

"THAT WHICH IS PERFECT"

I. CORINTHIANS 13:10

BY

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PREFACE

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The purpose of this critical monograph is, of course, to ascertain the exact interpretation of the passage under consideration. The writer has truthfully come to the passage with no preconceived idea as to its interpretation. But after much thought, prayer, and study, there seems to be one good interpretation which can be fully supported. The writer has always had a special interest in the field of history, and this subject has been particularly fascinating since its background is steeped in apostolic life and times.

It is with grateful appreciation that the writer acknowledges the abundant counsel and guidance given by his faculty advisor Dr. Alva J. McClain. The hours spent in talking over this problem with him have enriched the writer's life as well as having enlightened him as to the meaning of the passage. A great debt is also owed to the entire faculty for the blessings and knowledge obtained in the classes at Grace Theological Seminary during the past two years.

All Bible passages are quoted from the King James version unless otherwise indicated.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

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There are many problems in the Bible, and anyone who thinks differently is either unwise or unlearned. All Biblical problems may be classified under one of three types. First, there are those problems which may be settled through thorough investigation, with the full assurance that the conclusion is correct. Second, there are those problems which may be investigated with a satisfactory conclusion being drawn. Yet this type of a problem may be interpreted in various ways by various individuals with good support for each view taken, and no position lacking real problems in connection with it. Third, there are those Biblical problems concerning which we know little or nothing up to the present time. It would just seem that God had not chosen to reveal these things to us as yet.

The problem under consideration here falls into the second type of Biblical problem. The explanation as to why we cannot be absolutely certain of any one interpretation of this passage is understandable. I. Corinthians 12 - 14 deals with the spiritual gifts, and is so steeped in the first century history of the church and the early workings of the Holy Spirit that we can but assume and conjecture certain things to have been true of that period. History has always faced the problem of trying to construct accurately the life and ways of an earlier period, but has never been

able to accomplish this to the extent desired. How much more difficult it is to try to reconstruct God's dealings with the early church!

In the pages which are to follow, the author shall humbly present what he feels to be the most plausible interpretation of the passage along with the strongest evidence to support this view. If this monograph only serves as a means of presenting the answer to the problem it shall fall far short of the author's desire for the reader. It is hoped that this discussion will bring the reader face to face with the marvelous provisions God has made for his church down through the centuries.

The precise subject of this monograph includes only the single clause "that which is perfect" in I. Corinthians 13:10. However, verses 8 and 9 shall be thoroughly discussed for they are the key to the interpretation of verse 10.

ENGLISH VERSIONS

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Authorized Version:

"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. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away."

New Translation of the Bible - Moffatt:

"Love never disappears. As for prophesying, it will be superseded; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will be superseded. For we only know bit by bit, and we only prophesy bit by bit; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will be superseded."

New Testament in Basic English:

"Though the prophet's word may come to an end, tongues come to nothing, and knowledge have no more value, love has no end. For our knowledge is only in part, and the prophet's word gives only a part of what is true: but when that which is complete is come, then that which is in part will be no longer necessary."

Revised Standard Version:

"Love never ends; as for prophecy, it will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will

pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away.

THE TEXT IN THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

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v. 8. Ἡ ἀγάπη οὐδέποτε πιπτει. εἴτε δὲ
 προφητεῖαι, καταργηθῶσονται. εἴτε γλῶσσαι,
 παύσονται. εἴτε γνώσις, καταργηθήσεται.

v. 9. ἐκ μέρους γὰρ γινώσκομεν, καὶ ἐκ
 μέρους προφητεύομεν.

v. 10. Ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ τὸ τέλειον, τὸ ἐκ
 μέρους καταργηθήσεται.

From the Westcott and Hort text.

TEXTUAL VARIATIONS

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There are no textual variations in the clause which forms the subject of this monograph.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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There has never been any critic of note who doubted that the apostle Paul wrote I. Corinthians. If one were to do so, he must

be prepared to dispute the historical truth of the character of St. Paul. For no more complete transcript of that character, as we find it set forth to us in the Acts, can be imagined, than that which we find in this, and the second Epistle.¹

External testimony to Pauline authorship is to be found in great abundance. Such men as Clement of Alexandria, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Irenaeus, Athenagoras, and Tertullian leave us in no doubt as to their beliefs concerning the writer of the epistle. The internal evidence is also clear and convincing on this point.

The time and place of the writing of I. Corinthians should be settled in order to give a proper background to the book. Acts 18:1-17 tells us of St. Paul's first visit to Corinth, at which time the church was founded by him. After staying about eighteen months in this fruitful field, Paul departed and returned to Asia Minor, establishing himself for a period of between two and three years in Ephesus. It was during this stay that the first epistle to Corinth was written. The exact time of the writing was probably "a little before Easter in the year 58."²

¹Henry Alford, The New Testament for English Readers (London: Rivingtons, 1872), II, p. 14.

²Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians, trans. D. D. Bannerman (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1890), p. 6.

Definite reasons may be found for Paul's writing of this epistle, and also as to why he penned the subject matter found therein. After establishing the church in Corinth, Paul continued on with his journey. But meanwhile, events moved rapidly in the church at Corinth and they were far from satisfactory. Paul certainly knew about these matters for the distance from Ephesus to Corinth was not a long journey by sea. In the constant coming and going between the two cities, news of what was transpiring must frequently have come to his ears. Chapter 1, verse 11, clearly indicates that the members of the household of Chloe brought news of the contentions that prevailed, and there were no doubt other informants. On this account Paul commissioned Timothy to visit Corinth (4:17), although this epistle was to anticipate his arrival there.

Much discussion from the commentators on the subject of the so-called "lost letter" of Paul has come down to us, but the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia seems to clearly indicate the relation of this lost letter to the epistle under consideration. Paul

felt impelled in a letter (5:9) which is now lost, to send earnest warning against companying with the immoral. Moreover, Apollos, after excellent work in Corinth, had come to Ephesus, and was received as a brother by the apostle (3:5,6; 16:12). Equally welcome was a deputation consisting of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (16:17), from whom the fullest information could be gained, and who were the probable bearers of a letter from the church of Corinth itself (7:1), appealing for advice and

direction on a number of points. This letter has not been preserved, but it was evidently the immediate occasion of our ep., and its tenor is clearly indicated by the nature of the apostle's reply.¹

First Corinthians is very diverse in its subject matter. This is because of the numerous problems facing the church, and the desire of the apostle Paul to impart spiritual help to this young body of believers. The epistle begins with a consideration of the various factions within the group. Some of the members were living openly immoral lives, and discipline was almost non-existent. Some of the members had quarrels between themselves, and they went so far as to drag each other into heathen courts to settle the matters. There was a diversity of opinion as to Christian marriage, social relations, banquets and food offered to idols, and the position of women in the assembly. Disorders had taken place at the Lord's Supper and at the love-feasts. There seemed to be a great problem with regard to the use and value of the spiritual gifts, and the hope of the resurrection. It is with all of these problems that the apostle Paul deals.

