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*Historiam esse vitae magistram, vere dixerunt ethnicic*  
—Calvin on Romans 4:23–24

The editors wish to echo the author that all the following authors seek to honor by acknowledging not only that the world of unbelief occasionally joins Calvin in referring to history as the teacher of life (*vitae magistram*) but also that in our own lives, those who have preceded us have been marvelous teachers of life, precisely because they valued history so highly. For centuries, little-known (but faithful) professors have sought to enlighten young minds with the knowledge that John Calvin proffered. Our lives have been enriched by such, and we are profoundly grateful for those who taught us Calvin's *Institutes* and an appreciation for Calvin's insights. We wish to thank and dedicate this volume to all those who have been our seminary professors and life instructors, especially to those below who kindly and wisely inculcated a love for Calvin in us during our formative years:

Dr. William S. Barker  
Dr. Robert L. Reymond  
Dr. David C. Jones  
Dr. Joseph H. Hall  
Dr. David C. Calhoun  
Dr. D. Clair Davis  
Dr. Sinclair B. Ferguson  
Dr. S. Lewis Johnson  
Dr. Richard B. Gaffin Jr.



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## FOREWORD

Calvin's *Institutes* (5th edition, 1559) is one of the wonders of the literary world—the world, that is, of writers and writing, of digesting and arranging heaps of diverse materials, of skillful proportioning and gripping presentation; the world, as Dorothy L. Sayers described it in *The Mind of the Maker*, of the Idea, the Word, and the Power. In the days before blurbs and dust jackets, authors had to state on the title page whatever they wanted readers and bookshop browsers to be aware of regarding their book's contents. This explains why, with what might strike us as self-promoting grandiloquence, Calvin titled the first edition (1536) *Basic instruction (institutio) in the Christian religion, embracing just about (fere) the whole sum of godliness (summa pietatis), and all that needs to be known in the doctrine of salvation; a work very well worth reading by everyone zealous for godliness*; and why in 1539 this became *Basic instruction in the Christian religion, now at last truly answering to its description (nunc vere demum suo titulo respondens)*; and why the 1559 edition announced itself as *Basic instruction in the Christian religion, freshly set out in four books, and divided into chapters according to the fittest method, and so greatly enlarged that it can almost be regarded as a new work*. Plainly, Calvin was at last content with what he had done, and the verdict of history is that he was entitled to be. Simply, as grand-scale exposition of a very large body of integrated thought, the *Institutio* is truly a marvel.

Through its five editions, Calvin's *summa pietatis* grew to five times its original length and from six to eighty chapters, divided into four books of which the fourth matches for length the first three put together. It began as a catechetical account of foundational Protestant Christianity, loosely modeled on Luther's *Smaller Catechism*, covering in sequence the Decalogue, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the gospel sacraments

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and the five rites incorrectly so called, and the life of freedom under the Word of God in church and state; all with an apologetic cast, in hope of gaining respect and acceptance from the King of France, to whom Calvin addressed a courteous dedicatory letter. New material mutated the second edition (1539) into a sort of *summa theologiae*, a theological student's preparation and *vade mecum* for Bible study, and this trebled the book's length. In the third and fourth editions the amplifying process continued, and by 1559 the *Institutio* was twice as long again as in 1539. It was now a full-scale declaration of biblical Christianity as Calvin saw it—who and what God is, and what he was, is, and will be doing in and for the human race, according to his Word. The titles of the four books reflect the four-part division of the Creed and, behind this, the order of things in Paul's letter to the Romans. They run thus: "of the knowledge of God in his works and qualities . . . as Creator and sovereign Governor of the world"; "of the knowledge of God the Redeemer as he has shown himself in Jesus Christ"; "of the manner of participating in the grace of Jesus Christ"; and "of the external means of aids which God uses to draw us to Jesus Christ his Son and to keep us in him" (church, sacraments, and civil order, all viewed as a means of grace).

The readability of the *Institutio*, considering its size, is remarkable. Calvin's pacing is steady and urgent throughout. Just about every sentence contains concentrated thought expressed in elegant, fast-moving, colorful, punchy Latin rhetoric. (No English translation fully matches Calvin's Latin; that of the Elizabethan, Thomas Norton, perhaps gets closest; Beveridge gives us Calvin's feistiness but not always his precision; Battles gives us the precision but not always the punchiness, and fleetness of foot; Allen is smooth and clear, but low-key.) Calvin's combative streak and lawyer's training impelled him to argue his opponents under the table, as we might put it, and sixteenth-century controversial manners, or lack of them, led him to bad-mouth his opponents personally as he argued against their ideas, and the 1559 *Institutio* is disfigured by some over-arguing and satirical brutalities. All in all, however, the book remains a literary masterpiece, a triumph of the didactic writer's art, and when read seriously it makes a very winning impact on the mind and heart, even today.

Nor is that all.

The *Institutio* is also one of the wonders of the spiritual world—the world of doxology and devotion, of discipleship and discipline, of Word-through-Spirit illumination and transformation of individuals, of the Christ-centered mind and the Christ-honoring heart. Shaping all its elaborate doctrinal discussions, with their rigorous biblicism, their strong assertions of divine sovereignty, and their sharply focused trinitarianism, is a persistent orientation to the conscience, a contagious awareness that we do and must live our lives *coram Deo*, in the presence and sight of the searcher of hearts, and a drumbeat insistence that sound belief must express itself in *pietas*, faithful—that is, faith-full—obedience to, and worship of, the Father and the Son through the Spirit. Though the *Institutio* became more than a catechism in that it reached beyond the basics of the discipling process, it nowhere became less than a catechism by losing its discipling focus as the permanent bottom line. The exposition of Jesus Christ as set forth in the Creed, and of the Christian life, of the Ten Commandments, and of praying the Lord's Prayer, stands out in the ongoing flow as (to change the image) jewels in the crown

Catechizing, a ministry neglected and needing to be recovered in the modern church, is the work of systematically teaching children and adults the truths that Christians live by, and the way of actually living by them. The catechizing process may take different forms, from the familiar question-and-answer, repeat-after-me style of children's catechisms, to the lecture-for-discussion method of such as Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century and Nicky Gumbel in the Alpha course of today. Real, intelligent commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord, and God, to the fellowship of the church as one's proper milieu for life, and to self-identification as pilgrims through a world that is not our home to a heaven that is, must ever be catechizing's direct goal. This practical discipling purpose runs all through the *Institutio*. I doubt there is any other treatise of comparable length of which that can be said. Still today, one simply cannot read it receptively without being searched, humbled, and challenged regarding one's sincerity and progress (Calvin's favorite word), or lack of it, in one's personal Christian life.

And there is yet more to be said.

