

# A SPRINT THROUGH CALVIN'S INSTITUTES

## The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ

### I. Book III of *Institutes of the Christian Religion* – “The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ: What Benefits Come to Us From It, and What Effects Follow”

**A. The Unoriginality of Election in Calvin** – See Luther, Melancthon, Bucer, Zwingli, even Augustine!

**B. The Place of Election in Calvin's *Institutes*** - Book III on Christian Living!

**C. The Importance of Election for the Christian** - *“We shall never be clearly persuaded, as we ought to be, that our salvation flows from the wellspring of God's free mercy until we come to know His eternal election.”* (3.21.1)

### II. The Definition of Election

*“In actual fact, the covenant of life is not preached equally among all men, and among those to whom it is preached, it does not gain the same acceptance either constantly or in equal degree. In this diversity the wonderful depth of God's judgment is made known... If it is plain that it comes to pass by God's bidding that salvation is freely offered to some while others are barred from access to it, at once great and difficult questions spring up... Let this, therefore, first of all be before our eyes: to seek any other knowledge of predestination that what the Word of God discloses is not less insane than if one should purpose to walk in a pathless waste, or to see in darkness... We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man... As Scripture, then, clearly shows, we say that God once established by his eternal and unchangeable plan those whom he long before determined once for all to receive in salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction...”* (3.21.1, 5, 7)

1. What do we mean when we say that God's election is “absolute”, “particular”, and “double” (see below)?

*“We must now add a second, more limited degree of election... that is, when from the same race of Abraham God rejected some but showed that he kept others among his sons by cherishing them in the church.”* (3.21.6)

*“But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel...”* (Rom 9:6)

*“Indeed, many, as if they wished to avert a reproach from God, accept election in such terms as to deny that anyone is condemned. But they do this very ignorantly and childishly, since election could not stand except as set over against reprobation... [T]hose whom God passes over, he condemns; and this he does for no other reason than that he wills to exclude them from the inheritance which he predestines for his own children.”* (3.23.1)

### III. The Cause and Ground of Election

1. How do the many people who cannot accept election (as outlined above) explain its grounds?

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, \* even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”* (Eph 1:3-4)

*“By thus covering election with a veil of foreknowledge, they not only obscure it but feign that it has its origin elsewhere... When Paul teaches that we were chosen in Christ ‘before the creation of the world’ (Eph 1:4), he takes away all consideration of real worth on our part... It is simply the Lord's clear declaration that he finds in men no reason to bless them but takes from his mercy alone (Rom 9:16)... To sum up: by free adoption God makes those whom he wills to be his sons; the intrinsic cause of this is in himself; for he is content with his own secret good pleasure.”* (3.21.1, 6, 3.22.7)

*“Again I ask: whence does it happen that Adam's fall irremediably involved so many peoples, together with their infant offspring, in eternal death unless because it so pleased God? Here their tongues, otherwise so loquacious, must become mute. The decree is*

*dreadful (horribile), I confess. Yet no one can deny that God foreknew what end man was to have before he created him, and consequently foreknew because he so ordained by his decree. If anyone inveigh against God's foreknowledge at this point, he stumbles rashly and heedlessly.*" (3.23.7)

2. What is, then, the ultimate cause for both election and reprobation?
3. What is the *proximate* or "evident" cause for condemnation? Are these two causes of condemnation compatible? Which cause is clearer to us?

*"Accordingly, man falls according as God's providence ordains, but he falls by his own fault...we should contemplate the evident cause of condemnation in the corrupt nature of humanity—which is closer to us—rather than seek a hidden and utterly incomprehensible cause in the God's predestination."* (3.23.8)

#### IV. The Goal of Election

- A. God's Glory – "...it is certain that he so judged because he saw that thereby the glory of his name is duly revealed." (3.23.8)
- B. The Sanctification of Christians – "Paul teaches that we have been chosen to this end, that we may lead a holy and blameless life." (3.23.12)

#### V. Objections to Election Answered

- A. It makes God a tyrant. – "...it is very wicked merely to investigate the causes of God's will...For God's will is so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever he wills, by the very fact that he wills it, must be considered righteous." (3.23.2)
- B. It removes our guilt and responsibility. – "Man falls according as God's providence ordains, but he falls of his own fault." (3.23.8)
- C. It proves God shows partiality. – "The fact that God therefore chooses one man but rejects another arises not out of regard to the man but solely from His mercy." (3.23.10)
- D. It destroys zeal for an upright life. – "Paul teaches that we have been chosen to this end, that we may lead a holy and blameless life." (3.23.12)
- E. It makes all admonitions meaningless. – "Let preaching then takes its course that it may lead men to faith." (3.23.14)

#### VI. The Use of Election

- A. To Humble Men and Exalt God's Glory! – "Let preaching, then, takes its course that it may lead men to faith, and hold them fast in perseverance with continuing profit. And yet let not the knowledge of predestination be hindered, in order that those who obey may not be proud as of something of their own by may glory in the Lord." (3.23.13)
- B. For Assurance! – "Christ, then, is the mirror wherein we must, and without self-deception may, contemplate our own election... predestination, rightly understood, brings no shaking of faith but rather its best confirmation." (3.24.5)
- C. For Worship and Reverence! – "Reason, thou; I will marvel. Dispute, thou; I will believe. I see the depth; I do not reach the bottom." (3.23.5) (Quoting Augustine paraphrasing Paul)

*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!<sup>34</sup>*

*"For who has known the mind of the Lord,  
or who has been his counselor?"*

<sup>35</sup> *"Or who has given a gift to him  
that he might be repaid?"*

<sup>36</sup> *For from him and through him and to him are all things.  
To him be glory forever. Amen. (Rom 11:33-38)*