

PAUL'S ESCHATOLOGY IN 1 CORINTHIANS 13.12:
KNOWING FACE TO FACE (THEN) VERSUS THROUGH ENIGMA (NOW)¹

Paul's comments about *agape* in 1 Corinthians 13 relate to his discussion about spiritual gifts in chapters 12 through 14.² In light of the misuse of gifts such as speaking in tongues by the Corinthians, the apostle wants to press upon them what is most important overall. To do this, he uses eschatological reasoning based on an early Christian dichotomy.³ While Paul does not use "the coming age" or "the last days" in this passage, his "then" versus "now" antithesis in verse 12 certainly implies this temporal versus eternal distinction.⁴ And it is a distinction that qualifies, by way of a hierarchy of usefulness or value, the various lofty, esoteric, or spiritual means of communication and understanding most highly esteemed by the believers at Corinth—prophecies, tongues, and knowledge (13.8).⁵ These gifts, while helpful for building up the body of Christ in

¹Unless otherwise noted, scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

²Harvey (1998), 171, suggests the following ABA structure for 1 Corinthians 13. See also Witherington (1995), 270, quoting J. Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (1925), 311.

A Comparison of love with the gifts—love gives them value (verses 1-3)

B The characteristics of love—love stands the test of time (verses 4-7)

A' Comparison of love with the gifts—love abides while the gifts cease (verses 8-13)

³See Hoekema (1979), 13-22, 68-75, on "the nature of New Testament eschatology" and "the tension between the already and the not yet." Compare Lincoln (1981), 33ff., "1 Corinthians and Heavenly Existence."

⁴For Paul, according to Ridderbos (1975), 52, "the 'at present' or 'now' indicates the continuance of the mode of existence defined by the world, over against the 'then' or 'once' of the perfection still to be expected (1 Corinthians 13.10, 12, *et al.*). For other excellent statements on 1 Corinthians 13.12 in Paul's thought, see Ridderbos (1975), 249, 294, 551, 562; Beker (1980), 149, 179, 234; Knowles (2008), 104, 129, 137, 197.

⁵Dunn (1990), 193, says, "1 Corinthians 13.1-13 is obviously directed against a kind of enthusiasm, where zeal for the more spectacular charismata, particularly prophecy, glossolalia, and knowledge, had provoked jealousy, arrogance, irritability, and kindred sins. Love had been the loser, and love provides the test (13.4-7). No matter how outstanding the gifts exercised, if they produced a loveless character, Paul counts them of no value whatsoever."

the here and now, are not preeminent or the greatest expressions of God's grace.⁶ This is because, according to the apostle, they "will pass away" or "will cease." Paul, therefore, wants his brothers and sisters to follow the "more excellent way" based on *agape*. Because of the eschatological reality of their new life in Christ (see 1.7-8), less prominent gifts will be replaced by the greater glory and perfection that will be revealed at the coming of the Lord Jesus.⁷

Now, Paul asserts, we perceive things in this life as if we were looking in a mirror.⁸ It is a perception founded on the empirical senses. And it is an enigma, a puzzle, a reflection.⁹ It

⁶Meeks (1983), 123, correctly observes, "The value of the spiritual gifts is thus strictly derived from their usefulness in solidifying and 'building' the group. 'Building' is understood as occurring through rational means. The highest of all gifts is accordingly other-regarding love (chapter 13)."

⁷See the appropriate comments by Thompson (2006), 133-134, on Paul's emphasis about the importance of *agape* to *oikodome* ("building up") in the body of Christ. He says, "The description of the permanence of love in 13.8-13 maintains the eschatological horizon that Paul first introduced in 1.7-8. At the end of God's grand narrative in which the Corinthians now participate, that is, the day of Christ, only love remains. The community that shares God's narrative will not emphasize gifts that are ultimately transitory, but will devote itself to the gift that remains. As in 3.10-17, Paul emphasizes the certainty of the end, when the transitory will be distinguished from the permanent. He challenges the community to overcome the immaturity of self-seeking and seek the good of others. This love becomes apparent in a community that seeks the *oikodome* of the church." On 1 Corinthians 1.7-8, compare Murray (1977), 405.

⁸Compare the only other NT use of *esoptron* ("mirror") in James 1.23. Vincent (1946), Volume III, 266, writes, "The thought of imperfect seeing is emphasized by the character of the ancient mirror, which was of polished metal, and required constant polishing, so that a sponge with pounded pumice-stone was generally attached to it. Corinth was famous for the manufacture of these. . . . The mirrors were usually so small as to be carried in the hand, though there are allusions to larger ones which reflected the entire person. The figure of the mirror, illustrating the partial vision of divine things, is frequent in the rabbinical writings, applied, for instance, to Moses and the prophets."

⁹Danker (2009), 10, suggests that the Greek word *ainigma* (only here in NT; cf. in LXX, Numbers 12.8; Deuteronomy 28.37; 1 Kings 10.1; 2 Chronicles 9.1; Proverbs 1.6) derives from "*ainissomai*, 'hint at' something as in a riddle," and indicates indirect communication, so "in Paul's mirror metaphor *en ainigmati* [means] 'by reflection' or 'indirectly' in distinction from personal encounter (1 Corinthians 13.12)." See also the article on *ainigma* by Gerhard Kittel, in Kittel and Friedrich (2006), Volume 1, 178-180. For English translations, see footnote 52.

gives us a limited knowledge or a finite understanding of our world and our situation in it. Even with his considerable learning, varied expertise, and numerous gifts, Paul himself is limited. He knows this very well. In this life, he and all believers are like children in thinking, speaking, and acting (13.11).¹⁰ And this also is true of the body of Christ with its full endowment of spiritual gifts. He affirms, “For we know in part and we prophesy in part” (13.9). In other words, even the full endowment of spiritual gifts, in the church in this world, is not equivalent to the full (i.e., the complete or perfect) complement of the expression of God’s grace in the age to come. “When the perfect comes,” Paul adds, “the partial will pass away” (13.10). The spiritual gifts are temporal, and they are given only for a time while God’s work of holiness is brought to completion.¹¹ With these gifts, God helps the individual believer in his or her striving toward perfection, and he helps the community of faith in its quest for maturity. But this is for the here and now.¹² *Agape*, however, is not so constrained. In remarks about Paul’s view of the life to come, Donald Guthrie highlights this point and states:

In his great hymn of love, the apostle admits that present understanding is fogged, but that future understanding would be unclouded (1 Corinthians 13.12). There would be the removal of all hindrances to real appreciation of God. We shall know as we ourselves

¹⁰ Georg Braumann says that “Paul uses this opposition to distinguish one age (*arti*, now) from the other (*tote*, then, v. 12). Just as the man now thinks differently from the child, so his knowledge in the age to come will be transformed..” Brown (1986), Volume 1, 282. For a different understanding of Paul’s use of the *nepios* (“child”) / *aner* (“man”) contrast in verse 11, see Johnson (2009), 162.

¹¹See 1 Corinthians 1.8; cf. Philippians 1.6, 10; 2.16.

¹²Keener, *Mind* (2016), 195-196, states, “The full knowledge of God is eschatological (1 Corinthians 13.12), but believers can experience a foretaste of that knowledge in the present. We might describe this knowledge as quantitatively finite, given the finiteness of the human recipients, but qualitatively perfect (in its pure form), because it comes from the Spirit of the infinite God.” Erich Tiedtke adds, “All knowledge by faith is only an imperfect anticipation of the future knowledge, ‘face to face’ (1 Corinthians 13.12).” Brown (1986), Volume 1, 587.

are known. Since it occurs in the context of a hymn of love, Paul's statement must be meant to focus particularly on a perfect understanding of the nature of love.¹³

And according to Paul, "love never ends" (13.8).¹⁴ Therefore, Paul urges his children in the gospel to press on and strive to attain the "most excellent way" to be found in *agape*.¹⁵

One of the keys, I think, to interpreting Paul's excursus about spiritual gifts and the superiority of *agape* in this eschatological framework is his terse but consequential expression in verse 12, "but then face to face" (Greek, *tote de prosopon pros prosopon*), and its parallel, "then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (Greek, *tote de epignosomai kathos kai epegnosthen*). For the apostle, the contrast between knowing "in part" and seeing as "in a mirror dimly" now, or in the present age, is knowing "fully, even as I have been fully known" and seeing "face to face" then, or in the coming age. It would have been helpful, for some exegetes today at least, if Paul had "fleshed out" his phrase "face to face" by adding "with God," "with Christ," or additional information. But he did not, so we work with the text that we have and try to understand, in its original setting, what the apostle meant to convey to the Corinthians. Leon Morris notes, however, "But *then*, says Paul, it will be *face to face*. He does not define his *then*, nor does he say with whom we shall be *face to face*. But in neither case is there need. His

¹³Guthrie (1981), 881.

