

THE *November 1, 2009* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Special Reformation Issue:

John Calvin—500th Anniversary

Welcome to our Special Reformation Issue of 2009. The editors believed that our readers would appreciate having summaries of the speeches that were given at the Seminary's Calvin Conference, "After 500 Years: John Calvin for Reformed Churches Today." The conference was, under God's blessing, a grand success—encouraging and edifying to all. Read Rev. DeVries' interesting description of it.

The issue begins with a "Meditation," a brief excerpt of one of Calvin's "Sermons on Election and Reprobation." Reading carefully, you will notice that the objections to the doctrine of predestination Calvin faced are the same as those heard today. Nothing new under the sun.

But the speeches are new. May the Lord of the church use them to create in us thankful hearts for His gift of John Calvin. And may the Lord bless His church today with preachers of like bold faith, keen understanding, and real piety.

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Sermon on Genesis 25:21, 22*

Rebekah knew that of her, howsoever it should be, should come that blessed seed who had been promised. See in brief the whole that is here rehearsed. But all would be dark, if it were not declared particularly. Let us note here then, that they that are called into the church do not always remain there, as we have seen a notable example in Ishmael, who was the eldest son of Abraham. Notwithstanding, he was banished from the family. And this was not of the riches of the world, nor of those possessions that Abraham had. For Abraham was rich in cattle, in gold and silver, but he had not one foot of land. This heritage therefore—to what had it respect? Even to the spiritual promise, that is to say, that God had chosen the seed of Abraham, which was as much to say, that this shall be a people that shall be dedicated to my service. And those who shall come of them will

I receive and accept for my children, to the end that I may gather them into everlasting life.

Mark then how Ishmael with his birthright is cast from the hope of life. And it remaineth only to Isaac. Even so is it herein concerning Esau and Jacob. For both of these were descended of Abraham. Yea they were twins. Their mother bare them in one belly. Yet one is received, and the other rejected; one is chosen, and the other refused.

So then we see that they who for a time have place in the church, and bear the title of the faithful and of the children of God, may well be so accounted before men, but they are not written in the book of life. God knoweth them not, nor avoucheth them for His. Hereby we are admonished not proudly to vaunt ourselves, nor to be drunken with sottish presumption, when God shall show us this favor, to bring us into His church. But let us walk in purity, and labor to make sure our election, and to have the testimony thereof in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, and not to trust only to the outward title and ap-

pearance, which we may pretend before the world.

Moreover we are taught a far greater thing. And that is, in the first place, that albeit God had established His covenant with Abraham, yet notwithstanding He would declare that this was not all, to have made offer of His grace, but that it behooved that He chose according to His liberty such as He thought good, and that the rest should remain in their cursed state. Therefore saint Paul allegeth this place to apply it to the secret election of God, through which, before the foundation of the world, He chose those as seemed good unto Him.

Now this is a very high and profound matter, but when it shall be further declared, every one may make his profit of it, so that we be attentive unto it. And for the remnant, let us receive that which the Holy Scriptures show unto us, with sobriety, and let us not desire to be wiser than is lawful for us. But let us rest in that which God shall speak unto us, and moreover let us be humble, not to reply against Him, nor to bring forth our fantasies before

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Him, as though we would plead against God. But acknowledging that His judgments are bottomless, let us not search farther therein than is permitted unto us.

It is very true that this will be hard for us to digest if we bring in our own judgment, as there are a great sort of fanatical heads that cannot abide this doctrine. For it seemeth good to them to reply against God. But what profit they thereby in the end? We have alleged that herein we must bring with us a humility, for to reverence that which is hidden from us. Indeed saint Paul hath well showed us this by his example. For instead of disputing the matter, he crieth out: O how wonderful are the judgments of God?

Behold saint Paul, who was altogether amazed. He found himself astonished, he who had been lifted up above the heavens, he who had seen the secrets of God that were not lawful for man to utter. Saint Paul, who was (as a man would say) a companion of angels, was found in this case to marvel, and to be altogether confounded.

What shall become of these Scullions who have scarcely licked with the tip of their tongue

one word of the law and gospel, and yet nevertheless would go beyond saint Paul? Yet men shall find this pride in very many. But for our part let us return to that which is here showed us. *O man, who art thou?* When therefore we will make comparison betwixt God and us: who is God? within what compass shall we enclose Him? Shall it be within the compass of our brain? And we have scarcely half an ounce of wit, and in the meantime God, who closes His fist to hold the whole world as a grain of dust (as Isaiah the prophet saith) and is comprehended neither in heaven nor in the earth, who hath an infinite power, and infinite justice and wisdom, and hath incomprehensible counsels—and yet for all that we must come to make Him subject to our foolish fantasy.

And whereto will this grow? Moreover, who are we? Men, saith saint Paul. By which word he meaneth that we are nothing at all—as if he should say, must it be that thou presume so much, as to dare to inquire of the bottomless secrets of God, seeing thou art nothing but clay and dung? And again, what is thy understanding? Thou art full of sin and iniquity, thou art a poor blind one: and

yet thou wilt that God shall make an account to thee? And wilt thou conclude, that if thou find not that which He doeth good and reasonable, that thou mayest accuse Him? And must He needs hold up His hand at thy bar?

Now let us mark this admonition in the first place, and let us know that our Lord Jesus Christ teacheth us that we cannot do amiss to hearken and open our ears, to inquire and search after what it hath pleased Him we should know. But let us take heed that we go not beyond it. For there is no rage so great and outrageous as when we will know more than God doth show us. Moreover, we shall have spun a fair thread if we apply all our senses and all our studies thereto. This shall be always to enwrap us so much the more in a labyrinth and maze, unless we have the direction of God to show us the way.

