

THAT WHICH IS PERFECT (I CORINTHIANS 13:10):  
A NON-ESCHATOLOGICAL APPROACH

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A THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
WESTERN CONSERVATIVE BAPTIST SEMINARY  
PORTLAND, OREGON

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
MASTER OF ARTS IN EXEGETICAL THEOLOGY

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JUNE 1993

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## ABSTRACT

Research into the identification of τὸ τέλειον of I Corinthians 13:10 has to this point attempted to establish that it is a reference to the completion of the New Testament canon, to some aspect of the eschaton, to the maturity into which the church would grow, to the maturity into which individual believers grow, to the death of the believer, or to the general principle that completeness supersedes incompleteness.

Each of these views has its difficulties. The best solution may yet be found.

This paper proposes another approach to the interpretation of I Corinthians 13:10 which incorporates a contextual, historical, grammatical, and lexical analysis. It suggests that τὸ τέλειον is a reference to ἀγάπη, or at least to the maturity accompanying ἀγάπη, and that the point of the passage is not the cessation of spiritual gifts, but the termination of the incompleteness of spiritual gifts exercised apart from ἀγάπη. It makes no attempt to establish the continuance of χαρίσματα throughout the church age. It sees I Corinthians 13 as being a chiastic structure, with 13:8b-12 paralleling 13:1-3 as a description of the limitations of spiritual gifts apart from love.

## CHAPTER 1

### NEED FOR THE STUDY

Research into the identification of τὸ τέλειον of I Corinthians 13:10 has traditionally attempted to establish that it is a reference to the completion of the New Testament canon,<sup>1</sup> to some aspect of the eschaton,<sup>2</sup> to the maturity into which the church would grow,<sup>3</sup> to the death of the believer (when τὸ τέλειον is viewed in the context of I Corinthians 13:8-13),<sup>4</sup> or to love itself, with the idea being that the Corinthians' interest in spiritual gifts reflects immaturity and that their childish desire for gifts will be put away when they come to the fullness of love.<sup>5</sup> A recent approach has been to suggest that τὸ τέλειον alone

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill F. Unger, *The Baptism and Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 141-42.

<sup>2</sup>MacArthur, for example, argues that τὸ τέλειον is the eternal state (John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Charismatics: A Doctrinal Perspective* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978], 165-71; idem, *Charismatic Chaos* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992], 230-31, n. 20).

<sup>3</sup>See, e.g., J. R. McRay, "To Teleion in I Corinthians 13:10," *Restoration Quarterly* 14 (1971): 168-83; and R. L. Thomas, "'Tongues . . . Will Cease,'" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 17 (1974): 81-89.

<sup>4</sup>Thomas R. Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts: Are They for Today?* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1983), 340-44.

<sup>5</sup>See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 644-45.

refers to no specific event but to the principle that completeness supersedes incompleteness.<sup>6</sup>

It remains to be demonstrated with certainty whether any of these views of the identity of τὸ τέλειον are accurate. Each seems to have its weaknesses and limitations. It is possible that the most accurate view is one not yet suggested. This study is needed to assess the validity of the contrasting views and to examine the merits of a possibility not yet explored.

#### Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to explore an alternative interpretation of I Corinthians 13, focusing specifically on verse 10, which suggests that τὸ τέλειον does not refer to the completion of the canon of the New Testament, to the eschaton, to the maturity at which the church would arrive, or to the death of the believer. It is proposed instead to refer to the maturity which comes to the individual believer who has been "made perfect in love."<sup>7</sup> This is similar to Randy Tate's view that τὸ τέλειον refers to "a state of completion or spiritual maturity whose hallmark is *agape*."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts*, 334-35.

<sup>7</sup>After reaching this conclusion independently and submitting the first draft of this thesis, the author located Randy Tate's article, "Christian Childishness and 'That Which Is Perfect,'" which proposes a similar view. Tate's work is evaluated in this draft. (See Randy Tate, "Christian Childishness and 'That Which Is Perfect,'" *Paraclete* 24 [Winter 1990]: 11-15.)

<sup>8</sup>Tate, "Christian Childishness," 14.

But the interpretation explored in this thesis goes beyond Tate to suggest that the "abolishing" of τὸ ἐκ μέρους (I Corinthians 13:10) does not refer to the cessation of the χαρίσματα, but to the cessation of the incompleteness of the effects of the χαρίσματα functioning apart from the motivation of ἀγάπη. This treatment of I Corinthians 13 sees Paul as describing a hypothetical operation of the χαρίσματα apart from ἀγάπη to demonstrate to the Corinthians their failure to comprehend fully the purpose for which the χαρίσματα are given.<sup>9</sup> Though Tate's view is similar, he takes the passage to say that in their

state of spiritual infancy and immaturity, the Corinthians were using incompletes, partials . . . by which to judge Christian maturity. . . . [T]he 'now' refers to a state of spiritual childishness. . . . [T]he 'then' refers to a state of spiritual maturity or completeness marked by *agape*. . . . When Christians move into that state of spiritual maturity governed by love, with faith and hope running a close second, they will look upon fellow Christians through the clear glasses of love, rather than employing the incomplete gifts as the measuring rod of maturity.<sup>10</sup>

### Procedure

The next section of this chapter summarizes the previous research on I Corinthians 13:8-13. Chapter 2 analyzes I Corinthians 13 from the perspective that Paul's

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<sup>9</sup>This is hypothetical only on Paul's part. (See I Corinthians 13:1-3.) Paul cast himself in this hypothetical role only to demonstrate to the Corinthians that their all too genuine experience of χαρίσματα minus ἀγάπη missed the point for which the χαρίσματα are given.

<sup>10</sup>Tate, "Christian Childishness," 14-15.

basic intent was to demonstrate the incompleteness of the *χαρίσματα* apart from the motivation of *ἀγάπη*. This is set in the larger context of I Corinthians 12-14. Chapter 3 offers a literary, historical, grammatical, and lexical analysis of the text to determine if this proposal is defensible. Chapter 4 draws the appropriate conclusions. The appendix offers a chiasmus as the structure of I Corinthians 12:31-14:1.

#### Summary of Previous Research

John J. Murray, in his review of B.B. Warfield's *Counterfeit Miracles*, applauds Warfield for stating "very clearly the classic Reformed position that miracles are bound up with the giving of revelation" and for giving "a broad-ranging survey of the counterfeit."<sup>11</sup> He faults Warfield, however, for identifying *χαρίσματα* with the gifts of I Corinthians 12:8-10:

Warfield does acknowledge that the name 'charismata' is broad enough to include the non-miraculous gracious gifts as well as the miraculous ones. But surely all the gifts are gracious, coming from God's unmerited love to us? [sic] Many of the gifts have not ceased. We play into the hands of Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals if we identify charismata with the gifts of 1 Corinthians 12.8-10.<sup>12</sup>

J. Lanier Burns holds that in I Corinthians 1:7 "it seems best to view *χαρίσματα* as spiritual gifts (I Cor. 12-

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<sup>11</sup>John J. Murray, "Have Miraculous Gifts Ceased?" *The Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 3 (Autumn 1985): 58.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

14) in view of Paul's later preoccupation with that subject in the same letter."<sup>13</sup>

Murray questions whether each gift of I Corinthians 12:8-10 is miraculous, whether all of them have to do with revelation, and whether non-revelatory gifts should be known in today's church.<sup>14</sup> He points out that "[h]istorians tend to disagree on the evidence for the cessation of the charismata in the early Church" and suggests that this issue cannot be resolved by an appeal to history, but by "a thorough and careful exegesis of 1 Corinthians 13.8-13."<sup>15</sup> That is the task with which we are concerned.

Cessation of the *Χαρίσματα* upon the Completion  
of the Canon and/or the Death  
of the Apostles

Some have interpreted τὸ τέλειον (I Corinthians 13:10) to refer to the completion of the New Testament canon and/or the passing of the apostolic era. Daniel Fraikin, for example, suggests that Paul's criterion for the *χαρίσματα* was the upbuilding of the body, and that inherent in that

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<sup>13</sup> J. Lanier Burns, "A Reemphasis on the Purpose of the Sign Gifts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (July 1975): 247.

<sup>14</sup>Murray, 59. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., disagrees with this "quasi-mechanical distinguishing (within the lists of Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4) between extraordinary gifts that have ceased and ordinary gifts that continue or, what would be worse, between supernatural and natural gifts." He believes this involves "a much too inorganic handling of Scripture" (Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1979], 112).

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

criterion is the recognition that when the upbuilding has occurred, the *χαρίσματα* would cease to play an essential role. To Fraikin, the upbuilding was completed at approximately the end of the first century AD.<sup>16</sup> Walter Chantry agrees.<sup>17</sup> Thus the arrival of τὸ τέλειον is seen as being roughly coterminous with the death of the apostle John. John F. Walvoord thinks it is at least possible<sup>18</sup> and Robert L. Reymond believes it is definite<sup>19</sup> that τὸ τέλειον is a reference to the completion of the canon of Scripture.

It is commonly suggested by those who hold this view that the reason the *χαρίσματα* terminated with the death of the apostles and/or the completion of the canon of Scripture is that the purpose of the *χαρίσματα* was to authenticate the testimony of the apostles. Burns, for example, asserts that "if the sign gifts were for authentication of new revelation for Jewish unbelievers, then there is no possibility for their existence today unless the canon is open for new

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<sup>16</sup>Daniel Fraikin, "'Charismes et ministères' à la lumière de I Cor. 12-14," *Église et Théologie* 9 (October 1978): 462.

<sup>17</sup>Walter J. Chantry, *Signs of the Apostles: Observations on Pentecostalism Old and New* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976), 51-52.

<sup>18</sup>John F. Walvoord, "The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 (April-June 1986): 109-122.

<sup>19</sup>Robert L. Reymond, *What About Continuing Revelations and Miracles in the Presbyterian Church Today?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1977), 32-34.

revelation for the same audience."<sup>20</sup> Charles Ryrie agrees that Paul "is simply saying that the gifts are no longer given because the particular purpose for which they were originally given (i.e., to authenticate the oral message) has ceased to exist."<sup>21</sup> This view is at least as ancient as Gregory the Great.<sup>22</sup>

An appeal to the grammar of the passage is made by those who hold this view. It is pointed out that τέλειον is neuter and that a neuter noun would normally not be used of a person. Thus it could not refer to the coming of Christ.<sup>23</sup> Robert Glenn Gromacki believes it is significant that τέλειον is nowhere used in the New Testament to refer to the coming of Christ.<sup>24</sup> This view suggests that the neuter τὸ τέλειον does,

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<sup>20</sup>Burns, 249.

<sup>21</sup>Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 87.

<sup>22</sup>W. F. Arndt quotes Gregory the Great from Nebe, *Evangelische Perikopen*, II, p. 437: "These things were necessary in the beginning of the Church, for in order that faith might grow, it had to be nourished by miracles; for we, too, when we plant shrubs, pour water on them till we see that they have gotten a strong hold on the ground; and when once they are firmly rooted, we stop the watering. For this reason Paul says: 'Tongues are for a sign, not to believers, but to unbelievers'" (W. F. Arndt, "Does the Bible Teach that Only Christians of the Apostolic Age Would Possess Miraculous Powers?" *Searching Together* 16 [Spring 1987]: 13).

<sup>23</sup>A summary of this argument may be seen in Thomas R. Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts: Are They for Today?* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1983), 341-342.

<sup>24</sup>Robert Glenn Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1967), 123.

however, fit the concept of a "thing" and could thus refer to the canon of the New Testament.

