The Person of Christ, I

At present we are in the first five chapters of Book II, on the need for the Redeemer. Book II is about knowledge of the Redeemer, "God the Redeemer in Christ," as Calvin expresses it. For five chapters he sets forth why we need a redeemer, and then for six chapters he tells us that Christ the Redeemer is the theme of the whole Bible, the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. Today we will get into Calvin's discussion on the person of Christ, and next time we will look at his discussion on the work of Christ. Today we will discuss the person of Christ, Book II, chapters 12 through 14.

Let us join in prayer, as we use a prayer again from Calvin to begin this lesson. Let us pray.

"Grant, Almighty God, that as Thou not only invitest us continually by the voice of Thy Gospel, to seek Thee, but also offerest to us Thy Son as our mediator, through whom an access to Thee is opened, that we may find Thee a propitious Father. O grant that, relying on Thy kind invitation, we may through life exercise ourselves in prayer, and as so many evils disturb us on all sides and so many wants distress and oppress us, may we be led more earnestly to call on Thee and in the meanwhile be never wearied in this exercise of prayer, until having been heard by Thee throughout life, we may at length be gathered to Thine eternal kingdom, where we shall enjoy that salvation which Thou hast promised to us and of which also Thou daily testifiest to us by Thy Gospel and be forever united to Thine only begotten Son, of whom we are now members, that we may be partakers of all the blessings which He has obtained for us by His death. Amen."

As I have said, Calvin treats both the person of Christ and the work of Christ: the person of Christ in Book II, chapters 12 through 14, and the work of Christ in Book II, chapters 15 through 17. That will take us through the rest of Book II. Calvin does not make a sharp distinction between the person and work of Christ; it really is not possible to do so. When you talk about the person of Christ, you have to talk to some extent about the work of Christ, and when you talk about the work of Christ, you certainly have to talk about the person of Christ. However, I think, in general terms, we could say that Calvin maintains that distinction of person, chapters 12 through 14 and work, chapters 15 through 17. The outline that we will follow, then, is this:

1. Book, II chapter 12, "The Mediator Must be God and Man."
2. Book I, chapter 13, "Christ is God." We have already studied that, but we want to review that or at least note that Calvin has dealt with the deity of Christ in Book I, chapter 13.
3. Book II, chapter 13, "Christ is Man." It is easy to remember that, because they are both chapter 13. Chapter 13 of Book I is about how Christ is God, while chapter 13 of Book II is about how Christ is man.
4. Book II, chapter 14, "Christ is One Person."

So that is the outline we will follow in this lesson, beginning with this: "Christ had to become man in order to fulfill the office of mediator" (Book II, chapter 12). I think we should note here once again Calvin's use of the concept of accommodation. Here it is not simply accommodation in words, but it is accommodation of God in Himself, as God becomes our mediator. We see this especially in the incarnation of Christ. You know that Calvin says that Christ is Mediator before the incarnation. We will get into that in a few minutes. In fact, He is Mediator from the very beginning, in Calvin's understanding of the role of the second person of the Trinity as Mediator after the creation of mankind. However, this is especially evident in the incarnation. Calvin quotes the church father Irenaeus in Book II, chapter 6, section 4. Irenaeus writes that "the Father, Himself infinite, becomes finite in the Son." That does not mean that the first person of the Trinity becomes finite in the second person, because the

second person of the Trinity is also, and remains, infinite. We will look at that. It is an important point that Calvin makes later in his treatment of the person of Christ, but Irenaeus writes that "the Father, Himself infinite, becomes finite in the Son, Jesus Christ, for He has accommodated Himself to our little measure, lest our minds be overwhelmed by the immensity of His glory." So the great God accommodates Himself to us as He becomes, in the second person, man. The question then is why did Christ become man?

