

Explicit and Implicit Appendixes to Calvin's View of Justification by Faith

By David W. Hall

A search for the term “justification” in the text of John Calvin's *Institutes* shows that the term ‘justification’ is used over 200 times—certainly indicating that this concept was of dominant interest to Calvin.¹ This and other considerations have given rise to the claim that the doctrine of justification is the most important doctrine for the Protestant Reformation in general and for Calvin in particular. If that claim is sustained, then it would also stand to reason that other correlates, properly tied to justification, would consistently reflect both the meaning and the thrust of Calvin's view of justification.

The preponderance of this term's occurrences is roughly in the middle of the *Institutes* in Book 3, chaps. 11–12. Accordingly, once this doctrine is constructed in principle in those sections, other correlates are then built on that supporting foundation. Thus, if Christianity rises or falls with justification by faith, certain other implied Christian teachings might be expected to give way (or be strengthened) depending on how this teaching is maintained. Similarly, if these correlates reflect Calvin's homology a stronger understanding of his view of justification ensues. Moreover, the importance of many of these auxiliary doctrines is seen by the depth that Calvin devotes to these areas in the second half of the *Institutes* following his explanation of justification. Indeed, most of the normal topics of Christian living are impacted by the meaning of justification, and practical theology is infused by these ideas.

To better understand Calvin on this topic, in this essay I will discuss:

1. Calvin's view of justification (including interactions with current experts and the *Institutes*). Surely this was a vital and critical area. It also begets overflows and correlates.
2. What Calvin explicitly calls the “Proper appendix of justification,” namely, Christian Liberty.
3. Other implicit areas in which Calvin draws on justification to make assertions for other *loci*: prayer, election, eschatology, and church government.

Summary of Calvin on Justification from the *Institutes*

This much debated area may not be as obscure or as difficult as some seem to make it. Whether one begins with Calvin's commentary on Romans, or with the *Institutes*, as long as one reads Calvin comprehensively, his view on justification seems fairly clear and consistent. While it is always possible for creative theologians to find a stray thread here or there in any theological wardrobe (particularly in the larger ones, say by Augustine, Calvin, Edwards), Calvin's view can safely be categorized as consistent with the forensic view, expressed in later Protestant and Puritan creeds and confessions. It certainly was not a precursor, N. T. Wright notwithstanding, to a Second Temple of Judaism view; nor was this a sclerotic post-reformation Scholastic development.

According to the *Institutes*, justification follows a discussion of the “Life of the Christian Man.” Along with cross-bearing and self-denial, this Christian life has an eschatological horizon that is never outpaced or forgotten. The Christian, just prior to Calvin's discussion of justification, is to understand and use the good gifts of God without becoming addicted to them (3.11.2). Godly contentment should inspire a Christian to accept poverty or blessing, becoming enchanted with neither but always looking to our heavenly calling. With that backdrop, Calvin then launches into his discussion of justification in Book 3, chapter 11.

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1. The search was made using the text of Calvin's *Institutes* at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.txt> (accessed September 8, 2010).

Justification is tied to regeneration, as part of a “double grace (*duplicem gratiam*)” (3.11.1). The first of those graces is that one is reconciled to God “through Christ’s blamelessness,” resulting in a gracious Father instead of a condemning Judge. That seems to be Calvin’s beginning definition of justification: the act of God by which he transforms us from criminals to children. The second grace is that “sanctified by Christ’s spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life,” or regeneration. In this context, Calvin calls this justification “the main hinge on which religion turns,” asserting: “For unless you first of all grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of this judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God.” Thus, Calvin begins by contending that justification must be known and was essential for both salvation and continuing piety.²

Calvin defines justification initially as both being “reckoned righteous in God’s judgment” and as being “accepted on account of his righteousness” (3.11.2). Thus God provides both the legal verdict and the moral atonement. As a result, the one who is justified is “reckoned in the condition not of a sinner but of a righteous man.” God judicially alters the “condition” of a sinner, and by the death of Christ “reckons” that sinner to be righteous. The justified sinner “grasps the righteousness of Christ through faith . . . is clothed in it, [and] appears in God’s sight not as a sinner but as a righteous man.” For Calvin, then, justification is “the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as righteous men. And we say that it consists in the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness” (3.11.2).

While modern theologians may debate other aspects of the Reformed tradition, Calvin’s initial definition is clear, unencumbered, and boringly orthodox. Calvin proceeds to support his view of justification by citing only a few passages, since “it would take too long to collect all the passages” (3.11.3) that exhibit the meaning of

justification. Furthermore, he viewed Paul’s teaching on justification to be summarized by the term “acceptance,” further emphasizing the judicial/forensic nature of justification. Calvin spoke to this clearly: “Therefore, since God justifies us by the intercession of Christ, he absolves us not by the confirmation of our own innocence but by the imputation of righteousness, so that we who are not righteous in ourselves may be reckoned as such in Christ” (3.11.3). Thus, Calvin equates justification with “acceptance,” “imputation,” “pardoning,” “reckoning,” and the divine commutation of justice.

So careful was Calvin to focus on God’s commutation of justice that he provided an extensive critique of Osiander’s view. Osiander (1498–1552) taught “some strange monster” of essential righteousness, in which he advocated that Christ’s essence was ontologically mingled with ours in justification. Calvin objected both to “infusion” of Christ’s essence and “substantial” righteousness (3.11.5). Calvin’s point was none other than this: God the Judge justifies, and his act reckons our condition differently than it is. Osiander’s problem was a “dividing” of Christ’s natures; in contrast, Calvin emphasized that Christ’s atoning work fully comprehended both natures and was performed *qua* Mediator. Christ’s obedience and the acts of his human nature were equally central to justification. Instead of an ontological union (Osiander), Calvin taught—and this guards us against the substantialism of Eastern Orthodoxy (see McCormack below)—that the union was a “mystical” (3.11.10) or spiritual one (note, much like the logic he employed later in his sacramentology).

