

taken from Calvin

Institutes of the Christian Religion I

(ed by John T McNeill) (trans. & index by Ford Lewis Battles)

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note the contrast between this anointing and that shadow anointing which was then in use. It is as if the angel had said, "When the shadows have been dispelled the true priesthood will shine forth in Christ." The more detestable is the fabrication of those who, not content with Christ's priesthood, have presumed to sacrifice him anew! The papists attempt this each day, considering the Mass as the sacrificing of Christ.

CHAPTER XVI

HOW CHRIST HAS FULFILLED THE FUNCTION OF REDEEMER TO ACQUIRE SALVATION FOR US. HERE, ALSO, HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION ARE DISCUSSED, AS WELL AS HIS ASCENT INTO HEAVEN

(Alienated by sin from God, who yet loved us, we are reconciled by Christ, 1-4)

1. The Redeemer

^{e(b/a)}What we have said so far concerning Christ must be referred to this one objective: condemned, dead, and lost in ourselves, we should seek righteousness, liberation, life, and salvation in him, as we are taught by that well-known saying of Peter: "There is no other name under heaven given to men in which we must be saved" [Acts 4:12]. The name "Jesus" was bestowed upon him not without reason or by chance, or by the decision of men, but it was brought from heaven by an angel, the proclaimer of the supreme decree.¹ The reason for it is added: he was sent to "save the people from their sins" [Matt. 1:21; cf. Luke 1:31]. We must note in these words what we have touched upon elsewhere:² the office of Redeemer was laid upon him that he might be our Savior. ^eStill, our redemption would be imperfect if he did not lead us ever onward to the final goal of salvation. Accordingly, the moment we turn away even slightly from him, our salvation, which rests firmly in him, gradually vanishes away. As a result, all those who do not repose in him voluntarily deprive themselves of all grace. Bernard's admonition is worth remembering: "The name of Jesus is not only light but also food; it is also oil, without which all food of the soul is dry; it is salt, without whose seasoning whatever is set before us is insipid; finally, it is honey in the mouth, melody in the ear, rejoicing in

¹ The "decree" of salvation proclaimed in the angel's message to Mary, Luke 1:28-33.

² II. vi. 1.

the heart, and at the same time medicine. Every discourse in which his name is not spoken is without savor."³

But here we must earnestly ponder how he accomplishes salvation for us. This we must do not only to be persuaded that he is its author, but to gain a sufficient and stable support for our faith, rejecting whatever could draw us away in one direction or another. No one can descend into himself⁴ and seriously consider what he is without feeling God's wrath and hostility toward him. Accordingly, he must anxiously seek ways and means to appease God—and this demands a satisfaction. No common assurance is required, for God's wrath and curse always lie upon sinners until they are absolved of guilt. Since he is a righteous Judge, he does not allow his law to be broken without punishment, but is equipped to avenge it.

2. *The awareness of God's wrath makes us thankful for his loving act in Christ*

^eBut, before we go any farther, we must see in passing how fitting it was that God, who anticipates us by his mercy, should have been our enemy until he was reconciled to us through Christ. For how could he have given in his only-begotten Son a singular pledge of his love to us if he had not already embraced us with his free favor? Since, therefore, some sort of contradiction arises here, I shall dispose of this difficulty. "The Spirit usually speaks in this way in the Scriptures: "God was men's enemy until they were reconciled to grace by the death of Christ" [Rom. 5: 10 p.]. "They were under a curse until their iniquity was atoned for by his sacrifice." [Gal. 3:10, 13 p.] "They were estranged from God until through his body they were reconciled." [Col. 1:21-22 p.] Expressions of this sort have been accommodated to our capacity that we may better understand how miserable and ruinous our condition is apart from Christ. For if it had not been clearly stated that the wrath and vengeance of God and eternal death rested upon us, we would scarcely have recognized how miserable we would have been without God's mercy, and we would have underestimated the benefit of liberation.

For example, suppose someone is told: "If God hated you while you were still a sinner, and cast you off, as you deserved, a terrible destruction would have awaited you. But because he kept you in grace voluntarily, and of his own free favor, and did not allow you to be estranged from him, he thus delivered

³ Bernard, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* xv. 6 (MPL. 183. 340 f.; tr. S. J. Eales, *Life and Work of St. Bernard* IV. 83 f.).

⁴ Cf. I. i. 2; I. v. 3, and notes appended to these passages.

you from that peril." This man then will surely experience and feel something of what he owes to God's mercy. On the other hand, suppose he learns, as Scripture teaches, that he was estranged from God through sin, is an heir of wrath, subject to the curse of eternal death, excluded from all hope of salvation, beyond every blessing of God, the slave of Satan, captive under the yoke of sin, destined finally for a dreadful destruction and already involved in it; and that at this point Christ interceded as his advocate, took upon himself and suffered the punishment that, from God's righteous judgment, threatened all sinners; that he purged with his blood those evils which had rendered sinners hateful to God; that by this expiation he made satisfaction and sacrifice duly to God the Father; that as intercessor he has appeased God's wrath; that on this foundation rests the peace of God with men; that by this bond his benevolence is maintained toward them. Will the man not then be even more moved by all these things which so vividly portray the greatness of the calamity from which he has been rescued?⁵

To sum up: since our hearts cannot, in God's mercy, either seize upon life ardently enough or accept it with the gratefulness we owe, unless our minds are first struck and overwhelmed by fear of God's wrath and by dread of eternal death, we are taught by Scripture to perceive that apart from Christ, God is, so to speak, hostile to us, and his hand is armed for our destruction; to embrace his benevolence and fatherly love in Christ alone.