¹⁴Walther Gunther, in Brown (1986), Volume 2, 546, observes that, unlike the temporary spiritual gifts, "*agape* is a reflection of what is still to come (1 Corinthians 13.9, 12, 13)." On *agape* itself as a gift from God, but different from the rest, see Thiselton (2016), 45-46.

¹⁵Meeks (1993), 186, notes, "To a community divided by a novel kind of competition for status through possession of spiritual knowledge and wisdom and ecstatic 'gifts,' Paul, in the digression of his famous 'hymn to love,' contrasts these temporary powers with the virtue that endures . . . (1 Corinthians 13.9-12). The 'then' which is not yet, the consummation still beyond human reach, which Ernst Kasemann taught us to call the 'eschatological reservation,' has wide moral implications."

meaning is plain enough.”¹⁶ R. C. H. Lenski agrees that Paul’s meaning is inferred easily. He comments, “‘Now’ we see imperfectly, ‘then’, when we reach heaven, ‘face to face’, which we may regard as an adverbial expression modifying ‘we shall see’ [to be] understood.”¹⁷ And G. G. Findlay is more explicit about Paul’s meaning when he says, “The ‘face’ *to* which ours will be turned is *God’s*. *God* is the tacit object of verse 12b, which interprets the figure—‘Now I know (*ginosko*) . . . partially; but then I shall know-well (*epignosomai*), as also I was well-known” [cf. 8.3; Galatians 4.9].¹⁸

The expression “face to face” is used almost twenty times in the English Standard Version with the normal and literal meaning of personal, physical contact, that is, person to person.¹⁹ This meaning is highlighted in passages such as Jeremiah 32.4 where the prophet predicts that King Zedekiah would see and speak to Nebuchadnezzar, ruler of Babylon, directly or personally—“face to face and . . . eye to eye.” Compare Jeremiah 34.3, “You shall see the king of Babylon eye to eye and speak with him face to face” (see also Isaiah 52.8). This type of close, intimate contact is the clear meaning of “face to face” in references to encounters with God by the patriarch Jacob, the prophet Moses, and the people of God, the Israelites. Jacob named the place of his encounter with the Almighty, Peniel (Hebrew *penu-el* or “face of God”), and said, “‘For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered” (Genesis 32.30; cf. 33.10). In the tent of meeting, or the tabernacle, the Lord routinely spoke with his prophet Moses “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33.11; cf. Numbers 12.8; Deuteronomy

¹⁶Morris (1985), 182.

¹⁷Lenski (1961), 570.

¹⁸Findlay (1970), 901.

¹⁹See Appendix One: “Face to Face” in the Bible.

34.10), although the full glory of the Lord remained hidden from Moses and could not be revealed.²⁰ And, in his recitation of Israel's reception of the covenant statutes (i.e., the ten commandments) at Mount Horeb, Moses told the people, "The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire" (Deuteronomy 5.4; cf. Numbers 14.14; Ezekiel 20.35). "Face to face" indicates direct, as opposed to indirect, contact. It is a bodily experience by humans and, concerning the Almighty, represents an anthropomorphism or accommodation (i.e., "the process of adapting or adjusting to someone or something") to humans.²¹

Similarly in the New Testament passages, "face to face" is used of in-person encounters versus being away or apart bodily or physically.²² Perhaps with a bit of sarcasm in defense of his style of ministry against accusations by his opponents, Paul tells the Corinthians, "I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away" (2 Corinthians 10.1; cf. verse 10). To the church at Colossae, a church that Paul never visited as far as we know, he writes, "For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face" (Colossians 2.1). After a stay of only a few weeks in Thessalonica that was cut short due to violent riots (see Acts 17.1 ff.), Paul sends a letter to the

²⁰Woods (1972), 216, remarks, "To Moses God granted the fullest revelation of himself possible within the limits of human capacity." God himself provided for Moses the disclaimer, "'But . . . you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live. . . . Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen'" (Exodus 33.20-23). Harris, Archer, and Waltke (1980), Volume 2, 1782, note, "The possibility of *lir'ot panay* [i.e., see God's face] . . . is inconceivable." See Patterson (2007), "Human Images of God in the Bible."

²¹Oster (1995), 324, remarks, "While there are some dissenters, most interpreters rightly regard the phrase 'face to face' as a divine encounter (e.g., Genesis 32.30; Exodus 33.11; Numbers 14.14; Deuteronomy 5.4; 34.10; Ezekiel 20.35; cf. Judges 6.22)."

²²None of these NT occurrences, however, are precisely *prosopon pros prosopon* ("face to face") except for 1 Corinthians 13.12. See Appendix One: "Face to Face" in the Bible.

church there and says, “But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face” (1 Thessalonians 2.17; cf. 3.10). Later, when Paul is imprisoned in Caesarea, the Roman procurator Porcius Festus briefs Herod Agrippa II and his queen Julia Berenice about Paul. While the governor was in Jerusalem, the Jewish leaders presented their case against Paul and pressed the governor for a guilty verdict. But, Festus notes, “I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him” (Acts 25.16). And the apostle John in short letters to “the elect lady and her children” and “the beloved Gaius” emphasizes his preference to communicate with them in a direct, personal way—“Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete” (2 John 12; cf. 3 John 14). In light of these uses of “face to face” in the Bible, it is difficult to see Paul’s meaning in 1 Corinthians 13.12 as anything other than a direct and personal encounter of some sort.²³

In 1 Corinthians 13.12, Paul may be alluding to one of the Old Testament passages that uses the expression “face to face.” Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner argue convincingly that the apostle gleans from Numbers 12.6-8, Deuteronomy 34.10, and early rabbinic interpretation.

They write:

In 13.12 Paul alludes to Numbers 12.6-8, which contrasts Moses’ prophetic experience with that of all other prophets. Whereas other prophets receive revelation through visions and dreams (12.6; cf. Joel 2.28), Moses experiences the presence of the Lord face to face (*stoma kata stoma*), not indirectly (*ou di ainigmaton*) and sees his form (LXX: “glory”): “With him I speak face to face, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the Lord.” Paul says, “Now we see in a mirror [*di esoptrou*]

²³For *prosopon* (“face”), Danker (2009), 307, includes 1 Corinthians 13.12 in his list of NT passages that “focus on personal presence.”

indirectly [*en ainigmati*], but then face to face [*prosopon pros prosopon*]. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.²⁴

James Moffatt concurs, “But the sole point of the apostle’s illustration is to contrast indirect and direct knowledge. He is thinking of the well-known contrast in his Greek Bible between ordinary prophets, who knew the Lord merely through visions and dreams (*ainigmata*), and Moses, who was promised direct intercourse and a vision of the Lord ‘**face to face**, not in any *ainigma*’ (Numbers 12.6f.).”²⁵ F. F. Bruce likewise sees this use of “face to face” by Paul as gleaned from the experience of Moses. He writes:

Another figure pointing the contrast between present and future knowledge is the contrast between seeing a dim and distorted reflection in a metal **mirror** (Greek, *esoptron*) and seeing the direct reality. Although the figure of the **mirror** serves a different purpose here from that in 2 Corinthians 3.18, the analogy of Moses is present in both places—here by implication and there expressly. In Numbers 12.8 Yahweh says of Moses: ‘With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in dark speech, and he beholds the form of the Lord’. Some strands of rabbinical exegesis interpreted ‘the form (Hebrew, *mar’eh*) of the Lord’ as referring to a *clear* mirror in which Moses beheld him (*Leviticus Rabbah* 1.14). The LXX rendering of the phrase ‘in dark speech’ (*di’ ainigmaton*, ‘through riddles’) is similar to the phrase rendered **dimly** in our present passage (*en ainigmati*, ‘in a riddle’). The reflection in a metal mirror might be so dim or distorted that one would have to guess (Greek, *ainittesthai*) what the reality was like, **but then**, says Paul, we shall see **face to face** (cf. also the reference to Deuteronomy 34.10 to ‘Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face’).²⁶

²⁴Ciampa and Rosner (2007), 739. See full quotation in Appendix Two.

