

Chapter 8.6

The Biblical Cessation of *Scripture & Sign Gifts*

A Closer Look at 1 Corinthians 13:8-13

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A) The Context of 1 Corinthians 13:8-15

A.1) The Modern Context: *the charismatic debate*

Throughout the volume *Divine Revelation*, and the books contained here, we repeatedly encounter the claim of *charismaticism*¹ that miraculous gifts such as divine knowledge, prophecy, and tongues have been uniquely restored to them after their cessation some 1600 years ago.² In the context of this modern debate, the Apostle Paul's prediction that these gifts would cease is obviously important, and will therefore be thoroughly discussed here.

In helping the Corinthians value love more than miraculous gifts, the Apostle Paul wrote:

(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. (9) For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; (10) but when the perfect [*teleion*: "completion"] comes, the partial [*ek meros*: "in pieces"] will be done away.

(11) When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. (12) For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known. (13) But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Cor 13:8-13 NASB)

Paul's statement in verse 8 that the **"gifts of prophecy . . . will be done away . . . tongues . . . will cease . . . (and) knowledge . . . will be done away"** is obviously important to our study concerning the viability of these gifts today. It is clear that the Apostle said these gifts would cease.³ The debate concerns when, and the relative difficulty in interpreting the passage has given rise to a great deal of debate about it.⁴

The key verse in the debate is verse 10 where the Apostle says these gifts will cease when **"the completed/perfect thing comes [to *teleion*]."** There are basically two different views of what **"the completed/perfect thing"** is and thus, when the gifts were, or are, to cease:⁵ 1) When Christ returns and/or the Eternal State begins;⁶ or 2) When the NT revelation was completed and made sufficiently available.⁷

A third view held by some is that “**the completed/perfect thing**” that brings about the cessation of the gifts listed is the maturity of the Church.⁸ However, this view claims that this maturity occurs at the return of Christ, and therefore, concludes essentially the same as the first view. While we will at times address this “maturity” view, it can still be suggested that there are two general views on when the Apostle believed these miraculous gifts would cease—at the return of Christ, or the completion of the reception and distribution of the NT revelation.

The first view is commonly known as the *continuationist* interpretation, based on the claim that these gifts of divine knowledge, prophecy, and tongues were to continue throughout the Church Age until Christ returned. The second view is commonly known as the *historicist* view, referring to the claim that these gifts were to cease with the completion and availability of the NT revelation. We prefer to label this view *historicism*, because the gifts in question did indeed cease by the fourth century.⁹ The *historicist* view of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 can be summed up as follows:

[v. 8] The reception, understanding, and communication of new divine revelation is clearly the context of the passage. If the similar and unique nature and purpose of the three gifts that Paul chooses to discuss are kept in mind, the context and meaning of the passage is established. These three gifts served to communicate and authenticate the NT revelation in the first century. The fulfillment of their unique purpose and resulting cessation was specifically to complete the NT revelation of God, not to bring about the Eternal State. Essentially, Paul is communicating in this passage that the then current methods used by God to communicate and distribute divine revelation were inferior to a superior method that God was to transition to in the future, namely, the NT Scriptures.

[vs. 9-10] One theme of the passage is the impending *completion* of something that was *incomplete* when Paul wrote the Corinthians. Paul’s contrast between *to teleion* and *ek merous* in verses 9-10 will not support the popular idea of a thing or person with heaven-like *perfection* replacing something that is *imperfect*. Therefore, the idea that Paul is speaking of the completion of the NT revelation would seem to be a more accurate understanding of his words, rather than the Eternal State.

This interpretation also recognizes the precedent that God had already set in the process He used in the implementation of the Old Covenant. God provided divine revelation to explain the covenant,

that revelation was recorded, copied, and distributed, and the revelatory gifts ceased with the Prophet Malachi. We would expect God to follow the same process with the NT revelation that accompanied the implementation of the New Covenant, and suggest that these *Scripture* and *sign gifts* ceased with the recording and distribution of the NT.

In fact, rather universal agreement on Church history confirms this is precisely what happened in the fourth century.¹⁰ Accordingly, if the Apostle was predicting the cessation of these revelatory gifts at Christ's return, then he would be a false prophet because Church history records their cessation much sooner.

[**vs. 11-12**] The incomplete and indirect nature of the revelation provided through these gifts is illustrated in three connected metaphors. Paul wrote this at a period of time when the implementation of the New Covenant was still in its "childhood." He also understood that in the introductory stage of the implementation of a covenant, miraculous gifts are given to provide and authenticate the revelation needed to implement the covenant. However, after that revelation is sufficiently available to implement the covenant, a more "mature" and written mode of revelation replaces the gifts and remains. Thus the Apostle's contrasting child/adult metaphor to reflect the "partial" vs. "completed" mode of revelation spoken of in verse 10.

Secondly, the indirect nature of the gifts, as opposed to possessing Scripture, is illustrated by seeing someone *indirectly* in a mirror as opposed to seeing someone *directly* "**face to face.**" The Apostle means nothing literal here, and is only illustrating the indirect way that divine revelation would come to the individual Corinthian Christian through Apostles and Prophets.

Neither of these metaphors describe something imperfect becoming perfect. An adult's communication and reasoning skills are not perfect, nor is a human's visual perception, even by direct sight. This same theme of indirect/direct then needs to guide our interpretation of the Apostle's third metaphor of knowing something indirectly and "**in part,**" and knowing someone in a fuller and more direct way because you know them personally. This is simply the contrast between how the Corinthians might have experienced Paul indirectly and "**in part**" from his letters, but in a fuller and more direct way when he visited them personally.

[**v. 13**] Love's superiority over the gifts is based on the fact that it endures longer than they do. Paul's addition of "**faith**" and "**hope**" with "**love**" also communicates their superiority over these gifts. The superiority that "**faith**" and "**hope**" have over these gifts is

based on the same thing that love's superiority is based on: "**faith**" and "**hope**" also endure longer than these gifts. The whole triad of virtues were to last (*meno*) longer than these passing (*katargeo*) gifts.

To make the gifts equal to "**faith**" and "**hope**" in any way (e.g. all endure until Christ's return), makes these gifts equal to love in at least some way. This seriously weakens Paul's whole argument and we have no reason to believe that these gifts were equal to the triad of virtues in any category, including their endurance. Knowing that faith, hope, and love will last until Christ's return, the Corinthians understood that these gifts would not. Also, the clear reason that love is greater than all of them is that it lasts into eternity, which even faith and hope will not.

The purpose of this chapter is to offer evidence for the *historicist* view of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, "An interpretation that has enjoyed support over the years."¹¹

Nevertheless, the *continuationist* view that Paul has the return of Christ or the Eternal State in mind for the cessation of tongues, prophecy, and divine knowledge, has become the most popular view held among even some of the most respectable scholars of the Church. As noted in the endnotes above, these include John Calvin (1509-1564), D. M. Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981), F. F. Bruce (1910-1990), C. K. Barrett, J. I. Packer, John MacArthur,¹² and Vern Poythress of Westminster Theological Seminary. As NT scholar Craig S. Keener notes:

Evidence from the context that 'the perfect' refers to the second coming, together with the impossibility that Paul could have expected the Corinthian Christians to think he meant the canon, has left few evangelical scholars who continue to use this text to support a [present] cessation of the gifts.¹³

Of course, "charismatic" authors hold this view. Jack Deere claims:

[No one] can produce a specific text of Scripture that says the apostolic office has ceased or would cease during the church age. All of these arguments are based on theological deductions, not on specific statements of Scripture.¹⁴

On the contrary, we argue elsewhere that the gift of divine knowledge which Paul says will cease in 1 Corinthians 13:8, is the same revelatory gift listed at 12:8, and was virtually synonymous with the Apostles' revelatory abilities.¹⁵

J. Rodman Williams, an early and foundational theologian of *charismaticism* wrote:

The attempt on the part of some to identify *to teleion* ("completion" 1 Cor 13:10) with the completion of the canon of Scripture hardly needs comment. Such an attempt—which actually is only a device to seek invalidation of the gifts as continuing in the church—is utterly futile.¹⁶

Dallas Willard, a popular proponent of seeking extra-biblical divine revelation, writes:

There is nothing in Scripture to indicate that the biblical [i.e. miraculous] modes of God's communication with humans have been superseded or abolished by either the presence of the church or the close of the scriptural canon . . . This is simply a fact.¹⁷

Likewise, Christopher Forbes, a recognized expert in the early Church's experience with the miraculous gifts states:

It goes virtually without saying in recent scholarship that the [*historicist*] view cannot be defended on exegetical grounds. . . [The] language [of 1 Cor 13:8-13] is so strong as to rule out anything less than an eschatological interpretation.¹⁸

Likewise, the "charismatic" theologian Max Turner writes: "This [historicist] position is exegetically indefensible, and is not held in serious New Testament scholarship."¹⁹ Even the Reformed theologian, Richard Gaffin, who believes the miraculous gifts have ceased, nonetheless writes:

The coming of 'the perfect' (v. 10) and the 'then' of the believer's full knowledge (v. 12) no doubt refer to the time of Christ's return. The view that they describe the point at which the New Testament canon is completed cannot be made credible exegetically.²⁰

Finally, the venerable D. M. Lloyd-Jones said of the *historicists* view of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13: "Indeed, there is only one word to describe such a view, it is nonsense."²¹

However, what the above authors call "futile," "against simple fact," "exegetically indefensible," and "nonsense," is the very view that one of the brightest minds in Church history put forth as the proper interpretation of the Apostle's prediction. In a sermon series now entitled *Charity and Its Fruits*, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) wrote what will suffice as a summary introduction to the view argued for in this chapter:

It is this miraculous gift [of divine knowledge] 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. . . .

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. . . .

[T]he first hundred years of the Christian era, or the first century, was the era of miracles [more correctly human miracle working]. 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.

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Accordingly, those who believe they have rather easily and dogmatically dismissed the traditional *historicist* interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 should heed the following:

Those who reject the possibility of establishing any argument [for *historicism*] from I Corinthians 13 on exegetical grounds should not be too quick to dismiss the principles produced by Edwards on that matter. There is a fundamental difference between ministering to a local church which possesses the whole Bible in writing [as was widely available by the fourth century], and by contrast, a pioneering situation in which the Scriptures have yet to be translated and published in the language of the people concerned [as existed when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians].

Edwards reasons well and powerfully when he contrasts the imperfect and infantile with the perfect and mature, supporting this further by a comparison of the present state with that which will be perfect in the consummate sense. Those who contemptuously dismiss Edwards with a wave of the hand tell us more about themselves than about Edwards!

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Therefore, while in many Christian circles the correct interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 is not even debatable, we believe that the support of the *historicist* view by Edwards and other respected scholars,²⁴ suggests the issue is at least worth careful study. And we believe the arguments below will bear that out as well.

A.2) The Revelational Context:

Divine knowledge, prophecy, & tongues were miraculous gifts for receiving and authenticating new divine revelation with the authority of Scripture

The claim that the gifts of divine knowledge, prophecy, and tongues were to continue throughout the Church Age is a serious one. These gifts served the purpose of providing and authenticating new divine revelation that was to be believed and obeyed as the word of God. Accordingly, those claiming that the Apostle was referring to the return of Christ as the cessation point for these gifts are in danger of holding the rather heretical position that God is still providing Scripture-quality revelation.

This is why, of course, that many who advocate the *continuationist* interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 are forced to redefine the gifts of divine knowledge, prophecy, and tongues into something less than miraculous abilities that produced and authenticated reliable divine revelation. But this is the weakest aspect of the whole *continuationist* argument. Scripture is crystal clear that these gifts operated in the NT age in a miraculous way to provide and authenticate new divine revelation that was to be believed and obeyed as Scripture itself, in the absence of Scripture.

This is why our *historicist* position is not fundamentally based on a particular interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. As noted elsewhere, several scholars hold a *historicist* position concerning these gifts, but do not share a *historicist* interpretation of this passage.²⁵ Accordingly, the clearest evidence that *continuationism* is in error is the fact that the modern versions of the gifts of divine knowledge, prophecy, tongues, and miracle working do not match

the biblical attributes of these gifts, and are therefore modern day counterfeits.²⁶

We will not rehash the demonstration of this biblical fact here, as we have written whole chapters elsewhere to do so.²⁷ And if there is any doubt that these gifts are appropriately referred to as *Scripture* and *sign gifts*, then these chapters should be read and evaluated by the reader. However, if the three gifts listed by the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 did in fact provide and authenticate reliable new divine revelation, then the debate as to when the Apostle thought these gifts would cease is over. No one, who wants to be held as an orthodox Christian, will claim that God is still providing reliable new divine revelation today. Therefore, if it was agreed that this was the purpose of these gifts, then we would agree that the Apostle believed and taught that they would cease with the completion and availability of the NT revelation.

A.3) The Canonical Context: *prophecy ceased with completion of OT revelation*

We are claiming that the Apostle's reference to the cessation of revelatory gifts, at the time of a "**completion** [*to teleion*]" (1 Cor 13:10), was referring to the completion of the reception, recognition, and distribution of the NT revelation. Our claim is given considerable support by the fact that this is precisely what occurred in relation to the OT revelation.

Elsewhere, we have noted the historical consensus among the Jews that after the Prophet Malachi, God did not provide His people with anymore such gifted men until John the Baptist and the dawn of NT revelation.²⁸ In other words, with the completion of the OT revelation, the biblical gift of prophecy, and all miraculous revelatory gifts ceased among God's people. Why then would we be so surprised that the same thing would occur in relation to the NT revelation?²⁹

It is important in order to properly understand Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 that he had a "canon consciousness" about divine revelation. He and the early Christians understood that the gift of prophecy operating under the Old Covenant had produced a limited, recognized, uniquely authoritative, and infinitely valuable set of "**God-breathed**" "**Scripture**" (2 Tim 3:16). Accordingly, the British NT scholar William Sanday (1843–1920) remarked:

The conception of a Canon, of an inspired volume, was first formed for the Old Testament, and only extended from it to the New. . . . It was not that any new . . . idea of Canonicity

had to be constructed. The idea was already there, complete in all its parts.³⁰

Likewise, his counterpart in America, B. B. Warfield (1851–1921) wrote:

The Christian church did not require to form for itself the idea of a "canon," -or, as we should more commonly call it, of a "Bible," -that is, of a collection of books given of God to be the authoritative rule of faith and practice. It inherited this idea from the Jewish church, along with the thing itself, the Jewish Scriptures, or the "Canon of the Old Testament."³¹

More recently, the noted Methodist theologian, William Abraham notes that in the early Church:

The idea of a list or canon of books was not alien to the early Christians; on the contrary, it is likely that the idea of canon played a very significant role in the development of the Christian tradition.³²

Accordingly, our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 recognizes the precedent that God had already set in the process He used in the implementation of the Old Covenant. God provided divine revelation to explain the covenant, that revelation was recorded, copied and distributed, and the revelatory gifts ceased with the Prophet Malachi. We would expect God to follow the same process with the NT revelation that accompanied the implementation of the New Covenant, and suggest that these *Scripture* and *Sign* gifts ceased with the recording and distribution of the NT.

It is important to remember the revelatory state of things in Corinth when the Apostle wrote 1 Corinthians c. 51 A.D. There was no written record to the revelation needed to implement the New Covenant. This letter was written relatively early in the process of New Covenant revelation. Accordingly, it would be approximately 40 years later that the Apostle John would record the last part of this revelation. Then it would take at least another 200 years for this complete NT revelation to be copied, recognized, and sufficiently distributed.

The Apostle knew from OT precedent that God's standard operating procedure was to initiate and implement a covenant through supernaturally taught and authenticated messengers, and then to have that message recorded, copied, and distributed so that such supernatural messengers were no longer necessary. This is precisely what he is describing in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, as also evidenced by his last instructions to Timothy to preach, preserve,

and pass on the NT revelation already given, not to expect more divine revelation.³³

The Apostle not only seemed to claim that revelatory gifts such as a divine knowledge and prophecy would cease with the completed production and authentication of Scripture, but that these temporary modes of revelation were inferior to the means that the Holy Spirit uses now through the written word of God (cf. 1 Cor 13:8-12). Scripture producing and confirming gifts were “**partial**” (v. 9), only allowing the people of God to “**see (as if) in a mirror dimly**” (v. 12) and not providing the full revelation that we have in Scripture.

When such gifts operated among God’s people, they could only receive revelation from God if they possessed these unique gifts themselves, or were in the presence of someone who did. Now, however, the direct revelation of God is available to all Christians at any time and in any place because we possess something better than those temporary methods of revelation: the written word of God. Indeed, not all methods of divine revelation are to continue their use indefinitely, and Scripture is the intended goal, traditional terminator, and crowning method of all other methods of divine communication.

Along these lines we have written elsewhere:

In general, *miraculous means of communication cease when a method of revelation that God deems superior is implemented*. This is clearly illustrated in the ministry of the King when we notice the conspicuous absence of people seeing angels or visions or other means of *miraculous communication* during His ministry on Earth. This principle can also be demonstrated by the fact that in biblical history, when the Prophets arrived (e. g. Samuel), theophanies ceased. Likewise, when either the OT or NT revelation was complete and available, gifts of miraculous communication such as prophecy and divine knowledge ceased as well.³⁴ This is because Scripture is deemed by God as a superior revelation.³⁵

Along the same lines, as we have written at length elsewhere, the end goal of virtually all *personal divine revelation*, including the miraculous kind, is covenant making. And God’s plan has been for such covenant revelation to be completed and recorded in Scripture, upon which other methods of divine revelation virtually cease. Accordingly, we have written elsewhere:

[T]he cessation of Apostles, Prophets, and miracle workers was the universal testimony and conviction of the Christian Church for over 1600 years, reflecting God’s own

withdrawal of them. What else would we expect when there has been no new covenant implemented?

We would expect such unique things to happen at the *beginning* of the implementation of a new covenant between God and man. Indeed, there were “fireworks” over Mt. Sinai at the implementation of the Old Covenant (Exod. 19), a special manifestation of God Himself to all the people, but such manifestations did not indefinitely continue for the Israelites, and eventually only the OT Scriptures remained.

Likewise, there were “fireworks” at the very beginning of the implementation of the New Covenant in which God uniquely revealed Himself. But like the experience of those who entered the Old Covenant, the initial “fireworks” were not to continue, but rather God has granted other “signs” of His continuing commitment such as the new birth, the fruits of the Holy Spirit, and the NT Scriptures.³⁶

Accordingly, the reason these miraculous gifts ceased twice in the history of God’s people, was that both times were a completion stage of the reception and authentication of biblical revelation, which is the very purpose of these miraculous revelatory gifts. We have clearly demonstrated these purposes regarding the gifts of divine knowledge, prophecy, and tongues elsewhere.³⁷

Therefore, if God’s purpose for these gifts was the reception and authentication of new divine revelation that was to be recorded, copied, and distributed to exercise authority over all of God’s people, then we must interpret the Apostle in the context of this very thing. These gifts were not designed to bring about the second coming of Christ and have no reason to continue until then. Their purpose was producing both the OT and NT and when they did, they ceased.³⁸

A.4) The Historical Context: *Paul’s prophecy was fulfilled in the fourth century*

The genre, so to speak, of this passage is prophecy. The Apostle is making a prediction of something that will occur in the future based on divine revelation he had received from God. It is not always clear what event a biblical prophecy is referring to, until, in hindsight, we can confidently recognize its fulfillment (cf. 1 Pet 1:10-11). In fact, it is possible, like other biblical Prophets, that the Apostle did not know what event he was referring to, but was simply communicating the prophecy in the language God had

revealed to him. However, even Paul knew the purpose of the gifts he lists were revelatory in nature and it would seem he would know the completion of the NT revelation was in mind.

Nevertheless, the question to ask regarding the meaning of a biblical prophecy is this: Has there been a historical event that would reasonably suffice to fulfill the prediction? Concerning Paul's prophecy of the cessation of the gifts of divine knowledge, prophecy, and tongues, the answer is a clear, well-documented, and virtually universally agreed upon "Yes."

Historically speaking, these gifts did cease in the early history of the Church, just at the time that the NT revelation had been widely canonized and distributed, as we have thoroughly documented elsewhere.³⁹ For example, regarding the cessation of the gift of tongues, Augustine (354-430), the preeminent leader of the Western Church in the fourth century wrote:

In the earliest time, "the Holy Ghost fell upon them that believed; and they spoke with tongues," which they had not learned, "as the Spirit gave them utterance." These were the Sign adapted to the time. For it was appropriate to have evidence of the Holy Spirit in all tongues, to show that the Gospel of God was to run through all tongues over the whole earth. That thing was done for a sign, and it passed away.⁴⁰

Likewise, Bishop Chrysostom (c. 347-407), a preeminent leader of the Eastern Church at the time, wrote in the context of teaching on the gifts discussed in 1 Corinthians 12-14:

This whole place is very obscure; but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to, and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur, but now no longer take place.⁴¹

Elsewhere, Chrysostom viewed the historical cessation of these gifts *in his day* as a fulfillment of the Apostle Paul's prophecy, not the future return of Christ. He taught:

Now then after [Paul] in every way had shown her [the Church] to be very exceedingly great, he does so again from another most important head, by a fresh comparison exalting her dignity, and saying; "but whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease."

For if both these [gifts of prophecy and tongues] were brought in for the sake of the faith; when that is every where sown abroad, the use of these is henceforth superfluous. . . . It is no marvel that prophecies and tongues should be done away.⁴²

Augustine and Chrysostom were not some fringe, obscure Church leaders, but knowledgeable of, and respected by, vast regions of the Church in their day. And it wasn't because they wanted these miraculous gifts to pass away that they wrote such things, but they were simply reporting the facts about 1600 years ago. And throughout that 1600 years, the Church universally considered claims that those gifts had been restored, to be fanatical and on the fringe of orthodox Christianity.⁴³

Here, then, is the importance of understanding that the Apostle was revealing a prophetic prediction here. If he was referring to the completion of the reception, canonization, and distribution of the NT revelation, then we can continue to regard the Apostle as a true Prophet of God, because historically his prediction came true.

On the other hand, if the Apostle was predicting the continuation of the gifts of tongues, prophecy, and divine knowledge until the return of Christ, *then he was a false prophet*, because his prediction did not come true. This is a difficulty that is rarely, if ever dealt with by those who want to interpret the Apostle as predicting the cessation of these gifts at the return of Christ.

