

May 10, 2009

**Dear Friends of the Foundation:**

We have arrived this week at Book III, chapter 2, section 7. Here Calvin writes of faith:

**Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.**

It is striking that he defines faith as "knowledge." Moreover, it is "a firm and certain" knowledge. It is something that we know and that we know surely and with great confidence. This represented a major change from the medieval catholic church. That church had taught that faith was not a matter of knowing but of believing and feeling, even believing what could not be known, and therefore of believing what that church said to believe. Calvin rejected that as nonsense. He insisted instead that faith is a matter of what we can know, not merely of what we believe or how we feel. Still today, there are people who portray faith as a matter of believing, and feeling good about, that which we do not and cannot know. But what comfort would that be? How surely could we believe, and therefore how comforted could we be by, that which we do not and cannot know?

Not only is faith "a firm and certain knowledge," but also it is a knowledge "of God's benevolence toward us." The content of our knowledge is that God is good toward us. God wills our good. Such knowledge is salvation. To be ignorant of God's grace and mercy would be to be hopelessly lost. To know God's grace and mercy is to be saved. How do we know of God's benevolence? Faith is "founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ." The knowledge of God's benevolence is not a general knowledge. It is not available by looking at the world. It is not available by searching one's heart. We know that God wills our good because, and only because, Jesus Christ tells us so. We know that God wills our good because, and only because, Jesus Christ paid the price for our sin in his death on the cross and promised to us in his place the good that he deserved. This is not ignorance. This is not a warm feeling. This is specific and well grounded knowledge of God's good will for us.

Moreover, this knowledge is "both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit." This knowledge depends upon divine revelation to our minds and divine sealing upon our hearts. That is, we are saved by grace alone. If we were smart enough or good enough to attain this knowledge ourselves, we would not need grace, and we would not need to be saved. But we are not smart enough, and we are not good enough. We need help, and that help is grace. That grace is that God the Holy Spirit gives us faith so that we know in our minds that God wills our good and then, because and only because we know it, we also believe with all our hearts that God wills our good. Such knowledge is the faith through which alone we are saved.

Grace and Peace,

*Jim*

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