

1 Corinthians 13 - What Love Is & What Love Is Not; Cessation of the Revelatory Gifts

III. Questions asked of Paul (1 Cor 7:1--16:24)

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1 Corinthians 13

- (C) The need for love (13:1-13)

Paul's purpose for inserting the "love chapter" between his teaching on spiritual gifts may initially seem out of place. But he's teaching the church at Corinth, who over-emphasized the gift of tongues (to the detriment of other gifts), and who lacked love, that love will never end but some of the gifts (i.e. tongues) will come to an end. Thus, love for others should control the use of the believer's spiritual gifts within the church.

- (a) Necessity of love (13:1-3)

1 If I speak with the tongues of mankind and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

1 If I speak in the languages of humans and angels but have no love, I have become a reverberating gong or a clashing cymbal.

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

- In the first three verses of this chapter, Paul tells the Corinthians that exercising one's spiritual gifts without love is annoying (v1), characteristic of a "nobody" (v2), and does not bring benefit to anyone (v3)
- His point that without love covering the exercise of spiritual gifts, they are a pointless waste of time, and actually do more harm than good
- The fruit of the Spirit is a more obvious demonstration of the Spirit's presence in a person's life, and His control over one's life, than our spiritual gifts
- "If" - third class condition meaning it is a possibility; it is uncertain of fulfillment, but likely.
"If at a future time the condition is met, then this will follow."
- "...I" - Paul is using himself as an example as one who might, for example, speak in tongues but not have love
- "...tongues" - *glōssa*, Paul leads with tongues because of the Corinthians' fascination with this gift (Cf. 1 Cor 14)
- Throughout the entire discussion of the gift of tongues, there is no evidence that Paul regarded them as anything but languages; throughout the entire NT, tongues always refers to languages
- "...[tongues] of mankind" - languages that human beings speak (i.e. English, Spanish, Italian, etc.)
- "...and" - *kai*, ascensive, better translated "even" to heighten the hyperbolic sense
- "...[tongues] of angels" - Paul uses the first person here because the Corinthians believed that they spoke with the tongues of both men and angels (Cf. 14:14-15)
- When Paul talks about speaking with the "tongues...of angels" he's talking about speaking in a known, understandable language. He's talking about the two purposes of tongues described earlier...to edify the body and as a sign for unbelievers that God was doing something new in Acts 2.
- In Ps 78:25, the writer described manna as "the bread of angels"; this description of the manna stresses its heavenly origin and high quality, not that the angels actually eat manna. Paul is using "tongues...of angels" in a similar way.
- Some argue that speaking in "tongues of angels" refers to a secret prayer language. However, every time an angel speaks to a human in Scripture, it's always in an understandable, known language (Cf. Luke 1:26-38).
- "...love" - *agapē*, God's love, placed in the believer by the indwelling Spirit
- It is only the indwelling Spirit who can produce this love in a believer and manifest it through a believer
- "...noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" - make loud noise, but make no sense; the gift that the Spirit gave the person, who didn't use it with love, would provide no edification to those to whom the gift was dispensed.

— Paul's point is that even if one could speak in this exalted language, but they did not act lovingly (actively seek the benefit of someone else), their speech would be hollow and empty, even annoying to others

2 If I have *the gift of prophecy* and know all mysteries and all **knowledge**, and if I have all **faith so as to remove mountains**, but do not have love, I am nothing.

2 If I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can understand all secrets and every form of knowledge, and if I have absolute faith so as to move mountains but have no love, I am nothing.

2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

- "If" - third class condition (see note v1)

- "...prophecy" - the power to declare the things of God, the power to bring the word of heaven to bear upon the earth, the power to bring eternity into time (Cf. 14:1-5 vs. tongues)

— It is a higher gift than speaking in tongues (14:1-5), but still inferior to love

— Is it possible to have the gift of prophecy and have not love? Balaam's prophecy (Num 23:9) has been true for 3500 years; Caiaphas, the High Priest (John 11:49-50)

- "...knowledge" - a revelatory gift in the early church, since Paul connects it with prophecy (which was also a revelatory gift in the early church)

- "...faith so as to remove mountains" - a Jewish proverbial saying that conveyed the idea of making the impossible possible (Cf. 12:9; Matt 17:20; Luke 17:6)

— Having multiple spiritual gifts and exercising those gifts without love means nothing. The believer or church is not edified, they receive no benefit.