Since chapters 12-14 form the section within which the pale of our discussion lies, it will be well for us to note these chapters more minutely. This division imparts

¹R. Dykes Shaw, "Corinthians, First Epistle to the," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, ed. by James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), II, p. 714.

instructions and warnings concerning spiritual gifts. The first verse of chapter 12 begins as follows: "Now concerning spiritual gifts. . . ." It is seen that a definite transition is made with what has immediately preceded. G. G. Findlay states that "the nature of the Christian community is the subject of chaps. xll. and xiv.." ¹ It is in the discussion of this community that we find mention of the three important spiritual gifts of tongues, prophecy, and knowledge.

The manner in which these gifts were exercised within the local congregation is of great importance to us in laying a suitable background for exegesis. One whose mind has been tempered by 20th century conceptions of the church can scarcely picture the local congregation of that first century. If you had attended the church at Corinth in the year 58 A. D., you no doubt would have found that the saints met in private homes for worship. Lindsay nicely describes the church gatherings as follows:

It is St. Paul, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, who gives us the most distinct picture of the meetings of the earliest Christian communities. The brethren appear to have had three distinct meetings - one for the purpose of edification by prayer and exhortation, another for thanksgiving which began with a common meal and

¹G. G. Findlay, "First Corinthians," Expositor's Greek Testament, ed. by W. R. Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946), II, p. 742.

and ended with the Holy Supper, and a third for the business of the little society.

1. In his description of the first the apostle introduces us to an earnest company of men and women full of restrained enthusiasm, which might soon become unrestrained. We hear of no officials appointed to conduct the services.¹

The order of the service in this first century church is not vastly different from that found in our churches today, with the exception of the exercise of the spiritual gifts. The service probably began with a benediction, followed by prayers of the brethren, and the singing of hymns.

After the hymns came reading from the Old Testament Scriptures, and readings or recitations concerning the life and death, the sayings and deeds of Jesus. Then came the 'instruction' - sober words for edification, based on what had been read, and coming either from the gift of 'wisdom,' or from that intuitive power of seeing into the heart of spiritual things which the apostle calls 'knowledge.' Then came the moment of greatest expectancy. It was the time for the prophets, men who believed themselves and were believed by their brethren to be specially taught by the Holy Spirit, to take part. They started forward, the gifted men, so eager to impart what had been given them, that sometimes two or more rose at once and spake together; and sometimes when one was speaking the message came to another, and he leapt to his feet, increasing the emotion and taking from the edification. When the prophets were silent, first one, then another, and sometimes two at once, began strange ejaculatory prayers, in sentences so rugged and disjointed that the audience for the most part could not understand, and had to wait till some of their number, who could follow the strange utterances, were ready to translate them into intelligible language.²

¹Thomas M. Lindsay, The Church and The Ministry in the Early Centuries (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1902), pp. 43-44.

²Ibid., pp. 46-47.

One might sensibly ask why it was necessary to have the gifts of tongues, prophecy, and knowledge in the early church. The answer is in the fact that the early church did not have the complete New Testament canon of Scripture, and in the embryo stage of the church, these spiritual gifts were necessary for the upbuilding and edification of the saints. One could not well imagine the condition of a church such as Corinth after its founder Paul had left their midst. They were left for some time probably without a single New Testament book to guide and instruct them in their newly found faith. It was because of this that

there arose in the midst of the primitive Christian societies men specially filled with all this wealth of insight, and inspired or 'gifted' to disclose to their fellows the divine counsels and the hidden mysteries of the faith.¹

As these young believers looked at the peoples around them both immediately and remotely, it can be seen that their need of special divine revelation at this time was most necessary. Lindsay states the matter very nicely as follows:

The primitive Church had its birth at a time when the old religions, whether Jewish or Pagan, had lost their power; when the old religious formulae no longer appealed to the hearts and consciences of men; when an immediate pressing religious need for which all craved. Prophecy gave this to the young Christian communities. The effect of the presence of these inspired men, who spoke soberly enough at times, and often burst forth in raptures and recited the visions

¹Ibid., p. 93.

they had received, can scarcely be overrated. They confirmed the weak, they admonished the lax, they edified the whole society.¹

In this historical section the author has endeavoured to set forth a picture of the conditions to be found in the church at Corinth about the time when the apostle Paul wrote his first epistle to them. This picture will be further expanded in the main body of the author's interpretation.

¹Ibid., p. 92.

MAJOR PROBLEM

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE CLAUSE "THAT WHICH
IS PERFECT" IN I. CORINTHIANS 13:10?

VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

I. THE PAROUSIA VIEW

One of the interpretations given by scholars to this passage is that the clause "that which is perfect" refers to the perfect or complete state to be ushered in at the end of this age. Some of these men believe that it refers not only to the state but also to the "perfect man" of Ephesians 4:13, and these would come to pass at the same time. The commentators are not agreed as to the exact time this perfection or completeness will take place for they have varied eschatological beliefs. Most of them hold it will be at the parousia of Christ. It is really immaterial as to the exact time this will take place, for the important feature is that it will be in the life which is to be ushered in at the end of the church age.

Along with this view is also the belief that the spiritual gifts mentioned in I. Corinthians 13:8-9 function actively throughout the church age. The imperfections of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge are held by these men to be for this imperfect life on earth. It is not until the perfection of the life hereafter that these gifts lose their usefulness and activity.

Among those holding this view are Hodge, Lenski, Jacobs Ellicott, McFadyen, Shore, Maier, Evans, Edwards, Meyer, Lange, Cook, Farrar, A. T. Robertson, Plummer, and Barnes. Of course each of these men differ on the small

phases perhaps, but as far as an interpretation in its entirety is concerned, these men are in general agreement.

