Person of Christ, II

"*Thou art our Shepherd; we are Thy flock. Thou art our Redeemer; we are the people Thou hast bought back. Thou art our God; we are Thine inheritance. Therefore, be not angry against us to correct us in Thy wrath. Recall not our iniquity to punish it, but chastise us gently in Thy kindliness. Because of our demerits, Thine anger is enflamed, but be mindful that Thy name is called upon among us, and that we bear Thy mark and badge. Undertake, rather, the work that Thou hast already begun in us by Thy grace in order that the whole earth may recognize that Thou art our God and Savior.*" Amen.

In some ways, the treatment of Christ that Calvin gives in Book II, chapters 6-17, is really the heart of the *Institutes*. One writer has called it the "nerve center" of the *Institutes*. All of Book I and the first five chapters of Book II lead up to Christ. Book I tells us what we would have known about God if we had not sinned, but Adam did sin, and we fell into sin. That situation requires a Redeemer. The first five chapters of Book II discuss in detail the effects of that sin upon us. Then Christ is discussed in Book II, chapters 6-17.

Book III and Book IV flow out of that section. Book III has the title, "The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ." Thus Calvin moves from who Christ is in Book II into Book III in which we learn the way in which we receive the grace of Christ. Then Book IV is titled, "The External Means, or Aids, by which God Invites Us into the Society of Christ." You can see that everything leads up to these chapters in Book II, and everything flows from these chapters in Book II.

I have mentioned that Calvin divides his treatment of Christ by discussing the person of Christ in Book II, chapters 12-14 and the work of Christ in Book II, chapters 15-17. He does not, however, insist on a strict distinction between the person and work of Christ. When we talk about the person of Christ, we necessarily talk about the work of Christ. When we talk about the work of Christ, we must also keep in mind the person of Christ.

Calvin's way of beginning his treatment of the work of Christ is to use the rubric of the "threefold office" of "Prophet, King, and Priest." It is more common for us to think of "Prophet, Priest, and King," but Calvin's order is "Prophet, King, and Priest." I am not sure, but I believe Calvin arranged it that way so that his treatment of Christ as Priest leads into his treatment of Christ as Redeemer in Book II, chapters 16 and 17. I want to talk about this threefold office, looking at the work of Christ as Prophet, King, and Priest.

Calvin was not the first person to think of this. The idea of describing the work of Christ under this rubric had been used for a long time. We find it in the church fathers, Thomas Aquinas, and many other people. The idea was gradually developed by Calvin in the *Institutes*. By 1545 there was a clear statement of the three offices. In 1536 it did not appear, but by the 1545 edition the three offices did appear. In the 1559 edition, the one that is used today, there is a separate chapter devoted to the three offices, chapter 15 of Book II. It has an important discussion between Calvin's discussion of the incarnation in Book II, chapters 12-14, and his discussion of redemption in Book II, chapters 12-17. As I said, it connects the person and work of Christ. It is Calvin's way of putting together the person who came to be born in this world and the work that He eventually did, which Calvin focuses on, which was the work of redemption. Christ is Prophet, King, and Priest. As we will see, the concepts that Calvin develops there are proclamation, protection, and reconciliation. The prophet engages in proclamation. The king provides protection. The priest offers reconciliation.

The threefold office also has a significant role in Reformed theology after Calvin. The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter VIII, "Of Christ the Mediator," puts it this way: "It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest, and King." One of the reasons that the threefold office has become popular and useful in theology is that in the Old Testament the prophet, the priest, and the king were inducted into their offices by anointing with holy oil. Each one was anointed with oil in order to be inducted into office, which foreshadowed a fulfillment of the "Anointed One," who was the Messiah Himself. The "Messiah" is the "Anointed One." We have these pictures of the Messiah in the Old Testament under the threefold office.

Let us consider these three offices, beginning with prophet, or proclamation. Calvin said, "Christ was anointed by the Spirit to be the herald and the witness of the Father's grace." In His work, Christ is a teacher and preacher. As Calvin put it, Christ is "the herald and witness of the Father's grace." There are two parts to that identification. Christ taught during His earthly ministry. Calvin said in Book II, chapter 15, section 2, "The perfect doctrine He has brought has made an end to all prophecies." Christ's preaching had finality to it. The Old Testament prepared for it, and then Christ preached the final Word. Then that Word is set forth and explained more fully in the remaining books of the New Testament after the Gospels. God finally spoke in His Son. That sums up and underscores all biblical revelation.