Cessation of the *Χαρίσματα* upon the Revelation  
of Jesus Christ

This seems, by far, to be the view of the majority of New Testament scholars. A representative sampling will suffice. F. W. Grosheide suggests, "Once the acme has been reached and this dispensation come to an end, then all that belonged to this dispensation, including the *charismata*, will terminate."<sup>25</sup> G. G. Findlay comments, "This *τελείωσις* is brought about at the *παρουσία*—it 'comes' with the Lord from heaven. . . ."<sup>26</sup> Henry Alford asserts "unquestionably the time alluded to is that *of the coming of the Lord*. . . ."<sup>27</sup> Siegfried S. Schatzmann agrees: "Paul focused on the eschatological revelation of Christ at the end of this present age. All *charismata* . . . will cease at that time."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), 310.

<sup>26</sup>G. G. Findlay, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961), 2:900.

<sup>27</sup>Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, rev. Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), 588.

<sup>28</sup>Siegfried S. Schatzmann, *A Pauline Theology of Charismata* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 78.

Cessation of the *Χαρίσματα* upon the  
Maturity of the Church

The view that the *χαρίσματα* would cease at the point the early church reached maturity is based on a valid meaning of *τέλειον* ("mature") and the influence of Paul's appeal to his infancy as compared to his maturity in I Corinthians 13:11.<sup>29</sup>

Cessation of the *Χαρίσματα* at Some  
Unspecified Time

In his discussion of "biblical evidence for cessation" of the *χαρίσματα*, Thomas R. Edgar makes no appeal to I Corinthians 13:8-10.<sup>30</sup> This is significant in view of his rejection of Charismatic and Pentecostal claims as to the continuance of or reinstatement of the miraculous phenomena of the apostolic age. Edgar does not hold what has been a common appeal among some non-Charismatic and non-Pentecostal cessationists, i.e., that by his use of *τὸ τέλειον* Paul alluded to a specific time when the miraculous gifts will cease. He

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<sup>29</sup>A discussion and rebuttal of this view may be seen in Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts*, 342. Edgar points out that the idea of the maturity of the church "is very remote from the passage. The full and partial aspects are related to prophecy and knowledge, not to the Church. The time involved is when the individual knows fully, not the Church. It is questionable that the early Church could be considered partial or childish in contrast to the Church after A.D. 70. Such a view requires stopping or setting aside of the apostolic Church, even though the Scripture describes it as foundational."

<sup>30</sup>Thomas R. Edgar, "The Cessation of the Sign Gifts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (October-December 1988): 379-383.

sees τὸ τέλειον as telling us "nothing specific about what is referred to. . . . The statement, in effect, says, 'Anything that is complete, when it comes, always replaces the partial.'"<sup>31</sup> Edgar is of the opinion, however, that Paul did have a specific event in mind which can be determined only from the context. This event is "the time when an individual believer is with the Lord."<sup>32</sup> Edgar does not take this to mean specific spiritual gifts will continue throughout the church age. He does not see the context as addressing the continuity or discontinuity of the gifts.<sup>33</sup>

Richard B. Gaffin sees τὸ τέλειον and the τότε (then) of I Corinthians 13:12 as a reference to "the time of Christ's return,"<sup>34</sup> but to him this does not mean Paul intended to specify the time when any particular mode of revelation will cease. Gaffin concurs with Edgar's belief that the time of the cessation of the χαρίσματα is not in view in I Corinthians 13:8-13, differing from Edgar only in that Edgar sees the τότε as a reference to the time when the believer is with the Lord. Gaffin asserts, "The time of the cessation of prophecy and tongues is an open question so far as this passage is concerned and will have to be decided on the

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<sup>31</sup>Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts*, 334-335.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 343.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 344.

<sup>34</sup>Gaffin, *Perspectives*, 109.

basis of other passages and considerations."<sup>35</sup>

### Definitions and Delimitations

Throughout this study, *χαρίσματα* refers to the nine spiritual gifts listed in I Corinthians 12:8-10, or to specific gifts within the nine as determined by the context of the passage under examination. The author is aware that *χαρίσματα* is also used in reference to other gracious gifts of God, but this work is limited to the context of I Corinthians 12-14. *τέλειον* refers to that perfect thing which will "abolish" the thing which is in part, as indicated in I Corinthians 13:10. Though *τέλειον* is used in other contexts in the New Testament where its identity is unquestioned, the definition for the purposes of this study must be determined by the immediate context.

This study does not attempt to examine other sections of Scripture to which appeals are made by cessationists and non-cessationists. The intention of the author is solely to determine the identity of *τὸ τέλειον* and whether this identity contributes to our ability to assess any intent by Paul to indicate the time of the cessation of the gifts.

Even though this study determines that the *τέλειον* is the maturity accompanying *ἀγάπη*, this alone does not indicate the continuity of the *χαρίσματα* throughout the church age. It indicates only that as long as the *χαρίσματα* are given, *ἀγάπη*

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 111.

is required to minister them in the completeness intended by the Holy Spirit.

## CHAPTER 2

### A PROPOSED INTERPRETIVE MODEL OF I CORINTHIANS 13:1-12

First Corinthians 13 falls within the larger context of I Corinthians 12-14 in Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts. Beginning with I Corinthians 7:1, Paul seemed to respond to a series of specific questions written to him by the Corinthians. He introduced his response to each question by the words *περὶ δὲ*, "now about" or "now concerning." This authorial clue to a change of topic occurs in 7:1; 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; and 16:1. It could be argued that although 11:1 and 15:1 do not make use of *περὶ δὲ* Paul was still introducing new topics, for he followed a similar pattern: *Ἐπαινῶ δὲ* ("Now I praise" [11:2]) and *Γνωρίζω δὲ* ("Now I make known" [15:1]).

David K. Lowery understands Paul to answer questions "on the topics of marriage (chap. 7), personal liberty (8:1-11:1), church order (11:2-14:40), and doctrine (chap. 15)."<sup>36</sup> W. Harold Mare suggests that I Corinthians 11:2-16

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<sup>36</sup>David K. Lowery, "I Corinthians," in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament Edition* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 517.

is excluded from the larger section from 7:1 to 14:40 that is "devoted in a large part to answering questions."<sup>37</sup> He sees Paul as responding to specific questions in 7:1; 7:25; 8:1; and 12:1. Mare suggests that 16:1 may also begin a response to a question from the Corinthians.

Regardless of whether a new section begins in 11:2 or 12:1, we can be certain that the topic of 12-14 is *χαρίσματα*. In 12:4 Paul declared, *Διαίρέσεις δὲ χαρισμάτων εἰσὶν, τὸ δὲ αὐτὸ πνεῦμα* (Now there are differences of gifts, but the same Spirit). Though there is variety of gifts, there is singleness of source: the Holy Spirit. The *χαρίσματα* of the context are nine; they are identified in 12:8-10: (1) *λόγος σοφίας* (a word of wisdom); (2) *λόγος γνώσεως* (a word of knowledge); (3) *πίστις* (faith); (4) *χαρίσματα ἰαμάτων* (gifts of healings); (5) *ἐνεργήματα δυνάμεων* (operations of powers [working of miracles, NKJV]); (6) *προφητεία* (prophecy); (7) *διακρίσεις πνευμάτων* (judgments [or discernings] of spirits); (8) *γέννη γλωσσῶν* (kinds of languages); (9) *ἐρμηνεία γλωσσῶν* (interpretation of languages).

Throughout this section (12:8-10) Paul reiterated the origin of the gifts in the Spirit. The gifts come *διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος* (through the Spirit [12:8]), *κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ πνεῦμα* (according to the same Spirit [12:8]), *ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ πνεύματι* (by the same Spirit [12:9]), and *ἐν τῷ ἐνὶ πνεύματι* (by the one Spirit [12:9]). The section is concluded, *πάντα δὲ ταῦτα ἐνεργεῖ τὸ ἓν καὶ τὸ*

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<sup>37</sup>W. Harold Mare, "I Corinthians," in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 10:226.

αὐτὸ πνεῦμα (and the one and the same Spirit energizes [or operates] all these things [12:11]).

After extended use of the metaphor of the human body to illustrate the unity and diversity of the church (12:12-27), Paul returned in 12:28-30 to a listing of four of the χαρίσματα (miracles, gifts of healings, diversities of languages, interpretation), as well as positional or ministry gifts not mentioned in 12:8-10 but described elsewhere (i.e., apostles, prophets, teachers [Ephesians 4:11]) and the practical gifts of helps and administrations.

Then Paul urged the Corinthian church to desire eagerly the χαρίσματα τὰ μείζονα (greater gifts; 12:31). This admonition is followed by the promise that Paul would then show a way καθ' ὑπερβολὴν, a way "according to excellence" (12:31). This excellent way proves to be the way of ἀγάπη (love).

An Hypothetical Situation: Χαρίσματα without  
the Motivation of Ἀγάπη (13:1-3, 8-9)

This section is titled "an hypothetical situation" because Paul apparently did not intend in 13:1-3 to suggest that he actually did exercise spiritual gifts without love. His use of the third class subjunctive (Ἐὰν... λαλῶ... δὲ μὴ ἔχω, "If I speak and I have not") and his repeated use of the subjunctive assumes unreality.<sup>38</sup> His intention seems not to

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<sup>38</sup>See H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1955), 170, and Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians in The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 630, n. 20.

be to denigrate the spiritual gifts he mentioned, but to show their incompleteness or inadequacy if not motivated by love. The γλώσσαις (languages) in which he spoke were apparently energized by the Holy Spirit; thus it could not be his intent to belittle or mock their use. The languages of men were not those Paul would be able to speak as a result of his extensive education; the reference follows too closely on the heels of his reference to the spiritual gift (12:30, 28). These are genuine human languages spoken by the "utterance" of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4). That these languages are indeed given supernaturally is underscored by Paul's reference to the languages of angels. Paul thus introduced an interesting possibility: one may exercise a genuine gift of the Holy Spirit without love. In a case like this, the person exercising the gift has become, however, "as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal" (NKJV). Paul did not suggest that the gift itself is in question but that the person exercising the gift without love is empty and hollow.

The next gifts Paul discussed are prophecy, knowledge (presumably the word of knowledge), and faith (13:2). His reference to the ability to understand all mysteries may have to do with the gift of the word of wisdom, or he could have been including abilities external to the nine spiritual gifts as in 12:28-29, or this ability may be concomitant with the gift of prophecy. In any case, the gifts were apparently genuine, though it remains hypothetical that he

actually did what he suggested. Again, it was not the gifts that were nothing; it was Paul who was nothing in this scenario, for he pictured himself exercising these gifts apart from love.

Paul's final references were not to spiritual gifts but to acts of charity and to martyrdom (13:3).<sup>39</sup> The point seems clear: though one gives everything he has to feed the hungry, and even if one willingly suffers martyrdom, there is no profit in it for the giver or the one put to death if these things are not done from a motivation of love. There remains a benefit to the person ministered to by the gift; whether or not the motivation of the giver is charity, the hungry are still fed by his gift. And whether or not his motivation is love, his martyrdom may still be a testimony of his faith.

Nowhere in this section (13:1-3) did Paul suggest that the gifts of the Spirit or acts of kindness are in themselves worthless. The gifts of the Spirit are by definition valuable; the Holy Spirit does not give worthless gifts. But, since they are gifts, they reveal nothing of the character or motivation of the recipient of the gifts.

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<sup>39</sup>There is a question as to whether the original reading in 13:3 was ἵνα καυχῆσωμαι ("that I may glory") or ἵνα καυθήσωμαι ("that I should be burned"). The third edition UBSGNT opts for ἵνα καυχῆσωμαι, giving it a {C} rating. Whatever the reading should be, there is no effect on the argument of this thesis. (See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1971]), 563-64.

