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Because of Christ: *Living Out the Gift of God Through Faith*

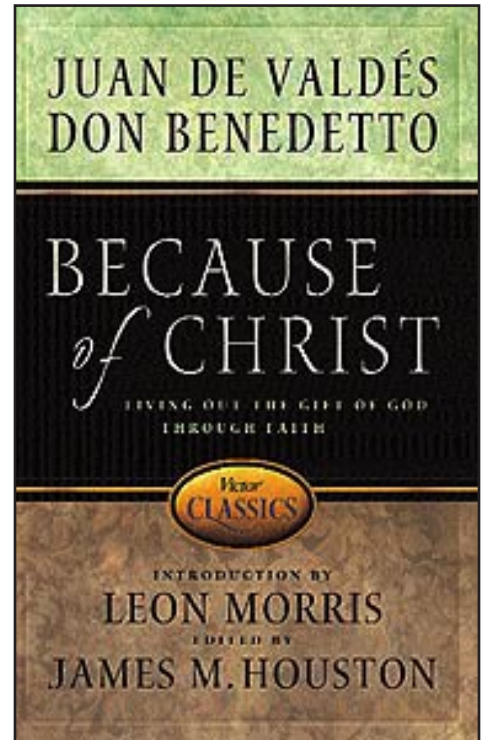
A Quick Focus

The Book's Purpose

- Showcase the doctrinal positions of two sixteenth-century Reformers from Italy
- Emphasize the centrality of justification by faith in Reformation theology
- Shed light on theological issues that are still matters of discussion today
- Demonstrate how these authors distanced themselves not only from the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church but also from Renaissance humanism

The Book's Message

Justification by faith is the central Christian doctrine. In our natural state, we are unable to come to God or to do works that please Him. God must choose, predestinate, call, and save us. We are saved by grace through faith, not by works. The indwelling Holy Spirit guides the believer in spiritual growth. The Christian does not rely on human wisdom or natural reason; rather, he is taught by the Spirit.



by Juan de Valdés and Don Benedetto
David C. Cook
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Thirteen Main Points

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Juan de Valdés: Excerpts from *110 Considerations* and other writings

The Nature of the Christian Life

The nature of man. I have struggled to understand what it means when the Scriptures say that man is created in the “image and likeness of God.” As I reflected on the matter, I began to gain an understanding of the matter. The image and likeness of God “**consists in what is part of God’s eternal character, as well as His attributes of kindness, mercy, justice, faithfulness, and truth.**” God created man with these attributes, but the first man lost them through disobedience. Man became mortal, and when he became mortal he became “**malevolent, cruel, impious, faithless, and false.**”

Upon further reflection, I saw that the image of God was in the person of Christ. He expressed perfectly the attributes of God. I also came to understand that those who are called and drawn to the gospel are incorporated into Christ and recover the image of God. One day we shall all be like Christ. Christ is the head of the body, and we are the members.

How the spiritual man differs from the natural man. Those who are sons of God will submit to being ruled and governed by God. But those who are ruled by human wisdom are the sons of Adam. Though the sons of God will utilize physicians and medicine to preserve their health, they will do so without placing supreme confidence in them. They depend on God alone. This is the way of prudence and discretion. It is presumptuous folly to trust in oneself and to attempt to rule one’s own life.

Conditions of entry into the kingdom of God. A person is not likely to rely upon another person for help until he is at the point of helplessness. This tendency carries over to the spiritual realm. We are not willing to trust in God for salvation until we reach the point of giving up our reliance on human wisdom and our dependence on the things of this world. This is why Jesus said that the poor in spirit were blessed and why He said that it is difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.

Good resolutions are not enough. There have been times when I have resolved to do certain good or pious things and yet have not done them. On the other hand, there have been times when, without making such a resolution, I have done things pleasing to God without even being aware that I was doing them. Upon reflecting on these things, I have concluded that I do things pleasing to God when I do not depend on my own ability or the strength of my resolve but instead yield myself to God’s will and depend on Him. Instead of making daring resolutions, I desire to be conformed to the will of God and to be ruled by Him.

