

CESSATIONISM IN 1 COR 13:8-12

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Looking at the setting of 1 Corinthians 13 first in 1 Corinthians as a whole and then in the setting of 1 Corinthians 12–14 is the beginning of an investigation of cessationism in 1 Cor 13:8-12. Next comes a study of 1 Cor 13:8-11 in the context of 1 Corinthians 13. The following step is an investigation of the terms used in 1 Cor 13:8-11, including prophecies, knowledge, and tongues. At that point the study addresses the subject of the cessation of gifts spoken of in 1 Cor 13:8-10, followed by attention given to “tongues shall cease.” The time of the cessation of the gifts in 1 Cor 13:10 is next for consideration, a time that depends heavily on the meaning of teleios in that verse. The term means “mature” in that instance, referring to a maturation that would come to the church. Then comes a tracing of the argument’s progression in 1 Cor 13:8-11. The whole discussion of the gifts’ cessation is part of the emphasis of chapter 13 on the supremacy of love, a factor that should always be in mind in a discussion of cessation. First Cor 13:8-12 intertwines revelation, cessation, and maturation with cessation and maturation coming at a related point in time, but speaking of the cessation of revelatory gifts at the time the church matures.

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THE SETTING OF CHAPTER 13 IN 1 CORINTHIANS

The larger context of the 1 Corinthians as a whole is important to a study of 1 Cor 13:8-12. After Paul’s introduction in 1:1-9, which leads strongly into his initial address, in 1:10-6:20 he mentions matters communicated to him through a personal report. But beginning in chapter 7, he responds to issues addressed to him in a written report,¹ introducing the section with the words, “Now concerning the things about which you wrote ...” (7:1). He follows that with “now concerning virgins” in 7:25, “now concerning things sacrificed to idols” in 8:1, “now concerning spiritual gifts” in 12:1, and “now concerning the collection for the saints” in 16:1.

¹Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 21-23.

Other items addressed in the letter such as the role of women and men in worship in 11:2-16 and conduct at the Lord's Supper in 11:17-34 are not so introduced. The matter under consideration in 1 Corinthians 12-14 is clearly a response to a written inquiry sent to Paul.

Another significant factor in this discussion relates to the argument in the opening chapters. The chapter divisions in the first part of the book are not necessarily helpful. For example, the thought begun in 1:18 runs through to 2:5; and the rest of chapter 2 (2:6-16) may flow into chapter 3, for 3:1-4 flows directly out of 2:6-16 but also provides a transition into 3:5-17.² This is independent of the discussion on 13:8-13, but the progression of thought in these early passages is important in determining the meaning of τὸ τέλειον (*to teleion*, "the mature") in 13:10.

THE SETTING OF CHAPTER 13 IN 1 CORINTHIANS 12-14

In the immediate context, Paul's response to the Corinthian inquiry covers 12:1-14:40. Paul's ending of the chapter with the same verb (ζηλοῦτε, *zēloute*, "be zealous, 12:31) that he uses to begin chapter 14 (ζηλοῦτε, *zēloute*, "be zealous," 14:1) is important. Though it could be argued that one of these verbs is indicative and the other imperative, the common form and context dictate otherwise. What is stated in 14:1 is "not a precise repetition" of what is stated in 12:31, but the imperatival aspect of as 12:31 carries over.³

What is especially significant is that the apostle follows a pattern found elsewhere by leaving off his argument in 12:31 and then, after a brief diversion to another very important matter, resuming his discussion in 14:1 with a distinctly different emphasis. Paul clearly lists the gifts in 12:28 in their order of importance, and, in so doing, puts "apostles" first and then "prophets." Since apostles were limited in number and were not available on a long-term basis in every church, the highest remaining gift was prophecy. Therefore, when he resumes his discussion in 14:1, he does not refer to apostleship but rather to prophecy as the leading gift available to a local body. The subject in both passages is the same.

The place of 1 Corinthians 13 in the overall argument of 12:1-14:40 is also important. Some like Jean Héring may conclude, "It could be argued, therefore, as certain that Chapter 13 did not originally occupy its present place in the Epistle,"⁴ but the majority of scholars accept the order found in the present text. A definite continuity in the development of thought prevails as Paul moves from chapter 12 to 13 and then resumes his discussion of gifts in chapter 14.

²Ibid., 121-22.

³Ibid., 623, 654-55.

⁴Jean Héring, *The First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Epworth, 1962) 134.

General Observations about Spiritual Gifts

The uniqueness of each gift passage and list. Due to the continuity of thought in this section, many items in chapters 12 and 14 impact an understanding of chapter 13. One of those is the discussion of gifts in chapter 12. First, at least 5 (and arguably 6) separate listings of gifts appear in the NT (1 Cor 12:8-10; 12:28-30; [13:8]; Rom 12:6-8; Eph 4:11; 1 Pet 4:11) and two of those lists are in 1 Corinthians 12 (12:8-10; 28-30). It is evident that each list of gifts is unique, even the two in 1 Corinthians 12. The order is unique and some of the gifts appear only once. For example, the gift of wisdom (λόγος σοφίας, *logos sophias*) occurs only in 1 Cor 12:8 and the gift of “pilotage” (κυβερνήσεις, *kubernēseis*) only in 1 Cor 12:28. Therefore, when one approaches each list, he must ask some major questions, such as, “Why are these gifts listed here?” and “What is the significance of the presence/absence and the ordering of gifts within the list?” Answers to those have an impact on the meaning of 1 Cor 13:8 since all three mentioned there are also found in the list of 1 Cor 12:8-10. Therefore, a study of the list in 12:8-10 and the ordering of that list will have some bearing on understanding the gifts included in 13:8.

The nature of spiritual gifts [in 12:8-10]. Two basic observations are helpful before addressing the gifts specifically. First of all, Carson contends that “the lists as a whole contain an impressive mixture of what some might label ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’ endowments, or ‘spectacular’ and ‘more ordinary’ gifts.... The intriguing thing is that Paul himself makes no such distinctions: it is the same God who works all things in all men.”⁵ That conclusion is without immediate contextual support. In fact, Fee, commenting on the list in 12:8-10, writes,

What distinguishes this listing is the concretely visible nature of these items, especially of the last seven. These, after all, are not only “gifts”; they are above all manifestations of the Spirit’s presence in their midst, most likely chosen because they are, like tongues itself, extraordinary phenomena. It would scarcely do for Paul at this point to attempt to broaden their perspective by listing less visible items. That will come in time (especially through the analogy of the body and in the lists in vv. 28-30); but for now the emphasis is on the supernatural. Indeed, the truly remarkable feature of this list is the attribution of “each one” of a whole gamut of supernatural activities—in the same matter-of-fact way that contemporary churchmen would list positions on an organizational chart!⁶

A doctor may have great skills in his practice (all of them ultimately God-given in one way or another) and may be able to bring healing to many, but that skill is not the “gift of healing.” The gifts mentioned are—by their very nature—supernaturally and specially bestowed by God on each believer.

⁵Donald A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 37.

⁶Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 591.

The identity of spiritual gifts. In addition, one of the major problems that surfaces in so many of the discussions on gifts—be it from a cessationist or noncessationist point of view—is the attempt to give the gifts mentioned in each of these lists a 21st-century correspondent. This is certainly the source of much debate on such things as prophecy. Poythress, in addressing that specific issue, writes, “I maintain that modern spiritual gifts are analogous to but not identical with the divinely authoritative gifts exercised by the apostles.”⁷ The likelihood of Poythress’ premise should be weighed in light of defining all the gifts. For example, a seminary graduate remarked, “People have confirmed that I have the gift of discernment.” Now, he may well have “a gift of discernment” but he does not have “the gift of discernment” referred to by Paul in 1 Cor 12:10.⁸ That was unique to that day and in all likelihood has no connection with any gift a person may have today. By the same token, “the gift of pilotage” referred to only once (12:28) probably did not resemble in Paul’s mind what we think of when we refer to “the gift of administration” today.

Specific Observations on the Gifts in 1 Cor 12:8-10

At this point some basic observations are necessary with reference to the list of gifts in 1 Cor 12:8-10.

The basis for understanding the division of the gifts. Arguably, both cessationists and noncessationists have made much more over the list of gifts in 1 Cor 12:8-10 than Paul intended. Fee addresses this issue when he writes, “To illustrate the thesis of v. 7 Paul proceeds to offer a sizable list of ways in which the Spirit is manifested in the Christian assembly. Because this is the first of several such listings of ‘gifts’ in the Pauline corpus, considerable interest has been generated over this passage in terms of the nature and meaning of the various gifts themselves.”⁹ But, as he goes on to say, “That lies outside of Paul’s own interest, which is simply to illustrate the *diversity* of the Spirit’s activities/manifestations in the church.”¹⁰

An initial matter of importance is to take each list as given and try to determine the significance of the specific gifts addressed. For example, “Why does Paul chose to refer to the three gifts mentioned in 13:8?” or “What do they have in common?” As to the significance of that grouping of gifts, it is best to look back at the list in 1 Cor 12:8-10. There are many views about the arrangement of the gifts in that list. Fee addresses the issue this way:

⁷Vern Sheridan Poythress, “Modern Spiritual Gifts As Analogous to Apostolic Gifts: Affirming Extraordinary Works of the Spirit Within Cessationist Theology,” *JETS* 39/1 (March 1996):71.

⁸Carson, *Showing the Spirit* 40, presents a contrary view.

⁹Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 590.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

Attempts to classify the several items are numerous and varied. Some have suggested that they reflect a descending order of value, while others have rearranged the items conceptually. A popular grouping is (1) gifts of instruction (wisdom and knowledge); (2) gifts of supernatural power (faith, healings, miracles); and (3) gifts of inspired utterance (prophecy, discerning prophecies, tongues, interpretation of tongues).¹¹

The merit of this view is that it maintains the order of the gifts as given and does not rearrange them. On the other hand, Carson, who also discusses the various attempts to classify this list, writes,

If any such classification is warranted by features in the text itself, it is the one that notes the variation in the Greek terms for “another.” Sometimes Paul maintains a distinction between these two terms ἄλλος (*allos*, “another”) and ἕτερος (*heteros*, “another”)—for example, in Galatians 1:6-7—and sometimes he does not. If the distinction is maintained here, some argue, an intelligible result is achieved: when ἕτερος (*heteros*, “another”) appears, a new division in the list is intended.¹²

Fee concurs as he writes, “If grouping is legitimate at all, it is most likely to be found in some clues Paul himself has given, by starting the third and eighth items (faith and tongues) with a different word for ‘another.’”¹³ On the basis of this, Carson, much like Meyer,¹⁴ presents the following development of thought:

This issues in the following division: the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge lie in the intellectual arena; faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, and distinguishing of spirits are grouped separately, perhaps linked with special faith, the lead item in this division; and tongues and the interpretation of tongues, in a category by itself.¹⁵

The conclusion concerning the division of the gifts. Meyer (first published by T & T Clark in 1883) makes this observation, “The following nine charismata, enumerated in a preliminary way up to ver. 10 (besides which, others are afterwards mentioned, ver. 28), are divided into three classes, which cannot, however, correspond to the three διαίρεσεις (diatareseis, “varieties”), vv. 4-6, because there *each sentence* comprises *all* charismata.”¹⁶ He then goes on to state, “The *external* division is distinctly marked by Paul himself in this way, namely, that

¹¹Ibid, pp. 590-91.