Let us therefore keep this purpose: that is to say, to hearken to that which God doth propound unto us. And as soon as He shall once shut His mouth, let us have all our understandings locked up and captive, and let us not enterprise to know more than that He shall have pronounced unto us.



Rev. Michael DeVries

Reflections on the Calvin Conference

The first week of September brought gorgeous late-summer weather for West Michigan. Many had traveled—some long distances—to attend

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the conference (September 3–5, 2009) sponsored by the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary commemorating the 500th anniversary of John Calvin's birth. The conference was entitled, "After 500 Years: John Calvin for Reformed Churches Today." My wife and I had been planning for

some months to attend at least part of the conference. When I received a classical appointment to preach in Byron Center the Sunday following the conference, we were able to travel from our home in Wingham, Ontario knowing we could attend the entire conference.

The publicity leading up to the conference was very well done. What Reformed individual would not have his or her interest piqued and be motivated to attend a speech described this way: "Preaching...what is the point? How outdated can you be? If you have to speak, keep it entertaining and keep it brief, real brief." Such, sadly, are the thoughts of many in the church of our day. But there is another perspective. Come and hear what John Calvin had to say about preaching, the place preaching occupied in his own ministry, and why it matters to us today...." These announcements describing each of the seven scheduled speeches, appearing in many church bulletins, made it clear that the speeches would not be a boring rehash of Reformation history, but would be lively presentations filled with relevance for us today, as the conference theme suggested.

The conference was held at a convenient location in Byron Center, Michigan, making use of the fine facilities of the First Christian Reformed Church. The sanctuary was comfortable and spacious, the narthex large, conducive to visiting with others. The fellowship hall was convenient for the scheduled refreshment breaks. A nice-sized audience was able to assemble for the daytime speeches. Large numbers gathered for the two evening speeches, making use of the church balcony necessary for seating. It was wonderful to meet and greet friends and fellow saints from so many of our churches and other denominations as well—old friends from Iowa, Texas, South Dakota, Alberta, and elsewhere, as well as new acquaintances from as far away as Ireland and Australia!

The conference schedule was well arranged. Each speech included a beautiful organ prelude, lively audience singing, devotions, and an introduction by one of our current professors. But the

focus was always on the speech itself. Real treats were a brief concert before the lecture program on Thursday evening by the Hope Heralds men's choir, and the piano and cello concert by Eric and Crista Phelps prior to the Friday evening speech. Interestingly, the Phelps included in their selections Psalm 23 from the Genevan Psalter, the songbook created under John Calvin's supervision and used during his ministry.

The speeches themselves were outstanding, in my humble opinion. There was an excellent assortment of speakers—our seminary professors, both active and emeritus, as well as ministers of the Word, all of whom were graduates of our Seminary, but serving congregations in Northern Ireland and Australia as well as the United States. The subjects dealt with in the seven speeches concerned not what were perhaps interesting but esoteric or relatively unimportant matters, but timely and significant truths and issues of John Calvin's life and work. The speeches gave evidence of considerable research and study but were profitable, not just for scholars, but for all of the people of God, also the young people in attendance.

During the scheduled breaks between the speeches, there was

more to occupy the time than enjoying tasty refreshments and warm fellowship. The Reformed

Free Publishing Association had a table set up in the fellowship hall with some of their publications, most notably their latest book, available for the conference, *The Reformed Faith of John Calvin – The Institutes in Summary*, by Prof. David J. Engelsma. Occupying several tables was an excellent assortment of Reformed

literature, new and used, provided by Mr. Gary VanDerSchaaf, Credo Books. It appeared to me

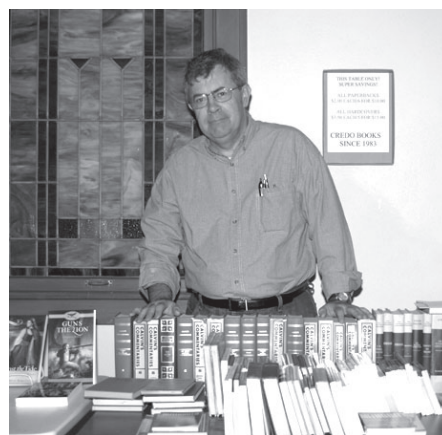
that Gary was doing a brisk business, selling out of some of his books dealing with Calvin. Also on display in the fellowship hall were many impressive church his-

tory projects provided by students of our Protestant Reformed high schools. What a lot of time and effort were put into these projects! It was nice that there was a good amount of free time over the course of the conference to take advantage of these things.

The Byron Center PRC Young People's Society came up with a great idea when they decided to provide lunch and a couple of suppers for conference attendees at their church building. My wife and I enjoyed a delicious chicken dinner on Friday evening at the church—another opportunity for



Eric Phelps on the cello



Gary VanDerSchaaf and Credo Books

good fellowship with fellow believers in Christ.

The final session of the conference was an open question period. Written questions could be submitted throughout the conference regarding the speeches or related matters. Many of these questions were answered by the full panel of the conference speakers at the session. Initially I thought it might have been better to have a time reserved for questions after each speech. But upon reflection this was a very good way to cap off the conference. Many perceptive, interesting questions were asked and answered, sometimes by more than one of the speakers.

