

Discussion Guide for Session 9

A. **Announcements and prayer:**

Grant, Almighty God, that as thou has best been pleased in thine infinite mercy not only to choose from among us some to be priests to thee, but also to consecrate us all to thyself in thine only begotten Son, — O grant, that we at this day may purely and sincerely serve thee, and so strive to devote ourselves wholly to thee, that we may be pure and chaste in mind, soul, and body, and that thy glory may so shine forth in all our performances, that thy worship among us may be holy, and pure, and approved by thee, until we shall at length enjoy that glory to which thou invites us by thy gospel, and which has been obtained for us by the blood of thine only-begotten Son — Amen.
(Calvin)

B. **Scripture meditation:** Jer. 29:12, *Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.*

Calvin's Commentary:

“...But there is added a promise, that God would hear them. It may however appear, that God promised conversion even in the first clause; and, no doubt, prayer is the fruit of repentance, for it proceeds from faith; and repentance is the gift of God. And further, *we cannot call on God rightly and sincerely except by the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit; for he it is who not only dictates our words, but also creates groanings in our hearts.* And thus Augustine, writing against the Pelagians, understands the passage, and proves that it is not in the power of man either to convert himself or to pray; “for God,” he says, “would in vain promise what is in the power of man to do; and this is the promise, ye shall pray; *it then follows, that we do not pray through the impulse of our own flesh, but when the Holy Spirit directs our hearts, and in a manner prays in us.*” I do not, however, know whether the Prophet intended to speak in so refined a manner. From other passages of Scripture it is easy to prove, that we cannot pray to God, except he anticipates us by his own Spirit. But as to this passage, I prefer to take a simpler meaning, that God would hear, when they began to pray; but yet he shews that it would not be after a short space of time, because they were almost untameable, and would not repent until after many years....” [*Italics-EPH*]

C. **Review questions from Session 8:**

1. What is the principal work of the Holy Spirit?
2. According to Calvin the *sine qua non* of salvation by sovereign grace, is that _____ must come before justification and sanctification?
3. What are two terms Calvin commonly uses to designate sanctification?
4. What are three terms Calvin uses as synonyms for justification?
5. What was the polemic rationale for discussing sanctification prior to justification in Book III of the *Institutes*?

6. How does Calvin explain the co-existence of faith and unbelief in believers?
 7. What did Calvin refer to as “the main hinge on which religion turns?”
 8. According to Calvin what are the three Christian freedoms that emanate from our union with Christ and justification?
- D. **Book III.20:** “Prayer, Which Is the Chief Exercise of Faith, and by Which We Daily Receive God’s Benefits”

1. By way of introduction, I thought the following anecdote by David Calhoun (from Lecture 16) offers a helpful perspective two approaches to prayer (and faith), contrasting Calvinism and Arminianism:

“I heard a story once that I am not sure is true. It sounds apocryphal to me, but I will tell it anyway with that caveat. Wesley and Whitefield were preaching together. We know they did that from time to time. Wesley was an Arminian, and Whitefield was a Calvinist. According to this story, they were spending the night at an inn and each man knelt by his bed to pray. Whitefield prayed, “*Lord, we thank Thee for all those with whom we spoke this day, and we rejoice that their lives and destinies are entirely in Thy hand. Honor our efforts according to Thy perfect will. Amen.*” [Italics-EPH] His friend John Wesley then said, “Mr. Whitefield, is this where your Calvinism leads you?” Apparently, that was a comment about what a brief prayer it was. Wesley went on to pray. Two hours later when Whitefield woke up, Wesley was still on his knees, asleep. Whitefield said, “Mr. Wesley, is this where your Arminianism leads you?” Calhoun continues, “As I said, I do not think that story is true, but it is a good story. It does not mean that Calvinists fail to pray because they are Calvinists. Nor does it mean that Arminians fail to pray because of human weakness. That affects us all. If the story means anything, then it teaches us that zealous Christians face real difficulties in prayer. I certainly do, and I expect that you do too. In the long chapter in the *Institutes* concerning prayer, Calvin seems very much aware of that reality. Prayer is not easy. We need to be stimulated, encouraged, and aroused to pray. We also need to learn how to pray.”

2. Following are excerpts from Chapter 20: In Christ, God “opens to us the heavenly treasures that our whole faith may contemplate his beloved Son, our whole expectation depend upon him, and our whole hope cleave to and rest in him.” It remains, then, “for us to seek in him, and in prayers to ask of him, what we have learned to be in him (20.1).”
3. Prayer is the means by which “we reach those riches which are laid up for us with the Heavenly Father.” God’s providence includes “both the will and power to take the best care of us (20.2).”
4. God, of course, knows what we need and is able to help us unasked, but Calvin insists, “those very things which flow to us from his voluntary liberality he would have us recognize as granted to our prayers (20.3).” Both things are true: God watches over us unceasingly and he awaits our prayers.

