

John Calvin for Everyone
The Institutes of the Christian Religion
Book 3 – Chapter 13

TWO THINGS TO BE NOTED IN FREE JUSTIFICATION

In this chapter, Calvin offers two additional thoughts as regards his belief (offered in the previous chapter) that God's justification of us (God declaring us free from sin and inviting us into a loving relationship) is an absolutely free gift that we cannot earn but can only accept.

Summary: Calvin begins the chapter: *"Here indeed, we are especially to note two things: namely, that the Lord's glory should stand undiminished and, so to speak, in good repair, and that our consciences in the presence of his judgment should have peaceful rest and serene tranquility"* (pg. 763). In order to understand Calvin's first point about maintaining the Lord's glory undiminished, we need to understand what he means by *"the Lord's glory."* For Calvin, the Lord's glory is the essence of God's reality. God is glorious. We experience this glory in the beauty of creation, in Jesus' saving work and in the work of the Spirit in the church (because these are the actions of God self). Our task is to return this glory back to God rather than keeping any of it for ourselves. The way we return it is by giving God all credit for God's work through acts of praise and thanksgiving (giving credit where credit is due).

One way to think of this is to see God's glory as light shining from the sun. The task of human beings is to reflect that light back to God. We reflect it back by giving God thanks and praise for everything (because it all comes from God), including our justification and salvation. We diminish God's glory when we keep any credit for ourselves (and in this case credit for our justification/salvation). While this may seem odd to us, for Calvin it makes sense because God is the source of everything and we are merely the recipients. He writes, *"For as long as man has anything to say in his own defense (meaning we say that we participate in our justification/ salvation), he detracts...from God's glory...man cannot without sacrilege claim for himself, even a crumb of righteousness, for that same amount will then be plucked and taken away from the glory of God's righteousness"* (pg. 763-5). In essence if we keep some glory and honor for ourselves we are taking what is actually God's, thus diminishing God's very self.

Calvin's second point is that when we do give all glory to God, we will find a faith that offers us peace. *"...to have faith is to strengthen the mind with constant assurance and perfect confidence, to have a place to rest and plant your foot...(because) whatever God mercifully promises (saving us through faith), he also faithfully performs"* (pg. 766). Calvin's point is that because God has promised to save us, we do not need to depend upon ourselves for salvation, but rather we can depend completely upon God to save us and thus we can find a deep and profound sense of peace. *"Hence Christ is called 'King of Peace' (Isaiah 9:6) and 'our peace' (Ephesians 2:14) because he quiets all agitation of conscience...in short, we must seek peace for ourselves solely in...Christ..."* (pg. 767).

Calvin concludes with these words. *"Therefore, we must come to this (realization): that believers should be convinced that their...hope for the inheritance of a Heavenly Kingdom lies in the fact that...they are freely accounted righteous (declared innocent by God and are thus forgiven)"* (pg. 768).

Reflection: Once again, we see Calvin working to make sure that all "glory and honor" go to God and not to us. While this is rooted in his belief that God is the source of everything and we are merely the recipients, it is also rooted in his belief that God is loving and faithful. In other words, if we are willing to give all credit for our justification/salvation to God, then we can rest easy because God does what God promises, meaning God saves us. And nothing we can do can get in the way. Thus giving glory to God (credit where credit is due) brings us inner peace.

Questions:

1. How would you describe God's glory?
2. For what do you give God thanks and praise?
3. Where do you find peace in your life?