Calvin says a number of things about this. He says, first of all, there is no simple, or absolute, necessity. That is, Christ would not have become man without the fall of mankind. There is no simple or absolute necessity. There was nothing inherent in Christ or the Trinity that would demand an incarnation. Now the reason Calvin was concerned about this—you might think that this is a kind of obtuse point that he would not have to make—is because there was a contemporary theologian by the name of Osiander. Osiander taught that the incarnation was a necessary part of creation. As soon as God made man, it was necessary then for God to become man. Calvin did not think much of Osiander as a theologian, and he takes him on here and in other places. When he describes Osiander's view of a necessary incarnation, he uses the expression, "such rubbish as this." But he takes some time to deal with this "rubbish," as he calls it. Calvin held that the purpose of the incarnation was our redemption and nothing else. That was the reason God became man, to redeem us. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," as the Scripture says in 1 Timothy 1:15. So there is no simple or absolute necessity for the incarnation, *contra* Osiander. However, Calvin says, there is a conditional necessity. He expresses this in a number of different ways. One way that he says it, in Book II, chapter 12, section 1, is that "Christ's incarnation stemmed from a heavenly decree." So even though there is not an absolute necessity, it was necessary for Christ to become man because of God's decree.

I think it is important here to recognize that Calvin does not set the Father against the Son. There is nothing in Calvin that leads us to think that the Father is justice and the Son is love. Sometimes in sermon illustrations, or in sermons without illustrations, you can get the idea that it is the Father who is demanding justice and it is the Son who suggests the solution. There is nothing like that in Calvin. Rather, there is the closest cooperation between the Father and the Son in the work of redemption. Calvin says, "The Father's mercy made Christ's action possible"—so the mercy is the mercy of the Trinity, the Father as well as the Son—"and the Son ungrudgingly took our nature"—so there is no tension within the Trinity on this issue.

Calvin does not develop this heavenly decree into a covenant of redemption. When we were talking about covenant theology last time, I said that some later covenant theologians had three covenants: the covenant of redemption, the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace. I think you can find the ideas of a covenant of redemption and a covenant of works in Calvin, but not the language. Calvin never speaks of a covenant of works, nor does he speak of a covenant of redemption. He does show the close harmony between the Father and the Son, with the decree of God the Father in giving the elect to Christ and the work of God the Son, who at the will of the Father redeems the elect. In a sense, you might say that this is the substance of the later covenant of redemption, but Calvin is very restrained in his treatment of this. Some later writers were not so restrained. I am thinking particularly of Edward Fisher's *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, which had a very great impact on Scotland, producing the "Marrow-men" of Scotland. That was a good development in Scottish theology, but Edward Fisher's book, written in 1644, goes into quite a lot of detail on this point, even establishing an imaginary conversation between the Father and the Son in eternity. Of course, Calvin does not do anything like that. His point, I think, could be extended into a covenant of redemption, although Calvin does not use the word "covenant" to describe what he is talking about here.

What does he mean, then, by "conditional necessity"? Given the condition of our fallenness, the fact that we have fallen into sin, then if God wills to rescue us, it is necessary to do it through Christ as Mediator. That is where the necessity comes in, as far as Calvin is concerned. Because we are sinners—given that condition—then if God is going to redeem us, this is the way that He must do it. Calvin does not see a lot of options for God, as some of the medieval theologians did, especially the late medieval nominalists. They taught that God could have redeemed creation in any way He chose. The necessity was only God's choosing to redeem us, but He could have done that as He did through Christ or He could have done it some other way. For Calvin, given the condition of our fallenness, this is the only way. It is the only way, Calvin says, because of the nature of our condition as fallen people.

Calvin makes a point that is a little bit startling, perhaps, the first time you look at it. He says, as you may remember from the reading, that even unfallen man needed a mediator. There needed to be a mediator even before the Fall—not an incarnation, but a mediator, because man was created finite. Here is how he puts it in Book II, chapter 12, section 1: "Even if man had remained free from all stain, his condition would have been too lowly for him to reach God without a mediator." So unfallen Adam and Eve, because they were in a perfect but finite condition, were too lowly to reach God without a mediator. I think we would call that "mediation as sustenance." That is not Calvin's term, but I think that helps to set forth that idea that he develops there. Even unfallen but finite man needed a mediator, so "mediation as sustenance" would be the work of the mediator upholding and ordering unfallen creation. There is a role there for the second person of the Trinity before the Fall in sustaining and upholding that creation.

