

# *“When that which is perfect is come...” Is it the Coming or the Canon?*

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**Q**uestion: In 1Cor.13:10, we read that knowledge and prophecy are done away when *“that which is perfect is come”*. Is this the coming of the Saviour or the completion of the Canon of Scripture?

**A**nswer: Biblically, the apostolic sign-gifts of prophecies, tongues, and knowledge have ceased as 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 indicates they would. These are contrasted with love which endures. Love never fails, it never fades out or becomes obsolete (Amp. NT). It is an attribute of God.

Prophecies will **fail** - be **done away**. The verb used, *katargethesontai*, means “to make idle”, “inoperative”, “to be superceded”. The gift of prophecy was to be seen as passing and temporary.

Tongues would **cease**. The verb is *pausontai* and means, they would “make themselves cease automatically”.

Knowledge would **vanish away** - be **done away**. It will be “made idle”, “inoperative”, and “superceded”. It is the same verb as is used for prophecies. Prophecies, tongues, and knowledge are each and all temporary and passing gifts. They were all present when Paul wrote, but they were incomplete and *“in part”*. *“For we know **IN PART**, and we prophesy **IN PART**”* (1Cor.13:9).

Knowledge and prophecy are superceded when *“the perfect”* is come (1Cor.13:10). It is clear that the things that are *“in part”* will not continue.

*“When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part **shall be done away**”* (1Cor.13:10).

They are not enduring gifts, but temporary. Prophecy, tongues, and knowledge, are each and all passing gifts.

The expression, *“in part”*, is *“ek merous”* as opposed to *“the whole”*. Paul uses the same words in 1Cor.12:27 regarding members of the body of Christ. He states: *“Now ye are the body of Christ, and members **in particular**”* (ek merous). The Corinthian believers were only **a part** of the body of Christ.

When Paul wrote his epistles to the Corinthians (about AD55-57) the Church had very little of the New Testament. Possibly the Gospel of Mark, two epistles to the Thessalonians, Galatians and Romans. All of the twenty remaining books followed later.

In the early Church it was necessary that New Testament truth should be communicated by prophets and apostles who were the foundation upon which the Church was built (Eph.2:20). However, when *“that which is perfect is come”*, that which is *“in part”* would be *“done away”*. That which was partial (incomplete) when Paul wrote, would be superseded when the perfect (complete) came. No more would prophets need to receive direct communication from God, for the *“perfect”* (complete) revelation would be available to all.

The expression, *“that which is perfect is come”*, is commonly interpreted to mean, *“when the Lord shall come”*. However, where in the context, is the return of the Lord even alluded to? The context is dealing specifically with the imperfection of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge, which will all pass away.

The verse, 1Cor.13:10, could be translated as follows, *“but when the complete comes, the partial will be superseded”*. The Corinthians possessed partial knowledge at that time, but when the whole, complete revelation had come, the partial would be replaced by the complete wholeness of Divine knowledge.

Paul illustrates from his personal experience in 1Cor.13:11: *“When I was a child”* (*nepios*, an infant), in contrast with an adult (*teleios*). Paul said he spoke as a child, thought as a child, reasoned as a child, but when he became a man he put away childish things.

If we really believe that *“that which is perfect”* refers to the Lord’s return, then we are saying that no matter what God does in our lives now, or how the Holy Spirit illuminates and transforms us (2Cor.3:17-18), we can be nothing more than spiritual children. This interpretation flies in the face of the clear statements of Scripture that we are to be

*“no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind and slight of doctrine...”* (Eph.4:14).

Those who declare that the word *“perfect”* refers to Christ’s second coming do so without a single Biblical reference to support it.

Paul, in this epistle charges the carnal Corinthian Christians with being babes in Christ when they should have been spiritual adults. He could only give them milk and not solid food for they were not able to receive it (1Cor.3:1-2). What a rebuke that was!

