

“WHEN THAT IS PERFECT IS COME . . .”

— 1 Cor. 13: 8-13

When studying with people who insist that God still bestows miraculous gifts upon men today, we usually point out that the scriptures teach these gifts were given for a limited time and have now ceased, the word having been confirmed by them (Mk. 16:20; Heb. 2:3, 4). When citing 1 Cor. 13:8-13 to support this conviction the usual reply is that verses 10-12 speak of Christ coming again and thus the miraculous gifts are to remain until that time.

In the first place the impersonal pronoun “that” cannot refer to the Christ. It is most irreverent to refer to Jesus as “that.” In this context we observe a number of contrasts: “that which is in part” with “that which is perfect (complete)”, things that are “done away” with things that “abide”; “childhood” with “manhood”; seeing “darkly” with “face to face”. There is an obvious relationship between incompleteness and such things as “part”, “child”, “see darkly (not clearly)”, just as there is between completeness and “man”, “seeing face to face (clearly)”. Childhood is soon “done away” while adulthood “abides.”

God’s completed revelation is “that which is perfect”. It was not delivered “complete” at first, but “in part”. All did not have the gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues (through which God’s revelation was given), and each was consequently dependent upon the other in receiving knowledge. For example, the man in the chariot who had only the Old Testament (part) of God’s revelation was dependent

upon the prophet Phillip for more (complete) knowledge of the Christ (Acts 8:28-35).

Paul mentions three gifts which were to abide — the spiritual gifts of faith, hope, and love which were to remain even after the doing away of tongues etc. at the coming of “that which is perfect”.

Our **FAITH** is in Christ declared to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4). We see him only by faith now but one day we’ll see him as he is (1 Jn. 3:2, 3). We walk by faith now, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:1-7), but when he comes again “faith will be lost in heavenly sight”.

Further, this faith produces the **HOPE** of eternal life (Tit. 1:2, 3:7) which will be realised at the “glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ (Tit. 1:13). Hope will cease when eternal life is given at the coming of Christ the second time for no man still hopes for that which he has received (Rom. 8: 23, 24). **LOVE** is the “greatest” and will never cease for God is love (1 Jn. 4:16).

In summary: Miraculous spiritual gifts were to be done away when “that” which is perfect is come, yet faith, hope and love were to abide ever after the doing away of tongues etc. As faith and hope cease at the second coming of Jesus, yet tongues, knowledge and prophecy cease before faith and hope, we can know “that which is perfect” does not refer to Jesus or his second coming, but to something which happens before that great event.

What then is “that which is perfect”? It is the completed revelation of God’s will as we have it in the scriptures today, confirmed by the miracles (Heb. 2:3, 4), and into which a person may look “face to face” (James 1:23-25). It is the “all scripture given by inspiration of God” that is able to make the man of God perfect by thoroughly furnishing him unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

— Roland J. McDowell.