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Calvin's *Institutio* is one of the wonders of the theological world, too—that is, the world of truth, faithfulness, and coherence in the mind regarding God; of combat, regrettable but inescapable, with intellectual insufficiency and error in believers and unbelievers alike; and of vision, valuation, and vindication of God as he presents himself through his Word to our fallen and disordered minds. Refusing to affirm anything that does not echo explicit biblical teaching, and refusing too to separate things God has joined, Calvin spells out Christ-centered faith and life with a sure touch. Justification by faith, “the mainstay for upholding religion” (3.11.1), is central, both spatially and theologically, occupying chapters 11–18 of book 3. What precedes it is what must first be known before we can grasp it—that God is triune, holy, and just yet good and gracious, Lord of history and disposer of all things (1.10–18); that godliness means humble love, gratitude, reverence, submission, and dependence God-ward (1.2); that we humans are by nature guilty, blind, and helpless in sin (2.1–5); that both Testaments witness to Jesus Christ, the divine-human Mediator, whose death gained salvation for us (2.6–17); what the law requires (2.8); what faith is (3.2); how God gives faith (3.1); how faith begets repentance (3.3–5); and Christian living (3.6–10). What follows justification is, in effect, a program for our spiritual health as justified sinners. We must know that our freedom from the law is for obedience to it (3.19); that we cannot go on without prayer (3.20); that God's election guarantees our final salvation (3.21–24, the “predestination chapters”); that we have a sure hope of resurrection in glory (3.25); that we must wait on the ministry of Word and sacrament in the church for our soul's growth (4.1–19); and that we must be good citizens, since civil government exists to protect the church (4.20). Such is personal Christianity, with justification as the framing notion, as Calvin's giant catechism—overgrown, perhaps, but a catechism still—sets it forth.

For Calvin, the angle of these pastoral presentations was just as important as their substance. Doxological theocentrism shaped everything. His compassionate concern that everyone should know God's grace was rooted in a deeper desire, namely that everyone should glorify God by a life of adoring worship for the wonder of his work in creation,

providence, and salvation, fully recognizing the realities that the Reformational slogans *sola Scriptura*, *solo Christo*, *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, and *soli Deo gloria*, were put in place to guard. Knowledge of God as Creator and Redeemer, holy, just, wise, and good, comes to us by Scripture *alone*, not by our own independent insight or guesswork. The blessings of redemption—reconciliation with God, the gift of righteousness and sonship, regeneration, glory—come to us by Christ *alone*, not by any fancied personal merit or any priestly mediation on the part of the church. Christ and his gifts are received by faith *alone*, not earned by effort. That very faith is given to us and sustained in us by grace *alone*, so that our own contribution to our salvation is precisely nil; all the glory for it must go to God *alone*, and none be diverted to us. We are simply the sinners whose need of salvation is met by the marvelous mercy of him who “did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all” (Rom. 8:32 ESV). The 1559 *Institutio* is, as we have seen, Calvin’s swan song, in which he speaks his last word on everything, including the errors he constantly battled—anti-trinitarianism, illuminism, Pelagianism, anti-nomianism, autosoterism, sacerdotalism; wrong ideas about justification, ecclesiastical authority, the eucharist, and so on—and the roughness of his polemic as he works over these deviant views for what he expects to be the last time is an index of the intensity of his sense that the mistakes rob God of the praise that is his due.

Great theology, like the Bible in which all great theology is soaked, is essentially transhistorical and transcultural, and interprets us, joltingly sometimes, as we seek to interpret it. The 1559 *Institutio* is great theology, and it is uncanny how often, as we read and re-read it, we come across passages that seem to speak directly across the centuries to our own hearts and our own present-day theological debates. You never seem to get to the book’s bottom; it keeps opening up as a veritable treasure trove of biblical wisdom on all the main themes of the Christian faith. Do you, I wonder, know what I am talking about? Dig into the *Institutio*, and you soon will.

This book celebrates the five hundredth anniversary of John Calvin’s birth and is the work of a team of scholars to whom different sections of the *Institutio* were parceled out. Full advantage is taken of the current cottage

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industry of Calvin studies, which has achieved already notable insights in many areas. The essays vary in technical level, but are all strong and clear for the wayfaring man, and some are outstanding. They add up to a very valuable volume, which I commend with enthusiasm. For making Calvin known today as well as once he was, and in every age deserves to be, this really is a major step forward. *Soli Deo gloria!*

J. I. PACKER

## PREFACE

Over the centuries various ways have been found to gather some of the finest authorities for conversations. Whether one thinks of the ancient Athenian agora where citizen philosophers held forth, or an Arthurian round table which was an early form of a polis, or Luther's table talks with disciples in German common houses, or a French salon heady with eighteenth-century Enlightenment ideals, or today's blog, which provides instant access for an international community, we often find that excellent ideas are further sharpened with infusions of commentary from others. This volume is best viewed as a conversation among informed friends.

The common topic is textual matter from John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The common commitment is to honor the text and to, perhaps, elucidate the topic in some fashion. The scholarship contained is uncommon.

The editors are quite happy to present to the reading public this collection of commentaries on Calvin's *Institutes*. We think that John Calvin would certainly approve of the hearty discussion, amplification, and reflection upon his work such as we offer herein. He certainly recognized that his first edition (1536) could be improved, for he revised this magnum opus in 1539, 1545, 1554, and 1559.

One can observe how widely his work spread in a relatively short time. By 1578, Oxford undergraduates were required to read Calvin's *Institutes* and his Catechism. Moreover, if English sermons in the next (seventeenth) century were still referencing Calvin's *Institutes* as a vital source for opposing governmental abuse, American colonial sermons conveyed his sentiments even more. "Probably no other theological work," wrote Herbert Foster, "was so widely read and so influential from the

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Reformation to the American Revolution. . . . In England [it] was considered 'the best and perfectest system of divinity' by both Anglican and Puritan until [Archbishop William] Laud's supremacy in the 1630s."<sup>1</sup> "Most colonial libraries seem to contain some work by Calvin"; indeed, "scarcely a colonial list of books from New Hampshire to South Carolina appears to lack books written by Calvinists."<sup>2</sup>

For centuries, this robust theological classic has remained must-reading for ministerial students, informed Christians, and various academic disciplines. The fact that this work is still available in multiple editions via the leading online book service is a further tribute to its value.

Prior to this present work, other individuals have set forth their own commentaries or summaries of Calvin's *Institutes*. What this volume offers is a chorale with many voices; we believe that the chorale is superior to a solo.

Expert commentators were chosen for this volume with three criteria in mind: (1) their sympathetic readings of Calvin's work, although not uncritically so; (2) their teaching of this material for a considerable span of time, normally in seminaries or universities; and (3) their willingness to meet a rigid publication schedule to have this material form part of the commemorative corpus for the Calvin Quincentenary in 2009.

The editors wish to thank each of our overextended contributors who prioritized this work. The end product reflects the years of preparation and contemplation of these topics that each of them brings to this volume. We wish to thank them, their families, and their

1. Robert M. Kingdon, *Calvin and Calvinism: Sources of Democracy* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1970), 37. See also the *Collected Papers of Herbert D. Foster* (privately printed, 1929), 116.