¹²Carson, *Showing the Spirit* 37. [translation added]

¹³Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 591.

¹⁴Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians* (reprint; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1983) 6:280.

¹⁵Carson, *Showing the Spirit* 37.

¹⁶Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians* 6:280. [emphasis in the original; transliteration and translation added]

he notes the transition to a *new* category by ἑτέρῳ [*heterō*, “to another”] (while for subdivision *within* the classes he uses ἄλλῳ [*allō*, “another”), thus: (1) ver. 8, by ᾧ μὲν [*hō men*, “to one”]; (2) ver. 9, by ἑτέρῳ δέ [*heterō de*, “but to another”]; (3) ver.10 by ἑτέρῳ δέ [*heterō de*, “but to another”].”¹⁷

In summary, borrowing from Meyer, we would offer the following:

- I. Charismata connected with _____ (*to be determined later*):
 1. λόγος σοφίας (*logos sophias*, “word of wisdom”).
 2. λόγος γνώσεως (*logos gnōseōs*, “word of knowledge”).
- II. Charismata depending upon special *energy of faith*:
 1. The πίστις (*pistis*, “faith”) itself.
 2. Its agency in *deeds*, namely,
 - a. ἰάματα (*iamata*, “healings”)
 - b. δυνάμεις (*dunameis*, “miracles”).
 3. Its agency in *words*, namely, the προφητεία (*prophēteia*, “prophecy”).
 4. Its *critical* agency, the διακρίσις πνευμ.[άτων] (*diakrisis pneum.-[aōn]*, “discerning of spirits”).
- III. Charismata connected with the γλῶσσαι (*glossai*, “tongues”):
 1. Speaking with tongues.
 2. Interpretation of tongues.

In spite of Paul’s clear demarcation, Carson finds it difficult to accept such a division because, according to him, “there is enough overlap between the first two categories to make the theory less than convincing. Does not prophecy, in the second division, also produce intellectual results (first division)? Is faith more characteristic of distinguishing spirits (second division) than of uttering a word of wisdom (first division)? On balance, it is best to treat the gifts one by one.”¹⁸

Λόγος σοφίας (*logos sophias*)—word of wisdom. When anyone fails to accept the division established by Paul or seeks to reorganize the structure to make more sense, to that degree, he is not letting the text drive him. Divisions of this list are pertinent to an understanding of 1 Cor 13:8-13 for several reasons. The first is that failing to accept the order of this list—or any of the lists—as it is and seeking to discern the author’s meaning may cause someone to miss the author’s point. This is especially pertinent when attempting to ascertain why he chose the three gifts in 13:8. The second is accepting the division the text demands shows that he chose a gift from each of the three sections of 12:8-10 to consider in 13:8. It is therefore important to determine—as in the division in 12:8-10—the relationship of those gifts to each other. A third matter has to do with the meaning of the “word of

¹⁷Ibid. [emphasis in the original; transliteration and translation added]

¹⁸Carson, *Showing the Spirit* 37.

knowledge” in 12:8 in light of its further use in 13:8.

For example, accepting the fact that the first two gifts mentioned in 12:8 belong to the same category leads to an understanding of the meaning of *logos gnōseōs* in 12:8 because of its association with *logos sophias*, which is found only here in the NT in the context of spiritual gifts. As to the significance of the word *logos sophias*, Fee comments,

With a considerable stroke of inspiration Paul now does two things: (a) He uses one of their own terms to begin his list of ‘manifestations’ in the assembly that demonstrate the great diversity inherent in the one Spirit’s activities; and (b) he reshapes that term in light of the work of the Spirit so as to give it a significantly different content from their own.¹⁹

As to the identity of *logos sophias*, Thomas writes,

The widespread occurrence of “wisdom” in the Word of God is obvious to any Bible reader. The gift so labeled, however, has a more restricted sense because it refers to a specific function of which only a certain group in the body of Christ has been capable. That specialized sense is understandable in light of 1 Corinthians 2:6-13. In this earlier section of the epistle, Paul describes himself in connection with other apostolic and missionary teachers, such as Apollos and Cephas (cf. 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4-6). As divine mouthpieces, they spoke, “God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom” (1 Cor. 2:7). By mentioning wisdom in connection with “mystery” and what is “hidden,” this passage points clearly to divine revelation received by these early Christian leaders, which they in turn transformed into words for communicating to others of their generation. It is the process of receiving and communicating this special revelation that is discussed in the paragraph through 2:13.²⁰

Λόγος γνῶσεως (*logos gnōseōs*)—word of knowledge. When it comes to a discussion of the meaning of *logos gnōseōs*, which is found three more times in very significant places in chapters 12–14, Fee comments that it and the “word of wisdom” should “be understood as parallel in some way,” and then concludes, “Most likely, therefore, it is a ‘spiritual utterance’ of some revelatory kind. This is suggested by its place between ‘revelation’ and ‘prophecy’ in 14:6 and by the fact that, along with prophecy and tongues, it will cease at the Eschaton (13:8).”²¹ He then further states, “How the content of such an utterance makes it *gnōsis* as distinguished from ‘wisdom’ and ‘revelation’ is perhaps lost to us.”²² Since this and the *logos sophias* are parallel in some way, they must both be revelatory gifts. On that basis, one could conclude that the division of 12:8-10 be defined as: (1)

¹⁹Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 591-92.

²⁰Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999) 28-29.

²¹Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 593.

²²Ibid.

revelatory gifts; (2) faith gifts (gifts dependent upon the energy of faith [Although one may not have put prophecy in that category, it was arguably a gift that was dependent upon the energy of faith for the one communicating the revelatory word from God.]) and (3) tongues and interpretive gifts.

It is important to accept the uniqueness of each list of gifts and to try to determine the purpose and nature of the gifts. The ordering of the gifts in 1 Cor 12:28 is clear from its context. The gifts chosen by Peter (1 Pet 4:10-11) have their distinct purpose and are unique. Although there are some parallel statements between Eph 4:11-16 and 1 Cor 13:8-11, the purpose and ordering of the “gifted ones” in Ephesians 4 are unique to that context. The same could be said for the list in Rom 12:6-8. Therein lies one of the problems in attempting to come up with a comprehensive list of all the gifts. Another problem, which was addressed above, is that some (if not many/most) of the gifts were limited to that period in the life of the church and are not similarly reflected in the life of the church today.

What does this have to do with the three gifts mentioned in 13:8? Since understanding why Paul lists the gifts he does in each individual context is important, and since in each case the configuration and the order are unique, the same applies to 1 Cor 13:8. Furthermore, the reason an understanding of 1 Cor 12:8-10 is so significant is that in 13:8, a gift from each section of the first delineation in 12:8-10: *gnōsis* from the first section, *prophēteiai* from the second section, and *glossai* from the third section. Why does Paul refer to these three gifts in that context? What is especially significant about them that sets them apart in his discussion? That will be addressed later. But two things are worth keeping in mind. First, the context in which the gifts are found must determine the conclusion. Second, the gifts are chosen for a determined purpose in that context, and because of that, one does a gross injustice to that context to conclude with Carson, “In other words, the gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues (and presumably by extrapolation most other charismatic gifts) will pass away at some point future to Paul’s writing...”²³ He is correct in noting that the context speaks of the cessation of these three gifts at some point future to Paul’s writing, but he goes beyond the direct statement of the passage when he suggests that one can extrapolate from this context that other gifts will cease as well. Although other gifts may cease, the passage does not mention any gifts beyond those three.

THE SETTING OF VERSES 8-11 IN 1 CORINTHIANS 13

The primary purpose of 1 Cor 13:8-13 is not to focus on the cessation of spiritual gifts. On the other hand, though the emphasis is still on giving further proof of the supremacy of love, there is a definite statement on the cessation of certain

²³Carson, *Showing the Spirit* 70.

gifts. In fact, Fee says, “The greater urgency of this present argument ... is with the ‘only-for-the-present’ nature of the gifts, not with the permanence of love—although that is always lingering near the surface. Love is scarcely mentioned (vv. 8a, 13 only); the fact that the gifts will pass away forms the heart of the entire argument (vv. 8-12).”²⁴ Interpreters may disagree about the time of the cessation, but no one doubts the statement about the cessation.

The Relationship of 13:8-13 to 13:1-7

Understanding the relationship between 13:8-13 and its immediately preceding context in 13:1-7 is absolutely essential. Carson states it quite well:

The connection between this section and what has immediately preceded is entirely natural. In the preceding verse (13:7), Paul concludes by saying that love “always perseveres”; in other words, “Love never fails” (13:8). But the connections are deeper. In the first three verses of this chapter, Paul draws a contrast between love and the *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*, “gifts”). Now in verses 8-13, he picks up the contrast again, but with a new wrinkle. Here the contrast turns on the fact that love is permanent, while the *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*) terminate. That, too, demonstrates love’s intrinsic superiority. Thus the statement *love never fails* also anticipates verse 13. Unfortunately the powerful thrust of Paul’s argument is sometimes lost under detailed debates as to when the *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*) cease; but those debates can be an impetus to tracing out the thought of the apostle. If we get the issue of cessation straight, we shall grasp the central points of this section.²⁵

The concluding statement is quite true, but it leads the present writer to a different conclusion than it does Carson. What is especially significant, however, is that the final words of verse 7 about love always persevering are picked up in verse 8 and open the door for the discussion that follows.

The Relationship of 13:8-11 to 13:12-13

Some matters concerning 13:12-13 are important because of their impact in the minds of many with respect to the argument of 13:8-11, and especially vv. 9-10. One of the conclusions assumed by some, if not most, noncessationists (and some cessationists as well) is that one’s interpretation of v. 12 must determine the meaning of τὸ τέλειον (*to teleion*, “the mature”) in v. 10.²⁶ On the other hand, an individual representing a cessationist position finds himself reading his view of v.

²⁴Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 642.

²⁵Carson, *Showing the Spirit* 66.

²⁶E.g., Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 1038; Richard B. Gaffin, “Cessationism,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts For Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 55.

10 into v. 12 and thereby arguing against what seems to be the clear meaning of that verse.²⁷

That whatever is stated in vv. 8-10 must somehow relate to what Paul says in v. 12 goes without question. There is little doubt in the minds of most cessationist and noncessationist commentators that v. 12 refers to some aspect of the *παρουσία* (*parousia*, “coming”) or the eschaton. How this thought connects with v. 10 is a matter of question. Does it reiterate in a broader context what has already been discussed, or does it flow from the thought of v. 10 and provide a further discussion of that verse’s meaning? That will be addressed later, but for the present, the major issue is the focus of the author.

A major defining syntactical matter in 13:12 is the repeated ἄρτι ... τότε (*arti ... tote*, “now ... then”), which occurs twice in that verse, and around which the argument of that verse revolves. As Thiselton puts it, “The major contrast turns on ἄρτι, *just now*, or **for the present**, and τότε, **then** (in the temporal rather than the logical sense). The two terms are repeated, each time with the contrastive δέ, **but**. The introductory γάρ, **for**, signals that Paul uses this imagery to explain what has gone before (in vv. 9-11).”²⁸

To what does the “then” refer? Meyer states that it is the Parousia.²⁹ Or, as Fee puts it, “as it were; at the Eschaton.”³⁰ Carson comments on the statement “face to face” and says that it is “... almost a formula in the Septuagint for a theophany, and therefore almost certainly a reference to the new state brought about by the parousia.”³¹ Toussaint concludes, “Few would controvert the idea that verse twelve is anticipating the return of Christ for His own.”³² So, as can be seen, little doubt exists that v. 12 refers to being in the Lord’s presence in spite of the argument of some cessationists that this is not so.³³

But once again, the thing to keep in mind—and it cannot be emphasized too much—is that the central thought of 1 Corinthians 13 is on the supremacy of love. That is evidenced in this summary: “The chapter falls into three clearly marked parts. (1) The Necessity of possessing Love, 1-3; (2) Its glorious Character, 4-7; (3) Its

²⁷Myron J. Houghton, “A Reexamination of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153/611 (July 1996):352-53.