A couple of other items I would mention: There were at

least sixty entries in the writing contest sponsored by the Seminary in conjunction with the conference. On Friday evening the first, second, and third place winners of each division were announced. It is wonderful that so many participated in this contest. I really appreciated, also, the beautiful prayers or portions thereof of John Calvin used by Prof. Gritters in his devotions. And a nice activity for visitors to the Grand Rapids area on Saturday afternoon was the bus tour, which included the Seminary, churches, schools, as well as other points of interest. I have no doubt that Prof. Cammenga proved to be an entertaining tour guide.

All in all—a first-class conference from every point of view! Our Seminary and the Theologi-

cal School Committee are to be commended for sponsoring this conference. Also deserving of appreciation is the Evangelism Committee of Southwest PRC, which handled the logistics for the conference—publicity, refreshments, and much more no doubt.

This was a wonderful commemoration of the 500th anniversary of Calvin's birth, from beginning to end honoring our sovereign God's work in and through His servant John Calvin. The conference succeeded well in underscoring "the importance for the contemporary church to maintain Calvin's Calvinism."

Tapes are available through the conference website (500years-ofcalvin.org).



Prof. Barry Gritters

Calvin as Model for Reformed Ministers Today (1)

If Reformed ministers today in their 50-year pastorates did half of what Calvin did in his 27, preached a quarter as often per week as Calvin preached, worked with a tenth as much energy as did this man of God, reached even to Calvin's knees in theological stature, were devoted to the people's care with a fraction of his devotion, willing to suffer for only one year what Calvin suffered most of his ministry, and had hearts of love for

God a quarter of the size of this man's heart, their congregations would be healthy. Reformed churches would be prospering. Under the good providence and grace of God they would be able to survive in these evil days, and be good and strong witnesses of the Lord.

When a Reformed minister today reads about Calvin's devotion to his work because of Calvin's devotion to his God, he might tempted to respond with shame: "What have I done with my gifts? How have I served my Lord with my time?" But he might also respond differently. Understanding, first, that God



Prof. Gritters

gives men of Calvin's stature and strength, capacity, and caliber, very infrequently, and second that each man is to work with the gifts

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that God gave to *him*...he might instead be spurred on to more faithful labor so that, following Calvin's model, he too can be a blessing to the church of Christ in his corner of the kingdom as Calvin was in his.

But Calvin, a model? His detractors in Geneva said: "Better with Beza in hell than Calvin in heaven." A pattern for Reformed ministers today? This reformer, writer, theologian, scholar?

Yes, like the apostle Paul in Philippians 3:17 ("as ye have us for an ensample"), Calvin can be a model for Reformed ministers.

First, John Calvin was personally upright.

His enemies in Geneva testified otherwise. His contemporaries slandered him with the kinds of accusations that today would make a man file defamation lawsuits. One of his first biographies, by Jerome Bolsec, was a vile piece filled with accusations of ambition, "filthy lucre," womanizing, even homosexuality. Such evil accusations spurred Calvin's colleague Theodore Beza to write the first biography that spoke truth about this man of God.

I have been a witness of him for sixteen years and I think that I am fully entitled to say that in this man there was exhibited to all an example of the life and death of the Christian, such as it will not be easy to depreciate, and it will be difficult to imitate.

If there is any truth in the claim that great temptations for pastors are **sloth, self, sex, and silver**, this was not learned from observing John Calvin.

First, Calvin was **selfless**. Although God thrust him into the limelight, he did not seek publicity and acclaim. Before he died, he left clear instructions that his grave-site not be

marked, lest people venerate him instead of his God. Likely he would have shuddered to think that the doctrines of grace and the true system of the Christian faith would be named *Calvinism*. Unlike some of God's servants, his ego did not match his abilities. Because he was conscious of the danger, he taught: "The only true dignity of a Christian is indignity." His last words before his death were: "God had pity upon me."

Sexually he was upright. Before he was married he was hesitant to take a wife. "I shall not belong to those who are accused of attacking Rome, like the Greeks fought Troy, only to be able to take a wife." When finally he began looking for a wife he made it known to his friends who were looking for him: "Always keep in mind what I seek to find in her, for I am none of those insane lovers who embrace also the vices of those with whom they are in love, where they are smitten at first sight with a fine figure." After his wife died, when he was only 40, he pledged that he would from then on "lead a solitary life." And he did. Chastely. For 14 more years.

As to **silver**, some of his enemies accused him of filthy lucre, but most knew better. He was not rich, nor interested in riches. Fighting off the hurtful accusation, Calvin said: "If some will not be persuaded while I am alive, my death at all events will show that I have not been a money-making man." And who has not heard the pope's purported praise of Calvin: "The strength of that heretic consisted in this, that money never had the slightest charm for him. If I had such servants, my dominion would extend from sea to sea."

And any accusation of **sloth** is reckless. What man today could go stride for stride with this man in his tireless devotion to the work? He slept very little and

probably did not know what a vacation was. A worker, Calvin preached seven and more times per week, lectured to seminararians, wrote letters in the thousands, authored books, visited sick, led consistory meetings, met with troubled refugees, counseled and advised the deacons and hospital directors. Even on his deathbed he wanted to work on dictation. When one of his friends urged him to rest, Calvin responded, to the effect: "What, would Christ find me idle when He comes?"

Second, Calvin was a willing and patient sufferer.

Calvin suffered such physical hardships you might be inclined to call him the "Genevan Job." Headaches, stomach cramps, asthma, the knifing pain of kidney stones, and hemorrhoids. You first smile, then wince, when you hear that his doctor recommended that he ride a horse to jar loose the painful kidney stones, but that his hemorrhoids were too painful for him to sit on the horse. He worked through physical ailments that would have made most strong men today apply for early retirement.

