

Sin and its Results

We now come to sin and its results, and that means we are now in Book II. So, be encouraged. You have gotten through Book I of the four books of the *Institutes*. Calvin's titles are important: "The Knowledge of God the Redeemer in Christ, first disclosed to the Fathers under the Law and then to us in the Gospel." The title really sets forth the entire contents of Book II. We will talk about sin and its results, the need for the Redeemer (the first five chapters of Book II), and then salvation through Christ who is the Redeemer (the rest of Book II, chapters 6 through 17). In other words, our outline is Christ, Law, Christ. You might say that Calvin completely surrounds the Law with Christ or completely surrounds the Law with the Gospel in Book II. We will see more of what that means when we get to that part of Book II. Let us come before the Lord in prayer, using one of John Calvin's prayers before we look at this material. Let us pray.

"Almighty God, Thou hast in the Gospel set clearly before us with how many and how dreadful sins we are afflicted. This Thou hast done in order that we may learn to be displeased with ourselves, and so lie down, confounded and despairing, in our sins and in the guilt contracted from them. Thus we may yet know the true glory that Thou hast offered to us, and we can be made partakers of it if we embrace with true faith Thine only begotten Son, in whom perfect righteousness and salvation has been offered us. Grant we may so cleave to Christ and receive his benefits in faith that we may be able, not only before the world, but also against Satan and against death itself, to glory in Thee, for Thou alone are just and wise and strong. May Thy strength, Thy justice, Thy wisdom shine upon us in our iniquity and ignorance and weakness, until at last we may reach that fullness of glory laid up for us in heaven through the same Christ our Lord. Amen."

When Calvin begins Book II, he does not begin with Christ for five or six chapters. He does not really start the treatment of Christ, His person and His work, until chapter six. In the first five chapters, he sets forth sin and its results, or another way to say it is a need for the Redeemer. Before we get to the Redeemer, which is the main topic of Book II, Calvin gives to us the need for the Redeemer. You might say that Book I is the knowledge of God and ourselves. Book II is about the knowledge of God and ourselves, because the first five chapters focus on knowing ourselves—what we were as created in Adam but primarily what we have become as a result of the Fall. Calvin says in his commentary on Isaiah 53:6, "For unless we realize our own helpless misery, we shall never know how much we need the remedy which Christ brings nor come to Him with the fervent love we owe Him." This brief statement from Calvin's commentary sets forth the program that he places before us in Book II. First of all, we need to realize our helpless misery, which is what the first five chapters do for us. If we did not have the first five chapters, we would not know the remedy that Christ brings or come to Him with the fervent love we owe Him.

I have already mentioned the little book by R. C. Reed, *The Gospel as Taught by Calvin*, which is a short booklet treating Calvin's teaching. The book is by a professor who taught at the old Columbia Seminary when it was in Columbia, South Carolina about a hundred years ago. In the book, R. C. Reed says, "Logically one's views of sin determine his views of redemption. Christ came to repair whatever ruin was brought by Adam. To appreciate the work of the former, we must understand the work of the latter. To know just how much we are indebted to Christ, we must know just how much we are indebted to Adam." First, we look at our debt to Adam, or we look at the ruin that has come upon us because of Adam's sin and our involvement in that sin. Then, we can appreciate what Christ did. We need to see, first of all, our miserable ruin and then we can see His magnificent redemption. Calvin summarizes all of the first five chapters of Book II in the very beginning of chapter 6. He says, "The whole human race

perished in the person of Adam” (Book II, chapter 6, section 1). That is Calvin’s summary of these first five chapters that we are going to look at in this lesson.