²⁸Thiselton, *1 Corinthians* 1067. [italics and boldface in the original]

²⁹Meyer, *1 Corinthians* 6:306.

³⁰Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 649.

³¹Carson, *Showing the Spirit* 71.

³²Stanley D. Toussaint, “First Corinthians Thirteen and the Tongues Question,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120 (1963):312.

³³Houghton, “A Reexamination of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13” 352-54 (also see Glenn O’Neal and Ralph Colburn, “I and II Corinthians,” *The Brethren Teacher* 14 [July-September 1964]:34).

eternal Duration, 8-13.”³⁴ Although vv. 8-13 mention love only twice—the first and last verses—and although the central theme in vv. 8b-12 is the cessation of certain spiritual gifts, the overall point is still on the supremacy of love, since gifts will cease to exist but love will not. That is the clear initial statement in this section (v. 8a), “Love never fails.”

With this foundation, developing the thoughts of vv. 8-12 step by step is next.

THE TERMS USED IN 1 CORINTHIANS 13:8-11

After a consideration of the relationship of 13:8-12 to the context of the entire book and more specifically to the closer context of chapters 12–14, a look at the five verses more directly and an analysis of their vocabulary comes next. First of all, definitions of prophecy, tongues and knowledge are necessary.

The Gift of Prophecy

The first gift in 13:8 is “the gift of prophecy.” A discussion of this gift does not require much space at this point since another essay in this issue deals with that, but this quote from Thomas might help put the gift in perspective:

Persons who possessed the gift of prophecy shared with the apostles the responsibility of being channels of direct revelation; they had insight into the “mysteries” of God (1 Cor. 13:2; Eph. 2:20; 3:3, 5) as did the apostles. NT prophets were the vehicles of Divine revelation (1 Cor. 14:29), some of which passed into written form and was included in Scripture (e.g. Luke/Acts, Hebrews). The very words of their prophecies, being based on and inseparable from divine revelation, were inspired and therefore authoritative. This was an indispensable element of revelation. Without direct revelation from God, someone who promoted edification through exhortation and comfort had to base his message on the inspired words of others. This explanation of modern-day preaching is preferable to the view that equates preaching with the gift of prophecy.³⁵

Walvoord describes one thus gifted by saying, “His message is individual and personal; it revealed the will of God which otherwise might have been unknown, meeting the need which later was to be filled by the written New Testament.”³⁶ He then states further, “Mere teaching guided by the Spirit as experienced by many Christians throughout the present dispensation is not evidence of a prophetic gift.

³⁴Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994) 286.

³⁵Robert L. Thomas, “Prophecy Rediscovered? A Review of the Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:596 (January 1992):93-94.

³⁶John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit* (Findlay, Ohio: Dunham, 1958) 177.

The prophet, if a true prophet, must necessarily deliver a message free from error, a product not of his own mind, but a revelation from God.”³⁷ Giving an added dimension to this, Hill writes, “A Christian prophet is a Christian who functions within the church, as a divinely called and divinely inspired speaker who receives intelligible and authoritative revelations or messages which he is impelled to deliver publicly, in oral or written form, to Christian individuals and/or the Christian community.”³⁸

The Gift of Knowledge

The third gift which was to pass away is “the gift of knowledge.” For purposes of this essay, “the gift of knowledge” is the second for consideration, leaving “the gift of tongues” until last. The nature of “the gift of knowledge” was addressed above, but a few things should be added here. This is not knowledge itself but rather “the gift of knowledge.” Carson puts it this way, “What passes away, of course, is not knowledge per se, but the charismatic gift of knowledge (for knowledge itself will never pass away; and if it did, no one would know it); not the content of prophecy, but the individual prophesyings....”³⁹ In other words, “In itself γνῶσις [*gnōsis*] may be the result of instruction guided by reason, and it requires no special illumination; but the use of this knowledge, in accordance with the Spirit for the edification of others, is a special gift.”⁴⁰ Fee writes, “Most likely, therefore, it is a ‘spiritual utterance’ of some revelatory kind. This is suggested by its place between ‘revelation’ and ‘prophecy’ in 14:6 and by the fact that, along with prophecy and tongues, it will cease at the Eschaton (13:8).”⁴¹

The cessation of gifts will be examined later, but it can be noted here that this gift will cease. Alford is incorrect in holding that prophecy and tongues will be absolutely superseded, whereas knowledge will only be relatively superseded,⁴² because the text uses the same verb for the cessation of both prophecy and knowledge.

The Gift of Tongues

Before a discussion of “the gift of tongues,” it would be good to remember that the gift of tongues had a valuable place in God’s economy. One of the most

³⁷Ibid., 177-78.

³⁸David Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979) 8-9.

³⁹Carson, *Showing the Spirit* 67-68.

⁴⁰Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians* xix. [transliteration added]

⁴¹Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 593.

⁴²Henry Alford, *The Greek New Testament with a Critically Revised Text: and a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (London: Longmans and Company, 1894) 2:585.

disturbing factors in the debate about tongues is that it often is portrayed as a bad gift. God deemed it as a good gift, necessary, valuable, and useful for His purpose in the early life of His church. The proper use of the gift did not disturb Paul; the abuse of the gift was of concern to him.

The Nature of the Gift

One of the most significant features about tongues is the nature of the gift. As with the other two gifts cited in v. 8, considerable debate exists today about the identity of this gift. Although a clear understanding of all aspects of this gift is not essential for a conclusion drawn from the passage, it is important to address it to some extent. As suggested earlier, Paul's discussion of the gifts in 12:8-10 is significant since the gifts in 13:8 are in that list as well, and in fact, are each drawn from separate sections of that list. A case in point is the γένη γλωσσῶν (*genē glōssōn*, "kinds of tongues") of 12:10 and the γλώσσαί (*glōssai*, "tongues") of 13:8. Paul undoubtedly refers to the same gift in the two places, but the phrase *genē glōssōn* in 12:10 has led to all kinds of conclusions about this gift. A general idea about the use of this word itself will be helpful. This essay will restrict the discussion to the references to *glōssai* leading up to and including 1 Cor 13:8.

The general use of *glōssa*. Although some would base the meaning of *glōssa* in 13:8 on their understanding of its use in 1 Corinthians 12–14, their conclusions often do not correspond to the common use in the NT or the Septuagint. The word *glōssa* occurs 37 times in the NT (only 14 of those in 1 Corinthians) and over 150 times in the LXX. The common use in the NT agrees with the common use of the word elsewhere in literature and refers to the physical organ of the body known as the tongue (Mark 7:33, 35; Jas 3:5, 6), to languages (Rev 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15), and to anything shaped like a tongue (Acts 2:3).⁴³

In the Septuagint, *glōssa* appears almost invariably as the translation of the two Hebrew words: לָשׁוֹן (*lāšōn*, "tongue") and שָׂפָה (*šāpāh*, "lip"). The former, which is used most frequently, refers to a language (Neh 13:24), to the tongue as an organ of a man's body (Josh 10:21; Judg 7:5, 6), to the tongue of an animal (Exod 11:7), to a (tongue-shaped) wedge of gold (Josh 7:21), to a (tongue-shaped) bay of the sea (Josh 15:2, 5; Isa 11:15), and to a tongue of fire or devouring (Isa 5:24).⁴⁴ The latter word, שָׂפָה, has the basic meaning of "lip," "speech," and "edge": lip as a human organ of speech (Isa 29:13), speech as a language (Gen 11:7), edge as of a sea shore (Gen 22:17) or of the bank of a river (Gen 41:3, 17).⁴⁵ Neither of these

⁴³Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1897) 312.

⁴⁴Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1906) 546.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 973-74.

Hebrew words refers to ecstatic utterances. In fact, it could be summarily stated from the use of this noun in other places in Scripture and even outside of Scripture in NT times that no valid proof exists for its use as an ecstatic utterance.

The use of *glossa* in Acts. The main word translated “tongue” is *glossa*, from which the term “glossolalia” is derived (Acts 2:4, 11; 10:46; 19:6; 1 Corinthians 12–14), but a synonymous word not used as often is *διάλεκτος* (*dialektos*, “language”). Since *glossa* and *dialektos* are used in connection with the gift in Acts, an examination of the two words and their relationship to the gift is necessary. The term *dialektos* (found in Acts 1:19; 2:6, 8; 21:40; 26:14) defines “the tongue or language peculiar to any people”⁴⁶ or to a nation or region.⁴⁷ It is so used by Aristotle (fr. Polyt. Aristotle prob. 10, 38: 895a: τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μία φωνὴ ἀλλὰ διάλεκτοι πολλαί [*tou anthrōpou mia phōnē alla dialektoi pollai*, “one voice of man but many languages”]).⁴⁸ Polhill, commenting on the use of *dialektos* in vv. 6-8, states, “It can only refer to a known language or dialect.”⁴⁹ Marshall takes that a step further as he writes, “Verses 6, 8 and 11 show that human languages are meant.”⁵⁰ It should be noted that vv. 6 and 8 use the word *dialektos* while v. 11 contains the word *glossa*. Thomas writes, “It cannot be doubted that the word has the same meaning here (2:6, 8), being a reference to the language and dialects spoken by the persons listed in verses nine through eleven.”⁵¹ He further comments, “That was the nature of the gift exemplified in Acts 2, where the ‘tongues’ of verse 4 and 11 were one and the same phenomenon as the ‘language’ in verses 6 and 8.”⁵²

Although that is quite clear, Polhill comments, “The word ‘tongue’ may be ambiguous in v. 4,” and then concludes, “Luke uses the expression ‘to speak in other [*heteros*, ‘different’] tongues [languages]’ in v. 4, thus making a distinction from tongue-speaking (which he did know and referred to in 10:46).”⁵³ The problem with that conclusion is that there is nothing linguistically or contextually that demands a distinction between what is found in Acts 2 and what is referred to in Acts 10:46.

Those who, like Dunn, suggest that the miracle was in the hearing, not the

⁴⁶Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930) 139.

⁴⁷Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, BAGD (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000) 232.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman, 1992) 99.

⁵⁰I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 69.

⁵¹Robert L. Thomas, “The Holy Spirit and Tongues,” *The King’s Business* 54 (May, 1963):9.

⁵²Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts* 36.

