

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 (also “sanctification/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. Justification as the “Hinge” of Religion

“[Justification] is the main hinge on which religion turns, so that we devote the greater attention and care to it. For unless you first of all grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of his judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God... [J]ustified by faith is he who, excluded from the righteousness of works, grasps the righteousness of Christ through faith, and clothed in it, appears in God’s sight not as a sinner but as a righteous man... In the shady cloisters of the schools anyone can easily and readily prattle about the value of works in justifying men. But when we come before the presence of God we must put away such amusements! For there we deal with a serious matter... How shall we reply to the Heavenly Judge when he calls us to account? Let us envisage for ourselves that Judge, not as our minds naturally imagine him, but as he is depicted for us in Scripture... Outward parade of good works, which alone we now esteem, will be of no benefit there... To sum up, man cannot without sacrilege claim for himself even a crumb of righteousness, for just so much is plucked and taken away from the glory of God’s righteousness... In short, we must seek peace for ourselves solely in the anguish of Christ our Redeemer. (3.1.1-2, 3.12.1-2, 4)

A. C’s 3 definitions of Justification:

- (1) *“the acceptance with which God receive us into His favor as righteous... It consists in the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness.” (3.11.2)*
- (2) *“To justify means nothing else than to acquit of guilt him who was accused, as if his innocence were confirmed.” (3.11.3)*
- (3) *“We define justification as follows: the sinner, received into communion with Christ, is reconciled to God by His grace, while, cleansed by Christ’s blood, he obtains forgiveness of sins, and clothed with Christ’s righteousness as if it were his own, he stands confident before the heavenly judgment seat.” (3.17.8)*

B. Two Main Ideas:

- (1) Imputation – *“You see that our righteousness is not in us, but in Christ...” (3.11.23)*
- (2) Forgiveness of Sins – *“The righteousness of faith is reconciliation with God, which consists in the forgiveness of sins” (3.11.21)*

1. Why does forgiveness of sins require the imputation of righteousness? In other words, why couldn’t God have simply forgiven our sins?

2. If you Calvinist believe in justification by faith alone, doesn’t that mean you don’t care about good works?

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH: Do We Mean the Same Thing?

	Calvin/Reformed View	Roman Catholic View
How is a sinner <i>declared</i> just before God?	Only by the <i>imputed</i> righteousness of Christ, given by God's free grace.	Only after the righteousness of Christ is <i>infused</i> in us, together with resulting good works.
What is the <i>ground</i> of one's justification?	Christ's work completed in history, counted for the sinner. <i>"...so long as any particle of righteousness remains with us some occasion for boasting remains with us."</i> (3.11.13)	Christ's work in history, together with one's "God-given" works and the works of others. <i>"If any one saith, that men are justified by the sole imputation of the justice [righteousness] of Christ ... let him be anathema"</i> (Sixth Session, Canon 11)
What is meant that justification is "<i>by faith</i>"?	Faith is the <i>instrument</i> or means by which one receives God's grace. ("by faith alone") <i>"It is clear from their own writings that in using the term 'grace' they are deluded."</i> (3.11.15)	Faith is the <i>foundation</i> or <i>initiation</i> of one's state of grace, which must be further propelled by good works done in faith (e.g., sacraments of baptism, penance). <i>"If any one saith, that the good works of one that is justified are in such manner the gifts of God, that they are not also the good merits of him that is justified ... let him be anathema"</i> (Sixth Session, Canon 32; italics mine).
What is the role of good works?	Good works are the necessary fruit or result of one's justification, yet distinct from it. <i>"...having admitted that faith and good works must cleave together, we still lodge justification in faith, not in works."</i> (3.16.1)	Good works are the divinely provided, but personally performed, basis for my acceptance to God. <i>"If any one saith that the commandments of God are ... impossible to keep: let him be anathema"</i> (Sixth Session, Canon 18)
Creedal description of justification:	<i>"Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone."</i> (WSC 33)	<i>"They, through the observance of the commandments of God and of the Church, faith co-operating with good works, increase in that justice [righteousness] which they have received through the grace of Christ, and are still further justified"</i> (Sixth Session, Chap 10; italics mine).

3. In light of the above chart, evaluate the following statement from the ecumenical 1994 document, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium”: *“We affirm together that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ”* (*First Things*, May 1994 issue, 16).

4. What are some of the effects of the Reformed vs. Roman Catholic views of justification in terms of merit? What about assurance?

III. An Effect of Justification: CHRISTIAN FREEDOM!

[Christian freedom] is especially an appendage of justification and is of no little avail in understanding its power... [U]nless this freedom be comprehended, neither Christ nor gospel truth, nor inner peace of soul, can be rightly known... Christian freedom, in my opinion, consists of three parts... (3.19.1)

A. Freedom from the Law: *“...the consciences of believers, in seeking assurance of their justification before God, should rise above and advance beyond the law, forgetting all law righteousness...they ought to give no place to the law.”* (3.19.2)

- What does Calvin mean by “give no place to the law”?

B. Freedom to obey God: *“The second part, dependent upon the first, is that consciences observe the law, not as if constrained by the necessity of the law, but that freed from the law’s yoke they willingly obey God’s will.”* (3.19.4)

- But what if I still sin??

“[Sons] do not hesitate to offer [their fathers] incomplete and half-done and even defective works, trusting that their obedience and readiness of mind will be accepted by their fathers, even though they have not quite achieved what their fathers intended.” (3.19.5)

C. Freedom from “things indifferent”: *“...we are not bound before God by any religious obligation preventing us from sometimes using them and other times not using them, indifferently.”* (3.19.7)

- What are some examples of things “indifferent”?
- How do Calvin’s two principles of moderation (for us) and compassion (for others) shape this type of freedom?