

10 Calvin's Doctrine of the Divine Election and Pastoral Ministry

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, how great it is to hold this Fifth Congress on Calvin Research again in this country. As the coordinator of the Asian Congress, I would like to welcome all the participants from Japan, Taiwan, and Korea, especially Professor Wilhelm Neuser from Germany and Professor Willem Balke from Netherlands.

It is my great honor to give the opening address on this great occasion. I have chosen the topic : "Calvin's Doctrine of the Divine Election and Pastoral Ministry." As many of you may know, the 7th International Congress on Calvin Research shall be convened in 1998 in Korea. Korea Calvin Society is preparing a publication on the topic of "Calvin Research and Pastoral Ministry" for the Congress. It will be a joint work of Calvin scholars and leading pastors in this country. Dr. Lee Sou-Young has prepared about twenty topics on Calvin research and each topic will be treated jointly by one Calvin researcher and one pastor. Each research is to be applied to concrete pastoral situation.

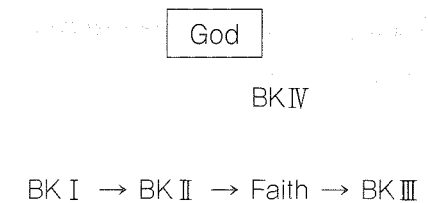
My topic of this address is an example of the work which Korea Calvin Society is presently working on.

Calvin's Theology Is Soteriological and therefore Pastoral and Missiological

There is a theological thesis behind this attempt, which I have already presented at the last Congress held in 1989 Korea, which was the 2nd Congress. The thesis is that, on the one hand Calvin research ought to be applied to pastoral ministry and effective and fruitful in the church, and on the other hand pastoral ministry ought to be guided by Calvin's theology. This thesis is simply a conclusion from the fact that Calvin's theology is soteriological and therefore at the same time must be pastoral. Since God uses pastoral ministry for the salvation of the elect, and God has sent down even his Son for our salvation, therefore our thesis in regard to Calvin research and pastoral ministry can easily be confirmed, because in Calvin God the Redeemer works out His salvation in Christ and applies this redemption in Christ to us through the Christ ministry. This thesis can also be confirmed by the general structure of his Institutes. The entire book of the Institutes is structured around a little word "faith." Roughly speaking it is this one word which connects BK I and BK II with BK III.

BK I + BK II → faith → BK III

On the other hand BK IV ministers for "faith." Consequently rough presentation of the structure of Calvin's *Inst.* is as follows :



This picture shows clearly that Calvin's theology is soteriological and therefore it is at the same time pastoral or missiological.

Our present topic : "Calvin's Doctrine of the Divine Election and Pastoral Ministry" will also prove the thesis. From the out-set we can see how the doctrine of divine election or predestination is to be closely related to pastoral ministry. According to Calvin, the divine election is the foundation and beginning of our salvation(III.14 : 21 ; IV.22 : 5). On the other hand our salvation is entirely accomplished in the bosom of the church. Therefore, we can already clearly see the inseparable relationship between the divine election of those predestinated and the pastoral ministry for their salvation.

Wendel and Niesel Fails to See Calvin's Concern with Salvation and Ministry

Calvin is very much practical man because he was a scientific man. As he handles theological science, he is never drawn away from the spiritual and factual reality by any vacant speculations. Calvin is concerned with the whole course of salvation : beginning with God's sovereign and eternal election up to its full fruition. Calvin begins with its very root, "decretum absolutum," i.e. "eternal election, by which God

has predestinated some to salvation, others to destruction” and he sets forth the entire course of the progress of the great salvation of the elect, up to the entrance into the glorious inheritance of the Kingdom. In contrast to Calvin’s scientific theology, we can see the best examples of unscientific abstract character of the western theologies, even in the field of Calvin studies, Francois Wendel and Wilhelm Niesel. Being occupied too much with their basic theses, they fail to grasp and set forth accurately the truth of the election, and the actual process of salvation of the elect : the divine call through the church ministry and the beginning and continual progress of justification of the elect. Particularly Calvin emphasises the importance of “good works” of the believer as the necessary step to the entrance into the inheritance. Calvin is not ambiguous at this point.

Those whom the Lord has destined by his mercy for the inheritance of eternal life he leads into possession of it, according to his ordinary dispensation, by means of good works(Inst. III.14.21).