The strongest argument for the untenableness of this interpretation is not so much centered about the view as to what the "perfect" is, but rather concerning the time when the spiritual gifts of tongues, knowledge, and prophecy should cease. The writer believes that it can be clearly shown that these gifts ceased at the end of the apostolic age. Therefore these three gifts could not continue to exist until the parousia of Christ. The full proof of the writer's position is connected with the main body of the discussion which is to follow, and so no systematic argument against the parousia view will be presented here.

II. THE MODIFIED PAROUSIA VIEW

Advocates of this view hold that the "perfect" is the perfect or complete state ushered in at the close of this age, and with that also the perfection of man when he shall come to bear a perfect likeness to Christ. But in so far as the spiritual gifts are concerned, these commentators believe that some of the $\chi\alpha\rho\iota\sigma\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$ (charismata) of the Spirit cease to function at a point between apostolic times and the end of the church age. The gift of knowledge is often cited as one of the necessary gifts which must remain until the coming of Christ when knowledge shall reach its zenith. Among those holding to this interpretation are Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, Ironside, Goudge, Findlay, and Olshausen.

In refutation of this view, the first thing noted by the writer is the fact that among the supporters of this view there is no agreement as to which of the gifts no longer exist, and also as to when those gifts which do not exist today ceased to be given. It is logical to believe that if the advocates of an interpretation cannot agree on the major elements of it, then there is reason to suppose that they cannot be certain of their position. The writer agrees that some of these gifts have ended, but proof that these three mentioned in I. Corinthians 13:8-10 have already ceased will be taken up later.

III. THE PNEUMATOLOGICAL VIEW

The only known advocate of this view is J. H. Timbrell. He holds that the "perfect" of I. Corinthians 13:10 is the giving by the Holy Spirit of the spiritual gifts of knowledge, prophecy, and tongues in the fullest measure to the Christian. These gifts were not the possession of every member of the church, for knowledge was given to some and miracles to others, thus showing their partitive nature. But the Holy Spirit is ready and anxious to pour out all of these gifts to every individual in great measure that will gather up and perpetuate in the gifts themselves. "The great truth is simply this - the state of perfect love enthrones the Giver Himself in place of His gifts."¹

The refutation of this interpretation is again based on the fact that the three gifts mentioned in I. Corinthians 13:8-10 did not continue in the church after apostolic times, as we shall later see. Therefore, if these three gifts did not exist after apostolic days, then they could not be given by the Holy Spirit down through the centuries as Timbrell would hold.

¹J. H. Timbrell, Through a Glass Darkly - An Exegetical Study in First Corinthians XIII. (New York: Palmer and Hughes, 1888), p. 106.

IV. THE CANONICAL VIEW

This interpretation is the one held by the writer of this paper and will be dealt with extensively in the following section. The writer holds that "that which is perfect" refers to the complete canon of the New Testament Scriptures. Along with this is the belief that the charismata (χαρίσματα) of knowledge, prophecy, and tongues are those having to do with divine revelation, these three having ceased after the completion of the canon.

Dr. Alva J. McClain holds to this interpretation. It is interesting to note that although no known commentator holds to the position being set forth as correct, there is strong support from them for each step leading to the canonical interpretation. The commentators simply do not carry to a logical conclusion all of the steps involved in arriving at the correct interpretation.

THE WRITER'S INTERPRETATION

INTRODUCTION TO THE WRITER'S INTERPRETATION

When a subject has the magnitude of the one under consideration, it is always difficult to decide the way in which the material might best be presented. Instead of setting forth the arguments according to linguistic, contextual, doctrinal, historical and rational considerations, the writer has chosen to examine all of these within a series of propositions which will lead progressively to the interpretation believed to be correct. Any minor problems which would usually be considered separately, will be treated in the material of the propositions.

PROPOSITION I. THE SUBJECT OF I. CORINTHIANS 12-14
IS THAT OF THE SPIRITUALITIES AND THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS.

As we turn to chapter 12, we see the opening words *περὶ δὲ τῶν πνευματικῶν*, which are translated in the A. V. "Now concerning spiritual gifts." The grammar of this clause indicates that a new subject is being undertaken. Robertson and Plummer in the International Critical Commentary write very pointedly on this as follows:

The *περὶ*, as in vii. 1 and viii. 1, probably refers to topics mentioned by them; and the *δὲ*, as in xi. 2, marks the transition from one topic to another, and probably from one topic about which they had asked to another about which they had asked.¹

Since 12:1 is transitional, beginning a new section of the book, we should note the length of this division. Barnes is correct in the following statement: "This chapter commences a new subject, the discussion of which continues to the close of the fourteenth chapter."² Olshausen, Farrar, Lenski, Ironside, et. al., hold to this division also, while Morgan, Hoyt, et. al., would add chapter fifteen to the section. At any rate, 12:1 begins the section in which the thesis subject proper is located.

¹A. T. Robertson and Alfred Plummer, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians," The International Critical Commentary, ed. by Briggs, Driver, and Plummer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916) p. 259.

²Albert Barnes, Notes, Explanatory and Practical on the New Testament (London: Blackie and Son), V, p. 223.

The general theme of chapters 12-14 is that of the πνευματικῶν (pneumatikon), translated "spiritual gifts" in the A.V.. Robertson and Plummer remark very plainly on the difficulty of understanding the meaning of many of the matters of which Paul wrote.

The difficulty of this section lies in our ignorance of the condition of things to which he refers. The phenomena which are described, or sometimes only alluded to, were to a large extent abnormal and transitory. They were not part of the regular development of the Christian church. Even in Chrysostom's time there was so much ignorance about them as to cause perplexity. He remarks that the whole of the passage is very obscure, because of our defective information respecting facts, which took place then, but take place no longer.¹

We admit that the passage is very difficult, but it is the duty and privilege of the child of God to search the Word to find a correct interpretation, supporting the position held as strongly as possible.

We at once note that in the A. V. the word "gifts" is in italics. In secular literature a word may be printed in italics to give emphasis, but such is not the case with italicized words in the Bible. It means that the word is not in the Greek, but has been supplied by the translators, and usually properly so, in order to give meaning to the passage. However, in this particular case, the English

¹Robertson and Plummer, op. cit., p. 257.

rendering "spiritual gifts" possibly conveys to our minds an incorrect impression.