Calvin spied “more poison” (3.11.11) in Osiander’s view that “we are righteous together with God.” It could hardly be clearer that Calvin held to a forensic view of justification, especially when his polemic against Osiander in his most important theological treatise is assessed. At one point Calvin affirmed that the essential meaning of justification was so clear as “reckoning” (an “expression taken from legal usage”) that he wrote: “Anyone moderately versed in the Hebrew language, provided he has a sober brain, is not ignorant of the fact that the phrase arose from this [legal] source, and drew from it its tendency and implication” (3.11.11).

Bruce McCormack has seized on Calvin’s critique of Osiander and shows how this refracts Calvin’s denotation of justification. Following Calvin’s own definition of justification (3.11.2), McCormack recognizes Calvin’s emphasis on justification as acquittal—certainly a legal concept. He comments that: “‘to justify’ means nothing else than to acquit of guilt him who was accused as if his innocence were confirmed.” The setting is that of a

2. Among the recent discussions of Calvin on justification are the following: Mark A. Garcia, “Life In Christ: The Function of Union with Christ in the *Unio-Duplex Gratia* Structure of Calvin’s Soteriology with Special Reference to the Relationship of Justification and Sanctification in Sixteenth-Century Context” (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 2004); Mark A. Garcia, *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin’s Theology* (Paternoster, 2008). A. N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2002); J. Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ (Changing Paradigms in Historical and Systematic Theology)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Michael Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2007); and Dennis E. Tamburello, *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1996).

courtroom. The question is one of guilt or innocence. And the divine verdict is one of innocence. How can this be? Because the guilt for our sins was imputed to Christ, who then suffered the legal penalty that our guilt required. "This is our acquittal: the guilt that held us liable for punishment has been transferred to the head of the Son of God [Isa. 53:12]."³

McCormack then observes further about the concept of acquittal:

A judgment of acquittal would require that the righteousness on which it is based be complete. That is to say, the acquitted person must be completely innocent of the charge against him or her. But complete innocence is found in Christ alone. He alone was sinless. His obedience alone is perfect. But that, then, means that the ground of our justification must lie, at every moment of the Christian life, outside of ourselves. It is not just that our works do not justify us. For Calvin, it is not even God's work *in us* that justifies us. For God's work in us is never complete in this life. Outside of us, Christ's righteousness is complete; in us, it is not. Therefore, if justification does indeed consist in acquittal, then the ground of our justification must be found to lie in the alien righteousness of Christ and in it alone, (McCormack, "Union with Christ in Calvin's Theology," 517).

Moreover, McCormack confirms that, "The mechanism by means of which Christ's perfect righteousness is made to be ours is that of imputation. Imputation is a concept drawn from the realm of accounting (of book-keeping). Guilt is not credited to the account of the sinner; Christ's righteousness is. The same mechanism is employed by Calvin to explain how our guilt is made to be Christ's—in other words, how he who knew no sin was made sin on our behalf.... That is, he who was about to cleanse the filth of those iniquities was covered with them by transferred imputation.... Our guilt was made his by imputation.... In any event, atonement and justification are twin doctrines for Calvin. Both are construed in strictly forensic terms," (McCormack, "Union with Christ in Calvin's Theology," 518).

Finally, citing Calvin's critique of Osiander's view that the "essential righteousness" of Christ is taken to our nature, McCormack analyzes:

Against this conception, Calvin says that Osiander ought to have been 'content with that righteousness which has been acquired for us by Christ's obedience and sacrificial death.' The *acquired* righteousness of

Christ: by this phrase Calvin clearly means to refer to the righteousness that accrues to Christ's sinless obedience in life and in death—in other words, to his *human* righteousness, that which is added to his divine righteousness. The care taken by Calvin to render impossible a mixture of natures in Christ himself is now playing itself out in his conception of justification. It is the human righteousness of Christ that is made ours. And no mixture of the divine and the human (either in Christ or in ourselves) is necessary to explain this, since the human righteousness of Christ is made ours by means of imputation, (McCormack, "Union with Christ in Calvin's Theology," 518, 519).

Cornelis Venema further summarizes that, for Calvin, any discussion of faith would be barren, deformed, and useless should it fail to include an elaboration of this two-fold benefit as Calvin did:

Let us sum these up: Christ was given to us by God's generosity, to be grasped and possessed by us in faith. By partaking of him, we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father, and secondly, that sanctified by Christ's Spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life.⁴

Notwithstanding, Calvin did not teach that justification fails to lead to sanctification. Returning to the term 'regeneration,' he believes that God always produces moral reform in the life of the truly justified: "He does not justify in part but liberally.... From this it follows that the doctrine of justification is perverted and utterly overthrown when doubt is thrust into men's minds, when the assurance of salvation is shaken and the free and fearless calling upon God sufferance hindrance—nay, when peace and tranquility with spiritual joy are not established" (3.11.11). To be sure, for Calvin "justification and

3. Bruce McCormack, "Union with Christ in Calvin's Theology: Grounds for a Divinization Theory?" in *Tributes to John Calvin: A Celebration of his Quincentenary*, ed. David W. Hall (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 517. For McCormack's other comments on this, see also Bruce McCormack, *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006) and Bruce McCormack, "What's at Stake in Current Debates over Justification: The Crisis of Protestantism in the West," in *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbans and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004).