[1 Cor 12:8; 14:5]

3 And if I give away all my possessions to *charity*, and if I surrender my body so that I may glory, but do not have love, it does me no good.

3 And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

3 Even if I give away everything that I have and sacrifice myself, but have no love, I gain nothing.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

- "...if" - third class condition (see note v1)

- Even what passes for extreme self-sacrifice for the less fortunate, if done without love, provides no profit (benefit) to the body of Christ
- Paul's personal sufferings for the salvation of others were also worthless without love (2 Cor 11:23-29; 12:10)
- Even martyrdom may or may not spring from love; if it didn't, it was valueless in the sight of God and would bring no divine reward

(b) Nature of love (13:4-7)

There are three Greek words for love. The first word is *eros* which is love for an adorable object, especially between a man and a woman. This word is never used in the Greek NT. The second word is *phileo* and refers to friendship love. This word or its root is used several times in the Greek NT (John 21:15,16,17; Titus 2:4). The third word is *agapē* and refers to the unconditional love of God for us which is not deserved and has no thought of return. This is the word that is used many times in the Greek NT and in this passage. This is the word Jesus used when He gave us a new commandment, that we love one another as He loved us (John 13:34). It is the love of God that is shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit (Rom 5:5; Gal 5:22-23) and the chief characteristic by which we are known by the world (John 13:35). This love is not tolerance of sin (Rev 2:18-29) or compromise with sin (Rev 2:12-17), but love for righteousness and truth. It wants the best for each individual, which is always freedom from the power of sin. This love is more important than all the gifts and something that, if exhibited by the Corinthians, would correct their abuse of the spiritual gift of tongues.

While the following famous verses are appropriate within marital relations, it is a love within the assembly that Paul is describing. Marital love includes but extends beyond these words (1 Cor 7:2-6; 10-11; et. al.).

In this passage, Paul describes love by what it is and what it is not. He begins with two descriptions of what love is (patient, kind), followed by eight descriptions of what it is not. He then concludes with four additional descriptions of what love is.

- 4 Love is patient, love is kind, it is not jealous; love does not brag, it is not arrogant.**
- 4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant,**
- 4 Love is always patient; love is always kind; love is never envious or arrogant with pride.**
Nor is she conceited,
- 4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,**
- "...patient" - *makrothumeo*, a compound word: *makro* = "great" and *themeo* = heat. Love allows a great amount of friction to develop in relationships without becoming fed up.

- Patience is listed first because Paul understands that people are different: different spiritual gifts, different hearts, different abilities, different personalities, different experiences
- We need patience because at some point these differences will cause misunderstandings ("great heat")
- Patience is often used of God (Luke 18:7; 2 Peter 3:9; Rom 2:4; 9:22, etc.). We need to remember how patient God is with us (Cf. 1 Tim 1:16).
- "...kind" - "kindness" is love's active initiative; not a triumph of obstinacy, but a triumph of grace
- Going out of your way (i.e. Jesus' treatment of Judas). It shows mercy to others as God has shown mercy to us.
- Both "patience" and "kindness" are fruits of the Spirit
- After two positive expressions of love ("patience" and "kindness"), Paul lists eight verbs that indicate how love does not behave. The first five typify the Corinthians.
- "...it is not jealous" - it does not envy the success of others. Jealousy can be disastrous:
 - Murder (Cain and Abel, Gen 4:3-8)
 - Slavery (Jacob's sons & Joseph, Gen 37:11,28)
 - High priest, jails apostles (Acts 5:17-18)
 - Jews of Paul and Barnabas, expelled them from Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:45-50)
- "...does not brag" - it never heaps praise on oneself
- Jesus never showed off. His greatness was often revealed in what He suppressed.
- "...is not arrogant" - it is not inflated by an exaggerated sense of self
- Knowledge puffs up our ego, but love builds up others (8:1). Arrogance is inflated selfishness, love is genuine humility. Arrogance and love are mutually exclusive.