That is, gifts are not given upon conditions. They are free. This is underscored by the fact that the Corinthians lacked no *χαρίσματα* (1:7), though they were carnal babes in Christ (3:1-3) who embraced schisms (1:10-11), tolerated incest in the church membership (5), resorted to civil courts to decide intra-church disagreements (6), and abused the Lord's Supper (11:17-34). This larger context informs 13:1-3. Thus, while the situation Paul described was hypothetical for him, it was not hypothetical for the Corinthians. It was all too real. By means of the subjunctive mood, Paul identified himself with the Corinthians in their carnal state of spiritual infancy. The message he intended for them was that his description of the operation of spiritual gifts, of benevolence, and even of martyrdom apart from love was an accurate representation of the state of affairs in the Corinthian church.

This model sees I Corinthians 13:8-9 as continuing the hypothetical theme of 13:1-3. The intervening verses (13:4-7) are parenthetical in that they describe and define the characteristics of love. In this view, the point of verses 8-9 can be gained by reading them immediately after verses 1-3. That is, the operation of spiritual gifts apart from love is of no value to the person through whom the gifts are ministered. Love is the only quality that never fails to validate the character of its possessor. Prophecies (apart from love) will "fail"; tongues (apart from love) will

"cease"; knowledge (apart from love) will "vanish."<sup>40</sup>  
 Knowledge and prophecy (apart from love) are partial, or incomplete.

Ἀγάπη Defined (13:4-7)

The definition and description of the characteristics of love may be significant in establishing the general tenor of the passage. The fifteen results of love may be the elements missing, creating the incompleteness of verses 1-3, 8-9, and 12. That is, the absence of longsuffering, kindness, rejoicing in truth, bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, and enduring all things, and the presence of envy, parading oneself, being puffed up, rude behavior, seeking one's own, being provoked, thinking evil, and rejoicing in iniquity may be that which causes one to become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal, to be nothing, and to be profited by nothing, regardless how noble one's efforts or how genuine one's gifts may be.

The Removal of τὸ ἐκ μέρους by the  
 Arrival of τὸ τέλειον (verse 10)

This interpretive model of the passage sees ἀγάπη as τὸ τέλειον, the perfect "thing" which results in τὸ ἐκ μέρους, the "thing" in part, being "abolished" (καταργηθήσεται). This is

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<sup>40</sup>The words "fail," "cease" and "vanish" are placed in quotation marks because, although these are the words used in the Authorized Version to translate πίπτω, παύω and καταργέω, it is the opinion of this writer that they should be translated otherwise, as will be explained in the following chapter.

not seen as an "abolishing" of the spiritual gifts themselves, but as an abolishing of the incompleteness of the exercise of spiritual gifts without the motivation of love. This is seen as being in continuity with verses 1-3; namely, that spiritual gifts or even acts of charity or witness are lacking a vital element when exercised without love. If, however, they are exercised with love, that incompleteness is removed.

A Comparison of the Absence of ἀγάπη as a  
Motivating Force to the Immaturity  
of Childishness (verse 11)

\_\_\_\_\_It seems significant that in a discussion of spiritual gifts, and in the immediate context of gifts involving prophecy, tongues, and knowledge, Paul illustrated his point by referring to his manner of speaking, understanding, and thinking when he was a child. These natural abilities seem intended to serve as counterparts to the spiritual gifts. Speaking may be intended to be a natural counterpart to the gift of tongues, understanding to prophecy, and thinking to knowledge.<sup>41</sup>

Paul's statement, "When I became a man, I put away childish things," seems to flow well with this analysis of

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<sup>41</sup>Although prophecy is usually ministered by the spoken word, v. 2 couples prophecy with the ability to understand all mysteries and all knowledge; it does not seem unlikely that Paul was comparing his childish understanding with the operation of the gift of prophecy without love. This seems to be supported by v. 5, where Paul made use of the same word (λογίζομαι) to describe the way love thinks. For an opposing view see Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 588.

the passage. When he became a man, he did not stop speaking or understanding or thinking; he stopped doing these things with the immaturity of childhood (νήπιος). Now his speaking, understanding, and thinking were with the maturity of adulthood. The point seems to be that the spiritual gifts, operated without the motivation of love, are the spiritual equivalents to the speaking, understanding, and thinking of a young child. But what the child needs is not to surpass speaking, understanding, and thinking; he needs to grow into a maturity where these normal activities are tempered by a fuller perspective. Likewise, the believer does not anticipate a day when he will no longer have opportunity to minister to others by means of spiritual gifts; he looks for the day when he will grow into a maturity which brings full value to the ministry of spiritual gifts.

The passage seems tied together by Paul's use of καταργέω. He used the word to describe the fate of prophecies (without love, according to this view), of knowledge (verse 8), of the "thing" in part (verse 10), and of the "things" of a young child (verse 11). Since the abolishing of the "things" of childhood cannot refer to the cessation of speaking, understanding, or thinking, it seems reasonable to assume Paul did not have in mind the cessation of the spiritual gifts of prophecies, tongues, or knowledge. Rather, he had in mind the cessation of the immaturity

resulting from their exercise apart from love.<sup>42</sup>

Limitations of Vision When ἀγάπη Is  
Absent; Clearness of Vision When  
ἀγάπη Is Present (verse 12)

This interpretive model sees the coming of that which is perfect (verse 10) as being in continuity with the τότε (then) of verse 12. The idea of enigmatic seeing (βλέπομεν . . . ἐν αἰνίγματι) and incomplete knowledge (γινώσκω ἐκ μέρους) is seen as related to the incompleteness of spiritual gifts without love (verses 1-3, 8-9). In this view, in verse 12 Paul continued his hypothetical description of the use of spiritual gifts without the motivation of love. The absence of love was the unspoken, but understood, problem causing the Corinthians to see dimly in a mirror and to know only in part. When they matured in love, they would see clearly ("face to face") and know with the completeness with which they were known (apparently by God).<sup>43</sup>

It could be that verse 12 was intended by Paul to correct the "overspiritualized" eschatology of the Corinthians.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps they were of the opinion that it was through the spiritual gifts themselves that one enters into

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<sup>42</sup>The next chapter will explore the meaning of παύω, which Paul used in v. 8 to describe the fate of tongues.

<sup>43</sup>It does not seem significant as to the meaning of the verse that Paul began in the first person plural and changes to the first person singular.

<sup>44</sup>See G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, Vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 630-632, 642.

the state of τὸ τέλειον.<sup>45</sup> But without love, all is a puzzle; regardless of the extent of one's knowledge, the vital ingredient is missing.

### CHAPTER 3

#### A CONTEXTUAL, HISTORICAL, GRAMMATICAL, AND LEXICAL ANALYSIS

The interpretive model suggested in the preceding chapter stands or falls with the larger literary context, particularly of chapters 12-14, the historical situation at Corinth at the time of Paul's writing, and the grammatical and lexical analysis. Is it possible that καταργέω refers not to the cessation of prophecies and knowledge but to the termination only of their incompleteness due to the absence of love? Can παύω mean something other than that the gift of tongues will terminate? Can ἀγάπη be identified with τὸ τέλειον?

#### The Context of I Corinthians 12-14

Tate argues that the context of these chapters deals not so much with spiritual *gifts* as with spiritual *matters*:

Since the form of the substantive in 12:1 is in the genitive plural (*pneumatikōn*), it may be neuter ("spiritual matters") or masculine ("spiritual people"). But add to this the neuter form (*ta pneumatika*) in 14:1, and the most plausible choice for translating *ton*

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<sup>45</sup>See White's comments on the triumphalist claims of the Corinthians (R. Fowler White, "Richard Gaffin and Wayne Grudem on 1 Cor 13:10: A Comparison of Cessationist and Noncessationist Argumentation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35 [June 1992]: 179).

*pneumatikōn* becomes "spiritual matters."<sup>46</sup>

First Corinthians 12:1 begins with the words, "Περὶ δὲ τῶν πνευματικῶν. . . ." Πνευματικῶν is, of course, an altogether different word than *χαρίσματα*, which is normally used for spiritual gifts. Πνευματικῶν is a genitive, neuter, plural pronominal adjective. It could be translated "spiritual people" or "spiritual things." But Paul's use of τὰ πνευματικά (an accusative, neuter, plural pronominal adjective) in 14:1 strongly suggests that the word is a virtual synonym for *χαρίσματα* in 12:31. Fee resolves the problem thus: "When the emphasis is on the manifestation . . . Paul speaks of *charismata*; when the emphasis is on the Spirit, he speaks of the *pneumatika*."<sup>47</sup>

The essential idea of chapter 12 is that while there is great diversity in the body of Christ (the church), so also is there unity as each member contributes his unique ministry for the good of the whole. The analogy of the human body in 12:12-27 suggests that just as every member of the human body is required for the completeness of the body, so is every member of the body of Christ uniquely gifted so as to contribute to the completeness of the church. That which affects one member affects all (12:26).

Chapter 14 offers practical regulations as to how the various members of the body of Christ are to exercise their

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<sup>46</sup>Tate, *Paraclete*, 12.

<sup>47</sup>Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 576.

unique roles (as they pertain to *χαρίσματα*) so as to contribute to the good of the whole. Specifically, the chapter focuses on the gifts of tongues and prophecy, both of which involve vocal communication, but only one of which can be understood by the gathered assembly. Since the premium is on edification of the church (14:12), prophecy is superior to tongues, unless the tongues are interpreted (14:5). Paul concluded by urging the Corinthians earnestly to desire to prophesy, not to forbid speaking with tongues, and to "let all things be done decently and in order" (14:39-40).

Sandwiched between chapters 12 and 14, the "hymn to love," as it is sometimes called, continues the discussion of specific gifts from chapter 12 but in the context of love (*ἀγάπη*). Chapter 13 is surely related to the preceding and following chapters by more than the discussion of *χαρίσματα*. Although the virtue of love is not specifically discussed in chapters 12 or 14, there is an undercurrent in both chapters emphasizing that individual spiritual gifts exist for the benefit of the whole.<sup>48</sup> It is the exercise of the gifts by believers who have love which results in the gifts having their ultimate benefit (12:31-13:3). The love described in 13:4-7<sup>49</sup> would surely prompt mutual care (12:25), empathy

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<sup>48</sup>See I Corinthians 12:7, 21, 25-26; 14:3-6, 9, 11-13, 16-17, 19, 23-26, 31.

<sup>49</sup>The list of love's characteristics possibly extends into v. 8 with the statement "love never fails" concluding

(12:26), a concern for the strengthening of fellow believers (14:12), and a willingness to abstain from non-productive exercises of spiritual gifts (14:28).

If, with Fee and Lund, we view chapters 12-14 as a chiasm, chapter 13 is the heart of the structure, an "explanatory digression" which is "crucial to the argument as a whole."<sup>50</sup> That is, love, the unspoken theme of chapters 12 and 14, rises clearly to the surface at the central point of the chiasm: chapter 13.

#### The Historical Situation at Corinth

It is so well known as scarcely to need documentation that the ancient city of Corinth was a hotbed of idolatry and immorality. Aristophanes' (ca. 450-385 BC) invention of the verb κορινθιάζω (to act like a Corinthian, i.e., to commit fornication) and Strabo's no doubt exaggerated account of the temple of Aphrodite with its thousand temple prostitutes are often quoted in descriptions of the moral and religious depravity of the city. But these descriptions are of the old Corinth, which was destroyed in its conflict with Rome in 146 BC.<sup>51</sup> When the city was founded again in 44 BC by Julius

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the list. For a summary of the arguments for and against this, see Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 642-43.

<sup>50</sup>See Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 16, 51 n. 15, 571, and Nils W. Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 175-76.