The Reformed tradition has always held that the function that I have just described—the sustaining of the creation—belonged to Christ, but it has not usually described this role as the role of a mediator. Generally, the Reformed tradition will reserve the word "mediator" for the work of Christ in relation to fallen humanity. However, the role of Christ in sustaining creation is one that is clearly present in Reformed theology. This is how the Westminster Confession of Faith puts it in chapter 7: "The distance between God and the creature is so great that, although reasonable creatures do owe their obedience to Him as their creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him"—"fruition" is a word that we do not generally use today, but it means that we could not have any enjoyment or use of God—"as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which He has been pleased to express by way of covenant." So what the Westminster Divines call "covenant" here, the covenant of works, Calvin calls the work of the Mediator. The Westminster Confession says that unfallen man needed God's voluntary condescension, and they call it "covenant." Calvin says that unfallen man needed a mediator. So even though the tradition does not follow Calvin in using the word "mediator," I think the idea is certainly there in the Reformed tradition.

If unfallen man needed a mediator, how much more does fallen man need a mediator? That is the next point that Calvin makes, and here we come to "mediation as reconciliation." I will use the terms mediation as sustenance before the Fall and mediation as reconciliation after the Fall. Before the Fall, the Mediator sustains the creation; after the Fall, He recovers a rebellious creation. When Calvin gets to this point, mediation as reconciliation, he speaks of mediation now in stages. We still have not come to the incarnation, but Christ's work of mediation starts long before the incarnation. In fact, it starts before the Fall. But now, after the Fall, the Mediator is present in the Old Testament, as we have already seen. The same mediator is in the old covenant and in the new covenant. The second person is present in various ways: in the words of the promise, beginning with Genesis 3:15, under the signs and the ceremonies of the old covenant, in the sacrifices and the various ceremonies, and in the presence of the angel of the LORD. He sometimes appears as a pre-incarnate, visible presence of the angel of the LORD. This is how Calvin puts it in Book I, chapter 13, section 10, that "God's Word"—the second person of

the Trinity—"already at that time, as a sort of foretaste, began to fulfill the office of mediator, for even though He was not yet clothed with flesh, He came down, so to speak, as an intermediary, in order to approach believers more intimately." Christ will come down in the incarnation and become one of us, but He comes down, so to speak, even before the incarnation in these various ways that I have outlined. He does this to get closer to humankind, to approach the Old Testament believers more intimately. So there is the Old Testament role of the Mediator; then at the incarnation, He is manifest in the flesh. Calvin's favorite way of saying, "the person and work of Christ" is simply to say "the Mediator." When Calvin says "the Mediator," he includes both the person and the work of Christ.

So the first reason we need a mediator is because of the nature of our condition, first finite and then fallen. Second, we need a mediator because of the requirements of our salvation. This is why we are talking about a conditional necessity here, because of the requirements of our salvation. We have a need, as we have seen in the first five chapters of Book II. We need to be restored to God's grace. Our sin has come in through Adam and through our own embracing of that fallen nature. Both original sin and our actual sins have broken our relationship with God. We need to be restored to God's grace, and then God provides a way for us to be restored. We must pay the penalties for sin, Calvin says, but we cannot. Then Christ comes, manifest in the flesh, to pay the penalty that we deserved, because of the requirements of our salvation—our sin, our need, the fact that we must pay, the fact that we cannot pay, the fact that only God can pay, but man is required to pay—commands the God-man as the solution to our dilemma. This is how Calvin puts it in Book II, chapter 12, section 2, "Who could have done this had not the selfsame Son of God become the Son of man and had not so taken what was ours as to impart what was His to us and to make what was His by nature ours by grace?" He must be God, He must be man, to pay what we could not pay and to give to us what we did not deserve. In Book II, chapter 12, section 3, we find another summary statement: "In short, since neither as God alone could He feel death, nor as man alone could He overcome it, He coupled human nature with divine, that to atone for sin He might submit the weakness of the one to death and that, wrestling with death by the power of the other nature, He might win victory for us." These are classic Anselmian statements, and Calvin insists that the Mediator must be God and He must be man. That is why there is a conditional necessity. Given the Fall, given our need, if God wills to redeem us, this is the way that God must redeem us.

