

June 8, 2009

Dear Friends of the Foundation:

As we continue reading through John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, this week we arrive at chapters 5, 6, and 7.

Here, following his earlier expositions of faith and repentance, Calvin arrives at his explication of the Christian life. It consists of three components which may not sound very attractive to us: the denial of ourselves, bearing the cross, and meditation on the future life. But I think we shall find that he has some of the most remarkable and profound things to say in this very pastoral portion of this writing.

The first step of the Christian life and indeed the sum of the Christian life is the denial of the self not for the sake of denial but for the sake of serving God instead of self. Listen to what Calvin writes about this, and I think you will catch a sense of Calvin the preacher, which is what all of his theology was meant to serve:

We are not our own: let not our reason nor our will, therefore, sway our plans and deeds. We are not our own: let us therefore not set it as our goal to seek what is expedient for us according to the flesh. We are not our own: in so far as we can, let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours.

Conversely, we are God's: let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God's: let his wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions. We are God's: let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal. O, how much has that man profited who, having been taught that he is not his own, has taken away dominion and rule from his own reason that he may yield it to God! For, as consulting our self-interest is the pestilence that most effectively leads to our destruction, so the sole haven of salvation is to be wise in nothing and to will nothing through ourselves but to follow the leading of the Lord alone.

Let this therefore be the first step, that a man depart from himself in order that he may apply the whole force of his ability in the service of the Lord. (III.7.1)

Grace and Peace,

Jim

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