During His earthly ministry, Christ was teaching, but Calvin also stresses that He still teaches. He did not only teach while He was here on earth, but as Prophet He still teaches. His office of Prophet has not ceased. He continues to teach through His ministers. Christ does not teach in His flesh, as He did in the days when He lived on earth, but He continues to teach through His ministers. In Book II, chapter 15, section 2, Calvin says, "He received the anointing as Prophet, not only for Himself that He might carry out the office of teaching, but for His whole body that the power of the Spirit might be present in the continuing preaching of the Gospel." As we listen to sermons, or as we preach, Christ is involved in that. It is His prophetic office that continues as His Word is set forth. When Calvin was writing his commentary on Matthew 17:5, he said the words "hear ye Him," recall the church to its unique teacher, Christ. That is what sermons are. Christ now preaches through the mouths of His servants who proclaim His Word. His office of Prophet continues. In his commentary on Matthew 28:20 Calvin said, "His ministers cannot put forward whatever they may think but must themselves depend solely on the mouth of one Teacher." That commits us to the exposition of the Scripture, because that is the word of Christ. As we proclaim the Scripture, we are not putting forth what we think, but rather we are putting forth what God says.

I was reading an article on an airplane in which a minister was describing the preaching of various groups. He said that Jews have to say, "It is written in the Torah," and Catholics say, "The church says," but Protestants say, "It seems to me." He agreed with that and thought it was a good way to describe Protestant preaching. I believe it was a poor way to describe Protestant preaching. It is never, "It seems to me," but rather it has to be, "The Bible says." When we set forth what the Bible says, we are setting forth what Christ says. Of course, we have to interpret the Bible, and there is an element there of personal understanding and appropriation. Yet we work hard to eliminate the perspective of "it seems to me" and elevate the truth of the Bible.

Christ is a prophet, and as a prophet He proclaims the truth of God. Second, Christ is King. That is the second of the threefold office. Calvin said in Book II, chapter 15, section 3, "Christ was anointed King that He might be the eternal protector and defender of His church." As with the office of Prophet, there are two points regarding Christ's office of King. First, Christ rules now. Christ is King now. He is ruling now. As He rules now, He does two things. He protects believers. He is our King, and He is protecting

us. That raises the question of why we still have so many problems, including suffering and death like other people. Calvin's answer to that is in Book II, chapter 15, section 4, in which he says, "The happiness promised us in Christ does not consist in outward advantages." He is our King, so He is protecting us, but He has not promised to keep us from trouble, disease, or death. He has not promised that our lives will be easy. That is not what it means that we have Christ as our King. It does not consist in outward advantages. Calvin said that the kingship of Christ is truly spiritual. This life is under the cross, so Christians should be prepared for suffering, trials, and, humanly speaking, disasters. That is life under the cross. So Christ is King, but we have to interpret that in the right way. We interpret it as a spiritual kingship, not an earthly one in which He is going to give us outward advantages. As King, He gives us inward advantages and blessings to overcome the trials that we face. He does not provide us an absence of trials. So He is ruling now, protecting believers. Calvin said He is "the eternal protector and defender of His church."

He is also ruling now by judging the wicked. Christ as King is active in this world, protecting believers and judging the wicked. Again, as in protecting believers, we must understand that judging the wicked does not mean that there is total and complete judgment in this life. The wicked get away with many things, so it seems. Even though we can sense some judgment of God upon the wicked, we do not see God annihilating the wicked, nor destroying them. They often prosper and persecute the righteous. I read a sentence that illustrates what I want to say about this point. It said, "The judgments of God fall often enough in this world to let us know that God judges." As you study history, you see the judgment of God falling upon nations and people. The same sentence went on to say that it happened "seldom enough to let us know that there is a judgment hereafter." That means that all the judgment is not completely here and now. There is a judgment to come. That is another point that Calvin emphasized. He said, "The full proof of His rule will appear at the last judgment." There we will see how our King has perfectly protected His church and how He completes the judgment of the wicked in the last judgment. Francis Schaeffer used to say that "there will be a balancing of the books." That has not happened yet. The books are not close to being balanced. Yet eventually there will be a balancing of the books, and everything will be set right.

