

## Calvin on Sanctification — a “Synergism”?

### Philippians 2:12-13

*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. [NKJV]*

**Calvin:** They toil hard in their schools to reconcile free will with the grace of God ... [that] which might be capable of turning itself by its own movement, and might have a peculiar and separate power, by which it might co-operate with the grace of God. ... In order, therefore, that free-will may harmonize with grace, they divide in such a manner, that God restores in us a free choice, that we may have it in our power to *will* aright. Thus they acknowledge to have received from God the power of willing aright, but assign to man a good inclination. Paul, however, declares this to be a work of God, without any reservation. For he does not say that our hearts are simply turned or stirred up, or that the infirmity of a good will is helped, but that a good inclination is wholly the work of God.

### 2 Peter 1:2-10

*Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, 3 as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, 4 by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. 5 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, 6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, 7 to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. 8 For if these things are*

*yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble... [NKJV]*

### Calvin:

**v. 5.** *And besides this [NKJV But for this very reason].* As it is a work arduous and of immense labor, to put off the corruption which is in us, he bids us to strive and make every effort for this purpose. He intimates that no place is to be given in this case to sloth, and that we ought to obey God calling us, not slowly or carelessly, but that there is need of alacrity; as though he had said, “Put forth every effort, and make your exertions manifest to all.” ...

*Add to your faith virtue, or, Supply to your faith virtue.* He shews for what purpose the faithful were to strive, that is, that they might have faith adorned with good morals, wisdom, patience, and love. Then he intimates that faith ought not to be naked or empty, but that these are its inseparable companions. ...

**vv. 5-7.** It may, however, be here asked, whether Peter, by assigning to us the work of supplying or adding virtue, thus far extolled the strength and power of free-will? They who seek to establish free-will in man, indeed concede to God the first place, that is, that he begins to act or work in us; but they imagine that we at the same time co-operate, and that it is thus owing to us that the movements of God are not rendered void and inefficacious. But the perpetual doctrine of Scripture is opposed to this delirious notion: for it plainly testifies, that right feelings are formed in us by God, and are rendered by him effectual. It testifies also that all our progress and perseverance are from God. Besides, it expressly declares that wisdom, love, patience, are the gifts of God and the Spirit. When, therefore, the Apostle requires these things, he by no means asserts that they are in our

power, but only shews what we ought to have, and what ought to be done. And as to the godly, when conscious of their own infirmity, they find themselves deficient in their duty, nothing remains for them but to flee to God for aid and help.

**v. 8.** *For if these things be in you, you will neither be barren nor unfruitful.* Then, he says, you will at length prove that Christ is really known by you, if ye be endued with virtue, temperance, and the other endowments. For the knowledge of Christ is an efficacious thing and a living root, which brings forth fruit. For by saying that these things would make them *neither barren nor unfruitful*, he shews that all those who boast of it without love, patience, and the like gifts, glory in vain and falsely that they have the knowledge of Christ, as Paul also says in Ephesians 4:20...

**v. 9.** *But he that lacketh these things is shortsighted, even to blindness.* He now expresses more clearly that they who profess a naked faith are wholly without any true knowledge. He then says that they go astray like the blind in darkness, because they do not see the right way which is shewn to us by the light of the gospel.

**v. 10.** *Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.* He draws this conclusion, that it is one proof that we have been really elected, and not in vain called by the Lord, if a good conscience and integrity of life correspond with our profession of faith. And he infers, that there ought to be more labor and diligence, because he had said before, that faith ought not to be barren.

He mentions *calling* first [*“make your calling and election sure”*], though the last in order. The reason is, because election is of greater weight or importance ... At the same time he speaks here of calling as the effect and evidence of election....

Now a question arises, Whether the stability of our calling and election depends on good works, for if it be so, it follows that it

depends on us. But the whole Scripture teaches us, first, that God's election is founded on his eternal purpose; and secondly, that calling begins and is completed through his gratuitous [by grace alone, undeserved] goodness. ... For the matter stands thus, — God effectually calls whom he has preordained to life in his secret counsel before the foundation of the world; and he also carries on the perpetual course of calling through grace alone. But as he has chosen us, and calls us for this end, that we may be pure and spotless in his presence; purity of life is ... the evidence and proof of election, by which the faithful may not only testify to others that they are the children of God, but also confirm themselves in this confidence, in such a manner, however, that they fix their solid foundation on something else....

The import of what is said is, that the children of God are distinguished from the reprobate by this mark, that they live a godly and a holy life, because this is the design and end of election. Hence it is evident how wickedly some vile unprincipled men prattle, when they seek to make gratuitous election an excuse for all licentiousness; as though, forsooth! we may sin with impunity, because we have been predestinated to righteousness and holiness!

*For if ye do these things, you will never stumble.* Peter seems again to ascribe to the merits of works, that God furthers our salvation, and also that we continually persevere in his grace. But the explanation is obvious; for his purpose was only to shew that hypocrites have in them nothing real or solid, and that, on the contrary, they who prove their calling sure by good works, are free from the danger of falling, because sure and sufficient is the grace of God by which they are supported. Thus the certainty of our salvation by no means depends on us, as doubtless the cause of it is beyond our limits. But with regard to those who feel in themselves the efficacious working of the Spirit, Peter bids them to take courage as to the future, because the Lord has laid in them the solid foundation of a true and sure calling.