

Justification and Christian Freedom

This lesson will cover Calvin's long section on justification in Book III, chapters 11 through 19. Calvin spent considerable time on this doctrine. He tended to repeat himself in some areas. When I talk about Calvin's doctrine of justification, I will not follow the order that Calvin used in these chapters. I will instead sum up his thoughts since there is some repetition there. First, let us look to the Lord in prayer, again using a prayer from John Calvin.

“Almighty God, You set before our eyes the many evils by which we have provoked Your anger against us. And yet, You give us the hope of pardon if we repent. Grant us a teachable spirit that, with becoming meekness, we may pay attention to Your warnings, but not so as to despair of the mercy offered us, but seek it through Your Son, as He has once for all made peace with You by shedding His blood. So cleanse us also by Your Spirit from all our pollutions until, at last, we stand spotless before You in that day when Christ shall appear for the salvation of all His people. Amen.”

As a brief review, remember that in Book III Calvin talks about the way in which we receive the grace of Christ, what benefits come to us from it, and what effects follow. He began with a chapter on the Holy Spirit, who is the bond between Christ and us. The Spirit is the way, and the principle work of the Spirit is faith. Then Calvin said he had to choose between two points that equally demanded attention at that position of his treatment in the *Institutes*: one was justification and the other was sanctification. Surprisingly, Calvin chose to put sanctification first, for reasons that I have explained. It was probably because of Roman Catholic objections to the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Calvin wanted to emphasize the importance of, necessity of, and certainty of good works in the justified person before he treated the doctrine of justification itself. He explained that in Book III, chapter 3, section 1, when he said, “Our immediate transition will be from faith to repentance [or sanctification], for when this topic is rightly understood, it will better appear how man is justified by faith alone.” Thus having spent time on the race of repentance, which is sanctification, or the Christian life, Calvin was ready to ask the question of what produced that kind of life. How can it be that a person can live that way? The answer is that God alone can do the work that enables a person to become a Christian and then live the Christian life. God does it by justifying us by faith alone.

Now in our study, we finally come to justification according to Calvin. The length of the treatment shows something of Calvin's concern to emphasize this doctrine. He did not want us to think that, because he postponed it, it is not central, urgent, or foundational. Calvin actually called it in Book III, chapter 11, section 1 the “main hinge on which religion turns.” We could translate that statement as the “main thing” about religion, but Calvin's image is an interesting one. Justification is the “main hinge on which religion turns.” He said the same thing in Book III, chapter 14, section 11, when he called the doctrine of justification “the principle hinge on which our controversy with the papists turns.” You might wonder why Calvin uses that particular metaphor. I believe the answer is that Luther used it in his book, *The Bondage of the Will*, which was written against Erasmus' *On the Freedom of the Will*. Luther said, “You [speaking to Erasmus] saw what was the grand hinge on which the whole turned, and therefore you attacked the vital part at once.” Luther went on to thank Erasmus for focusing on the main topic rather than indulgences, purgatory, or the corruptions in the Catholic Church. Luther said those were minor topics compared to this main topic, which is how a person is saved. Calvin picked up on that language and used it in the *Institutes*.

Some have wanted to see Calvin's treatment of justification as somewhat second-handed and perhaps not vital to the construction of his own theological system. Alister McGrath makes that point. In my

view, however, that is quite mistaken. I believe that what we have here is Calvin stressing this doctrine in an unambiguous way. In one sense, it certainly is second-handed, because he inherited it mostly from Luther. Yet that does not mean that it is secondary. Luther was the first to clarify this doctrine, but Calvin followed and emphasized it just as much as Luther did. T. H. L. Parker, in his book *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought*, wrote, "Justification is something Calvin has been working up to all through the *Institutes*." I believe that is much closer to an accurate assessment of the place of this doctrine in Calvin than was Alister McGrath's comment.