The spiritualities of which Paul is speaking in chapters 12-14, are those manifestations and workings of the Holy Spirit bringing about unity in the church of God. Paul had dealt with the carnalities in the church at Corinth in the first twelve chapters, and now he has turned to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church. In the early church we see the divine way in which the Holy Spirit cared for every single need of God's people, whether it was a social need, a spiritual need, or an intellectual need. These spiritual gifts or great manifestations of the Holy Spirit were empowerments needed by the saints of God at that time.

There is some disagreement among scholars over the gender of the word Πνευματικῶν (pneumatikon). It seems that the correct view is that the noun is neuter rather than masculine. Thus the translation would be "spiritualities" rather than "spiritual people" as the masculine rendering would make it. Among those holding to this being neuter are Alford, Chrysostom, DeWette, Meyer, Olshausen, Clarke, Luther, and Edwards.

It is with a particular group of the whole order of the Πνευματικῶν (pneumatikon) that we are concerned, namely the χαρίσματα (charismata). This term is used "in a technical sense to denote extraordinary gifts of

the Spirit bestowed upon Christians to equip them for the service of the church."¹ Our major concern will be with the *χαρίσματα* of tongues, knowledge, and prophecy, and we shall deal with these at great length later.

Before leaving the discussion of the spiritualities, something should be said concerning certain endowments of the Holy Spirit which are not strictly *χαρίσματα*. "Some of the gifts enumerated cannot be said to belong in any peculiar sense to the distinctive category. 'Faith' (I. Cor 12 9), for example, is the essential condition of all Christian life."² Therefore the conclusion is that the various *χαρίσματα* were only given to a certain few in the church, but each member was to possess such great spiritualities as love and faith.

In concluding this proposition, note what has been proven thus far. It has been seen that chapters 12-14 begin a new section in the book, and the subject of this section is that of the great spiritualities. Among the whole group of spiritualities are the *χαρίσματα*, or gifts, which were bestowed upon certain individuals in the early church.

¹J. C. Lambert, "Spiritual Gifts," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, V, p. 2843.

²Loc. Cit.

PROPOSITION II. THE SPIRITUALITIES WITH WHICH PAUL IS DEALING IN I. CORINTHIANS 12-14 EXIST IN THIS PRESENT AGE, AND SOME OF THEM CONTINUE INTO THE FUTURE LIFE.

We must settle the period of time in which the spiritualities, and the *χαρίσματα* in particular, operate before we can move any further to the conclusion of our problem. There is some disagreement among the commentators as to whether or not some of these spiritualities continue on into the future life, and it is for that reason that the problem must be solved.

With regard to the *χαρίσματα*, there is no evidence in Scripture that these are intended for the future life. The I. S. B. E. article on "Spiritual Gifts" included the following under that classification: apostleship, prophecy, discerning of spirits, teaching (under which the gift of knowledge is included), kinds of tongues, workings of miracles, gifts of healing, ruling, and helps.¹ Each of these gifts is connected with divine revelation. It was necessary for God to reveal himself in some way to man before the canon of Scripture was available as the guide for faith and practice. The writer believes that a careful study of chapters 12-14 will give no reason for

¹J. C. Lambert, op. cit., p. 2844.

believing that these *χρόνια* are for any age other than the present one. Much support for this may be drawn from the commentators. John Schmidt says: "Not only do some of these gifts lose their significance from one period to another, but all of them are limited to this temporal world."¹ Lange, although not personally agreeing with the writer's position at this point, nevertheless gives great weight to the interpretation set forth. He says:

Chrys. and others, however, understand these futures (that is, in 13:8), of the time when, faith having spread abroad, these special gifts will no longer be needed; hence, as belonging to the present age. And this has been the practical construction put upon them by a large portion of the Protestant church. Whatever may be the exegesis given this passage, the prevailing belief is that these gifts, especially those of a miraculous nature, were destined for the apostolic period, and have already ceased.²

Among the commentators there is a great problem concerning the gift of knowledge. One might ask, "Is this gift not to continue into the heavenly state?" There really is no great problem here if we will but distinguish between knowledge per se, and knowledge as a special gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul himself states in 13:8 that the gift of knowledge will cease, and yet other Scriptural

¹John Schmidt, Letter to Corinth (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1946), p. 113.

²John Peter Lange, A Commentary of the Holy Scriptures: Critical Doctrinal and Homiletical, trans. Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), VI, p. 271.

passages assure us that in heaven we shall even have a greater knowledge than we now possess. Therefore, the *χαρίσματα* of knowledge must be knowledge of a certain distinct type since it is going to pass away in this age.

So we conclude that the evidence supports the belief that the *χαρίσματα* are for this age alone. But, as we have seen before, the *χαρίσματα* are only one group of the spiritualities mentioned in chapters 12-14.

The spiritualities of faith, hope, and charity, ~~which should belong to every Christian, must also be re-~~legated to some specific age. Some have held that these three entities do not continue into the future life, but the writer does not believe that this interpretation is correct. The problem centers around the word *νῦν* (*nun*), translated "now" in 13:13. This word may be used in two ways. First of all, as being temporal. If this were what Paul intended, then he would be saying in effect, "For the present life faith, hope, and love abide, but love alone abides forever." There are two obvious reasons why this could not be correct. The phrase, "these three" would definitely limit the reference of the word "abide" equally to faith, hope, and love. And also, it is unnatural to understand *μέχρι* relatively in reference to faith and hope, but absolutely in reference to love. Paul would certainly have said concerning love that its superiority consists in

its abiding forever and that the others do not abide had he meant to convey that thought.

Instead of regarding *vuvv* as temporal, it seems best to interpret it as logical, identifying it with the "now" of verse 12. Among those holding to this view are Olshausen and Findlay. Paul is here using the "now" as a summary or conclusion to his argument. He is saying in effect, "Now concluding this matter, faith, hope, and love abide; these three, but the greatest is love, yet it is not the most lasting." Even in this trinity of graces there is order, and love is set out as being the most important one. Hodge summarizes the writer's argument as follows: "The contrast is not between the more or less permanent gifts pertaining to our present state; but between what belongs exclusively to the present, and what is to continue for ever."¹

It is not difficult to show that faith, hope, and love continue into the future life, at least in essence. Barnes indicates that these three are needed in heaven, as well as on earth.

