

**Is the Cessation of Tongues
Related to the Coming of That Which Is Perfect?**

William E. Arp, ThD
Professor of New Testament
Baptist Bible Seminary

Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, 2013

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1.0 Introduction

Paul tells the Corinthians that love never fails,¹ but prophecies and knowledge will pass away, and tongues will cease (1 Cor. 13:8). These will pass away and cease *when* “that which is perfect”² comes. When “that which is perfect” comes, it will replace “that which is partial.”³ This happens future to Paul writing this letter. The major interpretative problem in this paragraph (13:8-13) focuses on the identity of “that which is perfect.” Identifying “that which is perfect” may contribute to solving the dispute between the cessationists and the noncessationists concerning prophecy, knowledge, and tongues.

Some cessationist interpreters think “that which is perfect” refers to the completed NT canon. They think that spiritual gifts (at least prophecy, knowledge, and tongues) ceased when the NT canon was completed at the end of the first century.⁴ Gilbert B. Weaver writes that “the condition for the cessation of the spiritual gifts of knowledge and prophecy and tongues is the completion of the New Testament canon.”⁵ R. Bruce Compton agrees and writes that ‘the perfect’ in 13:10 refers to the completed New Testament canon and that with the closing of the

¹ Greek πίπτει which commonly means “to fall.” It is used here with the meaning “collapse,” or “suffer ruin”; Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Revised Edition, TNTC (IVP: 1987), 182. This love never folds under pressure of the most intense and sustained kind; David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, TBST (IVP: 1985), 233.

² Greek τό τέλειον.

³ τό ἐκ μέρους.

⁴ They hold that the NT canon was completed when John wrote Revelation AD 85-95 although the canon of the NT was not recognized by a church council until AD 397.

⁵ Gilbert B. Weaver, “Tongues Shall Cease,” *Grace Theological Journal* 14:1 (Winter 1973), 13.

canon miraculous gifts ceased.”⁶ Larry D. Pettegrew writes, “Interpreting ‘the completed’ as the New Testament is still the natural and logical explanation of the passage.”⁷

2.0 Purpose

The view that canon is to be identified as “that which is perfect” is not unanimous, however, even among cessationists. Richard B. Gaffin, a cessationist, thinks that the view that “that which is perfect” is the completed New Testament canon “cannot be made credible exegetically.”⁸ A non-cessationist, Gordon D. Fee thinks that the completed-canon view is an “impossible view.”⁹ Are these evaluations correct? The purpose of this paper is to suggest four areas which cessationists who hold the completed-canon view must address (or readdress) in order to consider the exegetical credibility of this view.

Those who hold the completed-canon view ignore some of these areas and disagree with the interpretation of each other in some of the areas. Therefore, addressing (or readdressing) is necessary. The four areas are 1) the *structure* of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13; 2) the *contribution* of the verb “will cease”¹⁰; 3) the *omission* of tongues in the cessation statement; and 4) the *contrast* between “the partial”¹¹ and “the perfect.”¹² The specific purpose for addressing these four areas is to see whether this passage teaches the cessation of the gift of tongues when “that which is perfect” comes. Contrariwise, the purpose of the paper is not to

⁶ R. Bruce Compton, “1 Corinthians 13:8-13 and the Cessation of Miraculous Gifts,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 9 (2004), 100.

⁷ Larry D. Pettegrew, *The New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit*, 2d edition (Kregel: 2001), 182.

⁸ Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost* (Presbyterian and Reformed: 1979), 109.

⁹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans: 1987), 645.

¹⁰ Greek παύσονται.

¹¹ Greek τὸ ἐκ μέρους.

¹² Greek τὸ τέλειον.

deal with these five issues exegetically, but rather to propose them for consideration as to *why* they contribute to the interpretation of this passage and *why* they relate to whether tongues cease when “that which is perfect”—the completed-canon comes. This paper will not present an interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, nor will it answer whether tongues cease when “that which is perfect” comes.

