

1 CORINTHIANS 13:8–13 AND THE CESSATION OF MIRACULOUS GIFTS

by
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INTRODUCTION

⁸Love 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. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part; ¹⁰but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. ¹¹When 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. ¹²For 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. ¹³But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love (1 Cor 13:8–13).²

As recent publications indicate, the debate over the present versus the future cessation of miraculous gifts continues unabated.³ Central to this

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²All Scripture references are from the NASB, 1995 edition, unless indicated otherwise.

³The following titles are representative of those published within the last ten or so years: Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993); O. Palmer Robertson, *The Final Word: A Biblical Response to the Case for Tongues and Prophecy Today* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1993); Jon Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Postbiblical Miracles* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994); Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and*

debate has been Paul's discussion of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge in 1 Corinthians 13:8–13. The two key questions addressed in this passage are the interpretation of "the perfect" in 13:10 and the point at which prophecy, tongues, and knowledge cease.

An interpretation that has enjoyed support over the years is that "the perfect" refers to the New Testament canon and that miraculous gifts ceased with the closing of the canon at the end of the first century.⁴ However, this interpretation has come under fire by representatives from both sides of the cessation issue. As one advocate for future cessation has declared, "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."⁵

Such criticisms notwithstanding, the purpose of this article is to re-examine the exegetical evidence from 1 Corinthians 13:8–13 and to defend the above interpretation, namely, that "the perfect" in 13:10 refers to the completed New Testament canon and that with the closing of the canon miraculous gifts ceased. To do this, the various views on the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:10 are surveyed to highlight the significant interpretive issues in the overall debate. Following this, the verses within the immediate context are examined in sequence in order to establish a proper interpretation of the debated constructions and to demonstrate the validity of the canon view.

Spiritual Gifts Then and Now (Exeter: Paternoster, 1996); Thomas R. Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit: Affirming the Fullness of God's Provision for Spiritual Living* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996); Christopher Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and its Hellenistic Environment* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997); Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Verse by Verse Study of 1 Corinthians 12–14*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999); Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, rev. ed. (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 2000); Craig S. Keener, *Gift and Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

⁴For proponents and a discussion of this view, see the following section.

⁵Keener, *Gift and Giver*, p. 106. See also Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts*, p. 294. Addressing the canon view, Turner states, "This position is exegetically indefensible, and is not held in serious New Testament scholarship." Richard Gaffin, a proponent of the present cessation of miraculous gifts, states, "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" (*Perspectives on Pentecost: Studies in New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1979], p. 109; idem., "A Cessationist View," in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, ed. Wayne A. Grudem [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], p. 55). This last title is part of a recent survey on contemporary views where the completed canon view is not represented.

MAJOR VIEWS

Allowing for minor differences, the views on the interpretation of “the perfect” in 1 Corinthians 13:10 may be catalogued under four headings.⁶ These are that “the perfect” refers to (1) the completed New Testament canon; (2) the spiritual maturity of the church; (3) the return of Christ, with the miraculous gifts ceasing before then; and (4) the return of Christ, with the miraculous gifts continuing until then. These views are presented below in terms of their interpretation of the key elements in the passage. Specifically, each view is discussed in terms of the nature of the gifts mentioned in 13:8, the meaning of the expression “in part” in 13:9–12, the time when these gifts cease, the illustration contrasting the activities of a child with those of an adult in 13:11, the analogies concerning seeing and knowing in 13:12, and the point of the comparison involving faith, hope, and love in 13:13.⁷

The Completed New Testament Canon

Proponents of the canon view argue that the gifts mentioned in 13:8, prophecy, tongues, and knowledge, all entail direct revelation from God. The three gifts in 13:8 are said to be “in part” or partial in the sense that each gives only a portion of the revelation God has intended for the church. Accordingly, that which is described as “the perfect” in 13:10 refers to the counterpart of the piecemeal revelation these gifts provide. In other words, “the perfect” refers to the full or complete body of revelation God intended for the church and preserved in the New Testament canon. As such, with the completion of the New Testament at the end of the apostolic era, and, thus, with “the perfect” having come, these gifts ceased.⁸

⁶Similarly Thomas R. Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts: Are They for Today?* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1983), pp. 341–44; D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), pp. 68–69; F. David Farnell, “When Will the Gift of Prophecy Cease?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (April–June 1993): 191–95; Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, pp. 194–207.

⁷Similarly Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, pp. 236–40.

⁸With minor variations, see John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit: A Comprehensive Study of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), pp. 173–88; Merrill F. Unger, *New Testament Teaching on Tongues* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1971), pp. 92–101; idem, *The Baptism and Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Chicago: 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* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1977), pp. 30–36; Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Charismatic Gift of Prophecy: A Reformed Response to Wayne Grudem*, 2nd ed. (Memphis, TN: 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*, but

The illustration in 13:11 contrasting the activities of thinking and speaking as a child with those of an adult is generally understood by advocates as contrasting the church's ability to communicate and understand revelation prior to and after the completion of the New Testament canon. Prior to the completion of the canon, those having these gifts communicated revelation in a limited or piecemeal fashion, and the church's understanding of revelation was for that reason limited as well. This would correspond to the limited thinking and speaking skills of a child. Once the canon had been completed, these limitations were removed. Adulthood having arrived, the limited communicative and cognitive skills of a child were, in effect, laid aside.⁹

The analogies of seeing and knowing in 13:12 are generally understood in a similar way. To "see in a mirror dimly" is a metaphor and refers to seeing or perceiving God's will unclearly because of limited revelation. To "see face to face," likewise a metaphor, simply means having the lack of clarity due to limited revelation removed. The full-orbed revelation of God having been given, the church is able to see clearly and distinctly the whole counsel of God intended for this age. The same may be said of the contrast in the last half of the verse between to "know in part" and to "know fully." With the completed New Testament canon, believers are able to know the revealed will of God fully and distinctly. It is as if they were able to know themselves as God (or others) knows them, that is, directly and clearly, unobstructed by the use of a mirror.¹⁰

Finally, from the perspective of the canon view, the point of 13:13 is that faith, hope, and love continue throughout the present age, in contrast to the revelatory gifts which cease with the completion of the canon. Beyond this, love is said to be the greatest of these in that it will continue on into eternity. The same is not true with faith and hope.

recognizes that the New Testament canon is a corollary of the completed revelatory process (p. 32).

Some define "the perfect" in terms of the next view, identifying "the perfect" with 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. For this reason, these are listed as supporting in principle the first view. See Robert G. Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement*, rev. ed. (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1972), pp. 122–29; Walter J. Chantry, *Signs of the Apostles: Observations on Pentecostalism Old and New*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: 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.

⁹E.g., Unger, *New Testament Teaching on Tongues*, pp. 96–97.

¹⁰E.g., Reymond, "What About Continuing Revelations Today," pp. 34–36. The consensus among supporters of the canon view takes the phrase in 13:12, "just as I also have been fully known," to mean "fully known by God." See Houghton, "A Reexamination of 1 Corinthians 13:8–13," pp. 353–55.

When Christ returns, faith in Christ is replaced with seeing Christ, while hope in the promises of God is replaced by the realization of those promises. Thus, 13:13 reinforces the point made at the outset of the passage in 13:8 where the apostle declares that “love never fails.” Unlike the revelatory gifts which cease with the completion of the canon, and unlike even faith and hope which cease with the return of Christ, love never ceases.¹¹

The Spiritual Maturity of the Church

Advocates of the maturity view take prophecy, tongues, and knowledge in 13:8 in roughly the same way as the previous 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. The expression “in part” refers to the knowledge provided by these gifts, however, rather than the revelation upon which it is based. 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. It should be noted that this view is heavily influenced in its definition of the “perfect” from Ephesians 4:1–16. There Paul describes the growth of the church from its initial, childhood level to its adult or mature level, the latter described by the expression “perfect,” the same word used here in 13:10.¹²

The illustration contrasting the activities of thinking and speaking as a child with those of an adult in 13:11 is generally understood by advocates as something of a parenthesis. While the verses before and after depict the maturity of the church in terms of its ultimate end, 13:11 views the church’s maturity as a process involving several stages.

¹¹E.g., Houghton, “A Reexamination of 1 Corinthians 13:8–13,” pp. 355–56.

¹²With minor variations, see Joseph Dillow, *Speaking in Tongues: Seven Crucial Questions* (Grand Rapids: 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.

The specific stage in view with this verse is that attained by the church with the completion of the New Testament writings.

Paul knows that when the Lord returns, the church will attain its final state of maturity and knowledge. He also understands that with the completion of the New Testament canon a significant milestone will be reached in the life of the church in these same areas. Not knowing if the Lord's return and the completion of the canon will coincide, Paul addresses the issue of the canon here in case this event precedes the Lord's return. Speaking, thinking, and reasoning as a child represent the initial level of the church's knowledge and maturity provided by the revelatory gifts. Engaging in these same mental and verbal activities as an adult represents the increased level of knowledge and maturity the church attains with the completion of the canon.¹³

The analogies of seeing and knowing in 13:12 are generally taken as contrasting the initial, limited level of the church's maturity with its ultimate level gained in connection with the Lord's return. To "see in a mirror dimly" refers to the limited level of knowledge and maturity that is available for the church based on the revelatory gifts. To "see face to face" and to "know fully" both refer to the final state of knowledge and maturity the church will enjoy when it stands in Christ's presence.¹⁴ Lastly, adherents generally understand 13:13 in the same way as the canon view. Faith, hope, and love continue in the present age, in contrast to the revelatory gifts which cease with the completion of the New Testament canon. Love, nevertheless, is the greatest in that it continues after the Lord returns whereas faith and hope do not.¹⁵

The Return of Christ; Miraculous Gifts Ceasing Before Then

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 previous 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 previous 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

¹³E.g., Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, pp. 80–82. Contra Dillow, *Speaking in Tongues*, p. 132, and McDougall, "Cessationism in 1 Cor 13:8–12," pp. 209–13. Both take "the perfect" in 13:10 as referring specifically to the relative level of maturity the church reaches with the closing of the New Testament canon rather than to the final level of maturity at the return of Christ.

¹⁴E.g., Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, pp. 82–83.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 83–84.

and imperfect.

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.¹⁶

In 13:11, the contrast between speaking, thinking, and reasoning as a child with that of an adult is seen as essentially contrasting the level of knowing God before Christ returns with the level of knowing God after Christ returns. Before Christ returns, the church’s knowledge of God and its communication of that knowledge are both partial and imperfect. After Christ returns, these deficiencies are removed. The same may be said of the analogies of seeing and knowing in 13:12. Before Christ returns, the church is limited in its ability to see and know God, due largely to the inherent limitations of the revelation it has received. But with the return of Christ and the gathering of the church to Christ, limited sight will be replaced by the presence of Christ, and imperfect knowledge will be replaced by full and complete knowledge. At that time, the church will see God face to face and know Him as they are

¹⁶With 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 Cessationist View,” pp. 55–56; George W. Knight III, *Prophecy in the New Testament* (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage, 1988), pp. 21–22, n. 12; R. Fowler White, “Richard Gaffin and Wayne Grudem on 1 Cor 13:10: A Comparison of Cessationist and Noncessationist 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.

known by Him, that is, clearly, directly, fully.¹⁷

The point of 13:13, according to this view, is not that the church's imperfect knowledge ceases at the return of Christ, while faith, hope, and love continue beyond this. The point is that these three characteristics abide in the present age together with the church's imperfect knowledge. Furthermore, faith and hope point forward to the time of Christ's returns when faith will be replaced by sight and hope in the promises of God will be supplanted by the fulfillment of those promises. Love, by way of contrast, is the greatest of these three in that it alone continues into eternity.¹⁸

The Return of Christ; Miraculous Gifts Continuing Until Then

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 represent only a portion of what can be known of God. Furthermore, the truth that is received by those gifted may not be fully understood or 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 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 previous 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. When the church stands before Christ, incomplete revelation involving the revelatory gifts will be replaced by complete revelation, and imperfect knowledge with full and complete knowledge. As such, proponents argue that the revelatory gifts continue until Christ returns.¹⁹

¹⁷E.g., Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost*, p. 110.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 111–12.

¹⁹The description of this view is taken primarily from Grudem, who speaks only

of prophecy as involving divine revelation. See *The Gift of Prophecy*, pp. 100–103, 113–17, 227–52, 293–302, 324–27; idem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), pp. 1049–61, 1069–82. See also Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, pp. 38, 66–76. Carson appears to include the gift of knowledge within the revelatory category and defines “the perfect” more precisely as the “state of affairs” brought about by the return of Christ (p. 69). The integrity of the New Testament canon is not threatened by this ongoing revelation, supporters argue. As mentioned above, the revelation from these gifts is imperfectly understood and/or communicated by the recipients and, as a consequence, its proclamation lacks divine authority. Hence, the revelation from these gifts is not on a par with Scripture. See Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, pp. 160–65; Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, pp. 243–45; C. Storms, “A Third Wave View,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, ed. Wayne A. Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) pp. 207–12.

