

## The Sermons of John Calvin -- Content

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# Absolved Only Through the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ

by John Calvin

*Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.*

## Gal. 5:1-3

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Last time, we saw that in order to have an abiding place in the church, we need the Lord Jesus Christ as our foundation. There are many who claim to be children of God who have never been born again through that good seed which enlightens, and brings acceptance with God, who then acknowledges us as his children. We must hold fast to the pure doctrine of the gospel if we desire to be truly united to the Lord Jesus Christ. He, as our Head and our Mediator, unites us to God the Father. We have already spoken about the reason why Paul mentions both the servile and the free offspring. He tells us that those who seek justification through their own good deeds are severing themselves from the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. For they are binding themselves to perform that which is impossible, that is, to satisfy God by keeping his commandments. Whereas, we are so full of weaknesses that we cannot possibly fulfill the least article of the law, let alone reach the perfection which the law requires. This is why Paul concludes that we must maintain the liberty that was purchased for us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, he is most certainly referring to the ceremonies here, although we should always return to the original purpose and main goal of the law. For if the law were only concerned with keeping a certain feast day or abstaining from a certain kind of meat, this would not be an issue of such weight as to stir up so many contentions within the church. Yet, Paul never wasted his time dealing with trivial or inconsequential matters. He was concerned with doctrine; for to make other matters obligatory was to exclude multitudes from the hope of salvation. If it is a mortal sin to neglect a certain ritual, I become a transgressor if I fail, and there is no remedy for such a sin. God is my judge and will call me to account; there is no means of redemption. Whilst it is true that we all must observe the law, yet there is a remedy if, on account of our shortcomings, we run to the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, he submitted to the law in order to buy our liberty. He took our

curse upon him in order to set us free. So then, if we impose various additional obligations, and say that to do this or that is a sin, our Lord Jesus Christ will not serve as a remedy for such things in the way that I have said. Instead, we will remain under the curse without hope of deliverance. Thus, Paul has good reason to exhort the Galatians to stand fast and not allow themselves to return to servitude. For this, he says, will rob them of a priceless gift, and they will fall from the grace of God and be separated from the Lord Jesus Christ, the only source of salvation and eternal happiness.

Now, in order to experience the nature and qualities of this gift, we must learn to hide ourselves in God. Let me give an example here. If certain laws and obligations are placed upon us by men, they do not detract from our liberty before God. Whatever belongs to law and order, and is either forbidden or commanded, must be obeyed for the sake of the common good. If a certain duty is required, we ought to do it, thereby serving one another in the community. Notice, therefore, that the things which pertain to law and order require that we interact in a united and harmonious way, having such a strong bond that we will serve our neighbours, and not selfishly look after our own interests. However, when it comes to spiritual liberty, we need to withdraw from the crowd in order to experience its nature and effects. I say that each one of us must come before God personally, for one day we shall give account before our heavenly judge. We are to examine ourselves within and ask, how am I to present myself before the judgment seat of God? If my life is examined according to the law, woe is me! I am guilty of an infinite number of offences, that even if there were a million deaths, it would be insufficient to pay for the sins I have committed. Yet, God desires to show me his favour, and receive me in mercy in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. When I approach him, therefore, I can come with my head held high, having been acquitted and absolved through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who paid for my sin and gave me full deliverance. This is the first thing, the way in which I must serve God. Of course, I must dedicate my life to him, but how do I begin? For I cannot bring him the perfection that he requires, nor even the hundredth part of it! Well, God bears with me, and still accepts and approves that which is imperfect and weak, and even that which is mixed with sin. Why? Because he accepts me in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ as one of his own children. This, I say, is how we are to come before God if we wish to know and experience the fruit of this liberty of which Paul speaks.

When Paul says, 'be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage', he shows that before we had faith in the gospel and understood the significance of the sufferings and death of the Son of God, we were held tightly bound as prisoners and did not enjoy any freedom. Indeed, if Jesus Christ had not intervened and become the Mediator between God the Father and man, our souls would still be tormented and afflicted. For there is not one of us who does not recognise that he is more than guilty, and we would have remained in this condition, drowned in despair, had we not been rescued by the Lord Jesus Christ. Such sorrow would have been ours if we never knew how merciful God would be on us;

how he would bestow peace to us, and the boldness to call upon him because Jesus Christ has gone before us. On the other hand, if we do not know that God has truly received us, and is satisfied with the obedience that we seek to render to him (though with much weakness), then we are bound by a second rope, which will strangle us. This is the case with all unbelievers. Now the gospel has shown that God loves us, and that he freely accepts us as his children in his goodness. Therefore, Paul warns us not to be trampled upon by men in their tyranny, but to be delivered from the rigorous obligations of the law which force us into slavery. We are to uphold our privileged position, now that Jesus Christ has set us free.

Let us now consider the reason that he gives: 'Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.' This statement, which tells us that circumcision can cut men off from any share in the salvation purchased by our Lord Jesus Christ, is very harsh. However, we must remember, first of all, that when Paul speaks of circumcision here, he is not referring to the act itself, but to its purpose. The seducers that had infiltrated the Galatians and corrupted the purity of the gospel wanted them to believe that a person had to be circumcised in order to keep the law. Paul stops here, and says that if we are being forced and obliged to perform this task for God and to enter into this covenant with him, Jesus Christ will not profit us. This is well worthy of our attention. Today, we say that it is hellish tyranny to command people to obey certain rules on the grounds that their failure is a mortal sin! Likewise, it is tyranny to forbid something simply because it does not please men. Someone ordained that we should keep Lent, and another, that we should confess all of our sins once a year. Now if we dispute this, the Papists, as I have said, will be thrown into a mad rage, without considering the reasons why we have been stirred up to insist upon this view. Why? Because they look no further than the external act. Yet, we must look more deeply. The Papists command that we obey, on pain of committing a mortal sin, making us think that we are obliged to do it to be acceptable to God; we have entered into a covenant with him based upon doing our duty. Whoever has fulfilled his duty has made God his debtor, according to the devilish doctrines which abound in Popery. We can only obtain grace by our merits, and the memory of our sins and iniquities can be wiped out by making our own satisfaction for sin and thereby appeasing God's wrath. We see, therefore, that if we can obtain our own pardon, Jesus Christ is made of no value and cannot profit us at all. Why? Because Jesus Christ is not our righteousness if we do not seek remission of our sins through the sacrifice of his death. We need to be sure that God is our Father, and that we can call upon him with a peaceful conscience, having been adopted through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, it is true that the seducers who deceived the Galatians still desired Jesus Christ to be known as the Saviour of the world. They believed both the law and the gospel, so they upheld all the titles that belonged to Jesus Christ. However, they believed that part of our salvation has to be merited, as a means of appeasing God. Thus, Jesus Christ simply supplied that which was lacking. But this leaves poor souls with troubled consciences still. The same applies today in Popery. The Pope, with all the scum of his clergy, differs

nothing from the seducers that Paul is arguing against here, except, perhaps, that they used the authority of the law of Moses to push forward their own notions and make them acceptable. The people that Paul criticises here were arguing that they must observe the rite of circumcision. They said it was necessary for everyone to be circumcised. Why? In order to be guiltless before God; that, having done their duty, they may be acceptable to him. What, then, is the role of Jesus Christ? He acts as a kind of supplement; they are not saying that he has no purpose, but that he supplies the difference, after men have acquitted and absolved themselves, and only if they need extra help! Such is the speech of the seducers who opposed Paul. And what of the Pope? Instead of the ceremonial law of Moses, he says that we must obey what he ordains, and what his councils determine, or decisions of this person or that. He makes such directives compulsory, on pain of committing a mortal sin. If we have offended God, he says we can redeem ourselves through penances, rather than by doing what God has commanded. His idea of penance is not to fulfill that which has been commanded in the law, but to do even more than is required; this is how we are acquitted in God's sight and made acceptable to him. We can see, therefore, that the Pope has retained the same devilish principle that these people sought to introduce. Indeed, his sin is even worse, because instead of using the law of Moses for his authority, he bases it upon his own inventions, forged in his own mind!

Paul opposes all this, and says that Christ shall profit them nothing if they seek such a covenant with God. Why? Because it is as if they are dividing Christ, and only attributing to him half of that which is wholly his own. He is our righteousness and he is our peace (*1 Cor.* 1:30; *Eph.* 2:14). What does this word 'righteousness' imply? It means that God can freely accept us through the Lord Jesus Christ. If we say that we can please God by our merits, and that Jesus Christ simply completes that which we lack, are we not tearing him in two, and dismembering him as far as is in our power? We are not to do such a thing, nor allow others to do so. Furthermore, our Lord Jesus Christ has paid for our sins, and there is no other means of being reconciled to God than the knowledge that he has delivered and rescued us from the penalty of eternal death. If we think that we can purchase our own redemption through our own merits, and believe that the rest will come from him, as a small addition, we are openly mocking him, which is abominable. We see why Paul says that Jesus Christ will not profit in such circumstances; he wants men to stop deceiving themselves by creating a Jesus Christ who only partially fulfils his office. No; we must receive him as he is revealed to us by God the Father. He has been given to us so that we might not trust in anything else, but have recourse to him alone. We are to be content to have him as our Head, and we must serve God the Father with all that we have, knowing that although it amounts to nothing, yet he is pleased with it through our adoption in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is this which makes us ourselves and all our works acceptable to God. Ourselves, I say, though we are worthless, and our works, though they are vain. God is pleased with them because he does not take account of what we are, or of what we have done, nor of the quality or quantity of our works. He is interested in the fact that we have come to him, as members of the body of his only Son, leaning entirely upon the sacrifice by which he bought us.

This is why Paul adds, for the greater confirmation of the same, 'I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.' If we wish to justify ourselves in this way, he says, Christ will not profit us. We have here a very straightforward and articulate statement of what Paul said earlier, and we must pay attention to it, for it is difficult to persuade people that Christ is of no value at all if they seek to make use of him only in part. For although the Turks and pagans have not even known Jesus Christ, they have a similar view to the Papists, and we will find much conformity between them. For there have never been any pagan people in this world who have believed that we cannot please God. They have always boasted about their good deeds and thought that their salvation depended upon them. Pagans have, therefore, always believed that they can obtain grace and merit favour in God's sight. Hence, they have offered sacrifices to him, unaware that these are a figure of the Lord Jesus Christ, hoping to bring God a propitiation. This, also, was done by the Jews, having defiled and corrupted the true significance of the law. The Papists follow suit today. They are certain that God accepts what they do, and is somehow indebted to them. They enter into a covenant with him whereby he is compelled to accept what they do, though they have failed him. (For on the one hand, they readily accept that they cannot achieve everything perfectly — although, on the other hand, they claim that they can accomplish more than God has required of them, and that this serves as payment!) Now, because it is difficult to persuade men that Jesus Christ cannot serve as part-payment, we must give all the more attention to this passage, where Paul tells us that whoever is circumcised is a debtor to perform the whole law.

Firstly, when Paul speaks of circumcision, he is not referring to that which was instituted by God. Why, indeed, did he ask this of Abraham? It was a seal of the righteousness that comes through faith, as Paul himself says in the fourth chapter to the Romans (*Rom.* 4:11). When Abraham was circumcised, it did not make him a debtor to keep the whole law: on the contrary, it was to obtain remission of his sins, and to assure him that God accepted him as one of his children in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, circumcision set our father Abraham free! Why did he do it? Because it was a sacrament that reminded him of the free mercy of God. Those with whom Paul argues here took circumcision as a meritorious work, hoping to obtain God's favour by it. They saw it as a covenant which said, 'I have declared my allegiance to you by doing this, and now I seek a reward'. If we enter such a covenant with God, then we are debtors to keep the whole law. In other words, Paul is saying that we cannot bargain with God. Men must not imagine that they can please God in part, and that he is, therefore, obligated to them. He is not bound to allow them into his paradise because they have done this or that. No, no, says Paul, we must reach heaven by very different means; we are not to have this notion of a mutual covenant with God, which makes him obligated to grant us eternal life in return for compulsory observation of the law. If this is what we have believed, then we are debtors to keep the whole law.

In brief, Paul contends here with the Satanic doctrine which holds sway in Popery today. They speak of partial righteousness, which means that part of it proceeds from the grace of God, whilst the other portion is supplied by meritorious works. How could this be? After all, it is quite obvious that there has never been a man alive in this world who has fulfilled the whole law of God. Experience proves this so clearly! Since the Papists realise the truth of this, it being most evident, as I say, that no man can keep all of the law, they have the effrontery to say, 'Oh, we do not believe that a person can be completely righteous in every way, and therefore Jesus Christ is our righteousness and our Redeemer in part. The rest we merit through our good deeds!' Shame, shame, says Paul. If you imagine that you have an agreement with God whereby you have merited something from him, and deserve a reward because you have placed him in your debt; if, I say, you are so mercenary as to say, 'I have done this, now you must do that', you have made yourself a debtor to do the whole law. These are foolish notions; men are deceiving themselves by thinking that God accepts all that they do, yet will ignore all that they have omitted to do. For example, a man owes a hundred pounds, and has to pay it back. Yet, he thinks his creditor ought to be content if he gives him four pounds, and says, 'Here. Take this as payment'. Then he brings him another six, then ten. Finally, after much ado, he has paid him a third or a quarter of the sum owed. Now, if he believed that he had acquitted himself of the debt by doing this, would it not amount to wicked ingratitude? His friend had opened his purse to help him at a time of need, and did not spare anything in order to support him. Yet, he wants to be acquitted of the debt because he has given back I know not what, saying 'Take this as payment', when he has not even paid a quarter of the total amount. We can see that this would be ridiculous. What, then, of those who want to enter into account with God by their merits? For God has said, and Paul has already quoted this for us, that whoever does not keep all the things that are written in the law is accursed.

What, then, are our obligations under the law? To observe it perfectly. And who is able to accomplish this? There is not one who can fulfill even a single requirement to perfection. Yet, what do these hypocrites do, who believe they can be worthy through their own works? They do this and that, hoping to be righteous in part at least. God will accept none of it. He will never retract the following statement, which he made with his own mouth, 'Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them' (*Deut. 27:26*). This is why Paul insists here that whoever is circumcised is a debtor to keep the whole law. It is as if he were saying, 'Do not deceive yourselves any longer. God does not have two paths. He has declared in the law that whoever does not perfectly fulfill it is accursed.' There is not one who has succeeded, so that leaves us all under this curse. There is but one remedy, and that is to come to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is wrong to believe in the partial value of Jesus Christ, whilst holding on to I know not what of our own. We ought, rather, to confess that we are under the curse until our Lord Jesus Christ has freed us and we have sought all that we need in him. We need to confess that all our works are of no value, and that they stink in the eyes of God, until he owns us as his children, and enables us to walk in liberty of conscience, knowing that our sins are

forgiven by virtue of the pardon that he obtained for us. Now, God no longer imputes our sins and iniquities to us, because he sees us as we are in the person of his only Son.

This is how Paul sets out to prove what he said earlier, that Jesus Christ is of no profit to those who have been circumcised. Why? Because, if they seek salvation through works, they must achieve all that God requires, and not bits and pieces (as they say). They must accomplish the whole law, without omitting anything. Who is able to do this? If we were to select the most holy and perfect person that we could find, he could not even perform a hundredth part of that which has been commanded. Thus, men are bereft of any hope of salvation unless they come emptied of all their 'merits' and fully lean on the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing that they cannot be justified by him or by his grace unless they have renounced all those things in which they once trusted.

Furthermore, when Paul speaks of circumcision here, he means the erroneous view of it spread by these seducers, imagining that they were winning God's favour and fulfilling the law. Similarly today, all who keep the papal ordinances are overturning the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am not saying that a man will be condemned for refusing to eat meat on Fridays or on fast days; yet, if he abstains from meat out of superstition, and believes he is meriting God's favour by so doing, then he is rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ. He was given to us as our Advocate, in order to reconcile us to God the Father. He has set us free so that we have no need of human traditions. Many keep the papal ordinances because they believe it is a mortal sin to eat meat on a certain day, and that, by abstaining, they deserve God's mercy because they have satisfied him. They even think that they are honouring Jesus Christ when they make confession, or do this or that! They believe that the door of heaven will remain closed to them unless they open it by confession, thinking that, by this means, they can appease God. Thus, by believing these things, they make themselves debtors (as I have said), and reject the grace obtained for them by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us now apply this doctrine to our profit. In the first place, we know that God has declared in the gospel that whenever we come to him (unless we are vexed and perturbed, like reeds shaking in the wind), we are to call upon him freely and openly as our Father, who has adopted us as his children. Secondly, the only way we can be pleasing to him is through having our sins forgiven. How? Jesus Christ has fully paid the price, and given us complete pardon. However, we know that this does not mean that we are to remove our bridles and please ourselves, like wild animals that cannot be tamed by God. No, rather, we must come to him freely, willing to obey him. We need the assurance that he accepts us as his children and supports us so compassionately that he approves of what we do, though it is worthless, because of the fatherly love he bears us. If we do not have this assurance, the thought of serving God will make us grind our teeth. If, however, we



are persuaded that God looks upon us favourably; if, though we are weak and can do nothing worthy of his approval, he accepts us in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, then we will surely be filled with courage. We will be like a ship's sail that has been stretched and filled by the breeze! Thus, our hearts will run to obey him, like a ship driven along by its sail, when we know that God delights in us and accepts our works, not wanting us to be compelled into servitude. He is happy for us to be his children, and that we desire to obey him. Knowing this, we can serve our God with all the more zeal. With his grace as our foundation, we are so filled with his joy that we can offer the sacrifice of praise. Likewise, having sought him in prayer, we can know that he will answer us and, in return, we can thank him for the priceless gifts that he communicates to us every day.

Now let us fall down before the majesty of our great God, acknowledging our sins, and praying that it would please him to make us more conscious of them, so that we are truly humbled, and give ourselves wholly to the Lord Jesus Christ. Having come to him, may we persevere in the faith of the gospel, without drawing back in any way whatever. May he support us in our infirmity, when we are touched with our need for true repentance. May we tremble and groan before him, until the day that he delivers us from this mortal body, which, like a prison, confines us in bondage to sin. Thus, we all say, Almighty God, and our heavenly Father, etc

## Freedom from the Bondage of the Law

by John Calvin

*Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.*

*Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.*

### Gal. 4:21-26

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Freedom is such a desirable thing to every one of us, that without it our lives would be little more than a living death, or at the very least, perpetual misery. Indeed, so far as we are able, we flee subjection and constraint, and covet liberty, which, according to the old proverb, is a priceless treasure. If this is true of our earthly lives, then it applies even more to the eternal salvation of our souls. Yet how many there are who are still in bondage, as if they have a noose tied around their necks! Although they claim to love freedom, they live as though they were bound in slavery. This freedom is particularly evident when people are able to rejoice in the liberty purchased for them by the Lord Jesus Christ, which brings rest to their souls. In the gospel, God declares that he delights to adopt us as his children, and in doing so, he frees us from Satan's snare and from the tyranny of sin. But there are very few who will accept this gift when it is presented to them, because of their cursed captivity to sin; they seem to prefer to be subject to their own carnal appetites, rather than to yield in obedience to God and walk in complete liberty. Paul, therefore, has good reason to scold the Galatians for living under the law, because they are rejecting the freedom and liberty that they should have enjoyed as children of God.

Now Paul gives us a symbol, a vivid picture illustrating that the very law itself reveals the poverty and misery of the human heart; yet the Galatians prefer to remain under it! For the house of Abraham is a clear symbol of the church of God. It tells us much about the

state of the church. It is written that Abraham had two sons: Ishmael and Isaac (*Gen.* 16:1ff). Ishmael was born to Hagar, Abraham's servant, who was given to him to be his wife. But there was a serious fault here, for it was not right for him to break faith with his lawful wife, Sarah. Now, what was the reason for this union between Abraham and Hagar? It was brought about because Sarah acted hastily and rashly, believing that God was too slow about fulfilling his promise to her to provide her with offspring. She thought that she was unable to conceive. But her understanding of God's Word was poor, and she did not have the patience and contentment that faith demands. In short, this was a relationship to be condemned, an immoral union, though Abraham did not originally intend this at all. He had not been driven by wicked lust, he had simply desired to have seed through which would spring the salvation of the world. But how foolish such acts are, when we attempt this or that without being told to do so by the Word of God. When we are driven by our own rash desires, many sins occur. Thus, Ishmael was born to Hagar, the 'bondmaid', from an illicit relationship with which God was not pleased. Isaac was born to Sarah a long time after Ishmael, for Ishmael may have been sixteen years old when Isaac was born. Paul (following Moses' account) tells us that Isaac was born according to promise and Ishmael according to the flesh. Now this does not mean that Abraham was not Isaac's father, but rather that he was born through divine power; for Abraham was declining; indeed, he was half-dead and had no strength left in him! He was a hundred years old, and his wife was almost the same; she had been infertile throughout her life of roughly ninety years. The idea that she could conceive and give birth was seen as laughable when the angels brought her this message (*Gen.* 18:12). Therefore, Isaac was born according to promise, for God worked a miracle in order that he might send the Lord Jesus into this world; not following the laws of nature, but through the goodness of God alone and according to his perfect will.

Thus, in the house of Abraham, we have a figure of the church: two women, both of whom gave birth to a son. As for Hagar, Paul tells us that she represents Mount Sinai, where the law was given, and we are told that this was in Arabia, to show that it was not in the holy land chosen by God as an inheritance for his people. Sarah represents Jerusalem. Not, he says, the present city, for it has changed beyond recognition. Its inhabitants have separated themselves from the law and from pure doctrine. Now, when I say the law, I do not mean it in the way Paul refers to it in this letter — the law that engenders bondage — I mean the covenant that God made with his people through the Lord Jesus Christ. Since Jerusalem at the time of Paul had rejected Jesus Christ and, therefore, broken their covenant with God, Paul says that he must refer to it as Hagar and Sinai. For the Jews, he is saying, boast about their temple and sacrifices and the like, and that they are the chosen and elect people of God, yet they are banished and excluded from the holy land, as it were, and have a meaningless connection with the law. For if we were to see Jerusalem at the time of Paul, we would realise that it was comparable to Sinai. But there is another Jerusalem: 'Jerusalem which is above'. This corresponds to the church through which we receive regeneration in God's sight. The church, through the incorruptible seed of the gospel, engenders offspring who are freeborn. For she is 'the mother of us all'. Then Paul quotes the words of Isaiah, 'Rejoice, thou barren that bearest

not' (*Isa. 54:1*). Now, Isaiah is not referring to a particular woman here, but the church of God, using this image as a simile. For a time the church had been very dissolute and, therefore, Isaiah tells us it was as if she had been cast away. A kind of divorce had occurred between God and his people. But the prophet assures the church that he will multiply her one day, and that she would have more children than if she had always prospered and flourished. This happened when the gospel was proclaimed to the world. For the church not only comprises the children of Abraham, or one particular race; but through the holy seed of the gospel, she has brought forth an infinite number of children for God, of every nation and land, even those far-distant from our own. For God has displayed his might throughout the globe. This is the meaning of the passage that we have quoted.

Paul tells us that these things are 'an allegory'. The first point we need to make here is that Paul did not wish to deny the literal meaning of Holy Scripture. There are some people who find a curious pleasure in seeking out strange interpretations of the Scriptures. By overlooking the literal interpretation, they undermine the whole. Hence, there are countless perversions and corruptions of the truth. False allegories abound today; they are adopted by multitudes, and yet are nothing more than Satanic inventions. Because such theories are accepted and applauded, the people remain bewitched by Satan. What fine expositors they make! Yet, how are they so successful? Well, if a doctrine is neither from heaven nor from earth, it is easy for poor ignorant souls to remain in suspension between the two! Paul does not intend us to interpret Moses' story of Isaac and Ishmael as a fanciful speculation — no, he is demonstrating that this historical account reveals the state of the church, though, in those days, the only church that God presided over was that of the house of Abraham. (Of course, there was Salem, whose king was Melchisedec, but this was not clearly understood at that point. Therefore, God chose to adopt a people through Abraham, and to reveal that he wished to be called upon by a people whom he had separated from the rest of mankind.) However, we must not read Moses' account coldly, without looking any further, that is, without considering what happened to this family and applying it to the church.

Now, let us come to the central theme — the law. When Paul compares Hagar, Abraham's servant, to Mount Sinai and the law which was given on that mountain, he is not referring to the substance of the law. For the law contains many promises of salvation which were fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ; Paul himself declares this in several other passages, as we have already seen. If we take and apply the law in its proper and legitimate usage, we will see it as an incorruptible, life-giving seed, through which God becomes our Father and sets us free. The law only engenders servitude with relation to external issues, as we have discussed before. Our forefathers of old, though they were children of God and heirs of the kingdom of heaven just like ourselves, were under tutors and governors. They were like little children, incomplete until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their ceremonies were like bridles or cords preventing those who observed them from enjoying the liberty that we have today through the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet,

when Paul speaks of the law creating servitude, he is speaking here of the way in which the Galatians misapplied the law, for he continues by saying that those who are under such servitude will eventually be banished and excluded from the family and inheritance of God. Thus, although our forefathers lived in servitude with regard to external things, yet they were free; for the Spirit gave them a faith that overcame their bondage, as it says in the eighth chapter to the Romans. Without faith, they would have been cut off from any hope of salvation. To sum up, Paul refers to the law here in this negative way because of the particular interpretation these hypocrites had made of it, corrupting it by reducing it to the observance of petty rules, and by making their observation meritorious. In doing so, they were binding people's consciences so tightly that they were almost suffocated!

Now, Paul has adequately dealt with this subject on a previous occasion, but it would be helpful for us to remind ourselves of what he said. He drew a contrast between the law and the gospel; for those who seek justification through the law imagine that God is indebted to them if they fulfil their duty towards him. They have heard the promise that if a man keeps the law, he shall live (*Lev. 18:5*). They are rigorous in their law observance and even believe they have accomplished all that God requires and demands. Having such a promise before them, they await their reward, no longer believing that salvation is a free gift, but rather that they have deserved all that God has promised. Thus, eternal life becomes the expected recompense for all their meritorious deeds. So much for the law. As for the gospel, God becomes our Father when we are released from the curse of sin and Satan and, indeed, from the condemnation due to us through the law. For it is written that those who have not kept the law perfectly are accursed, as we have said before (*Deut. 27:26*). Thus, all are guilty; the whole world is plunged into despair without remedy, unless God withdraws the condemnation of poor sinners, and quashes the sentence he has pronounced upon them. We have now understood what Paul means when he refers here to the law. He is not saying that Moses' teachings are insufficient for a person to become a child of God, or that there are no promises of eternal salvation for mankind in the law, but simply that before Christ came into this world there was not the full enjoyment of liberty that we have today. More than this, he is informing us of the abuses of the law by hypocrites who had misinterpreted its purpose. They imagined that they could please God and obtain his favour by its observance. But Paul tells us that we remain in slavery until we are delivered by another kind of seed, that is to say, the gospel.

Now, when Paul says that Hagar or Sinai corresponds to 'Jerusalem which now is', he means that city which had once been God's sanctuary, and which, therefore, ought to have been the fountainhead of heavenly and pure doctrine. For both Isaiah and Micah tell us that 'out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem' (*Isa. 2:3; Mic. 4:2*). But the Jews became defiled and added their own inventions and interpretations to the purity of true doctrine. They even rejected Jesus Christ, the fountain of life. Thus, Paul tells us that this Jerusalem is like Hagar the bondmaid and Mount Sinai,

which can only bring about condemnation. This is worthy of note, because it shows us that God has never favoured a place so much that he could not punish the ingratitude of its inhabitants for their misuse of his benefits; mercies which he placed at their disposal. This is Jerusalem, known as the holy city of God, his royal palace, his habitation, the place of his residence — all of these descriptions are to be found in Holy Scripture, (*Psa.* 48:1-3, 132:13; *Matt.* 4:5, 27:53). Yet, Paul tells us that it has become like Sinai, an infertile mountain in a distant and desolate area outside the borders of the holy land, which God chose as the inheritance and resting place of his elect people.

Recognising that such a change had taken place in Jerusalem, the city once chosen by God and blessed with such excellent titles, what will happen to the people who reject the gospel today? Even if they have known great honour, God can easily bring them down to ignominy. Look what is said about the towns where Jesus preached the gospel, like Capernaum and the rest; they could boast of having been first to hear the message of salvation, or that Jesus Christ preached more there than in Jerusalem itself. But we are told that such towns would be ‘brought down to hell’ (*Matt.* 11:23). It was for their rebellion and stubborn persistence in evil; their refusal to accept the grace that was offered to them in the preaching of the gospel. We know what Jeremiah said about Shiloh (*Jer.* 7:12). You see, the Jews boasted that they had the city of Jerusalem with its temple and altar. But Jeremiah tells them to visit Shiloh — that place where the ark rested for so many years. People would come there from all parts to worship God and bring their sacrifices, but now what would they see there? A terrifying reminder of the vengeance of God because they had misused the good things that God had originally blessed them with.\

Now, let us apply this for our own instruction, so that we learn to walk in fear and wisdom, for God has been gracious to us by dwelling amongst us and establishing his royal throne to reign over us. For our part, we ought to obey him, and shelter ourselves beneath his wings in sobriety and humility. If we were to think that he is under obligation to us, then we will be audacious, opinionated and proud towards him. We would abuse the gifts that he intended to be for our well-being, and such wickedness could not go unpunished. Thus, the example of Jerusalem warns us to yield peacefully in obedience to our God, and allow him to rule over us. We must be submissive in every way, and not puffed up with pride or presumption, now that he has poured out his spiritual blessings upon us. Indeed, this ought to make us confess our dependence upon him and to humble ourselves.

Incidentally, we can see how foolish the Papists are to want to associate God with Rome; for they say it is the ‘apostolic seat’. But their claims about Peter are nothing more than lies and fables. Whilst it is certain that Paul was held prisoner in Rome, and it may even

be deduced that he died there, this is all that sets Rome apart. The gospel was attacked there, and that den of the devil was saturated with the blood of the martyrs, as if to provoke the wrath of God. It was here that men conspired to fight against the truth, and blot out, as far as they possibly could, the name and memory of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is all the dignity that Rome can claim! These people imagine that Rome has all the honourable titles that Jerusalem once had, though there is not a single syllable in the Scriptures to justify this. Nowhere do they tell us that God reigns there, or has chosen to dwell within its walls; nowhere is it referred to as 'mother', or as having a special honour — nothing like this at all! Paul does say that the faith of the Romans was known everywhere and that they had a good reputation (*Rom. 1:8*), but he is speaking of a mere handful of people. For those who ruled in Rome were certainly not Christians, yet there was a small group gathered together in hideouts, and these are the people that Paul praises and esteems. Therefore, we must never imagine that the whole of Rome belonged to the church of God! We saw what happened to Jerusalem — that she was compared to Hagar and Sinai, that is to say, that she had become a profane and polluted place. Her holiness had long been forgotten, because she had not continued in the pure doctrines of the gospel.

We can only conclude, therefore, that even those who are nearest to God, and who have enjoyed close communion with him, will be cast off like strangers if they do not persevere in holiness; for holiness is like a tie that keeps us closely bound to our God. We can see that the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ is rejected, trodden under foot, held in contempt and disdain in Rome today. Furthermore, gospel teachers are persecuted by fire and their blood is shed in that place. There is no true religion there at all now, for it is full of wickedness and corruption. If a man were to enter Rome and return with the fear of God, some good seed having been sown in his heart, it would be a miracle. It is clear that Rome is the very cavern of hell. May it please God that people would suffer broken necks rather than venture upon that city! For at this time, even the nation of France has been infected by her impiety. The majority of those in France have become nothing more than dogs and pigs, with no more true religion than brute beasts. All the more reason, therefore, for us to heed this warning and to walk in wisdom and the fear of God, being careful that we are not deprived of the privileges that we have received because of our ingratitude. May God never wreak his terrible vengeance upon us, and make us trophies of dishonour and shame. Such is Paul's description of Jerusalem, which had formerly known such great honour.

Notice, furthermore, that under the figure of Abraham, God proclaims that he is the Father of all his own people. We have, therefore, been born of God in that we belong to his church. Yet it is not enough simply to claim that God is our Father, unless we have been truly regenerated through the incorruptible seed, which is alone the guarantee of life and eternal salvation. We may ask the question, how is it possible to be members of God's family and yet be like illegitimate offspring? The answer is that, by our iniquity

and wickedness, we have corrupted the Word of God, which is his seed. This is the way Peter describes it (*1 Pet.* 1:23). Yes, it is true that the Word, since it proceeds from God, is spotless in itself. It sparkles with purity, and contains all the treasures of the righteousness, goodness and mercy of God. This is the nature of the Word of God, but we have devalued it and altered it according to our own whims and fancies, and added our own impurity. So then, although we may regard ourselves as children of God, yet we are bastard children, as we shall see in greater detail this afternoon, by God's good pleasure. For Paul proceeds to show that Ishmael, though the eldest son, was finally expelled from his own family. This occurred because he was illegitimate, being born to Hagar. Therefore, we are to learn that we must be born into God's family through faith in the Word of God in its purity; God then enlightens our minds through the Holy Spirit, who reveals to us the will of God. For if we alter the Word of God beyond recognition, according to our own perceptions, though it may still be called the seed of God, it will not be so in truth, for it has been corrupted.

Thus, there are so many people around today who call themselves Christians but live under false pretences. For example, the Papists say that they believe in God and seek to adhere to the Holy Scriptures, but it is evident that they have twisted them. Instead of accepting the Holy Scriptures with all due reverence, they wrest them according to their own convenience, and even mock them and joke about them! As we have said on a previous occasion, they blasphemously treat the Scriptures like a wax nose that they can mould to whatever shape they wish! They have turned everything into confusion by their contrivances! Indeed, whatever the Papists call serving God has been hatched in their own minds. There is no question of ordering one's life according to what God has commanded and decreed. No, he is dethroned, and they usurp his lawful sovereignty and attribute such authority to themselves that they subjugate consciences and create whatever laws seem good to them. This sin is too great and too evil for words. How, then, do the Papists formulate their articles of faith? It must be according to what they have determined themselves, for there is certainly nothing in them that has been drawn from the Scriptures! Never mind what is written in the Holy Scriptures; they have conclusions of their own, which they regard as the very oracles of heaven, for they are swiftly received as commonly accepted facts. When they seek our approval of such nonsense, they say that, first and foremost, these are received doctrines: we must bow to their antiquity as if it makes them prescriptive for us, and thereupon they may just cite a few passages of Scripture which they have pulled out of context for good measure. But this is a mockery, for they have wilfully defiled the Word of God. Surely even little children, aware of such great and glaring ignorance, would spit in their faces!

Thus, the Papists are a good example of what Paul is illustrating here. In other words, there are many who boast that they are children of God, and servants of the church, who are really illegitimate. They are born of corrupt seed, for instead of adhering to pure doctrine which could bring the regeneration that leads to eternal life, they have added



their own doctrines and thus violated the integrity of God's Word. We are not stretching the point too far when we say that Paul's argument is borne out by the Papists today. For what is our greatest quarrel with them at this point in time? It concerns free will, meritorious acts of service, satisfaction for sin, and the rest. The Papists say that we can obtain favour in the eyes of God by our own efforts, and that we do not need the aid and assistance of the Holy Spirit. Yes, they admit that there is some collaboration, and that God works within us up to a point; but they say that we are his helpers, and we would be most weak and useless if our virtue did not help us to gain God's favour. They also say that the grace of God is of no effect unless we add to it something of our own doing. Thus, they are building a doctrine based upon merit; the only way you can reach the kingdom of heaven is by pleasing God. You need personal merit in order to pay for the sins you have committed. This is what the Papists spout forth! Furthermore, they conclude that it is a blasphemy to say that it is impossible to keep the law of God perfectly. They claim that anybody, if he applies himself, can fully observe its requirements. Yes, it is easy to brag in this way whilst still living in darkness, for those who say these things are themselves wicked fornicators, drunkards, blasphemers, people given to all kinds of gross and sinful behaviour. We know just how holy these monks, hypocrites, crooks and vermin are!

As for ourselves, we would say that we are born slaves of sin and under the tyrannical rule of Satan. We are held so tightly in his grip that we cannot even have one righteous thought about doing good. Our nature tends wholly towards evil, just like a donkey carrying its yoke and burden, yet our sin proceeds entirely from our own wills. We are born in sin and, therefore, can do nothing else; we continually offend God until he sets us free by his Holy Spirit and grants us his liberty. Furthermore, we believe that it is impossible to keep the law of God, but that the law simply reveals our duty; it is for each one to read his condemnation therein. We must come before God in silence, as evildoers, in order to obtain grace for the offences that we have committed. We come clothed in shame, confessing that we are lost, that God might save us through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. In short, we say that it is completely beyond our powers to acquit ourselves in the eyes of God. But he comes to our aid; he does not scrutinise us or enter into account with us. When we have offended him, there is no satisfaction for sin other than the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. The only way we can be cleansed is to wash ourselves in his blood.

We see, therefore, the practical application of Paul's teaching when we consider the points of conflict between the Papists and ourselves. Though they associate with the name of God, and falsely claim to honour it, and though they say they are his children because they accept the Holy Scriptures, yet they demonstrate that their mother is Hagar and Sinai, and that they are still in bondage. They still have the yoke around their necks, and refuse to come to God to accept the liberty that he offers. They would rather usurp that which God has reserved for himself alone by justifying themselves through their own merits and by seeking to fulfil the law. They are children of the bondwoman, therefore,

and must remain slaves; their end is to be cast out forever. As for us, we will see the implications of this teaching later on, but, briefly, it concerns the fact that our only means of deliverance is through the gospel. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself declares in the eighth chapter of John's Gospel that it is his role to set us free, and that this privilege was given to him by God the Father, to deliver us from all condemnation. We must, therefore, come to the Lord Jesus Christ and find all that we need in him, for it is through him that we are freed from the yoke of the law. This yoke is too heavy for us to bear: not only does it weigh us down, it actually plunges us into the pit of hell. Thus, we obtain this deliverance only through the seed which brings regeneration and complete liberty. We become children of God, and not only are we known as such in the eyes of the world, but before angels. We will finally reach the inheritance that has been obtained for us at so great a cost, and which we could never have possessed by our own merits. It can only be obtained through the One to whom it all belongs, having conferred the inheritance on us through the gospel which we hear each day.

Now, let us fall down before the majesty of our great God, acknowledging our sins, and praying that he would help us to feel them more than ever before. Then we may grow and mature more and more through genuine repentance, so that, in coming to him, we may do so in all humility and without hypocrisy. We must be ashamed of our sin to the point that we seek no other remedy than the Lord Jesus Christ. Since our great God has received us and sealed us with the grace of his adoption in our hearts by his Holy Spirit, may we maintain the purity of the gospel, adding nothing of our own invention. May nothing be corrupted by our own notions, but may the Holy Spirit keep us obedient in the faith. In this way, as he has begun to show us his favour, we for our part will aim unswervingly for perfection. Thus, we all say, Almighty God and heavenly Father, etc.

## Justification is by Grace Alone

By John Calvin

*We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.*

### Gal. 2:15-16

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Thus far, we have expounded why Paul, addressing the subject of the ceremonies, types and shadows which were practised before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, reaches the general conclusion that a man cannot be justified or acceptable in God's sight unless he observes the whole law. Now, at first, we might consider these things to be two separate issues; however, as we have been saying, Paul has to draw us back to basics in order to expose the folly of believing that we can obtain favour in God's eyes through our own merit. Now, we have already discussed the reason why Paul adds the word 'law'. For however much it may be commonly held that a good man can earn favour and acceptance with God, men are very seriously mistaken in such matters. Indeed, whatever we may have done, we cannot win God's favour, because he deserves the very best of all that is in our power. There is, therefore, no merit possible on our part (if, indeed, we may call it that), unless we fulfil the terms of the covenant he made with us, when he said that whosoever keeps the law shall obtain life and salvation (*Lev. 18:5*). When God uttered these words, he was prepared to accept our total obedience as worthy of salvation, but this does not, in fact, imply that we can, therefore, merit favour, for none of us have done our duty (as we shall see hereafter). Thus, the promise would have been forfeited, or at least without effect in that it would never apply to anyone, had not God sent the remedy — that is to say, unless, despite our unrighteousness, he forgave our sins, and accepted us as righteous. When Paul says that we cannot be justified by the works of the law, he means that if we claim to merit grace and salvation because God has promised that those who observe the law will be accounted as righteous, we are completely mistaken; for no one keeps the law perfectly. We must realise that we all stand guilty before God and have the sentence of condemnation hanging over our heads.

In order to express this fact more clearly, Paul draws a comparison between the Jews and the Gentiles. He says that even though they were ‘Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles’ they realised that they could only be acceptable to God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. For, although all men have fallen in Adam and therefore have no individual merit, it appeared that the Jews had a special privilege, in as much as God had adopted them as his own children and called them his servants. Yet, this is where the Jews went wrong. For when the Scriptures speak of ‘the uncircumcision’, they refer to the pollution which indwells us from Adam, and places us all under condemnation from our mother’s womb. But the Jews believed that God had freed them from this curse upon mankind and therefore they boasted. Whilst it is true that great honour was conferred upon them, which they should have valued above all earthly good — for God had chosen them to be his people and his inheritance — yet they ought to have humbly acknowledged that in their own selves they were unworthy. Indeed, we also are used to adopting such a presumptuous attitude when we experience the grace of God; likewise the Jews, for the most part, wrongly believed they were superior to everyone else. They thought God had found something about them that made him prefer them to those he had rejected. This arrogance brought with it wicked ingratitude, for they did not attribute to God all the good things they had received from his hand, but were puffed up with pride, as if God thought they were better or more worthy of eternal salvation than the Gentiles.

To extinguish all such presumption, Paul begins his argument thus: ‘we who are Jews by nature . . .’ It appears that he is saying, ‘Yes, it is true that we have been shown greater grace than the Gentiles, whom God did not accept into his church’. But when he speaks like this he does not, in fact, intend to give the Jews occasion for pride; rather, he is spreading before them the things they have freely received from God to teach them that they have no grounds for boasting. In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul makes two statements which at first sight seem contradictory, yet which are in perfect harmony. On the one hand he asks, ‘Do we not have more privileges than the Gentiles?’, and he answers, ‘Yes. For we were chosen to be his people; he gave us circumcision as a sign and seal that we are his children; he made a covenant with us; he promised to send us the Redeemer of the world. Thus, if we consider the mercies that God has showered upon us, we have been blessed indeed, and exalted far above all other peoples.’ Here Paul magnifies the goodness of God towards them (*Rom.* 3:1-2). However, later he asks the same question (What advantage have the Jews?), but answers, ‘None at all’ (*Rom.* 3:9-10). ‘For we are all under God’s curse. If the Gentiles are to be condemned, then we are to be condemned twice as much, for they have the excuse of ignorance. Nevertheless, they cannot escape God, but will perish although they have never had any instruction or knowledge of doctrine. It follows, then, that we will be condemned by the law, because God has taught us and yet we have not stopped sinning or transgressing his righteous laws, so that now we are plunged into greater and deeper condemnation than even Gentiles and unbelievers’, he says. Thus, the Jews were distinct from the Gentiles — not because they were more worthy or more righteous, but simply because God chose them out of his free bounty.

In the same way, the children born to believers are no better than the children of other Gentiles or even of Turks when it comes to their nature. For we are all part of a corrupt and accursed mass whom God has condemned, so that none of us may exalt ourselves and think ourselves of more worth than our friends. However, Paul declares that our children are sanctified, that they are not stained in the same way as those born to unbelievers or pagans (1 *Cor.* 7:14). It would seem that there are some contradictions here. Yet the whole hangs together very well, because, as for our natures, we are all tainted and corrupted, with only one exception [Christ]. Yet there is such a thing as a supernatural gift, that is, a privilege that God confers in order that the children of believers are dedicated to him, and he recognises and accepts them as his own. This is why the children of the church today are regarded as the people of God and amongst the number of the elect, just as under the law the Jews were separated from the rest of the world. This explains why Paul says, 'We are Jews and not sinners of the Gentiles'. By 'sinners', he means those who continue in their filth and have not been washed by the grace of God. In deed, circumcision itself was a sign and a testimony to the fact that God accepted the family of Abraham and the race that descended from him as his own familiar and special people. In old times, this is what distinguished the Jews from unbelievers; for, although they were of equal status as children of Adam, yet God had chosen some and left others as strangers to his family. If we ask why this should be, the answer can only be purely because of God's grace, since the Jews themselves were not outstanding in any way.

Let us now follow the argument that Paul is constructing here. He says, 'Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ.' In saying this, Paul demonstrates that whatever grace they had received from God, they were not at liberty to trust in man or in themselves as if they deserved this from God. No, rather, they had to seek refuge in his free bounty, recognising that salvation is in Jesus Christ alone, who came to rescue from perdition those who were already lost. This is confirmed in that other passage, where it says that he 'came and preached peace to you which were afar off and to them that were nigh' (*Eph.* 2:17). Jesus Christ is that peace, for it is through him that God can love us and receive us in mercy. This is not only true for those who were previously far away like the Gentiles, but also for the children of Abraham, despite the dignity and nobility they already possessed (for this was not theirs by nature). Paul says that the Jews who had been converted to Christianity knew that they could not be justified by the works of the law, but only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and he makes a comparison between the two in order to show that we cannot be justified by grace unless we actually renounce all personal merit.

This is well worthy of our attention. For indeed, even the Papists profess to be justified by faith, but this is only half of the truth and it is the rest of the picture which spoils the whole. Sure enough, they are persuaded of the fact that a man cannot be accounted

righteous before God unless Jesus is the Mediator and unless that person rests upon him for salvation. The Papists know this only too well, and yet they so often say, 'We are justified by faith but not by faith alone.' This is the point with which they take issue, and this is the principal matter upon which we differ. Paul, however, shows their folly when he says, 'but by faith', for this expression implies that all that men bring to God to please him is rejected. The door is, therefore, tight shut to all merit, for Paul declares that the only way to come to God is through faith. We will soon see more clearly why Paul draws a comparison with the law as if here are two opposites. The law presupposes that if we fulfil what God requires of us we will be found good servants and he will give us the reward he has promised; faith, on the other hand, presupposes that we are poor, lost, condemned souls and that we are to find in Jesus Christ what we so desperately need.

Take this as an example: there are two men seeking food and shelter. One has money and wishes to be treated in accordance with his means. They both ask for something to eat, but the second man is poor and does not have a penny, so he begs for alms. They both have something in common, for they both seek food, but the first has money with which to satisfy his host. Thus, after eating and drinking well and being courteously entertained, the host, for his part, will be happy to receive his payment, no longer thinking that his guest is in any way indebted to him. Why? Well, he has been satisfied and has even gained from it. But the life of the poor man who asks for alms depends upon the one who can provide him with food and shelter, for he can give him nothing in return. In the same way, if we seek to be justified by the law we must deserve that justification; for then God will receive from us and we from him in a reciprocal manner. Is such a thing possible? Not at all, as we shall examine in more detail later. We must, therefore, conclude that we cannot obtain righteousness by the law, and that if we believe we can make God our debtor, we will only provoke his wrath. The only option is to come as poor beggars, that we may be justified by faith. Not as if faith were a virtue proceeding from us, but we must come humbly, confessing that we cannot obtain salvation except as a free gift. This, then, is why the law is put in opposition to faith. Paul is showing us that all who claim to be acceptable to God by their merits are turning their back upon the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. We shall study this at greater length hereafter.

A man may raise this objection: the law was given by God, so therefore it cannot be placed in opposition to faith, which also proceeds from God. The answer to this is simple. God made both the day and the night, water and fire, cold and heat. Surely, the day is not in opposition to the night, but rather God in his goodness and wisdom has arranged that they appear in a suitable order; man has the brightness of the sun in which to do his work by day, and by night the sun hides itself away so that man may take his rest. Therefore, although day differs from night, there is no disharmony between them. The same applies to fire and water. Every created thing has its function — and fire and water complement each other very well; however, if we were to mix them together, then they would indeed clash! This is true of the law and the gospel. Those who believe that we are justified by

the law as well as the gospel are confusing everything; it is as if they are crashing heaven and earth together! In short, it would be easier to mix fire and water than to say this: that we can merit a measure of the grace of God and yet also need the aid of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we consider what the law is and why it was given, we will discover that there is no discrepancy with the gospel, nor with faith, but that there is perfect harmony between them. This objection is thus dealt with. If we say that both faith and the law proceed from God, we are right; but we must give some thought (as we will do shortly) to the reason why God originally instituted them both.

Let us return to Paul's words — he says that we can only be justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. When he speaks of justification, he means being accounted righteous in the sight of God. This expression needs to be understood because it is dealing with the whole subject of how we are saved. We would be miserable creatures indeed if, having lived a long life in this world, someone were to ask us the way of salvation and we did not know how to respond! Many fools have feasted on the bread of God without knowing how to be acceptable to him. This is why we ought to be all the more attentive to what Paul is telling us here. He says that we are justified. How? Are we already righteous — are we blameless? Not at all, but God accepts us. The word 'justification' points us to that favour which God bestows upon us when we become his children and he our Father. You may ask, why do the Scriptures use the word 'justify' when it seems so inappropriate? We could just as well say that God loves us, that he takes pity on us, that he desires to be our Father and Saviour — why not use these expressions instead of speaking of justification? The Scriptures do not refer to it without good reason.

If we analyse salvation in its most basic sense, we will say that we are saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. However, this does not imply knowledge of our miserable condition by nature or of the remedy that we need to apply. For in order to put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, we must acknowledge that by the sin of Adam, as well as by our own iniquities, we are altogether lost. We ought to have already discovered this for ourselves. We will never understand that our sins condemn us in God's sight, unless we know that we need to be put right with him. In other words, we will not be aware of the righteousness of God if we simply say, 'We are saved by grace and by faith.' For God cannot once deny himself, since he embodies sovereign justice; he is all purity and perfection and, therefore, he detests what is evil. Yet we are totally corrupt and there is only wickedness in us; it follows, therefore, that God must hate us. However, if he hates us, woe unto us, for we are damned. This is why we need to be justified before we can be pleasing to God. This means we must be cleansed from our sins and transgressions; otherwise, we could never appreciate God's mercy (as I have said). If we acknowledge that we are sinners, we will realise that God hates sin, and yet though he hates it he has nevertheless provided a way to save us — by forgiving our sins, and by cleansing and purging us from them through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, who gives us spiritual cleansing. God washes us clean in order that he might receive

us, so that sharing in his love, we may be assured of our salvation. This is why the Scriptures use the word ‘justification’.

Papists may debate over its meaning like foolish beasts. ‘What!’, they say, ‘Justified by faith? Faith does not make a person perfect — how, then, can it justify us?’ They do not realise that the justification spoken of in the Scriptures refers to God covering our sins (as I have been saying) and, by virtue of his sufferings and death, cancelling them in and through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever others may say, it is written that we are accounted righteous in God’s sight when he remits and pardons our sins. In fact, Paul speaks of this in the fourth chapter to the Romans, where he says: ‘Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered’ (*Rom. 4:6-7; Psa. 32:1*). Again, in another passage he says, ‘For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin’; (this means that he received all the condemnation due to us for our sins), ‘that we might be made the righteousness of God in him’ (*2 Cor. 5:21*). Thus, we, being joined and united to his person and to his body, are accounted righteous, because his obedience was so perfect that it was sufficient to cleanse and remove our sins. We have now dealt with the meaning of the term ‘justification’.

Turning our attention to the expression ‘faith’, Paul states here that they have ‘believed’ in Jesus Christ. If we were to ask a fool what he considers faith to be, he might well say ‘belief, but he clearly would not understand what either word means. Are we happy to be as ignorant as such fools? Let us firstly point out that the Lord Jesus is the object of both our faith and our belief. Is salvation through faith? Yes, if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us consider for a moment why the Lord Jesus Christ is set before us as the one in whom we must rest all our faith. It is simply because we find in him all we need for our justification. We have already said that we are accounted righteous in God’s sight when he has forgiven our sins and no longer calls them into account. And how does this happen, if not by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ which was shed for our cleansing? By his sufferings and death, he made satisfaction for our sins and appeased the wrath of God against us. We must seek no further means of payment, other than the sacrifice made by God’s only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is he who is called God’s beloved Son (*Matt. 3:17*), so that we might be beloved in him; he is called the Righteous One (*Isa. 53:11*), so that we may partake of his righteousness; and he is called the Holy One (*Luke 1:35*), so that we may be sanctified in him. This is why our attention is drawn to the Lord Jesus Christ when we consider ‘faith’.

However, the Papists form their own opinions on the subject, revealing by what they claim that they have never experienced what it is to believe. ‘What!’, they say, ‘is it possible for a man to be justified by faith alone, seeing that even devils themselves believe?’ This is indeed true, and James uses this argument (*Jas. 2:20*); however, we also



see him scorning those who vainly and frivolously said they were Christians and had faith, and yet showed no fruit. The Papists have strayed even further, in that they say faith means believing in God, and that the subject of our faith is God, when by belief they mean a mere imagining that there is a God somewhere who has created the world and who now controls it. They remain at this point, asleep in their ignorance, and yet do not hesitate to call themselves good Christians and good Catholics, as they say, although they are altogether ignorant. Therefore, we should not be surprised if, devoid of discernment or intelligence, they fight against the doctrine contained in Holy Scripture, or when they deny, with incorrigible obstinacy, that man is saved by faith alone. They do not even know what faith is. How carefully, therefore, must we heed the words of Paul here which tell us that if we do not look to Jesus Christ, we cannot know what faith really is. Without him, we cannot know remission of sins, how to approach God, how to put our trust in him, or to call upon him. Neither will we know what it is to have peace of conscience, or the hope of eternal life. All this is beyond our reach until we are introduced to Jesus Christ and until we have looked to him and cast ourselves upon him. This kind of faith brings grace: when we recognise that we are wretched creatures, and abominable in God's sight, seeking the remedy in the Lord Jesus Christ. We must accept that he offered himself for us in order to redeem us from the curse under which we lived, and that he has washed us in his blood. By his obedience, he has cancelled all our transgressions so that we can be assured that God accepts and receives us as his children. This is how we can understand this passage.

Having stated that he, and all the Jews that had been converted to Christianity had been saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul adds the following: 'for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified'. We have heard this before in application to those of his own nation, but here he proclaims it in a more general sense to the whole world. When he says, 'no flesh', he primarily implies that there is no difference between the Jews and the Gentiles when it comes to the way of salvation. Although the Jews had been circumcised, chosen as God's inheritance and sanctified by him, nevertheless, they could have no hope of salvation except through God's pure grace alone. See how they are set at the same level as the Gentiles, having the same status. Paul seeks to expel all pride that men may have about their own virtues. Indeed, many of us know ourselves to be so depraved that we cannot possibly attribute any honour to ourselves, as if we should deserve anything at God's hand. Those who are drunk or debauched or who have given themselves over to all kinds of evil feel too ashamed to elevate themselves or to boast that they can persuade God to save them by their merits or good works. In fact, they hide themselves even from other people because they are ashamed of their baseness. But the bigoted, who make a show of their 'holiness' before men, are so hardened that they deceive themselves into thinking they deserve paradise — as if God were indebted to them! These hypocrites, though utterly depraved and full of ambition, avarice, wickedness and such like things, because of all their manipulations and pretences, believe that God sees nothing wrong with their corrupt practices and even persuade themselves that he will accept them because of their merits! Those who regularly attend Mass, running from the alehouse to the chapel, buying pardons and other such things, observing fasts and feast days — they are puffed up with vain pride and believe that God owes them something. By saying 'no

flesh', Paul declares that it is pointless to separate ourselves from one another here below, as if one is just and the other unjust. We must all humble ourselves and judge ourselves, knowing that all our virtues are but filthy rags in God's sight, even the very best that we can do. For even if a man were perfectly righteous in our estimation, because he never harmed anyone, or because he could resist all kinds of evil and was chaste and sober — in short, though he were reputed to be an angel — yet within, there would be nothing but corruption. How is this possible? Well, we must never judge by the appearance, for all that glitters (as the proverb says) is not gold. We cannot judge what is sin or virtue without first looking within. For if a man does not ascribe to God what is rightfully his, he is not robbing men of their honour, but God. Thus, however much men might praise and commend him, he is full of pride and ambition, and nothing will humble him except coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

So then, even those who make a good outward show of religion shall be condemned before God. Hence, Paul intends to stop men from trusting in their own merits. But there is yet more. For when he says, 'no flesh', he not only refers to men whom God has given over, who have not been renewed by his Holy Spirit, but he also includes believers. For although God's Spirit dwells within us after he has led us to a knowledge of the gospel and grafted us into the body of the Lord Jesus Christ — although, I say, God's Spirit dwells within us, we are all included in this word 'flesh' because of what we are by nature. Thus, when Paul declares here that 'no flesh shall be justified', he means that unbelievers are condemned in Adam and remain condemned, and that believers, because they will always be imperfect and have many spots and blemishes, are condemned as much as the others. Indeed, this condemnation is a general one, for whoever seeks to be justified by the works of the law will always find himself guilty — yes, even the holiest person that ever existed. Let us take Abraham as an example of perfection, or David, who abounded in all virtues, or Noah, Job, and Daniel, whom Ezekiel names as three righteous men (Ezek. 14:14). They all fall into the same category as men who could only be justified in God's sight through grace.

Now then, I ask you all, where do we stand? Those who say that they will be justified by their merits, or 'meritorious works' as they call them, have they not been driven to excessive pride by the devil? For who can match David, or Noah, or Abraham, or Daniel? Surely, even those who have done well in God's school, and who are fired by true zeal in giving themselves totally to God, are convinced that they are still far from having reached the standard set by David, or even Noah or Daniel! Knowing this, therefore, we can see that the Holy Spirit is here casting down those who exalt themselves overmuch, to convince us that we have not the merest drop of righteousness, so that we seek all that pertains to our salvation in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now we understand what the statement implies when it says that 'no flesh shall be justified'. It is as if Paul were saying that, when it comes to our nature, we are only evil within, despite what appears to be the case outwardly. We may be greatly praised and respected by the world; we may be

surrounded by vain flattery; but until God works in us to change us, we are full of filth. Indeed, all the virtues that men exalt are nothing short of vices that will lead men to destruction and plunge them into hell. For even those who have been renewed by the grace of God, and who have learnt to obey him by doing the things which God loves and cherishes, even they can bring nothing to God that can settle their accounts with him. They will always be in debt because all the good gifts they have proceed from God; also, even such men are corrupt through sin and infirmity. Thus, we must be stripped of all trust in our own righteousness. For, from the greatest to the least of us, we are all condemned. If we seek justification by the law, we are greatly deceived — we will never find it.

Now we can understand much more clearly the truth of what I have been saying concerning the Lord Jesus Christ as a refuge for those who are convinced of their spiritual need. This means that the only real preparation for belief in Jesus Christ is to be touched with a real, vivid sense and awareness of our sins. This is why Christ said: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls' (*Matt.* 11:28-29). Elsewhere, the Scripture clearly says that he was sent 'to preach good tidings unto the meek.. . to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound' (*Isa.* 61:1). Therefore, those who take pleasure in their sins will never come to the Lord Jesus Christ. They may boast that they have faith, for many mockers of God profane this word, holy as it is. Everyone wishes to be thought of as a Christian, and no matter how depraved they are, they will say that they believe as much as any other. But when a man speaks in this manner, it is evidence enough that he has not one drop of faith. When true believers say, 'I believe', they express it in great weakness, knowing that had not God taken pity on them, even the little they had would have been taken from them. Those who loudly boast that they have complete faith are nothing but dogs and swine, who have never once tasted true religion nor the fear of God. The term 'faith' will always be shamefully defiled by these dogs, who do nothing other than mock God. They cannot discern between good and evil, and are so foolish as to wallow in their own sins. Take a drunkard, for example, who is past shame; after drinking to excess, he longs to remain in his intoxicated state. Then there are the whoremongers, perjurers, blasphemers, and suchlike — all of whom claim to have faith; but for all that, it is certain that they are not ready to meet the Lord Jesus Christ. Why not? Because they do not realise that they can only be justified by grace. Let us remember, however, that to be thoroughly persuaded that we cannot be justified by the law, we must set God before us on his judgment throne and summon ourselves before him every morning and evening, knowing that we must give an account of our whole lives. Also, we must realise that we would be sent to the pit a hundred thousand times if God did not pity us and raise us up in his infinite mercy. Then we will know that we cannot be justified by the law, for we are all under condemnation every time we compare ourselves with God. We need to have such fear, that we cannot find rest until the Lord Jesus Christ has saved us. See, therefore, how good it is for us to be heavy laden, that is to say, to hate our sins and to be in such anguish over them that we feel surrounded by the pains of death, so that we seek God in order that he might ease us of our burden. We must,

however, seek him in the knowledge that we cannot obtain salvation, full or in part, unless it is granted to us as a gift. Paul is not saying that we may find something of what we lack in Jesus Christ, and supply the rest ourselves. He says we cannot be counted righteous through our own merits, or works, but only through faith.

Let us, therefore, understand that there is no salvation whatsoever outside of Jesus Christ, for he is the beginning and the end of faith, and he is all in all. Let us continue in humility, knowing that we can only bring condemnation upon ourselves; therefore, we need to find all that pertains to salvation in the pure and free mercy of God. We must be able to say that we are saved through faith. God the Father has appointed his Son the Lord Jesus Christ that he might be both the author and finisher of our salvation. We are to deny ourselves and give ourselves to him wholly and completely, that all the praise might belong to him.

Now let us fall before the majesty of our great God, acknowledging our sins, and asking that he would make us increasingly aware of them, that we may hate them more and more, and grow in repentance (a grace that we need to exercise all our lives). May we learn so to magnify his grace, as it is shown to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, that we might be completely taken up with it; and may we not only do so with our lips, but place our entire trust in him. May we grow in that trust until we are gathered up into our eternal home, where we shall receive faith's reward. May he not only grant this grace to us, but to all peoples, etc.

## On Discerning Who Belongs to the True Church

by John Calvin

*But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.*

**Gal. 4:26-31**

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We saw this morning that many people who claim to be believers and to be associated with the name of God are, nevertheless, illegitimate children. For this reason God, disowns them, though they may be considered ‘Christians’ in the eyes of the world. They have corrupted that good seed, which is pure doctrine, which they need in order to be regenerated and adopted into God’s family. What good is it to be regarded as part of the church if we are not truly born of the good seed which is both pure and perfect? For this to occur, we must be governed by the Word of God, without twisting it or adding to it. This is why Paul speaks here of the heavenly Jerusalem as our mother. Yes, it is true that those who contort the natural meaning of Scripture are not true children of God, and are liars and hypocrites when they address God as their Father. Yet, because they appear to be believers, Paul tells us that we may discern them by their mother, and thus know whether they are truly the legitimate children of God and acceptable to him. For the word ‘church’ is often used lightly. The Papists in our generation use the term as a shield to cover all their errors! Since the Word of God is against them, they make use of this; at least they have the church on their side!

Well, Paul is warning us to be careful when it comes to discerning who really belongs to the true church. For the Jews had abundant evidence to show that Jerusalem was the very place where God dwelt, since, as we saw this morning, he had chosen her and testified that she would be his everlasting resting place (*Psa. 132:14*). Yet, is it not true that this same Jerusalem was like a den of thieves, and even our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified there? In this way, through their treachery, the Jews cut themselves off from the household of God forever. Indeed, they sought, as far as they possibly could, to destroy his truth. Thus, the city of Jerusalem, though she had once been honourable, came to be regarded as dishonourable and shameful in the eyes of both believers and the angels themselves. In the same way, we must be careful today when we speak of ‘the church’, to ensure that we ourselves are not of that illegitimate seed; for if we have hypocritically uttered God’s name before men, he will surely reject us and banish us from his family.

God bestows great honour upon the church here, when he calls her the mother of all believers. It reminds us of the words of Paul in another place, where he says that the church is the pillar which upholds God's truth in this world (*1 Tim.* 3:15). It does not mean that the truth needs to be maintained by sinners like ourselves, inclined as we are to fickleness and inconstancy, and prone to falsehood. How could the truth of God rest upon the shoulders of men, unstable as we are? Yet, through his unfailing kindness, he desired that his Word should be proclaimed here below, and committed that responsibility to those whom he has called. It is for this reason that the church is referred to here as 'the mother of us all'. As the Lord Jesus Christ declares, God alone is our Father (*Matt.* 23:9). God is our spiritual Father, and must have no rival. It is he that brings us the hope of eternal life by means of his true church, in which he has placed his incorruptible seed. As the prophet Isaiah says, 'my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever' (*Isa.* 59:21). Thus, God governs his people through his Word. It is this message which he has bestowed as a deposit and priceless treasure for the salvation of his church, to bring us regeneration and nourish our spiritual lives.

Therefore, we need wisdom to discern the true church of God, as I have already said. As the mother of God's children, we ought not to misuse or sully her name. Unfortunately, this is precisely what has happened and continues to occur to this day. It is a common error in our day to use the term 'church' to obscure and hide God's truth from the people. What else do the Papists do when they call themselves 'the church' so proudly and publicly? They have managed to seal up the mouth of God, as it were, and trample his Word underfoot. Indeed, they no longer even refer to it, all the while accepting unreservedly that which has been fabricated in their own minds, both declaring it and submitting to it. See how men, who are no more than earthworms and dung, consider themselves equal to God, and all is done under the auspices of the so-called 'church'. But Paul warns us here to seek for that church which upholds pure doctrine, for it is by this means alone that we are adopted as God's children. As we have seen before, the most important thing is to be grafted into the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. Firstly, we need to recognise that we are accursed by nature and that all our works are filthy rags; we are under the tyrannical rule of the devil, and the only escape is for God, in mercy and compassion, to rescue us. We can only enter the household of God through this one door, that is, through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is how the church bears us as her children, through the incorruptible seed we have been speaking about.

However, in order really to profit from this passage, there are two further points to bear in mind. Firstly, we are not to be like those who claim to be believers without ever reading or listening to the preached Word. They imagine that the Holy Spirit will reveal all to them in a vision or some such thing! In fact, the truth is, they despise doctrine and regard it as they would an alphabet for the instruction of little children. Be careful not to allow yourselves to be led astray by Satan and his wiles in this way. If we desire to be children of God, and to bear the true marks of a believer; if we desire to be acknowledged as such even by angels, we need to be teachable and, with all reverence and humility, thus to maintain order in the church. Even the greatest amongst us, and those who have been

raised to honourable status, must recognise that the highest dignity men could have, be they kings or princes, is to be children of God. If a man wishes to exempt himself from this condition, he is rejecting God completely and cutting himself off from all hope of salvation. This, then, is the first point, that while we are in this world, we must make it our business to profit from the Word of God. Herein lies the key to spiritual life; for if God has granted us regeneration, we are to nourish ourselves with the teaching of Scripture for the rest of our lives. Indeed, it is the only food for our souls. Let us never proudly or presumptuously despise doctrine, as if we no longer needed to be students of the Word, for we are to accept what we are taught daily, and by this means become true children of the true church. This is the first point.

Secondly, we need to be discerning, and not like animals who are led by the reins across the fields. We need to be aware of what constitutes the true church; for God has left certain signs within it which will not fail as a means of discerning his true people. Wherever his Word is preached faithfully without any human additions, his own people will be found. This will occur where the gospel is unadulterated, and where people are led directly to God to seek in him all that they lack. They will follow the Lord Jesus Christ as the Way set before them. Ridding themselves of all pride and arrogance, they will eagerly clothe themselves with the spiritual qualities belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ. All their glory and all their teaching will proceed from the house and sanctuary of God, the true church which is our mother. They can then be sure that God accepts and receives them as his children. This, I say, is a certain and infallible means of discernment unless, of course, our minds are dull and clouded. There are many people who close their eyes and shut their ears, believing that they are justified simply because they say they belong to the church. In reality, they are hiding the fact that they follow Satan, together with all his deceptions, lies and abuses. May we not be like animals, led by our appetites, but may we be brought to the place where we are born again through the seed of his Word, and fed in the only true pasture for souls.

Paul quotes the testimony of Isaiah here (*Isa.* 54:1). In this Scripture, God is not referring randomly to any group who claim the title 'church', but only his sheep, his remnant, left to him after the terrible apostasy of the Jews. Whilst it appears, at first sight, that God had wiped out and abolished his church in the world, yet there was still a small number that he had gathered to himself, known as his elect remnant (*Isa.* 1:9). Thus, the prophet Isaiah tells us that those who had been redeemed, and who had truly returned to God, ordering their lives in obedience to his Word — these were the children of the church. It is important to notice that the church is not triumphant in this world; she does not shine with the kind of splendour and magnificence that would capture our hearts with just one glimpse and make us her devotees. Often, she is desolate and disfigured. This is all the more noteworthy when applied to the Papists. How must they set out to prove that they are the true church? They surely need some evidence. Yet, all they can point to is their wealth, their popularity, and all their pomp and splendour. But this is not the way that God desires his church to be known. Rather, the Lord Jesus Christ desires to reign here below, surrounded by his enemies. He has chosen that his disciples must experience those things of which he warned them. In other words, they will be rejected by the world and be despised; people will wag their tongues at them, and trouble them, giving them no

peace nor rest in this life (*Matt.* 10:16ff). Therefore, when we speak of the church, let us remember what Paul tells us here: that she is like a barren woman who is alone in her household, and without support or help. She is rejected and ignored, and has one foot in the grave, as it were. But God promises that she will be restored, and will have more children than she that is married and enjoys honour and a good name.

