

Selections for John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion

(www.reformed.org/books/institutes)

(Underlining and bold print are added enhancements for clarification and emphasis.)

6. God's Love and Grace is Evident in Predestination:

We must add a second step of a more limited nature, or one in which the grace of God was displayed in a more special form, when of the same family of Abraham God rejected some, and by keeping others within his Church showed that he retained them among his sons. At first Ishmael had obtained the same rank with his brother Isaac, because the spiritual covenant was equally sealed in him by the symbol of circumcision. He is first cut off, then Esau, at last an innumerable multitude, almost the whole of Israel. In Isaac was the seed called. The same calling held good in the case of Jacob. God gave a similar example in the rejection of Saul. This is also celebrated in the psalm, "***Moreover he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim: but chose the tribe of Judah,***" (Ps. 78:67, 68). This, the sacred history, sometimes repeats that the secret grace of God may be more admirably displayed in that change. I admit that it was by their own fault Ishmael, Esau, and others, fell from their adoption; for the condition annexed was, that they should faithfully keep the covenant of God, whereas they perfidiously violated it. The singular kindness of God consisted in this, that he had been pleased to prefer them to other nations; as it is said in the psalm, "***He has not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them,***" (Ps. 147:20). But I had good reason for saying that two steps are here to be observed; for in the election of the whole nation, God had already shown that in the exercise of his mere liberality he was under no law but was free, so that he was by no means to be restricted to an equal division of grace, its very inequality proving it to be gratuitous. Accordingly, Malachi enlarges on the ingratitude of Israel, in that being not only selected from the whole human race, but set peculiarly apart from a sacred household; they perfidiously and impiously spurn God their beneficent parent. "***Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau,***" (Mal. 1:2, 3). For God takes it for granted, that as both were the sons of a holy father, and successors of the covenant, in short, branches from a sacred root, the sons of Jacob were under no ordinary obligation for having been admitted to that dignity; but when by the rejection of Esau the first born, their progenitor though inferior in birth was made heir, he charges them with double ingratitude, in not being restrained by a double tie.