

Q. Why do you say "that which is complete has come" in 1 Corinthians 13:10 refers to the canonization of Scripture?

A. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul is describing love, which, in verse 8, he says "never fails." He goes on to say that the spiritual gifts of prophecies, tongues (the miraculous speaking in other languages), and knowledge will cease or end. Then, in verses 9-10, he says, "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect thing comes, then that which is in part will be caused to cease" (*Literal Version of the Holy Bible* used throughout). I have mentioned in several articles that I believe that Paul is referring to God's complete revelation to us in the form of the Bible. For me to simply say this does not, of course, prove it. So I would like to now explain my line of reasoning.

Paul is writing this chapter to the Corinthians to define love and explain its superiority. The Corinthians seemed to have several problems, and one of them appears to be that they valued spiritual gifts even to the point of becoming jealous with one another over them (1 Corinthians 12). Along with this, they seemed to overvalue speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 14). All of this caused Paul to want to remind them that love is more valuable than any of these gifts.

In 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, Paul says, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but I do not have love, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophecies, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give out all my goods, and if I deliver my body that I be burned, but I do not have love, I am not profited anything." So, love is superior to tongues, to prophesying, to the gift of knowledge, and even to faith. Indeed, giving all of our goods and even our bodies is of no value to us without love.

In verses 4-7, Paul describes qualities of love. Then, in verse 8, he says, "Love never fails. But if there are prophecies, they will be caused

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to cease; if tongues, they shall cease; if knowledge, it will be caused to cease." "Never fails" is from the Greek, *oudepote ekpipsei*. It means, "not at any time falls off." That is, through all of the ages and eternity, there will always be love.

Prophecies will stop. The Greek word *katargēthēsontai* literally means "idle down." Tongues will cease (*pausontai*). Considering the context of the gift of prophecy and the gift of tongues, what is meant by knowledge in this verse is apparently the gift of knowledge, that is, miraculously revealing new knowledge to the assembly. The gift of knowledge was to "idle down" or stop. Love, on the other hand, will never be outdated or obsolete. It will never idle down or cease. It is eternal. That is Paul's point here. But we surely have to admit that Paul is also saying that the gifts of prophecies, tongues, and knowledge will not continue forever. At some point future to Paul, they were to idle down and stop. The question is, when?

God used prophecies, tongues, and knowledge to add to the body of revelation for the general edification of the believers. So, when Paul says prophecies, tongues, and knowledge will cease, and he further says, "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect thing [*teleion*] comes, then that which is in part will be caused to cease," I take him to mean that the *teleion*, or "complete" thing, refers to revelation. Some say that it refers to the coming of Jesus Christ. But that does not fit the context. Because prophecies, tongues, and knowledge are the immediate context, and they are means of receiving revelation, then good exegesis demands that we take Paul to mean *teleion* as referring to revelation. Paul is saying that when we have the complete body of revelation that God wants us to have, then those things—prophecies, tongues, and knowledge—that revealed only partly will idle down or cease.

We now have a body of revelation or canon of Scripture that we call the Bible. I believe that it is the complete body of revelation that God wants us to have. Obviously, there are mysteries about God that He does not want us to know in this life, and there may be some things that we will never know. But the Bible is the complete revelation that we need in this life. If we have this complete body of revelation, why would we need prophecies, tongues, and knowledge? We would not.

If someone were to argue that the Bible is not complete, and that we continue to need more revelation, then we would disagree on a basic tenet of Christianity: The Bible is given by inspiration of God; is infallible and inerrant; and is the revelation of all that is necessary to

know about God, salvation, faith, worship, and Christian living. This is an axiom of Christianity that we believe by faith. Thus, believing this axiom about the Bible, I see that it perfectly fits what Paul is saying about the complete revelation that would cause the partial forms of revelation of his day to cease.

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