The third office of Christ is the office of Priest. This is the work of Christ in reconciliation. The office of King has to do with the actual bestowal of every spiritual good. The office of Priest has to do with the removal of spiritual evil. A king brings spiritual good, and a priest takes away sin and reconciles us to God. Calvin makes the point that Christ was anointed both Priest and sacrifice for sin. In Christ was something unique. There were the Old Testament prophets, and we have Christ as Prophet. There were the Old Testament kings, and we have Christ as King. There were the Old Testament priests, and we have Christ as Priest. Yet the Old Testament priests were not both priest and sacrifice. In Christ, however, we have both Priest and sacrifice. By His holiness and sacrifice He blots out our guilt and reconciles us to God. That is His work as sacrifice. As Priest, we have His work of intercession. By His pleading we obtain favor. As Priest, Christ died as the sacrifice. Also as Priest, Christ intercedes to the Father so that His sacrificial work of reconciliation will bring us favor with God.

In His commentary on Matthew 27:12, Calvin has a beautiful illustration of the relation between Christ's reconciliation and His intercession, which are two parts of His priestly office. In this passage Calvin describes the trial of Jesus before Pilate, saying, "Jesus remained silent before Pilate in order that ever after He might speak for us." In remaining silent before Pilate, He accepted the judgment that was meted out upon Him by the Romans, and He died for our sins. He did not object and try to escape it. Because He remained silent before Pilate, He is able to speak ever after for us. Calvin also said in his commentary on 1 John 2:1, "Christ's intercession is the continual application of His death to our salvation."

Calvin said in Book II, chapter 15, section 6, "Christ is Priest, not only to render the Father favorable toward us, but also to receive us as His companions in this great office." In other words, just as there is an element in which we are involved in the proclamation of Christ's work as Prophet, so there is a part of Christ's work as Priest that involves us. We are not involved in reconciliation, of course, but rather in intercession. This is one place in the *Institutes* that the Protestant doctrine of the priesthood of all believers comes forth. That doctrine is not as clearly set forth in Calvin as it is in Luther. For Luther, that is a major theme. For Calvin, it is certainly important, and we find it from time to time in his writing, as we do in Book II, chapter 15, section 6 when Calvin says, "Christ is Priest, not only to render the Father favorable toward us, but also to receive us as His companions in this great office." He intercedes, and we intercede. There are other places that Calvin teaches the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, although not too often in the *Institutes*. He does so in Book III and Book IV, and I will point it out when he does so. You can also find a treatment of this idea in some of Calvin's commentaries. There is not a major section or chapter, however, in the *Institutes* that deals with this doctrine. Calvin certainly agreed with Luther that all believers are priests, that we are to serve as intercessors, and Christ is our Intercessor.

Chapter 16 of Book II focuses on Christ as our Redeemer. We move from Christ as Priest to Christ as Redeemer. The question that Calvin begins with is "How did Christ accomplish redemption for us?" His answer in Book II, chapter 16, section 5 is, "By the whole course of His obedience. That means His incarnation, earthly life, and death. That is the "whole course of His obedience." Calvin says that it was especially His obedience unto death. The later Reformed tradition would divide the doctrine into the "active" obedience of Christ and the "passive" obedience of Christ. Usually, theologians refer to the "active" obedience of Christ with regard to His life. He actively obeyed the Law, the will of the Father, for us. They refer to His "passive" obedience with regard to His death. He accepted, agreed to, and embraced His death. I am not fond of that distinction, because it seems to me that there was active obedience in His death as well. It was not just that He surrendered to death, but rather He took death upon Himself and died. It was not just that He was killed, but rather that He offered Himself as a sacrifice. If we only say that He was killed, then we have not said everything. He embraced death. On the other hand, in His "active" obedience, there is a certain passiveness as well. He accepted the sufferings and struggles that God assigned to Him. People will probably continue to use that distinction, although I am not sure it is particularly helpful.