I tell you, we need to bear this teaching in mind today. We see the church trampled upon, and the enemies of the truth acting so proudly and venomously towards her. They have shown fight and charged, standing in triumph over us, as if we were nothing more than dust or smoke. When we witness such things, let us patiently wait for God to gather together his elect, content meanwhile in the knowledge that we are his children, though the world despise and reject us. Thus, if we wish to know what the church is, let us not look for it with an eye full of vanity, like those who seek only pomp and beautiful appearances. On the contrary, let us remember that God will afflict his poor church to the point that it has no beauty or attraction in the eyes of men, but rather appears desolate. Even, as we shall see shortly, if everyone rises up against the church, let us be content to be one of God's children. For if we have been called to God through the pure doctrine of the gospel, we become companions of all our forefathers who were chosen under the law. We are one with all the righteous kings and patriarchs, prophets and martyrs; in short, all believers since the time of Abel as well as those who are to come, to the end of time itself. Yes, the Papists boast that they are a vast multitude, but the prophet Isaiah mocks at all this. Why? Because the important thing is to discern who are the rightful children. What are all the temples of the Papists but brothels of Satan? Everything about them is tainted with filth, and their service for God is corrupt. There is nothing upright about any of it! So then, the Papists, though they call themselves 'the church of God', are born illegitimate, and belong to the brothel, along with their mother and all the synagogue of Satan. This is how it is according to Isaiah and Paul, a faithful expositor led by the Spirit of God, confirms his message. Let us only join those who are the true children of God, who have the infallible seal of the Holy Spirit and refuse simply to follow the crowd. As for those who are wretched, let them go their way to perdition, for they have willingly thrown themselves into the nets of Satan, wandering like poor brute beasts void of knowledge.

However, let us bear in mind that those who are children of the church can still be our fathers in the faith. We have been born again through their message, as we heard the Word of God. It is written that all who believe are sons of Abraham and the true Israel of God, as if we had descended from Jacob (*Gal.* 6:16). Our fathers in the faith, therefore, belong to this same fraternity, though we are known collectively as the sons of God and of his church. Similarly, our Lord Jesus Christ is called our Head. Though he is ultimately the only Son of God, yet by associating ourselves with him and becoming members of his body, we can call ourselves the sons of God, not by nature but because we have been freely adopted. Therefore, Paul tells us that we, like Isaac, are the children of promise. He does not wish us to have any vain confidence in our own merits, nor in our own persons, but rather that we should be devoid of pride when we realise that our dignity has been conferred upon us by the grace and kindness of God alone. In this way, we differ from those illegitimate children who falsely glory in the name of God. They are



full of presumption and hypocrisy. All they talk about is free will, meritorious works, penances, the four cardinal virtues, as well as theological virtues, as they call them! In short, they are puffed up with pride. As for ourselves, we are of promise, which means that God has looked upon us in mercy and plucked us out of the abyss of hell where once we were. Through the gospel, he has become our Father, and he has declared that an inheritance awaits us, bought not by ourselves or any other mortal creature, but by Jesus Christ. He, though very God, became man, that we might find in him that which we could never have found in the world.

Thus, Paul concludes here that if we wish to be grounded upon the gospel and enjoy assurance of salvation, we must never entertain thoughts of our own merit, nor believe that we can contribute anything of ourselves, for it is simply a matter of accepting that which has been offered to us. Jesus Christ is not half a saviour, he is *the* Saviour! These are some implications of this promise, as we have already seen at some length. Of course, the law has its promises, but as I have explained, they all have conditions. The promise which Paul refers to here abolishes all human pride, casts man down and reveals that he is lost. The only answer, therefore, is in the Lord Jesus Christ. The only way we can enjoy the blessings of God is by means of the gospel. It teaches us that salvation is to be found in God alone, and that we must return thanks to the One who granted it. It is not a reward that he is obliged to give, for in no sense is God indebted to us.

At this point, Paul says, 'But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.' Thus, it is inevitable that we will be so treated. Hypocrites and liars, illegitimate children who have defiled the truth and cut themselves off from it, will gloat over us. They will exalt themselves against us, as if we were unworthy even to kiss their feet. They will rise up proudly and persecute us. But Paul is teaching us to be faithful, and not to allow our faith to be shaken by their arrogance; nor are we to be deceived by the cunning of such hypocrites and traitors, who have twisted the Word of God. For in the end, it will be for them as it was for those of the house of Abraham: 'Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.' All such, though they claim to be believers, and wish to be considered part of God's family, will be cut off as rotten branches, and will have no part nor lot in the inheritance.

There is an excellent message here which ought to be most useful to us, and which confirms that to which I have alluded: and that is, that we are not to be dazzled by the splendour of this world, nor transported with amazement when we see displays of great magnificence. If we were to believe all that we saw with our eyes, the Pope upon his throne, with all his sparkling garments and their trimmings, would seem an idol to be worshipped. It does not surprise us that people stand there aghast, as if they have been hit over the head with a club and are semi-conscious! Why? Because men are inclined to judge carnally, and are less than little children when it comes to the things that concern the kingdom of heaven. Yet, Paul tells us that those in positions of authority, who are filled with self-importance and who are held in awe — indeed, those who might be regarded as the first-born — are often Ishmaelites. They are bastard children, despite

what they may claim about their seniority. Now, if Paul lived today, the proclamation of his message would be so unwelcome that he would be burnt a hundred times over! Today, we may write or say whatever we wish, but we could not describe the Pope and his clergy more aptly than in the words of Paul. The implications of this text are that they are a band of Ishmaelites and evil, illegitimate children who fight against God and all his true offspring. Now, the Papists claim that they have not just established themselves today, nor even a hundred years ago. They claim that they have observed their ceremonies and traditions for eight or nine hundred years. Well, it is clear that, even in this, they shamelessly lie to us; but even if the world had not deteriorated in those eight hundred years, the fact that they are the 'first-born' makes them no more important or worthy than Ishmael! With time, they have grown in number and say that we are no more than a handful of people in comparison to them. They say that they have kings and princes among their number, that the whole world agrees with them, from the greatest to the least, and that their rule extends across most of Europe and part of Africa. But even with all this to boast of, it amounts to no more than the seniority of Ishmael. They ought to be looking for other evidence, namely, that they seek to live according to the teaching of the law and the gospel, and add nothing of their own devising; for doing this results in corrupt and illegitimate doctrine. Of course, they will not discuss whether or not they have adulterated the purity of the Word of God. But it is plain enough for all to see! Under cover of being a 'church', as I have been saying, they have audaciously assumed that they have the authority to add and detract from the Word of God.

Thus, we do not need to conduct a detailed examination, nor to possess a special gift of discernment to tell whether or not the Papists are, indeed, children of God. Like Ishmael they are proud to be first-born; they are proud that they have an infinite number of adherents. They say that we are like little runts, in a manner of speaking: we are despised, and we have no dignity or reputation in the world. When they speak like this, it is Ishmael that we can hear. We have great need of patience, therefore; for when the enemies of God occupy the best places in his house, it is a sore trial. They are like straw in the barn, whilst we are hidden away, like seed beneath the soil. It is a miserable condition that is hard for us to bear and, indeed, we have seen many forsake the gospel through weakness. Such poor, simple souls hear the noble titles, such as the Catholic Church, the Apostolic Throne, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, Successor to Saint Peter and Saint Paul, prelates, bishops, etc. With all this placed before them, these poor folk are confused and conclude that they ought to follow. They are captivated by this mask, the same as would horrify little children; but this does not happen to those who are strong and follow God faithfully. Thus, when the Papists claim that they are the 'representative church', they speak the truth, for indeed, they are no more than a representation! In other words, they are like a beautiful medal, but all that glitters is not gold, as they say! We need to know whether they teach the truth.

Take note of what Paul is telling us here. For the ill-treatment of Isaac by Ishmael was not just a one-off occurrence. We see the same kind of thing happening today. The children of God will be oppressed and trodden underfoot by those who, in theory, are the first-born, and many simple souls will be seduced by this very claim of theirs. They cover all their filth and pollution with such pretty colours, do they not? However, let us prepare

ourselves for battle, says Paul, and not allow our faith to be overcome by the pride of those who are the enemies of the truth of God. These are domestic enemies, not like the Turks or pagans, but those who are garrisoned within the church, such as the prelates and great leaders. Yet, we must not be surprised, for we have been prepared for it through the example of our father Isaac. We need to persevere to the end, if we have been born again through the pure seed with which God is pleased, for this alone makes us rightful children and heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

Yet it may still be considered strange when Paul says that Isaac was persecuted by his brother Ishmael. For Moses simply writes that on the day that Isaac was weaned, at the feast, Ishmael laughed mockingly (*Gen. 21:8-9*). According to Moses' account, there is no mention of Ishmael persecuting Isaac. He only mocked, being the older child, and considering himself superior to Isaac through greater knowledge. If it was simply a matter of laughter and mockery, why, then, should Paul call this persecution? Well, the persecution that the child of God has to endure is not always by the sword, or by fire, torture, imprisonment, or other bodily suffering. Sometimes he is drowned in a torrent of abuse that unbelievers and enemies of the truth spew out of their mouths. If we are familiar with what it says in the Psalms, we will not find it strange that Paul should speak as he does. We are told that the reproaches that are made against our majestic God will also fall upon us (*Psa. 69:9*). We are to be very particular when the name of God is slandered, or his honour undermined in any way whatsoever. If a person were to attack the reputation of any one of us here, we would be angry and start a quarrel. We would see that it only takes one word of criticism for us to draw our swords in anger, under the pretext that we are defending our honour. If a man were to criticise our parents, such passions would be aroused in us that we would soon be out of control. Therefore, when God is attacked, and when men voice their criticism of him, ought we to suffer it, and not be moved with anger and indignation? This is why it says that the zeal of God's house has eaten us up (*Psa. 69:9*). We are not only to feel anger when a person undermines the majesty of God, or twists the doctrine of salvation, or when the church is full of ungodliness: these things should eat us up within.

To return to what I was saying, it is written that Ishmael persecuted Isaac. We may ask, how? With Gehenna, or with fire? Or did he have a sword with which to cut off his head? Not at all! He simply mocked at the promise that was made to Isaac. It was foretold that Ishmael would live, but not as a child of promise. It was in Isaac that the world would receive blessing (*Gen. 21:12*). Indeed, Jesus Christ was promised through Isaac, and thus, this was a promise of salvation. By mocking, Ishmael was giving a mortal wound to the children of adoption and to all believers, by disdaining and attacking their source of highest good and eternal felicity. Now we understand what Paul intended by this. He wants us to apply his teaching, and to be ready for these internal conflicts. The Turks and the pagans are not the only adversaries of the gospel. There are also many hypocrites, seeking to destroy, as far as they possibly can the doctrine of grace which is offered to them by the Lord Jesus Christ. They would rob him of his dignity and worth, rather than magnifying the wonderful generosity of God, the source of our souls' well-being. Let us be ready, I say, to fight these battles with our internal foes, who claim to be children of

God. They say they are our superiors and boast of their seniority, hoping it will make us feel crushed and beaten.

There is another point, and that is that, when we see the doctrines of God twisted in this way, we should be cut to the quick with anguish. By nature, we flee anything that will harm us, or afflict the body. Yet, we should not be so wrapped up in this world that we prefer what seems desirable here below to our heavenly inheritance. Whenever the name of God is blasphemed, or whenever a person seeks to wipe out the doctrines that bring life, we should feel such anguish that we cannot overlook the matter, even more than if we were afflicted in our bodies. If we were to be threatened with having our throats slit, or with enduring all the torments imaginable (the enemies of the gospel today can only satisfy their rage against our poor brothers by torturing, burning, cutting off tongues and the like, as we know) — if this were to happen to us, I say, we are not to take it so hard as when the name of God is ripped to shreds, and attacked by wicked men. But why should they do such things? Well, if they slit our throats, it is not only to deprive us of this fleeting and transitory life, but also to cut us off from the kingdom of heaven. By corrupting the true doctrine, they are turning meat into poison, life into death, light into darkness. This passage is Paul's exhortation and warning to us not to give ourselves over to the things of this world. Our thoughts and affections should be raised heavenward, and centred on the priceless gift which has been offered to us through the gospel. We must fight for this cause more than for our own lives. For truly, a million lives upon this earth cannot be compared to that eternity in heaven which the Lord Jesus Christ has promised. This is what we need to remember: our passion can never be said to be unreasonable if we are reacting to the blasphemies of wicked men against God. For it is by their schemes and devices that they seek to alter and falsify the only doctrine which can bring spiritual life.

Finally, notice what Paul says in conclusion, that all those who boast in this way that they belong to the church today and claim the rights of the first-born will be cast out as bastard children. Do not be deceived by the splendour that surrounds those who strive against the truth of God: their tyranny is maintained by force, by persecution, by gloating and the like. Look to their end: they will be cut off, for they are not heirs. They may well live in the same house, just as we are told that the Antichrist sits in the temple of God (2 *Thess.* 2:4); but they will be scraped off like mud or dung. Now, this does not happen in the sight of men and, therefore, it is hidden from our eyes today. However, we must wait for God to manifest his truth more openly, and for the Lord Jesus Christ to confound his foes by the sword of his mouth, the power of his Word. We need to stand firm with unshakeable faithfulness, that however despised or criticised we are, we might persevere in the holy calling of our God, knowing that we will not be disappointed if we lean upon the doctrines of the gospel. Let us remain grounded therein, until the day that God reveals that which is presently hidden. On that day, we will be truly gathered to his side, knowing that we have not been taught his precious Word in vain. Nor will it be in vain for us to have renounced the foolish inventions of man, and to have sought life only through that pure seed that brings regeneration. This pasture alone can feed and nourish us to the end.

Now let us fall down before the majesty of our great God, acknowledging our faults, and praying that he would make us more conscious of them, so that we are led to true repentance. May we continue to tremble before his throne, and be confounded within ourselves; yet still assured that he accepts us in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The remission of our sins is guaranteed if we seek it in true faith, without stepping aside to the right hand or to the left. We must follow the way that he has shown us, and we cannot go astray if the Sun of Righteousness lights our path. May he show this grace, not only to us, but to all peoples and nations on earth, etc.

## On Perverting the Gospel of Christ

by John Calvin

*I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.*

**Gal. 1:6-8**

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Now we will look more deeply into the subject I touched upon this morning. I said that whereas Paul does not spare the Galatians, neither does he wish to shut the gate of salvation to them completely. He intends to bring them to repentance, and for this reason he speaks of the grace of God into which they had all been called. Yet, he does not flatter them; rather, he rebukes them for their sins. In particular, he rebukes them for their fickleness, for they had listened to deceivers who came in among them distorting the pure doctrine of the gospel. In order to make them better perceive their treachery, Paul says he marvels that they have forsaken their heavenly calling so quickly and easily. He wonders how it is that they have been led astray so swiftly, and how it is that they have remained in that state, given that they had felt and experienced the grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ. Because he is seeking to restore them, he is not saying at the outset that they have completely turned away from the gospel, but rather that they have been overtaken by temptation through seducers, who sought no less than to pervert the truth of God. There is only one pure gospel, as also there is only one Jesus Christ on whom it is founded. It is not for us to create the gospel anew; indeed, if we seek to add anything to the pure seed which we have received from our Lord Jesus Christ, we are destroying what God has established. This, in sum, is what Paul is teaching us in this first verse.

It might seem that Paul is being overly harsh and severe in rebuking the Galatians' weakness, seeing they had never once thought of rejecting the gospel, nor Jesus Christ who had been preached to them. But Paul pays no attention to the way they viewed the situation; he sees it as it really is — in other words, that once people turn away from the truth of God, they are rejecting Jesus Christ and cutting themselves off from him. Some people may think this strange, for many would like to mix light with darkness. Indeed, the confusion that exists in Popery is an outstanding example of this. They make many wonderful claims to the effect that they are upholding the Christian faith into which they have been baptised. But, for all this, it is clear that they have turned everything upside-down. Superstitions reign, and they practise open idolatry of a worse kind than has ever been known, even among the pagans. Any reverence for God is destroyed, since each one sets himself up as a saviour in place of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, the Papists would respond by saying that they are not apostates, and that they have not abandoned Jesus Christ. But our Lord Jesus Christ is no ghost; he cannot change according to the whims of men. In short, he cannot be separated from his church. Thus, whatever the Papists may

claim, they rob Jesus Christ of all his authority. 'If there is only one mediator,' [they say], 'what about the male saints, our patrons, and the female saints, our advocates?' If we speak to them of the sacrifice by which our Lord Jesus Christ has obtained perfect justification for all believers, once and for all, [they will say], 'Are we not supposed to say Mass every day and offer Jesus Christ again as a sacrifice to appease the wrath of God?' If we speak to them of free forgiveness of sins, [they will say], 'What about the ways in which we have made satisfaction for our own sins, and thus earned God's pity?' If we say that we can only be made good by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, and that until God transforms us, we are full of sin and rebellion, [they will say], 'What? What about our free will?' In short, they will name the name of Jesus Christ often enough, and will still give him his title of Redeemer, but they will divide his office and put it on offer so that each man may claim a share in it for himself. They also imagine that the saints and angels in paradise are their patrons, and that, therefore, they have infinite means of coming before God, for so it seems to them. Now, we may well conclude that the Holy Spirit has good reason to call them apostates; for they have forsaken Jesus Christ, and cut themselves off from him. They even misuse his name. But Jesus Christ never changes; we have seen that Paul says in 2 Corinthians that we will not find in him yes and no (2 *Cor.* 1:19), because he remains constant. Thus, whatever the Papists babble about Christianity, it is nothing but mere hypocrisy and lies. They falsely and wickedly use the name of the Son of God, either as a mask or as an idol.

This, then, is why Paul accuses the Galatians of having been led astray. If we ask what they had done, the answer is that they sought to observe the ceremonies of the law as if they were necessary. Yes, it is true that these ceremonies had been ordained by God. Of course; yet, they were a temporary condition for the people of old, for at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ all this had to cease. Because the Galatians were mixing old figures and the shadows of the law with the pure light of the gospel, Paul, unable to bear it, says that they have rebelled and turned away from God. But there was something worse: namely, that they were making the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ altogether void, by believing that man can merit and acquire his own justification before God, and make himself acceptable in God's service. When these deceivers introduced this particular error of keeping to the 'former shadows', it led the Galatians to believe that they were presenting God with meritorious service. Yet, our salvation must be free, or Jesus Christ is no longer anything. We call it free salvation simply because it is given to us by God, and we come to him to be fed, with nothing but a hungry desire for what we are lacking. We should approach God as miserable beggars, if we would be justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. For if we imagine that we have one drop of merit, we will not be motivated to come to him. One of the learned ancients said, and not without reason, that we cannot receive the salvation offered to us in our Lord Jesus Christ unless we can first erase the memory of all our merits, and acknowledge that we are only full of wretchedness. Paul, therefore, was completely justified in saying that the Galatians had fallen away from Jesus Christ and from God the Father.

However, there was another problem: they had been deluded into believing what others desired them to believe. They had been subjected to a slavish bondage, which robbed them of the peace of conscience that they ought to have had in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Indeed, together with the reconciliation we have through his sacrificial death and passion, we must also be set free from the rigours of the law to which we were once in bondage. To explain this (as we will soon see more clearly; for here I am dismissing these matters, but we will see their wider implications shortly), you know that it says in the law that all those who do not fulfil what God commands to the last letter will be accursed (*Deut.* 27:26). Yet it is impossible for us to reach such perfection. Therefore, it was necessary for our Lord Jesus Christ to obtain our liberty, and to free us from the yoke of the law, which we are unable to bear, as it says in the fifteenth chapter of Acts (*Acts* 15:10).

We have now seen, in effect, why Paul accuses the Galatians of rebelling, and why he calls them traitors to God and to our Lord Jesus Christ: they had robbed him of the loyalty that they had promised. By this, we too are being admonished to keep to the pure and simple doctrine of the gospel, without straying in one direction or another. For it is not enough to have the name and title of Christians, or to bear the mark of baptism: we must continue steadfast in the doctrine of the gospel. As we have said before, our Lord Jesus Christ cannot deny himself. He can only be known in the way he has been revealed to us by God the Father, our own various conceptions of him being irrelevant. The gospel shows us why he came, his office, the benefits that we receive from him and the strength that he gives us. If we do not have the pure and simple doctrine which our Lord Jesus Christ has revealed, we have nothing at all, but if we have been taught it, let us hold on to it to the very end. If we draw back, even just a little, it is nothing short of unfaithfulness. Indeed, we must remember that terrible Fall, where we, together with others, fell and became entangled with so many errors, lies and deceits of Satan, that Jesus Christ was totally unknown to us. Since God has now, in his goodness, taken us from such an abyss, let us resolve to have firm and constant faith, so that we are no longer shaken like reeds in the wind. Let us remain firmly rooted in the gospel, grounded upon the invincible power of our Lord Jesus Christ. In him all the promises of God are 'yes and amen' (2 *Cot* 1:20); their truth and their fulfilment is in him. Therefore, let our faith rest steadfast in these facts. This is what we must retain in our minds from Paul's teaching in this passage.

To make the Galatians even more ashamed of themselves, he speaks to them of the calling of grace. We can relate the words, 'from him that called you', as much to Jesus Christ as to God the Father, there being no great significance in this. We can, however, understand what Paul is saying. He is criticising the Galatians for their base behaviour; for they had even less excuse for going astray, considering they had experienced the goodness of God. For if God calls us, even if he summons us in order to put us to shame, we are still his creatures, and, therefore, owe him our obedience. We must always submit to his authority, whatever he decides to do with us. It is our duty to say to him: 'Here I am. What do you require of me?' Whereas, if we make excuses when God calls us, we are perverting the proper order of things. But God not only calls us to himself, he gives us all the treasures of his goodness in our Lord Jesus Christ. He gives himself willingly to us, asking of us only that we should be his own. Since God treats us with such kindness, and ravishes all our faculties with admiration for him, this should render us most unwilling to draw back. Nevertheless, if we do happen to wander to and fro after we have come to him,



we will have much less excuse, and will therefore suffer a more severe and a more terrifying condemnation, as I have already suggested.

We see now why Paul mentions the grace into which the Galatians had been called. In fact, we are more guilty today than our fathers were under the law, if we fail to abide in the pure doctrine of the gospel, without swerving from it. For although God led our forefathers to salvation under the law, yet that calling was not accompanied by such open and abundant displays of the riches of his mercy as we now have in our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us examine ourselves. If God has already made his grace known to us, may this inspire and encourage us to have even greater boldness and invincible strength, so that we may continue in our calling, until we reach the place to which he is calling us. When we compare ourselves with wretched, ignorant unbelievers, our ingratitude is all the more apparent, in that we have had fuller and nobler grace shown to us. We know that many poor souls stray far and wide. They are, however, subject to condemnation: 'For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law' (*Rom. 2:12*). Now, as for us, God has declared his will to us in such familiar terms, and has given us the opportunity to learn the doctrines of the gospel (if we would only apply ourselves to them); therefore, our condemnation will be even greater than theirs, if we do not make every effort to devote ourselves entirely to God, as I have already said. This makes our responsibility all the greater.

Paul adds another point here: that all this had happened so quickly. Indeed, it is terrible that the Galatians, who had been taught from the lips of the apostle, had defiled themselves during his lifetime. This made them even more blameworthy, because just three days [as it were] after receiving the gospel, they fell away by mixing false teachings with God's truth. Had they kept the faith until a good while after the death of Paul, it does not follow that this would have excused them in God's sight, if they had subsequently fallen away. For as the truth on which our faith is grounded is everlasting, although the heavens and the earth are passing away, even so our faith must endure to the very end (*Luke 21:33*). Our faith should not depend on the life or death of men; it should be anchored in heaven. Therefore, if we change from one day to the next, we shall have the more to answer for, and our ungratefulness will be even more pronounced. In fact, what Paul says here about the Galatians is far too much in evidence today. Those who have been taught the gospel become discontented after three years [or so] if they do not have some novelty or other, for they have 'itching ears'. Many vain people backslide because they are not content with the truth in the gospel. They always want to be moving house [as it were], because they need some new thing to feed their foolish imaginations. Others grow dissatisfied when they see that the gospel has not brought them any of this world's goods. There are even some who turn away when they find that they may well be persecuted, and have many enemies. They will have to suffer while others prosper (or so they think). Thus, you can see how many desert our Lord Jesus Christ, not just as one generation succeeds another, but even as those who appear to be his followers turn and rebel after three, or perhaps ten years.

How closely then do we need to hold on to this teaching, since it applies to us. Let us consider the grievance Jeremiah had against the Jews. He says, in effect, 'Go to distant

lands, run to the isles, observe what is done by other people. Each one keeps to his own idols', adding, 'which are yet no gods' (*Jer. 2:10-11*). Satan had deceived them by calling this worship, and they were so set in their ways that they could not be moved. (I hope you are as steadfast as they were, since God has revealed himself to you, and you have a full and certain knowledge of his will.) Surely, however, the same could be said of us nowadays: for we have seen how unbending the Turks [*Moslems* are being referred to here as "Turks" - Ed.] are! And although the wretched Jews are no better than unclean dogs, yet they are very persistent in maintaining the authority of their law. As for the Papists, their foolishness is so apparent as to make them hideous; even children could judge them. Yet for all that, they burn with such mad zeal to maintain their blasphemous practices. As for ourselves, as soon as the devil beckons with his finger, we are enticed away. It seems as if each of us is on the lookout to see if there is anything new; the slightest thing will immediately weaken us and lead us astray. There is enough sin here without going any further. We must, therefore, take heed to the accusation which is made here by the mouth of Paul against the inconstancy of those who turn away from God, so soon after he has called them into the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

At this point, Paul states that the cause behind all this is that, 'there be some that trouble you and would pervert the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ'. Here, Paul is asserting that anything which we may add to the gospel is nothing but mere smoke. Eventually we will discover that it is the devil who has conceived such nonsense in order to deceive miserable fools who cannot adhere to God's truth at all. 'This is nothing other than some people troubling you,' he says. It is true that this expression 'nothing other' [The Authorised Version of 1611 renders this 'not another [gospel]', thus reflecting a view different from that given in Calvin's French translation. Trans.] seems to imply that the whole matter is of no importance. However, Paul is saying that the Galatians were wrong to be troubled by those from Jerusalem and Judaea, who told them they must not separate the law from the gospel. 'No, no,' he says, 'there is only one Jesus Christ. There is only one doctrine that will lead us to him, and give us faith, through which we may obtain salvation. If we wish to have and maintain a pure knowledge of the gospel, we must realise that this is where we find perfection; those who go further are simply trouble-makers throwing everything into disarray.' This text is well worth noting. We learn from it that if our Lord has given us the privilege of being taught in his school, we must no longer have weak faith which can be blown here and there. We must have resolute determination, so that we can say, 'Here is the faith by which we are going to live and die.' We meet many who do not openly oppose the teaching of the gospel, and who even suffer us to preach the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, if we were to ask such people what they disagree with in the gospel, [their answer would be] 'Nothing!' But then, if they were to see an altar adorned with grotesque statues, sure enough, they would flock to it! They would go and hear Mass and do all the other excesses of the Papists; it is all the same to them. And if all this is set before them as error, they still cannot see that it makes any difference. Take good note — such base behaviour reveals that they do not have faith. How? Well, this is how we can know, and even feel, if we ourselves are believers: when we have discernment about the gospel, and conclude that it is the infallible truth of God, and that it cannot lead us astray if we follow it. However, the Papists have invented a faith (as they call it) which is veiled; this suits them fine (even though the poor souls know nothing), as long as they continue to say, 'I rely on our Holy Mother Church; I hold to what she believes.' These people

openly display that they have no faith, and do not know how to be saved. It is written that we can only obtain justification and salvation through faith, when we embrace Jesus Christ as the one who communicates all blessings. Therefore, if the Lord Jesus Christ is unknown, there can be no faith. Popish leaders and teachers have been bewitched by a most awful deception of Satan to speak as they do, which proves to us that they have no knowledge of God; indeed, they are following the path of reprobates.

Let us observe, then, that when Paul tells us there is no other gospel, he wants us to abide in the Lord Jesus Christ and to remain faithful to him, now that we realise the gospel has come from him, rejecting anything which is contrary to its teaching. If we have such maturity, we will be equipped to do battle with Satan, and to oppose all the various opinions that are in the world today. We will never be shaken, whatever troubles come our way; nor will we ever lack the assurance of faith. However, if we waver, we will be just like little children: if they are offered an apple in one hand, sure enough, they will run to it. If they are then offered some other pleasant thing in the other hand, they will reach for that in the same way! Having deserted the first thing, they will rally around the second. If, I say, we are as fickle as this, then it is a sure sign that we are completely unfaithful. Know, therefore, that there must be harmony between our faith and the gospel. Having given ourselves totally to it, we will never turn aside, because we fix our faith on what is contained therein, as we have already said. Not that we can all be as well-versed as each other; for it is certain that most of those whom the Lord Jesus Christ has in his flock do not understand the tenth part of the Holy Scriptures! Yet, whatever else we do not know, we should have the following beliefs in common: that, (1) There is one God the Father, in whom we all believe, who has adopted us out of his pure mercy. (2) There is only one Jesus Christ, through whom all blessings are given to us. (3) We are made regenerate by the Holy Spirit.

Concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, we must also be aware that he is our Advocate, and that without him we cannot approach God. We would not dare to say 'our Father' unless we were members of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ —unless he spoke on our behalf as our intercessor and friend, guiding us, as it were, by the hand to bring us to God the Father. If we do not know these things, then we cannot obtain salvation. Paul accuses the Galatians of failing to recognise that there is only one gospel, which cannot be altered. He does not want them to grieve our Lord Jesus Christ, who alone is to be heeded. He also warns us of seducers, who seek to turn us from the pure simplicity of the gospel of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ. He teaches us to regard them as abhorrent, for (as we shall soon see more clearly) they pervert the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. How dreadful it is that the gospel, the foundation of our salvation, and the key that opens the gates of paradise, should be perverted! It is our only treasure. We were banished from the kingdom of heaven and could not come near to it, until God made a way, through the gospel, for us to be his people and for him to be our King, so that we can be led and governed by his authority. Inestimable treasures are contained in the gospel. God is reconciled with man; the gates of heaven are opened to us; our Lord Jesus Christ has been given to us as our inheritance; we are made partakers of all the good things that he has bestowed upon us; and we are assured of our eternal salvation. It were better that the whole world should perish and be consumed than that this gospel should be perverted.

This is what Paul says about all those who come to trouble us, after we have been so faithfully taught, and of all those who bring us little novelties, mixing in their own inventions here and there — these people turn men from the kingdom of God, and from his royal throne, so that they are no longer governed by him, and thereby the sceptre of our Lord Jesus Christ is no longer extended to them for their salvation. If God's honour, and our own salvation, is as dear to us as it ought to be, and if sharing in all the blessings of heaven is precious to us, then whenever we are approached by such scoundrels seeking to detract from the majesty of God, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and even our salvation, ought we not to shun them and cast them out as we would the most deadly plague in the world? This, in short, is what we must do: we must cling with strong affection to the gospel, and not allow anyone to corrupt it in any way. We must not let anybody confuse our minds by their claims to be bringing us an alternative view. Even if the people who speak to us have great knowledge, and are skilful, sharp-witted and very eloquent, we must reject them as abominations, people who have come to draw us away from the purity of the gospel. This is what Paul is teaching us here.

Having spoken of this, Paul then adds, that if either he, or an angel, came to preach any other gospel than that which the Galatians had already heard, they were to reject them. They must be treated as accursed people, and as devils, and be excommunicated. We see here that Paul becomes heated (in a manner of speaking), as he is seeking to promote constancy in the faith so that we will not be shaken. Yet he does not do so without good reason. For we know how fragile we are, and not only fragile, but worse than this, we are vain and rebellious. When we are first taught from the Word of God, if we are not genuinely touched, we find it the strangest book in the world; for the teaching of the gospel is always foolishness to the human mind, as we have seen on previous occasions (*1 Cor.* 2:14). And the reason for this? Because we are vanity: our hearts have wandered and gone astray, our natures incline and tend to falsehood, and we almost wilfully desire to be beguiled. Because our minds are thus corrupted, we should not be surprised if we do not desire the Word of God and if it does not become a part of us. For our only activity is in rebelling against God. Although we think we are doing right, we are, in fact, blind. In short, the Scriptures do not say without cause that all men are 'vanity and leasing' (*Psa.* 4:2). We are in rebellion against God, pulling in the opposite direction when he calls us. God has granted us the privilege of being drawn to himself, and of realising that his truth is what we must hold to. He has so mastered us that we are no longer full of guile, but willing to be completely subject to him. Even so, the devil is still able to lead us astray at any moment, because we are so fragile and inconstant! We have seen this happen to those who were mirror-images of holiness (as it were). We have been shocked to see them change so quickly and wander from the right path. What causes this? As I have already said, even when we are in good form, we cannot remain in this state long before we travel in the opposite direction; that is, unless God works in us and strengthens us in our weakness.

This is why Paul upholds the teaching of the gospel in such a forceful way (occasion having been given him by the Galatians, who had gone astray because they had been taught to observe the ceremonies of the law). Seeing such an example and such a picture of man's great weakness and fickleness, Paul states that the truth of the gospel must

supersede anything that we may devise. He also implies that we ought not to be deceived by the knowledge, skill or eloquence of men, for even if the angels from heaven had entered our ranks, we should rather count them as devils. But this, apart from anything else, must have seemed a very strange thing to say. What! The angels from heaven! But what else is it to which he refers? His own preaching. He does not simply speak of the gospel of Christ, but of the gospel which *he* had preached to them. And can he be superior to the angels from heaven? Well, in the first place, we see that it is nothing to praise the gospel in a general and vague sense; you must know, its teaching. After all, there are many who will mock the folly of the Papists, but if you were to ask them the rudiments, which even little children know well, they do not know them. If one says one thing and another says something else, it is all one and the same thing to them. There is no difference; it is as if they are throwing salt, water, mustard and bitter juice together in a recipe! They will speak often enough in general terms about how we must preach the gospel, and yet they do not know what it is! In order to correct such a sin, Paul speaks of the gospel which he preached to them. By this (as I have said), he is showing us that we ought to know the substance of the doctrine which is brought to us in the name of God, so that our faith can be fully grounded upon it. Then we will not be tossed about with every wind, nor will we wander about aimlessly, changing our opinions a hundred times a day; we will persist in this doctrine until the end. This, in brief, is what we must remember.

Because Paul speaks in such bold language in defence of his teaching, this should make it all the more genuine to us. He does not speak with human arrogance or presumption, but in the name of God. Indeed, there is no question here of his boasting about himself; he proves this by saying, 'if I'. He puts himself first, as if he is saying: 'Even I myself, if I change my doctrine, or if you find I have swerved in any way, let me be regarded as a devil.' Here, Paul is showing that he was not seeking to gain a reputation for himself, nor was he fighting for his own cause, so that people would say how intelligent, wise and gifted he was. No; he puts himself on the level of all believers and says: 'Let us all embrace the whole of our Master's teaching, which God has entrusted to us, and to which we must submit our conduct. For although I have taught you this doctrine, yet it is not mine, but it is of God, who never changes. If I change, do not be shaken, nor surprised about this, but treat me as a devil, count me accursed. As for yourselves, remain grounded in the truth that you have always known. I would rather you saw me as accursed and abominable, and even the angels from heaven also, than that you forsake the truth about the Son of God and turn away from it.' We can see from this what Paul desired: that God's truth should be revered amongst men, as it deserves to be, and that it should be esteemed in such a way, that all our senses, thoughts, desires and affections should be subdued and held captive to it. It is not lawful for any living creature to change anything in the gospel, for God has spoken by the mouth of his only Son. May he be our master indeed, and may each of us obey him without question. This is what Paul desired. But since we cannot now finish commenting on the rest, it will be reserved for next Sunday, in God's good pleasure.

Now let us fall before the majesty of our great God, acknowledging our faults, and praying that he will make us ever more conscious of them. May this lead us to a right repentance, and make us grow and increase in faith, as true sacrifices to him. Since our

Lord Jesus Christ gave himself for our redemption, let us also seek to dedicate ourselves fully to him. May we be led by him to persevere, so that in life and in death we seek no other contentment or rest than to acquiesce in his good will. May we glory in nothing other than the salvation which he has purchased for us. May this grace not only be granted to us, but to all peoples and nations on earth, etc.

## Pure Preaching of the Word

by John Calvin

*But shun profane and vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymeneus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.*

### 2 Timothy 2:16-18

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We have already shown that St. Paul hath, not without cause, diligently exhorted Timothy to follow the pure simplicity of the Word of God, without disguising it. The doctrine which is set forth to us in God's name, to be the food of our souls, will be corrupted by the devil, if in his power; when he cannot destroy it, he blendeth things with it, in order to bring it into contempt, and destroy our knowledge of the will of God. There are many in this day who put themselves forward to teach; and what is the cause of it? Ambition carrieth them away; they disguise the Word of God, and thus Satan goeth about to deprive us of the spiritual life.

But this he is not able to accomplish, unless by some means the doctrine of God be corrupted. St. Paul repeateth the exhortation: that we must shun all unprofitable babbling, and stay ourselves upon plain teaching. which is forcible. He not only condemneth manifest errors, superstition, and lies, but he condemneth the disguising of the Word of God: as when men invent subtleties, to cloy men's ears; bringing no true nourishment to the soul, nor edification in faith, and the fear of God, to the hearers.

When St. Paul speaketh of vain babbling, he meaneth that which contenteth curious men; as we see many that take great pleasure in vain questions, wherewith they seem to be ravished. They do not openly speak against the truth, but they despise it as a thing too common and base; as a thing for children and fools; as for them, they will know some higher and more profound matter. Thus they are at variance with that which would be profitable for them. Therefore, let us weigh well the words of St. Paul: *vain babbling*; as though he said, if there be nothing but fine rhetoric and exquisite words to gain him credit that speaketh, and to show that he is well learned, none of this should be received into the church; all must be banished.

For God will have His people to be edified; and He hath appointed His Word for that purpose. Therefore, if we go not about the salvation of the people, that they may receive nourishment by the doctrine that is taught them, it is sacrilege; for we pervert the pure use of the Word of God. This word *profane*, is set against that which is holy and dedicated to God. Whatsoever pertaineth to the magnifying of God, and increases our knowledge of His majesty, whereby we may worship Him; whatsoever draweth us to the kingdom of

heaven, or taketh our affections from the world, and leadeth us to Jesus Christ, that we may be grafted into His body, is called holy.

On the contrary, when we feel not the glory of God, when we feel not to submit ourselves to Him, when we know not the riches of the kingdom of heaven, when we are not drawn into His service to live in pureness of conscience, when we know not what the salvation meaneth which was purchased by our Lord Jesus Christ, we belong to the world, and are *profaned*. The doctrine which serves to mislead us in such things, is also called *profane*. Thus we see what St. Paul's meaning is: to wit, when we come together in the name of God, it is not to hear merry songs, and to be fed with wind, that is, with vain and unprofitable curiosity, but to receive spiritual nourishment. For God will have nothing preached in His name, but that which will profit and edify the hearers, nothing but that which containeth good matter.

But it is true, our nature is such, that we take great pleasure in novelty, and in speculations which seem to be subtle. Therefore, let us beware, and think as we ought, that we may not profane God's holy Word. Let us seek that which edifieth, and not abuse ourselves by receiving that which hath no substance in it. It is hard to withdraw men from such vanity, because they are inclined to participate in it. But St. Paul sheweth that there is nothing more miserable than such vain curiosity: "For they will increase unto more ungodliness." As if he had said, my friends, you know not at first sight what hurt cometh by these deceivers; who go about to gain credit and estimation among you, and with pleasant toys endeavor to please you; but believe me, they are Satan's instruments and such as in no wise serve God but increase unto more wickedness; that is. if they are let alone, they will mar the Christian religion; they will not leave one jot safe and sound. Therefore, see that you flee them as plagues, although at first sight, the poison which they bring be not perceived.

Every one of us should suspect himself, when we have to judge of this doctrine. And why so? Because (as I said before), we are all weak; our minds are altering and changing, and besides, we have a foolish desire that draweth to things which are unprofitable. And therefore let us beware that we do not satisfy our own desires. Although this doctrine may not seem bad to us at the first view, yet notwithstanding, if it has not a tendency to lead us to God, and strengthen us in His service, to confirm us in the faith and hope that is given us of everlasting life, it will deceive us in the end; and prove to be but a mixture which serveth no purpose, except to take away the good which we had received before.

To be short, those that have not this in view, to draw the world to God, and build up the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He may rule among us, mar all. All the labor and pains they take but increases their wickedness; and if they be suffered to go on in this way, a gate is set open to Satan, whereby he may bring to nought whatsoever is of God. Although this is not done at the first blow, yet we see the end is such. To express this the better, St. Paul adds, "Their word will eat as doth a canker."

The word "*eat*," mentioned here, is not commonly understood; it is what the surgeons call, an *eating sore*, and what is also called, *St. Anthony's fire*: that is to say, when there is



such an inflammation in any part of the body, that the sore eateth not only the flesh and sinews, but the bones also. In short, it is a fire that devoureth all: the hand will cause the arm to be lost, and the foot the leg, unless at the beginning, the part that is affected be cut off; thus the man is in danger of losing his members, unless there be fit remedies provided for it; in this case we should spare no pains, but cut off the part affected, that the rest be not utterly destroyed.

Thus we view it here spiritually: for St. Paul sheweth us that although we may have been well instructed in wholesome doctrine, all will be marred, if we give place to these unprofitable questions, and only endeavor to please the hearers, and feed their desires. Seeing we understand what St. Paul's meaning is, let us endeavor to put this exhortation into practice. When we see men go about, endeavoring to turn us aside from the true doctrine, let us shun them, and shut the gate against them. Unless we take it in hand at the first start, and entirely cut it off, it may be as difficult to control as the disease of which we have spoken.

Therefore, let us not be sleeping; for this is a matter of importance; it will prove a deadly disease, unless it be seen to in time. If this exhortation had been observed, things would be in a better condition at the present day in Christendom. For this doltishness of papistry is but the vain babbling spoken of by St. Paul. Even those who would be counted the greatest doctors among them, who are of many years standing, yea, and have spent their whole life in it, think upon nothing but foolish prattling; which serveth no other purpose than to lead men astray, as no man knoweth what they mean. It seemeth that the devil hath forged this language by a miraculous subtlety, in order that he might bring all doctrine into confusion.

It is plainly perceived that they have conspired to do contrary to that which St. Paul hath in God's name forbidden. For they that have thus turned the Word of God into a profane language of barbarous and unknown words shall be much less able to excuse themselves. Many there are that would gladly have pleasant things taught them; they would make pastime of the Word of God, and recreate themselves thereby; thus they seek vain and unprofitable teaching. They would bring error, contention, and debate into the church, and endeavor to bring the religion we hold into doubt, and obscure the Word of God.

Therefore we must be so much the more earnestly serve God, and continue constantly in the pureness of the gospel. If we have a desire to obey our God as we ought, we must practice that which is commanded us, and pray Him to cleanse the church from these plagues, for they are the devil's instruments. This might be applied to all corruptions and stumbling-blocks invented by the devil; but it is here spoken of concerning the doctrine whereby we are quickened, which is the true food of the soul.

Now let us come to that part of the subject, in which St. Paul informs us who are of this number. He saith, "Of whom is Hymeneus, and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already: and overthrow the faith of some." When he nameth Hymeneus and Philetus, he sheweth that we must not spare them, who, like scabby sheep, may infect the flock, but we must rather tell every one, what kind of

men they are, that they may beware of them. Are we not traitors to our neighbors when we see them in danger of being turned from God, and do not inform them of it? A wicked man that goeth about to establish perverse doctrine, and cause offences in the church, what is he but an impostor? If I dissemble when I see him, is it not as though I should see my neighbor in danger, and would not bid him beware?

If the life of the body ought to be so precious to us that we would do all in our power to preserve it, of how much more importance is the life of the soul! Those who endeavor to turn every thing upside down, will come and sow their false doctrine among the people, in order to draw them into a contempt of God. These barking dogs, these vile goats, these ravenous wolves, are they that have erred, and endeavored to overthrow the faith of the church: and yet we suffer them. Men will frequently say, must we be at defiance with them? Must we cast them off that they may fall into despair? This is said by those who think we ought to use gentleness; but what mercy is it to spare one man, and in the mean time to cast away a thousand souls, rather than warn them? We must not suffer wicked herbs to grow among us – lest they should get the upper hand, and choke whatsoever good seed there be, or utterly destroy it.

Satan cometh with his poison and plagues, that he may destroy all. We see the flock of God troubled and tormented with ravenous wolves, that devour and destroy whatsoever they can. Must we be moved with mercy towards a wolf: and in the mean time let the poor sheep and lambs of which our Lord hath such a special care, let them. I say, perish? When we see any wicked man troubling the church? either by offences or false doctrine, we must prevent him as much as lieth in our power: we must warn the simple, that they be not misled and carried away; this I say, is our duty.

The Lord would have the wicked made known, that the world may discern them, that their ungodliness may be made manifest to all. St. Paul speaketh of some who are busy bodies, idlers &c.: these must be pointed out likewise, that they may be shunned. What must be done to those who have the sword in hand; who have become very devils; who can in no wise live in peace and concord, but thrust themselves forward to bring all to nought? When we see them thus, must we hold our peace? Let us learn to know them that trouble the church of God, and keep them back, and endeavor to prevent them from doing injury. Hereby we see how few there are that have a zeal for God's church.

We speak not only of open enemies (for we confess that we must name the *papists*, that we be not entangled with their error and superstition), but we see others that seek to turn us away from the simplicity of the gospel: they endeavor to bring all things into disorder; they sow tares, that they may bring this doctrine into hatred, and cause men to be grieved with it; others would have a licentious liberty to do what wickedness they choose, and thus throw off the yoke of our Lord Jesus Christ. We see others, who seek nothing but to fill the world with wickedness, blasphemies, and vileness, and thus endeavor to tread the reverence of God under foot. We likewise see gross drunkards and tiplers, who endeavor to bring all men into confusion.

And yet, who is there among us that setteth himself against these things? Who is there that saith, let us beware and be watchful? On the contrary, those that ought to reprove such wickedness sharply not only wink at it, and let it pass, but they favor it, and give it their support. We see the wickedness that overspreads the land; we see those that endeavor to pervert and bring to nought our salvation, and bring the church of God into doubt; and shall we dissemble, and make as though we saw none of these things? We may boast as much as we please about being Christians, yet there are more devils among us than Christians, if we countenance such things.

Therefore, let us look well to the doctrine which is here given us; and if we see wicked persons trying to infect the church of God, to darken good doctrine, or destroy it, let us endeavor to bring their works to light, that every one may behold them, and thereby be enabled to shun them. If we attend not to these things, we are traitors to God, and have no zeal for His honor, nor for the salvation of the church. We must be professed enemies of wickedness, if we will serve God. It is not enough for us merely to refrain from committing sin, but we must condemn it as much as possible, that it may not bear any sway, or get the upper hand of us.

After St. Paul hath named these two individuals, he informs us that they turned away from the faith, insomuch that they said the resurrection was passed. So we see their fall was horrible. Hymeneus and Philetus were not obscure men; for St. Paul makes mention of them, although they were afar off, Timothy being at this time in Ephesus. It is therefore evident that they were famous men. They had been for some time in great reputation, as chief pillars in the church. But we see how far they fell; even to renounce everlasting salvation which was purchased for us by our Lord Jesus Christ. If we look not for the resurrection, of what use is it for us to teach that there is a redeemer who hath saved us from the slavery of death? Of what use will the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ be to us, unless we wait for the fruit that is promised us in the latter day, at His coming?

Notwithstanding these men had been for a season of the number of the faithful, yet they fell, as it were, into the bottomless gulf of hell. Thus God declareth His vengeance toward them that abuse His gospel. It seemeth that these men were drunken with foolish ambition: they sought nothing but renown; they disguised the simplicity of the Word of God, and endeavored to show themselves greater than others. But God esteemeth His Word far higher than He doth man; for if men cast it down and make a mock of it, He will not hold them guiltless. Thus we see that those who were like angels have become very devils: they are blinded, and yet they would become great doctors.

The ability of these persons, of whom St. Paul speaketh, were not of the common sort; they were not idiots, but of high standing in all the churches: and yet they are fallen into such blindness that they deny the resurrection of the dead: that is, they renounce the chiefest article of our religion and deprive themselves of all hope of salvation. How is this possible! It seemeth strange that men who were able to teach others should come to such gross and beastly ignorance. Thus we see how God revengeth scoffers and scorners

that abuse His Word. It cannot be but He must cast them off into a state of reprobation; that they may never be able to discern any more, and become utterly void of all reason.

Therefore, if at this day, we see men become beastly, after having known the truth of God, and become void of reason, we must know that God will thereby magnify His Word, and cause us to feel the majesty thereof. And why so? Because He punished the contempt of it by giving such persons to the devil, and giving him full liberty over them. Therefore we must not be offended when we see those who have tasted the gospel, revolt from the obedience of God; but let it rather be a confirmation of our faith: for God sheweth us plainly that His Word is of such importance that He cannot in any wise have men abuse it, nor take it in vain, neither disguise or profane it.

We must learn to take heed, and walk fearfully and carefully. Let us view these things as a looking-glass set before our eyes, that we may see those who seemed to be passing for good Christians, fallen; having in themselves nothing but wickedness, using detestable speeches, having nothing but filthiness in all their lives. Seeing God hath placed these things before us, let us take warning thereby, and awake and walk in the simplicity of the gospel, that we may not become a prey to Satan.

It is true, these men had a fantastical resurrection as some do at the present day; who would make us believe that to become Christians was to rise again: but the Scripture calleth us to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ that we be always ready and prepared, that He may be made manifest; and until that time our life is hidden, and we are, as it were, in the shadow of death. When the Scripture calleth us to our Lord Jesus, these fanatics say, we must look for no other resurrection, except that which takes place when we are enlightened in the gospel.

We will here observe that our old man must be crucified, if we will be partakers of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, and rise again with Him. St. Paul hath shown us, that if we will be of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, we must be partakers of His cross; we must walk in death before we can come to life. How long will this death continue? As long as we are in this world. Therefore St. Peter saith, baptism is, as it were, a figure of the ark of Noah (I Pet. 3:21). For we must be enclosed, as it were, in a grave; being dead to the world, if we will be quickened by the mark of our Lord Jesus Christ.

They that would have a resurrection at midway, do they not pervert the nature of baptism, and consequently all the order that God hath set among us? Let us learn that until God shall take us out of this world, we must be as pilgrims in a strange country: and that our salvation shall not be shown us until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: for He has become the first fruits of them that slept (I Cor. 15). And likewise, "He is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence" (Col. 1:18). It is true that Jesus Christ has risen again; but He must needs appear to us, and His life and glory must be shown us before we can come to Him.

St. John saith that we are sure we are God's children: that we shall see Him even as He is, when we shall be made like Him. It is true, God is revealed to us when He transformed us into His image; but that which we conceive by faith, is not yet seen, we must hope for it at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Notwithstanding the great absurdity of the error, St. Paul informs us that the two individuals here spoken of, have overthrown the faith of some. This is a thing that ought to make us tremble; to think that a doctrine which ought to be laid aside at the first sight should overthrow the faith of some.

We see how the children of God are afflicted in this world; yea, it is often pitiable to behold their situation; while the unbelievers who contemn God, are at their ease, and live in pleasure. They make their triumph, whereas the saints are made as the off-scouring of the world (I Cor. 4:13). How is it possible for men to conceive this heresy: to say the resurrection is already past? And yet we see that this was welcome to some; yea, in the primitive church in the time of the apostles. When they, whom Jesus Christ had chosen to preach His truth throughout the world, still lived, some fell from the faith.

When we see such an example, have we not occasion to be astonished, and walk in fear! Not that we should doubt but what God will help and guide us, but it behooveth us to arm ourselves with prayer, and rely upon the promises of our God. Well may we be amazed, when we think upon the heinousness of this error; that God hath suffered some to be turned away from the faith already. If the apostles, who exercised all the power that was given them from above to maintain the truth of God, could not prevent men from being misled, what must we expect now-a-days! Let us be diligent in prayer, and flee to God that He may preserve us by His Holy Spirit. May we not be puffed up with presumption, but consider our nothingness, for we should quickly be overthrown, if we were not upheld by the supreme Being.

These lessons are not given us without a cause. Although Hymeneus and Philetus are not alive at this day, yet in their persons the Holy Ghost meant to degrade the wicked, who go about to pervert our faith; that we may not be grieved at whatsoever comes to pass; that we may not depart from the good way, but be guarded against all offences. We must not be so puffed up with pride, as to go astray after our own foolish imaginations; but we must take heed, and keep ourselves in obedience to the Word of God. Then we shall be daily more and more confirmed, until our good God taketh us to His everlasting rest, whereunto we are called.

# The Call to Witness

by John Calvin

*Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel, according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,*

## II Timothy 1:8-9

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Although God shows His glory and majesty in the gospel, yet the unthankfulness of men is such, that we have need to be exhorted, not to be ashamed of this gospel. And why so? Because God requires all creatures to do Him homage: yet the greater part rebel against Him; despise, yea, and are at defiance with the doctrine whereby He would be known and worshipped. Although men are so wicked as to lift up themselves against their Maker, let us, notwithstanding, remember that which is taught us in this place; to wit, that we be not ashamed of the gospel; for it is the witness of God.

If the gospel be not preached, Jesus Christ is, as it were, buried. Therefore, let us stand as witnesses, and do Him this honor, when we see all the world so far out of the way; and remain steadfast in this wholesome doctrine. St. Paul here setteth his own person before us: not that he wished particularly to be approved, but because we often get in difficulty, if we separate ourselves from the servants of God. When there is a minister of the Word of God troubled, molested, and persecuted, we are apt to forsake him in time of need, thinking it is but mortal man: but in doing this, we offend God; because this man that suffereth, beareth the mark of the gospel: thus the cause of God is betrayed. Therefore, St. Paul saith to Timothy, be not ashamed of me.

The mind of Timothy might have been shaken; therefore, St. Paul saith to him, though the world despise me, though they mock and hate me, yet must thou not be moved by these things; for I am the prisoner of Jesus Christ. Let the world speak evil of me; it is not for my of fences: God alloweth my cause; for indeed it is His. I suffer not for mine own evil doings, having His truth always on my side. Therefore, the cause of my persecution is, because I have maintained the Word of God, and continue to maintain it. Thou shouldest not be guided by the world's judgment, for men are carried away with evil affections. Let it be sufficient for thee then, that I am as it were a pledge for the Son of God; that He magnifieth my person; that if it be reproachful to the world, it ceases not to be honored before God, and His holy angels.

Let us not deceive Jesus Christ in the testimony we owe Him, by stopping our mouths, when it is needful to maintain His honor, and the authority of His gospel. Yea, and when we see our brethren afflicted for the cause of God, let us join with them, and assist them

in their affliction. Let us not be shaken by the tempests that arise, but let us always remain constant in our purpose; and stand as witnesses for the Son of God, seeing He is so gracious as to use us in such a good cause. Let us mark well, whether men suffer for their sins, or for the truth of God. When we see one oppressed, we must not despise him, lest we do injury to God: we must ascertain for what cause men suffer. If they have walked in a good conscience, and are blamed, if they are tormented because they serve God, this is enough to remove whatever the wicked world can say against them. Therefore St. Paul adds, "Be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel."

There is no man but what would willingly escape affliction; this is according to human nature; and although we confess, without dissembling, that it is a singular grace which God bestows, when He enables men to bear affliction, and maintain His cause, yet there is not one of us, but what would willingly draw his neck out of persecution. For we look not at the lesson given by St. Paul, which saith. the gospel bringeth troubles. Jesus Christ was crucified in His own person, and His doctrine is joined with many miseries. He could, if it pleased Him, cause His doctrine to be received without any gainsaying. But the Scripture must be fulfilled: "Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies" (Psalm 110).

We must come to Him upon this condition; to be willing to suffer many bickerings; because the wicked lift up themselves against God, when He calleth them to Him. Therefore, it is impossible for us to have the gospel without affliction. We must be exercised; we must fight under our Lord Jesus Christ. Doth he not then renounce his salvation, that would get rid of the cross of Christ? What is the hope of life? Only in this, that we are bought by the sacrifice of the Son of God. Then will He have us made like unto Him, and have us transformed into His image.

We must not be ashamed of our brethren; when we hear evil reports of them, and see them cast off by the world, let us always be with them, and endeavor to strengthen them; for the gospel cannot be without affliction; as I have already said. It pleaseth God, that men should be so divided. But He calleth all to the unity of faith; and the doctrine of the gospel is the message of atonement; but yet the faithful are drawn by the virtue of His Holy Spirit (as we shall notice more particularly hereafter) ; but the unbelievers remain in their hardness: thus the fire kindleth; as when thunder engendereth in the air, there must needs be trouble; so it is when the gospel is preached.

Now, if the gospel bring affliction, and it be the mind of Jesus Christ, that what He suffered in His person, shall be fulfilled in His members, and be daily crucified, is it lawful for us to withdraw ourselves from that situation? Seeing it is so, that all hope of salvation is in the gospel, we must rest thereon; and mark what St. Paul saith; to wit, we must assist our brethren when we see them in trouble, and when they are reviled by the wicked; and choose rather to be their companions, and suffer the rebukes and scoffs of the world, than to be otherwise honored with a good reputation, having our faces turned from them that suffer for that cause, which is ours, as well as theirs.

We are apt to be weak, and think we shall be swallowed tip by persecutions, as soon as our enemies assail us: but St. Paul observes, we shall not be destitute of the aid and

succour of our God. He armeth us forthwith, and giveth us an invincible power, that we may remain sure and stedfast. For this reason St. Paul adds, "according to the power of God." But as we have said, every man would be glad to have some cover or cloak, whereby he might withdraw himself from persecution. If God would give me grace. I would gladly suffer for His name; I know it is the greatest blessing that I could receive.

Every man will confess this: hut they add, we are weak, and shall quickly be beaten down by the cruelty of our enemies. But St. Paul taketh away this excuse, by saying, God will strengthen us, and that we must not look to our own strength. For it is certain, if we never come into conflicts with our enemies, we shall be afraid of our own shadows. Seeing we know this weakness, let us come to the remedy. We must consider how hard it is to withstand our enemies; therefore let us humble ourselves before God, and pray Him to extend His hand, and uphold us in all our afflictions. If this doctrine were well imprinted in our hearts, we should be better prepared to suffer than we are.

But we are apt to forget it; yea, we stop our ears, and close our eyes, when we hear it spoken of. We pretend that we wish God to strengthen us, but we cannot bring our sight to the power that St. Paul speaks of; we are apt to think, that we have nothing to do with it; although the Lord hath shown us, that His power will always uphold us. Therefore, let not our weakness cause us to withdraw ourselves from the cross, and from persecution; seeing God hath received us into His hands, and promised to supply our needs. St. Paul here addeth a lesson to make us greatly ashamed, if we be not enticed to glorify Jesus Christ by suffering persecution; he saith, "God hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling."

Behold! God hath drawn us out of the gulf of hell! We were utterly cast away and condemned: but he hath brought us salvation, and hath called us to be partakers of it. Therefore, seeing God hath showed Himself so liberal, if we on our parts turn our backs to Him, is not this a shameful malice? Let us mark well the accusation of St. Paul against those that are inconstant; those that are unwilling to stiffer the assaults made against them for the sake of the gospel. Undoubtedly his mind was to comfort the faithful, for the time to come; he therefore showeth what God hath done for them already.

When God giveth us any token of His goodness, it is to the end we should hope for the like at His hands again; and wait till He bring to pass what He hath begun. Therefore, if God hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, do we think that He will leave us at midway? When He hath showed us our salvation, and given us His gospel whereby He calleth us to His kingdom, and openeth the gates unto us; when He hath done all this, do we think He will leave us here, and mock us, and deprive us of His grace, or make it unprofitable? No, no; but let us hope that He will bring his work to a perfect end.

Therefore, let us go on with good courage; for God hath already displayed His power toward us. Let us not doubt but what He will continue it, and that we shall have a perfect victory over Satan and our enemies; and that God the Father hath given all power into the hands of Jesus Christ, who is our head and captain; that we may be partakers of it. Thus we see St. Paul's meaning. God hath witnessed, and we know it by experience, that He



will never fail us in time of need. And why so? For He hath already saved us, in that He hath called us to the gospel, and redeemed us from sin. He hath called us with an holy calling; that is to say, He hath chosen us to Himself, out of the general confusion of mankind.

The Lord having drawn us to Him, will He not up-hold us, and guide us to the end? This is a sure confirmation of the power of God; that we always find Him ready to help us: therefore we put our trust in Him, knowing that we have already felt His power. That we may profit by this doctrine, let us know first of all, that whereas God hath given us the knowledge of His truth, it is as much as if He had shown us already that we belonged to His heavenly inheritance, and that we were His, and of His flock. If we are persuaded of this, and resolved therein, we shall always go forward in the cause, knowing that we are under His protection. He hath sufficient strength to overcome all our enemies, which makes our salvation sure.

Let us not fear, on account of our weakness, for God hath promised to assist us. We should think upon this, and endeavour to receive that which is said to us. The Lord will bring our salvation to an end! He will assist us in the midst of persecutions, and enable us to overcome them. When we are once convinced of these things, it will not require much power of rhetoric to strengthen us against temptations. We shall triumph over all our enemies: notwithstanding we seem to the world to be trodden under foot, and utterly overwhelmed. But we must come to this declaration which St. Paul addeth, concerning the salvation of which we have spoken, and the holy calling. He saith, "Not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace."

For He had no respect to our works or dignity, when He called us to salvation. He did it of mere grace. Therefore we shall be less excusable, if we disobey His requirements, seeing we have not only been purchased by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, but He had a care of our salvation before the world was made. Let us here observe that St. Paul condemns our unthankfulness, if we be so unfaithful to God, as not to bear witness of His gospel; seeing He hath called us to it. And that He may better express this purpose, the apostle adds, that this "was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began; before the world had its course, or beginning: it was revealed at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When this great Savior made His appearance, the grace that was hid before, yea, and could not be reached by the knowledge of man, was made clear and manifest. And how so? The Son of God destroyed death, and also brought everlasting life! And we need not go afar off to find it, for the gospel leadeth us to it. When God sendeth us this message of salvation, we have only to receive the inheritance which He promised us. Let us open our mouths, that He may fill them; let us open our hearts, and give this testimony of the gospel leave to enter; and the immortality of the kingdom of heaven shall dwell within us; though we be poor, frail vessels, and have nothing but corruption and rottenness in us; yet notwithstanding, we do already lay hold upon this immortality, and have a sure witness of it, when we can accept this grace that is offered in the gospel.

That we may better understand what is here contained, let us remark that this word *purpose*, signifieth the everlasting decree of God; which hath no causes whatsoever. For when we speak of God's counsels, we need not dispute about who moved Him: as though we should imagine reasons, and say, this is the reason why God hath determined after this sort; this is the cause why He would have it so. FM God will have us use such soberness, that His bare will may suffice us for all reason. When it is said, God hath thus appointed it, though our eyes be dazzled, and the matter seem strange to us, and we see no reason why it should thus be, yet we must not find fault. It is wisdom in us to do whatever God appointeth, and never ask why.

But because men have busy heads, and given much to curiosity, St. Paul bringeth us to God's purpose; and telleth us plainly, that we must consider it so deep that we cannot enter into it, to know who moved Him. He was moved only by His just will; which is a rule of all justice. Therefore, we are hereby informed, that our salvation depends not upon our deserts: God never examined what we were, nor what we were worthy of, when He chose us to Himself; but He had His purpose; that is, He sought no cause of our salvation but in Himself. St. Paul sheweth evidently that this word *purpose* signifieth this decree. But because men cannot by reason of the pride that is in them withhold themselves from imagining some worthiness of their own, they think that God is under an obligation to seek them: but St. Paul saith pointedly, *purpose and grace*. This is as much as if he had said *free purpose*.

This is therefore to beat down all our works: that we be not so foolish and stubborn, as to think God chose us because there was something in us worthy of it. No, no; but we must know that God never went farther than Himself, when He chose us to salvation. For He saw that there was nothing but condemnation in us: therefore He contented Himself, by mere grace and infinite mercy, to look upon our misery, and help us; although we were not worthy. For better proof hereof, St. Paul saith that this grace was given us before the world began.

We perceive by this, how void of sense men are when they vaunt themselves of believing that they are the cause of their own salvation; and have prevented God's goodness, or were before Him, and met with Him. Whereupon hangeth our salvation? Is it not upon the election and choice that hath been from everlasting? God chose us before we were. What could we do then? We were made fit, we were well disposed to come to God. Nay, we see that our salvation doth not begin after we have knowledge, discretion, and good desires; but it is grounded in God's everlasting decree, which was before any part of the world was made.

What can we do then? Have we any means to put forth ourselves? Can we give God occasion to call us, and separate us from the rest of the world? Are we not then marvellously mistaken, when we think we have some worthiness of our own, and exalt our deserts to darken God's grace, and be thus prepared of ourselves to have access to Him? We must mark well for what purpose St. Paul here mentions the election of God; saying, that grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. They that think to

abolish the doctrine of God's election, destroy as much as possible the salvation of the world.

This is the most fit instrument, used by the devil, to deface the virtue of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; to bring to nought, and destroy the gospel; yea, and to put the goodness of God out of man's memory. The devil hath no fitter instruments than those who fight against predestination; and cannot in their rage suffer it to be spoken of, or preached as it ought to be. If we detest the *papists* (as indeed they ought to be detested), because they have profaned the Holy Scripture, and have marred and depraved the truth of the gospel and the service of God, by infecting all the world with superstition and idolatry, much more are they to be detested who go about to bring to nought God's election; and endeavour, by indirect and crooked ways, to stop men from speaking of it plainly and openly, and of preaching it as it ought to be.

Wherein consisteth the salvation of the faithful, only in God's free election? Would we not have men preach that God hath chosen His, of mere goodness, without regard to any thing whatsoever? Will we not admit this to be such a mystery as cannot be attained to, showed and declared to us as far as God wished to reveal it? If we do not admit this, we enter into a conspiracy with Satan; as though Jesus Christ suffered in vain, and the passion that He suffered profited the world nothing. We may here remark that the gospel cannot be preached, that it is a profane gospel, or the doctrine of Mahomet, that there is no church nor Christianity, if God's election be abolished.

The Holy Ghost that speaketh here must needs be proved a liar, if this doctrine be not received. Therefore, let us fight constantly; for it is the groundwork of our salvation. How can we build, and maintain the building, if the foundation be destroyed? St. Paul sheweth us here with what virtue we must fight, and how we shall come to this inheritance which was so dearly purchased for us: he sheweth us how we shall enter into the possession of the glory of God and make an end of this building and faith. My friends, we must be grounded upon the grace that was given us, not today nor yesterday, but before the world began.

It is true, God calleth us at this day, but His election goeth before; yea, and God chose us without any respect to our works, as we could have done nothing before: but we are debtors to Him for all; for He drew us out of the bottomless pit of destruction, wherein we were cast, and past all hope of recovery. Therefore, there is good reason for us to submit ourselves wholly to Him, and rely upon His goodness, and be thoroughly ravished with it. Let us hold fast this foundation, as I said before, unless we will have our salvation perish and come to nought. This doctrine is profitable for us if we can apply it well to our own use.

They that would not have us speak of God's election will say, it is not necessary. But such men never tasted God's goodness, neither do they know what it is to come to our Lord Jesus Christ. If we know not that we are saved because it pleased God to choose us before the world began, how can we know that which St. Paul saith to us; to wit, that we should give ourselves wholly to God, to be disposed of at His will, and to live and die in

His service? How can we magnify His name? How can we confess that our salvation cometh from Him only, that He is the beginning of it, and that we have not helped Him therein? We may say it with our mouths, but unless we believe it, as here set forth, it will only be hypocrisy.

Therefore, let us learn that the doctrine of God's election, whereby we are taught that He predestinated us before the world began, ought to be preached openly and fully, in despite of all the world that would stand against it. And not only so, but we should know that it is a very profitable doctrine for us; because we cannot lay hold upon the infinite goodness of God, until we come thither. Unless this point be well cleared, God's mercy will be always disguised. I say, unless this be made plain to us, that He hath chosen us before we were born, and before we could prevent Him.

Men will frequently say that we were bought with the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that we are not worthy that God should show us such great mercy: they will likewise say, who hath part and portion in such a redemption as God hath made in the person of His Son? Even they that will; they that seek God; even they that submit themselves to Him. They that have some good motives, and are not rude; those that are good natured, and have some good devotion. When men make such a mixture, and think they are called to God, and to His grace, for something that is in themselves, that they bring something to recommend them to the favor of God whereby they may attain salvation, the grace of God is darkened, and rent asunder.

This is a sacrilege that ought not to be countenanced. For this cause, I said the goodness of God shall never be thoroughly known until this election be laid before us; and we are taught that we are called at this time, because it pleased God to extend His mercy to us before we were born. This doctrine must be explained more at large; but as time will not admit at present, we shall attend to it in the latter part of the day.

## The Doctrine of Election

by John Calvin

*Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

### 2 Timothy 1:9, 10

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We have shown this morning, according to the text of St. Paul, that if we will know the free mercy of our God in saving us, we must come to His everlasting counsel: whereby He chose us before the world began. For there we see, He had no regard to our persons, neither to our worthiness, nor to any deserts that we could possibly bring. Before we were born, we were enrolled in His register; He had already adopted us for His children. Therefore let us yield the whole to His mercy, knowing that we cannot boast of ourselves, unless we rob Him of the honor which belongs to Him.

Men have endeavored to invent cavils, to darken the grace of God. For they have said, although God chose men before the world began, yet it was according as He foresaw that one would be diverse from another. The Scripture sheweth plainly that God did not wait to see whether men were worthy or not when He chose them: but the sophisters thought they might darken the grace of God by saying, though He regarded not the deserts that were passed, He had an eye to those that were to come. For, say they, though Jacob and his brother Esau had done neither good nor evil, and God chose one and refused the other, yet notwithstanding He foresaw, (as all things are present with Him) that Esau would be a vicious man, and that Jacob would be as he afterwards showed himself.

But these are foolish speculations: for they plainly make St. Paul a liar who saith, God rendered no reward to our works when He chose us, because He did it before the world began. But though the authority of St. Paul were abolished, yet the matter is very plain and open, not only in the Holy Scripture, but in reason; insomuch that those who would make an escape after this sort, show themselves to be men void of all skill. For if we search ourselves to the bottom, what good can we find? Are not all mankind cursed? What do we bring from our mother's womb, except sin?