God’s covenant in Jesus Christ. We were created to love and obey God; however, through disobedience, we have failed to keep this covenant of creation. Therefore, God sent His Son to fulfill our obligation to God, establishing a new covenant. Within this covenant relationship, we accept four realities. First, we trust in Christ, and we are free from the punishment we deserve. Second, we are justified in Christ and partake of His divine nature. Third, Christ’s resurrection assures us of eternal life. Fourth, as His children, we are free from the natural inclination to sin. We enjoy the first two realities in this present life; we will enjoy the other two in the life to come.

Christian life consists in being dead to the world and alive to God. The name “Christian” was given to believers as a term to be despised, because one who was baptized was saying that he was henceforth dead to the world.

Many who participated in the rite were not dead to the world, and thus had not been raised to new life. We must be careful not to call ourselves “Christian” unless we are dead to the world, buried with Christ, and raised to new life in Him.

The quickening of the spiritual life is dying to the world. When a person accepts justification by faith through Jesus Christ, he begins to die to the world, and he is quickened to live for God. Mortification is incomplete death; the person is still subject to earthly passions and to physical death. By the same token, the quickening of a person can be seen as incomplete resurrection. Until our physical death, it is our duty to mortify ourselves and to respond to the quickening of the Holy Spirit. After we die, when we enter eternity with God, our death to sin and our resurrection to life will be completed.



Knowing God

The knowledge of good and evil. After Adam’s disobedience, man lost the image of God and acquired the knowledge of good and evil. Thus, this knowledge is unnatural and was not part of God’s design for man. When a man becomes a new creature, he regains the image of God and, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, begins to renounce and mortify his human wisdom and his natural ability. The Christian life is a process that, among other things, involves the diminution of the light of nature and a growing dependence upon spiritual light. Some may argue that the apostle Paul implies in Romans 1 that people are capable of knowing God by natural light alone; however, Paul’s purpose is to show that people who reject God are without excuse since a form of knowledge of God—not sufficient for salvation—is possible for anyone. Others may argue that since David and other saints, including the apostle Paul, used human reason and wisdom in their writings, such things cannot be bad. Though we utilize human wisdom in this life, especially in our dealings with other people, we

KNOWING GOD

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recognize that such wisdom is ultimately powerless to guide us in the way of Christ.

Man's blessing consists of knowing God. Learning about God through His created world is to know Him in a secondhand manner. True happiness consists in knowing God directly through Jesus Christ, being united with Him, and depending completely upon Him. Only those who are in Christ can know Christ, and only through Christ can they know God.

Four ways of knowing God in Christ. There are four ways by which Christians know God. The first is the revelation of Christ. This is an internal revelation; it consists of **"the reality of Christ's deity, His humanity, His divine and human existence, His glory and shame, His dignity and lowliness, and all else that proceeds from the revelation of Christ."** Second, the Christian knows God by the communication of the Holy Spirit. Third, the Christian knows God by regeneration and renewal. Fourth, the Christian knows God by an inward vision. This fourth way comes, if it comes at all, after the other three.

Believing with difficulty is better than to do so with ease. There are two classes of people: those who believe easily and those for whom belief is extremely difficult. The first type of person will believe many things that are false. The second type will believe nothing, false or true, until thoroughly convinced.

The merit of Christian doubt. A person who is tempted to doubt is experiencing a work of Christian progress. A person who is growing in the Christian faith but still finds human wisdom active within him will experience doubt. Here are some suggestions for counteracting the temptation to doubt. First, regard this temptation as evidence of progress in the Christian life; the temptation is an indication of the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life. Second, remind yourself that if the spiritual and divine life were not real, you would feel no internal contradiction. Third, if the Christian faith were not a gift from God, you would not feel a desire to please God. Fourth, if the spiritual life were not divine, you would not feel abhorrence toward ungodly things. Fifth, if there were a better alternative for appearing blameless before the judgment seat of Christ, you would have a cause for doubt. But there is no better alternative than to die and be buried with Christ and be raised with Him.

Christian understanding depends upon God. It is not within a man's power to believe in God or to love Him; neither can he make himself inwardly pious and holy. God must do these things. At the same time, we are commanded to be devout, just, and holy. It is our duty to pursue these virtues. As we prayerfully depend upon God and as we desire to please Him instead of other people, God will work His will within us.