There is a significant treatment of justification in the *Institutes*. It covers nine chapters. There is more space given to justification by faith in the first three books than any other topic, except for the doctrine of the Christian life. Space is not the most determinative factor in assessing the importance of what is being treated, but it certainly is significant. If you consider all four books, the doctrine of the church gets more pages than any other doctrine. The doctrine of justification, however, is significantly treated. Calvin even seemed to believe that he might have been overdoing his treatment by repeating certain points. He said in Book III, chapter 14, section 6, "The thought repeatedly returns to my mind that there is a danger of my being unjust to God's mercy when I labor with such great concern to assert it as if it were doubtful or obscure." He did not want us to think that because he emphasized it, saying the same thing over again, and repeated himself, that he was trying to make a point that was somehow not certain. Calvin's attention to the doctrine and his repetition was not because the doctrine is uncertain but because it is so important and because it was so controversial. Calvin treated doctrines that were controversial much more than he treated doctrines that, in the sixteenth century, were not controversial. Thus there was not a huge amount of attention to the doctrine of the Trinity. It was not because that was not considered essential, but rather because almost everybody accepted it. The doctrine of justification, however, was one that was controversial. Thus Calvin spent considerable time on it.

That summarized the importance of the doctrine of justification. Now we can consider the relationship of justification by faith to sanctification. Calvin saw both sanctification and justification as the gifts of God. Justification frees us from the necessity of obeying the Law for salvation. It does not free us from the necessity of obeying the Law, but it does free us from the necessity of obeying the Law for salvation. We cannot do that anyway, so it is our only hope. Sanctification, regeneration, or newness of life, enables us to obey the Law as justified people. These two topics are closely linked in Calvin's thought. They are both gifts of God, gifts of the Gospel. They cannot be separated. Justification is the source of sanctification. Without justification, one has neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation, nor one on which to build piety toward God. When Calvin began to talk about justification in Book III, chapter 11, section 1, he said that he was beginning to treat the foundation of all things. Without that foundation, there is no way that we could build piety toward God, for there would be no basis on which we could establish our salvation. So while they are two different things, they cannot be separated. You cannot have justification without sanctification, and you cannot have sanctification without justification. At the same time, however, Calvin was very concerned that they should not be confused or compounded. When we talk about justification and sanctification, we should not separate them, but at the same time it is essential not to confuse them.

Calvin believed that the heresies of his day were caused by the confusion of sanctification with justification. Calvin had two targets, or opponents, with that idea. One was a Lutheran, a theologian by the name of Osiander. The other target was the Roman Catholic theologians. He opposed them both, and he thought they both made the same mistake in the long run, even though they came at the issue from quite different angles.

Let us consider Osiander first. Calvin did not have much respect for Osiander. Calvin attacked him on a number of occasions. Osiander was not a great theologian, and we would probably not know much about Osiander if Calvin had not spent so much time attacking him. The Lutherans did not care much for Osiander either. So when Calvin attacked him, he was not attacking Lutheranism. He was attacking a Lutheran theologian who had some heretical views, according to both Calvin and most Lutherans. What Calvin described as Osiander's doctrine was "some strange monster of essential righteousness." What so upset Calvin about Osiander was that Osiander believed in justification, but he rejected the undiluted imputation concept. In other words, Osiander claimed that a person could not be justified merely because God declared him justified, without some kind of change happening in that person. He said that God cannot regard as just those who are unjust. He said it is both improper and impossible for God to simply declare a sinner justified. He said that something must happen in a sinner to enable God to speak of that sinner as justified. Calvin said that teaching was "some strange monster of essential righteousness." Osiander believed that we become just not because God says we are just, but by the fact of Christ indwelling in us. For him, justification is not only a forensic act, or a declaration, it is the actual coming of Christ to indwell us. In that way we are made righteous by the infusion of Christ, by the essence of Christ within us. God can look upon us as justified because, to some extent, we really are now righteous and just people.