2. Kingdon, *Calvin and Calvinism*, 37. Other historians argue that the Puritanism of New England was "patterned after the Westminster Catechism and embodied the type of Calvinistic thought current in all of New England at that time." See Peter De Jong, *The Covenant Idea in New England Theology, 1620–1847* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945), 85. Foster, *Papers*, 79, lists numerous Americans who owned copies of Calvin's *Institutes*. Patricia Bonomi has also firmly established that the majority of seventeenth-century Americans followed "some form of Puritan Calvinism, which itself was divided into a number of factions." See Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 14.

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institutions for allowing them to lend a hand to a once-in-a-lifetime festschrift, one that we cheerfully albeit posthumously offer to the Protestant Reformer who offered so many tributes to the theological exemplars who shaped his life. We do so with the prayer that five hundred years from now, perhaps an even larger audience will be working similarly.

DAVID W. HALL  
PETER A. LILLBACK

## II

# JUSTIFICATION AND UNION WITH CHRIST

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*INSTITUTES 3.11–18*  
RICHARD B. GAFFIN JR.

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In book 3, chapters 11–18 of Calvin’s *Institutes* we have a matured treatment of the doctrine of justification from the first generation of the Protestant Reformation. One does not overstate to say that it has few peers and arguably is unsurpassed among numerous other excellent treatments that have appeared subsequently, particularly in the tradition of confessional Reformed orthodoxy, for which Calvin has proven to be such an important fountainhead figure. To provide a synopsis of these chapters that reflects on their contents is a daunting task under any circumstance. That is all the more so with the limited space at my disposal, and dictates something other than a continuous, section-by-section survey.

Addressing these chapters under the title “Justification and Union with Christ” might seem to be an undue narrowing of their scope or blurring of their controlling focus. That is not at all the case. Rather, not only the

appropriateness but also the importance of doing so will emerge as we proceed. Nonetheless, this approach does mean that a number of particular issues addressed in this magisterial treatment of justification, each important and worthy of considerable discussion, will not be addressed, other than some of them tangentially. Of that I am keenly aware.

### **Justification in the *Institutes*—1536 to 1559**

A brief overview of the treatment of justification in successive editions of the *Institutes* prior to the definitive 1559 edition provides a helpful perspective on our chapters. It is notable that in the first edition (1536) justification is not a separate topic. It is treated at the close of the opening chapter, on the law, structured primarily by a discussion of the Ten Commandments. This treatment flows out of a discussion of the summary of the law and has interspersed within it a discussion of the threefold use of the law. It is without a title of its own, and in fact can even be read as beginning within a paragraph.<sup>1</sup> I point this out not at all to suggest that at this time justification was not yet important or of only passing concern for Calvin. All one need do is read these pages to be convinced otherwise. But, clearly, at this point and within the overall design of what he had undertaken to do in the *Institutes*, justification had not yet assumed thematic prominence.

This situation changes strikingly with the substantial, 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 seven times the length of the treatment

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1536 edition, trans. and annotated by F. L. Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 29–35, 37–41. The titles of the six chapters are “The Law,” “Faith,” “Prayer,” “The Sacraments,” “The Five False Sacraments,” and “Christian Freedom, Ecclesiastical Power, and Political Administration.” Section headings within the chapters have been added by the translator.

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in 1536 and consists of eighty-seven numbered sections, without subtitling or other internal subdivisions.<sup>2</sup>

The final, 1559 edition, in turn, represents an approximately 25 percent increase over the 1539 edition and subsequent Latin editions and printings (appearing between 1539 and 1554), with some variations among them but of basically the same length. Equally, perhaps more, important is the overall restructuring that takes place. What previously, since 1539, had been a single book of approximately twenty chapters (the number varies among the editions between seventeen and twenty-one, without significant changes in content), now for the first time has the multiple book-chapter-section format, familiar since to readers of this definitive Latin edition in its translation into numerous languages.

We are not left to speculate how Calvin himself viewed this substantial reconfiguration. In his prefatory remarks to the reader, he comments that the editing he had done previously, beginning with the second (1539) edition, was such that the work “has been enriched with some additions.” But, he continues, “I was never satisfied until the work had been arranged in the order now set forth.”<sup>3</sup>

This statement ought to be kept in mind for its likely bearing on his treatment of justification specifically. Apparently, his handling of that doctrine in 1559, in particular both its internal structuring and its placement in relation to other materials, afforded him a measure of satisfaction that had eluded him previously for twenty years. This treatment is expanded by about 15 percent, with the eighty-seven sections of preceding editions being increased to ninety-four and distributed over eight chapters, with titles. The additional material consists in large part of chapter 11, sections 5–12, which deal with the views of Osiander.

As noted above, prior to 1559, beginning with the expanded 1539 edition, justification was treated in a single lengthy chapter titled “Concerning

2. The 1536 edition and the subsequent Latin editions prior to 1559 (the latter presented together with individual variations between them noted) are in I. Calvinus, *Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, vol. 1, ed. G. Baum, E. Cunitz, E. Reuss, *Corpus Reformatorum* 29 (Brunswick: C. A. Schwetschke, 1863); see li–lviii for a synopsis, by topics, of all Latin editions; for the chapter on justification, 738–802.

3. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. J. T. McNeill, trans. F. L. Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:3. All quotations will be from this translation, unless otherwise indicated.

Justification by Faith and the Merits of Works.” None of the chapters in 1559 bear this title, though it is reflected in part in the negative reference to “the Merits of Works” in the title to chapter 15. Still, this faith-merit of works theme remains no less dominant and pervasive in 1559. In fact, seen in its entirety, Calvin’s discussion of justification is fairly read as set polemically against Roman Catholic teaching that justification has its proximate source or basis in grace-assisted works, deemed meritorious, of the baptized Christian. This late-medieval system of meriting justification, formalized at the Council of Trent in 1547,<sup>4</sup> is ever on the horizon for Calvin, often being opposed implicitly when it is not being confronted directly.

Sections 1–4 of chapter 11 repay careful analysis. Structurally, they are fairly seen as introductory in a way that provides foundations and sets the direction for virtually everything that follows in our chapters. Accordingly, I will examine them, especially the first section, in some detail, by identifying prominent themes and emphases there, and, as space permits, also exploring some of them elsewhere throughout these chapters. Current debates about Calvin on justification as well as about the doctrine of justification more generally are in the background, although, necessarily, connections to these debates will for the most part be more implicit than elaborated. It needs also to be kept in mind that my assignment is justification in this part of the *Institutes*, not in Calvin as a whole. Certainly, I hope my treatment is not in any way at odds with the considerable pertinent material there is elsewhere both in the *Institutes* and in his commentaries, sermons, and numerous other occasional writings. But such materials can come into consideration only incidentally.<sup>5</sup>

4. See the decree and canons on justification (Sixth Session, 1547), e.g., in P. Schaff, “The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent,” *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper, 1983), 2:89–118. Calvin’s lengthy response (on justification) is in “Acts of the Council of Trent with the Antidote,” *Tracts and Treatises in Defense of the Reformed Faith*, trans. H. Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 2:108–62.

