

a professor in Princeton, U.S.A. In it he writes: "The Church has held from the beginning that the Bible is the Word of God in such a sense that its words, though written by men and bearing indelibly impressed upon them the marks of their human origin, were written, nevertheless, under such an influence of the Holy Spirit as to be also the words of God, the adequate expression of His mind and will. It has always recognised that his conception of co-authorship implies that the Spirit's superintendence extends to the choice of words by the human authors (verbal inspiration), and preserves its product from everything inconsistent with a Divine authorship . . . thus securing, among other things, that entire truthfulness which is everywhere presupposed in and asserted for Scripture by the Biblical writers (in-errancy)". Peter wrote: ". . . **knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation, for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit**" (2 Peter 1:20,21).

To be continued

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*"Paul talks of a time "when that which is perfect" would come.
To what does he refer?" (1 Cor. 13:10)*

This quotation, as you will have recognised, comes from that beautiful and familiar exposition of the superiority of Love. But whilst 1 Cor. 13 is a chapter powerful and important enough to stand alone, it should really be studied in context with chapters 12 and 14. Misunderstandings arise when the 13th chapter is read out of context and studied in isolation.

If we always bear in mind that when the books of the Bible were written they were not divided into chapters and verses, we shall be spared a great many of the problems which arise from a device which was intended to be a help to us.

1. **Turning, first, to chapter 12,** we find that Paul is continuing to respond to the series of questions sent to him by members of the Church in Corinth. He has now reached an issue which appears to be a major preoccupation with the Corinthian brethren; a question concerning the relative importance of the various miraculous gifts, bestowed by the Holy Spirit Himself (v.11).

Those who possessed such gifts as other tongues, the interpretation of tongues, healing and prophecy, believed that their gifts were the most important of the nine 'charismata' ('grace gifts') which Paul lists in this section of his letter. These were the gifts which attracted most attention and which enjoyed a profile higher than the less dramatic and less ostentatious gifts, such as those of miraculous knowledge or wisdom.

The apostle's first concern, therefore, is to make the brethren recognise that whatever gift a person possesses, it has been bestowed on him, not for his personal elevation, but for the edification of the entire Body of Christ, the Church.

Indeed, this is the illustration he uses. He presents an analogy which portrays the Church as a body comprised of many members, each of which has its distinctive

function and which occupies its own special place (vv. 12-27).

Incidentally, we should notice that in vv. 29-30 how effectively he dismisses the view, still held today by many of the so-called 'Charismatic' groups, which says that anyone who does not possess a spiritual gift has not received 'the second blessing' and may well be regarded as a kind of 'second-class' Christian.

2. Then, in ch. 13, Paul urges the brethren to desire the 'better gifts' = '*kreittona*', or the 'greater gifts' = '*meizona*'; that is, gifts which are 'better' or 'greater' than the things about which they are so concerned. These better, more desirable possessions are Faith, Hope and Love, of which the greatest is Love (v.13).

3. The conclusion which remains to be drawn is that the Corinthians were taught, by Paul, that one could be a true Christian without possessing any miraculous gift, but there is one spiritual endowment - one Christ-like virtue - which is indispensable, because it is a virtue which 'abides'. The word '*meno*' literally means 'to remain when other things have ceased'.

Here we come to the nub of the matter, because in verses 8 to 11 Paul assured his Corinthian brethren that whatever miraculous gifts of the Spirit they possess, those gifts are transient and they *will* inevitably pass away.

'Prophecies', in the plural and referring to a range of abilities which included both *forth*-telling and *fore*-telling, would be 'abolished, end, be caused to cease'. The A.V. states that prophecies 'shall fail', which is an unfortunate rendering, liable to give the wrong impression, because Spirit-inspired prophecy never 'failed'. For prophecy to 'cease' is an entirely different matter.

The gift of tongues, also was destined to 'cease', as was miraculous knowledge, because Paul assigns all of them to the Church's infancy and declares that, like the playthings of childhood, they will one day be 'put away'.

And when would this 'cessation' occur? The question has drawn our attention to that time, 'when that which is perfect is come' (A.V.).

4. The 'end of the age'? The Coming of Christ?

This phrase has sometimes been taken to refer to the end of the age, when Christ returns, and if this were a correct interpretation it would be a strong argument for the continuance of spiritual gifts.

But it is *not* correct, because Christ cannot be described as a 'thing' - as '*that* which is perfect'. The word 'perfect', in this form, '*teleion*', is neuter and would never be used to describe a mature person. It is a form which was used to refer to a baby, or a child.

For example, in Luke 1;35, the A.V. reads, 'that holy *thing* which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God'. Strange as it may sound in our ears, in those days all children were described in the neuter gender until they reached the age of puberty, from which time they would be referred to in masculine or feminine forms, as the case required.

Therefore, the word 'perfect' used here in 1 Cor. 13:10, cannot possibly refer to Christ and His return.

Furthermore, if the Holy Spirit had intended us to understand this as a reference to Christ, it would have been easy for Him to have said, 'when He who is perfect', or even, 'when Christ comes again'.

5. The Perfection of Heaven? This is another explanation which has been suggested. We are asked to believe that the phrase refers to the future life in Heaven and to the state of perfection to which the believer looks forward.

But it is difficult to fit this view into these three chapters, dealing, as they do

entirely with the way in which the Church should behave here, on earth! And, in any case, this word, 'perfect', common though it is in the New Testament, is not once used with reference to heaven's state of perfection.

6. What, then, does the phrase mean? Well, the word, '*teleios*', from '*telos*', meaning 'an end', has to do with reaching maturity and the attaining of a purpose or goal. Therefore the contrast is between something that is incomplete, in part, and therefore transient (see v.9 again), and something that is complete and abiding.

Paul has pointed out to his Corinthian brethren that they know 'in part'. They are living in a time when God's will and purpose is in process of being revealed 'through His holy apostles and prophets' (Eph. 4:4-6). Bear in mind that the apostles had been promised that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth, teach them all things, and bring to their remembrance the things they had been taught by the Lord (John 15:26; 16:13).

As we look back from our position today we see that during that period, the gifts of the Spirit were bestowed in order to support and strengthen the infant Church (Rom. 1:11). Indeed, it might be said that the spiritual gifts were the things that belonged to the Church's infancy, which would be one day laid aside.

That time came when the apostolic age ended as the last apostle completed his work.

We have, today, in the New Testament Scriptures, in the inspired writing of the apostles, all that the Holy Spirit desires us to possess and know. We have the full and final revelation of God's will for His people. The complete; the 'mature'; the 'perfect' has come. the miraculous gifts, which the Holy Spirit clearly indicated as of limited duration have passed away, and today, as James tells us, we look into 'the perfect law, the law of liberty' (Jas. 1:25).

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