Fee follows a similar line of argument. Like Grudem, Fee views the contrast between the partial and the perfect to include both the gifts and the church’s knowledge based on these gifts. And he understands the contrast as involving both qualitative and quantitative dimensions, describing the message from these gifts as incomplete (quantitative) and indirect (qualitative), but not distorted. Unlike Grudem, he sees only one kind of prophecy in the New Testament, which he equates with Old Testament prophecy, and he takes all three gifts as revelatory, involving Spirit-inspired utterances. See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 591–99, 641–52.

Fee’s interpretation raises the question as to the relationship between these ongoing revelatory gifts and the canon of Scripture (see Gaffin, “A Cessationist View,” pp. 44–48). While Fee does not appear to address this question, at least directly, others within the same Pentecostal/Charismatic context do. Oss, for example, states that “Pentecostals have never elevated miraculous gifts (including utterance gifts) to the level of canon (inerrant revelation with full divine authority).” See Douglas A. Oss, “A Pentecostal/Charismatic View,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, ed. Wayne A. Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p. 279. What Oss fails to explain is how the ongoing gift of New Testament prophecy, which ostensibly is identical to the gift of Old Testament prophecy that was preserved in the canon, falls short of canonical status. Or, as he puts it, “Can something that is inspired of God be less than canon?” In answering “yes,” Oss argues that the ongoing revelatory gifts are mediated through fallible human agencies, rendering the revelation they communicate different from that mediated through infallible biblical authors. See Oss, “A Pentecostal/Charismatic Response,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, ed. Wayne A. Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp. 91–93; idem, “A Pentecostal/Charismatic Conclusion,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, ed. Wayne A. Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp. 313–14. If that be the case, then in what sense can these ongoing revelations be described as “inspired?” See Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., “A Cessationist Response,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, ed. Wayne A. Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp. 292–94, 337–39.

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.

The contrast in 13:11 between the activities of a child and those of an adult serve to illustrate the contrast in the kinds of revelation and knowledge the church has before and after the return of Christ. Before Christ returns, the church's knowledge of God and the revelation upon which it is based are partial and imperfect. When Christ returns, these partial and imperfect methods of communicating and knowing are rendered obsolete and inoperative. The analogies of seeing and knowing in 13:12 are taken in a similar way. Prior to the return of Christ the church is limited in its ability to see and know God, because of the inherent limitations of the revelatory gifts. But when Christ returns to gather His church, limited sight will be replaced with the personal presence of Christ, and imperfect knowledge will be replaced with full, clear, and complete knowledge.²⁰

Proponents are divided on the interpretation of 13:13. Some have interpreted 13:13 as following in sequence the events surrounding the return of Christ depicted in 13:12. To say that the three virtues, faith, hope, and love, abide means that all three virtues continue after the return of Christ and the cessation of the gifts. In this case, the supremacy of love to the other virtues is qualitative, not temporal in that all three virtues abide or continue throughout eternity.²¹ Others have interpreted the three virtues of faith, hope, and love in 13:13 as abiding in the present age, with only love continuing into the future following the return of Christ.²²

EXEGETICAL SURVEY OF 1 CORINTHIANS 13:8–13

Having presented the major views on the identification of “the perfect” in 1 Corinthians 13:10, the key exegetical issues from the surrounding verses are addressed in order to arrive at a proper interpretation of the debated constructions. Specifically, the salient questions raised from 1 Corinthians 13:8–13 in the discussion of the various views are examined in sequence, beginning with a brief analysis of the theme and argument of the passage within the larger section.

Theme and Argument

Chapter 13 is located within a larger section, 12:1–14:40, where Paul addresses the issue of spiritual gifts. Paul introduces this theme in 12:1, “Now concerning spiritual *gifts*,” with a construction he employs elsewhere in the epistle to address questions the Corinthians had raised

²⁰E.g., Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, pp. 230–33.

²¹E.g., Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, pp. 72–75.

²²E.g., Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 649–51.

in a previous correspondence.²³ At the same time, the impression gained from reading these chapters is that Paul is responding not only to questions raised by the Corinthian church but also to problems within the church on the use or misuse of spiritual gifts. Thus, in these chapters Paul is both answering questions and endeavoring to correct problems within the Corinthian church on the matter of spiritual gifts.²⁴

The general development of Paul's argument in these chapters appears fairly straightforward. Paul begins in chapter 12 by discussing the diversity of spiritual gifts and the unity of believers in the body of Christ. Chapter 13 stresses the importance of love in the exercise of spiritual gifts. Paul then concludes in chapter 14 by arguing, first, for the preeminence of prophecy over tongues in edifying the church and, second, for orderliness in public worship.²⁵ Looking specifically at chapter 13 and Paul's discussion on the importance of love, Paul develops his argument in three sections. He starts in 13:1–3 by showing the necessity of love in the exercise of spiritual gifts. Following this, he gives an extended description of the nature and character of love in 13:4–7. Then, in 13:8–13, he concludes by underscoring the permanence of love.²⁶

²³The new section is marked off by the phrase “now concerning” (περὶ δέ) and the vocative “brethren” (ἀδελφοί) at the beginning of 12:1. The phrase “now concerning” is used by Paul to address issues the Corinthians had raised in a previous letter to the apostle (cf. 7:1; 8:1; 16:1). The plural substantival adjective “spiritual” (τῶν πνευματικῶν) in 12:1 could be either masculine, “those who are spiritual,” or neuter, “spiritual gifts.” The majority of interpreters take it as the latter in light of the overall emphasis in the section on gifts, the clear instance of the neuter plural in 14:1 referring to spiritual gifts, and the parallel use of the synonym “gifts” (χαρισμάτων) in 12:4 and elsewhere. See the discussion in Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 570, 575–76.

²⁴As Fee notes, “On the basis of chap. 12 alone, one might think that they were asking questions about spiritual gifts; but chap. 14 indicates that, as throughout the letter, Paul's answer is intended to be *corrective*, not instructional or informational” (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 570).

²⁵Similarly Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 569–74. For recent treatment of these chapters from literary and rhetorical analysis, including bibliographies, see Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), pp. 441–44; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 902–7. A number of these studies have identified a macro-chiasm for this section. Paul lays the foundation for his response in 12:1–30 by addressing both the diversity of gifts and the unity of believers (A); he turns aside for a moment in something of a digression in 13:1–13 to develop the necessity of love in relationship to the gifts (B); he returns to his argument in 14:1–40 by discussing the importance of mutual edification and the need for proper order in the exercise of the gifts (A'). See the discussion in Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 571–72.

²⁶See, for example, C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the*

1 Corinthians 13:8

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

Paul develops his argument in 13:8–13 along two lines. His first line of argument establishes the permanence and preeminence of love. He does this by developing a second line of argument which shows the temporary nature of miraculous gifts. Of the two lines, Paul spends most of his time proving the temporary nature of these gifts; he mentions the permanence of love only at the outset and at the end of the passage. Yet his emphasis on the temporary nature of the miraculous gifts is intended to reinforce the permanence and value of love. Thus, the primacy of love is demonstrated in that love is permanent, and the miraculous gifts are not.²⁷

At the same time, there is an underlying polemical tone to Paul's argument in this section. Paul's emphasis on the temporary nature of miraculous gifts suggests that the Corinthian believers were elevating the miraculous gifts and especially tongues to enhance their own stature and to demonstrate their spiritual maturity. Paul counters this misunderstanding by pointing out the temporary nature of these gifts in contrast to the permanence of love. The implication from all of this appears evident. Because it is both permanent and primary, love is the true gauge of spiritual maturity and directs how the temporary should be exercised.²⁸

The Nature of the Gifts

Two issues need to be addressed in this verse in light of the current debate. The first is to identify the nature of the gifts mentioned. Although some argue to the contrary, the evidence from the immediate and larger contexts argues for taking prophecy, tongues, and knowledge

Corinthians, Harper's NT Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 299; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 627–28. Some include 12:31b in the first section of the chapter and separate 13:13 from the preceding verses to form a separate section. See W. Harold Mare, *1 Corinthians*, in vol. 10 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), p. 267. For recent discussion on the specific genre and structure of chapter thirteen, see Collins, *First Corinthians*, pp. 471–73, 483–85; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 1027–32 (including bibliography); David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), pp. 606–8.

²⁷Similarly Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 641–42.

²⁸Similarly F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, New Century Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 117; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 641–42.

as revelatory gifts, communicating special or direct revelation from God, and as having divine authority.²⁹ Furthermore, these three gifts represent the miraculous gifts Paul listed earlier in 12:8–10.³⁰ Paul divides the gifts in 12:8–10 into three groupings by using a different word for “another” (ἕτερος) 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.³¹ The common denominator among the miraculous gifts is that all involve either the giving of divine revelation or the authenticating of divine revelation. This statement is based, in part, on such passages as 2 Corinthians 12:12 and Hebrews 2:3 that associate the miraculous gifts with authenticating the message and/or messengers of special revelation. This is not to suggest that the only purpose or function of miraculous gifts was authentication, only that this was their principal function. As such, when their primary function was fulfilled, regardless of how many other benefits they may have provided, it is consistent to argue that the miraculous gifts ceased.³² An examination of the three gifts in 13:8 corroborates this definition.

Prophecy. This gift is variously referred to in these chapters as “prophecy”/“prophesies” (12:10; 13:2, 8; 14:6, 22), “prophets” (12:28–29; 14:29, 37), or “prophesy”/“prophesies” (13:9; 14:1, 3–4, 5, 23, 31, 39). The nominal forms describing the message or the human agent are indiscriminately interchanged with the verbal forms describing the activity. The revelatory nature of the gift in 1 Corinthians 13:8, that is, that it involves special, direct revelation from God, is generally conceded by all sides in the cessation debate, and rightly so.³³ In the nearer

²⁹For a definition and discussion of special revelation, see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), pp. 201–23; and Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp. 95–127. Erickson defines special revelation as “God’s manifestation of himself to particular persons at definite times and places...” (p. 201). Discussing the modality of special revelation involving divine speech mediated through individuals, he describes this as “direct communication of truth from God” (p. 215).

³⁰On the miraculous nature of the gifts in 12:8–10, see Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 91; contra Carson who sees a mixture of natural and supernatural gifts (*Showing the Spirit*, p. 37).

³¹Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 591.

³²See the extended discussion in Robert L. Saucy, “An Open but Cautious View,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, ed. Wayne A. Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp. 100–126, 227–29, 232–33; contra Storms, “A Third Wave View,” pp. 190–95, 218–20, 320–21.

³³For discussion of prophetic activity within the larger context of the first century, see David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 189–231.

context alone, Paul links prophecy with knowing divine mysteries in 13:2 and with receiving divine revelation in 14:29–31.

What is not conceded by all is the inerrancy and divine authority of this prophecy. Grudem, representing the fourth view above, argues that the New Testament identifies two kinds of prophets: apostolic and non-apostolic prophets. Revelation from apostolic prophets, like that from Old Testament prophets, was both inerrant and divinely authoritative. Revelation from non-apostolic prophets, on the other hand, was neither. It is the non-apostolic prophecy, says Grudem, that Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians 12–14.³⁴

Grudem's thesis rests principally on three arguments. The *first* is that the New Testament distinguishes between inerrant apostolic prophets and errant non-apostolic prophets. The key text for this argument is Ephesians 2:20 and the statement describing the readers as God's household "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets."³⁵ The expression "the apostles and prophets" is a plural Granville

³⁴Grudem states that "prophecy in ordinary New Testament churches was not equal to Scripture in authority but was simply a very human—and sometimes partially mistaken—report of something the Holy Spirit brought to someone's mind" (*The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 18). Elsewhere he adds, "The distinction I...am attempting to make here...is only at one point: the type of authority that attaches to the words spoken in a prophecy. When the prophecy is spoken (or written) by an apostle, then the words have unique authority—absolute divine authority.... But such absolute authority simply does not apply to the words of ordinary prophets in local New Testament congregations" (p. 48).

Regarding the gift of prophecy in 1 Cor 12–14, Grudem concludes, "Paul thought of prophecy at Corinth as something quite different from the prophecy we see, for instance, in Revelation or in many parts of the Old Testament. There, a divine authority of actual words is claimed by or on behalf of the prophets. But the prophecy we find in 1 Corinthians, while it may have been prompted by a 'revelation' from God, had only the authority of the merely human words in which it was spoken. The prophet could err, could misinterpret, and could be questioned or challenged at any point" (*ibid.*, p. 69).

³⁵On several occasions Grudem protests that Eph 2:20 is not critical to his argument (*The Gift of Prophecy*, pp. 13, 307–9, 344–45). However, in his own words, Grudem conveys the significance of this passage for his position, "Some have argued that Ephesians 2:20 shows what all New Testament prophets were like, and, furthermore, that the unique 'foundational' role of the prophets in Ephesians 2:20 means that they could speak with authority equal to the apostles and equal to Scripture.... This is an important question, because if everyone with the gift of prophecy in the New Testament church did have this kind of absolute divine authority, then we would expect this gift to die out as soon as the writings of the New Testament were completed and given to the churches" (*ibid.*, pp. 45–46; see also p. 330).