Love may be difficult to define; it is not difficult to discern. Paul attempts no definition, analysis, or description; he pictures love in action. He shows what it does and feels, and what it refrains from doing. He records the ways in which it manifests itself.

- 5 It does not **act disgracefully**, it does not **seek its own benefit**; it is not provoked, does not **keep an account of a wrong suffered**,
- 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,
- 5 and she is never rude; she never thinks just of herself or ever gets annoyed. She never is resentful;
- 5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not [easily] provoked, thinketh no evil;

- "...act disgracefully" - it is never dishonorable relative to a standard (Cf. 7:36). It is not rude, inconsiderate, inattentive. It avoids the whole range of unseemliness.
- Love does not deal with other people in a way that injures their dignity
- "...seek its own *benefit*" - love does not insist on having its own way or put its own interest before the needs of others
- Love does not grasp for its own "rights." This rules out selfish love: love "if"; love "because"; etc.
- Paul was an example. He served as their pastor for 1-1/2 years without financial support from them (9:18). Repeatedly instructed them to seek the welfare of others, not their own (10:24,33; Cf. Prov 3:29; Zech 8:17).
- "...is not provoked" - love does not become easily irritated, is not "touchy"; does not get inwardly aroused
- Even Moses, a very humble person (Num 12:3) lost his temper when people quarreled with him over lack of water (Num 20:2-11)
- Love is not irritable or touchy, but it absorbs offenses, insults and inconveniences for the sake of others
- Jesus was never angry at wrongs done to Himself. Never vindictive; never retaliated. There's no excuse for a bad temper or even grumbling!
- "...keep an account of a wrong *suffered*" - *logizeshthai*, doesn't keep a record of wrongs in order to pay them back (Luke 23:34; Rom 12:17-21; 2 Cor 5:19)
- The "keeping of accounts" is a bookkeeping term. Jesus came to blot out transgressions and remember them no more.
- Our memory should be devoted to kindnesses, not suspicions

- 6 it does not **rejoice in unrighteousness**, but **rejoices with the truth**;
- 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;
- 6 is never glad with sin; she's always glad to side with truth, and pleased that truth will win.
- 6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;
- "...rejoice in unrighteousness" - it is not glad when injustice or wickedness prevails
- "...rejoices with the truth" - love rejoices when truth and justice prevail

- 7 it **keeps every confidence**, it **believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things**.
- 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
- 7 She bears up under everything; believes the best in all; there is no limit to her hope, and never will she fall.
- 7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.
- "...keeps every confidence" - "bears all things"; it withstands difficulties and keeps things confidential by passing over them in silence

- Love covers unworthy things, rather than bringing them to the light and magnifying them
- "...believes all things" - trusting all things that one confides in you by taking them at face value rather than presuming there is more to the story
- Love is always eager to believe the best, give the benefit of the doubt; love puts the most favorable construction on ambiguous events
- "...hopes all things" - love has hope for the best outcome even after past failures
- Love is always hopeful that those who have failed will not fail again, rather than concluding that their failure is inevitable
- "...endures all things" - *hupomenein*, to bear or endure under trials rather than getting overwhelmed; not just passively, but in bearing them it can conquer them
- Love does not allow itself to become overwhelmed, but perseveres steadfastly through difficult trials

If we allow God's love to control us, we will use spiritual gifts in the way they were intended to be used, for the edification, encouragement, and consolation of the body (14:3).

(c) Endurance of love (13:8-13)

(i) Unlike love, the revelatory gifts will cease (13:8-10)

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

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.

8 Love never fails. Now if there are prophecies, they will be done away with. If there are languages, they will cease. If there is knowledge, it will be done away with.

8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

- "Love never fails" - *piptō*, love does not fall away or dissipate when the physical and temporal things on which affection rests pass away; love outlasts the temporal

— Love (*agape*) characterizes our existence now and forever, even into the Eternal State, but gifts (*charismata*) are only for the present age. Love is eternal since it is one of God's attributes (1 John 4:8,16).