We have a twofold knowledge of ourselves: ourselves as created and ourselves as fallen. This first point is a review of Book I. Calvin is looking back. If you remember, we already studied this under creation. Calvin uses the expression “our primal worthiness” to describe the greatness of our creation. In Book I, there was a hypothetical premise that this is the knowledge of God we would have had if Adam had not sinned. But, Adam did sin, and so that knowledge is no longer available to us without Scripture and the testimony of the Holy Spirit opening our understanding so that we can embrace Scripture as the very Word of God. There is also a hypothetical premise in the beginning of Book II: how great our natural excellence would be if only it had remained unblemished. Once again, Calvin returns to the grandeur of the creation of mankind and not only points us to the excellence of it but also to the purpose for which we were created. Our purpose is our duty to God. We were made to worship God and to love and serve Him. The response that should flow from us because of this is gratitude. We see what God did. We see the wonder of His creation of us—of people—and the response is gratitude. We also see ourselves as fallen, and this is the proper topic of the first five chapters of Book II.

Now, in Book II, he focuses on what we are and speaks somewhat eloquently about the greatness of the Fall from the splendor of God’s creation to the miserable ruin that we have become. It is a “sorry spectacle,” Calvin says, “of our foulness and dishonor.” He also addresses our entire inability to carry out the purpose for which we were created. We cannot, in ourselves, be what we were made to be. The response here should be humility. We bow low before God because we recognize that we have lost, through our own parents and through our own sin, that which God had prepared for us. Calvin says, “There is both humility and a new zeal to seek God in whom each of us may recover those good things which we have utterly and completely lost.” So, in the opening pages of Book II, Calvin wants to focus our attention on those two points: what we were—gratitude; what we are now—humility, brokenness, lowliness, and an earnest desire to seek God so that we can recover what has been lost. Calvin begins in Book I with the knowledge of God and ourselves. He says, “We are to know God, and we are to know ourselves.” We could summarize that by saying, “We are to know our original excellence, which was God’s gift, and be grateful for that. But, we also know our present sinfulness, so we are led to repent for corrupting such an excellent gift as God has given to us in the creation.” That is how Calvin introduces the topic, and then he comes to Adam’s sin. We will discuss Adam’s sin and then the effects of Adam’s sin on us.

Let us look at the nature of Adam’s sin. Calvin says, “It was not gluttony.” It is not that Adam and Eve were hungry for an apple. This, according to Calvin, is a childish view. Apparently, some medieval people thought that this had been the problem. They believed that these two people were greedy, hungry, and gluttonous. Calvin dismisses that as childish. When he tries to understand the nature of Adam’s sin, it becomes a little more complex. What really was the sin that drove Adam and Eve to the action that had such dire consequences for themselves and for the whole human race? He begins with Augustine’s idea. Saint Augustine said it was pride. It was pride that drove our first two parents—Eve and then Adam—to rebel against God. Calvin does not disagree with that, but he wants to probe a little deeper. So, he says, “We could also call it disobedience,” which he describes as the beginning of the Fall. There was pride and then the decision to disobey the command that God had set: “Thou shall not eat of this fruit.” Then, Calvin says, “We could call it unfaithfulness,” which he says is the root of the Fall, and all of this issues in ingratitude. The sin was pride, disobedience, and unfaithfulness, which rejects what God has said, is ungrateful for all that God has given, and seizes upon that which God has forbidden. So, that is Calvin’s attempt to look at the sin itself and define what it really was.

Why did it happen? What was the reason for Adam's sin? Here, Calvin is very clear that man's ruin is to be ascribed to man alone (Book II, chapter 1, section 10). Why did it happen? It happened because of the actions of Adam and Eve. It happened because of their free will, which they exercised contrary to the Law of God. The second question Calvin asks is "Why did God not prevent Adam's sin?" A lot of people have given different ideas about that. The usual answer is that God could not have prevented Adam's sin without making Adam and Eve like the other animals. In order to give our parents the freedom to love Him freely and not be constrained to love Him in any kind of mechanistic way, there had to be the freedom to disobey and the freedom not to love. This is the standard answer to that question, but it is not the one Calvin gives. Calvin says, "That question manifests inordinate curiosity." He closes the door on that question and considers it a question that we should not ask. I am not sure that the first answer is not a good answer, but it is not one that appealed to Calvin. He also says, "Beside that, it has to do with the secret of predestination" (Book II, chapter 1, part 10). This is one of the places, before he gets to the doctrine of election, where he says, "I could talk about election here, but I am not going to do it yet." It has to do with God's secret purpose and will. It was God's purpose and will that Adam and Eve sinned. This raises some big questions that we will have to look at in a few minutes. Basically, Calvin says, "God did not prevent it, and we should not probe too deeply into why He did not prevent it, because that manifests inordinate curiosity."