Knowing God falsely and truly. If we depend on human wisdom and reason for our knowledge of God, we will be misled by superstition and false religion.

This God is vindictive and cruel; He requires us to go to great extremes of self-denial and suffering in order to avert His wrath. But when we look into the Holy Scriptures and allow the Holy Spirit to teach us, we come to know that God is just the opposite of what we had supposed. We come into an intimate relationship with God through Christ. We are freed from our former fears and terrors as we come to know that God loved us so much that He gave His only begotten Son for our justification.

Christian faith needs the confirmation of experience. We can learn many facts about Christ and about the Christian faith; however, when we hear conflicting reports about these matters, we may become confused and begin to doubt what we thought we knew. In order to stand firm in the gospel, we must have direct experience of what we believe. The most effective experiences for acquiring this certainty are mortification of the flesh and quickening of the Spirit. The believer can acquire this confirmation of experience by practicing two activities. First, he must divest himself of all other modes of justification and must cling to justification by faith. Second, **"let him keep the strictest reckoning with himself as to his works, words, and thoughts."** He will thus be able to perceive his progress in the matters of mortification and quickening.

The Christian's faith is in proportion to his knowledge of God in Christ. The enemy of our souls desires to lead people away from faith. When a man accepts the gospel of Christ, Satan attempts to lead that man to skepticism and unbelief. Those who pursue knowledge of God through human wisdom alone do not realize that such wisdom makes them blind. Just as we were justified by faith alone, so our knowledge of God must depend on faith. We must depend on God and ask Him for the faith to know Him in Christ.

CBS

We will come to see God
as "so fastidious and irascible
that we see Him as offended
by everything."

The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Believer

Walking the Christian way without the Holy Spirit is like walking in darkness. To live by the light of human reason alone is like walking at night without a source of light. Walking at night without light leaves one bewildered, unsure of the way. One might feel afraid of things that are harmless and feel confident about things that are harmful. Pray to God that He would send you His Spirit to guide you. God will send the Holy Spirit to illuminate us in His own good time.

God's presence is only known by His Holy Spirit. It is not in my power to meditate upon God or to think about Him. I must depend upon the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit comes only to those justified by faith in Christ.

The Holy Spirit prompts us to love God. When our sins are forgiven by the cross of Christ, the Holy Spirit indwells us and **"bids us to become disenchanted with ourselves and to be enamored with God."** God's love for us is infinitely greater than our love for God; therefore, instead of striving to love Him more, we accept the righteousness that has been given to us by Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit guides us in understanding the Holy Scriptures. Scholarly men who do not rely on the Holy Spirit when studying Scripture are under the same illusions as are pagans who worship images. Such a scholarly man becomes an expert in the Scriptures and can find in them something that relates to any question he might have. But the Scriptures become a substitute for knowing God. By contrast, an unlearned man who has the Holy Spirit will make the Scriptures a part of himself. He is taught of God, and the Holy Spirit will use the Scriptures to bring about changes in his heart.

The Holy Spirit is evidenced in spiritual warfare. When a man desires to do the will of God, he will experience internal conflict. The flesh wars against the Spirit. He will experience opposition and persecution. He will at times feel weak and ineffective, but such weakness is evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work in his life.

Traits of a Spirit-filled life. The first mark of a true Christian is an affection and delight toward spiritual things and a desire for such things. The second trait is an abhorrence of all that has no trace of the Spirit. The third is approval of thoughts and experiences that the Holy Spirit commands. The fourth is the mortification of the mind and the body.



The Christian's Prayer Life

The Holy Spirit enables us to pray. Romans 8:26 tells us that we do not know how to pray as we ought, so the Holy Spirit prays for us. The man governed by human reason is presumptuous and arrogant; he thinks he knows perfectly well what to pray for. When prayer leaves us with a feeling of contentment mixed with pride and self-esteem, we can be sure that we are not praying in the Spirit. When we pray in the Holy Spirit, we have a deep sense of satisfaction blended with humility and self-mortification.

Faith in prayer. There is a paradox relating to prayer and faith. When my confidence in prayer is the greatest, I sometimes obtain less of what

I ask for. But when my confidence is least, I often obtain what I pray for. To pray in faith is to rely on God, not to trust in one's faith.