— This counters the Corinthian view that gifts were evidence that they were already in the eschatological stage of their salvation

- "...but" - *de*, a contrastive; indicates that while *agapē* will never end, the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will be "done away with"

- "...prophecy...tongues...knowledge" - revelatory gifts

- "...gifts of prophecy" - the ability to make inspired statements with the weight of Scripture

- It was a revelatory gift given to write the Scriptures under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21), although not every word spoken by the prophets was captured in Scripture
- "...they will be done away" - *katargeo*, rendered inoperative; abolished; to set aside, pass away, or cease; it's in the passive voice implying that it will be terminated by God
- "...tongues" - *glōssa*, the ability to speak a known foreign language that was previously unknown to the speaker
- It was also a revelatory gift that served as a sign to unbelievers (14:22)
- "...they will cease" - *pauō*, the verb "to cease" is a synonym and a variant of the verb "to set aside"
- The active middle voice implies that they would cease automatically, or peter out of themselves, at a different time than prophecy and knowledge
- There is virtually no distinction between the two Greek verbs that describe the termination of both prophecies (*katargeo*, "done away with") and tongues (*pauō*, "cease")
- The gift of tongues probably ceased in 70 AD when their purpose of being a sign to unbelieving Jews was fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem
- The gifts of prophecy and knowledge were likely done away with the close of the NT after John finished writing Revelation in about 95 AD
- "...knowledge" - *gnōsis*, a speaking gift that involved special revelation of some new idea, perhaps related to mystery doctrine (Cf. 13:2; Eph 3:3ff; 1 Cor 15:51, et al)
- "...it will be done away" - *katargeō*, the gift of knowledge will be "rendered inoperative" or "abolished" in the same way as the gift of prophecy (see note above)

[1 Cor 13:2; 14:5]

Is the Gift of Tongues in the Church Today?

Some charismatic Christians believe that it is. They argue mainly from experience, having heard someone, perhaps themselves, speak in what others refer to as tongues. In most cases, what they call tongues is gibberish, not a known language. This is different from what the NT identified as tongues, namely, known languages (Cf. 1 Cor 12; 14). In a few cases, people have apparently spoken in known languages that they have not studied, the type of tongues-speaking that the NT describes.

The real issue is what the NT says about tongues, not what one may have experienced. 1 Cor 13:8 says that tongues would pass away or cease of themselves, as in petering out. When would this happen? The NT does not specify when, but it implies that they would peter out before prophecy would end (lit. "be terminated" [by God], passive voice of *katargeo*).

There is no single verse that indicates tongues *would* cease or that they *did* cease in the apostolic period. However, it is safe to conclude that they did for two reasons. First, other

NT passages imply that they would and did cease then (Eph 2:20; Heb 2:3-4). Second, the early church fathers wrote that tongues petered out in the early history of the church, even though there were rare instances of the phenomenon after that [Origen (ca. 185-ca. 254 AD), "Against Celsus," 7:8 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 4:614; Chrysostom (347-407 AD), "Homily 12 on Matthew," in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 10:77].

For additional information, see:

[Ecclesiology 28 Spiritual Gifts - Part 8 - Selective Cessation \(1 Cor 13:8-13\)](#)

[Ecclesiology 29 Spiritual Gifts - Part 9 - Selective Cessation \(1 Cor 13:8-13\)](#)

[Ecclesiology 30 Spiritual Gifts - Part 10 - Selective Cessation \(1 Cor 13:8-13\)](#)

9 **For** we know in part and prophesy in part;

9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part;

9 For what we know is incomplete and what we prophesy is incomplete.

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

— "For" - signals an explanation for why prophecy and knowledge will be "done away with"

— When Paul wrote, these revelatory gifts contributed to knowing (gift of knowledge) "in part" and prophecy (gift of prophesy) "in part"

— But when "the perfect" comes (v10), the "partial" contribution of these gifts would be "done away with"

— A period of time is in view in moving from "partial" to "the perfect"

10 but when **the perfect** comes, **the partial** will be done away with.

10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

10 But when what is complete comes, then what is incomplete will be done away with.

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

— "...the perfect" - *teleios*, Greek neuter adjective; never used in the NT in the sense of "perfection" but rather "maturity" or "completeness"

— It is never used to refer to an eschatological event (Rapture, Second Coming, the Day of the Lord, or the Eternal State) because it is in the neuter gender, and these events are personal and in the masculine gender

— In James 1:25, it is used to describe the Word of God

James 1:25: But one who has looked intently at **the perfect** [*teleios*] law, the *law* of freedom, and has continued *in it*, not having become a forgetful hearer but an active doer, this person will be blessed in what he does.