⁵³Polhill, *Acts* 100.

speaking,⁵⁴ must take into account that the speakers—not the hearers—were those on whom the Spirit came, or as Polhill puts it, “Indeed, if the miracle was in the crowd’s hearing rather than in the believers’ speaking, one wonders why it was even necessary for Luke to tell of the Spirit’s coming so powerfully upon them.”⁵⁵

But in the main, what is especially challenging is that while some readily admit that the basic meaning of *glōssa* refers to the tongue as an organ of the body and also to other things shaped as a tongue and to languages,⁵⁶ they also suggest that it refers to “the gift of men who, rapt in an ecstasy and no longer quite masters of their own reasons and consciousness, pour forth their glowing spiritual emotions in strange utterances, ragged, dark, disconnected, quite unfitted to instruct or to influence the minds of others.”⁵⁷ Behm states, “The peculiar phenomenon of λαλεῖν (ἐν) γλώσση (γλώσσαίς) [“to speak in a tongue (tongues)”] (1 C. 12–14; Acts 10:46; 19:6), with which we should link the λαλεῖν γλώσσαίς καιναῖς [“to speak with new tongues”] of Mark 16:17 and the λαλεῖν ἑτέραις γλώσσαίς [“to speak with other tongues”] of Acts 2:4, may be understood only in the light of the vivid depiction in 1 C. 14:2ff.”⁵⁸ But, Thayer remarks that λαλεῖν ἑτέραις γλώσσαίς (*lalein heterais glōssais*, “to speak with other tongues”) means “to speak with other than their native i.e. in foreign languages, Acts 2:4 cf. 6-11” and that λαλεῖν γλώσσαίς καιναῖς (*glōssais lalein kainais*, “to speak with new tongues”) means “to speak with new tongues which the speaker has not learned previously, Mark 16:17.”⁵⁹

The “kinds of tongues” (γέννη γλωσσῶν, *genē glōsson*) in 1 Cor 12:10.

If the *glōssai* of 13:8 is the same as the *genē glōssōn* of 12:10, the use and meaning of *genē glōssōn* is an important consideration. Thiselton has an extensive contextually driven discussions on the “kinds of tongues.”⁶⁰ Much of his discussion draws from the emphasis he sees in *genē glōssōn*. In commenting on “kinds of tongues” and the corresponding “interpretation of tongues,” he writes, “These two gifts of the Spirit must be considered together, since our exegesis and understanding of each relates to our interpretation of the other. Our starting point must be to take γέννη, *kinds, sorts, species*, with full seriousness.”⁶¹ After a brief discussion, he concludes, “Too much literature seeks to identify *glossolalia* as ‘one thing’ when

⁵⁴James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 151-52.

⁵⁵Polhill, *Acts* 100.

⁵⁶Liddell, Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* 312.

⁵⁷Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon* 118.

⁵⁸Johannes Behm, “γλώσσα,” *TDNT* 1:772.

⁵⁹Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon* 118. [transliteration and translation added]

⁶⁰Thiselton, *1 Corinthians* 970-88.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 970. [emphasis in original]

Paul specifically takes pains to refer to *different species*.⁶²

Thiselton continues his discussion of various views on tongues with the comment, “On exegetical and largely contextual grounds the following approaches may be distinguished, and are not mutually exclusive in every case (although they are in some cases).”⁶³ He comments on the following views: (1) “Tongues as Angelic Speech”; (2) “Tongues as the Miraculous Power to Speak Other Languages”; (3) “Tongues as Liturgical, Archaic, or Rhythmic Phrases”; (4) “Tongues as ‘Ecstatic’ Speech”; (5) “Proposed Modification from Theissen: Conscious, Unconscious, and a Release (Cf. Rom 8:26)”; (6) “Tongues as Language of the Unconscious Released in ‘Sighs Too Deep for Words’ (from the Depths of the Heart).”⁶⁴ After a lengthy discussion, he refers to Theissen’s *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology* and draws this conclusion, “Theissen convincingly concludes that ‘glossolalia is language of the unconscious—language capable of consciousness.’”⁶⁵ On this basis, he concludes with this statement: “Tongues may then be viewed as ‘the language of the unconscious’ because it is unintelligible (unless it is ‘interpreted’) not only to others but also to the speaker.”⁶⁶

One has to appreciate all Thiselton’s work, but it is difficult to see how he can draw that much from the term *genē glōssōn*, when in fact 1 Corinthians 14 (the same broad context of 12–14), from which he draws a great deal of support for his conclusions, has a corresponding use of *genē* in the phrase *γέννη φωνῶν* (*genē phōnōn*, 14:10). Paul states, “There are, perhaps, a great many **kinds of languages** (*genē phōnōn*) in the world, and no [*kind*] is without meaning” (NASB [italics in the original; boldface and transliteration added]). Most think that *genē phōnōn* refers to actual languages. Even Thiselton introduces his discussion of 14:10 with this statement: “Paul now reaches his fourth example, drawn from the communication barrier which exists where, even when an intelligible language is used, if the speaker’s and addressee’s languages are not known to each other, each will effectively remain an **alien**...”⁶⁷

Beyond that, in spite of all his rhetoric on *genē glōssōn*, Thiselton has little to say concerning *genē phōnōn* and its relationship to *genē glōssōn* except for this comment: “A long tradition of modern commentators from Meyer to Conzelmann, Fee, and Wolff suggest that Paul uses *γέννη φωνῶν* (*genē phōnōn*) rather than *γλωσσῶν* (*glōssōn*) to denote foreign languages, in order to avoid confusion with

⁶²Ibid. [emphasis in original]

⁶³Ibid., 972.

⁶⁴Ibid., 972-86.

⁶⁵Ibid., 988.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid., 1105. [emphasis in the original]

the ‘tongues’ of glossolalia.”⁶⁸ But is there not another way to address the fact that (1) he uses the same word—*genē*—in both contexts to describe the nouns—*phōnōn* and *glōssōn*—and that (2) he uses two synonymous words—*phōnōn* and *glōssōn*—that have a commonality of meaning outside of 1 Corinthians 12–14 in referring to spoken languages? In keeping with the normal use of all the words involved and the related context (1 Corinthians 12–14), might it not rather be, as Thomas suggests, that “[d]ifferent tongues [or languages]’ (1 Cor 12:10) differs from the expression ‘different languages’ (1 Cor 14:10) in that the former were the result of supernatural enablement, while the latter came about through natural processes of learning”?⁶⁹

“The tongues of angels” (ταῖς γλώσσαις ... τῶν ἀγγέλων, *tais glōssais ... tōn aggelōn*) in 1 Cor 13:1. In a discussion of *glōssōn* in 12:10 and *glōssai* in 13:8, a last item to deal with is the relationship of 13:8 to the context of 1 Cor 13:1ff.

A major problem with much of this discussion is that *glōssa* occurs only 14 times in 1 Corinthians as compared to 37 times elsewhere in the NT and over 150 times in the Septuagint. Some, like Behm, have traced the development and use of *glōssa* and concluded that it means (1) a part of the body, (2) something tongue-shaped [as a piece of land] and (3) a language. They then seemingly disregard their own research and settle on a different meaning in 1 Corinthians 12–14. In so doing, Behm draws conclusions that do not do justice to the context. For example, he concludes from Paul’s statement in 13:1, “Some are tongues of men and others of angels.”⁷⁰ In fact, he adds,

It is used as a “technical expression for a peculiar language,” namely, the “language of the Spirit,” a miraculous language which is used in heaven between God and the angels (1 C. 13:1) and to which man may attain in prayer as he is seized by the Spirit and caught up into heaven (2 C. 12:2ff; cf. 1 C. 14:2, 13ff; Acts 10:46; 2:11). The heavenly origin of the phenomenon is certainly given strong emphasis in Acts 2:2ff.⁷¹

Behm is not alone. Marshall writes, “Most commentators think that the gift of tongues described in 1 Corinthians 12, 14 was the ability to speak in non-human languages (the tongues ‘of angels’, 1 Cor 13:1).”⁷² Thiselton goes so far as to state, “There can be no doubt whatever that whereas prophecy denotes primarily speech-acts *from God to the community* or *to individuals* within the assembled church,

⁶⁸Ibid. [transliteration added]

⁶⁹Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts* 37.

⁷⁰Behm, “γλώσσα,” 722

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²I Howard Marshall, *Acts*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 69.

tongues are addressed *from* believers *to* God (14:2: *to* God, *not* to human persons), as against prophecy 'to humans persons' (14:3).⁷³

Such conclusions do not reflect what Paul says in 13:1. As one has noted, "The condition (ἐὰν λαλῶ) is of the third class, a supposable case,"⁷⁴ or as another states, "ἐὰν λαλῶ supposes a case which never has been exemplified: 'even if I can speak,' or as E. V. 'though I speak.'"⁷⁵ As Meyer puts it, "It supposes something, the actual existence of which is left dependent on circumstances: assuming it to be the case, that I speak, etc...."⁷⁶ He then writes:

The meaning is: *Supposing that I am a speaker with tongues, from whom all possible kinds of articulate tongues might be heard, not simply those of men, but also—far more wonderful and exalted still—those of the angels.* Paul thus describes the loftiest of all conceivable cases of *glossolalia*. The tongues of *angels* here spoken are certainly only an abstract conception....⁷⁷

Another factor that has influenced the understanding of *glossa* in chapter 13 is the introduction of the italicized word "*unknown*" before the word "tongue" in several instances in 1 Corinthians (e.g., KJV). The italics show its omission in the original text, and its insertion is unfortunate, for the same word is translated elsewhere simply by "tongue." Walvoord adds a conclusion when he states,

The use of identical terms in reference to speaking with tongues in Acts and 1 Corinthians leaves no foundation for a distinction. In all passages, the same vocabulary is used: *laleō* and *glossa*, in various grammatical constructions. On the basis of this Greek and the statement of the text no distinction is found.⁷⁸

The Content of the Message

Much attention in the discussion of tongues revolves around the nature of the gift. Unfortunately, very little attention is given to the content communicated by that gift. If gifts were given "for the common good," and they were (12:7), and if no "common good" resulted from a message in tongues without interpretation as chapter 14 clearly argues, the content is important. Since benefit "for the common good" could result when "tongues" were interpreted—as Paul indicates in the words "... greater is the one who prophecies than the one who speaks in tongues, unless he

⁷³Thiselton, *1 Corinthians* 970. [emphasis added]

⁷⁴Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1931) 4:176.

⁷⁵Alford, *Greek Testament* II, 585.

⁷⁶Meyer, *1 Corinthians* 6:300-301.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 301. [emphasis in the original]

⁷⁸Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit* 183.

interprets, so that the church may receive edifying” (14:5)—a gross injustice is done if the only focus is on the “nature” of the gift without due emphasis upon its purpose if properly used.

In addition, here as in all other lists, Paul has a distinct purpose for using these three gifts. What is it? “A popular grouping is (1) gifts of instruction (wisdom and knowledge); (2) gifts of supernatural power (faith, healings, miracles); and (3) gifts of inspired utterance (prophecy, discerning prophecies, tongues, interpretation of tongues).”⁷⁹ Although that division does not reflect what Paul had in mind, much can be learned from it. A relationship does exist between tongues and prophecy; both are “gifts of inspired utterance.” Fee offers a related helpful point in his comment on “the gift of knowledge”: “Most likely, therefore, it is a ‘spiritual utterance’ of some revelatory kind. This is suggested by its place between ‘revelation’ and ‘prophecy’ in 14:6 and by the fact that, along with prophecy and tongues, it will cease at the Eschaton (13:8).”⁸⁰

Since tongues appears here between two other arguably revelatory gifts, since interpreted tongues brought the body of Christ an edifying word from God, and since 13:8-12 focuses to a great degree upon God’s revelation to His church, Paul here groups these three gifts because they are all to some degree revelatory in content. Carson suggests that maybe the distinction here is that tongues, as distinct from prophecy and knowledge, is not included in what one might term “inscripturated”⁸¹ revelation—though Carson’s overall concept in these words differs. Might not the inclusion of all three in one group and the exclusion of tongues in the discussion in v. 9 in addition to the exclusion of tongues in the list of gifts that are “rendered inoperative,” result from such a distinction?

