

“... That Which Is Perfect ...”

Several days ago, I had the opportunity to speak to someone about spiritual gifts. In the course of the conversation, when we discussed the ending of spiritual gifts, he brought up that the reference to “*perfect*” in 1 Corinthians 13:10 refers to Christ. He made the case that the only one who was “*perfect*” that he knows of was Christ.

The word for “perfect” is *teleios* and it occurs 19 times in the New Testament (Matthew 5:48; 19:21; Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 2:6; 13:10; 14:20; Ephesians 4:13; Philippians 3:15; Colossians 1:28; 4:12; Hebrews 5:14; 9:11; James 1:4, 17, 25; 3:2; 1 John 4:18). It refers to something which is whole or complete; it lacks nothing. Willis states, “It must refer to perfection or completeness in the same realm as that realm which was denoted by ‘*that which is in part.*’” In the context of 1 Corinthians 13, “*part*” describes the way God revealed Himself to man through spiritual gifts. Although they confirmed the word (Mark 16:17-20; Hebrews 2:2-3), Christians could not clearly see all of God’s will until it had all been revealed. So the “*perfect*” is the completed revelation of God’s will to man. Also, in the original language, the word “*perfect*” is an adjective which is neuter in its gender. If it were referring to Christ, it would be masculine, just as in our language.

A further illustration teaches that spiritual gifts were considered as being in the childhood stage versus the completed revelation being in the adulthood stage. Furthermore, when Paul said “*done away,*” he referred to what was set aside forever. When the infancy period of the church was over, spiritual gifts ceased. People cannot speak in tongues, cast out demons, heal the sick and raise the dead today the way that they did in the first century church. Those times have passed and those days have been done away.

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