

Contextual situation: Corinth was very gifted, blessed with greatness in teaching, prophecy, languages, and knowledge. Because they had such an exemplary extravagance of such gifts, they reasoned that they now lived in the fullness of the presence of God. They felt they had arrived in the heavenly age because the gifts, to them, implied the full presence of Jesus. This was particularly true of the gift of tongues, which they perceived to be a heavenly language which proved final and ultimate realization of the fullness of the last things promised by Christ Jesus.

Therefore, Paul is going to commend the gifts, but condemn the presumption of fullness. He places the gifts where they belong, as things only necessary for immaturity, not maturity, for weakness, not for fullness. The gifts are needed because of the incompleteness of the age, not the completion of the age. In other words, there are often helps which children need because they are children, which they will not need when they are mature and complete in adulthood. The gifts are like these helps. Necessary for childhood, but unnecessary when the fullness of maturity arrives.

But love? Love is for every age, and it remains for the child and for the adult, and for every age in between. Thus, spiritually, it is love which is for the fullness of the time and fit for eternity. The power gifts will be unnecessary when we see Christ face to face, for we will know Him and will not need to be taught. But love, love will abound more and more when we see Him face to face.

1. Spiritual Gifts of Knowledge Will Pass Away

a. Contrasting particle, $\delta\epsilon$ - "but"

- i. the contrast between the never-failing, always enduring love and the gifts are emphasized
- ii. While each has value for the Christian, there is a difference in value, particularly in which is according to the *eschaton*, the “last” things, the eternal things, the “final” things which will be raised up by Christ at His return (New Heavens and New Earth).

b. The gifts will come to end

- i. whether Prophecies - emphatic position
 1. "they will be brought to an end"
 - a. future passive form
 - b. "to be made ineffective"
- ii. whether Tongues - again emphatic
 1. "they will cease"
 - a. future middle form
 - b. "to cause to stop"
- iii. whether Knowledge - again emphatic
 1. "it will be brought to an end"
 - a. future passive
 - b. "to be made ineffective"

c. These three words: prophecies, tongues, knowledge are three spiritual gifts which the Corinthian church valued as evidences of their perfect arrival, their “end” (telos)

- i. They are gifts of understanding and communicating the truth of God
 1. Prophecies – proclaiming the words/message of God
 2. Tongues – speaking God’s Words in other languages
 3. Knowledge – preaching/exhortation/teaching the Word of God
- ii. Yet, Paul points out that these gifts will one day “come to an end”
 1. Verb connected to “prophecies” and “knowledge” is “καταργεω” = to bring something to its end, completion, no longer usable or needed because it has finished its purpose
 2. Verb connected to “tongues” is the word which means to stop, or to cease
 - a. Some have used this verse to imply that the gift of tongues ceased after Paul, but before our time (at the completion of the canon, or maturing of the Church, etc.), but I find this to be lacking due to the contextual referent of “face to face”

- a. Righteousness, Holiness, Mutuality for which we were made, etc.
 - vi. "The 'out of a part' will be brought to an end (same word as above)"
 - 1. When the "completion" or "perfect" comes, then we won't need the things pertaining to the partial
 - a. Only when the perfect comes, when God comes down to dwell with His people, having eradicated the very presence of sin and its curse, will there be no more tears, no more death, or mourning, or crying, or pain, *for the former things have passed away.* (Rev 21:3-5)
 - 2. This is because they exist because of what is lacking, what is portioned
 - c. All these things will be surpassed by completion (*telos*) of our glorification (Rom 8:30), when Jesus makes all things new (Rev 21:5) and the presence of sin and its consequential separation from God is abolished by seeing the face of Jesus (1 John 3:1-3), and we are changed to be like Him.
 - i. In a sense, the spiritual gifts are *tools* which serve the greater goal, the building of the building, rather than the end in themselves
 - 1. Thus, when the building is built the trowel and square are no longer necessary
 - 2. When the harvest is brought in the plow and sickle are no longer needed
 - 3. When the child is fully mature, the sippy-cup is retired
 - 4. All of these "are brought to an end" because their usefulness is over and their goals have been attained
 - ii. When we see Him face to face, prophecy will be unnecessary, for we will all know Him and hear His Word
 - 1. Separation of the Garden sin partially reversed now (by gift of prophecy)
 - 2. Separation of the Garden sin completely reversed then (by glorification)
 - iii. When we see Him face to face, tongues will be unnecessary, for we will all speak one language in hearing and understanding
 - 1. Babel partially reversed now (by gift of tongues)
 - 2. Babel completely reversed then (by glorification)
 - iv. When we see Him face to face, teaching (knowledge) will be unnecessary, for we will all know Him fully
 - 1. Brokenness of foolishness and misunderstanding partially reversed now (by gift of teaching/knowledge)
 - 2. Brokenness of foolishness and misunderstanding of Truth completely reversed then (by glorification, knowledge of God)
3. The Spiritual Gifts are Means of Growth, but Not Maturity Itself
 - a. The "partial" present time is likened to childhood
 - i. "When I was existing as" (all imperfect verbs, indicating an ongoing existence of living as a child)
 - 1. The "child" comparison here is that of a small child, and infant/toddler
 - a. "I was speaking as a child" (*imptf*)
 - b. "I was thinking as a child" (*imptf*)
 - c. "I was reckoning as a child" (*imptf*)
 - 2. Each of these aspects of childhood existence and conceptualization are related to the spiritual gifts listed above
 - a. Tongues – speaking
 - b. Prophecy – thinking
 - c. Knowledge – reckoning (evaluating)
 - b. The "completion" (*telos*), coming age of glory, is likened to adulthood
 - i. "Since" (same word as 'when') "I have become a man" (*pft*) (compared to 'completion', *telos*)
 - 1. The verb tense changes to perfect, indicating a finalized position, an arrival which has come and which will remain
 - 2. In this way, the analogy should not be read backwards, but forwards, towards the main point: when Jesus returns, we will have arrived and will no longer be "partial", but will be complete