A.5) The Corinthian Context: *virtues more valuable & enduring than revelatory gifts*

As we have argued elsewhere, Paul's purpose throughout 1 Corinthians 12-14 is to help the tongues hungry Corinthians to put this gift in perspective.⁴⁴ Specifically in chapter 13 he is arguing that the virtue of love is more important than the miraculous gifts. Accordingly, the Apostle writes:

If I speak [with the gift of] **tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.** ² **If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a** [gift of miraculous] **faith** [cf. 12:9⁴⁵] **that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.** ³ **If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames,**⁴⁶ **but have not love, I gain nothing.** (1 Cor 13:1-3)

Even the most miraculous gifts are worthless, and even harmful, if not exercised with love.

In order to further argue that love is superior to even these miraculous gifts, he then argues that, while love will endure forever, these miraculous gifts will cease. Accordingly, he writes: "**Love never fails** [*piptei*: literally "fall" meaning collapsing⁴⁷]; **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. (1 Cor 13:8 NASB). The Apostle says that love will never cease, but these miraculous gifts will.

In fact, as we will argue below, the Apostle makes the virtues of faith and hope equal to love in the sense that, "**now** [in the Church Age] **these three remain** [*menei*: endure]: **faith, hope and love**" (v. 13). Accordingly, even "**faith**" and "**hope**" are superior to these miraculous gifts because they will "**remain**," but the gifts listed will cease.

The fact that the whole point of Paul's argument here is to stress the temporary nature of these gifts of divine revelation, and the fact that he attaches *menei* (endurance, continuance) to faith, hope, and love, makes it clear that *he is arguing that the triad of virtues is greater than the triad of gifts simply because they last longer*. The fact that Paul compares the temporary nature of these gifts with the more enduring nature of faith, hope and love is intended to strengthen his argument regarding the inferior value of these gifts, especially tongues, compared to these virtues.

Accordingly, *those who would claim that these gifts were to endure as long as faith and hope* (i.e. the return of Christ), *make these gifts in some way equal to love which now accompanies faith and hope*. This is a conclusion which is completely contrary to everything Paul is saying here. He wanted the Corinthians to understand that the virtues of faith, hope, and love were superior to the gifts of divine knowledge, prophecy, and especially tongues, because the virtues will "**remain**," until the Lord's return (cf. Rom. 8:24-25, 2 Cor. 4:18, 5:7, Heb. 11:1), but the gifts will "**cease**" before that.

Now that we have covered several important contexts for understanding the issues addressed in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, we are ready to take a closer look at the text and meaning of each verse.

B) Interpretation of Verse 8

In light of the difficulties presented in correctly interpreting this text, it would seem helpful to provide an "expanded," although accurate translation of it. Provided below are three different renderings of each portion of this passage. The first is simply the NASB translation by itself. It is suggested that one refers to this in order to follow the flow of argument that Paul presents here. Secondly, the NASB translation is provided with transliterated Greek

words where it is thought helpful. Finally, in bold text, is an expanded translation which reflects both the flow of argument and the definitions of the Greek words in the passage.

Notes for justifying the expanded translation will follow it. Then the impact that the verse has on deciding which of the two major views reflects Paul's intention best will be presented. Some of the discussion will be quite detailed and it will become readily apparent why its meaning is relatively difficult to discern. But the implications of its proper interpretation are important, not to mention it is the word of God. So it would seem worth the effort to understand it.

B.1) Text & Translation

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. (1 Cor 13:8 NASB)

Love never fails [*oudepote piptei*]; **but if** [*eite*] **there are gifts** [supplied by NASB] **of prophecy** [*propheteia*], **they will be done away** [*katargeo*], **if there are tongues** [*glossais*], **they will cease** [*pausontai*]; **if there is knowledge, it will be done away** [*katargeo*].

Love lasts forever [a]. **But unlike love, wherever** [b] **God has provided** [c] **the temporary method of receiving the NT revelation through the gift of prophecy** [d], **that method of divine revelation will be abolished** [e]. **Wherever God has provided the temporary method of authenticating the NT revelation, particularly to the Jews, through the gift of miraculously speaking in foreign languages** [f], **that method of divine authentication will cease to function** [g]. **Wherever God has provided the temporary method of receiving and communicating the NT revelation through the gift of divine knowledge** [h], **that method of divine revelation will also be abolished.**

[a] **lasts forever** (*oudepote piptei*): The Greek literally means "never falls." The same Greek word is used in Luke 16:17 to refer to the Law that Christ said will never pass away. This translation is reflected best in the NLT, RSV, NEB, JB, TEV, NCV.

[b] **wherever** (*eite*): The Greek is rendered "if" in the NASB. It is important to notice why Paul says "**if there are prophecies.**" The

most obvious reason is that although these gifts were operating in some churches, they were not present in all churches and at all times.⁴⁸

[c] **God has provided:** Reflects the idea of “*gifts*” as supplied in the NASB, NIV, JB, and NCV, although it is not in the original Greek text. However, the insertion is appropriate because prophecy, tongues, and knowledge have all been described by Paul as spiritual gifts (*charismata*) that God had provided to the body of Christ. (cf. 1 Cor 12:4, 31)

[d] **temporary method of receiving the NT revelation:** Paul is clearly referring to the NT gift of prophecy and its description here reflects the definition established elsewhere in *KOG*.⁴⁹ Accordingly, in Ephesians Paul clearly describes the NT gift of prophecy as a means of biblical revelation equal in authority to apostleship when he writes that “**God’s household [is] built on the [revelatory] foundation of the Apostles and [NT⁵⁰] Prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone**” (Eph 2:19-20).

Likewise, he describes the NT gift of prophecy as having the purpose of receiving the NT revelation along with Apostles when he writes:

Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace [gift of Apostleship/divine knowledge] that was given to me for you,³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.⁴ In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the [NT revelation of the] mystery of Christ,⁵ which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy Apostles and [NT] Prophets.

Paul described the NT gift of prophecy as an instrument of Scripture-quality revelation, like the gift of apostleship. Therefore, it was a temporary gift in the same way, for the same reason, and at the same time as the gift of apostleship. Accordingly, like the gift of apostleship, the gift of prophecy was understood by Paul to be a **temporary method of receiving the NT revelation**.

[e] **abolished** (*katargēthēsontai*): The word is from the root word *katargeō*. The NASB variously interprets it: abolish, bring to an end, do away, nullify, remove, render powerless. Paul uses it again at the end of verse 8 for “knowledge” as well. This is a strong word in the Greek, suggesting something that will be intentionally obliterated.

[f] **the temporary method of authenticating the NT revelation, particularly to the Jews, through the gift of miraculously speaking in foreign languages (*glossais*):** Paul is referring to the *sign gift* of tongues and the translation reflects how the authentic gift was described in Acts 2:5-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:22, “**Tongues are a [miraculous] sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers.**” For further biblical and historical arguments for the fact that the purpose of the gift of tongues was to be a miraculous authentication of new divine revelation see elsewhere.⁵¹

[g] **cease to function (*pausontai*):** The word literally means to “stop, cease.” The word is not significantly different than *katargeo* used to describe the cessation of prophecy and knowledge.⁵²

[h] **the temporary method of receiving and communicating the NT revelation through the gift of divine knowledge:** The context is spiritual gifts and clearly what Paul is referring to is the supernatural gift of divine knowledge that he speaks of earlier in 12:8 and 13:2, and has been discussed and biblically defined elsewhere.⁵³

B.2) Interpretation: *Why these gifts?*

The question must be asked and answered as to why Paul singles out the revelatory gifts of prophecy, divine knowledge, and tongues as the subject of this passage? Why didn't he include the gift of teaching or serving, or leadership, if in fact he had in mind gifts that were going to last until Christ's return?

Some have claimed that Paul's choice of what gifts to include in this passage are not significant or that the reasons are *unrelated*.⁵⁴ Others suggest they had particular relevance to the issues in the Corinthian congregation. Indeed, if Paul had only chosen tongues and prophecy to discuss here, then this would be a legitimate claim. However, the Apostle's inclusion of the gift of divine knowledge possessed by the Apostles for the reception of divine revelation, broadens the scope of Paul's discussion beyond the Corinthian issues. Clearly the choice of these gifts is significant and a superior answer will be one that will explain Paul's use of the three gifts as a *related group*.⁵⁵

It would seem the most obvious reason then is that all three of the gifts Paul speaks of in this passage are *Scripture* and *sign gifts* that were related to the receiving, understanding, communicating, and authenticating of NT revelation in the absence of NT Scripture. As discussed above, the clear context of this passage is methods of

divine revelation, or how God communicates truth and increases knowledge of Himself to His people.⁵⁶ It is suggested here that if this is true then the debate as to when these gifts were to cease is essentially settled in this very first verse. If the gifts of prophecy, divine knowledge, and tongues were, in fact, given specifically to empower and authenticate a messenger of new, Scripture-quality revelation from God in the absence of Scripture, then Paul certainly has in mind the completion of the written NT Scriptures as the cause of their cessation.

Already we see some evidence that would favor the view that what Paul has in mind is the completion of the NT Scriptures. Whatever the “**completed thing**” (v. 10) is, its arrival will make the *Scripture* and *Sign gifts* Paul mentions obsolete, and it will cause their extinction. Did the return of Christ cause the cessation of these gifts? For those who see no evidence that authentic NT gifts of prophecy, divine knowledge, and tongues are operating today, the obvious answer is no. Something has occurred before the return of Christ to stop these methods of divine revelation and change to a different method. That “**completed thing**” would seem best interpreted as the completion and distribution of the NT Scriptures. And Church history proves that.⁵⁷

C) Interpretation of Verse 9

C.1) Text & Translation

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part (1 Cor 13:9 NASB)⁵⁸

For (*gar*) we know in part (*ek merous*), and we prophesy in part (*ek merous*)

These temporary methods of divine revelation will be abolished because [a] currently [b] the gift of divine knowledge [c] operates in pieces [d] through separate individuals in isolated cases [e], therefore providing us with only a partial and fragmented reception, understanding, and communication [f] of the whole NT revelation [g]. Likewise, currently the gift of prophecy operates in pieces through separate individuals in isolated cases, therefore providing us with only a partial and fragmented reception, understanding, and communication of the whole NT revelation [h].

[a] **because** (*gar*): Paul's use of *gar* ("because") here is significant in that it is "a conjunction used to express cause, explanation, inference or continuation."⁵⁹ In verse 9 he is explaining the *reason* that he said the revelatory gifts in verse 8 will stop.

[b] **currently**: Paul's words are clearly in the present tense and can only be automatically applied to the time he penned this letter, not to the 20th century.

[c] **gift of divine knowledge**: When Paul says "we know" and "we prophesy", he is referring to the gifts of divine knowledge and prophecy that he introduced this passage with in verse 8.

[d] **operates in pieces** (*ek merous*): literally "in part." The meaning of this Greek phrase is important to establish, as it helps define what "comes" in verse 10.⁶⁰ *Vine's* defines *ek merous* generally as "a part, portion, of the whole".⁶¹ The *NIDNTT* translates it here at 1 Corinthians 13:9, 10, 12 as describing something that is "incomplete, fragmentary".⁶² Anthony Thiselton in the *New International Greek Testament Commentary* writes of *ek merous* as used in this passage:

The idiom has the force of *piece by piece, bit by bit*, or part by part in many contexts, including here. . . *imperfectly* (NJB) fails to convey the process described here adequately. . . Paul conveys the pictorial image of "building up" knowledge by trying to fit together bits and pieces a part at a time. Luther uses the word *patchwork* (*das Stückwerk*). . . . For stylistic reasons we translate the first *ek merous* [v. 9] as "in fragmentary ways," and the second *ek merous* [v.10] as "part by part."⁶³

Accordingly, Dr. Thiselton translates the Greek in verses 9-10: "**For we know in fragmentary ways, and we prophesy part by part. But when the completed whole comes, what is piece by piece shall be done away**"⁶⁴

If contemporary English is the goal, then there is no doubt that *ek merous* is best translated as "partial" or "incomplete" as it is in the PME and the NEB respectively.⁶⁵ The RSV, JB, and NCV rendering of "imperfect" does not reflect the word's usage in its 38 occurrences in the NT outside of 1 Corinthians 13. Neither is the idea of "immaturity" within the possible meanings of this word as some have suggested.

[e] **through separate individuals in isolated cases**: This is practically why the divine knowledge was received and understood

“in pieces.” Paul has said earlier, **“if there are prophecies”** because this gift did not operate consistently in every congregation. Translating *ek merous* as **“separate individuals”** is also supported by the NASB rendering of *ek merous* in 12:27 as **“individually (*ek merous*) members.”**

[f] partial and fragmented reception, understanding, and communication: Although Paul applies *ek merous* (partial, fragmentary) directly to how these gifts were operating, the product of these gifts would be *ek merous* as well. Thus, **“partial and fragmented reception, understanding, and communication”** will be the product of revelatory gifts operating **“in pieces.”**

It is important to notice what Paul said was *ek merous* (“partial” or “fragmentary”): the gifts of divine knowledge and prophecy. The literal Greek is somewhat awkward as it is not readily apparent how a spiritual gift itself (not just its results) could be partial or fragmentary. However, when we visualize the early Church with no NT, it becomes obvious that Paul is describing their current experience regarding the reception, understanding, and communication of the NT revelation: it was “partial” and “fragmentary.”

[g] the whole NT revelation: This rendering obviously assumes that Paul envisioned a limit to the revelation that was to accompany the implementation of the New Covenant. Did Paul understand that God was revealing and authenticating a new divine revelation through these gifts, in order to accompany and facilitate the implementation of the New Covenant? Did Paul envision a completed revelation? We have rather thoroughly argued “yes” above.⁶⁶

[h] Likewise, currently the gift of prophecy operates in pieces through separate individuals in isolated cases, therefore providing us with only a partial and fragmented reception, understanding, and communication of the whole NT revelation: This is merely a reflection of the translation of **“we know in part”** above.

C.2) Interpretation: *revelatory gifts are piecemeal*

Clearly, the best translation of the Greek here is that Paul is speaking of miraculous gifts of divine revelation that operate in a “piecemeal” or “partial” fashion. As we noted above, when we visualize the early Church with no NT, it becomes obvious that Paul

is describing their current experience regarding the reception, understanding, and communication of the NT revelation. "Partial" and "fragmentary" aptly describes how the NT revelation was distributed in the Church for at least the first 200 years of its existence. It was received, understood, and communicated by the relatively few Apostles and Prophets scattered throughout the known world. And no Apostle or Prophet possessed the complete NT revelation themselves, as even Paul's knowledge of the whole NT revelation at this time was not complete without John's Revelation that was received and recorded approximately 40 years later.

Along these lines, Raymond F. Collins, in his well regarded *Sacra Pagina Commentary* notes that just as Paul uses Greek verbs for "pass away" four times to emphasize these gifts are temporary, Paul likewise uses *ek merous* four times in this passage to "underscore their limited character."⁶⁷

Accordingly, the eminent Moody Bible scholar Merrill F. Unger (1909-1980) commented on these verses:

The apostolic gift of knowledge by direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit was limited because it received truth only partially and piecemeal--here in this assembly a little, there in that assembly a little.⁶⁸

Along these lines, NT scholar D. A. Carson writes in the context of saying that understanding the NT revelation is something like putting a jigsaw puzzle together, and that we understand it better than the NT writers, adds, "This is . . . an acknowledgment that with greater numbers of pieces of the jigsaw puzzle provided, the individual pieces and clusters of pieces are seen in new relationships not visible before."⁶⁹ While Dr. Carson does not share our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, his analogy of the NT revelation as pieces of a jigsaw puzzle fits nicely with our interpretation.

In a similar context, NT scholar Paul Wooley notes:

The original writer [of a NT document], as indicated above, may not in every case have known as much concerning the divinely-intended meaning as does the modern Christian who can compare Scripture passage with Scripture passage and thus reach a unified conception of the divine intention.⁷⁰

Accordingly, the author of Hebrews begins his epistle with: "**God . . . spoke long ago to the fathers in the Prophets in many portions** [*polumerōs*: "many parts"] **and in many ways**" (Heb 1:1 NASB).⁷¹ Here again is reflected the "piecemeal" and "partial" way that divine revelation is received, understood, and

communicated apart from a completed collection of Scripture. Accordingly, J. I. Packer comments on Hebrews 1:1:

Here is implied , not only a climax, but also a contrast between a revelation, or series of revelations, that was partial and incomplete, a thing of bits and pieces, not fully integrated, and a revelation that was comprehensive, unified, and final. . .

The Bible appears like a symphony orchestra, with the Holy Ghost as its Toscanini; each instrumentalist has been brought willingly, spontaneously, creatively, to play his notes just as the great conductor desired, though none of them could ever hear the music as a whole. Not only the Prophets who foretold Christ (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-12), but all the writers of both Testaments, are constantly telling us more than ever they themselves knew. The point of each part only becomes fully clear when seen in relation to all the rest.⁷²

Elsewhere, Dr. Packer writes:

There is. . . a sense in which every New Testament writer communicates to Christians today more than he knew he was communicating, simply because Christians can now read his work as part of the completed New Testament canon.⁷³

Accordingly, because Paul understands that these gifts of direct and divine revelation were to be temporary, he knew that the period of this kind of revelation would come to an end and be replaced by something else. It would seem too that he understood the operation of these gifts would eventually lead to a completed revelation of all that God intended to provide, in order to accompany and assist the implementation of the New Covenant. Finally, Paul knew, if not by divine revelation, then from the precedent of the completion of the OT revelation, that when the revelation was completed it would result in a completed set of written, canonized, and distributed Scriptures. All of which leads to his next statement.

D) Interpretation of Verse 10

D.1) Text & Translation

but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away (1 Cor 13:10 NASB)

but when the perfect (*to teleion*) **comes** (*elthe*), **the partial** (*ek merous*) **will be done away** (*kartegeo*)

But when these fragmentary and temporary methods of revelation have fulfilled their purpose, God will provide [a] the completed [b] method of receiving, understanding, and communicating the whole NT revelation [c], and these fragmentary and temporary methods [d] will become obsolete [e]

[a] **God will provide** (*elthe*): This word is derived from *erchomai* "to come." The substitution of "**God will provide**" for the more literal NASB "**comes**" is supported by the fact that Paul is not talking about something only arriving, but rather becoming present and making a significant improvement on the partial and fragmentary revelation that he and the Corinthians were currently experiencing. In addition, it is clear that it is God who has provided the gifts which are *ek merous*, and therefore it would seem clear that it was to be God who provided what was *to teleion*.

[b] **the completed** (*to teleion*): This adjectival noun is derived from the noun *telos*, which has a significant diversity in meaning including: "end, goal, maturity, perfection, fulfillment, completion." The *NIDNTT* notes that the noun is:

[D]erived from a root *tel-*, which means to turn [a]round. Originally [in classical Greek] it meant the turning point, hinge, the culminating point at which one stage ends and another begins; later [it meant] the goal, the end."

The verb forms, *teleo* and *teleioo*, mean "bring to an end, carry out, bring to completion, complete, accomplish, finish, fulfill, make perfect." The literal meanings of the adjectival forms, including *teleion* used here by Paul, include "complete, perfect."⁷⁴

Vine's defines the adjective as "having reached its end (*telos*), "finished, complete, perfect."⁷⁵ The adjective form *teleios* is used

in the LXX to translate the Hebrew word *tamim*, meaning “entire, whole . . . complete in the sense of the whole thing.”⁷⁶

With this survey of possible meanings, it becomes obvious that the word has a variety of meanings. However, these meanings can essentially be divided into three: 1) maturity from something immature, 2) absolute perfection from something flawed, or 3) completion from something incomplete. Not surprisingly, these definitions coincide with the three major interpretations of what Paul is talking about in this passage 1) the maturity of the Church,⁷⁷ 2) the return of Christ or the Eternal State,⁷⁸ or 3) the completion of the NT revelation and Scriptures.

As in all cases like this, the context must eventually control the meaning of the Greek. More specifically, the meaning of *to teleion* here will be the opposite of *ek merous* which it is being compared to in the verse. As the NASB has it: “**when the perfect [to teleion] comes, the partial [ek merous] will be done away** (1 Cor 13:10 NASB).

However, we can even see in this translation that “**perfect**” is not a good counterpart to “**partial**.” While *to teleion* may have several possible meanings, the clear meaning of *ek merous* is “in pieces,” “fragmentary,” “incomplete.” Therefore, the proper translation of *to teleion* here is something like “**complete**.”

Accordingly, the Apostle Paul uses this very same contrast with these very same Greek words in the letter that followed this one to the Corinthians. In chapter one he writes:

For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that, as you have understood us in part [apo merous], you will come to understand fully [eōs telous] that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus (2 Cor 1:13-14).

Again, the Apostle is speaking of a partial, incomplete understanding that he hopes will turn into a complete understanding, not a perfect understanding.⁷⁹

Accordingly, as noted above, Dr. Thiselton has translated the Greek of verses 9-10: “**For we know in fragmentary ways, and we prophesy part by part. But when the completed whole [to teleion] comes, what is piece by piece [ek merous] shall be done away.**”⁸⁰ He adds:

The climactic *to teleion* includes the double meaning “the complete” (NRSV) and “wholeness” (REB). . . . Hence it combines the two related notions of *fulfillment* or *goal* and the *completed whole*. No English word alone can fully convey the meaning in this context.⁸¹

Likewise, NT scholar C. K. Barrett writes in regard to the use of *to teleion* here:

The adjective (in the neuter gender, and with the article *to* "the") rendered *totality* is fairly common in Paul; see [1 Cor 2:6; 14:20]. It takes its precise meaning from the context, and here, in contrast with *in part* (*ek merous*) it means not perfection (in quality) but *totality*--- in particular the whole truth about God.⁸²

Along the same lines, F. David Farnell, Professor of NT at Masters Seminary, notes: "The contrast with ἐκ μέρους ("in part") requires a quantitative idea (i.e., "complete") rather than a qualitative idea ("perfect")."⁸³

Accordingly, Pentecostal NT scholar Gordon Fee concludes:

The meaning [of *to teleion*] in the present instance [1 Cor. 13:10] is determined by its final goal of what is *ek merous*, "partial." Thus its root sense of "having attained the end or purpose" (BAGD), hence "complete," seems to be the nuance here. . . . Paul's distinctions are between "now" and "then," between what is incomplete and what is complete.⁸⁴

Gerhard Delling, in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, discussing the use of the adjective in the NT, states, "In the Pauline corpus the meaning 'whole' is suggested at 1 C. 13:10 by the antithesis to *ek merous*."⁸⁵ NT scholar Robert Thomas, Professor and the Master's Seminary, even though he argues for the "maturity" theme on this passage, nonetheless admits concerning the meaning of *to teleion* here:

The meaning "whole" or "complete" [not "mature"] for the adjective is well attested in Paul's usage as well as throughout the New Testament. This notion of *teleios* receives even greater impetus in its antithetical expression of I Corinthians 13:10. The idiom *ek merous* is specifically quantitative in character, presenting the concept of "partial" [not "mature"]. What better opposite to partial is there than "completeness"?⁸⁶

Douglas Judisch has also commented:

"Complete" and "piecemeal" [should be] used to translate the [Greek] words that traditional English versions render "perfect" and "imperfect" . . . the latter terms are acceptable translations if properly understood (as meaning "complete" and "piecemeal", respectively); but in contemporary English *perfect* and *imperfect* usually carry a moral connotation that is alien to the passage under consideration. . . .