Faith is confidence in God and in Christ; and there will be as much necessity for confidence in heaven as on earth. Indeed, the great design of the plan

¹Charles Hodge, An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1874), p. 275.

of salvation is to restore confidence in God among alienated creatures; and heaven could not subsist a moment without confidence; and faith, therefore, must be eternal.¹

He continues then with the subject of the eternal nature of hope.

All heaven cannot be enjoyed at once; and if there is any thing future that is an object of desire, there will be hope. Hope is compound emotion, made up of a desire for an object and the expectation of obtaining it. But both of these will exist in heaven.²

In concluding on the permanence of love, Barnes explains that love is the one principle which binds man to God and will therefore also be necessary throughout all eternity. Love pertains to society, and without it the kingdom of God could not continue to exist.³

From the evidence which has been presented the conclusion is that the *χαρίσματα* are only for this life, while great spiritualities such as faith, hope, and love, are for this life and the future life.

At this point something should be said with regard to the interpretation and time element in verses 11 and 12. The Pauline manner of dealing with a subject is clearly seen here. First the doctrine is presented, and then the illustration of the doctrine is given. Hodge is correct

¹Barnes, op. cit., p. 279ff.

²Barnes, op. cit., p. 280.

³Loc. Cit.

when he says that

The apostle employs two illustrations to teach us the difference between the present and the future. The one is derived from the difference between childhood and maturity; the other from the difference between seeing a thing by imperfect reflection, or through an obscure medium, and seeing it directly.¹

As we shall see more fully later, two periods of time are under consideration here. First, there is that period when Paul wrote this epistle, and at which time the church did not have the complete canon of Scripture. Second, there is that period when the canon of Scripture was completed and circulated among all of the churches. Surely such terms as childhood and maturity and clearness as opposed to obscurity vividly portray the differences between these two periods. And so, the conclusion is that verses 11-12 are illustrations of the time before the canon was completed and of the time after it was completed.

¹Hodge, op. cit., p. 272.

PROPOSITION III. KNOWLEDGE, PROPHECY, AND TONGUES
ARE THREE GIFTS HAVING TO DO WITH DIVINE REVELATION.

It would be most difficult to prove this proposition directly from Scripture, for there are no verses which pointedly teach this truth. However, there are many things we believe which are not stated to be true in so many words, such as the doctrine of the trinity, for example. It is therefore necessary that we appeal to logic and the general Scriptural teaching in order to substantiate the position being taken.

When God chose to reveal himself, his ways, and his laws to man, it seems reasonable that four foundational things would be necessary in order for such a revelation to be accomplished. These four are related to the spiritual gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge.

First, a revelation requires an agent through which God could operate. The medium is usually an individual chosen by God for this purpose. God does reveal himself through nature, and once even through a burning bush, but a written revelation always requires a writer.

Second, a revelation requires that the individual possess a knowledge from God of what he shall write or speak. The origin of such knowledge is with God alone. The term $\gamma\acute{\omega}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ is usually translated simply "knowledge," but Thayer shows that this word "applies chiefly to the

apprehension of truths. . . ."¹ This gift of knowledge was the "intellectual gift of formulating, coordinating, and setting forth with clearness the divine truth, so that men's minds may grasp its contents. . . ."² In I. Corinthians 12:8 is mentioned the phrase "word of knowledge" which is the "utterance of a prophetic and ecstatic intuition. . . ."³ Therefore, the conclusion is that this gift of knowledge consisted of truths given to men by God, which is a necessary element in the revelation of God to man.

Third, the revelation itself, whether it be written or spoken by the individual, could be in the form of prophecy, for prophecy was one of the numerous ways in which God has revealed himself. In the infancy of the church, when the scattered congregations of believers did not as yet have the complete written revelation, God used the prophet to reveal his will to the congregation. I. Corinthians tells us that there were several of them in that church, and probably they were to be found in every

¹Joseph Henry Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (New York: American Book Company, 1889), p. 119.

²R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1935), p. 572.

³Lambert, op. cit., p. 2843.

Christian community. The prophet was a minister to the believing church. Ordinarily his message was one of edification, exhortation, and consolation - I. Corinthians 14:3. There are times when he made an authoritative announcement of the Divine will in regard to matters pertaining to the church. The New Testament prophets were usually forthtellers rather than foretellers, for there are only rare occasions when these men predicted future events.

The prophet himself claimed to be the medium of Divine revelations. In I. Corinthians 14:30 we read, "If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace." It was the customary thing for God to reveal himself to these prophets as they sat in the congregation. Lindsay says,

The prophet was a producer, not an expounder simply, not a man whose task was finished when he had taught others to assimilate the divine knowledge which lay at their disposal. The prophet added something more. He was a revealer bringing forth something new. For PROPHECY PRESUPPOSED REVELATION (capitals mine); it rested upon it; and apart from revelation it did not exist. The prophet was a man of spiritual insight and magnetic speech. What he uttered came to him as an intuition of the Spirit, as if he had heard a voice or seen a sight.¹

It seems clear from the foregoing evidence that prophecy was a spiritual gift directly related to divine

¹Lindsay, op. cit., p. 94.

revelation. It was a product of God's work in the lives of men chosen to reveal divine truth.

Fourth, a revelation from God to man requires that it be either written or spoken in order that it might be perceived by the minds of men. In the exercise of the gift of tongues, human speech is a means of conveying the revelation God has given to the intellect of man. The gift of tongues enables the prophet to convey his message to the whole congregation. The Greek word translated tongue is $\gamma\lambda\omega\sigma\sigma\alpha$ (glossa) which is simply the organ of speech, a method of speech, or speech itself. More specifically, it was a gift which enabled men to speak in foreign languages never learned through natural processes. The Jews thought that the tongue was the unconditioned instrument of God and of his Spirit. See note at bottom of page 48.

Ordinarily the gift of tongues was manifested in the form of a prayer to God. The prayer was usually one of thanksgiving. Edification was usually gained by the speaker. The ordinary faculties of the speaker

were suspended and the Divine, specifically Christian, element in man took control, so that a condition of ecstasy was produced. The immediate (mystical) contact with the Divine enabled the utterance of 'mysteries.' . . ."¹

In I. Corinthians 14:2 we read of the prophet - "in the

¹Burton Scott Easton, "Gift of Tongues," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, V, p. 2996.

spirit he speaketh mysteries." A mystery is "a secret imparted only to the initiated, which is unknown until it is revealed. . . ."¹

The speaking in mysteries by the prophet clearly indicates that God has definitely used the gift of tongues in order to reveal truth to man. The human tongue was merely one way in which the revelation was given out to the congregation.