²⁵Moffatt (1930), 201; cf. Robertson and Plummer (1914), 298-299.

²⁶Bruce (1971), 128-129. Compare comments by Barrett (1968), 307-308, who notes that, in his use of “in a riddle” (*en ainigmati*), “Paul is probably dependent not so much on Hellenistic usage as on Numbers 12.8, where God says that he will speak to Moses face to face (cf. verse 12b), not obscurely (*through riddles*, *di’ ainigmaton*). But the expression would be fully comprehensible to Corinthians unfamiliar with the Greek Old Testament. . . . Paul means that in the present age all knowledge of God (all *gnosis*) is incomplete and unclear.”

The concurrence of interpreters is that “face to face” in 1 Corinthians 13.12 indicates a divine encounter between humans and God that is direct, personal, and not mediated.²⁷

This also is confirmed by Paul’s parallel phrase, “then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (Greek, *tote de epignosomai kathos kai epegnosthen*). Perhaps too much has been made by interpreters on how to translate and understand Paul’s use of *epiginosko* here.²⁸ Frederick Danker tells us that for *epiginosko* “the rendering ‘know’ fits all passages, but contextual nuances suggest a variety of resources in English: (1) of familiarity with something or someone through observation/experience or receipt of information, **know**; (2) of awareness or recognition based on previous knowledge, **know**, **recognize**; (3) with *epi*- in ascensive role, **really know**, **know well**; and (4) with focus on acquisition of knowledge, **find out**, **make acquaintance of**, **learn to know**.”²⁹ Danker places 1 Corinthians 13.12 in the third category above.³⁰ This is why the English translations render “know fully . . . fully known” (ESV, GEINT, LNT, NIV, NRSV, RNJB, TLO; cf. RSV, “understand fully . . . fully understood”; but

²⁷Compare “they will see his face” (Revelation 22.4; cf. Matthew 5.8). On the “face” of God, see Genesis 32.30; 33.10; Exodus 33.11, 20, 23; Leviticus 17.10; 20.3, 5, 6; 26.17; Numbers 6.25; 12.8; 14.14; Deuteronomy 5.4; 31.17-18; 32.20; 34.10; Judges 6.22; 2 Chronicles 6.42; 7.14; Job 1.11; 13.15, 20, 24; 33.26; 34.29; Psalms 4.6; 10.11; 11.7; 13.1; 17.15; 22.24; 24.6; 27.9; 30.7; 31.16; 34.16; 44.3, 24; 51.9; 67.1; 69.17; 80.3, 7, 16, 19; 88.14; 89.15; 102.2; 104.29; 119.135; 143.7; Isaiah 8.17; 54.8; 57.17; 59.2; 64.7; 65.3; Jeremiah 18.17; 21.10; 33.5; 44.11; Ezekiel 7.22; 14.8; 15.7; 20.35; 39.23, 29; Daniel 9.17; Hosea 7.2; Micah 3.4; Matthew 11.10; 17.2; 18.10; Mark 1.2; Luke 7.27; 9.29; 1 Corinthians 13.12; 2 Corinthians 4.6; 1 Peter 3.12; Revelation 1.16; 6.16. See too Patterson (2007), “We Will See Face to Face: God’s Face and Our Worship.”

²⁸Compare Paul’s use of *epiginosko* in Romans 1.32; 1 Corinthians 14.37; 16.18; 2 Corinthians 1.13, 14; 6.9; 13.5; Colossians 1.6; 1 Timothy 4.3.

²⁹Danker (2009), 141.

³⁰He also includes Matthew 11.27; Luke 1.4; Romans 1.32; 2 Corinthians 6.9; Colossians 1.6; 1 Timothy 4.3; and 1 Corinthians 16.18 (‘accord special recognition to’). Ibid.

KJV, NKJV, TNT, “know . . . known”).³¹ James Moulton and George Milligan argue, on the basis of the evidence of the nonliterary Greek papyri, that *epiginosko* “denotes not so much fuller or more perfect knowing, as knowing arrived at by the attention being directed to (*epi*) a particular person or object.”³² Since God is the object of the knowing, however, this point seems moot. Paul’s basic meaning is clear enough. As David Garland says:

Being known by God is far more important than our infinitesimal knowledge of God in this world. . . . At the consummation, our fragmentary knowledge will be replaced. Our notions, illusions, and misconceptions about ourselves, the world, and God will be dispelled and clarified. Paul’s point is that we will know God fully only after the parousia. In the meantime, all our knowledge is indirect and incomplete.³³

Paul is affirming that when we come face to face with our Creator, we will know much better then than we know now (cf. 1 John 3.1-3).³⁴ That God knows us better than we know ourselves

³¹NET translates 1 Corinthians 13.12b freely, “My understanding is incomplete now, but one day I will understand everything, just as everything about me has been fully understood.” Compare REB, “My knowledge now is partial; then it will be whole, like God’s knowledge of me.”

³²Moulton and Milligan (1980), 236. See too the comments by Morris (1985), 184.

³³Garland (2003), 625.

³⁴Bornkamm (1969), 185, believes this final knowledge derives from God’s election of believers. He says, “In what does the perfection of this final knowledge exist? Paul surprisingly does not follow ‘now I know in part’ with ‘then I shall know perfectly,’ but rather ‘then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.’ The consummation consists in the fact that the cleft between knowing and being known by God is abolished. ‘Even as I am fully known’: the divine gracious will of election reaches into the eternal pre-temporality before my knowledge begins, before I am born. Thus ‘I shall know fully’: the certain expectation reaches into the coming eternity when the transient things are put away. We must answer with Romans 8.29: ‘For those whom he (God) foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son’ (cf. also Philippians 3.21; 2 Corinthians 3.18). Thus the certainty of hope is based on the certainty of election in which the believers are destined for resurrection and glory.”

is a staple in Paul's thinking,³⁵ something he inherited from his Jewish background as well as from the teachings of Jesus.³⁶

By this direct encounter with God, Paul anticipates a more complete knowledge in the coming age, more complete because it is unveiled by God himself for us, that is, he reveals himself to us in a way that perhaps has been impossible before (e.g., in our sinful and temporal dying bodies versus in our glorified and eternal resurrected bodies).³⁷ And, in the context of Paul's instructions to the Corinthians (chapters 12–14), the contrast is with the knowledge of God and of ourselves that comes through the working of spiritual gifts in this present age. This *gnosis* or understanding based on spiritual gifts can only be temporary—incomplete and partial as it is—both for the church and for believers individually.³⁸ So the “then” Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 13.12 is a time in the future, the measure of which he and none of the early

³⁵See, for example, Romans 8.26-27; 11.33; 1 Corinthians 2.11; 8.3; 2 Corinthians 5.11; 12.2-3; Galatians 4.9; 2 Timothy 2.19; cf. 1 John 3.20.

³⁶Compare 1 Chronicles 28.9; Psalm 44.21; 139.1ff.; Jeremiah 17.10; 32.19; Matthew 10.29-31; Luke 12.6-7; 16.15; Acts 15.8; Romans 11.33; Hebrews 4.12-13. See too the section on God's wisdom and knowledge in Burrows (1946), 67-68, which he begins by stating, “God's incomparable superiority to man consists not only in his power but also in his knowledge of all things and his infinite wisdom in governing the universe. The same terms used to designate human knowledge, wisdom, and the like, are applied also to God. Thus Proverbs 3.19f. speaks of Yahweh's wisdom, understanding, and knowledge as shown in creation. God's knowledge, however, far surpasses that possessed by man.”

³⁷J. I. Packer observes that “due for displacement through the changes which the *parousia* will bring are: (a) the belly and food (1 Corinthians 6.13; our present bodies will be changed), and (b) prophecies and conceptual knowledge (*gnosis*), which, being at best modes of partial and indirect apprehension, will be left behind, as a grown man abandons childish things, when we apprehend God directly by sight (1 Corinthians 13.8, 10, 11).” Brown (1986), Volume 1, 73.

