

**John Calvin for Everyone**  
The Institutes of the Christian Religion  
Book 2 – Chapter 16 - Part 2

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

In the previous lesson, we covered Calvin's belief that even though we deserve God's hatred because we are sinners, we are saved because God loves us. We also began to examine the "how" of salvation, which was accomplished through Jesus' death and resurrection. In Jesus' death Calvin tells us that Jesus took our sins upon himself, thus defeating the power of sin and making us new people. In this chapter Calvin continues this discussion by examining several portions of the Apostles' Creed.

**Summary:** We pick up Calvin's discussion as he examines the concept of Jesus having "descended into Hell" from the Apostle's Creed. Calvin begins by affirming this doctrine as one that has been part of the Christian faith since its earliest days. This descent is based on I Peter 3:19 where Peter states that Jesus, after his death, went and preached to the spirits in prison. For Calvin this means that both the godly and ungodly in hell had a "*common awareness of Christ's death*" (pg. 515). More importantly however, Calvin believes that Jesus' descent happened because Jesus had to experience the completeness of death in order to "*grapple hand to hand with the armies of hell and the dread of everlasting death*" (515). Thus Jesus needed to be totally estranged from God in order to fully achieve our salvation.

At this point Calvin takes up "And on the third day, he rose from the dead:" again from the Apostle's Creed. Calvin wants us to understand that even though our salvation was accomplished on the cross "*...nevertheless "we have been born anew to a living hope' not through his death but 'through his resurrection'"* (I Peter 1:3) (Pg. 520). Calvin continues, "*For as he in rising again, came forth victor over death, so the victory of our faith over death lies in his resurrection alone...therefore, we divide the substance of our salvation between Christ's death and resurrection as follows: through his death, sin was wiped out and death extinguished; through his resurrection, righteousness (meaning right relationship with God) was restored and life raised up, so that thanks to his resurrection, his death manifested its power and efficacy in us*" (pg. 521).

Calvin moves next to the phrase that Jesus "ascended into heaven." The ascension, one of the least discussed doctrines, matters for Calvin first because he believes that only at Jesus' return to God did the Kingdom begin to come into being, and second because Jesus' presence was more useful because he was no longer, "*...confined in a humble abode of flesh...but was free to spread his power and energy...beyond all bounds of heaven and earth*" (pg. 523). Calvin sums up the importance of the ascension by saying that, "*The three benefits we receive from his ascension are that Jesus opens the way for us to heaven, that he appears before God as our advocate, and that he gives us spiritual life and spiritual gifts*" (pg. 525-6).

Finally, Calvin examines Jesus as the one who judges the living and the dead. This is good news for us because "*we will be brought before no other judgment seat than that of our redeemer, to whom we look for our salvation*" (pg. 526)! He concludes with, "*In short, since a rich store of every kind of good abounds in him (Jesus), let us drink our fill from the fountain, and from no other*" (pg. 528).

**Reflection:** In the church in which I grew up, children were in worship every Sunday. There were plenty of times when I was totally bored, but I did learn certain things; one of those being the Apostle's Creed. I could not have told you it was Trinitarian in nature, but it did teach me the basics of the faith. It taught me that God was creator, Jesus was savior (and I learned the basic highlights of his life and death) and that the Spirit was still present. Calvin's discussion of the Creed, allowed me to revisit not only those earlier days of my life, but to be reminded that our faith has a story that we can all tell.

**Questions:**

1. What do you think of Calvin's idea that Jesus needed to be totally separated from God?
2. What meaning does the resurrection carry for you?
3. Which of the three benefits of the ascension carries most meaning for you?