5. 20.5: The Holy Spirit is our teacher in prayer.
 6. Calvin illustrates not only the need for repentance and humility (20.9) in prayer but also of forceful confidence, “Only that prayer is acceptable to God which is...grounded in unshaken assurance of hope (20.12).”
 7. Christ is the “only Mediator, by whose intercession the Father is for us rendered gracious and easily entreated (20:19).”
 8. “Prayer rightly begun springs from faith, and faith from hearing God’s Word (20.27).” The Word of God shapes and controls our prayers.
 9. *Calvin’s exposition indicates his understanding of prayer as having a Trinitarian form: it issues from faith—the gift of the Holy Spirit is founded in union with Christ and is the vehicle through whom the faithful approach and invoke a loving Father.*
 10. The model prayer: Six petitions of the Lord’s Prayer (20.34-49)
 - a. What is owed to God (first three petitions)
 - b. Petitions for human needs (second three petitions)
 - c. All are concerned with God’s glory
 11. I thought Calhoun’s summary of Chapter 20 provides an appropriate conclusion here: “In order to sum up what Calvin said in that long chapter, we might say that prayer casts away all thought of our own glory, worth, and self-assurance, and, in humility, gives glory completely to God. Calvin stressed humility, sincerity, and all of those topics related to prayer. We cannot be proud and boastful and pray at the same time. That is why we can kneel to pray. It sets forth the fact that God is everything, and everything we receive is from His good hand.” (Excerpt from Lesson 17, page 3)
- E. **Book III.21-24**, “Election and Predestination: The Sovereign Expressions of God” (Scott); or, “The Certainty of Faith” (Partee)
1. In his sermon, “A Defense of Calvinism,” Charles Spurgeon testifies, “I believe the doctrine of election because I am quite certain that, if God had chosen me, I should never have chosen Him; and I am sure that He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterwards; and He must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find any reason in myself why He should have looked upon me with special love.” (I thought this statement provides an outstanding summation of Calvin’s teachings.)
 2. Class feedback from Scott’s historical overview (handout, Session 8)
 3. Contrary to popular opinion, Calvin did not invent the doctrine of election

and predestination—he expounds the doctrine from Scripture, his exegetical studies of Paul’s epistles, particularly Romans, and he further developed his thought from the writings of Augustine.

4. Calhoun states, “If you studied the Reformers, you would see the exact same teaching in Luther, Melancthon, Bucer, and Zwingli. Each one put it in his own words. Nonetheless, all the same teaching with all the same essentials is present in all of those Reformers. If you go back to before the Reformers, to the radical Augustinians of the medieval period, such as Thomas Bradwardine or Gregory of Rimini, you can find the same with them. If you go back far enough and arrive at Saint Augustine, you will see that Calvin derived most of what he said from Augustine” (Lesson 17, p. 1).
5. *Salvation is totally of God.* Calvin said, “We shall never be clearly persuaded, as we ought to be, that our salvation flows from the wellspring of God’s free mercy until we come to know His eternal election” (21.1).
6. Note that predestination is not developed in Book I in terms of the doctrine of creation, or in Book II as part of the doctrine of redemption, but at the end of Book III with the saving work of the Holy Spirit.
7. Calhoun states, “If we do not know this doctrine, we will not have confidence that God has saved us freely by His mercy. There will be the temptation to inject human effort and human desert into the doctrine of salvation. I appreciate the way Warfield explained it in an article he wrote on Calvin and the Reformation. Warfield said, ‘When you teach free grace, absolutely free grace, and mean it, you are a predestinarian.’ If you are going to teach free grace and really mean it, then you have to embrace the doctrine of predestination” (Lesson 17, pp. 3-4).
8. Partee states, “All Calvin’s doctrines are connected but some, like creation and redemption, justification and sanctification, providence and predestination, are especially interlocking.... Calvin links union with Christ and faith, sanctification and justification, prayer and predestination. At the deepest level of his theology the subject-object dichotomy is replaced by union with Christ” (p. 243).
9. Calvin states, “Election, as Paul testifies, is the mother of faith” (22.10).
10. Calvin explains God’s sovereign eternal election as an expression of God’s eternal love, of God’s grace made sure in union with Christ. (24.5)
11. Concerning God’s eternal reprobation: While “God declares that He wills the conversion of all, and He directs exhortations to all in common” (III.3.21), “[i]n actual fact, the covenant of life is not preached equally

among all men, and among those to whom it is preached, it does not gain the same acceptance, either constantly or in equal degree” (24.12).