3. *God's wrath against unrighteousness; his love precedes our reconciliation in Christ**

Although this statement is tempered to our feeble comprehension, it is not said falsely. For God, who is the highest righteousness, cannot love the unrighteousness that he sees in us all. All of us, therefore, have in ourselves something deserving of God's hatred. With regard to our corrupt nature and the wicked life that follows it, all of us surely displease God, are guilty in his sight, and are born to the damnation of hell.⁶ But because the Lord wills not to lose what is his in us, out of his own kindness he still finds something to love. However much we may be

⁵ The conception of the atonement as effectual through man's response to God's love revealed in Christ's death (a view usually associated with Abailard's name) seems momentarily suggested in this sentence. But Calvin's thought is not Abailard's. E. Brunner has justly stressed Calvin's adherence to the substitutionary doctrine of Anselm: *The Mediator* (tr. O. Wyon), pp. 438 f., 458, 507.

⁶ "Gehennae."

sinners by our own fault, we nevertheless remain his creatures. However much we have brought death upon ourselves, yet he has created us unto life. Thus he is moved by pure and freely given love of us to receive us into grace. Since there is a perpetual and irreconcilable disagreement between righteousness and unrighteousness, so long as we remain sinners he cannot receive us completely. Therefore, to take away all cause for enmity and to reconcile us utterly to himself, he wipes out all evil in us by the expiation set forth in the death of Christ; that we, who were previously unclean and impure, may show ourselves righteous and holy in his sight. Therefore, by his love God the Father goes before and anticipates our reconciliation in Christ. Indeed, "because he first loved us" [I John 4:19], he afterward reconciles us to himself. But until Christ succors us by his death, the unrighteousness that deserves God's indignation remains in us, and is accursed and condemned before him. Hence, we can be fully and firmly joined with God only when Christ joins us with him. If, then, we would be assured that God is pleased with and kindly disposed toward us, we must fix our eyes and minds on Christ alone. For actually, through him alone we escape the imputation of our sins to us—an imputation bringing with it the wrath of God.

4. The work of atonement derives from God's love; therefore it has not established the latter

For this reason, Paul says that the love with which God embraced us "before the creation of the world" was established and grounded in Christ [Eph. 1:4-5]. These things are plain and in agreement with Scripture, and beautifully harmonize those passages in which it is said that God declared his love toward us in giving his only-begotten Son to die [John 3:16]; and, conversely, that God was our enemy before he was again made favorable to us by Christ's death [Rom. 5:10]. But to render these things more certain among those who require the testimony of the ancient church, I shall quote a passage of Augustine where the very thing is taught: "God's love," says he, "is incomprehensible and unchangeable. For it was not after we were reconciled to him through the blood of his Son that he began to love us. Rather, he has loved us before the world was created, that we also might be his sons along with his only-begotten Son—before we became anything at all. The fact that we were reconciled through Christ's death must not be understood as if his Son reconciled us to him that he might now begin to love those whom he had hated. Rather, we have already been reconciled

to him who loves us, with whom we were enemies on account of sin. The apostle will testify whether I am speaking the truth: 'God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us' [Rom. 5:8]. Therefore, he loved us even when we practiced enmity toward him and committed wickedness. Thus in a marvelous and divine way he loved us even when he hated us. For he hated us for what we were that he had not made; yet because our wickedness had not entirely consumed his handiwork, he knew how, at the same time, to hate in each one of us what we had made, and to love what he had made.'⁷ "These are Augustine's words.

(The effects of the obedience and death of Christ, 5-7)

5. *Christ has redeemed us through his obedience, which he practiced throughout his life*

^(b/a)Now someone asks, How has Christ abolished sin, banished the separation between us and God, and acquired righteousness to render God favorable and kindly toward us? To this we can in general reply that he has achieved this for us by the whole course of his obedience.⁸ This is proved by Paul's testimony: "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience we are made righteous" [Rom. 5:19 p.]. In another passage, to be sure, Paul extends the basis of the pardon that frees us from the curse of the law to the whole life of Christ: "But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, subject to the law, to redeem those who were under the law" [Gal. 4:4-5]. Thus in his very baptism, also, he asserted that he fulfilled a part of righteousness in obediently carrying out his Father's commandment [Matt. 3:15]. In short, from the time when he took on the form of a servant, he began to pay the price of liberation in order to redeem us.

Yet to define the way of salvation more exactly, Scripture ascribes this as peculiar and proper to Christ's death. He declares that "he gave his life to redeem many" [Matt. 20:28 p.]. Paul teaches that "Christ died for our sins" [Rom. 4:25 p.]. John the Baptist proclaimed that he came "to take away the sins of the world," for he was "the Lamb of God" [John 1:29 p.]. In another passage Paul teaches that "we are freely justified through the

⁷ Augustine, *John's Gospel* cx. 6 (MPL 35. 1923 f.; tr. NPNF VII. 411).

⁸ Pannier remarks that the clause "born of the Virgin Mary," which seems the most supernaturalist article of the Creed, serves Calvin mainly as an attestation not of the divinity, but of the humanity of Christ, of his incorporation in Adam's race. (Pannier, *Institution* II. 382, note a on p. 98.) See also T. F. Torrance, *The School of Faith*, Introduction, pp. lxxx f.