



John Calvin's *Institutes in the Christian Religion* (1541)

A PPA Seminar: Fall/Winter 2017

Rev. Charles R. Biggs

Study 12: Chapter Eight: The Predestination and Providence of God

Read pgs. 463-515

“We call predestination God’s eternal counsel by which He has determined what He wishes to do with each and every person. For He does not create them all in like condition, but appoints some to eternal life and others to eternal damnation... Providence is what we call the order which God observes in governing the world and in directing all things.”

Prayer: “Grant, Almighty God, that as you have been pleased to adopt us once for all as your people for this end, that we might be grafted... into the body of your Son, and so be made conformable to our head, O grant that through our whole life we may strive to seal in our hearts the faith of our election... May we so ascribe to you the glory of your goodness, that having cast away and renounced all confidence in our own virtue, we may be led to Christ only as the fountain of our election... Amen.

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 29:29; Proverbs 16:4; Luke 12:32; Acts 13:48-49; Ephesians 1:3-14; Romans 8:29-30; 9:9-24

1. What wisdom does Calvin encourage believers to begin with when considering the doctrines of predestination and providence? Who are the two sorts of people that Calvin wishes to address? Which sort are you? What principle does Calvin borrow from Augustine? Do you think this an important principle? [pgs. 463-66]
2. How are the theological concepts of ‘foreknowledge’, ‘predestination’, ‘election’, and ‘providence’ related to one another? How does Calvin particularly define ‘predestination’? Write it out and seek to memorize it. How is Calvin’s definition very personal and practical rather than merely theoretical or philosophical? What do you make of this? [pgs. 466-67]
3. Is predestination just in your estimation? Support your answer from Scripture. How are the destinies of Jacob and Esau a “mirror” of God’s election or predestination? Why are some predestinated unto life and some unto damnation and condemnation according to Calvin? Honestly, does this offend you? Why, or why not? [pgs. 467-74]
4. **Read prayerfully and carefully pages 475-482.** Articulate in your own words how you would argue Scripturally, yet gently and respectfully, against a friend who might question this teaching of predestination. Particularly, answer these objections: (1) “*Why has God predestined some to damnation who were yet to be born?*”; (2) “*Doesn’t predestination make God the author of sin and iniquity?*”; (3) “*Why does God judge men and hold them responsible for their sins when they could*

do nothing else according to the teaching of predestination?”; (4) “Isn’t God showing partiality when He elects some to salvation?” [pgs. 475-82, 96-97]

5. What is the evidence of one’s election? How can one “see” their election without distortion? Prove it from Scripture. If you desire to have assurance of your election, how might you attain this according to Calvin’s pastoral theology? What Scriptures would you use to encourage you in your assurance? Have you enjoyed the freedom and joy of this assurance of election? Why, or why not? [pgs. 484-88]
6. If one is truly elect of God, will that person persevere to the end? Why, or why not? Use Scripture to support your answer. Why is it important to make a distinction between God’s universal and special call? [pgs. 488-94]
7. What is the difference between a general, universal kind of providence, and a very special and specific “purposeful providence” as Calvin articulates from Scripture? What are the practical and pastoral implications of this? What are the unbelieving counterfeits of the providence of God as revealed in Scripture? [pgs. 499-512]
8. Articulate how the Scriptural teaching of the providence of God is “*indispensable*” and can make every day more enjoyable, even (especially?!) the difficult times and circumstances believers’ face. Write out and memorize as many scriptures that support this that you might use for daily encouragement. [pgs. 505-15]
9. Thoughtful Reflection/Meditation: (A) Ponder the relationship between predestination and providence. How are the two related? How can reflection on these two biblical teachings make increasingly grateful and more confident as a Christian? (B) How important is it to determine and discern the difference between God’s revealed will and His secret and hidden counsel when speaking of predestination and providence?
10. Thoughtful Reflection/Meditation: *Could* the teachings of predestination and providence make a person careless? Why, or why not? *Should* the teachings make a person careless? Why, or why not?