³⁸Compare Paul's use of *gnosis* (“knowledge”) in 1 Corinthians 13.2, 8 with 1.5; 8.1, 7, 10, 11; 12.8; 14.6; 2 Corinthians 2.14; 4.6; 6.6; 8.7; 10.5; 11.6. See also Romans 2.20; 11.33; 15.14; Ephesians 3.19; Philippians 3.8; Colossians 2.3; 1 Timothy 6.20.

Christians were aware, but the substance of which—“face to face” and knowing “fully, even as I have been fully known”—he was certain and sure.

If Luke’s account of Paul’s Damascus road encounter with Jesus, which is told three times in Acts of Apostles (Acts 9.1-9; 22.6-11; 26.12-18; cf. 1 Corinthians 15.8-10), can be deemed credible, God’s apostle to the Gentiles certainly had a fervent expectation to see his God face to face. And his expectation was for an encounter of a different sort with the Almighty than what he experienced en route to Damascus. Unlike his knowledge of the Lord based on previous experiences of visions and revelations (which Paul himself did not understand completely; see 2 Corinthians 12.1-10) and unlike his knowledge of the Lord based on his experiences of spiritual gifts such as prophecies and tongues (see 1 Corinthians 14.18-19), Paul longed to be with his Lord and come to know him face to face. This was his hope; this was his prayer; this was the goal of his life in Christ (see Philippians 1.21-23; 3.12-14; cf. 2 Corinthians 5.1-10; 2 Timothy 4.6-8).

In light of this plain meaning of Paul’s *prosopon pros prosopon* by which he will come to a more complete knowledge of God,³⁹ it is difficult to see how anyone could read Paul and extract from 1 Corinthians 13.12 the idea that the apostle is talking about, as his main concern, the cessation of “extraordinary” spiritual gifts due to the passing of the apostles and the

³⁹This is the knowledge that God, who is *agape* (see 1 John 4.7ff.; cf. 1 Corinthians 8.3), possesses about all his creatures. See the discussion by Ernst Dieter Schmitz in Brown (1986), Volume 2, 402-403, where he says, “This being known is not the counterpart of some previous active comprehension of God by man, but rather of loving God (cf. 1 Corinthians 8.3). Full and real knowledge of God is part of the eschatological promise and expectation (1 Corinthians 13.12).” Levering (2016), 307, footnote 143, quotes Reinhard Hutter, who writes, “The Spirit and the Spirit’s works are precisely the guarantee that the knowledge of God, which we suffer by being engaged by them [i.e., by the Spirit’s works], is a knowledge neither at our disposal nor of our making, but the beginning of a final ‘clothing,’ a last ‘suffering’ that will include that knowledge of God of which the apostle Paul says: ‘Then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known’ (1 Corinthians 13.12).”

beginnings of a “canon” of New Testament writings (i.e., by way of circulation and collection among the churches).⁴⁰ According to Ralph Wilson, both the “canon” view and “maturity of the church” view of “that which is perfect” (KJV; Greek, *hotan de elthe to teleion*; 13.10)⁴¹ are post-Enlightenment readings of the text and date no earlier than the twentieth century.⁴² After his extensive study of “that which is perfect” by Christian interpreters from patristic, medieval, and modern periods, Rodney Decker concludes, “Both the canon view and the mature body view are recent interpretations that have developed out of the controversy over contemporary manifestations of the spiritual gifts. Both can be traced only to the mid or early twentieth century, though there were some antecedents to both in the nineteenth century.”⁴³ These views, at best, seem to be superimposed on and not derived from the text.⁴⁴ Yes, Paul says that prophecies, tongues, and knowledge will cease.⁴⁵ But he does not say when, except by way of

⁴⁰Hays (1997), 229, says, “It is sometimes claimed that ‘the complete’ (*to teleion*) in verse 10 refers to the completion of the New Testament canon, so that the charismatic gifts were only for the apostolic age and have now ceased to function in the church. This interpretation is simply nonsense.” Compare Fitzmeyer (2008), 498, who notes that “the perfect” while much debated can hardly be a reference “to the completion of the NT canon, as some have tried to take it; such an extraneous meaning is foreign to this context. . . . It seems, however, to express rather some sort of goal; it has undoubtedly something to do with the *eschaton* or what Paul calls ‘the Day of the Lord’ (1.8; 3.13; 5.5) or with the *telos*, ‘end’ (of the present era), as in 15.24.”

⁴¹The English translations of this phrase vary slightly: ESV, RSV, “but when the perfect comes”; GEINT, “but when comes the completion”; KJV, TNT, “but when that which is perfect is come”; NET, “but when what is perfect comes”; KNT, “when the time of fulfillment comes”; LNT, NIV, “but when completeness comes”; NKJV, “but when that which is perfect has come”; NRSV, “but when the complete comes”; REB, “when wholeness comes”; RNJB, “but once perfection comes”; TLO, “when perfection is come”.

⁴²Wilson (2022).

⁴³Decker (1994), 66.

⁴⁴See Carson (1987), 66-72.

⁴⁵See discussion by Garland (2003), 622-623.

inferring from his comments in chapter 13 that they will cease “when the perfect comes . . . then face to face . . . then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”⁴⁶

What does this eschatological reading of Paul’s “then” versus “now” have to say about the cessation versus the continuation of spiritual gifts such as prophecies, tongues, and knowledge? There is probably nothing to be taken from 1 Corinthians 13.12 about such matters, except that, according to Paul, cessation of spiritual gifts will happen. Just as with the *parousia* of the Lord,⁴⁷ the New Testament writers were certain and sure of its occurrence, but they do not set any sort of date, not even in their own lifetime, as some interpreters have presumed.⁴⁸ On this note, those who believe in the continuation of spiritual gifts during the present age have it right, according to Paul’s statements in 1 Corinthians 13. In his discussion of a noncessationist, or continuationist, reading of scripture, Craig Keener states, “Paul seems to assume that prophecy and tongues remain until we see Jesus face to face, partial knowledge being valuable until it is

⁴⁶Other uses of *teleios* (“complete, perfect”) in the NT indicate its relation to the heavenly Father (Matthew 5.48; cf. 19.21), to the will of God (Romans 12.2), to the power of God that produces maturity in believers in Christ (1 Corinthians 2.6; 14.20; Ephesians 4.13; Philippians 3.15; Colossians 1.28; 4.12; Hebrews 5.14; James 1.4; 3.2), to the “perfect tent” of Christ (Hebrews 9.11), to the gifts from the Father of lights (James 1.17), to the law of liberty that is from God (James 1.25), and to the love that comes from God (1 John 4.18). Compare uses of *teleiotes* (“completeness, perfection”) in Colossians 3.14 and Hebrews 6.1. See comments by Mare (1976), 269, and Reinier Schippers, Brown (1986), Volume 2, 61ff., who highlights the “eschatological function” and “heavy apocalyptic overtones” of *telos*, etc. in the NT.

⁴⁷For occurrences of *parousia* (“arrival, coming”) in the NT, see Matthew 24.3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Corinthians 15.23; 16.17; 2 Corinthians 7.6, 7; 10.10; Philippians 1.26; 2.12; 1 Thessalonians 2.19; 3.13; 4.15; 5.23; 2 Thessalonians 2.1, 8, 9; James 5.7, 8; 2 Peter 1.16; 3.4, 12; 1 John 2.28.

⁴⁸See Fletcher (1981). Note too that this is what Beker (1982), 96ff., 111ff., struggles with in his interpretation of the delay of the *parousia*.

supplanted by perfect knowledge as we are known (1 Corinthians 13.8-12).⁴⁹ One would be hard pressed to see it any differently based on 1 Corinthians 13 (cf. Acts 2.17-21).⁵⁰ It would be presumptuous to assert today that we know more about the cessation of spiritual gifts than what the apostle Paul did during his life. And it would be presumptuous to so limit the work of God and the Holy Spirit among his people to only a part of this present age.⁵¹

What is to be noted from the text itself, according to Paul, is that “now we see in a mirror dimly” (ESV; Greek, *blepomen gar arti di’ esoptrou en einigmati*).⁵² Of course, there are

⁴⁹Keener, *Spirit* (2016), 55. See also Green (1975), 198. Keener (2005), 109, states, “The time of the gifts’ passing to which Paul refers is when believers see God ‘face to face’ (13.12; cf. LXX Genesis 32.30; Judges 6.22) and ‘know fully’ just as God knows them (13.12; cf. 8.2-3), that is, at Christ’s return (1.7-8; 15.43-44, 50-54).” Compare the discussion of spiritual gifts and the rationale for their continuation in the church today by Allison and Kostenberger (2020), 426-434.

