



Articles and Sermons :: When Will the Gifts of the Spirit Cease According to John Calvin.

When Will the Gifts of the Spirit Cease According to John Calvin. - posted by UntoBabes (), on: 2014/1/23 13:18

Commentary on Corinthians - Volume 1

1 Corinthians 13:9-13-

9. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

9. Ex parte enim cognoscimus, et ex parte prophetamus:

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

10. At ubi venerit quod perfectum est, tunc, quod ex parte est, abolebitur.

11. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

11. Quum essem puer, ut puer loquebar, ut puer sentiebam, ut puer cogitabam: at postquam factus sum vir, abolevi puerilia.

12. 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.

12. Cernimus enim nunc per speculum in aenigmate: tunc autem facie ad faciem: nunc cognosco ex parte: tune vero cognoscam, quem admodum et cognitus sum.

13. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

13. Nunc autem manet fides, spes, caritas, tria haec: sed maxima ex his est caritas.

He now proves that prophecy, and other gifts of that nature, are done away, because they are conferred upon us to help our infirmity. Now our imperfection will one day have an end. Hence the use, even of those gifts, will, at the same time, be discontinued, for it were absurd that they should remain and be of no use. They will, therefore, perish. This subject he pursues to the end of the chapter.

9. We know in part This passage is misinterpreted by most persons, as if it meant that our knowledge, and in like manner our prophecy, is not yet perfect, but that we are daily making progress in them. Paul's meaning, however, is that it is owing to our imperfection that we at present have knowledge and prophecy. Hence the phrase in part means "Because we are not yet perfect." Knowledge and prophecy, therefore, have place among us so long as that imperfection cleaves to us, to which they are helps. It is true, indeed, that we ought to make progress during our whole life, and that everything that we have is merely begun. Let us observe, however, what Paul designs to prove that the gifts in question are but temporary. Now he proves this from the circumstance, that the advantage of them is only for a time so long as we aim at the mark by making progress every day.

10. When that which is perfect is come "When the goal has been reached, then the helps in the race will be done away." He retains, however, the form of expression that he had already made use of, when he contrasts perfection with what is in part. "Perfection," says he, "when it will arrive, will put an end to everything that aids imperfection." But when will that perfection come? It begins, indeed, at death, for then we put off, along with the body, many infirmities; but it will not be completely manifested until the day of judgment, as we shall hear presently. Hence we infer, that the whole of this discussion is ignorantly applied to the time that is intermediate.

11. When I was a child He illustrates what he had said, by a similitude. For there are many things that are suitable to children, which are afterwards done away on arriving at maturity. For example, education is necessary for childhood; it does not comport with mature age. So long as we live in this world, we require, in some sense, education. We are far from having attained, as yet, the perfection of wisdom. That perfection, therefore, which will be in a manner a maturity of spiritual age, will put an end to education and its accompaniments. In his Epistle to the Ephesians, (Ephesians 4:14,) he exhorts us to be no longer children; but he has there another consideration in view, of which we shall speak when we come to that passage.

12. We now see through a glass Here we have the application of the similitude. "The measure of knowledge, that we now have, is suitable to imperfection and childhood, as it were; for we do not as yet see clearly the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom, and we do not as yet enjoy a distinct view of them." To express this, he makes use of another similitude that we now see only as in a glass, and therefore but obscurely. This obscurity he expresses by the term *enigma*.

In the first place, there can be no doubt that it is the ministry of the word, and the means that are required for the exercise of it, that he compares to a looking-glass. For God, who is otherwise invisible, has appointed these means for discovering himself to us. At the same time, this may also be viewed as extending to the entire structure of the world, in which the glory of God shines forth to our view, in accordance with what is stated in Romans 1:16; and 2 Corinthians 3:18. In Romans 1:20 the Apostle speaks of the creatures as mirrors, in which God's invisible majesty is to be seen; but as he treats here particularly of spiritual gifts, which are subservient to the ministry of the Church, and are its accompaniments, we shall not wander away from our present subject.

The ministry of the word, I say, is like a looking-glass. For the angels have no need of preaching, or other inferior helps, nor of sacraments, for they enjoy a vision of God of another kind; and God does not give them a view of his face mere

ly in a mirror, but openly manifests himself as present with them. We, who have not as yet reached that great height, behold the image of God as it is presented before us in the word, in the sacraments, and, in fine, in the whole of the service of the Church. This vision Paul here speaks of as partaking of obscurity â€” not as though it were doubtful or delusive, but because it is not so distinct as that which will be at last afforded on the final day. He teaches the same thing in other words, in the second Epistle â€” (2 Corinthians 5:7) â€” that,

so long as we dwell in the body we are absent from the Lord;
for we walk by faith, not by sight.