Grudem adds a disclaimer, though. Even if the prophets in Eph 2:20 are equal to the apostles in authority, he would simply postulate a third category of ordinary, congregational prophets who do not share in this level of authority. In other words, Grudem would respond by saying that what Paul declares about prophets in Eph 2:20 would not apply to prophets elsewhere in the New Testament. The problem with Grudem's response is that Paul is discussing the function of apostles and prophets

Sharp construction involving two nouns preceded by a single article, the two nouns joined with a simple conjunction.³⁶ Grudem is reluctant to allow for two groups in Ephesians 2:20, apostles *and* prophets, because those referred to in this verse are said to lay the foundation for the church, a foundation, Grudem recognizes, that culminates in the New Testament canon. The tension for Grudem is that he wants to maintain the inerrancy of the foundation here and, at the same time, hold that New Testament prophets were errant. His solution is to interpret the expression in this verse as referring to a single group, “apostolic prophets.” By interpreting the expression in this way, Grudem is able to distinguish these prophets from the ordinary, non-apostolic prophets mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. Thus, according to Grudem, it is only apostolic prophecy that is involved in laying the revelatory foundation for the church and, therefore, is inerrant and divinely authoritative; ordinary, non-apostolic prophecy is neither.³⁷

The problem with Grudem’s interpretation is that nowhere else in the New Testament does this precise construction involving two plural nouns refer to a single group. The two options that are attested for this specific construction are either that “apostles and prophets” refers to two distinct groups or that “apostles” is a subset of the second, larger group “prophets.” In either case, the two groups are distinguished, not

within the context of the universal church, as even Grudem acknowledges (*ibid.*, p. 338). Thus, despite Grudem’s disclaimer, the implication is that what Paul says of the prophetic gift here would be true of the gift elsewhere.

³⁶Granville Sharp, *Remarks on the Definitive Article in the Greek Text of the New Testament: Containing Many New Proofs of the Divinity of Christ from Passages Which are Wrongly Translated in the Common English Version*, 3rd ed. (Durham, UK: Vernor and Hood, 1803), pp. 3–19. Sharp’s first rule is that when this construction involves personal, common, singular substantives in the same case, the two substantives always refer to the same person (p. 3). He further notes, however, that if the substantives are plural, then there are numerous exceptions (p. 6). See also Daniel B. Wallace, “The Semantic Range of the Article-Noun-Kai-Noun Plural Construction in the New Testament,” *Grace Theological Journal* 4 (Spring 1983): 59–84; *idem*, “The Article with Multiple Substantives Connected by KAI in the New Testament: Semantics and Significance” (Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1995), pp. 136–60; *idem*, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp. 270–90.

³⁷Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, pp. 329–46. Eph 3:5 is generally included in this discussion in that it has the identical construction found in 2:20. Grudem lists four possible translations for the phrase “the foundation of the apostles and prophets” in 2:20. The phrase could mean that the “foundation” was (1) “the apostles and the *Old Testament prophets*”; (2) “the *teaching* of the apostles and *New Testament prophets*”; (3) “the apostles and *New Testament prophets* themselves”; (4) the “*apostle-prophets* themselves (that is, the apostles who are also prophets).” He opts for the fourth, saying at the outset of his discussion, “I will argue...that Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5 is talking not about two groups of people, apostles and prophets, but about one group, ‘apostle-prophets’” (p. 330).

equated.³⁸ In all fairness, however, it must be granted that variations of this construction involving other than two plural nouns are found in the New Testament to refer to a single group. So, it is possible that the precise construction in Ephesians 2:20 could be translated as Grudem does.³⁹ Nevertheless, the grammatical evidence renders this option suspect. Instead, the evidence from the New Testament, as noted above, favors taking the expression as referring to two groups, apostles and prophets, both engaged in laying the revelatory foundation for the church that culminated in the New Testament canon. If the canon be inerrant and divinely authoritative, as Grudem argues, then so must be the revelatory ministries of both groups that contributed to laying that foundation. Consequently, the grammatical evidence weighs against Grudem's translation and effectively counters this argument.⁴⁰

The *second* argument Grudem uses is that the New Testament directs believers to test or evaluate the prophet's message in order to sort out the good from the bad. Such directives, Grudem declares, are in conflict with the concept of inerrant prophecy that carries divine authority and which characterized Old Testament prophecy. Grudem recognizes that there are requirements in the Old Testament to test the prophets and that there are similar requirements in the New Testament. In these cases, he argues, the requirements are levied for the purpose of

³⁸Wallace identifies five possible semantic categories for this construction involving substantives: (1) two entirely distinct groups, though united; (2) two overlapping groups; (3) first group as a subset of the second; (4) second group as subset of the first; (5) two identical groups ("The Semantic Range of the Article-Noun-Kai-Noun Plural Construction in the New Testament," pp. 67–70). Although Grudem must argue that Eph 2:20 fits the fifth or identical category, Wallace states, "In both clear and ambiguous texts there were *no* noun + noun constructions belonging to the identical group" (*ibid.*, p. 81). For this precise construction involving two nouns, Wallace lists two possibilities—two distinct groups or the first a subset of the second—and opts for the latter in Eph 2:20 and 3:5 (*ibid.*, p. 82). See also *idem*, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, pp. 284–86, including bibliography.

³⁹The closest constructions referring to a single group are those with two substantival adjectives (e.g., Eph 1:1) or the combination of a substantival adjective joined with a noun (e.g., Rom 16:7). However, none of the examples Grudem lists in support of taking the construction in Eph 2:20 as a single group involves two nouns. A passage that involves two plural nouns is the expression "some pastors and teachers" found in Eph 4:11. Although Grudem attempts to use this passage to support his interpretation of Eph 2:20, his interpretation here faces the same challenges as his interpretation of Eph 2:20 and 3:5. See Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, pp. 333–46. For rebuttal, see the comments by Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 284.

⁴⁰Responding to Grudem's arguments on Eph 2:20, Wallace concludes, "We must refrain from entering into the larger issues of the charismata and fallible prophecy in our treatment of this text. Our point is simply that the syntactical evidence is very much against the 'identical' view, even though syntax has been the primary grounds used in behalf of it" (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 285).

discerning the true prophet from the false. Grudem adds, however, that there are other commands in the New Testament, not found in the Old Testament, that call for sorting through individual prophecies to separate what is of value from what is not. He concludes from this that ordinary New Testament prophecy contains a mixture of truth and error. As such, it lacks divine authority and is distinct from Old Testament prophecy.⁴¹

The principal passage used by Grudem in defense of this argument is 1 Corinthians 14:29. There Paul commands, “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.” According to Grudem, the directive “pass judgment” means that the members of the congregation in Corinth were to sift through the content of individual prophecies to distinguish what was true from what was false.⁴² Grudem’s interpretation of this verse is based on the context of the passage and on the verb Paul employs. The context, Grudem argues, has in view prophets who are members of the Corinthian congregation and who have already been approved by the congregation as true prophets. Thus, Paul is not directing the congregation to pass judgment on these prophets. Rather, Paul is proscribing a scrutiny of each prophecy to glean that which is accurate and profitable from that which is not.⁴³ The verb Paul uses, Grudem adds, supports this understanding of the verse. It is a compound form that carries the idea of “making distinctions” or “carefully evaluating,” weighing an item to distinguish the good from the bad. Had Paul intended with this verse a testing of the prophets themselves to discern the true from the false, Grudem declares, the simple form of the verb meaning “to judge” would have been employed, rather than the compounded form Paul uses.⁴⁴

In response, neither the context of the passage nor the verb used by Paul clearly supports Grudem’s interpretation. Grudem acknowledges that for a prophet to be accepted as a true prophet in the New Testament, his or her prophecies would first be examined—as was the case in the Old Testament. Were their prophecies found to be true, that is, nothing false or out of harmony with God’s Word, then that prophet

⁴¹Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, pp. 54–62. The two passages frequently discussed regarding the testing of Old Testament prophets are Deut 13:1–5 and 18:15–22.

⁴²The question of whether those evaluating the prophecies in 1 Cor 14:29 were (1) other prophets, (2) those with the gift of discernment, or (3) the entire congregation, does not appear critical. Even if it were concluded that those doing the evaluating in 1 Cor 14:29 were limited to certain individuals, passages such as 1 Thess 5:20–21 clearly expand the responsibility to include the entire congregation. See the discussion in Grudem, who argues that the evaluation in 1 Cor 14:29 is the responsibility of the entire congregation (*The Gift of Prophecy*, pp. 54–57).

⁴³Ibid., pp. 58–59.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 59–62. The compound verb is διακρίνω; the simple verb is κρίνω.

would be recognized as a true prophet.⁴⁵ That being so, how is it that, once approved, a true prophet could then speak that which was false? In other words, if conformity to divine truth is the criterion for judging a true prophet, then, by definition, a true prophet cannot prophesy that which is false and still be classified a true prophet. Grudem cannot have it both ways.

Furthermore, the verb Paul employs has a wide semantic range, as Grudem recognizes. While it can carry the sense that Grudem gives it in 1 Corinthians 14:29, that of examining something where there are several options, it can also have the sense of examining something where only two options are in view. Paul uses it in the latter sense in 1 Corinthians 4:7 of judging one person superior to another, and in 11:29 of a failure to distinguish the proper use or purpose of the Lord's Supper from an improper one.⁴⁶ Thus, the verb in 1 Corinthians 14:29 could easily refer to distinguishing a true prophet from a false prophet

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 24–25, 58–61. Grudem recognizes that Old Testament prophets were tested to determine the true from the false: “So what we find in the Old Testament is that every *prophet* is judged or evaluated, but not the various parts of every *prophecy*. The people ask, ‘Is this a true prophet or not? Is he speaking God’s words or not?’ They never ask, ‘Which parts of this prophecy are true and which are false? Which parts are good and which are bad?’ For one bit of falsehood would disqualify the whole prophecy and would show the prophet to be a false prophet” (p. 24).

As well, Grudem recognizes that there are passages in the New Testament that call believers to test the prophets to discern the true from the false. Contrasting these passages with 1 Cor 14:29, he says, “The other passages give warnings of strangers coming to the church *from outside* (Matt 7:15; 1 John 4:1, 3; note also *Didache* 11.5, 6) and provide criteria by which they could be tested” (p. 58). In describing the nature of this criterion, he adds, “Elsewhere in the New Testament, the criterion for evaluation of public speech in the churches seems always to have been conformity to Scripture or received teaching (Acts 17:11; 1 Cor 14:37–38; Gal 1:8; 1 John 4:2–3, 6), and we expect that that would be the standard used here [1 Cor 14:29] as well” (p. 61). But Grudem’s argument is problematic. If the criteria for discerning a true prophet from a false prophet be conformity to Scripture or received teaching—a true prophet is one whose prophecies conform—how is it that a prophet once approved could then prophesy that which did not conform to Scripture or received teaching?

Whatever contribution the *Didache* and others of this genre offer for understanding New Testament prophecy is mitigated by the fact that they are post-apostolic, non-canonical, and the normative nature of their teaching is contested. For discussion, see F. David Farnell, “The Current Debate about New Testament Prophecy,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (July–September 1992): 284–88; idem, “Does the New Testament Teach Two Prophetic Gifts?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (January–March 1993): 66–72; Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, pp. 87–88.

⁴⁶*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. “διακρίνω,” by Friedrich Büchsel, 3:946–47. Commenting on its use in the New Testament, Büchsel states, “In the NT it does not occur in its original spatial sense, only in the fig. ‘To make a distinction between persons’” (3:946). In this category with the active voice, he includes Acts 11:12 (assuming the active voice is read); 15:9; 1 Cor 4:7; 11:29; and 14:29. See also Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, pp. 80–81.

by weighing the accuracy of each prophecy. This is precisely how the cognate noun is used in 1 Corinthians 12:10, where the idea is that of discerning between true and false prophets based on the content of their prophecies.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Grudem points to 1 Thessalonians 5:20–21, “Do not despise prophetic utterances, but examine everything *carefully*,” as the key parallel in support of his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:29. Yet the verb used in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 is the same verb used in 1 John 4:1 where John says, “Test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” And, Grudem places this latter passage in the category of testing the prophets to judge the true from the false.⁴⁸

In light of all of this, it is difficult to see how the testing in 1 Corinthians 14:29 is any different from what is found elsewhere in the New Testament or from what was required of Old Testament prophecy. The reason and need for these tests, whether in the Old Testament or in the New, is the presence of false prophets. The requirement to test the prophets in the Old Testament does not suggest that true prophets were either fallible or lacking divine authority. It only demonstrates that there were false prophets who were claiming to be true prophets of God and who needed to be exposed. The same problem of false prophets is found in the New Testament, and the call to test the prophets simply confirms that fact.

The *third* argument Grudem employs is that there are instances in Acts where prophets prophesied something that is not true. Central to this argument is the prophecy recorded in Acts 21:11. In Acts 21:10–11 a prophet named Agabus warns Paul about the dangers awaiting the apostle in Jerusalem, declaring to Paul that the words of his warning are the words of the Holy Spirit. Grudem, denying the accuracy and authority of ordinary New Testament prophecy, argues that the warning from Agabus contains errors. Specifically, Agabus says that the Jews would bind Paul and deliver him to the Gentiles, whereas, Grudem argues, it is the Gentiles who actually bind the apostle, not the Jews. Furthermore, the Jews do not hand Paul over to the Romans; the Romans forcefully take Paul away from the Jews. Because of this and despite that fact that Agabus attributes his words to the Holy Spirit, Grudem concludes that the prophecy must not be taken as inerrant and

⁴⁷See the discussion in Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 596–97, 693–94. Commenting on the expression “let the others pass judgment,” Fee states, “This latter item is the verb for ‘distinguishing between spirits’ in 12:10 (q.v.). As noted there, this is probably to be understood as a form of ‘testing the spirits,’ but not so much in the sense of whether ‘the prophet’ is speaking by a foreign spirit but whether the prophecy itself truly conforms to the Spirit of God, who is also indwelling the other believers” (p. 693).