Reflections on the Lord's prayer. First, when I call God Father, I can hope for all that an obedient son can hope for from a good and loving Father. Second, when I say "Our Father," I am expressing my relationship to all other brethren who have God as their Father. Third, the Holy Scriptures often present the Father as being in heaven. Fourth, it is the desire of all sincere Christians that the Father's name be sanctified. Fifth, the sincere Christian desires that the kingdom of God come quickly. Sixth, sincere believers desire that God's will be done here on earth as it is in heaven. Seventh, Christians depend upon God's bounty for their daily needs. Eighth, we come to God for forgiveness of our sins. Ninth, devout Christians know their weaknesses, so they fear temptation. Tenth, devout Christians are aware of the evils against which they battle, so they depend upon God for deliverance.



The Christian's Use of Scripture

The Holy Scriptures should be read without idle curiosity. The human mind stimulates itself through curiosity. It is dangerous to study the Scriptures simply out of curiosity. The natural mind is capable of feeding on Scripture for its own sake; such curiosity often results in vanity. Instead, the Christian should fix his attention upon the inward realities and feelings which the Holy Spirit wants to work into his soul through the Scriptures.

How the Holy Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Second Peter 1:19 speaks of the light of the Holy Scriptures. As I meditate on this truth, seven things come to my mind. First, a person who seeks to be godly is better off with some light than with none;

THE CHRISTIAN'S USE OF SCRIPTURE

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therefore, the Holy Scriptures are of use to him. Second, a person cannot understand the things of God through the Scriptures alone as he could with the Holy Spirit. Third, a person who has no other light but the Scriptures is afraid of being without them. Fourth, a person who reads the Scriptures but does not apply them will become deceived. Fifth, when the Holy Spirit begins to illumine his mind, he will begin to know God. Sixth, the person who puts his confidence in the Holy Spirit knows that the Spirit will never fail him. Seventh, the man who is filled with the Holy Spirit will not need to discover all the secrets in Scripture because he is content to know God.

Patience and comfort of the Scriptures. In Romans 15:4, Paul talks about the patience and comfort of the Scriptures. The Scriptures give patience by reinforcing our confidence that what God promised He will fulfill. The promises of God confirm and strengthen our hope.



The Christian's Vocation

The Christian's vocation. The man who has been called by God will desire nothing more than to please God. He must mortify his affections and seek God's will. He will be tempted by ambition, but the Holy Spirit will bring his mind into conformity with the will of God.

How to be sure of one's vocation. Through the experience of justification by faith, we can be sure that God has called us. We may doubt whether we are moved by the call of God or by our own impulses, but God gives us peace of conscience as we make the righteousness of God our own.

The sign of our vocation is to believe with difficulty. Those who believe many things easily may be led to believe what is false. A person who believes by revelation can believe only as much as he has experienced. The very struggle to believe is often a sign of vocation rather than a natural faculty of belief.

Why does God unfold our vocation so slowly? Sometimes a person's vocation is revealed immediately and dramatically, as was the case with the apostle Paul. In other persons the knowledge of vocation develops slowly, as when a farmer sows the corn and then waits for the harvest. God will act as seems best to Him.

The passion of ambition. Man uses the passion of ambition to increase his own self-fulfillment and reputation and to acquire as many possessions as possible. It is God's desire that we be content with whatever God has given us.

Why is love supreme? In 1 Corinthians 13, the apostle ranks love above faith and hope. Faith consists of belief and confidence. A person with hope has patience and endurance. Hope presupposes faith.

“A man who believes in faith and is tested in hope will bear love toward God and Christ.”

Love maintains and sustains faith and hope. And love will never fail, for throughout eternity we will delight in loving God in Christ.

Human and spiritual wisdom in suffering. Every devout Christian must be persuaded that God is good and that He is worthy of trust. God does allow His saints to be tested by affliction, but they respond by trusting Him all the more and by submitting themselves to His will.

How to deal with spiritual aridity. It is only by the Spirit of God that I am freed from the sense of barrenness and of alienation from God. I cannot in my own strength cause myself to feel the presence of God. I must become disenchanted with the world, including my fleshly attempt to approach God. As I do this, the Holy Spirit enables me to love God more deeply, and I become transformed into the image of Christ.