Therefore we differ not one whit, one from another; but it pleaseth God to take those to Himself whom He would. And for this cause, St. Paul useth these words in another place, when he saith, men have not whereof to rejoice, for no man finds himself better than his fellows, unless it be because God discerneth him. So then, if we confess that God chose us before the world began, it necessarily follows, that God prepared us to receive His grace; that He bestowed upon us that goodness, which was not in us before; that He not

only chose us to be heirs of the kingdom of heaven, but He likewise justifies us, and governs us by His Holy Spirit. The Christian ought to be so well resolved in this doctrine, that he is beyond doubt.

There are some men at this day, that would be glad if the truth of God were destroyed. Such men fight against the Holy Ghost, like mad beasts, and endeavor to abolish the Holy Scripture. There is more honesty in the papists, than in these men: for the doctrine of the papists is a great deal better, more holy, and more agreeable to the sacred Scripture, than the doctrine of those vile and wicked men, who cast down God's holy election; these dogs that bark at it, and swine that root it up.

However, let us hold fast that which is here taught us: God having chosen us before the world had its course, we must attribute the cause of our salvation to His free goodness; we must confess that He did not take us to be His children, for any deserts of our own; for we had nothing to recommend ourselves into His favor. Therefore, we must put the cause and fountain of our salvation in Him only. and ground ourselves upon it: otherwise, whatsoever and howsoever we build, it will come to nought.

We must here notice what St. Paul joineth together; to wit, the grace of Jesus Christ, with the everlasting counsel of God the Father: and then he bringeth us to our calling, that we may be assured of God's goodness. and of His will, that would have remained hid from us, unless we had a witness of it. St. Paul saith in the first place, that the grace which hangeth upon the purpose of God, and is comprehended in it, is given in our Lord Jesus Christ. As if he said, seeing we deserve to be cast away, and hated as God's mortal enemies, it was needful for us to be grafted, as it were, into Jesus Christ; that God might acknowledge, and allow us for His children. Otherwise, God could not look upon us, only to hate us; because there is nothing but wretchedness in us; we are full of sin, and stuffed up as it were with all kinds of iniquity.

God, who is justice itself, can have no agreement with us, while He considereth our sinful nature. Therefore, when He would adopt us before the world began, it was requisite that Jesus Christ should stand between us and Him; that we should be chosen in His person, for He is the well beloved Son: when God joineth us to Him, He maketh us such as pleaseth Him. Let us learn to come directly to Jesus Christ. if we will not doubt God's election: for He is the true looking glass, wherein we must behold our adoption.

If Jesus Christ be taken from us, then is God a judge of sinners; so that we cannot hope for any goodness or favor at His hands, but look rather for vengeance: for without Testis Christ. His majesty will always be terrible and fearful to us. If we hear mention made of His ever-lasting purpose, we cannot but be afraid, as though He were already armed to plunge us into misery. But when we know that all grace resteth in Jesus Christ, then we may be assured that God loved us, although we were unworthy.

In the second place, we must notice that St. Paul speaketh not simply of God's election, for that would not put us beyond doubt; but we should rather remain in perplexity and anguish: but he adds, *the calling*; whereby God hath opened His counsel, which before

was unknown to us, and which we could not reach. How shall we know then that God hath chosen us, that we may rejoice in Him, and boast of the goodness that He hath bestowed upon us? They that speak against God's election, leave the gospel alone; they leave all that God layeth before us, to bring us to Him; all the means that He hath appointed for us, and knoweth to be fit and proper for our use. We must not go on so; but according to St. Paul's rule, we must join the calling with God's everlasting election.

It is said, we are called; and thus we have this second word, calling. Therefore God calleth us: and how? Surely, when it pleaseth Him to certify us of our election; which we could by no other means attain unto. For who can enter into God's counsel? as saith the prophet Isaiah; and also the apostle Paul. But when it pleaseth God to communicate Himself to us familiarly, then we receive that which surmounteth the knowledge of all men: for we have a good and faithful witness, which is the Holy Ghost; that raiseth us above the world, and bringeth us even into the wonderful secrets of God.

We must not speak rashly of God's election, and say, we are predestinate; but if we will be thoroughly assured of our salvation, we must not speak lightly of it; whether God hath taken us to be His children or not. What then? Let us look at what is set forth in the gospel. There God showeth us that He is our Father; and that He will bring us to the inheritance of life, having marked us with the seal of the Holy Ghost in our hearts, which is an undoubted witness of our salvation, if we receive it by faith.

The gospel is preached to a great number, which notwithstanding, are reprobate; yea, and God discovereth and showeth that He hath cursed them: that they have no part nor portion in His kingdom, because they resist the gospel, and cast away the grace that is offered them. But when we receive the doctrine of God with obedience and faith, and rest ourselves upon His promises, and accept this offer that He maketh us, to take us for His children, this, I say, is a certainty of our election. But we must here remark, that when we have knowledge of our salvation, when God hath called us and enlightened us in the faith of His gospel, it is not to bring to nought the everlasting predestination that went before.

There are a great many in these days that will say, who are they whom God hath chosen, but only the faithful? I grant it; but they make an evil consequence of it; and say faith is the cause, yea, and the first cause of our salvation. If they called it a middle cause, it would indeed be true; for the Scripture saith, "By grace are ye saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8). But we must go up higher; for if they attribute faith to men's free will, they blaspheme wickedly against God, and commit sacrilege. We must come to that which the Scripture showeth; to wit, when God giveth us faith, we must know that we are not capable of receiving the gospel, only as He hath framed us by the Holy Ghost.

It is not enough for us to hear the voice of man, unless God work within, and speak to us in a secret manner by the Holy Ghost; and from hence cometh faith. But what is the cause of it? Why is faith given to one and not to another? St. Luke showeth us: saying, "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13 :48). There were a great number of hearers, and yet but few of them received the promise of salvation. And what few were they? Those that were appointed to salvation. Again, St. Paul speaketh so largely upon

this subject, in his epistle to the Ephesians, that it cannot be but the enemies of God's predestination are stupid and ignorant, and that the devil hath plucked out their eyes; and that they have become void of all reason, if they cannot see a thing so plain and evident.

St. Paul saith, God hath called us, and made us partakers of His treasures and infinite riches, which were given us through our Lord Jesus Christ: according as He had chosen us before the world began. When we say that we are called to salvation because God hath given us faith, it is not because there is no higher cause; and whosoever cannot come to the everlasting election of God, taketh somewhat from Him, and lesseneth His honor. This is found in almost every part of the Holy Scripture.

That we may make a short conclusion of this matter, let us see in what manner we ought to keep ourselves. When we inquire about our salvation, we must not begin to say, Are we chosen? No, we can never climb so high; we shall be confounded a thousand times, and have our eyes dazzled, before we can come to God's counsel. What then shall we do? Let us hear what is said in the gospel: when God hath been so gracious, as to make us receive the promise offered, know we not that it is as much as if He had opened His whole heart to us, and had registered our election in our consciences!

We must be certified that God hath taken us for His children, and that the kingdom of heaven is ours; because we are called in Jesus Christ. How may we know this? How shall we stay ourselves upon the doctrine that God hath set before us? We must magnify the grace of God, and know that we can bring nothing to recommend ourselves to His favor; we must become nothing in our own eyes, that we may not claim any praise; but know that God hath called us to the gospel, having chosen us before the world began. This election of God is, as it were, a sealed letter; because it consisteth in itself, and in its own nature: but we may read it, for God giveth a witness of it, when He called us to Himself by the gospel and by faith.

For even as the original or first copy taketh nothing from the letter or writing that is read, even so must we be out of doubt of our salvation. When God certifieth us by the gospel that He taketh us for His children, this testimony carries peace with it; being signed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and sealed by the Holy Ghost. When we have this witness, have we not enough to content our minds? Therefore, God's election is so far from being against this, that it confirmeth the witness which we have in the gospel. We must not doubt but what God hath registered our names before the world was made, among His chosen children: but the knowledge thereof He reserved to Himself.

We must always come to our Lord Jesus Christ, when we talk of our election; for without Him (as we have already shown), we cannot come nigh to God. When we talk of His decree, well may we be astonished, as men worthy of death. But if Jesus Christ be our guide, we may with cheerfulness depend upon Him; knowing that He hath worthiness enough in Him to make all His members beloved of God the Father; it being sufficient for us that we are grafted into His body, and made one with Him. Thus we must muse upon this doctrine, if we will profit by it aright: as it is set forth by St. Paul; when he saith, this grace of salvation was given us *before the world began*. We must go beyond the order of



nature, if we will know how we are saved, and by what cause, and from whence our salvation cometh.

God would not leave us in doubt, neither would He hide His counsel, that we might not know how our salvation was secured; but hath called us to Him by His gospel, and hath sealed the witness of His goodness and fatherly love in our hearts. So then, having such a certainty, let us glorify God, that He hath called us of His free mercy. Let us rest ourselves upon our Lord Jesus Christ, knowing that He hath not deceived us, when He caused it to be preached that He gave Himself for us, and witnessed it by the Holy Ghost. For faith is an undoubted token that God taketh us for His children; and thereby we are led to the everlasting election, according as He had chosen us before.

He saith not that God hath chosen us because we have heard the gospel, but on the other hand, he attributes the faith that is given us to the highest cause; to wit, because God hath fore-ordained that He would save us; seeing we were lost and cast away in Adam. There are certain dolts, who, to blind the eyes of the simple and such as are like themselves, say, the grace of salvation was given us because God ordained that His Son should redeem mankind, and therefore this is common to all.

But St. Paul spake after another sort; and men cannot by such childish arguments mar the doctrine of the gospel: for it is said plainly, that God hath saved us. Does this refer to all without exception? No; he speaketh only of the faithful. Again, does St. Paul include all the world? Some were called by preaching, and yet they made themselves unworthy of the salvation which was offered them: therefore they were reprobate. God left others in their unbelief, who never heard the gospel preached.

Therefore St. Paul directed himself plainly and precisely to those whom God had chosen and reserved to Himself. God's goodness will never be viewed in its true light, nor honored as it deserveth, unless we know that He would not have us remain in the general destruction of mankind; wherein He hath left those that were like unto us: from whom we do not differ; for we are no better than they: but so it pleased God. Therefore all mouths must be stopped; men must presume to take nothing upon themselves, except to praise God, confessing themselves debtors to Him for all their salvation.

We shall now make some remarks upon the other words used by St. Paul in this place. It is true that God's election could never be profitable to us, neither could it come to us, unless we knew it by means of the gospel; for this cause it pleased God to reveal that which He had kept secret before all ages. But to declare His meaning more plainly, he adds, that this grace is revealed to us now. And how? "By the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ." When he saith that this grace is revealed to us by the appearing of Jesus Christ, he showeth that we should be too unthankful, if we could not content and rest ourselves upon the grace of the Son of God. What can we look for more? If we could climb up beyond the clouds, and search out the secrets of God, what would be the result of it? Would it not be to ascertain that we are His children and heirs?

Now we know these things, for they are clearly set forth in Jesus Christ. For it is said, that all who believe in Him shall enjoy the privilege of being God's children. Therefore we must not swerve from these things one jot, if we will be certified of our election. St. Paul hath already shown us, that God never loved us, nor chose us, only in the person of His beloved Son. When Jesus Christ appeared He revealed life to us, otherwise we should never have been the partakers of it. He hath made us acquainted with the everlasting counsel of God. But it is presumption for men to attempt to know more than God would have them know.

If we walk soberly and reverently in obedience to God, hearing and receiving what He saith in the Holy Scripture, the way will be made plain before us. St. Paul saith, when the Son of God appeared in the world, He opened our eyes, that we might know that He was gracious to us before the world was made. We were received as His children, and accounted just; so that we need not doubt but that the kingdom of heaven is prepared for us. Not that we have it by our deserts, but because it belongs to Jesus Christ, who makes us partakers with Himself.

When St. Paul speaketh of the appearing of Jesus Christ, he saith, "He hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." It is not only said that Jesus Christ is our Savior, but that He is sent to be a mediator, to reconcile us by the sacrifice of His death; He is sent to us as a lamb without blemish; to purge us and make satisfaction for all our trespasses; He is our pledge, to deliver us from the condemnation of death; He is our righteousness; He is our advocate, who maketh intercession with God that He would hear our prayers.

We must allow, all these qualities to belong to Jesus Christ, if we will know aright how He appeared. We must look at the substance contained in the gospel. We must know that Jesus Christ appeared as our Savior, and that He suffered for our salvation; and that we were reconciled to God the Father through His means; that we have been cleansed from all our blemishes, and freed from everlasting death. If we know not that He is our advocate, that He heareth us when we pray to God, to the end that our prayers may be answered, what will become of us; what confidence can we have to call upon God's name, who is the fountain of our salvation? But St. Paul saith, Jesus Christ hath fulfilled all things that were requisite for the redemption of mankind.

If the gospel were taken away, of what advantage would it be to us that the Son of God had suffered death, and risen again the third day for our justification? All this would be unprofitable to us. So then, the gospel putteth us in possession of the benefits that Jesus Christ hath purchased for us. And therefore, though He be absent from us in body, and is not conversant with us here on earth, it is not that He hath withdrawn Himself, as though we could not find Him; for the sun that shineth doth no more enlighten the world, than Jesus Christ showeth Himself openly to those that have the eyes of faith to look upon Him, when the gospel is preached. Therefore St. Paul saith, Jesus Christ hath brought *life to light*, yea, everlasting life.

He saith, the Son of God hath abolished death. And how did He abolish it? If He had not offered an everlasting sacrifice to appease the wrath of God, if He had not entered even to the bottomless pit to draw us from thence; if He had not taken our curse upon Himself, if He had not taken away the burden wherewith we were crushed down, where should we have been? Would death have been destroyed? Nay, sin would reign in us, and death likewise. And indeed, let every one examine himself, and we shall find that we are slaves to Satan, who is the prince of death. So that we are shut no in this miserable slavery, unless God destroy the devil, sin, and death. And this is done: but how? He hath taken away our sins by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, though we be poor sinners, and in danger of God's judgment, yet sin cannot hurt us; the sting, which is venomous, is so blunted that it cannot wound us, because Jesus Christ has gained the victory over it. He suffered not the shedding of His blood in vain; but it was a washing wherewith we were washed through the Holy Ghost, as is shown by St. Peter. And thus we see plainly that when St. Paul speaketh of the gospel, wherein Jesus Christ appeared, and appeareth daily to us, he forgetteth not His death and passion, nor the things that pertain to the salvation of mankind.

We may be certified that in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ we have all that we can desire; we have full and perfect trust in the goodness of God, and the love He beareth us. But we see that our sins separate us from God, and cause a warfare in our members; yet we have an atonement through our Lord Jesus Christ. And why so? Because He hath shed His blood to wash away our sins; He hath offered a sacrifice whereby God hath become reconciled to us; to be short, He hath taken away the curse, that we may be blessed of God. Moreover, He hath conquered death, and triumphed over it; that He might deliver us from the tyranny thereof; which otherwise would entirely overwhelm us.

Thus we see that all things that belong to our salvation are accomplished in our Lord Jesus Christ. And that we may enter into full possession of all these benefits we most know that He appeareth to us daily by His gospel. Although He dwelleth in His heavenly glory, if we open the eyes of our faith we shall behold Him. We must learn not to separate that which the Holy Ghost hath joined together. Let us observe what St. Paul meant by a comparison to amplify the grace that God showed to the world after the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; as if He said, the old fathers had not this advantage, to have Jesus Christ appear to them, as He appeared to us.

It is true, they had the self-same faith; and the inheritance of heaven is theirs, as well as ours; God having revealed His grace to them as well as us, but not in like measure, for they saw Jesus Christ afar off, under the figures of the law, as St. Paul saith to the Corinthians. The veil of the temple was as yet stretched out, that the Jews could not come near the sanctuary, that is, the material sanctuary. But now, the veil of the temple being removed, we draw nigh to the majesty of our God: we come most familiarly to Him, in whom dwelleth all perfection and glory. In short, we have the body, whereas they had but the shadow (Col. 2:17).

The ancient fathers submitted themselves wholly to bear the affliction of Jesus Christ; as it is said in the 11th chapter of the Hebrews; for it is not said, Moses bore the shame of Abraham, but of Jesus Christ. Thus the ancient fathers, though they lived under the law, offered themselves to God in sacrifices, to bear most patiently the afflictions of Christ. And now, Jesus Christ having risen from the dead, hath brought *life to light*. If we are so delicate that we cannot bear the afflictions of the gospel, are we not worthy to be blotted from the book of God, and cast off? Therefore, we must be constant in the faith, and ready to suffer for the name of Jesus Christ, whatsoever God will; because life is set before us, and we have a more familiar knowledge of it than the ancient fathers had.

We know how the ancient fathers were tormented by tyrants, and enemies of the truth, and how they suffered constantly. The condition of the church is not more grievous in these days, than it was then. For now hath Jesus Christ brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. As often as the grace of God is preached to us, it is as much as if the kingdom of heaven were opened to us; as if God reached out His hand, and certified us that life was nigh; and that He will make us partakers of His heavenly inheritance. But when we look to this life, which was purchased for us by our Lord Jesus Christ, we should not hesitate to forsake all that we have in this world, to come to the treasure above, which is in heaven.

Therefore, let us not be willingly blind; seeing Jesus Christ layeth daily before us the life and immortality here spoken of. When St. Paul speaketh of life, and addeth immortality, it is as much as if he said, we already enter into the kingdom of heaven by faith. Though we be as strangers here below, the life and grace of which we are made partakers through our Lord Jesus Christ shall bring its fruit in convenient time; to wit, when He shall be sent of God the Father to show us the effect of things that are daily preached, which were fulfilled in His person when He was clad in humanity.

## The Many Functions of God's Timeless Law

by John Calvin

*Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.*

### Gal. 3:19-20

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We established last time that the law came after the promise of God to be gracious to the house of Abraham. God promised free grace, and the Jews were to lean upon this promise for their salvation, knowing that God would mercifully send them a Redeemer, through whom they would obtain remission of their sins. From this, Paul concludes that the law (which came after the promise) did not abolish that which had been ordained and established by God. However, it would be easy to assume that the law was added to strengthen the promise, as if it had been weak in isolation. Indeed, the apostle seems to argue along those lines in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where he says, in the words of Jeremiah, that God would provide a new law — the gospel. The apostle explains that the law given by Moses was imperfect and insufficient for salvation (Heb. 8:7). At first, it might seem that the same could apply here to the law and the promise, that the promise required a finishing touch, as if it were incomplete in and of itself, and needed to be perfected. Otherwise, surely, the law is superfluous? Yet, it would be against all reason to suppose that God would give us this doctrine for no purpose at all!

We must, therefore, give our attention to examining the function of the law, and to discovering to what end it was given, lest we mistakenly assume that the gospel promise was inadequate, and only partially beneficial for salvation. Paul states that God did not intend to provide us with a means of justification or salvation when he sent us his law; it was added, he says, 'because of transgressions'. It was not created simply to keep us on a tight rein (as the saying goes) because of all the evil and depravity in the world; for we have many ordinary laws and statutes which have been formulated to punish crime here on earth. If we were all like angels, blameless and freely able to exercise perfect self-control, we would not need rules or regulations. Why, then, do we have so many laws and statutes? Because of man's wickedness, for he is constantly overflowing with evil; this is why a remedy is required. If we were all healthy, we would have no need of medicine, but man's intemperance means that there will always be diseases, and, therefore, remedies must be sought out. The existence of so many civil laws bears testimony to the fact that we are totally evil and depraved and, therefore, need to be restrained and harnessed. But Paul does not understand the function of the law in this way — he goes much further. He declares that God gave his law in order to expose man's iniquity, which proves, therefore, that this is not a means of salvation! For heat and cold cannot originate from the same source! If a fountain is sweet, we cannot seek bitter water there; likewise,

if a fountain is bitter or salted, we must seek elsewhere for sweet water. The same can be applied to the law.

Why, then, was the law given? In order that men could be doubly convicted of their sins before God and realise that their hypocrisy, self-flattery, desire to hide behind excuses, and other such sins are vain and to no avail. Hence, in the fourth chapter to the Romans, and the fifteenth verse, Paul argues that we cannot be justified by the law, since it brings upon us nothing but the wrath of God. (He is referring to God's vengeance.) In a certain sense, it could be said that both life and death proceed from the law. For the law condemns us all and sentences all to death by showing that we are accursed and abominable in God's sight. What folly, therefore, to seek to be justified simply by its observance! Paul also states in the seventh chapter to the Romans, and the eighth verse, that the law actually causes sin to increase! We are already liable to condemnation, even before we have heard the law; as it is written, those who have sinned without the law will nevertheless perish (*Rom. 2:12*). In other words, the heathen, although they have no code from which they stray, still have the inner witness of their conscience, which acts as their judge. Thus, men are worthy of damnation well before they are summoned into God's presence and examined, God having taken his place on the judgment throne. Yet those who persist in sinning and offending God believe themselves to be faultless! For we are subject to such self-flattery, that although we are wallowing in sin, our consciences will never once feel ashamed without the law: they will remain dull and insensitive. Instead, we would feel at liberty to do whatever wicked things we desire. But when once we hear the law, we recognise sin, and are forced to humble ourselves before God (or else gnash our teeth like rebels!). God awakens us through the law and leads us to acknowledge our desperate condition. It is like a man whose face is covered with filth; people laugh at him but he does not understand why! If someone were to bring him a mirror, he would be ashamed and steal away to clean off the dirt, but he will only do this when he has discovered his ugliness! Or if a man has some sort of deformity which makes others afraid to look at him, he will not realise that he has such a disfigurement until a mirror is brought before his eyes! The same applies to us: although we are full of evil and iniquity to the extent that heaven and earth are ashamed of us, and God prepares an awful fate for us, we go on our way unperturbed! Why? Because we are unaware of our sin; we are so blinded by our own hypocrisy that we cannot perceive any danger. But the law reveals just who we are, and sets before us the judgment of God. The law teaches us that we will be condemned if we fail to do certain things. And what are these things? It is not simply a matter of guarding our feet, hands, eyes and ears; no, we must keep ourselves pure and free from all covetousness. Our integrity must be such that all our affections, thoughts and desires are centred upon God. We are not to be enticed or led astray by anything in this world. But where can such a person as this be found?

Now God has ascended his throne and sits as judge, and he has pronounced his sentence upon us — we are accursed because we are found to be transgressors, which, indeed, we are. That is the miserable condition of the human race. This is why Paul says in this passage that the law was added 'because of transgressions'. However, the law does have other functions. For example, one of the chief reasons why we need the law is to teach us how we are to worship God. It shows that we are to honour him by our obedience, rather

than each person living as a law unto himself! The law helps us to distinguish between good and evil. What is the 'reasonable service' that God deserves? Is it not to submit ourselves to his will, as Paul says in the twelfth chapter to the Romans, verse one? Is this not a most excellent function of the law —to show us how we may please God and what rules we are to obey, rather than for us to be struggling in vain, believing we are serving God when we are not? But when Paul speaks of the law being added for transgressions' sake, he does not intend to give us an account of the uses of the law and the fruits it produces. We have said that the law instructs us, and teaches us to discern between good and evil; it urges us by means of goads, as it were, to give ourselves wholly to God. But Paul is referring to the law in the context of the passage he is expounding, proving that the law is not superfluous, yet, neither is it a means of justification. Indeed, its function is to confound us and reveal that we are sinners in a twofold sense, to convict us of our sin and leave us without excuse. In fact, we soon realise that there is a bottomless pit awaiting us. This is why the law was given: it was added to the promise, not because the latter was powerless without it, unable to bring salvation without assistance from another source; not at all, says Paul! It was added in order that we might realise that God is right to condemn us all, and to give our minds no rest from anxious and tortuous thoughts, in order that our despair might lead us to find hope in his promise.

If we object that the promise could have achieved this alone, the answer to this is very simple. Although God has revealed himself as Saviour, and shown us that we will be condemned unless he has mercy upon us, we cannot respond as we ought unless he first humbles us. Through his promise, he calls us to himself with the tender love of a father. This ought to be sufficient to make us aware of our sins and to make us hate them: yet, we are so comfortable in our sins that we will not give them any thought unless we are coerced. Therefore, after God had made this promise to man, we should have groaned under the burden of sin and sought refuge in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, but we did not, that is, until God dealt us a few mighty blows with his hammer through the law! Does this not reveal our wickedness, that we abuse God's kindness to us, and use it for an occasion to flatter ourselves? Of necessity, he deals harshly with us, and exposes what we are truly like, to alarm us so that we might run to him for grace. The word 'added' here indicates that Paul is accusing us of despising God's goodness, revealed in his gentle and gracious call. Indeed, we virtually constrain him to use force in order to humble us; only when our wills are thus inclined by force will we seek his grace in the Lord Jesus Christ.

At this point, Paul adds that the law applied 'till the seed should come to whom the promise was made'. The 'law' chiefly refers to the ceremonies, although we can also include all the qualities, circumstances and details of the law, as we say. If we take the law to refer only to the Ten Commandments, then what Paul says here is entirely inappropriate! For even today the law carries weight, in that it is our rule for living. It reveals to us the will of God, keeping us from living as vagabonds, aimlessly wandering about from place to place, as it were, for the pathway is set out before us. Therefore, because the law teaches what is right, it is timeless and will endure to the end of the world. It is important for us to enter into the mind of Paul here and realise that he is referring to the promises, curses and ceremonies of the law. On the one hand, we are promised that if a man obeys, 'he shall live in them' (*Lev. 18:5*). We have already dealt

with this. Next, there is the threat: 'Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them' (*Deut. 27:26*). The law, as we have discovered, only promises salvation to those who have lived pure lives in all integrity. All of us fall short of this and, therefore, the promise does not apply. This is the first point. If we object that God is mocking at men, the answer is, not at all! Rather, we are so full of pride and arrogance that we think we can achieve salvation by ourselves. Therefore, God has to say, 'If you are as virtuous as you think you are, prove it to me. For my part, I have given you my law and I have prepared a reward for you if you obey it. You will not be disappointed if you serve me. Eternal life is promised you, but first you must do your duty — set to work!' Even if men were to attempt to do so with all their might, they would doubtless discover weakness of which they were previously unaware. Thus, the promises of the law do not apply to us, yet, nor are they thwarted, because they serve a rather different purpose.

The curses of the law are infallible. The following text condemns us all: 'Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them.' We are obliged to fulfil them all, and there must not be one single point at which we fail. We are wrong if we believe we can serve God in part; he does not divide up his commandments in this way. He desires the one who is chaste to abstain also from plundering, pillaging, cheating, violence and everything else. Since this is the case, these warnings are binding upon us all, and Paul was aware of this.

Concerning the ceremonies, they serve to highlight our lost condition. We have already referred to what Paul says in Colossians chapter two, and the fourteenth verse, where he describes them as ordinances which are designed to bind us and keep us in place. If a man borrows a sum of money, he then owes it and must pay it back with his own hand. This ought to be sufficient. However, if he secures a mortgage, he is obliged under penalty to pay it back, especially if it be a public matter. This makes his burden greater. The same applies to the ceremonies. The law was sufficient to condemn all mankind, for all have sinned; yet God, seeing the pride that was so deeply rooted in our hearts, added ceremonies to place us under an even more solemn obligation to him. But Paul says that all this was only 'till the seed should come'; in other words, the law cannot harness or restrain those who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Rather, it leads them to faith and they find in Christ all that is lacking in the law! Thus, when God is harsh in his condemnation, it is only to procure our salvation, and the fact that he thunders against us is an evident token of his exceptional grace towards us! How is this? I have already said, and experience bears this out, that we would never stop abusing his kindness to us, using it for our advantage if this were not the case. Therefore, God must arrest us and act as our judge, so that we hear the dreadful sentence and sink in despair. Then we expect no less than eternal death, and this verdict is confirmed and ratified by his law. Yet, all is designed to humble us in order that we might come to the Lord Jesus Christ with true zeal and in sincerity. Having experienced such anguish and torment in our consciences, we will learn to rest entirely upon him. This is why the law only applied 'till the seed should come'.

If we, then, ask how it was that our forefathers obtained salvation, the answer is that although the law reigned before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ with regard to



outward things, nevertheless, our fathers still had to rely upon the grace they had been promised (despite the fact that Christ had not yet come). We shall learn more of this presently. Now we have resolved the following point: that the law did not alter the promise, neither was it added to support the promise, as if it had been insufficient alone for salvation. Rather, it was added because of man's pride and arrogance, that we might humbly seek the mercy that is offered us in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that, through him, we might be enabled to receive and enjoy his forgiveness.

At this point Paul mentions that the law 'was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator'. Here he authorises the law and indicates that we are to receive it with all due reverence. However, we are only to apply it in the way that God intended! To make this point, Paul speaks of angels, to demonstrate that God had many witnesses who gave authority to the law and showed how it was to be received and esteemed. But Paul's main object here is to speak of the Mediator — that is to say, the Lord Jesus Christ. Many have thought this was referring to Moses, since he was a mediator between God and man with regard to doctrine. However, this is hardly a suitable interpretation! After all, Paul firstly speaks of angels, and then of the Mediator as their head, the one who holds the position of supreme sovereignty. This cannot be applicable to Moses! Indeed, Paul's argument here is that there is no disparity between the law and the gospel concerning the free promise of salvation. In order to reiterate this, he refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, explaining that when the law was established, it was with his hand and under his leadership. This word 'hand' often implies power in Scripture, and here it is used to draw a contrast between the angels and Jesus Christ himself. Paul mentions the assembled angels because their presence should ensure that the law is heeded by men, and accepted without reservation. The angels were witnesses of God's majesty, yes, but the Mediator is even greater than they! The 'hand' here implies his headship, revealing that he has sovereign authority and, therefore, has the chief commission of ordaining the law. This ought not to seem strange to us; for when the angel appeared to Moses he said, 'I am the Lord' (Exod. 3:6). Yet he is called an angel! This means that he was a messenger of God as the word implies; yet he says in effect, 'I am the Lord, whose being proceeds from myself alone'. This cannot be said of any creature (including the angels) who, like ourselves, were made from nothing! It would have been blasphemy for an angel to usurp such a title, which belongs to God alone. We must, therefore, reach the conclusion that this angel was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, who was already fulfilling his role as Mediator. This, indeed, is borne out by Paul in First Corinthians, chapter ten and verse nine, where he speaks of the rebellion of the Jews in provoking God to anger with their murmurings and foolish lusts. Paul says that they were tempting Christ himself, who led and guided them through the wilderness. Therefore, I have no difficulty in believing that our Lord Jesus Christ was already a mediator, because in many different ways he acted to reconcile men to God the Father. This is why the apostle writes in the Epistle to the Hebrews that Jesus Christ is the same, 'yesterday, and today, and forever', and that we must cleave to him and not be carried about with 'strange doctrines' (*Heb. 13:8*).

Hence, Paul is teaching us that Jesus Christ mediated between God and man in order that poor sinners might be granted relief from their troubled minds concerning the judgment of God. Now we can rejoice because God has provided a mediator through whom we

may obtain grace to approach him. But the Lord Jesus Christ is also a mediator in another sense, and that is that God has always communicated to man through him. For there is such a gulf between God and ourselves, we are so alienated from him through sin, that we cannot have access to him. He can only stoop to us through a mediator. Indeed, is this not what the vision of Jacob teaches us in the twenty-eighth chapter of Genesis, verse twelve? It tells us there that Jacob saw a ladder, at the top of which God was enthroned in majesty, and the angels were ascending and descending on this ladder. There can be no doubt that this image was to reveal to Jacob that we are excluded from the kingdom of God until a means is found to reconcile heaven and earth. In other words, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is 'God manifest in the flesh'; he is higher than the heavens, yet he has identified with us in that he took our nature upon himself and became a man — frail, but without sin. Although he was perfect, he took upon himself our infirmities. This is how it was that the law was ordained by the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, it follows that there can be no contradiction between the law and the gospel, for Jesus Christ never changes and cannot deny himself.

Now let us turn our attention to Paul's next statement. He says 'a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one'. By saying that the Mediator is not 'of one', he implies that the Lord Jesus Christ came to gather together in one all things in heaven and on the earth, as he says in the first chapter to the Colossians (*Gal. 1:20*). Some have understood this text to mean that Jesus Christ had more than one nature; others, that if he is the Mediator for all mankind, it follows that there can be no disharmony between the law and the gospel. However, Paul is clearly referring to the bringing together of Jews and Gentiles here! In effect he is saying, 'Yes, Jesus Christ was Mediator when the law was set forth, that God might humble men through him to the end that they might receive his grace. But let us notice that, although he was already Mediator when he presented the law to the Jews, his office was to extend much further, since he was also to gather the Gentiles who were cut off from God. For though, for a time, God chose the descendants of Abraham above the rest of humanity, yet at the end of time he has made us partakers of the salvation from which we were once estranged. Those of us who were afar off have been welcomed in alongside those who were previously close to God.' Indeed, in that other passage, Paul calls Jesus Christ 'our peace', since he has reconciled and united to God both those who were already near (the Jews) and those who had no knowledge of God (*Eph. 2:17*). We have been accepted into the body of his church because of Christ's coming. Those who were once separated by a great distance have been united, not only with God, but with one another.

Now we understand Paul's teaching in this passage, but in order to profit from all we have considered, there is a specific lesson we ought to learn from this one fact: that God gave us his law through angels. That is, that these same angels will be witnesses against us if we ignore or pass by the law, or trample it underfoot, as it were. Thus, the angels will have the right to ask God to avenge our ungodly rebellion. When God chose angels to assist him in the setting forth of his law, he was not playing games; rather it was in order that we might reverence the law. Yes, it is true, we cannot perfectly fulfil what it demands; however, if we were to stop there, we would be totally engulfed in despair, and remain under the sentence of eternal death. If God has graciously taught us his will and

enabled us to discern between good and evil, our response ought to be to bow our necks to receive the yoke that God places upon us, a response of submission to him. This is the first point. Secondly, the law is designed to prompt and prick our consciences, because we are so cold, lethargic and inactive that we would never come to God of our own accord. The law, therefore, should cause each one of us to examine ourselves; indeed, for our own instruction, we would do well to commit to memory the commandments of God and recite them morning and evening.

Let us, therefore, keep ourselves on a tighter rein, since the angels observe and watch over us. Having been employed by God to establish the law, they will not allow us to despise it, or to put it to an open shame as if it were worthless. Furthermore, the law is there to condemn us, and we will receive this condemnation in the presence of these same angels, regardless of how much men may have praised and applauded us. Even if the whole world were on our side, it would count for nothing. For why, then, would God have chosen to have his angels there to assist with the publication of his law, if not to teach us to be ashamed of our sinfulness, humble ourselves willingly and seek salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ?

As for the Lord Jesus Christ being the Mediator of the law, we can be sure that if we have sought refuge in his grace, the law no longer has the power to condemn us, nor to cause sin to have dominion over us. For we must bear in mind what Paul wrote in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter fifteen, and the fifty-sixth verse: 'the strength of sin is the law'. The law sharpens sin, as it were, leaving us mortally wounded. Therefore, if we do not enjoy the consolation spoken of here, we will surely be seized with terror and have no assurance of salvation, despite the promises made by the Lord Jesus Christ. We will constantly be weighing these truths which seem so contradictory, saying, 'Surely the law came from God? Yet God condemns us through it! Although he sent the Lord Jesus Christ to be the remedy, there does not appear to be any way of escaping its sentence!' Thus, we will be tormented by such thoughts. But if we consider that the Lord Jesus Christ was the Mediator who established the law, we realise that if he is our Advocate today, he is able to forgive us. Thus, we do not have to be counted amongst the lost. Yes, God has indeed pronounced his curse upon us, and we have been oppressed by the torment and anguish that this has created. Our evil does at first seem to be incurable, but we know that our Lord Jesus Christ is able to fulfil both roles: that is, to teach us humility through such terrifying thoughts, and yet also to assure us of salvation. Thus, when we are cast down in this way, the only way to be raised up is to recognise that the One who was established as the Mediator of the law has been revealed to us today in this same office of Mediator, as some of us can testify from our own experience.

Finally, let us notice that he is not the Mediator for one nation alone, but for the whole world because we are all God's creatures. Yes, by the sin of Adam we were all cut off, but the Lord Jesus came to gather together things in heaven and things on earth, as we have already discussed (*Col. 1:20*). This being the case, we should never doubt that God accepts us today as heirs of his promise, because he sees us as the spiritual children of Abraham. And although we are living in days very different from the time of the ceremonial law, which divided some people from others, this does not prevent us from

being able to approach God with boldness. How is this? Because 'God is one'. There may be Jews and Greeks, and many other different nations, with a variety of languages, morals and ways of life, and certainly each individual is full of inconsistencies and subject to change, with no firm anchorage; but let us all learn to fix our eyes upon God, for he is one. He has given us his law and his gospel; let us not think that there is any contradiction between them, for they are in perfect harmony. Let us, rather, be led by these means to come to the Lord Jesus Christ. And how can we do this? Only when we are stripped of all pride, and feel that horror and repugnance that makes us detest ourselves upon the realisation that we are spiritually dead. Then we will come to the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing that God the Father accepts us if we come in his appointed way. Why? For he is one. When he gave us his law, he did not intend to diminish the authority of the promise which preceded it. When he revealed his grace more fully in the gospel, it was not because he considered the law worthless or invalid, for it provides us with a rule for living. Thus, to avoid being under its curse, the law teaches us that the only escape is found in that Seed which was promised at the beginning of time, and in whose hands our salvation is secure; that is, in the Lord Jesus Christ — the fountain and source of all blessing.

Now let us fall before the majesty of our great God, acknowledging our sins, and asking him to make us increasingly conscious of them, that we might detest them. May we not only confess them with our lips, but may our hearts also be in full submission to God's Holy Word. May his free grace comfort us, as it has been revealed to us in our Lord Jesus Christ. May his Holy Spirit continually transform us, in order that if we are full of rebellion, he may bring us under his control and make us meek, ready to follow his holy will and devote ourselves completely to him. We pray for all these things, saying, Almighty God, and our heavenly Father, etc

# The Mystery of Godliness

by John Calvin

*And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*

## 1 Timothy 3:16.

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St. Paul exhorted Timothy to behave himself in his office; showing him to what honor God had advanced him, in that he had placed him to govern his house. He showed him also that the office itself was honorable; because the church upholdeth the truth of God in this world, and that there is nothing more precious, or more to be sought after, than to know God, and to worship and serve Him, and be certain of His truth, that we might thereby obtain salvation. All this is kept safe for us: and thus, so great a treasure is committed to our care by means of the church; according to the words of St. Paul. This truth is well worthy to be more highly esteemed than it is.

What a hidden thing is this, and how wonderful a matter; that God was manifest in the flesh, and became man! Does it not so far surpass our understanding, that when we are told of it, we are astonished? Yet not withstanding, we have a full and sufficient proof, that Jesus Christ being made man, and subject to death, is likewise the true God, who made the world, and liveth forever. Of this, His heavenly power beareth us witness. Again, we have other proofs: to wit, He was preached unto the Gentiles; who before were banished from the kingdom of God: and that faith had had its course throughout the whole world, which at that time was shut up among the Jews; and likewise Christ Jesus was lifted up on high, and entered into glory, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father.

If men despise these things, their unthankfulness shall be condemned: for the very angels have hereby come to the knowledge of that which before they knew not of. For it pleased God to hide the means of our redemption from them, to the end that His goodness might be so much the more wonderful to all creatures: thus we see St. Paul's meaning. He calleth the church of God, the keeper of his truth: he likewise sheweth that this truth is such a treasure, as ought to be highly esteemed by us. And why so? Let us mark the contents of the gospel; God abased Himself in such a manner, that He took upon Himself our flesh; so that we have become His brethren. Who is the Lord of glory, that He should so far humble Himself as to be joined to us, and take upon Him the form of a servant, even to suffer the curse that was due to us? St. Paul comprehendeth all things whatsoever that Jesus Christ received in His person; to wit, that He was subject to all our infirmities, *sin, only excepted.*

It is true that there is no blemish in Him, but all pureness and perfection. Yet so it is, that He became weak as we are, that He might have compassion and help our feebleness; as it is set forth in the epistle to the Hebrews (4:15). He that had no sin suffered the punishment due to us; and was, as it were, accursed of God the Father, when He offered Himself a sacrifice: that through His means we might be blessed; and that His grace which was hidden from us, might be poured upon us. When we consider these things, have we not occasion to be astonished? Do we consider what a being God is? We can in no wise reach unto His majesty, which containeth all things in itself; which even the angels worship.

What is there in us? If we cast our eyes upon God, and then enter into a comparison, alas! shall we come near this highness which surmounteth the heavens? Nay, rather can we have any acquaintance with it? For there is nothing but rottenness in us; nothing but sin and death. Then let the living God, the well-spring of life, the everlasting glory, and the infinite power, come; and not only approach to us and our miseries, our wretchedness, our frailty, and to this bottomless pit of all iniquity that is in men; let not only the majesty of God come near this, but he joined to it, and made one with it, in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ! What is Jesus Christ? God and man! But how God and man? What difference is there between God and man?

We know that there is nothing at all in our nature but wretchedness and misery; nothing but a bottomless pit of stench and infection; and yet in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, we see the glory of God who is worshipped by angels, and likewise the weakness of man; and that He is God and man. Is not this a secret and hidden thing, worthy to be set out with words, and likewise enough to ravish our hearts! The very angels could never have thought upon it, as here observed by St. Paul. Seeing it pleased the Holy Ghost to set forth the goodness of God, and show us for how precious a jewel we ought to esteem it, let us beware on our part that we be not unthankful, and have our minds so shut up, that we will not taste of it, if we cannot thoroughly and perfectly understand it.

It is enough for us to have some little knowledge of this subject; each one ought to be content with what light is given him, considering the weakness of our judgment; and looking for the day wherein that which we now see in part, shall be wholly and perfectly revealed to us. Yet notwithstanding, we must employ our minds and studies this way. Why doth St. Paul call this a mystery of faith, that Jesus Christ, who is God everlasting, was manifest in the flesh? It is as much as if he should say, when we are gathered to God, and made one body with the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall behold the end for which we were made; to wit, that we might know that God is joined and made one with us in the person of His Son.

Thus, we must conclude that no man can be a Christian, unless he know this secret which is spoken of by St. Paul. Should we now examine, and ask both men and women whether they know what these words mean, that God was manifest in the flesh, scarcely one in ten could make so good an answer as would be looked for from a child. And yet we need not marvel at it; for we see what negligence and contempt there is in the greatest part of mankind. We show and teach daily in our sermons, that God took upon Him our nature;

but how do men hear them? Who is there that troubleth himself much to read the Scripture? There are very few that attend to these things; every man is occupied with his own business.

If there be one day in the week reserved for religious instruction, when they have spent six days in their own business, they are apt to spend the day which is set apart for worship, in play and pastime; some rove about the fields, others go to the taverns to quaff: and there are undoubtedly at this time as many at the last mentioned place, as are here assembled in the name of God. Therefore, when we see so many shun and flee from this doctrine, can we marvel that there is such a brutishness, that we know not the rudiments of Christianity? We are apt to consider it as a strange language, when men tell us that God was manifest in the flesh.

But this sentence cannot be put out of God's register. We have no faith, if we know not that our Lord Jesus Christ is joined to us, that we may become His members. It seemeth that God would stir us up to think upon this mystery, seeing we are so sleepy and drowsy. We see how the devil stirreth up these old makebates to deny the humanity of Jesus Christ, and His Godhead: and sometimes to confound them both; that we may not perceive two distinct natures in Him: or else to cause us to believe that He is not the man who fulfilled the promises in the law; and consequently descended from the stock of Abraham and David.

Is it indeed the case, that such errors and heresies as were in the church of Christ at the beginning, are set forth in these days? Let us mark well the words that are here used by St. Paul: God was manifest in the flesh. When he calleth Jesus Christ God, he admits this nature which He had before the world was made. It is true, there is but one God, but in this one essence we must comprehend the Father, and a wisdom which cannot be severed from Him, and an everlasting virtue, which always was, and shall forever be in Him.

Thus, Jesus Christ was true God! as He was the wisdom of God before the world was made, and before everlastingness. It is said, He was made manifest in the flesh. By the word *flesh*, St. Paul gives us to understand that He was true man, and took upon Him our nature. By the word *manifest*, He sheweth that in Him there were two natures. But we must not think that there is one Jesus Christ which is God, and another Jesus Christ which is man! but we must know Him only as God and man. Let us so distinguish the two natures which are in Him, that we may know that the Son of God is our brother. God suffereth the old heresies, which in times past troubled the church, to make a stir again in our days, to stir us up to diligence. The devil goeth about to destroy this article of our belief, knowing it to be the main prop and stay of our salvation.

If we have not this knowledge of which St. Paul speaketh, what will become of us? We are all in the bottomless pit of death. There is nothing but death and condemnation in us, until we know that God came down to seek and save us. Until we are thus learned, we are weak and miserable. Therefore, the devil went about doing all in his power to abolish this knowledge, to mar it, and mix it with lies, that he might utterly bring it to nought. When we see such a majesty in God, how dare we presume to come nigh Him, seeing we are

full of misery! We must have recourse to this *link* of God's majesty, and the state of man's nature together.

Do what we can, we shall never have any hope, or be able to lay hold of the bounty and goodness of God, to return to Him, and call upon Him, until we know the majesty of God that is in Jesus Christ; and likewise the weakness of man's nature, which He hath received of us. We are utterly cast off from the kingdom of heaven, the gate is shut against us, so that we cannot enter therein. The devil hath bestowed all his art to pervert this doctrine; seeing that our salvation is grounded thereon. We should therefore be so much the more confirmed and strengthened in it; that we may never be shaken, but stand steadfast in the faith, which is contained in the gospel.

First of all we have this to note, that we shall never know Jesus Christ to be our Savior, until we know that He was God from everlasting. That which was written of Him by Jeremiah the prophet, must needs be fulfilled: "Let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord" (Jer. 9:24). St. Paul sheweth that this must be applied to the person of our Lord Jesus Christ: and thereupon he protesteth that he made no account of any doctrine or knowledge, only to know Jesus Christ.

Again, how is it possible for us to have our life in Him, unless He be our God, and we be maintained and preserved by His virtue? How can we put our trust in Him? For it is written. "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm" (Jer. 17:5). Again, how can we be preserved from death except by God's infinite power? Even if Scripture bore no witness to the Deity of Jesus Christ, it is impossible for us to know Him as our Savior, unless we admit that He possesses the whole majesty of God; unless we acknowledge Him to be the true God; because He is the wisdom of the Father whereby the world was made, preserved, and kept in being. Therefore let us be thoroughly resolved in this point, whenever we speak of Jesus Christ, that we lift our thoughts on high, and worship this majesty which He had from everlasting, and this infinite essence which He enjoyed before He clothed himself in humanity.

Christ was made manifest in the flesh: that is to say, became man; like unto us in all things, sin only excepted (Heb. 4:15). Where he saith, sin only excepted, he meaneth that our Lord Jesus was without fault or blemish. Yet notwithstanding. He refused not to bear our sins: He took this burden upon Himself, that we through His grace might be disburdened. We cannot know Jesus Christ to be a mediator between God and man, unless we behold Him as man. When St. Paul would embolden us to call upon God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, he expressly calleth Him man.

St. Paul saith, "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 2:5). Under this consideration, we may in His name, and by His means come familiarly to God, knowing that we are His brethren, and He the Son of God. Seeing there is nothing but sin in mankind, we must also find righteousness and life in our flesh. Therefore if Christ has not truly become our brother, if He has not been made man like unto us, in what condition are we? Let us now consider His life and passion.



It is said (speaking of Christ), "But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26). And why so? St. Paul sheweth us the reason in Romans 5:18. "As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." If we know not this, that the sin which was committed in our nature, was repaired in the self-same nature, in what situation are we? Upon what foundation can we stay ourselves? Therefore, the death of our Lord Jesus Christ could not profit us one whit, unless He had been made man, like unto us.

Again, if Jesus Christ were only God, could we have any certainty or pledge in His resurrection, that we should one day rise again? It is true that the Son of God rose again; when we hear it said, that the Son of God took upon Him a body like unto ours, came of the stock of David, that He is risen again (seeing our nature is of itself corruptible), and is lifted up on high unto glory, in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, "we are made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6) Therefore, those that went about to bring to nought man's nature, in the person of the Son of God, are to be the more detested. For the devil raised up in old times some individuals who declared that Jesus Christ appeared in the shape of man, but had not man's true nature: thereby endeavoring to abolish God's mercy towards us, and utterly destroy our faith.

Others have imagined that He brought a body with Him from heaven; as though He partook not of our nature. It has been declared, that Jesus Christ had a body from everlasting; composed of four elements: that the Godhead was at that time in a visible shape, and that whenever the angels appeared, it was His body. What madness it is to make such an alchemy, to frame a body for the Son of God! What shall we do with that passage which saith, "He took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:16,17).

It is said. He took upon Him our flesh, and became our brother. Yea, and that He was made like unto us, that He might have pity upon us, and help our infirmities. He was made the seed of David, that He might be known as the Redeemer that was promised, whom the fathers looked for from all ages. Let us remember that it is written, the Son of God appeared in the flesh; that is. He became very man, and made us one with Himself; so that we may now call God our Father. And why so? Because we are of the body of His only Son. But how are we of His body? Because He was pleased to join Himself to us, that we might be partakers of His substance.

Hereby we see that it is not a vain speculation, when men tell us that Jesus Christ put on our flesh: for hither we must come, if we will have a true knowledge of faith. It is impossible for us to trust in Him aright, unless we understand His manhood: we must also know His majesty, before we can trust in Him for salvation. We must know moreover that Jesus Christ is God and *man*, and likewise that He is but one person.

Here again the devil tries to stir up the coals of strife, by perverting or disguising the doctrine which St. Paul teaches us. For there have been heretics who have endeavored to maintain that the majesty and Godhead of Jesus Christ, His heavenly essence, was forthwith changed into flesh and manhood. Thus did some say, with many other cursed blasphemies, that Jesus Christ was made man. What will follow hereupon? God must forego His nature, and His spiritual essence must be turned into flesh. They go on further and say Jesus Christ is no more man, but His flesh has become God.

These are marvelous alchemists, to make so many new natures of Jesus Christ. Thus the devil raised up such dreamers in old times to trouble the faith of the church; who are now renewed in our time. Therefore, let us mark well what St. Paul teaches us in this place; for he giveth us good armor, that we may defend ourselves against such errors. If we would behold Jesus Christ in His true character, let us view in Him this heavenly glory, which He had from everlasting; and then let us come to His manhood, which has been described heretofore; that we may distinguish His two natures. This is necessary to nourish our faith.

If we seek life in Jesus Christ, we must understand that He hath the whole Godhead in Him; for it is written, "For with thee is the foundation of life: in thy light shall we see light" (Psa. 36:9). If we would be maintained against the devil, and withstand the temptations of our enemies, we must know that Jesus Christ is God. To be short, if we would put our whole trust and confidence in Him, we must know that He possesses all power; which He could not have, unless He were God. Who is He that hath all power? It is He that became feeble and weak; the Son of the virgin Mary; He that was subject to death; He that bore our sins: He it is, that is the wellspring of life.

We have two eyes in our head, each performing its office: but when we look steadfastly upon a thing, our sight, which is separate of itself, is joined together, and becometh one; and is wholly occupied in beholding that which is set before us: even so are there two diverse natures in Jesus Christ. Is there anything in the world more different than the body and soul of man? His soul is an invisible spirit that cannot be seen or touched; which hath none of these fleshly passions. The body is a corruptible lump, subject to rottenness; a visible thing which can be touched: the body has its properties, which are entirely different from that of the soul. And thus we ask, what is man? A creature, formed of *body* and *soul*.

If God used such a workmanship in us, when He made us of two diverse natures, why should we think it strange, that He used a far greater miracle in Jesus Christ? St. Paul uses these words, *was manifest*, that we may distinguish His Godhead from His manhood; that we may receive Him, as God manifest in the flesh; that is to say. Him, who is truly God, and yet hath made Himself one with us: therefore we are the children of God; He being our justification, we are delivered from the burden of our sins. Seeing He hath cleansed us from all our misery, we have perfect riches in Him; in short, seeing He submitted Himself to death, we are now sure of life.

St. Paul addeth, "He was justified in the spirit." The word *justified* is oftentimes used in Scripture, for *approved*. When it is said. He was justified, it is not that He became just, it is not that He was acquitted by men, as though they were His judges, and He bound to give them an account: no, no; there is no such thing; but it is when the glory is given Him which He deserveth, and we confess Him to be what indeed He really is. It is said, the gospel is justified when men receive it obediently, and through faith submit themselves to the doctrine that God teacheth: so in this place, it is said, Jesus Christ was justified in spirit.

We must not content ourselves by looking at the bodily presence of Jesus Christ, which was visible, but we must look higher. St. John says God was made flesh; or the Word of God, which is the same. The Word of God, which was God before the creation of the world, was made flesh; that is, was united to our nature; so that the Son of the virgin Mary, is God; yea, the everlasting God! His infinite power was there manifested; which is a sure witness that He is the true God! St. Paul saith, Jesus Christ our Lord was made of the seed of David; he likewise adds, He was declared to be the Son of God (Rom. 1).

It is not enough for us to behold Him with our natural eyes; for in this case, we should rise no higher than man: but when we see, that by miracles and mighty works, He showeth Himself to be the Son of God, it is a seal and proof, that in abasing Himself, He did not leave off His heavenly majesty! Therefore, we may come to Him as our brother: and at the same time worship Him as the everlasting God; by whom we were made, and by whom we are preserved.

Were it not for this, we could have no church; were it not for this, we could have no religion; were it not for this, we could have no salvation. It would be better for us to be brute beasts, without reason and understanding, than to be destitute of this knowledge: to wit, that Jesus came and joined His Godhead with our nature; which was so wretched and miserable. St. Paul declares this to be a mystery; that we may not come to it proudly and arrogantly, as many do who wish to be thought wise; this has caused many heresies to spring up. And indeed, pride hath always been the mother of heresies.

When we hear this word, *mystery*, let us remember two things; first, that we learn to keep under our senses, and flatter not ourselves that we have sufficient knowledge and ability to comprehend so vast a matter. In the second place, let us learn to climb up beyond ourselves, and reverence that majesty which passeth our understanding. We must not be sluggish nor drowsy; but think upon this doctrine, and endeavor to become instruction therein. When we have acquired some little knowledge thereof, we should strive to profit thereby, all the days of our life.

When we become possessed of this knowledge, that the Son of God is joined to us, we should cast our eyes upon that which is so highly set forth in Him; that is, the virtue and power of the Holy Ghost. So then, Jesus Christ did not only appear as man, but showed indeed that He was Almighty God as all the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in Him. If we once know this, we may well perceive that it is not without cause that St. Paul saith, all the treasures of wisdom are hidden in our Lord Jesus Christ.

When we have once laid hold on the promises of this Mediator, we shall know the height and depth, the length and breadth, yea, and whatsoever is necessary for our salvation: so that we may stay our faith upon Him, as upon the only true God; and likewise behold Him as our brother; who hath not only come near to us, but hath united and joined Himself to us in such a manner, that He hath become the same substance. If we have come to this, let us know that we have arrived to the perfection of wisdom, which is spoken of by St. Paul in another place; that we may fully rejoice in the goodness of God; for it hath pleased Him to lighten us with the brightness of His gospel, and to draw us into His heavenly kingdom.

# The Salvation of All Men

by John Calvin

*For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior: Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*

## 1 Timothy 2:3-5.

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When we despise those whom God would have honored, it is as much as if we should despise Him: so it is, if we make no account of the salvation of those whom God calleth to Himself. For it seemeth thereby that we would stay Him from showing His mercy to poor sinners, who are in the way to ruin. The reason why St. Paul useth this argument, *that God will have all the world to be saved*, is that we may, as much as lieth in us, also seek the salvation of those who seem to be banished from the kingdom of God; especially while they are unbelievers.

We must always observe what the condition of the world was in the days of St. Paul. It was something new and strange to have the gospel published to the world in those days: for it appeared that God had chosen the stock of Abraham, and that the rest of the world would be deprived of all hope of salvation. And indeed we see how Holy Writ setteth forth the adoption of this people: but St. Paul commandeth us to pray for all the world; and not without cause, for he addeth the reason, which is here mentioned: to wit, because *God will have all men to be saved*. As if he should say, my friends, it is reasonable that we should observe what the will of God is, and at what He aimeth; that every one of us may employ himself to serve Him aright.

Therefore, seeing it is the will of God that all men should be partakers of that salvation which He hath sent in the person of His only begotten Son, we must endeavor to draw poor, silly, ignorant creatures to us, that we may all come together to this inheritance of the kingdom of heaven, which hath been promised us. But we must observe that St. Paul speaketh not of every particular man, but of all sorts of men, and of all people. Therefore, when he saith that God will have all men to be saved, we must not think that he speaketh of them individually, but his meaning is this: that whereas in times past He chose a certain people to Himself, He meaneth now to show mercy to all the world: yea, even to them that seemed to be shut out from the hope of salvation.

He saith in another place, the heathens were without God, and void of all promise; because they were not as yet brought to the fellowship of the Jews. This was a special privilege that God had given to the descendants of Abraham. Therefore St. Paul's meaning is not that God will save every man, but that the promises which were given to but one people are now extended to all the world: for as he saith in this same epistle, the wall was broken down at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. God had separated the

Jews from all other nations; but when Jesus Christ appeared for the salvation of the world, then was this difference, which existed between them and the Gentiles, taken away.

Therefore, God will now embrace us all: and this is the entrance into our salvation. For if that had always continued, which God ordained but for a season, then should we be all accursed; and the gospel would not have been preached to us: we should have had no sign or token of the love and goodness of God. But now we have become His children; we are no more strangers to the promises, as were our fathers: for Jesus Christ came to be a Savior to all in general; He offered the grace of God the Father, that all might receive it.

As St. Paul speaketh of all nations, so he likewise speaketh of all conditions; as if he should say, God will save kings and magistrates, as well as others: we must not restrain His fatherly goodness to ourselves alone, nor to any certain number of people. And why so? For He showeth that He will be favorable to all: thus we have St. Paul's meaning. To confirm this matter, he addeth it is God's will that all should come to the knowledge of the truth. We must mark well why St. Paul useth this argument; for we cannot know the will of God, unless it be made known to us; unless we have some sign or token whereby we may perceive it. It is too high a matter for us to know what God's counsel is; but as far as He showeth it to us by effect, so far we comprehend it.

The gospel is called the mighty power of God, and salvation to all them that believe: yea, it is the gate of paradise. It followeth then, if through the will of God the gospel be preached to all the world, there is a token that salvation is common to all. Thus St. Paul proveth that God's will is that all men should be saved. He hath not appointed His apostles to proclaim His name only among the Jews, for we know that the commission was given them to preach to all creatures; to be witnesses of Jesus Christ from Jerusalem to Samaria, and from thence throughout all the world.

Are the apostles sent to publish the truth of God to all people, and to all conditions of men? It followeth then that God presenteth Himself to all the world, that the promise belongeth to both great and small, as well to the Gentiles now, as to the Jews before. But before we go any farther, it is necessary to beat down the folly, or rather the beastliness, of those who abuse this passage of St. Paul; who endeavor to make the election of God of no effect, and to utterly take it away. They say, if God will have all men to be saved, it follows that He hath not chosen a certain number of mankind, and cast the rest away, but that His will remaineth indifferent.

They pretend that it is left to the choice of men to save themselves or not; that God letteth us alone, and waiteth to see whether we will come to Him or not; and so receiveth them that come unto Him. But in the mean time, they destroy the ground work of our salvation; for we know that we are so accursed that the inheritance of salvation is far from us: if we say that Jesus Christ hath come to, remedy that, then must we examine the nature of mankind. We are so contrary in our nature, and such enemies to God, that we cannot but resist Him: we are so given to evil and wickedness that we cannot so much as conceive a good thought. How then can it be that we may become partakers of that salvation which is offered in the gospel, unless God draw us to it by His Holy Spirit? Let us now see

whether God draw all the world to it or not. No, no, for then had our Lord Jesus Christ said in vain, "No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me' draw him" (John 6:44). So then we must needs conclude that it is a special grace that God bestoweth upon such as pleaseth Him, to draw them, and teach them in such a manner, that they believe the gospel, and receive it with true faith.

And now, why doth God choose one, and leave another? We know that men cannot come to God by their own deserts, neither are those who have been chosen deserving any such thing as to be preferred to their companions, as though there were some worthiness in them. It followeth then that before the world was made (as St. Paul saith in the first to the Ephesians), God chose such as pleased Him: and we know not why this man was chosen in preference to that. And still we must confess that whatsoever God doth is done justly, although we cannot comprehend it. Therefore, let us receive that whereof we are so thoroughly certified in Holy Writ; and not suffer ourselves to be lead astray, under a shadow of vain reason, used by men, who are ignorant of the Word of God.

At the first sight, there appears to be some weight in their argument *God will have all men to be saved*: therefore say they, it is left to the free choice of every man to become enlightened in the faith, and to partake of salvation. If a man will read but three lines, he will easily perceive that St. Paul here speaketh not of every particular man as we have already shown, but that he speaketh of all people, and of all conditions of men. He showeth that the case standeth not as it did before the coming of Christ, when there was but one chosen people, but that God now showeth Himself a Savior to all the world; as it is said, thine inheritance shall be even to the ends of the earth.

Moreover, that no man may abuse himself, or be deceived by the vain and foolish talk of those who pervert Holy Writ, let us examine how the doctrine of these enemies of God, and all godliness, standeth. God will have all men to be saved; that is, as they imagine, every one. If it be the will of God at present, no doubt it was the same from the beginning of the world: for we know that His mind changeth not. So then, if at this day God will have all men to be saved, His mind was so always; and if His mind was so always, what shall we make of what St. Paul saith? that He will that all men come to the knowledge of the truth. He chose but one people to Himself, as it is said (Acts 14) and left the poor Gentiles to walk in their own ignorance.

There were likewise sonic countries where He would not suffer St. Paul to preach; as in Bithynia and Phrygia (Acts 16:7). And so we see that God would not have the knowledge of the gospel to come to every one at first. Thus we may easily see the error of those who abuse this text. St. Paul speaketh not in this place of the counsel of God, neither doth He mean to lead us to His everlasting election, which was before the beginning of the world: but only showeth what His will and pleasure is, as far as we ought to know it.

It is true that God changeth not; neither hath He two wills; nor doth He use any counterfeit dealing: and yet the Scripture speaketh unto us in two ways concerning His will. And how can that be? How cometh it to pass that His will is spoken of in two different ways? It is because of our grossness, and want of understanding. Why doth He

make Himself to have eyes, to have ears, and to have a nose? Why doth He take upon Him men's affections? Why is it that He saith He is angry, He is sorry? Is it not because we cannot comprehend Him in His incomprehensible majesty? Therefore, it is not absurd that Holy Writ should speak unto us of the will of God after two sorts: not because His will is double, but in order that He may apply Himself to our weakness, knowing that our understanding is gross and heavy.

When the Scripture informeth us that God hath chosen such as pleased Him before the world began, we behold a counsel into which we cannot enter. Why then doth Holy Writ inform us that this election and choice of God is everlasting? It is not without cause; for it is a very profitable doctrine, if it be received as it ought to be. For thereby we are reminded that we are not called to the knowledge of the gospel by reason of our own worthiness. We are no better than others, for we all sprung from the cursed root of Adam; we are all subject to the same condemnation; and we are all shut up under the slavery of sin and death.

When it pleased God to draw us out of the darkness of unbelief, and give us the light of the gospel, He looked not at any service which we might have performed, or at any virtue we might have possessed: but He called us, having chosen us before. This is the order in which St. Paul maketh mention in Romans 8: that knowing God, we must not take the glory to ourselves. Thus, the calling of the faithful resteth upon this counsel of God; and we see how far the Lord maketh known to us that which He had decreed before we were born. He toucheth us with His Holy Spirit, and we are ingrafted, as it were, into the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the true *earnest* of our adoption: this is the pledge given us, to put us out of all doubt that God taketh and holdeth us for His children, when by faith we are made one with Jesus Christ, who is the only begotten Son of God, unto whom belongeth the inheritance of life.

God giveth us such a sure testimony of His will that notwithstanding our ignorance, He putteth us out of doubt of our election; He giveth us a hope, of which we should be entirely void, if Jesus Christ did not call us to be members of His body. Thus we see how profitable this doctrine of election is to us: it serveth to humble us, knowing that our salvation hangeth not upon our deserts, neither upon the virtue which God might have found in us: but upon the election that was made before we were born, before we could do either good or evil.

When we know that according to this unchangeable election, God hath called us to Himself, we are so much the more put out of doubt of our salvation. Jesus Christ saith, no man taketh from Me that which the Father hath given Me (John 10). What is it that the Father hath given Jesus Christ? They whom He hath chosen, and whom He knoweth to be His. Seeing the case standeth thus, that God hath given us to His Son, to be kept and defended by Him, and that Jesus Christ promiseth that none of us shall be lost, but that He will exercise all the might and power of the Godhead to save and defend us, is not this a comfort surpassing all the treasures of the world? Is not this the true ground upon which all the assurance and certainty of our salvation is settled?



We are as birds upon the boughs, and set forth as a prey to Satan. What assurance then could we have of tomorrow, and of all our life; yea, and after death, were it not that God, who hath called us, will end His work as He hath begun it. How hath He gathered us together in the faith of His gospel? Is it grounded upon us? Nay, entirely to the contrary; it proceedeth from His free election. Therefore; we may be so much the more freed from doubt. We must not strive to know any more of God's counsel than what is revealed in Holy Writ.

The will of God is opened to us, as often as we hear His Word preached, whereby He calleth and exhorteth us all to repentance. After He hath once shown us that we are all damned in His sight, and that there is nothing but condemnation in us, He sheweth us that we must renounce ourselves, and get out of this bottomless pit. In that which God exhorteth all men, we may judge that it is His will that all men should be saved: as He saith by the prophet Ezekiel, "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God; and not that he should return from his ways and live?" (18:23). "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (33:11).

How will God have sinners turn themselves? and how shall we know it? Seeing He will have repentance preached to all the world. When it is said that God will have mercy upon sinners, upon such as will come to Him, and ask forgiveness in Christ's name, it is a general doctrine. So then, it is said that God will have all men to be saved, not having respect to what we devise or imagine, that is, as far as our knowledge can comprehend it. When the Scripture speaketh of the love and will of God, let us see if men can have repentance by their own actions, being self taught, or whether it is God that giveth it.

God saith by His prophet, I will that all men turn and live. Can a man by his own works turn himself? No: for if that were in our power, it were more than to make us. It is an undoubted doctrine throughout the whole Scripture that our Lord Jesus Christ giveth Himself the praise of turning us. He saith, "I will put a new spirit within you: and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 11:19). To be short, there is nothing that the faithful ought so much to do as to give God the glory, confessing that it is He alone that can turn us; and that He hath adopted us in such a manner that He must needs draw us by the grace of His Spirit.

Have men such knowledge that they are able to attain this faith, this wonderful wisdom which is contained in the gospel, such as the very angels themselves reverence? Let us mark what God saith to us in His Word: that He will open our eyes, and unstop our ears; because the natural man understandeth no part of the secrets of God; for it is the Holy Ghost that revealeth them to us. It is hardly possible to read a single passage in Holy Writ, without finding some sentence, which informeth us that men are utterly blind by nature until God openeth their eyes. They can in no wise come to Him, until He draw them, and enlighten them by His Holy Spirit.

Seeing that God alone turneth men from their wickedness, experience teacheth us, and so doth the Holy Scripture that He giveth not His grace to all men. It is said, "The Lord hath

not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day" (Deut. 29:4). It is plainly shown that God doth not cast forth His grace without direction, but that it is only for those whom He hath chosen, for those that are of the body of His church, and of His flock. Thus we see what St. Paul meaneth when he saith, *God will have all men to be saved*: that is, He will have some of all nations, and all conditions.

It is said that He offereth His gospel to all, which is the means of drawing us to salvation. And doth this profit all men? No; of this our own eyes are witnesses. For when we hear the truth of God, if we rebel against it, it proves a great condemnation to us. Yet so it is, that there are many who do not profit by the gospel, but rather become worse, even those to whom it is preached; therefore, they are not all saved. God must go farther in order to bring us to salvation; He must not only appoint men, and send them to teach us faithfully, but He must operate upon our hearts. He must touch us to the quick, He must draw us to Him, He must make His work profitable to us, and cause it to take root in our hearts.

It is evident that we have to consider the will of God in two ways: not that it is double of itself (as we before observed), but we must consider it as adapted to our weakness. He formeth His speech to us in His Word, according to our capacity. If God should speak according to His majesty, His speech would be beyond our comprehension; it would utterly confound us! For if our eyes be not able to abide the brightness of the sun, would our minds be able to comprehend the infinite majesty of God? These silly men who would destroy God's election ought not to abuse this passage; nor say that we make God to have two wills; for therein do they impudently misrepresent us. We say, as far as we can perceive, God would have all men to be saved, whensoever, and how oft soever, He appointeth His gospel to be preached to us.

As we said before, the gate of paradise is opened to us, when we are called to be partakers of that redemption which was purchased for us by our Lord Jesus Christ. And this is the will of God, as far as we can comprehend it: that when He exhorteth us to repentance, He is ready to receive us, if we will come to Him. Although we have answered the doubts which might have been raised- upon this subject, we will bring a similitude to make this doctrine more easy. (I call a similitude that agreement and similarity which God maketh between the children of Israel and us.) God saith that He chose the children of Abraham for His inheritance, and dedicated them to Himself: He loved them, and took them for His own household (Deut. 7).

This is true; for He made His covenant with all those that were circumcised. Was circumcision a vain figure, and of no importance? Nay, it was a sure and undoubted sign that God had chosen that people for His own, accounting all for His flock that came of that race. And yet, was there not a special grace for some of that people?

Surely there was, as St. Paul setteth forth, "For they are not all Israel which are of Israel: neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children" (Romans 9:6, 7), for God deprived some of this benefit that His grace and goodness might seem greater to those whom He called to Himself. Behold, therefore, the will of God which was made manifest to the children of Israel is at this day made manifest to us.