His pain of heart must have been harder. His very first son lived only two weeks. Three years later a precious little daughter died at birth. Two years after that, another child was born prematurely, and died. When his dear help-meet of only nine years contracted TB at age 40, he lost her, too, and lived a widower for the rest of his ministry—almost 15 years.

Just as difficult was his "cross-bearing." The common people in Geneva treated him poorly. They named their dogs after him, composed songs to mock him. Calvin's love for David's Psalms may be explained by his David-like opposition—for Christ's sake.

Willingly he endured all these troubles. Before Calvin became Geneva's pastor and Rev. Farel was thundering at him to stay, Calvin said: "If I had the choice, I would rather do anything than comply with your wishes in this matter. But when I remember that I am not my own, I offer my heart as a burnt sacrifice to the Lord." When, after he had been banished from Geneva, the authorities changed their minds and asked him to return, he said, "I'd rather go to the executioner." But he went anyway, because Calvin did not pastor where he would be most comfortable, but where he would be most useful.

Third, Calvin was a wise and sympathetic pastor.

To describe (or think of) Calvin as a scholar, theologian, church reformer, disciplinarian (in the good sense), liturgist, catechist, organizer of schools, hospital and orphanage builder, or anything else, without describing him first of all as a pastor of the church in Geneva, would be to do him great injustice. Calvin was all these, but to be accurate we must describe him as "The Pastor of Geneva."

He was a **sympathetic** pastor, with a heart that yearned for the people's good. Calvin longed to deliver the people from suffering. He suffered with them. Geneva's poor, orphans, widows, and sick, found an advocate in Pastor Calvin. Under his influence the office of deacon was restored in the church. His heart was so full of charity, he wrote: "Do we want to show that there is reformation among us? We must begin at this point, that is, there must be pastors who bear purely the doctrine of salvation, and then deacons who have the care of the poor." Calvin's compassion made Geneva a refuge for those fleeing persecution. Others could not flee but were

arrested. Calvin personally tried to gain their release and took time to write letters to them. He ministered to many in need, not only visiting face to face those from whom he could have contracted the plague, but giving from his own small stores to help orphans. Nothing could stop him from this God-given care: I am prepared "to pawn my head and feet, that it (money) will be found forthcoming here."

He was also a **wise and balanced** pastor. This man served with a rare wisdom. He refused to support radicals (the "200 percenters") in the city, resisting his own colleagues at times. He gave good counsel to churches torn by strife, telling the people both that "some of you are impelled by a zeal not tempered by moderation," and that they must be patient with their less-than-satisfactory pastor. Then, to the consistory: "It will be your duty to bring [the people] to reason with all meekness and humanity...(and) you know the rule which the Holy Spirit lays down...that each should yield and give up his right." His wisdom even anticipated Article 11: "Sometimes, for the good of the congregation, ministers must go even if they are innocent." His pastoral wisdom warned against judging a man's salvation, called the people to seek the salvation even of their enemies, cautioned the "hyper-Calvinists" of his day ("We cannot yet distinguish the elect from the reprobate"), and kept him by the side of the heretic Servetus right up to his execution, if peradventure God might give repentance...(cf. II Tim. 2:25).

Fourth, Calvin was a teacher of the church's children.

As good ministers today know, Calvin knew that the church would not last another generation if the children did not receive catechetical instruc-

tion, plus thorough parental Christian education. He saw the urgent need not only for training in the faith, but also for secular education from good teachers.

So he instituted catechism. After he was banished from Geneva, he would not return except under four conditions, one of which was catechism. He (and the consistory) demanded that parents send their children, beginning already at age 7, and that they be disciplined if they refused. He required the children to memorize answers, sing the Scriptures to commit it to memory, and attend classes until they made confession of their faith. And that qualified officebearers be the teachers.

With a pastor's heart, he also drew up ordinances for Christian schools. Calvin understood that the church also had responsibility to promote the Christian education of the children. So Geneva established the Academy to train preachers, magistrates, lawyers, etc. Also a school for the children, beginning at age 7.

Children learned theology, but also the arts and sciences, because Calvin was convinced that the Reformation could grow and increase only through a study of the arts and sciences as well as that of theology. As to finances, the schools were to be well-funded, so that even the poor could attend. And, just as with catechism, parents were to be punished if they refused or neglected to send their children to the school. Very clearly, Calvin saw that, although the education of the children was the duty of the parents, both church and state had part in it.

Passionately this pastor was interested in the welfare of the lambs!

... to be continued. 

John Calvin, the Church Reformer (1)

John Calvin was a church reformer *par excellence*. He was a church reformer only because God made him a church reformer, for the church is God's and reformation is God's work. When the church of God apostatizes from His truth and the biblical pattern for the church, then reform is required. The church must be re-formed, that is, formed back to the Bible.

Church reformation is a spiritual work, and thus reformation begins with the Spirit changing the hearts of the members. God Himself determines the man who will work mightily to lead the church back to the Bible. God not only knows the need for reform, He sovereignly determines the man who will lead the reform of His church. God plans all the circumstances of his life, and thus molds and fits the man to be a reformer.

Such a man was John Calvin. God ordained Martin Luther to destroy the foundations of the apostate church of Rome, and then to begin erecting anew. God chose Calvin to build on the foundation of Luther, and to continue the reform of God's church back to the Bible.

The purpose of these articles is first to sketch the life and work of John Calvin. But the further goal is to show how God specially created Calvin and then molded him for the work. What about Calvin made him to be the

church reformer as regards his personality, training, and experiences? We cover Calvin's life in this article, and take up the rest in the second article.