⁵⁰Most arguments for cessation of spiritual gifts, based on 1 Corinthians 13, focus on “that which is perfect” in verse 10 and say very little or nothing about “face to face” in verse 12.

⁵¹Compare Paul’s recognition of the limits of our finite understanding when compared with God’s wisdom and knowledge in Romans 11.33-36. See also Job 5.9; 11.7-9; 15.8; 36.22; Psalm 92.5; 139.6; Ecclesiastes 8.17; Isaiah 40.13-14, 28; Jeremiah 23.18; 1 Corinthians 2.16.

⁵²English translations of verse 12a vary: GEINT, “for we see still through a mirror indistinctly”; KJV, “for now we see through a glass darkly”; KNT, “at present, we are looking at a confused reflection in a mirror”; LNT, “for now we see by a mirror, obscurely”; NET, “for now we see in a mirror indirectly”; NIV, “for now we see only a reflection as in a mirror”; NKJV, NRSV, RSV, “for now we see in a mirror, dimly”; REB, “at present we see only puzzling reflections in a mirror”; RNJB, “for now we see in a mirror, confusedly”; TLO, “for now we see through a glass obscurely”; TNT, “now we see in a glass even in a dark speaking”. Carl Heinz Peisker, in Brown (1986), Volume 2, 746, translates *ainigma* as “indistinct, enigmatic image.”

Two translations by members of acappella Churches of Christ obscure 1 Corinthians 13.12 by omitting “face to face.” GBNT has: “At this time, we see only a blurred image in the *metal* mirror. At the time of maturity, we will see plainly—as one person looking at another’s face.” WNCV has: “Now we see as if we are looking into a dark mirror. But at that time, in the future, we shall see clearly.” Compare the lengthy rendering by CLB: “In the same way, we can see and understand only a little about God now, as if we were peering at his reflection in a poor mirror; but someday we are going to see him in his completeness, face to face. Now all that I know is hazy and blurred, but then I will see everything clearly, just as clearly as God sees into my heart right now.”

nuances of this “seeing” in the apostle’s writings, but this is a part of his eschatology. For the believer in Christ, eschatology indicates movement toward a goal (e.g., Philippians 3.14; cf. 1 Corinthians 9.24-27).⁵³ There is growth and progress,⁵⁴ but there is struggle with imperfection.⁵⁵ And there is frustration with the engima of life, with the lack of clarity and seeing things, as it were, through a reflection in an old metal or dimly lighted mirror.⁵⁶ Finally, though, in Christ

⁵³Danker (2009), 323, defines *skopos* (“goal”), used only in Philippians 3.14 in NT, as derived from the “racing imagery of having one’s eye or mind fixed on the point where one is declared a winner.”

⁵⁴See, for example, Romans 12.2; 2 Corinthians 3.18; Colossians 1.9-10; 3.10; 1 Thessalonians 3.12-13; 2 Thessalonians 1.3 (cf. 1 Peter 2.1-2; 2 Peter 1.5-8; 3.18), and note the correlation between growth in Christ and “completion” or “perfection” (from *teleios*, *teleiotes*, *teleioo*) in Ephesians 4.13-15; Philippians 1.6, 9-11; 3.12-15 (cf. Hebrews 5.12-14; 6.1; James 1.2-4).

⁵⁵From Paul, the classic passage is Romans 7.7-25.

⁵⁶It could be that both “canon” and “maturity” views of 1 Corinthians 13.8ff. suffer from a perfectionist mentality that the Corinthian believers were struggling with. Compare Robertson and Plummer (1914), 299, who aptly comment, “Our knowledge of divine things in this life cannot be direct; all comes through the distorting medium of human thought and human language, figures, types, symbols, etc. Even those who are illumined by the Spirit can give only a few rays of the truth, and those not direct, but reflected. Even the Gospel is a riddle, compared with the full light of the life to come. Here our knowledge is mediate, the result of inference and instruction; it is partial and confused; a piecemeal succession of broken lights. There it will be immediate, complete, and clear; a connected and simultaneous illumination. The imperfection of our knowledge, even of revealed truth, is not sufficiently recognized; and hence the rejection of Christianity by so many thoughtful people. Christians often claim to know more than it is possible to know. They forget how much of the Bible is symbolical.”

Colin Brown, in Brown (1986), Volume 3, 335, suggests, “The Christian view of revelation maintains that the God who spoke and acted then [i.e., in biblical times] is the same God who speaks and acts now, and that the words, actions, and symbolism of the past are media through which God speaks today in our contemporary situation. Without media of some form or other there is no revelation. In this life we do not perceive God directly but only indirectly (1 Corinthians 13.12; cf. Matthew 5.8; Exodus 33.20ff.). Thus there is a sense in which revelation involves a veiling of God in the media of revelation in all their concreteness and historicity in the selfsame act as the unveiling (cf. K. Barth, *CD* I, 1, 188). Our knowledge of God in his revelation of himself depends in part therefore on our understanding of the concrete media of revelation.”

there is the blessing of maturity to attain, the completion of a person's work in life (e.g., 2 Timothy 4.6-8), and the promise of seeing the Lord face to face and experiencing that lifting away of the fog, the solving of many riddles, and the fitting together of the pieces of the puzzle.

As Wilhelm Mundle states:

First and foremost the New Testament looks forward to the coming Lord: when Christ, the hidden life of Christians, shall appear, then they will appear with him in glory (Colossians 3.3f.). Then that knowledge which is here enjoyed only in part and which cannot lift the veil of God's hiddenness will no longer be obscure. It will no longer be a matter of seeing 'in a mirror dimly' (1 Corinthians 13.12), but will be turned into sight, face to face. To see the face of God is . . . the fulfilment of the Christian's joyful hope.⁵⁷

So just as Jesus pushed forward to complete the work that was given to him by his heavenly Father,⁵⁸ Paul likewise understands that he is pressing forward "toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3.14; cf. verse 12).⁵⁹ Until then, while we await that time of "face to face," Paul encourages the Corinthians, and he encourages each of us, to follow the way of *agape*, which is the way of God and the way of his Christ. "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Colossians 3.14). This is Paul's eschatology in 1 Corinthians 13.12.

⁵⁷Brown (1986), Volume 2, 218.

⁵⁸See Luke 13.32; John 4.34; 5.36; 17.4; 19.28, 30.

⁵⁹Paul uses *dioko* ("chase, go after, pursue") three times in this section of Philippians (3.6, 12, 14), but he intensifies the idea of forward progress toward a goal by interjecting the idea of "forgetting what lies behind" and "straining forward" (Greek, *epekteinomai*, "reach out toward, stretch forward to"; only here in NT). See Danker (2009), 99, 138.

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Gill, David H. “Through a Glass Darkly: A Note on 1 Corinthians 13.12.” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Volume 25, Number 4 (October 1963): 427-429.

Gill highlights Plutarch’s *Isis and Osiris* 76.382, which uses *ainigma* and *esoptron*, as a possible parallel to Paul’s use in 1 Corinthians 13.12. He suggests that Paul’s meaning for *ainigma*, rather than “riddle” or “something that is utterly baffling,” should be construed as “indistinct divine revelation” or “reflection of the divine.”

Guzik, David. “1 Corinthians 13–Agape Love.” *The Enduring Word Bible Commentary* (Goleta, CA), 2018. Online at: <www.enduringword.com/bible-commentary/1-corinthians-13/>. Accessed 11 June 2022.

This is a brief, well-reasoned exposition of the entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 13 that keeps *agape* in relation to the spiritual gifts as the main focus of the apostle.

Holladay, Carl. *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians*. The Living Word Commentary. Editor, Everett Ferguson. Abilene Christian University, 1984.