4. Cornelis P. Venema, "Union with Christ, the 'Twofold Grace of God,' and the 'Order of Salvation' in Calvin's Theology," in *Calvin for Today*, ed. Joel Beeke (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Press, 2010), 93.

sanctification are inseparable. As such, however, they are not confused but distinguished. Accenting inseparability, Calvin speaks not of two graces but of ‘two-fold grace’ in the singular, although later in this section he does refer to regeneration as ‘the second of these gifts’ or better, this ‘second grace,’ signaling some distinction. The nature of both this difference and inseparability, as well as the nature of the underlying union involved, Calvin will clarify as his discussion unfolds.⁵

Venema (“Union with Christ,” 144, 145) agrees that justification, the first benefit, is always accompanied by the second benefit, sanctification—although justification has a logical priority that the French Reformer could not ignore. Such justification—juridical in nature—“consists in the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness” (3.11.2). Standing against the received Medieval confusion of justification with a condition of possessing righteousness, Calvin saw justification as including divine acquittal as well as acceptance and reconciliation. Venema warns of the practical ills that flow from confusing justification with either sanctification or apotheosis: “Unless

the difference between justification and sanctification is carefully maintained, the goodness and mercy of God will be seriously impugned and the assurance of faith will be threatened.”⁶

Venema argues convincingly that Calvin expected that his readers would easily conclude, by his sequence of topics, that justification was not by works but by faith alone—but as “simple pardon.”⁷ Furthermore, Calvin believed this precise ordering of topics would underscore the inseparability of justification and sanctification. In short, much of the discussion about Calvin on justification—especially if it leads to minimization of justification or an optimization of external factors—appears upon calmer understandings to be a Shakespearean “Much Ado About Nothing.” Or put it this way: looking for Calvin to articulate or support a ‘new perspective’ on justification is about like expecting Calvin to enunciate a ‘new perspective’ on creation, the Trinity, inspiration, or so on.

Richard Gaffin puts things in focus when he summarizes:

If it needs to be said again, obviously, by the nature of the case, for Calvin sanctification as an ongoing, life-long process follows justification and in that sense justification is ‘prior’ to sanctification and the believer’s good works can be seen as the fruits and signs of having been justified. Only those already justified are being sanctified. But this is not the same thing as saying, what Calvin does *not* say, that justification is the source of sanctification or that justification causes sanctification. That source, that cause is Christ, in whom, Calvin is clear in this passage, at the moment they are united to him by faith, sinners simultaneously receive a two-fold grace and so begin an ongoing process of being sanctified just as they are now also definitively justified.⁸

Gaffin further explains:

A good text passage in this regard, it seems, is the last section (23) of chapter 11, one that serves to summarize important elements developed throughout the chapter as a whole. Justification, characterized here as being ‘by the intercession of Christ’s righteousness’ (cf. 3:11, 3–728; 3:14, 9–776), it is ‘worth carefully noting,’ amounts to saying that ‘man is not righteous in himself but because the righteousness of Christ is communicated to him by imputation’ (753). This communication or sharing therefore excludes, he states in the very next sentence, a ‘frivolous notion.’ This is the notion, ‘... that man is justified by faith because by faith he shares the Spirit of

5. Richard Gaffin, “Justification and Union with Christ,” in David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback, *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes* (Phillipsburg, NJ, P&R, 2008), 253–254.

6. Cornelis P. Venema, “Union with Christ, the ‘Twofold Grace of God,’ and the ‘Order of Salvation’ in Calvin’s Theology,” in *Calvin for Today*, 98. Venema’s chapter also provides a helpful summarization of the dialogue (in *JETS*, 2007–2008) between Thomas Wenger and Marcus Johnson. Among other things, Venema makes it clear that the earlier discussion of sanctification before justification in Calvin should not discount how Calvin routinely treats sanctification as an effect of, fruit of, or following from justification (154). Moreover, in *Institutes* 3.3 Calvin explains the order of his *loci*, and in 3:11.1 when he speaks of justification as “the main hinge on which religion turns,” while calling for it to have a priority of comprehension given to it, Calvin states: “For unless you first of all grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of his judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God.”

7. Venema, *op. cit.*, 106.

8. Richard Gaffin, “Justification and Union with Christ,” in *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes*, 256. Gaffin also reports the substantial enlargement and placement of this topic in the second (and other) editions of Calvin’s *Institutes*, showing the “roughly four-fold, expansion of the *Institutes* in the second, 1539 edition. Now and in subsequent editions (1543–45 and 1550–54) there is a separate chapter on justification (6 or 10, depending on the edition), positioned between chapters on repentance and the similarity and difference between the Old and New Testaments. This chapter, with its own title, “Concerning Justification by Faith and the Merits of Works” (*De justificatione fidei et meritis operum*), is approximately 7 times the length of the treatment in 1536 and consists of 87 numbered sections, without sub-titling or other internal subdivisions.” Further, Gaffin theorizes that Calvin’s crystallization of this topic in his final edition was, in part, a response to the 1547 Council of Trent.

God, by whom he is rendered righteous.' This juxtaposition could hardly be more pointed, or its sense clearer. Set in opposition are two notions of being counted or rendered righteous—by the imputation of Christ's righteousness or by sharing [participat] in the Spirit. The latter is dismissed decisively, with the further comment, "This [the "frivolous notion"] is too contrary to the above doctrine ever to be reconciled to it.' Here the thought that imputation is nonforensic or somehow a nonjudicial transfer or communication is plainly excluded. The transfer effected by imputation, specifically 'the righteousness of Christ ... communicated ... by imputation,' is nonpneumatic and purely forensic, (Gaffin, "Justification and Union with Christ," 263).

Toward the conclusion of Calvin's discussion of justification, we begin to sense the practical test of doctrine in his writing (3.11.11). Not only is it founded, in Calvin's work, on proper exegesis and systematic consistency, but also the practical effect of a doctrine confirms its right understanding. Thus for Calvin the erroneous constructs—whether Osiander's, the Romanist's, or the Enthusiast's—of doctrine falsely conceived is revealed in its practical bondage and hindrance. It is this practical test that leads us to the next sections of this paper. Calvin's conclusion to section 3.11.12 illustrates how practical he is: "In short, whoever wraps up two kinds of righteousness [*ed.* Osiander's key flaw] in order that miserable souls may not repose wholly in God's mere mercy, crowns Christ in mockery with a wreath of thorns."