Let us look at the transmission of Adam's sin. In the first five chapters of Book II, Calvin is not only talking about how Adam and Eve sinned but also about how that has impacted us so that we are born sinners. The fact of that is clear to Calvin as he thinks about the sin of Adam and Eve. Calvin says, "Before we saw the light of this life, we were soiled and spotted in God's sight (Book II, chapter 1, part 5). So, before we are born, we are guilty—we are soiled and spotted in God's sight. The church fathers call this "original sin," and we often use this term also. It means that we are born into sin. We do not become sinners because we sin, but we sin because we are sinners. That expression is a little confusing, and Calvin prefers another one. He would rather use the phrase "inherited sin" or "inherited corruption." We are born in sin, but how did that happen? How did it happen that the sin of our first two parents is somehow passed on to us? Calvin does not say it is inordinate curiosity to ask that question. In fact, he spends considerable time trying to answer that question because there are passages in the Bible that give us understanding about that. If the Bible sets forth something, we need to follow that. Calvin attempts to do that.

The first point he makes is that our sin is not inherited biologically or physically or carnally. Calvin says, "The contagion does not take its origin from the substance of the flesh or the soul." It is not through the sexual act of propagation of the human race that sin is passed on. Augustine was tempted to think that that could be an explanation, but Calvin did not think that. It is not a carnal propagation. We do not inherit sin in that way. Second, it is not propagated by imitation, which means that we do not become sinners because we imitate other sinners. The first point Calvin deals with is that we are not sinners because we are biologically the offspring of sinners. He makes the point that the offspring of Christians are sinners as well as the offspring of the unregenerate. The manner of its propagation is not the carnal act. The sexual act of begetting a child is not the way sin is passed on to us, but neither is it passed on to us as Pelagius taught—by imitation. It is not that we become sinners by sinning. Calvin rejects the Pelagian concept. He says this about Pelagius: "He attempted to cover up the disease and thus rendered it incurable." Pelagius said that sin is not passed down, and the reason people sin is because they see others sinning and they imitate them. In addition, Pelagius said that all would be well if we stopped sinning. That covers up the disease, and when you cover up the disease, there is no hope for a cure. Even though Calvin can seem almost harsh in these chapters, his is a much kinder approach to expose our condition. It is much better for a doctor to say, "This is what is wrong with you, and we have to do something about this," than to say, "There is not much wrong with you," when there is a lot wrong

with us. Ultimately, Calvin's "tell-it-like-it-is" approach is much kinder. He makes it as negative as it is so that we know what we are up against.

Well, if it is not inherited biologically and it is not propagated by imitation, then how does it happen that we are born in sin? Calvin says that we do inherit our sin from Adam, and there are two possible ways to think about this. First, Adam is the root of human nature. Second, he is the head of the human race. These are the two views in systematic theology that are known as the realistic view and the representative view. Calvin does not seem to feel constrained to choose between the two. Generally, theologians will accept one and reject the other. Calvin uses them both and thinks both are true. However, his preference seems to be on the side of representation.