Luther would not have agreed with that, and Calvin certainly did not either. Calvin said, "We who are not righteous in ourselves are reckoned as such in Christ." In justification, it is not that we are indwelt by Christ and so are justified on that basis, but rather we are not righteous in ourselves. We are reckoned righteous in Christ. Calvin's objection to Osiander was that Osiander mixed sanctification and justification. The indwelling of Christ certainly is an important doctrine for Calvin, but our union with Christ that produces the righteousness we experience as Christians is sanctification, not justification. Osiander's view was justification by sanctification, whereas Calvin's view was justification by faith alone and sanctification as the result of our justification. Calvin insisted that, in terms of our justification, our righteousness is always outside of ourselves. It is something God does for us. He imputes it to us. He gives us credit for it. He reckons us as righteous, but we are not righteous. Yet we become righteous as a result of the justification that is given to us outside of anything that we do or anything that happens within us. It was the same thing that Luther talked about when he talked about "alien righteousness." The righteousness that we have that justifies us is always alien. It belongs to somebody else. It is not ours. It is, of course, the righteousness of Christ that is imputed to us.

The first target of Calvin was Osiander, and the second target, the more significant target, was the whole Roman Catholic sacramental system, which was built up during the Middle Ages. In that system, the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification was one that mixed God's grace with human works. It was another form of justification by sanctification. Even though Osiander and the Roman Catholics were quite different in their approach to this doctrine, Calvin thought they ended up in the same place. Calvin said that the Catholics "interpret the grace of God not as the imputation of free righteousness [which was Calvin's view] but as the Spirit helping in the pursuit of holiness." So the grace of God was there, but justification was not viewed as simply God declaring the sinner justified on the basis of the work of Christ. The Catholic view of justification was rather that God applied the work of Christ to the sinner, enabling the sinner to begin to do his part in the work of salvation.

Throughout these chapters, Calvin was concerned to show that he was following Saint Augustine in most things. When Calvin got to the doctrine of election, he was greatly concerned to show that he was following Augustine on that doctrine as well. In this treatment of the Catholic view of justification, Calvin said, "For when Augustine says anything clearly, Lombard obscures it." Lombard was Peter Lombard, author of *The Sentences*. He was called the "master of the sentences." He was the premiere

Catholic medieval theologian prior to Thomas Aquinas. Lombard's *Sentences* were the standard Catholic systematic theology of the Middle Ages. What Lombard did was mainly look for sources, quotes from the church fathers and earlier medieval theologians, and create his theology on the basis of what others had said. Augustine was often quoted in Lombard. Calvin said, however, that whenever "Augustine says anything clearly, Lombard obscures it, and if there was anything slightly contaminated in Augustine, Lombard totally corrupts it." Thus Lombard was not Calvin's favorite theologian. Lombard and the others who stand for Roman Catholic theology were then subject to Calvin's attack.

Calvin did have some differences from Augustine. Augustine talked about salvation by grace alone. That was the whole theme of his anti-Pelagian writings—it is not by works, but rather it is by God's grace. The Reformation formula, however, of justification by grace through faith was not present in Augustine. The aspect of "through faith" is not present in Augustine, as it is in Luther. Luther agreed with Augustine that salvation is by grace alone, but it needs to be said "by faith alone" as well. There is much more emphasis in the Reformation and in Calvin on faith alone than there was in Augustine. There has been ongoing discussion about that point, but I do not see a huge problem there. Augustine said "by grace alone," and the Reformers said "by faith alone," and they both meant that you cannot add anything to God's grace. That emphasis on faith is not found in Augustine, however, as it is in Calvin. The other important point of difference—although there are some tiny points of difference in matters of interpretation—is that Calvin clearly held to a double predestination. It is debated whether Augustine did or not. It is suggested that perhaps Augustine was a single predestinarian while Calvin was a double predestinarian. People investigate what Augustine and Calvin each said about reprobation.