It is said in Amos 4:7, "God caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city." So the Lord sendeth His gospel wheresoever it pleaseth Him: His grace is poured out upon all the world; yet it cannot be but He worketh otherwise with those whom He draweth to Himself, for all of us have our ears stopped, and our eyes hoodwinked. We are deaf and blind, unless He prepareth us to receive His Word. When the gospel is preached to us, it is as much as if God reached out His hand (as He saith in Isa. 65:2) and said to us, come unto Me. It is a matter which ought to touch us to the heart when we perceive that God cometh to seek us. He doth not wait till we come to Him, but He sheweth us that He is ready to receive us, although we were His deadly enemies. He wipeth away all our faults, and maketh us partakers of that salvation, which was purchased for us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus we see how worthy the gospel is to be esteemed, and what a treasure it is! As St. Paul saith to the Romans. "It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth:" it is the kingdom of heaven; and God openeth the door, that we, being taken out of the bottomless pit wherein we were sunk by nature, may enter into His glory. We must remember that it is not enough for us to receive the Word that is preached to us by the mouth of man, but after we have heard it, God must speak to us inwardly by His Holy Spirit; for this is the only means to bring us to the knowledge of the truth. Therefore, when God hath dealt so mercifully with us, as to give us the light of faith, let us hold it fast, and pray Him to continue it, and bring His work to perfection.

Let us not lift ourselves proudly above other men, as though we were more worthy than they are, for we know that it is our God that hath chosen us, and setteth us apart from others, by His mere goodness and free mercy. We must know, moreover, that men are very faulty, when God offereth them His Word, and they receive it not. This is spoken that unbelievers and rebels might have their mouths stopped, that they might not blaspheme the name of God, as though He had been wanting on His part; and to the end that all the faithful should, in humbleness of heart, glorify God for His grace and mercy toward them: for we see how He calleth all those to whom His Word is preached, to salvation.

If men reply by saying they cannot come to God, we cannot stand to plead here, for we shall always find ourselves in fault. If a man say, it resteth only in the hands of God, and if He would give me repentance, could He not do it! If I remain stiff-necked in my hardness and malice, what can I do in this case, seeing God will not give me repentance to turn to Him? This is not in any wise to be allowed; for God calleth us sufficiently to Him, and we cannot accuse Him of cruelty; even if we had not His Word, we must needs confess that He is just, although we know not the cause that moved Him to deprive us of it.

When we are called to come to God, and know that He is ready to receive us, if we do not come, can we deny that we are unthankful? Let us not separate salvation from the knowledge of the truth; for God doth not mean to lie, nor deceive men, when He saith, when they come to the knowledge of the truth they shall be saved. *God will have all men to be saved;* but how? *If they will come to the knowledge of the truth.* Every man would

be saved, but no man will draw nigh to God. The Scripture informeth us that if we desire salvation, we must attend to the means which God hath appointed; that is, we must receive His Word with obedience and faith.

The Scripture saith this is everlasting life: to wit, to know God the Father, and to receive Christ as our only Savior. Therefore let us learn, as it is here set forth, not to doubt of the certainty of our salvation; for the kingdom of God is within us. If we wish God to receive us, we must receive the doctrine given us by St. Paul. How are we called to the hope of salvation? By the influence of the grace of God, which maketh known to us His love and favor. Thus we may see what St. Paul's meaning is when he saith, God will have His grace made known to all the world, and His gospel preached to all creatures. Therefore, we must endeavor, as much as possible, to persuade those who are strangers to the faith, and seem to be utterly deprived of the goodness of God, to accept of salvation.

Jesus Christ is not only a Savior of few, but He offereth Himself to all. As often as the gospel is preached to us, we ought to consider that God calleth us to Him: and if we attend to this call, it shall not be in vain, neither shall it be lost labor. But can we come to Him without any assistance, except what we derive from our own nature? Alas, we cannot! "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). When God dealeth so graciously with us as to touch our hearts with His Holy Spirit, then He causeth His gospel to work profitably to our salvation; then He maketh a display of the virtue spoken of by St. Paul.

Again, we must remember when the gospel is preached to us, that it is to make us more void of excuse. Seeing God hath already shown us that He was ready to receive us to mercy, if we would come unto Him, our condemnation will no doubt be increased, if we be so wicked as to draw back, when He calleth so mildly and lovingly. Notwithstanding, (as we are here exhorted), let us not leave off praying for all men in general; for St. Paul sheweth that God will have all men to be saved; that is to say, men of all people and nations.

Although we see a great diversity among men, yet we must not forget that God hath made us all in His own image and likeness, and that we are the workmanship of His hand; therefore He extends His goodness to those who are afar off, of which we have had sufficient proof: for when He drew us unto Him, were we not His enemies? How then cometh it to pass that we are now of the household of faith, the children of God, and members of our Lord Jesus Christ? Is it not because He hath gathered us to Himself? And is He not the Savior of the whole world, as well as of us? Did Jesus Christ come to be the mediator of two or three men only? No, no; but He is the *mediator between God and men*.

Therefore, we may be so much the more assured that God taketh and holdeth us for His children, if we endeavor to bring those to Him who are afar off. Let us comfort ourselves, and take courage in this our calling: although there be at this day a great forlornness, though we seem to be miserable creatures, utterly cast away and condemned, yet we must labor as much as possible to draw those to salvation who seem to be afar off. And above

all things, let us pray to God for them, waiting patiently till it please Him to show His good will toward them, as He hath shown it to us.

## The Spirituality of the Law

by John Calvin

*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*

### Gal. 5:19-23

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We saw this morning that men stand condemned in the sight of God because all that proceeds from man is contaminated and filthy. Now if God is the Author of all perfection, it follows that all that is contrary to his nature or to his Word is totally corrupt. Hence, there is a constant battle of the flesh against the spirit; for if men were left to pursue their own paths, they would be mortal enemies of God throughout their whole lives. For this reason, we can only conclude that men are full of evil and iniquity. When we hear this sentence pronounced, we ought to be utterly ashamed; for here is the decree of our heavenly judge, and it is not lawful to contest it, for God speaks with authority. When he declares that we are evil and perverse by nature, he fulfils his office; for we must give account to him. However, men are so blinded in their hypocrisy or pride that they do not care if they have provoked God's anger against themselves. This is because we all flatter ourselves and feed our sins. Therefore, the only way we can be made truly to acknowledge our sins is by force. Even then, we make use of evasive techniques and subterfuge. What is more, we brazenly seek out frivolous excuses, as if they would be pleasing to God! Therefore, it is not enough for us to hear God's general sentence of condemnation pronounced against us; we need God to reveal our own vileness, to make us ashamed of ourselves. We need him to be specific and point his finger at the sins that are apparent and obvious to the people around us.

Hence, Paul, having said this morning that all the thoughts and feelings of men strive against God, now adds the declaration that we have just heard. He tells us that the appearance of fruit enables us to assess the condition of the tree, though the most important part, the root, is hidden. Just as the tree is known by its fruit, the sin that reigns in us and in our nature is seen by the works that we produce. Thus, we can see why Paul says here that 'the works of the flesh are manifest'. It is as if he is saying that people deliberately close their eyes to obscure their own evil, and deceive themselves into thinking that they are full of nothing but virtue, although they are bursting at the seams with ever so many terrible vices. However much we may protest, seek out different excuses, wipe our mouths and disguise the way things really are, yet we have to return to the fact that our lives declare, loud and clear, the kind of people we are. Thus, the works

of the flesh are indeed manifest. Now this is enough to rebuke those who seek to hide behind a layer of makeup, as it were, as if they were innocent in the eyes of God. It is true that Paul does not give a complete list here of the sins that God condemns in the law, but he recites examples by which we may easily judge the rest. Besides, it would have been a lengthy procedure if Paul had wanted to enumerate them in this way. As we shall see, however, this list is sufficient to convict all those who think they stand to gain by their hypocrisy.

In order to have a better understanding of all this, we need to be aware of what it is to walk in obedience to God. In the second chapter of Titus, verse eleven, it says that the grace of God has appeared that we might walk in the world here below in holiness, temperance, and righteousness while we hope for the life that God has promised us, and the coming of our great Saviour, who will gather us to himself in his heavenly kingdom. To this, Christians must apply themselves above all else. They must be exercised in these things; namely, the knowledge that this is not the place of our eternal rest, nor our inheritance. This world is like a foreign land that we must travel through, whilst our eyes are lifted up to heaven. This is the most important thing. Yet this cannot be achieved unless believers call upon God and have recourse to him alone. As for our lives, Paul speaks of three specific things: there is holiness, which means that we serve God with a pure heart, with integrity and honesty, renouncing all the pollution of this world. This is the first point. Secondly, we must not become worldly or profane, but must lead an honest life. The third is that we harm no one, that we never practise deceit or cruelty, but that we seek, rather, to serve our neighbours. The life of a Christian should be like this.

Now, Paul says here that for those who do not acknowledge that they are wholly at enmity with God, and full of malice and rebellion, a simple test is needed. If we were to examine their lives, we would find that some are given over to fornication, some are drunkards, others are given up to all kinds of wickedness, some are murderers, others are witches, some stir up revolts, others are full of ambition, some still seek only to sow discord and trouble and to create sects that pervert the truth of God by their corruption. This is what we will find if we look into men's lives. Now, what will they gain by complaining against God and seeking to hide their baseness by quibbling? If they do not confess this with their mouths, then their lives will speak. Their lives, with all the works that we see them perform, will be a testimony to what we have said; thus, there can be no further debate.

Moreover, when Paul says that the works of the flesh are manifest, he does not mean that all whom God leaves to follow their natural course, and who are not led by the Holy Spirit, are guilty of each sin named here. It is more likely that a person will be corrupt to the extent that he will be given over first to one sin, then to two or three, as occasion arises. Thus, there are many pagans and unbelievers who have no fear of God, and have never been taught his Word, who yet have some appearance of virtue and uprightness. However, this does not mean that they are therefore free from corruption, for if the infection is hidden and lurking inside them, then they have a tumour which will eventually rot every part of them. For man's nature knows no perimeters, no limits; all is unbounded confusion. This is what we are to retain from this passage; and, in order that

none of us should be deceived by hypocrisy, we need to look well to ourselves and examine our lives diligently. Then we will have occasion to cast our eyes downwards, and close our mouths, knowing that we are utterly wretched, and worthy of condemnation. It is true that nothing that Paul lists here is apparent, and maybe we cannot be accused before men; but even if we outwardly appear to be like little angels, we are still evil and perverse, until God has transformed us. It is just that God does not wish us to be without testimony in our lives to cast us down and cause us to condemn ourselves voluntarily.

Now we will see how to apply this doctrine. If we think we are worthy in some way, and do not perceive our own poverty, let us examine our lives, and make a comparison between our own actions and all that God has proscribed and prohibited. It is then we will have a good picture of our wickedness and filth; instead of us thinking that we are full of purity and perfection as we did before, God will reveal to our eyes that we are full of iniquity. Yet, after we have recognised one sin, then two, then three, we must then conclude that this is not even a hundredth part of it. For we are always bedazzled when it comes to awareness of our own poverty. Even when we see our works clearly, we ought to be able to proceed to their source. Some people are so dense that they think they will be acceptable as long as they have not been guilty of fornication, or as long as their drunkenness remains undiscovered, or as long as their deception has been so secretly and carefully carried out that no one has noticed it. Paul's intention, however, in saying that the works of the flesh are manifest, is not to flatter men by telling them that a sin can remain uncondemned until it is detected. For, as I have said, one sin leads to another. Thus, if fornication, drunkenness, theft, murders, treachery, blasphemy against God, strife and rebellion, are detestable things in themselves, we can only conclude that the same is true of impiety, ambition, pride, or an inordinate sense of self-esteem and self-worth which remain hidden in the heart. Covetousness, where we desire the things that belong to others and such-like, is another sin that we must condemn. In short, external actions give testimony to the fact that we are full of infection in the sight of God. Where is this seen? In our desires, in our advice, in our thoughts, and in all our undertakings; we can see that all these things spring from an evil source.

Thus, we are drawn to a knowledge of our sins which makes us utterly ashamed of ourselves before God. God uses the same method of instruction in the law. There God does not forbid fornication alone, but he prohibits adultery. At first sight, it looks as if God does not forbid cheating or plundering. Instead, what does he condemn? Stealing. He does not forbid lying, only bearing false witness. Thus, to those who know nothing of the power of the law, it seems as though they have fulfilled their duty if they have abstained from these specific crimes. For this reason, Paul says that for a time he thought he was most righteous, as if God could have discovered nothing for which to reproach him (*Rom. 7:7*). Thus, hypocrites become drunk with pride and become completely wild if God rebukes them, for they think he greatly wrongs them. Why? Because they do not understand the nature of the law. It is spiritual, says Paul, which means that we must be totally transformed before we can submit to it (*Rom. 7:14*). So long as we follow our carnal natures, all that we think, all that we do and say, can only be sin in the eyes of God.



Thus, we are not to look simply at the word that is used in the law. For when God gives the example of adultery, he was also seeking to make any fornication seem detestable to us, for if marriage vows are broken and violated, it is a perversion of all law and order amongst men. By this word 'adultery', therefore, God is showing that he detests all sexual impurity and immodesty. We are also told, 'Thou shalt not kill'. Is it not, therefore, lawful to fight? Not at all; not even to hate, according to John, who tells us that if anyone secretly hates his neighbour, even if he never torments him, nor lifts a finger against him, he is a murderer in the eyes of God (*1John 3:15*). Thus, by the word 'murder', God is condemning any harm that we might do to our neighbours. Therefore, even though we may not lift a finger to hurt them, if we hate them or bear them ill-will, we are guilty of murder in the eyes of God. The same applies to stealing; thieves are not just the people we flog and hang, and whose ears we cut off. These, I tell you, are not the only thieves in the sight of God. Even those who seek reputation as good people, and are highly respected — if they deceive and cheat on their neighbours, though they cannot be accused of theft because of their high standing in the eyes of men, they are nevertheless thieves before God. The same applies to all other sins.

In this passage, where Paul says that the works of the flesh are manifest, his line of instruction moves from the grosser sins to the lesser ones. Once we have been convinced of our poverty and sin, and once we have discovered our own shameful condition, so that we are left speechless, we must then be convinced of another point: we need to realise that all of the appetites which lead us to do evil, be it theft and cruelty, deception and perjury, or hatred and enmity — all of these things are equally to be condemned. For the tree is still a bad one, even if we do not see its fruit at first sight; the tree has its own nature, but the only way we can judge the nature of the tree is by its fruit. Now, this is worthy of note because, as I have said, though God compels men to condemn themselves, they will only half do so. They want all that is not apparent to others to be forgotten, so that no mention is ever made of it. The person who is condemned for having done evil will doubtless never excuse his sin if he is forced to confess it. Yet, there is no question of him voluntarily examining himself to feel the judgment of God against him. He does not think about what he deserves, or consider the many temptations he went through before he committed this act, and the hundred or so times that he had offended God before his sin was apparent to all.

We must, therefore, pay all the more attention to this warning upon which I have commented; especially since the Popish doctors display their excessive stupidity by saying that it is not a sin to think evil, or to be tempted, as long as one does not consent to do it. A man could be tempted to wrong his neighbour in some way; he may have a grievance or frustration which makes him want to avenge himself upon the person who has offended him. If the occasion were to arise, he would be delighted. This is not sin, they tell us, unless he has consented to the temptation with resolve. They are only wiping their mouths like whores, or showing their snouts like sows, after they have wallowed in the mire and dirt. A man may murmur against God and be angry with him, and doubt whether God will look after him; he may be troubled by many mistrustful thoughts, so that he cannot find refuge in God; but none of these things are sin according to the Papists. I am not saying that the common herd are the only ones to be deceived in these

matters, for all of their schools hold to the doctrine and belief that this is not sin. They do say that all is sin before baptism; but after baptism, all becomes virtuous, however much we may doubt God, or however many grievances we have against him. We may be very impatient with him, or agitated about this matter or that — but we cannot be accused if we have not been moved to practise evil outwardly! In short, if we are inclined to all that God condemns and reproves in his law — all that is unlawful — it is nothing. They are well suited to believe such stupid things! After all, they have made idols and grotesque statues to worship, and now their minds have become darkened as they make merry around their gods, scoffing at us, as at a little child holding forth about righteousness and integrity. We must not, therefore, be surprised if such people behave like this. Because they have falsified the glory of God and destroyed it, they must be completely brutish.

As for us, let us note the words which I have already quoted from the apostle Paul, namely, that the law is spiritual. If we are convicted as rebels against God because of external, visible acts, let us remember that God will find an infinite number, indeed, an abyss of evil desires writhing inside of us, though they are not regarded by men as rendering us guilty. We must, therefore, conclude that in everything and in every way we are drowned in perdition, until God looks in pity upon us, and draws us out. The way to apply this text of Paul's to our instruction is as follows: inasmuch as we are unaware of the sins that lurk within us, it is necessary for God to come and examine our lives. After this, we will learn to humble ourselves. So then, once we see the sins that are known and evident to all, and which cannot be excused, even in the eyes of little children, may we be led even further to sound out the depths, and acknowledge that all our appetites and thoughts are like many rebellions against God. Yet if each of us were more careful to examine ourselves in this way, we would all surely have occasion to tremble and sigh; all haughtiness and pride would be cast down and we would be ashamed of every aspect of our lives. But we know that each of us turns away as much as we can from any knowledge of our sins; we throw them all behind our backs. God does not forget them; though we may want them to be forgotten, he has to keep them in remembrance. This is what Paul attracts our attention to in this passage.

Furthermore, we can see the foolishness and ignorance (or, rather, stupidity) of the doctors of the Papacy, in that they believe that the word 'flesh' refers only to man's sensual nature (as they call it); for this is how they divide it up. They admit that the appetites which they label 'inferior' are very corrupt, but believe that as long as we have free will, there remains some degree of reason and intelligence within us. According to the Papists, the sensuality of man exhibits itself when he is not guided by his own reason, but devotes himself excessively to sexual impurity, or drunkenness or gluttony or some such thing. Yet here, Paul puts ambition on the same plane. Why else is it that men envy one another, and compete for superiority over one another, desiring to be the wisest or most intelligent? Is it not because each one longs to be esteemed in the eyes of the world? Is this less worthy of condemnation than fornication or drunkenness? If a poor lout who loves eating and drinking becomes very drunk, well, he will continue along on his merry way; he does not ask to be a king or a great lord — he simply whiles away his time. Another who is addicted to gambling will go and play with rascals like himself, without being tempted by ambition and the desire for great honour. Therefore, those who are

considered to be most honourable, and who think highly of themselves, are the most carnal, says Paul. We saw in the First Epistle to the Corinthians that he accused them of being carnal, because they debated with one another over doctrinal matters, and had a foolish longing to be prized and noticed by men (*1 Cor.* 3:3). Indeed, he mentions 'strife and divisions' there too. If a man troubles the church of God by false doctrines, either out of disdain for others, or out of a desire for acclaim and reputation, the Papists would not say that he was carnal. They would say that he was too clever; but Paul says that heresies, ambition and emulations are works of the flesh. This proves what we said this morning, that the word 'flesh' includes all that pertains to man. We will be completely given over to evil unless we are changed and transformed.

As I have already said, it is true that pagans and unbelievers will always be considered virtuous, though God has let go of their reins and has not regenerated them by his Holy Spirit. Indeed, we will find some degree of decency present in their lives; at the very least, they will not all be fornicators, or drunkards or thieves. How can Paul say that they are carnal, therefore? Because the heart of man is a deep pit of iniquity, as Jeremiah says, without base or bank; the prophet exclaims, 'What an abyss the heart is! Who can fathom its depths? Only God' (*Jer.* 17:9).

For men flatter themselves, as we know, and commit wicked acts with impunity; they are so hardened in sin that they heap up evil upon evil and sin upon sin, considering their vices to be virtues. Nevertheless, their lives may have a glossy, attractive appearance. Thus, we cannot say that those who have not been taught the truth will be justified. Paul said in the first chapter to the Romans that the whole world is guilty of ungodliness and ungratefulness, since God has revealed himself to all without exception, enough to leave them without excuse (*Rom.* 1:20). He adds, 'when they knew God, they glorified him not as God'; therefore, he gave them up as reprobates, and abandoned them to their own gross, wicked lusts. Paul continues by reciting all the detestable things they do. Amongst other things, he speaks of murder, fornication, and other evil and corrupt things which we ought not to mention. After that, he speaks of envy, as in this passage, and of those who invent evil things; of deceit, backbiting, malignity, contentions and debates. Of course, not all of these are in evidence in every unbeliever! However, Paul tells us that all unbelievers, from the greatest to the least, are ungrateful to God, and have robbed him of the honour that is his due. Hence, they are guilty of sacrilege, because they have removed all that belongs to him. Thus, he gives them the wages that they have deserved, owing to the fact that the seeds of all sin lie in man's nature.

Nevertheless, although men are stuffed full of as many vices as we can imagine, God still holds the reins and does not allow men complete abandonment to wickedness. Because of this, many unbelievers are not controlled by their natural senses, indeed, are chaste and modest; they do not steal another's goods, but are sober and upright. In short, they have many virtues according to the opinion of the world. Why, then, are they condemned along with fornicators, thieves and drunkards? It is because they do not have these virtues out of a desire to obey God, for there is no integrity in their hearts. They are held back out of shame, or for some other reason unknown to us. In this way, God spares the human race, so that things are not in a state of confusion, and men are not totally brutish. God is

in control of these unbelievers to the end that all their virtues, whatever they may be, remain vices. Therefore, at the first opportunity, when God releases their reins, they devote themselves to all kinds of evil. We might say that believers could just as easily become debauched. Indeed, but God has promised to strengthen them to persevere. Also, there is a great difference between the children of God, who are led by his Holy Spirit, and unbelievers, who are still carnal. The children of God aim and intend to dedicate themselves to him and to be truly purified by his grace. The others walk aimlessly, and if they are good, they scarcely know why! They will call it 'virtue', but they do not have God in mind because they are far from him. This is what we need to remember from this passage.

On the other hand, Paul says that 'the fruit of the Spirit is joy, peace, gentleness, kindness, patience', and suchlike things. It is as if he is saying that in view of our great perversity and the fact that we are full of evil and corruption, there is enough here to exercise us to ensure that we will not be idle for the rest of our lives! The battle against our sin is sufficient to occupy us day and night. Yet, we are also commanded to be kind and good-natured, to live sober and chaste lives, and to keep ourselves from being polluted. We are to dedicate ourselves as a sacrifice to God, and to abstain from all that would cause harm. Instead of seeking self-advancement, we are to do all that we possibly can to help and comfort those who need us. When we see that all this is expected of us, we ask, is it possible to achieve this? Not at all; in fact, we need to be transported up to heaven in order to approach God. The holiness that God requires in the law, and all the good works that he demands of us are because he is seeking a union between ourselves and him. But where are the wings to fly so high? For we can neither be chaste, nor benign, nor kind, nor temperate, nor sober, unless we renounce the world and ourselves, and discard all that we are by nature. However, this is beyond our faculties. Therefore, there is much here that could frighten us away.

Hence, Paul concludes by saying that 'against such there is no law'. In other words, if we are truly led by the Spirit of God, we are no longer under the law. Here, Paul encourages all believers, who will feel their own weakness until they leave their mortal bodies behind. God still supports them, and their service is acceptable to him, even though they are not completely renewed to the point of perfection. Therefore, they are to persevere; otherwise, they will be troubled and fall into despair. Paul, therefore, exhorts us to be constant here, telling us that if we are led by the Spirit of God, we will no longer be subject to the law.

However, at the same time, he is indirectly mocking those with whom he has a quarrel, as we saw this morning, for they advertised their virtues with great fanfares! It is so in the Papacy today, where to speak of holiness and the service of God is to speak of nothing more than good deeds and keeping many ceremonies. In other words, they are concerned with trivial nonsense. A Papist will dabble in this and that—he will bow to one statue, and then move on to the next. Bigots will light their candles, apply the holy water several times, make the sign of the cross repeatedly here, there and everywhere, and be sure to keep fast days. They weigh themselves down with all these things in order to redeem themselves, through Masses, or other abominations. This is how God is served and

honoured! For the Papists, perfection consists in that which is nothing short of a lie; the candles must be attractive, the organs must sound good, there must be many parades, the statues must be well gilded, they must prepare fragrances and be appeased by all kinds of other follies. This is tomfoolery, indeed, abomination, though they may consider it to be highly virtuous.

As for us, we say that the service of God is spiritual, and that he does not regard that which is seen by men (*John* 4:23-24). God seeks an upright integrity and sincerity of heart, as it says in the fifth chapter of Jeremiah (verse three). However, on the contrary, men persuade themselves that they can satisfy God in their own way and as they please, and thus they transfigure him and imagine that he is absolutely the same as themselves, and will, therefore, agree with their ideas. This should not surprise us, for although they say that they have been taught the law, they never study it and do not really know what it contains. Let us learn, therefore, that if we want to devote ourselves to serving God, we are not to do whatever seems right to us, for our own ideas, as we call them, are simply the deceptions of Satan. We are to give heed to that which God has commanded, and occupy ourselves with the things that he has ordained. Let us make these our study, that we might render him obedience.

We must take good note of the passage that is set before us here, because however hard we strive to observe our own inventions, it does not mean that God will accept any of them. We are following our nature, which is corrupt. What, then, does God want us to do? What does he ask of us? In the first place, that we renounce all perversity, hatred, rancour; all dissensions, deceit, all that causes harm, blasphemies, idolatry, cruelty, violence, treachery, envy and enmity. Thus, we must be good soldiers if we wish to devote ourselves to serving God, fighting against the works of the flesh, rather than against the works that are visible, and which the world either condemns or approves. Our fight is against the hidden lusts. May we be cleansed of this filth, which is stagnating within our hearts. May we apply all our efforts to this end; not that we can achieve this ourselves, but we must be ready to pray to God, and to examine ourselves morning and night. Once we have recognised our sins, may we be moved to tremble and ask for help from the right source. We must ask that God would remedy the evil with which we are stricken. If, therefore, we increasingly strive to live a happy life, to be good-natured, to be patient in adversity, to suffer insults and injuries without seeking vengeance — if, I say, we are like this, we will have a lot to occupy us, and can never be idle.

Let us leave the Papists to get on with their fooling around with God. Why do they fret themselves so much? Because they have never known how God wishes to be served and honoured. According to them, his ordinances are nothing compared to their foolish inventions. Let me give you an example. A man works honestly in order to make a living; though he only has brown bread to his heart's content, he still calls upon God in the morning and praises him in the evening. If he has children, he denies himself as much as possible in order to feed and clothe them. If God sends afflictions to his household, he bears them patiently. If he practises some kind of handicraft, or some other trade, he will refrain from cheating on his neighbours. He would prefer to die rather than to wrong anyone. This man, who lives first and foremost an honest life, will not be arrogant

enough to seek self-advancement without restraint. He will not be given over to intemperate habits. He will be modest in his eating and drinking, patient in all adversities. What kind of man is this according to the Papists? 'Oh, he's a secular man; in other words, he is a man of the world.' This is how much they value the pure service of God. We know that the principal service that God requires of us is that we devote ourselves entirely to him; this means that we will glorify him in affliction as well as in prosperity, and that we will follow the vocation we have when we are called, without pride, ambition or envy. God takes delight in this, but according to the definition of the Papists, those who live in this way are worldly!

Where are the Papistical 'angels' then? Within cloisters! When these wicked hypocrites have stuffed themselves full, and gorged themselves with good fare, they do not know what to do with themselves except to gamble or pursue other evils. (For we know that all the convents of the Papacy are full-blown brothels, and would to God that they were only brothels — for they commit such gross and shocking acts there that our hair would stand on end to hear about them!) In other words, their lifestyle would horrify us, and yet these are angels compared to the poor folk who live as we described earlier. Why is this? Because they sing matins devoutly, they sing Mass and separate themselves from the rest of the world. They do not engage in digging earth, nor do they get involved with sewing or tailoring, or anything else. Theirs is a contemplative life, and they are in a state of perfection. Can you not see how the world has been deceived? Such people, who make God into little statues, well deserve the pit for devising such absurd errors.

As for ourselves, let us be aware that our God is Spirit, and that he wants to be served spiritually, as he tells us in his Word. At the same time, let us be wary of becoming trapped in the foolish notions which bewitch these wretches; let us, instead, realise that God speaks with us so that we might have recourse to him in all holiness, righteousness and uprightness. Let us measure our lives against the law and not against our own opinions or those of the world. Let us be concerned with what God commands and forbids, since we have to give account to him, and knowing that we have no other judge than God himself. May we exercise ourselves in all these things, believing that if we do so, we will not be labouring in vain. Leave the Papists to break their legs and their necks, all the while unsure of what they are doing, yet vexing God and provoking him more and more. In order that we do not strive in vain, or wander about here and there following this or that opinion without a fixed destination, let us exercise ourselves in the things that Paul teaches us in this passage. Subsequently, we will not be condemned for occupying ourselves with meaningless things which God disapproves of, detests, and declares to be frivolous.

Now let us fall down before the majesty of our great God, acknowledging our sins, and praying that he would make us increasingly conscious of them, so that we cast ourselves down low. Having condemned ourselves, let us have recourse to him, knowing that he is always willing to help those who are starved of his grace, and who desire it in sincerity. Since he has given us to the Lord Jesus Christ, and views his conduct as if it were ours, may he pour out the treasures and the gifts of his Holy Spirit that we may partake of them. May he increase his grace in us, and may we be so well armed that we achieve the victory

in all our combat with Satan, the world, and our own flesh. May he show this grace not only to us, but to all peoples and nations on earth, etc.

## The Word our Only Rule

by John Calvin

*Unto the pure all things are pure; but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him: being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.*

### Titus 1:15-16

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St. Paul hath shown us that we must be ruled by the Word of God, and hold the commandments of men as vain and foolish; for holiness and perfection of life belongeth not to them. He condemneth some of their commandments, as when they forbid certain meats, and will not suffer us to use that liberty which God giveth the faithful. Those who troubled the church in St. Paul's time, by setting forth such traditions, used the commandments of the law as a shield. These were but men's inventions: because the temple was to be abolished at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those in the church of Christ, who hold this superstition, to have certain meats forbidden, have not the authority of God, for it was against His mind and purpose that the Christian should be subject to such ceremonies.

To be short, St. Paul informs us in this place that in these days we have liberty to eat of all kinds of meat without exception. As for the health of the body, that is not here spoken of; but the matter here set forth is that men shall not set themselves up as masters, to make laws for us contrary to the Word of God. Seeing it is so, that God putteth no difference between meats, let us so use them; and never inquire what men like, or what they think good. Notwithstanding, we must use the benefits that God hath granted us, soberly and moderately. We must remember that God hath made meats for us, not that we should fill ourselves like swine, but that we should use them for the sustenance of life: therefore, let us content ourselves with this measure, which God hath shown us by His Word.

If we have not such a store of nourishment as we would wish, let us bear our poverty patiently, and practise the doctrine of St. Paul; and know as well how to bear poverty as riches. If our Lord give us more than we could have wished for, yet must we bridle our appetites. On the other side, if it please Him to cut off our morsel, and feed us but poorly, we must be content with it, and pray Him to give us patience when we have not what our appetites crave. To be short, we must have recourse to what is said in Romans 13: "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." Let us content ourselves to have what we need, and that which God knoweth to be proper for us; thus shall all things be clean to us, if we be thus cleansed.



Yet it is true that although we were ever so unclean, the meats which God hath made are good; but the matter we have to consider is the use of them. When St. Paul saith *all things are clean.*, he meaneth not that they are so of themselves, but as relateth to those that receive them; as we have noticed before, where he saith to Timothy, all things are sanctified to us by faith and giving of thanks. God hath filled the world with such abundance that we may marvel to see what a fatherly care He hath over us: for to what end or purpose are all the riches here on earth, only to show how liberal He is toward man!

If we know not that He is our Father, and acteth the part of a nurse toward us, if we receive not at His hand that which He giveth us, insomuch that when we eat, we are convinced that it is God that nourisheth us, He cannot be glorified as He deserveth; neither can we eat one morsel of bread without committing sacrilege; for which we must give an account. That we may lawfully enjoy these benefits, which have been bestowed upon us, we must be resolved upon this point (as I said before), that it is God that nourisheth and feedeth us.

This is the cleanness spoken of here by the apostle; when he saith, all things are clean, especially when we have such an uprightness in us that we despise not the benefits bestowed upon another, but crave our daily bread at the hand of God, being persuaded that we have no right to it, only to receive it as the mercy of God. Now let us see from whence this cleanness cometh. We shall not find it in ourselves, for it is given us by faith. St. Peter saith, the hearts of the old fathers were cleansed by this means; to wit, when God gave them *faith* (Acts 15).

It is true that he here hath regard to the everlasting salvation; because we were utterly unclean until God made Himself known to us in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; who, being made our Redeemer, brought the price and ransom of our souls. But this doctrine may, and ought to be applied to what concerneth this present life; for until we know that, being adopted in Jesus Christ, we are God's children, and consequently that the inheritance of this world is ours, if we touch one morsel of meat, we are thieves; for we are deprived of, and banished from all the blessings that God made, by reason of Adam's sin until we get possession of them in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, it is faith that must cleanse us. Then will all meats be clean to us: that is, we may use them freely without wavering. If men enjoin spiritual laws upon us, we need not observe them, being assured that such obedience cannot please God, for in so doing, we set up rulers to govern us, making them equal with God, who reserveth all power to Himself. Thus, the government of the soul must be kept safe and sound in the hands of God. Therefore, if we allow so much superiority to men that we suffer them to inwrap our souls with their own bands, we so much lessen and diminish the power and empire that God hath over us.

And thus the humbleness that we might have in obeying the traditions of men would be worse than all the rebellion in the world; because it is robbing God of His honor, and giving it, as a spoil, to mortal men. St. Paul speaketh of the superstition of some of the

Jews, who would have men still observe the shadows and figures of the law; but the Holy Ghost hath pronounced a sentence which must be observed to the end of the world: that God hath not bound us at this day to such a burden as was borne by the old fathers; but hath cut off that part which He had commanded, relative to the abstaining from meats; for it was a law but for a season.

Seeing God hath thus set us at liberty, what rashness it is for worms of the earth to make new laws; as though God had not been wise enough. When we allege this to the papists, they answer that St. Paul spake of the Jews, and of meats that were forbidden by the law. This is true, but let us see whether this answer be to any purpose, or worth receiving. St. Paul not only saith that it is lawful for us to use that which was forbidden, but he speaketh in general terms, saying, *all things are clean*. Thus we see that God hath here given us liberty, concerning the use of meats; so that He will not hold us in subjection, as were the old fathers.

Therefore, seeing God hath abrogated that law which was made by Him, and will not have it in force any longer, what shall we think when we see men inventing traditions of their own; and not content themselves with what God hath shown them? In the first place, they still endeavor to hold the church of Christ under the restrictions of the Old Testament. But God will have us governed as men of years and discretion, which have no need of instruction suitable for children. They set up man's devices, and say we must keep them under pain of deadly sin; whereas God will not have His own law to be observed among us at this day, relative to types and shadows, because it was all ended at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Shall it then be lawful to observe what men have framed in their own wisdom? Do we not see that it is a matter which goeth directly against God? St. Paul setteth himself against such deceivers: against such as would bind Christians to abstain from meats as God had commanded in His law. If a man say, it is but a small matter to abstain from flesh on Friday, or in Lent, let us consider whether it be a small matter to corrupt and bastardize the service of God! For surely those that go about to set forth and establish the tradition of men, set themselves against that which God hath appointed in His Word, and thus commit sacrilege.

Seeing God will be served with obedience, let us beware and keep ourselves within those bounds which God hath set; and not suffer men to add any thing to it of their own. There is something worse in it than all this: for they think it a service that deserveth something from God to abstain from eating flesh. They think it a great holiness: and thus the service of God, which should be spiritual, is banished, as it were, while men busy themselves about foolish trifles. As the common saying is, they leave the apple for the paring.

We must be faithful, and stand fast in our liberty; we must follow the rule which is given us in the Word of God, and not suffer our souls to be brought into slavery by new laws, forged by men. For it is a hellish tyranny, which lesseneth God's authority and mixeth the truth of the gospel with figures of the law; and perverteth and corrupteth the true service of God, which ought to be spiritual. Therefore, let us consider how precious a privilege it

is to give thanks to God with quietness of conscience, being assured it is His will and pleasure that we should enjoy His blessings: and that we may do so, let us not entangle ourselves with the superstitions of men, but be content with what is contained in the pure simplicity of the gospel. Then, as we have shown concerning the first part of our text, *unto them that are pure, all things will be pure.*

When we have received the Lord Jesus Christ, we know that we shall be cleansed from our filthiness and blemishes; for by His grace we are made partakers of God's benefits, and are taken for His children, although there be nothing but vanity in us. "But unto them that are defiled and unbelieving, is nothing pure." By this St. Paul meaneth that whatsoever proceedeth from those that are defiled and unbelieving is not acceptable to God but is full of infection. While they are unbelieving, they are foul and unclean; and while they have such filthiness in them, whatsoever they touch becomes polluted with their infamy.

Therefore, all the rules and laws they can make shall be nothing but vanity: for God disliketh whatsoever they do; yea, He utterly abhorreth it. Although men may torment themselves with ceremonies and outward performances, yet all these things are vain until they become upright in heart: for in this the true service of God commenceth. So long then as we are faithless, we are filthy before God. These things ought to be evident to us; but hypocrisy is so rooted within us that we are apt to neglect them. It will readily be confessed that we cannot please God by serving Him until our hearts be rid of wickedness.

God strove with the people of old time about the same doctrine; as we see especially in the second chapter of the prophet Haggai: where he asketh the priests, if a man touch a holy thing, whether he shall be made holy or not, the priests answered, no. On the contrary, if an unclean man touch a thing, whether it shall become unclean or no, the priests answered and said, it shall be unclean: so is this nation, saith the Lord, and so are the works of their hands. Now let us notice what is contained in the figures and shadows of the law. If an unclean man had handled any thing, it became unclean, and therefore must be cleansed. Our Lord saith, consider what ye be: for ye have nothing but uncleanness and filth; yet notwithstanding, ye would content Me with your sacrifices, offerings, and such like things. But He saith, as long as your minds are entangled with wicked lusts, as long as some of ye are whoremongers, adulterers, blasphemers, and perjurers, as long as ye are full of guile, cruelty, and spitefulness, your lives are utterly lawless, and full of all uncleanness; I cannot abide it, how fair soever it may seem before men.

We see then that all the services we can perform, until we are truly reformed in our hearts, are but mockeries; and God condemneth and rejecteth every whit of them. But who believeth these things to be so? When the wicked, who are taken in their wickedness, feel any remorse of conscience, they will endeavor by some means or other to compound with God by performing some ceremonies: they think it sufficient to satisfy the minds of men, believing that God ought likewise to be satisfied therewith. This is a custom which has prevailed in all ages.

It is not only in this text of the prophet Haggai that God rebuketh men for their hypocrisy, and for thinking that they may obtain His favor with trifles, but it was a continual strife which all the prophets had with the Jews. It is said in Isa. 1:13, 14, 15: "Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new-moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with: it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting, your new-moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood."

And again it is said, "Though ye offer me burnt offerings, and your meat-offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts" (Amos 5 :22). God here showeth us that the things which He Himself had commanded were filthy and unclean when they were observed and abused by hypocrites. Therefore, let us learn that when men serve God after their own fashion, they beguile and deceive themselves. It is said in another text of Isaiah, "Who hath required these things at your hands ?" Wherein it is made manifest that if we will have God approve our works, they must be according to His divine Word.

Thus we see what St. Paul's meaning is when he saith there is nothing *clean* to them that are *unclean*. And why? *For even their mind and conscience are defiled*. By this he showeth (as I before observed) that until such times as we have learned to serve God aright, in a proper manner, we shall do no good at all by our own works; although we may flatter ourselves that they are of great importance, and by this means rock ourselves to sleep.

Let us now see what the traditions of *poper*y are. The chief end of them are to make an agreement with God, by their works of supererogation, as they term them; that is, their surplus works; which are, when they do more than God commandeth them. According to their own notions, they discharge their duty towards Him and content Him with such payment as they render by their works, and thereof make their account. When they have fasted their *saints* evenings, when they have refrained from eating flesh upon Fridays, when they have attended mass devoutly, when they have taken holy water, they think that God ought not to demand any thing more of them and that there is nothing amiss in them.

But in the mean time, they cease not to indulge themselves in lewdness, whoredom, perjury, blasphemy, &c.: every one of them giving himself to those vices; yet notwithstanding, they think God ought to hold Himself well paid with the works they offer Him; as for example, when they have taken holy water, worshipped images, rambled from altar to altar, and other like things, they imagine that they have made sufficient payment and recompense for their sins. But we hear the doctrine of the Holy Ghost concerning such as are defiled; which is, there is nothing pure nor clean in all their doings.

But we will put 'the case, by supposing that all the abominations of the papists were not evil in their own nature; yet notwithstanding, according to this doctrine of St. Paul, there can be nothing but uncleanness in them, for they themselves are sinful and unclean. The

holiness of these men consists in gewgaws and trifles. They endeavor to serve God in the things that He doth not require, and at the same time leave undone things that He hath commanded in His law.

It has been the case in all ages that men have despised God's law for the sake of their own traditions. Our Lord Jesus Christ upbraided the Pharisees, when He saith, "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition" (Mat. 15:3). Thus it was in former times, in the days of the prophets. Isaiah crieth out, "Wherefore the Lord said, forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work and wonder; for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid" (chap. 25:13). While men occupy themselves about traditions, they pass over the things that God hath commanded in His Word.

This it is that caused Isaiah to cry out against such as set forth men's traditions; telling them plainly that God threatened to blind the wisest of them, because they turned away from the pure rule of His Word to follow their own foolish inventions. St. Paul likewise alludes to the same thing, when he saith they have no fear of God before their eyes. Let us not deceive ourselves; for we know that God requireth men to live uprightly, and to abstain from all violence, cruelty, malice, and deceit; that none of these things should appear in our life. But those that have no fear of God before their eyes, it is apparent that they are out of order, and that there is nothing but uncleanness in their whole life.

If we wish to know how our life should be regulated, let us examine the contents of the Word of God; for we cannot be sanctified by outward show and pomp, although they are so highly esteemed among men. We must call upon God in sincerity, and put our whole trust in Him; we must give up pride and presumption, and resort to Him with true lowliness of mind that we be not given to fleshly affections. We must endeavor to hold ourselves in awe, under subjection to God, and flee from gluttony, whoredom, excess, robbery, blasphemy, and other evils. Thus we see what God would have us do, in order to have our life well regulated.

When men would justify themselves by outward works, it is like covering a heap of filth with a clean linen cloth. Therefore, let us put away the filthiness that is hidden in our hearts; I say, let us drive the evil from us, and then the Lord will accept of our life: thus we may see wherein consists the true knowledge of God! When we understand this aright, it will lead us to live in obedience to His will. Men have not become so beastly, as to have no understanding that there is a God who created them. But this knowledge, if they do not submit to His requirements, serves as a condemnation to them: because their eyes are blindfolded by Satan; insomuch, that although the gospel may be preached to them, they do not understand it; in this situation we see many at the present day. How many there are in the world that have been taught by the doctrine of the gospel, and yet continue in brutish ignorance!

This happeneth because Satan hath so prepossessed the minds of men with wicked affections that although the light may shine ever so bright, they still remain blind, and see nothing at all. Let us learn, then, that the true knowledge of God is of such a nature that it showeth itself, and yieldeth fruit through our whole life. Therefore to know God, as St. Paul said to the Corinthians, we must be transformed into His image. For if we pretend to know Him, and in the meantime our life be loose and wicked, it needeth no witness to prove us liars; our own life beareth sufficient record that we are mockers and falsifiers, and that we abuse the name of God.

St. Paul saith in another place, if ye know Jesus Christ, ye must put off the old man: as if he should say, we cannot declare that we know Jesus Christ, only by acknowledging Him for our head, and by His receiving us as His members; which cannot be done until we have cast off the old man, and become new creatures. The world hath at all times abused God's name wickedly, as it doth still at this day; therefore, let us have an eye to the true knowledge of the Word of God, whereof St. Paul speaketh.

Finally, let us not put our own works into the balance, and say they are good, and that we think well of them; but let us understand that the good works are those which God hath commanded in His law and that all we can do beside these, are nothing. Therefore, let us learn to shape our lives according to what God hath commanded: to put our trust in Him, to call upon Him, to give Him thanks, to bear patiently whatsoever it pleaseth Him to send us; to deal uprightly with our neighbors, and to live honestly before all men. These are the works which God requireth at our hands.

If we were not so perverse in our nature, there would be none of us but what might discern these things: even children would have skill enough to discern them. The works which God hath not commanded are but foolishness and an abomination: whereby God's pure service is marred. If we wish to know what constitutes the good works spoken of by St. Paul, we must lay aside all the inventions of men, and simply follow the instructions contained in the Word of God; for we have no other rule than that which is given by Him; which is such as He will accept, when we yield up our accounts at the last day, when He alone shall be the judge of all mankind.

Now let us fall down before the face of our good God, acknowledging our faults, praying Him to make us perceive them more clearly: and to give us such trust in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that we may come to Him and be assured of the forgiveness of our sins; and that He will make us partakers of sound faith, whereby all our filthiness may be washed away.

## We All Stand Condemned by the Law

by John Calvin

*But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.*

**Gal. 3:11-12**

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We have seen that men must be worse than insane (whatever they say) if they do not come to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. For if they cling to the law, it will only bring damnation, as I have shown; this is borne out sufficiently by our own experience. Indeed, when Paul in his Epistle to the Romans seeks to prove that men are greatly deceived if they trust in their own merits, he points out that the law can only bring God's wrath and vengeance upon us (Rom. 4:15). For although we already stand condemned (even before God has opened his mouth in judgment against us), our evil is exposed by the law because it is written that if we transgress in just one area, we are God's enemies and have provoked his wrath against us. What can be gained by protesting when the sentence is given from the heavenly throne? There is no room for appeal. Thus, to have a proper understanding of the gospel, we must recognise that we need to lean entirely upon the Lord Jesus Christ and his mercy alone as our only hope of salvation. We all need to examine our own lives, for if we do so honestly and without hypocrisy, our spiritual standing will be abundantly clear. The Papists will not agree that faith alone can render us acceptable to God. This is because they have never been willing to place themselves before the judgment seat of God, but, instead, prefer to dwell in the darkness, as it were. Therefore, it should not surprise us if they grant themselves complete liberty to do as they please. However, the way of true, pure religion is for each of us to scrutinise our own lives. Surely, even if we were carefully to examine just one minute of our lives, we would find ourselves worthy of eternal death. Indeed, each one of us would discover ourselves to be sinners, not in just one area but a hundred thousand; not due to some one fault but to countless millions. Now if even we ourselves acknowledge that we are full of so many blemishes, surely God is aware of many more than we could ever perceive, because he sees more deeply than we can, as John writes in his epistle (*1 John 3:20*). Thus, the case is settled. The verdict is that no one can be justified by the law; justification is through faith alone.

The apostle continues his discourse by adding another argument, which is this: if we seek our righteousness in the law, it will be clean contrary to the righteousness obtained by the elect children of God through faith. 'What is justification by the law?', Paul asks. He answers: 'The man that doeth them shall live in them.' In other words, whoever obeys God and keeps his commandments will have salvation as his reward. This is a wonderful promise, but what good will it do us? If we were to try to do perfectly all that God commands, we would find God revealing just what a grievous state of condemnation we are in, by bringing our failure to the forefront. What sort of salvation would it be, if each

of us had to achieve it ourselves and deserve it? At first, when we hear that God is willing to reward with the gift of eternal life all who have honoured and served him by keeping his law, it seems like a wonderful prospect (that is, before we ponder its implications!). 'What!', we say, 'Here is God indebted to us, assuring us that we will inherit paradise if only we serve him and do his will.' But if we pause to place our lives alongside his commandments, we will find that although it appears that God is willing to be so kind and indulgent towards us as to reward us if we serve him and keep his law, the purpose of this is to plunge us deeper into the pit in which we already find ourselves by nature. What hope, therefore, can we have? The solution is set forth here by the apostle in the words of Habakkuk: 'The just shall live by faith' (*Hab. 2:4*). Let us, therefore, turn away from the promise which the law gives us, for it is of no value to us, and accept the free grace of our God, who is stretching out his arms to receive us, that is, if we first rid ourselves of all pride. This is, in effect, what Paul means here.

This argument discloses two opposites. Imagine this: one person claims that fire is a source of heat, and another arrives and rather obstinately argues the opposite. We might say to him, 'Can ice or frost create heat, then? Surely, they are opposite elements, and completely incompatible with one another!' Or imagine a quarrel about whether the heat of the sun is necessary to this life of ours or not. Well, what would happen if there were no sun in the world? We would all choke on filthy air, which is only purged by the shining of the sun. Therefore, as there are opposing forces in the realm of nature, so the apostle says that we cannot be justified by both the law and the grace of God! If we desire to be in his favour, it can only be through his own goodness and love for us, which he has revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and not through any dignity we possess in and of ourselves. But in order properly to understand this teaching, we need to pay careful attention to Paul's words here. He says that the righteousness of the law is achieved by observing whatever God has commanded us. This proves that keeping the law is quite sufficient to save us, for God has clearly declared, 'This is how you are to live. This is how you are to order your lives', and he has given us the ten commandments contained in the law. This law is an infallible rule for our lives, and we are not to seek for perfect righteousness anywhere else. This is why we are so opposed to the Papists, who think they are serving God so faithfully by devising their own commandments. God demands obedience. Let us be clear that the law contains the perfection of holiness in its teachings; it is not lawful to add anything to it. Man's struggle to introduce devotions which he has conceived in his own imagination is vanity.

However, the fact that the teachings of the law are sufficient to show us the nature of true righteousness, is not the end of the matter. We must move on to the next point, which is, 'Can we do what God has commanded?' We saw this morning that we fall very far short and, thus, the promise for all who keep the law is not applicable to us. The Papists are greatly deceived in this matter: they still hold to the lie that God has not commanded anything that we cannot accomplish ourselves. Yet, Paul says the very opposite. They claim in support of their error that God must, therefore, be cheating us, because he clearly says, 'The man that doeth them shall live in them.' But it is very easy to resolve this objection. Yes, we would, indeed, be most confused over the meaning of this verse, had not God granted us a remedy to this problem; otherwise, it would mean that no one could



live! As I have said, it would seem, superficially, that we have everything to gain, because God tells us that we can be acceptable in his sight by keeping the law, and he promises us a crown of glory; in fact, it would seem that we just cannot lose! But when all is taken into account, we come back to this same conclusion: no man can obtain eternal life in this way, no matter how much he desires it. Why? Because no man observes the law perfectly. It is not written that 'The man who keeps part of the law will live', but all of it. What, then, is justification by the law? A perfect obedience to it which does not fall short in any way. Such obedience cannot be found on earth: it therefore follows that we are all excluded from the promise which is given in the law.

This, however, does not mean that God is cheating us. He makes such a promise because men deceive themselves through pride and boast of their own merits; he therefore wishes to convict us of our guilt and of our inability to fulfil his demands. What would become of us if there were no law, nor such a promise as this? Think of the heathen — they have always sought to be pleasing to God through their own virtuous conduct. Yet, at the same time, they have an awareness of their shortcomings. This is why they retain the use of sacrifices. Of course, they do not understand the true purpose of sacrifice; when the heathen sacrifice something, they confess that they are in debt to God and need to find acceptance with him. Much like the Papists today, they amass many little rituals in their service to help them find reconciliation with God. Pagans throughout the ages have observed the kind of practices that the Papists use today. Whatever they may say, both groups think they can make themselves worthy of God's salvation. Now, here the Lord is saying that we are wrong if we think he will not reward us, for out of his free goodness he promises to count us righteous if we observe his law. The question is: do we keep it? No; we fall very far short, in fact so short of it that we are made to feel desperate. God has good reason for making such a promise, even though it cannot be realised in our lives. Its intention is to correct the pride which fills us to the point of bursting, and which requires a drastic remedy. And what is this remedy? Well, God knows that we begin to murmur if he does not treat us according to our desires, and therefore he is willing to pour out his grace and blessings upon us in this world, in this passing life. Furthermore, he says he is willing to reserve an immortal inheritance for us, upon condition that we serve him. If we submit to him and keep a good account with him, he says he will reward us both in this life and the next. In saying all these things, he intends that all flesh should remain silent before him, confessing that if God were to punish them, or send them many afflictions and trials, they would be well deserved. For those of us who have properly examined their lives will confess without hypocrisy that we are not even worthy to eat the bread that sustains our physical lives on this earth. How, then, could we possibly merit paradise and the glory that belongs to God alone? How could we reach this by our own virtues? Thus, men's boasting tongues are silenced, even through this most generous and bountiful promise of the Lord.

At this point, we ought to note that this same promise is free in and of itself, but that we fall so far short of its standards that it will do us no good whatsoever until we relinquish our claim upon it. This would seem rather unclear to us, if I did not expound it in more detail. The heathen, as I mentioned earlier, think that God will reward them if they live honest and blameless lives in the sight of men. But this is foolishness, even madness, for

how could God possibly be indebted to us? (This is made clear in the seventeenth chapter of Luke — *Luke 17:10*.) Even if we could do better than the angels in heaven, would it mean that God would be bound to repay us? Not at all! For we belong to him; we are his possession. Our Lord Jesus Christ uses the picture of a servant; not speaking of a servant as we know it today, but, rather of a slave like the ones they used to have in those days. Even if a servant were killed a hundred times over for his master, as it were, living or dying, he is at his master's disposal. Our Lord Jesus Christ is saying to us, 'You are no more than poor mortal creatures yourselves, yet if any of you has a slave, he treats him like an ass or an ox. After working and labouring hard all day long, he returns home in the evening, but the master will not even let him sit down at his table! Even so, a servant has only done his duty and only that which he was hired to do.' Has God less authority than mortals? Even though you may be his, and are seeking to walk in obedience to his will, it can never be said that he is in any sense beholden to you. Thus (as I have already proved), although the Lord declared in the law, 'The man that doeth them shall live in them', it is important to consider what moved him to make such a bountiful promise of eternal life. It was not because he was indebted to us! If we kill ourselves, as it were, a hundred times in his service, this cannot make him obliged to pay us any wages whatever. But, in his mercy, he draws near and says, 'Although I owe you nothing, and although you can bring me nothing worthy of a reward (for you are bound to me in all points and in every respect), yet I desire to recompense you for your labour. Therefore, do your duty, do whatsoever I command and then you will not be disappointed but will receive your reward.' This is what we need to remember, and we will hear more of this shortly.

As for the Papists, they accept part of this, but not all. Most of them (I refer to those who are the Pope's closest allies) know nothing of these principles. Yet there are some who will grant that the divine promise of the law (to give life to all who have served God) does not teach that the works themselves have any merit in terms of eternal life, but only because of the promise. However, given that God has bound himself in this way, they nevertheless hope to deserve some reward at his hand. Why do they think in this way? Well, they say that, otherwise, his promise ('The man that doeth them shall live in them') was made in vain. However, these wretches do not understand what I have been expounding, namely, that God's promise does not mean that men can merit salvation by their own works, but was rather intended to convict their souls and to lead them to true humility. This they shun, through their own foolish pride and ambition.

Now we can see the purpose behind Paul's words — if we claim to be justified through the law or through our own works, we must not fail in the least duty or omit to do anything, however small. For it is written, 'The man that doeth them shall live in them'. Now, what man is so proud that he would dare boast he has fully discharged his duty towards God? None but a hypocrite who has been overtaken by devilish pride, or a profane person who despises God and who has never truly repented, whose conscience is either asleep or bewitched. Only such a person can deceive himself into thinking he deserves anything. Thus, since the righteousness of the law is unattainable, and is something from which we are utterly barred, we need to find another righteousness. Put another way, we need God to accept us through his free grace. Instead of God receiving anything from us, we need the obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ to be imputed to us,

though we do not deserve it. Thus, we are delivered by God from our state of condemnation by nature through the abolition of all our offences and iniquities. In effect, this is what is meant in another passage, where Paul argues so admirably about this very doctrine (*Rom.* 3:19). In this place, too, the point at issue is the righteousness of the law. It is a wonder to me that the Papists have gone so far astray as to ignore such a clear warning as Paul makes in the latter text. They still protest thus: 'What!', they say, 'You are making a mockery of God! He has promised a reward for good works. Since he has promised on so many occasions to recompense us, how can he not carry it out? Otherwise, men might accuse him of lying.' But Paul answers them thus: 'My friends, if we think God will accept us because we deserve his favour, let us examine the promise he made us. If an argument breaks out between two men over buying or selling or some such thing, they will say, "Let us examine the contract and what is contained within it." As soon as the document has been read, the case will become plain. One of them will say, "This article belongs to you, upon condition that you pay for it. If you do not pay, you can lay no claim to it." In the same way, with reference to the way of salvation, we must come to the original and chief contract that God made with us. Now, that contract is the law. Therefore, if men are seeking to be paid according to their service, they will find that this will banish them from everlasting life rather than enable them to obtain it. For God has declared that they have to perform all that he has commanded them, before they can inherit the salvation he has in store.' All that remains is to find out whether or not it is possible for any man to perform these commandments perfectly.

Well, as we have already discovered, no one fulfils these requirements satisfactorily; thus, the promise cannot apply to us in our natural state. However, this is not what the Papists believe. They hear the words, 'The man that doeth them shall live in them' and think the most important thing is to observe the law. It is enough for them that God has given his Word to reward them. Whilst it is true that God has indeed said this, he requires that we actually fulfil his demands. The Papists will then use the following passage, where Paul says, 'For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified' (*Rom.* 2:13). They will use such quotations, but are clearly blind to their meaning, for Paul is saying that we can only be justified if we obey all that is commanded. The Jews used to glory in the law that had been given to them, saying, 'The law tells us that we are the people of God.' But there was a condition attached to this. And who has fulfilled that condition? Have you? Not in the least! Thus, we cannot be justified by hearing the law, as Paul says. How foolish if each of us simply came to church to hear the message that was being declared here, and then went away again, gratifying our own lusts. Paul says we must observe what God commands us, yet, since no one can do this properly, we all stand condemned.

The Papists, however, fail to reach the same conclusion because they only cling to half the text: 'But the doers of the law shall be justified.' Yes, this is so if a person has kept the law, but first show me such a man. In the same Epistle to the Romans, Paul later declares that God's promise of eternal life to all who keep his law is of no value to us because we can never perform it adequately (*Rom.* 8:3). In fact, by nature we are completely hostile to God's righteous standards. Now that he has regenerated us by his Holy Spirit, we are entirely indebted to him; every good thing we possess we have

received from his hand, and he simply rewards his own gifts in us. Can we, therefore, speak of merit? No. Indeed, we must go further and say that even though our Lord deigns to crown our works when they are good in his sight, they can only be partly good, for there will always be enough sin mixed in with them to condemn us. Thus, we are stripped of all confidence in our own righteousness, because our works have insufficient worth in the eyes of God. If we were being judged by the text, 'The man that doeth them shall live in them', our works would be shown to be totally offensive to God. He would say, as it were, 'You are all dead, damned and lost. Why? Because none of you have done the things I asked you to do, whereas it was your duty to do so.' This is why we need to consider the second aspect to the solution I mentioned, which is 'living by faith'.

Paul, in the passage I referred to earlier (*Rom. 3:21-22*), does not quote the words of Habakkuk as he does in Romans chapter one and the seventeenth verse. But he says that the law points to the righteousness which is by faith. The righteousness of the law (that is, the God-given rule in the law which justifies us) is that we must obey and observe all his commandments. But the righteousness of faith speaks another language. It says that it is not for man to seek to win God's favour through the way he lives his life, and thus earn his reward or crown; rather, it is for man to rest entirely upon God's Word, allowing it to dwell in his heart and upon his lips. For if we believe in our hearts that the Lord Jesus Christ has died, and confess with our lips that he has risen again, we shall be counted righteous in God's sight (*Rom. 10:9*). Notice that Paul explains his meaning at some length here for us to comprehend why he separates the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of faith, showing us that they are incompatible and can no more be mixed together than fire and water. Not that there is any contradiction between the law and the gospel (as I have already made clear), for we know that they both proceed from the same God. But we must remember God's purposes, as we have said all along. By giving us the righteousness of the law, he intended to humble us. Next, we will come before him realising we are condemned; this we would never have done if he had not revealed to us our own poverty. When we read that God promises justification if we serve him aright, he is saying in effect, 'Poor creatures, what worth or value do you have in and of yourselves? Weigh up my commandments and consider what they involve, and then reflect upon how each of you have lived. This will make you feel as if you could drown in self-despair.' Yet, though God speaks in this vein, he also grants a remedy — 'Come', he says, 'to the teachings of the gospel'. And what are they? Paul quotes the expression of Habakkuk, from chapter two and the fourth verse: 'The just shall live by his faith'. And in this passage he explains it more clearly, as we have seen, stating that we need to resort wholly to the Lord Jesus Christ. For the 'Word' that should be in our hearts and upon our lips, bringing us to God, and opening the kingdom of heaven to us, is not a Word that makes us cleave to this world below. Nor does it lead us to believe that God will praise us for our merits, allowing us to be puffed up with pride. Not at all; rather, it makes us cling to the Lord Jesus Christ. The righteousness of faith that God grants us involves the following: understanding that our sins are blotted out through the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ; understanding also that through his resurrection we have obtained righteousness, and are now heirs of his heavenly kingdom (whereas before we were condemned to the pit of hell, which is the heritage that belongs to us and of which we are worthy by nature). We must also realise that in Jesus Christ, all that we lost in Adam is

restored to us. The curse which covered us is removed when God sets us free. This is the righteousness of faith, and indeed, when we examine the context of the verse Paul quotes from the prophet Habakkuk, we will see that it is to this very doctrine that the Holy Spirit is pointing.

Now, the prophet had spoken about the chastisements and judgments that God would send on the people; therefore, having examined the situation, we might well have concluded that all was lost. Then he says that the pride of the wicked will swell and increase, but that their feet are in a slippery place and they will stumble in the way. The more they seek to exalt themselves, the more grievous will be their fall. This is what the prophet pronounces upon the wicked. On the other hand, he says of the just that they shall 'live by faith'. Notice he says that the just shall live, implying that God's children will not find life here below. Even if they were to travel all over the world, and search high and low, they would soon realise that there is death and decay everywhere and in everything. However, though they do not enjoy this 'life' at the present time, they look forward to a life to come, and cherish it in their hearts and minds by faith. The prophet is seeking to draw the minds of God's elect away from both the world and themselves, so that they may cleave entirely to God, finding his grace alone sufficient for their salvation. Yet, Paul puts the case more briefly in our passage, because he was fully persuaded of the things I have expounded, and had already written of them — he always taught that faith leads us to find salvation in God alone. The law, though it may appear to be teaching something very different, actually shows us that there is no life in us at all, if we understand it aright. The law says, 'Work hard and do what you can to obtain paradise.' Why does it say this? Not to feed man's vain confidence in his own merits — certainly not! Rather, to prepare us to receive the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in humility. For (as I have said), although we are far away from God, we all like to think we are worthy of his acceptance. But our Lord will be avenged on such presumptuousness. He says to us, 'Let me see what you have done, draw near and we will begin the reckoning. Whichever of us owes anything to the other will have to pay it. I will not disappoint you; I have the reward in my hand. It is all ready. If you have done what I have commanded you, do not worry, you will be well paid for your labour. Therefore, set to work and let me observe how you will serve me.' In saying this, our Lord, as I have said, prepares and disposes us to know what we are by nature. When we have acknowledged our poverty, then we will come to him to supply what we lack. Thus, the law leads to faith, albeit by a surprising route!

Whatever we may think, there will always be the paradox of which Paul speaks here. That is to say, that a person cannot be justified by faith unless he has first recognised and acknowledged in complete sincerity that he is lost. For salvation must be based upon the knowledge that we deserve damnation. It might seem as if Paul has taken the prophet's words too far, if Habakkuk was simply speaking of the afflictions of this transitory life. The just 'shall live' could mean 'shall survive', even though God may afflict and torment him. He will not fall if he rests upon the promises of God. Paul, however, is not dealing with the question of God comforting us and delivering us from the calamities to which we are subject in this world; he is concerned with the question of our eternal salvation, which is of far greater importance than anything else in this fleeting life. It might appear,

therefore, as if he has misapplied the words of the prophet. But let us remember that the words themselves would have been uttered in vain if the thoughts of the prophet had gone no further than this world, for afflictions come upon all, upon good and bad alike. How, then, can we speak of living by faith, if we are constantly falling into the same trials that God has already delivered us from once, twice or three times before? If God has comforted me today in some affliction or other, and shown me his grace, tomorrow he may afflict me with another trial. What would my life be like if I had but this world alone to trust in? Therefore, to sum up, the prophet was saying that although believers may be miserable and may languish in this life, nevertheless, God blesses them in this world, and, furthermore, all the evil they endure here below shall turn to felicity. Why? Because they trust in their God. We ought to be aware, therefore, that there is a better inheritance than this, and we need to seek true, everlasting happiness — the kind that endures.

We must be careful to comment on the word ‘just’ here. For if Habakkuk had said, ‘Wretched sinners shall live by faith’, we would perhaps have imagined that his words were addressed to just a handful of people. Most will freely accept that poor sinners need to flee to God for refuge, but as for those of nobler virtues, surely they are exempt from what applies to the common people, God having exalted them to a higher degree? Surely it is their prerogative to be justified? Even today, though the Popish clergy (as they call them), with all their ceremonies, are filthy in God’s sight, and ought to be abhorred by both God and man, yet they presume, because of their monkish habit and all the rest of their nonsense, that God is greatly in their debt! These bigots, having done all their babbling, and trotting up and down from altar to altar, and from chapel to chapel on various pilgrimages, hope that God will remember all their works. They hope that all of this will be put towards the payment of their account, with a hundred thousand other things that they plan to present to God! This is why the Lord Jesus Christ said that poor wretched sinners, even harlots, would enter the kingdom of heaven sooner than all these foul toads who are puffed up with pride in their own merits (*Matt. 21:31*)! Although their lives are full of wicked abominations, yet in their hypocrisy they suppose that God is bound to reward them.

Now, to eliminate all opportunity of entertaining such thoughts, the prophet expressly says, ‘The just shall live by his faith.’ At first, the meaning of this verse might be obscure to us. Does it mean that in order to have righteousness we must first live by faith? If this is the case, those who do not live by faith cannot be righteous. But what is the justification spoken of in the gospel? It is this — God freely granting us the means by which we may have access to him. We can be acceptable to him in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, for we cannot obtain righteousness through the law. Thus, although a man may live by faith, he is not righteous in and of himself. The prophet, therefore, means that the just are saved by the free grace of God alone. It is as if he were saying, ‘Perhaps God will grant you grace to serve him acceptably, impressing upon your heart by his Holy Spirit true fear and a zeal to glorify him as he deserves. He may well enable you to struggle against the lusts of the flesh to a great extent, striving with the sin which is part of your nature. Yet for all this, you must still turn your back upon all that you have done if you are seeking to please God.’ Indeed, we must rest upon the Lord Jesus Christ alone. If even those who are righteous can only be justified through faith, who is there who will

dare to seek to be justified through merit? Only devils, wicked men and the enemies of God.

Thus, when the Papists boast today (as they do) about the purity of their works and meritorious deeds, they only prove that they do not know the meaning of true righteousness. They are flying in the face of both God and nature. They say they want to be righteous — what do they mean? They mean in themselves, through works of merit. But what does the prophet say? He does not say that the just shall live by their works, but that they will be saved by the grace of God alone. If the just renounce, as they ought, all trust in their own merit, it follows that those who think they can come before God in the strength of their own deeds and that he will be bound to reward them, are striking themselves off the register of the righteous. Thus, according to the statement uttered here by the prophet, the Papists are rejected by God if they continue in their errors. Paul quotes the words of David: ‘Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.’ He teaches us that the righteous are those who condemn themselves, feeling in the very depths of despair, until God, in his goodness, rescues them (*Rom.* 4:8; *Psa.* 32:1ff). When David said, ‘Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin’, he was not, at this stage of his life, a wicked or dissolute man, nor one who despised God or who had never examined his conscience to expose his sin! On the contrary, God had chosen him; he had anointed him through Samuel; he had made him one of the foremost prophets. His kingdom prefigured that of the Lord Jesus Christ. In short, God had so transformed him that he was now like an angel living amongst men. Yet, he confessed and acknowledged his sins, sorrowing and mourning over them, and was in a state of torment like that of hell itself. He remained thus tortured until God came and displayed his mercy, knowing no joy or peace until God granted him forgiveness. We, too, can only be happy if God overlooks all our deeds and blots out all our sins. This joy is ours if God is gracious to us, no longer considering what we are by nature — poor, condemned sinners — and accepting us, not as we are in our own persons, but for the sake of his only Son. Indeed, David reiterates this teaching in another place (*Psa.* 143:2): ‘Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.’

Let us, therefore, learn the following lesson: the more a man fears God, the more he will be ashamed of his sin. Consciousness of sin is not something that should last for a mere three or four months — we ought to detest our sins for the rest of our lives. After all, let us remember that the mouth of hell is open, ready to swallow us up unless God supplies the grace we need so desperately and plucks us out of the pit of death. This is why it is written that ‘the just shall live by faith’ — not as a doctrine that applies for three or four months only; nor is it written for those whose lives are less holy than others. God addresses these words even to the very noblest amongst us.

Now before we end, we need to comment upon the word ‘live’. It does not refer to a fixed length of time, say a day or three months. It speaks, instead, of a life lived by God’s grace every moment, in which we seek his presence and grace day by day to the end of our earthly lives. Although our lives are hidden in this world, as Paul says (*Col.* 3:3), and we see nothing but death in front of us, we need to rest entirely upon the promise of God. He has assured us of eternal life and this life is his to give — he will reserve it for us! He has

pledged it to us by sending the Lord Jesus Christ, who died and rose again for our sakes. Now we no longer need ask, 'Who will go up for us to heaven?'. Or, 'Who will descend into the depths?' Or, 'Who will go over the sea for us?'. 'The Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart' (*Deut.* 30:12; *Rom.* 10:6-8). We know that our Lord Jesus Christ descended into the deep; that is, he became a curse for us (as we shall see, God willing, in the next sermon — let this suffice us for now). Also he ascended into heaven and opened the door for us, since he entered on our behalf. Let us find great assurance in these truths and allow ourselves to be like poor, dead men in this world while we await the revelation of the life which has been promised us. There is no doubt but that God will reveal and manifest it to us in his time, and we will fully rejoice in that 'life' which his holy gospel has so long proclaimed.

