

April 8, 2009

**Dear Friends of the Foundation:**

As Easter approaches, let us hear again what Calvin has to say on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

First of all, in his commentary on the Gospel according to John, chapter twenty, Calvin writes:

**"The resurrection of Christ is the chief article of our faith."**

This is it! This is the *sine qua non*. Without this, we would have nothing.

Second, and more fully, this is what he wrote in the *Institutes*, as an exposition of the Apostles' Creed:

**"ON THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN FROM THE DEAD"**

Next comes the resurrection from the dead. Without this what we have said so far would be incomplete. For since only weakness appears in the cross, death, and burial of Christ, faith must leap over all these things to attain its full strength. We have in his death the complete fulfillment of salvation, for through it we are reconciled to God, his righteous judgment is satisfied, the curse is removed, and the penalty paid in full. Nevertheless, we are said to "have been born anew to a living hope" not through his death but "through his resurrection." For as he, in rising again, came forth victor over death, so the victory of our faith over death lies in his resurrection alone. Paul's words better express its nature: "He was put to death for our sins, and raised for our justification." This is as if he had said: "Sin was taken away by his death; righteousness was revived and restored by his resurrection." For how could he by dying have freed us from death if he had himself succumbed to death? How could he have acquired victory for us if he had failed in the struggle? Therefore, we divide the substance of our salvation between Christ's death and resurrection as follows: through his death, sin was wiped out and death extinguished; through his resurrection, righteousness was restored and life raised up, so that—thanks to his resurrection—his death manifested its power and efficacy in us. Wherefore, Paul states that "Christ was declared the Son of God . . . in the resurrection itself," because then at last he displayed his heavenly power, which is both the clear mirror of his divinity and the firm support of our faith. Elsewhere Paul similarly teaches: "He suffered in weakness of the flesh, but rose again by the power of the Spirit." In the same sense Paul elsewhere discusses perfection: "That I may know him and the power of his resurrection." Yet immediately thereafter he adds, "The fellowship of his death." With this Peter's statement closely agrees: "God raised him from the dead and gave him glory so that our faith and hope might be in God." Not that faith, supported by his death, should waver, but that the power of God, which guards us under faith, is especially revealed in the resurrection itself.

So then, let us remember that whenever mention is made of his death alone, we are to understand at the same time what belongs to his resurrection. Also, the same synecdoche applies to the word “resurrection”: whenever it is mentioned separately from death, we are to understand it as including what has to do especially with his death. But because by rising again he obtained the victor’s prize—that there might be resurrection and life—Paul rightly contends that “faith is annulled and the gospel empty and deceiving if Christ’s resurrection is not fixed in our hearts.” Accordingly, in another passage—after glorying in the death of Christ against the terrors of damnation—he adds by way of emphasis: surely “he who was dead has risen, and appears before God as our mediator.”

Further, as we explained above that the mortification of our flesh depends upon participation in his cross, so we must understand that we obtain a corresponding benefit from his resurrection. The apostle says: “We were engrafted in the likeness of his death, so that sharing in his resurrection we might walk in newness of life.” Hence, in another passage, from the fact that we have died with Christ he derives proof that we must mortify our members that are upon the earth. So he also infers from our rising up with Christ that we must seek those things above, not those on the earth. By these words we are not only invited through the example of the risen Christ to strive after newness of life; but we are taught that we are reborn into righteousness through his power.

We also receive a third benefit from his resurrection: we are assured of our own resurrection by receiving a sort of guarantee substantiated by his. Paul deals with this at greater length in 1 Corinthians 15:12-26.

We must, by the way, note that he is said “to have risen from the dead.” These words express the truth of his death and resurrection, as if it were said: he suffered the same death that other men naturally die; and received immortality in the same flesh that, in the mortal state, he had taken upon himself.

John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. from the 1559 Latin ed. by Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., in *Library of Christian Classics*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), Book Two, chapter sixteen, section thirteen (vol. 1, pp. 520-522).

I urge you all who preach to preach the gospel this Sunday. Preach your hearts out. Proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ both as God's vindication of Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross and also as the promise of our own resurrection.

Happy Easter to you all!

Grace and Peace,

*Jim*

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