

John Calvin for Everyone
The Institutes of the Christian Religion
Book 3 – Chapter 25
THE FINAL RESURRECTION

The final chapter of Book Three focuses on the resurrection. Because there were many in Calvin's day who rejected not only a physical resurrection, but the idea of life after death, Calvin defends both of those ideas in this chapter.

Summary: For Calvin, resurrection was the goal of God's election so that we might become Christ's companions. *"Therefore, Christ rose again that he might have us as companions in the life to come"* (pg. 991). This will happen when God restores his kingdom; an event for which we are to wait patiently, not trying to figure out the time of its arrival.

The basis for his belief in the resurrection is Christ's resurrection. *"But, that no question may be raised concerning Christ's resurrection, upon which is based the resurrection of us all, we see how often and in what varied ways he has caused it to be attested to us"* (pg. 991). These attestations include the resurrection accounts during which Jesus was seen not only the disciples (in the upper room, by the sea of Galilee, on the road to Emmaus, etc.); the witness of more than five-hundred people (referenced by Paul); the Apostle Paul's story of his own encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus; and Stephen's vision of Jesus in heaven. In light of these witnesses Calvin states that *"To discredit so many authentic evidences is not only disbelief but...obstinacy"* (pg. 993). And resurrection is possible because the God we worship is a God of *"boundless might"* (pg. 993) easily capable of raising people from the dead.

Calvin turns next to the immortality of the soul. He believes that when we die, our souls do not. *"If souls did not outlive bodies, what is it that has God present when it is separated from the body...and if souls when divested of their bodies did not still retain their essence, and have capacity of blessed glory, Christ would not have said to the thief, 'Today you will be with me in paradise'"* (pg. 997). Thus, even when our bodies die, the essence of who we are as human beings is not annihilated, but instead has an ongoing existence. Even so, Calvin does not want to spend too much time discussing issues such as the soul's intermediate state (or where do our souls go when we die). He is content to acknowledge that scripture tells us that we are with Christ.

The next issue with which Calvin deals is that of our resurrected bodies. He is clear that the bodies we have now, are the bodies we are going to get in the resurrection, only better. What this means is that while our resurrected bodies appear to be the ones we had before, they will be remade in an incorruptible form. *"...we shall retain the substance of our bodies, but there will be a change; that its condition may be far more excellent...(because we)...will put on incorruption"* (pg. 1002-3).

Finally, Calvin describes our ultimate destination (which by the way is on a reclaimed earth and not in heaven). *"But I reply that in the very sight of it there will be such pleasantness, such sweetness in the knowledge of it alone...that this happiness will far surpass all the amenities that we now enjoy. Let us imagine ourselves set in the richest region on earth where we will lack no pleasure"* (pg. 1007).

Reflection: Calvin offers us a very positive image of the life to come. It is one in which we will know and be known; in which we will live in communion with Christ; one in which we will still, "be ourselves" only better. At the same time, he refuses (and rightfully so) to speculate about what this new earth will look like or whether we will all be making holes-in-one on a regular basis. The unfortunate thing for me is that he ends this chapter with a vivid description of the hell that awaits those who are not elected to live in paradise. Fortunately, scripture allows us to abandon that concept of hell and instead embrace a more loving future for all.

Questions:

1. What is your view of the resurrection? Why?
2. How does belief in the resurrection (if you have one) give you hope?
3. What would a renewed earth look like to you?