In his later epistle to the Hebrews, he stated:

*“When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.”*

*For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: **FOR HE IS A BABE** (nepios). But strong meat belongeth to them that are **OF FULL AGE** (teleion, "perfect"), even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb.5:12-14).*

It would be wrong to teach that we are to remain spiritual babes until the Lord returns! However, that is the implication if "*that which is perfect*" refers to the coming of the Lord. Could it be possible that God would want us to remain spiritual babes in this present life, however devoted, committed and obedient we may seek to be? Even though we yield to the instruction of the Holy Spirit, are we to remain like handicapped children until the Lord returns and we see Him "*face to face*"? No such doctrine can be found in the Word of God.

Paul uses the word "*perfect*" to describe "*maturity*" or "*coming of full age*" in his address to the Ephesians:

*"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto A PERFECT (teleion) MAN, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph.4:11-13).*

"Perfection", in Ephesians chapter 4, has nothing to do with the Lord's return but describes spiritual maturity, Christ-likeness, and the "*stature of the fulness of Christ*" which God wants us to enjoy right here and now.

What then does the Scripture mean when it states:

*"Now we see through a glass darkly (obscurely); but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1Cor.13:12)?*

The glass referred to is a mirror. James wrote that some were

*"like unto a man beholding **his natural face in a glass**: For **HE BEHOLDETH HIMSELF**, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso **looketh into the perfect** (teleion, complete) **law** of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" (James 1:23-25).*

"*Face to face*" means that we see the true nature of ourselves when we look into the mirror of Divine revelation. We see our own face. The Corinthians could only partly see the picture because they did not have the complete (perfect) Word of God. The sign-gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge were given to be the means by which the early Church received New Testament truth. However, when the whole Scriptures became available in AD96 with the completion of the canon, then they would see clearly the complete picture in the mirror of God's Word. Thereafter the three gifts would cease, fade away and be superceded. They no longer served any purpose. They became redundant.

The ancient mirrors did not give back a perfect reflection, but with a perfect (complete) Scripture we see face to face exactly as God sees us. However, not only do we look into the perfect law and see all our wrinkles and blemishes exactly as God sees, but we also see God's perfect plan for ourselves and His Church. With these *"exceeding great and precious promises"* we even partake of the Divine nature and are able to *"escape the corruption that is in the world through lust"* (1Peter1:4).

With such Scriptures available to us,  
*"let patience have her perfect (teleion) work, that ye may be perfect (teleioi) and entire, wanting nothing"* (James1:4).

The conclusion of the matter therefore is that prophecy, tongues and knowledge were special gifts given to the early Church to edify the Church until the complete (perfect) revelation became available. Prophecy and knowledge needed the gift of languages to communicate that truth as the early disciples took the Gospel to the far-flung parts of the Gentile world.

When unbelieving Jews saw the Gospel preached to Gentiles in Gentile languages, they saw it as the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy that God would speak to them *"with men of other tongues and other lips"* (1Cor.14:22).

The clear teaching of Scripture is supported by the evidence from Church history, which testifies that all of the miraculous sign-gifts ceased to be given at the end of the Apostolic age (AD100) and they faded away during the second century till by the mid second century they ceased to exist.

Claims by the Montanist sect that the Paraclete returned about AD150, were an attempt by Satan to bring demonic activity and sorcery into the Church under the guise of *"spiritual gifts"*. Tertullian was the foremost spokesman for Montanism which lasted for only 100 years and disappeared in the second half of the third century. See John Ecob's book entitled, *"Tongues Shall Cease"*, available free from the Herald of Hope.

The Charismatic tongues revival which began about 1900 bears no resemblance to the New Testament gift of tongues. Biblical tongues and other sign gifts fulfil no function at all after the completion of the canon of Scripture. **There are no addenda to a perfect revelation.**

Peter wrote his second epistle just before his death about AD64-65. Paul was martyred about the same time. Only John remained, and his Gospel and Epistles were written about AD90. Revelation was complete by AD96. Now, *"If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book"* (Rev.22:18).

Any claim to have prophetic gifts after *"that which is perfect is come"* has serious and eternal consequences.