The first is the realistic view, which says that even though our sin is not transmitted biologically, it is true that we have a connection with Adam. He is our first father, and we are descended from him. When a child is born into this world, that child does not represent a totally new beginning. The world does not start over with that child. That child is part of the human race. Because we are part of the human race, we are part of Adam. The sin of Adam infects and affects the entire human race. In Book II, chapter 1, part 7, Calvin says, "The beginning of corruption in Adam was such that it was conveyed in a perpetual stream from the ancestors into their descendants." Sometimes Calvin uses a figure of a tree to illustrate his point. The root of the tree symbolizes Adam. We are little acorns out on one of the far limbs. However, the root and the acorn are part of the same tree. So, we are part of the human race. When Adam and Eve sinned, it affected not only themselves but also all of their descendants.

Another way Calvin looked at the transmission of Adam's sin is that the relationship between Adam and the human race is not to be viewed in terms of the unity of the race (although he does not reject that and say that is improper) but to look at it representatively. In other words, God, by divine appointment, made Adam the representative of the race so that what Adam does according to God's appointment is going to affect all the descendants of Adam. In Book II, chapter 1, part 7, Calvin says, "It had been so ordained by God that the first man should at one in the same time have and lose, both for himself and for his descendants, the gifts that God had bestowed upon him." In his commentary on John 3:6, Calvin says, "The corruption of all mankind in the person of Adam alone did not proceed from generation but from the ordinance of God. As in one man He adorned us all, so He has also in him deprived us of His gifts." That seems to lean much more heavily to the representative view and almost appears to deny the realist view.

John Murray, who has written some on this subject, feels that Calvin is on the right track but is not quite clear enough. He probably thinks that because Calvin combines these two views. Murray says, "While Calvin's view of original sin is thoroughly Pauline and biblical, yet exegetically he has not been successful in analyzing the precise thought of the apostle in this passage"—he is talking about Romans 5:12. However, we understand Calvin. Whether he is right or wrong is another issue. John Murray thinks Calvin is basically right but does not have it precisely right according to Paul's treatment of the issue in Romans 5. It is quite clear that Calvin says, essentially, "Sin is passed on. We could look at it realistically, but it is probably better to look at it representatively. In either case, what Adam did affects us. So, his sin has become our sin."

Now we come to our sin. What does it mean that Adam's sin has become our sin? Because we are Adam's descendants—part of the same tree—and he was appointed our representative by God's ordinance, Adam's sin has become our sin. We are born in sin and so deserve punishment. We are born guilty. In Adam's sin, mankind deserved to be vitiated (Book II, chapter 1, part 6). In Book II, chapter 1, part 8, Calvin says, "A contagion imparted by him resides in us, which justly deserves punishment."

Calvin also says, "Without guilt, there would be no accusation." So, the fact that we are born in sin means that we are born guilty and so deserve punishment.

This is pretty hard teaching for most people to accept. R. C. Reed, whom I quoted a little earlier, said, "Is it true, not is it palatable: a sinner's moral taste is no test." That is the issue, is it not? If this is true according to the Bible then this is what we must hold. It does not matter whether or not we like it. A sinner's moral taste is not the ultimate judge of truth, but the revelation of God in the Bible is the ultimate judge of truth. So, we are not only guilty and deserving of punishment, but we are also depraved.

We could describe that depravity in two ways. It is positive, and it is radical. Calvin says, "Our nature is not only destitute and empty of good"—that is, deprivation. This is bad enough, but more than deprivation, Calvin says, "We are characterized by depravation. We are not only deprived but we are depraved. Our nature is not only destitute and empty of good but also fertile and fruitful of every evil." I have some images of evil bubbling up within us. It draws a very bleak picture of fallen mankind. Calvin is, to some degree, reacting against Aquinas and the scholastics—the medieval theologians who taught that the Fall simply meant the loss of something additional to man's nature. They taught that the Fall strips off this something else, and we are back to the original nature. The *donum superadditum*, the added gift, is gone, leaving man as he was before the gift was added. However, this was not Calvin's view. It is not that our nature is somewhat unaffected by the Fall, just having lost the extra blessing that God placed on Adam and Eve. We are not just deprived of that extra blessing. We are also depraved so that now we do those works that Scripture calls "works of the flesh." We are not just back to some sort of beginning point but are conditioned so that the works we do are to be understood as the works of the flesh.

