

1 Corinthians 13:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

Analysis

For we know in part (ἐκ μέρους γινώσκομεν, ek merous ginōskomen)—Ek merous means "from a part" or "partially." Ginōskō is experiential, relational knowledge. Our current theological understanding, biblical expertise, and spiritual insight are fragmentary, incomplete. Even our best grasp of God's truth is like seeing individual puzzle pieces without the full picture.

And we prophesy in part (καὶ ἐκ μέρους προφητεύομεν, kai ek merous prophēteuomen)—Even Spirit-inspired proclamation is partial. Prophets don't have comprehensive revelation; they speak what God gives them in the moment. The repetition of ek merous emphasizes the limitation: all current spiritual gifts operate within the constraints of this age.

This verse grounds the previous statement (v. 8) that gifts will be abolished. Why? Because they're partial by nature. Prophecy and knowledge are like scaffolding around a building under construction—necessary now, but removed when the building is complete. Paul is preparing for verse 12's contrast: now we see dimly, then face to face.

Historical Context

The Corinthians' obsession with spiritual knowledge (gnōsis) and prophetic gifting led them to believe they had arrived at spiritual perfection (4:8, "Already you are filled! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings!"). Paul

confronts their realized eschatology by insisting that even the highest gifts are fragmentary in this age. Complete knowledge awaits the age to come.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing that your theological knowledge is 'in part' cultivate humility in doctrinal discussions and denominational debates?
2. In what ways might you be guilty of the Corinthian error of thinking you've 'arrived' spiritually or intellectually?
3. How should 'we know in part' affect your attitude toward Christians who disagree with you on secondary theological matters?

Interlinear Text

ἐκ	μέρους	γὰρ	γινώσκομεν	καὶ	ἐκ	μέρους
in	part	For	we know	and	in	part
G1537	G3313	G1063	G1097	G2532	G1537	G3313

προφητεύομεν·

we prophecy
G4395

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 139:6 (Parallel theme): Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.

1 Corinthians 2:9 (Parallel theme): But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

1 Corinthians 13:12 (Parallel theme): For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

1 Corinthians 8:2 (Parallel theme): And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.

Psalms 40:5 (Parallel theme): Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.

Proverbs 30:4 (Parallel theme): Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?

Matthew 11:27 (Parallel theme): All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.

1 John 3:2 (Parallel theme): Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

Ephesians 3:8 (Parallel theme): Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

Romans 11:34 (Parallel theme): For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?