⁴⁸The verb in both verses is the present imperative δοκιμάζετε.

divinely authoritative communication.⁴⁹

In response, Acts 21:11 can be interpreted in such a way that no such errors are found. The prophecy by Agabus may be taken as accurate, if it is allowed that the Jews in Jerusalem are the ultimate cause of Paul's incarceration by the Gentiles. In other words, it is the actions of the Jews against Paul that ultimately lead the Gentile authorities to incarcerate the apostle.⁵⁰ This interpretation appears to be the very one that Paul himself endorses in Acts 28:17. In explaining to the Jews in Rome the circumstances behind his arrest, Paul says, "I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans." Although Paul does not say specifically who it was that delivered him, the larger context argues that it was the violent treatment by the Jews in Jerusalem that resulted in Paul's being taken into custody by the Romans (cf. Acts 21:30–33; 24:6; 26:21).⁵¹

Assuming for the moment Grudem's distinction between apostolic and non-apostolic prophets, Grudem's interpretation means that Paul,

⁴⁹Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, pp. 77–83, 286, 310. Of the examples Grudem identifies in support of this argument, he spends the majority of his time developing his point from this passage. Commenting on the prophecy by Agabus, Grudem declares, "The events of the narrative itself do not coincide with the kind of accuracy that the Old Testament requires for those who speak God's words. In fact, by Old Testament standards, Agabus would have been condemned as a false prophet, because in Acts 21:27–35 neither of his predictions are [*sic*] fulfilled" (p. 78).

⁵⁰See, for example, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1998), p. 689. Commenting on the voice of the verbs, Wallace states, "Paul was not, strictly speaking, *bound* by the Jews, but by the Romans because a riot was breaking out in the temple over Paul. And he was not, strictly speaking, *handed over* by the Jews to the Romans, but was in fact arrested and later protected by the Romans because of the Jewish plot to kill him. What are we to say of this prophecy? Only that because of the Jews' *actions* Paul was bound and handed over to the Gentiles. They were the unwitting cause, but the cause nevertheless" (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 412).

⁵¹Similarly, F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 2nd ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 505; John B. Polhill, *Acts*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992), p. 539. See also Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, pp. 81–83. Grudem attempts to distance Paul's explanation of the events of his arrest in Acts 28:17 from the prophecy by Agabus. He argues that Paul is describing his subsequent transfer into the Roman judicial system, not his original incarceration in Jerusalem. Thus, says Grudem, Paul's explanation and the prophecy by Agabus are not addressing the same event (*The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 310). But Grudem's explanation is difficult to square with the other accounts recorded in Acts of Paul's initial arrest. Describing to Felix the account of Paul's arrest in Acts 24:6–7, the Jewish lawyer Tertullus, representing the Jewish authorities from Jerusalem, states, "Then we arrested him. [We wanted to judge him according to our own Law. But Lysias the commander came along and with much violence took him out of our hands]." Furthermore, in Acts 26:21, Paul himself reports the account of his arrest to Agrippa and Felix, saying, "For this reason *some* Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death."

an apostolic prophet, must be in error as well. However, the prophecy by Agabus, when combined with Paul's later interpretation, supports both the accuracy and the authority of this prophecy as representing the very words of God's Spirit. The formula Agabus uses to introduce his prophecy, "This is what the Holy Spirit says," is fully consistent with this conclusion.⁵² In that this passage is Grudem's chief example of errant New Testament prophecy, he has failed to make his case. Consequently, there is no compelling evidence that New Testament prophecy is different from Old Testament prophecy. As such, New Testament prophecy is nothing less than inerrant and fully authoritative.

Tongues. This gift is variously called "kinds of tongues" (12:10, 28), "to speak in tongues"/"a tongue" (14:2, 4–6, 13, 18, 23, 27, 39), or simply "tongues" or "tongue" (13:8; 14:22, 26). The consensus in the current debate is that to "speak in tongues" means speaking direct revelation in a language unknown to the one speaking. All references to this gift in the New Testament fit this definition.⁵³ The question whether the language spoken is a human language, an angelic or heavenly language, or an unintelligible language does not materially affect the issue of cessation. Assuming there is essential continuity between the references to the gift of tongues in Acts (cf. 2:4, 6, 8, 11; 10:46; 19:6) and in 1 Corinthians 12–14, the evidence points to human languages. Luke specifically identifies the "tongues" in Acts 2:6, 8 as human languages; he links the "tongues" in Acts 10 directly to the "tongues" in Acts 2

⁵²Grudem recognizes the difficulty this formula represents for his position. He offers three possible explanations and opts for taking the formula to mean "not that the very words of the prophecy were from the Holy Spirit but only that the content generally had been revealed by the Spirit." Yet in taking this option, he admits, "The problem with this solution is that the phrase...is used frequently in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) to introduce the words of the Lord in the Old Testament prophets ('Thus says the Lord...')." He attempts to mitigate this admission by adding that the exact words used, "Thus says the Holy Spirit," are never elsewhere used to preface Old Testament prophetic speech. He concludes from this that the formula does not necessarily introduce the very words of God (*The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 82). His conclusion, based on the distinction between "thus says the Lord" and "thus says the Holy Spirit," appears motivated by other than linguistic considerations and is difficult to maintain in light of the obvious correspondence between the two formulas.

⁵³See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "γλῶσσα," by J. Behm, 1:722–26. After surveying the various uses of the gift in the New Testament, Behm concludes, "It thus seems most likely that the word γλῶσσα has here the sense of 'language,'...and that it is used as a 'technical expression for a peculiar language,' namely, the 'language of the Spirit,' a miraculous language" (1:726). Commenting on the gift in 1 Cor 12:10, Fee states, "The following seem certain: (a) It is Spirit-inspired utterance; that is made explicit both in vv. 7 and 11 and in 14:2. (b) The regulations for its use in 14:27–28 make it clear that the speaker is not in 'ecstasy' or 'out of control.' (c) It is speech essentially unintelligible both to the speaker (14:14) and to other hearers (14:16). (d) It is speech directed basically toward God (14:2, 14–15, 28)" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 598).

(10:46–7; 11:15); and he mentions “tongues” in Acts 19 without any additional qualifiers, suggesting that they are the same gift. Since Paul was present in Acts 19 to observe this gift and uses the same designations in 1 Corinthians to describe the gift as Luke does in Acts, the evidence supports the conclusion that “tongues” refers to human languages. The verses traditionally used against this conclusion, specifically from 1 Corinthians 12–14, can all be interpreted in harmony with this definition.⁵⁴

As with “prophecy,” the debate is whether this revelatory gift involves inerrant, divinely authoritative communication. A key text in the debate is 1 Corinthians 14:2. There Paul declares that the one who “speaks in a tongue” speaks “mysteries.” Some have argued that the “mysteries” mentioned here refer simply to what is outside the understanding of the speaker or hearer, that which is mysterious or unknown.⁵⁵ However, the use of “mysteries” elsewhere in the New Testament argues for a different sense. Elsewhere in the New Testament, “mysteries” most commonly refer to God’s plans and activities that have been hidden from mankind, but which are now revealed. As such, the expression regularly carries the connotation of direct revelation from God.⁵⁶ Supporting this understanding in 1 Corinthians 14:2 is the statement in this verse that such “mysteries” are mediated to the

⁵⁴Similarly Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), pp. 244–48; Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts*, pp. 222–29; Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, pp. 120–64; Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech*, pp. 47–72. For a recent survey on the state of the discussion, see Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 970–88.

⁵⁵So Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 656; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 1085–86.

⁵⁶See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. “μυστήριον,” by G. Bornkamm, 4:819–24. Commenting on the relationship between “mystery” and “revelation” in Paul, Bornkamm states, “The mystery is not itself revelation; it is the object of revelation. This belongs constitutively to the term. It is not as though the mystery were a presupposition of revelation which is set aside when this takes place. Rather, revelation discloses the mystery as such. Hence the mystery of God does not disclose itself. At the appointed time it is in free grace declared by God Himself to those who are selected and blessed by Him” (4:820–21). Speaking specifically about 1 Cor 14:2, he adds, “To penetrate the mysteries of God, the divine counsels concealed in Him, is the special gift of the prophet (1 C 13:2). The contents of speaking in tongues are also μυστήρια (1 C 14:2)...” (4:822). See also *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. “secret,” by G. Finkenrath, 3:504–6. Finkenrath writes, “Practically wherever it occurs in the NT *mysterion* is found with vbs. denoting revelation or proclamation, i.e., *mysterion* is that which is revealed” (3:504). And also *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. “mystery,” by G. W. Barker, 3:452–54. Barker states, “In the NT *mysterion* as a religious term has an even more precise meaning. In its fullest expression it refers to the secret thoughts, plans, and dispensations of God, which, though hidden from human reason, are being disclosed by God’s revealing act to those for whom such knowledge is intended” (3:452).

speaker by God's Spirit.⁵⁷ All of this is consistent with the definition of "tongues" as speaking direct revelation that communicates the inerrant, authoritative words of God.

Knowledge. Placed in a series with "prophecies" and "tongues," "knowledge" in 13:8 must refer to the spiritual gift Paul lists in 12:8 as a "word of knowledge." As such, the gift in 13:8 needs to be distinguished from the knowledge that every believer has through the illuminating work of the Spirit. By context, Paul is referring specifically to the spiritual gift given to some believers, but not to all.⁵⁸ As with the other gifts in 13:8, the debate is over the accuracy and authority associated with this gift. There is general agreement that the gift is, in some sense, revelatory. Two key texts are helpful in this debate, 1 Corinthians 13:2 and 14:6. In these passages, "knowledge" is juxtaposed either with "prophecy" and "revelation" or with "prophecy" and "mysteries," suggesting not only a common revelatory link, but also a common basis of accuracy and authority.⁵⁹ The evidence is indirect, but consistent with the force of the other two gifts as communicating direct revelation that is inerrant and divinely authoritative.

⁵⁷Some take the expression "Spirit" (πνεύματι) in 1 Cor 14:2 as a reference to the human spirit (so the NIV). See, for example, Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), p. 187. However, the evidence from the surrounding context argues convincingly for Holy Spirit. As Fee declares, "It is clear from 12:7–11 that tongues is the manifestation of the Spirit of God through the human speaker. It does not seem remotely possible that in this context Paul would suddenly refer to speaking 'with one's own spirit,' rather than by the Holy Spirit" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 656). Thiselton adds, "Almost always it denotes the Holy Spirit except in those specific contexts (14:14 and 32) where semantic contrasts clearly indicate otherwise" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 1086).

⁵⁸Similarly Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, pp. 67–68. His oft-quoted dictum bears repeating: "What passes away, of course, is not knowledge per se, but the charismatic gift of knowledge (for knowledge itself will never pass away; and if it did, no one would know it)." See also Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, pp. 28–30.

⁵⁹See, for example, Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 643–44. Fee states, "It needs only be noted further that 'knowledge' in this passage does not mean ordinary human knowing or learning, but refers rather to that special manifestation of the Spirit, the 'utterance of knowledge' (12:8), which understands revealed 'mysteries' (13:2)" (p. 644). Commenting on Paul's listing of gifts in 14:6, he adds, "His concern is to specify various kinds of Spirit-inspired utterances that have intelligibility as their common denominator. Thus he includes two items from previous lists, 'knowledge' and 'prophecy' (see 12:8–10; 13:2, 8)" (p. 662). Contra Grudem, who defines knowledge along with the "word of wisdom" in 1 Cor 12:8 as the non-miraculous, non-revelatory ability to speak to others in a way that conveys wisdom and knowledge (*The Gift of Prophecy*, pp. 293–302). However, his definition and subsequent discussion confuse these two gifts with the wisdom and knowledge that are available to every believer through the illuminating work of God's Spirit.

The Cessation of Tongues

The second issue involving 13:8 is whether the cessation of tongues coincides with the cessation of the other two gifts or whether it occurs at a different time. Those who argue that tongues cease apart from the cessation of the other two gifts base their interpretation on the change of verbs in this verse and the absence of “tongues” in the following verses. The change of verbs is addressed here; the absence of “tongues” in the following verses is addressed below.