Christ accomplished redemption for us by the whole course of His obedience. Here it is that Calvin begins his exposition of the Apostles' Creed, which summarizes what Christ did for us. Calvin says, "The Creed passes at once in the best order from the birth of Christ to His death and resurrection, wherein the whole of perfect salvation consists." He did not find fault with the Creed. It is interesting, however, that the life of Christ is omitted in the Apostles' Creed. We say that we believe in "Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord, who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate…" What place does the life of Christ have in the Apostles' Creed? I suppose we could say it gets a comma or semicolon. It says, "Born of the Virgin Mary [comma], suffered under Pontius Pilate." It moves from His incarnation to His suffering on the cross. His life is not mentioned. Calvin says, "The remainder of the obedience of Christ is not excluded." Calvin wanted to say that even though there is not an actual statement in the Apostles' Creed that talks about the obedience of Christ throughout His life, it is not excluded. Calvin says, "Paul embraced it all, from the beginning to the end, in Philippians 2:7-8, 'He took the form of a servant.'" In a sense, we could say the Creed this way: "…and in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord—He took the form of a servant—and was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate." Calvin does not suggest that we

add those words to the Creed. Yet we may certainly think of those words as we recite the Apostles' Creed.

I will work through Calvin's treatment of the Creed, not in detail, but to point out a few things of interest. First, "He suffered under Pontius Pilate." The point that Calvin wanted to make was that there was not one but two verdicts given at the trial of Jesus. Calvin said, "Christ allowed Himself to be condemned before a mortal man because He willed to deliver us from the penalty to which we were subject as sinners." One verdict was "guilty." He was pronounced guilty by Pilate and the Jews, and He was crucified on the cross. Christ accepted that. He allowed Himself to be condemned, because it was the way He could provide for us our salvation. Calvin also said, however, that there was another verdict given, which was "innocent." Nobody spoke that verdict in Jerusalem, but, as Calvin said, "From His shining innocence it was obvious that He was burdened with another's sin rather than His own." As Christ moved through His trial and execution, Calvin saw His innocence shine forth in such a way that even though He was guilty, He was guilty because of the sins of the world that had been laid upon Him. There were two verdicts: guilty for our sake, but innocent in Himself.

He was crucified. Christ made Himself subject to the cross. Calvin talks about the cross as being a place of shame. So Christ embraced the shame there, the very depths of degradation. With the two verdicts under Pontius Pilate—Pilate's verdict and God's verdict—even though the Father turned from Christ, Calvin explains it that it was as if the Father turned from Christ. He was crucified. He made Himself subject to the cross. It was full of shame, but Calvin said that He changed it into a "triumphal chariot." So again, there are two ways of looking at this event. When you look at the trial, you see a man being condemned as guilty and being crucified for His guilt. Yet you also see shining innocence. Then when you look at the cross, you see a place of degradation and shame. Yet it is transformed into a triumphal chariot. We have continual illustrations of that in the way we use the cross today. We do not think of it as a place of degradation, because it adorns our buildings, people wear it as jewelry, and people adore it as a treasured symbol of the Christian faith. That is because Christ changed what was very ignoble and shameful into something triumphant and wonderful.

Then the Creed goes on to say, "He was dead and buried." Calvin said it says that because "in every respect He took our place to pay the price of redemption." So Jesus died and was buried. He took our place in what we deserved—death and burial. Those are rather straightforward expressions of the Creed, although I do think Calvin gave an interpretation that was full of insight. He enables us to repeat the Creed with more insight and understanding. The next phrase, however, is a disputed one. So it will be important to note what Calvin does with it.

The Creed says, "…descended into hell." Calvin believed that this part of the Creed is an essential part of the Creed. I recently read an article from a theologian who said that it is best to leave this phrase out of the Creed now, because we do not believe. He was an evangelical theologian who said that saying "descended into hell" is not an appropriate understanding of what Christ did. Calvin did not agree with that. He said, "It is a matter of no small moment in bringing about redemption." That means that Calvin saw the phrase "descended into hell" as the most important part of the Creed.