The Roman Catholic theologians who Calvin reacted against tended to limit the problem to part of man's nature. In other words, what really is the problem that we have now that we are descended from Adam? Many of these theologians spoke about the place of the problem as concupiscence, but by that they meant "sensuality." The lower nature, the physical part of mankind, is the problem, leaving the will and the mind if not untouched certainly not as affected as the carnal nature. Calvin will use the word "concupiscence." He says, "It is all right to use that term. It is not improper if it is applied to whatsoever is in man." So, when you read "concupiscence" in Calvin, he means the mind, the intellect, the will—everything. If everything is affected and everything is depraved, you can use "concupiscence," but do not shut off "concupiscence" to part of mankind. Part of us has fallen more than the rest of us in terms of the lower nature (the physical nature or the carnal nature) being the real seed of sin. The real seed of sin is the mind, the will; it is the whole person. That is what Calvin means here by radical depravity. He says, "Whatsoever is in man from the understanding to the will, from the soul even to the flesh, has been defiled." So, he does not leave anything untouched.

In Calvin's treatment of human sinfulness, its comprehensiveness is what sticks out. It includes both actual sinning and proclivity to sin. It touches on every aspect of human existence—the mind, the will, the body, and the soul—and it affects every stage of life. Even the youngest child bears the hidden seed of Adam. So, along with "radical," we use the word "comprehensive." However, I think we should make another point here because Calvin does this, and that is, it is radical but it is not total depravity. That means that the "T" in TULIP is wrong as far as Calvin is concerned. Those five points do not come from Calvin. They come from the aftermath of the Synod of Dordt and were a reaction to the five points of the Remonstrants or Arminians. The phrase "total depravity" gives the wrong impression. It is not total because not all wicked traits appear in every person. If it were total, all wicked traits would have to occur in every person. Those wicked traits that do appear are not fully manifested. So, when we are

speaking about Calvin's point of view, it is much better to say "radical" than to say "total." This can be found in Book II, chapter 1, part 8. We will come back to this point.

The point here is that God restrains the sinfulness of sinful people so that every sinful person does not manifest every possible sinful trait. Also, the sins that sinners do manifest are not allowed to go to their full expression. It is hard to imagine what the world would be like if we had total depravity. It is bad enough with radical depravity, but total depravity would be something else. You can use the word "total" if you use it in the sense of the comprehensiveness of our depravity. That was the intention of whoever created the five-point response. We know it came from the Synod of Dort. However, we do not know who created the TULIP acrostic. I would like to find out how that came into existence. If you are asked by the presbytery, "What are the five points of Calvinism," you should probably say "total depravity" for the first one but not get into too much detail about how Calvin might disagree. However, it would be more accurate, according to Calvin's thinking, to call it "radical" unless you can call it "total" in the sense that every part of the human person is affected. In other words, it is not just restricted to the flesh. It is "total" in the sense that it affects the intellect, for instance, as well.

We are unable to alter our condition. The title of chapter 2 of Book II is "Man is Deprived of Freedom and Bound Over to Miserable Servitude." So, we are not only in this condition of guilt and deprivation, but we cannot do anything about it. We are deprived of freedom of choice and bound over to miserable servitude. Calvin makes two points here. He says, "The supernatural gifts are altogether abolished"—and by that he means faith, love for God, and zeal for holiness. Those supernatural gifts that Adam possessed were lost. Now, people are not born with faith, love for God, and zeal for holiness. And the natural gifts were corrupted. By "natural gifts" he means reason, or intellect, and will. These have been corrupted but not destroyed. We still have a mind, and we still have a will. However, these have been so seriously impaired and totally (or radically) perverted that the mind and the will cannot function the way they should.