In conclusion, note that we have seen that knowledge, prophecies, and tongues, were gifts having to do with God's revelation to man. These gifts were imparted in order that the early church, which was then without the written revelation we now have, might be able to ascertain the will of God in matters pertaining to doctrine and conduct.

Note: The Scriptures teach that there are both known and unknown tongues. The tongues of Acts 2 were known languages for "every man heard heard them speak in his own language." But the tongues of I. Corinthians 12-14 were probably unknown tongues or languages for an interpreter was needed. An interpreter would not have been necessary had the languages been understood.

¹D. Miall Edwards, "Mystery," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, III, p. 2104.

PROPOSITION IV. PAUL HIMSELF DECLARES THAT THESE THREE GIFTS HAVING TO DO WITH DIVINE REVELATION WILL CEASE TO EXIST.

The proof of this proposition is to be found in I. Corinthians 13:8. The verse reads as follows: "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."

The apostle Paul here states that each of these gifts will pass away, but he does not state the time at which this shall take place. However, the gifts did exist at the time when this book was written, which was about 58 A. D. Therefore these gifts had to cease at a date subsequent to that.

The Greek clauses having to do with the passing away of these gifts will now be discussed separately, according to the gifts.

A. Prophecies shall fail.

This is rendered in the Greek *είτε δὲ προφητεῖαι, καταργηθήσονται*. A variant rendering would make *προφητεῖαι* and *καταργηθήσονται* singular, but the meaning would not be changed. The singular rendering would simply look upon the individual prophecies as a whole, and state that as a group they will pass away.

The first important verb telling of the end of the gift of prophecy is *καταργηθήσονται*. This is 3rd plural, future, indicative passive of *καταργέω*. Thayer gives the meaning of this verb as to render idle, inoperative, unemployed, to cause to cease, do away with, annul or abolish. The passage is not teaching that the prophecies which have been uttered will not be fulfilled, for that would bring the Word of God into disrepute. But rather the idea is that the prophecies will no longer be given after a certain time, or that the future giving of prophecy will become inoperative, caused to cease, or abolished.

The passive meaning of the verb is also "to cease, pass away, be done away."¹ The passive teaches that the object is being acted upon by something outside of itself. It is something outside of the gift of prophecy that causes it to cease, and the tense indicates that the cause is yet to be manifested in the future.

Paul is plainly saying that the giving of prophecies is something which shall come to an end. In a later discussion the time at which this took place will be stated.

B. Tongues shall cease.

In the Greek this is *εἴτε γλῶσσα, παύσονται*. The verb is *παύσονται*, from *παύω*. It is 3rd person

¹Thayer, op. cit., p. 336.

plural, future indicative middle. The verb *παύω* means to make to cease or desist, to restrain a thing or person from something. Liddell and Scott suggest that the middle generally denotes willing cessation. The tense used here teaches that the willing cessation of the gift of tongues will be in the future. The best explanation as to why the cessation of tongues should be willingly done, and by the person himself, and at a time subsequent to 58 A. D., is that a time would come when this gift would no longer be necessary. Therefore it would just naturally cease to be exercised by individuals. At any rate, the clear teaching of the Greek here is that this spiritual gift of tongues would cease at some time subsequent to 58 A.D. Later we shall see exactly when this took place.

C. Knowledge will cease

This phrase is rendered *εἴτε γνῶσις, καταργηθήσεται*. It is 3rd person singular, future indicative passive of *καταργέω*. This is the same word used for the cessation of prophecy in the earlier part of the verse. Therefore it can be asserted that Paul is teaching that this gift of knowledge, like the gift of prophecy, will be abolished, or be done away with and this through the working of a source outside of the gift itself, this taking place some time after the writing of I. Corinthians.

It is evident from the study of I. Corinthians 13:8 that Paul is informing the church at Corinth that the spiritual gifts of knowledge, tongues, and prophecy, even though very important to the church then, are definitely going to be abolished in the future. Now let us consider the time at which this will take place.

PROPOSITION V. HISTORY AND GENERAL SCRIPTURAL TEACHING INDICATE THAT AT LEAST THE GIFTS OF TONGUES AND PROPHECY ENDED DURING THE EARLY PART OF THE SECOND CENTURY.

A. The gift of tongues has ended.

It would be most foolish to try to set an exact day or year when the gift of tongues and prophecy ceased to be bestowed by the Holy Spirit. M'Clintock and Strong state this fact as follows:

It is probable however, that the disappearance of the "tongues" was gradual. As it would have been impossible to draw the precise line of demarcation when the προφητεία of the apostolic age passed into the διδασκαλία that remained permanently in the church, so there must have been a time when "tongues" were heard, though less frequently, and with less striking results.¹

Although we cannot state the exact time when the gift of tongues ended, there is good historical evidence to support the belief that the gift ended shortly after apostolic times. A. T. Robertson gives excellent support to this interpretation.

Irenaeus (Hoer. V. VI.) can still tell us, speaking apparently from hearsay, of brethren who prophesied, and spoke through the Spirit in all kinds (παντοδαπας) of tongues; but Chrysostom (on I. Cor. 14) frankly declares that the gifts described by St. Paul were unknown in the Church of his day. That the gift of tongues really survived even down to the time of

¹John M'Clintock and James Strong, "Gift of Tongues," Cyclopaedia of Biblical Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1869), X, p. 484.

Irenaeus is, in the absence of corroborating evidence, difficult to believe. His rather vague statement may rest on some report as to the Montanists of Asia Minor, but in their case again the definite evidence we possess points to 'prophecy' rather than 'tongues' as the distinctive forms of their ecstatic speech¹

The weight of this historical evidence is most convincing when interpreted in a proper light. Let it be remembered that our knowledge of the conditions existing in the early church comes through the testimony of the church fathers, and we must accept their testimony of the conditions existing in their times as being valid if there is no apparent reason for believing otherwise. Irenaeus was born about 115-125 A. D. Naturally when he came to write in his later life of the gift of tongues, even memories of childhood relating to tongues would have been mentioned had he experienced contact with this gift then. Although drawing from a lifetime of experience, it is interesting to note that Irenaeus makes only a vague statement concerning the existence of this gift even in the near apostolic days in which he lived. The last apostle had scarcely been dead a generation when Irenaeus came on the scene. This indicates rather clearly that the gift of tongues, which was so prevalent in the church at Corinth around 58 A. D., had ceased almost completely by the early part of the

¹A. T. Robertson, "Gift of Tongues," A Dictionary of the Bible, ed. by James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), IV, p. 796.

second century. The testimony of Chrysostom, who lived about 347-395, adds further weight to the argument. He says that the gift of tongues was unknown in his time, but he was unable to explain the reason for this disappearance.

