate the perfect relates to the Second Coming of Christ and heaven. Verse 12 says, "Now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also am fully known." One comment will suffice for the present. We will not have full knowledge even in heaven. Only God has full knowledge. We will *never* attain that level of knowledge. And so verse 12 does not necessarily indicate what it seems.

Returning to verse 10, could this text possibly refer to the completion of the Bible? My answer is yes. The word 'perfect' also means 'mature' or 'complete' or 'fully developed'. And so it is possible that Paul has in mind the complete Bible, the fully developed Scriptures, as he says, "When the perfect comes, the partial will be done away." If this is in fact the case, the special words of knowledge, prophecy, and tongues become obsolete when Scripture is complete and the canon is closed.

This view fits with what we have already said concerning the nature of love as the normative sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit. It fits with the argument Paul is setting forth in 1 Corinthians 13. Verse 1-3 warn against reliance upon the gifts as a certain sign we are born again. The fruit of love is set in absolute contrast. This is why love is described as it is in verses 4-7.

Love is again contrasted with the special gifts in verse 8. Here the contrast is between the abiding nature of love and the transitory nature of the special gifts. They had their special usefulness for a time. In the program of God, they cease to be normative signs of the Spirit. Love is the superior sign.

When do the special gifts cease to function as special signs of the Spirit? This special function comes to an end when an adequate and comprehensive exposition of love is provided to the people of God. And this takes place when Scripture is complete. In the Book we have a *perfect* picture of love.

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IN RESPONSE - GETTING INTO THE WATER

by Dennis Prutow

We have another query on baptism and we look at one of the primary texts in question, Mark 1:9-10.

And it came about in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the spirit like a dove descending upon Him.

This text is important because of the description given of the baptism. Literally, Jesus was baptized *into the Jordan*. The preposition is the Greek word *eis* which is very properly translated *into*. Notice that Jesus also *came up out of the water*. Jesus not only came up, He came *out* of the water. The word translated *out* is the Greek word *ek* which very properly means *out of* or *out from*. And so at first glance, the propriety of immersion seems to be verified.

But further investigation indicates the interpretation of the first glance is lacking. How so? Let's look at it from an ordinary everyday perspective. When we speak about getting into something, we do not necessarily imply immersion. For example, getting into the water in the tub to take a bath in no way implies total immersion. And when the bath is finished, we get up out of the water. This is a very common way of speaking.

We may use the same language regarding swimming. Getting into the pool may or may not imply immersion. If I stand at the edge of the pool, I have gotten *into* the pool. By the same token, diving into the pool indicates something different.

I use this analogy for two reasons. First, the same preposition is used in the case of stepping *into* the pool and of diving *into* the pool. But there are two meanings given to the same preposition by the context. In one case the word *into* indicates stepping *into* the water at the edge. In the second case, the word *into* refers to plunging fully into the water.

Following this line of thinking, a legitimate and possible meaning of Mark 1:9 is that Jesus and John went *into* the Jordan and stood in the water. The meaning of the preposition *eis* would be fulfilled. John may have then poured water

over Jesus. Finally both Jesus and John would have *come up out of the water*. That is, Jesus would have walked up to the bank of the Jordan and come out of [*ek*] the water. This would also fulfill the meaning of the terms used by Mark. And so, when we look at the use of the words and their context, immersion is not demanded.

In fact, the context suggests the portrayal of the baptism I've just given. Mark 1:10 says, "And immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the spirit like a dove descending upon Him." The picture is that of the Holy Spirit being poured out upon Jesus. The word translated *upon* in Mark 1:10 is the Greek word *eis*. It is the same word earlier translated *into*. Now I suppose you could argue that Jesus was immersed in the Spirit. But that is not what Mark tells us. Jesus was not baptized into the Spirit. Rather, the Spirit descended *upon* Jesus.

This gets us to the symbolism involved. Jesus was anointed by the Spirit. The Old Testament picture of such anointing involved the *pouring* of oil upon the king or priest. This was the common understanding of the process.

Those who insist upon immersion take us to Romans 6 and tell us the symbolism of baptism is that of death, burial, and resurrection. Immersion is *the only mode* which gives an effective portrayal. Let's look at Romans 6:3-4. Italics indicates the Greek pronoun *eis*.

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized *into* Christ Jesus have been baptized *into* His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism *into* death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

We have been baptized *into* Christ and *into* His death. We have been buried with Christ through baptism *into* death in order that we might walk in newness of life. What does this mean? Paul explains in the next verse.

For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, cer-

tainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:5).

The word "For" indicates Paul is giving an explanation. Baptism *into* Christ means we have been *united* with Christ. If the central motif was burial and resurrection, immersion would be necessary. But Paul tells us baptism refers to *union* with Christ. And union with Christ involves more than burial and resurrection. We are united to Christ in His life, death, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly reign. Immersion is not needed to symbolize *union* with Christ.