Paul uses the passive form of a verb meaning “to cease” when he speaks of the cessation of prophecies and knowledge, but uses a different verb in a different voice when describing the cessation of tongues. The conclusion some draw from this is that the passive voice is used with “prophecies” and “knowledge” because they cease when “the perfect” comes. In other words, “the perfect” is the agent of the passive verbs that brings “prophecies” and “knowledge” to an end. In contrast, the verb with “tongues” is taken as a middle voice and interpreted to mean that “tongues” will cease in and of themselves, without an outside agent, that is, apart from the arrival of “the perfect.”⁶⁰

The problem with this interpretation is that the verbs used are roughly synonymous. Furthermore, it is not clear that the verb employed with “tongues” has the force of the middle voice or carries the meaning that tongues “cease in and of themselves.” A number of interpreters argue that the verb in the middle voice is either deponent, having the force of the active voice, or intransitive, used where there is no direct object. In either case, the consensus among these is that the change in verbs is purely stylistic and the two verbs are used synonymously. As such, the verbs are interpreted to mean that all three gifts cease with the arrival of “the perfect.”⁶¹ Further support for this

⁶⁰Similarly 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.

⁶¹E.g., Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 643–44 (n. 17); Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, pp. 66–67; idem, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), pp. 76–77. Carson states, “When we examine the use of the verb *παύω* (*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)...” (*Exegetical Fallacies*, p. 77). See also the discussion in Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, pp. 422–23. Wallace critiques the deponent view, preferring to see the verb in the middle as intransitive. He allows for an intended difference in the meaning of the two verbs used,

conclusion is provided with the interpretation of 13:9–10.

1 Corinthians 13:9–10

⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part; ¹⁰but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

These two verses serve to explain Paul's declaration in 13:8 that prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will cease. Specifically, 13:9 explains why these gifts will cease; 13:10 identifies when they will cease.⁶² Several questions are raised with Paul's explanation in these verses.

The Absence of Tongues

The first question raised in 13:9 concerns Paul's leaving out "tongues" in his discussion of the gifts from the preceding verse. Those who separate the cessation of tongues from the cessation of the other two gifts use the fact that "tongues" is not mentioned in 13:9 to support their interpretation. The thought is that prophecy and knowledge cease because they are replaced by "the perfect." Tongues, on the other hand, is not replaced by anything and simply cease on their own, separate from the other two gifts. Thus Paul leaves out "tongues" when discussing the replacement of the partial with "the perfect."⁶³

Several arguments against this interpretation have already been mentioned above. In terms of this verse, it is best to see Paul omitting a reference to tongues for stylistic reasons, intending it to be included by context. Paul lists the gifts in 13:8 with prophecy first and knowledge last. He reverses this order in 13:9 to form something of a chiasm. As such, Paul simply omits a reference to tongues in 13:9 because it is unnecessary, the chiasm indicating that all three gifts are intended.⁶⁴

but does not indicate what that difference is. 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.

⁶²Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 644.

⁶³E.g., Toussaint, "First Corinthians Thirteen and the Tongues Question," pp. 314–15; MacArthur, *The Charismatics*, p. 165; idem, *1 Corinthians*, p. 359; idem, *Charismatic Chaos*, pp. 230–31; Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts*, p. 337; Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, p. 78.

⁶⁴On the forming of a chiasm, see Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plumer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, 2nd ed., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914), p. 297. Arriving at the same conclusion, though not following the same line of argument, is Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 644, n. 21. Fee argues, "The choice of prophecy and knowledge from the preceding verse does not 'mean' anything. 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, as well as all the other *charismata* in 12:8–10, are to be understood as

Further supporting this is the fact that Paul's discussion in 13:9–10 serves to explain his statement about the cessation of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge in 13:8. That being the case, it may be assumed that Paul's explanation in these verses includes all three of the gifts mentioned in 13:8.⁶⁵

The Meaning of “in Part”

The second question raised with 13:9 is over the meaning of the adverbial prepositional phrase “in part” (ἐκ μέρους) in the expressions “we know in part” and “we prophesy in part.” The various definitions offered for this phrase can be consolidated into two categories. The first is that phrase has a qualitative force indicating that which is “immature” or “imperfect.”⁶⁶ The second is that it has a quantitative force meaning that which is “partial” or “incomplete.”⁶⁷ 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.

Having said that, the evidence for defining “in part” based on the use of this phrase and its cognates elsewhere supports the quantitative definition of “partial” or “incomplete.”⁶⁸ The evidence is admittedly limited. Although the phrase is used over twenty times in the LXX, there do not appear to be any parallels to its use in 13:9. The predominant meaning in the LXX is in a locative sense of “side,” “edge,” or

included in the argument.” Contra Carson, who sees no significance in the reversing of the gifts from 13:8 (*Showing the Spirit*, p. 67).

⁶⁵See, among others, Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 644; and Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 196. Grudem argues, “No doubt Paul also intended tongues to be included in the sense of verse 9 as among those activities that are ‘imperfect,’ but he omitted overly pedantic repetition for stylistic reasons. Yet tongues must be understood as part of the sense of verse 9, for verse 9 is the reason for verse 8, as the word ‘for’ (Greek *gar*) shows. Thus verse 9 must give the reason why tongues, as well as knowledge and prophecy, will cease.”

⁶⁶E.g., Gaffin states, “Present knowledge is fragmentary and opaque (vv. 9, 12); the knowledge of the future, consummate, clear, and direct (v. 12). The contrast between ‘the partial’ and ‘the perfect’ (v. 10; cf. vv. 9, 12) is qualitative, not quantitative...” (*Perspectives on Pentecost*, p. 110).

⁶⁷E.g., Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 306. Commenting on the expression “the perfect,” Barrett argues, “It takes its precise meaning from the context, and here, in contrast with *in part* (ἐκ μέρους) it means not perfection (in quality) but *totality*—in particular the whole truth about God.”

⁶⁸The material presented in this paragraph is taken primarily from Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982), p. 148, n. 59.

“border,” none of which fit the context here. 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 13:9.⁶⁹ Although not used extensively, there is a parallel construction that is consistently employed in the New Testament in a quantitative sense (ἀπὸ μέρους; cf. Rom 11:25; 15:15, 24; 2 Cor 1:4; 2:5).⁷⁰ While not conclusive, the meaning of the parallel construction supports a similar force for the phrase in 13:9. Further evidence is provided in connection with the term “the perfect” in 13:10.

The Gender and Meaning of “the Perfect”

The critical question raised with these verses is the meaning of the term “the perfect” (τὸ τέλειον) in 13:10. The term “the perfect” represents an articular neuter adjective functioning as a substantive and translated “the perfect” or “that which is perfect.”⁷¹ Much has been said about the neuter gender of the adjective and what that indicates in terms of the adjective’s antecedent.⁷² The best explanation is that the adjective gets its gender from the neuter noun forming the expression “in part” in 13:9–10. In other words, by using the neuter form of the adjective in this context, Paul signifies that whatever the “in part” refers to, “the perfect” refers to its counterpart or its antithesis.⁷³ Having the

⁶⁹See *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. “μέρος,” by W. Mundle, 2:304.

⁷⁰See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. “μέρος,” by J. Schneider, 4:596.

⁷¹Similarly BDAG, s.v. “τέλειος,” p. 995. Carson inexplicably identifies the gender of the adjective as masculine (*Showing the Spirit*, p. 69).

⁷²E.g., Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts*, pp. 334–35.

⁷³The gender of an adjective is generally determined by the gender of the word it modifies. This is true even if the adjective is used as a substantive, as here. Mounce notes, “When an adjective functions as a substantive its... *gender and number are determined by what it stands for*” (William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003], p. 65). While the noun for which the adjective stands is not always clear or easy to supply, nevertheless that for which the adjective substitutes generally determines the gender of the adjective. See C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), p. 96; Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), pp. 120–21; Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 294. Porter emphasizes the exceptions where an antecedent noun is unnecessary or impossible to identify. On the relationship between ἐκ μέρους and τὸ τέλειον, see *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. “τέλειος,” by G. Delling, 8:75. Discussing the use of the adjective in the New Testament, Delling states, “In the Pauline corpus the meaning ‘whole’ is suggested at 1 C. 13:10 by the antithesis to

adjective in the neuter gender thus links “the perfect” and the “in part” as having ultimately the same referent. Whatever the “in part” refers to, the “perfect” refers to as well. The only difference between the two expressions is the difference over the relative dimension or extent of the referent.

Having answered the question about the gender and antecedent of “the perfect,” what remains is to identify the meaning of “in part” in 13:9. 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.⁷⁴

Two objections are raised against this definition of “the perfect.” The first is whether such a meaning is possible within the historical context of the first century. The second is whether such a meaning can be harmonized with the illustrations in the following verses, especially the illustration in 13:12 which appears to refer to the events surrounding the return of Christ. The first objection is addressed here. The second objection is answered in connection with the discussion of 13:12.

A number of interpreters argue that neither Paul nor his readers could have understood the concept of a completed canon of New Testament revelation. As such, Paul could not have intended this meaning in this passage. The concept of a canon, they aver, did not develop until the centuries following the close of the apostolic age. Hence, a text can never mean what it could never have meant at the time it was written.⁷⁵

ἐκ μέρους.”

⁷⁴See, for example, Gromacki, who concludes, “Logically, *to teleion* must refer to completeness or perfection in the *same realm* as that referred to by *to ek merous*. Since *to 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” (*The Modern Tongues Movement*, p. 126, citing Gilbert B. Weaver, “‘Tongues Shall Cease’: 1 Corinthians 13:8,” [research paper, Grace Theological Seminary, 1964], p. 12).

⁷⁵Fee’s comment is representative of this objection: “It is an impossible view, of course, since Paul himself could not have articulated it. What neither Paul himself nor

This is a legitimate criticism, if those who levy it against the definition of “the perfect” given above would demonstrate how it applies. Such criticism notwithstanding, the biblical and historical evidence argues to the contrary. This evidence argues that Paul and his readers would have been familiar with the concept of a completed, self-contained body of direct revelation from God. In other words, while the term “canon” may not have developed until after the first century, the underlying concept was familiar both to the writer and to his readers.⁷⁶

Two arguments specifically support the recognition of this concept in the first century. *First*, there 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.⁷⁷ 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

the Corinthians could have understood cannot possibly be the meaning of the text” (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 645, n. 23). Unfortunately, neither Fee nor the others who espouse this criticism demonstrate why such an understanding would have been foreign to Paul’s thinking.

⁷⁶As Beckwith states, “We commenced this work by remarking that, though the technical use of the word ‘canon,’ to denote the correct list of the Holy Scriptures or the collection of books so listed, goes back only to writers of the fourth century A.D., the use of lists is much older, and so is the concept of a collection of Holy Scriptures, to which some books properly belong and others do not” (Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985], p. 63). See also *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Canon,” by G. L. Robinson and R. K. Harrison, 1:591–92.

⁷⁷Describing the aftermath of the death of Judas Maccabeus, c. 160 B.C., the author of 1 Maccabees (c. 100 B.C.) writes, “So there was great distress in Israel, such as had not been since the time that prophets ceased to appear among them (1 Macc 9:27; all quotations from the Apocrypha are taken from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books* [NRSV], ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy [New York: Oxford University Press, 1991]). The first century A.D. Jewish historian Josephus reflects a similar perspective. Following his catalog of the OT canonical books, he writes, “From Artaxerxes to our own time the complete history has been written, but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier records, because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets” (*Against Apion* 1.41; taken from *Josephus*, 9 vols., trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, Loeb Classical Library, ed. G. P. Goold [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926], p. 179). A like tradition recognizing the cessation of biblical prophecy with the ministries of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi is found in the Babylonian Talmud, *Yomah* 9b, *Sotah* 48b, *Sanhedrin* 11a, and *Midrash Rabbah* on the Song of Songs, 8.9.3. See also 2 Baruch 85.3 (c. 110 B.C.).

so.⁷⁸ 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.⁷⁹ 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.

Second, there are references in the New Testament that support this concept as well. The New Testament writers speak of God's giving new revelation for the church. A number of the gifts mentioned in the immediate and larger contexts of the present discussion support this fact. This would include, among others, the gifts of apostles and prophets.⁸⁰

⁷⁸Following the cleansing of the temple by Judas Maccabeus, c. 164 B.C., the author of 1 Maccabees records, "So they tore down the altar, and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them" (1 Macc 4:45-46). Similarly, in connection with the official record of the confirmation of Simon as High Priest, c. 140 B.C., the author of 1 Maccabees writes, "The Jews and their priests have resolved that Simon should be their leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise" (1 Macc 14:41). Similar evidence is found in the Testament of Levi 8:15 (c. 250 B.C.), Testament of Benjamin 9:2 (c. 250 B.C.), in the Prayer of Azariah 1.15 (c. 200 B.C.), and from Qumran, *Manual of Discipline*, 1QS 9.11.

⁷⁹Similarly, Grudem notes, "The belief that divinely authoritative words from God had ceased is quite clearly attested to in several strands of extra-biblical Jewish literature.... Thus, writings subsequent to about 430 B.C. were not accepted by the Jewish people generally as having equal authority with the rest of Scripture" (*The Gift of Prophecy*, pp. 240-41). Saucy echoes this, saying, "According to the Jews, Malachi was 'the seal of the Prophets' and 'the last among them.' The manifestation of prophecy among God's people ceased with Malachi because it had accomplished its purpose for that time. While the question of the total cessation of prophecy at this time is debated, that some change occurred is generally accepted" ("An Open but Cautious View," p. 125). See also *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Prophet," by G. Smith, 3:1003. Contra, among others, Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity*, pp. 103-6. Aune argues, "The opinion is widespread that prophecy ceased in Judaism during the fifth century B.C., only to break forth once again with the rise of Christianity. The evidence which we shall consider in this chapter, however, flatly contradicts that view" (p. 103). Yet even he acknowledges that whatever claims to prophecy may be found in this literature, it is significantly different from that found in the OT. "Israelite prophecy did not disappear. Rather, like all religious and social institutions, it underwent a number of far-reaching and even radical changes during the period of the Second Temple" (ibid.).