— "...the partial" - the revelatory gifts: prophecy, tongues/interpretation, knowledge (v8)

To What Does "the perfect" & "the partial" Refer?

Paul says, When "the perfect" comes, "the partial" will be set aside. So in order to rightly interpret this passage, we need to understand what "the perfect" and "the partial" are referring to. There are three primary views:

(1) Eschaton (Ideal) View

This view, the most popular among scholars, argues that "the perfect" refers to the time after the Second Coming and millennial kingdom, at the inauguration of the Eternal State, when we see God "face to face" (v12).

- They believe that all spiritual gifts (even the revelatory gifts) last until the Eternal State.

To support this view, they cross-reference "face to face" in 1 Cor 13:12 with "see His face" in Rev 22:4. From this, they believe *teleion* in Rev 22:4 refers to the Eternal State:

1 Cor 13:12: For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then **face to face** [*prosōpon pros prosōpon*]; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

Rev 22:4: they will **see His face** [*prosōpon*], and His name *will be* on their foreheads.

- However, 1 Cor 13:12 doesn't say we will see God face to face...you have to read God into the verse in order for it to correlate to Rev 22:4. God is not mentioned at all in this chapter.
- They interpret "now" [2x] in v12 as referring to when the revelatory gifts (prophecy, knowledge, tongues/interpretation) are in operation
- They interpret "then" in v12 as the revelatory gifts ceasing after Jesus returns at the Second Coming and/or the Eternal State
- As to how this view handles the two illustrations in v11-12:
 - They say that the church is in immaturity today, and won't reach full maturity until Jesus' return
 - We (the church) will move from limited sight to full sight (v12)
 - Today we know "in part" but when Jesus returns we'll know "fully"

Problems with the Eschaton (Ideal) View:

- *Teleios* has a number of meanings/usages in Scripture, but it never means "perfection"
 - Sometimes it refers to a grown man, who is not sinless, but who sins less (spiritually growing/mature) (1 Cor 2:6; 14:20; Phil 3:15; Eph 4:13).
 - Sometimes *teleios* means "complete" which also doesn't mean a person is perfect (Rom 12:2)
 - In v11-12, Paul uses himself as an example. He says that if you want to see what *teleios* looks like, look at me. He points to himself. Paul was a great guy, but he never claimed to be perfect/sinless (Cf. Acts 23:2-3; Rom 7; Gal 5:16; Phil 3:12).
 - Because Paul uses himself as an example of *teleios*, and we know Paul wasn't perfect, then *teleios* cannot refer to sinless perfection here.

- *Teleios* is never used to describe eschatological events, including the Second Coming, the millennial kingdom, or the Eternal State. If *teleios* referred to any of these events here, it would be the only reference in the NT.
- Perfection (a "quality") does not provide a suitable antithesis to "in part" [*ek meros*] of v10,12 (a "quantity")
 - The "perfection view" pits two ideas that do not go together...a *quality* (perfection) against a *quantity* ("in part"). Paul is not comparing something ideal with something in part...that wouldn't make sense.
- Eschatological events happen immediately making the analogy of v11 difficult
 - Scripture consistently describes end time events as happening quickly, instantaneously, suddenly (inauguration of the kingdom, the Rapture, etc.). God doesn't need a long period of time to wrap up history.
 - If this is the case, how could *teleios* refer to a quick or sudden event when Paul analogizes it (v11) to the maturing of a child? Children don't mature suddenly; it's a gradual process that people go through.
- *Teleios* is in the neuter gender, while the personal coming of Christ would require a masculine adjective
 - A neuter adjective is a very strange way to describe the personal return of Jesus Christ. Jesus is always referred to in the masculine gender in Scripture.
- Allows for an open canon (Jude 3; Rev 22:18-19)
 - If you believe that the gifts of tongues/interpretation, prophecy, and knowledge are still in operation today, then you must believe that the canon of Scripture is still open. If someone can come into the church and utter a direct word from the Lord (via any of these revelatory gifts), then you should take what they say and write it into your Bible.
 - This is the logical outcome of believing the revelatory gifts are in operation today, and will continue up until the return of Christ. This simply cannot be true, because Scripture is clear that the canon of Scripture is closed.