For Calvin all these steps of God’s grace : God’s “heaping grace upon grace” are the fruits and the gifts of the Holy Spirit which proceed from the very source of his freely given election. Therefore, Paul’s description of the divine predestination of Rom. 8 : 30

Whom he did predestinate, them he also called : and whom he called, them he also justified : and whom he justified them he also glorified.

Calling, justification, good works, and glorification : all comes under one rubric, God’s election of the predestinated. Wendel is very much

concerned with the problem of harmonizing the contradictory thoughts ; the principle of justification by faith alone and any credits given to good works. Wendel is afraid of “seeing in Calvin the germs of the future puritanism”(Calvin, p. 276).

Wendel indicates, “some disciples of Calvin took a much more affirmative position with regard to the testimony of works” and gives an emphatic conclusion : “But this tendency, it must be repeated, is contrary to authentic Calvinist’s thought”(Ibid. p. 277). Wendel, however, could not dismiss Calvin’s putting a great importance on “the testimony of good works,” therefore he makes somehow a compromising remarks on this matter. “In reality, the author of the Institutes admits the testimony of works only under the restrictions required by his theology as a whole, and as signs of a very inferior kind”(Ibid. p. 276). Calvin, however, has never considered “good works” “as signs of a very inferior kind.” In Calvin, they are indeed “the divine dispensation” by which the Lord leads his elects into the glorious inheritance.

Since Wilhelm Niesel is also completely trapped with his abstract, epistemological theology and misrepresent Calvin’s “syllogismus practicus,” he also gives a very negative conclusions in regard to the “benefits” which we enjoy, as the testimonies of our being elected. Niesel concludes “Calvin did not invite us to use the syllogismus practicus to strengthen our hope of salvation”(The Theology of Calvin, p. 180). The fundamental problem in Niesel is, as it is the case with all other modern Western theologians, that he is solely occupied with epistemology which cannot be the end in itself but simply a means to metaphysics. Niesel reveals this fact frankly : “It becomes clear that Calvin is strictly concerned with the theology of revelation and that his teaching is wholly

centered on Jesus Christ.” Here we can see the basic defective point of all Barthian theology in regard to the doctrine of “the Word of God.” Calvin’s syllogismus practicus, i.e. “Clinging to those latter signs” as “sure attestations of our election”(IV.24.4) is not the matter of “the theology of revelation” but the matter of our salvation and of the church ministry. Niesel gives a clearcut negative conclusion in this matter :

For this reason Calvin warns us against the syllogismus practicus ; for the latter implies that our view is deflected from God, who is to be found in Christ alone, and is turned towards man. By such a proceeding the hope of salvation is not increased but rather imperilled(Ibid. p. 181).

In contrast to both Wendel and Niesel’s explanation of Calvin’s views of “good works” as “signs of a very inferior kind” or as “syllogismus practicus” when Calvin notes on “the latter signs which are sure attestation of our election,” Calvin is concerned more with our salvation itself and pastoral ministry, than any “syllogismus practicus,” for epistemological confirmation of the “testimony of election.” As for Calvin, epistemological confirmation of election is not so much important, as their practical working for salvation and eternal blessedness.

Election and Call or Preaching

In Calvin, there are special relationship between “election” and “God’s call.” First, “election” is actualized only through “call.” The purpose of “election” is to adopt the elect as his children. In order, however, to educate the elect, God must call them into his church.

“Although in choosing his own the Lord already has adopted them as his children, we see that they do not come into possession of so great a good except when they are called”(Inst. III.24.1). On the other hand, “when they are called, they already enjoy some share of their election.”

Therefore, “election” is for the elect to become God’s children and consequently for God to become their Father. Calvin well express the fact :

Therefore, God designates as his children those whom he has chosen, and appoints himself their Father(III.24.1).

On the other hand, this relationship is concretely actualized through calling.

Further, by calling he receives them into his family and unites them to him so that they may together be one(Ibid.).

Therefore, in Calvin “calling” is actually “evangelism,” by which those who are predestined to become his children, are to be called into church, that is, the society of Christ. When Calvin says “the preaching of the gospel streams forth from the wellspring of election,”(III.24.1) it seems to mean that the inner source of the divine grace, that is God’s good pleasure toward his chosen ones, is the very source of the preaching of the gospel. Calvin indicates, Jn 6 : 45, “Every man who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me” to mean the same thing.

Calvin analyses this matter a step further.

of those whom he predestinated to become his children and the necessity of union and communion with Christ for the elects. "God can honor them with the inheritance of his kingdom" if they had preciously become partakers of his Christ.

Now how can this union and communion can be take place. It is only through the preaching of the gospel.