3.0 The Structure of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13¹³

The first area which those who hold the canon-view should address is the structure of Paul’s argument as he expressed it in the passage. This is a necessary first step. Paul wanted to explain something about prophecy, knowledge, and tongues, and he communicated his explanation in a logical argument. Consequently, interpreters must pay close attention to the way Paul builds his argument. They must observe the whole picture before looking at the parts.

3.1 The Diagram-Translation

The following diagram-translation helps to show the argument-structure of the passage. Paul’s argument is structured around main propositions which provide the main points of Paul’s argument. These propositions are modified by other clauses, phrases, and words which give content information about his argument. Also conjunctions join these main propositions to other main propositions to show the logical movement of Paul’s argument.

¹³ This passage is a continuation of Paul’s argument about the endurance of love. He has explained the necessity of love (1-3) and the nature of love (4-7). He then contrasts the permanence of love with the passing away of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge (8-13).

- I reasoned as a child;
 when I became a man,²²
 I did away with the *speaking, thinking, and reasoning* of the child.
12. FOR²³
 we see now through a mirror in a reflection,
 BUT²⁴
 then
we shall see face to face;
 I know now in part
 BUT²⁵
 then
- I will know fully
 just as²⁶ also I have been known.
13. BUT
 now²⁷
 these three—faith, hope, love abide;
 BUT
 the greatest of these is love.

Paul begins the passage with the positive proposition that love never fails. He then moves to three negative propositions which state that prophecy and knowledge will be done away with and tongues will cease. He explains that knowledge and prophesy pass away because the content of both is partial. He presents knowledge and prophesy as being closely related to each other (perhaps close enough to be perceived as a single entity).

Paul then illustrates the contrast between the partial and complete from his own life. He refers to two time periods in his life and his speaking, thinking, and reasoning during these time

²² This is a temporal subordinate clause which tells when put away his childish behavior.

²³ Greek γάρ which gives a second reason or explanation for prophecies and knowledge being done away with, and for tongues ceasing. For the view that γάρ introduces an explanation for the distinction between childhood and adulthood, see Roy E. Ciampra and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*. PNTC (Eerdmans: 2010), 658.

²⁴ Greek δέ denoting discontinuity. Paul moves from seeing now to seeing then.

²⁵ Greek δέ marking discontinuity. Paul moves from partial knowledge to full knowledge.

²⁶ Greek καθώς which introduces a subordinate comparative clause. Paul compares his knowing with him being known.

²⁷ Greek νυνί which focuses on the conclusion reached; Frederick William Danker, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (University of Chicago: 2009), 244. Paul concludes that love is permanent; gifts are not.

periods. When he was a child, he spoke, thought, and reasoned as a child. When Paul became a man, he stopped speaking, thinking, and reasoning as a child. The Corinthians must recognize that the gifts to which they attached paramount importance were the transient concerns of spiritual immaturity.²⁸

He next gives two analogies which explain why “the partial” needs to be replaced by “the perfect.” These analogies bring out sharply the contrast between the partial situation in the present time and the perfect situation in the future. The Corinthians presently see dimly, but when “the perfect” comes, they will see clearly. Paul presently knows partially, but when “the perfect” comes, he will see fully.

Finally, Paul reaches his conclusion. Faith, hope, and love abide permanently in contrast to prophecy, tongues, and knowledge which will pass away. And of these three, love is the greatest.

3.2 Structural Conclusion

The completed-canon view interpretation of “that which is perfect” must first consider the structure of the passage. It must follow Paul’s argument as expressed in the passage. The interpretation should reflect Paul’s entire argument noting the main clauses and the modifying clauses and the relation of these clauses to each other. The interpretation should also reflect the function of the conjunctions in Paul’s argument.

²⁸ See F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, NCB (Marshall, Morgan and Scott: 1971), 128.

4.0 The Contribution of “Will Cease”

The second area which those who hold the completed-canon view deals with the contribution of the verb “will cease” to the interpretation. There are two issues related to “will cease,” and the interpreter who holds this view should address both of them. The two issues are Paul’s change of verb from “done away with” to “cease” and his use of middle voice.