The testimony of these two fathers as to the time of the cessation of the gift of tongues is substantial evidence offering support for the proposition under consideration. After all, there is no known evidence from history which would nullify the testimony of these men.

Another good argument may be set forth to prove that this gift ended early in the second century. It is based upon a study of the particular Biblical books in which these gifts are mentioned. M'Clintock and Strong state that

Traces of the gift are found, as has been said, in the epistles to the Romans, the Galatians, the Ephesians. From the Pastoral Epistles, from those of Peter and John, they are altogether absent, and this is in itself significant. The life of the apostle and of the Church has passed into a calmer, more normal state. Wide truths, abiding graces, these are what he himself lives in and exhorts others to rest on, rather than exceptional however marvellous *χαρισματῶν*. The "tongues" are already "ceasing" (I Cor. XIII, 8), as a thing belonging to the past.¹

It is true that this is an argument from silence, but nevertheless it does carry weight. Peter and John were

¹M'Clintock and Strong, op. cit., p. 484.

among the last to write books on the New Testament. The omission of the gift of tongues, which was prevalent in the church not many years earlier, is significant. It is as if these later apostles did not consider this gift necessary to the church of their day.

Several commentators are in agreement with the writer in holding that the gift of tongues ended shortly after the close of the first century. Among these are Jamieson Fausset and Brown, Jacobs, and Nowell-Rostron.

Something should be said with regard to the claims made by the advocates of the modern tongues movements. Wm. G. Moorehead is sharp in his denunciation of such groups.

It may not be out of place here to say that the so called "gift of tongues," so loudly proclaimed by certain excitable persons of our day, had nothing in common with the mighty action of the Spirit of God on the day of Pentecost, and hardly anything with that which the Corinthian Christians enjoyed, and which Paul regulated with a master-hand.¹

The only sure way of testing these tongues movements is to see if they stand the tests as set forth in God's Word. I. Corinthians 14 gives about seven requirements for the gift of tongues if it is to come up to the Biblical standard. These are as follows:

1. Only two or three persons are to speak in one meeting - 14:27.
2. Those speaking in tongues must do so in turn - 14:27 ARV.

3. There must be an interpreter present - 14:27. In case no interpreter is present, the individual must keep silent - 14:28.
4. The speaker must display self-control - 14:32.
5. There must be no confusion in the exercise of the gift - 14:33.
6. No woman is to speak publically in tongues - 14:34.
7. Acknowledgement of these Pauline instructions are the commandments of the Lord - 14:37ff.

A study of the modern tongues movements would reveal that there is a glaring deficiency among them in coming up to this true Biblical standard for speaking in tongues. The writer himself has attended numerous meetings where individuals claimed to speak in tongues, and in each case one or more of these principles were violated.

An argument is sometimes set forth by the Pentecostals to the effect that the gift of tongues has not really ended yet, but that it is because of sinful Christians that the gift is no longer given. They argue that if the Christians were to clean up their lives, the Holy Spirit would once again bestow these gifts, and particularly the gift of tongues, in abundance upon believers. The refutation of this argument is quite obvious. Today there are many more separated, Spirit-filled Christians than in any preceding age, and yet the gift of tongues has not been restored to the church. There are many Christians today,

as fully sanctified as any of apostolic times, and yet Christians today do not exhibit this gift.

From all of the argumentation and evidence given in the previous pages, it is evident that the gift of tongues did not continue to exist after the early part of the second century. The burden of proof would be upon anyone believing otherwise, and it is believed that this burden could not be successfully borne.

B. The gift of prophecy also ended during the early part of the second century.

This gift of prophecy, as was stated earlier, included both the predictive element and forthtelling. In fact, the New Testament indicates that the major portion of the prophet's ministry was that of forthtelling.

Let us first of all consider prophecy in the predictive sense. The appeal here can rightly be to rationality. Surely no true believer today has valid reason to believe that God leads individuals to make predictions of the future which are certain to come to pass, because they have come from God himself by revelation and inspiration. It is not that God could not do this, but rather that he has not chosen to reveal himself in this manner now, for Christians have the complete canon of Scripture as a guide to future events. Any message to man from God and apart from Scripture and the normal workings of the Holy Spirit

would be through special divine revelation, and if the message were written inspiration would be necessary. Such a message therefore would be truly Scripture. But God's Word gives definite warnings against adding or subtracting from what has already been written. So this belief that the gift of prophecy in the predictive sense exists today would be very dangerous ground for any Christian.

That the gift of predictive prophecy ended with the completion of the canon is correctly stated by the Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia as follows:

The Revelation of John was certainly intended to close the era of prophecy until the Lord's second coming. For after the death of the apostles, prophecy slowly gave place to the use of the New Testament Scriptures, which became from that time, and are today, the norm and source of divine truth.¹

In the same article there is added support for this interpretation.

New Testament prophecy belongs to the period of the founding of the church when faith especially needed the guidance and the support of the Spirit of Christ, and when the written word either did not yet exist or was not in general use.²

One might well imagine the encouraging effect the gift of prophecy had upon this early apostolic church. A display of the predictive element would assure the believers that God was truly among them, and it would strengthen them

¹Karl Burger, "Prophecy," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, ed. S. M. Jackson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1910), IX, p. 277.

²Loc. Cit.

in the faith. But after the completion of the writing of Scripture, there was no longer need for such a gift for comfort and encouragement, for these could now be found in the Word itself. The conclusion is that the gift of prophecy in the predictive sense was no longer necessary after the completion of the canon, and therefore ceased to be given.