Since Calvin was responding to the Roman Catholic view of justification, which was that God infused righteousness into His people, it has been asked how Augustine's view of justification differed from the Catholic view that Calvin was attacking. Augustine's view was grace alone, apart from works. The Catholic view is semi-Augustinian. They say yes to grace, but works have to be added, however those works may come. Works could be the result of the infusion of Christ's righteousness, or it could be the enablement of the Spirit or the obedience of the Christian. For Catholics, justification ultimately depends on some human works. For Augustine, however, justification did not depend on human works, but on God's grace alone. I hope to have time to cover the Catholic system of salvation in comparison to Calvin's system of salvation. In the Catholic system, when a person gets to heaven, he gets there both because of reward and human accomplishment. In Calvin's understanding, however, heaven is just as much a gift as justification. We get to heaven because of God's grace, not because of our efforts. Calvin's view raised the Catholic objection and question of whether it therefore matters what we do. Yet Calvin already spent considerable time emphasizing the necessity of the Christian life as the product of justification before he even treated justification as the basis for the Christian life.

Calvin usually gave definitions. He liked definitions, and he liked to be clear. He liked to set forth his thought in a brief phrase, sentence, or paragraph. He gave three definitions, at least, of justification. They are not contradictory, but each one is slightly different. In Book III, chapter 11, section 2, Calvin says that justification is "the acceptance with which God receives us into His favor as righteous." Acceptance is the key term there. God receives us into His favor as righteous, as though we were righteous. Calvin continues, "It consists in the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness." We receive the righteousness of Christ. Calvin said in Book III, chapter 11, section 3, "To justify means nothing else than to acquit of guilt him who was accused, as if his innocence were confirmed." Then in Book III, chapter 17, section 8, Calvin says, "We define justification as follows: the sinner, received into communion with Christ, is reconciled to God by His grace, while, cleansed by Christ's blood, he obtains forgiveness of sins, and clothed with Christ's righteousness as if it were his own, he stands confident before the heavenly judgment seat."

When we consider those definitions, two ideas come through. One is the idea of imputed righteousness. Believers are righteous, not in themselves, but through the righteousness of Christ. It is not imparted righteousness, as with Osiander. It is imputed righteousness. The righteousness of Christ is reckoned as ours. In Book III, chapter 11, section 23, Calvin says, "You see that our righteousness is not in us, but in Christ." As we talk about justification, we have to talk about righteousness, but not ours. It is in Christ. One of Calvin's illustrations for this was Jacob in his brother's clothing. When he came before his father, his father recognized him as someone he was not. It is a rather convoluted illustration. One might not consider using it because of all the background to that illustration. I am not sure that I would want to use it in a sermon. Yet Calvin's point was clear: when Jacob came before his father, his father said, "You are Esau." As we stand before the Father, in somebody else's clothing, the Father says to us, "I see you as righteous." Imputed righteousness is essential to Calvin's teaching.

The other idea that is highlighted is forgiveness of sins. Justification is not only that God sees us as righteous because we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ, but God also sees us as forgiven of our sins. In Book III, chapter 11, section 21, Calvin says, "The righteousness of faith is reconciliation with God, which consists in the forgiveness of sins." So sins are forgiven, and the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us. Those are not really two different things. Forgiveness of sins is based on the righteousness of Christ imputed to us. They are two ways of looking at what transpires in justification—sins forgiven and we stand clothed in the righteousness of Christ. If we thought only of our sins being forgiven, and then we stood before the Father as ourselves, that would be a rather pitiful situation. We are still sinners, despite that fact that we have been justified. Instead, the guilt of our sins is forgiven, and we stand in the presence of God, clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

The Council of Trent was occurring throughout a large portion of Calvin's lifetime as a Reformer in Geneva. He was aware of the rules that were being drawn up by the Roman Catholics in Trent, in Italy. Calvin also wrote about what Trent was producing in order to answer Trent's doctrines and Trent's attacks on Protestant doctrine. In one place when Calvin wrote about the Canons of Trent, he referred to his opponents as "venerable fathers." It is interesting that he used such a pleasant description of his opponents, which he did not always do. Perhaps it was irony or sarcasm, but nonetheless it sounded better than "those scoundrels" or "those dogs" or something else that Calvin often said about his theological enemies. Calvin said, "The venerable fathers will not allow justifying faith to be defined as the confidence with which we embrace the mercy of God as forgiving sin for Christ's sake."