What is very clear is that Paul here addresses only three revelatory gifts not “presumably by extrapolation most other charismatic gifts,” as Carson suggests.⁸² As the context shows in each of the verses in 9-12, his emphasis is on God’s revelation of Himself and His truth. It is also worth noting that only knowledge and prophecy carry over from v. 8 to vv. 9-10 since they reflect—in a way distinct from tongues—inscripturated revelation and as such become the center of the argument being developed in vv. 9-10.

The Cessation of Gifts in 1 Cor 13:8-10

Another very significant matter in 13:8-12 is the cessation of the three gifts of v. 8. In fact, the reference to the cessation of gifts and more particularly the verb *παύσονται* (*pausontai*, “they will cease”) sandwiched between two uses of

⁷⁹Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 590-91.

⁸⁰Ibid., 593.

⁸¹Carson, *Showing the Spirit* 72.

⁸²Ibid.

καταργέω (*katargeō*, “I render inoperative”) is one of the major exegetical issues to be resolved. That this is a significant issue is supported by individuals who agree in principle with one another but who reach different conclusions. Lightner writes, “The problem is, what is the force of the futures? Some say they refer to the completion of the canon, others apply them to the coming of the Lord.”⁸³ He continues, “These future tenses of verse 8 refer to the close of the canon, or that time when God’s revelation has been all recorded and recognized.”⁸⁴ On the other hand, Toussaint, who espouses the view that tongues cease before prophecies and knowledge are rendered inoperative, states, “The main ones (details) are these: the change of verbs in verse 8, the change of voice in the verbs of verse 8.”⁸⁵

To emphasize the importance of this matter, Carson writes, “The debates turn on the following exegetical points,”⁸⁶ followed by what he feels are the crucial exegetical matters. One matter he entitles, “The Relation Between ‘Perfection’ (τὸ τέλειον) and the ‘Imperfect’ ([τὸ] ἐκ μέρους).”⁸⁷ The other exegetical matter, and the one he addresses first is: “The Significance of the Verb παύσονται.”⁸⁸ That is how crucial this matter is. Thus, to address this issue adequately one must discuss the use of *pausontai* in contrast with *katargeō*. Then, he must address the second of these matters, the meaning of *to teleion*.

Before an examination of the words individually, a major point of hermeneutics involving the interchange of verbs—καταργηθήσονται ... παύσονται ... καταργηθήσεται (*katargēthēsontai ... pausontai ... katargēthēsetai*, “they will be rendered inoperative ... they will cease ... it will be rendered inoperative, 13:8)—deserves attention. As noted earlier, Toussaint makes much out of the change of verb and voice.⁸⁹ Carson differs with Toussaint: “This view assumes without warrant that the switch to this verb is more than a stylistic variation.”⁹⁰ This essay does not reach the same conclusion as either Toussaint or Carson and is not at this point taking issue with the difference of opinion, but it does take issue with the principle reflected in Carson’s words “without warrant” since Paul has no compunction about using *katargeō* four times in vv. 8-11 while only using *pauō* only once.

⁸³Robert P. Lightner, *Speaking in Tongues and Divine Healing* (Des Plaines, Ill.: Regular Baptist Press, 1965), p. 30.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Toussaint, “First Corinthians Thirteen” 314.

⁸⁶Carson, *Showing the Spirit* 66.

⁸⁷Ibid., 67.

⁸⁸Ibid., 66.

⁸⁹Toussaint, “First Corinthians Thirteen” 314.

⁹⁰Carson, *Showing the Spirit* 66.

The Use of Καταργέω (Katargeō)

The verb *katargeō* depicts the cessation of prophecy and knowledge in both vv. 8 and 10. All three occurrences are future passive, with the two uses in v. 8 differing only in the first being plural because of the plural “prophecies” and the second singular with the singular “knowledge.” Several points to observe in v. 8 include, first of all, the verb has a basic meaning of: “to render inoperative or invalid, to abrogate, abolish.”⁹¹ Some even use “destroy.”⁹² The second point is that, since all three uses of this verb in verses 8 and 10 are passive, they denote that the action of the respective nouns—prophecies and knowledge—is achieved by something outside themselves. Taking the two points together shows that to translate the verbs “will pass away”⁹³ does gross injustice to the verb’s meaning and voice. The third point indicated by the future tenses in v. 8 is that the action would happen at some point after the writing of this epistle. A specific time for this action is not to be found in these verbs, but, if stipulated at all, in something else in the context.

One thing that is certain in this passage: the cessation of both prophecy and knowledge happen in the same manner. In addition, the use of the same verb for the cessation of these gifts does not support Alford’s statement, “The two first, προφ. and γλώσσα, shall be absolutely superseded: γῶσις relatively.”⁹⁴

“Tongues Shall Cease”

The Use of Παύω (Pauō)

Regarding the verb *παύσονται* (*pausontai*) Carson states,

In verse 8, the verb with prophecies and with knowledge is in the passive voice: prophecies and knowledge “will be destroyed,” apparently in connection with the coming of “perfection” (v. 10). But the verb with “tongues,” *παύσονται* (*pausontai*), is in the middle; some take this to mean that tongues will cease *of themselves*. There is something intrinsic to their character that demands they cease—apparently independently of the cessation of prophecy and knowledge. This view assumes without warrant that the switch to this verb is more than a stylistic variation. Worse, it interprets the middle voice irresponsibly. In Hellenistic Greek, the middle voice affects the meaning of the verb in a variety of ways; and not only in the future of some verbs, where middles are more common, but also in other tenses the middle *form* may be used while the active *force* is preserved. At such points the verb is deponent. One knows what force the middle voice has only by careful inspection of all occurrences of the verb being studied. In the New

⁹¹G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936) 238.

⁹²Hans Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 225.

⁹³Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 1032ff.

⁹⁴Alford, *The Greek Testament* 2:588.

Testament, this verb prefers the middle; but that does not mean the subject “stops” under its own power. For instance, when Jesus rebukes the wind and raging waters, the storm *stops* (same verb, middle voice in Luke 8:24)—and certainly not under its own power.⁹⁵

He concludes, “In short, I do not think that very much can be made of the use of *παύσονται* (*pausontai*) in verse 8, any more than one can make much of other stylistic features that regularly escape detailed comment (e.g., prophecy and knowledge change their order when Paul moves from v. 8 to v. 9).”⁹⁶

Just a brief review of the comments on *pauō* between the two immediate and four extended uses of *katargeō* is in order. First, this writer does not think the argument of the passage depends on the use of *pauō*, as Carson’s argument may suggest.⁹⁷ But neither can he view this verb as merely “rhetorical”⁹⁸ or a “stylistic variation.”⁹⁹ Paul used *pauō* for a distinct purpose, a purpose different from what he communicated by *katargeō*. The use of the two different verbs was not merely to avoid repetition, because Paul uses *katargeō* four times in vv. 8, 10, and 11. Thus a distinction is intended. On the other hand, it is a major stretch to make *pausontai* refer to something that would happen so many years before two gifts cease, as does Toussaint.¹⁰⁰ That seems to be an attempt to accommodate a presupposition rather than assess the statement.

Second, this writer has a problem with Carson’s statement about the “irresponsible” interpretation of the middle voice. No doubt, the majority of uses of *pauō* in the NT (13 of the 15)¹⁰¹ are in the middle form. On the other hand, from a historical comparative point of view, most if not all “deponent” verbs became deponent because of the nature of word meanings and not because of an edict of grammarians. Thus, a verb like this, much like *δέχομαι* (*dechomai*, “I receive”), tends to have a meaning that most readily corresponds to the middle voice. The nature of the verb may tend toward a middle usage, without arguing against the verb having a meaning that reflects middle usage. In addition, anyone who has studied the Greek language extensively knows that the middle voice, with all its nuances, is most difficult to understand for those studying the language many years later.

Another intriguing thought comes from Carson’s statement, “In the New Testament, this verb prefers the middle; but that does not mean the subject ‘stops’

⁹⁵Carson, *Showing the Spirit* 66-67. [emphasis in the original]

⁹⁶Ibid., 67.

⁹⁷Ibid., 66-67.

⁹⁸Houghton, “A Reexamination of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13” 348-49.

⁹⁹Carson, *Showing the Spirit* 66.

¹⁰⁰Toussaint, “First Corinthians Thirteen” 315-16.

¹⁰¹Houghton, “A Reexamination of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13” 348.

under its own power.”¹⁰² Does anyone believe that? In light of all that has been said and written about the divine source of spiritual gifts, does anyone really believe that tongues or any other gift comes to an end without God’s divine intervention? In addition, Carson goes on to say, “For instance, when Jesus rebukes the wind and raging waters, the storm stops (same verb, middle voice in Luke 8:24)—and certainly not under its own power.”¹⁰³ This same passage is used by Houghton (a cessationist) to make a similar point.¹⁰⁴ That text says, “And being aroused, He rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm” (NASB). It does not say, “He stopped them.” Rather, it says, “They stopped.” The winds ceased to blow and the waves ceased to surge—of themselves if you please—but not without divine intervention. Once again, even if there is a significance to the middle voice, it cannot be to argue—any more than with the winds and waves—that they ceased of themselves without divine intervention. A difference of verb and a difference of voice occurs in v. 8, with some significance to that difference even if what that may mean is not clear. Although it is not the crucial issue, the arguments presented by Carson are not sufficient to disprove that “[t]here is something intrinsic to their [tongues] character that demands that they cease—apparently independently of the cessation of prophecy and knowledge.”¹⁰⁵

The Combined Use of Pauō and Katargeō

Further, accepting the fact that Paul’s use of *pauō* is not merely rhetorical or merely a stylistic variation and believing that it is there for a distinct purpose, probably not to be found primarily in the fact that Paul uses the middle voice, “What then might its purpose be?” First of all, there is a significance to the variation of the vocabulary, but it is worth considering that for all the emphasis given to *pausontai*, the issue which is more to the point is why he uses *katargeō* so often in such a short span (4 times) in the context of his discussion of prophecy and knowledge rather than using *pausontai*. A hint might come from the distinction that Carson makes (without at the same time accepting the viewpoint he is discussing) when he states, “The view that Paul is referring to the closing of the canon depends on understanding New Testament prophecy and related gifts as having the same revelatory and authoritative significance as inscripturated prophecy.”¹⁰⁶ This essay is not arguing for *to teleion* being a reference to the completion of the canon, but maybe the distinction being drawn by Paul is that although all three gifts—prophecy, tongues and knowledge—are to some degree revelatory, the first and third have a “revelatory

¹⁰²Carson, *Showing the Spirit* 67.

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Houghton, “A Reexamination of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13” 348.

¹⁰⁵Carson, *Showing the Spirit* 66. [brackets added]

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 72.

and authoritative significance” with a possible “inscripturated” function that tongues does not have, and thus are dealt with separately as gifts which will—at some time future to the writing of this chapter—be forcefully “rendered inoperative.” Maybe that also answers the question relative to the reference to “we know in part” (a possible reference to the “gift of knowledge”) and “we prophesy in part” (certainly a reference to the above mentioned “gift of prophecy”) in the following verse without any reference to tongues.

