

1 Corinthians 13:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

Analysis

But when that which is perfect is come (ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ τὸ τέλειον, hotan de elthē to teleion)—To teleion is "the perfect," "the complete," or "the mature." Debate centers on its referent:

1. Christ's return and the eternal state
2. the completed New Testament canon
3. Christian maturity.

Context strongly favors the first: the next verse contrasts childhood with maturity, and verse 12 contrasts present obscurity with seeing "face to face"—clearly eschatological language echoing Numbers 12:8 and 1 John 3:2.

Then that which is in part shall be done away (τὸ ἐκ μέρους καταργηθήσεται, to ek merous katargēthēsetai)—The same verb from verse 8: "abolished, rendered inoperative." When completeness arrives, partiality becomes obsolete. When we see Christ face to face and are fully transformed into His image (1 John 3:2), we won't need prophetic revelation (we'll see Truth Himself), fragmented knowledge (we'll know fully), or tongues (we'll communicate perfectly).

This doesn't diminish the value of gifts now; it puts them in perspective. They're tools for this age, means to an end (building up the church in love), not the end itself. Love, by contrast, continues into perfection.

Historical Context

Some Corinthians believed they had already attained spiritual perfection through knowledge and gifts (4:8). Paul insists that "the perfect" is still future. Early church fathers (Chrysostom, Augustine) understood teleion as the eschaton, the final state. The "canon completion" view arose in the 20th century, primarily to argue for cessationism, but lacks exegetical and historical support.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does this verse challenge both charismatic triumphalism (overvaluing gifts) and cessationist rationalism (dismissing gifts)?
2. What would change in your spiritual life if you truly believed that your current knowledge and gifting are temporary scaffolding for love's eternal building?
3. How should the promise of future 'perfection' affect your discontent with present spiritual limitations and church imperfections?

Interlinear Text

ὅταν	δὲ	ἔλθῃ	τὸ	τέλειον	τότε	τὸ	ἐκ
when	But	is come	G3588	that which is perfect	then	G3588	that which is in
G3752	G1161	G2064		G5046	G5119		G1537
μέρους	καταργηθήσεται						
part	shall be done away						
G3313	G2673						

Additional Cross-References

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.

Isaiah 24:23 (Parallel theme): Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.

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