In comments on 1 Corinthians 13.8-13, Holladay suggests that Paul’s remarks are “allusive” and “impressionistic rather than realistic” with ample use of “metaphors and figures of speech.” He also believes that “Paul’s language here is ambiguous, perhaps intentionally so” and “attempts to lend precision and clarity to it are automatically rendered dubious, if not presumptuous” (173). Accordingly, Holladay waffles on how best to interpret *katargeo* (“pass away”), the now/then contrast in verse 12, the language of “knowing,” and *to teleion* (“the perfect”). He makes no comment at all on “face to face.”

Hollander, Harm. “Seeing God ‘In A Riddle’ or ‘Face to Face’: An Analysis of 1 Corinthians 13.12.” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, Volume 32, Number 4 (June 2010): 395-403.

Kistemaker, Simon J. *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Baker Books, 1993.

MacArthur, John F. *1 Corinthians*. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Moody Press, 1984.

MacArthur believes “the perfect” in 1 Corinthians 13.10 to be the eternal state, not the completion of Scripture, not the rapture, not the maturing church, not the second coming (364-366). He also says, “The cessation of tongues took place a short while after Paul wrote this letter, but the gifts of prophecy and knowledge have not yet been **done away**, because **the perfect** has not yet come. Like tongues and all other gifts, those two gifts are temporary, but they are less temporary than tongues” (362).

McGarvey, J. W., and Philip Y. Pendleton. *Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans*. Reprint. The Standard Bible Commentary. Standard Publishing Foundation, n.d.

McGarvey, in comments on 1 Corinthians 13.8-12, seems to be ambivalent on the contrast between “now” and “then” in the text, that is, taking the latter to refer to both the maturity of the church and the coming of Christ (131-132).

Osburn, Carroll D. “Difficult Texts in 1 Corinthians Reconsidered: ‘That Which Is Perfect’ (1 Corinthians 13.10 Revised).” Abilene Christian University Lectures 58 (2 January 1976). *Lectureship and Summit Audio Collection* 3578 (1992). Online at: <www.digitalcommons.acu.edu/sumlec_audio/3578/>. Accessed 12 June 2022.

Osburn states in this lecture that the “completed canon view is simply not a consideration. What it [i.e., ‘that which is perfect’] does not mean is a completed canon.” But he does not believe that Paul’s “face to face” is with God (i.e., on the basis that “with God” is not stated explicitly). He argues instead for a “maturation in love” view of the text.

Roberts, Robert Lee, Jr. “That Which Is Perfect—1 Corinthians 13.10.” *Restoration Quarterly* 3 (October 1959): 199-204.

Sanders, Jack T. “First Corinthians 13: Its Interpretation Since the First World War.” *Interpretation*, Volume 20 (April 1966): 159-187.

Seaford, Richard. “1 Corinthians XIII.12.” *The Journal of Theological Studies*, Volume 35, Number 1 (1984): 117-120.

Stott, John R. W. *Baptism and Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today*. Second Edition. InterVarsity, 1975.

Stott concludes his work with comments on 1 Corinthians 13 (116-117). “Although the *charismata* are all given for service, for the edification of Christ’s body, yet they must be exercised in love if they are to have their intended effect. For without love all gifts, however spectacular, are worthless (13.1-3). So love is the ‘still more excellent way’, more valuable than even the highest gifts (12.31). Yet there should be no need for us to choose between gifts and love, for in God’s purpose they belong together. True love always expresses itself in service, and not least in using the gifts bestowed on us to enable to serve. In fact, if love and truth go together, and love and gifts go together, so do love and service, since true love always expresses itself in service. To love is to serve. We are left, then, with these four aspects of Christian life forming a ring or a circle which cannot be broken—love, truth, gifts and service. For love issues in service, service uses the gifts, the highest gift is the teaching of the truth, but truth must be spoken in love. Each involves the others, and wherever you begin all four are brought into operation. Yet ‘the greatest of these is love’ (13.13).”

Swete, Henry Barclay. *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament*. Reprint. Baker Books, 1964.

In his Appendix (361ff.), see his notes on “The Gift of Prophecy,” “The Gift of Tongues,” “The Inspiration of Sacred Books.”

Thiselton, Anthony C. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. Editors, I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner. Eerdmans, 2000.

See his excellent comments about “face” in 1 Corinthians 13.12 and intimacy (1070).

Walvoord, John F. *The Holy Spirit: A Comprehensive Study of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*. Third Edition. Zondervan, 1958.

See his three chapters on “The Nature of Spiritual Gifts,” “Permanent Spiritual Gifts,” and “Temporary Spiritual Gifts” (163-188).

APPENDIX ONE: “FACE TO FACE” IN THE BIBLE⁶⁰

Genesis 32.30

“So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, ‘For I have seen God **face to face** [Hebrew, *panim ’el- panim*; LXX (32.31), *prosopon pros prosopon*], and yet my life has been delivered.’”

Exodus 33.11

“Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses **face to face** [Hebrew, *panim ’el- panim*; LXX *’enopios ’enopio*], as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.”

Numbers 12.8

“‘With him I speak **mouth to mouth** [Hebrew, *peh ’el- peh*;⁶¹ LXX, *stoma kata stoma*; NET, NIV, NKJV, NRSV, REB, RNJB, ‘face to face’], clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?’”

Numbers 14.14

“‘And they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O Lord, are in the midst of this people. For you, O Lord, are seen **face to face** [Hebrew, *’ayin be ’ayin*;⁶² LXX, *’ophthalmois kat ’ophthalmous*; JPS, ‘in plain sight’; NETS, ‘eyes by eyes’], and your cloud stands over them and you go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night.’”

Deuteronomy 5.4

“‘The Lord spoke with you **face to face** [Hebrew, *panim bepanim*; LXX, *prosopon kata prosopon*; NETS, ‘face-to-face’] at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire.’”

Deuteronomy 34.10

“And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew **face to face** [Hebrew, *panim ’el- panim*; LXX, *prosopon kata prosopon*; NETS, ‘face-to-face’].”

⁶⁰Adapted from entries for “face to face” in the ESV at “Bible Gateway” Online with Hebrew/Greek text and variant translations noted in brackets.

⁶¹See Holladay (1971), 289.

⁶²On *’ayin* (“eye”) used for the face, see Gesenius (1949), 623.

Judges 6.22

“Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the Lord. And Gideon said, ‘Alas, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the Lord **face to face** [Hebrew, *panim ’el- panim*; LXX, *prosopon pros prosopon*; NET, ‘face-to-face’].”

Proverbs 27.19

“As in water **face reflects face** [Hebrew, *happinim lappinim*; LXX, *prosopa prosopois*; JPS, KJV, RSV, ‘face answers to face’; NIV, NKJV, NRSV, RNJB, ‘water reflects the face’; NET, ‘as in water the face is reflected as a face’; REB, ‘as someone sees his face reflected in water’],⁶³ so the heart of man reflects the man.”

Isaiah 52.8⁶⁴

“The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for **eye to eye** [Hebrew, *’ayin be ’ayin*; LXX, *’ophthalmoi pros ’ophthalmous*; JTS, ‘every eye’; NET, ‘with their very own eyes’; NETS, ‘eyes shall look at eyes’; NIV, REB, RNJB, ‘with their own eyes’; NRSV, ‘in plain sight’] they see the return of the Lord to Zion.”

Jeremiah 32.4

“Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him **face to face** [Hebrew, *piw ’im- piw*; LXX (39.4), *stoma ’autou pros stoma ’autou*; KJV, ‘mouth to mouth’; NETS (39.4), ‘his mouth . . . to his mouth’] and see him eye to eye.”

Jeremiah 34.3

“You shall not escape from his hand but shall surely be captured and delivered into his hand. You shall see the king of Babylon eye to eye and speak with him **face to face** [Hebrew, *upihu ’et-pika*; LXX (41.3), *to stoma ’autou meta tou stomatos sou*; KJV, ‘mouth to mouth’; NETS omits]. And you shall go to Babylon.”

⁶³For Proverb 27.19, Delitzsch (1950), 214, translates, “As it is with water, face correspondeth to face, so also the heart of man to man.” NETS, which translates the LXX rendering, has “As faces are not similar to other faces, so neither the hearts of people.”