The Time of the Cessation (13:10)

The time of the cessation of these gifts, a major issue in 13:10, centers on the meaning of *to teleion*. Therefore, the meaning of *to teleion* in this verse is of considerable importance in understanding the passage as a whole. Ruthven, commenting on v. 10, writes, “1 Cor 13:8-13 is perhaps the *locus classicus* in the discussion on the continuation of spiritual gifts.”¹⁰⁷ Or, as Fowler White writes about v. 10, “Cessationists have ordinarily regarded agreement with noncessationists on this point as the kiss of death for the cessationist position, and vice versa.”¹⁰⁸ Defining *to teleion* is therefore a crucial part of this discussion.

Several views exist on the meaning of *to teleion* in 1 Cor 13:10. Two of the major views are (1) the closing of the canon or (2) a point of time in the future related to the coming of Christ. To deal with this, a look at the use of τέλειος (*teleios*) in other Pauline passages is necessary.

Significantly, *ton teleion* of 13:10 is the only use of the adjective *teleios* as “a neuter, articular substantive”¹⁰⁹ and here it was “probably created precisely to serve as a contrast to “the partial” or “the imperfect.”¹¹⁰ Carson, responding to the possible problem created by παρουσία (*parousia*, “coming”) being feminine and *to teleion* being neuter, states, “The objection is without merit, for ‘perfection’ is not the parousia itself, but the state of affairs brought about by the arrival of the parousia.”¹¹¹ Also, Carson’s statement with regard to Gaffin is significant for he comments, “[I]f with Gaffin that perfection is connected with the parousia, then his interpretation sees too little in the text.”¹¹²

Another key factor in understanding of 13:8-12 is the presence of the thrice repeated ἐκ μέρους (*ek merous*, “in part”), a major connecting link between vv. 9-

¹⁰⁷Jon Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Postbiblical Miracles* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) 131.

¹⁰⁸R. Fowler White, “Richard Gaffin and Wayne Grudem on 1 Cor. 13:10: A Comparison of Cessationist and Noncessationist Argumentation,” *JETS* 35/2 (June 1992):174.

¹⁰⁹Carson, *Showing the Spirit* 72.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Ibid., 69.

¹¹²Ibid., 69 n. 57

10 and v. 12. The phrase gives continuity to the progression of thought in the passage. It should be understood in light of its direct meaning, not what one wants to make it say. For example, Godet writes, “In contrast to ἐκ μέρους, *in part*, one would expect τὸ πᾶν, *the whole*, the entire.”¹¹³ Certainly, the use of τὸ πᾶν (*to pan*) instead of τὸ τέλειον (*to teleion*) might have been a good support here for those who see this as a reference to the completion of the canon. But Godet continues with a statement worth considering: “But it is not without reason that the apostle says τὸ τέλειον (*to teleion*), *the perfect*, substituting the idea of perfection in quality for that of completeness in quantity.”¹¹⁴ Although one may argue that the reference is not to “the perfect,” it is worth noting that the emphasis is on quality rather than quantity or completeness.

The Use of Teleios in the New Testament.

To gain an understanding of *teleios* in this context, a consideration of its use inside and outside the NT is in order. Sometimes the use outside the NT—namely in the LXX—gives a great deal of insight but that is not the case here. The main Hebrew words translated in the Septuagint by *teleios* are סָלֵם (*sālēm*, “complete”) and אָמִים (*āmīm*, “complete”).¹¹⁵ These words are used for *teleios* about seven times apiece, with the latter referring to that which is sound or complete, the stress being on what is whole, perfect or intact¹¹⁶ and having the sense of something being sound, healthful, wholesome, unimpaired, innocent, or having integrity (cf. Exod 12:5; Gen 6:9). The former word, סָלֵם, is used for what is complete, finished, or sound.¹¹⁷

In the NT, *teleios* is used in the sense of “having reached its end, finished, mature, complete, perfect.”¹¹⁸ The word refers to people and to things. With respect to people, its general use denotes being full-grown, mature, complete, or perfect with the “... idea of complete goodness, without reference either to maturity or to the philosophical idea of τέλος.”¹¹⁹ With reference to things, the word means complete or perfect.¹²⁰ Danker and Abbott-Smith concur that *teleios* is not used in this second manner more than five times (i.e., the minority or one-quarter of the times) in the

¹¹³F. Godet, *Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957) 2:251.

¹¹⁴Ibid. [transliteration added]

¹¹⁵Gerhard Delling, “τέλος,” *TDNT* 8:72.

¹¹⁶Reinier Schippers, “τέλος,” *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 2:60.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* 442.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Ibid.

NT, and both cite 1 Cor 13:10 as one of those examples.¹²¹ Seven other uses, in connection with persons, have the idea of complete or perfect.¹²²

The Use of Teleios in the Pauline Corpus

One soon realizes that the study of the use of *teleios* in the LXX and the rest of the NT gives supportive evidence but does not give conclusive evidence as to its meaning in 1 Cor 13:10. One might conclude from earlier statements that since it is not here referring to a person, it refers to what is perfect or complete. But Thayer writes, "What 'end' is intended the reader must determine by the context."¹²³ What seems to be of some significance is that of the approximately twenty times *teleios* appears in the NT, eight occurrences (almost one-half) are in Paul's writings (Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 2:6; 13:10; 14:20; Eph 4:13; Phil 3:15; Col 1:28; 4:12). A detailed look at Paul's use of *teleios* is therefore essential to determining its meaning in 1 Corinthians 13:10.

The Use of Teleios in Romans 12:2

Romans 12:2 is a good place to begin in a study of *teleios* in the Pauline corpus, since its meaning of "perfect" there is one of the justifications for translating it the same way in 1 Cor 13:10. In Rom 12:2, *teleion* is used, along with ἀγαθόν (*agathon*, "good") and εὐάρεστον (*euareston*, "pleasing"), in apposition with τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ (*to thelēma tou theou*) to describe God's will.¹²⁴ In this case, it has an adjectival sense, with the definite meaning of "perfect." Cranfield summarizes this way: "God's will, that which God requires of us, is perfect, complete, absolute; for He claims us wholly for Himself... Thus the last of the three terms interprets the other two; for it makes it clear that this ἀγαθόν καὶ εὐάρεστον is not something manageable and achievable ... but the absolute demand of God..."¹²⁵ This is the only use of *teleios* by Paul where the absolutely certain meaning is "perfect." A noticeable feature is that the word it describes is in the immediate context.

The Use of Teleios in Paul Outside Romans 12:2

No doubt surrounds Paul's use of *teleios* in Rom 12:2, but how does he use it the remainder of the time? The other eight uses of *teleios* by Paul are Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 2:6; 13:10; 14:20; Eph 4:13; Phil 3:15; Col 1:28; 4:12. Four (or one-half) of

¹²¹Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New 7*; Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* 442.

¹²²Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* 442.

¹²³Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon* 620.

¹²⁴C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982) 2:610.

¹²⁵Ibid.

those (1 Cor 2:6; 14:20; Eph 4:13; Col. 1:28) are best rendered “mature.” In one of the three remaining uses, Phil 3:15, although the opinions are divided, a fair rendering would be, “Therefore—as many as are mature—let us think this way/have this attitude....” Walvoord makes a good case in that passage as he writes,

Relative perfection is frequently in the Scripture, as indicated by the context. In some instances, *spiritual maturity* is referred to as perfection. Paul writes to the Philippians, “Let us therefore, as many as are perfect—*teleioi*, be thus minded” (Phil. 3:15). That he is referring to spiritual maturity rather than sinless perfection is made clear by the reference in the same passage in verse twelve, “Not that I have already obtained or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus.” The reference in Philippians 3:12 is to ultimate perfection which will include sinlessness, of course, but this Paul denies as a present possession. Spiritual maturity may be compared to physical maturity—full development without, however, absolute perfection.¹²⁶

Another Pauline reference where *teleios* could be considered to mean “perfect” is Col 4:12. Yet in Col 1:28, where the same term is used, Paul states that his goal is to present every man “mature” or “full grown” in his walk with God. Little debate surrounds that conclusion. If Paul in Col 1:28 used *teleios* to depict “maturity” as a goal of his ministry in each person’s life, it is arguable that he would use it the same way in Col 4:12 as he expresses in prayer his desire for them. If that be the case, the only passage left is 1 Cor 13:10.

In summary, Paul obviously uses *teleios* to mean “mature.” Ephesians 4:13; 1 Cor 2:6; 14:20 (all to be discussed below) are definitely translated “mature.” Colossians 1:28 refers to maturity (and likely 4:12). Out of the eight uses by Paul, four are definitely “mature”; two are possibly even probably so; only one is definitely “perfect” (Rom 12:2) since “the word is governed there by the preceding τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ. Knowledge of the ‘perfect,’ ‘entire’ will of God in the concrete situation is developed by renewal of the power of judgment through the Holy Spirit.”¹²⁷ The one remaining use is in 1 Cor 13:10.

The Use of Teleios in 1 Corinthians

The use of *teleios* in 1 Corinthians. A major consideration in resolving the meaning of *to teleion* in 13:10 is the way Paul uses the word in the broader context of 1 Corinthians, i.e., the larger setting of the entire book. Therefore, the first issue will be usage in the whole book, and the second will be the immediate context of 1 Cor 13:8ff.

1 Corinthians 2:6–3:5. The larger context of 1 Corinthians argues for the

¹²⁶John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit* 208-9. [emphasis in original]

¹²⁷Gerhard Delling, “τέλειος,” *TDNT* 8:76-77.

meaning “mature” in 2:6–3:5. Not only is this true because of the apostle’s usual usage, but also because each time in this book, it appears in a context in contrast with νήπιος (*nēpios*) or a related verb or noun, evident in 2:6–3:5. That pairing of words is important because “the antithesis between τέλειος (2:6) and νήπιος (3:1) is frequent (14:20; Ephesians 4:13, 14).”¹²⁸ In this book alone, the contrast occurs three times, and within chapters 12–14, it occurs twice (13:10–11; 14:20). In these “other connections, τέλειος denotes the state of mature manhood in contradistinction from a νήπιος or παῖς.”¹²⁹ Thiselton states,

On the lexicography of the word, see above on 2:6, where it clearly carries the different sense of *mature* (usually of persons), as it does in its remaining use in this epistle, ταῖς δὲ φρεσὶν τέλειοι γίνεσθε (14:20). However, here there is also a further hint of τέλειος as denoting a goal. For just as in 2:6 the wisdom for *the mature* is not for those who exhibit childish self-centeredness and immediacy, even so here Paul is about to draw the same contrast with being *infantile* or *childish* or *childlike* in v. 11a and the *goal* of mature adulthood. Hence it combines the two related notions of *fulfillment* or *goal* and the *completed whole*. No English word alone can fully convey the meaning in this context.¹³⁰

The idea of such a contrast is established in 1 Cor 2:6 where the apostle describes his manner of speech to those who were mature, τοῖς τέλειοις (*tois teleiois*), and later he remarks that he could not speak to the Corinthians in this manner, but would have to speak to them as νηπίους (*nēpiois*, “infants”) (1 Cor 3:1). First Cor 2:6 reads, Σοφίαν δὲ λαλοῦμεν ἐν τοῖς τέλειοις (*sophian de laloumen en tois teleiois*).... But 3:1 speaks of the readers as νηπίους ἐν Χριστῷ (*nēpiois en Christō*). A definite contrast between *teleiois* and *nēpiois* is intended.

