

Sermon XV- Jonathan Edwards

“The Holy Spirit Forever To Be Communicated To The Saints, In The Grace Of Charity, Or Divine Love “

1 Cor. 13:8

“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.” [KJ]

“Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.” [ESV]

How does the fact that charity, or divine love, is an everlasting gift from God, affect our relationship with Him or others? affect the preservation of the church and His people?

Edwards has been heading in a general direction in supporting the superiority of charity or divine love. First, love is essential to all other gifts. Secondly, *all other good dispositions and behaviors* arise from love.

And thirdly, love is distinguished from extraordinary gifts that have ceased, or will cease.

“But by the knowledge which the apostle says shall vanish away, is meant a particular miraculous gift that was in the church of God in those days. For the apostle, as we have seen, is here comparing charity with the miraculous gifts of the Spirit — those extraordinary gifts which were common in the church in those days, one of which was the gift of prophecy, and another the gift of tongues, or the power of speaking in languages that had never been learned. Both these gifts are mentioned in the text; and the apostle says they shall fail and cease. And another gift was the gift of knowledge, or the word of knowledge, as it is called in the eighth verse of the previous chapter, where it is so spoken of as to show that it was a different thing, both from that speculative knowledge which is obtained from reason and study, and also from that spiritual or divine knowledge that comes from the saving influence of the Holy Spirit in the soul. It was a particular gift of the Spirit with which some persons were endowed, whereby they were enabled by immediate inspiration to understand mysteries, or the mysterious prophecies and types of the Scriptures, which the apostle speaks of in the second verse of this chapter, saying, “Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge,” etc. It is this miraculous gift which the apostle here says shall vanish away, together with the other miraculous gifts of which he speaks, such as prophecy, and the gift of tongues, etc. All these were extraordinary gifts bestowed for a season for the introduction and establishment of Christianity in the world, and when this their end was gained, they were all to fail and cease. But charity was never to cease.” [p. 305]

DOCTRINE: “THAT THAT GREAT FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT, IN WHICH THE HOLY GHOST SHALL, NOT ONLY FOR A SEASON, BUT EVERLASTINGLY, BE COMMUNICATED TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST, IS CHARITY, OR DIVINE LOVE.”

I. Holy Spirit is an *everlasting* gift to God's people and church

Acts 2: 32-33 (God's promise)

John 14:16-17 (Christ's promise)

"The Spirit of God is so given to his own people as to become truly theirs....the Spirit of Christ is not only communicated to those that are converted, but he is made over to them by a sure covenant, so that he is become their own. Christ is become theirs, and therefore his fullness is theirs, and therefore his Spirit is theirs-their purchased, and promised, and sure possession." [p. 308]

II. Other gifts are also given, wherein the Spirit of God is communicated to his church

- a. Extraordinary gifts (prophecy, tongues, word of knowledge); given to OT and NT saints
- b. Common gifts- given to converted/unconverted alike

"...in common convictions of sin, and common illuminations, and common religious affections, which, though they have nothing in them of the nature of divine love, or of true and saving grace, are yet the fruits of the Spirit, in the sense that they are the effect of his influences on the hearts of men. And as to faith and hope, if there be nothing of divine love with them, there can be no more of the Spirit of God in them than is common to natural unregenerate men. This is clearly implied by the apostle, when he says in this chapter, "Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." All saving faith and hope have love in them as ingredients, and as their essence; and if this ingredient be taken out, there is nothing left but the body without the spirit. It is nothing saving; but at best, only a common fruit of the Spirit." [p. 309]

III. All these other fruits of the spirit, both extraordinary and common, have ceased, or will cease

1. Extraordinary- prophecy and tongues ceased when the saints to whom they were given, died. They are no longer needed and will not be needed in heaven

"As to the miraculous gifts of prophecy and tongues, etc., they are but of a temporary use, and cannot be continued in heaven. They were given only as an extraordinary means of grace that God was once pleased to grant to his church in the world. But when the saints that once enjoyed the use of these means went to heaven, such means of grace ceased, for they were no longer needful. There is no occasion for any means of grace in heaven, whether ordinary, such as the stated and common means of God's house, or extraordinary, such as the

gifts of tongues, and of knowledge, and of prophecy. I say, there is no occasion for any of these means of grace to be continued in heaven, because there the end of all means of grace is already fully obtained in the perfect sanctification and happiness of God's people." [p. 309]

