

Calvin's Institutes, Book Three*The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ:*

- 1) *What Benefits Come to Us from It, and*
- 2) *What Effects Follow*

Introduction

Calvin has spent the last chapters of Book Two describing Jesus Christ in his work of atonement. In Book Three Calvin now concerns himself with the application of that atonement. In this effort, he writes 25 Chapters, of which we will take material from about half! The title of the Book (above) gives the plan. Calvin will describe to us the benefits that come to us from Christ's atonement, and how they are applied. Then, he will describe the effects which those benefits have on us.

The currently planned list of topics to be covered from Book Three is:

Union with Christ	Justification by Faith	Prayer
The Doctrine of Faith	The Judgment	Rules to guide prayer
Assurance	Peace of Conscience	Predestination
Spiritual Conflict	The Progress of Justification	Certainty of Election
The Fear of God	Good Works	Perseverance
Perseverance	Assurance	
The Doctrine of Repentance	The Promises of Law and Gospel	
Death and Life	Rewards	
Holiness	Freedom	
Unpardonable sin		
Confession of sin		

Three class sessions remain to us during this School of Discipleship semester. The last class is planned for Dec 9. We will resume our progress through the list in the Spring semester at whatever point we were interrupted in the Autumn.

Chapter I THE THINGS SPOKEN CONCERNING CHRIST PROFIT US
BY THE SECRET WORKING OF THE SPIRIT

Sec 1. *The Holy Spirit as the bond that unites us to Christ*

Outline

- 1) Christ and all his benefits for poor sinners become ours through spiritual union with him. Without this union, all his work would be to no avail for our salvation.
- 2) The work of bringing us into union with Christ is accomplished by the Holy Spirit. He is sent:
 - a. To witness to Christ's work effectually, and
 - b. To seal the knowledge of Christ upon our hearts.
 - c. The result is faith in Christ, which we "feel" (have assurance of).
- 3) By this knowledge of Christ brought to us by God the Spirit, we receive the "double grace" which is, which is deliverance from:
 - a. The curse [through justification]
and
 - b. The bondage [through sanctification]
of sin.

All this is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, who applies to us the finished work of Christ,

- a. by bringing us into union with Christ,
 - b. by faith.
- 4) God the Spirit is the "glue" or "bond" of the union we have with Christ.

By his almighty power we are brought into this union of salvation and kept in it by the Holy Spirit, who, himself becomes an intimate part of this union, since he is the "connection" between us and Christ.

Purpose

Now, the fact that not all believe who hear the Gospel brings Calvin to magnify the internal, "secret" work of the Holy Spirit as he applies the benefits of Christ to the elect. However, Calvin does not wish at this point to emphasize the doctrine of election -- but rather the grace of God the Spirit. Calvin wishes to show forth this vital and special work of the God the Spirit, just as he has shown forth the special ministry of Christ in the previous Book of the Institutes.

Thus, we may come to know how much we depend on the Spirit, and on his essential work in the economy of our salvation.

Calvin text with notes:

Christ's benefits must become ours.

We must have union with Christ

Scripture Proofs

We obtain this union by faith.

But the real worker is the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit witnesses to Christ.

We must now examine this question. How do we receive those benefits which the Father bestowed on his only-begotten Son -- not for Christ's own private use, but that he might enrich poor and needy men? ¹ First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us. For this reason, he is called "our Head" [Eph 4:15], and "the first-born among many brethren" [Rom 8:29]. We also, in turn, are said to be "engrafted into him" [Rom 11:17], and to "put on Christ" [Gal 3:27]; for, as I have said, all that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him. It is true that we obtain this by faith.² Yet since we see that not all indiscriminately embrace that communion with Christ which is offered³ through the gospel, reason itself teaches us to climb higher and to examine into the secret energy of the Spirit, by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits.⁴

Earlier I discussed the eternal deity and essence of the Spirit.⁵ Now let us be content with this particular point: that Christ so "came by water and blood" in order that the Spirit may witness concerning him [1 John 5:6-8⁶], lest the salvation imparted through him escape us. For, as three

¹ This is a reference to the argument Calvin was dealing with from scholastic theology in the immediately preceding section of the Institutes. (If you interested, see the second set of notes from the last class, which were not lectured on.) Calvin views all Christ's work as being done all for our benefit, and not a whit for his own.

² In view of the fact that Calvin's teaching on Christ's Atonement (just previous in the Institutes) views Christ as having provided our complete salvation, it is clear that faith is our proper response.

³ Calvin considers the Gospel to be "offered" to all who hear it, without any questioning of whether the hearers might be elect or not. Calvin's doctrine is found in the Three Forms of Unity and in the Westminster Standards (WCF 10:4).