This interpretation destroys the contrast between “the complete thing” and “the piecemeal thing” in verse 10. For the contrast does not seem to be a qualitative one (as between this life and the life to come), but a quantitative one (between a whole and its individual parts or some of those parts).”⁸⁷

Finally, one commentator notes:

It is of interest also to note how the word *teleion* is used in the Septuagint [ancient Greek translation of the OT]. It speaks of Solomon “finishing” the temple. So the word here does not mean that a perfect state was reached, but rather that a work was finished. When a work is finished, then that which is unfinished by the very nature of the case ceases to be. The unfinished gives place to the finished product.

The word also in Ephesians 2:20 carries the same thought of a building being finished. It is surely instructive to notice that the Apostles and Prophets were part of the foundation. The foundation in any building once completed is never laid again. So it is a good Scriptural inference, and not nonsense, to say that the foundation gifts along with the foundation men all ceased when the foundation was completed.⁸⁸

Nonetheless, the contrast with *ek merous* “**partial**” is often ignored or not deemed valuable by most others.⁸⁹ Dr. Forbes suggests that the intended contrast between *ek merous* and *teleion* “may be asking a little too much precision from Paul.”⁹⁰ That seems rather convenient for someone who wants to find the idea of perfection here.

One proposed translation is the idea of maturity. This is understandable as Paul uses *teleiois* in this very letter to convey that meaning: “**we do speak wisdom among those who are mature (*teleiois*)**” (2:6). And in fact the idea of maturity is the most common use of the word in Paul’s writings.⁹¹

However, such a meaning here ignores the fact that Paul intended the meaning of *to teleion* to be the opposite or the fulfillment of what is *ek merous*. As pointed out in section C above, *ek merous* cannot, and does not have the meaning of “immaturity” in the NT, but rather “partial, fragmentary,” making the idea of something becoming mature not necessarily the best contrast to something that is in pieces. Even Dr. Thomas, a foremost promoter of the idea that the Apostle is speaking of the maturity of the Church in this passage, admits:

Admittedly this understanding of *to teleios* is not immune to objection, most notably a disruption of the antithesis with *ek*

merous. Pitting a quantitative idea [maturity] against a qualitative one [partial] is quite unsatisfactory.⁹²

Dr. Thomas adds elsewhere:

Completion is in the context. Note the four occurrences of *ek merous* that require an opposite—"completion": 13:9 (twice), 13:10, and 13:12. It is not a matter of completion's not being in the context; it is rather a question of the completion of what.

The completion spoken of in verse 12 is unobscured cognitive sight to replace the limited prophetic revelations and unlimited knowledge to replace partial revelations through the gift of knowledge. Those partial revelatory gifts were the means used by the Spirit in bringing the NT Scriptures—among other revelations—to the church. So a termination of revelatory gifts coincided with the completion of the NT.⁹³

Secondly, *teleion* here is in the neuter form strongly indicating that Paul is referring to a thing, not a person. In all the instances where the NT uses this adjective to describe maturity, it is always in the context of a person, never a thing. "Things" do not become mature.

Thirdly, the idea of maturity would not best fit the overall context of this passage which, as argued above,⁹⁴ is *methods* of divine revelation, not the Church or Christians per se.

Most others want to translate *to teleion* here as "**the perfect**" as it is in most translations of the Bible. Of course, even the English word "perfect" has a wide variety of meanings, including "mature" and "complete."⁹⁵ However, most expositors who wish to translate *to teleion* here are referring to a state of absolute, flawless perfection as will occur in the Eternal State.

Absolute perfection is a possible meaning of *teleion*, as in Matthew 5:48, "**be perfect** (*teleioi*), **as your heavenly Father is perfect** (*teleios*). And it is used to convey the idea of perfection elsewhere in the NT.⁹⁶ In fact, Paul uses cognates of this word to refer to the end of the Church Age or the perfected state in 1 Corinthians (cf. 1:8; 15:24). Therefore, translating *to teleion* here as "**the** [absolute] **perfect** [thing]" might suffice, except for several things.

First, *to teleion* is never specifically used by Paul or other NT writers to refer to the return of Christ. Dr. Thomas writes concerning this view:

[T]his understanding presents a meaning of *teleios* which is unparalleled in Paul's usage, if not in the New Testament as a whole. The rendering "perfect" apparently portrays a meaning

that was more in vogue with the world of Greek philosophy than with the writers of Scripture.⁹⁷

Secondly, and more importantly, as with the idea of maturity, the idea of absolute perfection here would not seem the best contrast to that which is “partial” or “incomplete.” As pointed out above in section C, *ek merous* does not have the meaning of “imperfect” or “flawed.” The fact that there are literal and legitimate definitions for *teleion* that reflect a contrast with something “in pieces”, “partial” or “incomplete” better than absolute perfection suggests it is not the best translation here.

Thirdly, the idea of perfection does not fit Paul’s analogies very well. Paul says the difference between the current fragmentary and partial methods of NT revelation and the method of revelation that will replace them is like the difference between the cognitive and communication abilities of a child and an adult (cf. v. 11). Although an adult’s cognitive and communication abilities are obviously *better* than a child’s, they are not perfect in the sense of flawless. If Paul wanted to convey the idea of perfection, it would seem he would have chosen a different metaphor. Likewise, to see someone directly is a *better* mode of perceiving them, but not a perfect one. Even if we see someone “**face to face**” (v. 12) we do not know them perfectly. Again, Paul’s analogies do not convey the idea of perfection.

Unfortunately, this obvious comparison that Paul is making between *to teleion* and *ek merous* is not reflected in many modern translations. For example, the NIV has “**For we know in part** (*ek merous*) **and we prophesy in part** (*ek merous*), **but when perfection** (*to teleion*) **comes, the imperfect** (*ek merous*) **disappears**” (vs. 9-10). Only here in verse 10, out of 41 other occurrences, does the NIV translate *ek merous* as “imperfect,” even though it translates the same word as “**in part**” twice in the phrase that precedes it. And it is again suggested that if *ek merous* cannot be translated as “imperfect;” than *to teleion* should not be translated in contemporary English as “perfection” as it is here in the NIV, and in the NCV, and JB. Even the *NIV Study Bible* notes on this passage: “The Greek for this word [*to teleion*] can mean “end”, “fulfillment”, “completeness” or maturity” [not “perfect” as in flawless]. In this context the contrast is between the partial and the complete.”

This is why most reputable scholars will *not* translate it this way, including Drs. Barrett (“totality”), Thiselton (“completed whole”), and Fee (“complete”), who adds that the NIV “tends to mislead.”⁹⁸

Nor should *to teleion* here be rendered as “the perfect (thing)” as it is in the NASB, RSV, NKJV, CEV, and TEV; which wrongly

demands the idea of being flawless rather than simply finished. The NEB and the PME would seem to be the best and most consistent translations here. The former reads, **"For our knowledge and our prophecy alike are partial, and the partial vanishes when wholeness comes."** The PME has it: **"For our knowledge is always incomplete, and our prophecy is always incomplete, and when the complete comes, that is the end of the incomplete."**

On the surface, the distinction between perfection and completion may not seem important. However, many use the supposed idea of perfection in this passage to support their claim that Paul is speaking of the return of Christ or the Eternal State. John MacArthur, for example, comments on this passage and says:

Not until our minds are perfected will we be able "to know fully just as [we] also have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12). So we wait for the time and experience of perfection . . . The Corinthians would have taken Paul's meaning in the plainest and simplest way: as a reference to spiritual and moral perfection.⁹⁹

First, Dr. MacArthur's debatable interpretation of verse 12 will be taken up below. Secondly, Dr. MacArthur offers no arguments against translating *to teleion* as "the completed thing" and no arguments to support his translation of *to teleion* as "the perfect thing." Again, it is suggested that interpreting *to teleion* as "faultless heavenly perfection" instead of "the completed thing" ignores Paul's use of *ek merous* which never means "imperfect" or "flawed" but rather "partial," "in pieces," and "incomplete." The Corinthians would *not* have understood *to teleion* as "heaven" in the context of contrasting it with *ek merous*, as Dr. MacArthur claims. They *would* have understood it as referring to something partial and in pieces being completed.

Thirdly, the context of the passage is not the accomplishment of "spiritual and moral" perfection as Dr. MacArthur suggests, but rather, the completion of the NT revelation that was to accompany and facilitate the implementation of the New Covenant. Finally, Dr. MacArthur's view leaves the supernatural revelatory gifts of prophecy and divine knowledge still operating, which, in our opinion, reveals a significant misunderstanding of their purpose and nature. There is no doubt that if the purpose and nature of these gifts was providing new divine revelation in the absence of Scripture, as we have argued at length elsewhere, then Dr. MacArthur's view that the "**completed thing**" is the Eternal State is improbable.

The rightly respected NT scholar D. A. Carson would seem to make similar mistakes when commenting on this passage:

When "perfection" comes, the "imperfect" disappears: what is the connection between these two categories? . . . when does this perfection come, and in what does it consist? There are three groups of theories.

It has been strongly argued that "perfection" refers to the maturity of the church. . . . It has also been strongly argued that the "perfection" is the completed canon itself. . . . The third . . . interpretation is that "perfection" is related to the parousia. . . .

The outcome of the debate over these positions is very important, because Paul writes that the imperfect disappears *when perfection comes*. In other words, the gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues . . . will pass away at some point future to Paul's writing, designated by him "perfection"

In my judgment, [the] third position [that "perfection" is related to the parousia] has powerful evidence in its defense. . . . It is difficult to believe that Paul could have expected the Corinthians to think that by "perfection" he was alluding to the cessation of the writing of Scripture.¹⁰⁰

Like Dr. MacArthur, nowhere does Dr. Carson offer any support for translating *to teleion* as "perfection" and *ek merous* as "imperfect." Contrary to Dr. Carson, Paul intentionally pairs these terms to convey the idea of something that is "incomplete/complete," "partial/whole," "unfinished/finished," rather than "imperfect/perfect" as Dr. Carson would have us assume.

But such a translation obviously lends itself to his interpretation. For example, notice the effect on Dr. Carson's statement if liberty is taken to substitute his "perfection" theme with the definitions of *to teleion* and *ek merous* established above:

When "completion" comes, the "incomplete" disappears: what is the connection between these two categories? . . . The outcome of the debate over these positions is very important, because Paul writes that the incomplete disappears *when completion comes*. In other words, the [revelatory] gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues . . . will pass away at some point future to Paul's writing, designated by him "completion" It is difficult to believe that Paul could have expected the Corinthians to think that by "completion" he was alluding to the cessation of the writing of Scripture.

No, it is not difficult to believe such a thing, in light of the very unique purpose for the gifts Paul is listing and the pattern that God had followed with OT revelation. The potential, and it is suggested, misleading impact of translating *to teleion* as "perfection" instead of "completion" becomes evident. If we are to correctly understand this passage of Scripture, we need to honor, instead of ignore, the Apostle's intentional contrast in the Greek text of verse 10 between that which is incomplete with that which is complete.

[c] **method of receiving, understanding, and communicating the whole NT revelation:** The insertion of "**revelation**" here reflects the context of this passage which is methods of receiving divine revelation, as argued above.¹⁰¹ In verse 9, it is the "**NT revelation**" that they knew and prophesied in part. The partial thing in 10b refers to the "**NT revelation**" that they knew in part in verse 9. If what is known in part and what is partial in verses 9 and 10b refer to the "**NT revelation**" received through these gifts, then the completed thing in 10a is also referring to the "**NT revelation**" received through these gifts.

[d] **fragmentary and temporary:** Reflects the meaning of *ek merous* in the text. See discussion under section C above.

[e] **become obsolete** (*katargeo*: "abolish") The idea of obsolescence is supported by the word's use in the NT to describe something that is being made obsolete, in order to replace it with something else. Thus it is translated "**nullify**" (NASB, NIV, RSV) "**without effect**" (NKJV) and "**cancel**" (JB, NEB) in Romans 3:3; and "**nullify**" (NASB, NIV), "**make void**" (NKJV), "**overthrow**" (RSV), and "**pointless**" (JB) in Romans 3:31, to describe the OT law that is made obsolete by the New Covenant.

In Romans 4:14, *katargeo* is translated "**void**" (RSV), "**made of no effect**" (NKJV), "**worthless**" (NIV, TEV, NCV, CEV), "**nullified**" (NASB), and "**meaningless**" (NLT), to describe the uselessness of God's promise to save by faith if we are still under the law (cf. Gal. 3:17). This rendering also reflects the meaning of *katargeo* as "**abolished**" in this verse and elsewhere. See section B.2.e above.

D.2) Interpretation: *when the NT revelation is completed, the revelatory gifts will cease*

It is suggested here that if "**the completed**" mode of NT revelation is the best translation of *to teleion*, then the best interpretation of "**the completed**" mode of NT revelation would be

the completed NT Scriptures, making the temporary NT revelatory gifts obsolete and bringing about their extinction. Again, the maturity of the Church would not seem to reflect a “**completed**” mode of NT revelation. Nor would the person/return of Christ when the context would seem to specifically apply to the completion of the NT revelation that was to accompany and facilitate the implementation of the New Covenant. Robert Gromacki, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Bible and Greek at Cedarville University, would seem to put it all together when he says:

This word *teleion* means that something is partially here now, is presently developing, and one day will become complete. This word fits the concept of the progressive revelation of the New Testament of which Paul [and Peter were] aware (John 14:25-26; 16:12-13; cf. Col. 1:25 [see also 2 Pet. 3:15-16]). . . .

Logically, *to teleion* must refer to completeness or perfection in the *same realm* as that referred to by *ek merous*. Since *ek merous* refers to the transmission of divine truth by revelation, the other term *to teleion* must refer to God’s *complete* revelation of truth, the entire New Testament.¹⁰²

Likewise, the Greek scholar Spiros Zodhiates in his popular *Complete Word Study New Testament* comments on verses 8-10 and concludes:

The phrase “when that which is perfect is come” refers to the written revelation of Scripture. When this revelation was completed, there was no need for the temporary gifts (e.g., tongues, prophecies, and knowledge) which were given in order to substantiate the message that the Apostles were preaching.¹⁰³

Along the same lines, Bruce R. Compton, Professor of Biblical Languages and Exposition at the Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, has written in an excellent exegesis of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13:

Since Paul declares that the gifts mentioned in 13:9 are in some way “in part,” the proper approach to identifying the meaning of the phrase is to ask what these gifts have in common that could be described as “in part.” Based on the definitions given above, the common denominator among the gifts is that they all involve direct revelation from God. As such, the expression “in part” simply refers to the fact that the revelation communicated by these gifts is partial or piecemeal. The corresponding expression “the perfect” as the counterpart

to the partial must refer to the full or complete revelation, of which these gifts contribute their portion.

Finally, since these gifts are specifically identified in 12:27–28 as those which God has given to the church, the body of Christ, “the perfect” represents the full or complete revelation that God intends for the church. Thus, “the perfect” points to completed revelation God has intended for the church and has preserved in the New Testament.¹⁰⁴

What we are suggesting here is precisely what happened with the revelation, recording, canonizing, and distribution of all the divine revelation that accompanied the implementation of the Old Covenant. As we have argued above, God had clearly set a precedent for all to see, and there is little doubt that Paul, and the first century Church, understood that the implementation of the New Covenant, and its accompanying revelation, would follow a similar pattern.¹⁰⁵

Do we doubt then that Paul understood that after the NT revelation had been “deposited” through the revelatory gifts, that these gifts would cease, and gifts of teaching would replace them, just as the “Teachers of the Law” had replaced the OT Prophets? Considering the precedent set by the reception and completion of the OT, surely Paul did not expect the direct and divine NT revelation to continue indefinitely. That would seem to be precisely why he envisioned the cessation of these revelatory gifts.

It was also noted above that *teleion* is derived from the root *tel-*, which in classical Greek originally meant “the turning point, hinge, the culminating point at which one stage ends and another begins.” This describes very well what occurred with the methods of understanding, receiving and communicating the NT revelation when the NT Scriptures were completed. That was indeed a “turning point . . . the culminating point at which” the temporary gifts of divine revelation ended and the era of the perfect, complete, permanent, whole, directly, and personally available NT Scriptures began. The revolutionary nature of that transition should not be missed. One only has to imagine the Christian life without the NT Scriptures to realize why Paul would have been so excited about its completion and subsequent distribution.

As was noted earlier, the fact that these temporary gifts involved the reception of NT revelation, means that their operation was not so much to bring about the return of Christ, but rather the completed NT revelation. Therefore, it would seem the “turning point” for these gifts would more precisely be the completion of the NT Scriptures, rather than the return of Christ. Not to mention that the historical evidence for the extinction of these gifts at the time

the early Church completed the recognition, copying, and sufficient distribution of the NT revelation.¹⁰⁶

What then with other possible interpretations of this verse? Did Paul view the maturing of the Church as being the means by which the NT revelation would become written, canonized, and distributed as the OT revelation was? It certainly was not the maturing of the nation of Israel that inscripturated the OT revelation.

Did Paul envision that the return of Christ would result in a completion, recording, and distribution of the NT revelation? Again, that was not the case with the OT revelation. And, in fact, the completion of the OT revelation occurred long before the first advent of Christ, and it would seem reasonable to assume that Paul certainly accepted the possibility that the completion of the NT revelation, and its inscripturation would occur before the second advent of Christ.

He certainly understood that the completion of the NT revelation and NT Scriptures was essentially unrelated to the return of Christ and could be accomplished without it, just as the completion of the OT revelation and Scriptures had been unrelated to the first advent of Christ. Paul envisioned a completed NT revelation resulting in NT Scriptures and what he envisioned as bringing that about was not the maturity of the Church, nor the return of Christ, but the NT Scriptures.

We see other reasons for rejecting the idea that in this context of speaking about a change and improvement in the modes of divine revelation, that the Apostle had the return of Christ or the Eternal State in mind. In other words, would the return of Christ, or Christ Himself, be the perfect method of NT revelation that Paul intended to communicate? It is suggested not, for the following reasons.

First, *to teleion* is in the neuter form, clearly referring to a thing, not a person. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that the Apostle would refer to the person of Christ as the coming mode of revelation in this way.

Secondly, it should be remembered that Paul's use of the three gifts he chooses to discuss in this passage suggests that the context here is a communication method that God will use to deliver the NT revelation that is to accompany specifically the implementation of the New Covenant. Whatever replaces the gifts in question need only provide a completed NT revelation to accompany and facilitate the implementation of the New Covenant, and nothing beyond that. Again, the purpose of these gifts was not to bring about the return of Christ.

Accordingly, it is suggested here that the revelation of Jesus Christ and the resulting Eternal State will indeed go far beyond

what was needed to accompany and facilitate the implementation of the New Covenant. The completion of the NT Scriptures, however, did facilitate the implementation of the New Covenant by providing the complete NT revelation that the temporary gifts could not.

Accordingly, interpreting Paul as saying that in terms of revelation, the Church was to go from the inferior revelatory gifts, all the way to seeing and hearing Jesus Christ Himself, with no methods of divine communication in between, completely ignores the very significant event of the completion, recording, acceptance, and distribution of the written NT revelation in Scripture. It was pointed out above that Paul and the Corinthians were well aware of the revelatory process that had occurred with the revelation and implementation of the *Old Covenant*, and that process had included the completion and distribution of written Scripture. Between the time the Prophets had spoken and the first arrival of Christ, there had been the completion of the OT Scriptures. To claim that Paul thought the Church would go from prophecy to God in person, without written Scripture in between, completely ignores the precedent that God had already set with the revelation and implementation of the OT.

Finally, even if the best translation of *teleion* in verse 10 was absolute perfection, it is suggested that the NT Scriptures would be an equal or superior interpretation of a perfect mode of NT revelation than either of the two alternatives. Although many translate *teleion* as "the perfect thing" it seems surprising how few interpret "the perfect thing" as the completed NT Scriptures. This very adjective *teleion* is used in James to describe the written Scriptures (cf. Jms 1:15). The idea of perfection is applied to the Scriptures throughout the OT (Ps 19:7-10, 119:140, Pr 12:6). Remembering that the context here is the *methods* which God uses to communicate to man, we can readily see that the NT Scriptures could certainly be interpreted as a perfect method of revelation.

Nonetheless, the best interpretation of verse 10 is that the Apostle is referring to the completion of the reception, communication, recording, and distribution of the NT revelation that these gifts provided, at which time these gifts would cease, just as they did in the fourth century with the completion of these things. And at least our interpretation does not make the Apostle a false prophet.

E) Interpretation of Verse 11

E.1) Text & Translation

When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. (1 Cor 13:11 NASB)

As an analogy [a], when I was a child I used to communicate information like a child, process information like a child, and receive information like a child [b]. But when I became an adult, I permanently replaced [c] these temporary and inferior methods of communicating, processing, and receiving information, and changed to better methods of communication [d], allowing me to communicate more clearly and understand more completely.

[a] **As an analogy:** It is important here to remember that Paul is using a metaphor. The partial and inferior modes of communication are not a literal child, just as the replacement mode of divine revelation was not to be a literal adult person.

[b] **communicate information like a child, process information like a child, and receive information like a child:** The NASB “**speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child**” reflects the literal Greek well. However, the expanded translation reflects the fact that the context is modes of communication, revelation and understanding.¹⁰⁷ It also reflects the fact that Paul is comparing the relatively inferior and temporary ways in which a child communicates and understands with the superior perception and communication abilities of an adult.