John Calvin's Life

John Calvin was a Frenchman, born on July 10, 1509 in Noyon, Picardy. Calvin's family was a respectable family of middle rank. His father worked on legal and financial matters for the clergy in and around Noyon.

John Calvin's mother died in 1515, when John was only six years old. On account of this, he lived for long stretches with some aristocratic families of Noyon. His father later remarried. All told, John had three brothers and two half-sisters.

His Education

With the children of these aristocratic families, Calvin was sent off to Paris to study in some of the best schools in Europe. This was in 1523, when John was about fourteen. The goal, initially, was a solid education directed towards church office. John was following the path of his older brother, Charles, who did enter the priesthood.

After four or five years, John's father instructed him to change schools in order to study law. This change was probably tied to his father's troubles with the church, eventually resulting in his excommunication. Calvin followed his father's wishes, applied himself diligently, and eventually did complete his studies and obtain a degree in law.

But law was not his first love, and after his father's death in



Prof. Dykstra

1531, John Calvin returned to his original goal of studying theology. He immersed himself in the classic literature of Greece and Rome as well as of the ancient church fathers. He learned Greek, Latin, and Hebrew thoroughly. All that was a solid foundation for an intensive study of theology.

His Conversion

To this point in his life John Calvin was still devoted to the Romish Church. Obviously, studying in the great universities in Paris, he would have heard about Martin Luther and the great stir he was creating. The Reformation was already fourteen years old when Calvin returned to the study of theology. The Reformation was sweeping across Europe. The printing presses were churning out books and diatribes of Luther and his followers, as well as of his opponents. But Calvin indicates that he rejected these new ideas for some time. He was stubbornly devoted to the Church and to her doctrine.

Prof. Dykstra is professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

His conversion was sudden. He gives evidence that it was a struggle, not unlike that of Luther, though not as prolonged. Like Luther, he could not find peace in a salvation that included his own works. God changed John Calvin's heart and mind.

After his conversion, Calvin committed himself wholly to the Reformed truths with his customary diligence. So much was this the case, that he soon had other Reformed believers coming to him for instruction.

Calvin had friends in Paris who were of the same conviction. This came out publicly in a speech delivered by a close friend, Nicholas Cop. Cop set forth Reformation truths, especially justification by faith alone. That speech was quite possibly written by Calvin, or with his help.

The speech caused such an uproar that Cop and anyone close to him with sympathies for the Reformation were forced to flee. Thus Calvin fled Paris in 1533, leaving his life as a university student behind. Thus began a new chapter in his life.

A Pilgrim

For the next three years, Calvin lived in various cities, finding refuge in the homes of several influential people. These various residences afforded him not only protection, but also access to excellent libraries where he could continue his study of theology. Another benefit for Calvin was that he met other Reformation theologians with whom he could discuss his newfound faith.

Calvin made his break from Rome official in 1534 by resigning his benefices. A benefice was something akin to a scholarship, and it committed the scholar to return to the service of the church after his studies were completed.

Calvin moved to Basle in 1535. There he completed his first edition of the *Institutes of the*

Christian Religion. It was published in 1536, when Calvin was but twenty-six years old.

Calvin made a trip to Italy, but his name was known to the Inquisition there, and he soon left the country. He passed through Geneva, Switzerland in 1536 on his way to Basle. There the fiery Reformed preacher William Farel detained him and compelled Calvin to remain and assist Farel in Geneva.

A new phase: Pastor

Calvin's life as a pastor can be divided into three distinct parts—his first stay in Geneva (for less than two years); his ministry in Strasburg (for three years); and his second stay in Geneva (until his death in 1564).

Geneva: July 1536–April 1538

Although initially Calvin's work in Geneva was that of a lecturer on Scripture, Calvin was soon ordained a minister and began preaching regularly. This first stay was marked by controversy and turmoil. The city of Geneva had decided to forsake Rome, but was far from embracing the Reformation as Calvin and Farel taught it. Their labors in Geneva ended abruptly when the city council voted to expel Calvin, Farel, and another faithful pastor, Pierre Viret.

Strasburg: September 1538–September 1541

Calvin, relieved to be free of the responsibilities in Geneva, now intended to return to the life of the scholar. But Martin Bucer prevailed upon Calvin to come to Strasburg to shepherd a church of French refugees in that German-speaking city.

The next three years were one of the happiest periods of John Calvin's life. He worked exceedingly hard—preaching, teaching, and seeing to the needs of his flock. In addition, he wrote several commentaries and revised

his *Institutes*. His congregation flourished under his diligent labors. They appreciated him much.

During this time Calvin married a widow named Idelette de Bure. Every indication was that John and Idelette Calvin had a happy marriage. Sadly, they had but one (living) child born to them, and he survived only a few days. Their marriage lasted a brief nine years before Idelette died. Calvin never remarried.

Meanwhile, back in Geneva things had gone very badly in the church and the city. Eventually the city fathers became convinced that they had made a mistake, and they began asking Calvin to return. He ignored or rejected their overtures for a year, and then, in spite of his dread, he returned to Geneva under the conviction that God called him to labor there.

Geneva: September 1541–May 27, 1564

The first fourteen years in his second pastorate in Geneva were a time of almost unbearable pressure and strife. Calvin had enemies inside the church, including deficient, untrustworthy fellow pastors. The majority on the city council were enemies of Calvin and resisted all his efforts to reform the church. He was attacked by heretics, by Lutherans, by the theologians of Rome, and by Anabaptists. Within the city Calvin was reviled and reproached. One Genevan citizen named his dog "Calvin" so that he could have the pleasure of kicking him. Calvin fully expected to be put out of Geneva a second time.