Now let us fall before the majesty of our great God, acknowledging our sins, and praying that he would make us increasingly conscious of them. May we be so affected by them that we cast ourselves down before him, trembling and groaning under the burden of the weaknesses and sins which beset us, until he has fully purged us. Let us also pray that, during this mortal life, he would bear us up until he has utterly delivered us from slavery to sin and bondage to Satan; until, I say, he has granted us complete liberty. May he not only grant this grace to us, but to all peoples, etc.



## When Curse Becomes Blessing

by John Calvin

*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith . . .*

### Gal. 3:13-18

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As we have seen, if our only hope of salvation rested upon the condition that we fulfil our duty, we would all be condemned; for we have all fallen short in many different ways and are, therefore, guilty in the eyes of God. Indeed, even the holiest amongst us can never claim to have reached a state of perfection, never again to fall, and free from all infirmity! We are, therefore, led to conclude that we will all be lost and condemned when God calls us to account. This is man's true condition, despite the high regard he may have for himself! Therefore, we need some means of escape from the curse we are under. Otherwise, what good will it do us to have our ears daily assailed by the Word of God? It will only push us closer towards eternal death. Thus, in order that the Word of God should profit and assist us to find salvation, we have to find a way of escape from the sentence of judgment pronounced upon the human race. Paul points out the way of escape to us here: 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.' He shows us that it was not in vain that our Lord Jesus Christ hung on the tree, for he suffered to bear the curse of all those he would call to salvation.

As we have said, we are all under this curse, which means it was necessary for our Lord to take our burden of sin upon himself. In the law of Moses, it is written: 'Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree' (*Deut. 21:23*). Our Lord commanded that the bodies of the dead should be removed from sight, because it was a disgrace to see a human body thus defiled and therefore he desired it to be taken away. Yet, when God pronounced this curse upon all who hung upon a tree, he knew only too well what was going to happen to his only Son. For the Lord Jesus Christ did not suffer such a death by accident, nor according to the whim of man. Whilst it is true that he was crucified by unbelievers, it had been ordained by the will of God (*Acts 2:23; 4:28*). As it is written, God so loved the world that he did not even spare his only Son, but delivered him up to death for us. Indeed, if his death had been determined by Judas alone, who had him wickedly and forcibly led away, this could not be the foundation for our salvation at all! We must remember that God had appointed it thus, as Peter expounds in greater depth in Acts chapter two, verse twenty-three, where he states that the wicked hands that crucified our Lord Jesus did no more than God had previously determined in his will. Thus, when we read that our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, we must remember that it was all for our salvation, because by this means God was seeking to reconcile us to himself. Therefore,

when God said, 'Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree', he was not ignorant of what was going to occur, for all had been settled and predetermined.

These two facts must be carefully held together — that God has said that whoever hangs upon a tree is cursed, but that it was his will for his own Son to suffer thus. Why was this? He took our burden upon himself, as our substitute, and made himself, as it were, the chief of sinners on our behalf. Jesus Christ became a curse in order to deliver us from the curse of the law. It may seem harsh and strange at first sight that the Lord of Glory, he who has all sovereign authority, and before whom all the angels of heaven tremble and prostrate themselves, should be subject to a curse. But we must call to mind what Paul wrote in the first letter to the Corinthians, that is to say, that gospel teaching is foolishness to the human race, who regard themselves as wise (*1 Cor.* 1:18, 23). In deed, in this way, God humbles us for our folly. For there is enough wise and good instruction, if we care to heed it, in the heaven and earth around us; yet we are blind and shut our eyes to God's wisdom displayed in nature. This is why he has opened up a new way to draw us to himself — through something which we deem foolish! Thus, we must not judge what we read here, concerning the curse to which the Son of God was subject, by our own human reasoning. Instead, we should delight in such a mystery and give glory to God that he loved our souls so much that he redeemed them at such inestimable cost to himself. Far from detracting from the majesty of our Lord Jesus Christ, or obscuring the glory which the Holy Scriptures attribute to him, this teaching provides occasion to glorify him even more. Indeed, may we all do so, for here is our Lord Jesus Christ refusing to consider it robbery (as Paul expresses it) to reveal himself in his infinite glory (*Phil.* 2:6). He willingly emptied himself; he not only took upon himself a human nature and became a man, but he also submitted to a most shameful death in the sight of both God and man. How precious to him we must have been for him to allow himself to experience such extreme suffering for our redemption! If we could but taste something of what this implies, we would forever magnify the unspeakable grace which surpasses all human understanding. However, although we cannot comprehend it fully, and can only fathom the hundredth part of it, it delights us to know that we can grasp something of its meaning, however small!

Yet, how this exposes the malice and perversity that is in man! For when Paul declares that our Lord Jesus Christ became a curse for us, it washes over us. There are even those who are so depraved that they will see this as an occasion to behave scandalously, abandoning the gospel altogether when they hear of the way in which Christ has redeemed us. Such people say, 'What! Can it be that the Son of God, the fountain of all that is good, and the one who sanctifies us, has been cursed?' To their way of thinking, God has acted in an unreasonable and disorderly fashion! But, (as I have been saying), God had to stoop to this 'folly' because we did not respond to his wisdom, though the way was clearly evident; thus he exposes our own ignorance! We can only wonder at the mysteries of God, for their significance may be obscure to us and seem strange; for in the face of such wonders, our intellect fails and our powers of reasoning are confounded!

The fact that the Son of God became a curse for us demands a fuller examination of our sinful state. Indeed, we begin to realise that we are detestable in the eyes of God, that is,

until our sins and iniquities have been cleansed in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. For even if all the angels of heaven were to be made answerable for us, the price they would pay would be insufficient. The only one able to make satisfaction for our sins is the Lord Jesus Christ. But, when he came to this world, it was not by a display of divine and heavenly power that he paid our debt of eternal death. How, then, did he come? In weakness; indeed, not only so, but he was accursed. If this had not been the case, our burdens would have crushed us and all would have perished in the abyss. When we understand that the Son of God, the Lamb without blemish, the mirror and fountain of all righteousness, that this One was cursed for us, should we not be horrified at the thought of all our sins and engulfed in despair until God rescues us in his grace and infinite mercy? Therefore, let us be aware that when God says he has redeemed us from the curse of the law, it is to bring us to a state of complete humility. We can never be humble unless we are first stripped of self-confidence and become ashamed at what lies within us. Then we are frightened and lost, knowing that the wrath of God hangs over us until the remedy is applied to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, our whole life is detestable in God's sight and there is no means of reconciliation with him apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, who takes away the curse which is upon us and bears it himself. Now, each time that we read this passage, we should arise and present ourselves before the judgment seat of God, aware that there is a pit waiting to swallow us up if we remain as we are. Let us feel our lost condition and be ashamed before God. Furthermore, let us magnify the grace bought for us by the Son of God, and be careful not to detract from his worth in any way whatsoever, even though he became a curse. This ought, rather, to stir us to render all the praise that he deserves, for he has proved our salvation to be so precious to him.

Moreover, let us properly appreciate such a pledge of our salvation and display of the love God has for us, and let us not doubt that we are acceptable in God's sight when we approach him. For he has redeemed us at such a cost, as Peter shows in his first epistle — not with silver or corruptible things but with the Lord Jesus Christ who became a ransom for us (*1 Pet.* 1:18). Therefore, we must trust that whenever we come in his name to ask for mercy, it will be bestowed upon us. But if we come believing that we have a scrap of merit, what good is it? We know how much the Father loves the Son, and how precious his death was in his sight. For this reason, we can have full confidence that God will forgive us and be favourable and kind to us if we cleave to what Paul shows us here: namely, that our Lord Jesus Christ spared nothing for us, even to the point of bearing our curse.

However, let us turn our attention to what Paul continues to say: 'That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.' By mentioning Abraham, he reveals that the promise belonged first to those who descended from him. For the gift of salvation was for the Jews until God opened the doors to everyone else, and spread his gospel abroad, that all might share in the redemption purchased by the Lord Jesus Christ. For although this promise originally belonged to the Jews and was peculiar to them, it was made applicable to the whole world. How is this possible? Because the promise originated in the Spirit and was not dependent upon observing the ceremonies. By referring us to the Spirit, Paul blots out all the false doctrines taught by seducers who sought to mix the law and the

gospel together. He is revealing that now all these things are superfluous, that is to say, sacrifices, circumcision and suchlike. This is not to argue that we cannot profit by reading what is contained in the law: no, but the practice of it has been abolished. This is why we can say that the promise is a spiritual one for us today, because we no longer need the types and shadows of days gone by. Now we are simply called and invited to commune with our God. Now we are able to cry to him with complete confidence, because, having been adopted by him, we lean entirely upon the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only foundation the gospel allows; we find all we need in him. This is, in effect, what Paul intends us to learn from this passage.

To reinforce the message, he adds another point which proves that the gospel is the perfect revelation of the way of salvation, and that we need no other teaching but the simple doctrine of justification through the free grace of our God. He tells us that the law was given four hundred and thirty years after the free promise of salvation. Now we know that a covenant made between men, if it is to be authentic, must stand, no matter what happens. It follows, therefore, that the law was not given to cancel what God had promised to Abraham and his descendants (and consequently to the rest of us). We may at first question this argument of Paul's, thinking that a second contract must annul the first. As soon as men have entered an agreement, they are liable to have second thoughts and change their minds, making the first contract null and void. The same applies to laws and statutes, for a first law can easily be broken and invalidated by a second. But Paul presupposes something which needs to be considered, which is that if a man has promised and solemnly obligated himself to do something, he cannot retrace his steps — the agreement must remain firm. Yet, if two parties were to agree together to change their previous resolutions by mutual consent, this is a different case. Indeed, such an example is almost irrelevant here if we bear in mind that men change their ideas so lightly at the slightest whim. Paul, however, presupposes that the 'person' in question has made a covenant which will endure, and which will not be disputed or contravened afterwards in any way whatsoever. If one of the parties were to break that original covenant, it would be counted terrible treachery which all men alike would judge intolerable, since the agreement was so solemnly and formally recorded that it must be upheld and maintained without the slightest contradiction. Now, is it possible that there could be less constancy in God than in a man, who is mere vanity by comparison? Therefore, I conclude that the gospel promise holds firm because the free promise was made before the arrival of the law.

All this could mystify us if it were not explained in greater detail. We have already dealt with the contrast Paul makes between the law and the gospel in previous studies. When God promised salvation, it was upon condition that we served him, completely fulfilling our duty to him. This, however, is not possible; thus, we are excluded from all hope of salvation by the law. It is not that God is unfaithful on his part: it is we who do not meet his requirements! It is like a man who says, 'I am willing to sell goods to you on condition that you have the money.' Thus, whoever does not have a penny cannot buy any of the goods, for this is the condition that was set down in the first place. Similarly, God promises that we will inherit salvation if we serve him, but this does not benefit us because we cannot fulfil what he demands. Indeed, we are so full of iniquity, so polluted

and infected in his sight, that he quite justly regards us with detestation. Therefore, we all stand condemned under the law. However, God freely and graciously accepts us through the Lord Jesus Christ, who offers us the remission of our sins. In fact, he greatly desires us to accept the grace that we are offered and to lean completely on the Lord Jesus Christ, not upon ourselves.

Now Paul asks, ‘Which is more ancient — the free promise of salvation or the law?’ We are aware of the difference between them. Now, if the law were the more ancient, it must hold firm, because God never changes and is not subject to variation. However, if the free promise came first and was made before the law was decreed, then we must conclude that God has not changed his mind, nor withdrawn his original promise. He would not have desired the abolition of this covenant, for such would have been a withdrawal of his kindness and mercy. If, at one time, he bound himself out of his free bounty to give salvation to men on a basis other than merit, subsequently changing his mind as if he desired us to enrich him by our good works, it would be absurd! Paul tells us that the free promise was given before the law. It therefore follows that the law does not change anything about the promise; its nature and its force remain intact. Whilst it is true that the Lord Jesus Christ had not yet been born on earth when the promise was made to our father Abraham, he had already been chosen as our Mediator because, through him we would be reconciled to God.

Now, in case we think that the law must have been unnecessary, or that there must have been a change of mind on the part of God, Paul next addresses this matter. We must not become confused; though it is not possible to explain everything in an hour, nor indeed in a day, it is enough for the moment for us to have this one fact clearly understood: that the promise to ordain us to be his children was made by God before the law. Indeed, it was not made with reference to our merit or personal worthiness; God did this out of his own goodness and mercy and expected nothing from us because he knew we were full of nothing but wretched sin. This promise had its foundation in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose office was already that of Mediator, granting access to God the Father. Having said this, we conclude that this promise will endure to the end of the world. The main reason this must be said is because the Jews tended to boast in their heritage. Paul seeks to tell them that their father Abraham did not have the law and yet was content, although he did, of course, offer sacrifices and the like. But, even though he was eventually circumcised, at the time he received the promise no written code as yet existed and not even any circumcision. For although Abraham was not circumcised when he received the promise, he was, nevertheless, justified apart from circumcision by faith alone. Therefore, Paul demonstrates to the Jews that it is very foolish indeed to count themselves in a category apart from the rest of humanity, and to base their hopes upon the types and shadows of the law, seeing that their father Abraham, the chief patriarch of the church, was justified in the same way as people today. In other words, he was justified by the mercy of God alone, having recognised that he was a poor sinner, lost and condemned in Adam, and that the only blessing he could hope for was to be included in the promise made in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what we are to remember.

Next, we must carefully consider the promise addressed directly to Abraham, which revealed to him that all nations on earth would be blessed through his seed (*Gen. 12:3*). Now, there are two main points made here. One is that the blessing is not only promised to the earthly descendants of Abraham (as we have seen), but to the whole world in general. Thus, we who descend from Gentile stock (that is, from those who are unclean and who were originally banished from the heavenly kingdom) can also share in this promise. Although we do not belong to that holy lineage that God chose at the beginning, yet now salvation extends even to us. How is this? Because it was promised that all the nations on earth would be blessed. This being the case, dare we speak as if God has withdrawn his liberal hand, and only seeks the descendants of Abraham, when he had already declared that he would reveal himself as the Saviour and Father of mankind when the time was right? Thus, the most important point here is this: though this promise was made to Abraham, it did not apply to his physical descendants alone, but to all men, even though this was not apparent at first because the fulness of time had not come, as we shall see in the following chapter.

The second point is that the blessing promised to Abraham was for his seed. Paul says that he does not refer to 'seeds' in the plural, but to one seed; we must, therefore, conclude that he is referring to Jesus Christ. We might perhaps have felt that Paul is making much of something which has little relevance; after all, the term 'seed' refers simply to descendants, not specifically to one man, nor to ten, nor to forty! Surely, it speaks of a whole race of people, the seed of Abraham being the race that descends from him. Indeed, this comprised such a great multitude that it was said to be like twelve peoples (*Gen. 17:6*); for when we refer to a people, we speak of about a hundred thousand men, and there were more than this in the tribe of Judah alone! Thus, it would seem that Paul had not properly considered what God intended by this word 'seed', when he says that it refers to just one man. But we must weigh up Paul's conclusions in order to realise that they are correct and firmly established; indeed, we shall see that his argument is utterly infallible.

Abraham did not have just one son; after Ishmael, he had Isaac. And what happened to his oldest son? He was cast out of his house, as we shall see when we come to consider the next chapter. Thus, here is Ishmael, who has all the privileges of being the first-born of Abraham's household, being cast out like a stranger, just as it is written, 'Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac' (*Gen. 21:10*). After this, other children were born to him (*Gen. 25:1ff*). He gave each one their allotted portion and then sent them away. Only Isaac remained with Abraham. In time Isaac had two children, twins born of the same womb (*Gen. 25:22-23*). The first-born, Esau, who ought to have had the authority, was rejected and not counted as a descendant of Abraham; thus, he had no share in the promised blessings. That left only Jacob, for his father ignorantly and mistakenly blessed him, then declared that he could not withdraw that blessing, nor alter what he had said since he had been the instrument of the Holy Spirit (*Gen. 27:37*). If we take the term 'seed' to apply to those who descend from Abraham, then surely this will include such people as the Ishmaelites and Hagarenes (as they are called) and the like. If this were so, the Idumaeans, their servants, might also be counted as part of his household. But the inheritance was taken

away from these people. Therefore, the phrase 'the seed of Abraham' must be understood in a rather different way.

Let us think through the issue for a moment. Without faith, what would unite the church? There would be no sure means of discerning the spiritual seed of Abraham. How would we distinguish them from the rest of mankind? The only way is by coming to the Head, in other words, to the Lord Jesus Christ. The unity of the body depends on its Head, on its Redeemer. This is why Paul says that the promise does not refer to seed in the plural, but to one man, to whom we must come if we are to discover his spiritual people. In other words, if we desire to locate the church of God, we must start with the Lord Jesus Christ, because his own will be gathered round him. All who belong to his body and cleave to him by faith are the children of God, and are his servants. These are truly the seed of Abraham. This is discussed more fully in the Epistle to the Romans, chapter nine, verse six, where it says, 'They are not all Israel who are of Israel.' How is this? Well, there was really only one child of promise: Isaac. Therefore, we must come to the Lord Jesus Christ, for in him all the promises of God are 'yes and amen', being absolutely firm and sure (2 *Cor.* 1:20). Without him, we would all be lost. This is why it is written in the first chapter of Colossians, verse twenty, that the office of the Lord Jesus Christ was to gather together all that had been scattered in heaven and on earth; without him, we would all be confounded.

Now we can see much more clearly the line of Paul's argument. Before the law was imparted to the world, that is, before we were informed of our duty to obey all that is written therein, God had already revealed his good pleasure. Seeing the human race lost and condemned, he desired to bring his elect to himself in order to bestow mercy on them. This was not only for one race but for 'all nations' as the Scripture asserts. And the source of that mercy is the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, when Abraham was alive, our Lord Jesus Christ had already been appointed Mediator, that through him the wrath of God against us might be appeased. Thus, when we come in his name asking for grace, it will be supplied to us and our expectations will not be disappointed. This had already been established and, happily, nothing has changed; we can be sure that God accepts us today if we are fully rooted and grounded in the Lord Jesus Christ. For the covenant made in his name shall not change — it is permanent and will always be in force. Thus, we may freely come before God and call upon him as our Father since he has adopted us as his children; not because there was anything worthy in us, but only because of his mercy are we united by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, in order to receive the grace of God and have assurance of salvation, we need to renounce all opinions we might have of our own worth. We must give heed to what is declared in this passage concerning faith, for it is only through faith that we are enabled to enjoy such blessing. Faith (as we have explained) means that we embrace the mercy of God. But we cannot have faith until we have been touched with a sense of our own poverty, for the Lord Jesus Christ, by becoming a curse for us, presents us with a picture of our cursed state. Faith, therefore, cannot exist without repentance, for it is not possible for us to come to God seeking salvation and asking him to pity our miserable condition, unless we have been convicted in our souls and led to deplore ourselves. Hypocrites who

mock at God by wallowing, intoxicated, in their sins, must not expect Jesus Christ to receive them as his own; for such people may not even so much as approach him. Indeed, his invitation is intended for those who labour and are heavy laden (*Matt. 11:28*), who can bear no more and who stagger under the burden of their sins. This is how we must approach the Lord Jesus Christ, not with any merit of our own; for all the ceremonial law and all the sacrifices we could offer cannot contribute to our salvation. Rather, before God shows us mercy, we must come in a state of humility, fully aware of our miserable condition. We are first brought low in order that we might perceive the curse that we are under, before we can rejoice that we have been purchased at such inestimable cost. This has been our theme throughout our study.

Thus, it is by faith that we receive the promise of the Spirit and become united to the Lord Jesus Christ. We become part of the spiritual seed of Abraham. Although we do not physically descend from his family, it is enough that we are united together with him by faith. Indeed, we have been regenerated by incorruptible seed, as Peter says, in other words by the Word of God, the Scriptures (*1 Pet. 1:23*). Having been transformed, we understand that God accepts us as part of the body of his only Son. Though of Gentile descent, we can still be joined to his church, since faith is all that is required. Here, all pride in human virtues and merits must cease, and men must recognise that they shall be utterly confounded unless they seek God in the way that he has appointed. Having said this, let us learn not to be blown here and there, like unstable men, who will not be content with what God has declared but must always add something to it of their devising. We need to guard against such an unholy mixture. I intend to expand upon this after lunch in the will of God. Let Jesus Christ be our sufficiency, since our salvation depends entirely upon him; we will lack nothing if we have an interest in him. This is the point to which Paul frequently returns in this book. Furthermore, he desires that we hold fast to God's truth, knowing that it does not allow for any additions. Were we to add to it, we would corrupt, pervert and falsify the covenant upon which our salvation depends. Having embraced our Lord Jesus Christ, we are expected to remain fully in him, because this one man has sufficient grace for us all. In him, we can call upon God boldly, knowing that, although we descend from the accursed race of Adam, we, nevertheless, receive blessing in Jesus Christ. He now accepts us as his children and freely adopts us. He desires that this message should be heard throughout the world — there is now an open door and free access by which we may draw near to him.

Now let us fall before the majesty of our great God, acknowledging our sins, and asking that he would make us increasingly conscious of them, that we may detest them. May we spend our lives seeking and striving to honour and serve him in strict obedience. And since we cannot free ourselves owing to our great infirmity, may he bear us up until he has freed us from all the defilements of the flesh, and clothed us in his righteousness. Indeed, he has begun this work in us now and affords us solid ground of assurance that what he has begun, he will complete. Thus, we all say, Almighty God and our heavenly Father, etc.



## On Glorifying Only in the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ

by John Calvin

*But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.*

### Gal. 6:14-18

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We saw earlier that Paul condemned those whose only desire was to sit on the fence in order to please the world, and escape persecution. For this had caused them to twist the gospel, and we see numerous examples of this today. Having seen that pure doctrine and the truth of God are unacceptable to the world, but that wicked men are incensed against it, these people, I say, seek to find some way to avoid creating bad feeling and incurring hatred. This being so, if we today were to interview people with at least some good sense, we would scarcely find one in a hundred of them who would admit that there were errors in the Papacy. Most would say that we ought not to force them to abandon everything and that it would be enough if they were to get rid of some of their more unreasonable and absurd superstitions, even if they continued to nurture many other corruptions. Why? Because, as we have said, they desire to be esteemed and highly credited, and because it is all the same to them if they betray the purity of the gospel, provided they can remain exempt from persecution. What is it that motivates them, but the fact that they wish to be valued and to acquire a good reputation? Now the devil, who has stirred up this kind of conflict ever since the days of Paul, continues to this present day, and therefore we need to arm ourselves with this doctrine. The best remedy is the one that Paul proposes here: that we reject all glorying, save that which is in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In order to understand this clearly, we must firstly remember what is written in Jeremiah, and confirmed here by Paul. In other words, that all the glory of man must be abased in order that God be exalted as he deserves. (Jer. 9:23, 24). Indeed, in the same way it is written that all the wisdom that men believe they possess is nothing, and will not be taken into account; it must be blotted out, that we might have recourse to God, as the one who has all abundance of good things in himself (Isa. 29:14; 1 Cor 1:19). Let us acknowledge, I say, that all wisdom proceeds from his free grace, so that we are enlightened by his Holy Spirit, and, being weak, strengthened by his might. Being full of pollution and iniquity, may righteousness be restored in us according to his gift.

Now let us come to the means. It is not enough to know that God is our light, that he is our righteousness, that he is our wisdom, and that he is our strength; in other words, that in his person is perfect life, joy and felicity. This is insufficient, for there is still too great

a distance between himself and us. Yet we need to know how and by what means we can obtain all the graces that we seek in God. We know that they are all communicated to us in Jesus Christ, for he descended here below, made himself nothing, and was crucified willingly for our sakes. Therefore, since we must draw all that we lack from the Lord Jesus Christ, we can understand why Paul says that he sought only to glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Why? Because he suffered a cruel and bitter death, and even exposed himself to God's judgment on our behalf, receiving all our curse, and in this way was given to us as our wisdom, righteousness, holiness, strength and all that we lack.

Therefore, in the first place, we need to know who we are, before we can prevent all glorying and stay ourselves upon the Lord Jesus Christ. For we see many people bursting with pride who have no grounds for this whatsoever. All that they imagine to be true about themselves is no more than wind and smoke. Yet because they have not examined themselves properly to see what they are really like, they have not sought Jesus Christ; such are these hypocrites, and counterfeits, who are puffed up with presumption because of their 'merits'. Therefore, as I have said, we must consider our condition and see the extent of its wretchedness, that is until the Lord Jesus takes pity upon us. This is how we can prepare ourselves to come to him. This is the first point.

However, this is not all. For there are some who will confess that they are sinners, and that they are full of nothing but vanity, and yet continue to wallow in their filth. Why? Because they do not anticipate the judgment of God, and their minds have been lulled to sleep by the world. All such pleasure-seekers, who abandon themselves to drunkenness, or bawdiness, and the like, cannot excuse their wickedness, and indeed, they ought to be ashamed of it, and yet they seem to take pleasure in sins and continue in them as if hardened. Why? They have been intoxicated by the world, and blindfolded by the devil, such that they cannot see that one day they must give an account of themselves. They have stupidly made themselves believe that they will always remain as they are, pursuing evil things, and that they will never have to sigh and tremble, but only laugh, as if they seek wilfully to show contempt for God. Thus, we can see how it is that some are prevented (indeed, they are fully incapacitated) from coming to Jesus Christ, either because they presume to have their own wisdom, or because they are pursuing a false notion that Satan has placed in their minds, or because they think they are wise enough without Jesus Christ. These are the reasons why they despise him. Others, of whom there are an infinite number, know that they are poor sinners, and yet do not seek a remedy. Why? Because this world has them in its grip, and they are so caught up in it that they cannot lift their eyes or their minds above to seek for the remedy that has been provided in Jesus Christ.

We must, therefore, be all the more ready to meditate on what I have said, that is, to rid ourselves of all pride and presumption, and to feel so much shame that we have no rest until we have found relief in the Lord Jesus Christ. May we open our eyes to see our depravity and be ashamed of it, and not only so, but also to recognise that this life is nothing, and that God has placed us here as on a journey, so that he can test whether or not we are following him. May each of us therefore come aside, both morning and evening, to consider our sins, and may they be like goads to prick us and encourage us to

come to God. May we not be like brute beasts, tied to this world, but may our need lead us to come to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what it is to glory in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul specifically speaks of the cross here because he seeks to knock down and trample underfoot all haughtiness in man. For we always want to be 'someone' in and of ourselves, and maintain a certain dignity. Therefore, in order to rid us of such a wicked desire, Paul shows us that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, should be our only cause of glorying because he was crucified for us. Following on from this, he adds that we will be crucified to the world, and the world to us, when we have learned to glory only in the grace that our Lord Jesus Christ has brought us. How? Those who are not crucified to the world, that is, those who desire to have a position of some authority, and to be important, and who ask to be held in honour and promoted, in other words those who are diverted here, there and everywhere by their lusts, certainly do not yet know what it is to glory in the cross of Jesus Christ, for they begin at the wrong point. They are confused within themselves.

Therefore, Paul can say with confidence that when his glorying was founded upon the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, he abandoned and forsook the world. By 'world' he means all that appeals to our flesh, to men who neither think of God nor of eternal life, but are given over to avarice or ambition. Each one is controlled by his own natural instincts, and not one looks beyond this world. When men follow their inclinations and when God has not touched them by his Holy Spirit or drawn them to himself, it is true to say that though they have all strayed and roamed, yet there is a great variation in their desires, such that, when we examine the matter, we find that one is heading in a certain direction, whilst another is pulling in completely the opposite direction. Thus, it seems as if men are very different from one another. However, they are all alike in one area, that is to say that they want to be important in the eyes of the world, and are given over to their personal profit or pleasure. In other words, they are so enmeshed in things here below that they do not mind being separated from God. But Paul says that if all our glorying is in Jesus Christ, knowing that by means of his cross he has committed us to God the Father, and has secured the kingdom of heaven for us, then it will be easy for us to withdraw from the world and cut ourselves off from it, as it were. Why? Whoever has been cut to the quick and overwhelmed with a sense of their own sin will surely seek the grace offered to him in Jesus Christ, and the world will be worth nothing to him.

Indeed, we treat all the spiritual riches that God has offered us and invites us to share as if they were nothing, because, in comparison to the deceptions and temptations of Satan, we do not value them at all. What is this world, when we contemplate it as it is? Not one of us sees just how fragile our lives are, that they are but smoke which floats past and then vanishes. Men still burn with lust and are transported and carried away thereby. As for God, he calls out, 'Poor people! You have less sense than little children, in that you busy yourselves about wisps of straw, meaningless rubbish, and all kinds of nonsense, and attach yourselves whole-heartedly to these things. Yet when I offer you that which is perfect felicity, you ignore it; to you it is unimportant.' Hence, the reason that we are so cold and so slow to accept the riches that God offers us is that we are preoccupied with

the things of this world. Indeed, we value this world too highly. What makes us do this? It is because we do not know what priceless riches God is offering us.

Therefore, let us join together these two things: namely, let us be crucified to the world, and the world to us, glorying alone in Jesus Christ crucified. Now this is easier to say than to do, and yet each of us, wherever we are, must strive to do so; once we have heard this doctrine, we must put it into practice. For if we would be esteemed and accounted Christians before God and his angels, we must conform to what Paul tells us here; indeed, if we were not otherwise-minded, we would find plenty of opportunity to do so, as I have already said. For all those who simply look within themselves and consider what they are really like, and what condition they are in whilst still separated from Jesus Christ, will be terrified of feeling the wrath of God which they deserve. They will feel that they are ruined by their accursed state, and that it would be better if the earth were to swallow them a hundred times, rather than live under this curse for a single day as the enemies of God who cannot escape his hand. Let us therefore learn to examine ourselves. Those who wish to adorn themselves according to this world, especially women, will gaze into a mirror with great curiosity and concern. Yet our poverty and filth will not be reflected there, in order truly to humble us before God, or make us consider what we glory in. The one who recognises his shame and ignominy will certainly seek to remedy it, if indeed the Spirit of God is working deep within him, and he is not (as I have already said) intoxicated by Satan. Let us, therefore, learn to examine ourselves sincerely, without flattery, and when we have acknowledged our poverty and misery, let us come to the Lord Jesus Christ. Since, by means of the cross, all haughtiness, self-worth and boasting is cast down, let us be truly crucified to the world and may it mean nothing to us.

Now, by saying that the world was crucified to him and he to the world, it is certain that Paul means the same thing, yet he wants to reinforce that we can indeed renounce this world and be separate from it, by being crucified to ourselves with regard to the world. This means that all our loathsome desires (which are far too strong in us and consume us like a burning flame, pushing us in one direction, then another), must be mortified, for we know that the Son of God had to suffer such a shameful death on our behalf. Who is he who seeks to have his triumphs and do his courageous deeds in this world, when he knows that the One who is the head of angels, to whom belongs all glory, majesty and authority, hung on a tree and was cursed and hated for our sakes? In this way, all our lusts must be mortified; therefore, may the passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ be so effectual in our hearts, that our desires do not quiver impatiently within us as once they did. This is the first point.

Also, the world must be crucified to us. How is this? In comparison to the spiritual riches that Jesus Christ brings us, and which we enjoy through him, may we esteem the things of this world as straw and corruption, since all is corruptible. Furthermore, all that men covet so earnestly and with such determination that they become completely hindered by it, are nothing more than nets that Satan has spread in order to catch them. Are they not illusions and deceptions? Yes, this is most certain. Since this is so, let us learn that the world ought to be nothing to us, and let us be completely persuaded and assured of the fact that God is merciful to us, and acknowledges us as his sons and heirs; he has blessed

us and without his blessing we would be most miserable. Hence, we are to pass lightly by this world and not be attached to it or held back for anything; this must always be our aim. We know that we must make haste to the place to which God has called us, and if we become enmeshed by the love of this world, we will become alienated from our God. This is what we are to remember from this passage.

At this point Paul adds that 'in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature'. It is as if he is telling us that those who troubled the church in his day were motivated only by ambition. For if the church did not grow, and no one received any profit in any way as a result of the great trouble they stirred up, it surely proves that they were only seeking to replace the Lord Jesus Christ. For what should our aim be, but to see the Son of God reigning in our midst, and to be ruled by the Word of his gospel, and to know his power, so that all of us, great and small, place our entire trust in him? Following on from this, we aim to have our whole life transformed, that we might live in obedience to God and submit to his Word. For the spiritual temple of God is built upon faith and a new life; faith leads us to pay homage to God for all his riches, and to have recourse to him, and declare his praises — to call upon his holy name when we meet together. This is how we are built up to become the temple of God.

However, we must also be renewed in our lifestyle, and patiently learn to deny ourselves and dedicate our lives to God. This ought to be the message of those who have the responsibility to teach. Those who do not aim at these things reveal that they have no intention of serving the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus Paul declares that the only important thing is to be a new creature in Jesus Christ. In other words, we must come to the point where, as we saw in Second Corinthians, we are new creatures, if we want to be considered to be 'in Jesus Christ' (2 Cor 5:17). For if anyone boasts that he is most eloquent, and another that he is very clever, and another that he is a great scholar, and another that he has good manners, it is all vanity. Let us, therefore, learn to forsake ourselves and this world, and to dedicate ourselves to the one who bought us so that we might be set free. For it is only right that Jesus Christ who obtained us at such cost should possess us and rejoice greatly over us. This cannot be achieved unless we each deny ourselves and reject all that could hold us back amongst men. This is what we need to observe.

Paul speaks here of circumcision and uncircumcision because the dispute and the argument he had (as we have seen previously) concerned the ceremonial law, which he deals with here through the example of circumcision. For the Jews sought to retain all the types and shadows which were only intended to last for a time. Thus, Paul, ridiculing all this, says that our Lord Jesus Christ came, not to encourage us to keep these ancient figures, but, because the veil of the temple was torn in two, and because he is in himself the body and substance of all the shadows that existed under the law, we must now content ourselves with him, circumcision no longer being of any value.

We will derive greater profit from this passage if we apply it to what we see today. For, in the Papacy, there are many pointless rituals in which they place all their trust in order to be holy. When we ask the Papists how they can merit God's grace and obtain

remission of their sins, they boast that they have their holy water, their candles, their incense, their organs and choirs, their pilgrimages and this and that. Also, they have their foolish devotions, which involve trotting from altar to altar and from chapel to chapel. Then they must, of course, buy a good number of masses. In short, all that the Papists refer to as the service of God is nothing more than a Labyrinth, or an abyss, of superstitions which they have forged in their own heads. Let us come now to consider what these things are worth. God has made no mention of them; but they have been invented by men, in whose ears Satan has whispered in order to corrupt the true service of God. However, the Papists consider that there can be no religion, nor faith, nor service of God, nor zeal unless we too are transported by all their nonsense. Yet Paul, speaking of the ceremonies that God had ordained in the law, says that they are no longer anything. Why? Because God is content if we serve him with a pure conscience, and call upon him, having put our trust in him, knowing that all good things come from him. Let us, rather, live uprightly and honestly with one another, knowing that charity is the bond of perfection, and the end of the law; and let us also so dedicate ourselves to our God that we live chastely and in all holiness, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, as it says in Titus (Tit. 2:12-13). This is the starting point of holiness and perfection, as declared by God in his Word.

Yet the Papists will say on the other hand, 'What! And what will become of our lovely devotions? Will they all be abolished? It were better to pull God out of heaven!' This reveals the Papist's folly. We have seen what Paul has exposed here; that even if men are so mistaken about their own inventions that they think they offer God wonderful things, and are held back by these meaningless trifles, it is all worthless. Who has declared this? God, by the mouth of Paul. What, then, ought we to be? New creatures. What is a new creature? We must start by examining our lives and seeing ourselves as nothing in and of ourselves. Then we must offer to God the spiritual sacrifices that we owe him, presenting ourselves to him that he might have pity and mercy upon our misery, and aid and help us. May we be ready to follow him as he calls us, having no other source of wisdom but his Word alone, knowing that he does not wish to be served with pomp or with the fine, glittering external appearances that appeal to the world. He is content if we devote our thoughts and affections to him in sincerity. Moreover, it is our responsibility to understand what Paul is saying here, and to apply his teaching; for it is certain that those who refuse to flatter themselves in their sins, and who look to God, knowing that they must appear before his judgment seat, will forsake all glorying in themselves.

Furthermore, they will know what God demands in his Word, and how he would be served, and what he delights in, so that they will no longer be in danger of being deceived by the meaningless trifles which hypocrites pursue. For it is most certain that when the Papists torment themselves in order to serve God (as we see), it is only so that he will count them innocent, and so that they may escape his hand, and not be constrained to serve him as he has commanded; for they despise the whole law. Yet there are many things which they do regard as vital, and which they desire God to accept. But (as I have said) their main aim is to believe that their duty to God has been fulfilled, so that he will not oppress them too much. Meanwhile, they follow their own course, allow themselves great licence and grant themselves absolution of all their sins. They think that since they

have brought God something (that is, a mere shadow), he dare not speak a word against them and has to remain silent. Now we have seen Paul's intention here.

Finally, he adds, 'And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy and upon the Israel of God.' By speaking of this 'rule', he implies that men may believe what they choose, and yet God will not give way to them, for he is immutable and will not yield to folly or be made to retreat. Paul tells us that such alteration is impossible. Whatever happens, the rule that God has established remains as it is, unchanging. This is something which we all accept on the surface of things. For who would not readily accept the fact that God is superior to us? We even feel that to say the contrary is to blaspheme. Thus we are all quite sure that God ought to reign, and that his law ought to be our rule for living. Yet, at the same time, see how men allow themselves to live without restraint! Each person invents this and that, and soon afterwards expects everyone else to hold to their inventions. Everyone wants to have their own separate rules. Whilst it may be true that not everyone in Popery follows the rule of St Francis, or of St Dominic, yet there is not a single foolish old woman or bigot in Popery who has not got his own rule. Just as there is not a single young calf who has not also his own rule for living. For all will say, 'This is the way I do my devotions.' And when they use the word 'devotion', they virtually push God into the background because they are really saying, 'I must have the liberty to do what I think is good, and God must content himself with that.'

What diabolical audacity men have! They compromise here and there, they talk wildly, they deviate first to one side then to the other. It is as if they make for themselves winding and crooked pathways, hoping that God will twist his rules and be pliable enough to bend to suit their own views. Therefore we have all the more reason to observe carefully what is said here, which is that men may torment themselves all they like, but God's rule remains and will follow its own course and direction.

What is this rule? It is that we aim for the perfection that our Lord Jesus reveals in the gospel; not that we can attain this during our lifetime, but rather that we are not to step aside one way or another, to the right or to the left, but to aim always for the goal that God has revealed to us. This is how we can be new creatures, by denying ourselves and dedicating ourselves fully to God. Since this is the case, let us make a decision to submit to this rule, and conform our lives to it. For each one of us immediately picks up our feet and legs to run off here or there; but in order not to go astray, we need to learn to hold fast to all that God reveals and teaches us in his Word. Now when Paul asks that peace and mercy be upon such people, it is to declare that, even if all in the world were foolishly to condemn us, we could ignore it and refuse to let it bother us, pursuing our own course. If God is for us, that ought to be sufficient. For if we are shaken by the foolish judgments of the world, and the opinions that they spread about us, we are not rendering to God the honour that is his due. If folk say of us, 'Those people are not living good lives', and we get upset and seek to conform to their tastes, we will surely be moving away from God.

Therefore, let us take good note of what Paul says here, which is that if men condemn us and find things to criticise in that which we do (and it is obvious that the world will never

be in harmony with God), it should mean nothing to us. It ought to suffice us that God has blessed us, and offers us complete happiness in this word 'peace', showing that he will have pity on us, however wretched we may be, and however much others may spit in our faces. Although we do not have all the virtues required of us, yet if we aim to follow God, we will always find him to be merciful. He supports us in our weakness, and aids us in our wretchedness. If we have all this, it ought to be enough. On the other hand, although the Holy Spirit blesses those who submit to God's rule, we also know that he curses and detests and loathes all those who go astray, and who make their own imaginations their law. They seek to have liberty to follow whatever seems right to them, and harden themselves against the Word of God. However valued they are by the world, and however much they are intoxicated with pride and presumption, thinking they are ever so important, we can see that God still regards them as detestable. This is what we need to remember: there is only one rule by which we must live and that is contained in the gospel.

Where does this rule lead us? It will ensure that we do not offer to God that which seems right to us, or that which we have forged in our own heads. Instead, we will submit ourselves fully to him and to his Word. We will recognise that in Jesus Christ we have all perfection. Thus we will be content with him alone, especially since we know he is merciful enough to show us pity, and our lives will be blessed and made happy by him, if we follow him to the place where he calls us. Conversely, we will be cursed unless we follow the rule that Paul speaks of here, no matter what opinion the world has of us, or however much the world may praise us.

Now he adds 'the Israel of God', to prove that those who serve God spiritually, he will always be pleased to acknowledge as his people. For the enemies of Paul, against whom he has a quarrel in this whole epistle, wanted to maintain all the ceremonies, as it seemed to them that these were the marks of the true church, just as the Papists today want to keep the holy oil, and this and that. But the enemies of Paul had much stronger grounds than the Papists, and in comparison their case was stronger. Yet Paul still rejects it all, and says that God does not concern himself with any of this. Whilst it is true that he had ordained the shadows of the law for a time, and they had their function, which was to lead the people to the Lord Jesus Christ, now that we have the substance and the truth in him, we must forsake it all. We have an even stronger reason, therefore, to say that the Israel of God are not those who appear in great splendour before the eyes of men, but those who bear the true mark of God. For when the Papists speak to us of the church, they must include the Pope with his three crowns, and the bishops, who disguise themselves in order to act out their farce. They are like horned beasts, and everything about them glistens; the priests and the monks are among them and they too dazzle the eyes of the simple. This is what the church of God consists of according to the Papists: in pomp and frivolous, useless nonsense. What of the sacraments? No, they need this or that extra thing — in short, they have their own marks which seem quite acceptable to them.

Yet we must look at the gospel. What do we find there? All simplicity. God does not want those who preach his Word and administer his sacraments to wear costumes or to make so many fanfares. Nor does he want the sacraments to be polluted by human



inventions, because all these are worthless to God. Let us, therefore, retain the definition that Paul gives here of the true church, so that we are unmoved when people say to us, 'Look, we have many beautiful things here.' It is true, if we judge according to our natural senses, for we are carnal and earthly and are, therefore, more inclined to follow that which appears beautiful to our senses. But it is not for us to decide how we must serve God; we must hold fast to that which he has proclaimed, because his decree is irrevocable, and it is that we should find all our wisdom in Jesus Christ. This can only happen if we obey him, and not before. Thus, we are to recognise that we must no longer be attached to the external things which he ordained at the time of the law; but we are to be content with Jesus Christ alone and the perfection that is in him.

Let us be sure to notice something else he says at this point: 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.' He exposes here that the world, due to its ingratitude, gives no thought to the riches which are offered in Jesus Christ. The gospel is preached often enough, and yet we all withdraw from it and turn away, as if we have decided to leave the good path that leads to salvation and throw ourselves headlong into ruin and perdition: What is the reason for this? It is because our spirits are empty, and the devil always gains entry; he entices us, he troubles us and makes us flutter about in the air. Indeed, until the grace of our Lord Jesus is with our spirit, we are like swaying reeds, without stability or foundation. This is what we need to aim for, so that God not only pours out his grace upon us, but that we also receive it into our spirit and heart; our spirit must become its throne and the place where it takes root, so that we might not be tied to this earth, but raise our affections and minds to God.

Now, because there will never be a time when this doctrine escapes contradiction, Paul here challenges those who would rise up against it, and says, 'From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus'. When he speaks of the marks of Jesus Christ, he sets them in contrast to all the armouries of princes, to all their diadems and sceptres, and to all that they possess to give them importance, and to obtain the worship and reverence of all. When a prince wants to be seen to be in control of his estate, he must be dressed in such a way that none dare look at him for fear of being bedazzled. They do this more often than not because there is nothing about them worthy of note, and so they need to rely on these borrowed means; the same is true of worldly people who give themselves to pomp and gallantry, and use this and that to acquire a good reputation. In short, the worldly will use any means to get themselves noticed, although these things are vanity in and of themselves. But Paul shows that the marks of our Lord Jesus Christ are, as we know, worth so much more, and far more precious, having more beauty in themselves than all that is cherished by the world.

However, we need to consider what is meant by 'marks'. He has explained this to us before, when he said that he was beaten several times. He had been stoned at one place, put in prison in another, and had suffered hunger and thirst (2 Cor 11:23-27). In other words, he had been regarded as loathsome and was therefore rejected. According to the world, we must flee such ignominy. Yet Paul says that these marks are worth more than all the honour and splendour that we could ever enjoy. He says that because he bears these marks, others must not 'trouble him' by preventing him from following his course

and fulfilling his duty.

Now Paul's intention in this passage has been, firstly, to show that if we are Christians and part of the true church of God, we must obey the command to be united to one another. How? Not with each person following their own imaginations; for there are indeed many who have a perverse spirit which makes it impossible for them to cooperate with others. Such people seek to keep themselves separate from everyone else, like wild horses, and it is to be hoped that there are monasteries and cloisters for such people who refuse to unite with others according to the command given to the church. Thus, having separated themselves in their pride from the company of believers, they can only really become monks of the devil! Whatever the case, we know why they hide themselves away: it is because the devil has them in his grip and possesses them. He simply seeks to persuade them to live separately from others so that he might eventually turn them away from God altogether.

Secondly, Paul shows us here that we must aim to keep this 'rule'; the Lord Jesus is to be our example, and we are to seek to conform to his image. When he speaks, may we submit to his teaching, so that each of us keeps his commands. Also, let us help one another. For we can boast about persecution, or this or that, all we like, but unless we seek to help others to enable the building of the spiritual temple to progress, it is certain that we are still serving Satan and are like slaves serving under his tyrannical rule. Let us learn to be of the same mind one with another as we submit to our Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, may those who are selfless and faithful in their walk with God despise all these pompous people who want to elevate themselves in their pride, introducing this or that; for Jesus Christ always recognises his marks. In other words, however contemptible we may be in the eyes of the world, we will always be acknowledged by the Son of God. Therefore, let us continue to walk, and let those who seek to hinder us know that God will beat them down, as we have seen previously (Gal. 5:12). It is only right that people should be put to shame and forced to scatter if they disrupt the unity of the church and refuse to serve according to their ability to the advancement of the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. God must send them to their ruin because of their pride and presumption. This is what we need to remember from this passage if we desire to persevere in the enjoyment of the riches that we possess, which were bought for us at so great a cost, through the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and which are offered to us daily through the gospel.

Now let us fall down before the majesty of our great God, acknowledging our sins, and praying that they would so grieve us that we would be made to tremble and seek his pardon. Then we will be transformed through true repentance and enabled to battle against all our vices and all the corruptions of our flesh, until he has freed us from them altogether; then he will clothe us in his righteousness. Thus, we all say, Almighty God and our heavenly Father, etc.

## Ravening Wolves Who Wreak Havoc

by John Calvin

*As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.*

**Gal. 6:12-13**

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It is not without good cause that God strongly exhorts those whose duty it is to preach the Word not to seek grace and favour in the eyes of men. He expects them to close their eyes to human opinions, so that they are not turned to one side or the other, or prevented from properly fulfilling their office. Indeed, we know it to be impossible for us to fulfil our office properly unless we fix our eyes upon God and turn our eyes away from men; for we can easily become corrupted if we do otherwise, and it takes very little to turn us one way or another. Yet the most important loyalty required of those who have the responsibility of preaching the Word of God is that they be not tempted, either through ambition or avarice, to speak to please and satisfy men. They must not be afraid of perils or dangers. For experience shows that, as soon as a man fears for his own skin, or else has an eye to his own profit, he will change in a moment of time.

It is true that those who seek to please men in this way are not demonstrating at that moment that they are evil or enemies of the truth; as indeed, our Lord Jesus shows in the tenth chapter of John's Gospel, where he makes a distinction between the hirelings and the wolves (John 10:12). Having spoken of good and faithful shepherds, who seek the common well-being of the flock, he says that there are ravening wolves, or thieves, who seek only to plunder everything, thereby wreaking havoc and confusion. These are people who fight openly with God, and strive and struggle to overturn pure gospel doctrine. However, there are others who run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, and who pretend to be serving God. Yet neither type edify us, not even through their zeal, for they are devoid of integrity. While it costs them nothing, they simply make a fair show. Indeed, so much so that we can often be deceived because we consider them to be ministers of Jesus Christ. However, they only seek the wages and are devoted to filling their own stomachs. This is why, when threatened, they immediately become fearful and they change and alter their approach. Yesterday they seemed to uphold the Word of God, but today they are bending over backwards here, there and everywhere. Why? Because they realise that this will gratify everyone, and thereby be more profitable to themselves.

This is why Paul now warns the Galatians that those who troubled them and led them astray from the right path were given over to their own ambitions; this is why they cast doubt on certain doctrines. Up to this point, Paul has used reason in his debating to show that if we put our complete trust in Jesus Christ, the ceremonies of the law are now

superfluous. Their application was temporary; they were designed to show us that, if we are truly leaning upon the grace that was purchased for us by our Lord Jesus Christ, we must not seek justification in the sight of God through our merit or any other foolish notion. Paul has dealt with and settled this argument as far as it was necessary for him to do so. Now, in order that the simple-hearted will be moved even more deeply he comes and addresses individuals, saying, 'Consider why it is that these people with whom I here quarrel mix the ceremonial law with the Lord Jesus Christ. Are they motivated by zeal, or a desire to serve God? Not at all! They have more of an eye to their danger of being persecuted. Therefore, since fear makes them distort the Word of God, it is not necessary for you to make further enquiries or longer investigations into what kind of people they are, and if you can trust them. For you will see how quickly they change and alter simply because they would avoid conflict. Thus, being traitors to God by their fearfulness, do they deserve to be believed, or to have people respect what they say?' This is Paul's aim here.

This teaches all ministers of the Word to have such constancy and faithfulness that they are unconcerned about whether the doctrines they preach are hated or whether they are pleasing to their hearers. They must follow their course, and not strike sail at the slightest sign of wind, nor must they sway like reeds bending here and there. Whatever changes and revolutions occur, whatever trouble and confusion arises, let them continue to serve God. In brief, we must practically apply that which we learnt earlier, which is that if we seek to please men, we are abandoning the service of the Son of God. This is the first point.

However, all believers can draw good, practical instruction from this passage. We are to be wary of those who seek their own profit and advantage, who desire the acclaim of others and want to be esteemed. For such people never have any stability. As I have already said, this may not be immediately apparent, because some are dupes; they even think that it is thanks to them that the Word of God does not appear odious, and is rather applauded. Therefore, they may appear to be on fire, and yet change their minds overnight. If there is some danger and they see that they are being prompted to testify to the Lord Jesus Christ, then they reveal their cowardice, and finally turn in the opposite direction, and turn their coat as the proverb says. Whatever happens, let us always be on our guard, that we might only trust those whose lives are upright, and who do not wander away when they see the world conspiring against them. Even when others are so possessed with rage that they seem to be about to devour them, and even when dangers are most apparent, they ought to continue steadfast and constant. In this way we can distinguish them as servants of God. But those who alter and are counterfeit, who first say one thing, then another (to escape the hatred of men and avoid suffering persecution), we must guard against so that we are not deceived or misled, for they are like deadly plagues. We cannot have any security or support unless we display the good judgment and carefulness that Paul urges us to have in this passage.

Now this message is necessary today. For why is it that so many hypocrites murmur as boldly as whores against the Word of God, and uphold such gross abuses as we see in the Papacy: the superstitions, the idolatries, the errors? It is because they know that if they do

not keep the pot boiling, and hold on to certain things, they will simply starve! They also consider the danger of persecution if they uphold such doctrine. They see it condemned by princes and powerful people in this world; they therefore decide to keep themselves hidden away in the shade. This, I tell you, is why an infinite number of people disguise the truth of God, and falsify it; instead, they uphold many corrupt practices. The reason is that they do not wish to endure for the sake of Jesus Christ. It is true that they may not be Papists in the least degree, nor blaspheme openly against the Word of God; yet they desire to create another path, yes, made according to their liking. For they accuse us of being too extreme and too rigorous because we condemn those who attend Mass, and those who convince themselves that they do not worship idols! 'Come now!', they say, 'Provided that they do not have these things in their hearts, do we need to oppress them to the point of creating offence, and cause people to risk death over it? What reason can there be for this? Our life is precious to God, and even if we do commit evil, he will still pity us in our frailty!' Those who speak in this way show for certain that they are motivated by some other reason; that is, that they have noticed that the world is inflamed against us and that it seems we daily run the risk of sinking and perishing. This is why they draw back, and seek to operate as a separate group, when they see the impending danger.

However, because we see weak preachers running away from persecution, not wishing to suffer any conflict for the Lord Jesus Christ, bending and compromising only in order to enjoy peace in this world, we must pay all the more attention to Paul's warning here, and discern who are the true servants of Jesus Christ. They are people who have no thought for their own profit, who do not seek the applause of men, nor the best fare, nor the honours of this world. They are content just simply to do their duty, without concerning themselves about the kind of wind that is blowing, be it a tempest or whirlwind, or be it calm, as long as they profit their hearers and maintain the doctrine that has been committed to them in all purity. If we follow that which is taught us here, it is certain that our faith will not waver. There are many today who do not know what they ought to do, and yet they say, 'I fear conflict and differences of opinion, and the strife that has to be faced in this world.' Some conclude that they must devote themselves fully to the Lord Jesus Christ, but there are others who follow a more gentle route, and who only desire a half-hearted transformation. Whom should I believe?

Simply open your eyes, for those who use such excuses are not seeking to follow the truth. They are quite happy to veil their turpitude, and to seek the flattery of others. But what do they gain? Satan is leading them to perdition, and they desire to follow him! Because they fear what will happen to them in life, they love the shadows, and devote themselves to pleasure and comfort. They must therefore receive the payment that they deserve. Those who deliberately become brutish in this way have been taken over by Satan, Paul declares, and now remain perplexed, not knowing what to do. They do not stop to think that those who simply preach the truth of the gospel are not to be pliable people, but to pursue their course without worrying about whether or not their doctrine is pleasing to everyone else. Since God has commanded them to speak, they do so. On the other hand, simpering people who say that we have to tread carefully and not 'swing beyond our hinges', who claim that it were better to be counterfeits, and double-minded;

such people cannot be driven by zeal or affection for serving God. They do not consider either the edification or well-being of the church. In short, their only concern is that they might escape persecution, and retain their comforts; they do not want anyone to attack them. Now this is indeed worthy of note, for those today who remain in their nests and offend God have no excuse. Why? Because Paul gives us a sure mark which distinguishes the true servants of God from the hirelings from whom we are to flee; that is to say, those who seek only to feed their stomachs and enjoy the comforts of this world.

At this point, he adds 'lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ'. By this word 'cross', there is no doubt but that Paul includes all doctrine, and he is saying that it is very difficult to preach in all simplicity that which is contained in the Word of God, without encountering much conflict. For although God protects us (I am speaking about those of us who preach his Word), and has no desire to put us through trials so rigorous that our enemies come against us with drawn swords, yet it is still true to say that the world has never obediently accepted the gospel, and there have always been murmurers and opponents. Indeed, we still see them today, and shall continue to do so, for our Lord wants to test the faithfulness of his own, and ultimately demonstrate the invincible power of his Word, which overcomes all the obstacles reared up by Satan. As it says in Jeremiah, 'And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee' (Jer. 1:19). Thus, God is glorified when the world, together with Satan, makes its strongest efforts, and yet cannot prevent the truth from running its course.

For this reason, Paul says that these motley people, who disguise and falsify the Word of God, are running away from the cross. In other words, they are fleeing from the true message of the gospel, in order to avoid persecution. Once again, this is a badly needed warning for us. For if we desire to serve God and his church, we must always be prepared to undergo danger. Even though the fires are not lit, and the enemies are not armed to execute the cruel persecution that they would like to mete out (or rather, even though our Lord is restraining those who are furious with his Word, and who wish to throw off his yoke), yet we must, nevertheless, suffer the revilings of many people. We will be defamed; there will be murmurings and slanders against us; but let us breathe it all in and then harden ourselves against it, as it were. We see that wherever the gospel is preached, a thousand accusations come against those who seek to carry out their duty faithfully. They are put on trial, and accused of this and that, but it is all pure calumny. In short, all those who wish to pursue their course must prepare themselves to bear many trials; these would lead them to compromise, were they not determined to obey God despite everyone else. Here is one thing.

However, we ought to remember that this extends to the whole body of the church in general. When we hear the message of peace that is brought to us in the name of God, let us not expect to be at rest as regards this world, but always to have to deal with many quarrels and difficulties. If anyone is not prepared for this, he must leave the Lord Jesus Christ, for such a person can never be one of his disciples. As he declares with his own mouth, the one who does not bend his shoulders to carry his burden and his cross is not worthy to be in his school, and indeed all such are excluded (Matt. 10:38). Therefore, let us learn that, being called to the Lord Jesus Christ, we must share in his cross as much as

pleases him; as it is written, that if we suffer with him, we will also be glorified and partake of the power which was revealed at his resurrection (Rom. 6:5). We must still have fulfilled in us, as members of his body, the sufferings that he first endured. It is true that he alone suffered what was necessary for our salvation, but we need to be conformed to his image, as it says in the eighth chapter to the Romans. However, even if God spares us from being amongst tyrants who could torture us, or evil men who could attack us, and he ensures that they only bark at us; yes, even if he leaves us in peace, it is because he pities our frailty and spares us because of our weakness. Let us not flatter ourselves in this meanwhile, but let us pray to God that through his Holy Spirit he would strengthen us. Then, when he calls us to line up ready for combat, we will not act like raw recruits, but will have premeditated long since the fact that we must share in the sufferings of Jesus Christ in order to reach the glory of his resurrection.

Paul, having thus spoken, now adds, in order to strengthen his argument, that those who are circumcised and who preach circumcision, do not keep the law, but they wish to glory in the flesh of those to whom they taught the ways of Judaism. In this passage, Paul is again accusing his adversaries of being double-minded people, in whom there is nothing but falsehood. Why? Before the coming of Jesus Christ, circumcision was a sign, much like baptism today. For the Jews knew that they were set apart by God as his inheritance. But those who mixed circumcision with the gospel fully believed that they too had to keep the law of Moses because it had been given by God and, therefore, must never be abolished. Thus the excuse they used was that circumcision was a sign that they observed the whole law. But here Paul reproaches them for not keeping the law at all. They were, therefore, deceiving God and man, because this was an exterior sign of something they were not doing; the very opposite was true! We can now see Paul's intention here.

With regard to this expression, 'keep the law', it is sometimes taken to mean accomplishing and observing all that it contains. No one can 'keep the law' in the sense that no one can perfectly accomplish all that is commanded therein. There is good reason for it to be referred to as an intolerable burden (Acts 15:10). Also, we know how weak we are, and the law reveals God's angelic standard of righteousness. How, then, is it possible to reach it? Therefore, no one keeps the law if we take this to mean perfect obedience which cannot be criticised. Believers, being governed and led by the Spirit of God, keep the law, that is to say, they walk according to the rule that is given in the law. Not that they run as fast as they ought, nor that they reach their goals immediately, yet they still aim at these things, God supporting them and not imputing their sins to them. Thus, believers keep the law.

However, here he is referring to the ceremonial law (although on previous occasions, Paul has shown us that all the commandments of God can only bring about our condemnation if we do not have resort to the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ). Yet here he is speaking about the ceremonies and shadows. Let us now consider his meaning here. He says that those who are circumcised do not keep the law. He means that whilst they have this sign as a standard, to make others think that they are Jews, in order to avoid hatred and persecution, they do not observe the whole law, for they still allow themselves freedom to despise all that ought to accompany circumcision. The person who is

circumcised ought also to sacrifice, and abstain from eating meat that is forbidden in the law, keep the festivals that are appointed therein, observe the various washings and cleansings, and so on. But these people pay no attention to this. When they are alone in secret and not being watched, none of this matters to them, and they have no scruples about showing contempt for the whole ceremonial law. Therefore, we can see that they were not circumcised out of zeal, but because they cared about what others think of them.

Now we must be clear that Paul is speaking here about those who insisted on the circumcision of others as a compulsory act. For on certain occasions, Paul had to be careful to conform to the ways of the Jews, and to forfeit the liberty that he otherwise rightfully enjoyed, so as not to give offence (Acts 16:3; 1 Cor. 8:9). But he always maintained that he was not under any obligation to do so. Thus, since Paul submitted of his own free will, he did not wish to place others in servitude, as indeed he protests, when he says that he would not wish to bind anyone. It is true that this is said in another context, in relation to marriage, but he is still setting out in general terms that he does not wish to cast a snare for the souls that were bought by the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus Paul conducted himself. Now he says here, 'Those who constrain you to be circumcised, in other words, who impose the law upon you, and who tell you that you must keep this ceremony or else commit a mortal sin, needlessly subjugate you.' To sum up, those who wanted to force Christians to submit to observing the ceremonies and shadows of the law of Moses are here accused of double-mindedness. They did not really do these things because God required them but because they wanted to please and gratify others, and thereby escape persecution.

Today, we need the same warning that the Galatians had to have in those days. If we consider the state and condition of our own age, we will easily recognise that this teaching is most necessary, and that the Spirit of God wants to reveal that which he knew would be important for us. For how many people do we find today who strongly and firmly uphold the ceremonies of the law, and see nothing wrong with this? Worse than this, they uphold follies and traditions which have been invented by men; and even abuses, errors and deceits which are more terrible and more foolish than anything else. All of these are insisted upon with extreme rigidity by those who want us to obey them.

When we set before these hypocrites the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and tell them that the light of the gospel is obscured by all such observances, or that we are becoming like the Jews (for truly, the Papists have borrowed so many things from the law that it is hard to distinguish between the Jews and those who call themselves Christians) — when we tell them these things, they still maintain that they must keep them to the very end because they have been observed since the beginning of time. If we go further and tell them that these are such follies that even pagans have never stooped to observe such awful or such ridiculous superstitions as they do today, they will reply: 'Oh, but we must keep the traditions of our Holy Mother Church.' They will rant and rave over this matter. But what are these hypocrites doing now, who have incited the rage of both princes and judges against those who faithfully preach the Word of God? Well, as soon as they are amongst their own, they simply mock at these traditions, but when they are engaged in a debate about them, they will say the very opposite to all that they preach and declare in



the flesh. By this we can see that they have no zeal for God and no integrity; but they seek to eat their fill, and to feast luxuriously, and then to be at peace and to have all their comforts and pleasures.

We see, therefore, that there are so many people without a single ounce of the fear of God or reverence for his Word, who nevertheless pretend to be great zealots. They allure poor souls, only to strangle them in a manner of speaking; therefore we must pay all the more attention to what Paul declares here. In other words, when we understand that these people who shout and rage do not practise what they preach, let us be on our guard and find out what motivates those we permit to teach us. It is true that if a man does the reverse of what he says, we must not as a consequence allow the Word of God to lose its authority over us. It is not fair to dethrone God from his sovereign position of authority for the sake of one wicked man. If a person leads a dissolute life, or commits a cowardly act, and yet has preached faithfully, we must not allow this to detract from the heavenly doctrine itself. We must not permit the truth of God to diminish in our eyes because a man, fickle by nature, alters and wavers, or if he is a hypocrite and his life does not match that which his mouth proclaims. I tell you right now that whenever we see those who seem champions of the truth, giving themselves permission to do anything and licence to do the opposite of all that they preach, we must consider the situation, and, using our good judgment, refuse to be deceived by false appearances, or led by the nose. Let us search out their doctrine and make a good and thorough examination of it.

If we proceed in this way, we will see that the Papist's doctrine is nothing but a covering that they hide behind so that they can remain at peace in this world. They do not care how things appear to God, and they cannot face changing because they do not wish to expose themselves to the hatred of others. For they always live in fear of bringing trouble upon themselves or having further problems. When we see this, we know it to be an sure indication of the fact that we must guard against Satan's attacks, so that we will not be deceived, at least not inadvertently, as we have been saying.

Finally, Paul adds that these people want to glory in the flesh of simple-minded folk. This definitely relates to the sign of circumcision. It is as if he is saying, 'They want to leave their mark upon you, in order to prove that they have won you over.' How detestable this makes them, that they would abuse the sign that God gave to ratify the adoption of Abraham and his descendants, and corrupt its true and legitimate use. For God had commanded the Jews to be circumcised. Why? So that they would understand that the whole human race was cursed, there being nothing but pollution within us, and that therefore we must renounce all that pertains to our nature or else forever remain polluted and be condemned before God. This is what the Jews had to learn through circumcision. Yet they received testimony to the fact that their salvation would come through human seed, as indeed we know that we are blessed by God through the Lord Jesus Christ. This circumcision was designed to humble the Jews and cause them to be dissatisfied with themselves and ashamed when they saw that their nature was cursed. And yet it was also a testimony to the grace of God, enabling them to call upon him as their Father, knowing that through the seed promised to Abraham, they would receive salvation.

This, I say, is the true and legitimate use of circumcision. But what did these people that Paul speaks against do? They knew that circumcision no longer applied, and that since the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, baptism was sufficient. But because the Jews called all who were not circumcised apostates, these scoundrels retained the sign without the reality. We can see, therefore, that they were true forgers, turning this doctrine into something other than God intended when he instituted this spiritual sacrament, simply because they sought to satisfy the world.

The same is true today. Those who seek to overturn God's truth are much worse than Paul's adversaries, for there was some semblance of honesty in their pretext for maintaining circumcision and the figures of the law, in that these had been instituted and established by God. But what about these hypocrites who loudly proclaim that we must keep the ancient rites without the least alteration? Upon what do they base their views? They cannot claim that God is the author of all these things. Men have invented them according to their own fantasies, or, rather, Satan has whispered these things in their ears. In short, there is a confused labyrinth of teachings in the Papacy which they refer to as 'the service of God'. These are dreams put forward by men, and the devil is still their chief source of inspiration. Yet such scoundrels insist that we can take nothing away. What is their motive? They say that these are the means whereby we can obtain God's grace, and that they also inspire men to a greater level of devotion. Then again, they refer to all the foolish inventions that their own heads have devised as 'sacraments', saying, 'You must observe this because it is a sacrament'. When all is said and done, it is obvious that, above all else, they want to please men and preserve themselves. They are forced, in spite of themselves, to confess that all of this is neither here nor there as far as God is concerned, and their service does not please him in the least; he would disown it all, for he seeks to be served by obedience. However, we cause terrible confusion when we suggest removing these things, and when we speak clearly about such matters.

This, I say, is the way they disguise, corrupt and falsify religion and make it a confused mixture of just about everything. They may just say that we can remove the worst and most grievous errors, whilst leaving the ceremonies, which are still admissible. All those, I say, who speak in this way only seek a fair wind and a good profit in this world. This being the case, let us be warned by the Spirit of God to flee such plagues. Although we cannot enjoy victory in this world, and although we are criticised and shamefully accused, may we keep ourselves upright for the sake of the truth of God. May it be enough for us to enjoy the approval of our heavenly judge, even if the whole world regards us as an abomination. However much of this treatment we see, let us be patient, waiting for the day when the Lord Jesus reveals himself as our surety, and gives such victory to his truth that all his enemies stand in shame and silence before him.

Now let us fall down before the majesty of our great God, acknowledging our sins and praying that he would so touch us by his Holy Spirit with a true spirit of repentance, that we might tremble, despairing of ourselves, being emptied and stripped of all presumption. Furthermore, may it please him to increase in us the graces of his Holy Spirit so that we are no longer given over to our flesh and to this world, and hindered and held back by them. May we instead aim to serve him and make every effort to ensure that his name is

glorified in us more and more, and that we bear visible evidence of our adoption, that we may be strengthened within ourselves. Thus others will have occasion to glorify the name of our great God, when he has worked in us. May he show this grace, not only to us, but also to all peoples and nations on earth, etc.

## **Sermons on the First Chapter of the Book of Ephesians**

### **The First Sermon on the First Chapter**

by John Calvin

*‘Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to all you holy and faithful ones in Jesus Christ. which are at Ephesus. Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ.’*

#### **Ephesians 1:1-3**

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When we read the epistles which St. Paul wrote to a variety of places, we must always consider that God meant they should serve not only for one time alone, or for certain people only, but for ever, and in general for the whole church. And truly if a man considers well the doctrine that is contained in them, it will be easy to discern that God’s intention was to be heard in the things that are spoken there, even to the world’s end; and also that he has such a care for us that he has not passed over or forgotten anything that might further our salvation. The sum of this Epistle which I have now taken in hand to expound is that St. Paul confirms such as had been already instructed in the gospel, in order that they might know that that is what they must rest upon, as upon the true and perfect wisdom, and that it is not lawful to add anything to it.

Paul tells us that the benefits which are brought us by our Lord Jesus Christ and of which we are made partakers by means of his gospel are so excellent that we must surely be extremely unthankful if we scurry to and fro like people who are never at rest or contented. And then he shows us also what we have in Christ in order that we should so cleave to him as not to presume to seek help anywhere else, but assure ourselves that he has procured everything for us.

Again, on the other side, he shows us that Christ has so well provided for his church that if we know how to use the gifts of grace he offers us, we shall have full and perfect happiness. Along with this, he warns such as have been instructed in the truth of the gospel to lead a holy life, and to show that they have profited as they ought to do in God’s school.

Now these things serve not only for the city of Ephesus, nor for any one country, nor for any one age or time, but we have need to be urged on more and more, seeing that the devil strives ceaselessly to turn us to evil. And when he cannot lead us completely away from the doctrine of Jesus Christ, he labours to make it distasteful to us some way or another, and to entangle us in new curiosities, only to bring to pass that we may not be constant in the faith that we have received, but give way to vacillation. Now whenever

our fancies are so fidgety, it is certain that an opening is made to blot out the remembrance of all that we had learned before and to take in many follies, yes, and erroneous doctrines, which serve to corrupt and pervert the purity of our faith.