The Benefits of a Justified Life in Christ

The benefits of Christ's obedience. Christ's obedience frees us from the injuries that resulted from Adam's disobedience.

The benefits of Christ's assurance. Our confidence is in Christ and His work, not in our own accomplishments. God calls only those whom He had first known and predestinated, and those He also justifies and glorifies.

Why others do not recognize the benefits of Christ. Man is not aware that he is a sinner, a rebel against God. He attempts to justify himself by his own efforts rather than depending completely upon the work of Christ.

The doctrine of atonement. God has laid all our sins upon Christ, and He has taken them all upon Himself. If we had been required to satisfy the justice of God, we would all be condemned to perdition. It was necessary for Jesus to be more than a man, to be the Son of God, in order to reconcile us to God.

THE BENEFITS OF A JUSTIFIED LIFE IN CHRIST

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Only the children of God have satisfaction in everything. Why are the children of God satisfied with the things of God while the children of Adam are not? God uses the following means to work this attitude into their hearts. First, He opens their eyes to recognize Christ's righteousness. Second, He opens their eyes to His deity. Third, He opens their eyes to the fact that they were crucified with Christ. Fourth, their eyes are opened to the reality of eternal life. Fifth, He opens their eyes to see evil as evil and good as good.

Three bases of conscience. Every man molds his conscience in one of three ways. First, some follow natural religion. They form their ideas of God through human reason and discharge the obligations they think God requires. Second, some follow the Jewish religion and attempt to conform their lives to all the laws of that religion. Third, some hear and heed the voice of the gospel and believe in Christ for remission of sins and reconciliation with God.

Is justification the fruit of piety or is piety the fruit of justification? According to human reason, justification is the result of piety. But the Holy Spirit teaches us that piety is the fruit of justification.

Why do we find it most difficult to trust God for material things? The things that threaten our ego are the ones most difficult to believe. It is difficult to accept the gospel because such acceptance involves admitting that we are helpless to save ourselves. In the same way, it is difficult to

trust God for material things because doing so would require admitting that we are helpless to supply all our own needs.

Spiritual gifts are never understood until they are possessed. Christianity is not like a science; it is a life experience. The goal of the Christian life is not knowledge about faith, hope, and love but actually experiencing these and other virtues. I have found several principles that apply to this matter. First, no one can understand the gifts of God except those who possess and experience them as an inward reality. Second, though people's experience of these gifts is imperfect, yet they know the reality of the gifts and desire them more and more. Third, the gifts of God are exercised in every area of the Christian life. Fourth, lapses of consistency in the gifts do not mean that the gifts are lost.



Don Benedetto: Excerpts from *The Benefit of Christ, Crucified*

The Nature of Original Sin

Our fallen inheritance. Through their disobedience, our forefathers left us an inheritance of unrighteousness and God's displeasure.

“It is now impossible for us through our own strength to love God or to align ourselves with His holy will.... It is this forward inclination to all unrighteousness and wickedness that is called ‘original sin.’”

The need for restoration. If we are to be delivered from sin and returned to a state of innocence, we must begin by acknowledging our own sinfulness.



The Purpose of the Law

The first purpose of the Law is to make us know we are sinners (Romans 3:20). The second purpose is to make sin increase. The third purpose is to reveal the wrath and judgment of God. The fourth purpose is to make man afraid of God's judgment. The fifth purpose is to compel a man to go to Jesus Christ for salvation.



Why Forgiveness of Sins Depends upon Jesus Christ

How Christ takes us from our misery. In order to be freed from our burden of sin, we must first acknowledge our need. We must then come to Christ, who alone is able to conquer sin in our lives. We must not believe that the sin of Adam has so thoroughly condemned us that there is no hope for us. Though sin is strong, no sin has greater power than the righteousness of Christ.

The offense and futility of self-righteousness. We who are Christians believe that Jesus Christ has taken all our sins upon Himself and suffered on the cross for our sakes. How ungrateful it would be for us to behave as though we could justify ourselves before God or purchase forgiveness of our sins by our own merit! To do so would be to despise the work of Christ on the cross.