4.1 Verb Change

At the beginning of this passage Paul writes that prophecies will be done away with,²⁹ tongues will cease,³⁰ knowledge will be done away with.³¹ Paul uses a different verb in a different voice for the ending of tongues than for prophecy and knowledge. Consequently, the second issue which the completed-canon view must address is the contribution, if any, of the verb “will cease” to the interpretation. Is Paul’s choice of a different verb for the ending of tongues significant or is it simply a stylistic change with no significance?

4.1.1 Verb Change is Significant

Some who hold the completed-canon view think the change is significant. Pettegrew writes: “The Greek for *cease* is a milder word than the Greek for *abolish* and implies a willing cessation instead of the forced cessation of *abolish* in the passive. Thus, the fact that a softer verb, not in the passive voice, was chosen by Paul for the gift of tongues places tongues in a slightly different class from prophecy and knowledge.”³² Thomas R. Edgar, although he does not hold to the completed-canon view, agrees that the change is significant. He proposes that the

²⁹ Greek καταργηθήσεται which is future passive indicative.

³⁰ Greek παύσονται which is future middle indicative.

³¹ Greek καταργηθήσεται which is future passive indicative

³² Pettegrew, *New Covenant*, 180-81.

verb “will cease” (παύσονται) “means that tongues just *stop*.” Consequently, he writes that tongues are not “replaced or superseded by a more complete aspect of tongues or by something similar.”³³

4.1.2 Verb Change Is Not Significant

Compton thinks the change in verbs is insignificant. He writes that the change in verbs is purely stylistic.³⁴ Myron J. Houghton concludes the change is “nothing more than rhetorical style.”³⁵ Weaver writes that the difference between the two verbs is sometimes exaggerated. He thinks the two verbs are synonymous³⁶ and concludes that “the essential difference between the knowledge and the prophetic gifts on the one hand and the gift of tongues on the other is sufficient basis for Paul’s using different verbs to indicate their cessation.”³⁷

4.1.3 Verb Change Conclusion

Some who hold the completed-canon view and see this passage as important to their position do not mention the verb change.³⁸ This paper proposes that those who hold the completed-canon view should address the verb change and its significance more completely since the verb change has implications for the interpretation of the passage. If the verb change

³³ Thomas R. Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts: Are They for Today?* (Loizeaux: 1983), 337.

³⁴ Compton, “1 Corinthians,” 120.

³⁵ Myron J. Houghton, “A Reexamination of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:611 (July 1996), 349-50.

³⁶ Weaver, “Tongues,” 17.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁸ Robert G. Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement* (Presbyterian and Reformed: 1976), 125-29.

There are cessationists who don’t focus on this passage to support their position. See F. David Farnell, “When Will the Gift of Prophecy Cease?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:598 (April 1993), Mark A. Snoeberger, “Tongues—Are They For Today?” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 14:0 (2009).

is significant, it *may* signal that Paul is not dealing with tongues in the remainder of the passage where he explains the cessation of prophecy and knowledge.

4.2 Voice Change

When Paul writes that tongues “will cease,” he not only uses a different verb; he uses a different voice for that verb.³⁹ He changes from “done away with” in the passive voice to “will cease” in the middle voice. Is this change in voice significant? As with the verb change, some who hold the completed-canon view think the change is significant while others think it is not.

4.2.1 Voice Change Is Not Significant

Pettegrew, who holds the completed-canon view, thinks the voice change is not significant. He writes that “because *cease* is usually deponent and translated as if it were in the active voice, this change of voice probably should not be emphasized.”⁴⁰ Weaver thinks the use of the middle voice “may not be exaggerated in importance, since extra-biblical sources record its common usage in the middle.”⁴¹ Houghton proposes that the change in voice “is nothing more than rhetorical style.”⁴² Compton thinks the change in verbs is “purely stylistic.”⁴³ Donald A. Carson, who is not a cessationist, thinks that one who sees the middle voice as significant “interprets the middle voice irresponsibly.”⁴⁴

³⁹ Greek παύσονται.

⁴⁰ Larry D. Pettegrew, *The New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit*, 2d Edition (Kregel: 2001), 180.

⁴¹ Weaver, “Tongues,” 13.

⁴² Myron J. Houghton, “A Reexamination of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:611 (July 1996), 346.