<sup>51</sup>Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1-3.

Caesar as a colony of Rome, it no doubt regained its reputation as a center of widespread sexual sin, as would be true of any prosperous seaport of the day. The new Corinth also was a haven for at least twenty-six sacred places, not counting the Jewish synagogue.<sup>52</sup> This gives meaning to Paul's reference to "so-called gods" and to "many gods and many lords" (I Corinthians 8:5).

As Fee has pointed out, "[T]he church was in many ways a mirror of the city."<sup>53</sup> It was a diverse body (I Corinthians 12:13) made up largely of former pagans who "brought to the Christian faith a Hellenistic worldview and attitude toward ethical behavior."<sup>54</sup>

The traditional view of the purpose of the letter is that it is a response to the problem of the division of the Corinthian church into parties, with Paul sometimes siding with one party and sometimes with neither. There was indeed division in the church.<sup>55</sup> But Fee has proposed a reconstruction of the historical situation in Corinth as "one of conflict between the church and its founder."<sup>56</sup> The key issue is Paul's difference with the Corinthians over

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>55</sup>See 1:10-12; 3:4-5; 11:18-19.

<sup>56</sup>Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 6.

what it means to be "spiritual" (πνευματικός).<sup>57</sup> Paul described them as "puffed up" (4:6, 18; 5:2) and arrogant (5:6). He declared that their "knowledge" had caused them to be "puffed up," and he informed them that contrary to this negative effect of their "knowledge," "love edifies" (8:1). There were those among them who were contentious (11:16) and those who perceived themselves to be "spiritual" (14:37).

It is certainly purposeful of Paul as he wrote concerning "spiritual matters" (πνευματικῶν; 12:1) that he alluded to speaking with tongues of men "and of angels" (13:1). To the Corinthians, their ability to speak with tongues was "evidence that they had already assumed the spiritual existence of the angels."<sup>58</sup> Their Hellenistic dualism led them to minimize the importance of the material world, including the human body.<sup>59</sup> They saw no significance for the body in the present or in the future (6:12-20; 7:1-6; 15:12). This is no doubt behind Paul's allusion in 13:3 to the pointlessness of giving one's "body to be burned" if one does not have love.

Though Paul responded to a series of questions from the Corinthian church, he devoted nearly 20 percent of his letter to the discussion of πνευματικῶν and χαρίσματα.<sup>60</sup> This is

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 6, 8, 10-12.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>The epistle includes 437 verses, 84 of which are

considerably more attention than he gave to any other single subject.<sup>61</sup> With more of the content concerned with love than with any other subject, and with the chiastic structure of 13 itself,<sup>62</sup> wherein the characteristics of love are highlighted, there can be little doubt that Paul's chief aim in this letter was to call the self-sufficient Corinthians (4:8) to a life of humility characterized by love. And the chief arena of their life in which love needed to be exhibited was in the exercise of spiritual gifts.

Does the Treatment of Prophecy, Tongues, and  
Knowledge in I Corinthians 13:8 Have to Do  
with the Absence of ἀγάπη?

\_\_\_\_ First Corinthians 13:8 contains three verbs which are critical to this analysis. They are: (1) πίπτει (present, active, indicative, third person singular form of πίπτω); (2) καταργηθήσονται (future, passive, indicative, third person plural form of καταργέω) and καταργηθήσεται (future, passive, indicative, third person singular form of καταργέω); and (3) παύσονται (future, middle, indicative, third person plural form of παύω).

\_\_\_\_\_ included in chapters 12-14.

<sup>61</sup>In the sections of the book which seem to respond to the questions written by the Corinthians, in descending order, Paul devoted 13 percent of his letter to the resurrection (15:1-58), 9 percent to marriage (7:1-40), 4 percent to the Lord's Supper (11:17-34), 3 percent to headcoverings (11:2-16), 3 percent to things offered to idols (8:1-13), and 1 percent to the collection for the saints (16:1-4).

<sup>62</sup>See appendix.

As this verse is commonly translated, it lends itself to the traditional interpretation that the cessation of prophecies, tongues, and knowledge—at whatever point—is in view. For example:

Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away (NKJV).

Love never disappears. As for prophesying, it will be superseded; as for 'tongues,' they will cease; as for knowledge, it will be superseded (Moffatt).

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away (NIV).

Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away (RSV).

Grosheide's comments are typical:

There will no longer be any prophecies for there will be no need for them. The time that this shall be is indicated in vs. 10. Of the tongues Paul states . . . that *they shall cease*. Knowledge too will not any longer perform its task.<sup>63</sup>

If indeed πίπτω refers to the permanence of love, it is a strong argument that the cessation of prophecies, tongues, and knowledge is in view in verse 8. But if it is possible to see πίπτω with another significance, the argument from parallelism is blunted.<sup>64</sup>

#### Πίπτω

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<sup>63</sup>Grosheide, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 308.

<sup>64</sup>G. G. Findlay argues for the cessationist view on the basis of the parallelisms in v. 8 (Nicoll, ed., *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 2:900).

πίπτω conveys the passive of the idea of βάλλω.<sup>65</sup> Βάλλω means "I throw" or "I cast." Πίπτω means "I fall," but in the sense of "I am thrown (down)." The idea, then, is not so much that of ceasing, but of falling from a higher point. The word is used literally and figuratively in Scripture, the latter including the meaning of falling in a religious or moral sense, of falling under condemnation, and of becoming invalid, coming to an end, or failing.<sup>66</sup>

There seems to be nothing in πίπτω to demand a meaning of cessation.<sup>67</sup> The context in which it is found will to a

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<sup>65</sup>Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 659.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 660. BAGD places the meaning in I Corinthians 13:8 in the category of becoming invalid, coming to an end, failing. But W. Michaelis asserts, "πίπτω means here 'to be defeated,' 'to be brought to the ground,' 'not to stand'" (W. Michaelis, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittell and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968], 6:166). Michaelis bases his view on the ground that ἡ ἀγάπη οὐδέποτε πίπτει stands in continuity with the preceding list of characteristics about love, bringing the list to a conclusion. C. K. Barrett, though seeing the phrase in view as beginning a new paragraph, prefers the meaning that love "persists even when it is rebuffed" (C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [New York: Harpers, 1968], 305). Gordon Fee, recognizing the validity of each point of view, comments, "Perhaps Paul's intent is to be found in the very ambiguity of such figurative language, so that both [the idea of cessation and the idea of never being defeated or brought to the ground] are in view. There is a sense in which love is never brought down; it reflects God's character, after all, and cannot fluctuate from what it is. Yet that very reality is what also gives it eternal character, so that it 'remains' even after all other things have come to their proper end" (Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 643).

<sup>67</sup>Leon Morris writes, "Paul points out, love 'never

large extent determine its meaning. To this point in I Corinthians 13, Paul had not discussed cessation of love or of spiritual gifts. He had, however, exalted love to a place of preeminence; it is the quality that gives meaning to all else. If πίπτω is to demand the meaning of cessation, it will have to come from the context immediately following its use, for there is nothing in the immediately preceding context to require this meaning. As Fee points out,

[T]he combination of the adverb "never" [οὐδέποτε] and the present tense of the verb [πίπτει] suggests that it stands in continuity with the preceding list, bringing the whole to its conclusion. In this case it would mean something like "Love is never defeated, is never brought to the ground; it persists even when rebuffed."<sup>68</sup>

But Fee also sees reasons to view verse 8 as the beginning of a new paragraph, the most significant of which are,

(1) the repetition of the subject ἡ ἀγάπη . . . (2) the δέ and repeated εἴτε before the three gifts . . . and (3) the verb πίπτει, standing in contrast to the μένει with which the paragraph concludes.<sup>69</sup>

Fee summarizes the evidence: "Perhaps Paul's intent is to be found in the very ambiguity of such figurative language, so that both are in view."<sup>70</sup> Even Carson, who views the

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falls down' (v. 8). This is usually interpreted to mean that love stands forever, an interpretation that seems to me to be right. But we ought to notice that the verb may also be used to mean 'collapse' or 'be ruined.' Accordingly, the usage here may also suggest that love is not downed, not defeated by anything it encounters" (Leon Morris, *Testaments of Love* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981], 251).

<sup>68</sup>Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 642-43.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 643.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid. (See n. 66 above.)

statement "love never fails" as anticipating verse 13, also sees the statement that love "always perseveres" (πάντα ὑπομένει, 13:7b) as being another way of saying "love never fails" (13:8a).<sup>71</sup>

But perhaps we should not be too quick to discount the grammatical evidence that "love never fails" concludes the list of love's characteristics rather than introducing a new paragraph, especially since the latter idea may be unduly influenced by a preconceived interpretation of the passage. The problem of the repetition of the subject ἡ ἀγάπη fades when we examine the previous list of love's characteristics and discover that ἡ ἀγάπη appears thrice in verse 4 with no hint that the second and third appearances begin new paragraphs. The appearance of the subject again in the final phrase of the list may simply be a way of bracketing the list. The problem of the δέ and the repeated εἶτε before the three gifts may not be a problem at all. This may serve only to set the three gifts mentioned in contrast to the entire description of love in verses 4-8a. This would especially be true if the thesis proposed here is correct, that is, if verse 8 is not discussing cessation of the gifts but the limitations of the gifts apart from love. The final problem posed by Fee is a genuine problem only if, as he assumes, πίπτει actually does stand in contrast to μένει of verse 13. If

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<sup>71</sup>D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of I Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), 66.

μένει is transitive, with an implied object, as suggested elsewhere in this thesis, the problem vanishes.

Indeed, the idea that love will never be thrown down (from a higher point) seems to fit contextually. Love is the greatest (μείζων) thing (13:13). It will never be cast down from that lofty height.<sup>72</sup>

#### Καταργέω

Καταργέω appears twice in verse 8, once in reference to prophecies and again in reference to knowledge. It is commonly thought in this context to carry the meaning "to cease, pass away."<sup>73</sup> If indeed this is the meaning, it would seem to influence the meaning of πίπτω (i.e., while prophecies and knowledge will cease, love will not).

If the current interpretive model is wrong, and the idea in verse 8 is simply the cessation of the gifts, rather than a description of the incompleteness of the gifts apart from love, no specific point of termination of the gifts is identified in the verse. But in a variety of contexts, καταργέω carries a meaning, "to render useless or unproductive, occupy unprofitably, to make empty and

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<sup>72</sup>Findlay is of the opinion that v. 13 clearly demands of πίπτω the meaning of cessation, but this is to assume that μένει (abides) is the counterpart of πίπτει and that the more remote context defines the word (see Findlay in Nicoll, ed., *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 2:900.)

<sup>73</sup>This is the meaning assigned to its use in I Corinthians 13:8 by BAGD, 417.

unmeaning."<sup>74</sup> Leon Morris points out:

The verb *katargeō* is thoroughgoing. It is made up of the intensive prefix *kata*, the alpha-privative, and *ergon*, meaning "work," and means something like "to cause to do no work"-i.e., "to render null and void."<sup>75</sup>

Words are defined by contexts. It is at least possible that Paul used *καταργέω* with the meaning he intended elsewhere: to render powerless (Romans 6:6) or to make empty and unmeaning (Romans 4:14). Luke certainly made this use of the word (Luke 13:7). If that was Paul's intent, he meant that prophecies and knowledge without love will be empty and meaningless (i.e., they in no way confirm the character of the person exercising the gifts [13:2]).<sup>76</sup> This comports well with the essence of 13:1-3. An examination of the broader range of uses of *καταργέω* raises the question as to whether the traditional translations of the word in 13:8 may be heavily influenced by the common hermeneutic applied to

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<sup>74</sup>Wesley J. Perschbacher, ed., *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 226.