⁴ While we come to know Christ by faith, this calling to faith is made real by the discriminating action of the Holy Spirit.

⁵ The only fit witness to God's Grace is God!

⁶ **1 John 5:6-8** ⁶ This is he that came by water and blood, *even* Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. ⁷ For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. ⁸ And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. *KJV.*

1 John 5:6-8 This is he that came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not by the water only, but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one bearing witness, because the Spirit is the truth. And there are three that are bearing witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. *Translated from the Robinson-Pierpont Majority Text (Byzantine).*

Subjective confirmation of the witness.

The Spirit sets us apart to Christ.

So that we receive the "double grace," as we are brought into union with Christ

witnesses in heaven are named -- the Father, the Word, and the Spirit -- so there are three on earth: the water, the blood, and the Spirit. There is good reason for the repeated mention of the "testimony of the Spirit," a testimony we feel engraved like a seal upon our hearts,⁷ with the result that it seals the cleansing and sacrifice of Christ.⁸ For this reason, also, Peter says that believers have been "chosen in the sanctification⁹ of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Christ"¹⁰ [1 Pet 1:2]. By these words he explains that, in order that the shedding of his sacred blood may not be nullified, our souls are cleansed by the secret watering of the Spirit.¹¹ For the same reason, also, Paul, in speaking of cleansing and justification, says that we come to possess both,¹² "in the name of ... Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" [1 Cor 6:11]. The Holy Spirit is the bond¹³ by which Christ effectually unites us to himself. To this, also, pertains what we taught in the previous book concerning his anointing.

⁷ For Calvin, the doctrinal truth of Christianity, as it affects us personally, is always experienced.

⁸ This "sealing" is an assurance of having received the benefit of Christ's work -- an assurance which is given by the Holy Spirit. Faith and assurance go together, and in many ways, in Calvin, mean the same thing.

⁹ "Sanctification" is a reference to being "set apart" by the Holy Spirit, unto the purpose of obedience, and to receive the sprinkling of the blood (of atonement) of Jesus Christ. In this text, sanctification is a definitive act accomplished by the Holy Spirit at the point of regeneration. Progressive sanctification during our Christian lives is the fruit of this definitive sanctification. Also, as Calvin has taught in the previous sections, the blood of the atonement takes away the guilt and penalty of sin and breaks the dominion of sin right now -- the "two graces" -- and then removes sin's presence after this life.

¹⁰ Visible here is the dual grace -- enablement of obedience, and cleansing from the guilt and penalty of sin.

¹¹ That is, Christ's work must be applied by the Holy Spirit. And, this application is particular (to the elect).

¹² Cleansing and justification are, again, the double grace.

¹³ The Holy Spirit's work is not merely to do something external to us in order to bring us and Christ together. He himself is the "bond" of union between Christ and ourselves. He is the link between Christ and us, the "glue" which holds the Body of Christ together. As such the Spirit is a constituting element of the Union which we experience with Christ. This is a central doctrine in Reformed Theology. It pervades the application of redemption in all its parts, including the doctrine of the Sacraments.

Sec 2. *How and why Christ was endowed with the Holy Spirit*

Outline

Christ came with the Spirit, in a special way, in order:

- 1) To separate us from the world, and
- 2) To gather us unto the hope of the eternal inheritance.

The Holy Spirit is the “root and seed” of the heavenly life in us.

This is the glory of the Kingdom of Christ, as promised by the prophets [Joel 2:28].

This work is Trinitarian:

- 1) The Father gives the Spirit to the Son.
- 2) The Son dispenses his grace through the Spirit.

All who thirst are invited, and

All who come

Receive their measure of the Holy Spirit.

Christ could not be Mediator, without dispensing the Spirit, who is the channel of God’s grace, and bond of union between ourselves and the Godhead.

Calvin text with notes:

The Spirit came to set us apart unto the heavenly life.

But, in order to get a clearer notion of this matter, so well worth investigating, we must bear in mind that Christ came endowed with the Holy Spirit in a special way: that is, to separate us from the world and to gather us unto the hope of the eternal inheritance.¹⁴ Hence he is called the “Spirit of sanctification”¹⁵ [2 Thess 2:13¹⁶; 1 Pet 1:2¹⁷; Rom 1:4] because he not only quickens and nourishes us by a general power that is visible both in the human race and in the rest of the

¹⁴ Christ’s work is not to restore the Kingdom to be at home in this world, but rather to be at home in the age to come.

¹⁵ To “sanctify” is to “set apart.” The “sanctification” of the Spirit sets us apart from the world unto God. This is the “definitive sanctification.”