In my view it is difficult to overemphasize the close link between Trent on justification and the immediately preceding decree on original sin (Fifth Session, 1546; *Creeds of Christendom*, 2:83–88). The Roman Catholic understandings of sin and justification stand and fall together. An abandonment of its semi-Pelagian position for a biblically sound view of the former would lead to an uncompromised *sola gratia*, thoroughly biblical revision of the latter.

5. Among recent broader treatments of Calvin on justification, though focused largely on our chapters, see A. N. S. Lane, “The Role of Scripture in Calvin’s Doctrine

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## Union with Christ and Twofold Grace

Section 1<sup>6</sup> begins with Calvin reminding his readers of what he has previously explained “with sufficient care,” namely that “the one sole means of recovering salvation” left for those under the curse of the law is “in faith.” He also recalls his discussion of faith and its attendant “benefits” and “fruits.” No doubt, in view, at least primarily, are places in book 3 such as 3.2 and 3.3, on faith and regeneration by faith.<sup>7</sup> Then follows a summary of these matters, which needs to be quoted here in its entirety (725):

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 his Spirit<sup>8</sup> we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life.

This summary (*summa*) involves two accents that should not be missed. First and foremost is the focus on Christ, on his *person*. The saving benefits in view that Christ procures do not accrue to faith apart from his person. Specifically, they are received only as he, himself, by faith (*fide*), is “grasped and possessed.” In other words, in view here is the believer’s

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of Justification,” in C. Raynal, ed., *John Calvin and the Interpretation of Scripture*, Calvin Studies 10–11 (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 2006), 368–84, and, overlapping, A. N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic–Protestant Dialogue* (London/New York: T. & T. Clark, 2002), 17–43, and pertinent literature cited in each.

6. All section headings as well as chapter subdivisions have been added by the editor (J. T. McNeill); the former, for the most part, have been taken over from those provided by Otto Weber in his German edition (see p. xx). Material quoted in the text will be followed by section and/or page number in parentheses.

7. It is not clear why the editor (725, n. 1) includes 2.12.1. It needs to be kept in mind that Calvin regularly uses “regeneration” in a broader sense than does subsequent Reformed theology beginning in the seventeenth century. He includes the ongoing renewal of the believer, equivalent in subsequent theology to sanctification in distinction from regeneration.

8. Battles’s translation “Christ’s spirit” is to be corrected in light of the original “*eius Spiritu*” (J. Calvin, *Opera Selecta*, ed. P. Barth and W. Niesel [Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1959], 4:182—hereafter OS 4). “Spirit” should be capitalized, and the antecedent of “his” is more likely the Father than Christ (both the Allen and Beveridge translations have “his Spirit”). The reference is surely to the Holy Spirit.

union with Christ, about which we hear, emphatically and repeatedly, as Calvin's treatment of justification unfolds.

Secondly, by this union, this sharing of him,<sup>9</sup> believers "principally" or, as we might also translate, "above all" (*potissimum*) receive "a double grace" (*duplicem gratiam*). This twofold grace, Calvin will presently make clear, consists, each in a word, of justification and regeneration (= sanctification), each being described in this summary statement in terms of its outcome. For the former, justification, in place of an unreconciled heavenly judge believers have a gracious or propitious (*propitium*) Father. Since this twofold grace is "principal," apparently for Calvin it encompasses all other saving benefits of union with Christ.

This summary, with which Calvin opens his treatment of justification, expresses what may be described as "his triangulation of union with Christ, justification, and sanctification."<sup>10</sup> These three elements are fairly taken as points of reference that largely determine the framework of Calvin's thinking, all told, on the application of redemption, the personal appropriation of the finished salvation accomplished by Christ, with which he is formally occupied in book 3 of the *Institutes*. In particular, as we are seeing from the opening of chapter 11, they determine the framework of his thinking on justification.

This raises the large and important question of how these three elements relate to each other, a question that will occupy us, directly or indirectly, throughout the rest of this synopsis. But already, from Calvin's beginning summary, on this relational issue at least two things stand out. For one, union with Christ has precedence in the sense that the twofold grace is rooted in union and flows out of it. This grace is derivative; that is, it is received "by partaking of him." Secondly, as the twofold benefit of union, justification and sanctification are inseparable. As such, however, they are not confused but distinguished. Accenting inseparability, Calvin speaks not of two graces but of "twofold grace," in the singular, although later in this section he does refer to regeneration as "the second of these

9. *Cuius participatione* (OS 4:182).

10. M. 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), 236.

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gifts” or, better, this “second grace,”<sup>11</sup> signaling distinction and a certain priority to justification. 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. But these observations already prompt us to speak of the basic union-twofold grace (*unio-duplex gratia*) structure of Calvin’s applied soteriology.<sup>12</sup>

Directly following this summary statement Calvin, still in section 1, draws attention to a noteworthy feature of the overall structure of book 3, a feature present from 1539 on.<sup>13</sup> Prior to taking up justification, he has discussed regeneration (sanctification) at considerable length, saying what he deemed “sufficient” on the topic and mentioning justification only in passing. This way of proceeding is apparently counterintuitive, even contrary, to Reformation instincts, for which, in the face of Rome’s suspending of justification on an ongoing process of sanctification, stressing the priority of justification to sanctification would appear to be crucial. It also seems at odds with what he himself will presently say about the pivotal importance of justification.

This way of ordering material in book 3, deciding to treat sanctification fully (chapters 3–10) before justification, has provoked considerable discussion about Calvin’s motive(s) in doing so.<sup>14</sup> Here we may note that, whatever other factors may have been at work, his primary motivation, at least as he saw it, is plain enough from what he immediately goes on to say. He has proceeded as he has “because it was more to the point to understand first how little devoid of good works is the faith through which alone we obtain free righteousness by the mercy of God; and what is the nature of the good works of the saints, with which part of this question is concerned” (725–26). This clause bears careful scrutiny. First, Calvin says that he has discussed sanctification at length before justification in order to show that

11. *Secunda gratia* (OS 4:182).

12. See the penetrating discussion of M. A. Garcia, *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin’s Theology* (Paternoster, 2008), chapter 1 and other pertinent literature cited there.

13. Notations in the text of the Battles translation, a valuable feature, indicate the origin of material by edition; see 1:xxvii.

14. See, most recently, the overview of K. Wübbenhorst and the literature cited there in “Calvin’s Doctrine of Justification,” in B. L. McCormack, ed., *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006) 117 n. 53.

faith does not lack good works. It was “to the point” (*ad rem*) to make clear the nature of saving faith “first,” that is, before discussing justification. Why? One consideration is no doubt polemical. The constantly echoing charge from Rome at that time (and ever since) is that the Protestant doctrine of justification, of a graciously imputed righteousness received by faith alone, ministers spiritual slothfulness and indifference to holy living.