[c] **permanently replaced:** The fact that these gifts are abolished, or set aside so that they can be replaced by something better fits the meaning of *katargeo* and reflects both the context here and the fact that it is virtually inconceivable that an adult would revert to childish communication skills.

[d] **better:** This reflects the comparison that Paul is wanting to make with this analogy. An adult’s perception and communication skills are not “perfect” compared to a child’s “imperfect” skills. Rather, they are simply “better.” Again, there is no idea of perfection being communicated here.

E.2) Interpretation: *revelatory gifts are for immature stage of covenant*

Obviously, the idea of the NT Scriptures being a *better* mode of receiving and understanding revelation, accurately reflects Paul's intended meaning for the contrast of child/adult communication abilities and effects. Paul wrote this at a period of time when the implementation of the New Covenant was still in its "childhood." He also understood that in the introductory stage of the implementation of a covenant, miraculous gifts are given to provide and authenticate the revelation needed to implement the covenant. However, after that revelation is sufficiently available to implement the covenant, a more "mature" and written mode of revelation replaces the gifts and remains. Thus the Apostle's contrasting child/adult metaphor to reflect the "partial" vs. "completed" mode of revelation spoken of in verse 10.

In fact, later in 1 Corinthians chapter 14, the Apostle will refer to the use of tongues as immature:

Brothers, stop thinking [*phresin*: "mind"; "understanding" KJV] **like children** [in how you value the gift of tongues] . . . **but in your thinking** [understanding] **be adults. In the Law it is written:** **"Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to Me," says the Lord.** **Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers.** (14:19-21)

In what way were the Corinthians immature in their understanding of the gift of tongues? They placed far too great a value on it as a means of divine revelation. Accordingly, Paul explains that similar phenomenon in the OT was used as a sign of judgment on God's people. And Paul reminds them, the essential purpose of tongues was not as a great mode of divine revelation, but as a miraculous authentication of other divine revelation. Likewise, at 13:11, Paul is encouraging them to devalue childish forms of revelation such as tongues, for better "adult" and full grown forms of revelation such as Scripture.

Accordingly, G. B. Weaver in the *Grace Theological Journal* comments on verse 11:

He [Paul] does refer to tongues in his personal illustration of verse 11: "When I was a child I spake as a child." Just as the thinking and reasoning correspond to the gifts of knowledge and prophecy, this corresponds to the relative inferiority of tongues as a revelation of . . . God, as compared with the yet-to-be-completed [Scriptures].¹⁰⁸

Again, Paul is speaking of the maturation process of revelation. Gifts like divine knowledge, prophecy, and tongues are a part of the infancy stage of the revelational process to implement a new covenant. As that process matures, it produces more mature forms of revelation like the more permanent Scriptures.

Along these lines, Dr. Judisch wrote:

One may observe, furthermore, that this [*historicist*] interpretation accords well with the two illustrations used in verses 11-12 to contrast the state of the Christian before the completion of the apostolic revelation and his state after its completion.

In verse 11 Paul compares this difference to that between himself as a child and himself as a man. A child knows much less than a man and is consequently less capable of . . . systematic thought. Similarly the Christian was less knowledgeable and consequently less capable of . . . systematic thought in A.D. 50, when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, . . . then in 100 [A.D.] when John died.

In the year 50 the Christian was dependent for an infallible guide to faith and life almost wholly, aside from the Old Testament, upon the oral instruction of the Apostles and . . . Prophets. . . . And that oral instruction came to the Christian only bit by bit, something in one congregation and something else in another—"piecemeal," as Paul puts it in verse 9 (*ek merous*).

By the time Paul died, on the other hand, his own revelation was complete, the essence of it having been committed to writing, and there were at least twenty-one apostolic writings available for careful study and comparison by the Christian. By the time of John's death, the whole revelation of God was complete and its essence set down in the most definitive and useful manner possible.¹⁰⁹

What again of other views? Obviously, the child/adult analogy here fits very well with a "maturity" interpretation, which is why advocates of this view make this analogy the controlling theme of the entire passage. However, "maturity" does not at all fit the analogy Paul uses next: seeing in "**a mirror dimly**" (v. 12). Nor, as argued above, does it reflect the real controlling theme of a contrast between that which is *ek merous* ("in pieces") and that which is *to teleion* ("complete").

Paul's child/adult metaphor also presents problems for the view that Paul has Christ's return or the Eternal State in mind. Dr. Thomas explains:

Equating *to teleion* with the *parousia* is beset by yet another difficulty, the illustration in v. 11. As Robertson and Plummer have aptly noted, the difference between childhood and manhood is a very feeble illustration of the vast difference between the Christian's present state and that after the *parousia*.¹¹⁰

For Paul to compare the present economy in its entirety with the immature condition of a *nepios* [child] is completely out of character for him as he is known in the rest of his writings. Whether in reference to an individual believer or to the body of Christ collectively, Paul's projection was a growth process through which conditions of childhood were left behind.

Furthermore, use of his own adult status to picture perfection following Christ's return is at odds with the very next verse, where his present condition is one of limitations: "Now that I am a man (v. 11), I know partially(v. 12)."

A further difficulty in understanding v. 11 in harmony with the *parousia* view lies in the nature of transition from childhood to adulthood. It is not a momentary [or instant] change, as prophetic Scripture anticipates the *parousia* to be, but a gradual one.¹¹¹

Dr. Farnell adds:

Paul's illustration of gradual development from childhood to adulthood does not really typify the immense transformation associated with the Lord's return (v. 11). Adulthood is not completely free of limitations as would be the Parousia.¹¹²

In other words, if the Apostle had really had in the mind the return of Christ as the moment in which divine revelation would be "completed," he would not have used the child/adult metaphor. However, the idea of a completion of the NT revelation in Scripture fits the child/adult metaphor as explained above, and the mirror/face to face analogies, as we argue next.

F) Interpretation of Verse 12a

F.1) Text & Translation

For now we see in a mirror dimly

For now [*arti*: "right now"] **we see in a mirror** [*di esoptrou*] **dimly** [*en ainigmati*]

Another analogy of the modes of revelation we experience now in the first century through these gifts [a], is how we would perceive someone through their reflection in a mirror in an indirect and limited way [b].

[a] **the modes of revelation we experience now in the first century through these gifts** (*arti*: "right now"): The Greek word *arti* expresses, "strictly present time in contrast to the past or future."¹¹³ Therefore, the immediate context is the revelatory situation c. 50 A.D. when Paul wrote the Corinthians. The larger context is, again, a transition of ways God will provide divine revelation. Thus, in verse 8 the Apostle introduces this whole section listing revelatory and sign gifts that operated in the first century.

[b] **how we would perceive someone through their reflection in a mirror in an indirect and limited way:** This rendering reflects what Paul means by his analogy of a reflection in a mirror.¹¹⁴ NT scholar Leon Morris pointed out, "what [a mirror] shows is limited by the frame, and it is always indirect."¹¹⁵ Paul's analogy applies very well to the suggestion that he is talking about the "limited" and "indirect" modes of divine revelation that were in use at the time. They were "limited" in the fact that no one Prophet or Apostle seems to have possessed all of the revelation that God intended for the NT age. God distributed different pieces of that revelation among several different men. As was mentioned above, even Paul's extensive knowledge of new divine revelation was incomplete without John's Revelation. These gifts were "indirect" for most Christians in the sense that the new divine revelation at this time came through the work of the Spirit in *another* person's life, through someone's revelatory gift.

The habit of translators rendering *en ainigmati* as "dimly" (cf. RSV, ESV; NIV "poor reflection"; KJV "darkly," NLT "imperfectly") is unfortunate and misleading. The Apostle is not implying that the then current modes of divine revelation such as divine knowledge

and prophecy produced a *distorted* image of truth. On the contrary, these gifts produced the trustworthy word of God that we have in NT Scripture today. Accordingly, the Pentecostal Dr. Fee writes:

Corinth was famous as the producer of some of the finest bronze mirrors in antiquity. That suggests that the puzzling phrase *en ainigmati* is probably not as pejorative [negative] as most translations imply. . . . In fact the idea that their mirrors were of poor quality and therefore one did not get a true image is purely a modern idea. . . . More likely the emphasis is not on the *quality* of seeing that one experiences in looking into a mirror—that would have surely been an affront to them [the Corinthians]—but to the *indirect nature* of looking into a mirror as opposed to seeing someone “**face to face**” It is not a distorted image that we have in Christ through the Spirit; but it is as yet indirect, not complete. ¹¹⁶

Accordingly, Dr. Thiselton translates the Greek: “**For we are seeing the present only by means of a mirror indirectly.**” ¹¹⁷ Again, the controlling factor in the translation is the comparison that is being made between seeing someone in a mirror (indirectly) and seeing someone “**face to face**” (directly). This is derived as well from the ancient Greek understanding of a mirror in relation to divine revelation. Dr. Barrett notes:

The metaphor [of a mirror] is sometimes used, especially by Philo, to describe an indirect and partial knowledge of God. . . . The fact is that the metaphor of the glass must take its sense from the context; always the glass is an instrument of revelation, sometimes the stress lies simply on the revelation, sometimes on its indirectness. The latter use obtains here, but the ambiguity of the metaphor accounts for the addition (for which some odd explanations have been supplied) of a further qualification, *obscurely* (literally, *in a riddle, en ainigmati*). In this Paul is probably dependent not so much on Hellenistic usage as on Num. xii. 8, where God says that He will speak to Moses “**face to face,**” not obscurely. ¹¹⁸

F.2) Interpretation: *revelatory gifts provide indirect revelation to the Church*

Again, the Apostle is merely using the metaphor of a mirror to reflect the fact that divine revelation coming through Apostles and Prophets was “indirect” for Christians in the Church. And he will contrast this with the fact that a more “direct” mode of revelation is forthcoming.

It is true, however, that seeing someone “**face to face**” as opposed to in an ancient bronze mirror would also give you a clearer image of the person. But this is simply because you would see more detail of the person’s face. And as the collection of written NT revelation grew in the early Church, they too would have more details about the New Covenant, and a clearer picture of God’s plan.

G) Interpretation of Verse 12b

G.1) Text & Translation

but then face to face (1 Cor 13:12b NASB)

but then [*tote de*] **face to face** [*prosopon pros prosopon*]

But when God provides the completed method of communicating the NT revelation [a], then our reception of the whole NT revelation will be more direct and our understanding of it more clear [b]. It will be like seeing someone in person as opposed to just seeing their reflection in a mirror.

[a] **But when God provides the completed method of communicating the NT revelation** (*tote de*: “but then”): The “**then**” is clearly referring back to when “**God will provide the completed** [*to teleion*] **method of communicating the NT revelation**” mentioned in verse 10.

[b] **then our reception of the whole NT revelation will be more direct and our understanding of it more clear** (*prosopon pros prosopon*: “face to face”). The phrase is adverbial, with no subject here, so Paul’s point is not actually seeing someone’s face, as much as simply a comparison with seeing things in an equally hypothetical mirror. And because the context of the metaphor is how we receive divine revelation, Paul’s point is that when “the completed thing comes” (v. 10), “**then our reception of the whole NT revelation will be more direct and our understanding of it more clear**” because the more indirect and limited revelation coming from the gifts (like a mirror) will cease.

G.2) Interpretation: *Scripture provides more direct & clear revelation*

It is understandable that many would assume that Paul is alluding to literally seeing Christ “**face to face**” as the mode of revelation that will replace the gifts. However, there are several problems with this.

First, it is to be remembered that the Apostle is using metaphor. The phrase “**face to face**” cannot be taken any more literally than “seeing in a mirror.” Most would agree that in 12a Paul is not intending to say that he and the Corinthians were currently and literally looking into a real mirror and seeing the face of Christ “indirectly.” Therefore, it would seem misguided to assume that he is talking about them seeing a literal face in the future, let alone the literal face of Christ.

Accordingly, Dr. Gromacki writes, quoting Dr. Weaver:

If the mirror is metaphorical for something, then the ‘face to face’ experience is also metaphorical. If the mirror represents imperfect knowledge, then the face to face encounter is metaphorical for the complete state of knowledge. ¹¹⁹

Likewise, Dr. Judisch pointed out:

Those who want “the complete thing” of verse 10 to be the state of eternal glory argue that the first clause of verse 12 is referring to seeing Christ in a dim way throughout this life and that the second clause speaks of seeing Christ face to face in a literal sense in heaven. Such an interpretation is dubious . . .

[I]t takes the “dimly” (*ainigmati*) of the first clause figuratively [not literally as seeing Christ’s face dimly with our eyes], but the “face to face” (*prosopon pros prosopon*) of the second clause literally; a more consistent approach to the intended contrast seems preferable . . . supplying the object “Christ” or “God” or the like is a rather arbitrary procedure. ¹²⁰

Finally, we will quote Dr. Compton:

Virtually all recognize that the first part of Paul’s analogy, “seeing in a mirror dimly,” functions metaphorically and refers to the limitations associated with the “in part” nature of the revelatory gifts in 13:9–10. (See, for example, Spicq, *Agape in the New Testament*, 2:162; and Garland, *1 Corinthians*, p. 623)

Taken as a metaphor, “face to face” simply means that, whenever “the perfect” comes, believers will see or perceive clearly, fully, and distinctly what previously they had seen only partially, indistinctly, and unclearly. . . . The predominant use

of the “face to face” expression in the Old Testament as a metaphor argues in favor of Paul using it in a similar way in 1 Corinthians 13:12.¹²¹

Secondly, we have a great deal of biblical evidence that he need not be referring to actually seeing God’s face. The phrase “**face to face**” is used four other times in the NT and it is always speaking of another human (cf. Acts 25:16; 2 Cor 10:1; 2 John 1:12; 3 John 1:14) and never of Christ or God. Even when the phrase is used in the OT in reference to God, it simply means a more personal and direct revelation of God, and never literally seeing the “face” of God, which was forbidden.¹²²

When the Apostle writes “**For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face**” (12a-b), he is probably alluding to how God described His revelatory relationship with Moses:

When a Prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal Myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of My servant Moses With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD. (Num 12:8)

Here, God too is saying that the gifts of divine knowledge and prophecy, which worked through “**visions**” and “**dreams**,”¹²³ was a more indirect method of divine revelation. And the “**face to face**” revelation that Moses received came to him in a more direct way. However, this did not mean that Paul was promising that we would consistently see “**the form of the Lord**” in our life on Earth like Moses. Nor did Moses actually see God’s face, and not even his experience would imply the idea of seeing God or the Eternal State, an idea that so many want to impose on Paul’s statement.

Dr. Charles Ryrie, in his well known *Study Bible*, objects that *to teleion* in verse 10 cannot “refer to the completion of the canon of Scripture [because] that would mean that we now see more clearly than Paul did.”¹²⁴ Dr. Ryrie’s argument suggests that Paul’s knowledge of the NT revelation was complete in c. 55 A.D. when Paul wrote this letter. That would seem unlikely considering that according to the consensus of modern scholarship, at least 20 of the 27 books of the NT hadn’t been written yet, including most of what Paul would contribute. (e.g. see helpful chart in *The Ryrie Study Bible*, 1499). The Apostle Paul never thought he was the sole source of the NT revelation, as he presented his revelation to “**Peter, James, and John**” for approval (cf. Gal 2:1-9).

Because we possess today 13 NT writings, none of which we can be certain that Paul ever saw, it would seem safe to say that our possession of the completed and entire NT does indeed give us a

clearer and better understanding of the entire NT revelation than the Apostle.¹²⁵ Accordingly, Dr. Compton, in agreement with others¹²⁶ writes:

After all it is Paul who has declared that prophetic revelation is piecemeal (1 Cor 13:9). The portion of divine revelation that Paul knew was considerable, and he knew that portion as well as any believer could, but he still did not have the entirety of divine revelation for the church. Therefore, his understanding was to that extent limited and less than that which is available with the completed canon.¹²⁷

The purpose of Paul's metaphor here is simply to tell the first century Corinthians that the "**communication of the whole NT revelation will be more direct and our understanding of it more clear**" after the "**completed**" thing mentioned in verse 10 becomes available. The Christian's possession of the entire NT revelation in written form gives them a "**clearer**" understanding of it than the "**limited**" understanding of the first century Christian who was only able to receive bits and pieces of it through the inspired utterances of the Apostles and Prophets. Also, our possession of the Scriptures makes our reception of God's word "**more direct**" and personal as it comes through the written word which we can possess personally (as opposed to only being known by an Apostle or Prophet). This is something that Paul says more expressly in the next statement.

H) Interpretation of Verse 12c

H.1) Text & Translation

now I know in part (1 Cor 13:12c NASB)

now I know [*ginōskō*] in part [*ek merous*]

Now, even my gift of divine knowledge only allows me to understand part of the whole NT revelation [a]. And like seeing someone's reflection in a mirror, some of that understanding comes indirectly through others who also have gifts of divine knowledge and prophecy. And, not everything about the whole NT revelation is clear to me yet [b].

[a] **my gift of divine knowledge:** Paul's switch to the singular "I" is significant and its significance lies in the unique abilities that Paul had to receive direct and divine revelations of new truth, which relatively few of the Corinthians had. See Paul's description of his unique abilities in Eph. 3:1-9. Paul in fact reminds the Corinthians of his special gift of revelation in 1 Cor 1:6-11 and 2 Cor 2:14, 11:6.

[b] **not everything about the whole NT revelation is clear to me yet:** This is intended to reflect *ek merous* in the text. However, when Paul says "I know in part", he is clearly making a parallel statement to seeing in a mirror dimly. Therefore the meaning of "knowing in part" should reflect the mirror analogy as it does here. And again, his statement here also refers to the gift of knowledge which was a temporary method of understanding the NT revelation. Accordingly, Dr. Thiselton paraphrases Paul's use of *ek merous* here as, "**The . . . attempt to put together fragments or "parts" of knowledge indirectly from various sources**"¹²⁸

H.2) Interpretation: *Paul's understanding of NT revelation was partial*

By saying he knows divine revelation "**in part**," the Apostle is simply repeating what we have suggested he is saying throughout the passage.

I) Interpretation of Verse 12d

I.1) Text & Translation

but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known (1 Cor 13:12d NASB)

but then [tote de] I shall know fully [epiginōskō] just as I also have been fully known [epiginōskō]

But when [a] God provides the completed method of understanding, receiving, and communicating the whole NT revelation, then, like seeing someone in person, even I will have a more direct and better understanding of the whole NT revelation [b]. Just like people can have a more direct

and better understanding of me if they meet me personally.
[c]

[a] **But when** (*tote de*: "but then"): This clearly again refers back to when **"God provides the completed method of understanding, receiving, and communicating the whole NT revelation"** mentioned in verse 10.

[b] **then, like seeing someone in person, even I will have a more direct and better understanding of the whole NT revelation** (*epiginōskō*: "to know"): The addition of the word "fully" in the NASB, NIV, RSV and similar phrases in the less literal translations, is not warranted by the Greek word *epiginōskō*. The word's mistranslation here significantly distorts the meaning of the text. *Epiginōskō* literally means to "know upon" and nothing more.

The word occurs 44 times in the Greek NT and is curiously translated "fully know" only here in the NASB and NIV. Usually it is translated simply "to recognize" or "to know." Its first occurrence is found in Matthew 7:16: **"By their fruit you will recognize (*epiginōskō*) them."** *Ginosko* (know) and *epiginosko* (know upon) are virtually indistinguishable in the NT and because they are both used to convey the same meanings. Accordingly, the Greek reference *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)* makes no distinction between them.¹²⁹ *Epiginosko* then is not a "fuller" or "perfect" knowledge as opposed to *ginosko* as implied by these translations. Douglas Moo, Professor of NT at Wheaton, points out that:

Some scholars think that Paul generally distinguishes between *gnōsis/ginōskō* and *epignōsis/epiginōskō*, the latter denoting a "deeper," more advanced knowledge than the former¹³⁰. . . . But any such distinction simply does not hold in Paul. As J. A. Robinson has shown¹³¹ the *epi*-prefix indicates not intensity, but direction; and Paul uses *epignōsis* customarily with an object of the "knowing."¹³²

Therefore, in this text, the Apostle is not speaking of him knowing *anything* "fully," nor of anyone, including God, knowing him "fully." The text should simply read: **"then I shall know just as I also have been known"** and the knowledge he speaks of is not some kind of full or perfect knowledge, but may in fact be imperfect and incomplete.

So what can we make of Paul's comparison between *ginōskō* and *epiginōskō* in verse 12? Paul says, **"now I know [*ginōskō*] in part, but then I shall know [*epiginōskō*] as I also have been known [*epiginōskō*]."** It has already been pointed out that the

insertion of “fully” to reflect the use of *epiginōskō* erroneously implies a greater intensity, instead of simply direction. It is suggested here that what Paul is implying is a more “personal” knowledge, rather than a “perfect” knowledge.

This suggestion would not only reflect the Greek word’s use in the NT, but is supported by the fact that Paul is simply restating his “mirror/face to face” metaphor here.¹³³ It is important at this point to see Paul’s flow of thought in verse 12:

(12a): **For now we see in a mirror dimly**

(12b): **but then face to face;**

(12c): **now I know [*ginōskō*] in part [*ek merous*],**

(12d): **but then I shall know [*epiginōskō*] just as I also have been known [*epiginōskō*].**

This attaches the meaning of *epiginōskō* in 12d, to what it means to see someone “**face to face**” in 12b. This makes the difference between *ginōskō* and *epiginōskō* the same as the difference between indirectly seeing someone in a mirror and directly seeing someone “**face to face**.” The latter does not mean seeing something “perfectly,” but rather more directly. This definition reflects the fact that the *epi*-prefix “upon” implies a direction of the knowledge instead of a greater intensity.

In addition, the meaning of *epiginōskō* is derived from a contrast with “**in part**” (*ek merous*) in 12c. *Ek merous* never carries the idea of “imperfect” or “flawed” and therefore it is suggested that *epiginōskō* cannot carry the meaning of “perfect” or “flawless” knowledge, which again, is not reflected in the prefix *epi* anyway.

[c] **Just like people can have a more direct and better understanding of me if they meet me personally:** The common, but misguided, practice of interpreting *to teleion* as “perfect” when it is being compared to *ek merous* (“in part”) has already been pointed out above. The unlikelihood that *epiginōskō* can be interpreted as “perfect” knowledge has also been pointed out here.