It is true that the phrase "descended into hell" was not part of the earliest forms of the Apostles' Creed. Only one writer from before 650 suggested that it could be in the Creed, but apparently he only used the phrase to mean that Christ was buried, which repeated what had already been said. It was not until after 650 that the phrase "descended into hell" became a fixture in the Creed, even the Creed goes back to the early third century in Rome. It took a long time for this phrase to be added. I think we can say, however,

that the idea that Christ descended into hell was fairly common in the church fathers in the second and third centuries and down to Calvin's time.

The traditional view was that there was a literal descent of Christ to the world of the dead between His death and resurrection. He died on the cross, and then went down into hell, and then He was resurrected and then He ascended to the Father. What did Christ do when He was in hell? People have different ideas about that. They can be summed up in a number of ways. One view is that He preached repentance and rescued prisoners. Some people think that is a reference to Old Testament believers who did not go directly to heaven until Christ descended to hell or to the place of the dead. There is some dispute about what exactly "hell" means here. It could mean the place of the dead or it could mean a place of punishment. The traditional view is that Christ went and preached repentance and rescued believers and triumphed over Satan. This is sometimes called the "harrowing of hell." It is a great theme of medieval art. There are many pictures of Christ going down to hell and tearing the place up. It can be found in Dante's *Divine Comedy* and in other writings. The main idea is that Christ literally descended in His body and went to hell and triumphed over hell.

Calvin did not take that line of interpretation. It might be said that Calvin demythologized the statement. Calvin said the phrase meant Christ's spiritual torment on the cross. He said it was "that invisible and incomprehensible judgment which He underwent in the sight of God." One way to view it is that the terms crucified, dead, and buried, set forth the external facts. Christ was placed on the cross. He died as a result of that experience. And he was buried. Yet there is also the phrase "descended into hell," which does not speak of the external suffering, but rather the burden He was bearing in Himself as a result of bearing the sins of the world. Calvin called it "a harsher and more difficult struggle than with common death." In other words, what Christ struggled with on the cross was far more than what you and I would struggle with if we were crucified. You can imagine the anguish and agony of that experience, but there was something much "harsher and more difficult" that Christ struggled with, according to Calvin. That struggle was His bearing the sins of the world. That was what made the cross redemptive. Without the expression "descended into hell" interpreted in this way, the Creed would contain objective facts, but it would not have a theological interpretation of those facts. This is the setting forth of the redemptive nature of the cross.

So the traditional review is chronological. The victory was already won on the cross. Then Christ made a journey, after that triumph, to the underworld. In Calvin's view, however, it was all simultaneous. As He hung on the cross, Christ descended into hell. The descent is the victory. It is not that the victory was won and then the descent took place. It is rather that as He died, and as He bore our sins, the descent took place as He struggled on the cross. That was the victory.

In the catechism for the church at Geneva, which is a catechism that Calvin wrote, Calvin's view is clearly set forth. Part of the catechism is meant to lead children through the Apostles' Creed. First, the minister asks, "As for what immediately follows, that 'He descended into hell.' What does this mean?" The children were taught to reply, "That he endured not only common death, which is the separation of the soul from the body, but also the pains of death, as Peter calls them." Calvin believed that the phrase "pains of death" in Acts 2:24 has to do with spiritual torment. The answer goes on to say, "By this word I understand the fearful agonies with which His soul was tormented." Then the next statement of the minister is "Tell me the cause and the manner of this." The answer in the catechism is "Because, in order to make satisfaction for sinners, He arraigned Himself before the tribunal of God, it was requisite that His conscience be tormented by such agony, as if He were forsaken of God." Note that it says "as if he were." He had the sense of being forsaken, the experience of being forsaken, but He really was not forsaken. Calvin applies that to us, because that is our experience too. We often have the sense of being

forsaken, but we are not forsaken, as the second person of the Trinity was not forsaken by God on the cross, although He did feel that He was forsaken.