⁸⁰E.g., Eph 3:4-5, "You can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit." For a defense that Paul is referring to new revelation given to the apostles and prophets in the NT era, see the discussion in Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), pp. 437-44. As Hoehner concludes, "This is an important verse, for it explains when and to whom the mystery was revealed. This mystery was not known before the NT era. Only after the death of Christ was it revealed to the holy apostles

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.⁸¹ Lastly, they also speak of this revelation metaphorically as a foundation upon which the church would be built.⁸² 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.⁸³

and prophets by means of the Holy Spirit” (p. 444).

⁸¹E.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 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), pp. 435–36. Schreiner argues, “We have an early recognition here that the touchstone for the Christian faith is in the teaching of the apostles and that any deviation from their teaching is unorthodox” (p. 436). Bauckham’s comments should not be construed as opposing this position. Rather, his comments are in response to those who identify this objective body of truth as representing second-century Catholicism (Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco, TX: Word, 1983], pp. 32–34).

⁸²Eph 2:19–20, “So then you are...fellow citizens with the saints and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*.” The two main options for interpreting the genitives “of the apostles and prophets” are either as subjective, the foundation *laid* by the apostles and prophets, or as appositional, the foundation which *consists* of the apostles and prophets. The former understands the foundation to be specifically the revelation provided by the apostles and prophets; the latter takes the foundation to refer generally to the persons and ministries of the apostles and prophets. See the discussion in Hoehner (*Ephesians*, pp. 398–99) who opts for the second interpretation. In either case, the foundation involves the activity of these individuals that resulted in, among other things, the writings that compose the New Testament canon. Hoehner himself links the apostles and prophets as the foundation with their role of giving revelation. In discussing the apostles in Eph 2:20, Hoehner says, “Regarding who and what function they had, it was concluded in the study in 1:1 that an apostle was an official delegate of Jesus Christ, commissioned for the specific tasks of proclaiming authoritatively the message in oral and written form and establishing and building up churches” (p. 400). Commenting on the prophets, he adds, “In light of an incomplete canon, the prophets may well have received revelation to complete what was needed so that every person could be presented perfect before God (Eph 4:12; Col 1:28). In conclusion, it seems that both the apostle and the prophet were involved in revelation” (p. 400).

⁸³Similarly Gaffin, “A Cessationist View,” pp. 42–54. Commenting on Eph 2:20, Gaffin states, “With this foundational revelation completed, and so too their foundational role as witnesses, the apostles and, along with them, the prophets and other associated revelatory words gifts, pass from the life of the church” (p. 44). Even non-cessationists recognize the once-for-all nature of the foundation in Eph 2:20 that culminated in the New Testament canon. They simply argue that the continuing revelatory gifts are not on a par with canonical revelation and, therefore, do not add to that foundation. Storms, for example, in responding to Gaffin, states, “This text need say no more than that apostles and prophets laid the foundation once and for all and then ceased to function *in that capacity*” (C. Samuel Storms, “A Third Wave View Response

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.⁸⁴

The Time When the “in Part” Ceases

The last question raised in 13:10 is when the revelatory gifts cease. The introductory statement, “when the perfect comes,” represents the protasis of an indefinite temporal clause. The construction is indefinite in the sense that the writer does not know precisely when “the perfect” will come, only that it is coming.⁸⁵ The statement that follows, “the partial will be done away with,” identifies what will transpire when “the perfect” comes. In other words, the two statements in 13:10 have a cause-and-effect relationship. The partial ceases when and only when “the perfect” arrives.⁸⁶ Assuming, as was argued, that “the perfect” refers to the completed revelation God intended for the church and preserved in the New Testament, then according to this verse the revelatory gifts ceased with the closing of the New Testament canon at the end of the apostolic era.

Those who see “the perfect” in 13:10 referring to events surrounding the return of Christ and yet have the miraculous gifts ceasing before then argue for a different meaning of what is “in part” to counter the above conclusions. Gaffin, for example, identifies “the perfect” with Christ’s return and acknowledges that the gifts in 13:8 are all revelatory. He further recognizes the cause-and-effect relationship between the coming of “the perfect” in 13:10 and the cessation of that which is “in part.” What Gaffin argues, however, is that the expression “in part” in 13:9–10 does not refer to the gifts themselves, but to the knowledge

to be Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, ed. Wayne A. Grudem [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], p. 81). His distinction between canonical and non-canonical revelatory gifts has been rebutted above in the discussion on 1 Cor 13:8 and the gift of prophecy.

⁸⁴Interestingly 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).

⁸⁵Wallace lists this under the subjunctive mood, calling this particular construction a “subjunctive in indefinite temporal clause.” He notes that with the indefinite temporal marker ὅταν the construction “indicates a future contingency from the perspective of the time of the main verb” (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 479).

⁸⁶As Porter explains, “Temporal clauses are often used to indicate the ‘time at which’ or ‘when’ some other event occurred. The most commonly used particles or conjunctions for introducing this kind of temporal clause are ὅτε and ὅταν” (*Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, p. 240).

provided by these gifts. In other words, it is the knowledge these gifts provide that continues until Christ returns; the gifts themselves actually cease before then with the closing of the canon. Thus, Paul is not addressing when the gifts cease, only when the knowledge derived from these gifts ceases.⁸⁷

The chief difficulty with Gaffin's interpretation is that it fails to make the connection between Paul's discussion in 13:9–10 and Paul's reference to the gifts in 13:8. As Gaffin himself recognizes, Paul refers to miraculous gifts in 13:8 and declares that these gifts will "cease."⁸⁸ Yet Paul begins 13:9 with an explanatory particle "for" to indicate that what follows is a clarification and support of his statement in 13:8 about the cessation of the three gifts. Paul specifically mentions two of these gifts in 13:9 and describes them as "in part." Then, in 13:10, Paul declares that what is "in part" will "cease," the same word he used in 13:8 in describing the cessation of two of these gifts. Thus, whatever Paul is saying in 13:10 about the cessation of that which is "in part" is supporting his statement in 13:8 about the cessation of the gifts.⁸⁹ Gaffin tries to drive a wedge between the gifts and the knowledge they provide, saying that only the latter is in view in 13:9–10. But by doing this, he divorces Paul's statement about the cessation of the gifts in 13:8 from Paul's explanation of his statement in 13:9–10.

An alternate approach is that offered by Edgar. Edgar recognizes the connection between Paul's description of what ceases in 13:8 and Paul's explanation of when this takes place in 13:9–10. He counters the conclusions reached with the completed canon view by arguing that in 13:8 Paul is not discussing the gifts per se, but the content of these gifts. It is the revelation provided by these gifts that Paul describes as ceasing in 13:8, not the gifts themselves. Furthermore, since Paul uses the first person singular in his statement in 13:12, "then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known," Edgar argues that "the perfect" refers to the knowledge believers have when they die and stand

⁸⁷Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost*, pp. 109–12; idem, "A Cessationist View," p. 55.

⁸⁸Gaffin argues, "Hence, the specific point of verse 8 ('as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away,' RSV) is to stress the temporary and provisional nature not simply of the believer's present knowledge, but, correlatively, of the *ways* he comes to know. Prophecy and tongues are in view as *modes of revelation* related to the believer's present knowledge..." (*Perspectives on Pentecost*, p. 110). As mentioned in n. 16 above, Gaffin is unsure whether "knowledge" in 1 Cor 13:8 refers to the gift of knowledge or simply to what may be known from the other revelatory gifts.

⁸⁹Commenting on the relationship of vv. 9–10 to v. 8, Fee states, "Paul now sets out to explain what he has asserted in v. 8. He does so by using the language 'in part' to describe the 'for now only' nature of the gifts (repeating the verb 'pass away' from v. 8 to indicate what happens to them) and 'the perfect/complete' to describe the time when what is 'in part' will come to an end" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 644).

before the Lord. Thus, partial knowledge provided by the revelatory gifts is replaced by full or complete knowledge when the believer is ushered into the presence of the Lord at death. The gifts themselves, he concludes, are not directly addressed in this passage and, in fact, cease with the closing of the New Testament canon.⁹⁰

The overriding problem with Edgar's interpretation is his handling of the lexical data. Edgar argues that when Paul refers to the gift of prophecy, he uses the singular, as in 12:10, rather than the plural, as in 13:8. Similarly, when Paul has in view the gift of tongues, he adds qualifiers such as "kinds of tongues" as he does in 12:10, rather than the simple expression "tongues" as in 13:8. The same may be said of knowledge. When referring to the gift, Paul calls it a "word of knowledge," whereas in 13:8, Edgar explains, Paul simply speaks of "knowledge." Thus, the references in 13:8 are not to the gifts, but to the content of these gifts and the knowledge such gifts provide.⁹¹

Yet when looking at Paul's use of these terms in the surrounding context, such distinctions are arbitrary at best and difficult to maintain. For example, Paul describes someone who "has a tongue" in 1 Corinthians 14:26, and, in the very next verse, he describes someone who "speaks in a tongue." According to Edgar, the latter is referring to the gift; the former is not.⁹² Furthermore, Paul mentions "prophecy" (12:10; 13:2), "prophets" (12:28, 29), "prophesy" (13:9; 14:1, 5), and "prophesies" (14:3, 4, 5), all within the section where he is discussing spiritual gifts.⁹³ Which of these is referring to the gift and which is not? According to Edgar, the verb "prophesy" in 13:9 cannot refer to the gift since it is related to the plural noun "prophesies" in 13:8. However, Paul uses the verb "prophesy" in 14:1, the very same verb he uses in 13:9, and in 14:1 he specifically identifies the verb as a spiritual gift.⁹⁴ Thus, Edgar's attempt to distinguish between the gifts versus the content derived from the gifts based on the variations in the terms Paul uses is simply not supported by the context and effectively nullifies his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8.

A third approach, proposed by Thomas, is beset with similar

⁹⁰Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts*, pp. 333–44.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 337–40.

⁹²Discussing the gift of tongues, Edgar states, "When the gift of tongues is mentioned elsewhere, there is a qualifying term, such as 'speak in tongues' or 'pray in a tongue'.... First Corinthians 14:26 is an apparent exception to this, but it is clear from the other items mentioned in the same verse that the gift *itself* is not meant by the word *tongue* in 1 Corinthians 14:26; rather, it refers to a language spoken through the use of the gift" (*Miraculous Gifts*, p. 339).

⁹³See the discussion on the theme and argument of 1 Cor 12–14 above.

⁹⁴Similarly Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 654–55.

hermeneutical problems. What is “in part” in 13:9, according to Thomas, is the church’s partial knowledge provided by the revelatory gifts and its limited level of maturity based on that knowledge. He interprets Paul’s analogies in 13:12 as describing the events surrounding the return of Christ and the rapture of the church. Connecting Paul’s analogies in 13:12 with the coming of “the perfect” in 13:10, Thomas makes “the perfect” refer ultimately to the full knowledge and maturity the church reaches when it stands before the Lord at His return. Since he is convinced the revelatory gifts ceased with the closing of the New Testament, he also allows for the coming of “the perfect” to refer to the intermediate state of knowledge and maturity the church gains with the completed canon. He supports this alternate meaning of “the perfect” from Paul’s analogy in 13:11. According to Thomas, becoming “a man” in 13:11 describes the intermediate state of the church’s maturity, and doing away “with childish things” alludes to the cessation of the miraculous gifts.⁹⁵

The chief liability with this approach, as even Thomas acknowledges, is that it sees two different events for the coming of “the perfect” and assigns two different meanings to “the perfect.”⁹⁶ According to Thomas, Paul’s statement in 13:10 “when the perfect comes” has in view both the closing of the canon and the return of Christ. Furthermore, “the perfect,” depending on which event is in view, refers either to the relative level of maturity the church reaches with the completed canon or to the full level of maturity it reaches with the return of Christ. Such a handling of the text, however, creates insuperable hermeneutical problems. Specifically, Paul’s statement about the coming of the perfect cannot have two different events in view with two different connotations without violating the univocal nature of language or the principle of the single meaning of Scripture.⁹⁷ To argue as Thomas does that Paul was not sure which would come first, the closing of the canon or Christ’s return, does not alleviate the problem.⁹⁸ Regardless, Paul’s statement about the coming of this event can have only one referent in view with a single connotation, if the interpreter is to maintain a coherent hermeneutic.

⁹⁵Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, pp. 76–84, 123–32, 189–90, 236–40.

⁹⁶As Thomas concedes, “This view assigns a double sense to *teleion*, a hermeneutical weakness” (*ibid.*, p. 240).

⁹⁷For discussion and defense of the univocal nature of language and the single meaning of Scripture, including documentation, see R. Bruce Compton, “Dispensationalism, The Church, and the New Covenant,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 8 (Fall 2003): 42–44.

⁹⁸Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, pp. 131–32.