Our faith, therefore, at present beholds God as absent. How so? Because it sees not his face, but rests satisfied with the image in the mirror; but when we shall have left the world, and gone to him, it will behold him as near and before its eyes

Hence we must understand it in this manner â€” that the knowledge of God, which we now have from his word, is indeed certain and true, and has nothing in it that is confused, or perplexed, or dark, but is spoken of as comparatively obscure, because it comes far short of that clear manifestation to which we look forward; for then we shall see face to face⁸⁰³ Thus this passage is not at all at variance with other passages, which speak of the clearness, at one time, of the law, at another time, of the entire Scripture, but more especially of the gospel. For we have in the word (in so far as is expedient for us) a naked and open revelation of God, and it has nothing intricate in it, to hold us in suspense, as wicked persons imagine; ⁸⁰⁴but how small a proportion does this bear to that vision, which we have in our eye! Hence it is only in a comparative sense, that it is termed obscure.

The adverb then denotes the last day, rather than the time that is immediately subsequent to death. At the same time, although full vision will be deferred until the day of Christ, a nearer view of God will begin to be enjoyed immediately after death, when our souls, set free from the body, will have no more need of the outward ministry, or other inferior helps. Paul, however, as I noticed a little ago, does not enter into any close discussion as to the state of the dead, because the knowledge of that is not particularly serviceable to piety.

Now I know in part That is, the measure of our present knowledge is imperfect, as John says in his Epistle, (1 John 3:1,2), that

we know, indeed, that we are the sons of God,
but that it doth not yet appear, until we shall see God as he is.

Then we shall see God â€” not in his image, but in himself, so that there will be, in a manner, a mutual view.

13. But now remaineth faith, hope, love. This is a conclusion from what goes before â€” that love is more excellent than other gifts; but in place of the enumeration of gifts that he had previously made, he now puts faith and hope along with love, as all those gifts are comprehended under this summary. For what is the object of the entire ministry, but that we may be instructed as to these things? ⁸⁰⁵Hence the term faith has a larger acceptation here, than in previous instances; for it is as though he had said â€” â€œThere are, it is true, many and various gifts, but they all point to this object, and have an eye to it.â€

To remain, then, conveys the idea, that, as in the reckoning up of an account, when everything has been deducted, this is the sum that remains For faith does not remain after death, inasmuch as the Apostle elsewhere contrasts it with sight, (2 Corinthians 5:7,) and declares that it remains only so long as we are absent from the Lord We are now in possession of what is meant by faith in this passage â€” that knowledge of God and of the divine will, which we obtain by the ministry of the Church; or, if you prefer it, faith universal, and taken in its proper acceptation. Hope is nothing else than perseverance in faith For when we have once believed the word of God, it remains that we persevere until the accomplishment of these things. Hence, as faith is the mother of hope, so it is kept up by it, so as not to give way.

The greatest of these is love. It is so, if we estimate its excellence by the effects which he has previously enumerated; and farther, if we take into view its perpetuity. For every one derives advantage from his own faith and hope, but love extends its benefits to others. Faith and hope belong to a state of imperfection: love will remain even in a state of perfection. For if we single out the particular effects of faith, and compare them, faith will be found to be in many respects superior.

Nay, even love itself, according to the testimony of the same Apostle, (1 Thessalonians 1:3,) is an effect of faith. Now the effect is, undoubtedly, inferior to its cause.

Besides, there is bestowed upon faith a signal commendation, which does not apply to love, when John declares that it is our victory, which overcometh the world. (1 John 5:4.) In fine, it is by faith that we are born again; that we become the sons of God; that we obtain eternal life, and that Christ dwells in us. (Ephesians 3:17.) Innumerable other things I pass over; but these few are sufficient to prove what I have in view; that faith is, in many of its effects, superior to love. Hence it is evident, that it is declared here to be superior; not in every respect, but inasmuch as it will be perpetual, and holds at present the first place in the preservation of the Church.

It is, however, surprising how much pleasure Papists take in thundering forth these words. "If faith justifies," say they, "then much more does love, which is declared to be greater." A solution of this objection is already furnished from what I have stated, but let us grant that love is in every respect superior; what sort of reasoning is that? that because it is greater, therefore it is of more avail for justifying men! Then a king will plow the ground better than a husbandman, and he will make a shoe better than a shoemaker, because he is more noble than either! Then a man will run faster than a horse, and will carry a heavier burden than an elephant, because he is superior in dignity! Then angels will give light to the earth better than the sun and moon, because they are more excellent! If the power of justifying depended on the dignity or merit of faith they might perhaps be listened to; but we do not teach that faith justifies, on the ground of its having more worthiness, or occupying a higher station of honor, but because it receives the righteousness which is freely offered in the gospel. Greatness or dignity has nothing to do with this. Hence this passage gives Papists no more help, than if the Apostle had given the preference to faith above everything else.

Re: When Will the Gifts of the Spirit Cease According to John Calvin. - posted by yuehan, on: 2014/1/23 14:12

The same commentary in nicer formatting, and with footnotes: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/comment3/comm_vol39/htm/xx.iii.htm

Whoa, so John Calvin wasn't a cessationist!