

April 19, 2009

**Dear Friends of the Foundation:**

I know that many of us are reading along together through Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. What you may not realize is that many congregations, presbyteries, denominational offices, seminaries, renewal groups, other organizations, and even blogs all around the world have picked up and promoted our plan for reading, so I am confident that thousands are joining with us.

If you have not yet begun and would like to join in, there is a plan for reading posted at this link:

[www.foundationrt.org/Calvins Institutes in 2009.pdf](http://www.foundationrt.org/Calvins_Institutes_in_2009.pdf)

This week we have arrived at Book II, chapter 12. This is a brief but packed chapter on our Mediator, Jesus Christ, being both true God and true man. I will offer several quotations:

Now it was of the greatest importance for us that he who was to be our Mediator be both true God and true man. If someone asks why this is necessary, there has been no simple (to use the common expression) or absolute necessity. Rather, it has stemmed from a heavenly decree, on which men's salvation depended. Our most merciful Father decreed what was best for us. (section 1, p. 464)

That is to say, it was by God's good and free will that the mediator was both divine and human. God does not act under compulsion of reasons outside his will. This also means that it is inappropriate for us to speculate about whether God might have accomplished our salvation in some other way. See, for instance, section 4: "He who ponders these matters with the diligent attention they require will readily have done with the vague speculations that captivate the frivolous and the seekers after novelty" (p. 467). It is our duty to pay attention to what God has done, not to speculate about what he might have done.

In fact, Calvin uses even stronger language about a danger we still see today: "All those who propose to inquire or seek to know more about Christ than God ordained by his secret decree are breaking out in impious boldness to fashion some new sort of Christ" (section 5, p. 469). Are we not surrounded by those who, dissatisfied with the Christ of Scripture, seek to fashion a Christ of their own? As I have noted before, innovation is heresy.

To return to the matter at hand, it is as mediator that Christ accomplishes a wonderful exchange with us and for us. This theme runs throughout Calvin's writings, and it is well articulated here in section 2:

What the Mediator was to accomplish was no common thing. His task was so to restore us to God's grace as to make of the children of men, children of God; of the heirs of Gehenna, heirs of the Heavenly Kingdom. Who could have done this had not the selfsame Son of God become the Son of man, and had not so taken what was ours as to impart

what was his to us, and to make what was his by nature ours by grace? Therefore, relying on this pledge, we trust that we are sons of God, for God's natural Son fashioned for himself a body from our body, flesh from our flesh, bones from our bones, that he might be one with us. Ungrudgingly he took our nature upon himself to impart to us what was his, and to become both Son of God and Son of man in common with us. (p. 465)

For the same reason it was also imperative that he who was to become our Redeemer be true God and true man. It was his task to swallow up death. Who but the Life could do this? It was his task to conquer sin. Who but very Righteousness could do this? It was his task to rout the powers of world and air. Who but a power higher than world and air could do this? Now where does life or righteousness, or lordship and authority of heaven lie but with God alone? Therefore our most merciful God, when he willed that we be redeemed, made himself our Redeemer in the person of his only-begotten Son. (p. 466)

Finally, and most briefly—Calvin cherished brevity!—he puts it thus:

In short, since neither as God alone could he feel death, nor as man alone could he overcome it, he coupled human nature with divine that to atone for sin he might submit the weakness of the one to death; and that, wrestling with death by the power of the other nature, he might win victory for us. (section 3, p. 466)

Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

Grace and Peace,

*Jim*

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