Imputed righteousness and forgiveness of sins are two ways of considering the same thing—for they are not contradictory, but rather they are complementary. But sometimes people seem to be uneasy with the idea of imputation. It is considered forensic, legal, or a kind of intellectualism. Forgiveness, on the other hand, is something that is warm and personal. Forgiveness leads to the doctrine of adoption and things like that. I do not think, however, that we should see it that way. For Calvin, imputation was certainly not an abstraction, with forgiveness being the real justification. Apart from imputation, forgiveness would have been unintelligible to Calvin. God does not, and cannot, simply forgive because He wants to forgive. He must have a way to forgive, a basis on which to forgive. Unless the righteousness of Christ can somehow be reckoned to my account, then what other basis is there for the forgiveness of my sins? God cannot simply say, "You are forgiven," because God's holiness and justice must be satisfied in some way in order for God to be God. Thus imputation is not some kind of abstraction. It is not a kind of cold intellectualism. We can embrace imputation as warmly as we can embrace forgiveness.

Let us now consider the results of the doctrine of justification by faith. In this third book, Calvin is writing about the way in which we receive the grace of Christ and the benefits that come to us from it.

We have just been studying those benefits, including imputation, the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and forgiveness of sins. The third book also covers what effects follow from receiving the grace of Christ. Some effects will follow. Calvin means that things will be present, or seen, in our lives, which are effects of justification as well as effects of repentance. The practical application of the effects of repentance was in the Golden Booklet of the Christian Life. Those effects included self-denial, bearing the cross, meditations on heaven, and uses of the present life. Those are all effects that show up in our lives as a result of God's work in our lives of repentance, regeneration, or sanctification. There are effects of justification as well. This is not merely a legal exercise that does not have any practical implication. Justification does have practical implications as much as sanctification.

There are two main effects of justification. First, Calvin said, "Justification serves God's honor. This enables us to honor God in the way we think and live so that His glory stands undiminished." Calvin also said in Book III, chapter 13, section 2, "Man cannot, without sacrilege, claim for himself even a crumb of righteousness, for just so much is plucked and taken away from the glory of God's righteousness." In other words, when you talk about salvation, if you take even a little bit away, just a crumb of righteousness that you claim for yourself, then you diminish by that much the glory of God's righteousness. When I think about the Roman Catholic medieval system, I usually call it "percentage theology." Catholic theologians differed on exactly how it worked, but the system meant that God does His part and you do your part. So, for instance, God might do 90% while you do 10%. That is percentage theology. If God does His part and you do not do your part, then you will not be saved. Even if God does 99% and you do 1%, then that is still percentage theology. Calvin said that it does not matter how small of a percentage you believe you do, if there is anything there, even a crumb of righteousness, then by that much it is going to diminish the glory of God's righteousness. So the doctrine of justification by faith alone is the only teaching that can fully honor God and allow His glory to stand undiminished.

Justification by faith alone serves God's honor. His glory stands undiminished. We cannot take credit for our salvation, even a little part of our salvation, and at the same time give all the glory to God. The prayer, "Thank You, Lord, for helping me to become a Christian," is not the same as, "Thank You, Lord, for saving me." The latter prayer is the one we will pray if we are true to Calvin's teaching and true to the Bible.

The other effect that follows from justification by faith is that this doctrine gives us peace of conscience. You cannot imagine how lacking that was in the sixteenth century unless you have studied many of the writings of the people of that time. There was no assurance, no confidence. Nobody ever knew where they stood unless they received some sort of direct revelation from God, telling them they were Christians. That did not happen very often, even according to Catholic sources. Salvation is a gift of God, and because it is a gift of God, there is a basis for confidence and assurance. Calvin said in Book III, chapter 13, section 3, "We profit nothing in discussing righteousness unless we establish a righteousness so steadfast that it can support our soul in the judgment of God." What can support our soul in the judgment of God? If we stand before God in the judgment, what will give us confidence? Will it be the fact that we did some good things? The people of the sixteenth century found that lacking. We can always doubt the validity or strength of our works. If salvation is a work, or even partially a work, even to a very small degree, how can I know that I have done that work? How can I know that I have measured up to the standard?