1 Corinthians 14:20. This same idea appears in 1 Corinthians 12–14, specifically in 14:20, when Paul uses παιδιά (*paidia*) and νηπιάζετε (*nēpiazete*), the verb form of *nēpios*, in contrast with *teleios*. In 14:20, we read, Ἄδελφοί, μὴ παιδιά γίνεσθε ταῖς φρεσὶν ἀλλὰ τῇ κακίᾳ νηπιάζετε, ταῖς δὲ φρεσὶν τέλειοι γίνεσθε (*adelphoi, mē paidia ginesthe tais phresin alla tē kakia nēpiazete, tais de phresin teleioi ginesthe*). Again *teleioi* stands in contrast to *nēpios*, represented in its cognate *nēpiazete*, and in a context with a related word *paidia*. The idea in 14:20 is, “Play the part of babies, if you like, in freedom from malice; but in common sense try to act like grown up people.”¹³¹ A similar thought transferred to 1 Cor 13:10 leads to the conclusion that this was “a severe rebuke to

¹²⁸Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians* 298.

¹²⁹R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884) 566.

¹³⁰Thiselton, *1 Corinthians* 1065. [emphasis in the original]

¹³¹Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians* 315.

those who prided themselves on their intelligence. Children prefer what glitters and makes a show to what is more valuable; and it was childish to prefer ecstatic utterance to other and far more useful gifts.”¹³²

The Use of Teleios in Eph 4:13-14

Before a final conclusion on Paul’s meaning in 1 Cor 13:10, a look at another passage where the apostle uses *teleios* in discussing spiritual gifts, Eph 4:1-16, is beneficial. Though his use of *teleios* there may not be determinative of its meaning in 1 Cor 13:10-11, it is certainly corroborative. The Ephesians passage has the same author and the same subject matter—although with a distinctly different emphasis. Paul refers to the purpose of gifts and states that a reason for the gifts is that the church might attain to the status of ἄνδρα τέλειον (*andra teleion*, “a mature man”) (Eph 4:13), in order that they might no longer be *nēpioi* (Eph 4:14) “tossed here and there by waves” (Eph 4:14, NASB). Note that *teleion* and *nēpioi* stand in contrast with one another, and *teleion* clearly refers to maturity.¹³³ In comparing the two passages, one does well to keep in mind several key issues.

The context is very similar but unique. Ephesians 4:1-16 and 1 Corinthians 12–14 are similar in that they both deal with spiritual gifts and spiritually gifted people. In addition, both emphasize the importance of love. Not only is love a key issue in Ephesians 4, but in v. 2 it occupies an emphatic position, and as Robinson puts it, “As elsewhere in this epistle (cf. 1:4; 3:17; 4:15, 16), love is introduced as the climax, the comprehensive virtue of the new life that includes all the rest.”¹³⁴ “The duty of mutual forbearance is to be practiced in love—its motive, inspiration and life being found in love.”¹³⁵ The result of love is unity (vv. 3, 13), an issue of great concern to Paul in 1 Corinthians 12–14. The word for unity—ἐνότητα (*henoiēta*)—occurs only here in the NT, and yet this theme of unity stands out in this passage and is reflected throughout most of the epistle. A final similarity between 1 Corinthians 13 and Ephesians 4 is in the use of *nēpioi* and *teleion* in both with the former following the use of the latter in both. In both cases, an added pictorial illustration further defines the initial statement.

The progression of argument is clear. The progression of argument in Eph 4:11-16, where *nēpioi* and *teleion* occur, is quite clear. First, 4:11 mentions the gifts/gifted people, and v. 12 states the purpose of the giving of the gifts/gifted

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1897) 120.

¹³⁴J. Armitage Robinson, *Ephesians* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1979) 92.

¹³⁵S. D. F. Salmond, “Ephesians,” in *Expositor’s Greek Testament* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1967) 3:320.

people. In stating the purpose, three prepositional phrases introduced with (1) *πρός* (*pros*), (2) *εἰς* (*eis*) and (3) *εἰς* (*eis*).¹³⁶ The goal function of the gifts/gifted people comes in 4:13, and once again, three prepositional phrases occur with the verb *καταντάω* (*katantaō*, “I come to”).¹³⁷ The three phrases show that the threefold goal is: (1) *εἰς τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ θεοῦ* (*eis tēn henoīēta tēs pisteōs kai tēs epignōseōs tou theou*)—“unto the unity of the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God”; (2) *εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον* (*eis andra teleion*)—“unto a mature man” and (3) *εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ* (*eis metron hēlikias tou plērōmatos tou Christou*)—“unto the measure of the stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ.” Of additional interest is the relationship of the three phrases: (1) The second—“unto a mature man”—more clearly defines the first—“unto the unity of the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God”—and (2) the third—“unto the measure of the stature that belongs to the fullness of Jesus Christ”—more clearly defines the second—“unto a mature man.”¹³⁸ Verses 14-16 state the result of reaching the goal. The first outcome is negative (v. 14)—“that we no longer be children [*nēpioi*]....”; and the second is positive (v. 15)—“speaking the truth in love ... grow up.”¹³⁹ All this “causes the growth of the body ... in love” (4:16).

The focus on “the mature man” is clear. One might question what this “mature man” looks like. That is not difficult to discern. *Teleion*, is singular—“one new man” (not “new men”) in Christ, as opposed to the plural *nēpioi*—“immature ones.” The difference in number clearly indicates that individualism is a mark of immaturity.¹⁴⁰ So the goal is that the church would “come of age” or reach the maturity of unity. The emphasis is on mature adulthood that should be evident in contrast with the childishness mentioned in the following verse.

Application to an understanding of *to teleion* in 1 Cor 13:10. When one applies the above conclusions to *to teleion* in 1 Cor 13:10, several observations are appropriate. First, the context of ‘spiritual gifts’ is the same. Second, the emphasis on love and unity runs through both passages. Third, the contrast of *teleios* with *nēpios* is evident. Even the order is the same, with *teleios* coming first and *nēpios* following in the next verse. Added to that is the fact that the first verse (Eph 4:13; 1 Cor 13:10) speaks of the state of *teleios* and in the next verse he discusses further—or illustrates—the other state by referring to *nēpios*.

¹³⁶Ernest Best, *Ephesians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998) 395; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1990) 253-54.

¹³⁷Best, *Ephesians* 399; Lincoln, *Ephesians* 255.

¹³⁸Peter O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 305-7.

¹³⁹William Hendriksen, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967) 200-201.

¹⁴⁰Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* 257.

The similarities are clear. Ephesians 4 uses the two words, *teleios* and *nēpios*, which when used in close proximity in other contexts refer to maturity and immaturity. In fact, the only place where Paul definitely uses *teleios* to mean “perfect” (Rom 12:2) has neither *pais* nor *nēpios* in the immediate context. Also, the basic content of 1 Corinthians 12–14 is similar to that found in Eph 4:11-14. These gifts were useful “in part” in bringing about “that which is mature” or the maturity of the church. Such an interpretation more aptly fits the common use by Paul and also the argument of 1 Corinthians 13, and thus eliminates such a statement as, “The difference between a *nēpios* and a *teleios* is as nothing compared with the twilight of this world and the brightness of the perfect day, but it will help us to understand this.” Such a statement stems from a gross misunderstanding of the meaning of the two words.

The Use (and Meaning) of Teleios in 1 Cor 13:10

In 1 Cor 13:10 *teleion* appears again and, in this case, it is not only in the proximity of *nēpios*, but v. 11 gives support for the argument made in vv. 9-10. Therefore, in an even more marked way, the two words should be seen in contrast with each other. Even Toussaint, who does not accept the rendering “maturity,” writes, “At first flush this interpretation of the passage appears to be the most attractive.”¹⁴¹ Furthermore, Barrett, although not using the word ‘maturity’ and not coming to the same conclusion as this essay, writes about v. 10, “The adjective (in the neuter gender, and with the article, τὸ τέλειον rendered *totality* is fairly common in Paul; see ii. 6; xiv. 20. It takes its precise meaning from the context, and here, in contrast with *in part* (ἐκ μέρους) it means not perfection (in quality) but *totality*....”¹⁴²

Significantly, Robertson and Plummer comment on 2:6 this way: “By τέλειοι St. Paul means the mature or full-grown Christians, as contrasted with νήπιοι (iii. 1). The word is used again xiv. 20; Phil. iii. 15; Eph iv. 13.”¹⁴³ After failing to cite the related construction in 1 Cor 13:10 as a similar use of this word, they come to 1 Cor 13:8-13 and make two interesting comments in light of their view that *to teleion* is a reference to the “Second Advent.” The first comment deals with the construction ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ τὸ τέλειον (*hotan de elthē to teleion*) in v. 10. They write, “He does not say, ‘But when we shall have come to the perfection of the other world,’ etc. He is so full of the thought of the Second Advent, that he represents the perfection as coming to us.”¹⁴⁴ And then, when commenting on v. 11, because they do not render *to teleion* as mature, they are forced to conclude that the

¹⁴¹Toussaint, “First Corinthians Thirteen” 313.

¹⁴²C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 306.

¹⁴³Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians* 35.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 297.

illustration “suggested by τὸ τέλειον ... is very inadequate, but it will serve.”¹⁴⁵ Taking *teleios* to mean “mature” as it does in both of its other references in this epistle—and especially in proximity with *nēpios*—makes it a very adequate illustration which is also very much to the point.

Thus, the reference here is to a point in Paul’s future—and the future of the church at that time—when *to teleion* would come, i.e., when a maturation would come to the church and at which point the revelatory gifts of prophecy and knowledge would be “rendered inoperative” by God. The verse does not give a date but it does state a conceptual truth. Peter’s reference to Paul’s writing being alongside “the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Pet 3:14-16) suggests that the two apostles realized that they were a part of God’s revelatory ministry to His church. What this verse clearly communicates is that there would be a time—at the maturation of the church (conceptually implied here)—when the revelatory process would cease to exist and the revelatory gifts brought to an end.

THE PROGRESSION OF ARGUMENT IN 13:8-11

The Progression of Thought in 13:8-12

That the focus and central thought of 1 Corinthians 13 is the supremacy of love is worth repeating. Although love is only mentioned twice in vv. 8-13, in the first and last verses, and although the central theme in vv. 8b-12 is on the cessation of certain spiritual gifts, the overall point being made, even by these verses, is still on the supremacy of love. Gifts will cease to exist, but love will not. That is clear in the initial statement (v. 8a), “Love never fails.”

With Paul’s emphasis on the supremacy of love, he does cite three gifts at this point, all three of them being to some degree revelatory in nature. The statement of this passage does not allow for Carson’s assumption about including most other gifts.¹⁴⁶ In addition, by the progression of argument in the succeeding verses, the focus continues on “revelation” which reaches its pinnacle in the anticipated final “face to face” revelation of v. 12.