Eph. 4:11-13

2. Examples of OT and NT people who had extraordinary gifts and why

"These gifts are not fruits of the Spirit that were given to be continued to the church throughout all ages. They were continued in the church, or at least were granted from time to time, though not without some considerable intermissions, from the beginning of the world till the canon of the Scriptures was completed. They were bestowed on the church before the beginning of the sacred canon, that is, before the book of Job and the five books of Moses were written. People had the Word of God then in another way, viz. by immediate revelation from time to time given to eminent persons, who were, as it were, fathers in the church of God, and this revelation handed down from them to others by oral tradition. It was a very common thing then, for the Spirit of God to communicate himself in dreams and visions, as appears by several passages in the book of Job. They had extraordinary gifts of the Spirit before the flood. God immediately and miraculously revealed himself to Adam and Eve, and so to Abel, and to Enoch, who, we are informed (Jude 14), had the gift of prophecy. And so Noah had immediate revelations made to him, and he warned the old world from God; and Christ, by his Spirit speaking through him, went and preached to the spirits that are now in prison, which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited while the ark was preparing (1 Pet. 3:19, 20). And so Abraham and Isaac and Jacob were favored with immediate revelations; and Joseph had extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, and so had Job and his friends. From this time, there seems to have been an intermission of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit until the time of Moses; and from his time they were continued in a succession of prophets, that was kept up, though not again without some interruptions, till the time of Malachi. After that, there seems to have been a long intermission of several hundred years, till the dawn of the gospel day, when the Spirit began again to be given in his extraordinary gifts, as to Anna, and Simeon, and Zacharias, and Elizabeth, and Mary, and Joseph, and John the Baptist." [p. 311]

What do you think Edwards is trying to prove in reviewing biblical examples of those who possessed 'extraordinary gifts'?

"These communications of the Spirit were given to make way for him who hath the Spirit without measure, the great prophet of God, by whom the Spirit is communicated to all other prophets. And in the days of his flesh, his disciples had a measure of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, being enabled thus to teach and to work miracles. But after the resurrection and ascension, was the most full and remarkable effusion of the Spirit in his miraculous gifts that ever took place, beginning with the day of Pentecost, after Christ had risen and ascended to heaven. And in consequence of this, not only here and there an extraordinary person was endowed with these extraordinary gifts, but they were common in the church, and so continued during the lifetime of the apostles, or

till the death of the last of them, even the apostle John, which took place about a hundred years from the birth of Christ; so that the first hundred years of the Christian era, or the first century, was the era of miracles. But soon after that, the canon of Scripture being completed when the apostle John had written the book of Revelation, which he wrote not long before his death, these miraculous gifts were no longer continued in the church. For there was now completed an established written revelation of the mind and will of God, wherein God had fully recorded a standing and all-sufficient rule for his church in all ages. And the Jewish church and nation being overthrown, and the Christian church and the last dispensation of the church of God being established, the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were no longer needed, and therefore they ceased; for though they had been continued in the church for so many ages, yet then they failed, and God caused them to fail because there was no further occasion for them. And so was fulfilled the saying of the text, "Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away."

Why were extraordinary gifts meant to be temporary, or for a limited season?

3. Common gifts of the Spirit, given both to the converted and unconverted, will also cease

"And as to those fruits of the Spirit that are common, such as the conviction, illumination, belief, etc., which are common both to the godly and ungodly, these are given in all ages of the church in the world; and yet with respect to the persons that have these common gifts, they will cease when they come to die; and with respect to the church of God considered collectively, they will cease, and there will be no more of them after the day of judgment." [p. 313]

Why will common gifts not last eternally?

IV. Charity, or divine love, is the unfailing and everlasting fruit of the Spirit, in which his continued and everlasting influence and indwelling in his church shall appear and be manifest

Divine love (charity) will be the everlasting fruit of the Spirit, both in a- members of the church and b- the church collectively

- a. the "particular members" of the church

"Every one of the true members of Christ's invisible church is possessed of this fruit of the Spirit in the heart. Divine or Christian love is implanted, and dwells, and reigns there, as an everlasting fruit of the Spirit, and one that never fails. It never fails in this world, but remains through all trials and oppositions, for the apostle tells us (Rom. 8:38, 39) that nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." And it ceases not when the saints come to die. When the apostles and others of their day died and went to heaven, they left all their miraculous gifts behind them with their bodies. But they did not leave the love that was in their hearts behind them, but carried that with them to heaven, where it was gloriously

perfected. Though when wicked men die, who have had the common influences of the Spirit, their gifts shall eternally cease, yet death never overthrows Christian love, that great fruit of the Spirit, in any that have it.' [p. 314]

Rom. 8:38-39

b.

the "collective" church as a whole

"Of old, when there were interruptions of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit in the church, and when there were seasons in which no prophet or inspired person appeared that was possessed of such gifts, still there never was any total interruption of this excellent fruit or influence of the Spirit. Miraculous gifts were intermitted through the long time extending from Malachi to near the birth of Christ; but in all this time, the influence of the Spirit, in keeping up divine love in the church, was never suspended. As God always had a church of saints in the world, from the first creation of the church after the fall, so this influence and fruit of his Spirit never failed in it. And when, after the completion of the canon of the Scriptures, the miraculous gifts of the Spirit seemed finally to have ceased and failed in the church, this influence of the Spirit in causing divine love in the hearts of his saints did not cease, but has been kept up through all ages from that time to this, and so will be to the end of the world." [p.315]

Conclusion: Love is the great end of all the other fruits of the Spirit!