<sup>75</sup>Morris, *Testaments of Love*, 252, n. 64.

<sup>76</sup>It may be objected that *καταργέω* (relating to prophecies and knowledge) and *παύω* (relating to tongues) are future tense, suggesting some specific point in the future when these gifts will terminate. But this may be an example of the gnomic future, which "states what will always happen, if the proper conditions are present, or what will always be true under given circumstances" (James A Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1979], 98). Although Brooks and Winbery do not offer I Corinthians 13:8 as an example of the gnomic future, the context of the chapter argues strongly for it. In every circumstance where spiritual gifts are not motivated by love, the exercise of the gift will be empty and meaningless as per Paul's description in verses 1-3.

the passage. If the translator assumes that the point of verse 8 is the cessation of the gifts as opposed to the permanence of love, he will limit the range of meaning of *καταργέω* to cessation. But in many cases, both in classical and New Testament Greek, *καταργέω* and its root, *ἀργέω*, carry the idea of being "useless," "unserviceable," "not accomplishing good," lacking "necessary fulness."<sup>77</sup> Paul used the word elsewhere in I Corinthians meaning "to render insignificant" (1:28), "to come to nothing" (2:6), "to render powerless" (15:24, 26), "to subject to judgment (6:13)."<sup>78</sup> In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul used *καταργέω* of that which experiences "devaluation" and is "deprived of its original value" in Christ (3:7, 13). The infinitive *καταργεῖν* "often means 'to put out of action' or 'to deprive of power' in cases where there has been relative value and validity."<sup>79</sup>

Quite obviously, the description of the exercise of spiritual gifts and benevolent deeds of I Corinthians 13:1-3 is that of gifts and deeds deprived of their value. If this theme is carried into verses 8-12, *καταργέω* should be translated with non-cessationist language. The idea would be, "Whether there be exercises of the gift of prophecy or

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<sup>77</sup>Gerhard Delling, "*καταργέω*," *Theological Dictionary of The New Testament*, Vol. 1, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 452-454.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 454.

of the word of knowledge, they will lose their value [if they do not spring from love]."

#### Παύω

The use of καταργέω in conjunction with prophecies and knowledge brackets the use of παύω in reference to tongues. It seems significant that Paul did not use καταργέω of tongues.<sup>80</sup> Apparently, Paul used the different verbs purposefully. An examination of the larger context of I Corinthians 12-14 indicates that the gifts of prophecy and the word of knowledge share a commonality: they are intended to edify others (I Corinthians 13:2; 14:3).<sup>81</sup> The gift of kinds of tongues alone does not edify others, but oneself (I Corinthians 14:4). Indeed, the person who speaks in a tongue by means of this gift does not speak to men, but to God (I

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<sup>80</sup>Edgar is of the opinion that the reason for the difference in the verbs is that the "argument explaining why prophecies and knowledge are temporary does not apply to tongues, since the verb *pausontai*, *stop*, cannot fit the argument that the complete replaces or supersedes the partial. Prophecies and knowledge are stated to be partial now; tongues are not. The replacement by the complete (*teleion*) refers only to knowledge and prophecy. Tongues are not mentioned in verses 9-13 because the discussion does not apply to them. . . . The idea of the *teleion*, *perfect*, does not relate to tongues. . . . Tongues will stop. They are not replaced or superseded by a more complete aspect of tongues or by something similar" (Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts*, 337).

<sup>81</sup>The grammar of I Corinthians 13:2 suggests a close relationship, a commonality, between prophecy, the understanding of mysteries, and the possession of knowledge. The gift of prophecy is not given for self-edification, neither is the ability to understand mysteries, nor is the possession of special knowledge. All these gifts exist to enable the recipient to minister to others.

Corinthians 14:2). The only case speaking with tongues benefits others is if the tongue is interpreted by one having the gift of interpretation of tongues (I Corinthians 14:5). Paul used καταργέω of the gifts which enable a person to minister to others; he used παύω of the gift which results in self-edification.<sup>82</sup> Paul did not use καταργέω

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<sup>82</sup>All the gifts, when motivated by love, will edify the person exercising them. This is indicated by Paul's negative description of I Corinthians 13:1-3. If a person who speaks with tongues does have love, he will not be as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal; it is only if a person does not have love motivating his gift of prophecy, his understanding, his knowledge, and his faith that he is nothing; only if a person feeds the poor or suffers martyrdom without love as his motivation is he profited nothing. There is profit for the individual who exercises gifts with the motivation of love. Paul's statement, "But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men" (I Corinthians 14:3), does not imply that the person prophesying does not receive edification, exhortation, or comfort; he is, after all, a member of the church himself and thus receives benefit from the exercise of the gift. On the other hand, there is one gift-kinds of tongues-which edifies others only if it is interpreted. But even if it is not interpreted, the person exercising the gift is edified, so long as the gift is exercised in love. This is so because the edifying effect of kinds of tongues is not limited to what can be understood with the human mind. Since a person can speak in genuine tongues only as the Holy Spirit gives the ability (Acts 2:4), there is a benefit to the human spirit in which the Holy Spirit resides, even if the tongue is not interpreted for the edification of the human mind. That there is personal benefit to the person speaking with tongues even if there is no interpretation is seen in that by means of tongues a person speaks to God (I Corinthians 14:2), which by definition is beneficial; he speaks mysteries in the Spirit (14:2), which implies genuine participation of the Spirit; he edifies himself (14:4), which has no negative connotation (all gifts edify the person exercising them when motivated by love); Paul wished all Corinthians spoke with tongues (14:5), which would seem to be a strange desire if there were absolutely no value to the tongues unless they were accompanied by the exercise of another gift; the person who prophesies is greater than the person who speaks with

(which according to the thesis of this study carries the meaning "to render useless or unproductive, occupy unprofitably, to make empty and unmeaning") of tongues, for they are already useless, unproductive, and meaningless to others (I Corinthians 14:2, 6, 9, 11, 16, 19, 23). Indeed, even the person speaking with tongues finds it meaningless to his own understanding; only his spirit is involved profitably (I Corinthians 14:14). Paul used *καταργέω* of the gifts which are intended to be meaningful to others (prophecy and word of knowledge). He used *παύω* of the gift which is intended for personal (spiritual) edification. But if the person speaking or praying in a tongue does it apart from the motivation of love, it is useless and unproductive even for him.<sup>83</sup>

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tongues, unless the latter interprets (14:5), which does imply an inferiority, but not an absence, of benefit; the human spirit is involved in prayers offered in a tongue (14:14; see also v. 15), which is beneficial; even if others do not understand, the person who blesses in a tongue gives thanks well (14:17); if there is no interpreter, one should not speak in tongues in the church, but he may speak to himself and to God (14:28), which indicates personal and spiritual benefit; and Paul commanded the Corinthians not to forbid speaking with tongues (14:39), again a strange command if the tongues were valueless without the exercise of an additional gift. At the very least, we could expect Paul to say, "Forbid to speak with tongues only if there is no interpreter."

<sup>83</sup>The love needed to complete the exercise of spiritual gifts is understood by the author to be the love described as the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). This would involve love for God and other people, as well as the appropriate love for oneself. Before the gifts of the Spirit can accomplish their purpose, they must be motivated by the fruit of the Spirit. Love is the premier fruit of the Spirit out of which all other spiritual qualities grow.

In verse 8, *παύω* appears in the middle voice, indicating that tongues will cease or be restrained of themselves.<sup>84</sup> *Καταργέω*, used of prophecies and knowledge, is in the passive voice, indicating that they will be the recipients of the action; they will be acted upon. In other words, the absence of love renders prophecies and knowledge meaningless; tongues are by definition already meaningless unless they are accompanied by the exercise of the gift of interpretation of tongues. The lack of love is not what makes tongues meaningless; that is the nature of the gift. For this reason, Paul did not mention tongues in verse 9 in connection with prophecy and knowledge.<sup>85</sup>

If the point of verse 8 is the cessation of spiritual gifts themselves, traditional translations of *καταργέω* like

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<sup>84</sup>Though Paul's use of the middle voice here could be merely a stylistic feature, it seems significant that he not only used the middle voice but also switched to an entirely different verb when discussing tongues as opposed to knowledge and prophecy. This may be because tongues are unique among the three gifts. They are in fact unique among the nine. Only the gift of tongues is of no value to others unless it is accompanied by another gift, although, in a sense, neither is the gift of interpretation of tongues of value apart from another gift. The latter gift cannot legitimately operate, however, in the absence of the gift of tongues.

<sup>85</sup>Fee is of the opinion that the "change of verbs is purely rhetorical." He does not believe it is possible to distinguish between *καταργέω* and *παύω* in this context (Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 644, n. 17). But surely this view leans heavily on the notion that the point of v. 8 is the cessation of the gifts. There is a change in grammar, a change in verbs, and a change in the relative value of the gifts mentioned (i.e., prophecy and knowledge have intrinsic value to those who are the beneficiaries of their exercise; tongues do not, apart from interpretation).

"cease" and "vanish away" are appropriate, as is the translation of παύω as "cease." But if the point is not the cessation of the gifts but the rendering ineffective of exercises of the gifts not motivated by love, the emphasis is not on the gifts as specific institutions in the body of Christ but on the pointlessness of specific exercises of the gifts without love. To be precise, verse 8 does not suggest that the spiritual gift of prophecy will "fail," but that prophecies—the utterances resulting from the exercise of the gift—will "fail." Neither does the verse suggest that the spiritual gift of kinds of tongues (γένη γλωσσῶν) will "cease," but that the tongues themselves—the utterances resulting from the exercise of the gift—will "cease." The treatment of knowledge is consistent: Paul did not declare that the spiritual gift of a word of knowledge (λόγος γνώσεως) will "vanish away" but that knowledge itself—the knowledge resulting from the exercise of the gift—will "vanish."

With this in view, it does not seem strange that tongues (specific exercises of the spiritual gift) can be expected to "cease." If we think of the exercise of the spiritual gift as the supernatural counterpart of the exercise of the natural ability to speak (as Paul suggested in I Corinthians 14:15), that is, that speaking with tongues differs from natural speech only in that in natural speech it is the human mind that gives the utterance while with the gift of kinds of tongues it is the Holy Spirit that gives

the utterance, we would expect the tongues to cease just as surely as we expect natural speech to cease. But we do not expect natural speech to cease permanently. Indeed, in Luke 5:4 and 11:1, *παύω* is used of the cessation of natural speech. But in neither case is the reference to a permanent cessation of speech; the reference is to the cessation of a specific episode of speech. *Παύω* carries the meaning "to stop."<sup>86</sup> In most contexts this stop is permanent, but it may be used of the cessation of specific episodes of activity.

Thus, the point of verse 8 need not be the permanent cessation of any of the gifts but, rather, the meaningfulness of all of the gifts apart from love. Prophecies and knowledge, where love is lacking, become meaningless to those who should be edified by the exercise of the gifts. Tongues become meaningless even to the person exercising them. Paul treated tongues differently than prophecies and knowledge, for tongues are already meaningless to others.<sup>87</sup>

#### Is ἀγάπη "That Which Is Perfect"?

Love is clearly the theme of I Corinthians 13. Ἀγάπη appears nine times in thirteen verses. It also appears again

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<sup>86</sup>BAGD, 638.