That was Luther's problem in the monastery. He went to the monastery in order to do more than he could do as an ordinary Christian. Then in the monastery he did more than he was required to do as a monk. He had said, "If ever a monk could get to heaven by his monkery, it was me." Whatever was

required by the order, Luther did more. He was supposed to confess, so he did confess. Yet the very first step of confession is contrition, feeling genuinely sorry for your sins. Without contrition, the confession is invalid. A sixteenth-century person could not confess sins for which he was not genuinely sorry. Luther stumbled even at that point, because how could he know that he was truly contrite? How much contrition was required? Then he confessed continually and repeatedly until he wore out his confessor. You might have heard the story when the man said, "Go and do something really bad. Then come and confess it." Luther would confess every trivial thing he did. Then he would leave and return and knock on the door saying he forgot something, some thought he had. Luther was trying to make the system work. Yet he never had any confidence, because he did not know if he had done enough.

If salvation is a gift from God, however, then we do not have to worry about our works. We can know that God has done enough. We can stand confident in His presence. I do not have to earn it or deserve it. I just receive it. I know that God's gift is enough.

The next topic is Christian freedom. It is an interesting chapter in the *Institutes*, Book III, chapter 19. This material in Book III, chapter 19 was already present in the 1536 edition. Some of it Calvin had taken from Luther, some from Melancthon. Melancthon had similar material in his *Loci Communes* from 1521. As always, Calvin added his own particular slant on the issue.

The material was moved around in the various editions of the *Institutes*. In 1559 it was placed at the end of his treatment of justification. He called it an "appendage" of justification. Calvin meant that, now that we understand justification, we need to understand Christian freedom because it will protect us from falling back into works-based righteousness. It will keep us from legalism and doubt. One writer has said quite truly, "How many words about Calvin's legalism would have remained unspoken if this chapter had been read more often?" If Calvin is going to be criticized for anything, besides being part of the burning of Servetus, he will probably be criticized for legalism. Sometimes I wonder if people who make those claims have read the *Institutes*. They certainly have not read Book III, chapter 19. Legalism does not understand the power of justification.

Calvin's point, which I have referred to before, is that both repentance—or regeneration or sanctification, whichever term you want to use—and justification have implications for how a person lives. The fact that we are counted just before God is no less significant for practical life than the fact that we are united to Christ in mortification and vivification. The fact that we are united to Christ in mortification and vivification leads to the life of the Christian. That is why Calvin puts those chapters on how a Christian lives at the end of his treatment of sanctification. The fact that we are reckoned righteous, with the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and our sins forgiven, also has practical implications for how a Christian lives. Calvin sets those implications forth in Book III, chapter 19, which is called "On Christian Freedom."

Book III, chapter 19 is there to answer the question of what difference this doctrine makes on the nature of the Christian life. Calvin tells us that it makes a difference in three great ways. The first is that we are free from the Law. Calvin said in Book III, chapter 19, section 2, "There is no place for the Law." You must realize, however, what Calvin means by that. One should realize what Calvin means after reading this far in the *Institutes*. Calvin means we are free from the Law as a means of salvation. We are free from salvation by works. Calvin said, "...so we are not disturbed and troubled over forgiveness of sins." That is a wonderful freedom. We know we have been forgiven. Our confidence is sure. We can forget the righteousness of the Law, and we can look to the grace of God.

Calvin's first point is classic Reformation teaching of salvation by grace alone. It is what he has been teaching in this whole section. Calvin is saying that Christian freedom is freedom from falling back into any kind of works righteousness that depends on us and not on God's grace. This is not a denial of the third use of the Law for the Christian. Yet the third use of the Law also does not deny the first use of the Law. The first use of the Law is to show me that I am a sinner, I cannot keep the Law, and I am doomed unless God does something for me. The third use of the Law is that I will keep the Law and I must keep the Law because it is God's holy intention for my life. Thus Calvin does not deny the third use. He says in Book III, chapter 19, section 2, "The Law does not stop teaching and exhorting and urging believers to good, even though before God's judgment seat it has not place in their consciences." When we stand before the judgment seat, the Law does not have a role. We will not even think about it. We can forget it. That does not mean, however, that we can forget the Law in our Christian living.