1 Corinthians 13:11

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.

With this and the following verse, Paul uses a series of analogies to illustrate and reinforce his point regarding the cessation of the miraculous gifts presented in the previous verses. The analogy in 13:11 is a common one, contrasting the activities of a child with those of an adult. An adult does not “speak” or “think” or “reason” in the same way a child does.⁹⁹ Two issues need to be addressed with this analogy.

The Relationship Between the Activities in 13:11 and the Gifts in 13:8

Some in the present debate argue that Paul’s references to speaking, thinking, and reasoning in this analogy correspond to the three gifts Paul mentions in 13:8. Specifically, speaking, they say, corresponds to “tongues,” thinking to “prophecy,” and reasoning to “knowledge.”¹⁰⁰ While it is tempting to see a connection between the three gifts in 13:8 and the three activities mentioned in this verse, the parallels appear somewhat forced, particularly between prophecy and thinking. Prophecy necessarily focuses on communicating to others; thinking is generally associated with mental activity alone. Rather, the connection between the three gifts and these activities appears more general. Paul’s illustration is apropos in that the three gifts previously mentioned and the activities in this verse all involve perception and the communication of that which is perceived. Any attempt to read beyond this is both unnecessary and unsupported by the context.¹⁰¹

The Application of the Analogy to Paul’s Argument

Paul links this analogy with his argument by repeating the verb he used in the previous verse in describing the cessation of prophecy and knowledge to describe in this verse the putting aside the activities of a child. The mental and verbal activities associated with childhood are “done away with” and replaced by the mental and verbal activities appropriate for adulthood. The analogy appears fairly straightforward in

⁹⁹See, for example, Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 646. Fee states, “Picking up the themes of ‘in part’ and ‘the complete,’ plus the verb ‘pass away’ from v. 10, Paul proceeds to express the point of vv. 9–10 by way of analogy. The analogy itself is commonplace. The adult does not continue to ‘talk’ or ‘think’ or ‘reason’ like a child.”

¹⁰⁰E.g., Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, pp. 80–81.

¹⁰¹Similarly Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, trans. James W. Leitch, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), p. 226, n. 85.

its support of Paul's argument. The mental and verbal activities of children are, in some sense, limited and restricted in comparison to the same activities of an adult. As such, when adults attain the fuller and more developed skills in these areas, they no longer use or need the less developed skills of children.¹⁰² In the same sense, prior to completed revelation, the church has limited ability to know and communicate the will of God. However, once the full revelation has arrived, the gifts providing the limited knowledge of God's will are "done away with" or replaced.

1 Corinthians 13:12

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.

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.¹⁰³ Several interpretive questions are raised with each analogy.

"Now We See in a Mirror Dimly"

Paul begins the first analogy by describing in metaphorical terms what he and his readers were able to "see" through the revelatory gifts he previously has described as "in part." Two questions are raised with the interpretation of this statement. 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

¹⁰²So Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 646. Fee states, "He is illustrating that there will come a time when the gifts will pass away. The analogy, therefore, says that behavior from one period in one's life is not appropriate to the other; the one is 'done away with' when the other comes."

¹⁰³Similarly Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 647; and Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 1067. Contra Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 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.

the predominant use of the word outside the Bible, it may be assumed that this is what Paul intended here.¹⁰⁴

The *second* question with this statement is over the meaning of “dimly.” Does the expression refer to that which is indirect versus that which is direct, or does it have the idea of that which is indistinct or distorted versus that which is clear? To a certain extent, the answer to this question is dependent on the meaning of the corresponding expression “face to face” in the following clause. Before looking at the corresponding expression, an initial conclusion on the force of “dimly” can be offered. The city of Corinth was noted for producing some of the highest quality mirrors in antiquity. Even so, seeing one’s reflection in even the best mirrors of that time could not be compared to the clarity of seeing someone face to face. Thus, to see in a mirror “dimly” necessarily involves some degree of limitation in terms of the clarity of that which is seen.¹⁰⁵ More than this cannot be said until looking at the expression “face to face.”

“But Then Face to Face”

The real crux with this analogy is the meaning of “face to face.” The majority in the cessation debate understands this expression to refer to the believer seeing Christ face to face. Applying the analogy to Paul’s argument, the *coming* of “the perfect” in 13:10, it is argued, refers to Christ’s return for His church and “the perfect” to the believer’s full knowledge of God when he stands before Christ and sees Him face to face.¹⁰⁶ As attractive as this interpretation sounds, there are serious problems that argue against it. Perhaps the chief problem is that this interpretation fails to grasp the metaphorical nature of Paul’s expression. 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 13:9–10.¹⁰⁷ However, taking “face to face” as a reference to the believer

¹⁰⁴See the discussion in Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 1067–68.

¹⁰⁵Similarly Garland, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 623–25.

¹⁰⁶From a cessationist perspective, see Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, pp. 82–83; Gaffin, “A Cessationist View,” p. 55. From a non-cessationist perspective, see Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, pp. 70–71; Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, pp. 195–204. Grudem represents the majority when he declares, “So when Paul says, ‘But then [we shall see] face to face,’ he clearly means, ‘Then we shall see God face to face’” (*The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 197).

¹⁰⁷See, for example, Spicq, *Agape in the New Testament*, 2:162; and Garland, *1 Corinthians*, p. 623. Garland describes Paul’s use of this expression, “He returns to the issue of partial knowledge and illustrates it with another common metaphor, seeing through a mirror” (p. 623).

seeing Christ when He returns interprets the second part of Paul's analogy literally rather than metaphorically.¹⁰⁸ 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.¹⁰⁹

Those interpreting "face to face" literally argue that the expression is used in the Old Testament as something of a technical term for seeing a theophany, that is, seeing God. Hence, the phrase in 13:12 should be interpreted in the same way.¹¹⁰ It must be granted that some of these Old Testament passages appear to use the expression literally to describe an individual seeing God directly and personally. That appears to be the case with the expression in Genesis 32:30 where Jacob, having wrestled with a man, declares that he has seen God "face to face." This assumes that the individual with whom Jacob wrestles is a pre-incarnate manifestation of the Godhead.¹¹¹ The same may be said of Judges 6:22 where Gideon, having provided hospitality for an angel, declares that he has seen the angel of the Lord "face to face." Again, this assumes that the one referred to as "the angel of the Lord" is a pre-incarnate manifestation of the Godhead.¹¹² In both of these passages, the context indicates that the expression "face to face" is used literally rather than

¹⁰⁸Mare is typical of the majority when he says, "The metaphor is that of the imperfect reflection seen in one of the polished metal mirrors (cf. James 1:23) of the ancient world in contrast with seeing the Lord face to face (cf. Gen 32:30; Num 12:8; 2 Cor 3:18)" (*1 Corinthians*, p. 270).

¹⁰⁹E.g., Gromacki, again citing Weaver, argues, "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" (*The Modern Tongues Movement*, p. 127).

¹¹⁰E.g., Carson says, "Now we see 'but a poor reflection': the expression suggests unclear or still indistinct divine revelation; but then when perfection comes, 'we shall see face to face'—almost a formula in the Septuagint for a theophany, and therefore almost certainly a reference to the new state brought about by the parousia" (*Showing the Spirit*, p. 71).

¹¹¹See, for example, Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), p. 556; John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, in vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), p. 210; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1994), p. 297; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 336.

¹¹²See, for example, Herbert Wolf, *Judges*, in vol. 3 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 420; Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), pp. 263–64. Block allows for "the angel of the LORD" to be either God or an angelic messenger from God.

metaphorically.¹¹³

In the majority of cases, however, the expression “face to face” is used metaphorically in the Old Testament. This is the case in Exodus 33:11 which states that “the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” This statement is made while the nation is encamped near Mt. Sinai and after the golden calf incident where the nation had fallen out of favor with the Lord. Moses, the text explains, would pitch a tent outside the camp of Israel, enter the tent, the pillar of cloud representing God’s presence would descend over the entrance to the tent, and there God would speak to Moses. However, the expression “face to face” in this verse does not refer to Moses actually seeing God. This is made clear in the verses that follow. In 33:18, Moses asks to see God’s glory. In response, the Lord specifically says that Moses cannot see His face (33:20). It would seem strange that Moses would be asking to see God, if the expression “face to face” in 33:11 were taken literally. From the qualifying clause that follows, “as a man speaks to his friend,” the expression “face to face” in 33:11 is to be taken metaphorically of God speaking with Moses openly and directly.¹¹⁴

This understanding of the expression is further supported by the parallel passage in Numbers 12:6–8. In responding to the charge of Miriam and Aaron that Moses was not the only prophet whom God had raised up over Israel, God declares the following:

Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; With him I speak mouth to mouth, Even openly, and not in dark sayings.... Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?

From this passage it is apparent that speaking with Moses “mouth to mouth” meant speaking with Moses directly rather than through dreams or visions. Comparing this passage with Exodus 33:11, the parallels argue for taking the two expressions, speaking to Moses “mouth to mouth” and speaking to Moses “face to face,” as synonyms. In both passages, the phrases are used metaphorically of direct, open, and personal communication. Neither passage suggests that the respective

¹¹³See Emanuel Miguens, “1 Cor 13:8–13 Reconsidered,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37 (January 1975): 85.

¹¹⁴As Durham notes, “The reference to intimacy of Yahweh’s communion with Moses is almost certainly to be considered a reflection of the traditions represented by the narratives of 33:12–17 and 33:18–34:9. As the second of these narratives makes clear, ‘face to face’ is here to be understood as an idiom of intimacy, not as a reference to theophany” (John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco, TX: Word, 1987], p. 443).

phrases are used of Moses actually seeing God's face.¹¹⁵

The same is true in Deuteronomy 5:4. Here, God renews the Law with the new generation of Israelites. In this verse, Moses recounts how God had spoken with the previous generation "face to face at the mountain from the midst of the fire." In the very next verse, Moses makes clear that the nation itself was not actually present on the mount. Because the people had been frightened by the blazing fire, they had asked Moses to serve as the mediator of God's revelation to them. In the following section, 5:22–33, Moses explains to the new generation how it was that he had served as the nation's mediator. The earlier generation had heard from a distance the voice of the Lord speaking to them from out of the midst of the fire on Mt. Sinai. The people were afraid because the Lord was speaking directly to them. They thought that if He continued to speak directly to them they would die. So they had asked Moses to act as their mediator, and the Lord had approved their request. In 4:12, Moses expressly says to those who heard, "You heard the sound of words, but you saw no form—only a voice." Thus, to say the Lord had spoken to them "face to face" meant that He had spoken to them directly, that is, without a mediator. They were never on the mount, and they did not see the Lord speaking from the mount.¹¹⁶

Deuteronomy 34:10 should also be understood metaphorically. In a historical postscript following Moses' death, the text reads, "Since that time, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." Moses' unique status among the prophets is explained in the following verses. He had performed so many extraordinary miracles, both in Egypt and during the exodus, that his role as God's special envoy had been forever established. Elevating Moses over all the other prophets, saying that God knew Moses "face to face," should be

¹¹⁵Commenting on the parallels between Exod 33:11 and Num 12:8, Levine writes, "Although God is close to Moses, Moses does not actually see God's face. As Exod 33:20 states, 'You will not be able to see my face, for a human being cannot see my face and survive.' The idiom 'face to face' does not mean, therefore, that one sees the face of the other, but is merely a way of expressing direct communication, with nothing intervening between the two speakers" (Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, Anchor Bible [New York: Doubleday, 1993], pp. 341–42). See also R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), p. 205.

¹¹⁶Christensen concurs, "The idiom *face to face* means that God spoke 'directly' to the people of Israel while Moses was on the mountain.... It obviously cannot be taken literally, since 4:12 states explicitly that the people did not see any form of God at that time. In Exod 33:7–23 we read that YHWH spoke to Moses 'face to face' (33:11). At the same time, however, YHWH informs Moses, 'You cannot see my face; for human beings shall not see me and live (33:20)'" (Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9*, rev. ed., Word Biblical Commentary [Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2001], p. 113).

understood metaphorically as referring to the close, personal relationship that existed between God and Moses. The verb “to know” in this context means “to have a relationship with,” while the phrase “face to face” means that the relationship was a close, personal relationship. The numerous miracles Moses performed underscored Moses’ authority as one who uniquely spoke for God and reflected the intimate relationship God had established with him.¹¹⁷

Ezekiel 20:35 should be interpreted similarly. In Ezekiel 20:35, God promises to bring the nation out of the lands where He has scattered them and bring them into the wilderness where He will judge them “face to face.” The following verses liken this judgment to God’s judging the nation during the wilderness wanderings. In that God’s judgment of the nation in the wilderness involved His direct intervention, not necessarily His personal appearance, it may be concluded that “face to face” has a similar force here. As such, the expression should not be taken literally. Rather, it has the idea of God’s intervening directly in the affairs of His people and purging the nation, as He did in the wilderness wanderings. Thus, “face to face” is used metaphorically here of the direct, personal way God will intervene to judge His people.¹¹⁸

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, however. 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

¹¹⁷Similarly, J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1974), pp. 113, 320; Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 148, 406.