Later, when we come to the next lesson, we will look at Christ's work—the death of Christ and what that means. We could talk about it here, but I think it fits a little better later on. So the first point is that Christ had to become man in order to fulfill the office of mediator. The second point is that Christ is God. That goes back to Book I, so we will not return to that, but I just want to remind you that we find Calvin's treatment of the doctrine of the deity of Christ in Book I. Now, in Book II, chapter 13, we find Calvin's treatment of the doctrine that Christ is man. Then, after we discuss this, we will see that He is the God-man, but He is one person.

Let us think about what Calvin says now about Christ as man. Calvin is very insistent, here in the *Institutes* and everywhere in the commentaries, that this means Christ is true man. He is a true human person. There were people in antiquity, as well as contemporaries of Calvin, who denied this. The Manichees talked about the "heavenly flesh of Christ." They said He had flesh, but it was not human flesh. It was not flesh like we have, but it was heavenly flesh. The Marcionites, and followers of other forms of ancient Gnosticism, spoke about the "mere appearance of Christ." They said He looked like a man, but He was not a man. It was an appearance and not a reality. Some of the Anabaptists in Calvin's own day also denied the true humanness of Christ. These included Menno Simons, the Dutch priest who became an Anabaptist after the debacle at Münster in 1535. He became the father of the Mennonites. Menno Simons taught that Christ took, or created, His body out of nothing. It was a body, but it was a special body, created out of nothing. (The Mennonites, by the way, have not followed Menno Simmons

in that way. The Mennonites today are quite orthodox in their view of the two natures of Christ.) But against all of that past heresy and contemporary heresy, Calvin insisted that Christ assumed our flesh. It was not a divinely created flesh, but human flesh like ours. So Christ was human, in all respects like us, with the single exception of sin—not finitude. He is like us in every way except without sin, but He is finite in His human body, as we are. Book II, chapter 13, section 1 calls Christ "a man truly begotten of human seed, subject to hunger, thirst, cold, and other infirmities of our nature." When you turn to the commentaries, it is pretty impressive how consistent Calvin is in this, because he shows that Christ experienced emotional states and psychological conditions. Christ was sometimes frustrated, sometimes unhappy, sometimes lonely, and so on, but there was no sin in all of that.

Let me just illustrate this in one place in the commentaries, and that is John 11:33, where it says, "He groaned in the spirit." Calvin comments at some length on this. This is just prior to the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Calvin says, "But how do groaning and trouble of mind belong to the person of Christ? It seems absurd to some when we say that Christ, as one among men, was subject to human passion. They think that the only way He sorrowed or rejoiced was by taking into Himself those emotions when He thought fit, by some secret dispensation." Calvin says this is the view of Augustine. He does not often disagree with Augustine, but he does sometimes, and here he does. Augustine said that Christ simply decided to take into Himself these feelings in order to make a point or illustrate something, but these were not real feelings that would have marked Christ, because, to Augustine, it does not seem worthy to think of the second person of the Trinity groaning in spirit. "But it will," says Calvin, "to my mind, be more agreeable to Scripture if we make the simple statement that when the Son of God put on our flesh, He also of His own accord put on human feelings, so that He differed in nothing from His brethren, sin only excepted." In this way, we detract nothing from the glory of Christ when we say that He submitted to this. When He became man, He became man. That does not mean only flesh, but it also means the emotional state of mankind. I will not read much more of this, but Calvin goes on to say, "Christ took our emotions into Himself so that by His power we may subdue whatever is sinful in them." You see, if He does not really take our emotions, if that is just something that He will from time to time voluntarily bring in to Himself, but they are not real emotions of His human nature, then He is not an example for us there, because we are not like that. We cannot decide that we are going to be sad or glad or anything else. These things just come; we do not decide that.