The NLT rendering of verse 12c-d offers a good example of the absurdity that occurs when the idea of “perfection” is forced upon these terms: “**All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now.**”

First of all, “God” is not in the Greek text, although it is carelessly inserted in many modern translations (cf. TEV, NEB, PME,

NCV, CEV). *Paul could just as well be speaking about how he can be known by other people, instead of by God.* This is a critical point.¹³⁴ Assuming that Paul is speaking of God unnecessarily skews the meaning of the text. Accordingly, Dr. Weaver writes concerning 1 Corinthians 13:12:

Another possible interpretation is that Paul is contrasting the subjective knowledge that a person has of himself with the more objective knowledge that others have of him. The prophet's narrow insight given to him for a local need gives way to the more universal message recorded in canonical scripture. In connection with this it is noteworthy that Paul does not speak specifically of knowing as God knows him, but merely, "as I am known," the agent left unexpressed.¹³⁵

Notice again what the text says when we erroneously insert "God" into the text. The NLT has the Apostle saying, "**but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now.**" *No he will not.* That cannot be what the Apostle intended to say. Nonetheless, "charismatic" scholars such as D. A. Carson, Wayne Grudem, and Jack Deere place this very interpretation on the text. For example, Mr. Deere writes:

[T]he statement, "Then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (v. 12) can only refer to the Lord's return. . . . The translation of the New International Version, "fully known" accurately reflects the meaning of the verb *epiginōskō*. . . . Paul is not saying that when the Lord returns, believers will be omniscient like the Lord. Rather, we will know accurately without any misinformation or misconceptions . . . when the Lord returns . . . we shall know as fully as we are known.¹³⁶

First, Mr. Deere makes the critical error of imposing the idea of "full" on the prefix *epi* in *epiginōskō*. Secondly, he is not honest enough about the comparison the Apostle is making. Likewise, Drs. Carson and Grudem claim that their view only means that our knowledge will "resemble" God's.¹³⁷ But Paul says, "**I shall know [epiginōskō], even as [kathos] I am known [epiginōskō].** *Kathos* does not convey the idea of remotely resembling something. Dr. Fee notes that, "Paul uses this word [*kathōs*] 25 times, always with the connotation, "exactly as," i.e., "it makes an exact comparison."¹³⁸ Accordingly, Dr. Compton remarks:

The debate centers on the second half of the analogy with the meaning of the statement, "I will know fully just as I also have been fully known." The majority opinion is that Paul is once again addressing events surrounding the return of Christ. As such, the statement is interpreted to mean that, in

conjunction with Christ's return and the church's being gathered to stand before Him, believers will know God as fully then as they are fully known by God now.

There are a number of problems with this interpretation that make it unacceptable. The first is that this interpretation, in effect, says too much. It blurs the creator-creature distinction by equating in some way, at least, the believer's knowledge of God with God's knowledge of the believer.

A number of those championing this [return of Christ] interpretation sense this tension. They attempt to mitigate the tension by adding qualifiers to the effect that the verse does not say what this interpretation seems to imply. The knowledge the believer will have of God is similar in only some ways, they explain, to the knowledge God has of the believer.

Such qualifications, however, are not supported by the text. The expression Paul employs in the comparison, "just as," does not permit qualifying or lessening the force of the comparison. The expression is used a number of times elsewhere by Paul, always in the sense of an exact correspondence.¹³⁹

The erroneous conclusion that one comes to from these translations, and the meaning imposed on them by many interpreters, is that *in Heaven our knowledge will be as complete and perfect as God's current and perfect knowledge of us*. That simply is not true. We will never be "all-knowing" like God. This fact alone strongly argues against the insertion of "God" here or the implication of perfect knowledge. Logically and biblically, you cannot impose such a meaning on this text. It is admitted that Paul is obviously implying a *better* knowledge in the terms and metaphors here, but not a *perfect* God-like knowledge.

I.2) Interpretation: *when the NT revelation was complete even Paul would have a more complete understanding and direct experience of it*

"God" is not in the original text, and should not be added. We suggest all the Apostle is saying is that when the "**completed**" mode of revelation comes, it will be a more direct mode than the gifts. Because the Apostle himself did not personally possess all NT revelation, even he did not know it all directly.

Once again, the metaphor of "**know in part**" vs. "**know fully even as I am known**" needs to be interpreted in a way that is consistent with the mirror/"face to face" analogy, and even the

adult/child analogy. Neither of these metaphors describe something imperfect becoming perfect. An adult's communication and reasoning skills are not perfect, nor is a human's visual perception, even by direct sight. This same theme of indirect/direct then needs to guide our interpretation of the Paul's third metaphor of knowing something indirectly and "**in part**," and knowing someone in a fuller and more direct way because you know them personally.

This is simply the contrast between how the Corinthians might have experienced Paul indirectly and "**in part**" from his letters, but in a fuller and more direct way when he visited them personally. Once again, the Apostle is merely contrasting the indirect way that divine revelation comes to the average Christian, with the more directly and personally accessible way it comes to us in Scripture. This will be analogous to how some *people* knew Paul—directly, personally.

Too many underestimate the value of having the completed Scriptures. It enables us to go from knowing very little about God, to perhaps knowing a great part of everything we will ever know about Him. Perhaps the increase in the *quantity* of our knowledge of God in Heaven is exaggerated. Will we learn of a new characteristic of God in addition to His love, grace, or power? The completed NT Scriptures provide us with an exponential increase in our knowledge of the ways and will of God. Again, think about how much we would know about Him without Scripture? Perhaps the exponential increase in our knowledge through Scripture is more comparable to the shift in our knowledge that will occur at the return of Christ, than many have considered. Indeed, we will have a more direct and personal knowledge of things, but that knowledge may still be about the same love, grace, and power we know of now.

J) Interpretation of Verse 13

J.1) Text & Translation

But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Cor 13:13 NASB)

But now [*de nuni*] abide [*menei*] faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

But now [a], unlike these temporary methods of divine revelation [b], the virtues of faith, hope, and love will continue [c]. But the greatest of all these is love, because it will not only outlast these gifts, but faith and hope as well [d].

[a] **But now** (*de nuni*): The question among some is whether Paul's meaning is temporal (as in "now at this time") or logical (as "in conclusion"). The difference is important, as the former maintains the temporal theme of the passage. Paul has repeatedly contrasted the state of things "now" (in c. 50 A.D.) and what they will be like in the future. Accordingly, *nuni* most naturally carries a temporal meaning in the Greek.¹⁴⁰ Dr. Fee writes:

Despite the long debate over the temporal or logical force of the combination, "and now," it is difficult under any circumstances to divest the adverb "now" of all temporal sense. That is, even if its basic thrust is logical (= but as it is), it carries the force "as it is in the present state of things."

This seems to be all the more so here, given the present tense of the verb "remain," and the fact that these three opening words conjoin directly to the preceding eschatological words. Thus, however we finally translate them, these opening words seem to imply some kind of present situation over against what is yet to be . . .¹⁴¹

Dr. Judisch adds: "Some would argue that since the original and most common sense of *nuni* is temporal rather than logical, one should render verse 13, 'But *in the present age* three things endure.'"¹⁴²

[b] **But now, unlike these temporary methods of divine revelation:** Paul has begun this statement with "**But now**" and is clearly referring to the current situation. Throughout this passage, in Paul's contrast between the "now" and "then," the subject of the "now" is the temporary gifts. See especially verse 12. It must be remembered too that Paul is concluding his argument here, the main purpose of which has been to emphasize how very temporary (like childhood) these gifts are. So not only throughout this whole passage is the temporary nature of these gifts the subject, but it is also the subject of this last verse. The continuing virtues are being contrasted with the ceasing gifts.

[c] **the virtues of faith, hope, and love will continue** (*menei*: "remain, endure") This word is from the Greek *menō* and used in

the NT 118 times and is variously interpreted in the NASB as "continue, endure, last, remain, abide, and stay."

However, it does not always communicate an *eternal* existence. For example, Paul in 1 Corinthians tells the unmarried to "**remain**" (*meinōsin*) unmarried (7:8) and "**Each one should remain** (*menetō*) **in the situation which he was in when God called him**" (7:20). The word in these verses is clearly used to mean something that endures during this lifetime, not eternity. Therefore, when the next occurrence of this word in this letter comes in 13:13, we should not assume that the Corinthians understood it necessarily as an eternal endurance, but simply something that will last longer than the gifts that will cease.

[d] But the greatest of all these is love, because it will not only outlast these gifts, but faith and hope as well: This explains how and why love could be greater than faith and hope. The best reason must be taken from the immediate context. One theme throughout this passage is the contrast between the temporary and the enduring. Those who would try to explain love's superiority to faith and hope in terms of anything but its eternal endurance (the fact of which Paul began his whole argument, v. 8) completely ignores the context here.

This view has ancient support. Tertullian (c. 200) quotes 1 Corinthians 13:13 and then comments:

Rightly [is love the greatest]. For faith departs when we are convinced by vision, by seeing God. And hope vanishes when the things hoped for come about. But love both comes to completion and grows more when the perfect has been given.
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Chrysostom (c. 400 A.D.) shares Tertullian's view:

When the good things believed and hoped for have come, faith and hope cease. . . . 'For hope that is seen is not hope' (Rom 8:24). . . . So these cease when those appear, but then love becomes most exalted. . . . 'The greatest of these is love' (1 Cor 13:13).¹⁴⁴

Likewise, Calvin (1509-1564) comments on this passage:

For faith does not remain after death, inasmuch as the Apostle elsewhere contrasts it with sight, (2 Corinthians 5:7) and declares that it remains only so long as we are absent from the Lord Faith and hope belong to a state of imperfection; *love* will remain even in a state of perfection.¹⁴⁵

As these men noted, such perspectives on the relationship between faith, hope, and love come from the Apostle Paul himself. Regarding faith, he wrote the Corinthians themselves:

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. . . . We live by faith, not by sight. (2 Cor 4:18; 5:7)

Likewise, the author of Hebrews wrote: **"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see"** (11:1). Simply put, the biblical concept of faith ceases to exist when the object of faith is physically seen. According to the Apostle, we now **"live by faith"** but in Heaven **"by sight."** Faith is simply not needed after Christ's return, for we will see all we need to.

Likewise, the virtue of hope disappears with sight. The Apostle writes:

For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. (Rom 8:24-25)

This is why the Apostle says love is greater than faith or hope. It lasts forever, **"never fails"** (v. 8). But faith and hope, while abiding with love during the present age, will cease in the next age.

This would all be perfectly clear to everyone except this meaning argues against the idea that the gifts being discussed in the passage would also remain until the end of this age along with faith, hope, and love. In fact, we need to quote rather ancient sources to find the common sense interpretation argued above, because most modern commentators argue that Paul thought faith and hope would last as long as love, or that love is qualitatively better than faith and hope. They conclude just about anything except the common sense meaning in the passage and throughout Scripture, that the reason Paul says love is greater than faith and hope is that it lasts longer.

One notable exception is the Pentecostal Dr. Fee who argues this very thing, but as Dr. Thomas notes: "Surprisingly, Fee champions this interpretation as well, but does not clarify how this interpretation fits in with his having the revelatory gifts also continuing throughout the present age."¹⁴⁶

We could debate on merely philosophical grounds as to whether we will be exercising faith and hope in Heaven, simply based on human understandings of these virtues. But we do not need to debate this with mere human philosophy as so many do. Scripture

gives us the answer. Nor do we need to speculate as to how the Apostle thought love was superior to faith and hope as many do. He tells us.

Nonetheless, most modern expositors attempt to find a different meaning. Dr. Morris seems to avoid the issues completely when he writes: "We should not press Paul's comparison too closely, nor waste our time inquiring into the precise manner in which love surpasses faith or hope."¹⁴⁷ On the contrary, the Apostle intends it to be an essential point to the conclusion of the argument of the passage.

Charles Hodge (1797-1878), like many today, argued that faith and hope are eternal like love:

If, however, (νυνὶ δέ), *but now*, be taken, as is commonly done, as relating to time, the meaning is, 'Now, i.e. so long as we continue in this world, there remain faith, hope and love.' These are the three great permanent Christian graces, as opposed to the mere temporary gifts of prophecy, miracles, and tongues.

But this does not seem to be consistent with what precedes. The contrast is not between the more or less permanent gifts pertaining to our present state; but between what belongs exclusively to the present, and what is to continue for ever [precisely]. In v. 8 it is said of love, as a ground or reason of its pre-eminence, that *it never fails*; and here the same idea is expressed by saying, *it abides*.

'To abide,' therefore, must mean, that it continues for ever. The same permanence is attributed to faith, hope, and love. They are all contrasted with the temporary gifts, and they are all said to abide. The one [love] is to continue as long as the others [faith and hope].¹⁴⁸

We confess that Dr. Hodge is confusing here. Nonetheless, his conclusion that faith and hope "abide" as long as love ignores both the immediate context and what other Scripture says about faith and hope. Contrary to Dr. Hodge, we pointed out above the Greek *menō* often does not mean lasts forever. Unfortunately, Dr. Hodge's view is reflected in the REB translation which reads: "There are three things that last forever."

Dr. Hodge goes on to suggest that the superiority of love is in its greater quality:

Others say that love is superior to faith and hope, because the latter belong to the present state only, and love is to continue for ever. But, according to the true interpretation of the verse, all these graces are declared to abide.

The true explanation is to be found in the use which Paul makes of this word *greater*, or the equivalent term *better*. In 12:31, he exhorts his readers to seek *the better* gifts, i.e. the more useful ones. And in 14:5, he says, 'Greater is he that prophesies, than he that speaks with tongues;' i.e. he is more useful.

Throughout that chapter the ground of preference of one gift to others is made to consist in its superior usefulness. This is Paul's standard; and judged by this rule, love is greater than either faith or hope. Faith saves ourselves, but love benefits others.¹⁴⁹

Admittedly, Dr. Hodge is full of ingenuity here. However, would anyone want to seriously argue that in this life love is "more useful" than faith! Or would we want to argue that our faith never "benefits others"? On the contrary, without the Christian faith that Paul is speaking of, Christian love itself is nonexistent. Trying to make love qualitatively better than faith and hope, rather than merely longer lasting, has a number of problems with it that are unnecessary and unbiblical.

Dr. Barrett argues that faith ceases at the end of this age if Paul is referring to the "miracle-working faith" mentioned in 13:2. But in the sense of general Christian faith, he says "the life of the age to come will rest on faith as completely as does the Christian life now."¹⁵⁰ Those following Dr. Barrett in some sense include Drs. Thiselton,¹⁵¹ Karl Barth,¹⁵² and H. Conzelmann.¹⁵³

However, this view seems to clearly ignore what the rest of Scripture says concerning the nature of faith. Ironically, Dr. Barrett himself, in his commentary on 2 Corinthians, states concerning the Apostle's statement that "**we live by faith, not by sight**" (2 Cor 5:7): "sight is a good counterpart to faith."¹⁵⁴ If it is, then we best not confuse our current age of faith, to the future age of sight.

Likewise, in our opinion, Dr. Thiselton shows a complete misunderstanding of the nature of the gifts Paul is discussing when he writes:

[H. W.] Meyer correctly argues that Paul cannot be using [*menei*] to mean remains until the parousia [like Hodge did], as if to distinguish this triad [of virtues] from spiritual gifts that fall away as the church matures, for then he would be omitting prophetic preaching, teaching, and knowledge, which the church needs throughout its history.¹⁵⁵

On the contrary, this is precisely what the Apostle is saying because the gifts of prophecy and divine knowledge produced extra-biblical divine revelation. The Apostle is indeed distinguishing the

duration of the gifts and the virtues of faith, hope, and love. Which, again, is why so many wish the Apostle to be saying something else.

Unfortunately, Dr. Carson writes regarding the Apostle's view of hope:

[I]t is true that there is a sense in which hope is no longer needed once eternity dawns. But that is not the only sense of hope: in 1 Corinthians 15:19, for instance, Paul writes, "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." Presumably in one sense Paul expects hope to continue beyond this life in the continued enjoyment of that for which we hoped."¹⁵⁶

In Carson's view then, Paul meant that if our hope in Christ does not *exist* after death, we are to be pitied. What is more likely is that Paul meant that if our hope in Christ does not *apply* after death, we are to be pitied.

Notice that the NIV which Dr. Carson quotes says "If only *for* this life" rather than "If only *in* this life." Such a translation of the Greek *en* would seem to argue against his interpretation. The TEV for instance translates the Greek "**If our hope in Christ is good for** (as opposed to "exists in") **this life only, and no more, then we deserve more pity than anyone else.**"

This translation is supported by the context. The idea that our hope in Christ would simply continue after death does not support Paul's argument concerning the importance of the resurrection. However, the fact that experiencing the *effect* of our hope depends on the resurrection, does strengthen Paul's argument.

It is true that some translations interpret *en* here as "in" (NASB, NKJV), however most interpret it as "for" (NIV, RSV, TEV, JB, NEB, NCV, CEV, and NLT). The preposition can be translated either way and the *NIDNTT* says: "Sometimes all the exegete can do is to reduce the number of possible meanings of *en* by examining the context." And again, it is suggested here that the context of 1 Corinthians 15 favors "for" instead of "in."

Regardless, Dr. Carson can offer no other verse in the NT that would imply that hope, as we know it, continues into eternity; and basing such a conclusion on the debatable interpretation of the verse he cites and his merely hypothetical reasoning does little to change Paul's clear statement in Romans that "**hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?**" (8:24).

Regarding faith, Dr. Carson says:

[I]t is true that in one sense faith will be displaced by sight. But there is another sense in which faith is simply thankful

trust in God, deep appreciation for him, committed subservience to him. Will there be any time . . . during which the very basis of my presence in the celestial courts will be something *other* than faith in the grace of God? ¹⁵⁷

Yes, there will. We will be in the physical presence of Grace, and will no longer need faith. Again, Dr. Carson can offer no Scripture for his claim, and his attempt at redefining faith again does nothing to change what the Scriptures clearly state: **"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."** (Heb. 11:1). The effects of our biblical faith continue beyond this life, but not faith itself.

Although Dr. Fee adopts the view that in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 Paul has in mind the return of Christ, he would seem to at least exercise some common sense when it comes to verse 13:

The obvious difficulty with the eschatological view [i.e. Paul is referring to Christ's return]—with which all who adopt it struggle in some way—is how Paul could envision "faith" and "hope" as continuing into eternity, especially since in 2 Cor. 5:7 he contrasts faith with the final glory in the words "for we walk by faith and not by sight," and in Rom. 8:24 he says that "hope that is seen is not hope."

Despite a variety of suggestions as to how these two virtues could still be a part of our eternal existence, I find the idea especially incompatible with Rom 8:24. "Hope" does not seem to be a meaningful concept once it has been realized." ¹⁵⁸

And yet he does not change his view that Paul is speaking of the return of Christ.

Dr. Thomas is one of the relatively few who takes a common sense approach to Paul's thought:

A further weakness in seeing *to teleion* as the *parousia* is the unnatural interpretation of v. 13 that results. Since the entire paragraph dwells upon the temporal superiority of love, v. 13 in bringing the paragraph to a climax would most naturally maintain this same emphasis. *Nuni* would have a temporal force in such a setting as this, and v. 13a would refer to the abiding character of faith, hope and love during the present and up to the *parousia*.

Also v. 13b would explain love's supremacy among these three on the basis of its eternal character. Love alone will survive the *parousia*. This agrees with Paul's concept of faith and hope in two other epistles of this period. In II Corinthians 5:7 he notes that faith will be replaced by sight at the coming of Christ. Similarly Romans 8:24-25 expresses his concept of

hope as ceasing at this same moment. Thus because of love's never failing (v. 8a) at the beginning of the paragraph it is "the greatest of these" at the end (v. 13b).¹⁵⁹

Dr. Thomas then adds a suggestion as to why there is so much confusion on this topic:

The temporal understanding of v. 13 is at least as old as Chrysostom, and has been espoused by some more recently. But for some mysterious reason it has been avoided by the majority.

Why has what appears to be an obvious meaning been so avoided? The motivation in a majority of the cases, if not all, has been a desire not to lose the contrast between prophecy, tongues and knowledge on the one hand, and faith-hope on the other. In other words, the compulsion is to extend faith and hope beyond the *parousia* so as to produce a temporal distinction between these and the three spiritual gifts mentioned earlier.

In other words, all agree that Paul is making the three virtues superior to the three gifts. So in order to maintain the presumption that the gifts were to endure until Christ's return, they need to make the gifts endure beyond Christ's return. Accordingly, Dr. Thomas adds:

Built into this scheme is the impregnable assumption that prophecy, tongues and knowledge extend up to the time of the *parousia*. Here possibly is the origin of what for many is an insoluble problem in v. 13. Is it not much more direct to notice that prophecy, tongues and knowledge do not necessarily cover the entire period up to the *parousia*, and that herein lies the contrast with faith-hope. In this way the more natural temporal connotation can be assigned to v. 13.¹⁶⁰

J.2) Interpretation: *even faith & hope will outlast the revelatory gifts in the Church Age*

The NASB translates v. 13: "**But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.**" On this verse, Dr. Fee asks an important question, but gives a disappointing and unacceptable answer:

But why this triad in the present context where the contrast has been between gifts and love? The answer lies beyond our immediate reach, since it is probably related to his former

association with this church, where he had spent eighteen months preaching and teaching.¹⁶¹

On the contrary, Dr. Morris is more substantial and accurate when he writes:

[T]he verb *remain* is singular in the Greek. . . . Paul is seeing the three as in some sense one. They form a unity. By adding *these three* he effectively sets them apart from everything else. They are pre-eminent [above the three gifts]. Nothing may stand with them [even the three gifts]. We see this also in the fact that the three are often linked in the New Testament and early Christian literature (Rom. 5:2-5; Gal. 5:5f.; Eph. 1:15-18; 4:2-5; Col. 1:4f.; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; Heb. 6:10-12; 10:22-24; 1 Pet. 1:3-8, 21f.; cf. Barnabas 1:4; 11:8; Polycarp 3:2f.).¹⁶²

The fact that the whole point of Paul's argument here is to stress the temporary nature of the revelatory gifts, and the fact that he attaches *meno* (endurance, continuance) to faith, hope, and love makes it clear that *he is arguing that the triad of virtues is greater than the triad of gifts simply because they last longer*. But what is also apparent is not only that faith and hope outlast these gifts, but love outlasts them all. The Bible would seem to be clear that in Heaven, both faith and hope are no longer necessary (cf. Rom 8:24-25, 2 Cor. 4:18, 5:7, Heb. 11:1). But Paul had introduced this section of Scripture by stating that "**love lasts forever**" (v. 8) and this is the most obvious reason why it is greater than even faith and hope (v. 13).