So with Calvin, there is no geographical movement of Christ, except for the three-day period in which He was under the power of death in the grave. When you compare Calvin's interpretation with the Westminster Confession of Faith, there is a difference. The Westminster Confession of Faith does not teach the literal descent into the place of the dead for preaching to Old Testament saints or the harrowing of hell. The Larger Catechism question 50, however, gives the answer that "Christ's humiliation after His death consisted in His being buried and continuing in the state of the dead and under the power of death until the third day, which hath been otherwise expressed in these words, 'He descended into hell.'" So the Larger Catechism understands the words "he descended into hell" as meaning that Christ died, was buried, and continued under the power of death until the third day.

What should we make of all this? I believe that the early traditional meaning of the words "He descended into hell" is the meaning that should be affixed to the Apostles' Creed. When Calvin came to those words, he did not drop them out because he disagreed with the traditional interpretation. Instead he changed the meaning of the words and kept them in. Even if you like Calvin's view, you can say that is not what the words meant. So some people say that we should take them out. Calvin did not tell us why he did what he did. He simply took the words of the Creed and then reinterpreted the words in what I consider a biblical position. My personal feeling is that Calvin has convinced me that we see something in the Apostles' Creed that says what Calvin is saying in his interpretation of the phrase "He descended into hell." So I am quite happy to take the traditional words and reinterpret them in the Calvinist fashion and go on using them. Yet, it is quite an issue in some churches. You may have to decide what form of the Apostles' Creed you will use. This will give you some insight, at least, into Calvin's interpretation of the Apostles' Creed.

There are several biblical verses to which the traditional interpretation of this phrase in the Creed could possibly point, particularly 1 Peter 3:18-20. I will not exegete those verses. You can look them up if you have interest. That passage is undoubtedly the primary text for this phrase. It talks about Christ, who was "in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey." I have studied Calvin's exegesis of that passage, and it is rather complicated. He tries not to use it in a way that would support the traditional view of Christ's descent into hell. The main point he makes is that Christ went by means of His spirit to the prison, but it is not altogether clear where that was or what that was. In my view, Augustine has a better interpretation of that passage, which he only proposed but did not actually advocate. He suggested that 1 Peter 3 does not refer to something that Christ did between His death and resurrection, but rather something He did through the Spirit at the time of Noah. Christ preached by the Spirit at the time of Noah to people, and He actually preached through Noah. So it would indicate Christ's prophetic office coming forth as He set forth His truth through the preaching of the righteous Noah.

The Creed also says that "on the third day He rose again from the dead." Calvin said, "The substitutionary work of Christ does not end in His death. Our restoration to life is completed by His resurrection." The Bible often connects death and resurrection, as Calvin does in explaining this point that "on the third day He rose again from the dead."

"He ascended into heaven." Calvin said in Book II, chapter 16, section 14, "By which He truly inaugurated His kingdom." Calvin also makes the point that He ascended into heaven in such a way that He did not leave us. As Calvin says, "He left us in such a way that His presence might be more useful to us." We still have the presence of Christ through the Spirit. The presence of Christ before the ascension

into heaven was different from the presence of Christ after the ascension into heaven. We sometimes think it would have been wonderful to live in the days of Christ and to be able to see Him and talk to Him and listen to Him, but only a limited number of people could do that. Christ in His body was in one place at one time. Now, however, He is with each of us and with every Christian always and everywhere. As Calvin said, "He left us in such a way that His presence might be more useful to us." Calvin also said, "Just as His incarnation did not remove Christ from heaven, so His ascension did not remove Christ from earth." The *extra Calvinisticum* comes into play again here. Christ also exists apart from His body. His body is in heaven, but Christ exists apart from His body so He can be with us. He is present with us in the Lord's Supper, apart from the body, as Calvin said, "Which is in one place in heaven." When He left heaven to come to earth and was born of the virgin, it was Christ, but He also existed beyond the body as the second person of the Trinity. He did not abandon heaven, and He did not forsake the work He was engaged in. Now that He has returned to heaven, He has not left us. As the omnipresent God, He is everywhere, but His body is not everywhere. That is an important point in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, because that distinguishes Calvin's view from Luther's view.

The next phrase of the Creed is "…seated at the right hand of the Father." Calvin said that is "where He is invested with lordship over heaven and earth." The Creed continues, "From whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead." Calvin said, "Our whole salvation is comprehended in Christ." That is how Calvin sums up his treatment of the Apostles' Creed.