⁴³ Compton, “1 Corinthians,” 121. Deciding that the middle voice is stylistic seems to be a subjective decision.

⁴⁴ Donald A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Baker: 1987), 66.

4.2.2 Voice Change Is Significant

On the other hand, there are cessationists who do not hold the completed-canon view who think the voice change is significant. Robert L. Thomas thinks the middle form “lends itself to the thought of the gift’s passing out of existence ‘under its own power,’ as it were.”⁴⁵ Stanley D. Toussaint writes that the middle voice indicates that tongues will “in and of themselves cease” before “that which is perfect” comes.⁴⁶ Thomas R. Edgar suggests that the voice form means that tongues just *stop*.⁴⁷ Daniel B. Wallace writes that the force of *παύω* middle voice is *intransitive* and likely means that tongues “will cease of their own accord, i.e., ‘die out’ without an intervening agent.”⁴⁸ Charles R. Smith who is a cessationist who does not hold the completed-canon view writes concerning the choice of the middle voice that tongues will not be forced out of existence, nor be terminated or replaced by the arrival of “that which is perfect On the contrary . . . , they will simply *stop* or *cease* in the natural process of things.”⁴⁹

4.2.3 Meaning of Middle Voice

Is the middle voice purely rhetorical and stylistic and therefore insignificant? Is it “will cease” a deponent verb which has no significance in the passage? Or is the middle voice significant in this passage? Jonathan T. Pennington in recent studies on deponency has concluded that “most if not all verbs that are considered ‘deponent’ are in fact truly middle in

⁴⁵ Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, Revised Edition (Kregel: 1999), 78

⁴⁶ Stanley D. Toussaint, “A Symposium on the Tongues Movement Part II: First Corinthians Thirteen and the Tongues Question *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:480 (Oct. 1963),” 316.

⁴⁷ Thomas R. Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts: Are They for Today?* (Loizeaux: 1983), 337.

⁴⁸ Wallace, *Grammar*, 422-23. D. A. Carson disagrees; see *Showing the Spirit* (Baker: 1987), 66-7.

⁴⁹ Charles R. Smith, *Tongues in Biblical Perspective*, 2d edition revised (BMH: 1973), 84.

meaning.”⁵⁰ Mark Dubis writes, “The notion of deponency has, at least in some cases, effectively obscured the semantic significance of the middle voice, leading to imprecise readings of the text.”⁵¹ Bernard A. Taylor thinks that interpreters need to move away from deponency and understand the function of the three different voices, especially the middle.⁵² Interpreters should understand middle voice verbs as having their own specific function. The Greek middle voice carries the most semantic weight of the Greek voices,⁵³ and is valid for communicating a meaning on its own, and finding that meaning is essential to interpretation.⁵⁴

What then is its meaning of the middle voice? It most likely is not reflexive.⁵⁵ Pennington writes that “most grammarians realize today that reflexive is a very rare function of the middle voice in Koine Greek.”⁵⁶ Rather, as Wallace notes, the indirect middle is the most common use of the middle voice in the NT.⁵⁷ The indirect emphasizes the subject’s involvement in the action of the verb. It expresses more direct participation and specific involvement of the subject doing the action.⁵⁸ The middle voice highlights the subject-centeredness of an activity. A. T.

⁵⁰ Jonathan T. Pennington, “Deponency in Koine Greek: The Grammatical Question and the Lexicographical Dilemma,” *Trinity Journal* 24:1 (Spring 2003), 62

⁵¹ Mark Dubis, *1 Peter*, BHGNT (Baylor University: 2010), xii.

⁵² Bernard A. Taylor, “Deponency and Greek Lexicography,” in Bernard A. Taylor, John A. L. Lee, Peter R. Burton, and Richard E. Whittaker, Editors, *Biblical Language and Lexicography* (Eerdmans: 2004), 174.

⁵³ Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2d Edition (JSOT: 1994), 67.

⁵⁴ Neva F. Miller, Appendix 2: “A Theory of Deponent Verbs,” in Barbara Friberg, Timothy Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, Editors, *analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Baker: 2000), 426.