With a clear view of Calvin on justification (Book 3, chaps 11–18) now in view, let us move forward to see how he then builds further on what is already constructed. Moreover, each appendage will corroborate the meaning of justification as explained above.

The Explicit Appendix: Christian Liberty

One of the significant disputes over the meaning of justification in Calvin's day clearly involved Osiander. Calvin labeled his view a "strange monster," thinking that it was tantamount to a revival of Manichaeism. The separation of essential parts, practice from doctrine, was often at the core of accusing one's opponents of Manichaeism. Just as Calvin had a consistent view of justification, he also believed that it consistently had payoff in Christian living.

John Calvin lived in a day when the freedoms most of us cherish were uncommon. In two different spheres, he was challenged to work out an enduring view of liberty. First, in the civil sphere, he lived in a society that had only

until recently known monarchies. There was no lengthy history of liberty, even in Geneva prior to Calvin's arrival. Before Calvin's time, most European cities were under the rule of a king and had few civil liberties. Much of his work would begin a tradition of civil liberty. The second area of authoritarianism that Calvin inherited was in the sphere of church government. Prior to his time, under the dominance of the Roman church, members were only granted liberties as the church recognized them. Those were, at times, few and far between. As such, the idea that a Christian could be truly free and at liberty to serve his own conscience was a new concept that Calvin aided substantially by his teaching.

In Book III of *The Institutes*, he took up this subject of Christian Liberty, and his insights are still unsurpassed today. To begin with, a key distinction must be introduced from the conclusion of chapter 19 of that work. Calvin spoke of two species of liberty: civil and spiritual (3.9.15). He taught that human government is twofold: (1) spiritual government is internal, and it trains the conscience in matters of piety and worship; and (2) civil government refers to external matters. The former has its seat in the soul, and the outer government refers to external activity. The church is to teach and handle the spiritual order; and the political rulers care for civil order. Calvin suggested that if we pay attention to this distinction, "we will not erroneously transfer the doctrine of the gospel concerning spiritual liberty to civil order." That division of labor would become an essential building block of stable societies; it would also supply ample protection for proper freedom.

With that in mind, it should be clearer that church and state each had a valuable role to play in human life. However, they should not interfere with the proper jurisdiction of the other; God intended it to be that way.

As Calvin began his groundbreaking chapter on Christian liberty, he first sought to explain why this topic was so important. He argued that it was necessary for contemporaries to understand this, even if only on an elementary level, lest they have their consciences burdened by the threat of endless rules and stifling captivity. Indeed, he asserted, this topic was a *proper* "appendage" (Lat. "appendix") to justification, meaning that if one knew how he had been truly justified (by God alone), then he might also know that true liberty would result only as one followed God. Thus, from the outset, Calvin's view of liberty should be distinguished from any humanistic view of liberty. He believed that liberty was a gift, and one that should be used as God has designed it. It was a natural correlate of the right understanding of justification.

Pastor Calvin was sensitive to the tender consciences of many Protestants. He argued that if one omitted an explanation of this subject, much wavering and trepidation would result (3.19.1). The battle over justification, in other words, could be lost not only over what justification meant in theory but also over how it was practiced. Accordingly, Christians who were justified, if they did not understand this “thing of prime necessity,” would “hesitate and recoil” in many things, hardly being able to undertake anything without crippling doubts. Calvin also taught that once justification is appropriated, then for those who “seriously fear” God, this topic yielded “incomparable benefit.” Moreover, he believed that this topic had its rightful place as a corollary or appendix, properly speaking, to justification.

So vital was this doctrine for Calvin that he concluded: “Unless this freedom be comprehended, neither Christ nor gospel truth, nor inner peace of soul, can be rightly known” (3.19.1). Thus, he advised that this “so necessary a part of doctrine” not be suppressed. For Calvin, this spiritual or Christian liberty consisted in three parts. First, believers were to have their consciences free in regard to the law of God. That is to say that if they were justified by God and freed from the demands of the law, then they would learn to look to the mercy of God continually and turn away from any thought of saving themselves by works. Not that the law was unimportant, but in terms of conscience, believers had to know that their assurance would come from looking only to Christ, not to human perfection or legal obedience. Freedom of conscience was as important as civil liberty, and it began with a right understanding of justification. In this first aspect, the relationship to justification is manifest, as Calvin noted that “the consciences of believers in seeking assurance of their justification before God” (3.19.2) stemmed from a proper knowledge of Christian liberty, and that “when justification is being discussed, [we should] embrace God’s mercy alone, turn[ing] our attention from ourselves, and look only to Christ.” Thus, the doctrine of justification—in its correct understanding of the role of law—leads to a Christocentric and ethical liberation.

The second part of Christian liberty was that believers were to obey the law from a different motive. Being regenerated by God, they were to “voluntarily obey the will of God” (3.19.4), not obeying out of a servile fear. Instead of being in terror, the believer should know the love of God; and liberty flowed from that. This also meant the end of various perfectionistic schemes. Calvin’s followers were to be perfect in Christ, not in themselves. That also implied the end of legalism.

The third part of Christian liberty was that the

believer was not obligated to observe external things only or keep the ceremonial customs of the Old Testament. Instead folks were permitted to use things as helpful or omit them, as long as they did not seek to overturn the moral law. Accordingly, there were many things in life that Calvin classified as “indifferent.” To fail to make that distinction would, he thought, mean “no end of superstition” (3.19.7). God’s Word was the authority for believers, but many things in life had to be decided in terms of principles and deduction. Believers were free to use the good things that God had created. They were only to use them as he had designed them and for his glory. As long as that was done, liberty was a good rule of thumb. The goal of this liberty was to “give peace to trembling consciences” (3.19.9). Of course, Calvin is not rightly understood as encouraging libertinism or using liberty as a “cloak for lust.” The “law of Christian freedom” was to lead to godly contentment, as Christians lived happily in their station of life (3.19.9).