Calvin effectively counters that charge by dwelling at length (133 pages) on the nature of faith, particularly its inherent disposition and concern for holiness. This material is distinct (not separate) from the issue of justification and prior to discussing it in any length. He concerns himself extensively with sanctification and faith in its sanctified expressions, largely bypassing justification and saying little about the role of faith in justification. Calvin destroys Rome’s charge by showing that faith, in its Protestant understanding, entails a disposition to holiness without explicit reference to its sole instrumental function in justification. This concern for godliness, an ongoing, ever-present concern in the life of the already justified believer, obviously follows justification, but it is not simply a consequence of justification. Calvin can proceed as he has in this fashion, treating sanctification at length before justification, because for him, as will presently be clear, “justification and sanctification were given to faith simultaneously and inseparably, though also variously, so that the order of their presentation was discretionary.”<sup>15</sup>

In addition to this polemical strategy, another, more positive consideration is in view. It should not be missed that the faith “through which alone we obtain free righteousness by the mercy of God” is “little devoid of good works.” In other words, sanctifying faith, faith functioning for holy living, is the same faith that justifies. Certainly, this does not mean that faith justifies because it sanctifies or as it functions in sanctification; the role of faith as the sole instrument in receiving justification, he makes clear elsewhere,<sup>16</sup> differs from its role in sanctification. But faith as justifying and faith as sanctifying are not different faiths, nor are these

15. G. Hunsinger, “A Tale of Two Simultaneities: Justification and Sanctification in Calvin and Barth,” in Raynal, ed., *John Calvin and the Interpretation of Scripture*, 224 n. 5; see also my “Biblical Theology and the Westminster Standards,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003): 175–77.

16. Within our chapters: 11.7—733–34; 14.17—784; 14.21—787; 18.8—830.

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exercises somehow separable. Further, to understand this and, correlatively, “the nature of the good works of the saints” is a part of the concern of “this question”—the question of *justification*. Pertinent to discussing justification, Calvin is saying here, is to clarify what place the believer’s good works have, a question that he will discuss in some depth especially in chapter 16.

These observations prompt a further comment on a point already noted. As twin components of the grace received by being united to Christ, justification and sanctification are inseparable. Now it appears that they are simultaneous as well; inseparability involves a *simul*, simultaneity. Calvin knows nothing of a justification that is first settled and then is only subsequently followed by sanctification. Rather, given with this settled and irreversible justification, from the moment it takes place, is a disposition to godliness and holy living, no matter how weak and sin-plagued that disposition and how imperfectly manifested subsequently. This is so, as we have seen here, because of the nature of justifying faith and, more importantly, because of who Christ is, to whom faith unites.

If it needs to be said again, plainly, by the nature of the case, for Calvin sanctification as an ongoing, lifelong 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 by his Spirit, Christ, in whom, Calvin is clear in this passage, at the moment they are united to him by faith, sinners simultaneously receive a twofold grace and so begin an ongoing process of being sanctified just as they are now also definitively justified.

With this prefatory mix of considerations introduced, flowing out of matters previously treated, Calvin begins, toward the close of section 1, to give justification the thorough treatment due it. What needs to be kept in mind throughout, he says, is that justification is “the main hinge on which religion turns” (726).<sup>17</sup> Several comments are in order on this often-quoted statement. While the Battles translation provides an evocative image (the

17. *Præcipuum . . . sustinendae religionis cardinem* (OS 4:182).

“turning hinge”), it appears to give the original an unintended turn (or perhaps I should say, twist!). Over a wide range of uses, the verbal idea in view (*sustineo*) has the force of “support,” “sustain,” “maintain,” or “bear.”<sup>18</sup> The Allen translation probably has it most accurately, “the principal hinge by which religion is supported.”<sup>19</sup>

However one decides the exact translation, Calvin plainly intends to highlight the central importance of justification. What figures prominently in Calvin’s mind about that importance here appears from what he goes on to say immediately, right at the close of section 1. Without justification, expressed as the believer’s settled and, by implication, favorable judicial relationship to God, and knowledge of that relationship, there is lacking a “foundation” (*fundamentum*) for salvation and piety.

With that noted, it is easy enough to lift this “principal hinge” and the following “foundation” statements out of context in the interests of maintaining the view that for Calvin justification is the cardinal and most basic blessing in the application of salvation, the fundamental blessing that gives rise to all others. But neither the wider context of his teaching in the *Institutes* and elsewhere, as we will sample the former, nor even the immediate context of section 1 will tolerate such a reading. The terms of the next to last sentence in section 1 must be noted. In possessing salvation, justification is a *sine qua non*, not the sole foundational consideration or even the chief article. However crucial, it is not the stand-alone foundation of salvation. As foundation, Calvin is clear from the outset in section 1, justification is a component, with regeneration, of the principal “twofold grace” that flows from the believer’s underlying union with Christ. The “hinge” of justification, if I may put it this way, is not a “skyhook.” It is anchored firmly, without in any way diminishing its pivotal importance, in that union.

This critical point is reinforced by noting that while the material in section 1 (apart from a single variant in wording) is intact from 1539 on,

18. *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 1892.

19. Calvin’s own French edition (1560) reads, “le principal article de la religion Chrestienne” (“the principal article of the Christian religion”). The German translation of O. Weber has “den hauptsächlichlichen Pfeiler . . . auf dem unsere Gottesverehrung ruht” (“the main pillar on which our religion rests”) and, similarly, the Dutch of A. Sizoo, “de voornaamste pijler . . . waarop de godsdienst rust” (“the main pillar on which religion rests”).

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in 1559 it is put in a fresh and deepened, though certainly not unexpected, light. This happens from the way in which it and chapters 11–18 as a whole are now, for the first time, to be read within the larger context of book 3. In particular, what we have been considering in section 1 is to be read in light of the outlook, as clearly sweeping as it is controlling, expressed at the very beginning of book 3, in particular chapter 1, sections 1–2, material that is new in 1559.<sup>20</sup> This reading given with the new disposition of material in book 3, we may say with little fear of undue speculation, is one reason why the 1559 edition gave Calvin his expressed measure of settled satisfaction, noted earlier, that he did not have with prior editions. On the point we are considering, Calvin, in his own estimation, expresses himself more adequately than he had previously.

Book 3 is titled “The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ: What Benefits Come to Us from It, and What Effects Follow.” This plainly shows that, having dealt, especially in the latter half of book 2 (chapters 9–17), with the finished work of Christ, the once-for-all accomplishment of salvation, Calvin understands himself to be concerned throughout book 3 with the application or personal appropriation of salvation (“the grace of Christ”), its “benefits” and consequent “effects.” All told, his concern now is with “the way” (*modo*, “mode,” “manner,” “method”) in which believers “receive” this grace, in which this salvation is appropriated. With this concern restated in the opening words of 3.1.1, the very next sentence reads, “First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value to us” (537).