Speaking of Calvin's commentaries, there is a complete set of the New Testament commentaries that was completed fairly recently, and then there is the old set of all of Calvin's commentaries—Old Testament and New Testament. The complete set in the older version appears at good prices from time to time, but it is really better to get the new Torrance edition, which is a new translation. Gradually, new translations of the Old Testament commentaries are coming out, too, although it will be years before they are complete. I have the Torrance edition of the New Testament and a good bit of the Old Testament in the old translation by the Calvin Translation Society, but the old translation is much more difficult, not because Calvin's language was difficult, but because translators in the nineteenth century liked to make things sound Victorian, so the old translation does not really sound like Calvin should sound.

Christ was a true man, but He was a sinless man. There is something important to notice here, and that is that, according to Calvin, Christ was not sinless because of the virgin birth. Sometimes people have the idea that the reason Christ is sinless is that He did not have a human father. (By the way, Calvin held what we consider a Roman Catholic doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary. Calvin believed that Mary remained a virgin throughout the rest of her life; most Protestants do not accept that.) However, Calvin did not connect the sinlessness of Christ to the virgin birth. The virgin birth is the source of an authentic, true humanity. Christ was born of a woman. That is where His humanity came from, not some

special created flesh, but born of Mary. Calvin insists that the virgin was not merely a channel through which Christ flowed. He was born of Mary, like other people in this world are born of their mothers. The difference is that He did not have an earthly father, but He was born of a woman. Calvin insists, against some people who would have differed with him, that the woman's seed must share in the act of generation. The woman is not just a channel through which a child comes, so that the male seed would have been the only important factor in the generation. As Calvin understood it, the woman's seed and the man's seed combine. This means that since Christ was born of a woman, and the woman was sinful—because all women are sinners as well as all men—then He was born of a sinner. We cannot, then, attribute His sinlessness to the virgin birth. The sinlessness of Christ is not due to the lack of a human father, but rather it is due to God's miracle. That is the major emphasis in Book II, chapter 13, section 4. "Christ is sinless because He was sanctified by the Spirit, that the generation might be pure and undefiled, as would have been true before Adam's fall." It was the work of the Spirit that guaranteed that Christ was born sinless, as people would have been born, if anyone had been born, before the Fall. The sinlessness of Christ is not to be attributed to the virgin birth. The true, full humanity of Christ is to be attributed to the virgin birth.

By the way, you probably notice that Calvin is not politically correct—and, I think, not even biblically correct—when he makes certain statements here in chapter 13 about the superiority of the male sex. He does not get that from the Bible; that comes from his culture.

Let me just illustrate the point about the virgin birth from his commentary on Luke 1:35. I will just read a little of this: "Thus, though Christ was born of the seed of Abraham"—He was one of the seed of Abraham because He was born of Mary, a descendant of Abraham—"He drew no contagion from that blemished nature, for from the very first, God's Spirit kept him pure, not merely that He should abound in holiness unto Himself alone but rather that He should make others holy. The very mode of His conception testifies that He was set apart from sinners to be our mediator." In that last sentence, I do not think Calvin means that the virgin birth made Christ sinless, but virginal conception (that is really a more accurate way to speak of it than virgin birth) testifies to, but does not create, Christ's sinlessness. The miracle at His birth testifies to something unusual happening, and the Spirit maintains His sinlessness, even though He is born of a sinful woman. It is the miracle of the Spirit that enables a virgin to bear a child, and it is the miracle of the Spirit that assures the sinlessness of Christ, not the virgin birth. Calvin does not link the deity of Christ to the virgin birth. Neither does he link the sinlessness of Christ to the virgin birth. The reason He is sinless is not because He does not have an earthly father. He had an earthly mother, and Mary later makes a sacrifice of purification, which acknowledges her sinfulness, so sin can flow through one or two parents. In Christ's case, it does not, because the miracle of the Holy Spirit shields Him from sinfulness. He is born, then, as a pure human being.