Calvin also offered a hierarchy of norms to help people make decisions. Matters of Christian liberty had to be subjected to the law of charity (3.19.13); by that, he meant that sometimes we must voluntarily restrict ourselves so that we do not cause others to stumble. Thus, liberty is not absolute in Calvin’s scheme. It is good and a gift from God, but even it must be kept in perspective. Moreover, just as the law of liberty must be subject to the law of charity, nevertheless this norm of love is not the final test either; for the law of love “must in its turn be subordinate to the purity of faith.” Thus, for Calvin a finely nuanced view of liberty and ethics valued the purity of the revealed faith to the utmost. Following that, the rule of charity trumped, and after that came Christian liberty.

Keeping things in that delicate balance—a balance which became a signature of Calvinism, I might add—would also help in periods of reform. An incrementalism of reform is consistent with this theory. Indeed, Calvin did not condone “the intemperance of those who do every thing tumultuously, and would rather burst through every restraint at once than proceed step by step” (3.19.13). Change could come slowly and steadily in his opinion, and he did not want either Christian liberty, nor love, nor the purity of the faith to be sacrificed in the process. Thus, he averred, “We are not at liberty to deviate one nail’s breadth from the command of God” (3.19.13). Liberty, thus was confined, and “consciencies were exempted from human authority” that did not agree with God entirely.

This view of liberty, wherever it spread, gave citizens confidence and protections. Within a century, the

American colonies would exhibit this Calvinistic distinctive. Not incidentally one of the first law-codes was named "The Massachusetts Body of Liberties." So close were law and liberty that Calvin's disciples could routinely name a state's law code a 'table of liberties.' The reason was that a proper understanding of liberty is essential for any successful venture, whether it is business, civic, or religious. Calvin had seen an oppression of liberties—both in Paris as Protestants were persecuted and in the eyes of the many Roman Catholic refugees who arrived so regularly at Geneva's walls—and he formed his view of liberties based on God's Word and also in a fashion that avoided misuses of it.

Christian liberty was the proper appendage of justification. However, Calvin knew that sanctification was always intertwined with justification. Thus, if not careful, other Christian matters of practice could virtually nullify justification if not rightly formulated. The final chapters of Books 3 and 4 treat those matters.

Implicit Appendixes

The logic in the final section of this essay is as follows: If we understand justification (J) as Calvin did, it leads necessarily to the doctrine of Christian Liberty (L). If both of those are obtained (J + L), then certain other Implications (I) follow. In each case below, the simple "J + L → I" logic shows the internal consistency of Calvin's thought. It also serves to liberate each of these individual *loci* from the bondage of medieval practices—a consequence that is not inconsiderable.

PRAYER: THE WAY ONE IS JUSTIFIED AFFECTS THE WAY ONE PRAYS

Jae Sung Kim has noted the difference that theoretical formulations make for the practice of prayer in his study of Calvin's soteriology and prayer. He notes that "one of the distinctive contributions of John Calvin to reformed theology is the firm establishment of the doctrine of application of redemption. One can easily contrast Calvin's soteriology from that of the Roman Catholics by reviewing his Book III of *the Institutes of the Christian Religion*." In an important essay, Kim seeks to "expose a distinct aspect of Calvin's soteriology, which emphasizes that justification by faith should be complemented by prayer in the Holy Spirit."⁹ Kim writes:

The focus of Calvin's doctrine of the application of redemption starts with recognizing faith as the primary

gift and secret work of the Holy Spirit to unite us with Christ. The Holy Spirit has recovered his deserved status and authority in Calvin's soteriology by being compared with the sacraments of authoritative Roman Church. The chief role of the Holy Spirit in the application of redemption is to unite us with Christ. "How do we receive those benefits which the Father bestowed on his only begotten Son ... It is true that we obtain into the secret working of the Spirit, by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits."¹⁰ Calvin recognizes the nature and the effect of this union in gradual spiritual growth. He regards the union with Christ as the goal of Christian life. Without the power of the Holy Spirit all human effort is a meaningless struggle even if that struggle assumes a religious shape.¹¹

Prayer and faith are both gifts of God. It is noteworthy that these two subjects are closely related in Calvin's biblical soteriology, especially in his numerous polemical arguments against the Roman Catholics and some radical Lutheran extremes. One of Calvin's controversial arguments on Reformed soteriology shows us a new understanding of justification by faith. The imputation of Christ's righteousness is not only alien but has been compared with the doctrine of infusion and self-attained righteousness of Council of the Trent. In this sense, Calvin's doctrine of prayer is also very different from the Roman Catholics," (Kim, "Prayer in Calvin's Soteriology," 343–55).

Kim's important observation is borne out from a perusal of some of Calvin's "rules for prayer." In his third rule for prayer, Calvin taught that any person who "stands before God to pray, in his humility giving glory completely to God, abandon[s] all thought of his own glory, cast[s] off all notion of his self-worth, in fine, put away all self-assurance" (3.20.8). One observes both the difference between the prevailing Roman view of prayers, as well as how similar the terminology (humility, cast off own glory, put away self-assurance) is to that of Calvin's forensic justification. Moreover, he adds that confidence is derived in prayer "solely from God's mercy" (3.20.9). Is Calvin not calling for *sola misericordiae ora* in the same

9. Jae Sung Kim, "Prayer in Calvin's Soteriology," in *Tributes to John Calvin: A Celebration of his Quincentenary*, ed. David W. Hall, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 343–355. See also Kim's Ph.D dissertation in note 11 below.

10. Kim, *ibid.* (referencing John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. F. L. Battles [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959], 3.1.1).