Then, Calvin first treats the mind (reason) and the effects of the Fall on the intellect. We sometimes speak of the Noadic effects of the Fall, and Calvin talks about that. Then, he talks about the effects of the Fall on the will. Calvin's stress on the Noadic effects of the Fall has few precedents in Christian theology. Most theologians do not give this much attention in terms of the role of the mind, but Calvin does. Both the heart (or will, if you prefer) and mind are deeply corrupted. When Peter Lombard speaks of this he talks about concupiscence being centered not only in the flesh but also in the will, but it does not affect the mind that much. So, Lombard says the mind (intellect) is relatively unscarred, but the rest of humanity is deeply vitiated. However, for Calvin, it is radical, it is total, it is across the board.

When he thinks of the reason of fallen people, he wants to divide this in two ways. He talks first about earthly things and then about heavenly things. In other words, does the mind of the unregenerate person, or the fallen person, work in terms of earthly things? And, how does it work? It does work. It works wonderfully in terms of earthly things. It is here in Book II, chapter 2, parts 14 and 15 that Calvin praises human learning. These are impressive sections because Calvin goes through the curriculum of the liberal arts and praises the learning of human beings (not Christians) in law, science, art, medicine, and mathematics. He says what a wonderful thing it is that these people have been able to learn so much in so many areas. This knowledge that human beings have and gain through the use of their fallen minds is knowledge that comes through sinful people, but it also comes from the Spirit of God, who is the sole fountain of truth. In other words, Calvin says that all of this learning is magnificent and wonderful. He celebrates it, but he says that all of this comes from God. This is not the regenerating work of God, but it is the work of God nonetheless. Special ability is given to people through God's special grace.

This can be a little confusing because we tend to use “special grace” for regenerating grace and “common grace,” which Calvin does not use, for this sort of thing. So, this is really the work of God’s common grace, but Calvin calls it “special grace,” because God gives it especially to individuals. For example, God gives special grace to one person so that he can become a great mathematician, and God gives special grace to another person so that she can become a great physician. We are not all alike. God gives special grace to individuals.

I was struck for the first time with this passage in Book II, chapter 2, part 17. I had read it many times, but it really struck me this time. Calvin asks, “For why is one person more excellent than another?” Why is one person a great musician and another person tone deaf? Calvin’s answer is this: “Is it not to display in common nature God’s special grace, which in passing many by, declares itself bound to none.” He is talking about the freedom of God in distributing these gifts however He chooses. This struck me because that same argument will be used later for election to salvation. God is free to choose whomever He pleases. In this context, God is free to give His gifts as He chooses. So, fallen man’s reason produces some great things in earthly things that are not independent of God but because of God’s special grace to those sinners. But, his understanding in heavenly things—that is, in matters related to salvation—fails. Calvin says, “Even though man is intelligent enough to taste something of things above, he misses the sum of things.” Calvin is saying that people can sometimes get a bit of an inkling about heavenly things. That goes back to Book I and the continuing witness of the sense of divinity and the seed of religion. However, it never really produces anything that is lasting or substantial. He talks about philosophers who may chance to sprinkle their books with droplets of truth. You can get some droplets of truth about spiritual things in books of fallen people, but he misses the sum of things. He does not understand the full picture, just bits and pieces.

The question has been asked, “In today’s terminology, what would God’s common grace look like when it is working in non-elect people?” God’s common grace working in non-elect people certainly produces the intellectual prowess and accomplishments of the mind. Calvin does not deal with the will here with the same detail. He is still talking about the mind. So, we could say that any part of the truth that a fallen person arrives at is due to God’s common grace. Also, Calvin says in Book I that the continuing witness that is being suppressed (the conscience and any sense of divinity) is like a flash of light that is gone before you can take a step. There is something there but not much, and it never really produces the full picture. Francis Schaeffer used to put it this way: “Fallen people have bits and pieces of spiritual truth but not the sum of things.” Calvin says, “All this capacity to understand with the understanding that follows upon it is an unstable and transitory thing in God’s sight when a solid foundation of truth does not underlie it.” If there is just a little bit there, there is not much, there is no foundation, and it does not last. Here (in Book II, chapter 2, section 18) is where he has the famous illustration that “man is like a traveler passing through a field at night who, in a momentary lightening flash, sees far and wide but the sight vanishes so swiftly that he is plunged again into the darkness of night before he can take a step.” With the flash of lightening you suddenly see something, but then it is gone. You are really, in a sense, worse off than before because you have been blinded by the lightening and cannot take a step.