We see then that the doctrine which is contained in this epistle is directed and dedicated to us at this present day, and that God has by his wonderful providence so disposed things beforehand that we not only have had the foundations of the gospel upon which to ground ourselves, but also the means by which our faith may from day to day grow and increase, so that we may still go forward until we reach perfection.

First and foremost, St. Paul claims the authority belonging to him, which had been given him by God, in order that men should not waste their time over his person, as though his word had been but the saying of a mortal man. For in very deed our Lord Jesus Christ is the only master from whom we must learn, for it is witnessed of him from heaven that it is only he and no other to whom we must listen [Matt. 17:5]. It has always been God's will to keep the guiding of his own church to himself, and that his Word should be received without contradiction. He has not given that privilege to any creature. And when Jesus Christ is ordained in the place of God his Father, it is because he is God manifested in the flesh, and the infallible truth itself, and his wisdom which was before all time [I Tim. 3:16].

Furthermore, when men speak they must not do it in their own name, nor put forward anything of their own fancy and brain, but they must faithfully set forth the thing that God has enjoined upon them and given them in charge. Thus you see why St. Paul uses this preface, as it were everywhere, that he is an apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ. Hence he holds it as a settled principle that if any man introduces himself to speak in his own name, there is nothing but rashness in him, for he takes upon himself what belongs to God only.

Again, since our Lord Jesus Christ was purposely sent to be our last teacher that we might have such wisdom as is perfect and utterly without fault, therefore St. Paul calls himself an apostle sent by him. This presupposes two things; first, that St. Paul had that charge committed to him; secondly, that he duly acquitted himself of it by rendering faithful service in the office that he was called to. For if a man were the most gifted and most excellent in the world, yet if he thrusts himself forward under his own impulse, he disturbs all order. And we know that God will have order and not disorder amongst us, as St. Paul says in the fourteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians.

He then that speaks, at least to teach, must have a calling, that is to say, he must be admitted and have his charge given him, so that every man may not put himself forward by reason of an unadvised zeal, as I said before. But to speak further of St. Paul's calling is not needful at this time, for we know how God gave testimony that he anointed him as his apostle [Acts 9:15]. And indeed he does not dispute much about it here, because it was known well enough in the church of Ephesus. But since the Galatians had been troubled by deceivers, so that St. Paul's authority, yes, and the name of God himself had been disgraced there, we see how he maintained his own status, telling them that the

reverence due to an apostle of Jesus Christ could not be taken from him without overthrowing the divine order [Gal. I:13—16]. Therefore it is enough for him here to have said in one word that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Let us come to the second point upon which I touched, namely, that it is not enough for a man to be called, except he discharge his duty with a pure conscience and with integrity in his office, which thing St. Paul took upon him as a thing beyond all question, and he had given sufficient proof of it. The deceivers may well boast with full mouth that they are called, as we see they do. For all they who fight against God and his Word, and sow trouble and tares in his church, would fain make a shield of their calling, and also of their zeal, for they will insist on being called Christians over and over again. But St. Paul had sufficiently proved that he did not come of himself, nor sought anything else than to spend himself in the building up of the church. And since the same was well known in Ephesus (as we may gather from the history of St. Luke: Acts 19), and he had fought many a hard battle, therefore he thinks it enough to say in one word that he is an apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Here we must take warning, first to keep to the pure doctrine which we know has proceeded from God, for we cannot go wrong if we follow that rule. And seeing that in our Lord Jesus Christ we have the performance of all that is requisite and needful for our instruction, so that we have no need to doubt whether we must keep to the gospel or add something to it, let us be content to take the Son of God as our Master, especially as he vouchsafes to stoop so low as to take that charge upon him, and also testifies that if we have profited well in his doctrine, we shall come to the true goal to which we should make our way.

You see then that the first lesson which we have to gather from this passage is that our faith must not waver one way or another, but have a sure and immoveable foundation to rest on, namely, God's truth, even as it is contained in the gospel. And seeing that St. Paul is sufficiently acknowledged by us, let us not doubt that God's Spirit speaks to us at this day by his mouth, neither let us hear the doctrine as if it were subject to our judgment. But let us subject our own understanding and minds and receive it without calling it in question, unless we will wilfully make war against God and lift up ourselves above him. This, then, is one of the things which we have to notice from this passage.

Furthermore, in order that this doctrine may not only be revered among us, but that it may also be pleasant to us, let us take note that St. Paul speaks in the name of Christ, who was sent to us by God his Father to bring us glad tidings of peace. Also let us bear in mind how he says in another passage that he was ordained to bring the message of reconciliation, and that he beseeches men in God's name to be reconciled to God [2 Cor. 5:20]. Now I told you that this was done to make the doctrine of the gospel sweet, that we might be desirous of it and give ourselves wholly to it. For whenever it is told us that God speaks to us, truly it is enough to give authority to all that he shall speak. But yet we may tremble at his voice and at the same time be troubled by it, according as we see a great number confess well enough that God deserves to be obeyed and to have all men subject to him, but in the meanwhile they turn away and shun him as far as they can, because his

voice makes them afraid.

But when Jesus Christ speaks to us as the mediator between God and man, we may go to him boldly, for (as it is said in the Epistle to the Hebrews) we are no more, as it were, at Mt. Sinai, where the lightnings flashed in the air when the law was published, insomuch that if a beast had come near to it, it must have died. The voice which God uttered at that time was terrible [Heb. 12:18—20; Exod. 19:12]. But nowadays, seeing that he encourages us by his gospel to receive the grace he offers us, and intends to wipe away the remembrance of our sins, let us allow ourselves to be justified by his free grace, and let us be peaceable and obedient to him. For indeed this ought to move us to come to him like poor hungry souls to be fed with the heavenly food that he will give us. Thus we see in effect what we have to remember when St. Paul calls himself the apostle of Jesus Christ.

Paul adds that he is an apostle by the will of God. This serves to place it beyond all doubt, in order that men should not blame him for presumption, as though he thought himself of better reputation than other men. He protests that it was not because of any worthiness of his own, but because it had pleased God to choose him for that office. And certainly it is no feigned humility when he says he was set in that position by God's mere grace and choosing [I Cor. 15:9; I Tim. 1:13—16]. For we see how in other passages he confesses that he is not worthy of such honour, but rather had deserved utter damnation, and therefore was to be taken as a mirror of God's infinite goodness, in that he had exalted him so high, even him who had been a murderer of Christians, who had shed the blood of the martyrs, and who had blasphemed against God and his Word, as he himself reports it.

We see then that there was no pretence in this confession of his, where he says that he was set in that state and rank by the will of God alone. And this serves a great purpose still, in order that we may not esteem God's Word according to the worth of those who bring it to us. For one of the common artifices which the devil uses to diminish reverence for God's Word is to place before our eyes the persons who bring it. Now it is certain that we are frail vessels and of no value, yes, of no more worth than broken pots. What is there in those whom God has ordained to be the ministers of his Word But the treasure is inestimably great at all times, despite the contemptibleness of the vessels [2 Cor. 4:7].

Let us take note then that when men come to bear testimony to the forgiveness of our sins and the salvation we ought to hope for, our faith must rise up higher and not stand questioning whether such a man is worthy to be heard or not, or enquiring what manner of person he is. Let us content ourselves with the thought that God by that means intends to draw us to himself. This is the way we must walk, and if we step aside from it, we soon go astray and are on the way to perdition.

Let us note this well, then, that we must submit ourselves to God's will and ordinance and receive without hindrance the doctrine that is preached to us by the mouths of mortal men. For we must not be wise in the way that many people are, who demand whether God could not send his angels from heaven and teach us by revelations, nor in the way of some busybodies who make pretence that they have the Holy Ghost at their beck and call,

[en leur manche (Fr.) (In their sleeve)], for which reason they disdain to receive the gifts as they are dealt out by God. So that we may not be bewitched by Satan after this manner, let us take note how it is said here that it is God's will that the gospel should be preached by the mouths of men, and that they are, as it were, witnesses to us. Whoever exempts himself from this ordinance is acting as if he thrusts back God's hand when he offers him sure and infallible testimony of his salvation. Thus you see what we still have to take note of from this passage.

Again, they that are called to proclaim God's Word ought to take warning from St. Paul's example to walk in lowliness. For who are we if we compare ourselves with him He shows us that he was not chosen for any native sufficiency or ability, but because it was God's will to have it so. Therefore let us assure ourselves that we hold all things of God and his pure grace, and that we cannot attribute anything to ourselves, unless we intend to rob him of his right. And we know that such ingratitude is not to be tolerated.

Next the apostle says, 'To all the holy ones that are in Ephesus and to the faithful in Jesus Christ'. It is true that the name of the city is expressed here, but yet (as I have touched on already) the doctrine is common to us all, and God has granted it for our use at this day, and we must receive it as if St. Paul were still alive and among us. Yes, and we must not only have an eye to him, but to the Person by whom he is sent. For although he died when he had finished his race, yet God's Spirit is immortal. Whatever happens, we must, for our learning, bear in mind what St. Paul says here when he speaks to the saints and faithful ones in Jesus Christ.

Although, then, we are not of that time, nor of the country and people of Asia, nevertheless seeing it has pleased God to join us with those to whom St. Paul wrote in his time, let us assure ourselves that it behoves us to be strengthened in the faith which we have received by the gospel, because it was the intention and purpose of the Holy Spirit to exhort to perseverance all those who have the rudiments of the gospel, and are still weak and in need of stronger confirmation.

But let us bear well in mind these words where it is said, 'the saints and faithful ones in Jesus Christ'. For St. Paul shows that all the holiness of men is nothing else but pretence until God has brought them to his own service and dedicated and consecrated them to it by faith. For we are all unclean by nature, and nothing but infection can come from us. It is true that, if men put on some fine outward show and appearance, they will be accounted as righteous as can be, and their virtues will be commended everywhere, just as we see that a man can acquire the reputation of great perfection if he but possesses some fair qualities. But we must remember that it is said in the fifteenth chapter of Acts that God cleanses men's hearts by faith [15:9]. And he had great reason to do so, for (as the prophet Jeremiah says) man's heart is a pit of horrible confusion [17:9]. We ourselves do not perceive it, but God has clearer eyes than me. Be that as it may, let us assure ourselves of this, that all the holiness which men imagine they have is but corruption and abominable before God, until such time as they are made one by the faith of the gospel. Therefore note it for a settled point that no other holiness is accepted and acknowledged at God's hand than the holiness of believers. For except we first become Christians we



are blind and can never render to God his due.

Although there were no other sacrilege than this, would it not be enough to mar all the virtues that we could have besides Again, seeing that the spirit of perfection, the spirit of the fear of God, the spirit of righteousness and the spirit of purity abide and rest in Jesus Christ, it is certain that all such as are separated from him have nothing else in them but vice and all manner of uncleanness, however much the world may applaud them.

On the other hand, let us note also that all such as boast of having faith in the gospel, and are not sanctified by God, betray their own hypocrisy and lying, and belie themselves by their own life, no matter what they may sing or say, just as we see many nowadays who defile and profane this name of the faith which ought to be holy. For every man will say that he is faithful, and they who have least faith are boldest to say that there is no faith but in themselves. And would God that it were so only by half! But we see even among all that bear the name of Christians that their whole life is disordered and loose, insomuch that they mock God to the full and despise all religion, and yet nevertheless in the meanwhile think (as I have said already) that they are greatly wronged if they are not taken as good and catholic Christians.

Yet for all this we see how St. Paul links these two things together in an inseparable bond, namely, that if we have the faith of the gospel, we must consequently give ourselves over entirely to our God and separate ourselves from the corruptions of the world, just as we have seen that in the Epistle to the Galatians [I:4; 4:5—7] he says that the coming into the world of our Lord Jesus Christ is in order that we should be sanctified by his blood, to yield obedience henceforth in all pureness to God his Father. And as he says in another place [IThess. 4:7] we are not called to uncleanness but to righteousness, in order that God's name should be honoured and glorified by us.

Thus you see what we have to remember from this preface, in order that we may be the better prepared to receive the doctrine contained in this Epistle, and that it may have such authority among us as it deserves, and moreover be made pleasant to us, so that we may understand how it is for our special benefit to learn at Paul's hand. For the apostle testifies the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to us and leads us to God to be reconciled to him, whereas we are naturally the children of wrath. And furthermore he shows how we may stand in God's favour, so that we may be bold to call upon him as our Father and be sure that he also accounts us his children.

Next Paul uses a thanksgiving to lift up all men's hearts to acknowledge how much they are bound and indebted to God, especially considering that he has shown himself so bountiful towards them in giving forth himself in all kinds of ways. 'Blessed (he says) be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things (or in heavenly places) in Christ.' Since the chief sacrifice which God requires at men's hands is that they should acknowledge his benefits and be thankful to him for them, St. Paul considers first of all how the same may provoke them to do their duty, for we are so slack that it is frightful to see it. We can well enough confess that our chief study and endeavour ought to be to have a well-ordered life,

namely, to praise God. For if a man asks us why we are found in this world, why God has such a care for us, why his goodness feeds and cherishes us, and finally why he, as it were, dazzles us with the great number of benefits he bestows upon us, it is in order that we should yield some acknowledgement of them to him. For (as it is said in the psalm) we for our part cannot profit him at all, neither does he require anything else of us in exchange, but thanksgiving, according as it is said in Psalm 116, 'What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits which I have received from him, except to take the cup of salvation at his hand and to call upon his name

You see then that all that we can ever bring to God is but to acknowledge ourselves bound to him for all things. And yet, for all that, no man discharges his duty, no, nor a hundredth part of it, in that respect, but rather, all of us from the greatest to the least defraud him of it, inasmuch as we do not cease through our baseness to bury his praise which ought to resound in our mouths. For this reason our Lord rebukes us for our negligence, for when the holy Scripture exhorts us to praise God and uses many words for that purpose, let us not think that they are superfluous, but let us acknowledge them to be so many upbraidings of our malice and wickedness for failing in the thing that is so requisite and (as you would say) the principal thing in life.

It is true that the Holy Spirit often sets forth other reasons why we should magnify God's name, as (for example) the order of nature, the fruits which the earth yields, the aid and help which God gives us, and other such things. And these are sufficient matter for which to praise God. But St. Paul leads us higher here, and will have us to glorify God above all things. He thinks it not enough to own that God has placed us in the world and that he nourishes us here, and that he provides all things needful during the passing of this transitory life, but he also says that God has chosen us to be heirs of his kingdom and of the heavenly life.

We are then doubly bound to God, and that, much more closely than ignorant and unbelieving wretches are. For although they are sufficiently indebted already, yet the good he has done us in Jesus Christ is beyond all comparison more excellent and noble, because he has adopted us to be his children. It is true, since we are men, that we are of the number of his creatures which he has fashioned after his own image. But what of that? This image is defaced in us by sin and by the corruption with which we are tainted by Adam's disobedience. And now what other heritage have we than his wrath and eternal death?

In brief, we are not worthy to be reckoned among the number of brute beasts, if we remain in the state which is ours by nature. Now then, seeing that God makes us members of his only Son, and ranks us with the angels and prepares us to become partakers of his own nature and glory (as St. Peter says in his first Epistle, I:12) ought we not to perceive there so high and noble a grace as should ravish us completely.

Thus you see that of the things which St. Paul meant to say in this text, the first is that we are here exhorted to apply ourselves wholeheartedly to the work of praising God, just because we are too cold and indifferent in that respect, if we are not pushed and

constrained to it. Besides this, St. Paul had one other intention more, namely, to feed us in such a way with the grace that we have by the gospel that we may no more covet this thing and that thing after our customary manner. We see how fickle we are by nature, and when God is so good to us as to set his Word before us, we insist on having some other things beside, and nothing can content us. And why not Because we are dull and have never conceived or understood what God shows us by his Word [Eph. 3:18]. For we shall see hereafter that such as know the love that God shows us in our Lord Jesus Christ have all that they can wish, high and low, far and wide. Also St. Paul now calls upon us to bless God with the purpose of keeping us to the doctrine in which consists the fulness of all happiness, at least if we know how to use it to our profit.

Furthermore, let us also note that it is not without reason that he speaks of ‘spiritual blessings’. For although we cannot eat a scrap of bread or drink a drop of water without being robbers of God, unless we acknowledge and confess that he therein shows himself a true Father to us, nevertheless the things that concern this body and this our transitory life are nothing compared with the things that serve for the eternal welfare of our souls. And in very deed, St. Paul’s exhorting us here to praise God for his heavenly blessings is done in such a way that at the same time he gives us to understand that we must be patient if we are afflicted in respect of the flesh, and do not have all things according to our desires, and if God curtails our food and handles us not so tenderly as we could wish.

Two things therefore are contained here. The one is that we should learn to know wherein our true and perfect happiness consists, namely, in the life which we hope for and which is hid from us as yet, in order that we should not be tied to the world. Note that for one point. Secondly, that if this world rejects us and despises us, and makes a laughing-stock out of us, we must settle ourselves in patience; and while the despisers of God vaunt themselves with pomp and show and it seems that we are unhappy compared with them, insomuch that some of us suffer hunger and thirst, and others are troubled and unjustly molested, we must look further. And why Even because we ought to content ourselves with the heavenly blessings which God has bestowed upon us. This blessedness so great, so high, and so inestimable, then, must make us overlook all the encumbrances we can conceive, whenever God exercises and tries us in this world by many afflictions, and wills that we should know scarcity and the lack of many things. This is the effect of the things we have to note from this passage.

Now before we come to the rest, let us note that this word ‘blessing’ is taken in different senses when St. Paul applies it either to God or to ourselves. It is said that we bless God. And how As he blesses us. After what manner does he bless us We do not bless him as he blesses us. We come far short of that. For (as I have shown already from the sixteenth psalm) all our services can do him no good. Again, we have to conclude that (as I have also shown from the one hundredth and sixteenth psalm) all that we can bring to God is no more than this acknowledgement that we are bound to him for all the good things we have. You see then that all our blessing is but to yield the sacrifice of praise to God. Let that serve for one point.

But now, when God blesses us, is it simply in words No! No! But it is a filling of us and a

bestowing of all things upon us that we want, as far as is needful. And why is this word 'blessing' attributed to him? Because he does not need to labour and take great pains to help his servants and to give them what he knows is expedient for them. If he simply says the word, that is to say, if he only declares his will, the thing is done.

Since then God, having created the world by his word alone, has power also to do us good simply by commanding it, therefore it is said that we become rich by his blessing alone, that is to say, by his showing himself loving and favourable to us. Now let us see if we are to be excused when we defraud God of his due by disdaining to open our lips to confess how much we are bound and indebted to him after we have received so many benefits at his hand. Let all the blessings that all the men in the world can give to God be laid in the balance against the blessing with which he enriches them; and which has the greater worth All that they can put forward is that it is needful for them to confess that they can neither say nor do anything that is worth while, whereas at the same time God shows us that he has all that is requisite for our happiness. Therefore it is not without reason that St. Paul says here that the faithful must fully devote and apply their minds and endeavours to bless the name of God, seeing that he gives them so great cause, for otherwise they would be unthankful and churlish. Therefore he says two things, 'The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ'.

When he says 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ', it must be explained in this way, that the God whom we feel so favourable to us is the Father of our Lord Christ. This circumstance deserves to be noted well. For by it St. Paul makes us understand that God's benefits, especially those that belong to the heavenly life and to the everlasting salvation of our souls, cannot come to us, except Jesus Christ is, as it were, the channel of them, so that we may be made partakers of them for his name's sake. Therefore let us note well that we are shut out from all God's benefits and from all things that concern the salvation of our souls, unless Jesus Christ becomes our way.

It is true that unbelievers eat and drink and glut themselves to the utmost, and the sun shines on them. But be that as it may, to speak properly, they do not enjoy all the things God gives them, because they usurp them without any lawful title to them. For the world was created for God's children, even with respect to their Head, who is our Lord Jesus Christ, In brief, it is not without cause that St. Paul, showing how God has given himself to us, says that it is because he is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. But (as I have already told you) it is not a question of eating and drinking, but of far greater and more precious things, namely, that God has adopted us as his children. And so you see in effect what we have to bear in mind.

Yet, that we may the better profit from this passage, let us take note that we must check ourselves lest we wander into many speculations when we know God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And why? The papists have this word 'God' often enough in their mouths, and likewise the word 'Jesus Christ', but at the same time they have disfigured Jesus Christ and utterly falsified the doctrine of his gospel in which he should be seen. So they have a God, though but by confused fancies, and yet they do not know him. And truly, they can no more explain what God they serve and adore than the Turks do. We

know that our Lord Jesus Christ (in the fourth chapter of St. John) says that they who do not have the doctrine by which to rule themselves well do not know what they worship, but continually invent idols for themselves. Therefore there is but one way by which to have good and infallible access to God, and that is by beholding him in his living image, for his majesty is too high, too much hidden, and too deep for us. But Jesus Christ has communicated himself to us, and applied himself to our weakness, and taught us whatever it was requisite to know, that we might come to God his Father.

You see then that we must have our Lord Jesus Christ for our way, in order that we might not stray. For seeing that God is the Father of our Head and of him who is made one with us, you see how we may have access to come freely to him. And surely without that mediator we are entirely shut out from him, and the majesty of God is bound to make the hairs of our head stand on end. But when we consider that he is entitled the Father of him who is our Head, let us know that he also is bound to own us as his children, because he has redeemed us.

Furthermore, although St. Paul here sets down in one word what our spiritual blessings are, nevertheless he shows that God has shown himself bountiful towards us in more ways than one. And of this he will make a larger exposition later by setting forth in particular the benefits which we obtain by the gospel, for the whole of this chapter is full of them. But be that as it may, here he gives us to understand that God's giving of his gracious gifts to us is not sparingly, and that his causing us to taste them is not done with a finger-lick, [*faire goûtee à leche doigt* (Fr.)]. as they say. But he shows that God has given them to us so diversely and fully that we have reason to magnify him in every respect. Therefore let us understand that, seeing that Jesus Christ is so given to us, in him we obtain all that is necessary for our salvation and for our happiness, just as St. Paul speaks of it in the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. For if the only begotten Son is given to us, how should not all the benefits which he has in himself be communicated to us with him and through him.

But be that as it may, let us learn to taste God's spiritual gifts in such a way that all our mental faculties may be concentrated to make much of them. And that this may come to pass, let us beware of having our minds too much wedded to the world. For the very cause that draws us away, preventing us from perceiving the hundredth part of the good that God has done us and from applying his benefits to our profit, is our own vanity, because everyone of us beguiles himself with his own foolish and extravagant lusts. Therefore let us learn to shake off the things that stop us from coming to our Lord Jesus Christ. And although our evil nature provokes us to seek the transitory things of this world, yet let us endeavour to withdraw from them, so that we may yield ourselves with a free heart to God and be earnestly minded to obey him and to give ourselves wholly to him, for so it is his will to have us joined to him.

This is the thing which we have to notice in St. Paul when, having spoken of the spiritual blessings, he immediately adds, 'in heavenly places (or things)', by which he meant to show that we are not able to receive the gracious gifts which are communicated to us in our Lord Jesus Christ, and which God would have us possess, till we know that there is

not anything in this world that ought to hold us back. Therefore when once we know that we are not created to dwell for ever in this world, but that we must only be pilgrims in it, and that our permanent heritage and rest is above in heaven, let us thereupon make our way there, and press towards it more and more. And although we are feeble, yet let us not faint, but pluck up good courage and pray God to give it to us. Moreover you see that the reason why St. Paul sets down the word 'blessings' is to cause us to know that whereas the devil lays many traps to debauch us and to turn us out of the way, God has made provision for all that, for he has such a store of blessings that he can overthrow and destroy all that may ever be against our salvation.

But now let us fall down before the majesty of our good God, with acknowledgement of our faults, praying him to acquaint us more and more with them, that we may be brought to true repentance. And let us condemn ourselves and seek to find in our Lord Jesus Christ all that we need, and that not for one day, or for a mere brief moment, but continually and steadfastly to our life's end. And whatever happens to us, let us always assure ourselves that we have good cause to praise our God, and that even if we are poor and miserable in this world, the happiness of heaven is enough to appease us, to sweeten all our afflictions and sorrows, and to give us such content that we may nevertheless have our mouths open to bless God for showing himself so kindhearted and liberal towards us as even to adopt us as his children, and to show us that the heritage which has been purchased for us by the blood of his only Son is ready for us, and that we cannot miss it, seeing that we go to it with true and invincible constancy of faith. May it please him to grant this grace not only to us but also to all peoples.

## The Second Sermon on the First Chapter

by John Calvin

*'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ: According to his choosing of us in him before the foundation of the world, in order that we should be holy and unblameable before him in love'.*

### **Ephesians 1:3-4**

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We have already seen how St. Paul exhorts us to praise and bless God because he has blessed us, and that not after an earthly manner but after a spiritual manner, so that we should content ourselves with God's showing of his fatherly goodness and love towards us in opening the gate of the kingdom of heaven to us by hope. Although we are subject to much misery in this world, yet there is good reason for us to content ourselves with God's choosing of us after that fashion and with his calling of us to himself, for it is witnessed to us by the gospel that he is our Father [Matt. 6:9; Lk. 11:2] inasmuch as he has joined us to our Lord Jesus Christ as members to their Head.

And now St. Paul brings us to the origin and source, or rather to the principal cause that moved God to take us into his favour. For it is not enough that God has revealed the treasures of his goodness and mercy to us to draw us to the hope of the heavenly life by the gospel—and yet that is very much. For had not St. Paul added that which we see now, it might have been surmised that God's grace is common to all men and that he offers it and presents it to all without exception, and, consequently, that it is in every man's power to receive it according to his own free will, by which means there would be some merit in us. For if there were no distinction between men except that some receive God's grace and others refuse it, what could be said but that God has shown himself liberal to all mankind. But they that are partakers of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ attain to it by faith. And so you see what might be judged of it. But St. Paul, to exclude all merit on man's part and to show that all comes from God's pure goodness and grace, says that he has blessed us according to his election of us beforehand. As if he should say that to exalt God's grace as becomes us, we must look upon the diversity that is found among men. For the gospel is preached to some, and others do not know what it is but are utterly shut out from it, as if God should make it rain in one quarter and allow another quarter to remain very dry.

Now if it is demanded why God pities the one part and forsakes and leaves and abandons the other, there is no other answer but that it so pleases him. Upon the preaching of the gospel in a place, some will be affected with lively faith in their hearts and others will go away as they came without benefiting at all, or else they harden themselves against God and betray the stubbornness that was hidden in them before. What is the reason for this difference? Even this, that God directs the one sort by his Holy Spirit and leaves the other

sort in their natural corruption.

You see then that the thing in which God's goodness shines forth most to us, is that by the preaching of the gospel to us we have, as it were, a token that he has pitied us, loves us, calls us and allures us to him. But when the doctrine preached to us is received by us with heart and affection, that is yet a further and more special token by which we perceive that God intends to be our Father and has adopted us to be his children. Not without reason, then, St. Paul says in this passage that we are blessed by God even according to his election of us beforehand. For it is not that we have come to him; it is not that we have sought him. But the saying of the prophet Isaiah [65:i] must be fulfilled in every respect, namely, that God shows himself to such as did not seek him, and that such as were far off see him near at hand, and he says to them, 'Here I am, here I am. Although you have despised me, yet I vouchsafe to come to you because I have a care of your salvation'. Thus we see what St. Paul was aiming at in this passage.

In short, we have to note here that we shall never know where our salvation comes from till we have lifted up our minds to God's eternal counsel by which he has chosen whom he pleased and left the remainder in their confusion and ruin. Now then it is no marvel that some men think this doctrine to be strange and hard, for it does not fit in at all with man's natural understanding. If a man asks of the philosophers, they will always tell him that God loves such as are worthy of it, and that, since virtue pleases him, he also marks out such as are given that way to claim them for his people. You see then that, after our own imagination, we shall judge that God puts no other difference between men, in loving some and in hating others, than each man's own worthiness and deserving. But, at the same time, let us also remember that in our own understanding there is nothing but vanity and that we must not measure God by our own yardstick, and that it is too excessive a presumption to impose law upon God so that it would not be lawful for him to do anything but that which we could conceive and which might seem just in our eyes. The matter here, therefore, concerns the reverencing of God's secrets which are incomprehensible to us, and unless we do so, we shall never taste the principles of faith. For we know that our wisdom ought always to begin with humility, and this humility imports that we must not come weighing God's judgments in our own balances or take it upon ourselves to be judges and arbiters of them. We must be sober because of the smallness of our minds, and since we are gross and dull, we must magnify God and say, as we are taught by the holy Scripture [Ps. 36:6], Lord, thy counsels are as a great deep, and no man is able to give an account of them.

You see then that the reason why some men find this doctrine hard and irksome is because they are too much wedded to their own opinion and cannot submit themselves to God's wisdom, to receive his sayings soberly and modestly. And truly we ought to take warning from what St. Paul says, namely, that the natural man does not understand God's secrets but regards them as stark foolishness [I Cor. 2:14]. And why? Because we are not his counsellors but must have things revealed to us by his Holy Spirit, or else we shall never know them, and we must have them in such measure as he gives them to us.

St. Paul speaks here of the things we know by experience, namely, that we are God's



children, that he governs us by his Holy Spirit, that he comforts us in our miseries and that he strengthens us through patience. We should not conceive any of all these things unless we were enlightened by his Holy Spirit. How then shall we understand that which is much higher, namely, that God elected us before the creation of the world? Since the matter stands thus, let us learn to put away all that we conceive in our own brain and put it under foot, and let us be ready to receive whatever God says to us, casting away our own judgment and assuring ourselves that we cannot bring anything from our side but utter stupidity. Thus you see what we have to bear in mind.

And, in fact, we see how St. Paul exhorts us to come to the same point. 'Who art thou, O man (he says) who contends against thy God?' [Rom. 9:20]. After he had set down many replies we are accustomed to make, he says, 'O man'. By the word 'man' he meant to make us perceive our own frailty, for we are but worms of earth and rottenness [Ps. 103:14]. Now then, what audacity it is to open our mouths to reply against God. Is it not a perverting of the whole order of nature? Is it in our power to pluck the sun out of the sky, or to take the moon between our teeth, as they say? Much less is it lawful for us to contend with God and to advance reasons for controlling his judgments which we cannot comprehend.

There are those who will grant this doctrine of predestination, which St. Paul treats here, to be true, for they dare not contradict the Holy Spirit, yet they would it were buried so that it might never be spoken of. But they merely show themselves to be nothing but fools in controlling the Holy Spirit who spoke it by the prophets and apostles, and even by the mouth of God's only Son. For when our Lord intends to assure us of our salvation, he brings us back to this eternal election; and similarly when he intends to magnify the gift of faith, the one in the tenth chapter of John and the other in the sixth. And therefore that kind of people come too late to put God to silence and to efface from the holy Scripture the things which are shown there. For the whole Scripture is profitable [2 Tim. 3:16]. St Paul said that of the Law and the Prophets. Therefore we may also conclude that there is nothing superfluous in the gospel, nor anything which serves no good purpose and by which we may not be edified both in faith and in the fear of God.

But this doctrine is thus contained there, and the Holy Ghost speaks it loud and clear. They must be Manichees who intend to mutilate and take away from the gospel. For what they did not like they set aside and have forged a gospel of various pieces, allowing nothing but what they themselves thought good. Now if such heretics have shown a devilish stubbornness against God in separating things which ought to be kept together in an inseparable bond, then they are also malicious and perverse who would nowadays have the doctrine of election kept silent. For they would stop the mouth of God, if it were possible, and seal his mouth whenever he utters anything they do not like.

Again, a man may clearly see their stupidity in that St. Paul did not have a better proof than this by which to magnify God's goodness. So then, if there were no other reason, it were better that the whole world should go to confusion than that this doctrine should be reduced to silence. For is it reason that God should set the infinite treasure of his mercies before our eyes and yet that they should not be spoken of, but be thrust under foot?

But there are yet two more reasons which show that this doctrine must of necessity be preached, and that we reap such great profit from it that it had been much better if we had never been born than be ignorant of what St. Paul shows here. For there are two things at which we must chiefly aim and to which it is fitting for us to apply all our studies and endeavours, and they are the very sum of all the things God teaches us by the holy Scripture. The one is the magnifying of God as he deserves, and the other is the assurance of our salvation, so that we may call on him as our Father with full liberty [Rom. 8:15]. If we do not have these two things, woe to us, for there is neither faith nor religion in us. We may talk well of God, but it will be but falsehood.

With regard to the first point, I have told you already that God's grace is not sufficiently known but by setting God's election, as it were, before our eyes. For suppose God draws all men alike, and that such as wish to obtain salvation must come of their own free will and self-moving. If it be so, then it is certain that we deserve to be received at God's hand, and that he should handle every man according to his deserts. But how shall God's goodness be magnified Simply in this way, that he goes before us by his pure bounty and loves us despite all, without finding either in our persons or in our works any reason why he should love us. If this is true, then there must needs be election: God takes the one sort because he thinks it good to do so, and leaves the other. Thus you see it is a most certain point that God's glory does not appear and shine forth as is fitting, unless it be known that he sheds forth his goodness and love where it pleases him.

I said just now that the preaching of his Word is a singular benefit to us. And that is the reason why it is said so often in the Law and the Prophets that God has not dealt with any other nation as he dealt with the line of Abraham, in that he vouchsafed to choose and adopt them, to which the law gave sure testimony. So then the children of Israel were exhorted to praise God because he had vouchsafed to give them his law [Deut. 4:7], and, in the meanwhile, had let the poor Gentiles alone as people that did not belong to him after the same fashion. But it is yet a far greater and more special privilege when he makes us profit by that Word. For it is certain that our ears might be assailed daily with the things that should be told us and that we would never be the better for it, until God speaks to us by his Holy Spirit within us.

In this matter, then, God shows a double grace. The one is when he raises up men to preach the gospel to us, for no man is meet and sufficient to do it of himself. It is therefore necessary that God should send those who call us to him and offer us the hope of salvation. But yet, for all that, let us note well that we cannot believe unless God reveals himself to us by his Holy Spirit and speaks to our hearts by the Holy Spirit, in addition to speaking to our ears by the mouth of man. And that is the reason why the prophet Isaiah says, 'Who hath believed our doctrine, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?' [Isa. 53:1]. He shows that there is no faith in the world till God has worked in men's minds and hearts by the power of his Holy Spirit. And for the very same reason also our Lord Jesus Christ says that no man comes to him except he be drawn by the Father; but whoever has learned of my Father (he says), the same submits himself to me [Jn. 6:44]. In a word, we see clearly that God shows himself merciful to us when he

vouchsafes to enlighten us by his Holy Spirit in order that we might be drawn to the faith of his gospel.

If this was done commonly and to all men without distinction, we should still have reason to magnify God. But now, when we see that some are hardened and others fickle, and that some go their ways without receiving any profit from what they have heard, and that others are altogether stupid, it is certain that it makes God's grace more apparent to us, even as it is said by St. Luke that, at St. Paul's preaching, as many believed as were ordained to salvation [Acts 13:48]. Truly a multitude of people heard St. Paul's sermon, and, beyond all doubt, he on his side had such grace that it ought to have moved even the very stones. Nevertheless, despite this, a great many continued in their unbelief and stubbornness; others believed.

Now St. Luke says plainly that it was not that some were more clever than others, or that there was more inclination to virtue in them than in others, but that God had specially ordained them to salvation. In a word, therefore, we see that all man's merits must cease and be laid underfoot, or else God will not have the praise he deserves. Furthermore, we must understand that faith comes not of ourselves, for if it did, there would be some merit in our works. It is true that by faith we confess that there is nothing but wretchedness in us, that we are damned and accursed, and that we do not bring anything with us but only an acknowledgement of our sins. But, even so, our faith would qualify as a thing of merit if we had it through our own initiative. We must therefore conclude that it is impossible for men to believe, unless it is given them from above.

And surely St. Paul here declares something well worth observing when he says 'Blessed be God'. And for what reason? Even for so enriching us in Jesus Christ that our life is happy and blessed. And afterwards he adds, 'according to his election of us'. Is not faith comprehended among the spiritual riches of which St. Paul makes mention? Indeed, and (what is more) it is the chief of them. For it is by faith that we receive the Holy Spirit; it is by faith that we become patient in our adversities; it is by faith that we become obedient to God; it is by faith that we are sanctified to his service. In short, faith continues always chief of all the spiritual benefits that God bestows upon us.

Now let us well remember St. Paul's order. He says that God has given us faith as well as any of the rest, according to his election of us. We see then that faith depends upon God's election, or else we must make St. Paul a liar. And so, with regard to the first point, you see that all who cannot suffer having predestination plainly and openly spoken of, are deadly enemies of God's grace and would make it obscure to the utmost of their power. For (as I said before) to hide it is to overthrow all religion.

The second point is the assurance of our salvation. The papists say that we must doubt it and that we can come to God only with a hope that he will receive us; but to assure ourselves of it—that we ought not to do, for that would be too great a presumption. But when we pray to God, we must call him Father, at least if we are the scholars of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he has taught us to do so.

Now, is it at a venture that we call him Father, or are we sure of it in ourselves that he is our Father? If not, then there would be nothing but hypocrisy in our prayers, and the first word that we utter would be a lie. The papists then never know what it is to pray to God, seeing that they cannot be assured of their salvation. But (as we shall see in the third chapter especially) the Scripture shows that to pray to God rightly, we must have belief in Jesus Christ, which gives us confidence, and upon that confidence we by and by conceive boldness. Be that as it may, we must not be hesitant nor yet doubt, but we must be thoroughly resolved and persuaded in ourselves that God counts us as his children. And how may that be but by embracing his mercy through faith, as he offers it to us in his gospel, and by assuring ourselves also that we are grounded in his eternal election? For if our faith should depend upon ourselves, surely it would soon slip from us; and it might be shaken off, if it were not maintained from above. And although we are kept or preserved by faith, as St. Peter says [I Pet. 1:5], yet it is God who keeps us. If, then, our faith were not grounded in God's eternal election, it is certain that Satan might pluck it from us every minute. Though today we were the most steadfast in the world, yet we might fail tomorrow. But our Lord Jesus shows us the remedy to strengthen us against all temptations in that he says: You do not come to me of yourselves, but the heavenly Father brings you to me; and since I have taken you into my keeping, be no more afraid, for I acknowledge you as the inheritance of God my Father, and he that has given me charge of you and put you into my hand is stronger than all [Jn. 10:28—29]. We see, then, that besides setting forth God's glory, our salvation also is assured by God's eternal predestination, which ought to be sufficient reason to move us to consider what St. Paul says of it in this place.

It is true (as I have mentioned already) that many men cavil when they hear that God has elected those as it seemed good to him and rejected all the rest. For we see that it is the smaller portion that come to God; and why then has he rejected the rest? Really, it is rather like saying that the will of God should not suffice for our rule. We ought to note, first, that God is not bound at all to any person. For if we once held that principle, that he owes us the least thing in the world, then we call in question his law. But since he on his side has no obligation towards us, but that we owe everything to him while he owes nothing to us, let us see now what we shall gain by all our contending. For if we aim at compelling God to deal alike with all men, he would have less liberty than mortal creatures. If a man is rich, he may do what he likes with his own goods. If he makes a gift to someone, is it reason that he should be sued at the law for it, and that every man should demand the same sum from him? Again, a man wishes to promote someone whom he loves. Now if all poor people should come and require him to do as much for them as a matter of obligation, would it not be ridiculous? Why, a man may adopt the most distant stranger in the world to be his child and heir, and he is free to do so. And mark, God is liberal to all men, for he makes his sun to shine upon both good and bad [Matt. 5:45]. He reserves only a certain number of men on whom to bestow the privilege of adopting them as his children. What shall we now gain by murmuring against him? If any man says that then he would seem to be a respecter of persons, it is not so [Col. 3:25]. For he does not elect the rich and pass over the poor; he does not choose noble men and gentlemen rather than men of no account and low degree [I Cor. 1:26]. And therefore it cannot be said that there is any respecting of persons before God, for in choosing those that are unworthy he has

respect to his own pure goodness alone. Nor does he consider whether one is more worthy than another, but he takes whom he pleases.

What more could we wish? It is good reason, then, that we should hold ourselves contented with God's will and check ourselves and leave him to choose whom he pleases, because his will is the sovereign standard of all equity and right. And so you see the mouths of all the world stopped [Rom. 3:19]. And although the wicked and profane murmur and find fault, or even blaspheme, yet God is mighty enough to maintain his own righteousness and infinite wisdom, and when they have jabbered their fill, they are sure to be confounded in the end. For our part we see what St. Paul says here. For it is no obscure doctrine when he says that God has blessed us. Truly, inasmuch as he has enlightened us with the faith of the gospel by his Holy Spirit and made us partakers of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, even thereby (he says) he has shown that he had elected us before the creation of the world. And therefore let us understand that to magnify God's grace aright, we must (as I said before) come to this fountain and original cause, that is to say, to election.

Now we have to proceed further, for in order the better to exclude all respect and worthiness which men might pretend, since we are inclined always to attribute something to ourselves and cannot bear to be brought to nothing, he says, 'before the creation of the world'. So then, since through such thinking we imagine ourselves to have that which we do not have, it was essential that St. Paul should here beat down all such ridiculous folly. And for that reason he says we could not on our side put ourselves forward when we were not yet born. In fact, God elected us before the creation of the world, and what could we then bring to him? It is true that the papists show much subtlety on this point, for they say that God elected unto salvation such as had not yet deserved it, but yet he elected such as he foresaw would deserve it. Thus they confess that no deserving at all went before election, either in order or in time, but that God (as he to whom all things are open) knew who would be worthy of it. Speaking thus they do not deny God's election. And so, to show that these wretches who nowadays cannot bear to have it spoken of are as devils incarnate and maintain a more outrageous and vile wickedness than the papists do, we must note that the papists confess that God has elected and predestinated those whom he thought good, even before the creation of the world. They stand to that, which thing these devils deny and would have God's majesty utterly annihilated by overthrowing his counsel in that way. The papists (at least such of them as have excelled others in their walk, and I speak even of the monks and friars who are called school divines) grant even more—that this election of God's is free and that he did not choose any man for any other reason than that it pleased him. But immediately afterwards they mix up everything and throw all into confusion, for they say that when God chose whom he pleased, he did it to make them deserve it. And on this they base all their merits, to such a degree that they conclude that men may win the kingdom of heaven by their own power. They grant indeed that as touching election, it is a free gift, but they always return to their foolish supposition that God foresaw those who would do good.

But how should he foresee that which could not be For we know that all Adam's offspring is corrupted, and that we do not have the skill to think one good thought of

doing well, and much less therefore are we able to commence to do good. Although God should wait a hundred thousand years for us, if we could remain so long in the world, yet it is certain that we should never come to him nor do anything else but increase the mischief continually to our own condemnation. In short, the longer men live in the world, the deeper they plunge themselves into their damnation. And therefore God could not foresee what was not in us before he himself put it into us.

How then do we come to God How do we obey him? How do we have a quiet mind that yields itself in accordance with faith? All these things come from him, and so it follows that he must do all himself. Wherefore let us observe that in saying that God elected us before the creation of the world, St. Paul preys supposes that which is true, namely, that God could not see anything in us save the evil that was there, for there was not one drop of goodness for him to find. So then, seeing he has elected us, regard it as a very clear token of his free grace. And for the same reason, in the ninth chapter to the Romans, where he speaks of the twins Jacob and Esau at such time as they were still in their mother's womb before they had done either good or evil, it is said that the elder should serve the younger so that all should come from the side of him who called them, and not from the side of their works [Rom. 9:11—12].

We see then how St. Paul shows there at greater length that which he here touches on briefly, that is to say, that since God chose us before the creation of the world, he thereby shows sufficiently that one man is not more worthy or excellent than another; that he did not have respect to worthiness. Therefore, seeing that the distinguishing between Jacob and Esau was before they had done either good or evil, it did not come of the works but of the caller. All praise, then, must be yielded to God and nothing at all be reserved to man. And so you see yet once again what we have to note here when St. Paul says that we were elected before the creation of the world.

He confirms the thing in better fashion still by saying that the same was done in Jesus Christ. If we had been elected in ourselves it might be said that God had found in us some secret virtue unknown to men. But seeing that he has elected us outside of ourselves, that is to say, loved us outside of ourselves, what shall we reply to that? If I do a man good, it is because I love him. And if the cause of my love is sought, it will be because we are alike in character, or else for some other good reason. But we must not imagine anything similar to this in God. And also it is expressly told us here, for St. Paul says that we have been elected in Jesus Christ. Did God, then, have an eye to us when he vouchsafed to love us? No! No! for then he would have utterly abhorred us. It is true that in regarding our miseries he had pity and compassion on us to relieve us, but that was because he had already loved us in our Lord Jesus Christ. God, then, must have had before him his pattern and mirror in which to see us, that is to say, he must have first looked on our Lord Jesus Christ before he could choose us and call us.

And so, to be brief, after St. Paul had showed that we could not bring anything to God, but that he acted beforehand of his own free grace in electing us before the creation of the world, he adds an even more certain proof, namely, that he did it in our Lord Jesus Christ, who is, as it were, the true register. For God's vouchsafing to elect us, that is to say, his

vouchsafing to do it from all eternity, was, as it were, a registering of us in writing. And the holy Scripture calls God's election the book of life. As I said before, Jesus Christ serves as a register. It is in him that we are written down and acknowledged by God as his children. Seeing, then, that God had an eye to us in the person of Jesus Christ, it follows that he did not find anything in us which we might lay before him to cause him to elect us. This, in sum, is what we must always remember.

It follows next that it is 'in order that we should be pure and unblameable before God in love'. This word 'love' may be referred to God, as if it were said that we shall find no other reason why God vouchsafed to take us for his children, but only his own free love. Or else (as seems very likely) St. Paul shows us here what the true soundness and perfection of the faithful is, namely, to walk in all righteousness before God. We cannot expound the whole now, but it will suffice to tell briefly what St. Paul had in view. For he shows here that although God's election is free and beats down and annihilates all the worthiness, works and virtues of men, nevertheless it does not provide us with licence to do evil and to lead a disordered life, or to run amok, but rather it serves to withdraw us from the evil in which we were plunged. For, by nature, we can do nothing else but provoke God's wrath; wickedness will always reign in us; and we are held down under the bonds and tyranny of Satan. God, therefore, must work and change us, for all goodness comes from his election, says St. Paul.

You see, then, that that to which he meant to bring the faithful was to make them know that just as God elected them of his own free grace, so he does not give them leave to yield themselves to all wickedness, but intends to keep and preserve them undefiled to himself. For God's electing of us and, with that, his calling of us to holiness are things joined inseparably together, even as St. Paul says in another passage, that we are not called to uncleanness and filthiness, but to be dedicated to God in all piety and holiness. [I Thess. 4:7]

Now, since we cannot expound the whole at this time, let us seek to profit from this doctrine. And seeing we are now about to prepare ourselves to receive the supper of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is a pledge to us of our election, as well as the hope of our salvation and of all the spiritual benefits that come forth from this source and fountain of God's free love, let us know that there he displays his riches to us not so that we should abuse them, but rather with the purpose of being glorified for them at our hands, not only with our mouths but also with our whole life. And since we hold all things of him, let us also learn to be his and to give ourselves up to his obedience, that he may enjoy us peaceably. And let us always aim at this mark, namely, to get a sure approbation that he takes and owns us for his children, by bearing his marks and by showing in very deed that we are truly governed by his Holy Spirit in calling upon him as our Father. Thus you see, in effect, what we have to observe in this passage till the rest follows.

Now let us fall down before the majesty of our good God with acknowledgement of our faults, praying him to make us feel them in such a way that we may continually profit in his fear, and be strengthened more and more in the same; and, in the meanwhile, so to bear with our weaknesses that we may always enjoy his grace even till he has set us in

possession of all things at such time as he shall have put away our sins and blotted them out completely for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake. And so let us all say, Almighty God, heavenly Father.



## The Third Sermon on the First Chapter

by John Calvin

*'God has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world to the end we should be holy and without blame before him in love; Who has predestinated us to adopt us to himself by Jesus Christ according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace wherein he has accepted us in his well-beloved.'*

### Ephesians 1:4-6

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I began to show you earlier that it is not lawful for us to indulge in loose living with the excuse that God has elected us before the creation of the world, as though it were right for us to give ourselves over to all manner of evil, because we cannot perish, seeing that God has taken us for his children. For we must not put things asunder which he has coupled together. Seeing then that he has chosen us to be holy and to walk in purity of life, our election must be as a root that yields good fruits. For so long as God lets us alone in our own natural state we can do nothing but all manner of wickedness, because there is such great corruption and perversity in man's nature that all that men ever think of doing is contrary to God's righteousness. Therefore there is no other way but to be changed by God. And whence comes this change but only through the grace that we spoke of, namely, that he elected and chose us for his children before we were born into the world.

Yet we must note further that God lets his elect ones go for a time so that they seem to be astray and utterly lost, and yet he brings them home again to his flock when it pleases him. And this serves to humble them the more and to make his goodness and mercy so much the better known to the whole world. If God should make all his elect ones behave perfectly from their very childhood, it would not be so clearly discerned that such behaviour comes through that grace of his Holy Spirit. But when wretched people that lived loosely and for a time were given to all kinds of evil are changed, it cannot happen without God working and putting forth his hand. Thus we see that the reason why God delays the calling of those whom he has elected is (I say) to give them life by his Holy Spirit that he may make them walk in obedience to him. For when we see them suddenly reformed beyond the common expectation and opinion of men, we perceive thereby that God has displayed his power in them, as I said before. And again, on the other hand, every one of us is convinced by experience that we are indebted to God for all the good that is in us. For when we are naturally inclined to any vice and afterwards it is corrected, we well perceive that God has looked mercifully upon us.

We perceive then that we have so much more reason to be humbled seeing that we were in the way of perdition till he had drawn us out of it. And it is essential for us to note that well, for there are some fanciful heads which imagine that God so guides his elect by his Holy Spirit that they are sanctified beforehand, even from the time they are born into the world, as soon as they come out of their mother's womb. But the contrary appears, and

indeed we see how St. Paul in another passage speaking to the faithful says, ‘Some of you were plunged in covetousness, some were given to cruelty, some were scorers, some were whore-mongers and loose-livers and others were gluttons and drunkards; and, in short, you were full of all uncleanness; but God, having changed you and made you clean from such filthiness and infection, has dedicated you to himself.’ [I Cor. 6:10—11]. Again, he says to the Romans, ‘You ought to be ashamed of the life which you led before God drew you to himself’. So then, whereas it is said in this passage that God chose his servants to make them walk in holiness of life, it is not meant that he is bound to govern them by his Holy Spirit even from their childhood. For (as I have already said) experience shows that he lets them go astray till the opportune time has come to call them.

But yet we must always bear in mind that God’s electing of us was in order to call us to holiness of life. For if he should let us alone still as wretched castaways, surely we could do nothing but all manner of wickedness according to the corruption that is in us. The good, then, proceeds from his free mercy which he has already displayed towards us before we were born, yes and before the world was created. Thus we see in effect what we have to learn from this passage. And so the blasphemies of such as would obscure God’s praise are put down, that is, of such as make a conflict and, as it were, a divorce between God’s free election and a seeking to live well. ‘Really’, they say, ‘has God elected us Then let every one of us do what he likes, for we cannot perish!’ And what does it matter whether we do either good or evil seeing that our salvation is grounded upon God’s grace alone and not upon any virtue in us?’

The answer to this is easy, namely, that if there were no such thing as God’s election, corresponding to as many thoughts and appetites as might be found in us, just so many rebellions would there be against all righteousness. For all of us tend to evil, and we are not only inclined to it, but we are, as it were, boiling hot with it. We run to it with frantic impetuosity because the devil possesses all who are not reformed by God’s Holy Spirit. And so we must needs conclude that our giving of ourselves to do good is because God guides and leads us to it by his Holy Spirit, and all because of his election. Therefore (as I said before) we must not separate the things that God has joined together. For we are not elected to give ourselves over to permissiveness, but to show by our deeds that God has adopted us to be his children and taken us into his keeping in order to dwell in us by his Holy Spirit and to unite us to himself in all perfection of righteousness.

Moreover, let us also observe that though God has reformed us and set us in the good way and made us to feel that he has worked in us already to subdue us to his Word and to make us serve him obediently in all things, yet it does not therefore follow that we are fully reformed on the first day, no, nor yet in our whole lifetime. St. Paul does not say that God brings his elected and faithful ones to the fulness of perfection, but that he draws them towards it, and so we are but in the way thitherward even to our death. Therefore, as long as we live in this world, let us learn to profit and go forward more and more, resting assured that there is still always very much that is blameworthy in us. For they that imagine any perfection are as good as bewitched by hypocrisy and pride, or rather, have no feeling or fear of God in them, but they are far-gone mockers. For he that examines himself shall always find such a store of vices that he shall be ashamed of them

if he seriously consider them.

They then which say that we can reach any perfection while we dwell in this mortal body clearly show that either they are utterly blinded with devilish pride, or else that they are profane people, void of all religion and piety. As for us, let us note (what I touched on before) that God has elected us that we should be blameless, but that we are not able to be so till we are fully rid of all our infirmities and departed out of this prison of sin in which we are now held fast. [Rom. 7:24] And, therefore, when we feel any vices in us, let us fight bravely against them, and let us not be down-hearted as though we were not God's children because we are not yet faultless before him, and our sins, which make us blameworthy, are always before our eyes.

Although, then, we find never so many miseries in ourselves to thrust us out of the way, yet let us go on, still assuring ourselves that as long as we live here in this lower world we have our journey to pursue. We must always keep going forward and are not yet come to the end of the way. See how the faithful ought to take heart and strengthen themselves although they are not perfect; and let that fact also cause us to groan and sigh under the burden which we are driven to feel. For the perfection of the faithful and of God's children is to acknowledge their own weakness and to pray God not only to amend all their misdoings but also to bear with them in his infinite goodness and not call them to account with extremity of rigour. You see, then, that our place of refuge and succour is God's mercy by which he covers and buries all our sins, because we have not yet attained to the mark to which he calls, that is, to a holy and faultless life. But, be that as it may, let us still go forward and take good heed that we do not get enticed from the right way.

If this word 'love' has reference to men, then St. Paul meant to note what is the true righteousness of Christians, namely, to walk in faithfulness and uprightness. For we know that the hypocrites would always appease God with ceremonies and fanfares, as they are called; and yet some of them are given to acts of robbery, some are full of envy, malice, cruelty and treason; some are drunkards and others are whoremongers and loose-livers giving rein to all kinds of wickedness. And yet, despite all this, they think all is safe if they put on a few holy looks [agios (Fr.) i.e., sanctimonious] and pretend some show of holiness by these ceremonies. St. Paul, to make an end of all such nonsense, says that we must walk in love (which is the bond of perfection and the fulfilling of the law) if we mean to have our life approved of God. And so you see what we have to learn from this passage.

Furthermore, let us notice that in this place St. Paul exhorts us to acknowledge ourselves indebted to God for all the virtue and goodness that is in us. For example, if we have any good zeal, if we fight against our own vices, or if we walk in obedience to God, how does it come about Even of this source, that he purposed it, that is, that God elected us beforehand. Let us consider, then, that the praise for it is due to him and let us not defraud him of his right. For although we lived as perfectly as angels, yet if we were so foolish as to think that such living comes from our own free will and self-effort, we miss the chief point of all. For to what purpose serve all our good works but to glorify God And if we regard ourselves as their authors, we see that they are marred thereby and are

turned into vices so as to be nothing else but ambition. We see, then, that the thing at which St. Paul aimed in this sentence is to bring us back always to God's gratuitous election that we might know that all good issues from that source.

He adds immediately that 'we are predestinated by adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will.' When he says that God has predestinated us by adoption, it is to show that if we be God's children it is not through nature but through his pure grace. Now this pure grace is not in respect of anything that God foresaw in us (as I mentioned earlier) but because he had marked us out beforehand and appointed us to such adoption, yes, even in such a way that the cause of it is not to be sought elsewhere than in himself. And that is the reason why St. Paul adds that he did it 'in himself and according to the good pleasure of his will'. He repeats also the same thing that I previously explained, namely, that all was done in Jesus Christ. You see therefore that what we have to note in this passage is that no other cause makes us God's children but only his choice of us in himself. For we have no such status by birth or inheritance, neither does it come of flesh and blood, as it is said in the first chapter of St. John, insomuch that all that can ever be looked for in our own selves is excluded and utterly abolished. And this is to show us that if men are left alone in their former plight, they have no communion at all with God but are utterly cut off from his kingdom.

It is true that our father Adam was created after the image of God [Gen. 1:26] and that he was excellent in his first state, but after the coming in of sin we all became utterly helpless, so that even Adam did not have any strength in himself, and his free will that was given him served him to no other purpose but to make him the more inexcusable. For he fell wilfully and through his own malice. But by this we see what sort of constancy he had in him, for, having been created with the utmost care [á grand' peine (Fr.)] he fell, and ruined himself, and ourselves with him. Now, then, we are all born the children of wrath and cursed of God. [Eph. 2:3]

And so, as long as we remain in our former state and plight there is nothing but eternal death in us. Therefore God must freely call us to himself, for are we able to purchase such a high calling Where is the gold or silver to buy it Where are the virtues with which to recompense God for so great and excellent a privilege To be brief, (as has been said already on this matter) it comes neither of flesh nor of blood, that is to say, it does not come of anything we can find in this world, but only of God's adoption. [Jn. 1:13] For the word which St. Paul uses means that God constitutes us children. When a man adopts a child he chooses him to be his heir, and all the goods that he has afterwards are passed on under that title. So it is with us who are heirs of the heavenly life because God has adopted and chosen us for his children. And further, St. Paul is not contented with having so far magnified God's grace, but he says moreover that God has also predestinated us and determined the matter beforehand.

We see, then, that St. Paul gathers together everything that may crush the foolish imaginations which we might conceive of bringing anything to God, or of advancing ourselves towards him to make ourselves acceptable to him. Therefore everything must be brought to nought so that God's grace only may be acknowledged in this respect. And

that also is the reason why he repeats 'through Jesus Christ'. If it be demanded, then, why and how we are predestinated by God to be his children, it is because he was pleased to look upon us in Christ. For (as I have said before) this is, as it were, the register in which we are written to attain to the heritage of life and salvation. For although God had pitied our miseries, yet we should always be as it were execrable in his sight if Jesus Christ did not come before him, because all of us being descended from Adam are of one measure, all of us alike and equal. Now some are accounted reprobates: and why is that but because God looking upon them in themselves passes them by. But he chooses us in our Lord Jesus Christ and looks upon us there, as in a mirror that is pleasing to him. And so you see how the difference comes about. Nevertheless, to express the matter even better, he says that God's choosing of us was 'in himself'. It is true that God does all good himself, but here St. Paul meant to show that which is not seen in all the ordinary works of God, namely, that no other cause moved him to elect us than his own will. St. Paul, therefore, takes away all respect of persons when he says that God elected us in himself. If he had found any merit or worthiness, if he had found any disposition or goodness or virtue, or (to be brief) if he had found one drop of anything he might like and approve of, he would not have elected us in himself but we ourselves should have had some partnership with him.

Seeing then that St. Paul locks up in God's counsel all things which belong to our salvation, and says that our election also is shut up in that purpose, it is as if he said that men grossly deceive themselves when they presume they are worth anything or have advanced or prepared themselves to the reception of such grace. Therefore we must be carried up on high if we would know that on which our salvation is grounded and what is its true origin and beginning and its sovereign and only cause. And so you see what is meant by this saying that God did it in himself.

But St. Paul adds even further, 'according to the good pleasure of his own will'. If he had set down no more but only the word 'will', it would have been enough, as we have seen and declared before, that St. Paul had been elected according to the will of God. And how so? Because he was neither fit nor worthy to have such a status except that it pleased God to choose him. St. Paul, therefore, does not brag that he had obtained the apostleship, but with all mildness acknowledges it to be the free gift of God. Thus you see what the word 'will' signifies, not in any one place alone but throughout all the holy Scripture. Therefore whenever God's will is afore-mentioned it is to show that men cannot advance anything of their own. Nevertheless, St. Paul sets down here a term of super abundance and says, 'according to the good pleasure'; as if he had said, 'It is true that God's will is the cause of our salvation; we should not flit to and fro seeking other reasons or means for it. However, since men are so unthankful and wicked that they would always darken God's glory, and would continually take more to themselves than belongs to them, if they are not sufficiently persuaded of God's will let them understand that it comes of the good pleasure of his will, that is to say, of a free will which does not depend upon anything other than itself, nor has any respect one way or another, but vouchsafes to choose us freely because it is pleased to do so'.

Now we see why such as seek to establish the cause of God's election of us would (if it

lay in them) overthrow his eternal purpose, for the one is inseparable from the other. If God has chosen us, as is shown here, then nothing can depend upon our deserts or upon anything we might have to bring forward, but God did it according to his own free will and did not find any other reason than his own good pleasure. If anyone thinks this strange, it is because they would treat God in an over-familiar manner. [comme un petit compagnon (Fr.)] And in this appears their devilish audacity in that they cannot allow God to reign in pure liberty so that what is pleasing to him might be received as good, just and rightful without contradiction. But let such people bark like dogs as much as they will, yet is this decree irrevocable which the Holy Spirit has uttered here by the mouth of St. Paul, namely, that it is not for us to look for any further cause of our election than the good pleasure of God, that is to say, than his own free will by which he has chosen us, though we were not worthy. His sole motive in so doing lies in the words, 'thus it pleased me'. And so we see in effect what we have to gather from these words of St. Paul.

Now St. Paul immediately says that it is 'to the praise of the glory of his grace'. Here he shows the final reason that moved God to elect us, namely, that his grace might be praised by it, yes, not after a common and ordinary manner, but with a certain glory. For he coupled those two things together so that we should be ravished when we see how God has drawn us out of the bottom of hell to open to us the gate of his kingdom and to call us to the heritage of salvation. Here we see once more the matter I dealt with previously, namely, that all who would do away with God's predestination or are loth to hear it spoken of, thereby show themselves to be mortal enemies of God's praise. It seems to them that that passes away and vanishes. Yes, but who is the competent judge of that? Do they think themselves to be wiser than God who has spoken clean contrary to that which they allege O (they say), that would be the way to open the mouths of many men to blaspheme God. Now, as for the wicked, it is certain that they will always find something to blaspheme about, and they cannot be stopped from doing so. But, for all that, God will have enough with which to justify himself, [Rom. 3:4] and all who so defy him and his righteousness will be confounded. [Ps. 51:4]

Be that as it may, it is not said here without cause that God is duly glorified and his high praise maintained, when we acknowledge that he has freely elected whom he willed, and that there is no other cause of difference between man and man, so that they whom he has reprobated perish because they deserve it, and they whom he calls to salvation ought not to seek the cause of it anywhere else than in this gratuitous adoption.

Furthermore, by these two words, St. Paul meant also to stir us up to a greater and more fervent earnestness in praising God. For it is not enough for us to confess coldly that our salvation springs from God's pure liber4ity, but we must be, as it were, inflamed to give ourselves wholly to his praise, as if we were wholly dedicated to it, according as St. Peter shows that since we are drawn out of the darkness of death, there is good reason for us to be speaking of the unutterable praises of God. [I Pet. 2:9] And by this he gives us to understand that when the faithful have strained themselves to the uttermost to acquit themselves in praising God's goodness, yet they shall never perfectly accomplish it because it is an incomprehensible thing. [Lk. 17:10] Note well therefore what we have to bear in mind. And so, from this goodness or grace of which he speaks, we must learn that

men will never yield to God his due glory till they are utterly brought to nothing, so that there remains in them not a single drop in which they may boast. Let us suppose that God's election had never been thought of, should he therefore cease to be praised No! No! For that is only a part of his praise. For if men should say no more than that God causes his sun to shine upon them, it were a reason to praise him. [Matt. 5:45] And when we open our eyes to look upward and downward upon the wonderful works he shows us, there is indeed reason enough to exercise us in his praise all our life long. Moreover, when his gospel is preached to us, there also we have reason to praise him though no mention at all is made of his election. I say there is enough in respect of us, but then he would be robbed of his chief praise and we should yield him but a portion of that which is due to him. And why? For the faithful would think that they had faith through their own impulse and free will. I told you earlier that faith is a fruit of election. For there is no other difference between us and unbelievers but that God reached out his hand and drew us to himself by a secret means at such time as we were turning our backs upon him and were making ourselves strange to him. [Rom. 5:10] To be brief, it is not without reason that St. Paul says here that God's praise shall never be glorified as it ought to be till we acknowledge his election to be the cause of all the benefits he bestows upon us, and that if he had not adopted us by his infinite mercy according to his eternal counsel, we should take part of the praise to ourselves which is due to him. And so God would be reduced and deprived of so much of his right. In short, we see well enough what is said here, that men must be utterly abased in order that God may have his right and no man be made a co-partner with him, but that all men may confess that he is both the beginning and the perfection of our salvation.

We must also note carefully how St. Paul adds that 'of his own grace he has accepted us in his well-beloved'. By this he makes it even clearer why our salvation is grounded upon God's mere election and free grace. For men will never quit their foolish presumption if they are not so overcome that they do not have one more word with which to answer back. St. Paul, therefore, to bring us to such reason, tells us that we are damned and lost in ourselves. Now when such a thunderbolt falls upon our heads, it is not for us to demonstrate our insolence. If men will then be so foolish as still to search everywhere, looking for something belonging to and reserved for themselves apart from the grace of God alone, no more than this saying is needed to turn them from it, namely, that we were not in God's favour till we were in Jesus Christ, because we are utterly damned and accursed in our own persons. This matter were sufficiently expounded already, if we were not so slow in understanding that which is so needful and which ought to be clear to us. And in truth, even experience ought to teach us in this matter. And, in fact, if hypocrisy did not blind us too much, we should well perceive that there is nothing but wickedness in us, and God's wrath would strike us with such fear that we should be at our wits' end. But God must compel us to obedience by a strong hand, or else we cannot find in our hearts to relinquish all praise from ourselves to him. Let us therefore note well what is meant by this statement in which it is said that we were taken into favour in Jesus Christ, because he is the well-beloved. And why is Jesus Christ called God's well-beloved, as he is termed in the seventeenth chapter of Matthew [v. 5] and in other places, and also is shown to be so in the prophet Isaiah? [Isa. 43:4] It is thereby shown us that God justly hates and abhors us so long as we remain in our own natural state.

For if that title were not peculiar to Jesus Christ, then it was said in vain, ‘This is my well-beloved Son in whom I am well pleased’. [Lk. 3:22] But if it is peculiar to Jesus Christ, then no other creature can claim it, insomuch that, although God loves his angels, yet they cannot be loved by him to perfection but by means of Jesus Christ. And as for us, there is indeed another consideration to be taken into account. For (as I have said already) we are hated, and Jesus Christ is the mediator to set the angels at full accord with God, insomuch that there would be no steadfastness or constancy in them if they were not upheld by him. [Col. 1:17—20] And besides, their righteousness should not be perfect except they were blessed and elected in him. So much for one point.

As for us, seeing we are estranged from God through sin, he must needs take us as his enemies and be an adversary to us. Jesus Christ therefore is the only well-beloved among men, and as for all the rest of us, God detests and disclaims us, even so far as to say that it repented him that he had made man; [Gen. 6:7] which saying of his means that we are not worthy to be numbered among asses, dogs and other beasts. For they remain still God’s creatures in the same state that he created them, but we are so wretched and perverse that we deserve to be cut down and to have the remembrance of us cursed and execrable before God. Now let us go on bragging and boasting, and seeking our coats of arms to ennoble ourselves, for we see how the Holy Spirit degrades all such as think themselves to be worth anything. Wherefore, let us consider that if we are enemies unto God, we are in a worse state than if we had never been created.

But at this point St. Paul tells us that ‘God has accepted us in his well-beloved’. Seeing then that our Lord Jesus Christ is received by God his Father to be the beloved, not only in his own person but also in respect of the love that is extended to all the members of his body, by that means we are gathered together again and God embraces us for his children, whereas formerly we were his enemies and utterly detestable to him. But, be that as it may, we must always come back to this election that we have spoken of before. For the graces communicated to us in our Lord Jesus Christ proceed also from the same source.

Next, continuing the subject I have touched on already, he shows us the great need we have of being well-beloved in Jesus Christ. For if we were not persuaded (by God) we would never grant (I mean unfeignedly) that we owe everything to God. For we are always labouring to advance ourselves some way or other, and every one of us seeks how he may reserve something to himself though it amount to no more than the point of a pin.

But, on the contrary, St. Paul shows us that God must really love us apart from ourselves, and that if we are well pleasing to him it must not be in respect of our own selves. And why? For we are captives and bondslaves of sin. We are held down under the yoke and tyranny of Satan. In short, we are shut up in the bondage of death till we are ransomed by our Lord Jesus Christ. Now then we see that the sum of this teaching is that men are admonished to get out of themselves and to seek their salvation in the pure goodness of God, even by adopting the means proposed to us here, namely, to resort to our Lord Jesus Christ. For there are two evil extremes against which we must be on our guard. One is that in coming to our Lord Jesus Christ we must not imagine that there is any worthiness



in us why he should make us partakers of his benefits. [Matt. 8:8] And how may that vice be corrected? Even by being led to God's gratuitous election. For the very reason why men presume so much upon their own free will, and the very ground also on which they build the opinion that they have conceived of their own merits and worthiness, is that they do not know that they are nothing in any other respect than that God has accepted them of his own pure goodness and grace because he had elected them already in his own eternal counsel.

Therefore, we cannot by any means attribute the beginning of our salvation to God, except we confess that which is shown us here, namely, that we were utterly damned and accursed at the time he adopted us, and that the origin of his adoption of us is that he had predestinated us beforehand, even before the creation of the world. Take note of that for one point.

The second evil extreme against which we must guard ourselves well, is speculation. Many fanciful people say, 'Ho! as for me, I shall never know whether God has elected me and, therefore, I must still remain in my perdition'. Yes, but that is for want of coming to Jesus Christ. How do we know that God has elected us before the creation of the world? By believing in Jesus Christ. I said before that faith proceeds from election and is the fruit of it, which shows that the root is hidden within. Whosoever then believes is thereby assured that God has worked in him, and faith is, as it were, the duplicate copy that God gives us of the original of our adoption. God has his eternal counsel, and he always reserves to himself the chief and original record of which he gives us a copy by faith.