11. Kim, *ibid.* (referencing Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* [Downers Grove: IVP, 1996], 96–103. Jae Sung Kim, "Unio cum Christo: The Work of the Holy Spirit in Calvin's Theology," [Ph.D. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1998]).

way that he calls for *sola gratia* and *sola fides* concerning justification? It is difficult to imagine a logical disjunction. It is not in our “own righteousness” that we have the enjoyment of a “pure conscience before the Lord” in prayer (3.20.10). To the contrary, faith necessarily joins the “acknowledgement of our misery, destitution, and uncleanness”—the same starting point for forensic justification. Calvin also denied that observing fixed hours for prayer could ever pay “our debt to God,” (3.20.50), drawing clearly and consistently on forensic terminology.

Shortly later, Calvin will argue that appealing to the intercession of Saints (*qua* Romanism) assaulted the dignity of Christ’s work. To hold such would imply that “Christ were insufficient or too severe” (3.20.21). It is a dishonoring of Christ that “strips him of the title of sole Mediator” to pray to others; moreover this “obscures the glory of his birth and makes void the cross” (3.20.21). Thus is Calvin’s thought intertwined.

Kim observes:

Faith should be exercised throughout Christian life, and prayer is essential to the manifestation of faith. From the very beginning of his 1536 edition, Calvin shows his special attention on this subject in chapter 3, which he modified and expanded in later editions of the *Institutes*. Prayer was one of six topics which Calvin presented in the first edition. Calvin’s treatise of “On Prayer” includes a brief commentary on the Lord’s Prayer as the perfect model for our praying. Calvin develops in detail six ways in which prayer strengthens our faith and four rules for biblical prayer in his lengthy exposition. Through continuing revised editions of the *Institutes*, the prayer section expands over a hundred pages. Finally, the prayer section became the longest single subject among eighty chapters in last edition (1559) of the *Institutes*. It is interesting enough that the doctrine of prayer links two important subjects, the Christian liberty and predestination in the final edition of the *Institute*, (Kim, “Prayer in Calvin’s Soteriology, 344).

Prayer is almost, but not quite (except as a part of sanctification) elevated to the *ordo salutis* in Calvin’s work. Jae Sung Kim summarizes:

In order to escape from Roman Catholic’s error, Calvin attacks the practice of penance, especially the three steps of the Scholastics: contrition of heart, confession of mouth, and satisfaction of works. For Calvin, God simply requires repentance and faith. Our sanctification is the object of regeneration and our efforts strive to overcome bad habits. The first step in the Christian life is self-denial,

which is the departure from self to thorough obedience to God. Then, bearing the cross leads us to mature trust in God’s will, (Kim, Prayer in Calvin’s Soteriology, 354).

Thus, justification as a critical part of soteriology has bearing on prayer. It is no mistake that Romanists and Calvinists view prayer differently. The same would be true for proponents of any of the other differing views of justification. Calvin put it this way: “God finds nothing in man to arouse him to do good to him but that he comes first to man in his free generosity. For what can a dead man do to attain life?” (3.14.5). Calvin applies this scriptural logic further, drawing on Hosea 2:19: “If a covenant of this sort, which is clearly the first union of us with God, depends upon God’s mercy, no basis is left for our righteousness.... If justification is the beginning of love, what righteousness of works will precede it?” (3.14.6). The logic of justification, applied to prayer, was subsequently applied to election.

ELECTION: THE WAY ONE IS JUSTIFIED AFFECTS THE WAY ONE VIEWS GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY

Calvin’s defense of divine election upon review may surprise some by its unanticipated gentleness and pastoral tone. He opines that the only possible way to understand this is for “reverent minds” to accept what God has written. He also argues practically that one of the benefits of election is the resulting comfort: “We shall never be clearly persuaded, as we ought to be, that our salvation flows from the wellspring of God’s free mercy until we come to know his eternal election, which illumines God’s grace by this contrast: that he does not indiscriminately adopt all into the hope of salvation but gives to some what he denies to others” (3.21.1). Moreover, he again reiterates that “our salvation comes about solely from God’s mere generosity” the contrary of which fails to tear pride up by its very roots. Nothing, says Calvin, has more potential to make us humble than to realize that our standing with Christ is undeserved. Furthermore, this teaching, along with forensic justification “is our only ground for firmness and confidence” and alone will free us from all fear” (3.21.1).

Calvin explicitly links election and justification in a key section that draws upon numerous Scriptural texts. At one location, he states again that “freely given mercy” not “regard to human worth” (the dynamic of justification) is the engine for this loving election that dares to adopt any into God’s family (3.21.7). Also in this context, Calvin speaks of “justification” as “another sign of [the] manifestation” of election (3.21.7). In the

next chapter, Calvin preaches that “we were adopted in Christ into the eternal inheritance because in ourselves we were not capable of such great excellence” (3.22.1). The internal consistency between Calvin’s view of justification and election demands that we allow his correlates to corroborate his main theorem.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT: THE WAY ONE IS JUSTIFIED
AFFECTS THE WAY ONE’S LIFE IS ORDERED IN THE
CHURCH AND HOW CHURCH POWER IS CONCEIVED

The bulk of Book 4, following on the heels of Calvin’s elaboration of justification, discusses various matters of church government. One might think that in these areas, the shadow of justification does not extend. This is not the case, however. If for no other reason, the very conception of church power and the ethos of ecclesiology are affected by the subjects and manner of God’s justification. A different view of justification would well lead to a different ecclesiology.

Calvin’s sixth chapter in his original edition addressed three topics: Christian liberty, ecclesiastical power, and political administration.¹² His teaching on Christian liberty was one of the earliest features of his thought, and it is either an essential part of gospel teaching (176) or, as it would later become known, an “appendix to the doctrine of justification.” Calvin’s discussion of this topic, which was so important in his day, follows the same outline as his 1559 edition, albeit in slightly compressed form. The longest section in his sixth chapter is on ecclesiology proper. Calvin viewed this in his day as an extension of Christian freedom (184), for if church masters invaded the conscience, that tyranny threatened Christian liberty. It is worthy of note that Calvin viewed church government as important for spiritual liberty—thus the need to devote so much writing to that subject during the Reformation era. Justification, thus, even overflowed into church order, with ecclesiology being infused with theology. It is not too much to assert that Calvin viewed himself as setting forth an ecclesiology of liberty as opposed to the prevailing tyranny of “innumerable,” “limitless,” and “entangling” church governance that “traps to catch and ensnare souls” (185). If this language sounds similar to Calvin’s comments on justification, there is a good explanation for this found in homology. In what would become associated with the customary Calvinistic ethos, Calvin expected that knowledge from the teaching of faithful pastors would “first assure that each one of us will keep his freedom in all these things; yet each one will voluntarily impose some necessity upon his freedom” (206).

