

Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin
(Translation by Henry Beveridge)¹
Men's Theology Study – November 17, 2021 – 6:30 pm

Book 2 – Of the knowledge of God the Redeemer, in Christ, as first manifested to the fathers, under the law, and thereafter to us under the gospel.

Discussion Questions: How would you define Penal Substitutionary Atonement? Double Imputation? Satisfaction (of God's wrath)? Mortification? Vivification? Are these terms helpful? Why do they matter?

Chapter 16 – How Christ Performed the Office of Redeemer in Procuring Our Salvation. The Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ

- A. Alienated by sin from God, who yet loved us, we are reconciled by Christ (s. 1-4).
1. The Redeemer (s. 1)
 - i) Why was Jesus sent? To redeem. "...the office of Redeemer was assigned him in order that he might be our Savior (s. 1)."
 - ii) Discussion Questions
 - (1) If perseverance to glory does not accompany salvation, how would redemption be defective?
 - (2) Does Calvin teach Christians can backslide and lose their salvation?
 - (a) Quote: "Therefore, the moment we turn aside from him in the minutest degree, salvation, which resides entirely in him, gradually disappears; so that all who do not rest in him voluntarily deprive themselves of all grace (s. 1)."
 2. The Importance of the Awareness of God's Wrath
 - i) Scripture is clear about the sinful estate of mankind.
 - (1) Enemies to God (Rom 5:10), cursed by the law (Gal 3:10, 13), and alienated to God (Col 1:21-22).
 - (2) Why does Scripture speak so severely of our sinful estate? In short, divine accommodation. "For were it not said in clear terms, that divine wrath, and vengeance, and eternal death, lay upon us, we should be less sensible of our wretchedness without the mercy of God, and less disposed to value the blessing of deliverance (s. 2)."
 - ii) The more we understand our depravity, the more we will appreciate God's grace to save us from our sins.
 - (1) From one degree: "...the person will indeed be affected, and made sensible in some degree how much he owes to the mercy of God (s. 2)."
 - (2) To a greater degree: "...will not these considerations move him the more deeply, the more strikingly they represented the greatness of the calamity from which he was delivered (s. 2)?"

¹Supplemental Material from *Analysis of the Institutes of the Christian Religion of John Calvin* by Ford Lewis Battles (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2001 Reprint) and *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes* edited by David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2008).

3. God Finds Grounds for Hatred and Love in Mankind
 - i) What are the grounds of God's hatred of us?
 - ii) What does God find us "which in kindness he can love"?
 - iii) What precedes our reconciliation in Christ?
 4. Atonement is the result of God's love, not what creates God's love.
 - i) How can we reconcile what appears to be a contradiction in God's character?
 - (1) John 3:16, "...God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son..."
 - (2) Rom 5:10, "...while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son..."
 - (3) Answer: Ephesians 1:3-5, "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. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will..."
 - ii) Augustine, "Our being reconciled by the death of Christ must not be understood as if the Son reconciled us, in order that the Father, then hating, might begin to love us, but that we were reconciled to him already, loving, though at enmity with us because of sin."
- B. The effects of the obedience and death of Christ (s. 5-7).
1. Active and Passive Obedience (s. 5)
 - i) Christ obtained reconciliation for us through his active obedience.
 - (1) Active obedience: "...even at his baptism he declared that a part of righteousness was fulfilled by his yielding obedience to the command of the Father. In short, the moment when he assumed the form of a servant, he began, in order to redeem us, to pay the price of deliverance (s. 5)."
 - (2) Rom 5:19, "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."
 - (3) Gal 4:4-5, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."
 - ii) Christ obtained reconciliation for us through his passive obedience.
 - (1) Passive obedience: Christ willingly receives the punishment of sin for sinners breaking God's perfect law (which he perfectly kept in his active obedience).
 - (2) Rom 3:25-26, "...whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."
 - (3) 2 Cor 5:21, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."
 - iii) How did Christ represent the character of both a sinner and a criminal?
 2. Double Imputation (s. 6)
 - i) "...that which was represented figuratively in the Mosaic sacrifices is exhibited in Christ the archetype (s. 6)."