⁶⁴Moffatt (1930), 202, says about this verse, “Rabbis sometimes thought that the end of the present world was implied in the prophet’s prediction that the redeemed of Israel would see the Lord **face to face**, as he returned to Zion (Isaiah 52.8). It was an expression of devout longing in apocalyptic (Revelation 22.3) as well as in the mysticism of the Isis cult.”

Ezekiel 20.35

“And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you **face to face** [Hebrew, *panim 'el- panim*; LXX, *prosopon kata prosopon*; NETS, ‘face-to-face’; REB, ‘confront’].”

Acts 25.16

“I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers **face to face** [GNT, *kata prosopon*; NET, ‘face-to-face’; NIV, ‘faced’; KNT, REB, NRJB, ‘confronted’; LNT, ‘before his face’; TNT, ‘before him’] and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him.”

1 Corinthians 13.12

“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then **face to face** [GNT, *prosopon pros prosopon*]. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”

2 Corinthians 10.1

“I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when **face to face** [GNT, *kata prosopon*; GEINT, ‘according to appearance’; KJV, NKJV, ‘in presence’; NET, TLO, TNT, ‘present’; RNJB, ‘facing’] with you, but bold toward you when I am away!”

Colossians 2.1

“For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me **face to face** [GNT, *to prosopon mou 'en sarki*; GEINT, ‘the face of me in (the) flesh’; KJV, NKJV, TLO, ‘my face in the flesh’; KNT, ‘in person’; LNT, ‘in the flesh’; NIV, ‘personally’; REB, ‘set eyes on’; RSV, ‘my face’; TNT, ‘my person in the flesh’].”

1 Thessalonians 2.17

“But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you **face to face** [GNT, *to prosopon 'umon*; GEINT, ‘the face of you’; KJV, NKJV, TLO, ‘your face’; NET, ‘in person’; NIV & REB omits; TNT, ‘personally’].”

1 Thessalonians 3.10

“As we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you **face to face** [GNT, *'umon to prosopon*; GEINT, KJV, NKJV, TLO, ‘your face’; NET, ‘in person’; NIV & REB omits; TNT, ‘presently’] and supply what is lacking in your faith.”

2 John 12

“Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk **face to face** [GNT, *stoma pros stoma*; GEINT, TNT, ‘mouth to mouth’; KNT, ‘by word of mouth’; RNJB, ‘in person’], so that our joy may be complete.”

3 John 14

“I hope to see you soon, and we will talk **face to face** [GNT, *stoma pros stoma*; GEINT, TNT, ‘mouth to mouth’; KNT, ‘by word of mouth’; RNJB, ‘in person’].”

APPENDIX TWO: 1 CORINTHIANS 13.12⁶⁵

In 13.12 Paul alludes to Numbers 12.6-8, which contrasts Moses' prophetic experience with that of all other prophets. Whereas other prophets receive revelation through visions and dreams (12.6; cf. Joel 2.28), Moses experiences the presence of the Lord face to face (*stoma kata stoma*), not indirectly (*ou di ainigmaton*) and sees his form (LXX: "glory"): "With him I speak face to face, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the Lord." Paul says, "Now we see in a mirror [*di esoptrou*] indirectly [*en ainigmati*], but then face to face [*prosopon pros prosopon*]. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

According to *Leviticus Rabbah* 1.14, there was a debate regarding the difference between Moses and the other prophets based on Numbers 12.8. Both sides held that Moses, like the other prophets, saw the Lord through a mirror (reading the word for "appearance" [*mar'eh*] in Numbers 12.8 as though it meant "mirror," another meaning of the word used for "vision" [*mar'a*] in Numbers 12.7 [cf. Exodus 38.8]). Some thought that the difference was that the other prophets saw the Lord through a series of mirrors rather than just one, while others thought that Moses saw the Lord through a polished mirror while the other prophets saw him through a blurred one. . . . Paul's reference to a mirror in the context of an allusion to the same text would be a strange coincidence if he does not share some interpretive tradition with its authors.

Paul suggests that Christians now share the experience of seeing God indirectly, in a mirror (presumably analogous to his understanding of the prophets' experience), but one day will see him face to face (as did Moses). *Leviticus Rabbah* 1.14 goes on to quote Isaiah 40.5 and say that although only a few in this age were able to see God the way Moses did, in the age to come "all flesh shall see the glory of the Lord" (as Moses did).

The contrast between this age and the age to come matches Paul's thinking precisely. The reference to the vision of "the glory of the Lord" (in the citation from Isaiah 40.5) brings us to the LXX translation of Numbers 12.8. Whereas the Hebrew text says that Moses saw the "likeness" or "form" (*temuna*) of the Lord, the LXX says he saw the "glory" (*doxa*) of the Lord. The LXX both affirms Moses' face-to-face experience with the Lord and interprets it as a vision of his glory (cf. 2 Corinthians 3.18).

Paul's alteration of *stoma kata stoma* ("mouth to mouth") in Numbers 12.8 (LXX) to *prosopon pros prosopon* ("face to face") may reflect the influence of Deuteronomy 34.10, which refers to Moses as a prophet whom the Lord "knew" (*egno*) "face to face" (*prosopon kata prosopon*). . . . Deuteronomy 34.10 not only provides a closer parallel to Paul's wording for "face to face," but also supplies another link to the motif of "knowing" and "being known" (see also Numbers 12.6 [LXX: *auto gnosthesomai*], which is prominent in 13.12 (cf. 13.8).

Paul's allusion to Numbers 12.8, then, is consistent with early Jewish interpretations in understanding that in the age to come all God's people will have an experience similar to that which distinguished Moses from the other prophets. We already see the Lord as through a mirror (imperfectly) and know him as well as that experience allows (cf. 2 Corinthians 3.18), but the day is coming when we will see him as Moses did, face to face, an experience of knowing him fully, as we are already fully known by him.

⁶⁵Ciampa and Rosner (2007), 739.

APPENDIX THREE: QUOTES ON 1 CORINTHIANS 13.10-12

“In this life Paul feels we see only the reflections of God and are left with much that is mystery and riddle. We see that reflection in God’s world, for the work of anyone’s hands tells us something about the workman, we see it in the Gospel and we see it in Jesus Christ. Even if in Christ we have the perfect revelation, our seeking minds can grasp it only in part, for the finite can never grasp the infinite. Our knowledge is still like the knowledge of a child. But the way of love will lead us in the end to a day when the veil is drawn aside and we see face to face and know even as we are known. We cannot ever reach that day without love, because God is love and only he who loves can see him.”⁶⁶

“10. *When the end comes the partial will pass away.* The ideas of being only partial and being limited in time come together in Paul’s principal clause, ‘the partial will pass away’ (*to ek merous katargethesetai*). Some textual witnesses (D, the medieval manuscripts, and the Syriac versions) accentuate the contrast between this limited situation and ultimate finality by putting ‘then’ (*tote*) before the principal clause. Even without the additional adverb the contrast is clear. *To teleion* provides a sharp contrast with *to ek merous*, ‘the partial.’ In English *to teleion* can be rendered as ‘the end’ or ‘the perfect.’ Given the eschatological thrust of the pericope, it seems useful to render the Greek by ‘the end.’ It is clearly a reference to the eschaton.”⁶⁷

“12. *Now I know in part; then I will know just as I have been known.* Repeating the now-then (*arti-tote*) contrast of verse 12a, Paul spells out the implication of his use of the metaphor of the mirror. Paul had previously written about the relative value of partial knowledge in comparison with loving and being known by God in 8.1-3. Now he returns to the theme of knowledge possessed by human beings, including himself (13.2; 14.6). The gift of knowledge is limited in time (12.8; 13.8); it is not possessed by everyone (8.7; cf. 12.11); it is not full knowledge. It is only partial (*ek merous*, 13.9, 12). This partial knowledge contrasts with the knowledge of the eschatological future. In the *tote* clause that speaks of that future, ‘Paul compares his eschatological future with his having been known by God before the foundation of the world and, equally, at the time of his historical call’ (Jan Lambrecht, *Pauline Studies* 101). The passive ‘have been known’ (*epēgnosthen*) is clearly a divine passive. To be known by God, to have the divinely-initiated experience of God, is paramount in the religious experience of any charismatically gifted person (cf. 12.6).”⁶⁸

“This expression [“face to face”] of eschatological hope in terms of a knowledge of God is unique in Paul’s writings, although it is a common Jewish theme (4 Ezra 7.98; Apocalypse 22.3-4; Matthew 5.8). In comparing the knowledge we have of God in this world (now) with that hoped for in the world to come (then), Paul employs two metaphors—one borrowed from the OT,

⁶⁶Barclay (1975), 125-126.

