

1 Corinthians 13:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

Charity never faileth (ἢ ἀγάπη οὐδέποτε πίπτει, hē agapē oudepote piptei)—Piptō means "to fall" or "fail." Love never collapses, expires, or becomes obsolete. Unlike gifts that are temporary tools for this age, love is eternal. This introduces the contrast between transient gifts and permanent love (verses 8-13).

But whether there be prophecies, they shall fail (εἴτε προφητεῖαι, καταργηθήσονται, eite prophēteiai, katargēthēsontai)—Katargeō means "to render inoperative, abolish, nullify." Prophecy, so valued by Paul (14:1), will be abolished when we see Christ face to face and no longer need mediated revelation.

Whether there be tongues, they shall cease (εἴτε γλῶσσαι, παύσονται, eite glōssai, pausontai)—Pauō means "to stop, come to an end." Tongues, the Corinthians' prized gift, will simply stop when their purpose is fulfilled. The middle voice suggests they will cease on their own.

Whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away (εἴτε γνῶσις, καταργηθήσεται, eite gnōsis, katargēthēsetai)—Even gnōsis (theological knowledge, doctrinal understanding) will be abolished in glory. Not because truth changes, but because partial knowledge gives way to complete knowledge. The three most celebrated gifts in Corinth—prophecy, tongues, knowledge—are temporary. Only love endures into eternity.

Historical Context

By AD 55, the Corinthian church had elevated spiritual gifts (especially tongues and knowledge) as markers of spiritual maturity. Chapter 13 interrupts Paul's extended discussion (12-14) to relativize these gifts. In eternity, when we're with Christ, there will be no need for prophecy (we'll see Him), tongues (we'll communicate perfectly), or partial knowledge (we'll know fully). But love will continue forever.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How might your pursuit of spiritual experiences, theological knowledge, or ministry effectiveness be eclipsing the primacy of Christlike love?
2. What does love's eternality reveal about why Jesus commanded love (John 13:34-35) as the identifying mark of discipleship rather than gifts?
3. How should the temporary nature of even valued gifts like prophecy and knowledge affect how you prioritize spiritual growth?

Interlinear Text

Ἡ ἀγάπη οὐδέποτε ἐκπίπτει εἴτε δὲ προφητεῖαι
G3588 **Charity** never faileth whether but **there be prophecies**
G26 G3763 G1601 G1535 G1161 G4394

καταργηθήσεται εἴτε γλῶσσαι παύσονται εἴτε
it shall vanish away whether **there be tongues** they shall cease whether
G2673 G1535 G1100 G3973 G1535

γνῶσις καταργηθήσεται
there be knowledge it shall vanish away
G1108 G2673

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 13:13 (Love): And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

Galatians 5:6 (Love): For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

Acts 2:4 (Parallel theme): And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Hebrews 8:13 (Parallel theme): In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

1 Corinthians 13:10 (Parallel theme): But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

1 Corinthians 12:10 (Parallel theme): To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:

Acts 19:6 (Parallel theme): And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.