¹¹⁸So, apparently, Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 651. Block writes, “This meeting is described as a *face to face* encounter between deity and people. *pānīm ‘el- pānīm* recalls the manner in which Moses used to meet with God (Exod 33:11; Deut 34:10). However, here the emphasis is not on the intimacy of the relationship between deity and human but on the directness of the encounter. This time there will be no cloud or mediator to shield Israel from the awesome divine majesty.” See the brief discussion in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, s.v. “פָּנִים,” by H. Simian-Yofre, 9:597.

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.¹²⁰

"Now I Know in Part, but Then I Will Know Fully Just As I Also Have Been Fully Known"

This represents the second of Paul's two analogies in 13:12. As with the first analogy, the "now"/"then" contrast corresponds to the "in part"/"perfect" contrast in 13:9–10. Paul makes this correspondence explicit by repeating almost verbatim the declaration in 13:9, "we know in part," at the beginning of his second analogy. The debate centers on

¹¹⁹E.g., Garland notes, "Face to face,' 'mouth to mouth,' and 'eye to eye' are OT idioms (see Gen 32:30; Exod 33:11; Num 14:14; Deut 5:4; 34:10; Judg 6:22; Isa 52:8; Ezek 20:35) that imply that something comes directly, not through an intermediary or medium, such as a vision or dream" (*1 Corinthians*, p. 625).

¹²⁰Having surveyed the OT evidence, Miguens echoes this conclusion, "In view of these facts, therefore, it appears that when Paul (1 Cor 13:12a) refers to a *blepein* [seeing] face to face, he does not speak about a vision of God directly and immediately, but about a Christian *blepein* or understanding of the Christian faith or mysteries (vs. 2)..." ("1 Cor 13:8–13 Reconsidered," p. 87). Fee comes to a similar conclusion, albeit from an eschatological perspective: "More likely the emphasis is not on the *quality* of seeing that one experiences in looking into a mirror...but to the *indirect nature* of looking into a mirror as opposed to seeing someone face to face. The analogy, of course, breaks down a bit since one sees one's own face in a mirror, and Paul's point is that in our present existence one 'sees' God (presumably), or understands the 'mysteries,' only indirectly. It is not a *distorted* image that we have in Christ through the Spirit; but it is as yet *indirect*, not complete" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 648). Removing the statement "one 'sees' God (presumably)," Fee's conclusion captures the force of Paul's metaphor. See further the discussion in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "ὁράω," by W. Michaelis, 5:344: "βλέπω certainly occurs in 1 C. 13:12, but here the metaphor of the mirror demands a figurative reference to sense perception."

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.¹²¹

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 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.¹²² 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.¹²³

The second problem with the above interpretation is that it is supported by a faulty understanding of the preceding analogy and the meaning of “face to face.” As noted above, the majority interpret Paul’s statement about seeing “face to face” literally as a reference to seeing

¹²¹E.g., Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, p. 70; Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, p. 83; Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts*, pp. 294–95; Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, pp. 196–97.

¹²²For example, Grudem adds, “The second and third word for ‘know’—the one for ‘then I shall know even as I have been known’—is a somewhat stronger word for knowing (Greek *epiginōskō*), but certainly does not imply infinite knowledge or omniscience. Paul does not expect to know all things, and he does not say, ‘Then I shall know all things,’ which would have been easy in Greek. Rather, he means that when the Lord returns, Paul expects to be freed from the misconceptions and inabilities to understand (especially to understand God and his work) that are part of this present life. His knowledge will resemble God’s present knowledge of him because it will contain no false impressions and will not be limited to what is perceivable in this age. But such knowledge will only occur when the Lord returns” (*The Gift of Prophecy*, p. 197).

¹²³Spicq identifies the precise force of the comparative construction: “The expression ‘even as’ (*kathōs*; St. Paul uses the word twenty-five times) means ‘exactly as’; it makes an exact comparison.... It always has this sense when God or Christ is being presented as model” (*Agape in the New Testament*, 2:166). Interestingly enough, Spicq still interprets 13:12 as referring to the Lord’s return. His conclusions underscore the tensions with this interpretation: “The vision of God face to face has its motive, its *raison d’être*, in the loving knowledge which God has of us, and our knowledge of him will correspond exactly to his knowledge of us” (*ibid.*).

Christ at His return. They conclude from this that the second analogy has in view the same reference. In other words, the reference is to believers knowing *God* fully when they stand before Christ at His coming.¹²⁴ However, the second analogy does not say that. Paul does state the object of what will be known. The name of God must be supplied, ostensibly based on the previous analogy, in order for the majority to arrive at this interpretation. Yet it has been shown above that seeing “face to face” is a metaphor for seeing something clearly rather than dimly. It is not a reference to seeing God. Thus, justification for interpreting the second analogy as a reference to the events surrounding Christ’s return and the believer seeing and knowing God is seriously undermined.

It is best to interpret the second analogy consistent with the interpretation of the first analogy and Paul’s larger argument. As already mentioned, the expression, “now I know in part,” repeats essentially Paul’s statement from 13:9. In 13:9, what was known “in part” was the revelation of God’s mind and will as communicated through the miraculous gift of knowledge. This revelation was “in part” because the gift provided only a portion of the revelation God intended for the church. It should be assumed that the same expression in 13:12 carries the same meaning as in 13:9. Applying the point of the previous analogy to his argument and using himself as an illustration, Paul is saying that the knowledge he has of God’s will as mediated through the revelatory gifts is partial. As he has previously argued, Paul is affirming that the individual revelatory gifts provided only a partial or piecemeal revelation of the will of God for the church.

This is contrasted in the second part of the analogy with what will transpire when “the perfect” comes and the partial is superceded. Paul declares that at that time, when God’s revelation for the church is complete, then he will know fully what he presently only knows in part.¹²⁵ Since the “in part” refers to Paul’s knowledge of God’s revelation, to “know fully” must also refer to Paul’s knowledge of God’s revelation. Full revelation will bring full knowledge of God’s will, just as partial revelation provided only partial knowledge of that will.¹²⁶ Paul’s

¹²⁴See the entries in n. 121 above.

¹²⁵Paul’s using himself in the illustration does not demand that he be alive when “the perfect” comes. According to 12:10, Paul did not know when “the perfect” would come. His use of himself in the illustration is with the assumption that “the perfect” would come during his lifetime. A similar example is found in 1 Thess 4:15, 17, where Paul includes himself with those who will be alive when the Lord returns.

¹²⁶E.g., Miguens, “1 Cor 13:8–13 Reconsidered,” pp. 81–83. Noting the parallels in 13:2, 8, and 12 on what is “known,” Miguens concludes, “As a result, *ginōskein* means, not to know God, but to have a deeper penetration and understanding of the ‘mysteries’ of faith” (p. 82).

statement about his being “fully known” picks up the thought of his previous analogy. Paul knows God’s will in a way similar to his knowing or seeing himself in a mirror, that is, dimly not distinctly. When “the perfect” comes, Paul will know fully the will of God, even as God and others fully know him, that is, clearly, distinctly, and directly. Others see Paul directly and therefore clearly and distinctly, not through the mediation of a mirror. This too is how Paul will know the will of God when God’s revelation for the church is fully disclosed.¹²⁷

1 Corinthians 13:13

But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Paul began the paragraph in 13:8 by contrasting the permanence of love with the temporary nature of the revelatory gifts. The implication is that what is permanent is of greater value than what is temporary. In the intervening verses, Paul has supported his argument by explicating the temporary nature of the revelatory gifts. With this verse, Paul returns to the issue of love, introducing two additional virtues, faith and

¹²⁷Fee arrives at a similar conclusion, though with an eschatological perspective, “By this [analogy] Paul intends to delineate the difference between the ‘knowing’ that is available through the gift of the Spirit and the final eschatological knowing that is complete. What is not quite clear is the exact nuance of the final clause that expresses the nature of that final knowing, ‘even as I am fully known’.... Most likely it simply refers to God’s way of knowing. God’s knowledge of us is immediate—full and direct, ‘face to face,’ as it were; at the Eschaton, Paul seems to be saying, we too shall know in this way, with no more need for the kinds of mediation that the mirror illustrates or that ‘prophecy’ and the ‘utterance of knowledge’ exemplify in reality” (p. 648). Replacing the references to the eschaton with the completed canon, Fee’s conclusion captures the force of Paul’s analogy.

Several have objected to this interpretation, saying it is absurd to think that with the completion of the canon a believer would know more of God’s mysteries than the apostle Paul knew prior to its completion. Lloyd-Jones expresses the tension when he says that such an interpretation means “that you and I, who have the Scriptures open before us, know much more than the apostle Paul of God’s truth.... It means that we are altogether superior...even to the apostles themselves, including the apostle Paul! It means that we are now in a position in which...‘we know, even as also we are known,’ by God...indeed, there is only one word to describe such a view, it is nonsense” (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Sovereign Spirit: Discerning His Gifts* [Wheaton, IL: Shaw, 1985], p. 32).

Such criticisms, however, appear to pit Paul against himself. 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. For similar rebuttals, see Raymond, “*What About Continuing Revelations Today*,” p. 35 (n. 12); Houghton, “A Reexamination of 1 Corinthians 13:8–13,” p. 353.

hope, to highlight further the superiority of love.¹²⁸ Since Paul has not mentioned the other two virtues in this section, the tensions come in trying to explain how these other virtues relate to the temporary gifts and how love is superior. There are basically two views.¹²⁹

The *first view*, generally championed by those who see the revelatory gifts ceasing with the events surrounding the return of Christ, interprets the opening words of the verse as having a logical rather than a temporal force. Paul is not saying “but now” meaning “at the present time” as though he were transitioning from discussing the return of Christ in 13:10–12 to his own time in this verse. Rather, Paul is saying, “but now” in the sense of “therefore,” “as it is.” According to this view, Paul contrasts the three virtues listed here with the gifts he has previously mentioned. These virtues are superior to the gifts because they abide or continue while the gifts do not. By taking the opening words as logical, Paul’s statement about the virtues is understood to describe what will transpire after Christ returns and after the revelatory gifts cease. In contrast to the gifts which cease at Christ’s return, these three virtues continue into eternity. The implication is that love, as one of these virtues, is superior to the gifts, since it continues while the gifts do not. Paul then concludes the argument by declaring that love is the greatest, even among the virtues that abide throughout eternity. Love is superior, however, not because it outlasts the other virtues, but simply because of its inherent value.¹³⁰

This view has some weaknesses that make its interpretation problematic. By taking the verse as describing events following 13:12 and the return of Christ, proponents are forced to argue that all three virtues continue into eternity. However, this interpretation seems to pit Paul against himself. In Romans 8:24–25, Paul argues that the believer’s hope is set aside at the return of Christ. Hope has as its object God’s promises and, specifically, God’s promises that are fulfilled when Christ returns. To put it in Paul’s words, “hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he *already* sees?” The same is true with faith. In 2 Corinthians 5:7, Paul basically makes the same point, saying that presently the believer lives by faith in God’s promises and not by sight. The clear implication is that when those promises are fulfilled at Christ’s return, the believer will no longer live by faith. Faith will be replaced by sight. Thus, both faith and hope, rather than continuing,

¹²⁸Similarly Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, p. 66.

¹²⁹Following Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, pp. 72–73; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 625–26. Carson lists a third view, but discounts it on grammatical grounds (pp. 73–74).

¹³⁰So, for example, Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, pp. 73–75; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 626–27.

are replaced when Christ returns.¹³¹

The *second view*, generally championed by those who see the gifts ceasing at the end of the apostolic age and the close of the New Testament canon, overcomes the above liabilities. This view interprets the opening words of the verse as temporal. Paul is saying that the three virtues continue “now,” that is, “in the present” or “in this present period.” As with the preceding view, this view understands Paul to be contrasting the virtues with the revelatory gifts. The virtues are superior because they are longer lived than the gifts. In this case, however, the contrast is between the gifts that cease at some point within this present period and the virtues that continue throughout this period. Paul then concludes by declaring the superiority of love to the other virtues. Love is superior, the implication is, because it alone continues beyond the present period into eternity.¹³²

CONCLUSION

Of the four views on the interpretation of this passage, the completed canon view overcomes the liabilities of the other views and leaves the least number of questions unanswered. It interprets “prophecy,” “tongues,” and “knowledge” in 13:8 consistently with the larger literary structure as references to miraculous, revelatory gifts. It defends the continuity between Old Testament prophecy and New Testament prophecy supported by the biblical data. This view maintains the proper link between Paul’s statement about these gifts ceasing in 13:8 and his explanation of that statement in 13:9–10. It gives an interpretation of “the perfect” in 13:10 that is corroborated by both the grammatical and historical evidence. It interprets Paul’s analogies in 13:11–12 in harmony with the immediate and greater contexts. Further, this view allows for an exposition of 13:13 that corresponds to what Paul says elsewhere about the virtues of faith and hope. For these reasons the completed canon view is established as the most exegetically defensible interpretation.¹³³

¹³¹Fee, a non-cessationist, nevertheless recognizes the liabilities with the first interpretation and gives a detailed rebuttal (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 649–51).

¹³²E.g., Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, pp. 83–84. 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 (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 649–51).

¹³³This conclusion counters the charge by Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts*, p. 294, who denies that the completed canon view is exegetically defensible. See n. 5 above.