<sup>87</sup>If Fee's view is correct (see n. 85), *παύω* would be strongly influenced by *καταργέω* on either side. In this case, the idea could be that tongues, like prophecies and knowledge, would be rendered ineffective by the absence of love.

immediately in I Corinthians 14:1. The way of love is doubtless the "more excellent way" of I Corinthians 12:31. The point of I Corinthians 13 does not seem to be that love is superior to the spiritual gifts (although it certainly is) but that love is necessary to complete the gifts.<sup>88</sup> The only verse in the passage which unquestionably asserts love's superiority is verse 13, where love is said to be the greatest (μεῖζων) of the trio of faith, hope, and love. Nothing in I Corinthians 13:1-3 seems to suggest that a choice must be made between tongues or love, prophecy or love, faith or love, acts of benevolence or love, or martyrdom or love. Nothing suggests a choice should be made to have love instead of tongues, prophecy, faith, acts of benevolence, or martyrdom. But these are the kinds of distinctions which would seem to be required if the point of the passage is the superiority of love over the spiritual gifts, acts of benevolence, or martyrdom.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, I

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<sup>88</sup>For the view that the point of I Corinthians 13 is to show that love is superior to the gifts, see White, "Richard Gaffin and Wayne Grudem on 1 Cor 13:10," *JETS*, 35:176.

<sup>89</sup>Of course love is superior to the spiritual gifts; the fruit of the Spirit is by definition qualitatively superior to the gifts of the Spirit. It is spiritual fruit which indicates maturity of character, not spiritual gifts. But nowhere in the larger context of I Corinthians 12-14 did Paul suggest a choice must be made between fruit and gifts. The issue is the incompleteness of spiritual gifts without love, not the superiority of love over spiritual gifts. The "more excellent way" of I Corinthians 12:31 is not the way of love as opposed to the way of spiritual gifts, but the way of spiritual gifts motivated by love as opposed to the way of spiritual gifts without the motivation of love. In the context, Paul described love as superior to faith and

Corinthians 13 is introduced by the admonition, "But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way" (I Corinthians 12:31, NKJV). If the point of I Corinthians 13 is that love is superior to gifts, it seems curious that Paul would encourage the Corinthians to desire the best gifts earnestly. It seems he would recommend that they turn away from the spiritual gifts in favor of love or at least that he would recommend minimal interest in gifts and maximum interest in love. Instead, he encouraged them to desire earnestly the gifts while at the same time showing them love's essential role in giving the gifts meaning and value. His statement, "Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy" (I Corinthians 14:1, NKJV), seems to reinforce the idea that the point of the previous chapter is not the superiority of love but that love and spiritual gifts complement each other. The gifts

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hope (I Corinthians 13:13) and some gifts as superior to others (I Corinthians 12:28-31a; 14:1, 5), but these comparisons are within categories. He was not setting the categories of spiritual gifts and spiritual fruit against each other; he was instead demonstrating their complementarity, with the lesser (gifts) being made meaningful by the greater (fruit). Only the traditional interpretation of v. 8 would indicate that the subject of the chapter is the superiority of love over spiritual gifts, but that assumes that πίπτω is synonymous with καταργέω and παύω. In other words, if the point is the superiority of love over gifts, the idea of v. 8 would have to be that love does not suffer the fate of prophecies, tongues, or knowledge. In this case we could expect to see the repetition of πίπτω after each gift, or at least some unmistakable parallelism. Instead, Paul used completely different verbs, which are capable of meanings other than cessation or even "falling," as this thesis understands the word.

are to be pursued in the atmosphere of love. The gift of prophecy especially is to be pursued, for it is the gift which "speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men" (I Corinthians 14:3, NKJV).

Is it possible that love could be "the perfect thing," and that Paul's reference is not to the cessation of gifts when "the perfect thing" comes but to the termination of the incompleteness existing prior to the coming (i.e., maturing) of love? In I Corinthians 14:20, in a statement reminiscent of I Corinthians 13:11, Paul encouraged the Corinthians not to be children in understanding but to be mature. The context is a discussion of speaking with tongues, and Paul used τέλειος to describe the maturity toward which the Corinthians should reach. As in 13:11, it seems obvious he did not want them to "put away" understanding; he wanted them to understand in a mature fashion.

In Ephesians 4:13-16, in a context discussing spiritual maturity, Paul made use of τέλειος to describe the completeness, the maturity, toward which Christians are to grow. In verse 14, he compared immaturity to childishness, using νήπιος (young child) to describe the childish state, just as he does in I Corinthians 13:11.<sup>90</sup> The maturity

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<sup>90</sup>It seems significant that Paul also made use of νήπιος in I Corinthians 3:1 to describe the Corinthians as "infants" in Christ. This may inform his use of νήπιος in I Corinthians 13:11; i.e., Paul spoke of himself as a child when he meant for the Corinthians to understand he was describing them as infants who need to supersede the immaturity of infancy. This would concord with his

toward which the Ephesians were to reach involved "speaking the truth in love [ἀγάπη]" (verse 15); it will result in the church "edifying . . . itself in love [ἀγάπη]" (verse 16).

It seems too much to be coincidental that, in both the Corinthian and the Ephesian passages, Paul discussed perfection (τέλειος), love (ἀγάπη), and edification (οικοδομή). Although the spiritual gifts of I Corinthians 12:8-10 are not in view in Ephesians 4:13-16, the gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers are (verse 11), and Paul did recommend "speaking the truth in love." In the Corinthian passage, he also recommended that truth be spoken in love, even if the speaking is that occasioned by an exercise of spiritual gifts. Whether believers speak out of their own understanding or from the impetus of the Holy Spirit through a spiritual gift, love is the criterion for the utterance. The absence of love renders the utterance infantile, childish, immature.

It seems apparent that the maturity toward which Paul encouraged the Ephesian church is the τέλειος of love.<sup>91</sup>

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description of himself in I Corinthians 13:1-3 as exercising spiritual gifts and acts of charity and even suffering martyrdom without love when he meant for the Corinthians to read themselves into the account.

<sup>91</sup>It is a secondary argument, but it seems significant that New Testament writers in general viewed love as signifying the perfect state. John wrote of "perfect love" (τελεία ἀγάπη) and of "being perfected in love" (τετελείωται ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ; I John 4:17-18). Peter saw love as the ultimate expression of Christian maturity (II Peter 1:7). Paul listed love as the first of the Holy Spirit's fruit (Galatians 5:22).

Ἀγάπη is a feminine noun; τὸ τέλειον is a neuter adjective. But as Edgar points out,

The neuter of this general statement is no indication that what is referred to is neuter. The statement, in effect, says, 'Anything that is complete, when it comes, always replaces the partial.'<sup>92</sup>

There seems to be no grammatical reason love could not be the "perfect thing." The context is clearly permeated with the idea that love is required to complete spiritual activity. As Tate observes,

*The whole context is concerned with one thing—love. . . . Paul's term for love (agape) is feminine rather than neuter. Perhaps, then, Paul's "that which is perfect" refers to a state of completion or spiritual maturity whose hallmark is agape.*<sup>93</sup>

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Farnell has identified eleven similarities and parallels between I Corinthians 13 and Ephesians 4: "(1) The νήπιος... τέλειος antithesis is found in both places. (2) The general subject of discussion in both is spiritual gifts. (3) Edification of the body of Christ is the stated objective in Ephesians 4 as well as in I Corinthians 12-14. (4) Both passages use the figure of the human body to represent the church. (5) Growth from childhood to maturity is emphasized in both cases. (6) Love is prominent in the growth process along with spiritual gifts in both passages. (7) Individual parts of Christ's body are depicted by the noun μέρος in both chapters (Eph. 4:16; I Cor. 12:27). (8) Whenever Paul discussed spiritual gifts, he had the body figure in view (Eph. 4:11-16; cf. Rom. 12:3-8). (9) An emphasis on unity is seen in Ephesians 4:1-6 (cf. 1 Cor. 12). (10) All seven unifying persons and features mentioned in Ephesians 4:4-6 are referred to in 1 Corinthians 12-14. (11) Ἀνήρ is used in both passages" (F. David Farnell, "When Will the Gift of Prophecy Cease?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 [April-June 1993]: 194). Though it is a secondary point, it should be noted that the thrust of Ephesians 4 is not the termination of any of the gifts listed but the exercise of the gifts in a context of love, which will result in edification of the body.

<sup>92</sup>Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts*, 334-335.

<sup>93</sup>Tate, *Paraclete* 24 (Winter 1990): 14 (italics in

What Is Done Away When τὸ τέλειον Comes?

Μέρος was used consistently by Paul to refer to things which are partial, or incomplete.<sup>94</sup> In I Corinthians 13:9-10 Paul declared, "For we know in part (ἐκ μέρους), and we prophesy in part (ἐκ μέρους). But when that which is perfect (τὸ τέλειον) has come, then that which is in part (τὸ ἐκ μέρους) will be done away (καταργηθήσεται, the same word used of prophecies and knowledge in verse 8)." Carson notes the significance of the adverbial prepositional expression ἐκ μέρους being substantivized in verse 10 by the addition of the article. The resultant idea is that of "the in-part-ness."<sup>95</sup>

The thing which is in part is not the gift of prophecy or the gift of the word of knowledge. It is the knowledge which results from the exercise of the gift of the word of knowledge and the prophecies which arise from the operation of the gift of prophecy when these gifts are not motivated by love. Gaffin agrees that the point of verse 10 is not the cessation of certain modes of revelation (the gift of prophecy and the word of knowledge) but "the termination of the believer's present, fragmentary knowledge. . . ." <sup>96</sup> He

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original).

<sup>94</sup>See Romans 11:25; I Corinthians 11:18; 13:9-12; II Corinthians 2:5; Ephesians 4:16.

<sup>95</sup>Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 68.

<sup>96</sup>Gaffin, *Perspectives*, 111.

continues, "The time of the cessation of prophecy and tongues is an open question so far as this passage is concerned and will have to be decided on the basis of other passages and considerations."<sup>97</sup>

When τὸ τέλειον (the perfect thing) comes, τὸ ἐκ μέρους (the thing in part or the "in-part-ness") will be "rendered useless, unproductive, empty, and meaningless," as καταργέω is understood in this analysis. That is, the incomplete state of the prophecies or knowledge arising from the exercise of these spiritual gifts apart from love will be surpassed by the completed state of the prophecies or knowledge resulting from the exercise of these spiritual gifts from the perfect motive of love. This view understands Paul's assertion "[f]or we know in part, and we prophesy in part" as continuing his hypothetical description begun in verse 1. By his use of the first person plural pronoun, Paul meant for the Corinthians to understand they were included in the number of those whose exercise of spiritual gifts left something lacking. The solution to this incompleteness would be to embrace the love so vividly described in 13:1-8a. This would bring completeness to the exercise of the spiritual gifts of I Corinthians 12-14; the incompleteness would be a thing of the past.

Though Karl Barth saw the τέλειος as referring to "the

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

goal and end of the present age,"<sup>98</sup> he also recognized that the issue is not the termination of spiritual gifts, but "a relativisation in the light of [the] glorious future."<sup>99</sup>

In the eternal light to which we move, prophecy, tongues and knowledge will be taken up into a new and higher form. . . . Paul definitely says of knowledge in v. 12 that it will not be set aside or abolished but will take place in a new and more perfect form: ἐπιγνώσσομαι. . . . The statement in v. 11b is made rather too stark with the rendering of . . . κατήργηκα as "done away." . . . [I]t is a matter of the taking up of these things into a new and higher form rather than their abolition. . . .<sup>100</sup>

Barth saw οὐδέποτε πίπτει as meaning that love "is that one form of Christian action which does not require and is not subject to transformation or absorption into another, higher and future form . . . relativisation will not overtake love. . . ."<sup>101</sup> He thought it a mistake to translate καταργηθήσονται as "set aside" or "destroyed." To Barth, the idea behind the word is change, not destruction.<sup>102</sup> With the coming of that which is perfect, prophecy and knowledge "will no longer take place in part. . . ."<sup>103</sup>

#### What Did Paul Put Away When He Became a Man?

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<sup>98</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 4, Part 2, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), 837.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 837-39.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 837.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 839.

