

1 Corinthians Part Two

Lesson #16, Chapter 13:6-13

Please review Chapter 13 before beginning this lesson. Ask the Lord to help you apply the truths found in this chapter.

1. Summarize verses 1-5 of Chapter 13.

2. What was happening among the Corinthians that spurred Paul to write on this topic? See 12:1, 4-7, 26-31.

3. Let's continue to learn about the many facets of love beginning in verse 6. What do we learn about love in verse 6?
 - a. Why is that a loving characteristic?

 - b. Why is this aspect of love particularly challenging in our culture today?

 - c. In order to put verse 6 into practice we need to discern between the lies of our culture and the truths of God's Word. How can we grow in this kind of discernment? See Ps. 119:99-104; Rom. 12:2; Col. 1:9-12.

 - d. What are some practical ways to love in this way? See Ps. 119:163; Prov. 17:5; 24:17; Rom. 12:9; 1 Cor. 5:1-2; Eph. 5:6-10; 1 Pet. 1:14-15, 22; 1 Jn. 3:18; 2 John 3-4.

7. Define *hopes* [Strong's #1679].
 - a. See what you learn about love that hopes from these references: Rom. 8:24-25; 1 Tim. 4:10; 1 Pet. 1:13.
 - b. Why is it so important to fix your hope on the right things when it comes to loving others?

8. Define *endures* [Strong's #5278 (NIV *perseveres*)].
 - a. What else do you learn about love that endures from Rom. 12:12; 2 Tim. 2:10; Heb. 12:2-3; James 1:12?
 - b. How can you apply Love endures all things in your life?

9. Love never does what according to verse 8? By contrast what happens to the gifts listed in verse 8?

10. Let's review one of the king of Bible study rules: *context!* Context unravels most Bible study knots, smooths out almost every conundrum, and clears the way to a proper interpretation of the passage. Difficult to understand sections of Scripture like this one mean we must study the context leading to and from the passage to gain insight into what the author intended his original audience to understand. Determine the context of Chapter 13 by answering the following questions:

- a. What is the main subject or main point of verses 1-8?

 - b. What is the main point of verse 13?

 - c. Since those answers are one and the same, what do we know hands down, sure as shootin' about verses 9-12?¹
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11. Verses 9 and 10 present us with a bit of a challenge, but before we dig further what facts can we observe from verses 9-10?

 12. The real problem in verse 10 lies in understanding what Paul meant with the phrase, *when the perfect comes*. Define *perfect* [Strong's #5046]. See also 1 Cor. 2:6; 13:10; 14:20 where Paul uses the same word. What is its meaning each time it's used?

 13. Paul illustrates his comments from verses 9-10 by comparing childhood and manhood. Verse 11 is intended to bring clarity to Paul's comments in verses 9-10. What observations can you make from verse 11?

 14. Paul clarifies even further by giving another illustration for verses 9-10. This one is found in verse 12. First, what observations can you make about verse 12 by itself?

¹Another way of explaining how context helps us overcome Bible difficulties is to think of the chapter as a river. When we observe a river, we can see which direction the water is flowing, and we know that the water downstream is flowing in the same direction as water coming from upstream. Verses 1-8 are all flowing in the same direction with one main point. Later we read verse 13 that also flows in the same direction as the earlier verses. Though verses 9-12 are obscured, we know that they too need to flow in the same direction as the rest of the "stream."

15. Now compare the illustrations of verses 11-12 with the instruction in verses 9-10. How do the illustrations help you understand the instruction?

16. Notice we still haven't figured out what the phrase *the perfect* means, but we are closer to understanding what Paul meant. Based on what you've observed after answering the above questions what have you learned about spiritual gifts?