Prophecy in the sense of forthtelling was also not needed after the completion of the canon and its circulation among the churches. The canon became in the fullest sense a lamp unto their feet and a light unto their pathway. In the apostolic congregation when a church such as Corinth had not one New Testament book, God raised up forthtellers in their midst. These men would rise during the meetings and declare authoritatively the will of God in matters pertaining to faith and practice. In other words, this was just a temporary measure used by God to direct his church until his full message, the completed canon, was in their hands.

So it is evident that prophecy in both the predictive and forthtelling senses was not necessary to the church after the Scriptures were in the possession of the church. After that time, there was no prediction of future events, nor did men stand up and authoritatively speak for God apart from Scripture.

In concluding on the time of the cessation of both the gifts of tongues and prophecy, a fine distinction should be drawn. When the term "Scriptures" is used, the reference is to the individual books of the Bible. But the term "canon" refers to the collection of all the individual books together. Earlier in this proposition it was stated that no definite date for the cessation of tongues and knowledge could be determined, but that there is good evidence to indicate that the terminus was during the early part of the second century. It was not until about 160 A. D. that the individual books came together and the complete canon was formed. And so our interpretation would not demand the cessation of these gifts until that date.

PROPOSITION VI. THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE ENDED ABOUT THE SAME TIME AS THE GIFTS OF TONGUES AND PROPHECY, AND IT WAS A SPECIFIC GIFT WHICH ENABLED DIVINELY CHOSEN MEN TO WRITE SCRIPTURE.

The gifts of tongues and prophecy are tangible, and it is not difficult to ascertain the general time when they ceased to be manifested. However, knowledge is intangible, making the time of its cessation most difficult to establish.

In a previous proposition it was shown that prophecy, tongues, and knowledge are gifts having to do with divine revelation, and it is for that reason that these gifts are mentioned together in I. Corinthians 13:8. The gifts of prophecy and tongues definitely ended during the early part of the second century. Since these three gifts are classed together, and since there is no indication of any gap of time between which they will cease, it is logical and proper to believe that the gift of knowledge also ended about the same time as the gifts of tongues and prophecy.

In moving toward the conclusion, there are three things which should be noted about this gift of knowledge.

1. Paul states, as has been previously stated, that the gift would cease, or be abolished, at a time subsequent to 58 A. D.
2. This gift ended about the same time as the gifts of

tongues and prophecy which we will put at 100 - 160 A. D. Therefore, the gift of knowledge came to an end between 58 A. D. and 160.

3. Paul states in 13:9 that when he was writing the epistle, the knowledge produced by the gift was "in part." The phrase in the Greek is ἐκ μέρους . ἐκ with the genitive means out of, while μέρος is the genitive singular of μέρος meaning part, portion, division, piece, or fragment. Paul is saying that in 58 A. D. "we know in part." In other words the gift of knowledge had been given to the church, but the knowledge which this gift conveyed was not at that time complete. By inference we can maintain that at a later time the gift of knowledge was to complete the knowledge that God intended to reveal to man.

Now that the facts have been set forth, it will be possible to come to some conclusion regarding the specific character of this gift. The facts indicate that this gift of knowledge was the ability given certain men by God enabling them to write inspired Scripture. Note how this interpretation harmonizes with the facts given about the gift. So far as the date of cessation is concerned, the last book of the Bible to be written was about 90 A. D.; and since the writer maintains that these three gifts ended at the latest by 160, the writing of the New Testament books is in complete accord with the view upheld. Also,

the gift was truly manifested "in part" in 58 A. D., for at that time probably not more than a very few of the New Testament books were in existence, and not until quite a few years later was the knowledge God wished to reveal to man in his Word completed. Finally, note that the gift of knowledge is related to divine revelation, and revelation, and revelation from God was necessary before an inspired book of the Bible could be written.

It is evident that the facts wholly substantiate the interpretation that the gift of knowledge was the ability given chosen men by God enabling them to write Scripture. There is no other known interpretation which will fit all of the facts.

PROPOSITION VII. IN CONCLUSION, THE PHRASE
 "THAT WHICH IS PERFECT" IN I. CORINTHIANS 13:10 REFERS
 TO THE COMPLETED CANON OF SCRIPTURE.

In I. Corinthians 13:10 there are two important Greek words which should be examined. The first is τέλειον translated "perfect" in the A. V.. It is the nominative singular neuter of τέλειος meaning brought to completion, fully developed, finished, brought to its end, and wanting nothing necessary to completeness. And then the verb is ἔλθῃ which is third person singular, second aorist subjunctive of ἔρχομαι which is translated to come or go.

It is a bit difficult to know how to translate the aorist here, but it seems probable that it is a culminative aorist. Dana and Mantey give the following definition of this type aorist:

The aorist is employed in this meaning when it is wished to view an event in its entirety, but to regard it from the viewpoint of its existing results. Here we usually find verbs which signify effort or process, the aorist denoting the attainment of the end of such effort or process.¹

Therefore, "the perfect" is seen in its entirety and with all of its results. The results would be the doing away of the imperfect gifts of knowledge, tongues, and prophecy.

¹H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), pp. 196-197.

The word τέλειον is neuter, and therefore refers to an object, rather than an individual. The very meaning of the word would indicate that it is an inanimate thing which is complete, fully developed, or lacking nothing necessary to completeness. With all of the contextual argument which has been set forth, the interpretation that "the perfect" is the complete canon of Scripture is the only logical conclusion to which one might come. Note that within the verse there is presented the two ideas of completeness and incompleteness. When the complete comes into view, then those things which are related to it and are incomplete will just naturally pass away, and the time of it will be instantaneous. The phrase "shall be done away" in verse 10, is the same Greek word used of the passing away of prophecy and knowledge, and so there can be no doubt that "that which is in part" in verse 10 refers to the gifts named above.

Since these three gifts have to do with divine revelation, it is most appropriate that the passing away of them should usher in God's complete written revelation to man which is the canon of Scripture. These gifts are no longer necessary after they have served to make possible the completed revelation, and have served to bridge the interval between the founding of the church and its reception of the Bible. And so they just naturally cease.

So the final conclusion is the "perfect" of I. Corinthians 13:10 is the complete canon of Scripture. No other interpretation of this passage will fit the context as well.

ENGLISH PARAPHRASE

"When the complete canon of Scripture is come into existence, then the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge, which have to do with divine revelation, will be abolished, for then the gifts will have served their purposes; namely, to make possible the writing of the complete canon of Scripture, and to bridge the gap between the founding of the church and its reception of the complete canon."

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