But by 1555 most of his powerful enemies had died, been executed, or left Geneva for various reasons. The majority of the city council supported him. Finally, Calvin had some peace. In this time, reform in Geneva flourished. Geneva became the center of the Reformation, to which

thousands of refugees fled. The Academy was established, and many hundreds of pastors were trained and sent out into Europe and beyond.

During these last years of his life, Calvin continued to work

hard, preaching and teaching. He had time to write and further to refine his theology. He breathed his last on May 27, 1564 and was buried in an unmarked grave. The work of John Calvin, the church reformer, was finished.

That, in brief, is John Calvin's life. But we have not examined the man that God formed and molded to be the great reformer that he was. That next time.



Rev. Angus Stewart

Justification: Considering the Judgment Day with Singular Delight

In our day of widespread spiritual blindness and theological deceit, it bears repeating that John Calvin's teaching on justification is radically opposed to that of Romanism, false ecumenism, the New Perspective on Paul, and the Federal Vision. The Genevan Reformer would shake his head in utter bewilderment at the claim of some that his doctrine of justification is not that of Martin Luther. Let it be clearly affirmed and understood that Calvin taught the orthodox, biblical truth of justification by faith alone in Christ alone through grace alone, as proclaimed in all the Reformed confessions.

However, this article, largely because of space constraints and partly because of embarrassment at proving something patently obvious to all but the most deluded, will not take time to establish that this particular circle is round.¹ Instead, we shall build

upon the truth of justification by faith alone by setting forth five aspects of Calvin's teaching on this doctrine that are perhaps less well known and understood, but which are, nevertheless, important for a full confession of, and greater comfort in, this glorious gospel jewel.

For this purpose, we shall consider Calvin's *Catechism of the Church of Geneva* (1560), which he wrote for children as a form of instruction in the doctrine of Christ.² What does Calvin's Genevan catechism say about justification? What did Calvin want the children of the church to know about it? What great truths of the gospel of justification did he reckon Christ's lambs (and not only His sheep) should and must grasp to be prospering and profitable members of the congregation?

First, justification and sanctification are distinct but inseparably joined.



Rev. Stewart

Master. But can this [justifying] righteousness be separated from good works, so that he who has it may be void of them?

Scholar. That cannot be. For when by faith we receive Christ as he is offered to us, he not only promises us deliverance from death and reconciliation with God [i.e., justification], but also the gift of the Holy Spirit, by which we are regenerated to newness of life [i.e., sanctification]; these things must necessarily be conjoined so as not to divide Christ from himself (p. 55).

Justification and sanctification are in Christ—both of them, together, inseparably—just as justi-

¹ Cf. David Engelsma, "The Doctrine of Justification in the Theology of John Calvin," *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, vol. 41, no. 2 (April, 2008), pp. 26-58.

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² Amongst other places, Calvin's *Catechism of the Church of Geneva* is found in John Calvin, *Treatises on the Sacraments: Catechism of the Church of Geneva, Forms of Prayer, and Confessions of Faith*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Scotland: Christian Heritage, 2002), pp. 34-94. Page numbers in the body of this article refer to this book.

fication and sanctification are the two distinct, cardinal blessings of the new covenant in Christ, as Calvin teaches repeatedly in his various writings, especially by appealing to Jeremiah 31:31-34. This being the case, there is no room for loose living or antinomianism in Calvin's teaching on justification. Those who are truly justified by faith alone will, and must, live new and godly lives and so do good works. Covenant children—and adults—need to know and practice this.

Second, justification includes assurance of salvation. Calvin wanted the Genevan catechumens to know this, as this dialogue between the Master (M) and the Scholar (S) shows:

M. What advantage accrues to us from this forgiveness [which is, of course, included in justification]?

S. We are accepted, just as if we were righteous and innocent, and at the same time our consciences are confirmed in a full reliance on his paternal favour, assuring us of salvation (p. 79).

This is necessarily the case because justification is itself a declaration of God to us in our consciousness that we are righteous and, hence, recipients of Jehovah's fatherly care and salvation. Thus justification itself carries with it the truth of assurance. This is a point Calvin makes repeatedly in his various works. For instance, in *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, immediately after speaking of justification, Calvin castigates Rome for its grievous heresy in this regard:

Lastly, there was another most pestilential error, which not only occupied the minds of men, but was regarded as one of the principal articles of faith, of which it was impious to doubt: that is, that believers ought to be perpetually in suspense and uncertainty as to their interest in the divine favor. By this sug-

gestion of the devil, the power of faith was completely extinguished, the benefits of Christ's purchase destroyed, and the salvation of men overthrown. For, as Paul declares, that faith only is Christian faith which inspires our hearts with confidence, and emboldens us to appear in the presence of God (Rom. 5:2). On no other view could his doctrine in another place be maintained: that is, that "we have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15).³

Thus the Genevan Reformer not only sees justification and sanctification as inseparably joined; Pastor Calvin also rightly teaches that justification includes assurance of salvation. The youngest catechumens in Calvin's Geneva were left in no doubt concerning this. Yet many Reformed theologians even in our day have not got this straight.

Third, justification includes the *continual* forgiveness of sins. It is not something that we receive once and for all at the very start of our Christian life, as many in evangelical circles believe and teach. Calvin explains that in the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer ("forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"), we who are already believers continually ask God to remit our sins:

M. What does the fifth petition contain?

S. That the Lord would pardon our sins.... When Christ gave this form of prayer, he designed it for the whole Church (p. 79).