⁵⁵ This use of the middle is sometimes called the direct middle in which the subject acts on himself. See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Beyond The Basics* (Zondervan: 1996), 416.

⁵⁶ Jonathan T. Pennington, “Setting Aside ‘Deponency’: Rediscovering the Greek Middle Voice in New Testament Studies,” in Stanley E. Porter and Matthew Brook O’Donnell, Editors, *The Linguist as Pedagogue the* (Sheffield Phoenix: 2009), 192, Wallace, “Grammar,” 416. This means that the view that the middle voice means that tongues “will in and of themselves cease” (Toussaint, “Symposium”, 316. Porter writes. “if one wants to argue the case that ‘tongues’ have ceased on their own (reflexive middle sense)at a particular point, it will have to be made apart from reliance on the middle voice here”; *Idioms*, 69.

⁵⁷ Wallace, *Grammar*, 419.

⁵⁸ Porter, *Idioms*, 67.

Robertson wrote that the middle voice “calls special attention to the subject.”⁵⁹ It indicates the subject of a verb is the focus of the verb’s action or state. The middle voice draws attention to the *subject* rather than the situation. Taylor summarizes, “The middle voice needs to be understood in its own status and function as indicating that the subject of a verb is the focus of the verb’s action or state.”⁶⁰ The middle simply focuses on the fact the *tongues* “will cease.” The middle voice does not tell anything about tongues ceasing.

4.2.4 Voice Conclusion

Wallace writes “The middle voice in this text, then, must be wrestled with if one is going to come to any conclusions about when tongues will cease.”⁶¹ Porter adds, “If anyone wants to argue the case that “tongues” have ceased on their own (reflexive middle sense) at a particular point, it will have to be made apart from reliance upon the use of the middle voice here.”⁶² Consequently, because of recent conclusions regarding deponency and middle voice, this paper proposes that those who hold the completed-canon view should address the meaning and significance of Paul’s use of middle voice for the verb “will cease” in this passage. The interpreter needs to consider whether Paul’s *use* of the middle voice is simply stylistic and therefore insignificant on the one hand. On the other hand, the interpreter might conclude that Paul’s use middle voice here is saying something about tongues ceasing and therefore significant. If the middle voice is significant, is it indicating only that as for tongues they “will cease,” or is saying something more about them ceasing?

⁵⁹ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the light of Historical Research*, 4th edition (Hodder & Stoughton: 1923), 804.

⁶⁰ Taylor, “Deponency,” 174, Carl W. Conrad, “New Observations on Voice in the Ancient Greek Verb. November 19, 2002,” Online: <http://artsci.wustl.edu/~cwconrad/docs/NewObsAncVc.pdf>.

⁶¹ Wallace, *Grammar*, 422.

⁶² Porter, *Idioms*, 68-9.

5.0 The Omission of Tongues

The third area which those who hold the completed-canon view should address is the omission of “tongues” in Paul’s cessation statement. Paul has written that prophecy and knowledge will be done away with and that tongues will cease. He next tells them that knowledge and prophecy will be done away with because they provide only partial revelation. For this reason when “that which is perfect” comes, it will replace “that which is partial.” He specifies that prophecy and knowledge will be done away with. However, in focusing on prophecy and knowledge, he does not say specifically that tongues will cease. Is this omission meaningful?

5.1 Omission is Insignificant

A number of cessationists who hold the completed-canon view do not think that omission of tongues from the cessation statement is significant.⁶³ Houghton thinks that Paul’s mention of prophecy and knowledge and not tongues is not particularly meaningful.⁶⁴ He quotes with approval Fee, who writes that the choice of prophecy and knowledge here does not “mean” anything.⁶⁵ Weaver sees no problem with the omission of “tongues.” He offers an explanation for their omission which allows them to be included in the cessation statement with prophecy and knowledge.⁶⁶ Compton thinks that Paul simply omits a reference to tongues

⁶³ Gromacki, *Tongues Movement*, 125-29, does not mention the omission of tongues.

⁶⁴ Houghton, “Reexamination,” 350.

⁶⁵ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 644.