12. “The preaching of the Word is effectual only upon the illumination of the Spirit” (24.2).
13. “Salvation is freely offered to some while others are barred from access to it, [the result is] at once great and difficult questions spring up, explicable only when reverent minds regard as settled what they may suitably hold concerning election and predestination. A baffling question this seems to many. For they think nothing more inconsistent than that out of the common multitude of men some should be predestined to salvation, others to destruction” (21.1).
14. It is clear that Calvin believed that damnation is the predestination of some persons, but this conclusion should not lead to arrogance, “For as we know not who belongs to the number of the predestined or who does not belong, we ought to be so minded as to wish that all men must be saved” (23.14).
15. Calvin rejects the position that God distinguishes among persons by foreknowledge of their merits, meaning that God adopts those foreseen to be worthy of grace and damns those foreseen to be evil (22.1-6).
16. God’s foreknowledge and foreordination are not different. “When we attribute foreknowledge to God, we mean that all things always were, and perpetually remain, under His eyes so that to His knowledge there is nothing future or past, but all things are present. And they are present in such a way that He not only conceives them through ideas, as we have before us those things which our minds remember, but He truly looks upon them and discerns them as things placed before Him. And this foreknowledge is extended throughout the universe to every creature” (21.5).
17. God has mercy upon whomever He wills, and He hardens whomever He wills (22.11). Election is not a matter of permission but decree, and we must understand that “God’s will is so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever He wills, the very fact that He wills it, must be considered righteous” (23.2).
18. Calvin denied predestination to grace as below divine honor and cooperating grace above human capacity (22.9). “Thus, he argued against the view proposed by Thomas Aquinas that God predestines the elect to grace, and the elect respond to God’s operating grace with cooperating grace. Thus, the elect predestined to grace but, in some sense, *earn* glory.” (Partee, p. 252)

19. Calvin thought that the main reason to teach the doctrine of election and predestination is to encourage confidence and faith in God's promises in Christ. "Predestination, rightly understood, brings no shaking of faith, but rather its best confirmation" (24.9).

F. **Book III.25**, "The Final Resurrection":

1. We move from Calvin's theology of faith to his theology of hope in the final chapter of Book III in which we see Christ as the mirror of our election and also the assurance of our hope as we see Him as the mirror of our resurrection.
2. Our union with Christ involves His assumption and redemption of our nature and His victory over death for our sake. "I am only touching upon what could be treated more fully and deserves to be set out more brilliantly...to separate [Christ] from ourselves is not permissible and not even possible, without tearing Him apart." Because Christ is raised in a perfect body, He "will come on the Last Day as judge to conform our lowly inglorious body to His glorious body" (25.3).
3. In affirming the immortality of the soul and the mortality of the body, Calvin concludes that the resurrection restores to vigor at God's command the selfsame body that died. The Scripture does not "define anything more clearly than the resurrection of the flesh that we now bear" (25.7), which may again be noted is crucial to understanding the Lord's Supper (Partee, p. 254).
4. It is a great mystery, but "the Lord will share His glory, power and righteousness with the elect [and] will somehow make them to become one with Himself" (25.10).
5. Calvin refuted the Anabaptist view that souls separated from the body by death slept until the final judgment. According to Calvin, on dying the faithful enter immediately into the kingdom of God (cf. 25.6).
6. The goal of resurrection is the ineffable splendor of eternal happiness which is fulfilled when death is swallowed up in victory (25.10).

G. **Conclusions to Book III**:

1. Book III applies the benefits of Christ to faithful persons
2. The doctrine of faith is that it is a secret work of the Holy Spirit which includes:
 - a. Sanctification and the Christian life
 - b. Justification and Christian freedom
 - c. Prayer and predestination

H. **Reading for Session 10** (Book IV, Chapters 1-13, the order of the Church; Chapters 14-19, the sacraments of the Church)

1. The order of the Church: 1.1; 1.4-5; 1.8-10; 3.8-9; 3.16; 4.1; 4.11; 8.11; 10.22; 11.1; 12.1; 12.4; 17.43
2. The Sacraments of the Church: 14.1-3; 14.5-6; 14.9; 14.14; 14.17; 4.19; 15.1; 15.5; 15.15; 16.1; 16.9; 16.17; 17.1-2; 17.31-33; 18.1; 18.5-7

I. **Handouts:**

1. Book IV Introduction: Photocopy from C. Partee, pp. 258-260 (attached)
2. Two *TableTalk* articles: Photocopies attached
 - a. “The Bond of Love: Calvin on the Lord’s Supper” by K.A. Mathison, pp 14-15, July 2009.
 - b. “The Key of Paradise: Calvin: Theologian of the Holy Spirit” by T. Anyabwile.