Next in the *Institutes* is chapter 17, which is "How Christ Merited Salvation for Us." This question may be something you never thought about before, but it was something that people in Calvin's day were asking. In other words, if salvation is by grace, why is there merit involved? Calvin would say that Christ merited grace for us. He also said, "Certain perversely subtle men teach that any mention of merit obscures God's grace." They were saying that if you talk about merit then you are undercutting God's grace. If God saves us by grace, then why does there have to be merit? Calvin's answer, found in Book II, chapter 17, section 1, is, "It is absurd to set Christ's merit against God's mercy." Those were two separate things for Calvin—God's mercy and Christ's merit. Calvin goes on to say, "It is a common rule that a thing subordinate to another is not in conflict with it." He uses a statement from logic to answer this objection. God's mercy is the main idea, and the subpoint is Christ's merit. In other words, God's mercy was to send Christ. There was mercy in Christ's coming, in the unity of the Father and the Son in the work of redemption, in order to merit life for us. Calvin was saying there is no conflict. Salvation is by God's mercy, and this was how God's mercy was accomplished for us. God chose to save us by Christ's merit. Christ, by His obedience, truly acquired and merited grace for us with the Father. When Calvin discusses the work of our salvation, He says that Christ was able to merit our salvation because God willed it. It was the way that God willed for us to be saved. Calvin said, "Jesus Christ was unable to merit anything but by God's good pleasure." It was God's decree and God's will. At the same time, Calvin speaks of Christ's obedience. Calvin said, "By Christ's obedience, He truly acquired and merited grace for us with the Father." The merit came because God said, "It will be this way," and the merit came because Christ obeyed. There was true merit. He earned our salvation by the whole course of His obedience—by His perfectly sinless life and by His redemptive death.

I want to say a few words of evaluation. Robert A. Peterson said in his book, *Calvin and the Atonement*, which is a marvelous book, "It is difficult to find another figure in the history of the Christian church who brought together as much data in his soteriology as Calvin did." He gives a comprehensive treatment of the doctrine of the work of Christ. I mentioned the threefold office of Christ, which is very important in Calvin's teaching. He has an Anselmian view, with distinctive emphases on justice, love, and Christ's atoning life. I used to think that Calvin followed in the history of doctrine directly following Anselm and his work, *Cur Deus Homo*, "Why the God-Man?" Now I believe it is more accurate to say

that in broad outlines Calvin approximates the teaching of Anselm, but Calvin's treatment is somewhat distinctive. He does not follow Anselm entirely. For one, I think Anselm was concerned primarily to show how through the atonement the justice of God was satisfied. Calvin spoke of that issue often too, but his focus was at least as much on the love of God in the atonement.

The final point of evaluation is the extent of the atonement in Calvin's treatment. Did Calvin believe in limited or universal atonement? There are scholars who write in favor of each side. I believe that Robert Peterson is right when he says that we cannot say whether Calvin believed in limited atonement or not. There are some statements in Calvin that certainly set forth limited, or particular, atonement. There are other statements in Calvin that set forth what we could call universal atonement. Calvin certainly believed in the universal offer of the Gospel, but that is not the same thing as universal atonement. Calvin may not have viewed this to be an issue, and it was not an issue in the time. It only became an issue later, at the time of the Synod of Dordt. When something is an issue, then you have to be precise and take sides and take care about what you say about it, unless you want to say you do not know. That may be one reason Calvin did not answer this question, simply due to the fact that people were not asking the question. Another factor may have been that Calvin was so concerned to be biblical that when a verse seemed to indicate limited atonement, he would go that way. When a verse seemed to indicate universal atonement, he would go that way. He either did not know a way to put those together, or he simply did not think of doing so. It was rather typical of Calvin to take a line of biblical thought as far as he could and then take another line of biblical thought, and then fail to make a logical connection between them if he did not think that Scripture gave him warrant to do so. Unless somebody sheds some new light on Calvin on this topic, I believe we can say that Calvin can be interpreted both ways. There are texts in the *Institutes* and in his commentaries that lead in both directions.