Now Christ gave us that sure communion with himself, when he testified through the preaching of the gospel that he had been given to us by the Father to be ours with all his benefits(Rom. 8 : 32). (Ibid.)

The purpose of church's ministry of the word and sacraments is to help the believers to possess Christ and enjoy all the benefits which he brings(Rom. 13 : 14 ; Eph. 4 : 15 ; Rom. 8 : 32 ; Jn. 3 : 15 ; Jn. 5 : 24 ; Jn. 6 : 51, 58). At the same time, this is also the purpose of the divine election. Therefore, God uses church's ministry to fulfill his purpose of election. God is said to have chosen those whom he has predestinated to conform the image of his Son, and called them into the community of Christ, that is, the church, "that they may be nourished by her help and ministry until they mature and at last reach the goal of faith"(IV.1.1). Now Calvin has established the inner relationship among the three things : the eternal divine election of those predestinated in Christ, the union and communion of the saints with Christ, and church's ministry of the Word.

The Doctrine of Election and Prayers

Now, at this point Calvin introduces the need of "prayer" in relation

to the doctrine of election. He indicates : "The practice of this doctrine ought also to flourish in our prayers"(Ibid.). He also indicates : "faith in election prompts us to call upon God"(Ibid.).

In Calvin the entire ministry of the church concentrate upon the one point "faith." "Faith," however, such a great thing as to make us "sons of God" and to enter into "the Great Inheritance," is something which is to be exercised concretely in spirit and in actual life. We can say that the spiritual exercise of "faith" is "prayer" and the physical exercise of faith in life is "good works." Calvin declares that prayer is the chief exercise of "faith." The title of chapter 20 of BK III explains every thing : "prayer, which is the chief exercise of faith, and by which we daily receive God's benefits." Again to Calvin "faith" is never without "good works." He emphasises "we dream neither of a faith devoid of good works, (non fidem somniamus bonis operibus vacuum) nor of a justification that stands without them(aut justificationem quae sine iis constet). Here again we see the necessity of church's ministry as the external aids to the believers, 1) for their exercise of faith in their prayer life in relation to their salvation, 2) for their exercise of faith in their actual life in the form of church discipline, that is, the exercise of the keys, according to Matt. 18 : 15-19, for "reproof and correction"(II Tim. 3 : 16).

In regard to "prayer life" for the practice of the doctrine of election, Calvin indicates "faith in election prompts us to call upon God." This is a very important and cardinal point. "Our faith in election" puts us already in paternal and filial relationship with God. Having him as our Father, we call upon him, "Aba Father," asking for things we need. The practice of the doctrine of election would mean it, and according

to Calvin, such practice ought to flourish in our prayers. In the title of the chapter on prayer, Calvin indicates “By prayer we daily receive God’s benefits.” However, God offers all his benefits in Christ.

For in Christ he[God] offers all happiness in place of our misery, all wealth in place of our neediness ; in him opens to us the heavenly treasures that our whole faith may contemplate his beloved son, our whole expectation depend upon him, and our whole hope cleave to and rest in him(Inst. III.20.1).

Now Calvin concludes :

it remains for us to seek in him[Christ], and in prayers to ask of him, what we have learned to be in him(Ibid.).

Calvin has preciously indicated that the purpose of election is to obtain salvation and immortality, being adopted as sons by our Heavenly Father. He offers them freely, however, only in Christ. If they are offered in Christ freely, we have to receive them in faith through prayers. Here is the focal point of church’s ministry for prayer engagements of congregation : to have that sure communication with Christ, as “he testified through the preaching of the gospel that he had been given to us by the Father to be ours with all his benefits.” When Calvin said “practice of this doctrine ought to flourish in our prayers,” he would mean that the contents of those passages of Rom. 8 : 32 ; Rom. 13 : 14, Eph. 4 : 15, Rom. 8 : 32 ; Jn. 3 : 15 ; Jn. 5 : 24 ; Jn. 6 : 51, 58 are to be actualized in ourselves and enjoyed in our spirit. Calvin sets forth the contents in a more systematic way

through those four passages of BK III,1.1 : Eph. 4 : 15 ; Rom. 8 : 29 ; Rom. 11 : 17 ; Gal. 3 : 27.

