

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. Chapter 1 – The Secret Work of the Spirit (“The Way”)
- B. Chapter 2 – The Definition of Faith (the chief work of the Spirit)
- C. Chapter 3-5 – The Doctrine of Repentance
 1. Confusingly, Calvin also calls “sanctification”, “conversion”, “the Christian life”
- D. Chapter 6-10 – The Christian Life (“Calvin’s Golden Booklet on the Christian Life”)
- E. Chapters 11-18 – The Doctrine of Justification.
- F. Chapters 19-25 – Liberty, Prayer, Election, Resurrection

II. The Holy Spirit: Who??

We must now examine this question. How do we receive those benefits which the Father bestowed on his only-begotten Son—not for Christ’s own private use, but that he might enrich poor and needy men? First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us... [A]ll that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him. It is true that we obtain this by faith... To sum up, the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself... Paul shows the Spirit to be the inner teacher by whose efforts the promise of salvation penetrates into our minds, a promise that would otherwise only strike the air or beat upon our ears... Consequently, he may rightly be called the key that unlocks for us the treasures of the Kingdom of Heaven... (3.1.1,4)

1. How is Book I (Knowledge of God the Creator) useless without Book II (Knowledge of God the Redeemer in Christ)? How then is Book II useless to us without Book III?!? What important aspect of the Gospel does this teach us as we talk with others?

“This union alone ensures that, as far as we are concerned, he has not unprofitably come with the name of Savior. The same purpose is served by that sacred wedlock through which we are made flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone [Eph 5:30], and thus one with him. But he unites himself to us by the Spirit alone.” (3.1.3)

“Nothing is more central or basic than union and communion with Christ... it is not simply a phase of the application of redemption; it underlies every aspect of redemption both in its accomplishment and application.”

*- John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 161-65.*

2. If Book I was titled “God the Creator” and Book II was “God the Redeemer in Christ”, why doesn’t the title of Book III mention the Holy Spirit by name? What might this Biblically appropriate? Isn’t Calvin called the “Theologian of the Holy Spirit” (B.B. Warfield)??

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” (John 16:13-14)

III. Faith: “I believe; Help my unbelief!”

And we must scrutinize and investigate the true character of faith with greater care and zeal because many are dangerously deluded today in this respect. Indeed, most people, when they hear this term, understand nothing deeper than a common assent to the gospel history... Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit... On the other hand, we say that believers are in perpetual conflict with their own unbelief... [T]he godly heart feels in itself a division because it is partly imbued with sweetness from its recognition of the divine goodness, partly grieves in bitterness from an awareness of its calamity; partly rests upon the promise of the gospel, partly trembles at the evidence of its own iniquity; partly rejoices at the expectation of life, partly shudders at death. This variation arises from the imperfection of faith... [But] the end of the conflict is always this: that faith ultimately triumphs over those difficulties which besiege and seem to imperil it... It is like a man who, shut up in a prison into which the sun's rays shine obliquely and half obscured through a rather narrow window, is indeed deprived of the full sight of the sun. Yet his eyes dwell on its steadfast brightness, and he receives its benefits. (3.2.1, 6, 7, 18)

1. According to Calvin's definition, what is the primary component of true faith?
2. Do you think Calvin was saying that if faith is not “firm and certain” then it is not true faith?
3. Is the end of faith ever in doubt?

A Calvinistic Definition of Faith: “Faith is a steady and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us invariably attacked by vicious doubts and fears over which it is finally victorious.” (Dr. David Calhoun)

IV. Lifelong Repentance: “My heart I give to unto You, O Lord, promptly and sincerely”

For since pardon and forgiveness are offered through the preaching of the gospel in order that the sinner, freed from the tyranny of Satan, the yoke of sin, and the miserable bondage of vices, may cross over into the Kingdom of God, surely no one can embrace the grace of the gospel without betaking himself from the errors of his past life into the right way, and applying his whole effort to the practice of repentance... [I]n my judgment, repentance can thus be well defined: it is the true turning of our life to God, a turning that arises from a pure and earnest fear of him; and it consists in the mortification of our flesh and of the old man, and in the vivification of the Spirit. (3.3.1, 5)

1. What is the difference between repenting out of fear of punishment and repenting out of fear of God? Hint: How does each approach view sin? Which is your approach?

“As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.”¹⁰ For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.” (2 Cor 7:9-10)

A True Turning: “[Paul] calls it ‘sorrow... according to God’ when we not only abhor punishment but hate and abominate sin itself, because we know that it displeases God.” (3.3.7)

A Total Turning: “...outward uprightness is not the chief point of repentance...men must cleanse away the secret filth in order than an altar may be erected to God in the heart itself.” (3.3.16)

A Continual Turning: “...this restoration does not take place in one moment or one day or one year; but through continual and sometimes even slow advances God wipes out in his elect the corruptions of the flesh, cleanses them of guilt, consecrates them to himself as temples...In order that believers may reach this goal, God assigns to them a race of repentance, which they are to run throughout their lives.” (3.3.9)