- ii. "I have brought to an end" (same word as above)
 - 1. "the things of the child"
 - 2. The childish babbling, incomplete knowledge, partial prophetic revelation, etc.
- c. The concept is that of growing out of lower stage of knowledge, speaking, and language into a deeper, fuller, truer maturity of these things
 - i. The childish gibberish cannot be compared to the speech of adulthood in its vocabulary, its syntax, its precision, its ability
 - 1. EXAMPLE: Charlotte's babbling at 1 year old recording
 - ii. The childish knowledge cannot be compared to the knowledge of adulthood in its comprehensiveness, its scope, its depth, its complexity
 - 1. A toddler's knowledge is very limited, and what he thinks he knows, he doesn't really know or fathom at all
 - 2. An electrical outlet is a keyhole; a coat hanging in the closet at night is a monster; preschool questionnaire's about a child's mother
 - iii. The childish valuation cannot be compared to the valuation of wisdom, of reality, of severity
 - 1. Children love weird things (scraps of lint, pieces of bottle caps, etc.)
 - 2. EXAMPLE: Grace and her "home"

4. Glory is to See Christ Jesus Face to Face

- a. Now we see "by means of a mirror"
 - i. Preposition is one of *means*, "we see by means of a reflection, not the real substance"
 - ii. Allusion to Numbers 12:8
 - 1. "I will speak to him mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD..."
 - 2. The Hebrew term for "clearly" (*mireh*) is amazingly close to the Hebrew term for "vision" (*mareh*) used in Number 12:6, whereby the differentiation between Moses and other prophets is being made: other prophets only heard from God by means of visions (mirror/vision), but Moses saw face to face.
 - a. The two words are only differentiated by pronunciation, and to which the Hebrew writing had no vowel markers to define.
 - b. In other words, "by means of a mirror" is a euphemism for "visions", as if God speaks to His prophets through visions, the shadow of the substance, but to Moses he spoke "face to face" (cf. Deut 34:10), he "saw the form" of the LORD
 - 3. Along with this is the NT word "dimly" in 1 Cor 13:12, for it actually is the word "riddle" (*αἰνιγμα*), i.e. "we now see by means of a mirror in riddle, but then face to face", which is also used in Number 12:8 referring to the clarity with which God spoke to Moses "not in riddles"
- b. Thus, it does appear that Paul had Numbers 12 and Deut 34 in mind to make such a comparison between partial knowledge, language, and prophecy and the fullness of that knowledge *in the presence of God* in the new heavens and new earth.
 - i. Think of it. On that day we will all know the LORD (Jer 31:34) as in Hebrews 8:12, where the author of Hebrews speaks very clearly of the eternity of the New Covenant as that which "brings to an end" the Old Covenant, "ready to vanish" (v13)
 - ii. This was the great hope of the ancients, to be like Moses and know God in such intimate knowledge
 - iii. This is the great hope of the Christian, for whom God sent His Son to obtain such glorious standing before Him (Rev 7:9-10), blameless and beyond reproach (Eph 5:25-27; Col 1:21-23), adopted as sons (Gal 4:5), brought near by the blood of Christ (Eph 2:13), raised to glory (John 6:40,44,54; 1 Cor 15:43), seated in the heavenlies at the right hand of God (Col 3:1-4; Eph 2:6).
 - iv. To know God fully is the end, the complete, the fullness, and all the rest is means.
- c. 1 John 3:1-3

Paul says that the gifts will one day complete their purpose, for we will know God fully, even as we are fully known. And these three things will remain on that day: faith, hope, and love. We will always depend upon God. We will always entrust our future to God. And we will always love well and be loved well, even as we are fully loved. To know God is to love God. So, why is love the greatest? Well, God does not have faith in another, does He? He does not need to entrust Himself to anyone. God does not entrust His future to another, for He is God and there is no other trustworthy for present or future. Yet, does God love? Ah, and there we see it. Theology roots us because we are rooted in God alone.

All that we do now is to be done according to love, seeking to use our gifts to build one another up in the fruit of the Spirit of God as we grow in our knowledge of Him with eyes and hearts fixed upon the hope that one day we will see His face and be complete in experience as we are by promise.