¹⁶ **2 Thessalonians 2:13** ¹³ ¶ But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

¹⁷ **1 Peter 1:2** ² Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.

The Trinitarian work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

We have assurance because we have the Spirit.

All who thirst are invited.

All believers have the Spirit

Christ could not be Mediator without administering the Spirit

How Christ is the "Second Adam."

The Spirit is the administrator, channel and bond of the Grace of God

living creatures, but he is also the root and seed of heavenly life in us.¹⁸ To the Kingdom of Christ, then, the prophets give the lofty title of the time when there will be a richer outpouring of the Spirit [Joel 2:28¹⁹]. ... Further, God the Father gives us the Holy Spirit for his Son's sake, and yet has bestowed the whole fullness of the Spirit upon the Son to be minister and steward of his liberality.²⁰ For this reason, the Spirit is sometimes called the "Spirit of the Father," sometimes the "Spirit of the Son." Paul says: "You are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you."²¹ But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not his" [Rom 8:9]. Hence, he arouses hope of a full renewal "because he who raised Christ from the dead will quicken our mortal bodies, because of his Spirit that dwells in us" [Rom 8:11]. ... For this reason he invites unto himself all who thirst, that they may drink [John 7:37]. And Paul teaches that the Spirit is given to each "according to the measure of Christ's gift" [Eph 4:7]. Also, we ought to know that he is called the "Spirit of Christ" not only because Christ, as eternal Word of God, is joined in the same Spirit with the Father, but also from his [Christ's] character as the Mediator. For he [Christ] would have come to us in vain if he had not been furnished with this power. In this sense he is called the "Second Adam," given from heaven as "a life-giving spirit" [1 Cor 15:45].²² This unique life which the Son of God inspires in his own so that they become one with him, Paul here contrasts with that natural life which is common also to the wicked. Likewise, he asks "the grace of ... Christ and the love of God" for believers, at the same time coupling with it "participation in the ... Spirit" [2 Cor 13:14], without which no one can taste either the fatherly favor of God or the beneficence of Christ; just as he also says in another passage, "The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" [Rom 5:5].²³

¹⁸ The Spirit gives and maintains life in all that has any kind of life, but in Christ he gives the heavenly life.

¹⁹ **Joel 2:28-29** ²⁸ And it shall come to pass afterward, *that* I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: ²⁹ And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.

²⁰ The Trinitarian order is shown. The gift of the Spirit originates with the Father, is given in his whole fullness to the Son, and He (the Spirit) then becomes the minister of the gifts laid up for us in the Son.

²¹ The Spirit dwelling in us is the bond of our union with Christ.

²² The headship of Adam, through natural generation, communicates his sin to us. But the headship of Christ communicate life by the Spirit. (Rom 5:12ff)

²³ By this Calvin means not only the "feeling" of God's love, which is vitally important, but that also the actuality of that love has been conveyed when it is felt.

3 Titles of the Holy Spirit in Scripture

Summary:

Calvin: "And here it is useful to note what titles are applied to the Holy Spirit in Scripture, when the beginning and the whole renewal of our salvation are under discussion.

The "Spirit of Adoption" [Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6]

Romans 8:15 ¹⁵ For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

Galatians 4:6 ⁶ And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

The "guarantee and seal" of our inheritance [2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:14], "to assure us that our salvation is safe in God's unfailing care."

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 ²¹ Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, *is* God; ²² Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

Ephesians 1:13-14 ... in whom [Christ] also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

He is "life," because of righteousness. [Rom 8:10]

Romans 8:10 ¹⁰ And if Christ *be* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin; but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness.

He is the "water of life." [Isa 55:1; 44:3; John 7:37].

Isaiah 55:1 ¶ Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Isaiah 44:2b-3 Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. ³ For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring:

John 7:37-39 ³⁷ ¶ In the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. ³⁸ He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. ³⁹ (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet *given*; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

He is the oil of anointing [1 John 2:20, 27].

1 John 2:20 ²⁰ But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.

1 John 2:27 ²⁷ But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

He inflames our hearts with devotion, so he is called “fire” [Luke 3:16]

Luke 3:16 ¹⁶ John answered, saying unto *them* all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:

He is the “spring” of heavenly riches [John 4:14].

John 4:14 ¹⁴ But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

He is “Hand of God” [Acts 11:21].

Acts 11:21 ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

“Accordingly, whatever good things are in us are the fruits of his grace; and without him our gifts are darkness of mind and perversity of heart [Gal 5:19-21].

Galatians 5:19,22 ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, [etc.] ... ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, [etc.]