Jude 3: Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was **once for all** handed down to the saints.
- This view maintains that prophets still exist throughout the church age, which is inconsistent with the scriptural teaching that God's word is sufficient (2 Tim 3:15-16) and complete (Rev 22:18-19).

(2) Maturity View

This view argues that "the perfect" refers to the time when the church reached the age of maturity. They view events such as the closing of the canon (~95 AD), the unification of the

church, the independence of the church (from the apostles, due to their death), and the church's break from being a denomination of Judaism.

- They interpret "now" [2x] in v12 as the time period before the church reached maturity
- They interpret "then" in v12 as the time period after the church reached maturity

This view is closer to the truth than the Eschaton view because:

- It believes in a closed canon of Scripture
- It believes that the revelatory gifts have ceased
- It treats "infants" and "adulthood" (v11) consistently with the context of the passage, which is maturity
- It interprets *teleios* as "maturity," which is consistent with how the word is used across the NT (2:6; 14:20; Cf. Phil 3:15; Eph 4:13; Col 1:28; 4:12; Heb 5:14)

However, there are some problems with this view:

- It runs into the same issue as the Eschaton View in that maturity, which is a "quality" does not line up with "in part" in v10,12, which is a "quantity"
 - Both views believe a *quality* ("the perfect," spiritual maturity) is being contrasted with a *quantity* ("in part," partial revelation)
- Verse 11 is not illustrating the church's growth to maturity, but rather illustrating what it means to go from the partial to the complete in v10
- The criteria for when the church reached maturity is arbitrary/subjective. You can argue that the vast majority of church (members) are immature today, so has the "church" really matured?
 - Was the church really mature in 70 AD?
 - Eph 4:11-13 seems to teach that the church is constantly growing into maturity throughout the church age
- "Maturity" is not a sufficient contrast with "in part." There's no argument that *teleios* can mean maturity, but there's no evidence in this context that this maturity is of the church

(3) Complete View

This view argues that "the perfect" refers to the moment John finishing writing Rev 22:21.

At that point, the biblical canon was closed, and the revelatory gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues/interpretation ceased to be operational in the church.

- This view argues that *teleios* should be translated as "complete" (Cf. NSRV) and refers to the time that the NT canon was closed
 - The partial revelation provided by the revelatory gifts (prophecy, tongues/interpretation/knowledge) would cease, but faith, hope, and love (v13) would remain.
 - The canon was not closed when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (~55 AD), so the revelatory gifts were necessary to explain the nature of the church and its purpose.

- This view interprets "now" (2x, v12) as the time period *before* the canon was closed (as of John's writing of Rev 22:21)
- This view believes "then" (v12) is the time *after* the canon was completed and the revelatory gifts ceased to be operational in the church
- In v11, where Paul is talking about children maturing into adults, is a picture of the church before the canon closed (children) to after the canon closed (adults)
- In v12 where Paul is talking about transitioning from limited sight to full sight refers to the church before the canon was closed (limited sight) to after the canon was closed (full sight)
- This view does not interpret "fully" as occurring when we see Christ face-to-face, but rather once we have God's full revelation in the form of Scripture

— See [Ecclesiology 28 Spiritual Gifts - Part 8 - Cessation of Certain Gifts \(1 Cor 13:8-13\)](#) and [Ecclesiology 29 Spiritual Gifts - Part 9 \(1 Cor 13:8-13\)](#) for more detail on all three interpretations.

Paul described the temporary character of the spiritual gifts (v8-10), contrasted them with love, and now gives two supporting illustrations: a child (v11) and a reflection (v12).

(ii) Two supporting illustrations (13:11-12)

(a) Transition from immaturity to maturity (13: 11)

11 When I was a **child**, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, **I did away with childish things.**

11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, thought like a child, and reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up my childish ways.

11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

- This verse is the first of two illustrations that Paul uses to illustrate the growth from partial to complete in v9-10...