First Corinthians 13:11 seems to support the explanation of verses 9-10 given in the previous section. When Paul was a young child, he spoke, understood, and thought as a child. But when he became a man, he "put away" (κατήργηκα, perfect, active, indicative, first person singular form of καταργέω) childish things. He did not cease speaking, understanding, and thinking when he became a man; he ceased speaking, understanding, and thinking *as a child speaks, understands and thinks*. That is, his mature manner of speaking, understanding, and thinking as a man superseded or "rendered useless, unproductive, empty, and meaningless" his manner of doing these things as a child. Leon Morris is of the opinion that Paul's use of καταργέω in verse 11 "points to a radical repudiation of childishness. . . ." <sup>104</sup>

Just as in verses 9-10 it is not the gift of prophecy or the word of knowledge which are superseded, so in verse 11 it is not the speaking, understanding, or thinking which are superseded. It is instead the immature manner of the speaking, understanding, or thinking which is superseded. This accords well with the view that in verse 8 it is not the gift of prophecy or the gift of the word of knowledge which are superseded but the immaturity of prophecies and knowledge apart from love.

The message the Corinthians were to receive from this illustration from Paul's childhood seems to be that they

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<sup>104</sup>Morris, *Testaments of Love*, 254.

should surpass the spiritual infancy of operating spiritual gifts without love as their motive. They should put away this "childish thing," this infantile practice of spiritual gifts for selfish reasons. As Morris declares, "Though Paul doesn't mention love explicitly here [in verse 11], he no doubt has it in mind."<sup>105</sup>

What Does It Mean to "See in a Mirror, Dimly,"  
and to "Know in Part"?

The enigmatic vision and partial knowledge of I Corinthians 13:12 ("For now we see in a mirror, dimly. . . . Now I know in part"; NKJV) seem contextually to flow with the hypothetical situation created by Paul in verses 1-3 and, according to this analysis, continued in verses 8-9. The exercise of spiritual gifts apart from love results in obscured vision, which parallels the loveless prophecy of verse 2, the meaninglessness of the prophecies of verse 8, the incompleteness of the prophecy of verse 9, and the immature understanding of the child of verse 11. The exercise of spiritual gifts apart from love also results in partial knowledge, which parallels the loveless knowledge of verse 2, the meaninglessness of the knowledge of verse 8, the partial knowledge of verse 9, and the immature thoughts of the child of verse 9.

The present tense, "now we see," referred to the current state of affairs in the church at Corinth, with

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<sup>105</sup>Morris, *Testaments of Love*, 254.

which Paul identified himself in verses 1-3.

When Shall We See Face to Face and  
Know As We Are Known?

The  $\tau\acute{o}\tau\epsilon$  of verse 12 corresponds to the coming of  $\tau\acute{o}$   $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\iota\omicron\nu$  of verse 10. Grudem and Gaffin agree on this point.<sup>106</sup> They also agree that  $\tau\acute{o}$   $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\iota\omicron\nu$  is a reference to the return of Christ. But this seems to be an assumption. There is no clear reference in I Corinthians 13 to Christ's return. Indeed, His return is not mentioned in the larger context of I Corinthians 12-14. It does appear in I Corinthians 15, but here the subject is the resurrection from the dead, not spiritual gifts.

The central theme of I Corinthians 13 is love as the necessary motivator of spiritual gifts and acts of charity and witness. This is the "excellent way" of I Corinthians 12:31. The goal of the entire passage, the apex toward which the chapter moves inexorably and in which it culminates in verse 13, is love. Immediately then, I Corinthians 14:1 begins, "Pursue love." In view of this, it does not seem unreasonable to see the  $\tau\acute{o}\tau\epsilon$  of verse 12 as a reference to the time when love arrives or when the Corinthians arrive at the goal of love.

Paul promised the Corinthians, then, that when they began to follow the more excellent way, the way of love,

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<sup>106</sup>Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), 231; Gaffin, *Perspectives*, 109.

they would no longer see dimly but "face to face." No longer would their knowledge be partial; they would know with fullness. This does not mean they would know everything there is to know and see everything there is to see. That is, they would not be omniscient. But insofar as the spiritual gifts are meant to impart sight, they would see. Insofar as the spiritual gifts are meant to impart knowledge, they would know.<sup>107</sup> The inhibiting limitation of life and ministry without love would be a thing of the past.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>It may be questioned whether potential disagreements between prophets who are not motivated by love will be eliminated when said prophets are motivated by love. That is, will the presence of love guarantee the end of diversity among those exercising spiritual gifts? But that is to overlook the nature of the gifts; they are not intended to impart infallibility or omniscience. For this reason they must be tested (I Corinthians 14:29; I Thessalonians 5:19-21). The issue with which Paul was dealing in I Corinthians 13 was not the definitive limitations of spiritual gifts but the additional and unnecessary limitations placed on the gifts when they are not motivated by love. Love will not guarantee the validity of any apparent exercise of a spiritual gift; only the process of judging and testing will guarantee that. But love will guarantee that if the exercise of a spiritual gift is genuine, the gift will accomplish its full purpose.

<sup>108</sup>An alternative view is proposed by Fee, who suggests that the point of the mirror analogy was not to suggest a distorted image, but an indirect image. Fee asserts that "Corinth was famous as the producer of some of the finest bronze mirrors in antiquity. . . . [T]he emphasis is not on the *quality* of seeing that one experiences in looking into a mirror . . . but to the *indirect nature* of looking into a mirror as opposed to seeing someone face to face." He summarizes: "Our present 'vision' of God, as great as it is, is as nothing when compared to the real thing that is yet to be; it is like the difference between seeing a reflected image in a mirror and seeing a person face to face" (Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 647-48). If

The idea that the point of the chapter as it relates to love is its permanence as opposed to the transitory nature of the spiritual gifts rests strongly on a common understanding of verse 13. Here Paul concluded, "But now faith, hope and love remain, these three. And the greatest of these is love." It is so widely attested that the point of verse 13 is the permanence of the three virtues listed that there is no need to document it. But that is not necessarily the meaning of μένει (third person singular, present active indicative form of μένω). Though the common meaning of μένω has to do with abiding in the sense of remaining in a certain place or state, the word can have reference to something which awaits. Paul used the word this way in Acts 20:23: "chains and tribulations await [μένουσιν] me." In the same chapter, Luke used μένω in reference to the men who awaited Paul's traveling party in Troas (Acts 20:5).

Μένω can mean "await" only if it is transitive. Since there is no object in the verse, an implied object must be established to support this claim. This writer views I Corinthians 12:31-14:1a as a chiasmus; his construction of

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this view is adopted, the contextual idea as seen in this proposal is that spiritual gifts exercised apart from the motivation of love limit one's "vision" or perspective of his brother or sister so that by comparison with the exercise of spiritual gifts with the motivation of love only a reflection in a mirror (however fine the mirror) is seen. There is nothing in v. 12 to suggest that the vision or knowledge in view is of God. Contextually, it is the vision or knowledge accompanying spiritual gifts, and spiritual gifts are intended to provide information or abilities for mutual ministry within the church.

the chiasmus is found in the appendix. If this construction is correct, point **B**, "And yet I show you a more excellent way" (I Corinthians 12:31b), is responded to by point **B'**, "And now faith, hope and love await [you], these three; and the greatest of these is love. Follow after love," (I Corinthians 13:31; 14:1a). The more excellent way is the way of faith, hope, and love, with love as the preeminent quality. Since Paul was showing this more excellent way to the Corinthians, it is implied that they have not yet embraced this way; it awaits them. The fact that Paul said, "Follow after love," indicates love was still future for them, at least as the motivating force behind spiritual gifts.

If Gene Getz's theory is correct in that the measure of the New Testament church is its faith, hope, and love, and if each epistle to a church is written to deal with deficiencies in any or all of these virtues, and if we can determine the strengths and weaknesses of the church by the mention or absence of any reference to these virtues in the early verses of the letter,<sup>109</sup> it seems significant that the Corinthian church was not commended for any of them. The word *faith* (πίστις) appears in seven verses in I Corinthians.<sup>110</sup> In no case was there a clear commendation of

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<sup>109</sup>See Gene Getz, *The Measure of the Church* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1975).

<sup>110</sup>I Corinthians 2:5; 12:9; 13:2; 13:13; 15:14; 15:17; 16:13.

their faith. The spiritual gift of faith is discussed in 12:9 and 13:2; faithfulness is held up as a desirable virtue in 13:13; their salvific faith was acknowledged in 15:14 and 15:17; and they were exhorted to stand fast in the faith (τῇ πίστει) in 16:13, an apparent reference to faith as doctrine or a body of belief. But 2:5 implies that to at least some extent their faith was in the wisdom of men. The word *hope* appears in only three verses in I Corinthians.<sup>111</sup> In no case were the Corinthians commended for their hope. The right of ministers of the gospel to hope for support from those to whom they minister is mentioned in 9:10; hope is seen as a desirable virtue in 13:13; the misery of hope in Christ only for this world is asserted in 15:19. The word ἀγάπη (love) appears in eleven verses of I Corinthians.<sup>112</sup> None of these references can be construed as a commendation of the love of the Corinthians. Paul questioned whether he should come to them in love (4:21); the characteristics of love are listed (13:4-8); and love is seen as superior to even faith and hope (13:13). Paul's love is mentioned (16:24). All other references to love imply the Corinthians' inadequacy in this virtue. Love edifies, but knowledge puffs up (8:1). The implication is that the Corinthians had knowledge but not

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<sup>111</sup>I Corinthians 9:10; 13:13; 15:19.

<sup>112</sup>I Corinthians 4:21; 8:1; 13:1; 13:2; 13:3; 13:4; 13:8; 13:13; 14:1; 16:14; 16:24.

love.<sup>113</sup> The incompleteness of spiritual gifts and benevolent acts apart from love is described (13:1-3). The Corinthians were urged to pursue love (14:1) and to do everything with love (16:14).

The only commendation received by the Corinthians was that they did not come behind in any *χαρίσματος* (I Corinthians 1:7). Paul, then, urged them to grow in these qualities, and especially in love.

That the Corinthians heeded Paul's advice is evident from a lexical study of II Corinthians. The book has only 59 percent of the content of I Corinthians, but it contains far more references to faith, hope, and love proportionately. Though there was no commendation for hope, the Corinthians were now commended for standing by faith (1:24) and for abounding in faith and love (8:7). The fact that the love in which they abounded was newly acquired is implied in that they were urged to reaffirm their love (2:8), Paul tested their love (8:8), and they were urged to show proof of their love (8:24). In what seems a plaintive cry, Paul complained that they did not properly reciprocate his love (12:15).

The contextual and structural evidence of I Corinthians and the lexical evidence of I and II Corinthians strengthen the idea that *μένω* is transitive with an implied object. The Corinthians, who were not surpassed in spiritual gifts, needed to reach ahead to obtain the qualities of faith (not

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<sup>113</sup>Compare this with I Corinthians 13:2, 8, 9, 12.

salvific faith, but faithfulness as a fruit of the Spirit [Galatians 5:22-23]), hope, and love.

So it is at least possible that the point of verse 13 was that faith, hope, and love awaited the Corinthians. They were to reach for love (I Corinthians 14:1); it is the perfect thing. With the coming of love, the incompleteness of their present experience would be terminated.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSIONS

The very fact that there remains such a wide variety of views among competent scholars as to the identity of τὸ τέλειον in I Corinthians 13:10, with new views continuing to surface, indicates the best solution may yet be discovered. As the view suggested in this thesis is examined, and perhaps fine-tuned by others, it may be found to have as much or more merit than some explanations which have been widely held.