In my view it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this sentence for Calvin’s soteriology as a whole. Positioned as it is at the opening of book 3, it expresses what is most fundamental for him, the consideration underlying all others within the application of redemption. This most deeply decisive consideration, put negatively here, is that Christ not remain “outside us,” that we not be “separated from him.” Or, to

20. Barth and Niesel (OS 4:1), followed in the Battles translation, propose that this material stems from the 1536 edition, but the connection is of the loosest and most general sort, especially so far as wording and sentence composition are concerned. To see this, one need only compare 3.1.1–2 (537–39) with *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1536 edition, 57–58.

express it positively, as he presently does, that “we grow into one body (*in unum*<sup>21</sup>) with him.” Here Calvin, as his point of departure for all that he has to say in book 3, brings into view and highlights the union that exists between Christ and believers. So central and pivotal is this union for the application of redemption that, again expressing it negatively, he can even say that without it the saving work of Christ “remains useless and of no value.”

This union, he immediately goes on to make clear, is “obtained by faith” (*fide*), as it does not exist apart from or prior to faith but is given with, in fact is inseparable from, faith. This mention of faith, and the key role accorded to it, prompts Calvin, still within this opening section, to touch on what would become a central question in subsequent discussions about the *ordo salutis*, namely the origin of faith, giving rise eventually in Reformed theology to the doctrine of regeneration in a narrower sense. We observe “that not all indiscriminately embrace that communion with Christ which is offered through the gospel.” Why? Not because of some differentiating factor on our side. The answer is not to be found by looking into ourselves or contemplating the mystery of human freedom and willing. Rather, consistent with his uniform teaching elsewhere about the total inability of the will because of sin, we must “climb higher” and consider “the secret energy of the Spirit” (*arcana Spiritus efficacia*). Faith is Spirit-worked, sovereignly and efficaciously.

Union with Christ, then, is forged by the Spirit’s working faith in us, a faith that “puts on” Christ (citing Gal. 3:27), that embraces Christ as he is offered to faith in the gospel. Faith is the bond of that union seen from our side. “To sum up, the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself” (538). Subsequently, within our chapters, as we will see (3.11.10—737), he will categorize this union as “spiritual” and “mystical.”

This, at its core, is Calvin’s *ordo salutis*: union with Christ by Spirit-worked faith. From the overall vantage point provided at the opening of book 3, justification is by faith (alone) because union with Christ is by faith (alone), and that union brings with it justification. Section 1 of 3.11, as we have seen, also begins to make that clear enough.

21. OS 4:1.

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In sections 2–4 Calvin proceeds by defining and further explaining the basic concept of justification by faith, with support from Scripture. An accent throughout is on the purely forensic character of justification. In principle, justification is either by faith or by works, and justified *coram Deo* is the person “who is both reckoned righteous in God’s judgment and has been accepted on account of his righteousness” (726). Since for sinners justification by their works is now excluded, “justified by faith is he who, excluded from the righteousness of works, grasps the righteousness of Christ through faith, and clothed in it, appears in God’s sight not as a sinner but as a righteous man” (726–27). “Therefore, we explain justification simply as 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” (727). Again, accenting the forensic, “Therefore, ‘to justify’ means nothing else than to acquit of guilt him who was accused, as if his innocence were confirmed” (728).

These defining statements, from the opening of Calvin’s treatment of justification, set its direction. Toward its close, in 3.17.8, he offers what appears to be the single fullest definition, at least within the *Institutes*, drawing together not all but significant threads in the discussion that has preceded: “But we define justification as follows: the sinner, received into communion with Christ, is reconciled to God by his grace, while, cleansed by Christ’s blood, he obtains forgiveness of sins, and clothed with Christ’s righteousness as if it were his own, he stands confident before the heavenly judgment seat” (811). In the light of these definitions and basic explanatory statements, we can explore further the relationship between union and justification.

### Union, Imputation, and Justification

The explanatory statement at the very end of 11.2 (727), quoted in the next to last paragraph above, is the first occurrence in our chapters of the word “imputation.” Previously in that section Calvin has spoken, as he will repeatedly subsequently, of righteousness being “reckoned,” and, beginning in section 3, again repeatedly thereafter, of righteousness being “imputed” to believers. These two ideas, “reckoning” and “imputing,”

“imputation,” are close, even overlapping, in their meaning. However, for Calvin they are not simply identical. In their close affinity he distinguishes them. That—a noteworthy distinction—is clear just beyond the middle of section 3. God’s justifying action, he says, “absolves us . . . by the imputation of righteousness,<sup>22</sup> so that we who are not righteous in ourselves may be reckoned as such in Christ” (728).

Here, and throughout his discussion, imputation is antecedent to reckoning. The imputation of righteousness, Christ’s righteousness as imputed, is the immediate ground or basis of the reckoning of righteousness, of being reckoned as righteous. It seems fair to say, then, that for Calvin justification, the justifying act itself, involves the distinct moments of imputation and reckoning, related to each other as just indicated. This seems to approach closely the notion emerging in later Reformed theology of justification as a constitutive declaration—it should be accented, for both Calvin and others subsequently, a *forensically* constitutive declaration.<sup>23</sup>

In view of Calvin’s distinguishing as he does between imputation and (judicial) reckoning, it might be supposed that for him imputation is in fact nonforensic, that “the matter of imputation was participationist not forensic,” that Calvin (like Luther) “saw clearly that ‘imputation’ was a nonforensic term with forensic consequences.”<sup>24</sup> Now certainly, it is true to say that for Calvin union with Christ is “the precondition for imputation.”<sup>25</sup> For him justification is ever in view, as we have already seen from the outset in 3.11.1, as a component benefit of the “twofold grace”

22. From the immediate and broader context, plainly this imputed righteousness is Christ’s specifically.

23. E.g., J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 1: 352–53: “It is declarative in such a way that it is also imputative. . . . The justifying act is constitutive. . . . Hence we may sum up by saying that justification of the ungodly is constitutively and imputatively declarative.” On this understanding, the constitutive does not import a nonforensic or transformative element into justification.

24. G. Hunsinger, “Calvin’s Doctrine of Justification: Is It Really Forensic?” (unpublished paper delivered at the Twelfth Biennial Calvin Colloquium, Erskine Theological Seminary, January 27–28, 2006; cited here with the author’s permission), 7, 22; “Imputation through participation formed the nonforensic center that governed his doctrine of justification” (9). My comments here address a possible, even plausible construal of this language. They should not be read as a fair or adequate response to the case carefully argued in Hunsinger’s paper. To interact with that argumentation would require more space than I have at my disposal and, more importantly, the reader would need to have access to the paper.

25. *Ibid.*, 8.