"And the great reason why it is so, that other fruits of the Spirit fail, and the great fruit of love remains, is, that love is the great end of all the other fruits and gifts of the Spirit. The principle and the exercises of divine love in the heart, and the fruits of it in the conduct, and the happiness that consists in and flows from it these things are the great end of all the fruits of the Spirit that fail. Charity or divine love is the end, to which all the inspiration, and all the miraculous gifts that ever were in the world, are but the means. They were only means of grace, but charity or divine love is grace itself; and not only so, but the sum of all grace. Revelation and miracles were never given for any other end but only to promote holiness, and build up the kingdom of Christ in men's hearts; but Christian love is the sum of all holiness, and its growth is but the growth of Christ's kingdom in the soul. The extraordinary fruits of the Spirit were given for revealing and confirming the word and will of God, that men by believing might be conformed to that will: and they were valuable and good only so far as they tended to this end. And hence when that end was obtained, and when the canon of the Scriptures, the great and powerful means of grace, was completed, and the ordinances of the New Testament and of the last dispensation were fully established, the extraordinary gifts ceased, and came to an end, as being no further useful." [p.316]

V. Further conclusions and application

1.

No scriptural basis for extraordinary gifts to return

“When the Spirit of God is poured out for the purpose of producing and promoting divine love, he is poured out in a more excellent way than when he is manifested in miraculous gifts. This the apostle expressly teaches in the latter part of the foregoing chapter, where, after enumerating many miraculous gifts, he advises Christians to covet or desire the best of them, but then adds, “And yet show I unto you a more excellent way,” [1 Cor. 12:31] namely, to seek the influence of the Spirit of God, working charity or divine love in the heart. Surely the Scriptures, when speaking of the future glorious state of the church as being such an excellent state, give us no reason to conclude that the Spirit of God will be poured out then in any other way than in the most excellent way.... If you do but read the text in connection with the two following verses, you will see that the reason implied why prophecy and tongues fail, and charity remains, is this, that the imperfect gives way to the perfect, and the less excellent to the more excellent; and the more excellent, he declares, is charity or love.”

“When the Christian church first began, after the ascension of Christ, it was in its infancy, and then it needed miracles, etc., to establish it; but, being once established, and the canon of the Scriptures being completed, they ceased, which, according to the apostle’s arguing, shows their imperfection, and how much inferior they are to that fruit or influence of the Holy Spirit which is seen in divine love. Why, then, should we expect that they should be restored again when the church is in its most perfect state?” [p.317-318]

2. Be cautious when you come upon *anything that may look like a new revelation, or that may claim to be any extraordinary gift of the Spirit*

“Sometimes a person may have an impression in his mind as to something that he thinks immediately revealed to him that is to come to pass concerning himself or some of his relatives or friends... persons imagine that they have an immediate direction from heaven to go and do this,...by impressions immediately made on their minds, or in some other way than by learning from Scripture or reason that it is their duty. And sometimes they fancy that God immediately reveals to them by a dream, what the future shall be. But all these things, if they were from God’s Spirit, would be of the nature of those extraordinary gifts of the Spirit which the apostle says do cease and are done away, and which, having long since failed, there is no reason to suppose that God will restore again. And if they are not from God’s Spirit, they are but gross delusions.” [p.320-321]

3. Greatly value those influences that are *evidences of true grace in the soul, and which are all summarily included in charity, or divine love- a foretaste of heaven!*

“This is the end and design of the apostle in the text and context, to teach us to value this charity or love, by showing that it never fails, though all the miraculous gifts of the Spirit do fail and come to an end. This grace is the most excellent fruit of the Spirit, without which the most extraordinary and miraculous gifts are nothing. This is the great end to which they are but the means; and which is, of course, more excellent than all these means...Having within us that love which is immortal in its nature, we shall have the surest evidence that our immortality will be blessed, and that our hope of eternal life is that good hope which shall never disappoint us. Love cherished in the soul on earth, will be to us the foretaste of, and the preparation for, that world which is a world of love, and where the Spirit of love reigns and blesses forever” [p.322]

What have you learned about God’s gift of charity (divine love) that gives you comfort, peace or assurance?