There seem to be deficiencies, some more serious than others, in each of the views previously proposed. It is difficult to see how τὸ τέλειον could refer to the completion of the canon, since, as Fee points out, "Paul himself could not have articulated it. What neither Paul himself nor the Corinthians could have understood can possibly be the meaning of the text."<sup>114</sup> Mare notes that the idea that τέλειον refers to the completion of the canon is "completely

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<sup>114</sup>Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 645.

extraneous to the context."<sup>115</sup> Carson agrees: "It is difficult to believe that Paul could have expected the Corinthians to think that by 'perfection' he was alluding to the cessation of the writing of Scripture."<sup>116</sup> Now that the canon has been completed, does the church see "face to face"? If that was Paul's point, the passage seems to imply a completeness of knowledge and a unity which still elude the church. If Paul had intended to allude to the completion of the writing of Scripture, it seems it would have been an easy matter for him to use ἡ ἀγράπη instead of τὸ τέλειον. His failure to identify a specific event or thing as that which is perfect suggests strongly that the identity is in the immediate context.

The suggestion that τὸ τέλειον is the maturity into which the church would grow is problematic. Precisely when was this state reached, or has it been? Since the church universal consists of the visible local church in communities around the world, is it possible that one congregation could reach maturity and thus have no more need of the spiritual gifts while another congregation, still immature, would continue to need them? McRay suggests that τὸ τέλειον is the joining together of Jews and Gentiles into one new and "perfect" man, thus bringing the church to

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<sup>115</sup>Mare, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 10:269.

<sup>116</sup>Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 70.

maturity.<sup>117</sup> But, as Carson declares, that theme "is irrelevant in the context of I Corinthians 13."<sup>118</sup> Others see the maturity coming with the rise of the regular clergy.<sup>119</sup> But the problems mentioned previously remain: the universal church does not have clergymen in every locale. Do these fledgling expressions of the church still need spiritual gifts while the more "advanced" churches with professional clergy do not?

Edgar's suggestion that τὸ τέλειον occurs at the death of the believer is ingenious.<sup>120</sup> But what practical hope did it hold for the Corinthians in their present state of incompleteness? Were they to resign themselves to an existence where they "know in part," "prophecy in part," and "see through a glass darkly"? Is the church throughout all ages to do that? If there is nothing the church can do to remedy the incompleteness of their present state, what was Paul's point in writing about it? Apparently he wanted to encourage the church to emulate his action in putting away "childish things" (13:11), but if the perfection he described comes only at death, there is no way this can be. If Edgar's position is correct, the point of 13:10 is that

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<sup>117</sup>J. R. McRay, "To Teleion in 1 Cor 13:10," *Restoration Quarterly* 14 (1971): 168-83.

<sup>118</sup>Carson, 71.

<sup>119</sup>Fee, 645.

<sup>120</sup>Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts*, 340-44.

"when we die, spiritual gifts cease."<sup>121</sup> But this is so obvious as to go without saying.

Edgar's suggestion that the idea of verse 10 is to state a general principle that "whenever a finished or completed thing is available, the partial aspects are set aside"<sup>122</sup> is valid, but it does not prove his assertion that τὸ τέλειον arrives at death or disprove the proposal of this thesis that τὸ τέλειον arrives when the believer reaches the maturity inherent in love. Indeed, the principle fits quite nicely with the idea that spiritual gifts exercised in love set aside the incompleteness of the effects of spiritual

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<sup>121</sup>Edgar is not of the opinion that spiritual gifts will actually continue throughout the church age, ceasing for each individual believer at his death. Although he holds that τὸ τέλειον "refers to the time when an individual believer is with the Lord," he rejects continuing exercises of the gifts of prophecy and the word of knowledge on the basis that "there is no need for partial revelation . . . now that we have the completed canon" (Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts*, 343-44). It is difficult to see how he escapes positing two separate meanings of τὸ τέλειον: the completed canon and death. Although he is right in his view that the emphasis in the passage is on *individual* rather than *corporate* knowing ("It is not a time when a complete prophecy is available or a completed body of truth is available [which is all that the canon supplied], but it is a time when *the individual actually knows and sees*," *ibid.*, 341), he cannot escape the fact that it is potentially possible for some individual to reach this state of complete knowing before death. If the idea is, as Edgar states, that "once the complete prophecy and knowledge are available the partial are superseded" (*ibid.*, 343), and if it is impossible for any individual to reach the state of complete knowledge before death, the believer is actually no better off after the completion of the canon than before. He still knows in part. If this is true, the practical use of the completed Scriptures is of no more value than the operation of spiritual gifts.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*, 334.

gifts exercised without love. Completeness does supersede incompleteness, and spiritual gifts completed by love supersede spiritual gifts without love.

The view that τὸ τέλειον is the eschaton or that it is at least the state of affairs occurring at the eschaton is held by many competent scholars. Fee represents them all very well:

At the coming of Christ the final purpose of God's saving work in Christ will have been reached; at that point those gifts now necessary for the building up of the church in the present age will disappear, because "the complete" will have come.<sup>123</sup>

But as Edgar observes,

If the Lord's coming is in view, it is strange that Paul does not state this explicitly . . . and in terms which leave no question about what is meant. . . .

If the rapture is in view, this would mean that even though dead believers are now present with the Lord and see Him directly, and even though they know much more than we who are alive, they will see more clearly and have more knowledge after the rapture. Where do they receive this additional ability or insight? If they receive it from seeing certain events fulfilled, then they would always be in this position of learning throughout eternity, and their knowledge would never be complete.<sup>124</sup>

It does seem that there is nothing in the context of I Corinthians which makes it necessary "to postulate a corporate event."<sup>125</sup> And if τὸ τέλειον occurs at the second coming of Christ, it will be necessary to embrace a

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<sup>123</sup>Fee, 646.

<sup>124</sup>Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts*, 342-43.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 340.

postmillennial eschatology.<sup>126</sup> According to premillennial eschatology, spiritual gifts or their equivalents will not cease at the second coming of Christ; they will indeed begin to have their fullest expression at that time. This hermeneutic sees the promise of Joel 2:28 as being completely fulfilled "after Israel's future repentance and restoration . . . in connection with the second advent of Christ. . . ."<sup>127</sup> The pouring out of God's Holy Spirit upon Israel will cause them to "prophecy," "dream dreams," and "see visions." On the Day of Pentecost, Peter saw the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which resulted in believers speaking with tongues, as being at least a partial fulfillment of this prophecy (Acts 2:16-21). The pouring out of the Holy Spirit is indicative of the establishment of the New Covenant with Israel (Isaiah 32:15; 44:3; Ezekiel 36:25-27; 39:29), and this will occur in conjunction with the second coming (Zechariah 12:10; Romans 11:26-27). The point is that redeemed Israel will enjoy the fullness of the Holy Spirit, accompanied by prophecies, dreams, and visions, after the Second Coming. If these things are "in part" as they exist in the church, and if the second coming of Christ is intended to terminate them, it seems curious at best that

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<sup>126</sup>The present writer embraces a dispensational, pre-tribulational, pre-millennial hermeneutic, but to defend it is outside the scope of this thesis.

<sup>127</sup>C. C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible*, King James Version (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 1262.

they will then be recovered by Israel although the Messiah is personally present.

Those who see τὸ τέλειον as love, but who think this means that believers will no longer desire spiritual gifts when they come to the fullness of love, miss the point of the passage. Paul's encouragement to the Corinthians to "desire eagerly the greater gifts" (12:31) and to "pursue love, but eagerly desire spiritual gifts" (14:1) cannot be reconciled with the idea that love replaces gifts. Spiritual gifts are to be pursued in an atmosphere of love.

Tate's view that τὸ τέλειον is "a state of spiritual maturity or completeness marked by *agape*" is not wide of the mark, but he continues to see the spiritual gifts as inherently incomplete.<sup>128</sup> Of course they are incomplete as compared to the fullness of knowledge possessed by God and no doubt as compared to knowledge that even believers will one day possess, but they should not be incomplete as to *their intended purpose*. Any incompleteness which does exist in the exercise of spiritual gifts, as related to what they should ideally be, is removed when they are exercised in love.

No view yet proposed as to the identity of τὸ τέλειον is without its challenges. But the proposal set forth in this thesis is at least no more encumbered by difficulties than other widely held views. Perhaps the examination of this

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<sup>128</sup>Tate, "Christian Childishness," 14-15.

analysis by others can lead to fresh dialogue and greater consensus.

#### APPENDIX

##### CHIASMUS: I CORINTHIANS 12:31-14:1

The following draws heavily on Lund's structure of the chiasmus in I Corinthians 12:31-14:1, but with the present writer's emendations.<sup>129</sup> Lund sees a new paragraph in 13:8a, and he views 13:13 as answering to 13:8. The structure presented here differs on both counts.

**A** and **A'** correspond precisely. If μένει is viewed as transitive with an implied object, **B'** complements **B** by describing the characteristics of the more excellent way. **C** and **C'** are seen in this construction as both describing the limitations of spiritual gifts apart from love. **C'** differs from **C** only in that it begins to hold out the hope of the removal of these limitations when the spiritual gifts are exercised in love. This hope is seen as gradually increasing throughout **C'** until it enjoys full expression in **B'**. **D** and **D'** both describe positive characteristics of love, while the

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<sup>129</sup>Nils W. Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament*, 175-76.

central point in the chiasmus, **E**, describes love's characteristics in essentially negative terms.

- A** But earnestly desire the best gifts 12:31a
- B** And yet I show you a more excellent way 12:31b
- C** Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels 13:1
- But have not love  
I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal
- And though I have the gift of prophecy 13:2
- all mysteries  
/ and  
\  
all knowledge
- And though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains
- But have not love  
I am nothing
- And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor 13:3  
And though I give my body to be burned
- But have not love  
It profits me nothing
- D** Love 13:4  
Suffers long  
(is) kind  
Love (does not)
- E** Envy 13:5  
Parade itself

(become) puffed up  
 behave rudely  
 seek its own  
 (become) provoked  
 think evil  
 rejoice in iniquity  
 but rejoices in the truth

13:6

(Love)

**D'** Bears all things  
 Believes all things  
 Hopes all things  
 Endures all things  
 Never fails

13:7  
 13:8a

**C'** But whether there are prophecies, they will fail  
 Whether there are tongues, they will cease  
 Whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away

13:8b

For we know in part  
 And we prophesy in part  
 But when that which is perfect has come  
 Then that which is in part will be done away

13:9  
 13:10

When I was a child  
 I spoke as a child  
 I understood as a child  
 I thought as a child  
 But when I became a man, I put away  
 childish things

13:11

For now we see in a mirror, dimly  
 But then face to face  
 Now I know in part  
 But then shall I know just as I  
 am known

13:12

**B'** And now faith, hope, and love await [you],  
 these three; and the greatest of these is love.  
 Follow after love,

13:31  
 14:1a

**A'** And desire spiritual gifts

## GENERAL OUTLINE

<b>A</b>	Exhortation to desire spiritual gifts	12:31a
<b>B</b>	Exhortation to be motivated by love in the exercise of spiritual gifts	12:31b
<b>C</b>	Spiritual gifts are incomplete without the motivation of love	13:1-3
	<b>D,E,D'</b> Love is complete	13:4-8a
<b>C'</b>	Spiritual gifts are complete only when love is the motivation	13:8b-12
<b>B'</b>	Exhortation to be motivated by love in the exercise of spiritual gifts	13:31-14:1a
<b>A'</b>	Exhortation to desire spiritual gifts	14:1b

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