⁶⁶ Weaver, “Tongues,” 21. He suggests that tongues were omitted because of the nature of the gift of tongues in contrast to prophecy and knowledge. He thinks “tongues are not so obviously a revelation-in-part” as prophecy and knowledge.

because it is unnecessary. He assumes that Paul's explanation regarding the replacing of "the partial" includes all three gifts.⁶⁷

5.2 Omission is Significant

Even though some cessationists who hold the completed-canon view do not think the omission of "tongues" is significant, other cessationists do think it is significant. Thomas thinks that the omission of "tongues" makes its disappearance different from prophecy and knowledge.⁶⁸ Toussaint writes that "it is more than mere circumstance that tongues are not mentioned." The omission implies that tongues will not be in existence to be done away with when "that which is perfect" comes.⁶⁹ Edgar argues that the omission of "tongues" puts them in a class by themselves, and that consequently tongues are not touched by the arrival of "perfection." He concludes that the replacement by "that which is perfect" refers only to knowledge and prophecy.⁷⁰

5.3 Omission of Tongues Conclusion

Since "tongues" is an interesting (and perhaps important) omission from Paul's cessation statement, this paper proposes that those who hold the completed-canon view should address its omission. Interpreters should consider whether the omission of tongues is stylistic and rhetorical and therefore insignificant. On the other hand, interpreters should ponder whether the omission is significant since it *may* affect whether tongues cease when "that which is perfect" comes.

⁶⁷ Compton, "1 Corinthians," 121-22.

⁶⁸ Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, Revised Edition (Kregel: 1999), 78.

⁶⁹ Toussaint, "Symposium," 316. Toussaint thinks "that which is perfect" is the rapture.

⁷⁰ Edgar, *Gifts*, 337.

6.0 The Contrast between “The Perfect” and “The Partial”

The fourth area which those holding the completed-canon view should address is the contrast between “that which is perfect” and “that which is partial.” What is Paul contrasting? Since Paul presents “that which is perfect” as the opposite or antithesis of “that which is partial,” both must belong to the same realm or have the same force.⁷¹ Douglas Judisch writes the true identity of the “complete thing” must come from the “contrast between it and ‘the piecemeal thing.’”⁷² Since “that which is partial” describes prophecy and knowledge (at the least) which are revelatory, the contrast deals with revelation. But what is it about revelation that he is contrasting? Is the contrast qualitative or quantitative? Is Paul contrasting the content of revelation or the communication of revelation? To put it another way, is he contrasting the message which is revealed or the mode by which that message is revealed?⁷³ Does “that which is partial” refer to immature or imperfect knowledge (qualitative) or to incomplete modes of revelation (quantitative)?

6.1 Quantitative Contrast

Those who hold to the completed-canon view think that Paul’s contrast is quantitative. “That which is partial” refers to partial or incomplete revelation which came from prophecy and knowledge. Compton writes that these gifts “give only a portion of the revelation God has intended for the church.”⁷⁴ They produce at best partial information. Weaver states that “in part” which modifies both “we know” and “we prophecy” (13:9) refers to “the transmission of

⁷¹ Compton, “1 Corinthians,” 123.

⁷² Douglas Judisch, *An Evaluation of Claims to the Charismatic Gifts* (Baker: 1978), 48.

⁷³ For a helpful discussion on the distinction between qualitative and quantitative see Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost* (Presbyterian and Reformed: 1979), 110 and Compton, “1 Corinthians,” 122.

⁷⁴ Compton, “1 Corinthians,” 99.

divine truth by revelation.”⁷⁵ Compton writes that “the expression ‘in part’ simply refers to the revelation communicated by these gifts is partial or piecemeal.”⁷⁶ Prophecy and knowledge are gifts which communicate partial revelation.⁷⁷

Those who hold the completed-canon view also think that “that which is perfect” logically must belong to the same realm as “that which is partial.” Consequently, they both refer to the transmission of revelation. Therefore, “that which is perfect,” refers to complete or completed revelation. It represents the full or complete revelation God intends for the church. Judisch writes that “that which is perfect” is ‘the complete revelation of God to man through the medium of the prophetic gifts.’⁷⁸ Compton says that “‘the perfect’ points to completed revelation God has intended for the church and has preserved in the New Testament.”⁷⁹ Pettigrew concludes strongly that interpreting “that which is perfect” as the New Testament is still the most natural and logical explanation of the passage,⁸⁰ Thus, the proponents of the completed-canon view think that when the complete revelation, the NT (“that which is perfect”), comes, prophecy, knowledge (“that which is partial”), and tongues, which communicate incomplete revelation, will pass away because they are no longer needed.