First Corinthians 10:1-2 gives a similar picture.

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into [*eis*] Moses in [*en*] the cloud and in [*en*] the sea.

Paul reminds us that ancient Israel followed Moses. He was their redeemer. They were baptized *into* [*eis*] Moses. Obviously, they were not actually immersed into Moses any more than we are actually immersed into Christ. They were *united* to Moses in the deliverance led by him. We are *united* to Christ. How was this *union* with Moses symbolized? The people followed the cloud they were under. They went through the sea. They were *not* immersed in the sea. They went through the sea on dry land (Exodus 14:22).

The theme of union with Christ is struck in a similar way in 1 Corinthians 12:13.

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into [*eis*] one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were made to drink of one Spirit. We are not immersed in the body. We are united to the body through the Spirit poured out upon us.

So we maintain the word *into*, *eis*, does not require immersion. And pouring rather than immersion fulfills the biblical imagery.

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IN RESPONSE - COMMON LOVE AND 1 CORINTHIANS 5:11

by Dennis Prutow

Two important questions arose as a result of my article, "Does God Hate the Sin and Love the Sinner?" One is very pointed and personal. How do I deal with my brother who is a homosexual? Where does common grace end and special grace begin? The second question is equally pertinent. What relationship am I to have with *professing* believers who live in abominable sin? Paul says we are not so much as to eat with such people (1 Corinthians 5:11).

To answer the first question, we return to Matthew 5:43-47.

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Christ is exhorting *common* decency, love, and graciousness. Christians, especially, are to exhibit a benevolent demeanor to all. We must extend common courtesy to peers and subordinates, and show common respect to those in authority.

We are also fully able to be benevolent. We can give help in disaster relief. We can assist the feeble, visit the elderly, and comfort the afflicted. For the common good and as an expression of the common grace and love of God we can and must do these things.

But where does this "common love," these expressions of "common grace," end? And where does special love and special grace begin? The questions create a false dilemma. Special grace is the manifestation of God's love in saving sinners. It is demonstrated in the sending of Christ to die on the cross (Romans 5:8). It is applied by the Holy Spirit

poured out in our hearts (Romans 5:5). This special grace and special love comes from God alone as He sovereignly dispenses it. Such saving love and grace is not within the purview of human capability. We cannot exercise it. We do not dispense it.

But common love and grace is quite another matter. Christ commands it. He makes no mention of our taking care lest we lapse into special love for those around us. We are incapable of the same.

As a result, in our relationships with men and women who are bound in sins such as homosexuality, we are to extend the courtesy and common grace due to every image bearer of God.

But then we have the question of 1 Corinthians 5:11.

But actually I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-not even to eat with such a one.

First of all, the context of the exhortation is the visible church. And so the association mentioned has to do with the function of the local church. The word 'association' means to 'mix up with' and the present tense indicates an ongoing continual activity.

The 'so-called brother' is a fellow *professing* believer. He is caught in the sin of incest (1 Corinthians 5:1). The exhortation of Paul is clear. This unrepentant immoral person must be put out of the fellowship of the body. This is what is meant by the words 'not to associate.' The members of the church were not to associate with this man *as a fellow believer and as a part of the local body*.

This is in accord with the instructions of Christ in Matthew 18:15-17.

And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen

even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.

We are obliged to talk with those who profess faith in Christ and live contrary to that profession. If they refuse to listen to us, we are to take one or two others with us to visit with them. And if they still refuse to listen, we bring the matter before the church. Failure to repent results in these individuals being stripped of their privilege of coming to the Lord's Table. Their former association is terminated. Such people are then to be considered unbelievers. This is exactly what was done in Corinth. "Sufficient for such a one is the punishment which was inflicted by the majority" (2 Corinthians 2:6)

But how are we to relate to unbelievers? We are to extend them every courtesy due the images of God. Every common good and grace is due them. At the same time we pray for them. We take opportunities to speak the gospel to them. We sit with them at coffee or over lunch to urge them to turn to Christ. This means we dare not shun such people. Paul also makes this clear. "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world" (1 Corinthians 5:9-10).

But we no longer associate with such people at the Communion Table. Specifically Christian associations with them are broken. Although we may sit at the table over coffee or a sandwich on occasion, we do not regularly fellowship with them as we do with other believers.

What if such people are members of a church which accept their immoral lifestyle? Our position remains the same. Even though we may consider these *professed* followers of Christ to actually be an unbelievers, we do not shun them. Rather, we pray for them. And we talk with them about Christ when given opportunity. In addition, the *common* courtesies extended to any unbeliever must also be extended to these image bearers of God.

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