Therefore, it is suggested here that we also have a triad of time segments: 1) The gifts, becoming obsolete and being abolished (v. 8 *katargeo*) in what would seem to be the relatively near future for the Corinthians, as their temporal nature is even likened to the very temporary and fleeting nature of childhood (v. 11); 2) the endurance of faith, hope, and love beyond the existence of these gifts, until Christ's return, thus making the virtues greater than the gifts because of their greater endurance; and 3) the eternal endurance of love even after Christ's return which makes it greater than the three gifts and the other two virtues. Another way of saying it is that there were three gifts that were to cease in this age, three virtues that were to remain during this age, and one virtue that would remain beyond this age.

The fact that Paul compares the temporary nature of these gifts with the more enduring nature of faith, hope and love is intended to strengthen his argument regarding the inferior value of these gifts compared to these virtues. The Corinthians know that faith, hope,

and love will last until they die or the Lord returns, just like the marriages and life situations that Paul had described earlier with *meno* as well (ch. 7). But he gives no such assurance for the Corinthians regarding the endurance of these gifts, and in fact stresses their transitory nature throughout.

Notice that Paul includes love as not only enduring past this life (13b), but as something that endures throughout this life also with faith and hope (13a). *Those who would claim that these gifts were to endure as long as faith and hope (i.e. the return of Christ), make these gifts in one sense equal to love which accompanies them.* A conclusion which is completely contrary to everything Paul is saying here. Because the triad of virtues was clearly to be understood as remaining until the Lord's return, the triad of gifts could not be understood this way in the context of Paul's argument.¹⁶³

K) An Expanded Translation

In the introduction above, it was stated that our purpose was to present evidence in favor of interpreting this passage as teaching that the gifts mentioned were to cease with the completion, canonization, and distribution of the NT revelation. Knowing this, it may seem that the above expanded translations are intentionally biased toward this opinion, as they would seem to clearly point to such a conclusion. However, a comparison of the expanded translations with the literal NASB will reveal that actually the former differs from the latter in only the following, relatively minor ways:

- 1) The context, one of which consists of God's method of communicating divine revelation to His people, is explicitly mentioned throughout the text. The "revelatory" context was established in section A.3 above.
- 2) The *Scripture* and *sign* gifts which introduce the passage in verse 8, are explicitly mentioned whenever they are referred to throughout the passage. And as discussed under the "biblical" context in section A.2 above, they are described as the NT consistently describes them as miraculous gifts of divine revelation and authentication.
- 3) Paul's statements are repeated throughout the text where applicable so that his train of thought may be better followed.
- 4) The Greek *to teleion* in verse 10 is translated as "**complete**" instead of "*perfect*" as in the NASB.
- 5) The most obvious meaning of Paul's contrasting metaphors (mirror/face to face and child/adult) in verses 11 and 12a are explicitly included in the text.

- 6) The Greek verb *epiginosko* in verse 12 is correctly given the meaning of "**direct and personal**" knowledge, instead of "full" or "perfect" knowledge.

Accordingly, we will conclude with the expanded translation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 for which we have offered several arguments above:

[8] **Love lasts forever. But unlike love, wherever God has provided the temporary method of receiving the NT revelation through the gift of prophecy, that method of divine revelation will be abolished. Wherever God has provided the temporary method of authenticating the NT revelation, particularly to the Jews, through the gift of miraculously speaking in foreign languages, that method of divine authentication will cease to function. Wherever God has provided the temporary method of receiving and communicating the NT revelation through the gift of divine knowledge, that method of divine revelation will also be abolished.**

[9] **These temporary methods of divine revelation will be abolished because currently the gift of divine knowledge operates in pieces through separate individuals in isolated cases, therefore providing us with only a partial and fragmented reception, understanding, and communication of the whole NT revelation. Likewise, currently the gift of prophecy operates in pieces through separate individuals in isolated cases, therefore providing us with only a partial and fragmented reception, understanding, and communication of the whole NT revelation.**

[10] **But when these fragmentary and temporary methods of revelation have fulfilled their purpose, God will provide the completed method of receiving, understanding, and communicating the whole NT revelation, and these fragmentary and temporary methods will become obsolete.**

[11] **As an analogy, when I was a child I used to communicate information like a child, process information like a child, and receive information like a child. But when I became an adult, I permanently replaced these temporary and inferior methods of communicating, processing, and receiving information, and changed to better methods of communication, allowing me to communicate more clearly and understand more completely.**

[12a] Another analogy of the modes of revelation we experience now in the first century through these gifts, is how we would perceive someone through their reflection in a mirror in an indirect and limited way.

[12b] But when God provides the completed method of communicating the NT revelation, then our reception of the whole NT revelation will be more direct and our understanding of it more clear. It will be like seeing someone in person as opposed to just seeing their reflection in a mirror.

[12c] Now, even my gift of divine knowledge only allows me to understand part of the whole NT revelation. And like seeing someone's reflection in a mirror, some of that understanding comes indirectly through others who also have gifts of divine knowledge and prophecy. And, not everything about the whole NT revelation is clear to me yet.

[12d] But when God provides the completed method of understanding, receiving, and communicating the whole NT revelation, then, like seeing someone in person, even I will have a more direct and better understanding of the whole NT revelation. Just like people can have a more direct and better understanding of me if they meet me personally.

[13] But now, unlike these temporary methods of divine revelation, the virtues of faith, hope, and love will continue. But the greatest of all these is love, because it will not only outlast these gifts, but faith and hope as well.¹⁶⁴

Publications & Particulars

¹ Regarding a definition of *charismaticism* see endnote in chapter 8.2.

² For further on the historical cessation of these gifts see chapters 9.13; 11.7; and 12.13.

³ The Apostle's clear statement that these gifts *would* cease, makes the following statement by the rightly respected D. M. Lloyd-Jones inexplicable. Lloyd-Jones concludes his summary of the cessation arguments with typical bluntness: "The Scriptures never anywhere say that these things were only temporary-never! There is no such statement anywhere." (*Sovereign Spirit* [Harold Shaw, 1985], 33). On the

contrary, the Apostle said: **"if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease"** (1 Cor 13:8).

Likewise, the eminent Pentecostal NT scholar Gordon Fee seems to not give the Apostle much credit when he writes regarding this passage:

Related to the previous discussion is that of the cessation of the [gifts]. This question, of course, is related not to questions that concerned Paul [then why did he write about the timing of their cessation?], but to those raised by our own history of the church. But in a manner unrelated to the way the question has been raised in our time, Paul does speak to it. . . .

What does not seem possible to extract from this answer is that Paul expected the [gifts] to cease within his lifetime, or shortly thereafter. This particular "answer" to the issue is raised not on the basis of reading the biblical text, but from the greater concern as to their "legitimacy" today. But this is a hermeneutical question, pure and simple, and one that Paul could not have understood. (*God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*, [Hendrickson, 1994], 893)

We had better be careful to assume what the Apostle "could not have understood."

Likewise, several NT scholars suggest that this passage has no bearing on the modern "charismatic" debate. For example, Anthony Thiselton claims regarding Paul's statement that **"if there are tongues, they will cease,"** that this:

hardly addresses the debate between Reformed and neo-Pentecostalist writers about "tongues will cease" after the close of the canon or at a given stage of individual or historical maturity. . . . This issue must be determined on other grounds than exegetical discussions of this verse. . . . *These verses should not be used as a polemic for either side in this debate*" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Eerdmans, 2000], 1062, 1064).

This seems a little self-serving on the part of those who want to claim these gifts are operating today. On the contrary, Paul *is* addressing several issues regarding the modern "charismatic" movement because several of these issues were occurring in the Corinthian congregation.

⁴ Bruce R. Compton, Professor of Biblical Languages and Exposition at the Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, has written an excellent exposition of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 in the theological journal published by his seminary: "1 Corinthians 13:8-13 And The Cessation of Miraculous Gifts" *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 9 (2004): 97-144. If we had discovered it before essentially completing this chapter, we may have simply referred to Dr. Compton's article, and accordingly we have added his thoughts especially to the endnotes. Nonetheless, his thorough treatment of the subject at least confirmed that our own treatment is rather thorough as well.

⁵ Dr. Compton reflects the more complete *four* categories commonly given for this debate:

Allowing for minor differences, the views on the interpretation of “the perfect” in 1 Corinthians 13:10 may be catalogued under four headings. These are that “the perfect” refers to (1) the completed New Testament canon [*historicism*, see endnote 1]; (2) the return of Christ, with the miraculous gifts ceasing before then [“knowledge” view] (3) the spiritual maturity of the church [“maturity” view]; and (4) the return of Christ, with the miraculous gifts continuing until then [“continuationist” view]. (*Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 9 [2004], 99)

View 1, the traditional “historicist” argument, or what we prefer to call *historicism* (see endnote 1) is the one we argue for. View 4, the relatively recent “continuationist” view, is what we argue against. We call it recent because while there have been many Christian teachers throughout the history of the Church who thought the Apostle was speaking of Christ’s return in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, they did not believe it offered support for the continuation of the miraculous gifts, because they universally believed that they had ceased. Which seems a bit of a contradiction to us.

View 2, which we will call the “knowledge” view, does not impress us either, even though it comes to the same conclusion as we do on the cessation of the gifts. Nonetheless, because of the number of respectable scholars who share it, we will allow Dr. Compton to describe it here:

Proponents of this view generally take all three gifts mentioned in 13:8, prophecy, tongues, and knowledge, as involving direct revelation from God. Similar to the [“maturity”] view, the expression “in part” in 13:9 refers to the knowledge gained from these gifts rather than to the gifts themselves. In contrast to the [“maturity”] view, however, it is the quality of knowledge, not simply the quantity of knowledge, that is being described. What the church is able to know of God from these gifts is not only fragmentary but temporary and indirect and, in that sense, partial and imperfect [in full agreement with the *historicist* view].

Accordingly, “the perfect” in 13:10 points to the return of Christ and specifically to the rapture of the church and the perfect knowledge that results when the church is in the presence of the Lord. Yet this does not mean that the gifts mentioned in 13:8 continue until that time. Since the contrast between the partial and the perfect in these verses refers to the kind of knowledge the church has rather than to the gifts themselves or even to the revelation they provide, the cessation of the gifts is not directly addressed.

Based on passages such as Ephesians 2:20, this view concludes that these gifts ceased with the completion of the New Testament canon. All that Paul is addressing in 1 Corinthians 13 is the replacing of the church’s partial and imperfect knowledge of God with full and perfect knowledge at the return of Christ. (102-103)

Samuel Waldron succinctly describes the “knowledge” view in his book, *To Be Continued?*:

The conclusion must be that Paul is teaching the doing away of partial knowledge in favor of perfect knowledge in verse ten. He says nothing about when the gifts of prophecy and tongues pass away. He only refers to the passing of the present partial knowledge that was conveyed through those gifts. He leaves open the question of the time of the passing of the gifts of prophecy and tongues. ([Calvary, 2005], 64)

Waldron's book is endorsed by R. Albert Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Tom Nettles, Professor of Theology at Southern Theological Seminary, and John MacArthur.

Dr. Compton lists the following scholars as supporting this view:

With minor variations, see Stanley D. Toussaint, "First Corinthians Thirteen and the Tongues Question," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120 (October–December 1963): 311–16; Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost*, pp. 109–12; idem., "A Historicist View," pp. 55–56; George W. Knight III, *Prophecy in the New Testament* (Presbyterian Heritage, 1988), pp. 21–22, n. 12; R. Fowler White, "Richard Gaffin and Wayne Grudem on 1 Cor 13:10: A Comparison of Historicist and Nonhistorical Argumentation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35 (June 1992): 173–81.

Gaffin equivocates on the meaning of "knowledge" in 13:8, uncertain whether it refers to the gift of knowledge or simply to the knowledge gained from the other two gifts. Commenting on 1 Cor 13:8, he says, "Prophecy and tongues are in view as *modes of revelation* related to the believer's present knowledge (whether or not 'knowledge' in verse 8 is an additional, third gift, parallel with prophecy and tongues)" (*Perspectives on Pentecost*, p. 110). White, on the other hand, takes "knowledge" in 1 Cor 13:8 as a reference to the gift of knowledge ("Richard Gaffin and Wayne Grudem on 1 Cor 13:10," p. 179).

Edgar follows the same basic line of argument as this view, but arrives at a different conclusion regarding when "the perfect" is attained. Based on Paul's use of the first person singular in 13:12b, "now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known," Edgar argues that "the perfect" in 13:10 refers to the full knowledge believers receive when they die rather than at the rapture of the church. See Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts*, pp. 333–44; idem, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, pp. 243–46.

Again, these are fine scholars, but to suggest that "the cessation of the gifts is not directly addressed" by the Apostle in this passage is inconceivable to us. In addition, the Apostle's reference to "**knowledge**" in 13:8 is no doubt the *gift* of divine knowledge he mentions in 12:8, not just spiritual knowledge in general (for further on the gift of divine knowledge see section ?). For an extended and convincing refutation of the "knowledge" view of 1 Corinthians 13:8–13 see Dr. Compton, 128–31.

⁶ Dr. Compton describes the view that the Apostle was predicting the miraculous gifts would continue until Christ's return:

Advocates differ about which of the three gifts Paul mentions in 13:8 involves direct revelation from God. Some identify prophecy alone, while others include tongues and/or knowledge. In any case, all agree that the revelation provided does not have the same authority as Scripture. These gifts are revelatory in the sense that the message communicated comes from the Spirit of God. Yet, unlike Scripture, the message once received by those so gifted is, in turn, communicated in merely human words, words which lack divine authority and which may be errant.

The three gifts in 13:8 are said to be "in part" because the message they communicate and the knowledge gained from this message . . . may not be . . . communicated accurately. Thus, "in part" signifies the ideas of that which is partial, as well as of that which is imperfect.

Similar to the previous view [the "knowledge" view described above], "the perfect" in 13:10 refers to the return of Christ and the full, clear, and complete picture of God the church will enjoy when it stands in Christ's presence. Unlike the ["knowledge"] view, however, the contrast between the partial and the perfect involves both the kind of knowledge the church has, as well as the mode of revelation on which this knowledge is based. Consequently, what is replaced when "the perfect" comes includes both the church's partial knowledge of God *and* the revelatory gifts which form the basis for that knowledge. (104)

As will be detailed in this chapter, we see several problems with this view. The most critical is the fundamental errors made in defining what the biblical gifts of divine knowledge, prophecy, and tongues were. *Charismaticism* waters down the biblical attributes of these gifts, gutting them of their truly miraculous nature, so that they can label the lesser counterfeits practiced today with these lofty biblical titles.

Wayne Grudem's redefining of the gift of prophecy is well known (see. ?), and accordingly he is representative of a "continuationist view when he states, "The allusion to the cessation of prophecy in 13:10 refers only to the Lord's return." (*The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* [Crossway, 2000], 219.

However, it is not only "charismatic" teachers who espouse this view. Reformed theologian J. I. Packer is recorded on the back of Dr. Grudem's book as stating: "Careful, thorough, wise, and to my mind, convincing." Likewise, Vern S. Poythress, Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Westminster Theological Seminary writes: ". . . a fresh, biblically sound, readable contribution . . . its depth of scholarship, pastoral solidity, and cautions against abuses are special strengths. Highly recommended."

In addition, David Farnell lists the following as those supporting the view that the Apostle was predicting that the gifts he listed would continue until the return of Christ:

F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 127-28; Robertson and Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 297; C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 306; F. W. Grosheide,

The First Epistle to the Corinthians, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 309–10; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 644–46; H. Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 226. ("Is the Gift of Prophecy for Today?" Parts 1-4, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 [April-June 1993], 193.

We would add Anthony Thiselton (cf. 1061), D. A. Carson (*Showing the Spirit* [Baker, 1987]), and John MacArthur to this list as well. However, these authors redefine gifts like prophecy as having something considerably less than their biblical attributes and authority.

Regarding Dr. MacArthur, Dr. Compton writes:

MacArthur can also be placed within this general category, except he identifies "the perfect" as referring to the eternal state rather than the return of Christ. Furthermore, for MacArthur, the canon is closed. Prophecy and knowledge, although continuing to the eternal state, are non-revelatory. Tongues, although revelatory, ceased with the close of the apostolic age, as did the other revelatory gifts. See John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Charismatics: A Doctrinal Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), pp. 163–67; idem, *1 Corinthians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), pp. 358–67; idem, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), pp. 230–32.

However, we confess that Dr. MacArthur seems rather difficult to pin down on this topic. While Dr. Compton places him in the "continuationist" view, he is actually a *historicist*. But, as noted above, professors from his Masters Seminary surprisingly hold the "maturity" view. In addition, we have noted his support of Waldron's "knowledge" view above. To confuse matters more, on his website, *Grace to You*, he seems to support our *historicist* view:

The phrase, "that which is perfect," is in the neuter gender in the Greek, hence it could not refer to a person, e.g. the Lord Jesus. The word *perfect* means mature or complete. It was the completed Word which rendered the gifts of revelation and knowledge obsolete. Scripture becomes the sole test of the authenticity of a man's message, and confirming gifts of a miraculous nature are no longer necessary to validate a man or his message (1 Corinthians 13:8-12). (While we attest to seeing this on the website, we confess to not having the location)

Finally, we will note here Calvin's view. While he was certainly leery of claims to extra-biblical revelation or the miraculous gifts (cf. section ?), he did believe that the Apostle was referring to the end of the Church Age as to when the miraculous gifts listed would cease. Accordingly, he wrote in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 13:10:

But when will that perfection come? It begins, indeed, at death, for then we put off, along with the body, many infirmities; but it will not be completely manifested until the day of judgment . . . Hence we infer, that the whole of this discussion is ignorantly applied to the

time that is intermediate [e.g. the completion of the NT canon]. (*Commentaries* at 1 Cor 13:10, online at www.ccel.org)

Evidently, Calvin would question Jonathan Edwards' intelligence, because he "ignorantly applied" the Apostle's statement to the completion of the NT revelation. See quote at?

- ⁷ Not surprisingly, there are several respected Bible scholars throughout Church history who have interpreted Paul as saying that the revelatory gifts would cease with the completion of the NT revelation. In this section (A.1) we will quote Jonathan Edwards (1704-1758) and in section A.3, Chrysostom (347-407).

W. E. Vine (1873-1949), the eminent Greek scholar, wrote in his commentary on 1 Corinthians:

With the completion of apostolic testimony and the completion of the Scriptures of truth ('the faith once for all delivered to the saints,' Jude 3, R.V.), 'that which is perfect' had come, and the temporary gifts were done away. For the Scriptures provided by the Spirit of God were 'perfect.' Nothing was to be added to them, nothing taken from them. ([Zondervan, 1965], 184).

About the same time, the popular commentary series of J. P. Lange seems to indicate that this was a prevailing view up through the middle of the 20th century. Regarding the *historicist* view, he writes that it was held, "by a large portion of the Protestant church." ([Zondervan, 1957], *in loc.*)

Dr. Farnell lists several more modern NT scholars advocating the traditional *historicist* view:

Evangelicals in this century have made full play of [B. B.] Warfield's paradigm, at times supporting his theological [and historical] proof with 1 Cor 13:8-10 and interpreting *to teleion* ("that which is perfect/complete") as the full canon. Cf. e.g. R. Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement* (1967, 1972); R. B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost* (1979); V. Budgen, *The Charismatics and the Word of God* (1983). Outside of evangelicalism one may find many scholars who link the cessation of direct revelation with the assembling of the NT canon, notably A. von Harnack, *History of Dogma* (Dover, 1961), 2.52-53.

W. G. Bellshaw in an article in Dallas Theological Seminary's *Bibliotheca Sacra* theological journal writes regarding the gift of tongues:

Since the New Testament was not complete, this gift was needed to validate the message which was being preached. After the canon of the Bible was completed, this gift was no longer necessary. Such is the explicit testimony of 1 Corinthians 13. . . . With the completion of the New Testament there no longer was a need for men to be used as instrumentalities to give forth God's authoritative message. This is now contained in the written Word. ("The Confusion of Tongues," *BSac* 120 [April-June 1963], 145-153)

Also, Dr. Compton lists others supporting our *historicist* view of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13:

With minor variations, see John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit: A Comprehensive Study of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*, 3rd ed. (Zondervan, 1958), pp. 173–88; Merrill F. Unger, *New Testament Teaching on Tongues* (Kregel, 1971), pp. 92–101; idem, *The Baptism and Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Moody Press, 1974), pp. 138–45; Robert L. Reymond, "What About Continuing Revelations and Miracles in the Presbyterian Church Today?" *A Study of the Doctrine of the Sufficiency of Scripture* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1977), pp. 30–36; Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Charismatic Gift of Prophecy: A Reformed Response to Wayne Grudem*, 2nd ed. (Footstool, 1989), pp. 51–60; Myron J. Houghton, "A Reexamination of 1 Corinthians 13:8–13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (July–September 1996): 344–56.

Reymond argues that "the perfect" refers to the completed New Testament revelatory process rather than to the New Testament canon *per se* [as do we], but recognizes that the New Testament canon is a corollary of the completed revelatory process (p. 32).

Also, in the last endnote of this chapter we quote the highly respected Reformed scholar Sinclair B. Ferguson as expressing our view exactly.

- ⁸ Dr. Compton mentions another view above, that the "completion" Paul speaks of refers to, "the spiritual maturity of the church." This is also a view with a great deal of support from rightly respected scholars, especially those coming from John MacArthur's Master's Seminary. Dr. Compton explains:

Advocates of the maturity view take prophecy, tongues, and knowledge in 13:8 in roughly the same way as the [*historicist*] view. Prophecy and knowledge involve direct revelation from God. Tongues, although functioning primarily as a sign gift, also entails direct revelation from God when combined with the gift of interpretation. These are said to be "in part" in 13:8 in the sense that the knowledge gained from these revelatory gifts is only a portion of what can be known of God. Just as the revelation provided by these gifts is partial, so too the knowledge gained from these gifts is partial as well. . . .

Furthermore, the extent of the church's knowledge goes hand in hand with the level of its maturity. Thus, to describe the church's knowledge as "in part" is, at the same time, to describe its level of maturity as partial or limited.