Calvin, however, did not overreact and argue that all

government was wrong simply because there were abuses of “tyrannical wickedness” (185). He viewed the New Testament (and the Old Testament) as exhibiting officeholders, given by God, and such officeholders must surely presuppose governance (186). Early on in this subject, in expected form, Calvin also distinguished his views on governance by holding to *sola Scriptura* instead of relying on tradition or reason alone. His divine-right ecclesiology would later be extended by his disciples, but on the level of principle his advocacy of *sola Scriptura* in this topic is as clear as in other theological *loci*. With Scripture acknowledged as his authority even for ecclesiology, Calvin asserted that “if faith depends on God’s word alone, if it looks to it and reposes in it alone, what place is now left for the word of men?” (189). That reliance on an alien source (or “alien righteousness”) is similar to his view on justification. Legislative power, thought Calvin, or the authority to “frame new laws” (189), was denied to the apostles; only ministerial power—the right to echo and assert what God had already declared—was given to the church. God, the sole ruler over souls, was the sole ruler over the church of all souls.

A comparison of Calvin’s 1536 content with his 1559 edition shows perhaps the greatest single expansion of one 1536 chapter into parts of thirteen chapters in the final edition—mostly describing the historical evolution and abuses of the papacy. Calvin’s vastly expanded 1559 edition is a fuller ecclesiology, detailing the marks of the church, the election of pastors, how pastoral visitation should be practiced, along with a lengthy polemic against the primacy of Rome (4.6) and a lengthy chapter on the devolution of the Roman church (4.7). When one compares chapters 3–4 of book 4 of the 1559 *Institutes* to the first edition, it becomes clear that much of that latter content is drafted from the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*; thus, the final edition of the *Institutes* is more comprehensive of Calvin’s wisdom on church governance, to be sure. Yet the cardinal principles of governance differ little.

CIVIL GOVERNMENT: THE WAY ONE IS JUSTIFIED
AFFECTS THE WAY ONE CONSTRUCTS THE CIVIL
MAGISTRATE?

While it may seem “alien to the spiritual doctrine of faith” (4.20.1), a certain necessity compelled Calvin to tie political matters to faith. Indeed, for Calvin, the whole plan of God’s salvation implied numerous ethical

12. Source for the page references in parentheses in this section is Ford Lewis Battles’s 1536 edition of Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986). The initial edition is drawn upon to illustrate the continuity of Calvin’s thought over time.

correlates and a correct formulation in governmental matters yields “greater zeal for piety” that may flourish in us “to attest our gratefulness” (4.20.1). For Calvin political matters flow from a proper appropriation of previous doctrines and also produced something as practical as thankfulness.

Moreover, Calvin’s naming of magistrates “the vicars of God” (4.20.6) employs terminology that reminds a careful reader of the substitution vocabulary that is similar to Calvin’s soteriological formulations. Also for Calvin the very concept that the civil government works for both the saved and the unsaved implies two other very important factors: (1) justification, under that formulation, is an internal-forensic work, not a moralistic one; and (2) Calvin’s view permits the non-justified to have equal protection, as Calvinist states have tended to provide.

ESCHATOLOGY: THE WAY ONE IS JUSTIFIED AFFECTS THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE FUTURE HOPE

It is well known that Calvin proffered an underdeveloped eschatology, at least in his *Institutes*. Some, of course, claim that he’s a modern-day postmillennialist based on remarks in his Commentary on Daniel and other OT prophets. Seldom, however, is Calvin viewed as having a premillennial bent, probably because he so frequently lambasted the “chiliasm.” I am happy to leave to other better scholars the exact determination of his view,¹³ if I may make but one note before moving to make some concluding remarks. My only insight into Calvin’s eschatology and its affinity to his view on justification is to point out one trenchant and pastoral comment he makes near the outset of this discussion. Calvin castigates being tied to earthly things, and suggests that we would do better spending more time on our “heavenly life” (3.25.1). Then he shows the pastoral payoff for raw doctrine: “Accordingly, he alone has fully profited in this gospel who has accustomed himself to continual meditation upon the blessed resurrection” (3.25.1).

In his Commentary on Romans 8:30, Calvin has no mental anguish tying justification to glorification. As a good pastor in his final summation, listen to his own paraphrase of the *ordo salutis* and how it is rooted in Greek verbs of the past tense:

13. See Heinrich Quistorp, *Calvin’s Doctrine of Last Things* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009). Also, see James L. Codling, *Calvin: Ethics, Eschatology, and Education* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010); or Hank Bowen, “Calvin’s Eschatological World and Life View,” <http://reformedherald.org/index.php/component/k2/item/65-calvin-s-eschatological-world-and-life-view> [accessed September 8, 2010].

“Those whom God now, consistently with his purpose, exercises under the cross, are called and justified, that they may have a hope of salvation, so that nothing of their glory decays during their humiliation; for though their present miseries deform it before the world, yet before God and angels it always shines forth as perfect.” What Paul then means by this gradation is, that the afflictions of the faithful, by which they are now humbled, are intended for this end—that the faithful, having obtained the glory of the celestial kingdom, may reach the glory of Christ’s resurrection, with whom they are now crucified. (*in loc.*, 320)

Interestingly, just prior to this Calvin defines justification as spanning “the unremitting continuance of God’s favor, from the time of our calling to the hour of our death, and asserts that since “Paul uses this word [justification] throughout the Epistle for **gratuitous imputation of righteousness** [emphasis added], there is no necessity for us to deviate from this meaning” (*in loc.*, 319).