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that stems from union. So, then, imputation, included in justification, is likewise given with that union. That is clear throughout. Further, we may fairly say that “For Calvin *participatio Christi* was prior to imputation, and imputation prior to judgment.”<sup>26</sup>

But, in putting matters this way, the question needing to be asked is, How exactly does he understand these priorities? It is true, as we have seen (3.1.1—537–38), that the union Calvin has in view is a Spirit-worked bond between the believer and Christ. It is a “spiritual bond” (3.11.10—737) in the sense of being effected and maintained by the Holy Spirit. It is unwarranted, however, to draw the conclusion that because, as we have seen, *within justification* the imputation of righteousness is antecedent to the reckoning of righteousness, therefore imputation is nonforensic. This intrudes into justification a nonforensic element that Calvin is everywhere intent on excluding. The twin benefits of the *duplex gratia* that stem from (Spirit-worked) union, justification and sanctification/ongoing Spirit-worked renewal, are as distinct from each other and unconfused as they are undeniably inseparable. In fact, it seems fair to Calvin to say that this twofold distinction (between justification and sanctification) is, in effect, the distinction between grace as forensic and nonforensic, a distinction that as such is irreducible. Justification, imputation included, is purely forensic. As such, stemming from union with Christ, it is also participationist.

“Participationist not forensic” suggests a disjunction that, as a reading of what he has written, Calvin, I suspect, would likely find puzzling to say the least. The basic *unio-duplex gratia* structure of his applied soteriology is such that the participatory (union) has both forensic (justifying) and nonforensic (sanctifying, renovative) dimensions or aspects, without any confusion or interpenetration of these two aspects. To view union/the participatory as introducing, by imputation, a nonforensic and so presumably Spirit-worked element into an otherwise forensic justification is to blur a basic distinction that Calvin was intent on maintaining, a blurring, further, that he would see as undermining the stability of a fully gracious justification.<sup>27</sup>

26. *Ibid.*, 9.

27. “Nonforensic” is a negative description. To say only that, other than that imputation is “participationist,” and given the spiritual character of that participation or union, seems to suggest that, as a transitive reality, imputation is pneumatic and effects a work of the Spirit

A good test 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.”<sup>28</sup> This is the notion “that man is justified by faith because by faith<sup>29</sup> he shares the Spirit of 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<sup>30</sup> 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.

At issue here is that “our righteousness is not in us but in Christ.” This, as much as any formulation of a few words, captures what is at the heart of Calvin’s understanding of justification: “not in us but in Christ.” Certainly, as he immediately adds, “we possess it only because we are partakers in Christ,” accenting once again the underlying and controlling union. But this “it,” the righteousness of those who are “sharers of Christ,”<sup>31</sup> is, for each of them, “righteousness outside himself” and as he is “destitute of righteousness in himself” (with an appeal to 2 Cor. 5:21). He has made that clear in the previous paragraph in denying that it has anything to

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within the believer. But that appears to verge closely on some sort of infusion, a notion that Calvin everywhere rejects vigorously.

28. *Nugamentum* (OS 4:206; Beveridge has “absurd dogma”).

29. The antecedent of *illa* is not *Christi iustitia* (“Christ’s righteousness”) in the preceding sentence (as Battles appears to have taken it), but almost certainly *fide*, two words earlier (so both Allen and Beveridge).

30. *Participat* (*ibid.*).

31. *Christi . . . participes* (*ibid.*).

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do with sharing or participating in the Spirit. The righteousness of the law fulfilled “in us,” the “only fulfillment” Paul alludes to (Rom. 8:3–4),<sup>32</sup> to the exclusion of any work of the Spirit in us, is “that which we obtain through imputation.”

Calvin walks a fine line here, but in doing so maintains a clear distinction. As we are “in him” (and he “in us”), our righteousness in justification is “outside of us.”<sup>33</sup> Union is Spirit-forged, a pneumatic reality, but the imputation given with that union is not. Imputation does not introduce a nonforensic component into justification. It is not a matter of what is pneumatically effected in us. Rather, imputation is a judicial transfer that preserves the purely forensic nature of justification and at the same time ensures that the righteousness reckoned in justification is resident solely in Christ, in his person, and not somehow within the person of the sinner united to him.

In the middle of the second paragraph of section 23, Calvin goes on to say concerning imputation, “For in such a way does the Lord Christ share his righteousness with us that, in some wonderful manner, he pours into us enough of his power to meet the judgment of God.” Admittedly, this statement and the language he uses, taken by itself, could be read in a nonforensic, pneumatic-transformative, even infusionist, sense. But that would fly fully in the face of everything else he writes in the immediate context and would attribute to him the view he is intent here on excluding by his appeal, as noted, to Romans 8:3–4 in the sentence preceding, and to Romans 5:19 in the sentence following.

Probably Calvin expresses himself here as he does to accent the forensic power of imputation, the full reality of the judicial transaction it effects, such that, as he goes on to say, “the obedience of Christ is reckoned to us as if it were our own (*ac si nostra*).”<sup>34</sup> At any rate, his intention is clear from Ambrose’s “beautifully stated” illustration, with which he closes this section: the believer’s righteousness in justification is like Jacob clothed not

32. Calvin’s understanding of these verses here (and in his Romans commentary, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948], 283) is probably not correct. But that does not invalidate his theological point here, supported by Scripture, in my view, on other grounds.

33. See the penetrating discussion of these and related matters in W. van’t Spijker, “‘Extra nos’ en ‘in nobis’ bij Calvin in pneumatologisch licht,” in *Geest, woord en kerk* (Kampen: Kok, 1991), 114–28. My thanks to Ron Gleason for alerting me to this essay.

34. OS 4.207.

in his own but his brother's garments that he might receive the blessing of Isaac. An "alien" righteousness indeed! "And we in like manner hide under the precious purity of our first-born brother, Christ, so that we may be attested righteous in God's sight" (753–54).

Within our chapters, in the midst of his treatment of the views of Osiander (3.11.10), is the fullest single passage, and certainly the most striking, in expressing the relationship between union, justification, and imputation, a passage that also serves to focus key aspects of this relationship. It begins with "I confess that we are deprived . . ." (736, bottom) and continues to ". . . fellowship of righteousness with him" (737). Consulting it will be helpful for the comments that follow.

Here justification could not be valued more highly; it is an "utterly incomparable good." Yet it is not that in splendid judicial isolation, as it were, involving a solitary imputative act. Rather, we are left "deprived" of it, "until Christ is made ours." Unmistakable is the echo of the second sentence in 3.1.1 ("as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done . . . remains useless and of no value to us"). In the actual possession of justification this union is what is deeply and ultimately decisive, and so it has "the highest degree of importance."

The union in view is described in a full multiplicity of other ways. It is the "joining together of Head and members," the "indwelling of Christ in our hearts," our being "sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed." It is to "put on Christ," to be "engrafted into his body," in short, to be made "one with him." It is, categorically, "mystical union" and, as such, just beyond this passage, a "spiritual bond."

This Spirit-worked union or bond, however, does not exclude imputation or make it somehow redundant. Rather, on its forensic side, union is a "fellowship of righteousness," and it is that by imputation. "We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us." Here Christ's righteousness imputed is alien or other in the sense that it is his doing, his obedience, not ours. But in another sense, in union with him, it is not alien at all. Union brings justification as a forensic fellowship, a sharing in Christ's righteousness, and it does so by imputation.