⁶⁷Collins (1999), 486.

⁶⁸Ibid., 487.

‘in an enigma’ (Numbers 12.6), the other from the popular Cynic-Stoic philosophy, ‘in a mirror.’ The first contrasts the privileged revelations given to Moses with those given to the prophets. Not even Moses could see God ‘face to face’ in this world (Exodus 32.20). The second refers to the indirect vision of an object seen in a mirror. One sees not the object itself, but its reflection. Since the passage occurs in a context devoted to a consideration of spiritual gifts, the Apostle is comparing with the ‘face to face’ vision of God the knowledge possessed through the charismatic gifts of gnosis and prophecy.”⁶⁹

“Paul illustrates the temporary nature of these gifts of the church by the analogy of childhood: when that age is surmounted, its interests and activities are transcended. **When I was a child, my speech was a child’s** (there is here just the suspicion of an allusion to the speaking with tongues), **my mind was a child’s**; but **now that I have become a man, I have done away with the things of the child**, and for me they are permanently abolished (*katergeka*, perf.). So the church, in the present age is in its minority, and its gifts are suitable to its condition; but, in the age to come, she will have attained, and the ways and the helps of her childhood will be left for ever behind. There is a great contrast between the *now*, with its partial states, and the *then* with its perfection (verse 10). **For NOW we see through** (or *by means of*) **a mirror**, the metallic mirror of the ancients, which did not reflect well; this fact illustrates the *en ainigmati*, **in a riddle**, probably *in a baffling way*, without clearness or sharpness of outline: the phrase is almost certainly suggested by the description of Moses in Numbers 12.8 where the Septuagint uses the same word (A.R.V. ‘in dark speeches’). The ‘seeing’ referred to is, as the context suggests, more particularly the union of God. But **THEN**, when Christ comes, our **face** will be turned directly to God’s **face**, and our knowledge of Him will be immediate, which is impossible now: for **now my knowledge is** gradual (*-sko*) and **partial**, but **then I shall know God well, even as I was also well known** of Him, on the ever-memorable day of my conversion to Christ (cf. 8.3).”⁷⁰

“Mirrors today give a rather faithful reflection of the individual who looks at himself in one. Not so in ancient times, for the mirrors were not well polished, and they were usually concave or convex, so that the image was both dim and distorted. Corinth was famous for the mirrors manufactured there. They were often used for divination. The person would look into the water or into the mirror and gaze intently until some kind of image appeared in terms of the future or of something hidden or unknown in the present. The story of Narcissus gazing at an image of himself, falling in love with himself and being transformed into the flower, was well-known. The world itself was thought to be a mirror through which one can arrive at some knowledge of God, as the Jew Philo taught. Paul himself will stress this in Romans 1.20, that God is knowable not directly but through his creation. But the use of the expression ‘indistinctly,’ which is the NAB’s translation of the Greek *en ainigmati*, points us to the biblical roots of Paul’s conception here. In Numbers 12.6-8, the Lord declares that he made himself known to prophets in visions and spoke to them in dreams, but to Moses he spoke mouth to mouth plainly and not in riddles (the same Greek word used here in Paul’s text). Now the

⁶⁹Kugelman (1968), 271-272.

⁷⁰McFadyen (1909), 91-92.

charismatic gifts of communication operative at Corinth resemble these imperfect revelations of the Old Testament. However marvelous they may be in their means of communication, they are essentially imperfect and obscure. However necessary they may be for the present life, they cannot compare with the face to face encounter (the expression replaces *mouth to mouth* of Numbers 12.8 and alludes instead to Exodus 33.20, which assures man that he cannot see God face to face in this present mortal life).⁷¹

“‘Then I shall know even as I am known.’ It is obvious that our knowledge even of the world around us has an obscurity and an imperfection about it. But of no knowledge is this obscurity so characteristic as of our self-knowledge and self-understanding. We know how energizing it is to come to an insight into ourselves through a dream or by the reflection which a friend gives us upon ourselves. Even this, of course, is partial, since no other human being knows us perfectly either. Who then does? Only God—and one of the promised joys of the future life is to know ourselves as God knows us, that is, to see in him not only the mystery of his own nature but also everything else that he sees and knows, particularly the mysterious depths of our self. In the present life our depths are known only by God. But if we live in charity and love we have an assurance of being known by God as the special object of his elective love: ‘If anyone loves God he is known by God’ (1 Corinthians 8.3). Thus the perfect knowledge into which we may enter in the future life is the sharing of God’s own knowledge, but in this life the sharing of God’s life is done more by love than it is by clear knowledge.”⁷²

“13.10 perfection. The context (especially v. 12) suggests strongly that the apostle here was referring to the second coming of Christ as the final event in God’s plan of redemption and revelation. In comparison with what believers will receive then, the present blessings are only partial and thus imperfect. It was therefore a sign of immaturity for the Corinthians to attach so much significance to and take so much pride in the temporary, incomplete gifts of the Spirit. The view that Paul may be referring to the complete revelation contained in the New Testament Scriptures—a view that makes prophecy and other revelatory gifts obsolete—has little support from the context. Still other understandings of ‘perfection’ have been suggested, such as the maturity in love for which the Corinthians were to aim, the maturing of the early church, and the death of the individual Christian.”⁷³

“13.12 I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. Perhaps because the Corinthians liked to boast of how much they knew (see note on 8.1), Paul concluded by stressing the partial character of our present knowledge. The shift from the active (‘know’) to the passive (‘am . . . known’) is found elsewhere in the apostle’s letters and serves to emphasize believers’ dependence on God’s grace (8.3; Galatians 4.9; cf. 1 Corinthians 14.38). Paul did not suggest here that believers’ knowledge of God would one day be comprehensive, for that would be

⁷¹Montague (1976), 171.

⁷²Ibid., 171-172.

⁷³NIVR, 1862.

impossible. Instead, he focused on the intimacy and immediacy of God's knowing, which believers will someday share."⁷⁴

"Paul retains a tension between what believers can achieve in this world and the perfection that will be realized when God's reign is fully realized. The Corinthians may have treated such gifts as speaking in tongues and prophecy as evidence that those who exercised them were already perfect. Paul's second example, looking at one's own image in a mirror, underlines the imperfection in our self-knowledge. By inserting the contrast between **now . . . see dimly . . . know partially** and **then face to face, know as I am known [by God]** (13.12), Paul indicates that no corrective measure transcends the limitations of this life. Contrary to Corinthian expectations, spiritual gifts do not provide direct access to heavenly immortality (W. Schrage, *Der Erste Brief an die Korinther*, Volume 3, 1999, 305)."⁷⁵

"It is simply impossible to imagine or to predict what being 'face to face' with God (1 Corinthians 13.12) in the *fullest* sense will mean. Admittedly this revelation will not come as a complete surprise, since the New Testament writers see Jesus Christ as 'the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being' (Hebrews 1.3). Stephen 'gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God' (Acts 7.55; i.e., standing as God's honored executive authority). . . . Yet even though Christ is the definitive revelation of God, we cannot claim that to know Christ in this life is thereby to know the *inexhaustible* depths of God. Any language about 'glory for me' does not denote some 'external' personal reward, but the inestimable privilege of full access to the wonder and beauty of God, namely, to God's glory."⁷⁶

"Holiness under the conditions of this world, where God can be seen only by faith, and where temptations abound, differs from holiness when we come face to face with God, leave temptations and earthly attractions behind, see the interconnectedness of all things and their true significance, and are totally open to the power of the Holy Spirit, overshadowed by divine glory and the resurrection side of the cross."⁷⁷

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Perkins (2012), 155.

⁷⁶Thiselton (2012), 185-186.

⁷⁷Ibid., 132-133.