The second use of Christian freedom is that we are now free to freely obey God. We have the freedom of children to freely obey God's will. It is not now the necessity of a servant who knows that he is not going to measure up, that he is going to fall short and be condemned, but it is the freedom of children to happily and freely obey the Lord. Obedience is not a requirement for sonship. It is the result of sonship. It is not that I must obey the Law so that God will love me, but it is that I want to obey the Law. I will obey the Law because God loves me. It is not so that God will love me. It is because God does love me.

Calvin said that is a wonderful freedom because now we can bring our small, imperfect, rude works to God, and we can know that they will not be measured by the rigor of the Law's demands. These works we do, in keeping the Law, are on a much lower level than the standard that the Law actually sets. There is a great gulf between what the Law requires and what the best of us ever accomplishes. Yet, we do not have to come into God's presence with terror, thinking that God is requiring one thing and we are only producing something far less. We come into the presence of a gracious Father.

I was in a doctor's office recently, which was a very nice office, with important medical books, but also with some very poor pictures on the wall. Those pictures were made with crayon. I do not know what they are pictures of. Maybe one was a tree and another was a bird, but they did not look like a tree or a bird. Yet he had those pictures proudly displayed on the wall of his office. The reason, of course, is that his children created them. On the bottom of the pictures you can see that they are signed with a message like "With love, to daddy." We might say they are pretty poor art. Yet they are treasured, displayed, and accepted. I am sure that doctor did not criticize his children because of the pictures' poor quality. He accepted his children's pictures because of what they stood for. In a sense, we are like that. We come into God's presence with our imperfect efforts, like those juvenile drawings, and God accepts what we bring. He does not find fault with our offerings. That is the second freedom. It is an incredible freedom.

The third freedom is freedom in the indifferent things, the *adiaphora*. That is the Greek word we use for that idea. Calvin uses that word occasionally, but not often. The idea, however, is certainly present in Calvin. Calvin said that, as we live the Christian life, there are many things that are indifferent, *adiaphora*. They are things that are not specifically covered by the Law. The Christian is free in all those things. There is no legalism in Calvin, despite what people think. We cannot make, and the church cannot make, an eleventh commandment. There are only ten commandments. God's Law is God's Law, and we should not add to the Law. Different expressions of Christianity have often done that. What is sometimes called "fundamentalism" tends to add to the Law. We are told: you shall not go to movies; you shall not dance; you shall not play cards; or you shall not drink alcoholic beverages. I grew up in that tradition, and there are some very good things about it. Yet all those laws were there, and we were made to feel that they were part of the Law of God.

Calvin, however, said that things that the Bible does not cover are indifferent. The Christian is free with regard to all those things, being guided by two principles. Calvin was not just saying that we should go out and do whatever we want in these areas. We are free in these areas, and we should not add to the Law, but there are two principles that we should keep in mind. First is moderation. Calvin said that as we think about the indifferent things, we should avoid both asceticism and indulgence. On the one hand, asceticism entraps the conscience in a long and inextricable maze. We can get trapped by being too strict. Calvin's illustration for this point was that some people think they should not drink good wine, so they drink mediocre wine. Then they think they should not even drink mediocre wine, so they drink poor wine. Then they think they should not drink wine at all, so they drink water. Then they think they should not drink clean water, so they drink dirty water. Calvin was using an argument *reductio ad absurdum*. Calvin said we should not go in that direction. We should not get caught in a rigid, narrow outlook on life. We should recognize that God has given us good gifts, and we should use those gifts for the purpose for which God has given them to us. This teaching then begins to overlap with Calvin's teaching on the life of the Christian. Both Christian freedom, which comes out of justification, an appendage to justification, and the life of the Christian, which flows out of repentance, return to the same ideas.