Consequently, "the perfect" in 13:10 refers to the state of the church where it has attained full maturity and has full knowledge of God. All of this will take place, proponents argue, at the rapture of the church, when the church is taken from the earth to stand in the presence of the Lord.

Dr. Compton lists the following proponents of this view:

With minor variations, see Joseph Dillow, *Speaking in Tongues: Seven Crucial Questions* (Zondervan, 1975), pp. 119–33; Farnell, "When Will the Gift of Prophecy Cease?" pp. 171–202; Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, pp. 77–84, 123–32, 236–40, 259–62;

Donald G. McDougall, "Cessationism in 1 Cor 13:8-12," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 14 (Fall 2003): 207-13.

Robert Thomas, Professor of New Testament at the Master's Seminary has been a primary proponent of the "maturity" view. Although Dr. Thomas argues for the "completion" definition of *to teleion* as we do, he concludes that it is referring to the maturity of the Church instead of the completion of the availability of the NT revelation. He gives a respectable explanation of his view in the book, *The Master's Perspective on Difficult Passages*, pp. 209-223.

Because proponents of this view are *historicists*, but think Paul has the idea of the *parousia* in mind throughout 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, they must, in our opinion, arbitrarily insert all of these things into the text. Notice the complexity and, again, in our opinion, the confusion that results with this view when Dr. Thomas concludes:

Returning to Paul's original emphasis in I Corinthians 13:8-13, therefore, it is proposed that Paul allowed for a threefold temporal graduation in this key paragraph:

- (1) the period of direct revelation and special authentication which is the childhood of the body of Christ.
- (2) the entire period of the body's earthly existence corresponding to the duration of the triplet faith-hope-love. Knowledge, prophecy and tongues occupied only a portion of this period, since the canon of New Testament books has been completed before the *parousia*. [But he does not believe this can be supported by this passage]
- (3) the period following the *parousia* when, insofar as the body of Christ is concerned, neither the gifts nor faith-hope will continue. ("Tongues . . . Will Cease," *JETS* 17:2 (Spring 1974) p. 89).

We confess there seems to be a contradiction here. While such a view usually agrees that the miraculous gifts have ceased, they interpret Paul here as saying they will continue until the full maturity of the Church which will not occur until the return of Christ.

Obviously, there are some things that our *historicalist* view has in common with the "maturity" view. Perhaps its greatest weakness, in addition to the fact it makes Paul a false prophet, is that it places too much emphasis on the Apostle's analogy of a child growing into adulthood (13:11), as if this is the controlling phrase in his whole argument. On the contrary, we see the parallel between the "completion" in verse 10 and the metaphorical "talking" like an adult in verse 11 to refer to a better mode of communication/revelation, which would keep its meaning more in line with everything else in the passage.

There may be some merit to the "maturity" view if it can be seen as referring to the "completion" of the NT revelation. This is the view in the well known Jamieson, Faucett, and Brown commentary where we read:

A primary fulfillment of St. Paul's statement took place when the Church attained its maturity; then 'tongues' entirely 'ceased,' and 'prophecies' and 'knowledge' so far as they were supernatural gifts of the Spirit, were superseded as no longer required when the ordinary preaching of the Word, and the Scriptures of the New

Testament collected together, had become established institutions.
(*in loc.*)

Likewise, Dr. Compton notes:

Some define "the perfect" [as] . . . the spiritual maturity of the church, but limit Paul's discussion in this passage to the church's maturity reached at the completion of the New Testament canon. . . . See Robert G. Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement*, rev. ed. (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1972), pp. 122–29; Walter J. Chantry, *Signs of the Apostles: Observations on Pentecostal-ism Old and New*, 2nd ed. (Banner of Truth, 1976), pp. 49–54. Gromacki appears to combine the two definitions of "the perfect" to include both the completed canon and the maturity of the church at the end of the apostolic era.

Nonetheless, we do not believe the maturity of the Church is the overarching theme of 1 Cor 13:8-13. Secondly, even if it was, it would still need to be decided as to what this maturity referred to and when it was to occur. The most likely conclusion is that this "maturity" would only be completed with the return of Christ. Thus, this becomes essentially another view in support of "*to teleion*" referring to the return of Christ.

All in all, then, we believe the whole debate concerning the Apostle's view of the timing of the cessation of the miraculous gifts can be simplified into two camps: 1) at the completion of the reception and distribution of NT revelation; or 2) the return of Christ.

⁹ For a fuller explanation of what we call *historicism* see endnote 1 above. For further on the historical cessation of these gifts see chapters 9.13; 11.7; and 12.13.

¹⁰ For documentation of the 4th century cessation of these gifts see chapters 9.13; 11.7; and 12.13.

¹¹ Compton, 98.

¹² The reason that Dr. MacArthur can claim both, that these gifts were to continue until the eternal state, but be a *historicist* claiming the miraculous gifts of the early Church have ceased, is because he defines the gifts of prophecy and knowledge in non-miraculous, and we would claim, unbiblical ways (cf. ?). As for tongues, he thinks a change in grammar concerning its cessation separates it from Paul's discussion, and actually reveals that the Apostle thought *it would* cease before the "completion" came (cf. section B.2.g).

¹³ Craig S. Keener, *Gift and Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Baker, 2001), 106.

¹⁴ Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (Zondervan, 1993), 247.

¹⁵ For arguments that the gift of divine knowledge was tied to the revelatory Apostles see chapter 8.2.

¹⁶ J. Rodman Williams, "The Greater Gifts" in *Charismatic Experiences in History*, Cecil M. Robeck ed. (Hendrickson, 1985), 57.

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- ¹⁷ Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (InterVarsity, 1999), 103.
- ¹⁸ Christopher Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity And Its Hellenistic Environment* (J. C. B. Mohr, 1995), 86, 89.
- ¹⁹ Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts* (Hendrickson, 1998), 294
- ²⁰ Robert Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost: Studies in New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1979), 109.
- ²¹ Lloyd-Jones, *Spirit*, 31-2.
- ²² Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits*; online at www.graphebooks.org/chanditfrjed.html, 158, 160, 161. More specifically, Edwards believed that there was a two-fold meaning to the Apostle's reference to "completion." One was the near future cessation of the miraculous gifts when the NT canon was completed, and the other was the further future cessation of even the non-miraculous gifts in Heaven. Edwards writes:
- There is a twofold *imperfect*, and so a twofold *perfect* state of the Christian church. The church in its beginning, or in its first stage, before it was strongly established in the world, and settled in its New Testament state, and before the canon of Scripture was completed, was in an imperfect state — a state, as it were, of childhood, in comparison with what it was to be in its elder and later ages, when it should have reached its state of manhood, or of comparative earthly perfection. And so, again, this comparatively perfect church of Christ, so long as it remains in its militant state, that is, down to the end of time, will still be in an imperfect, and, as it were, in a childish state, in comparison with what it will be in its heavenly state, in which latter it is comparatively in its state of manhood or perfection.
- And so there is a twofold failing of these miraculous gifts of the Spirit here mentioned. One was at the end of the first or infant age of the church, when the canon of Scripture was completed, and so there was to be no need of such gifts for the church in its latter ages, when it should have put away childish things, and come to a state of manhood before the end of the world, and when the Spirit of God should most gloriously be poured out and manifested in that love or charity, which is its greatest and everlasting fruit.
- And the other will be, when all the common fruits of the Spirit cease with respect to particular persons at death, and with respect to the whole church at the end of the world, while charity shall still remain in heaven, and there the Spirit of God shall be poured forth and manifested in perfect love in every heart to all eternity. (167)
- Edwards' view is intriguing (as usual) in that it reflects the near/far, partial/full fulfillment typical of much of biblical prophecy, of which Paul's prediction is an example.
- ²³ Erroll Hulse, "The Charismatic Experience" online at http://www.the-highway.com/charismatic1_Hulse.html

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- ²⁴ See endnote above for others who support a *historicist* view of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13.
- ²⁵ This would include John MacArthur (see endnote 5 above), and those described in endnote 4 above.
- ²⁶ For further in-depth discussion of the biblical attributes of these gifts see the appropriate books in *Knowing Our God*.
- ²⁷ Ibid
- ²⁸ Regarding the cessation of the gift of prophecy after Malachi see section 9.13.B.
- ²⁹ Nonetheless, many have doubted the “canonical” context of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. For example, Dr. Fee comments:
 Others see “the perfect” [of 1 Cor. 13:10] as referring to the full revelation given in the NT itself, which when it would come to completion would do away with the “partial” forms of charismatic revelation. Given its classical exposition by B. B. Warfield, this view has been taken over in a variety of ways by contemporary Reformed and Dispensationalist theologies. It is an impossible view, of course, since Paul himself could not have articulated it. [Why not?] What neither Paul himself nor the Corinthians could have understood cannot possibly be the meaning of the text. (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Eerdmans, 1987], 645, n. 23).
- The characteristically clear and thorough Dr. Fee is neither here. To presume to know what Paul could or could not have known is unwise considering the revelatory gifts and experiences Paul had. Who has ever received more divine revelation than Paul? It would seem Dr. Fee carelessly assumes too much.
- Dr. MacArthur’s view would seem equally invalid: “Some Christians believe the perfect has already come in the completion of Scripture. But that idea would have been meaningless to the Corinthians” (1 Cor., 364). How does Dr. MacArthur know that? No doubt the Corinthians understood more than many are willing to give them credit for. Knowledge of the OT precedent would have been available to them. Unfortunately, neither Dr. Fee nor the others who espouse this criticism demonstrate why a “canon consciousness” would have been foreign to Paul’s or the Corinthian’s thinking.
- ³⁰ William Sanday, *Inspiration* (Green & Co., 1903), 70-1.
- ³¹ B. B. Warfield, “The Formation Of The Canon Of The New Testament”, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, Vol. 1 (Baker, 2000).
- ³² William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (Clarendon Press, 1998), 32.
- ³³ For further evidence of the cessation of miraculous gifts in the NT see chapter 11.7.

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- ³⁴ For a history of the cessation of the gift of divine knowledge see chapter 8.5. For the cessation of prophecy see chapter 9.13.
- ³⁵ For further discussion of our claim that Scripture is a superior means of revelation to the means of *miraculous communication* see chapter 7.8.D.
- ³⁶ Excerpt from 10.7.C For further discussion of the relationship between divine/human covenants and the cessation of the *Scripture gifts* see sections 7.3.C and 10.7.C.
- ³⁷ We have clearly demonstrated these purposes regarding the gifts of divine knowledge, prophecy, and tongues elsewhere. See applicable parts of the Books devoted to them.
- ³⁸ On the “canonical” context of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 Dr. Compton writes:
 [T]here are several references in the Jewish literature of the intertestamental period and the first century that speak of the closing of the Old Testament canon as a self-contained body of direct revelation from God. This literature refers to the Old Testament as the product of prophetic revelation. Those writing note that true prophecy had ceased, and that God was not adding to what He had already revealed through His Prophets. They say this in spite of the fact that Jewish literature flourished throughout this period. Furthermore, these same writers also note that God had promised in the future to revive once again the voice of prophecy, but that He had not yet done so.
- In other words, these Jewish authors recognized that God had authored an authoritative body of revelation, that this body was a self-contained identifiable entity, and that this body of revelation had been closed in the sense that nothing further was being added to it. That being the case, there is no reason why believers in the first century would have struggled with the concept of a biblical canon as an identifiable body of direct revelation given by God or with the concept of a completed canon.
- Furthermore, the New Testament authors also speak of this revelation as an identifiable, self-contained entity, referred to as “the faith” or as “the traditions” which the Apostles and others were handing down to the church. Lastly, they also speak of this revelation metaphorically as a foundation upon which the church would be built. The very concept of a foundation lends itself to the ideas of a fixed body of revelation and one that, once established, would have no more additions (e.g., 1 Cor 11:2; 2 Thess 2:15; Jude 3).
- Jude exhorts his readers to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.” For a defense that Jude is referring to an objective body of truth representing the apostolic teachings or traditions handed down to believers, see the discussion in Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary (Broadman & Holman, 2003), pp. 435–36.

All of this forcefully argues that Paul and his audience would have been familiar with the concept of "the perfect" as referring to a completed body of revelation for the church.

Interestingly enough, those who deny that Paul could have understood the concept of a completed canon in 1 Cor 13:10 often see a reference to the canon in Paul's discussion of the foundation in Eph 2:20. Compare, for example, Wallace's discussion on 1 Cor 13:10, denying that Paul could have understood the concept of a completed canon, with his comments on Eph 2:20, where he associates the "foundation" with the NT (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, pp. 284–86, 295, n. 6). (Compton, 125-6)

³⁹ Historically speaking, these gifts did cease in the early history of the Church, just at the time that the NT revelation had been widely canonized and distributed, as we have thoroughly documented elsewhere. See esp. section 11.7.D.

⁴⁰ Augustine, *Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, Vol. VII of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, (The Christian Literature Co., 1888), VI. 10; Underlining added for emphasis.

⁴¹ John Chrysostom, *Homily on 1 Corinthians*, 29; online at www.ccel.org.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 34.2. One commentator has noted:

Some modern writers have indicated that it is only since the modern charismatic movement started around the turn of the twentieth century that men began to hedge on the meaning of the word "teleion" in I Cor. 13:8, and sought for some other meaning other than the perfect state of the believer in heaven. . . . It is of interest then to note that none other than Chrysostom who died around the turn of the fifth century, did not believe that teleion meant the perfect state. He understood the "future tenses here" to refer to a time when faith having spread abroad, these special gifts would then be no longer necessary. (ref. unavailable)

In light of the authority and influence that Chrysostom exercised in the early Church, Gary Shogren is at best exaggerating when he claims: "The consensus understanding of the Early Church Fathers on 1 Cor 13:8-12 was that "prophecy will continue in all the Church until the end" ("Christian Prophecy and Canon in the Second Century: A Response to B B Warfield" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (40:D 1997), 609-626). Likewise, C. Forbes comments that this view "was also the view held by the Patristic writers who discuss the passage" and he erroneously includes Chrysostom.

Nonetheless, Dr. Forbes writes:

See, for example, the anonymous writer against Montanism quoted with approval in Eusebius, H.E. 5.17: "the Apostle grants that the prophetic gift shall be in all the church until the final coming." See also Irenaeus, [*Against Heresies*] 2,28,7, 5.7.2 - 5.8.1, Clement of Alexandria, *Quis dives salvetur*, 38; Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 6.20; *de Oratione*, 25.2; and Tertullian, *de Patientia*, 12.10; and *Adversus Marcionem*, 5.15.6. (86)

One characteristic of these authors is that they wrote *before* the gifts had ceased in the fourth century with the wide spread distribution of the written NT revelation. One wonders if their interpretation would have resembled Chrysostom's more if they had written in his day.

- ⁴³ And throughout that 1600 years, the Church universally considered claims that those gifts had been restored, to be fanatical and on the fringe of orthodox Christianity.
- ⁴⁴ As we have argued elsewhere, Paul's purpose throughout 1 Corinthians 12-14 is to help the tongues hungry Corinthians to put this gift in perspective. See chapters 12.6-12.
- ⁴⁵ For further discussion of the gift of miracle faith which the Apostle is referring to here see chapters 11.4-5.
- ⁴⁶ We believe the Apostle is also referring to miraculous gifts here, which could be referred to as voluntary poverty and martyrdom. Certainly the descriptions of Christians singing and praying while being burned at the stake suggest a supernatural gift of God's grace. For further discussion on the gift of martyrdom see section 10.5.A.5.
- ⁴⁷ Dr. Thiselton notes: "The established reading *piptei* means *falls to the ground* in a literal and metaphorical sense, often with the added force of *collapsing* or falling apart (*BAGD*, 659-60) (1060-61).
- ⁴⁸ For arguments against the *prophetist* idea that the gift of prophecy was rather common in the early Church see section 9.4.B.
- ⁴⁹ For a biblical definition of the gift of prophecy see section 9.1.B.
- ⁵⁰ The claim that Paul is referring to Christian NT Prophets in Ephesians 2:20 is supported by the fact that he is certainly referring to them at 3:5 and 4:11. For further discussion see section 9.6.C.1.
- ⁵¹ For further biblical and historical arguments for the fact that the purpose of the gift of tongues was to be a miraculous authentication of new divine revelation see section 12.3.B.
- ⁵² Some see a significant difference between Paul's use of *katargeō* to describe the cessation of prophecy and knowledge, but *pausontai* for tongues. Dr. Compton lists the following:
 Toussaint, "First Corinthians Thirteen and the Tongues Question," pp. 314-15; Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement*, pp. 128-29; MacArthur, *The Charismatics*, p. 165; idem, *1 Corinthians*, p. 359; idem, *Charismatic Chaos*, pp. 230-31; Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts*, pp. 336-37; Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, p. 78. For a recent defense, distinguishing between the meaning of the two verbs on grammatical and lexical grounds without embracing the same conclusions, see McDougall, "Cessationism in 1 Cor 13:8-12," pp. 195-200. On the use of the verbs as synonyms, see Ceslaus Spicq, *Agape in the New Testament*, 2 vols., trans. Marie A. McNamara and Mary H. Richter (St. Louis: Herder, 1965), 2:160-61.

For example, Dr. MacArthur claims that Paul's switch to this verb indicates that the gift of tongues would stop *before* the gifts of prophecy and divine knowledge (*1 Cor.*, 359). He primarily bases his claim on the fact that the verb here is in the middle voice indicating that the cause of its ceasing comes from within and of itself. This is compared then to *katargeo* which Paul uses to describe the cessation of prophecy and knowledge, and which, it is claimed, indicates the source of their ceasing is from an outside force.

The point in all this is to justify Dr. MacArthur's claim that the gift of tongues ceased of itself in the first century, while the gifts of prophecy and divine knowledge are operating today until Christ stops them with His return (cf. Stanley Toussaint, "First Corinthians Thirteen and the Tongues Question" in *Bsac*, Vol. 120, Oct-Dec. 1963, 311-16).

First, such an interpretation completely ignores the biblical definitions of the gifts of divine knowledge and prophecy. These Scripture producing gifts are no longer needed, nor operating today. Secondly, Dr. MacArthur's view completely ignores the historical fact that the gift of tongues and prophecy *did* cease at relatively the same time in the fourth century or before, with the completion of the reception and distribution of the NT revelation.

Thirdly, this interpretation would also seem to be reading far too much into the often debatable effect that the middle voice has on a Greek verb. Dr. Fee explains, "The change in verbs is purely rhetorical; to make it otherwise is to elevate to significance something in which Paul shows no interest at all" (*1 Cor.*, 644, n. 17).

More specifically, Dr. Carson comments:

This view [MacArthur's] assumes without warrant that the switch to this verb is more than a stylistic variation. Worse, it interprets the middle voice irresponsibly. In Hellenistic Greek, the middle voice affects the meaning of the verb in a variety of ways . . . the middle *form* may be used while the active *force* is preserved . . . In the New Testament, this verb [*pauo*] prefers the middle; but that does not mean the subject "stops" under its own power. For instance, when Jesus rebukes the wind and raging waters, the storm *stops* (same verb, middle voice in Luke 8:24)—and certainly not under its own power. (*Spirit*, 66-67, italics in the original).

Likewise, in *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Baker, 1996), Dr. Carson states:

When we examine the use of the verb (*pauo*) in the New Testament, we discover that it regularly appears in middle form. In the active voice, its lexical meaning is 'to stop, to cause to stop, to relieve'; in the middle, either 'to stop oneself' (reflexive usage), or 'to cease' (i.e., it becomes equivalent to a deponent with intransitive force). It never unambiguously bears the meaning 'to cease of itself' (i.e., because of something intrinsic in the nature of the subject). (77)

⁵³ The context is spiritual gifts and clearly what Paul is referring to is the supernatural gift of divine knowledge that he speaks of earlier in 12:8 and 13:2, and has been discussed and biblically defined in chapter 8.2

- ⁵⁴ Dr. Fee comments concerning Paul's conspicuous choice of these gifts, "If there is any significance to his choice of gifts, it lies with the fact that the first, "prophecies," is his own preference for edification in the community, while the other two are Corinthian favorites" (*1 Cor.*, 643). It seems too convenient to suggest *unrelated* reasons for Paul's choice of these gifts. A *related* reason is a superior one. In addition, it would seem that Dr. Fee completely ignores 1) the unique revelatory and authenticating properties of these gifts and 2) the other aspects of this passage that make the context methods of revelation from God to man.
- ⁵⁵ Dr. Compton adds a legitimate but secondary reason why these three gifts are listed by the Apostle. And then in the final sentence, adds the most important reason.
Paul divides the gifts in 12:8-10 into three groupings by using a different word for "another" before the third ("faith") and eighth ("tongues") items. The three gifts in 13:8 are taken from the three divisions in 12:8-10, one from each division. As such, the three gifts are intended to represent the entire list. The common denominator among the miraculous gifts is that all involve either the giving of divine revelation or the authenticating of divine revelation. (109)
- ⁵⁶ For further on this point see sections A.2-3 above.
- ⁵⁷ For a review of the history of the cessation of tongues see chapter 12.13. For the gift of prophecy chapter 9.13.
- ⁵⁸ Some have seen significance in the fact that Paul does not explicitly mention the gift of tongues in verse 9 as he does divine knowledge and prophecy. Dr. MacArthur, for example, would seem to use this fact to support the claim that the gifts of divine knowledge and prophecy "are less temporary than tongues" and for further evidence he claims that tongues "is not mentioned after verse 8" (*1 Cor.*, 362). However, Dr. Fee's comment regarding Paul's deletion of tongues in verse 9 would seem superior to Dr. MacArthur's:
Partly this is due to style, partly to the fact that "tongues" does not lend itself easily to the way these sentences are expressed. "We speak in tongues in part" is not particularly meaningful; but tongues . . . are to be understood as included in the argument. (*1 Cor.*, 644, n. 21).
In addition, it has been pointed out that the context of this passage is how God communicates to His people. The gifts of prophecy and knowledge were essential in this before the NT Scriptures were completed, the gift of tongues was not. This would be another reason why Paul may not have repeated it.
In answer to Dr. MacArthur's second claim that tongues is not mentioned after v. 8, there are reasons to see a clear reference to it in Paul's metaphorical statement in verse 11 concerning speaking like a child. First of all, the verb "**speak**" (*laleo*) is also used in both 13:1 and 11, the first occurrence clearly referring to speaking in tongues. Secondly, it is suggested that like 13:11, Paul uses the metaphor of

acting like a child later in 14:20 to specifically refer to speaking in tongues.