Now we get into something a little complex, if that is not complex enough, and that is this: "Christ is man"—that is, true and sinless man—"and at the same time eternal God, united to but not restricted to the flesh." We need to look at a couple of passages here. I will turn to Book II, chapter 13, section 4 and read it to you. This is right at the end of chapter 13, at the bottom of page 481 in our edition of the *Institutes*. It is a famous passage in Calvin, and here it is: "For even if the Word, in His immeasurable essence, united with the nature of man into one person, we do not imagine that He was confined therein. Here is something marvelous: the Son of God descended from heaven in such a way that, without leaving heaven, He willed to be born in the virgin's womb, to go about the earth and to hang upon the cross; yet He continuously filled the world, even as He had done from the beginning." That is a view that Calvin set forth. He also sets it forth in Book IV, chapter 17, section 30. I will read from Volume 2; this idea comes up again in his discussion of the Lord's Supper, as you would probably guess. This is from the top of page 1403. "There is a commonplace distinction of the schools to which I am not

ashamed to refer." That means it is a medieval scholastic distinction. Calvin usually does not think much of these, but here he says he is not ashamed to refer to this. "Although the whole Christ is everywhere, still the whole of that which is in Him is not everywhere, and would that the schoolmen themselves had honestly weighed the force of this statement, for thus would the absurd fiction of Christ's carnal presence have been obviated. Therefore, since the whole Christ is everywhere, our Mediator is ever present with His own people, and in the Supper reveals Himself in a special way, yet in such a way that the whole Christ is present, but not in His wholeness."

What does that mean? The Word of God became incarnate in Jesus, but not in such a way that He has no existence also beyond the flesh—Calvin's phrase is *etiam extra carnem,* "also beyond the flesh." That is the key expression here. It means that as Christ lived on earth, the second person of the Trinity existed fully in Christ, but also beyond the flesh. You might say that the incarnation was not the temporary abdication of the Lord's empire. When He became man, He did not cease to do all the things that He had done before. There was a Christmas hymn written in the fifth century, which says this: "The Word becomes incarnate and yet remains on high." That very much expresses Calvin's idea. The Word becomes incarnate and yet remains on high. There are many places you could look beyond the *Institutes* for this. The commentaries on Luke 23:43, John 14:12, Acts 1:11, and Hebrews 1:14, and the whole Calvinist tradition, follows Calvin in this as well.

Let me illustrate that with the Heidelberg Catechism. Question 46 says, "How do you understand the words, 'He ascended into heaven?'" After giving an answer to that, the catechism asks in question 47, "Then is not Christ with us unto the end of the world, as He promised us?" If He ascended into heaven, is He not with us? The answer to question 47 is "Christ is true man and true God. As a man, He is no longer on earth, but in His divinity, majesty, grace, and spirit, He is never absent from us." Then comes the important question for our purposes, question 48, which asks, "But are not the two natures in Christ separated from each other in this way, if the humanity is not wherever the divinity is?" Calvin argues here—as he will against the Lutherans in Book IV when he comes to the Lord's Supper—that the humanity of Christ is at the right hand of the Father, in that one place, but Christ is present with us in the Lord's Supper in His fullness and in His wholeness. So the catechism says, "But are not the two natures in Christ separated from each other in this way, if the humanity is not wherever the divinity is? Not at all. For since divinity is incomprehensible and everywhere present, it must follow that the divinity is indeed beyond the bounds of the humanity which it has assumed and is nonetheless ever in that humanity as well and remains personally united to it."