We have looked at the mind. Now we need to come to the will. Calvin says, “The will is so deeply vitiated and corrupted in its every part that it can beget nothing but evil” (Book II, chapter 2, part 26). The title of chapter 3 is “Only Damnable Things Come Forth From Man’s Corrupt Nature.” Calvin does not really treat the will quite as fully as he does the mind. He does not ask, “Can the will make good decisions in earthly things?” We should probably parallel what he has said about the mind with the will. Rather than getting into what the will can do in earthly things by God’s grace, he simply moves on to the fact that only damnable things can come forth from man’s corrupt nature. He neglects to discuss, as he

does for the fallen mind, the remaining capacity for good and earthly (or lower) things. I do not think that Calvin would disagree with that. He just does not develop that thought.

As we come to the will, there are a number of things to be said. Not all wicked traits appear in every person. Here, we are back to the point we talked about earlier, that is, depravity is radical but not (at least in an absolute sense) total. His example is Camillus and Catiline. Camillus was a noble Roman patriot and a good man. He was not a Christian, which is Calvin's point. However, he was noble and admirable. Catiline was an evil man. He was a man who conspired to assassinate Cicero and to overthrow the Roman government in 63 BC. So, we have one good man and one bad man, and neither one of them was Christian. However, we have to use "good" in a certain sense here. Calvin's point is this: does Camillus have more righteousness than Catiline, the evil man? The answer is no. They are both equally sinners. The good man is just as sinful as the evil man. They are both guilty and depraved. So, one is not better than the other in that sense. Does Camillus, the noble patriot, have as much sin as Catiline, the evil man? The answer again is no. One man is not as sinful as another man. They are both equally sinful in one sense, and that is, nothing they do is spiritually good. However, one has more sin than the other. They are equally lost but not equally sinful. Why? It is because God's grace restrains where it does not cleanse.

This gets back the point of radical verses total. The grace of God does not cleanse Camillus because he is not one of the elect. He is not one of God's people. However, God's grace works in this man to restrain sin so that what we see is a good man and not an evil man. God's special grace makes possible admirable and heroic actions in non-elect persons. Abraham Kuyper said something that strikes me as being right on target with what Calvin says. Kuyper said, "You know certain people who have not as yet been able to grasp the faith but whose noble qualities of mind and heart render them peculiarly interesting and refreshing. Frequently, they are far more attractive to you than many a confessed believer. They are as flowers in the bud that cannot come to bloom. But, this half-open bud exhales exquisite fragrance." He is talking about unsaved people. We have all had that experience where we know unsaved people who are wonderful. We admire certain qualities in them. It is like a bud that cannot open, but even that bud exhales exquisite fragrance. So, not all wicked traits appear in every man. Man, however, cannot do good in heavenly things. It might be a brief insight, but it is just not lasting. It does not lead to anything lasting, because there is no foundation there.