Calvin, of course, did not create this logic of justification. He merely followed the Apostle Paul in Romans 5:1, who enumerated several blessings (peace, access, standing, perseverance) to “since we have been justified through faith, THEREFORE . . .”

And, so, my contribution to Calvin’s eschatology ends.

Observations and Conclusion

For Calvin, justification caused the recipients to “turn aside from the contemplation of our own works and look solely upon God’s mercy and Christ’s perfection” (3.11.16). Accordingly, a certain “order of justification” is observed, consistent with Calvin’s earlier definitions. This orderly design begins with God’s “freely given goodness” to the sinner, finding no good in the human subject. Then God “touches” the sinner with this goodness, causing him to turn away from any sense of moral virtue. The sinner seeks salvation wholly in God’s mercy by faith, and the sinner acknowledges that he has been reconciled to God. He is justified because of Christ’s mediatorial activity, and once regenerated “he ponders the everlasting righteousness laid up for him not in good works to which he inclines but in the sole righteousness of Christ” (3.11.16). Such apprehension leads then properly to Christian liberty as an appendage and to many other aspects of true piety.

Without such justification and its appendix, Calvin only sees a “strange monster” or salvation by works. Assurance of salvation is also assailed: “for when we rise up toward God [with works], that assurance of ours

vanishes in a flash and dies" (3.12.2). In summary, for Calvin "this whole discussion will be foolish and weak unless every man admit his guilt before the Heavenly Judge, and concerned about his own acquittal, willingly cast himself down and confess his nothingness" (3.12.1). Such is the safeguard afforded by a correct understanding of justification.

Calvin's view of justification is even tied to humility or the thought that we have nothing left to ourselves. In fact, the "gateway to salvation," according to Calvin does not lie open for us "unless we have laid aside all pride and taken upon ourselves perfect humility; secondly, that ... this humility is an unfeigned submission of our heart ..." (3.12.6).

Two correlates of free justification are that (1) God's glory is undiminished; and (2) our consciences have rest and serenity. Drawing on *The Institutes* (3.13.3), Cornelis Venema provides several helpful applications of Calvin's piety. Calvin expected that any inability to discern the difference between justification and sanctification would dramatically reduce a believer's assurance of faith. Writes Venema:

The conscience of the believer will always suffer from anxiety and uncertainty in the presence of God's perfect holiness and righteousness when the believer rests any confidence whatever in his or her works. In Calvin's words, 'now if we ask in what way the conscience can be made quiet before God, we shall find the only way to be that unmerited righteousness be conferred upon us as a gift of God.... For to have faith is not to waver, to vary, to be borne up and down, to hesitate, to be held in suspense, to vacillate—finally, to despair! Rather, to have faith is to strengthen the mind with constant assurance and perfect confidence, to have a place to rest and plant your foot, (Venema, "Union with Christ, the 'Twofold Grace of God,' and the 'Order of Salvation' in Calvin's Theology," 111).

Moreover, Venema is helpful to note how sanctification, rightly following justification, liberates the believer from being tempted to present God (mercenary-like) with an overdue bill. For when sanctification is within the matrix of free justification, "it represents the free, Spirit-authored life of a forgiven sinner in the presence of his gracious heavenly Father" (Venema, 113). The logic is that if sanctification is not buttressed upon God's prior pardon/acquittal, it invariably "becomes tainted with the infections of 'anxiety' before God ('Have I been sufficiently obedient?'), 'pride' ('Surely my good works contribute something to my acceptance with God!'), and a

'mercenary' spirit ('No doubt, my obedience will prove valuable since God will 'repay' me in kind.')

 (Venema, 113).

For Calvin, the divine righteousness that brings justification is not sufficiently presented unless God "alone be esteemed righteous, and communicate the free gift of righteousness to the undeserving" (3.13.1). Moreover, "God's glory is somewhat diminished if man glories in himself." Thus, Calvin's view of justification is strongly forensic—not ontological—and it results in the fruit of godliness. Justification and its appendixes, rightly understood, can permit no human glorying, and "man cannot without sacrilege claim for himself even a crumb of righteousness" (3.13.2). Calvin advised seeking peace of soul "solely in the anguish of Christ our Redeemer" (3.13.4). Most clearly, "Faith is something merely passive, bringing nothing of ours to the recovering of God's favor but receiving from Christ that which we lack" (3.13.5). On the practical (as well as theoretical) import of justification, Calvin's commentary on Isaiah 53:11 makes clear:

The work of Christ is stated in the words *He will justify many*; which mean that in the school of Christ, men are not merely taught about justification; they are made just by what he has done for them. And this is the difference between justification by law and justification by faith. For although the law shows what it is to be righteous, as Paul says, it cannot produce righteousness; and experience shows the same thing. The law is for us a mirror showing us our own unrighteousness. But the way to obtain righteousness, as taught by Christ, is simply to know him; and this is faith. In faith we lay hold on the benefit of his death and find full rest in him.

The philosophers have given many excellent rules by which they think righteousness may be established; but they cannot give righteousness to anyone. For who by their rules has achieved the good life? And it is of little help to know what righteousness is, if we remain without it.

But let us leave the philosophers aside. The law itself, which contains the most perfect rule of life, could not, as we said, confer righteousness.¹⁴

Calvin's theory of justification is clear from his writings. Thankfully, he confirms his forensic view repeatedly as he discusses explicit and implicit appendixes to justification—all of which form spokes connected to the hub (if I may use an analogy different from the "hinge") on which our religion rises or falls. ■

14. J. Haroutunian and L. P. Smith, *Calvin: Commentaries* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2010), 155–156.