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**WHY FORGIVENESS OF SINS DEPENDS UPON
JESUS CHRIST**
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Only God can justify.

**“It was by the shedding of Christ’s
blood that we have been set free
from the dominion of the Law,
the tyranny of sin, and the sting
of death.”**

Because of the sacrifice of Christ, the Law can no longer accuse or condemn us. Death has been overcome. We have been delivered from the world, the flesh, and the devil. Christ has made us righteous before God.

CBS

The Results of a Living Faith in Christ

We benefit as Christ’s bride. The Son of God takes us as His bride; now everything we are and have is His, and all of His is ours.

We boast as Christ’s bride. We enjoy a lofty position as His bride, and He alone receives the glory for what we are and what we do.

We act as Christ’s bride. Because of our relationship with Christ, we can live in joy and contentment.

How can I be assured I belong to Christ? We are to live by faith, resting in the good news of the gospel. We trust in God, and our faith is reinforced by the promises in His Word.

The consequences of true faith. True faith produces a life of peace and joy. Confident in the mercy and grace of God, we live in dependence upon Him. Our hearts will be directed to God. We will be willing to endure all sorts of hardships out of love for Him.

The authority of the fathers for doctrine of justification by faith. The doctrine of justification by faith has been attested to by venerable church fathers such as Augustine, Origen, Basil, Hilary, Ambrose, and Bernard of Clairvaux.

Our righteousness is imputed only by Christ. All our works come from impure motives; therefore, our actions cannot justify ourselves before a holy God. Righteousness is a gift that comes from the grace and mercy of God. When we place our faith in Christ alone, God’s righteousness is given to us.

The character of justified faith. Justifying faith is not like belief in a historical fact. It is a work of God in the heart. Through this faith our old man is crucified and we become new creatures in Christ. We die with Christ and are raised with Him. We enjoy forgiveness of sins. The Holy Spirit moves us to become more and more like Christ. We are accepted as righteous in the eyes of God solely through the merits of Christ.

The character of Christ’s faith in the believer. Our soul is knit and joined to Jesus Christ. The merit of Christ is imputed to the soul. Out of this union with Christ flow good works.

The difference between true faith and self-righteousness. Faith makes men righteous without the help of works. This faith inspires us to be like Christ, an inspiration that involves doing the things that please Him. By contrast, doing good works for the purpose of earning salvation will only make us puffed up with pride.

CBS

How the Christian Clothes Himself with Jesus Christ

Clothed with the example of Christ. We look to Christ as our example in thought, word, and deed. We reflect His character in the way we treat others. The goal of our life is to follow in His steps.

Clothed with the afflictions of Christ. Jesus calls upon us to take up His cross. This cross is the means He uses to mortify the affections of the mind and the lusts of the flesh. In this world we will have tribulations, but it is His intent that His power would shine through our infirmities.

**Let us,
then,
embrace
our
tribulations
joyfully.**

CBS

Some Remedies for the Lack of Assurance

Prayer. In prayer the mind is settled upon God. We can ask God to increase our faith.

Baptism. The memory of our baptism reminds us of our relationship with Christ.

Holy communion. In this sacrament, we are reminded of Christ's sacrifice for our atonement. We receive assurance that our sins are forgiven and that we share Christ's life.

Predestination. We have the assurance of Scripture that we have been chosen in Christ and that our names are written in heaven. If God has chosen us, who can hinder us or rob us of our joy? Knowing that we are predestinated to eternal life gives us courage and confidence to do God's will and to face tribulations without fear.



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The authors:

Juan de Valdés (d. 1541) was the son of a Spanish nobleman. His uncle was private secretary to Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor. Juan was educated at the university of Alcalá near Madrid, where he focused on biblical studies. Because his beliefs were in conflict with those of the official church, he was tried by the Spanish Inquisition and imprisoned in 1524 but later released. In 1540, about a year before his death, a number of his writings were compiled in a work titled *110 Divine Considerations*.

Don Benedetto took his vows as a Benedictine monk in 1519 in Mantua in northern Italy. He later moved to Venice, where he became a close friend of Flaminio, who was a friend of Juan de Valdés. In 1537, he was transferred to a monastery in Catania, Sicily. While there, in 1543, he wrote *The Benefit of Christ, Crucified*.

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