- ii) Double Imputation: "For the Son of God, though spotlessly pure, took upon him the disgrace and ignominy of our iniquities, and in return clothed us with his purity (s. 6)."
- 3. The Death of Death (s. 7)
 - i) "By dying he prevented us from dying; or (which is the same thing) he by his death purchased life for us. But in this he differed from us, that in permitting himself to be overcome of death, it was not so as to be engulfed in its abyss but rather to annihilate it, as it must otherwise annihilated us; he did not allow himself to be subdued by it as to be crushed by its power; he rather laid it prostrate, when it was impending over us, and exulting over us as already overcome (s. 7)."
 - ii) The benefits of the death of death
 - (1) He destroys the power of death and delivers from the fear of death (Heb 2:14-15).
 - (2) He mortifies our earthly members, burying us to sin with him (Rom 6).

C. Explanation of the doctrine of the descent into hell (s. 8-12).

- 1. Calvin argues the phrase "descended into hell" in the Apostle's Creed is important (s. 8).
 - i) "The chief thing to be attended to in the creed is, that it furnishes us with a full and every way complete summary of faith, containing nothing but what has been derived from the infallible word of God. But should any still scruple to give it admission into the creed, it will shortly be made plain, that the place which it holds in a summary of our redemption is so important, that the omission of it greatly detracts from the benefit of Christ's death (s. 8)."
- 2. Theories about what "descended into hell" means (s. 8-9).
 - i) It simply speaks of his burial. The latin word for hell being *infernus*, is used (I assume in the Vulgate) for sepulcher. Problems:
 - (1) First, why would the biblical authors under the inspiration of the Spirit obscure the meaning?
 - (2) Second, if it meant the same thing why would the creed use the needless repetition?
 - ii) Christ descended to the souls of the patriarchs, who died under the law, to announce his accomplished redemption, and bring them out of the prison in which they were confined (s. 9). Problems:
 - (1) Scripture doesn't attest to the OT saints being held in a hellish prison.
 - (2) 1 Pet 3:19-20, Possibly means that Christ's death was made known to both the righteous and wicked dead.
- 3. The "descent into hell" is an expression of the spiritual torment that Christ underwent for us (s. 10-12).
 - i) "Hence there is nothing strange in its being said that he descended to hell, seeing he endured the death which is inflicted on the wicked by an angry God (s. 10)."
 - (1) The creeds moves logically from the physical (was crucified, died, and was buried) to the spiritual (descended into hell).
 - ii) "And certainly no abyss can be imagined more dreadful than to feel that you are abandoned and forsaken of God, and not heard when you invoke him, just as if he had conspired your destruction (s. 11)."
 - iii) "Did Christ descend to hell at the time when he deprecated death? I answer, that this was the commencement, and that from it we may infer how dire and dreadful were the tortures which he endured when he felt himself standing at the bar of God as a criminal in our stead (s. 12)."

D. Christ's resurrection, ascension, heavenly session, and return for the final judgment (s. 13-17).

1. Three Benefits from Christ's Resurrection (s. 13)

i) By his resurrection alone, not his death, are we begotten again to a living hope (1 Pet 1:3).

(1) Speaking of Rom 4:25, "By his death sin was taken away, by his resurrection righteousness was renewed and restored. For how could he by dying have freed us from death, if he had yielded to its power? How could he have obtained the victory for us, if he had fallen in the contest? (s. 13)"

ii) If our mortification is connected to his death, our vivification is connected to his resurrection.

(1) Rom 6:4, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order than, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

iii) Assurance of our own resurrection.

2. "Ascended into heaven" (s. 14)

i) Why was it to our advantage that Christ should ascend into heaven (John 16:7)?

ii) By his ascension, Christ fills all things in heaven and in earth (Eph 4:10). From there he rules both heaven and earth more immediately by his power.

3. "Seated at the right hand of the Father (s. 15-16)

i) Simply means that Christ is ruling and reigning over all things, until the day he returns in judgment.

ii) Benefits (s. 16)

(1) He has opened up the access to the heavenly kingdom, which Adam had shut, and we are now seated with him.

(2) He intercedes for us.

(3) We depend on the power of the strength, might, resources, and triumph of his reign.

4. Christ's final return in judgment (s. 17)

i) How is Christ's kingdom in the world "in a manner veiled?"

ii) Who will be judged by Christ?

E. Concluding remarks on the Apostles' Creed and the Sufficiency of Christ (s. 18-19).

1. What purpose do creeds have if they aren't inspired Scripture?

2. The sum of the Apostle's Creed, and more importantly our salvation, are comprehended in Christ. Therefore, let us be careful from deriving any portion of our salvation from any other quarter or portion.