

Dear Friends of the Foundation:

Today I attended the funeral of a two year old child who died of meningitis. He was the great-grandson of a member of a congregation where I once served as pastor. It was not lost on me that the boy had lived far away in the same town where my own grandson, one year older, also lives.

It reminded me that of the more than 135 funerals I conducted while I served at that church, perhaps only one was of a man so young as to be in his sixties, and most were of those some decades beyond that. In fact, their funeral yesterday was of a lady who had been 104 years old. The loss which occasioned today's funeral was very different.

But it also reminded me of a letter which our friend Elsie McKee pointed out to me during one of our study seminars. The letter was written by John Calvin to a father who had lost his son. The boy had been a boarder in Calvin's home while studying at Strasbourg's Academy, and he had died of the plague while Calvin was away at a colloquy. Calvin writes in his first sentence, "I was so utterly overpowered that for many days I was fit for nothing but to weep," which is to say that Calvin was not unmoved by the death himself. Then some pages later, he makes an observation that might seem more suitable for a youth, but which Calvin clearly would not withhold even from an infant:

But what advantage, you will say, is it to me to have had a son of so much promise, since he has been torn away from me in the first flower of his youth? As if, forsooth, Christ had not merited by His death the supreme dominion over the living and the dead. And if we belong to Him (as we ought), why may He not exercise over us the power of life and of death? However brief, therefore, either in your opinion or in mine, the life of your son may have been, it ought to satisfy us that he has finished the course which the Lord had marked out for him. Moreover, we may not reckon him to have perished in the flower of his age, who had grown ripe in the sight of the Lord. *For I consider all to have arrived at maturity who are summoned away by death; unless perhaps we would contend with Him, as if He can snatch away anyone before his time. This, indeed, holds true of everyone.*

John Calvin, *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety*, edited and with translations by Elsie Anne McKee (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), p 298, emphasis added.

Lest any think this be simply a pastoral flourish or excess, we note that the same is found in his more formal writings:

... [W]e consider it incontrovertible that no one of the elect is called from the present life before being sanctified and regenerated by the Spirit of God.

John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated from the 1559 Latin ed. by Ford Lewis Battles, in *Library of Christian Classics*, ed. John T. McNeill

(Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), Book IV, Chapter xvi, section 18 (volume 2, page 1341).

It occurs to me that my continuing to live suggests that there remains a great deal more sanctifying which God has to do in me.

It also occurs to me that many of you are not only attending funerals today but also conducting them today and tomorrow and the next day, and that all of us have suffered our own losses. I pray that God may have mercy on us all.

The LORD bless you
and keep you;
the LORD make his face to shine upon you
and be gracious to you;
the LORD lift up his countenance upon you
and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26 (ESV)

Grace and Peace,

Dr. James C. Goodloe IV, *Executive Director*

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