Following an often repeated practice of Paul and other NT authors, Paul moves from one thought to another. This did not start in v. 8a, but appears throughout the chapter, especially in the section immediately preceding. Having started with the thought that love is “more excellent” (“I show you a more excellent way,” 12:31b) than gifts (vv. 1-3), Paul builds on the thought of love’s greatness by discussing some very significant qualities of love (vv. 4-7). He ends the list of the qualities with “love endures” (v. 7d) and immediately follows with “love never fails.” So once again, having introduced the verses under discussion with the overriding statement, “Love never fails,” Paul moves on to compare the “non-

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁴⁶Carson, *Showing the Spirit* 70.

failing” nature of love with the “failing nature” or the “cessation” of three revelatory gifts. Having introduced the subject of the “cessation” of the three, he turns the discussion away from love’s supremacy and it does not surface again until v. 13. He develops the cessation of the gifts further by discussing the process of the cessation. And lest one should miss the point of vv. 9-10, he illustrates it in v. 11. As will be noted later, the illustration leads him to a new but not totally unrelated thought in v. 12.

At this juncture the importance of v. 11 in the development of Paul’s argument deserves special attention. It is a key point in many ways. No doubt, Paul introduced v. 11 to support statements in vv. 9-10, and it surely does. But directly connecting v. 12 with the thought of v. 10, as sometimes happens, creates a major problem. Robertson and Plummer show this when they assess v. 11 as a “very inadequate ...” illustration of *to teleion* in v. 10.¹⁴⁷ It is only “inadequate” if the usual meaning of *teleios* is rejected and if v. 11 is taken as an illustration of v. 12.

Many unnecessary conclusions result from a misunderstanding of the argument of these verses. For example, Toussaint, after admitting the attractiveness of the meaning “maturity,” remarks that the emphasis in 13:12 on Christ’s return is a disturbing factor for such a view.¹⁴⁸ Grudem, whose view on cessation differs from Toussaint’s, also draws conclusions from v. 12 that argue against a “maturity” view, commenting, “First, the meaning of verse 12 seems to require that verse 10 is talking about the time of the Lord’s return. The word ‘then’ (Gk. *tote*) in verse 12 refers to the time ‘when the perfect comes’ in verse 10.”¹⁴⁹ That is the basis for many conclusions he proceeds to draw. Just a point to remember: if vv. 10 and 12 are not addressing the same thing, many of his conclusions are invalid. Houghton, whose views vary from Grudem’s, also ties both verses together, and has to argue against the ‘parousia’ in v. 12 to make it conform with his view on vv. 9-10.¹⁵⁰

The Relationship of 13:8-11 to v. 12

As noted above, many of the conclusions about vv. 9-11 result from reading v. 12 back into the preceding verses, but that is backward. A NT and Pauline pattern is for one thought to flow into another and that into another. First Cor 13:1-13 illustrates that pattern. From beginning to end the overwhelming message is the primacy of love in transcending the importance of spiritual gifts. The overall continuity of thought is evident from “I show you a still more excellent way (12:31b) ... but the greatest of these is love” (13:13b, NASB). The continuity is even clearer in 13:8-13. Paul starts with “love never fails” (13:8) and ends with “now abide faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love” (13:13, NASB). A definite

¹⁴⁷Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians* 297.

¹⁴⁸Toussaint, “First Corinthians Thirteen” 313.

¹⁴⁹Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 1033.

¹⁵⁰Houghton, “A Reexamination of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13” 352-54.

progression of thought exists and nowhere is it more clearly seen than in the transition from v. 7 to v. 8. Verse 7 ends with “[love] always perseveres,” v. 8 begins with “love never fails” or, as Carson states it, “In the preceding verse (13:7), Paul concludes by saying that ‘love always perseveres’; in other words, ‘Love never fails’ (13:8).”¹⁵¹

The argument in vv. 8-11 starts, “Love never fails,” and leaves his discussion of love until verse 13. Though love does not appear again until v. 13, the thought of the supremacy of love is never far below the surface. To solidify the statement concerning the “abiding nature” of love, he moves into a discussion of the “non-abiding nature” of gifts, and in so doing, mentions just three of them: prophecy, tongues, and knowledge. Once he has introduced the non-abiding nature of primarily revelatory gifts, he moves away from love and explains the cessation of these gifts (primarily the two most noticeably revelatory ones) and explains further their cessation. He uses the verb *katargeō* again. Having done this and illustrating the point made in v. 10, Paul introduces an illustration of man’s developing maturity. He takes the partial’s being superseded with a fuller revelation a step further and introduces a new thought which, although related in thought with vv. 9-10, completely transcends that to take readers to the “fullest revelation,” which will take place when believers enter Christ’s presence.

The thought in v. 12 far transcends that in v. 10. Verse 10 does not speak of ultimate revelation when believers see Christ face to face. Furnish makes this very clear:

The line of thought developed in verses 8b-10 is extended in verse 12, but in the process Paul both narrows and enlarges his discussion. He narrows it, because just as he had mentioned glossolalia along with prophesying and knowledge in verse 8, but then not in verse 9, he now leaves prophesying, too, behind to focus exclusively on knowledge. He also enlarges his discussion, however, by shifting attention to another kind of knowledge. His subject is no longer the special gift of knowledge granted by the Spirit to some and not to others, but the knowledge that is constitutive of one’s relationship to God. This shift of meaning begins with his use of a metaphor which contrasts the indirect and therefore partial vision provided by a mirror with the kind of seeing that is direct and complete: “For now we see in a mirror, indirectly, but then face to face” (v. 12a). Although the distinction made here between “now” and “then” is roughly analogous to the one in verse 11 between childhood and adulthood, this statement moves beyond the preceding one by bringing to the surface the underlying eschatological orientation of this whole chapter. “Now,” in this present age, one sees only indirectly and imperfectly; but “then,” in the age to come, one will see “face to face.”

The point of this metaphor is given in the second part of the verse, where Paul speaks again of knowledge: “Now I know in part [*ginōskō ek merous*], but then I will know fully even as I have been fully known [*tote de epignōsomai kathōs kai epegnōsthnē*]” (v. 12b). It is clear from both the context, which affirms the enduring reality and critical

¹⁵¹Carson, *Showing the Spirit* 66.

importance of love, and the reference to knowing as one has “been known,” that the underlying premise is the one Paul has set forth in 8.1-3 about knowledge and love. However extensive and significant one’s knowledge about God, because it belongs only to this age it remains indirect, as in a mirror, and therefore partial. But Paul anticipates that in the age to come one’s knowledge of God will be of a radically different order, a direct, “face to face” communion with God that is appropriate to the saving power of *agapē* by which one has already “been known” (graced and claimed) by God (*kathōs kai epegnōsthēn*; cf. 8.3, “known by him,” *egnōstai hyp’ autou*).¹⁵²

Not only does Furnish show that the matter addressed in v. 12 far transcends that of v. 10, but some also suggest that the use of v. 11 to illustrate v. 12 “is very inadequate....”¹⁵³

Paul has moved from one thought about God’s revelatory work to another, which far transcends the earlier revelation. That distinction alone should show two different levels of revelation in the two statements, but both having to do with God’s revelatory ministry to believers. Thus, Paul concludes with statements about the permanence of love in v. 13. In so doing, in his discussion of the permanence of love in contrast to the temporary character of three revelatory gifts, he addresses (1) the developing revelation in v. 8, (2) the fuller revelation in vv. 9-11 and (3) the ultimate revelation in v. 12. As evident in the transition between vv. 7-8, one thought leads into another. All are somewhat distinct but interrelated.

Not only is a progression of thought characteristic of this passage, but so also is the continuity of thought in the overall passage. It should be noted that this progression does not interfere with the overall theme. Carson puts it this way:

But the connections are deeper. In the first three verses of this chapter, Paul draws a contrast between love and the *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*). Now in verses 8-13, he picks up the contrast again, but with a new wrinkle. Here the contrast turns on the fact that love is permanent, while the *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*) terminate. That, too, demonstrates love’s intrinsic superiority. Thus the statement *love never fails* also anticipates verse 13.¹⁵⁴

SUMMARY

That Paul’s primary purpose in 13:8-12—as throughout the remainder of chapter 13—is not to present a discourse on the cessation of gifts, but rather to develop the thought of the supremacy of love needs to be understood clearly. Even in the verses in which he discusses the cessation of certain gifts, he is showing that

¹⁵²Victor Paul Furnish, *The Theology of The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: University Press, 1999) 101-2.

¹⁵³Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians* 297.

¹⁵⁴Carson, *Showing the Spirit* 66.

gifts—as good as they may be—will cease, but love will not. In the process of making this point, though, he chooses three gifts that are all revelatory in nature.

What is of some interest is how Paul moves from one thought to another throughout chapter 13 without losing sight of his main point. This is certainly true in vv. 8-12. He begins by referring to three revelatory gifts—prophecy, knowledge, and tongues—in v. 8 as he discusses revelation being given at the time of the writing. He then narrows this to two revelatory gifts—prophecy and knowledge—in vv. 9-11 as he discusses a fuller revelation, specifically inscripturated revelation. He then narrows further to one gift—knowledge, and that in a secondary manner—in v. 12 as he moves to the ultimate revelation of Christ Himself.

Since Paul is not delivering a treatise on cessation, one should not read more into statement than what it says. He sets forth a conceptual statement concerning the cessation of these three revelatory gifts—in developing the thought of love's supremacy. His purpose is not to set a date. From a present perspective, the gap between the subjects in vv. 8-11 and in v. 12 is many years, but that was not obvious to Paul. To him, that the process of revelation was taking place (v. 8) and that there would be a time when the revelatory process would come to an end (vv. 9-11) was a conceptual truth, but he saw that even such revelation, no matter how great, could not begin to compare with the final and full revelation when seeing Christ face to face (v. 12).

No doubt, Paul addresses the cessation of three gifts, all of which were revelatory. The focus is on the verb *katargeō*, which occurs four times in as many verses. Every time it is used with reference to inscripturated revelation, it is in the passive voice. This emphasizes the fact that inscripturated revelation, represented here by the gifts of prophecy and knowledge, would be forcefully brought to an end at some point future to the time of writing. Tongues, also a revelatory gift, but probably separated from the other two in vv. 9-11 since it was not in the category of inscripturated revelation, would also come to an end. The verb used with tongues is *pauō* in the middle voice (*pausontai*), which also suggests cessation. In contrast with *katargeō*, however, the termination of this gift would not have the same dramatic ending as the other two. It would in its own way come to an end, but certainly not without divine intervention.

The time of the cessation of these three gifts is of major concern in these verses. On the basis of Paul's use of *teleios* throughout his epistles and more specifically elsewhere in 1 Corinthians, it is evident that 1 Cor 13:10 uses *to teleion* in contrast with *nēpios* as a reference to "maturity" and not to "completeness" or the presence of the Lord, although the latter is clearly in view in v. 12. Although *to teleion* does not refer to the completion of the canon, the overall emphasis on divine revelation in this passage and the reference to three revelatory gifts shows that the revelatory process is a major theme. By the time the church becomes mature, the revelatory process reflected in the three gifts will come to an end by God's intervention. Thus tongues—a supernatural manifestation of the use of earthly languages—will end prior to or at the time of this maturation.

Verses 8-12 present three things: revelation, cessation, and maturation. They are intertwined. Cessation and maturation, although happening at a related time, should not be confused with each other. All revelatory gifts would come to an end before or at the maturation of the church (a concept, not a specific point in time). At the maturation of the church (whenever that happens) all revelatory gifts will have come to an end according to this passage.