Calvin: As has already been clearly explained, until our minds become intent upon the Spirit, Christ, so to speak, lies idle because we coldly contemplate him as outside ourselves -- indeed, far from us. ... But he unites himself to us by the Spirit alone. By the grace and power of the same Spirit we are made his members, to keep us under himself and in turn to possess him.

Thus, according to Calvin, it is by the Spirit that our Christianity is made living and real. It is by means of faith, which is the creation of the Spirit, that we are united to Christ.

4. *Faith as the work of the Spirit*

Calvin:

But faith is the principal work of the Holy Spirit.

Consequently, the terms commonly employed to express his power and working are, in large measure, referred to it [faith] because by faith alone he leads us into the light of the gospel, as John teaches: to believers in Christ is given the privilege of becoming children of God, who are born not of flesh and blood, but of God [John 1:12-13].

Contrasting God with flesh and blood, he declares it to be a supernatural gift that those who would otherwise remain in unbelief receive Christ by faith.

Similar to this is that reply of Christ's to Peter's confession of faith: "Flesh and blood have not revealed it to you, but my Father, who is in heaven" [Matt 16:17]. ... Like this, too, is the saying of Paul's that the Ephesians had been "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" [Eph 1:13].

Paul shows the Spirit to be the inner teacher by whose effort the promise of salvation penetrates into our minds, a promise that would otherwise only strike the air or beat upon our ears. Similarly, where he says that the Thessalonians have been chosen by God "in sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth" [2 Thess 2:13], he is briefly warning us that faith itself has no other source than the Spirit.

John explains this more clearly: "We know that he abides in us from the Spirit whom he has given us" [1 John 3:24]. Likewise, "From this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit" [1 John 4:13].²⁴ Therefore, Christ promised to his disciples "the Spirit of truth that the world cannot receive" [John 14:17] that they might be capable of receiving heavenly wisdom.

And, as the proper office of the Spirit, he assigned the task of bringing to mind what he had taught by mouth. For light would be given to the sightless in vain had that Spirit of discernment not opened the eyes of the mind. ... Paul so highly commends the "ministry of the Spirit" [2 Cor 3:6] for the reason that teachers would shout to no effect if Christ himself, inner Schoolmaster, did not by his Spirit draw to himself those given to him by the Father [John 6:44; 12:32; 17:6].

John 6:44 ⁴⁴ No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 12:32 ³² And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto me.

John 17:6 ⁶ ¶ I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.

We have said that perfect salvation is found in the person of Christ. Accordingly, that we may become partakers of it "he baptizes us in the Holy Spirit and fire" [Luke 3:16], bringing us into the light of faith in his gospel and so regenerating us that we become new creatures [2 Cor 5:17]; and he consecrates us, purged of worldly uncleanness, as temples holy to God [1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21].

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 ¹⁹ What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? ²⁰ For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

2 Corinthians 6:16 ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

²⁴ Here, and in other places where the subject influence of the Spirit is "felt," Calvin seems to identify that subjective consciousness of the presence of the Spirit with faith.

Ephesians 2:19-22 ¹⁹ Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; ²⁰ And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; ²¹ In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: ²² In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Appendix

It is very notable, when Calvin writes that “perfect salvation is found in the person of Christ,” and especially that we only receive this salvation as Christ “baptizes us in the Holy Spirit and fire,” that his doctrine is very New Covenant oriented. One might ask, What about the Old Testament saints? How can it be that salvation, which in effect only comes at Pentecost, yet was possessed in principle by God’s saints from the very beginning of the promise?

We should remember Calvin’s consistent teaching, which was reviewed in earlier lessons on Calvin’s “Covenant Theology,” that Calvin is totally Christ centered in his doctrine of the covenants. Therefore, I think Calvin’s position, and the emphases of his theology on these points, warrants the following statement:

When Calvin looks to the Old Testament, the saints are with us, the fathers are ours, the promises and all the virtue of God’s Word are for us -- forever, and the Covenant is ours.

When Calvin looks to the New Testament -- everything is new. This is what the doctrine of the Old Covenant pointed to. Salvation only really comes by Christ and the New Covenant, and the outpouring of the Spirit associated with this covenant (at Pentecost).

This position might be epitomized this way:

Hebrews 11:39-40

³⁹ And these all [Old Testament saints], having obtained a good report through faith,²⁵ received **not** the promise.²⁶
⁴⁰ God having provided some better thing²⁷ **for us**,²⁸ that they, without us, **should not** be made perfect.

With us, then, those ancient saints are made perfect (posthumously) in the glory of Mount Zion.

²⁵ Faith means faith in the promise.

²⁶ Means that they did not receive the fulfillment of the promise.

²⁷ The “better thing” is the New Covenant.

²⁸ We have received the ultimate inheritance of God through the New Covenant.