Elections, God’s Works, and Salvation

In Calvin “good works” occupies such an important place as he considers them to be one of the two parts of the gospel : repentance and forgiveness of sins. All the more “good works” is the qualification of believers by which means God leads them into His eternal Kingdom. It is surprising to find such great scholars like Wendel and Niesel could misunderstand at this very cardinal point as we have already indicated. Perhaps that may due to Wendel’s anxiousness to identify “sanctificaton” with repentance. Since he deals with this topic in relation to III. 6-10, “the Life of Christian Man,” he seems to have missed Calvin’s proper section on the topic of “sanctification” III.14-18.

Our present concern is to see how closely “good works” of the believers are related to “eternal predestination of election.”

At once we may quote again that clearcut declaration of Calvin which may answer to the whole question.

Those whom the Lord has destined by his mercy for the inheritance of eternal life he leads into possession of it, according to his ordinary dispensation, by means of good works(III.14.21.).

Of course the foundation of our salvation and the first cause of it is not “good works,” but “the mercy of God” by which we are elected. “But if the question of the manner,” Calvin says, “we must proceed to regeneration and its fruits”(III.17.6). Calvin explains the reason as

follows :

He receives his own into life by his mercy alone. Yet, since he leads them into possession of it through the race of good works in order to fulfill his own work in them according to the order that he has laid down, it is no wonder if they are said to be crowned according to their own works, by which they are doubtless prepared to receive the crown of immortality. But they are filty said to "work out their own salvation[Phil. 2 : 12]"(III.18.1).

The whole reason why the chosen must be made perfect is for the creator to perfect his own work in them. Therefore, "it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure"(Phil. 2 : 13). Calvin explains Phil. 1 : 6 in following way : "Now that God has begun a good work in them, it must also be made perfect until the Day of the Lord Jesus"(Ibid.). Therefore, Calvin consider this additional grace "the second grace"(secunda gratia)(III.20.45), "a double acceptance of man before God"(duplex acceptio homini)(III.17.4&5) "works righteousness"(operum justitiae)(III.17.9&10), "stages of his mercy"(III.18.1) "heaping grace upon grace"(III.14.21)

Therefore, it is clear that good works are the gifts of God from the same source of his mercy. They are "testimonies of God dwelling and ruling in us." They are "signs of the divine benevolence toward us." They are like "rays of the divine countenance"(III.14.18). These are the "fruits of their calling"(III.14.19). From the fruits "they may regard themselves as having been chosen as sons by the Lord"(Ibid.).

In Calvin the ultimate source of all the benefits is "God's mercy and love." In every occasion, Calvin indicates, we "must look only to his

freely given election which is the source and beginning." These gifts of the Holy Spirit proceed from that source : the first cause, that is, his free election. According to Calvin, the call is "a testimony of election" and justification is "another sign of its manifestation, until they come into the glory in which the fulfillment of that election lies"(III.21.7).

Now, we can delineate the whole picture of salvation in Calvin. The ultimate source and beginning of our salvation is the election of the predestinated to be conformed to the image of his son. The election must be naturally in Christ, no other way being left to us but through his redemptive work. God's calling is the pivot of the whole process of salvation, because it was pleasing to God to provide us with such a kind and common means of enjoying his grace, i.e. church's ministry of word and sacraments. When the chosen are called into the society of Christ, they already enjoy shares of their election : such as "justification" and "fruits of the Spirit," namely "good works." These latter things are simply "signs" and "manifestations" of God's presence with them as their Father. Now it is their part to live out as his children, but his mercy is extended to them in Christ, even up to this matter. Their good works being always spattered with such uncleanness, "yet because he examine our works according to his tenderness, not his supreme might, he, therefore, accept them as if they are **perfectly pure**"(III.15.4).

Conclusions

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, as I conclude this address, I would like to make a few remarks about such a gracious election of our

Heavenly Father, by which he adopts us as his children and appoints himself our Father. 1) What a great honor and glory for us the unworthy rather abominable to him, to be made his glorious sons for the eternal inheritance. 2) We ought to be even more grateful for God's caring for us in the bosom of his church, calling us from death into life, that we may enjoy communion with his Son and partake in all the benefits deposited with him. 3) He grants us the joy of exercises of our life as his children. Though, being defiled with stains and sins, we are far away from showing ourselves his children, yet he accepts us as his children even as perfectly pure. 4) God the Father accomplishes all these gracious works in us through his Christ, only through Christ ministry. The source and foundation, however, of this great salvation is God's mercy of his electing us, but the entire course of this salvation is only through pastoral ministry of the pastors. Therefore, pastors are said installed to fulfill the purpose of divine election.*

* Opening Address of the Fifth Asian Congress on Calvin Research, October 19, 1995, Han Chul-Ha.

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