— Paul uses himself ("I") as an example to contrast his ways as a child to his ways as a man

— When he was "a child" he "spoke like a child" (tongues?), "thought like a child"

(knowledge?), and "reasoned like a child" (prophecy?)

— The three descriptions of himself as a child may correspond to the partial revelation coming to the church through tongues, knowledge, and prophecy

- The transition from immaturity to maturity (child to man) is the transition of the church from before the canon closed to after the canon closed

- "...child" - represents the incomplete knowledge available to the infant, pre-canonical church

- Just as a child has inadequate knowledge to live as a mature adult, the church prior to having the full counsel of God lacked sufficient doctrine and revelation to lead a full spiritual life
- An adult reaches maturity when they are complete with the knowledge and skills necessary for life. This was not possible before the church had the full counsel of God, which is the only revelation that is sufficient for every need, every problem, every difficulty in life.
- "...I did away with" - *karageō*, cease, abolish, destroy; it's in the perfect tense meaning that he put away childish things decisively and with finality in the past, not needing to be repeated again (contrasting an infant vs. immature man)
- Paul "abolishing" his childish ways corresponds to the doing away of the revelatory gifts that gave partial knowledge
- The reason his "childish ways" were "abolished" is that with the completed NT canon, the church had a completed revelation on which to base its decisions. The revelatory gifts were no longer needed.

(b) Transition from limited sight to full sight (13:12)

12 For **now** we see in a **mirror** dimly, but **then face to face; now I know in part**, but **then I will know fully, just as I also have been fully known.**

12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

12 Now we see only an indistinct image in a mirror, but then we will be face to face. Now what I know is incomplete, but then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

- Paul now gives a second illustration of the partial becoming complete in v9-10...

— Paul used the example of the church seeing ourselves in a mirror to contrast the difference in visual quality of looking at a dim mirror versus a clear mirror

- "...now" [2x] - *arti*, immediate, arriving at any moment, imminent; denotes the present strictly as a point of time or as a period of time

— Refers to the time period when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (~55 AD), before the NT canon was complete

— This is how Paul describes the church looking at themselves from the partial revelation that had been given up to that time. It was not yet clear what the church was because the mystery doctrines that explain the nature and program of the church were still being revealed (Cf. 1 Cor 2:7; 15:51-52; Rom 11:25; Eph 3:3-7).

- "...mirror" - *esoptron*, only used 2x in the NT (here, James 1:23). Paul's use of *esoptron* here matches James' use of it, which describes the Bible as a tool for realistic self-

assessment.

James 1:23: For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a **mirror**;

- The city of Corinth was famous for its polished bronze mirrors. The state-of-the-art mirror at that time, however, was far short of mirrored glass of today.
- Paul envisioned a time, future, when believers would have the entire realm of mystery doctrine to objectively know themselves and be spiritually self sustaining. Only God has a complete knowledge of the believer and only with a complete canon of Scripture can a believer have sufficient, objective knowledge of himself.
- This mirror of truth enables the believer to accurately and objectively evaluate his own life and circumstances from God's viewpoint. Prior to the completed canon a believer only had an incomplete understanding of who he is and what he possesses, and the vast assets that God has provided for him.
- "...then" [2x] - *tote*, the time after the canon of Scripture is closed; the revelatory gifts (prophecy, knowledge, tongues/interpretation) would cease in the post-apostolic and post-NT canon era (after ~95 AD)
- Before the canon was complete, the church only knew who it was in part due to the piecemeal revelations received through prophecy, tongues, and knowledge. "But then" when the NT canon was complete, it would know fully who they were, just as each of us is fully known by God.
- "...face to face" - *prosōpon pros prosōpon*, refers to the believer's capacity to see himself clearly through the "perfect mirror" of the completed canon
- This phrase does not refer to fellowship *with* God (Judges 6:22), but rather revelation *from* God (Num 12:6-8), allowing for honest self-assessment (Cf. James 1:23). The Bible tells us who we are and gives us a measure of honest self-assessment (Heb 4:12).
- To infer "face to face" as meaning direct fellowship with God must read God into this verse because Paul doesn't mention Him and He is not included in the context
- There are many verses that use the term "face to face" to describe communication with God (Gen 32:20; Ex 3:11; Deut 5:4; 34:10; Ezek 20:35). So because the Bible uses "face to face" to describe communication with God, people interpret 1 Cor 13:12 in the same manner. Then they jump to the fact that at the Second Coming, we will see God face to face, so the revelatory gifts will continue until that time.
- However "face to face" does not always mean direct fellowship with God; it can also mean direct revelation from God. God speaking to man rather than man having fellowship with God. This is how God's communication with Moses is described in Num 12:6-8.
- "...know" - *ginōskō*, to have intimate knowledge of something or someone (Cf. Gen 4:1)
- "...in part" - *ek meros*, describes the revelatory gifts (tongues/interpretation, prophecy, knowledge) that were "partial" (v10)