While we are to avoid asceticism, we are also to avoid indulgence. It is a slippery path, a narrow path. We can go off the path by being too strict, or we can go off the path by being too loose. Calvin said that we should live not "luxuriate." He said in Book III, chapter 19, section 9, "Surely ivory and gold and riches are good creations of God, permitted, indeed appointed, for men's use by God's providence. And we have never been forbidden to laugh or to be filled or to join new possessions to old or ancestral ones or to delight in musical harmony or to drink wine. True indeed. But where there is plenty, to wallow in delights, to gorge oneself, to intoxicate mind and heart with present pleasures and be always panting after new ones—such are very far removed from a lawful use of God's gifts." The gifts are there, and we can use them as God intended for us, avoiding asceticism and avoiding indulgence.

The other principle that should guide us in our Christian freedom is compassion. Calvin said in Book III, chapter 19, section 10, "Christian freedom consists as much in abstaining as in using." That is a very important part of what Calvin wanted to communicate to us. In other words, I exercise my Christian freedom when I am free to use these gifts that God has given to us in these indifferent areas, which is much of life. Yet I am equally using my Christian freedom when I do not use these gifts. You can use your Christian freedom in drinking wine, and you can use your Christian freedom in not drinking wine. Why would we want to abstain? Calvin said, "We must not abuse our Christian freedom, but use it only if it helps the edification of our neighbor." This is an important principle. We are free in indifferent things, but we should always be aware of who is with us.

That idea is advanced with two further ideas. Calvin says that we must distinguish between the ignorance of our weak brothers and the rigor of the Pharisees. When we start thinking about our neighbor, there are two categories. There are weak brothers, and there are Pharisees. You must know the difference between a weak brother and a Pharisee. Calvin said that where you have a weak brother, you must not use your Christian freedom, because that person may be caused to stumble. Where you have a Pharisee, however, you do not have to abstain. Let me give you Calvin's illustration. Paul had Timothy circumcised, but he did not have Titus circumcised. There seems to be some kind of inconsistency there, in which he would insist on the circumcision of one of his associates but not on the other. Calvin said that Paul had Timothy circumcised because "Paul restricted his freedom." In other words, Paul normally would not have had Timothy circumcised because it was no longer a requirement in the Christian era. Calvin said, "Paul restricted his freedom because it was fruitful to do so." There were people who would have been offended. They would not have understood. So Paul thought it was right to take into

consideration the weaker brother. Calvin said that Paul asserted his freedom, however, in the right of Titus because of the "unjust demands of false apostles." One issue concerned weaker brothers while the other issue concerned Pharisees. In the second circumstance, there were Jews who were saying that circumcision was required for keeping the Law and for salvation. Paul said it was not necessary and so Titus was not circumcised. The rigor of the Pharisees is not something that should cause us to forsake our Christian freedom, but there are weaker brothers too. May God give us the wisdom to discern when we are dealing with weaker brothers and when we are dealing with Pharisees.

Calvin's final point under compassion, as he discusses indifferent things, is that we should remember that, as we try to avoid giving offence to people, we should make sure that we do not offend God. We must not offend God in trying to avoid offending our neighbor. There are some times when we can go too far in trying to avoid offending our neighbor, and we end up offending God. Calvin's illustration for this point is the Mass. To Calvin, it was wrong for a person who had embraced the Protestant teaching to continue to go to the Mass and participate in it. Some people were doing so. Calvin called them "Nicodemites." Nicodemus was one who secretly did things, by night. They were doing it because they said they did not want to offend neighbors and they did not want to be too harsh. After all, they said, people must first be fed with milk before they can grow to be fed by meat. So they were secret Protestants going to the Mass, and people said it was right because they had to have milk before they had meat. Calvin's answer was that milk is not poison. To him the Mass was poison. So we should not be too gentle with people when there is an issue involved that may offend God.

I do not have time to cover the Roman Catholic system of salvation in comparison with Calvin's doctrine of justification by faith alone. In the syllabus there is an outline that shows the Roman Catholic system of faith and works, and it shows Calvin's order of justification, with the various references to the *Institutes*.

The next section is a wonderful section of Calvin on prayer. So I will talk about prayer in the next lesson.