6.2 Qualitative Contrast

However, there are cessationists who do not hold the completed-canon view who think that the contrast between “that which is partial” and “that which is perfect” is *qualitative*. Paul is not contrasting *modes* of revelation, but the *message* of revelation. “Partial” and “perfect”

⁷⁵ Weaver, “Tongues,” 20.

⁷⁶ Compton, “1 Corinthians,” 124.

⁷⁷ Houghton, “Reexamination,” 351.

⁷⁸ Judisch, *Evaluation*, 48.

⁷⁹ Compton, “1 Corinthians,” 124.

⁸⁰ Pettigrew, *New Covenant*, 182.

refer to revelation; but to the *character* of it and not the *communicating* of it. Paul is talking about *imperfect*, not *incomplete* revelation.

Gaffin writes that the present (at Paul's time) knowledge provided by the revelatory gifts is "fragmentary and opaque."⁸¹ Toussaint writes that prophecy and knowledge refer to the content of prophecy and knowledge rather than the act of prophesying and speaking knowledge.⁸² He thinks that "knowledge" in verse 8 refers to "that which is known or the knowledge itself."⁸³ Edgar also understands "that which is partial" and "that which is perfect" to refer to the content of the prophecies and knowledge and not to the gifts of prophecy and knowledge. He thinks the prophecies (plural) are individual prophecies which are the result of exercising the gift of prophecy (singular). Likewise, the knowledge is the result of "knowing in part" which would include the results of the gift.⁸⁴ Gaffin, who is a cessationist but does not hold the completed-canon view, suggests that Paul's contrast is between present (at the time of writing) knowledge which is fragmentary and opaque, and future knowledge which is consummate, clear, and direct. He thinks that Paul gives the discussion a new turn in this passage "in which the dominating theme is knowledge."⁸⁵

6.3 Contrast Conclusion

Since the contrast between "that which is partial" and "that which is perfect" may be quantitative or qualitative, those who hold the completed-canon view should address this problem in their interpretation of this passage. Whether the terms refer to the modes of

⁸¹ Gaffin, *Perspectives*, 110.

⁸² Toussaint, "Symposium," 314.

⁸³ Ibid. It should be noted that the Greek text does not contain a word for "gift."

⁸⁴ Edgar, *Gifts*, 339.

⁸⁵ Gaffin, *Perspectives*, 110.

revelation or to the message communicated by the revelation *may* affect the interpretation of the passage. If the contrast is qualitative, Paul is not writing about gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues ceasing, but the content of these gifts which would mean he is not referring to the cessation of the gift of tongues.

7.0 Conclusion

Cessationists who hold the completed-canon view believe that Paul is explaining the cessation of the gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues to the Corinthians in this passage (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). These gifts will come to an end because they provide partial revelation. They will end when “that which is perfect” comes. Those who hold this view think “that which is perfect” is the completed NT canon.

Because there are certain important interpretative points which some cessationists who hold the completed-canon view neglect in their interpretation and other points where they differ among themselves and with other cessationists, this paper suggests four areas which these cessationists should address or consider as they interpret this passage and consider whether Paul is addressing the cessation of tongues.

They should observe the structure of the passage to see what Paul’s argument contributes to the interpretation. They should also consider whether Paul’s verb change to “cease” and voice choice of middle affect the meaning of the passage. Next, those who hold the completed-canon view should consider whether the omission of “tongues” in the cessation pronouncement is significant in the passage. Finally, they should address the nature of the contrast between “the partial” and “the perfect” to see if or how it affects Paul’s explanation

concerning the cessation of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues. Addressing these four areas should contribute much help to understanding what Paul is teaching about the cessation of prophecy, knowledge, and especially tongues in this passage.