Almost incidentally, Paul provides a glimpse of heaven and the life to come (v. 10; see also v. 12). All that is imperfect will be replaced by the perfect in every aspect of our existence. The experience of heaven will be like suddenly becoming adults after being children (v. 11). We will see face to face rather than seeing poor reflections. This will be most wonderfully true of our view of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. An old hymn by Isaac Watts puts it well:

Then shall I see and hear and know
All I desired or wished below;
And every power find sweet employ
In that eternal world of joy.

'The most excellent way' leads naturally to conclusions about the Christian's proper goal. ~Derek Prime²

17. What's the connection between the pursuit of certain spiritual gifts (see 12:31) and love for the brethren as explained in Chapter 13?

18. How does 1 John 4:15-21 explain the concepts of this chapter?

So what does "the perfect" refer to? Some believe it refers to the completion of the Scriptures; the rapture; the maturing of the church; the second coming, but I think the best answer is the eternal state or heaven because of the context. The context alone supports the view for the eternal state or heaven best. (For more on this interpretation

²Derek Prime, *Opening Up 1 Corinthians* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), pgs. 118-119.

read the insightful excerpt about “The Perfect” in the article below.) The *perfect* is that time of completion when all will be seen clearly, when we won't desire the *prominent* spiritual gifts or parade *our* gifts proudly before others, and when we will love others as described in this chapter.

19. Define *abide* [Strong's #3306 (NIV *remain*)].

20. What things remain according to verse 13?

21. How does the idea of something remaining or lasting (verse 13) fit in with Paul's comments about things that fail from verses 8-12?

22. What is the more excellent way that we should strive for in every area of our lives, especially when it comes to exercising our spiritual gifts? See verse 13.

The Different Views on “The Perfect” of 1 Corinthians 13:10
by Nathan Busenitz³

1. Some (such as F.F. Bruce) argue that love itself is the perfect. Thus when the fullness of love comes, the Corinthians will put away their childish desires.
2. Some (such as B.B. Warfield) contend that the completed canon of Scripture is the perfect. Scripture is described as “perfect” in James 1:25, a text in which the same word for “mirror” (as in v. 12) is found (in James 1:23). Thus partial revelation is done away when the full revelation of Scripture comes.
3. Some (such as Robert Thomas) contend that the mature church is the perfect. This view is primarily based on the illustration of verse 11 and on the close connection between this passage and Eph. 4:11–13. The exact timing of the church’s “maturity” is unknown, though it is closely associated with the completion of the canon, and the end of the apostolic era (cf. Eph. 2:20).
4. Some (such as Thomas Edgar) see the believer’s entrance into the presence of Christ (at the moment of death) as the perfect. This view accounts for the personal aspect of Paul’s statement in verse 12. Paul personally experienced full knowledge when he entered Christ’s presence at his death (cf. 2 Cor. 5:8).
5. Some (such as Richard Gaffin) see the return of Christ (and the end of this age) as the perfect. This is also the view of most continuationists. Thus, when Christ comes back (as delineated in chapter 15), the partial revelation we know now will be made complete.
6. Some (such as John MacArthur) view the eternal state (in a general sense) as the perfect. This explanation interprets the neuter of *teleion* as a reference to a general state of events and not a personal return of Christ. This view overlaps with both numbers 4 and 5 above in that, according to this view: “For Christians the eternal state begins either at death, when they go to be with the Lord, or at the rapture, when the Lord takes His own to be with Himself” (John MacArthur, *First Corinthians*, p. 366).

Of these views, I personally find the last three more convincing than the first three. This is primarily due (I will confess) to the testimony of church history. Dr. Gary Shogren, after doing an in-depth study of some 169 patristic references to this passage, concludes that the church fathers overwhelmingly saw the perfect in terms of something beyond this life (most normally associating it with the return of Christ, or with seeing Christ in heaven). Even John Chrysostom (who was clearly a cessationist) saw it this way. While not authoritative, such historical evidence is difficult to dismiss.

³Read the entire article written by Nathan Busenitz at http://thecripplegate.com/what_cessationism_is_not/