I speak here after the manner of men, for we know that God uses neither paper nor parchment on which to write our names, and I have told you already that, to speak properly, the register in which we are enrolled is our Lord Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, God keeps to himself the knowledge of our election, as a prince would do the chief and original register. But yet he gives us sufficiently authentic copies or deeds of it, in that he imprints it in our hearts by his Holy Spirit that we are his children.

You see then that the faith which we have in our Lord Jesus Christ is enough to assure us of our election, and therefore, what more do we ask I told you that Jesus Christ is the mirror in which God beholds us when he wishes to find us acceptable to himself. Likewise, on our side, he is the mirror on which we must cast our eyes and look, when we desire to come to the knowledge of our election. For whoever believes in Jesus Christ is God's child and consequently his heir, as I have declared before. [Jn. 1:12; I Jn. 5:1] It follows then that if we have faith, we are also adopted. For why does God give us faith? Even because he elected us before the creation of the world. This therefore is an infallible order, that insofar as the faithful receive God's grace and embrace his mercy, holding Jesus Christ as their Head, to obtain salvation in his way, they know assuredly that God has adopted them.

It is true that election is in itself secret. It is so profound and hidden a purpose that we can only wonder at it. Yet, despite this, God shows it to us insofar as it is needed and as he

knows it to be for our benefit and salvation. And he does that when he enlightens us with the faith of the gospel. Thus you see why, after St. Paul has spoken of God's eternal election, he sets forth Jesus Christ as the party to whom we must resort to be assured that God loves us and acknowledges us as his children and, consequently, that he had adopted us before we knew him and even before the world was created.

Moreover, we must gather from this passage that the doctrine of predestination does not serve to carry us away into extravagant speculations, but to beat down all pride in us and the foolish opinion we always conceive of our own worthiness and deserts, and to show that God has such free power, privilege and sovereign dominion over us that he may reprobate whom he pleases and elect whom he pleases; and thus, by this means, we are led to glorify him and further to acknowledge that it is in Jesus Christ he has elected us, in order that we should be held fast under the faith of his gospel. For if we are his members and hold him for our Head—for he has allied himself with us in a holy union which can never be broken so long as we believe his gospel—we must come to him to be assured of our salvation. For we see and feel by experience that God has adopted and elected us and that he now calls us and tells us that the assurance he has given us and daily gives us by his gospel, namely, that he will be our Father, and especially his engraving of it in our hearts by his Holy Spirit, is no deceitful thing. For the gospel may well be preached to all men, even to the reprobate, but, for all that, God does not extend to them this special grace of quickening them into life.

Therefore when we have our adoption engraven in our hearts, then (as shall further be declared afterwards) we have a good and infallible pledge that God will guide us unto the end, and that since he has begun to lead us into the way of salvation, he will bring us to the perfection to which he calls us, because, in truth, without him we could not continue so much as a single day.

And now let us fall down before the majesty of our good God with acknowledgement of our faults, praying him to make us perceive them more and more, that being utterly ashamed of them we may bate our vices and our life in every part, as it is evil and perverse, and resort to him who alone is able to give the remedy, and not swerve one way or another from him as he communicates himself to us in our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us keep on straight to him, acknowledging that we are chosen in him, believing also that we are sustained and preserved for his sake and that he will exert his power more and more in us until we have finished our race and are come to the heavenly heritage whither we are going; beseeching him that although we are yet far from it, yet he will vouchsafe to give us a steady and invincible strength to hold out continually till we have fully renounced the world. And, being quite abased in ourselves, let us seek that we may be so renewed in the image of God that it may shine perfectly in us, till we are made partakers of the glorious immortality which he has so dearly bought for us; also that it may please him to grant this grace not only to us, but also to all people and nations.

## The Fourth Sermon on the First Chapter

by John Calvin

*‘God has accepted us in his well—beloved, by whose blood we have redemption, that is to say, forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace, whereof he has shed abundance upon us in all wisdom and understanding by making us know the secret of his will (according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself, in order to dispense it when the time was full come), that is to say, to gather all things together by Christ, both the things in heaven and the things on earth, in himself.’*

### Ephesians 1:7-10

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I have shown already that we cannot be loved by God, but by means of his only Son. For if the angels of heaven are not worthy to be taken for God’s children except through a head and mediator, what all become of us who do not cease daily to provoke God’s wrath by our iniquities [Isa. 59:2]. In fact, we fight against him! God, then, must of necessity look upon us in the person of his only Son, or else he is bound to hate and abhor us. In short, our sins set such a distance between God and us, that we cannot approach him without immediately feeling his majesty against us, armed, as it were, to destroy us all.

But now it remains to be seen how God receives us into his favour by means of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is what St. Paul means in adding that ‘in him we have redemption through his blood, that is to say, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of God’s grace.’ Here we are first of all given to understand that the enmity which God bears us, is not in respect of our nature, but in respect of our corruption. I say it is not in respect of nature, for, since God has created us, it is certain that he cannot hate us. But since mankind is utterly marred and given over to all evil, God must needs be as a mortal enemy to us and as an adversary against us, till the remembrance of our sins is buried out of his sight. For we are worthy of eternal death till we are restored again, because God, being the fountain of all justice and righteousness, must detest the evil that he sees in us. Therefore, until such time as our sins are blotted out, it is impossible for us to hope that God should either favour or love us.

But let us notice here how St. Paul uses two words to express how we are reconciled to God. First, he sets down the ransom or redemption, which amounts to the same thing, and afterwards he sets down the forgiveness of sins. How then does it come about that God’s wrath is pacified, that we are made at one with him, and that he even accepts and acknowledges us as his children It is by the pardoning of our sins, says St. Paul. And furthermore, because pardon necessitates redemption he yokes the two together.

The truth is that, in respect of us, God blotted out our sins of his own free goodness and shows himself altogether bountiful, and does not look for any payment for it at our hands. And, in fact, what man is able to make satisfaction for the least fault that he has

committed If every one of us, therefore, should employ his whole life in making satisfaction for any one fault alone, and by that means seek to win favour at God's hand, it is certain that such a thing far surpasses all our abilities. And therefore God must necessarily receive us to mercy without looking for any recompence or satisfaction at our hands. But, for all this, the atonement, which is freely bestowed in respect of us, cost the Son of God very dear. [I Pet. 1:19] For he found no other payment than the shedding of his own blood, so that he made himself our surety both in body and soul, and answered for us before God's judgment to win absolution for us. Our Lord Jesus Christ (I say) entered into the work, both body and soul. For it would not have been enough for him to have suffered so cruel and ignominious a death in the sight of men, but it was necessary for him also to bear such horrible anguish in himself, as if God had become his judge, for he gave himself up in the behalf of sinners to make full satisfaction. And so you see why St. Paul has joined those two words together in this passage.

Therefore we have to observe, first of all, that we can obtain no grace at God's hand, nor be received by him, till our sins are wiped out and the remembrance of them completely erased. The reason for this is (as I said before) that God must hate sin where-ever he sees it. So then, as long as he considers us as sinners, he must needs abhor us, for there is nothing in us or in our own nature but all manner of evil and confusion. We are, then, enemies to him, and he is contrary to us, till we come to this remedy that St. Paul shows us here, which is, to have our sins forgiven. We see by this that no man can be loved by God because of any worthiness that is in himself. For wherein lies the love that God bears us I have told you already that he must be willing to cast his eye upon our Lord Jesus Christ and not look at us at all. But yet it is further declared that we are not acceptable to God until he has released us from our debts and adopted us, in spite of the fact that we are worthy of death before him. Thus you see that the knowledge of our salvation (as it is said in the song of Zacharias) is that God is merciful to us and forgives us our sins by reason of which we are his enemies [Luke 1:77].

Let us also bear in mind, however, that the full remission of our sins through God's free goodness, is not given without the ransom that was paid by our Lord Jesus Christ, not in gold or silver (as St. Peter says in his first epistle, 1:18), but it was necessary that he who was the spotless Lamb should give himself for that purpose. Wherefore, whenever we intend to seek God's favour and mercy, let us fasten the whole of our minds on the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, that we may there find the means by which to appease God's wrath. And, furthermore, seeing that our sins are done away by such payment and satisfaction, let us understand that we cannot bring anything of our own by which to be reconciled to God. And, in this, we see how the devil has, by his craft, cut off all hope of salvation from the world, by causing it to be believed that every man must ransom himself and make his own atonement with God. And that is the very thing which men call good works, merits, and virtues in the papacy. For to what end are all the inventions that they have forged directed? Why do they go on tormenting themselves in all sorts of ways, so that a man never ceases day or night, but makes endless circuits and harangues. The object of all these performances is to pacify God. And so all the good works which are thus counted in papistry are nothing else but means by which to make satisfaction for sins.

But that is simply to bring to nought the ransom of which St. Paul speaks here. For there is, so to speak, an inseparable bond between these two things, namely, that God puts our sins out of his remembrance and drowns them in the depths of the sea, and, moreover, receives the payment that was offered him in the person of his only Son. Therefore we cannot obtain the one without the other. If, then, we wish to find God propitious, let us realize that we are his enemies till he has pardoned all our debts of his own free goodness, and, further, that our Lord Jesus Christ had to step in between him and us. [se constitue là au milieu (Fr.)] For the sacrifice of his death serves to purchase an everlasting atonement for us, so that we must always flee to it for refuge.

It is true that the whole life of our Lord Jesus Christ has become our ransom, for the obedience which he yielded in this world to God his Father was to make amends for Adam's offence and for all the iniquities for which we are in debt. But St. Paul speaks here expressly of his blood, because we are obliged to resort to his death and passion as to the sacrifice which has power to blot out all our sins. And for that reason, God has set forth in types under the law that men could not be reconciled to him except by that means.

Now it is true that Jesus Christ not only shed his blood, even in his death, but also experienced the fears and terrors which ought to have rested upon us. But St. Paul here under one particular comprehends the whole, in the manner common to holy Scripture. In short, let us learn to find all our righteousness in God's showing of himself merciful towards us of his own free goodness, and let us not presume to put before him any virtue of our own to put him in our debt, but let it be sufficient for us that he receives us freely into his love without any worthiness on our part, but only because the remembrance of our sins is buried out of his sight. And again, let us understand that the same cannot be done but by the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that is where we must wholly rest.

Next, St. Paul adds that 'all is done according to the riches of God's grace.' Not without reason does he here magnify God's mercy which he displays in receiving us to favour. For we see on the one hand how men wilfully deceive themselves through their foolish self-conceit. For most men have always imagined that they might make their own atonement with God by their own satisfactions, and I know not what subterfuges besides. Seeing, then, that men are so far deceived in their own imaginations, St. Paul, to exclude all that, says that we must be ravished by the riches of God's grace. He could have said simply that God does all according to his grace, but he sets down here great treasures so that men should not be so foolish as to bring, as it were, only a farthing when their needs run to a million crowns. And, in fact, when the papists speak about their satisfactions, they say, not that they are able to do it sufficiently in all points, but that they are of the opinion that with the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ they will also bring something of their own, and will do so much by bits and pieces that God will be satisfied and appeased. Thus you see what a devilish opinion reigns in papistry, for they rest upon masses, they babble many prayers, they gad about on pilgrimage, they keep this feast and that feast, they perform I know not what devotions, they wear hair-shirts according to requirements—all this to supplement the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, as if

it were not all-sufficient.

But St. Paul tells us that God's goodness, as it is shown us in Jesus Christ, is so great a treasure that all other things must give place and be thrust under foot. And seeing that God displays such great bounty that we ought to be wholly ravished by it, is it not outrageous presumption when we would bring our own paltry trash, as though our going on pilgrimage and our performance of some other devotions were of any value or good? Is it not as though the blood of Jesus Christ were not a sufficient price, I say, a sufficient price and ransom for our salvation? You see then, on the one hand, how St. Paul here meant to cut off all occasions of the vain imaginations that men conceive in supposing themselves able to appease God's wrath by their satisfactions and payments, and, on the other hand, how he purposed to succour our weakness. For although we are inclined to believe wonders about our own virtues and to make ourselves believe that God is greatly under obligation to us, nevertheless, when it comes to calling upon God in real earnest and to putting our trust in him, then if Satan urge us to despair and we are tossed about with troubles and temptations, we are so dismayed that all the promises of the holy Scripture and all that is said to us about the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ cannot give us any hope. St. Paul, therefore, to remedy this vice of unbelief which is too deeply rooted in us, here sets before us the great treasures of God's goodness, so that all the self-conceit we can conceive may be, as it were, swallowed up, seeing that God vouchsafes to show such great abundance of kindness towards us.

And, on this account, he adds that 'he hath made the same grace to abound towards us in all wisdom and understanding.' By these words he gives us to understand by what means we come to possess that which he specified before. Behold, all our happiness and all our sovereign welfare consists in being reconciled to God, so that he may acknowledge us as his children, and that it may be lawful for us to call upon him as our Father with full liberty. But how shall we obtain that from which we are so far removed? It is said that although we are worth nothing, indeed can do nothing, yet we shall find in Jesus Christ all things which are lacking in ourselves, and that his death and passion will be a sufficient sacrifice to put away the remembrance of all our misdeeds.

However, does it therefore follow that all men are partakers of this benefit purchased for us by our Lord Jesus Christ? No, for unbelievers have neither part nor lot in it. It is, then, a special privilege for those whom God gathers to himself. St. Paul also shows us that faith is essential or Christ will profit us nothing [Gal. 5:4]. Although, then, Christ is in a general view the Redeemer of the world, yet his death and passion are of no advantage to any but such as receive that which St. Paul shows here. And so we see that when we once know the benefits brought to us by Christ, and which he daily offers us by his gospel, we must also be joined to him by faith. For the Jews, Turks and Papists, and all such like, are cut off and estranged from Christ and rot away in their own corruption, because they presume to work wonders of themselves. For it is a common principle among the Papists, Jews, Turks and all the heathen that ever were, that they must appease God's wrath. And how? By a great variety of means of their own devising, and of every man's imagining in his own brain. Such men, therefore, have no part in Christ. Wherefore, if faith is the key that opens the door to enjoy the treasure of which St. Paul has just spoken, then that is

how we shall be made as rich as is necessary for our salvation, so that we shall not lack anything if we are joined to Christ by faith.

Nevertheless, it is not without cause that St. Paul has here set down these two words, 'wisdom' and 'understanding'. For they show us that the learning of the gospel is enough to bring us to all perfection, and that whatever is added over and above that, is but dung, filth, and rottenness. In brief, St. Paul's designation of the gospel by those two honourable terms is in order that every man should quietly give ear to that which God teaches him by means of his only Son, and that we should be so teachable that we do not presume to know anything but that which comes out of his mouth, but that in all simplicity we receive whatever he says and persevere in the same though the whole world despise us and all men set themselves against us. Let us not prize the world's subtleties, as many men do who have itching ears and are always wanting to hear some new thing. Therefore, in order that we may not be thus lightheaded, or possessed by the foolish desire of knowing more than is lawful, let us note carefully how St. Paul says here that if we have once profited by the gospel, we shall find there all the fulness of wisdom, so that we may reject all other things, not only as needless, but also as harmful, because by them we shall be turned from the pure doctrine by which it is God's will to have us joined to him. To sum up, St. Paul meant to show here that God does us an inestimable favour when he vouchsafes to call us to the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, his only Son, and that when we have him, we must despise all other things and not be troubled with a foolish desire to know this and that, because (as I have already said) the full perfection of all our knowledge is to know our Lord Jesus Christ.

And now you see also why it was said to the Colossians that he (Paul) had been a faithful teacher, even to bring men to the perfection of wisdom. [Col. 1:25] He confesses indeed that he was rough and homely in speech [2 Cor. 11:6], and that he had neither the wisdom nor the eloquence that was highly commended in the world; but still, he declares that if his doctrine were received, it would be found full of substance for the full nourishment of men's souls, and that nothing more needs to be added to it. When we hear these things nowadays, we must take warning to restrain ourselves and to repress the vast and foolish curiosity that is rooted too deeply in us, so that we may cling to the pure doctrine of the gospel and rest wholly on it. Thus you see, in effect, what we have to gather from this passage.

Furthermore, let us note that which I have touched on already, namely, that as often as the gospel is preached, so often is God's grace poured out upon us. If we acknowledge his goodness and generosity which he causes us to discern by his watering of the earth that it should yield us fruits for the nourishment of our bodies, much more may we understand that when God sends us the word of salvation, he not only waters us for the health of our souls, but also causes us to drink so deeply that we can be completely satisfied. For St. Paul does not think it enough to say that, being unfruitful, we have some refreshment by the gospel but he says that it is as if God should pour down abundance of water upon us, and that we might be so watered and refreshed with it that we might thereby gather sustenance and vigour to endure to the end. And so you see how much we ought to value God's goodness when he vouchsafes to draw us to himself by means of his

gospel, and that also by this means we should enter into possession of the benefits purchased for us by our Lord Jesus Christ, as he offers them to us by his Word and will have us also to receive them by faith.

Now, for a larger exposition of the matter, he immediately adds that God's so doing is 'because he has manifested the secret of his will to us, even according to his own good pleasure which he purposed before in himself.' Here is another thing which ought to amplify the worth of the gospel even more, namely, that in it we have the secrets that were hidden previously in God. And it is not here only that St. Paul speaks after this manner, but we shall see an even fuller treatment of it in the second chapter. And not only in this Epistle, but also everywhere else, he shows how we ought to be, as it were, ravished when the gospel is preached, because God there opens the things that were incomprehensible to all men before, and which no man would ever have believed or conceived. For he seemed to have chosen only the line of Abraham in such a way as if he had rejected all the rest of the world. Therefore it was a wonderful thing when he poured out his grace upon all men in common. [Rom. 16:25; 1Cor. 2:7; 4:1; Eph. 6:19; Col. 1:29] Yet we know that when Jesus Christ came into the world these very same people were wholly degenerate, and God's doctrine was so corrupted that there was nothing but superstition among the Jews. It seemed then that all was past hope of recovery when suddenly, beyond the expectation of all men, salvation was offered to all nations. Behold, Christ who had before been hidden in deep obscurity, and even in such deep obscurity that there was no hope that he should ever come out of it, rose up as the sun of righteousness to give light to the world. [Mal. 4:2]

For this reason therefore St. Paul says that in the gospel we know the secret of God's will. It is true that at first sight there seemed to be nothing but simplicity in the gospel. And that is the reason also why many scoffers think that the things which are contained in the gospel are only for idiots, and they pride themselves that they are able to devise many more subtle things in their own dreams than in all the doctrine of Jesus Christ. But such people are unworthy to taste of that which is shown us here, for their pride utterly blinds them and makes them complete fools. Be that as it may, however, the faithful quite clearly perceive that there is a divine majesty in the doctrine of the gospel. And for that reason, St. Paul gives us to understand in this same passage that our coming to it must not be to learn any common thing, but to be raised above the world. For we shall never be teachable before God, nor ever be prepared to benefit in his school, unless we rise above the world and reverence the things that God speaks with his own holy mouth. In short, the beginning and door of our faith is humility. But how can men really humble themselves, unless they know that the things which God tells them far surpass their own intelligence and capacity. You see then that the thing at which St. Paul aimed is that we should reverence the gospel, assuring ourselves that it is not for us to judge whether God has spoken well or ill. For we must be fully persuaded that all that ever comes from him is infinite wisdom, even such wisdom as is utterly faultless. Therefore, so that all boasting in our selves may be beaten down, and that we learn to reverence soberly and modestly the doctrine preached to using God's name, St. Paul has purposely set down this secret.

Now, in order that we should know how much we are indebted to God, he repeats this



expression, 'according to his good pleasure', which he had set down before. And that is done to put away and to shut out all opinion which men might conceive of their own worthiness. For God's good pleasure can have no place unless men are barred from all deserving and come to him utterly empty. For as soon as we presume to bring anything at all to God, surely it is a putting forward of ourselves to the obscuring of God's grace so that it no longer has its beauty and pre-eminence as it ought. Therefore, in order that men should refrain from all vain confidence, St. Paul sends us back again to God's good pleasure, as if he should say that there was no other cause of the preaching of the gospel to the world than the generous and free goodness of God. However, to repress all the audacity of men, he adds that 'God had purposed the said decree and the said high incomprehensible counsel of his will, beforehand in himself.' For what is the reason why many men take such great liberty in questioning, disputing, and pleading against God, but because, as it seems to them, they are dealing with matters which ought to be open and well-known to them. So then, perceiving us to be so foolish and rash as to presume to enquire into God's counsel, St. Paul says that it is a sealed letter, that God has his counsel in himself, and that it is not lawful for creatures to rise so high. If they do so, it is the surest way to ruin themselves and to break their necks.

It is true that we may well apply all our endeavour to know God's will, but we must proceed no further than he has revealed in his Word, for his Word is our light. But where God holds his peace, he will have us rein ourselves in and, as it were, be captives, and not go on any further, for if we would try to know more than is granted us, that is to say, more than we ought to know and more than is imparted to us by his Word, it would be only entering further and further into a labyrinth, or rather, into the bottom of hell. Therefore let us note well that St. Paul's meaning in this text is that whenever God keeps his purpose to himself, it becomes us to bow our heads and keep ourselves content to be ignorant of it. For it is a cursed wisdom and such a wisdom as sends us to the pit of hell when we presume to know more than God has taught us. And, on the contrary, we are wiser in our ignorance than all the wise men of the world, when we do not take it upon ourselves to know anything beyond where God's Word guides and governs us.

It is true that there is only one single and simple will in God. But he declares it to us according to our capacity and so far as it is expedient and profitable for us. As we have seen, the forgiveness of sins is a matter that we cannot pass over, and therefore Zacharias calls it the knowledge of salvation. Again, it is necessary for us to know where the forgiveness of our sins is to be looked for. For if we do not have Jesus Christ, we still remain enemies of God [Luke 1:77], we have no atonement, neither have we rest in ourselves, and God's judgment must trouble us; but Jesus Christ is our peace. Furthermore, when we know the things witnessed to us by God's Word, we must at the same time reverence the mysteries that are hidden from us, as has been said already and must be said again when we come to deal with God's election. And St. Paul once again sets down here the word 'foreordaining', to show that God has predestinated us before the creation of the world, and yet the same was hidden. Yes, verily, but it is now declared to us, he says. Thus you see, in effect, that what we have to bear in mind is that we are not called to the knowledge of the gospel through our own skill, nor by putting ourselves forward, nor by making God indebted to us by any virtue; but God of his own infinite

goodness has been pleased to enlighten us. And he has not done it because it suddenly came into his mind to do it, like men who make resolves on the spur of the moment, but because he had thus determined it in his own counsel, even before all time.

And if our spirits fidget and provoke us to be inquisitive and to say, How so? Has God elected us beforehand? And why then did he not show it to us sooner? How is it that it was not perceived before now?—so that we should not be so rash, St. Paul says that this purpose was, so to speak, locked up in God, till it was disclosed to us. And so, to be brief, it is not lawful for us to know any more than is announced to us in the gospel; and, furthermore, we are required to reverence it. And for this reason, it is added that this was done in order to the dispensing of the truth in the fulness of time.

Now by this St. Paul shows that men may well torment themselves, but they shall fall short of their purpose, and all their thoughts and imaginations shall fail them if they go on seeking to know more than God has given them permission to know. For if any man demands why God has not been in much greater haste in the matter, he shows that he would be wiser than God. And is not that a devilish pride? Is the creature worthy to be supported by the earth when he raises himself so high? For this reason St. Paul says that the ordering of things belongs to God. For if a man in his own house may say, I will have my people to be provided for thus, I will have them drink such a beverage, I will have them eat a certain kind of bread, I will have them to sleep after this manner; how much more ought we to let God do so, for why should he have less privilege than worms of the earth? Therefore, let us give God leave to dispose of his church and of the salvation of his elect as seems good to him. And so for the time, let us receive as fully sufficient that which it shall please him to show us. For it is not for us to be judges or umpires in this case, to measure the times, years, months, or days, but it ought to content us that God desires to have it so.

Some man will argue the case and say, ‘What! four thousand years passed between the fall of Adam and the coming of Christ, and could not God have put the matter right by sending the Redeemer of the world sooner? Look what a number of wretched people wandered away in darkness; look at the destruction of mankind by a deluge that engulfed all things, and yet, in the meanwhile, Jesus Christ was hidden. Besides this, a small number of men tasted of him only by types and shadows. For there were none but the Jews, who waited for the Redeemer, who obtained salvation through him, and yet even they had to use calves and sheep and other brute beasts to assure themselves of the forgiveness of their sins and that God was propitious to them’.

If a man asks how this comes to pass, let us have recourse to that which is said here in a word, namely, that the time was not yet fully come. And why? Because God had so ordained it. And this is exactly the same thing that we have seen already in the Epistle to the Galatians, where St. Paul put down all the foolish speculations by which men go astray in wanting to raise themselves higher than is lawful for them [4:3]. Therefore, let us conclude that it is God’s peculiar office to appoint times and seasons, and that we must not regard any other to be the appointed time than that which he ordains. For even though winter and summer are usually with us every year, yet if summer arrives rather late, we

must check ourselves and not murmur against God. We may well say, Alas, if it pleased God to send us heat it would be most welcome. But yet, in the meanwhile, we must be fully persuaded thus—it is for God to govern, and all sovereignty and authority belong to him.

If we ought to behave ourselves so modestly in respect of the order of nature which is common among us, and in which God shows himself to us in a familiar way, what ought we to do when we come to the question of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, the eternal salvation of our souls and this high mystery that the Son of God has come to restore things which were lost and perished. Does it not become us to abase ourselves in that case, and humbly to receive whatever God tells us, and to know what he approves.

Thus you see why St. Paul spoke here expressly of the fulness of time, as if he should say that we can never profit in the gospel till we yield God so much honour as to content ourselves with his will alone, so that we do not come forward to reply against him, nor face him with our wrangling, but glorify him by acknowledging his counsel to be the rule of all wisdom, of all right, and of all equity.

And to show this the better, St. Paul adds immediately that it was ‘to gather all things together both in heaven and in earth, by Jesus Christ, in himself’. As for this word ‘gather’, St. Paul meant to show us thereby how we are all of us in a state of dreadful dissipation, till such time as our Lord Jesus Christ restores us. And this has reference not only to us, but also to all other creatures. In brief, it is as though he had said that the whole order of nature is as good as defaced, and all things decayed and disordered by the sin of Adam till we are restored in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. For although we see God’s wonderful wisdom, power, goodness, justice, and righteousness in all creatures, nevertheless there are marks of sin both high and low, and all creatures are subject to corruption, and all is disordered because God hates and rejects us [Rom. 8:22]. The restoration has therefore to be made by Jesus Christ. And that is what is meant by the gathering together of which St. Paul speaks here, in order that we should learn to hate ourselves and to be ashamed of the confusion that is in ourselves and with which the whole world is filled through our sinful life; and, moreover, learn also to magnify God’s goodness so much the more. On the one hand, then, the Holy Ghost warns us in this text not only that we ourselves are in a state of dissipation, but also that we have brought the whole world to the same state and keep it there daily by our sins, and that there is no other remedy but for Jesus Christ to repair everything and make such a gathering and union that we may be joined again to our God.

That then is the first point we have to note in this passage. It is true that this thing is said in few words, but it needs to be pondered at greater length. For it is the thing about which we ought to be employed both early and late, that when we look at ourselves we might think in this way—Who are you, O wretched creature? For you see you are separated from your God even from your birth. Look, you are his enemy and inheritor of his wrath, and furthermore, there is nothing in yourself which does not tend to evil and perverseness. You ought not only to feel this disorder in your own person, but also to perceive that everything else is out of order throughout the whole world because of your perverseness.

Therefore, let us abase ourselves and be ashamed, and at the same time confess how much we are indebted to God for his vouchsafing to gather us together in the person of his only Son— even us who have so torn to pieces the things he had set in such good order.

And for the same reason, St. Paul speaks here not only of men, who were estranged from God before by reason of sin, but also of ‘all things that are in heaven and earth’, in which he includes even the very angels [Col. 1:20]. For although God’s glory shines forth in them and they were never separated from him, nevertheless they needed to be gathered together by our Lord Jesus Christ, and that for two reasons. For although they never strayed, nor fell from what they were in their origin, and God’s righteousness always shows itself in them, so much so that they are, as it were, mirrors and patterns of it, nevertheless if God had willed to look upon them with severity, they would have found themselves far short of the perfection of righteousness that is in him, as it is said in the book of Job [4:18].

Furthermore, there is still one other reason to be linked with this, which is, that the angels should not have had such constancy and steadiness as was requisite, unless Jesus Christ had so established them that they might never fall. Thus you see one way in which they were gathered together. But this gathering of which St. Paul speaks here is with regard to their being united again with us. For we know that since we were banished out of God’s kingdom, we were cut off from all hope of salvation, so that the angels were immediately obliged to become our enemies, and would be so still, were it not for the conjunction we have with them by means of the Head who is common to us both.

And here you see also why in the ladder that was shown to Jacob, it is said that God stood upon the top of it and touched both heaven and earth, and that the angels went up and down on it [Gen. 28:12]. Now our Lord Jesus Christ is the true living and eternal God who touches both heaven and earth, because in his person God has joined his own divine essence and the nature of man together. Thus, therefore, you see that heaven is open so that the angels begin to acquaint themselves with us, and even to become our servants, as is said in the Epistle to the Hebrews [1:14], because the care of our souls is committed to them and (as is said in the thirty-fourth Psalm) they encamp about us and watch, and are our guardians. You see then how we are united again to the angels of paradise by our Lord Jesus Christ. And that is the reason also why he said ‘From henceforth you shall see the heavens open and the Son of Man coming down in his majesty with his angels’ [John 1:51]. By which he gives us to understand that heaven was shut against us and that we also were unworthy to find any favour at God’s hand, but that now he is come to be our Head and has made the atonement between his Father and us, and taken upon him the office of mediator and is become the Head not only of the faithful, but also of the angels, and has gathered all together again in such a way that, whereas the devils make war against us and cease not to plot our destruction, the angels are armed with infinite power to uphold us [Col. 2:10]. And although we do not see them with our eyes, yet we must certainly believe that they watch for our salvation.

Otherwise, what would happen? For we know that the devil is as a roaring lion and seeks nothing else but to devour us [1Pet. 5:8]. We see what a number of wiles he has with which to surround us. The angels, then, have need of an infinite power to defend us. It is also necessary that we be kept under the protection of our Lord Jesus Christ who is both their Head and ours. Thus you see briefly that the thing which St. Paul meant to tell us in this text where he says we are gathered together again, is that we were scattered beforehand, and that we are not only reconciled to God by the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, but also we are now joined once again to the angels, so that they have become our brethren and companions, and God has given them charge to guide and uphold us in all our ways and to watch over us and to be in continual battle for the withstanding of all the enemies that make war against us till we are gathered all together into the rest of heaven [Psa. 91:13].

Now let us cast ourselves down before the majesty of our good God with acknowledgement of our faults, praying him so to make us feel them that it may draw us to true repentance and make us to continue the same all the time of our life, and that at the same time we may not cease to trust in him and to offer ourselves boldly in his fight, since our sins are blotted out by the blood that was shed for the washing of them, and that we may so conform ourselves to this doctrine that we may all the time of our life acknowledge that seeing he has purchased us at such a price, we ought to give ourselves wholly to his service; and since he has shown himself so good a Redeemer towards us, we may not doubt that he will continue his goodness from day to day to the final completion of the thing he has begun, and strengthen us in all assaults till he has delivered us from the cruelty of Satan and of all his supporters, yes and clean taken us out of the world to make us partakers of the happy blessedness unto which he calls us.

And may it please him to grant this grace not only to us, but also to all people and nations.

## The Fifth Sermon on the First Chapter

by John Calvin

*'You also trust in Christ upon the hearing of the word of truth, that is to say, of the glad tidings of your salvation, by believing in which you are also sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, unto the redeeming of the purchased possession, to the praise of his glory'*

### **Ephesians 1:13-14**

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We have seen so far how St. Paul has declared that there is no other ground of our salvation than God's free goodness, and that we must not look anywhere else for the reason why he chooses the one person and forsakes the other. For it becomes us to hold ourselves contented with his pure will, purpose, and unchangeable decree. And whoever goes any further must inevitably stumble into such an abyss through his own rashness, that he shall feel that such as cannot honour God's majesty and his secret counsel with all lowliness and reverence must all (I say) remain in confusion. Therefore whenever we come to search for the cause of our salvation, let us learn to attribute it altogether to God.

It is true that to be God's children and heirs we must be of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which thing is brought about by faith, but yet we cannot believe the gospel except God draw us by his Holy Spirit. Now we see that he does not deal alike with all men. For he could very well enlighten all the world and bring it to pass that there should be no unbelievers at all, but we see the contrary. Therefore let us assure ourselves that he chooses whom he pleases. For if a man should ask the reason why he does it, it would be to lift ourselves up far too high; and that is the very reason why so many presumptuous people break their own necks, for they cannot find in their hearts to grant that God governs men according to his own will, as he has a perfect right to do. Furthermore, St. Paul has also, so far, set the Jews and Gentiles on equal footing, and that is a matter which requires still longer treatment. For seeing that God had chosen Abraham's offspring, it might have been thought that there had been some natural worthiness in them. It is true, if we consider the grace that God showed to the Jews, that they are much to be preferred above all the rest of the world. But if a man take them as they are in themselves, he shall find them empty of all righteousness. For we must always come back to this point, that God is not bound or obliged to any man at all, and his reception of the Jews by free adoption is not because they were more worthy than other men, or in order that they might boast in themselves on account of it. Therefore you see why St. Paul says expressly that they which believed in Jesus Christ in times past are comprehended under God's election as well as the others, and that the others cannot boast themselves to be more worthy, or to have deserved more than they, but that all must come to this point, that both of the Jews and of the Gentiles God chose whom he pleased, so that nothing should be considered in relation to this but only his mercy, and so that all mouths might be stopped and no man be able to allege that he contributed anything of his own.

Now, when St. Paul enters into this comparison between the Jews and the Gentiles, he says that if a man has regard to God's accepting of the Jews for his own heritage, they were a holy lineage and he had given them his law and his promises by means of which they were in more excellent and high degree than all the rest whom he had rejected and forsaken. But if we have regard to God, all man's boasting must be put down. But St. Paul in that place speaks only of the forgiveness of our sins and of our embracing of God's grace by faith, which things he shows cannot be attributed to any other cause than simply God's pitying us. Also we have seen before in the Epistle to the Galatians how St. Paul said to Peter, 'we are Jews by nature'. [Gal. 2:15] For since it was a common opinion that the Jews were a holy lineage because they were descended of Abraham's race, very well (he says), be that as it may, we have no other refuge or assurance of salvation but to believe in Jesus Christ, for he knew that men are utterly ruined and lost in themselves, because they bring nothing with them but God's wrath and curse. Therefore, just as in those passages, St. Paul has shown that men deceive themselves if they imagine that they have any merit or worthiness in them, so now, for the better confirmation of the same doctrine and to take away all disputing and to beat back all contradictions, he brings us to this source, namely, that God not only gives faith to whom he pleases, but also has elected and chosen us before the creation of the world. You see then that what we have to observe, in effect, is that all men, from the greatest to the least, are indebted to God, and there is none so holy or excellent that can claim exemption from that general state of men.

Now, in the next place, St. Paul magnifies God's goodness in that the Ephesians were gathered together and made one with those that were held and counted before as God's people and the household of his church. Before the Ephesians believed the gospel, there was great diversity among them, as will be shown at greater length in the second chapter. But, in spite of the fact that the believing Jews who had already been converted to our Lord Jesus Christ were as brethren to the angels of heaven, since they were members of the Head that was common to them both, whereas, in the meanwhile, the Ephesians were poor wretches, shut out from all hope of salvation, enemies of God, and devoted to destruction, God nevertheless took away that diversity and set them all in one company. God's goodness, therefore, was so much the more manifest in that he thus rescued them who were plunged into the bottom of hell, to join them with his own children and to make them fellows and heirs of his heavenly kingdom. That, therefore, is the reason why St. Paul, having spoken of such as had believed in Jesus Christ before, tells us expressly that God has gathered and established his church in such a way that it clearly appears that the greatest depend wholly upon him and have no other thing to rest on than his pure mercy; and that those who were, so to speak, cast away, even hated, have reason to glorify him, seeing he has delivered them from the confusion they were in.

And, furthermore, St. Paul shows that what he had said before is proved true to us by the effects of God's grace. For (as I have said before) our election is a secret thing, and even incomprehensible. When men have enquired into it as much as possible, they must surely quail in all their own thoughts, if they attempt to enter into the eternal counsel of God. And therefore it is not lawful for us to seek any further than the Scripture guides us and shows us the way. You see then that God's choosing of us is hidden in himself, but yet he

gives us evidence of it by the gifts of grace bestowed upon us, such as faith, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit. So much for one point.

Now, although it were only such a gift as when he makes his sun to shine both upon the good and the bad, or as when he causes the earth to bring forth fruit for all men without exception, it nevertheless ought also to be counted among God's gifts and benefits. But faith is a special gift which is not bestowed upon all men in common, but is reserved by God as a treasure to be given just as he pleases. And what is the reason for it? We are all of us the children of Adam, and we are all of the same stock. Why then does he enlighten some and leave the others alone in their blindness? There is no other reason but his election. So then, although we cannot conceive either by argument or reason how God has elected us before the creation of the world, yet we know it by his declaring it to us; and experience itself vouches for it sufficiently when we are enlightened in the faith. What is the reason why I receive the gospel and cleave to it, and, meanwhile, others remain in their beast-like stupidity, or are even embittered against the doctrine of salvation? If I imagine that it is due to my own skill, I am guilty of sacrilege. For we must always come back to that which we have seen already and say, 'Who is he that has made you more excellent than others?' [1Cor. 4:7]

St. Paul, then, in that saying pulls down all man's pride, in order that no man should put himself forward or affirm that he has anything of his own. We must not think (he says) that we have any worthiness of ourselves, but that all comes and proceeds from God. Therefore, in this text, St. Paul shows from experience how the Ephesians had been elected by God and that it behoved them to have their whole faith grounded upon that, that is to say, upon God's free goodness. And you have the proof of it (he says) in that you have heard the doctrine of the gospel and believed it. But how did that come to pass? He shows that they had to be sealed by the Holy Spirit. Now, if they were sealed, it was indeed necessary for the Holy Spirit to work beforehand. And so it is useless to enter into so deep a labyrinth as God's eternal counsel. For he shows us, as it were with his finger, how he has elected us, at least if we are not ungrateful to him, but acknowledge the good he has done us and are fully persuaded and resolved in ourselves that there is no other reason for it than that he has set his seal upon us from all eternity; in other words, that he has reserved us for himself as his own children. We see, then, St. Paul's meaning, and, therefore, let us learn not to make long preambles, when it is a question simply of confessing that we have all only through the pure mercy of God. For the faith that we have shows it well enough, because (as I have said before) it does not come from our own mother wit, but as a gift from above, and such a one as God communicates not to all indifferently, but only to such as he pleases.

Furthermore, here are many words well worth weighing. For, on the one hand, St. Paul intends to magnify the grace of the Holy Spirit by showing that we can have no part or lot in our Lord Jesus Christ, or in any of all the benefits he has purchased for us, except God put us in possession of our salvation by his Holy Spirit. That, therefore, is one point. And yet, St. Paul does not fail to show as well the inestimable benefit that we have by the gospel in that he terms it 'the word of truth' and 'the gospel of salvation'. For, first of all, he meant to assure us, in order that we might have an infallible warrant to call upon God



without doubting or scruple of conscience. For so long as we are in doubt whether God loves or hates us, it is impossible for us to pray truly to him, and so by that means you see how our salvation is utterly defeated, according to what is said by the prophet Joel. [Joel 2:32] And it is a common doctrine in the holy Scripture that we cannot obtain salvation, except by seeking refuge in God by prayers and supplications. But we should be shut out from that if we did not have the assurance spoken of, as we shall see more fully in the third chapter.

Therefore it is necessary for us to be fully assured that God is our Father, and that he accepts us for his children. And how shall we be sure of that unless the doctrine of the gospel is so certain in all points that it is not lawful for us to call it into question? That, therefore, is the reason why St. Paul says that it is the word of truth. No doubt, there are other truths also, for even when God threatens us, he does not do it in pretence, or yet in vain, for both his promises and his threatenings have their sure and certain fulfilment. But, since the present case concerns the correcting of all unbelief in us, to which we are so much inclined, St. Paul has termed the gospel, the doctrine of truth; as if he should say, My friends, God is a faithful witness to you of his own will, for the gospel is as much as if he showed his heart to you. Therefore, rest yourselves upon it. Moreover, he says also that our salvation lies enfolded in the gospel, and that is to make us love it and prize it. For would we be so senseless or so stark mad as to pour scorn upon our own welfare But yet, he says that all this comes from God's pure mercy and eternal election, which is remote and unknown to us, but we have knowledge of it by the gospel which is its means and its instrument. For what would be the purpose of our Lord Jesus Christ offering himself in sacrifice to reconcile the world to God his Father, unless we are made partakers of it by faith Now faith is not an opinion conceived by man in his own brain, but a settled belief that God cannot lie or deceive us, and that it is not to be feared that our hope shall not finally be well satisfied, if we wait upon him. So then, in short, St. Paul's intention was to show that if we know how to profit by the doctrine of the gospel, we shall no longer be disquieted and perplexed, but shall be able to call upon God wholeheartedly, acknowledging ourselves so bound and wholly indebted to him in all things that we have no fear that he owns us for his children, that we are accepted by him, and that he hears us in all the prayers we offer to him. So much for the first point.

Therefore, in accordance with St. Paul's exhortation, let us learn to rest in such a way upon the doctrine of the gospel, that it may be as if God showed himself visibly to us, and that the heavens were opened to us. And let us always bear in mind how it is pronounced by the mouth of our Lord Jesus Christ himself that, whenever sins are forgiven men by the preaching of the gospel, the same is there and then ratified in heaven. [Matt. 16:19; Jn. 20:23] Thus you see what certainty we ought to have, so that we are no more doubtful whether God will hear us or not. But just as the gospel teaches us to believe, so also St. Paul shows us that we ought to prize it as an incomparable treasure, since it is the power of God unto salvation to all that believe, as he says in the first chapter to the Romans. [Rom. 1:16] Seeing then that we are lost and undone of ourselves, and there is no other means to call us back again to God but by the gospel, let us greatly value that treasure and see to it that we profit by it. And in so doing, let us fearlessly despise both the devil himself and all his temptations which he practises against us, seeing that God has called

us and given us sufficient evidence of his fatherly love and good will towards us.

But let us come to the second matter I referred to. For St. Paul shows that besides God's consenting to have the gospel preached to us, it behoves him also to work by his Holy Spirit and by a special grace. And, in fact, we shall find many that will grant freely enough that God was not moved to send us his gospel by any other motive than his own free grace; but, at the same time, they surmise that the reason why some receive it and some do not, is because their own free wills hold sway, and so, by that means, God's grace is diminished. For God does not offer us his grace, as a man might offer an apple to little children, so that the best runner should come and have it. If God should thus toss it out, it is certain that the greatest part of our salvation would be the product of our own power and skill, and the praise of it would redound to ourselves.

Now, after St. Paul has shown that God has called and daily calls us to the inheritance of his heavenly kingdom, and that his so doing proceeds from his own pure, free grace, he further adds that we must be under the influence of his Holy Spirit. It is true he here sets down only one part of the grace of the Holy Spirit, but that is because he has set down the other part before, for he has not, in this passage, forgotten anything that belonged to his argument, but he began with God's free goodness with which we are all filled, and showed that faith springs out of that fountain of free election. But now, for the second part, he adds that God's enlightening of us by his Holy Spirit so that, whereas we were blind, he has imprinted his grace in our hearts and bowed and bent them to his obedience, is not enough for us, but, in addition, he must establish us and strengthen our faith by giving us an invincible perseverance to hold out to the end.

You see then where St. Paul is bringing us. Besides our receiving of faith at the hand of the Holy Spirit and besides his enlightening of us by his grace, of which I have spoken already, God also secures us in such a way that we do not fall away. To understand this better, we must first call to mind what has already been dealt with at greater length, that is to say, that so long as God leaves us alone in our own state and plight, we are blind wretches wandering in darkness, and no matter what is preached or said to us, we remain unmoved in our brutishness. For the carnal man shall never understand anything that pertains to God, or to his own salvation. [1Cor. 2 :14] You see then how we are utterly barred and excluded from heavenly light till God pities us and gives us the spirit of light and understanding. So much for the first point. And since that point has been discussed before, it is sufficient to do no more than to remind you of it.

Now there is yet another point, which is that when we have once embraced God's grace by faith, so that we know that our Lord Jesus Christ is he in whom we find all that is required to make us perfectly happy, it is very necessary for us to be established in this truth. And why Let us notice how volatile men are. He that is best disposed to follow God will soon fall, for we are so frail that the devil will overcome us every minute of time, if God does not hold us up with a strong hand. And for that reason it is said that God manifests his power in upholding us when he has elected us and given us to our Lord Jesus Christ. For if he did not fight for us, alas, what would become of us We should be absolutely confounded, and not by reason of one stroke only, but there would be an

infinite number of falls, as I said before. As soon as we were in the way of salvation, we should at once be turned out of it by our own frailty, lightness and inconstancy, if we were not restrained and if God did not so work in us that we might, by his Holy Spirit, overcome all the assaults of the devil and the world. Thus God's Spirit does a two-fold work in us with respect to faith. For he enlightens us to make us understand things which otherwise would be hidden from us, and to receive God's promises with all obedience. That is the first part of his work. The second is that the same Spirit is pleased to abide in us and to give us perseverance, that we do not draw back in the midst of our way. That, then, is what St. Paul is handling now.

It is as if he should say, My friends, you have known God's grace and you have had experience of it, and he has drawn you to obey his gospel. For you would never have come to it, if he had not shown himself merciful to you. But be sure of this also, that he increases his grace in that he gives you power to persevere in it. For had you continued only three days, or three years, or even more, God must needs have helped you in that, or else you would always have been tossed about like poor wretches at your wits' end, without any certainty at all, unless God had promised to take care of you and to guide you continually till you have come to the end of your way and have finished your course. That, therefore, is the reason why he says here that they were sealed by the Holy Spirit. Now we should carefully note the figure of speech St. Paul uses. For we know that deeds are endorsed by seals, and that has applied at all times. It is true that men did not write things down in the same way as they do nowadays. Nevertheless, instead of signing them with their own hands, they delivered their seal or ring. And that was the way they published wills, and other documents, and all covenants.

In this respect St. Paul says that we must be sealed in our hearts. It is true that, to speak properly, he should have said that the gospel was sealed. However, to make us understand that the fault comes and springs from ourselves and that the gospel is a doctrine of sufficient authority in itself, he meant to show us that God's sealing of his truth is because of our hard-heartedness and inconstancy, since we are shaken with every wind like wavering reeds until such time as he has strengthened us. But, be that as it may, let us observe that the Holy Spirit is, as it were, the seal with which he ratifies his truth to us.

Now I have told you already how greatly we stand in need of this. For, although we grant that God's Word deserves to be accepted without contradiction or reply, yet we do not cease to doubt it. And we discover that well enough by conviction. For whenever any trouble or annoyance comes, we are as people distracted, whereas, if we were thoroughly persuaded of God's goodness in such ways as he assures us of it, it is certain that we should not be in any such fear. All the trials, then, which shake us show clearly enough that we do not profit as we ought to do by the gospel. And, therefore, God on his part is pleased to empower it by his Holy Spirit, and to print it so certainly in our hearts that we may be steadfast and that the same steadfastness may not be beaten down by all that the devil can ever do or devise to overthrow our faith.

But we shall understand this thing even better by making such a continual examination of

our own weakness as I have spoken of before. For we can take up all the reasons of this world and yet we shall never be assured as fully and perfectly as we ought to be that God will be merciful to us and defend us in the midst of all the dangers of this world. For we are here, as it were, in a sea. The winds and storms assail us every minute, and we are always in danger of being swallowed up. How then may we defy Satan, being like poor sheep not furnished with either armour or weapon or any other means of help? How can we rejoice both in life and death, knowing that Satan might do anything against us, if we are not well sealed in an authentic manner? So then, besides being warned, in this text, to rid ourselves of all presumption and pride, so that God alone may be praised and magnified, we may also gather from St. Paul's words that we have weapons with which to meet the foe and strive well, and that although our enemy is mighty and sturdy, yet he will never overcome us, so long as we take advantage of what is said here, namely, that God's Spirit seals the truth and the certainty of the promises of the gospel in us.

Now St. Paul adds yet one figure of speech more, saying that God's Spirit is like a deposit. And let us not think it strange that St. Paul has so confirmed this doctrine, since the devil has never ceased from the beginning of the world to keep men puffed up with some foolish opinion of their own wisdom and strength. The reason for Adam's fall was that he wanted to rise higher than was lawful for him, and be wiser than God, which God gave him no permission to do. The case stands the same with us, and the devil still pursues his attack. See how he overthrew mankind with guile, and his whole endeavour even yet is to make us believe that we are able to do this and that. St. Paul, therefore, had to rid men of that false and cursed opinion of their own free-will and self-righteousness, and to show them that they are indebted to the Holy Spirit for all things. So much for that.

Secondly, we are so stupid and earthly that the doctrine had to be made easy [*mâcher* (Fr.) (To chew, to masticate)] to us, and we cannot conceive more of God's gracious gifts, which are invisible, than we see with our eyes and touch with our hands. It was therefore necessary for St. Paul to show by figures of speech that it is God's Holy Spirit who puts us in possession of the gospel and of all the benefits it contains, and who supports us in them to the end.

Now we know that contracts are confirmed by giving a deposit, which men commonly call the earnest-money. [*Denier á Dieu* (Fr.) (The mite for God)] Since, then, in buying lands, houses, inheritances or goods, although a man bare word ought to be sufficient, men are so wicked that if they perceive any hurt to themselves in a matter, they will not be ashamed to go back on their word. Therefore this ceremony of making a deposit was added, and it is just as though the payment were fully discharged, so that the contract cannot be rendered void. St. Paul, then, means here that God's Spirit serves fully to guarantee our salvation. And for what purpose 'For your inheritance, he says, 'to the day of your redemption'. It is true that we are already God's heirs, being his children. But we must note how it is said in the eighth chapter to the Romans [v. 24] that our salvation is shut up in hope. So then, we cannot see it or enjoy it now, according to the third chapter of Colossians [v. 3], where it is said that we are like dead men departed from this world, and that our life is hidden with God in Jesus Christ. Therefore, although we are God's children, yet we do not have the full enjoyment of it at present.

All this agrees well with what St. John says in his Epistle. 'We know', he says. By this he shows that our faith is not in doubt, yet he adds that it is not yet seen, but we must wait for the day when we shall be like God, and then we shall have light to see in full perfection that which now we only believe. [1 Jn. 3:2] Again, we have seen how St. Paul said in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, that as long as we are in this earthly pilgrimage, we are, so to speak, absent from God. [2 Cor. 5:6] And why? We walk (he says) in hope, and we do not see the thing as if it were present, but we see it by faith. In short, although we are passed from death to life (as is said in the fifth chapter of John [v. 24]), yet we fight against an infinite number of deaths, because we are besieged by them.

And St. Paul links both together well in this passage. For, on the one hand, he says we are not yet come to our redemption and heritage, and yet, at the same time, he shows that we are sure of it for all that, and that nothing but our own ingratitude prevents us from glorying to the full in God and from saying with all our hearts that we do not doubt we shall reach the heavenly life, since we have a pledge of it by the Holy Spirit and are so united to our Lord Jesus Christ that all his possessions belong to us, for they appertain to us and are communicated to us by faith.

Therefore, let us carefully observe what is contained in these words of St. Paul. He says that the Holy Spirit is our pledge. Seeing this is so we must needs be sure of our redemption, of which we shall have full possession at the last day. And this the facts of the matter themselves show well enough. For we are but poor worms of the earth, surrounded by rottenness and corruption. We are beset with as many miseries as it is pitiful to see. The world curses us, and mocks us and our simplicity. We have to endure hunger and thirst. It often seems that God has forsaken us and, as it were, cut us off, and that he does not even deign to pity us. We appear to be the most contemptible creatures in the world. That is how we stand to all outward appearance. And therefore it is imperative for us to have a remedy with which to assure ourselves in the midst of so many perplexities and heartaches. That is the reason why St. Paul purposely says that the Holy Spirit is our pledge. Although, then, the world gives itself liberty to trample us under foot, as they say; although our Lord keeps us tried with many temptations; although he humbles us in such a way that it may seem we are as sheep appointed to the slaughter, so that we are continually at death's door, [nous avons toujours la mort entre les dents (Fr.) (death between the teeth)] yet we are not destitute of a good remedy. And why? Seeing that the Holy Spirit reigns in our hearts, we have something for which to give praise even in the midst of all our temptations, in accordance with what is said in the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans [v. 15], that being once assured that God takes us for his children, we may not only call upon him, but also, though we are afflicted and tormented, yet we do not cease to be always and infallibly persuaded that he is our Father to lead us to the glory of heaven; for even that also is a way by which our hope is tried.

Furthermore, we are also warned to walk in patience, and, seeing God has given us his Holy Spirit as a pledge, we must not be so hasty and impatient as we have been accustomed to be. For if God handles us roughly, immediately we begin to complain, and we are very loath to suffer anything, for we see how tender and sensitive we are by nature.

But we must endure patiently, because God will not have us come to his kingdom with, so to speak, one leap, but will have us negotiate this world through thorns and briars, so that we shall have much trouble in getting through and we shall be in great distress. Seeing that he will have us led by such a way, and yet nevertheless gives us so good a remedy as ought to be sufficient for us—which is that he strengthens us with invincible constancy by his Holy Spirit—let us stand ready to fight till the time of victory is fully come.

It is true that our faith gets the upper hand even now, but we do not yet receive the full fruit of it, nor do we fully enjoy it. Therefore we must determine with ourselves to fight and groan continually and yet, at the same time, to rejoice also. And why? To rejoice in our hearts and yet to cry with St. Paul, ‘Alas, wretched creature that I am, who shall deliver me from this prison of my body?’, are not incompatible things. Therefore let each one of us mourn and even be grieved at heart, because we are still so much given to our wicked lusts and the numerous vices that are in us. Nevertheless let us not cease also to say that we thank God, and to be contented with his giving of such provision to us as ought well to suffice us, and to wait until he accomplishes and perfects what he has begun, seeing we have his Holy Spirit thus dwelling in us with a promise that we shall never be destitute of him right up to the end. Thus you see how we are here encouraged to take the bit between our teeth and to walk with such steadfastness that all the miseries of the world may not stop us pursuing our course till we come to our goal.

And that is the reason why St. Paul speaks purposely of redemption. It is true that we are redeemed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and he is given to us for our redemption, as is said in other passages, [I Cor. 1:30; I Tim. 2:6] but we do not have the effect and full fruition of it as yet. There is, then, a double redemption—one which was accomplished in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, and another which we wait for and which shall be shown to us at his coming again. Accordingly, St. Paul says in the eighth chapter to the Romans [v. 23] that, although we groan and are held down in anguish, yet we must not be dismayed by it, nor think it strange, because all creatures (he says) keep us company, and are even as a woman that travails with child. For we see that all the world is subject to corruption through the sin of Adam. Seeing then it is so, let us not falter in our groanings, but let us moderate our affections so that we are content that our redemption has been purchased for us in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, and let us trust in him that he will accomplish the same thing in us and our persons that he has accomplished for us in his own. That which St. Paul meant, then, is that God’s Spirit is our pledge during the time that we wait to be taken out of this transitory life and to be set free from all miseries, especially from the bondage of sin, which is the heaviest burden of all. Until such time, then, as we are delivered from all those things, we must rest on this, that God’s Spirit dwells in us.

And with regard to the ‘redemption of purchase’, it may well be taken for purchased redemption, since it is a very common way of speaking; just as by the expression ‘the Spirit of promise’ is meant the Spirit who satisfies all the promises; or ‘the Spirit of the fear of God,’ because it is he that makes us obedient to his righteousness. In the same way, when he speaks of the redemption of purchase, it may well be said that it is the

redemption which was purchased for us, to show that if we feel the effect of it in ourselves, so that we are not in any doubt about the things Jesus Christ has done for us, we must not fear that he has suffered in vain. For surely his suffering would be to no purpose at all towards us, if it did not reach us so that it might result in our profit, and that we might enjoy it. That, therefore, is what is purchased in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And yet, meanwhile, as far as we are concerned, we should keep ourselves in check in order that we should not through our own ingratitude refuse the benefit that God offers us, that is to say, our rejoicing in afflictions—for we know that our salvation is sure—or complain against God and blaspheme him, but walk on quietly until we are delivered from our present bondage, and until we are fully set free by being gathered together in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now let us cast ourselves down before the majesty of our good God with acknowledgement of our faults, praying him to make us feel them more and more, even so far as to bring us to utter revulsion from the rottenness that is in us, so that we, finding that there is nothing in us but a bottomless pit of all kinds of iniquity, may learn to resort to his righteousness, and to seek it at the source, and to acknowledge that he has shown himself a merciful Father towards us, not doubting that thereby he meant also to assure us that he had adopted us before the beginning of the world, in order that we should continue to call upon him with true steadfastness and never cease so to do.

And so let us all say, Almighty God, heavenly Father.

## The Sixth Sermon on the First Chapter

by John Calvin

*‘For this cause I also, having heard of the faith which ye have in Jesus Christ, and of the love which you have towards all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, should give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, to have knowledge of him, that is to say, to have the eyes of your mind enlightened, that you might understand what is the hope of his calling which ye ought to have, and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance among the saints.’*

### **Ephesians 1:15-18**

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We have seen already how St. Paul brought the Ephesians not only to the chief but also to the only cause of their salvation, and showed that they must attribute the whole of it to God without mixing with it any foolish pride, as if from their side they themselves had contributed to God’s grace which they had received, either by their free will or by any good intention in them. St. Paul therefore has shown, in effect, that not only the Ephesians to whom he spoke, but also they that had been God’s church beforehand, ought without exception to confess that all their welfare proceeded from God’s free goodness alone, not only because they were all redeemed by means of our Lord Jesus Christ, but also because he had called them to the belief of the gospel, in accordance with his election of them before the creation of the world.

And now he endorses all this doctrine by the witness he bears as before God, in that he magnifies his goodness even when he is separated, as it were, from man’s eye and from the sight of all witnesses. Now it is true the doctrine of the gospel ought not to be the less esteemed when it is preached and published openly before the whole world, but yet it behoves him who tells it to have it thoroughly imprinted on his heart and to say the same thing to himself, and before God and his angels, which he speaks before men; for otherwise it would merely be a jangle, or rather a profaning of God’s Word, if a man should step up into the pulpit to talk like an angel, but, at the same time, not be affected in heart, nor be persuaded of that which he speaks. It would be better for a man to be drowned a hundred times than for him to bear the most excellent testimony everywhere to salvation and to God’s truth and, at the same time, not be so persuaded in himself of the thing that he preaches, that God and his angels might know that he has the same thing imprinted on his heart.

Therefore, it is not without reason that, after St. Paul has preached God’s free goodness in electing whom he pleased, and in calling them to the knowledge of his gospel when he had elected them, and in confirming them with his strong hand, and in giving them invincible constancy and steadfastness when he had called them, he now adds that God knows his witnessing to it to be sincere and in good earnest. For he bears testimony here



concerning the prayers which he makes alone, when no man could know his thought or what he says and utters with his mouth, that even then he confesses the same doctrine before God, since he prays him to vouchsafe to finish what he has begun.

Here, therefore, we have to observe, first of all, that those who intend their labour to be profitable to the edifying of the church, and those who have true zeal, must not only give themselves to teaching, but also, at the same time, pray God to work with them by his power and grace. For often it happens that we simply beat the air [battre l'eau (Fr.) (beat the water)] (even though we have the tongues of angels) because we do not pray God to further the doctrine that we preach. For of ourselves we are but unprofitable instruments, and when he has given us utterance, he must also make it effectual, in accordance with the saying that he who plants is nothing and he who waters is nothing, but it is God that gives the increase. [I Cor. 3:7] Seeing it is so, let such as have the charge of teaching God's church walk in fear and with care, and not only endeavour to win men to God, but also humbly acknowledge that they can do nothing of themselves and that they would only be making a noise in the air, which would soon die away, if God did not work with them by the secret power of his Spirit. That, therefore, is what we have to call to mind from the words St. Paul speaks here.

But every one of us ought also to apply it generally to his own life. Therefore when we come to be taught God's Word, or when any one of us reads it by himself, let us not imagine our minds to be so discerning that we are able sufficiently to understand whatever the Scripture tells us, but let us acknowledge our own lack of understanding and pray God to make his doctrine prevail with us in such a way that it may not slip from us. But this will be perceived the better by the procedure St. Paul follows here, if we weigh carefully all the words he uses.

He says that 'he yields thanks unto God without end or ceasing' for the faith which he heard to be in the church at Ephesus, 'and for their love towards the saints'; and yet, even so, he continues his prayer to God that he would enlighten them more and more and bring them to the perfection which all the faithful ought to labour to attain, until God has taken them out of this world. Now in that he says that he does not cease to give thanks to God, we see, by his example, how the faithful ought to spend their time. For, in very deed, the chief sacrifice God requires and approves is that we should honour him for all his benefits, and yield him his deserved praise for them. And it is not to be thought that that can be done in fits and starts (as you would say); but as God, on his part, does not cease to pour out his benefits endlessly, so it is also fitting for every one of us to strive to bless and praise him without ceasing. For St. Paul speaks here without pretence, and when he blessed God for the Ephesians, he meant as much for all other churches. How unkind it would then be, if a man should think nothing at all of the benefits he has received at God's hand! We are all of us bound to praise God for our neighbours. If we hear it reported that God has prospered his church, or showed mercy to his people three hundred leagues away, and, to be brief, if we hear of anything that ought to make us glad, it is necessary for our mouths to be open to praise God for it.

Now if we are bound to do this for the benefits we do not see but which our neighbours

feel, though they are distant from us in far countries, what is to be thought of us when God fills our mouths (as it is said in the Psalms [Ps. 145:16] ) and yet, meanwhile, we have no intention at all of giving him thanks And we have to note further, that if we are bound to praise God for our meat and drink and for all the things that belong to this transitory life, he binds us to him beyond all compare when he calls us to the heavenly heritage and when he blesses and enriches us with spiritual gifts of grace, which serve to lead us much further than this world. Seeing then that God displays such bountifulness towards us, what excuse can we have if we do not follow the example shown us here by St. Paul, which is that our whole life long we must occupy ourselves continually in praising the name of God.

Now, with all this, he shows that faith and love are the very gifts of God and do not come from ourselves, as men always imagine through a devilish pride. I told you before that St. Paul did not play the hypocrite in giving thanks to God for the faith and love of the Ephesians. If every man was able to believe and have faith of his own accord, or could get it by some power of his own, the praise for it ought not to be given to God. For it would be but mockery to acknowledge ourselves indebted to him for what we have obtained, not from him, but from elsewhere. But here St. Paul blesses God's name for enlightening the Ephesians in the faith and for framing their hearts to make them loving. It is to be concluded, therefore, that everything comes from God.

The heathen, bringing in their own freewill, thought themselves under no obligation at all to God, except for their good luck, as they called it; for they imagined they had all things by their own power and skill. The papists also will readily grant that God's grace must necessarily help us in part, but, for all that, they will still have man exalted and to attain to faith by his own doings. Here St. Paul excludes all these devilish opinions and shows (as we have seen before) that whenever there is any church in the world, or any people to call upon him who are settled and grounded upon the beliefs of the gospel, God deserves to have all the glory for it. And why Because his hand must have been at work in that case, because men would never be disposed to any goodness if they were not guided and directed to it, and even forcibly drawn to it by the Holy Spirit. For there is so much rebellion in us that we are not only weak and feeble, as the papists imagine, but also utterly contrary to God until he has cleansed us. And this is what he means, in saying by his prophet Ezekiel that the hearts which were formerly of stone shall be changed into hearts of flesh, which means that he will soften them and cause them to bow in submission to him.

Furthermore, under these two words, faith and love, St. Paul has comprehended the whole perfection of Christians. For the mark at which the first table of the law aims is that we should worship one God only and cling to him for all things, acknowledging ourselves to be so indebted to him, that we ought to flee to him alone for all refuge and endeavour to spend our whole life in his service. That is the sum of the first table of the law. The contents of the second are nothing else but that we should live together in equity and uprightness, and deal in such a way with our neighbours that we strive to help all men without hurting any man. And we are sure that God has set forth so good and perfect a rule of good life in his law that nothing can be added to it.

Seeing this is so, it is not without reason that, in this place, St. Paul here sets down faith in Jesus Christ and love as a summary of the whole of the Christian life, showing to what we ought to be conformed and what is our standard. But, at the same time, we must also note that under this word 'faith', he comprehends the whole service of God. For it is impossible that, once being acquainted with his goodness as he has shown it to us in the person of his only Son, we should not be totally ravished in love to our heavenly Father. Behold, God draws us out of the pit of confusion and death and opens to us the gate of the heavenly kingdom, and tells us that he will take us for his children. How can we hear and believe this without being wholly given to him, forsaking the world, and hating the evil that is in ourselves, because it separates us from him. You see then how the word 'faith' means a yielding of ourselves wholly to God.

Again, faith is not an idle thing. It implies that we should resort to God, and that whenever we are stained with any spot, we should pray him to remedy it, for every need we encounter is meant to be as the pricking with a spur given to us by God to make us come to him. Faith, therefore, involves prayer and supplication. Indeed, it implies that we cannot but hallow the name of God by resting ourselves upon him and by yielding him all the glory that belongs to him, when we know that he gives us all things of his liberality, looking for nothing from our hands except the sacrifice of thanksgiving. Thus you see how faith involves all that is contained in the first table of the law.

It is true that the part is put for the whole. It must be remembered, however, that the things of which we have spoken cannot be put asunder. Now then we must live uprightly and justly with our neighbours, as it is said in the fifteenth Psalm [vv. 2, 3], that we are indebted to God for all things, and that we cannot yield him any recompence in exchange. Indeed when we have striven to the utmost to give him anything, all we can do is neither here nor there [ni chaud ni froid (Fr.) (neither hot nor cold)] to him. What does he require then? That we should be given to doing good to his poor faithful people, according as St. Paul also mentions the saints expressly in this text.

It is true that we ought to practise love towards all men without exception, for we cannot be the children of God, who makes his sun shine on both good and bad, unless we love our enemies and strive to relieve and help them. That, therefore, is the mark at which we must aim. Nevertheless, this does not prevent us loving all God's children with a brotherly love, because they are linked to us with a closer bond. That is the reason why it is said in the passage I referred to from the sixteenth psalm, as well as in this present one of St. Paul himself, that we ought to have love to all the faithful. In another place he discusses well the difficulty that may be seen here. For he commands us to have love to all men in general and chiefly to such as are of the household of faith [Gal. 6:10]. God, then, will have us become like himself and follow his example in doing good to all men, even to such as are not worthy of it, to such an extent that we should procure to the utmost of our power the welfare of those who seek nothing else but to put out our eyes.

Moreover, since God has stamped his image on all the faithful and commended them to us, he will have us bear a certain special brotherly love towards them. For God's gifts are

to be esteemed wherever they are seen, according to the fifteenth Psalm, [v. 4] where it is said that we must love such as fear God and abhor such as are wicked. Then, if we see the evidences God has put into his faithful people, by which he comes near them, is it not fitting that we also, on our part, should be stirred up to love them? In short, we see that St. Paul has comprehended here the whole rule of good and holy living, that is to say, that first of all we must hand ourselves over completely to our God to cling steadfastly to him; and, secondly, live honestly and uprightly with our neighbours, abstaining from all evil deeds and endeavouring to do good to all men, according to our strength and ability. And how may that come to pass? Even by knowing our heavenly Father and by acknowledging the infinite good he has done, and of which he vouchsafes to make us daily partakers, for the whole of our life depends upon him and he alone is the one to whom we look for everlasting salvation, calling upon him and yielding him thanks all our lives. So much, then, for the first point.

Moreover, with regard to the second point, it is not possible for us to love our neighbours, unless we also live soberly without showing any bad example, and pay such attention to our behaviour that no one may have cause for complaint. For what love is there in a whoremonger that endeavours to dishonour another man's wife, or in a thief that seeks to steal another man's goods? Again, seeing that our life ought to be guided with all honesty, whenever any man breaks out into drunkenness, blasphemy, or similar things, in so doing there cannot but be some troubling of poor people, some robbing them of their goods, or some wild running into all manner of extortions and excesses. So then, if we have love towards our neighbours, we shall live a sound and upright life with them and we shall rule it in such a way that we shall not busy ourselves about vain fancies, as we see the papists do; for they take great pains in their ceremonies, and they call it serving God to babble away, and to gad here and there on pilgrimage, and to do this and that, and, in the meanwhile, they swoon away in their own imaginations, and all for lack of knowing to what God calls them. Therefore, in order that we may not labour in vain, let us observe what God approves and let us hold ourselves to that. For we cannot go astray if we abide continually in the way, as he shows it to us by his Word, especially since he shows us in so brief a compass what is required for the leading of such a life as becomes us. For if the volumes were long and endless, we would excuse ourselves on the grounds that we were no great scholars and that we could not remember so many things. But now, seeing our Lord utters his whole demands in two or three words, we must grant that if we do not remember so short and concise and easy a lesson, we are too crafty and perverse, and wilfully stop our ears lest we hear what he says to us.

Finally, it is to be noted on this word 'faith', that St. Paul, not without reason, says, 'faith in Jesus Christ'; for that is where we must look. The fathers of old always had the image of God before their eyes, for they must only offer sacrifice before his mercy-seat. They were not given any reason to hope that God would hear them, or would be merciful to them in any other way. Then they had the visible image of the ark of the covenant, but now we have Jesus Christ, the image of God, who is in himself invisible; [Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3] for not without reason St. Paul says that God is incomprehensible until he manifests himself in the person of his Son.