Next, Calvin gets into a history of the doctrine of free will. Calvin discusses what the philosophers said about free will. His point is that there are some droplets of truth in the philosophers but mostly error. The philosophers taught that the will is free to follow reason. The mind acts, thinks, and cogitates, and then the will is free. Then, he comes to the church fathers and says that they are too close to the philosophers. He tries to make the best case he can for the church fathers. Yet, he acknowledges that they "so differ, waver, or speak confusedly on this subject that almost nothing certain can be derived from their writings." Erasmus is a contemporary example of this confusion. Augustine is the person he held on to for dear life, because in Augustine he found somebody he thought taught the right view of the will. I pretty much agree with Augustine, whom the godly, by common consent, justly invest with the greatest authority. So, philosophers get it wrong almost entirely. Church fathers are confused. Augustine is right. And, the scholastic theologians go from bad to worse. These are the medieval theologians who minimize the effect of the Fall. They believe in a perfectly unblemished reason and a will that is also largely unimpaired. Of course, this is not something that Calvin could accept. What is Calvin's doctrine? It is Augustine's doctrine. He has already praised Augustine.

Let me set forth Calvin's view of the doctrine of free will. Calvin prefers to avoid the expression "free will," but he will use it in a certain restricted sense. He talks about free will, but he defines what he

really thinks it means. He says, “What purpose is served by labeling with a proud name such a slight thing?” Do we have free will? “Yes,” Calvin says. What does it mean? It means that you can do what you want to do. What do you want to do? You want to sin, so it means that you are free to sin. That is what free will is. If you use it that way, Calvin would agree. Otherwise, he would want to say, as Luther did, that the will is in bondage. His point is that since the Fall, man has not been deprived of will but of a healthy will. We still have a will. It is not abolished. However, it is no longer a healthy will. We act by the will, but we cannot act rightly by the will. We cannot choose good. In one sense, our wills are bound. We can beget nothing but evil. In another sense, as I explained a moment ago, the will is free. By that, Calvin means that we are free to act wickedly because that is the way we are going to act. A bad tree cannot bring forth good fruit. We are free to act by will and not by compulsion—that is, the acts of fallen people are not acts that are coerced. A fallen person does not say, “I do not want to sin, but I am forced to.” A fallen person says, “I want to sin, and I am free to sin.” So, we sin willingly, not unwillingly or by compulsion. Sin is an internal necessity and not an external compulsion. We sin out of necessity because we are sinners. To say it another way, we sin because we want to and not because we are forced to, and we cannot free ourselves from wanting to. Jonathan Edwards said, “One may will as one pleases, but one may not please as one pleases.” You may will as you please, but you cannot change your pleasing. That is what you are. Consequently, we sin freely, not by compulsion. Calvin took over Augustine’s insight that we are indeed free but not freed. We are bound in sin, but we are free to sin. We are free to choose our sins. You can sin any way you want to. Fallen people sin as they choose. What purpose is served by labeling with a proud name such a slight thing? We have free will, which sounds good, but when you understand Calvin’s understanding, it is a slight thing.

Now, all of this is leading up to what Calvin calls the principle point, and that is the need for God’s grace. By this point, Calvin has wiped out any possibility of human moral improvement in any deep spiritual way. Unsaved, unregenerate, non-elect people can think good things, accomplish great things, and even make decent actions. However, none of that affects our standing with God. It does not eliminate the fact that we are sinners. Calvin does not drag us down into the depths of our perversity in order to leave us there but rather to prepare us to hear the good news of the Gospel. Luther says that the first half of the Gospel is that we are lost. You have to know you are lost before you can want to be saved. So, when you preach the Gospel, you preach lostness to people and that salvation comes through Christ. This is what Calvin is doing in Book II. He is hammering home our lostness, perversity, depravity, and guilt. We ought to be ready to hear the Gospel now, because there is no other message that can redeem us. God is the author of our salvation, but we respond from the heart. Salvation is not coercion either. We respond willingly. And, as we will see, it is God who produces that willingness in us. There is a chapter on how God works in men’s hearts. You have perhaps read that, so I will not comment on it. There is also a chapter on refutation of the objections commonly put forward in defense of free will. Calvin has a whole chapter saying that people have objections to this. One of the objections, for example, is that it does away with human responsibility. Calvin answers all of those in a very good way.

That is as far as we will go in this lesson. Next, we will look at redemption through Christ in Book II, chapters 6 through 8.