Finally, Paul intentionally introduced his arguments here with the mention of the gift of tongues (v. 8). Dr. MacArthur implies that immediately after mentioning it, Paul intends to exclude it from his arguments. This completely ignores Paul's explicit and intentional inclusion of it, not only in 13:8-13, but obviously throughout chapter 14.

⁵⁹ *NAS Hebrew & Greek Dictionaries*, Robert L. Thomas gen. ed., Electronic Edition, Parsons Technology (Lockman Foundation, 1998), #1063.

⁶⁰ This is one place which we would disagree with Dr. Compton:

To a certain extent, the definition of "in part" is dependent on the meaning of the expression "the perfect" in 13:10 in that "the perfect" is presented in 13:10 as the opposite or antithesis of that which is "in part." As such, the definition of "in part" must wait for the discussion of "the perfect" in 13:10. (122)

While this is true, there are many more possible definitions for *to teleion* than *ek merous*. Therefore, the narrower meaning of the latter is most helpful in determining the meaning of the other.

⁶¹ W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Thomas Nelson, 1996), 458 (underlining added for emphasis).

⁶² Colin Brown, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)* 4 vols., (Zondervan, 1986), 2:304; underlining added for emphasis.

⁶³ Thiselton, 1064.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1027.

⁶⁵ Dr. Compton adds regarding the meaning of *ek merous*:

[T]he evidence for defining "in part" based on the use of this phrase and its cognates elsewhere supports the quantitative definition of "partial" or "incomplete." . . . The exact phrase is found only five times in the New Testament. Four of these occur in the immediate passage and appear to be used in the same way. The other use is in the preceding chapter, 12:27, where it has the sense of "individually," a meaning that does not make sense in 13:9. Although not used extensively, there is a parallel construction that is consistently employed in the New Testament in a quantitative sense (*apo merous*"; cf. Rom 11:25 ["in part"]; 15:15 ["some"], 24 ["a while"]; 2 Cor 1:4 [sic *merous* not in text]; 2:5 ["some degree"]). While not conclusive, the meaning of the parallel construction supports a similar force for the phrase in 13:9. (122-23)

⁶⁶ For the important "revelational context" of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 see section A.2 above.

⁶⁷ Raymond F. Collins, *1 Corinthians* (Glazier/Liturgical Press, 1999), 486, n. 9.

- ⁶⁸ Merrill Unger, *NT Teaching on Tongues* (Kregel, 1971), 95.
- ⁶⁹ D. A. Carson, *Scripture & Truth* (Baker, 1992), 91.
- ⁷⁰ Paul Wooley, in *The Infallible Word*, Ned B. Stonehouse, ed. (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1946), 215.
- ⁷¹ The NIV, NCV, ESV, KJV, NKJV, and NLT translate *polumerōs* as “many times.” F. F. Bruce translates it as “various days” (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans, 1990], 44). The RSV, NRSV, and Donald Guthrie seem to ignore the literal Greek and translate it as “in various and many ways” (*The Letter to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans, 1983, repr. 1999], 62). Nonetheless, Dr. Bruce notes that the Greek literally means: “in many parts and in many ways” (*Ibid.*). In addition, even if it is translated “many times” these translations ultimately mean the same thing. If the revelation came at many different times than it also came in many different parts.
- ⁷² J. I. Packer, *God Speaks to Man: Revelation and the Bible* (Westminster Press, 1965), 58, 74.
- ⁷³ J. I. Packer, “Preaching as Biblical Interpretation,” in *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, Roger R. Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels eds. (Baker, 1980), 198.
- ⁷⁴ R. Schippers, *NIDNTT*, 2:59.
- ⁷⁵ *Vine’s*, 466.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 176.
- ⁷⁷ For further discussion of the “maturity” view see endnote 8 above
- ⁷⁸ MacArthur’s view is that τὸ τέλειον refers to the eternal state. He gives two reasons for this. First, “in the millennial kingdom there will be prophesying and teaching resulting in knowledge” (Isa 11:9; 30:20–21 ; 32:3–4 ; Jer 3:14–15; 23:1–4 ; Joel 2:28–32; Rev 11:1–12)
- ⁷⁹ Some suggest that *telous* here could be translated as meaning that the Corinthians will understand “in the end” at the day of Christ, that Paul was sincere. Accordingly, Paul Barnett writes:
 There may be a double entendre here. “Understand fully” can mean both “in full” (i.e., as distinct from “in part”) and, in “the day of the Lord Jesus” (at the “end”) as distinct from at present (“now”). (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [Eerdmans, 1997], 97; cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, [Hendrickson, 1973], 73; Colin Kruse, *2 Corinthians* [Eerdmans, 1987, repr. 1997], 72)
 There are several problems with this. First, once again, the meaning of *meros* (in part) must dictate the meaning of *telous* which it is being contrasted with. Accordingly, “knowing fully” is a much more compatible contrast to “knowing partially” than “knowing in the end.”
 Secondly, even the translations that render *eōs telous* in 2 Cor 1:14 as referring to an “end” (cf. NASB, NRSV, KJV, NKJV), translate the phrase correctly as *until the end*, implying that something has been happening

before the end. *Eōs* does not mean “in” or “at” as in “at the day of Christ” as Dr. Barnett implies. Accordingly, *BAGD* has its possible meanings as: *till, until, as long as, while, as far as, to, up to, to the point of* (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (*BAGD*) F. W. Danker, ed., 3rd ed. [University Of Chicago Press, 2001]).

Thirdly, as Paul’s use of *eōs* clearly implies here, the Apostle certainly hoped the Corinthians would have full confidence in him before the return of Christ. Thus Calvin interpreted the Apostle here:

As the Corinthians had not yet perfectly returned to a sound mind, so as to be prepared to weigh his fidelity in a just and even balance, but at the same time had begun to abate somewhat of their perverse and malignant judgment respecting him, he intimates, that he hopes better as to the future. “You have already,” says he, “to some extent acknowledged me. I hope that you will acknowledge more and more what I have been among you, and in what manner I have conducted myself.”

While Albert Barnes (*Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament*, online at www.ccel.org) and Charles Hodge (*Ibid.*) emphasize the knowledge of Paul’s actions that will come at the return of Christ, it is unclear to us as to whether they rejected Paul’s meaning as including a full knowledge that would occur before that.

⁸⁰ Thiselton, 1027.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 1065.

⁸² Barrett, 306.

⁸³ Farnell, 193. Cf. Thomas, *Gifts*, 203.

⁸⁴ Fee, *1 Cor.*, 644, n. 22, 655.

⁸⁵ Gerhard Delling, “*teleios*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)* G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., trans. G. W. Bromiley 10 vols. (Eerdmans, 1964-76), 8:75. See also, Paul Johannes du Plessis, *TELEIOS, the Idea of Perfection in the N.T.*, 1959, 204.

⁸⁶ Robert Thomas, “*Tongues...Will Cease*,” *JETS* 17 (Spring 1974): 83-85.

⁸⁷ Douglas Judisch, *An Evaluation of Claims to the Charismatic Gifts* (Baker, 1978), 45-48.

⁸⁸ Ref not available

⁸⁹ Unfortunately, Leon Morris gives no consideration to this. (*1 Corinthians* [Eerdmans, 1985], 182-3). Neither does Calvin, who actually implies *ek merous* in the context means “imperfection” (*in loc.*). Albert Barnes ignores it as well (*in loc.*).

⁹⁰ Forbes, 87.

⁹¹ For other uses of *teleion* in reference to maturity see 1 Cor 14:20; Php 3:15; Eph 4:13; Col 1:28; 4:12.

⁹² Thomas, "Tongues," 87

⁹³ Robert L. Thomas ed., *The Master's Perspective on Difficult Passages* (Kregel, 1998), 216.

⁹⁴ For further discussion of the "revelational" context of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 see section A.2 above.

⁹⁵ *Webster's* at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/perfect>. See definition 4 and 5.

⁹⁶ For other references to *teleion* as referring to the idea of absolute perfection see Matt 19:21; Rom 12:2; Heb 2:10; 5:9; 7:19; 7:28; 9:11; 10:1; 12:23; Jms 1:17, 25.

Those arguing for the "maturity" view attempt to claim that this could not be in Paul's mind. Dr. Thomas says, "No other use of *teleios* in Paul can possibly mean "perfection" in the sense of the absence of all imperfection." (*Understanding*). Likewise, Dr. Farnell writes:

Pauline usage of τέλειος never conveys the idea of absolute perfection, and such a philosophical meaning is also questionable in the rest of the New Testament. For further information on this point see *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "τέλειος," by Gerhard Delling, 8:69-77; Thomas, "Tongues...Will Cease," 83; idem, *Exegetical Digest of 1 Corinthians 12-14*, 96-97. While classical Greek usage may convey the idea of "perfection" (Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. Henry Stuart Jones, 9th ed. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1940], 1769-70), Paul never used this word in that sense (193).

However, neither writer explains their exclusion of the Apostles reference to the "**perfect**" (*teleion*) will of God in Romans 12:2, and it would seem it should not be excluded from the idea of absolute perfection.

⁹⁷ Thomas, "Tongues," 83. Quotes Delling in the *TDNT*.

⁹⁸ Fee, *1 Cor.*, 641.

⁹⁹ MacArthur, *1 Cor.*, 364.

¹⁰⁰ Carson, *Spirit*, 68-70, italics in the original, underlining added.

¹⁰¹ For further discussion on the "revelational" context, see section A.4 above

¹⁰² Gromacki, 126.

¹⁰³ Spiros Zodhiates, *Speaking in Tongues and Public Worship: An Exegetical Commentary on First Corinthians Fourteen* (AMG, 1998), 572.

¹⁰⁴ Compton, 124

¹⁰⁵ For further discussion of the "biblical" context see section A.4 above

- ¹⁰⁶ For the fact that the completion of the NT canon coincided with the historical cessation of the *Scripture* and *sign gifts* see section 11.7.D.
- ¹⁰⁷ See “revelatory” context above in section A.2
- ¹⁰⁸ G. B. Weaver, “Tongues Shall Cease” *GTJ* 14 (Winter 1973), 22.
- ¹⁰⁹ Judisch, 50.
- ¹¹⁰ Robertson and Plummer, 297.
- ¹¹¹ Thomas, “Tongues,” 17, 86.
- ¹¹² Farnell, 193.
- ¹¹³ *Vine’s*, 436.
- ¹¹⁴ Regarding Paul’s analogy of a “**mirror**” (*di esoptrou*), Dr. Compton writes:
 The *first* question is whether Paul refers to looking in a “mirror” or to looking through a “glass” or a “window.” The only other use of this word in the Old or New Testament is in James 1:23. There, it clearly refers to a mirror in that James describes someone looking at himself. Furthermore, since “mirror” is the predominant use of the word outside the Bible, it may be assumed that this is what Paul intended here. (133-4)
- ¹¹⁵ Morris, 183.
- ¹¹⁶ Fee, *1 Cor.*, 648, incl. n. 46, italics in the original. Dr. Thiselton agrees and discusses this at length (cf. 1067-69)
- ¹¹⁷ Thiselton, 1027
- ¹¹⁸ Barrett, 307
- ¹¹⁹ Gromacki, 127.
- ¹²⁰ Judisch, 51.
- ¹²¹ Compton, 134-5, 138. See full discussion in Compton, 134-9 where he concludes:
 The predominant use of the “face to face” expression in the Old Testament as a metaphor argues in favor of Paul using it in a similar way in 1 Corinthians 13:12. This is especially true when combining Numbers 12:8 with Exodus 33:11 and then comparing these with Paul’s analogy. God is described in Exodus 33:11 as speaking to Moses “face to face,” just as a man speaks to his friend.” In the parallel passage in Numbers 12:7-8, God declares that He reveals Himself to the Prophets in visions and dreams. This is not the case with Moses, how-ever. With Moses, God declares, He speaks “mouth to mouth,” that is, “openly and not in dark sayings.” Taking these two expressions “face to face” and “mouth to mouth” as synonymous, the contrast in Numbers 12:8 is between the piecemeal and somewhat enigmatic revelation given to the Prophets through visions and dreams and the full and direct revelation God gave to Moses.¹¹⁹

This appears to be the same contrast that Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 13:12a. Paul describes the church's perception of God's revelation, based on the revelatory gifts, as though someone were seeing something dimly in a mirror, that is, seeing something indistinctly or unclearly. In contrast, when God's revelation for the church is fully disclosed, it will be like seeing someone or something face to face, that is, clearly and distinctly.

In other words, partial revelation, whether through dreams and visions in the Old Testament or through the revelatory gifts in the New Testament, results in limited or restricted sight; complete revelation results in clear sight. The word "dimly" Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 13:12 is the same word the LXX uses to translate the expression "dark sayings" in Number 12:8, referring to God's revelation through the Prophets. Thus, consistent with the metaphor in the first half of Paul's analogy, to see something "**face to face**" in the second half means simply to perceive the revelation of God's will for the church clearly and completely.

¹²² For the prohibition to seeing God's face see esp. Exod 33:11, 20,23; Gen 32:30; Num 12:8; 14:14; Deut 5:4; 34:10; Judg 6:22; and Ezek 20:35. Elsewhere in *KOG* we have written:

One of the earliest and most striking examples of a personal encounter with God is His revealing of Himself upon the request of Moses to, "**show me your glory.**" God variously describes what He reveals as, "**My goodness,**" "**My glory,**" and "**My back**" (Exod 33:18-23). God's personal encounters with Moses were so intimate that the Scriptures say, "**The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend**" (Exod 33:11). Likewise, Jacob says, "**I saw God face to face**" (Gen 32:30; cf. Num 12:8; Deut 5:4)

Such statements need to be carefully interpreted in light of other Scripture concerning seeing God. For example, God tells Moses, "**you cannot see My face, for no one may see Me and live**" (Exod. 33:20). This echoes NT declarations including Christ's claim that, "**No one has seen the Father except the One who is from God; only He has seen the Father**" (John 6:46; cf. John 1:18; 1 John 4:12). Likewise, the Apostle Paul describes God as the One, "**who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see**" (1 Tim. 6:16).

We must conclude then that when Isaiah says, "**I saw the Lord**" (Isa 6:1), that it was a physical representation of the presence of God rather than a vision of the full and real essence of God. In addition, it is necessary to see the phrase "**face to face**" as "a biblical idiom for direct personal communication" and not as a literal claim to have seen the unveiled face of God. Even though Jacob says, "**I saw God face to face**" (Gen. 32:30) his encounter with God is clearly described as occurring in the form of a "**man**" (*'iysh*, male person, 32:24). Jacob's description cannot be taken to mean that he saw God's physical face and it is clear that Jacob simply used this

language to convey the intimacy that he experienced in his personal encounter with God. It is only in Heaven, after shedding mortality, that **"we shall see Him as He is"** (1 John 3:2). (2.4.10.B)

- ¹²³ For further discussion of the fact that the Apostles and Prophets received their revelation through more objective means such as visions, rather than merely "inspiration," see sections 10.7.C; chapter 8.3 and 9.5.
- ¹²⁴ Charles Ryrie, *Study Bible*, 1836, n. 13:10. In addition, there would seem to be a disconnect in Dr. Ryrie's subsequent note on 13:11 where he states "With the completion of the NT the need for such gifts disappeared." (Ibid., 1836, n. 13:11).
- ¹²⁵ Mr. Deere erroneously writes:
 If this [*historicist*] view were correct, we would have to say that "Paul saw but a poor reflection as in a mirror, but we see face to face; Paul knew in part but we know fully . . . Even though we have the completed Bible today, would anyone seriously want to argue that our knowledge and experience of God are superior to the Apostle Paul's?" (*Power*, 142).
 Deere misstates the *historicist* position again. What we are specifically stating is that we have a more completed NT revelation than Paul had in c. 51 A.D. when he wrote 1 Corinthians. Who could say whether "our knowledge and experience of God are superior"? But such a question is irrelevant to disproving the *historicist* position.
- ¹²⁶ For additional support for the idea that Paul thought a completed NT revelation would even provide him a better understanding, see Reymond, 35, n. 12; Houghton, 353.
- ¹²⁷ Compton, 142.
- ¹²⁸ Thiselton 1069.
- ¹²⁹ *NIDNTT*, 2:392, 93, 98.
- ¹³⁰ Even *Vine's Dictionary* makes the mistake of sharply distinguishing between *gnōsis* and *epi gnōsis*.
- ¹³¹ J. A. Robinson, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, 2nd ed., (James Clarke, n.d.), 248-54.
- ¹³² Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1996), 17, n. 139. The respected work of J. H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1914-19) states that "The evidence of the [ancient Greek] papyri [writings]" supports Moo's and Robinson's definition. (Part III, 236)
- ¹³³ Dr. Compton expands the context even further back to verses 10 and 11:
 Paul employs two additional analogies in 13:12 to support his argument regarding the cessation of miraculous gifts. Specifically, the explanatory "for" at the beginning of the verse indicates that the

analogies here are explaining and reinforcing the analogy in 13:11. In effect, the analogies in this and the preceding verse clarify and support Paul's argument in 13:9–10 about the coming of "the perfect" and the cessation of that which is "in part." By repeating the "now"/"but then" language in both analogies in this verse, Paul highlights the contrast in 13:9–10 between what is presently experienced "in part" and what transpires when "the perfect" comes. (Similarly Fee, 647; and Thiselton, 1067. Contra Barrett, 306; and Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, p. 80. Barrett and Thomas take 13:11 as a parenthesis and tie 13:12 directly to 3:10). (133)

- ¹³⁴ If Dr. Thomas made this one observation, and did not unnecessarily insert "God" into the text, we wonder if he might change his view. He has written:
As to I Corinthians 13:10, this brief survey of prophecy and knowledge gives plausibility to assigning the completed New Testament canon as the meaning of *to teleion*. Yet one serious drawback confronts the advocate of this viewpoint, and that is the reference in v. 12 to the condition which so obviously will be realized only at the *parousia*. Thomas, "Tongues," 82.
- ¹³⁵ Weaver, 14, 21. Author agrees with my interpretation.
- ¹³⁶ Deere, *Power*, 142, 282, n. 9.
- ¹³⁷ Carson, *Spirit*, 70; Grudem, *Prophecy*, 213.
- ¹³⁸ Fee, *1 Cor.*, 649.
- ¹³⁹ Compton, 139-40.
- ¹⁴⁰ For further support of the temporal meaning for *nuni* at 1 Corinthians 13:13 see Thomas, "Tongues," 84.
- ¹⁴¹ Fee, *Presence*, 212.
- ¹⁴² Judisch, 48.
- ¹⁴³ Tertullian, *Who is the Rich Man?*, 38; online at www.ccel.org.
- ¹⁴⁴ Chrysostom, *1 Cor. Homily*, 34:5; online at www.ccel.org.
- ¹⁴⁵ Calvin, *Comm.*, *in loc.*
- ¹⁴⁶ Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, 83–84. In Fee see *1 Cor.*, 649–51
- ¹⁴⁷ Morris, 185.
- ¹⁴⁸ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, *in loc.*; online at www.ccel.org.
- ¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*
- ¹⁵⁰ Barrett, 308-9.
- ¹⁵¹ Thiselton, 1073.

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- ¹⁵² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 5 vols., (T&T Clark, 1936-1977), 4/2 (sect. 68), 840.
- ¹⁵³ H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, trans. J. W. Leitch (1975), 230-31.
- ¹⁵⁴ C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Hendrickson, 1997), 158.
- ¹⁵⁵ Thiselton, 1073.
- ¹⁵⁶ Carson, *Spirit*, 74.
- ¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 74-75.
- ¹⁵⁸ Fee, *1 Cor.*, 650, n. 58.
- ¹⁵⁹ Thomas "Tongues," 84.
- ¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.
- ¹⁶¹ Fee, *Presence*, 213.
- ¹⁶² Morris, 184-5.

¹⁶³ This is perhaps the only place in Dr. Compton's exegesis of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 where we were a little disappointed. While he covers the rest of the passage in some detail, and comes to the same conclusion as we regarding v. 13, his discussion here is rather short. Perhaps he felt the need to bring an otherwise excellent article to an end.

Accordingly, we must go back over 30 years to find what we believe to be a complete and accurate interpretation of v. 13. Dr. Judisch correctly stated the obvious, not being biased against the *historicist* view as others would seem to be:

Verse 13 makes the point that, while prophecies, tongues, and prophetic knowledge will disappear, faith, hope, and love go on. Paul cannot be thinking then of a contrast between this life [the duration of which the three gifts endure] and the life to come [in which the three virtues endure]. For although love will go on into eternity (v. 8), faith and hope will not.

Hope in the midst of eternal bliss is a contradiction in terms, as Paul observes elsewhere: "Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (Rom. 8:24-25).

Likewise faith, because of the element of hope essential to it, is also inappropriate to the world to come. So Paul observes that while we are in the body, "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). And in a passage familiar to all, "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

The Apostle cannot mean, therefore, death or the parousia as the date at which the prophetic gifts will finally cease. Indeed, in order to make a point of the contrast between the temporary nature of the [miraculous] gifts and the relatively enduring nature of faith and hope, Paul must presuppose the disappearance of the [miraculous]

gifts a considerable time before the translation to glory of the church in general. (47-48).

¹⁶⁴ The greatly respected Reformed scholar, Sinclair Ferguson, likewise writes:

We might paraphrase I Corinthians 13:8-12 in the following way:

Love will never come to an end, since God himself is love; but special gifts like prophecy and speaking in tongues and the word of knowledge will, since they are only temporary ways in which the God of love makes himself known to us.

At the moment the knowledge of God we receive from prophecy, tongues and words of knowledge gives us only fragmentary knowledge of God. When we have the whole picture these gifts will give way - 'when perfection enters, imperfection creeps away'; 'the grown man puts away his baby toys', as they say.

Tongues, words of knowledge, prophecies - they are all like looking into the mirrors for which you Corinthians are so famous! But even a mirror with 'Made in Corinth' on it is a poor substitute for seeing (and therefore knowing) yourself as clearly as someone else can see and know you! But in the future, when we have the complete knowledge God has planned for us, we will not need to depend on these imperfect mirrors of tongues, words of knowledge and prophecy. Then we will know God completely, not merely in a fragmentary way -just as others know us.

Such a paraphrase has the merit of questioning the ease with which 'Perfection' and 'know fully, even as I am fully known' have been equated with the parousia and 'being known by God'. (*The Holy Spirit* [Intervarsity, 1996], 227-8.