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Some further comment, necessarily brief here, is in order at this point on Calvin's treatment of Osiander on justification. As noted earlier, the new material on justification in the 1559 *Institutes* consists in large part of this treatment in 3.11, sections 5–12. Noteworthy is the placing of this lengthy critique directly following the introductory sections 1–4. With the preliminary groundwork for his entire treatment of justification in place, the very first matter of substance he chooses to take up is the position of Osiander. Why? Why before giving attention in depth to anything else, attention to the views of a deceased (putative) Lutheran rather than, say, to Roman Catholic teaching, Trent, for instance, that necessitated the Reformation? In answer, several factors are no doubt at work, but they all have in common that they point to the controlling importance Calvin places on union with Christ and on properly understanding that union, particularly in its relationship to justification.

Osiander's views on justification appeared in late 1550 and sparked immediate controversy.<sup>35</sup> This was Calvin's first opportunity to respond to these views in the *Institutes*, since the previous (fourth) edition had appeared earlier in 1550. This response may have had a measure of added urgency because of a perceived similarity in viewpoint, by some in the meantime, between him and Osiander. But primarily it afforded him the opportunity positively, in contrast, to set out his own views.

Briefly stated, in Calvin's words, Osiander's view of justification is that "we are substantially righteous in God by the infusion both of his essence and of his quality" (730). This is a fair representation. Justifying righteousness is, in Osiander's own words, "essential righteousness." In his view, union with Christ is sharing in Christ's essence, by which his righteousness, specifically the righteousness of his divine nature, is communicated.

Calvin's critique is relentless. This is not because he stresses to the point of exaggeration his distance from a view about which he is forced to recognize, to his anxious discomfort, agreement at a number of points. Rather, he is clearly driven here by the conviction, *corruptio optimi pes-*

35. The secondary literature is extensive; see Lane, "Role of Scripture," 368 n. 2, par. 2, and Battles, 729 n. 5; for more detailed discussions of Calvin's interaction, see, e.g., Hunsinger, "Calvin's Doctrine," 10–21, and Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 197–252, with the literature each cites.

*sima* (“the corruption of the best is the worst”). Any appearance of agreement is no more than formal. Osiander’s misunderstanding of union and justification is thoroughly vitiated by the most serious and pernicious errors. From the opening sentence of section 5 the notion of “essential righteousness” is, in Battles’s somewhat colorful translation, “some strange monster.”<sup>36</sup> This is so, ontologically, because the underlying view of union, akin to Manichaeism, breaks down the Creator-creature distinction (730). No less seriously, soteriologically—and this is where the emphasis falls in Calvin’s critique—this view denies the value and even the necessity of “Christ’s obedience and sacrificial death,” done in his human nature. Further, Osiander’s “essential righteousness” bases justification on something done within or transfused into the Christian. Accordingly, his attendant notion of double righteousness breaks down the irreducible distinction between justifying and sanctifying righteousness by confusing pardoning and regenerating grace (732, 738–41). All told, the “strange monster” in the opening sentence of section 5 leads eventually to the closing sentence of section 12: “In short, whoever wraps up two kinds of righteousness in order that miserable souls may not repose wholly in God’s mere mercy, crowns Christ in mockery with a wreath of thorns.”

Calvin’s critique is so unsparing because he recognizes in the position of Osiander an abandonment of the Reformation understanding of justification. It is essentially the Roman Catholic doctrine in other garb—the proximate suspension of justification on righteousness resident in the believer. And he recognizes that the answer to both is the “free imputation” (731, 738) of Christ’s righteousness, wrought in his death and resurrection. That imputed righteousness Osiander “despises” and Rome has anathematized. But it is critically necessary to preserve a purely forensic justification. The settled security and “happiness” of believers are the result of their being “righteous, not intrinsically but by imputation” (739).<sup>37</sup> All told, as the result of imputation, “This is a wonderful plan of justification that, covered by the righteousness of Christ,

36. *Monstrum nescio quod* (OS 4:185); Allen has, “I know not what monstrous notion of . . .”; Beveridge, “a kind of monstrosity termed . . .”

37. *Iustus . . . non re ipsa, sed imputatione* (OS 4:193).

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they should not tremble at the judgment they deserve, and that while they rightly condemn themselves, they should be accounted righteous outside themselves" (740–41).<sup>38</sup>

The root error of Osiander on justification lies in his understanding of union with Christ, already noted. Opposing that error affords Calvin the opportunity to elaborate his own view of union, as we have already seen he does in section 10. Early on in his critique, in section 5, he observes that Osiander's self-deception comes from misconceiving "the bond of this unity," and that "all his difficulties" are easily resolved by recognizing that we are "united with Christ by the secret power of his Spirit" (730). In rejecting the view of Osiander, Calvin makes clear that Spirit-worked union is such that it preserves the personal distinction between Christ and the believers. Thus it is a union that insures that justifying righteousness is his accomplishment, not theirs, and is theirs solely by being imputed to them.

In the context of this rebuttal of Osiander, Calvin uses a metaphor for the union—twofold grace structure of his applied soteriology that seems difficult to improve on (3.11.6—732): Christ, our righteousness, is the sun; justification, its light; sanctification, its heat. The sun is at once the sole source of both such that its light and heat are inseparable. At the same time, only light illumines and only heat warms, not the reverse. Both are always present, without the one becoming the other; "reason itself forbids us to transfer the peculiar qualities of the one to the other."

The nature of our union with Christ is such that justification and sanctification coexist, without the "confusion of the two kinds of grace that Osiander forces upon us," and yet "in a mutual and indivisible connection." Why? Again, not simply because as a consequence of forgiving sinners, a consequence that might otherwise be separable from that forgiveness, God has decided that, in addition and subsequently, he will also renew them. Rather, justification and sanctification are inseparable because "Christ cannot be torn into parts." Or as Calvin puts these considerations later (3.16.1—798), "Do you wish, then, to attain righteousness [justification] in Christ? You must first possess Christ; but you cannot possess him without being made partaker in his sanctifica-

38. *Iusti extra se censeantur* (OS 4:195).

tion, because he cannot be divided into pieces.” The “triangulation” of union, justification, and sanctification could hardly be expressed more clearly; the controlling priority of Spirit-worked union is plain (“you must first possess Christ”), involving the integral inseparability, without confusion, of justification and sanctification. There is no partial union with Christ, no sharing in only some of his benefits. If believers do not have the whole Christ, they have no Christ; unless they share in all of his benefits they share in none of them.

It is striking that in rejecting Osiander’s view of justifying righteousness, rooted, as he sees it, in a seriously false understanding of union, Calvin is not led to reconsider or even tone down on his own understanding of union in relation to justification. Rather, he asserts that union all the more resolutely and emphatically. He could do no other. For he recognized—because he understood Scripture so well, especially the apostle Paul—that the Reformation understanding of justification—justification based exclusively on the forensically imputed righteousness of Christ and received by faith alone—stands or falls with the believer’s underlying union with Christ, properly understood.