Therefore, since we have Jesus Christ, who is the express image of God, we must indeed look to him. And now you see also why it is said that he is the express sign of the power of God his Father. For although the persons are distinct, yet he represents to us what belongs and is requisite to our salvation, so that, in knowing the Son we know the Father also, as St. John says. [Jn. 5:23] And he that does not have the Son renounces the Father, however much he protests that he comes to him. So then, since it is said here that we must believe in Jesus Christ, let us take notice of the warning he gives to his disciples. 'Do you believe in God ?' he says, 'believe also in me.' [Jn. 14:1] There he shows that the ancient fathers who lived under the law, only had obscure teaching until the time he was manifested to the world. It is true that they worshipped the living God, and also that they had no access to him but by means of the mediator. However, that was only under shadows and types. Nor did they have any such light as we have nowadays under the gospel. And for that reason also I told you that Christ is called the image of God, who is of his own nature invisible, so that we could not know him unless he disclosed himself by such means.

In short, let us note that we do nothing else but wander about until we have our faith established in Jesus Christ. And this will be the better perceived by the errors in which the world has been steeped to this day. For the papists will protest enough that they believe in God; Turks and Jews do as much. It is true that the papists and the Jews seem to come nearest the truth, for the Jews protest that they worship the living God, even the same God that gave them his law by Moses. But what of that? At the same time they reject Jesus Christ, who is the end and substance of the law. As for the papists, although they profess Christianity and avow Jesus Christ to be their Saviour, yet it is obvious that they make war against him, since they have established a way of serving God to suit themselves, so that there is nothing but disorder in all their doings. As for the Turks, they can say well enough, 'Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth', but shall we think that God will renounce himself or retract that which he has said, which is, that no man can come to him but by his well-beloved Son, whom he has constituted mediator between himself and men? Again, we see how the papists will say well enough that they believe in God, but, at the same time, they insist on having patron saints and advocates to bring them into his presence. Again, it is not enough for them that they have been bought with the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; it is necessary for us to introduce our own merits, and redeem ourselves by our own satisfactions; and when we have offended God we must resort to such and such means. If, then, a man cares to examine the papists' belief, he will surely find that they believe their own dreams and that all they ever do is but a bewildering labyrinth. For they mix whatever comes into their own heads with Jesus Christ, whereas we know that he ought to remain entirely by himself.

We see then how St. Paul leads us to the true test of our faith, which is by resting upon Jesus Christ, so that we feel ourselves utterly void of all goodness, and that we must draw from his fulness to be filled with all good things, or else woe will be to us. For if we had all the angels of paradise on our side (if it were possible), yet it is certain that there would be nothing but confusion, if we did not hold the Head, as St. Paul says in the first and second chapters of the Epistle to the Colossians. [1:18; 2:10] And so you see what we have to gather from this sentence.

Now, after St. Paul has said that he thanks God for the things that he saw already in the church of Ephesus, he adds that 'he prays to him also'. This is to show that when we see God bestow his excellent gifts upon his children, we need to beseech him to continue and further them, and that for two reasons. For he that stands may happen to fall; and, again, God must increase his grace more and more. For even they that are the most perfect shall have reason to be ashamed, if they look thoroughly into their own poverty. You see, then, that that to which St. Paul brings us is that when we praise God for the gifts he has bestowed upon his elect, his children, we ought to link prayer with our thanksgiving. And why? For it becomes him to perfect that which he has begun, and we must always take this ground—Lord, thou wilt not leave the work of thine own hands half done. [Ps. 138:8]

And the very thing we ought to do for others is also necessary for ourselves. In short, we are here exhorted to magnify God in such a way for his goodness and gifts which we already have, that we must perceive that there is still much that is lacking in us, and that it is necessary for us that he should give us perseverance to the end, and, moreover, that he should correct the rest of our faults and increase his grace in us until we are come to full perfection, which will only be when we are rid of this mortal body.

Yet, despite this, we see how Satan nowadays possesses such as surmise an infernal perfection, and make but the first three petitions to their Father, saying that it is enough to pray God that his name be hallowed, that his kingdom come, and that his will be done—and so they cut off all the rest of the prayer which our Lord Jesus Christ has left us. And in this matter I have the signature of their own hands, and that, their disciples know. By this those devils show that they must be utterly senseless, seeing they are carried so far away as to refuse to yield God this glory, that even now we are still charged with the burden of our infirmities, held down with many corruptions, surrounded with an abundance of vices, so that God must cleanse us from them more and more, even from day to day, until he has brought us to the perfection to which he calls us.

And it is all the more necessary for us carefully to note this doctrine because the papists are not as full with the errors of their superstitions and idolatries as these wretches are, who nowadays disseminate their poisons in their synagogues and hiding-places. But, be that as it may, let us note well what is shown us here by the Holy Spirit, when St. Paul says that he prays God. And why? I have told you already that the Ephesians had prospered and that the gifts of God and of his Holy Spirit were increased in them. He has shown that. Now, to conclude the matter, he says further that he prays God to give them that which they do not have, and which they still need. Since this is so, let us observe that the more we have prospered, the more reason we have to humble ourselves and, with all meekness, to beseech God to finish that which he has begun and to increase his gifts in us until we have no more need to go any further, which shall be at that meeting of which we shall speak very much more in the fourth chapter.

But now we must note well the words St. Paul uses. For he says, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, or the glorious Father (for the expression 'Father of glory' stands in the Hebrew language for 'glorious Father') 'give you the spiritual

revelation to have knowledge of him'. Now when St. Paul sends us here to Jesus Christ, saying that the God upon whom he calls is the same as he who is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, and even his Father too, it is to show the confidence he had of being heard, and that the Ephesians should be encouraged to follow the same method and rule of praying, and that when they have any occasion to come to God, they should take the same course that he did and keep to the straight path of coming to our Lord Jesus Christ.

But now if a man demand how God is above our Lord Jesus Christ, the question is easily resolved if we have an eye to the person of the mediator who is humbled in our place and condition to be the mediator between God and us. It is true that Jesus Christ is one with his Father, [Jn. 10:30] and when we speak of the living God, it is necessary for us to acknowledge that the whole fulness of the Godhead dwells in him. [Col. 2:9] Therefore, we must not set our Lord Jesus Christ apart, as though he were a new God and something other than he who was revealed to the fathers from the beginning (as some devils say nowadays, who have stirred up that stinking evil and abomination), but it is the very same God, the only God, who has shown himself to us in the person of the Father—so that we seek him in Jesus Christ. For in Jesus Christ we have to consider the office of middleman, [moyenneur (Fr.)] in that he so humbled himself. Not that he relinquished one whit of his majesty, nor that he was in any way cut short or diminished of his eternal glory. There was nothing of that. But for our sake he was humbled, [amoíndri (Fr.)] yes, and utterly emptied.[anéanti du tout (Fr.)] And we must not be ashamed to say that Jesus Christ was humbled, [amoíndri (Fr.)] seeing it is said that he was emptied, [anéanti du tout (Fr.)] for that is the very word that St. Paul uses to the Philippians. [Phil. 2:7] Therefore, when we speak of Jesus Christ as joined with us in order to bring us to his Father, so is he under God his Father, namely, with respect to the fact that he has taken our nature upon him and made himself our fellow.

And that also is the reason why he said to his disciples (as St. John reports in his twentieth chapter [v. 17]), 'Go ye to my brethren and tell them, I go to my God and your God, to my Father and your Father.' How amazing that Jesus Christ should join himself in such a way with his faithful people, that he said he will have the very same God as they. Yes indeed, but after what manner? For is he not God himself? Yes; but, since he is clothed with our flesh, and since he condescended to be made flesh in order that we might be members of his body, that is the reason why he has one God with us. And that is also the reason why the apostle applies this text of Isaiah to his person, 'Lo, here am I with the servants which thou hast given me'; [Isa. 8:18; Heb. 2:13] so that Jesus Christ appears there as a captain that presents himself before his king and prince, saying, 'Lo, here I am with the company of children which thou hast given me.' Be that as it may, we see that Jesus Christ draws us to God his Father in order that we should go to him with complete trust and that he should receive us. For, otherwise, who is he that would dare to promise himself that his request would be heard What grace could we obtain if the gate were not opened to us by Jesus Christ and if he did not prove to be what he has claimed, namely, that he is the way? [Jn. 14:6]

However, so that we might know the better what need we have to be guided by our Lord Jesus Christ, St. Paul sets before us here the infinite glory of God. How dare we, then, be

so bold as to present ourselves before God unless we have an advocate who obtains a way of access for us there? For if the sun dazzles men's eyes, and the heat of it burns us, though we are very far off from it, what will become of us when we approach God For what has the sun, but a little power which he has breathed into it And must we not certainly be, as it were, consumed when we come to the incomprehensible majesty that is in God But yet, if we have Jesus Christ, we have to understand that God is not only the Father of glory, but also the Father of mercy, and that he looks with pity upon such as are most miserable and held in reproach and disdain by the world. This is what we ought to rest on in praying to God.

St. Paul prays God expressly here to give the Ephesians the spirit of wisdom and revelation. It is certain that God had already revealed to them the truth of his gospel, as we have seen. And, indeed, we could not have one single spark of faith, or of light, unless God had worked in us already, according to what is said to Peter in the sixteenth chapter of St. Matthew, [v. 17] 'Flesh and blood hath not revealed these things unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.' And yet for all this, Peter showed afterwards that he knew nothing of Christ's spiritual kingdom. Although, then, he was just like a poor idiot at his A.B.C., yet it is testified of him that the small taste of the gospel that he had was a gift from heaven. By this we see how God has to increase his gift more and more in us, and in that respect our life is called a 'way', because we must always go forwards until our course is ended. And whoever imagines any perfection in this world is possessed by Satan, and utterly renounces God's grace. Nevertheless, let us not imagine that God changes his purpose (for he is not variable), or allows his grace to be chopped up into bits and pieces at men's pleasure, but he has appointed this order, that we should grow from day to day, and yet at the same time, learn in all soberness to acknowledge our shortcomings, and groan for them, and to afflict ourselves for them, and to hold ourselves in check.

You see then that these two things agree very well, namely, that the Ephesians had already received the spirit of revelation, and yet that they needed to have it given them by God. For although there is but one Spirit, yet are the gifts manifold, and they are distributed to every one of us in his measure, and as it pleases him to give them. There is none but Jesus Christ who has fully received them. He alone is the fountain that can never be drained dry. He it is upon whom God's Spirit has rested in order that we should all be made partakers of him. And for our own part, let us acknowledge that the wisest of us have need always to be scholars, and still to learn even to our dying day. Now let us note that this word 'revelation' condemns the blindness which belongs to us all. For we have our eyes open to distinguish between white and black; we see the sun and the moon; we see the things of this world and are able to form judgments about them; we need no new revelation for that sort of thing, for we have it by nature. It is true that our eyes are instruments of God's power and goodness by which he makes us enjoy the light, but that is something common to all. But here St. Paul shows us that we are blind and that we understand nothing of God's spiritual grace, unless he opens our eyes and takes away the veil that is before them, and even gives us a new sight which we do not have. For our eyes are worse than put out until he enlightens them by his Holy Spirit. Thus, you see what we have to bear in mind.



And this is what he continues to deal with, namely (he says) ‘to have the eyes of your understanding enlightened.’ But a man might reply, If we have the spirit of revelation already, why do we need it? There,—you speak as if you see everything. It is true that you see in part, but your eyes are still very much dimmed. And this may be said of all men generally, according as it is said that in this world we see things but dimly and, as it were, through a mirror, [I Cor. 13:12] until we are capable of seeing God in his heavenly glory, at which time we shall be made like him. Again, St. Paul writes thus, in order that men should not say, Must God reveal things in such a way to us, as if we were in such a condition that we could see nothing at all? And is a man no better than a brute beast without discretion or judgment? In answer to this, it is true that we have some understanding, but we are blind for all that, because we are corrupted by sin. God, therefore, has to give us new eyes, as I said before.

And the apostle adds the word ‘wisdom’, the better to beat down the foolish pride that men conceive in themselves, when they try to fly without wings to come to God. For there is not a man who would not be wise. If we desired true wisdom by seeking it from God’s hand, it would be a good and well-ordered desire. But there are two faults in us, for we want to be wise after our own conceit. Am I not wise enough to govern myself? a fool will say. And, at the same time, we despise God’s Word, and every one of us wants to have the reins on his neck and to be allowed to do what he thinks best. But that is too great an excess. The other fault is that in reading the holy Scripture, we still imagine that we can come to the knowledge of the things contained there by our own judgment. But here both faults are excluded by St. Paul. For when he asks God to give his faithful people the spirit of wisdom, he shows that they have no discernment, no more than brute beasts, except by the guidance of our Lord Jesus Christ, to come to the kingdom of heaven. For even in civil matters and worldly affairs, God only gives discernment to such men as he pleases.

Now, if God keeps his special goodness always to himself, to give prudence to whom he wills for the conduct of the inferior matters of this world, then it is he that causes unbelievers to be wise; and when it is a matter of the heavenly life, there is no natural disposition to wisdom in us. And so, St. Paul presupposes that which I have said already, namely, that we must be taught by God to know him by the doctrine of truth, through the testimony of the gospel; for, without that, we should be like those fanatics who fall into error under the pretence of having the revelation of God’s Holy Spirit. However, that is not the way in which St. Paul takes the word ‘revelation’, when he prays God to give it to his children. As for example, when Jesus Christ speaks of his Spirit, he does not separate it from the doctrine he had preached. ‘When the Spirit comes (he says) he shall tell you all truth.’ [Jn. 14:26; 15:26] And how is that? Had not the apostles received it already? Yes, but he adds, He shall show you that which you now hear from my mouth. To be brief, it is the peculiar office of the Holy Spirit to teach us in such a way that the word we hear may thereby have its position and true valuation, and that we may profit from it.

And next, St. Paul also shows what all our light and knowledge consists in, namely, in knowing God in the person of his only Son. That (I say) is that with which we must

content ourselves. For if we have prying minds and are inquisitive in things above our capacity, let us consider a little how weak and raw our understanding is. And if our hearts are so gross and heavy, what shall we do when we want to rise above heaven and earth? Are we able to embrace all that in so small a measure Nevertheless, we see how men take excessive leave to be inquisitive about this and that, and to pose questions by way of pleading and disputing against God. For this reason, St. Paul shows us here that if we intend to be wise, we must be sober, that is to say, we must understand that wisdom is of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ, as he himself will show hereafter, so that when we have once come to that point, we have so much as ought to suffice us perfectly; and if we presume to go any further, it is but a wilful ruining of ourselves.

St. Paul, then, will show that at great length afterwards, but it ought to be sufficient for us that both in this passage and in the whole of the holy Scripture, we ought to learn concerning the God whom we must serve, what is his will, how we may have our trust in him, what access we may have to pray to him, and to find our refuge in him at all times. That is the thing in which we must be employed. But that cannot be done unless all we ever have need of and avails for our welfare, is to be had in Jesus Christ in whom God has manifested himself. For in itself the majesty of God is too high a thing, and we should be lost a hundred times before we could come near him, if it were not that he is come down to us. But if we once have Jesus Christ, there we have a living image of him, in which we may see whatever is requisite for our salvation. For there we understand that God is our Father, and that we are cleansed from all our sins to be transformed into the glory of God. There we see how God accepts us for righteous, and how we are reconciled to God. There we perceive how he has ransomed us and that we shall never be left destitute of the grace of his Holy Spirit, until he has brought us to the enjoyment of our inheritance. Thus, we know all these things in our Lord Jesus Christ. And that is the reason why St. Paul says in another place, that he desired not to know any other thing than Jesus Christ, [I Cor. 2:2] and that it is he only of whom he intended to boast. As we have seen before, he forsook all things in order to abide under the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and although to the world this makes for nothing but shame and reproach, yet he protests that he has given up all that he esteemed before, and that he regards them only as a hindrance and loss, and even as filth and dung, in order to cleave to our Lord Jesus Christ and to show that such as are possessed by the foolish opinion of their own deservings separate themselves from our Lord Jesus Christ; and that if we will be united to him, we must give up all we imagine we have of our own and offer ourselves to him empty of all goodness, to be filled by him. And now you see also why St. Paul says that he would much rather come to the haven of salvation stark naked and poor, than live in the midst of the sea and there be engulfed. For although he were taken for an holy personage, and as half angel, yet he counted that as nothing, in order that he might be a partaker of the remission of sins that was given him in Jesus Christ, and of the grace which he has communicated to all his members. Therefore, let us learn to magnify God's grace in such a way that we may utterly forget all those fantasies with which the devil deceives the unbelievers, by puffing them up with I know not what manner of pride; and let us come utterly empty to our Lord Jesus Christ to beg his grace. For we cannot receive one drop of it, except by confessing ourselves to be utterly unworthy of it.

And now let us fall down before the majesty of our good God with acknowledgement of our faults, praying him to make us perceive them more and more, and that the same may so humble us that we may be established in his grace and labour to come nearer and nearer to him, that being subdued in ourselves, we may be raised up by him through his pure mercy, and depending altogether upon him, resort to him as to our Father, and continue in so doing until he has taken us out of the prison of sin and joined us perfectly to himself. May it please him to grant this grace, not only to us, but to all people.

## The Seventh Sermon on the First Chapter

by John Calvin

*'I pray for you, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, to have the knowledge of him. That is, to have the eyes of your understanding enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope you ought to have of his calling, and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance among the saints.'*

### **Ephesians 1:17-18**

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All men by nature have some understanding. Not that it shows itself as soon as they are born, but, in process of time, all have discernment between good and evil. And because of that, they are called reasonable creatures. But the understanding we have by nature is not enough to bring us to the kingdom of heaven. For we fall far short when matters concerning the heavenly life come in question. We see that every man applies his mind to the business and affairs of the world, and every man will think about his own interests. Again, although some could wish in their hearts that their own consciences were dead, nevertheless God has engraved the feeling in their hearts that our lives must needs be subject to rule, and even the most wicked and worst-natured of us all are compelled to have some prickings of conscience, and are constrained, whether they will or not, to approve the good and condemn the evil. It is true that when they have committed any fault, they will strive to cover it up with vain excuses. But if a man asks them whether murder, extortion, robbery, whoredom, deceit, and perjury are virtues or not, they will say they are vices worthy to be condemned. Every man will say so. For it is God's will that there should be such a knowledge printed in man's heart, so that all should be condemned without excuse, and forced to be their own judges.

But (as I said before) this is not enough to lead us to God and to open to us the kingdom of heaven in such a way that we may know how to be saved, or how to call upon God. Now we are totally blind in that respect, for our insight does not reach beyond the world. Therefore God has to work in us and give us new eyes to understand the things necessary for our salvation. And that is the reason why St. Paul prays to God here to give them enlightened eyes, by which he presupposes that men already have some smattering of understanding, not to reach so high as is necessary, but to have some seed of religion in them, and to perceive that there is a God.

Furthermore, God must give a greater clearness, and such a one as we are quite void of by reason of Adam's sin, for we are plunged in such darkness that we go utterly contrary to the good way, until God stretches out his hand to us. You see then that what is contained here is that God has done more for us in giving us the eyes of understanding than in making us men and putting us into the world, because thereby he reforms us and gives us a clear and sure insight as to those whom he has elected. For it is a privilege

peculiar to his own children and not common to all men. And truly we see that when God manifests his power, it is known only by such as have enlightened eyes, according to that saying of Moses, 'The Lord has not given you a heart to understand, nor eyes to see, even to this day.' [Deut 29:4]

We know that miracles were performed in the sight of the people, yet despite the crossing of the Red Sea, the issuing of the water out of the rock, the falling of the manna from heaven, the thick cloud by day and the fiery pillar by night, the plentiful supply of flesh to them, and the horrible punishments God laid upon the rebels and upon such as had given full vent to their own lusts, the people did not understand at all. Moses, telling them that they needed to set about seeking God, that they might be enlightened by his Spirit, says, I see that even unto this hour God's gracious doings have been buried among you through your ingratitude. But that is because men are stupid and never understand anything that belongs to their salvation, until God has worked in them.

Therefore, you must rid yourselves of all pride, and crave understanding at God's hand, acknowledging yourselves unable to aspire so high as to judge rightly of God's works and make yourselves profit by them, until he has given you heavenly spiritual insight. This is the substance of what we have to note in this passage.

Now, on this subject, it is easy to gather how the wretched world has been beguiled by the opinion of freewill which has been put into their heads. For the papists will grant readily enough that without God's grace we cannot walk as we ought to do; but yet, at the same time, they say that we may well further God's grace by our own freewill, and so they mix them together. When they set about defining freewill they say it is a complex thing, for we have reason and prudence to choose the good and to refuse the evil, and at the same time, we have also power and ability to perform and carry out what we have purposed. But we see how St. Paul speaks here of man's reason, which they term the queen that overrules and controls all our thoughts and deeds. He shows that she is stone blind, until God has renewed her, and that it is not a case of there being some vestige of ability in us, so that God has not to do more than supply our deficiencies. Had it been so, St. Paul would have said that God assists such light as we have, or that he increases it, or that he adds to it whatever it stands in need of. However, he does not so speak, but he says, 'God give you enlightened eyes', thus showing that it is a free gift, and not simply that our Lord has to bear with our infirmities and to add something to them. He also says that we being blind can see nothing at all, until he has opened our eyes, and that we are guided and governed by this revelation of his Holy Spirit, on which we have touched before.

And now, since men are always liable to run to extremes and busy their heads about many unprofitable things, St. Paul shows us that to which we ought to apply the whole of our minds and hearts, namely, to seeking to know what is the hope of our calling. I have told you already that men are, in a manner of speaking, born to curiosity, and that they rove and range, and devise many evil speculations, and that is the reason why many men torment themselves beyond measure, ever learning and never attaining to the knowledge of the truth, [2 Tim. 3:7] as St. Paul says. Therefore, let us carefully note that all the true

knowledge that we must seek, is to attain to the hope to which God has called us. For the purpose of the Scripture is not to feed us with vain and superfluous things, but to edify us for our welfare, that is to say, to make us perceive God's goodness that we might be joined to him, and that this might be our true happiness.

And from this we may also gather that, until such time as our Lord has enlightened us by his Holy Spirit, we can find neither way nor path to come near the heavenly life, no, not so much as to guess what it is all about. Therefore, our need is that our Lord should put us in possession of our salvation by the power of his Holy Spirit. I told you before that faith serves to give us access to the kingdom of heaven and to the heritage purchased for us by our Lord Jesus Christ, and that it is needful for God to give it to us by his Holy Spirit. Then since it is so, let us observe that we need not only to have the gospel preached to us, but also that God should pierce our ears, so that we may take heed to what is contained in it; and that he should open our eyes to see what he shows us. To be brief, that he may both begin all and bring all to pass.

However, (as I said before) since men, by their vain imaginations, take more upon them than they ought to do, and, on the other hand, despise God's gifts, St. Paul magnifies here the hope of which we have made mention before, saying 'what are the riches of the glory of his heritage among the saints'. It is true that when there is any talk of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ, we pronounce them to be lofty matters. Nevertheless, that is only to exempt ourselves from them, if we could escape, so that we could be content to remain completely ignorant of that which appertains to religion. We are insatiable when anybody feeds us with vanities and falsehoods, but if God calls us to his school, we shrink back as much as we possibly can, and we even set this before us as a shield, that we are simple, and that we have but a small and rather dull understanding, and that the secrets of God's Word are too deep and incomprehensible for us. We know well enough how to say as much as that, and yet it is all hypocrisy and pretence.

And for proof of this, men will always judge according to their own ideas, so that if anything is propounded to them out of God's Word, they say, Is it so And how is it possible They reason, they call it in question: Is it so? Indeed, it is God that speaks, and yet they will not receive, without contradicting, what is shown them in the name of God. We see, then, that they simply lie in saying they are dull and slow-minded, for they think quite the opposite. The starkest idiots, I say, and the biggest dolts of them all consider themselves to have a wisdom excelling that of God.

Again, on the other hand, what causes the gospel to be despised is that a number of haughty and fanciful people think it is but a simple doctrine, and that it does not have enough subtlety for them. So much the more, therefore, do we need to ponder what is shown us here by St. Paul, which is that the glorious heritage to which God has called us has infinite riches. For in addition to the fact that we are nothing else but mire and rottenness, sin shuts us out from all hope of salvation. And so long as we are God's enemies, what can we expect at his hand but utter confusion But yet it pleases him to make us partners with the angels of paradise, and even more. For we are made members of our Lord Jesus Christ, in order that we should be partakers of his life and glory. What

excellent riches are these! When we have applied the whole of our minds to them, ought we not to be thoroughly ashamed, seeing that God has displayed such inestimable goodness towards us So then, St. Paul, to waken men from their drowsiness and to rebuke and correct their unthankfulness, because they do not commend one hundredth part of God's grace as they ought to do, tells us that if we think well about it, we shall find that his speaking in this way is to stir us up to pray God to enlighten us, because without him we should not be able to come anywhere near faith, or near any knowledge at all.

Thus we now see St. Paul's meaning, which he pursues and opens up much more in adding, 'what is the excellence of his power in us who have believed'. And again, 'according to the effectual working of the strength of his power'. He here assembles and heaps up many words which all import one thing. But it is, as it were, a correction of the wickedness of men, who endeavour to obscure God's goodness as much as they can, insomuch that, since they are not able to obscure it altogether, they diminish it in such a way that it does not appear; as if it had but a spark, whereas it ought to have full shining. But, in passing, let us note that when St. Paul puts down here the saints and believers, he means the faithful whom God has already called to him. And by this he shows that even when we have faith, all our holiness proceeds from God's mercy, and men bring nothing of their own making. It is true that this title of 'saints' is very honourable, but yet we must go to the source of holiness, for in ourselves we have nothing but uncleanness. God's children have to be holy, yet they must consider from where they have it, whether by their own skill or by the gift of God. St. Paul shows here that the praise for it ought to be given to God alone. For it is not without cause that God says so often, 'I am holy'. [Lev. 11:44; 19:2; I Pet. 1:15] And again, we know that Jesus Christ sanctified himself for us, in order that we might be washed and cleansed from all our pollutions. So much for the first point.

Afterwards follows the cause of our faith, namely, that men do not attain it unless they are drawn by a secret impulse, according as it is said that we must learn from God [Matt. 2:29], not only because his Word contains all wisdom, and God thereby teaches us faithfully what is useful for us, but also because our Lord expressed it very clearly, saying, 'He that has heard it of my Father'. [Jn. 6:45] He himself, who was the wisdom of God, spoke it, and yet he showed that what he uttered with his mouth could not prevail, unless God spoke within a man by his Holy Spirit. Now, if Jesus Christ could not profit men by his teaching, except insofar as God's Spirit worked within their hearts, what shall the preaching do which we hear at the mouths of mortal men, who are nothing Men, then, must plant and water, but it is God who gives the increase, as St. Paul says in the third chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians [v. 6].

Furthermore, as I have told you that we must draw all our holiness from Jesus Christ, in whom we shall find all the fulness of it, so let us also understand that, by that saying, we are warned that we are not called to filthiness, to take leave to do evil, but to be, as it were, separated to the service of God. Many men will brag well enough that they are believers — and that word trips lightly from every man's tongue, — but faith is a more precious thing than we think, for it cleanses our hearts (as it is said in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts [v. 9]) in order that we should be, as it were, separated and set apart to

dedicate ourselves wholly to God's service. But by this it is meant that men are, as it were, of a corrupt and infected lump, until God has drawn out the one sort from the rest. We differ nothing at all, then, from them that are as deeply plunged as possible in all manner of evil and wickedness. We are all alike (I say) as far as our nature is concerned. But they that believe in our Lord Jesus Christ must be, as it were, drawn out from this world, as St. Peter also says in his First Epistle.

Again, we have already seen that we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ in order that we might be drawn out from this world, according also as he says in St. John's Gospel, where he prays to God his Father, not to take us out of this world and out of this transitory life, but to keep the evil of the world from prevailing in us, and to exempt us from it. [Jn. 17:15] You see, then, that what we have to bear in mind is that holiness is the true evidence of our faith. And therefore, whoever is called a Christian ought to be consecrated to God, and must not get entangled, or defile himself with the uncleanness and filthiness of the world. It is true that our holiness shall never be perfect as long as we are in this world, for we always carry our infirmities, and although sin may not overpower us, yet it dwells in us, and we continually battle against it to get the upper hand. But, come what may, when God has once sanctified us, we must apply ourselves to his service, we must endeavour to cleanse ourselves more and more from all vices, and we must give ourselves wholly to him so that we are no more like worldlings, who take leave to do what they wish. This, in effect, is what St. Paul wished to say.

Moreover, there can be no doubt that in this passage he makes a comparison between such as are sunk in total ignorance, or rather are so hardened that they have no inclination at all to submit themselves to the obedience of the gospel, but fight furiously against it, and the faithful, who are like poor sheep attending to the voice of the good shepherd. St. Paul, then, condemns here all scoffers who despise God and are like dogs or brute beasts without any feeling of religion. When we see them, they are all of them mirrors to us, sufficient to make the hairs stand up on our heads, by letting us know what we should be like if God had not taken pity on us. And therefore, when we see people scorn God so openly that they rush in confusion into all kinds of evil, let us acknowledge the infinite goodness of our God, in that he has separated us from that company. Wherefore, when we see one kind stupefied in their unbelief, and another kind full of pride, bitterness, and stubbornness against the gospel, let us understand that we ourselves would be like them, if God had not stretched forth his arm to us.

But now, let us note carefully the words that St. Paul uses here in saying, 'the excellent greatness of his might, according to the effectual working of the power of his strength'. It would seem that the Holy Spirit intended to thunder upon this devilish opinion with which the world has at all times been stupefied, that is to say, of freewill. For the heathen presumed so far as to say that God had indeed created them to be in the world, and that it was his to give them good fortune, as they termed it, but that it was in every man's own power and free choice to follow virtue and to behave himself in such a way that no fault might be found in him. See how the heathen divided things between God and themselves. The lesser matter — the setting of us here below to crawl about like frogs, — they left to God, but to attain heaven and to rule ourselves in all virtue, that, they said, was within the



range of man's own ability.

The Jews and the papists have not been altogether of this opinion, for (as I have intimated already) they confess that we have need of God's help. But yet, for all that, they will have us mix some portion of our own holiness with God's grace and be able to cooperate with it, as they say, insomuch that when all has been reckoned and every allowance made, the chief part will always be found in ourselves.

But let us see how the Holy Spirit speaks of it. To what end does he use all these terms — highness, power, strength, effectual working, and might? Why does he heap up all these, except to show that men are mad when they will take more upon them than becomes them? There is not one word here which does not serve to silence our cackling, if we boast of even a tiny drop of goodness. For if men say, I have some good disposition in me, I have some virtue, this is what St. Paul speaks of, 'Highness!'; as if he intended to show that all the goodness we have is above the world and does not have any root or origin in ourselves, but comes from on high, as St. James says. [Jam. 3:17] Again, if men say, that we have some power to withstand our own vices and to fight against temptations, St. Paul says here that our strength, our power, and our might comes from God, and that he must give it to us and we receive it from him. If men still say, that by exerting themselves they can well do I know not what, St. Paul tells us that there is no effectual working, there is no bringing of the thing to pass, unless God grants it according to his speaking of it in the second chapter of the Philippians, [v. 13] where he says that we must walk in fear and with care, seeing that it is God who gives both the will and the ability to perform the will, according to his own good pleasure, that is to say, he begins the work and causes it to be carried out. In brief, let us note that the words the apostle uses here are so many thunderclaps and lightnings, to beat down and subdue all the pride of man, in order that being put to shame in ourselves, we might give God the glory he deserves, and, with all lowliness, frankly and freely confess ourselves to be in the wrong, acknowledging that all goodness comes from him, and that we are indebted for it to him alone. Thus you see how, in effect, what we have to learn from this passage is to prostrate ourselves in such a way that we might have no desire to go shares with God, saying that he only helps us, and that there is some portion of his grace and Holy Spirit in our freewill; but we are to yield to him purely and simply the whole praise for our salvation.

Furthermore, let it also make us despise the world, that we may be contented with the hope of everlasting life which is purchased for us by our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know that although men are generally subject to many afflictions, and that this life of ours is not without reason termed a vale of wretchedness, yet God exercises his own children with a greater abundance of adversities than he does everyone else, because they also at all times have need to be urged to renounce the world. If we should live here too much at our ease and pleasure, what would become of us, seeing that we do not fail to go to sleep here, even though God spurs us and entreats us in so many ways to make haste without delaying here below. You see, then, in few words, how God will exercise us many ways after he has called us to the faith of the gospel, for, otherwise, we might take a distaste to serving him, and it would seem to us that his love were only a very meagre thing, if we did not learn to give up all other things as worthless or of little value, and to embrace

Jesus Christ. Therefore, let us learn that it is St. Paul's intention here to draw us to God in such a way that nothing may prevent us from going on in our calling. If we do not have everything to our liking in this world, let us learn to value the inestimable benefits of our God better than we have done, that we may say with David (as he speaks in his sixteenth psalm [v. s] ) 'I have my heritage which satisfies me'; seeing that God has given himself to me, I have such an excellent inheritance that I do not worry about going through all the afflictions of the world — poverty, sickness, reproach, fear, and threatenings — all these things shall be sweet to me, so long as I possess my God, and he makes me feel that he has chosen me and reserved me to himself and purposes to make me a partaker of all his good things.

Thus you see, in effect, that by this passage we are to be heartened and strengthened unto patience, to bear meekly all the afflictions and adversities of the world, and not to be grieved or annoyed: and although God causes us now and then to drink from a bitter cup and gives us reason to sigh and lament, yet we must not fall to grumbling and complaining, but assure ourselves that God has given us good comfort in that he has called us to be partakers of his kingdom, and has so put forth his power already in us that we ought, as it were, to lift ourselves above all earthly things, and to look down at them as at our feet.

And since we do not yet perceive such fulness of God's grace as were to be wished, St. Paul therefore sends us to the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. And surely if he had not added that God has manifested his power in his only Son, as we have already heard, what a disappointment it would be! For we might plead, by way of reply, How so? Where are these riches of God? For we are not only bereft of the goods of this world, but also we are as a dry and barren ground in respect of the grace of God's Holy Spirit. If there is any portion of it in us, it is so small that we ought to be ashamed of it, and yet, for all this, we are immersed in our infirmities. If we speak of God's power, it ought to be victorious over all sin in us. But we are so weak that we are as good as beaten down. Again, it is necessary that God's image should shine forth in us, but we bear so much filthiness and such blemishes about us as is pitiful to see. We should be wholly consecrated to God, but the world holds us back, and we are, as it were, entangled in it.

See how the faithful might be disheartened when any word were ministered about God's grace, if they stayed there and were not led forth to Jesus Christ. Not without reason, therefore, St. Paul adds here that God displayed the excellence of his power when he raised our Lord Jesus Christ from death. And he speaks purposely of his resurrection, because in his death we see only what is liable to daunt us. For there appeared nothing but weakness, but by his vanquishing death he showed himself to be the Son of God, even the Lord of glory and life, who had all power in himself. And that also is the reason why St. Paul says that God set him at his right hand. For it would not have been enough for Jesus Christ to have been raised again, unless he had a continual and abiding dominion. It is true that even in his resurrection, we have a testimony that he is the Son of God, but yet, for all that, we must take one further step, namely, that he did not have any sort of power and sway, but, by his rising again, he attained such superiority that all the world is governed by him, and he is now set down at the right hand of God his Father to

maintain and preserve his servants that call upon him and put themselves into his keeping, and has sufficient power to overcome Satan and all the world and all our enemies.

Now, then, we see St. Paul's meaning, that since we might be cast down and our faith at least badly shaken, if we should look no further than to ourselves, therefore he sets Jesus Christ before us as the true pattern, in which we may see that which as yet is unseen in ourselves, that is to say, God's inestimable power which is greater than that of the whole world. For, first, he is raised from the dead, and, secondly, he is set at the right hand of his Father. Now, speaking of God's right hand is a similitude taken from men. It is certain that God has neither right hand nor left, for he is infinite and fills both heaven and earth; and again, he has no body, but is of a spiritual essence. Therefore, we must not imagine any particular place when God's right hand is spoken of. And when it is said that Jesus Christ sits there, it is to show that he fills all the world with his power. It is true that in respect of his manhood, he is in heaven, and it is one of the articles of our faith that he is ascended into heaven. But yet, although he is absent from us in his body and there is a great distance between us, that does not prevent him filling all things with his Holy Spirit and dwelling in us himself and nourishing us by his own substance, according to the saying that his flesh is our meat and his blood our drink. [Jn. 6:55]

You see, then, that God's right hand is not some particular place where Christ is seated, but the sovereignty he has obtained to govern the whole world; and (as I said before) it is a figure of speech borrowed from men, as when a prince makes his vice-regent, he sets him at his right side, as if to say, See here the second person of my realm whom I will have men to obey. God, then, in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, purposed to show that he is our Father. It is true that the whole fulness of the Godhead is in Jesus Christ. [Col. 2:9] But as we are dull and lazy, and unable to attain to the majesty of God, therefore it is said that Jesus Christ has obtained all authority, so that we are sure that he has put us in his protection and that, being under his hand, we are safe, and all the devils of hell cannot prevail against us. For who is it that has all power It is even our Head. Although, then, we who are his members are weak, yet is there strength enough in the Head, which is the chief part of the body. And so you see for what reason it is said that Jesus Christ is set at the right hand of God his Father, namely, to show us that we do not need to seek far for his help, seeing that he governs all things both above and beneath, and we are committed to his charge here. And now let us sum up what St. Paul is telling us here. He says that God has manifested his high and infinite power in us. Nevertheless, since that is not sufficient by reason of the infirmities we feel, and because there is so much at fault in us still and we are not yet come to our full stature, no, nor even to the hundredth part of it, therefore, in order that we may be the better assured of all the things that we need, we must know that they are to be found in Jesus Christ.

Are we then still subject to death? Take note that Jesus Christ is received up into everlasting life, for the very reason why he became a mortal man like us was that the life which he has might belong to us. Does sin still dwell in us Know that Jesus Christ has neither spot nor blemish in him Are we weak? He is the power of God his Father, and whatever he received in his manhood, which he took of us, was for our sakes and for our profit. In short, whatever we lack, and whatever may comfort or enliven us, we shall find

it in our Lord Jesus Christ, in order that we might not be in care and perplexity, as though we were excluded from the benefits that St. Paul has made mention of before. Finally, we should never have any settled trust if we did not know that the things which are lacking in ourselves are in our Head. For the measure of God's gift of grace is very small even in the most perfect people and in such as are most advanced and have profited most of all. Since it is so, then, we should always be wavering and doubting. But when we know that all is accomplished in our Lord Jesus Christ, and that he is, as it were, the first fruits, and that we have been sanctified in him, and that in his person we have received beforehand what we shall be given in all plenitude hereafter when he has taken us out of this world, there, indeed, lies our certainty, on which we ought to stay ourselves so that we are not overborne by any temptation. In short, we are taught by this text that, although God's grace is weak in us, that is to say, although he has put only a small beginning of it in us, and not so large an abundance as will be required or is to be wished for, yet, nevertheless, this grace gives us a taste and savour to hope in him. For there cannot be so little grace of his Holy Spirit in us, without us knowing (as St. Paul says in the eighth chapter to the Romans) that it is as a pledge and earnest of the life he has promised us. It is true that this body of sin still dwells in us, but it ought to content us that God vouchsafes to communicate even a little of his Holy Spirit to us.

Furthermore, since we cannot be assured of all these things, in view of the smallness of mind that is in us and our infirmities and needs, therefore we must lift up our eyes to Jesus Christ. Indeed, how does it avail us that we may find all perfection in him; for we are too far off from him. We are far from him with regard to distance of place, and in that respect St. Paul says that we are absent from him, because we walk only by faith and not by open sight and actual viewing. But yet, for all that, we are members of his body. Seeing that it is so, then, just as a root cannot be separated from the tree, but sends forth its sap into all the boughs and branches of it, even so let us understand that the purpose for which our Lord Jesus Christ has, in such fulness, received the spiritual gifts that belong to the heavenly life, is to communicate them to us as far as is needed, stage by stage, according as we shall have profited in the faith.

And, with all this, let us continually bear in mind that we must stoop and humble ourselves and yet be content to find ourselves still far off from the perfection to which it becomes us to aspire, and to be like hungry people, so that we, feeling our own deficiency and need, must run to our God to beg at his hand, knowing that he is able to increase his help from day to day, and that if it were not so, we should be completely lost, and everything would slip away and disappear, unless he continued what he has begun. You see, then, how it is necessary for us to be joined to our Lord Jesus Christ, and to know that there is an inseparable bond between him and us. And, since he once became poor to make us rich (as it is said elsewhere), that is the very means by which all the riches in him are at this day communicated to us. Not that we have the full enjoyment of them, as I said before, but because it is enough for us that we have some small portion of them to make us taste the love of God and to know that he will not fail us in anything, but that since he has given us an assurance that he is come near to us and dwells in us by his Holy Spirit, as we have seen in the Second Letter to the Corinthians, he will also fill us right up to the end.

St. Paul's use of the word 'enrich' is to show that there will always be deficiency and neediness in us. Nevertheless, let us trust boldly to this promise that he which has begun the good work in us will go through with it, even to the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. And that is said to give us some refreshment when our life seems to us to be overlong, and we would be glad if the said perfection were already revealed in us, and that Jesus Christ had come again. But it is said that until that day we must always be journeying, and progressing further and further, and beseeching God that he will not suffer us to falter. We are sure that we shall never fail to experience want and need, but yet he will succour us in such a way that we shall perceive that if he has once vouchsafed to look upon us with the eye of his mercy, it is in order to carry on the work of our salvation at all times, and to cause us to know that he has not united us to our Lord Jesus Christ in vain, but that his so doing has been in order that every one of us might even now, according to the measure of faith, possess the good things that are suitable for him, until he has filled us to the full; which shall be when he has joined us perfectly to him.

But now, let us cast ourselves down before the majesty of our good God, with acknowledgement of our sins, praying him to make us so to feel them that it may draw us from them and cause us to direct our life obediently according to his commandments, so that we may show by our deeds that he has not bought us so dearly in vain, but that we give up all our own fleshly lusts and yield ourselves wholly to the service of him who has once and for all adopted us-for his heritage. And therefore, let us say, Almighty God, our Heavenly Father.

## The Eighth Sermon on the First Chapter

by John Calvin

*‘And that you may know what is the excellent greatness of his power towards us believers, according to the working of the might of his strength, which he displayed in Jesus Christ when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, above all principality, and might, and power, and dominion, and above all names that are named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet and set him over all things to be the head of the church, which is the body of him which filleth all in all.’*

### **Ephesians 1:19-23**

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We have already seen how God has sufficiently declared to us that if we have and possess his only Son, Jesus Christ, we have the full perfection of all good, so that if we cast our eye upon him, we may see all that can be desired. And thus, although there are many blameworthy things in us, and even though we find nothing but frailty in ourselves, yet we have a good, firm support to lean on, in that our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to him and tells us that the things he has received from God his Father are for us all, and that although we do not yet enjoy them to the full, we cannot come short of them. In short, our Lord Jesus Christ is set at the right hand of God his Father, in order that we might be sure that all things are under his control, and that he rules the whole world, and that all good things are from him and he is able to prevent all injuries, so that if we are under his protection, we may defy the devil and all our enemies.

And now, in order that we might learn to content ourselves all the more with Jesus Christ alone, and not wander here and there as we tend to do, St. Paul adds expressly that ‘he has been set above all might, sovereignty, principality, and power’. No doubt he means the angels. However, he has used this manner of speech to keep us the better to our Lord Jesus Christ, that no fancy might turn us from him; as if he should say, ‘Although God has imparted some portion of his glory, dignity, and power to the angels, yet it in no way diminishes that which he has given to Jesus Christ’; and therefore we shall find in him all things needful, so that we do not need to gad here and there for them; neither is it lawful to link any associate with him, because all pre-eminence and whatever else may be thought of as being most noble and excellent is there, that is to say, in our Lord Jesus Christ; and he alone is to be sought, as St. Paul himself says also in the first chapter to the Colossians. For it is not just recently that the world has sought occasion to turn away from our Lord Jesus Christ under the pretence of seeking the angels of heaven. We see how God’s creatures are always drawn to some superstition, and men make idols of angels, because God executes his sovereignty by them, and they are, as it were, his hands, his officers, and his instruments. [Ps. 104:4] That is why men think they have done much in imploring the protection of St. Michael, or St. Gabriel, or I know not whom else. For (as I said) it is not a newly devised vice. The devil, who is the father and author of lying,

has entangled men at all times with such fancies, and even Christians have followed what is told us in the secular histories in that respect.

For the heathen have always imagined the angels to be demigods and made them their mediators, by which to come to God, because they were not worthy in themselves. And in just the same manner do the papists talk this day. Now the very same abominations began to be built on the earth even in St. Paul's time. And for that reason, he shows that it is not lawful to join anything to Jesus Christ, but that although the angels are magnified and are called powers, authorities, principalities and dominions, and such other titles as men please, yet they must bow and be inferior to the Head, and the chief dignity must be reserved for God's Son, because all knees must bow before him, not only of creatures of this world, but also of heaven. [Isa. 45:23; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10]

We see, then, that the reason for St. Paul's assembling together so many words in this place to refer to the angels, is that we should the better be kept to our Lord Jesus Christ, and rest wholly upon him without deviating one way or another, under pretence that the angels have excellent and noble gifts. And so we see and may gather from this passage that all the folly of popedom in conceiving patrons, advocates, and mediators towards God sprang up from no other cause than from lack of knowing our Lord Jesus Christ and the things given him by God his Father. For we have no inclination to rest ourselves upon him, unless we know for what purpose he is come. But the papists have, on the one hand, imagined themselves to be separated from our Lord Jesus Christ, not knowing that he has become our brother in order that we might have intimate access to him, and, on the other hand, they have robbed him of his office which is appointed him in the holy Scripture, and made it into a dead thing.

So much the more, therefore, do we need to note well these sayings, that we are made all one and gathered together into one body with the angels of heaven and with the holy fathers that lived under the law, and that we and all the prophets, apostles and martyrs, must with one accord glorify one common Head, Jesus Christ, and come to him. He must be exalted for every man to look at, and we must not wilfully put veils before our eyes, but take away all impediment, that his glory may not be in any way dimmed. The true way, then, to overcome all obstacles that Satan shall cast in our way to stop us from coming to Jesus Christ, is to consider that there is no dignity or worthiness in the whole world, neither above nor beneath, which is not put in subjection, in order that we should all be joined to him with one accord. Thus you see, in effect, what we have to gather from this passage.

It is true that by these words we are given to understand also that God distributes offices among his angels, as it pleases him, so that one has a greater responsibility than another. But it is not for us to know how matters stand with them. Let us be content to know it according to the measure of our faith, and only give ear to God's Word, and in all soberness learn from him without giving rein to our own foolish curiosity, as some do, disputing subtly about the angels, as though each one would be master, qualified to distribute offices in the house of God. For there is not a more devilish audacity than to prattle in that fashion about God's secrets further than God has shown them to us by his

Word. Therefore, let us be content that the angels (however noble they may be) are ordained to be ministers of our salvation, by means of Jesus Christ. And when we want to acquire knowledge of them and their help, let us not act as the papists, who have their particular prayers to make to them, but let us come to Jesus Christ, for by that means shall all things become common between them and us.

When, having spoken of the church, we say, 'I believe in the communion of the saints', it is certain that the angels are included, seeing that God employs them to do us service. But why does he so? It is not because we are worthy of it, but because he has gathered us all together under Jesus Christ. That, therefore, is the true bond of concord and brotherhood between us and the angels of paradise.

Now, next, St. Paul adds that 'Jesus Christ has obtained a name (that is to say, a majesty) which is above all names, both in heaven and in earth'. Here St. Paul briefly shows us that all our wisdom is to know the benefits that are brought to us by the Son of God, and which we possess in him alone, so that our faith is settled wholly upon him, according as it is said in the Acts of the Apostles, that there is no other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved. [Acts 4:12] For (as I told you earlier), since God is incomprehensible and dwells in light which we cannot approach (as St. Paul puts it), [I Tim. 6:16] Jesus Christ must, as it were, step in between him and us, in order that we may come boldly to him, and know that he is not far separated or far distant from us. Wherefore, let us note that since mention is here made of 'Name', it is because God will be known in the person of his only Son. It is said, at the same time, that there are not many deities. With reference to the essence or being, we have only one God, [Deut. 4:35—39] but in Jesus Christ we have the living and express image of the Father, [I Cor. 8:4—6; Col. 1:15] so that in him we find whatever is expedient and requisite for our salvation. It is said that we ought to glory in our knowledge of the one true God, [Jer. 9:24] but yet that is accomplished in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, because when men go about seeking God, they enter into a terrifying maze unless Jesus Christ is their way, and leads them. Thus we now see what St. Paul was aiming at.

And it is also added that 'the same is not only for this world, but also for the other', by which it is meant that the knowledge we have of Jesus Christ will suffice us for the heavenly life. Now it would seem on the surface that there is some contradiction between what is said here and what is said in the fifteen chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. For there he says that at the latter day when the world shall be judged, our Lord Jesus Christ will yield up the kingdom to God his Father, of whom he holds it, and here he says that Christ is established in all authority, yes, even for the world to come. But these two agree very well. For when he says that Jesus Christ has a name above all names, and that he is the image of God his Father, that is because of our hardness and infirmity, as also when Christ is called the Lieutenant of God, it is because we could not be at rest unless we knew that God has his hand stretched out to succour us in our need; and we perceive that best of all in Jesus Christ, since he has come near to us and has become our brother.

God, then, does not so reign by means of Jesus Christ as if he had given up his own office



and sat idle in heaven; it would be a wicked imagination to think so. And indeed we see how our Lord Jesus Christ speaks of it in the fifth chapter of St. John (v. 17). My Father and I (he says) always have our hand at work. There he shows that his own ordaining to be the ruler of the world was not in order that the Father should meanwhile be at repose in heaven; but it is thus said for our sakes, in order that we should not doubt that God is continually near at hand to us when we seek him in faith. At the latter day, and after the judgment, we shall have new eyes, as St. John says. And since we shall be like God and be transfigured into his glory, we shall see him as he is, [I John 3:2] which we cannot do now because our understandings are too dull. Wherefore, it is enough for us now that we behold him as in a mirror darkly (as St. Paul says), and that we know him in part. [I Cor. 13:12] You see, then, that the yielding up of the kingdom by our Lord Jesus Christ to God his Father is in order that we shall behold God's majesty and being, which is now incomprehensible to us. For we shall have our nature changed, we shall be re-fashioned in the heavenly glory, and we shall be rid of all the corruption with which we are now compassed about.

And yet, for all this, it is not meant that Jesus Christ will be abased, for he shall then be much better in his perfection, according to what is said in the third chapter to the Colossians, that our life is hid in God with Jesus Christ, and that when Jesus Christ appears then shall our life be likewise manifested. In short, when we are come to the sovereign happiness that is purchased for us, then we shall have that which lies as yet only in hope, and Jesus Christ shall gather all things to himself, so that we shall then be partakers of his glory, every man in his own degree and measure. Thus you see how these two passages agree very well, for Christ will render up the kingdom to God his Father. And why? For we shall then see his heavenly majesty which we are not able to conceive at present, because we are carnal. Also we shall perceive that whereas Jesus Christ has appeared to us a mortal man, he has been so glorified in his human nature that in very deed he is God, of one and the same substance with his Father. This (I say) shall be fully known then, whereas now we have only a little shadow of it.

Furthermore, let us learn that when Jesus Christ was exalted by God his Father, it was in order that his exaltation should serve to our eternal salvation. And therefore, in the ninth chapter of Isaiah, he is called the Father of the age to come, in order that we might know, not only that he is given to us for this transitory life, but also that the substance of the faith which is grounded in him is in heaven, and that there we shall know the fruit of what is now hidden and which we taste as yet only in part, and that we shall enter into full possession of all the good things that are already given to him. Thus, you see why St. Paul has purposely made express mention of the age to come.

He adds immediately that 'God hath put all things under his feet, and made him head of the church over all things'. His speaking here of the subjection of the whole world is to show that whatever we have need of, if we can resort to our Lord Jesus Christ, he is able to succour us, for he has the wherewithal to do it. Yes, and we must note well how it is said in the eighth Psalm that God has care of all things, even the sheep, the birds of the air, and the fishes of the sea. In short, all creatures are put under his feet. And to what end For the Holy Spirit meant to draw us thereby, as little babes, and to show that the spiritual

benefits (which we ought to have in greatest esteem) are communicated to us by our Lord Jesus Christ. His saying then is that we might not eat one bit of bread, save in so far as we are members of Jesus Christ.

For it is just as if he intended to train us up higher by the A.B.C., since all things have been given to our Lord Jesus Christ, with the condition that if we are truly members of his body, all things that he has belong to us, and that if we are not separated from him, he will hereafter make us partakers of far higher and more excellent good things, that is to say, we shall be named God's children and be taken so to be, and we shall be the temples of his Holy Spirit. And what a thing is that! What a thing it is that we may come freely to him and call upon him boldly as our Father! What a thing it is to be enriched again with the gifts that we were stripped of by the sin of Adam! What a thing it is to be linked in fellowship with the angels, instead of being under the tyranny of Satan and under the thralldom of sin! How can we have these so high and noble things, since we cannot claim so much as a morsel of bread as our own without theft, saving in that we are members of our Lord Jesus Christ Now then we see what St. Paul aimed at in saying that all things are made subject to our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, let us learn now to give thanks to God in the name of his only Son our Lord Jesus Christ, whom he has sent, not only to feed and nourish our bodies, but also to be food to our souls that we may live for ever. And in that way let us learn to train ourselves, to acknowledge that our Lord Jesus Christ has supplies to succour all our necessities. If then the devil makes so violent an assault on us that we may be afraid of utter failure, let us understand that our Lord Jesus Christ has an invincible fortress with which to defend us against him, and arms with which to make us invincible in all battles. Therefore when we are weak, let us resort to his strength; when we lack any grace, let us desire him to give us what he thinks necessary; when our enemies behave like mad beasts, and it seems that we would be completely engulfed, as it were, in a whirlpool, let us beseech our Lord Jesus Christ to keep us under his protection and to keep Satan, as it were, chained with all his supporters, so that he does not allow us to be overcome by them.

You see then how all things were made subject to our Lord Jesus Christ, not for his own use (for what need had he of them?) but for our sakes, in order that he may give us whatever he knows to be for our profit, and that we also should learn to seek all things at his hand, that, when he sees our enemies have the advantage over us, he may repress them as he well can.

Furthermore, when St. Paul says here that Christ was ordained Head in the church (or over the church) 'in all things', it is to further his design to bring us wholly to Jesus Christ. As if he should say, It is true that God's gracious gifts are distributed, and that even the angels and mortal men also may be ministers of them to us; but yet, be that as it may, we must always resort to the source. The veins that are dispersed throughout the whole body may well give strength to every part, for they are, as it were, the channels of the blood, but yet, however that may be, the brain must always be the source of life. It is readily to be seen that in a tree the sap is spread throughout, and yet, although the root does not ascend to give nourishment to every branch and leaf, all the nourishment comes from the root. And if any man would say that the whole tree is maintained alive by any

one branch, quite the contrary is seen. It is true that a great bough may well give nourishment to the branches and twigs that are about it, but is it therefore right that that should take the glory from the root? No surely, no more than the members of a man's body ought to take the glory from the head, despite the fact that every member fulfils its office.

Here St. Paul says that our Lord Jesus Christ was given to the church to be her head above all things, as if he should say it behoves us all to resort to him. In this matter, there is neither St. Paul, nor St. Peter, nor the Virgin Mary, nor St. Michael who have anything of their own. For they are all needy and hungry saving insofar as Jesus Christ fills them, and therefore all of them, both great and small, must draw from his plenty. And that is the reason why, in the same passage which I cited out of the first chapter to the Colossians [v. 19], St. Paul says that it pleased God the Father that all fulness should dwell in Christ. For the title of Head is not simply a style of fleeting honour, but it serves to express the power of our Lord Jesus Christ so much the better. Therefore just as a natural head not only has superiority and preeminence above the whole body, but also yields nourishment to the whole and keeps the man alive, even so it is between our Lord Jesus Christ and us, so much so that all would go to ruin if we did not depend upon him. Although (I say) it seems that we have received most excellent gifts at God's hand already, yet nevertheless all is but wind and smoke, unless we persevere in union with our Lord Jesus Christ.

At the same time, it behoves us to note also that since Christ is called a Head, it is fitting that all others should obey him, and that we should acquiesce in his doctrine, that he may rule all things as the head rules all the rest of a man's body. For the feet walk and the hands move, and to be brief, there is no part which is not willing and ready to do whatever the head shall appoint it. The same must be done in the church. Jesus Christ must rule and all men must quietly obey him. And so we have to note in this text, first, that our salvation so depends upon Jesus Christ, that there are neither angels nor men, however holy they are, who do not have need to receive at his hand the things that they lack in themselves. And therefore when we stand in need of anything that is requisite, either for the present life, or for the heavenly life, either for our bodies or for our souls, there is no running to St. Peter, or to St. Paul, but we must go straight to our Lord Jesus Christ. So much for one point.

Secondly, let us also learn to allow ourselves to be ruled and to be held in check by the hand of our Lord Jesus Christ, that thereby we may show ourselves to be true members of his body. And he cannot be our Head, except he be at the same time our Shepherd too, and have all authority over us. But just as I told you that the devil has laboured to obscure the glory of God's only Son, under the shadow of angels, so, on the other side, he has sent us an idol into the world to be a barrier in our way, that Jesus Christ might be, as it were, separated from us. For the Pope is not ashamed to spew out this blasphemy, that the church would be but a headless body, if he himself did not reign over it and have the universal dominion of it, so that every man looked at him, and his seat were above the whole world. Now that is as much as if he should say that Jesus Christ has no more to do here, but ought to be content to be in heaven, and let his successor rule here in his stead. But in this we see how he overshoots himself to abolish the whole sovereignty of the Son

of God. So much the more therefore ought we to keep this passage well in mind, in which St. Paul says that Jesus Christ is appointed to be Head of the church above all things.

It is true that the Pope will affirm himself to be but as a subordinate [un chef subalterne Fr.] and therefore that Jesus Christ is not thrust out of his place. But let us look back to that which I have touched on already, which is that Jesus Christ will have no imaginary title, but will have his power which belongs to him, reserved to him. For a head requires not only to be set highest, but also to have all others to receive all things from him; and we must all understand that he is the very root of our life and the fountain from which we have to draw, even though he sends forth his spiritual benefits and good among us by such channels as he thinks good. Thus you see what we have yet further briefly to bear in mind.

This matter is expounded at greater length in the first chapter to the Colossians [vv. 16—18]. For St. Paul shows there that our Lord Jesus Christ was appointed to be the Head even from the beginning of the world, since all things were created by him, and not simply because he is at this day our Redeemer. For supposing Adam had not fallen into the ruin into which he has drawn us with him, yet God's Son would have been always as the firstborn of creatures. Not that he himself is a creature, but because he is the foundation, according also as St. Paul adds the reason for it, which is that by him the angels were created and in him they have their being. You see then that the Son of God would not have ceased to have had all pre-eminence both above and beneath, even if we had not fallen with our father Adam unto such confusion as we are in. But now our Lord Jesus Christ must be our Head after another manner, that is to say, to set us at one again with God his Father, and to gather us together again to him, from whom we were estranged by sin, so that he was our deadly enemy, till we were brought into favour again by means of Jesus Christ, in forgiving us our sins.

And besides this, St. Paul declares in the same passage that Jesus Christ was ordained Head of the church, in order that all fulness should be in him. Thus we see how we ought to be linked with the angels, with the ancient fathers and with the prophets, on the condition that our Lord Jesus Christ must nevertheless not only continue the first and chief, but also have all things related to him; on the condition also that we communicate in such a way together that each of us keeps his place and all be members of one body, and that there may be no more heads than one. For if we add any associate to Jesus Christ, it is robbing him of the things that God his Father has given to him alone. Let us be contented that he makes us partakers of all his benefits, upon the condition that we acknowledge all things to come from him and seek all things in him. For in the forty-fifth psalm it is well shown that we are all of us united to Jesus Christ, and that we receive some portion of all the good things that were given to him. But yet for all that, it is not to be said that he is merely one with us, and equal to us, and that he cannot be distinguished from the apostles, as the papists proverbially speak; but it is in order that we should know that none of all the good things which we can wish are far from us, but that they are offered us by him and that he is so liberal that he desires nothing else at our hands, but that we should receive the things that are for our own welfare, according as he himself says, 'Come unto me, all ye that are athirst, come, drink water, yea even without money

or money's worth, drink your fill of water, wine and milk.' [Isa. 55:1]

There our Lord shows how it is he that we must resort to, and that if we look upon him, his majesty is too high and too far off from us. Jesus Christ therefore must be our mediator, and since he is come down to us, let us also betake ourselves to him, in the manner expressed in the seventh chapter of St. John [vv. 37—38], 'Come unto me, all ye that are athirst; and whosoever drinks of the water that I will give him, he shall have his belly so full that fountains of water shall flow out of him.' Provided that men seek faithfully in Jesus Christ for the things they need, he will give us not only as much as shall be of use to every one of us for himself but also as much as we shall be able to bestow upon our neighbours too, and to succour their lack.

Now for a conclusion St. Paul adds that 'the church is the body and fulness of him that performs all things in all men.' In terming the church the body of Jesus Christ, he shows the thing that I have touched on already, that is to say, that we do not need to make long journeys nor find it difficult to get the things that we have need of. For since we are united and joined to the Son of God what more do we ask We must grant this principle that we have neither life, nor gladness, nor any good thing, except in God alone. That being confessed, let us see by what means we may reach him; it is by the means of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so you see the reason why it is said here that all fulness dwells in him and that it is his charge to unite us to God and to draw us back from the lost condition we are in.

Therefore we cannot swerve aside one way or another to attribute to St. Peter, or to St. Paul, parts of that which is reserved to Jesus Christ alone, without robbing God of his due. It is true that we may not come to admit it, but yet our hypocrisy will not serve to acquit us before God. We may indeed bring in many evasions, but yet we give sentence of condemnation on ourselves, in confessing that we ought to seek all our salvation at God's hand.

Well, then, if we allege, Ho! we are not worthy to present ourselves before God, it is true; and if we say How can we fly without wings that is true too. And if we say, Then we must turn to St. Peter or to St. Paul, we speak all these things out of our silly heads. [*à nostre fantaisie* Fr.] For God says exactly the opposite. I send you to my only Son (he says), for in him you shall find all you need; and do not fear you shall have any scarcity if you are once filled with the grace I have put in him, and abides in him. And that is the reason why the prophet Isaiah speaks purposely of wine, water and milk, [Isa. 55:1] as if he should say, we have all fulness of life in Jesus Christ. As for those then who run off to St. Peter and St. Paul, and think it necessary to have patron saints and mediators, they not only do wrong to Jesus Christ by cutting into bits and pieces that which is given wholly to him, but also rob God of his honour. For since it is his will that all fulness should dwell in Jesus Christ, as I have alleged before, it is certain that we go about defying him openly when we do not remain within the bounds which he has set us, putting ourselves in subjection to that person he has given to us, in order that he might give us all we need.

But yet, what he adds ought to be a greater and larger comfort to us, when he says that

‘the church is the fulness of him that fills all’. Now, by this word ‘fulness’, he means that our Lord Jesus Christ, and even God his Father, account themselves imperfect, unless we are joined to him. And that (as I said) is a witness to God’s infinite goodness, at which a man can never marvel enough. First and foremost, God does not need to borrow from other men’s hands, for he is perfect in himself, neither did he lack anything even before he made the world. And when he made it, did he do it for his own profit or to his advantage? It was simply in order that we should know his goodness, power, wisdom and righteousness, and be witnesses of it. For he has set us here as on a stage, in order that we should see his glory in all his creatures, and yet, despite this, he could very well do without us. But supposing God should borrow from others to perfect himself, and he were like mortal men, of whom none is able to do without company; suppose God were like that. What are we? How can he fare better by being joined to us? It is just as if the sun were joined with a stinking mire. For what have we but infection and filthiness? We are so corrupted by Adam’s sin that it is horrible to think about it. How then can we bring any such perfection to God Although there is nothing but frailty in us, although we are perverse and evil, although there is nothing in us but all manner of filth, and in short, although we are loathsome in his sight, yet, in spite of this, it is his will to have us joined to him, yes, even on the condition that he should be perfected [accompli Fr.] in us by our being united in that manner. As if a father should say, My house seems empty to me, when I do not see my child in it. A husband will say, I seem to be only half a man when my wife is not with me.

After the same manner God says that he does not consider himself full and perfect, except by gathering us to himself and by making us all one with himself. He takes his whole pleasure in us, and will have his glory shine forth in us, so that his beams may shine out on all sides. And although the whole glory is in himself, yet he will have it seen that it is his will that we should have our part and portion of it. Thus you see, in effect, what St. Paul meant by calling the church the fulness of God and of Jesus Christ.

Now then, can we be excusable before God, when we say that we cannot come to him, seeing we are his body in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ? If one of our feet, being diseased, should run I know not where, and roam up and down saying, I go to seek remedy elsewhere, and to do so should cut itself off from the body; if (I say) the members of the body had any understanding and discernment, and could speak in that way, would it not be madness for the foot to say it would be separated from the body to seek elsewhere what it needed? Even so, when the papists and other idolaters assert that they have to be helped by the saints and to have a variety of mediators and means to bring them to God, it is just as if they should say, Jesus Christ is nothing to us, neither do we have access or approach to him. Can the members really be separated from the Head Of a truth, St. Paul has here accused and condemned of ingratitude and unkindness all those who, under the pretext of unworthiness to come to God, devise new means for themselves and separate themselves from Jesus Christ, and diminish his power and tear it to pieces. St. Paul condemns them because they cannot find in their hearts to accept the benefit and privilege that is offered them, in that our Lord Jesus Christ has vouchsafed to become one with them, as with his own body. Now then, let us learn to have such liberty with our Lord Jesus Christ that we resort to him at all times, whenever we are warned of our

deficiencies and needs.

Furthermore, in order that the Lord's majesty should not be thereby obscured, St. Paul adds that he does not cease to accomplish all in all things. For we see, on the one hand, that when men are once endued with God's gifts, they begin to thrust themselves into his place and would be looked up to in his stead. That is how we behave; and it seems to us that the gifts God has bestowed on us freely are like a prey or booty to boast about, and to advance ourselves more than is lawful. Again, on the other hand, when we hear Jesus Christ spoken of, how he was humbled for our sakes, how he went down into the abyss of death, how he vouchsafed to be subject to all kinds of reproach, it seems to us that he may well be held in contempt by us. St. Paul therefore, to beat down all pride and to show that Jesus Christ was not so abased that his glory was diminished, says that nevertheless he does all in all things. Wherefore, let us learn to receive the blessing, grace and benefits which are given us by our Lord Jesus Christ. And, at the same time, let us acknowledge not only that we are made of nothing and that our life is but a fleeting and vanishing shadow, but also that all the virtue and excellence which we suppose ourselves to have, is but like a green flower which withers immediately as soon as God breathes upon it. And therefore, let us not imagine ourselves to be rich, when we are poor. Let us not boast ourselves in our free will. Let us not presume upon our own merits, nor upon any of the other fooleries which the devil has devised in popery; but let us draw at the fountain that cannot be drained dry, that we may find supplies to quench our thirst whenever we are dry.

Finally, there are two ways in which God does all in all things. For just as he himself created the world, so must all things be guided and governed by his hand. If it is asked who causes the sun to rise and set every day, who guides the whole order of nature, who ordains the days, months and years, and who makes the alternation of day and night, it is God, who does all in all things. We may say the same of all other things we perceive in the universal government of the whole world. Therefore, we must not imagine that God was a Creator for only a minute of time, for he also continues to maintain what he has created. But here, St. Paul speaks of the spiritual benefits, which are, as you might say, the heritage of God's children. God, then, does all things in us. Yes, but not only by the common order of nature, but by enlightening us with the faith of the gospel, in that he sanctifies and cleanses us from the vices and wicked lusts of our flesh, in that he draws us from the world and, to be short, in that he provides us with all things requisite to our welfare and salvation. And so you see how he does all in all things. As if St. Paul had declared in one word that the faithful are nothing, and can do nothing nor can they have anything of themselves.

He does not speak here, then, of the sun, or of the moon, or of the trees of the fields, or of any other fruit, nor does he speak of beasts, nor even of men so far as they are the children of Adam, but of those whom God has regenerated by his Holy Spirit, so that whatever concerns salvation, or belongs to the heavenly life, is not to be had except at his hand. He has all things in himself and does all in all things, as is said of him here. And therefore, let us learn to empty ourselves and to offer ourselves in sacrifice to God with true and genuine humility, to yield him his deserved praise. Let none of us separate

ourselves from him through our ingratitude, but let all of us do him such honour as to confess that we hold all from him and that we are joined to him by our Lord Jesus Christ who is our eternal God, acknowledging that it is he from whom all good things come, and that it is he also to whom all glory ought to be yielded and rendered.

Now therefore, let us cast ourselves down before the majesty of our good God with acknowledgement of our sins, praying him to make us perceive them more and more, and that the same may cause us to have such a dislike of ourselves that we may earnestly and heartily seek to give ourselves wholly to our Lord Jesus Christ. And since he has called us already to him by his gospel, let us fashion ourselves accordingly, renouncing all superstitions and assuring ourselves that all that we can ever imagine to bring us to the kingdom of heaven are but deceits of Satan, and that it is enough for us to have Jesus Christ alone to make our recourse to; that just as it was the Father's will to lift him on high in order that all men should look to him, so also we may have our eyes fastened upon him and apply our whole minds to him in such a way that we may have no other way or preparation than by him alone; nor swerve one way or another, but when we are once brought into the right way, keep on continually towards our aim until we are fully come to perfection. That it may please him to grant this grace, not only to us, but also to all people.