- These revelatory gifts were "in part" meaning these gifts were not designed by God to be a complete revelation of Himself; we now have that with the completed canon
- These gifts were functioning in early Christianity because early Christians needed these things, because they were without the light of a complete revelation from God. So how did the church function without a completed NT canon? They were completely dependent upon these revelatory gifts in order to hear and understand the Word of God.
- These gifts ceased once the canon was closed. These "in part" gifts have been superseded by something that is complete and all sufficient—the Bible.
- The sufficiency of Scripture means that a diligent student of the Bible has all the information and revelation from God that they need in order to become all that God has called you to become in Christ Jesus. We don't need some additional partial revelation, word of knowledge, or some partial prophecy in order to determine what God wants and requires from us (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3-4).
- "...I will know fully...have been fully known" - *epiginosko*, aorist tense, implies full and complete knowledge
- Contrary to many interpretations, "know fully" or being "fully known" does not occur when we see Christ face-to-face, but rather once we have God's full picture/revelation in the form of Scripture
- See [Ecclesiology 28_Spiritual Gifts - Part 8 - Cessation of Certain Gifts \(1 Cor 13:8-13\)](#) and [Ecclesiology 29_Spiritual Gifts - Part 9 \(1 Cor 13:8-13\)](#) for detail on the various interpretations of "the perfect" (v10).

(iii) Although faith, hope, and love will exist until Christ's return, only love will exist after Christ's return (13:13)

13 But **now****faith, hope, and love** remain, these three; but **the greatest of these** is love.

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

13 Right now three things remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

- In contrast to the partial gifts of knowledge, tongues, and prophecy, faith, hope, and love will remain and outlast the partial gifts
- Thus, the Corinthians (and us!) should place a higher priority on these (faith, hope, love) than on the temporal revelatory gifts
- "...now" - *nyni*, arriving immediately/soon (within a person's lifetime), but continuing on after arrival
- In contrast to *arti* (v12), denotes the period between Christ's two comings, embracing the fullness of the whole period
- "...faith" - *pistis*, trust that leads to action. The foundation of our relationship with God; the only way we become His children (John 1:12; Heb 11:6).

- "...hope" - *elpis*, our confidence in the future. Not a vague guess, but an absolute, confident assurance based on Him and His promises.
- Our God is the God of hope (Rom 15:13)
- "...love" - *agapē*, greater than hope (v7) and faith (v2). It contains them both!
- Love is foundational; God's eternal love for his Son and, through him, expresses His love for His people (Eph 1:5-6). God is love (John 3:16; 1 John 4:7-8,16).
- This triad occurs frequently in the NT: Rom 5:2-5; Gal 5:5-6; Eph 1:15-18; 4:2-5; Col 1:4-5; 1 Thess 1:3; 5:8; Heb 6:10-12; 10:22-24; 1 Peter 1:3-8,21-22
- "...remain" - *menō*, another contrast to the "partial/in part" revelatory gifts, faith, hope, and love will remain long after the gifts of tongues, prophecy and knowledge are gone
- "...the greatest of these" - among faith, hope, and love, love is the greatest because it will only increase when we see the Lord, rather than decreasing in us, as faith and hope will
- At the Rapture, hope will give way to immortality; at the Second Coming, faith will give way to sight
- In the future, we will continue to trust God and hope in Him, but the reality of His presence will make it easier for us to do so than it is now