In his *Institutes*, the Genevan Reformer affirms,

...we must have this blessedness [of justification] not just once but must hold to it throughout life... the embassy of free reconciliation

is published [i.e., preached] not just for one day or another but is attested as perpetual in the church (3.14.11).

Justification is not increased, for it is 100% complete, based on the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to us. But we who are just are also sinners (to borrow Luther's phraseology), and so we continually need to hear the assuring declaration of pardon in our consciousness. This is Reformed and biblical Christianity for young and old.

Fourth, Calvin teaches that the gift of justification, which is inseparably joined to sanctification and includes both assurance and continual forgiveness of sins, is received and enjoyed only in a true church. This is how the *Catechism of the Church of Geneva* relates two articles of the Apostles Creed: "I believe an holy, catholic church" and "the forgiveness of sins":

M. Why do you subjoin forgiveness of sins to the Church?

S. Because no man obtains it without being previously united to the people of God, maintaining unity with the body of Christ perseveringly to the end, and thereby attesting that he is a true member of the Church (p. 52).

M. In this way you conclude that out of the Church is naught but ruin and damnation?

S. Certainly. Those who make a departure from the body of Christ, and rend its unity by faction, are cut off from all hope of salvation during the time they remain in schism, be it however short (p. 52).

This fits perfectly with Calvin's teaching throughout his writings on the necessity of joining, or labouring to establish, a true church,⁴ as well as with ar-

³ John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Dallas, TX: Protestant Heritage Press, 1995), p. 27.

⁴ Cf., esp., John Calvin, *Come Out From Among Them: 'Anti-Nicodemite' Writings of John Calvin*, trans. Seth Skolnitsky (Dallas, TX: Protestant Heritage Press, 2001).

ticles 28 and 29 of our Belgic Confession, written chiefly by Guido De Brès, who was influenced by Calvin.

This is not justification by faith *and works*! Calvin is teaching that the church is the only sphere in which the blessing of justification by faith alone is enjoyed.

Fifth, justification for John Calvin brings “singular delight” in considering the judgment day.

M. Does it give any delight to our conscience that Christ one day will be judge of the world?

S. Indeed, singular delight. For we know assuredly that he will come only for our salvation.

M. We should not then tremble at this judgment, so as to let it fill us with dismay?


S. No, indeed; since we shall only stand at the tribunal of a judge who is also our advocate, and

who has taken us under his faith and protection (pp. 49-50).

What insightful questions and perceptive answers the Genevan catechism contains! Only the true gospel can enable us to contemplate the coming judgment day without our running away in dread or trembling in terror or being filled with dismay. Only justification by faith alone—the assurance that the righteousness of Christ is reckoned to our account by God’s grace without works—can give us confidence, nay “singular delight,” both now and at the last day, with regard to God’s judgment.

Any doctrine of justification that cannot do this is, therefore, a false doctrine of justification, and not the doctrine of justification

taught in the Bible, nor at the Reformation, nor by Calvin. This is the condemnation of Romanism, false ecumenism, the New Perspective on Paul, and the Federal Vision (amongst others).

John Calvin—good pastor and theologian that he was—preached the good news of justification to the catechumens in Geneva, and we and our children need to hear and believe it continually too: “Little children, do not be distraught as you contemplate the great judgment day. Do not think of it in abject terror. Consider it with singular delight because you are justified, you are righteous with the righteousness of God Himself wrought in our Lord Jesus Christ, who faced the judgment for you two thousand years ago on the cross.” 

Steven R. Key

Calvin the Preacher

As we commemorate the 500th year of John Calvin’s birth, it is worth considering John Calvin as a minister of the Word. While God used him mightily as a reformer, Calvin stood before God a faithful preacher of the gospel.

Calvin’s Preaching

Although the tremendous responsibilities that he bore and such a rigorous preaching schedule would seem to leave little time for sermon preparation, the strength of Calvin’s preaching began in his study. Gifted with a brilliant mind, he applied it to the study of God’s Word, working with the original languages, drawing on his extensive knowledge of the Scriptures, and often

also taking into account what others had written concerning the passage he was studying.

Calvin came to the pulpit without manuscript or notes. We know very little, therefore, about the early years of his preaching, and have little basis to make any evaluation of his development as a preacher. The sermons available to us today in the English language are sermons preached during the final 15-year period of Calvin’s ministry, from 1549 to 1564, during which time his sermons were carefully recorded and cataloged.

Calvin preached systematically through entire books of the Bible. The congregation in Geneva knew from week to week and day to day what section of Scripture they would hear expounded when they went to the house of God.

By these continuous expositions of Scripture, “difficult and



Rev. Key

controversial subjects were unavoidable. Hard sayings could not be skipped. Difficult doctrines could not be overlooked. The full counsel of God could be heard.”¹ So committed was Cal-

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¹ Steven J. Lawson, *The Expository Genius of John Calvin*, Orlando, FL, Reformation Trust Publishing, 2007, p. 32.

vin to this kind of series preaching that in his return to Geneva in September 1541, after having been banned from the city three years earlier, he did not climb the pulpit again with a special sermon for the occasion, but he opened the Scriptures and began to preach exactly where he left off three years before. Calvin would interrupt these series only for certain occasions, generally related to the church calendar, at which times he would preach from appropriate texts for the occasion.²

Because he believed that the whole Bible belonged to the people of God, he balanced preaching from the Old Testament with preaching from the New. He did so recognizing that all Scripture is amazingly relevant to God's people in every moment of history.