It almost sounds like the catechism and Calvin are saying two things at once, and they probably are. The divinity is fully in Christ and united to the humanity in Christ, but at the same time, it also exists beyond the flesh. Some people have seen this as a very important aspect of Calvin's thought and perhaps the idea that is most original in it. I do not think it is original, although the Lutherans have viewed this as something specifically Calvin's. They call it the *extra-calvinisticum.* If you hear of the *extra-calvinisticum,* this is what it refers to. Calvin's expression is *etiam extra carnem,* "also beyond the flesh," but the Lutherans called it the *extra-calvinisticum,* which could be translated as "that extra Calvin thing." They said it was a Calvinistic idea that after the incarnation the Son of God has His existence also beyond the flesh. But David Willis' book, *Calvin's Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-Called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology* makes it pretty clear that this is not something unique. Willis shows that this idea was embraced throughout Christian history. To illustrate the fact that others were saying the same thing, we could cite the fact that in Book IV, Calvin says that this is a distinction that has been made in the schools that he is not ashamed to embrace. In fact, David Willis says it could be called the *extra-catholicum* or the *extra-patristicum* rather than the *extra-calvinisticum.* In other words, it could be said to be the idea of the Catholic Church or the idea of the church fathers. As I was

re-reading fairly recently the *Incarnation of the Word* by the Greek church father Athanasius, the hero of Nicaea, I came across these words: "Christ banished death from us and made us anew, and invisible and imperceptible as in Himself He is, He became visible through His works and revealed Himself as the Word of the Father, the ruler and king of the whole creation. There is a paradox in this last statement that we must now examine. The Word was not hedged in by His body, nor did His presence in the body prevent His being present elsewhere as well. When He moved His body, He did not cease also to direct the universe by His might and mind. No, the marvelous truth is that, being the Word, so far from being contained in anything, He actually contained all things in Himself."

Let us come then to the next point. Christ is one person. You might think that what Calvin has just said would imply a kind of Nestorianism. Calvin has been accused of Nestorianism, just as Lutherans have been accused of Eutychianism. However, Calvin will now assert that there are not two persons, but one person. Christ is one person. "He who was the Son of God became the Son of Man, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person." That is a Chalcedonian statement—not by confusion of substance—the divinity and the humanity each retain their distinctive natures unimpaired.

Now we come to the question of how to deal with various Scriptures in light of this idea. Calvin makes four points here. The first is that Scripture sometimes attributes to Christ what must be referred solely to His humanity. You see, He is human and He is divine, but He is one person, so Scripture will attribute to the one person what we must see as belonging solely to His humanity. For instance, He increased in age and wisdom. Now, you can speak of the one person of Christ increasing in age and wisdom, but you realize that has to be applied to His humanity, not His divinity. The divine nature of Christ cannot increase in age and wisdom. Similarly, the fact that Christ says He did not know some things cannot be attributed to His divinity, because as divine, He is omniscient. That could only be attributed to His humanity. Thus, human attributes are properly applied to the person of Christ, because He is true man. As true man, you can say, as Luke says, He increased in age and wisdom.

The second point is that Scripture sometimes attributes to Christ what must be referred to solely as His divinity. For instance, when Christ said, "Before Abraham was, I am," that is true of the person of Christ, but we cannot think of that as being applied to His humanity, which did not exist before Mary conceived Him. However, it does apply to His divinity. As the eternal Son of God, He existed before Abraham. Divine qualities are properly applied to Christ because He is true God.

Third, Calvin says that Scripture sometimes describes what embraces both natures but fits neither alone. Calvin puts in this category those things that apply to the office of the Mediator. That is, the Mediator is both God and man, so when Scripture talks about the work of Christ as our redeemer on the cross, that is God and man. That cannot be applied only to the humanity or only to the divinity. It must be applied both to the humanity and to the divinity in the one person of Christ.

Finally, there is the communicating of the characteristics, or the communicating of the idioms, as it is called in theological language. Scripture sometimes attributes to Christ's divinity what more properly belongs to His humanity, and vice versa. The way Calvin says it here is "The things that He carried out in His human nature are transferred, improperly although not without reason, to His divinity." Can you think of an example of this? Here is one: God purchased the church with His own blood. Now, can God shed His blood? No, God does not shed blood. This properly belongs to the human nature, because only the human nature can shed blood, but the statement is applied to the person who is both God and man. In this passage, the person is called God and not man. So it is a true statement that God shed His own blood, but it does not mean that God has blood. It means that Christ, the God-man, who in His human nature shed His blood, is also God. So that is a verbal, not an actual, ontological, communicating of

attributes. In other words, the attribute of humanity is verbally assigned, improperly but not without a cause, to the divine nature. However, this is not an ontological shift. Nothing real has happened there, although what Calvin is expressing is very real. The attribute of one nature—"His own blood"—is affirmed of the person who is then named by His other nature, God. That is what we mean by the communication of the attributes.

I must move on to complete this, so if that is not clear, meditate on it. Christ is one person, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. The two natures constitute one Christ. The two natures remain distinct, but not in such a way as to constitute two persons. That is a great mystery. It seems to me that Calvin is very true to Chalcedon. Chalcedon does not solve this issue. It remains a mystery how Christ can have two perfect natures and yet be one person.

Calvin does give a number of illustrations here. It is rather curious to me that when he is talking about the Trinity, he says we should not try to illustrate it because we will get it wrong, but when he comes to the two natures of Christ, he ventures a couple of illustrations. Maybe he felt he had some stronger illustrations here, but in Book II, chapter 14, section 1, he sets forth the fact that "man consists of body and soul. Each retains its own distinctive nature, yet there is one man." I am body, I am soul, yet I am not two people but one person. In his commentary on 1 Timothy 3:16, Calvin says, "He"—that is, God—"appeared in a body." He uses the comparison of the two natures of Christ to two eyes of man. Each eye can have its vision separately, but when we are looking at anything, "our vision, which in itself is divided, joins up and unites in order to give itself as a whole to the object that is put before it." So you can think of those two illustrations. I am not necessarily recommending that you use those in sermons, but at least there is a possibility there of ways to think about how there can be two and yet one, two natures in one person.

I want to review here the main points of Book II, chapter 14, section 3, which I call "the career of the Mediator." First, remember, there is the work of the Mediator before the Fall. That work is sustenance, sustaining unfallen creation. Then, there is the role of the Mediator as reconciler. We see this role first of all in the Old Testament, as Christ appears in the word of the promise and in the ceremonies and, at times, as the angel of the LORD. The third stage in the career of the Mediator is the incarnation—His earthly birth and life ending in His death, resurrection, and ascension. The fourth stage in the career of the Mediator is His session, in which He sits at the right hand of the Father. According to Calvin, that position that Christ has now is not the same as the exalted position which, as eternal God, He never ceased to occupy. The second person has always had a role of glory, so also beyond the flesh. Even now Christ is in heaven as a man in His flesh, but He exists as He has always existed, also beyond the flesh. "Just as He was made low, not for His own sake, but for ours, so He was exalted in His body by which He entered heaven for us." The incarnation is no temporary episode in the life of the second person, but it is rather a permanent involvement in the human situation. There is yet one further step in the career of the Mediator, and that is the judgment. Book II, chapter 14, section 3 says, "When as partakers in heavenly glory we shall see God as He is, Christ, having discharged the office of Mediator, will cease to be the ambassador of His Father and will be satisfied with Him with that glory which He enjoyed before the creation of the world." That sums up the career of the Mediator.

Finally, I want to present a brief evaluation of Calvin's Christology. Calvin speaks often of learned ignorance. He urges careful use of the biblical witness, but all before the mystery. He does not pretend to empty out the mystery here. Calvin's preferred expression for the incarnate person of Christ is "God manifest in the flesh." That is how he liked to express that. Constantly you will see him say something like this: "He who as man did such-and-such was at the same time the Son of God." So he keeps together both the divinity and the humanity in one person, but there is no shading over of the humanity

into the divinity or the divinity into the humanity. The divinity remains divinity, and the humanity remains humanity. In Book IV, chapter 17, section 30, we read, "Christ did not suffer in His divinity, but the Christ who suffered in the flesh as an abject and despised man was also, as God, the Lord of glory." There is a stress on the distinction of the two natures. Calvin is not a Nestorian, and his stress on the two natures, I think, guards both the divine and the human.

Next time we will look at the work of Christ.