This commitment to series preaching tells us something else about Calvin's perspective of preaching and its relationship to the health of the church. He understood that the spiritual growth of God's people is not something sudden, but occurs by their being faithfully fed and nourished over a long period of time. For that reason, for however long it took, sometimes a year or more, Calvin would steep the congregation in the gospel set forth in a particular book or section of Scripture. 342 or 343 sermons from Isaiah and 189 sermons from the Book of Acts were typical of the extensive nature of his treatment of the books of the Bible. A shorter series from John Calvin would be a 43-sermon series from Galatians or 25 from the book of Lamentations.

Calvin's sermon delivery is said to have been rather slow and deliberate, partly because of his chronic affliction with asthma.³

² T.H.L. Parker, *The Oracles of God: An Introduction to the Preaching of John Calvin*, London and Redhill, England, Lutterworth Press, 1947, p. 70.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

From the reading of Scripture to the amen of his closing prayer the people of God would give Calvin their attention for an hour. He would not tax them longer. Nor would he overburden them with excessive sermon content in that hour. His sermons were able to be taken down word for word by those who recorded them.

The strength of Calvin's preaching is not to be found in his sermon outlines. He did not follow a stated outline with a theme and recognizable divisions taken from the logical structure of the text. He expounded the text sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase, and occasionally even word by word. He did so with great emphasis upon practical application of the teachings of the text, exhorting the congregation to submit to the Word of God. To Calvin the contents of the text bore the weight of carrying the minds of the congregation.

Calvin understood that by the work of the Holy Spirit, "The lives of those who believed the Word of God would be transformed by that Word.... To believe the Word was to live by the Word."⁴ The thoughts and affections of the hearts of God's people, when shaped by the power of the Word preached, would bear fruit to the glory of God. Of that Calvin was sure.

For that reason he sought to make the gospel message *personal*. He also spoke in language that could be understood by the common people. Theodore Beza, Calvin's contemporary and successor at Geneva, said of him, "Every word weighed a pound."⁵

⁴ Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 4: *The Age of the Reformation*, Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, England, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002, p. 130.

⁵ Leroy Nixon, *John Calvin, Expository Preacher*, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company,

The preaching of John Calvin was also marked by intensity and urgency. He came bearing the message of the great King!

So insistent was Calvin upon applying the Word of God to the congregation, even in the way of warnings and rebukes, admonitions and calls to repentance, that in a sermon on II Timothy 2:14-15, after pointing out the folly of a physician simply telling a sick man what the man *wants* to hear and treating him accordingly, Calvin asked, Does he not then become his patient's butcher?⁶

In a sermon on Job 33:1-7 in which Calvin had much to say not only about preaching, but about hearing the preaching, he spoke as if addressing ministers:

...when God grants us the grace to speak in His name, it behooves us to yield all the authority to His Word, and to advance the estimation of that Word. But if we are so turned aside by looking unto creatures, that we speak not freely as we ought to do, is it not a dishonoring of God? If a man is sent from an earthly prince, and suffers other men to scorn him, and he plays the goof and dares not bring the message that is committed to him: it is such a reckless wastefulness as is not to be pardoned. Behold, God receives us to His service, even us who are but dust before Him, even us who are altogether unprofitable. He puts us in honorable commission to bear abroad His Word; and He will have it carried abroad with authority and reverence.⁷

And the people must not say, "Ho! that is too hard to be borne.

1950, pp. 31, 34 (which quote comes from Broadus, *History of Preaching*, p. 120).

⁶ John Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistles to Timothy and Titus*, Facsimile of 1579 Edition, Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983, p. 802.

⁷ John Calvin, *Sermons on Job*, Facsimile of 1574 Edition, Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1993, p. 574. (modernization of the language is mine. sk.)

You ought not to go on like that." Those who cannot bear to be reproved had better look for another school-master than God. There are many who will not stand it: "What! is this the way to teach? Ho! we want to be won by sweetness." "You do? Then go and teach God his lessons!" These are our sensitive folk who cannot bear a single reproof to be offered to them. And why? "Ho! we want to be taught in another style." "Well then, go to the devil's school! he will flatter you enough—and destroy you." But believers humble themselves and are willing to be treated severely so that they may profit in God's school.⁸

Calvin never withheld what he saw as pertinent and necessary applications of God's Word. But the one man in the congregation to which all his sermons were directed was himself. Rarely did he speak to the congregation with the second person pronoun, *you*. Almost always did he say *we* or *us*, including himself in the congregation to whom the preaching was directed and placing himself under the authority of the Word of God as much as he did the congregation.

The Theological Foundation of Calvin's Preaching

The preaching of John Calvin was the preaching of a man who lived in the consciousness of the majestic holiness of God, who speaks to us in the preaching of the gospel.

That is the case, of course, only insofar as the preacher proclaims the holy and authoritative Word of God. That makes the calling of the preacher a weighty calling indeed! The preacher must faithfully expound God's Word!

⁸ T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, Louisville, Westminster/John Knox Press, p. 14.

That being established, however, the power of preaching is not to be ascribed to the minister, nor to the Word itself. No matter that the sermon be a most faithful exposition of Holy Scripture proclaimed most eloquently, preaching itself remains powerless—except by the sovereign and free work of the Holy Spirit, by whose power alone the preaching is made effective.

No wonder, then, that John Calvin could preach with such boldness! No wonder such fervency marked his preaching! He spoke not his own, but God's Word! He came not in his own power, but with the power of the Holy Spirit! He came with the confidence of Paul's confession in II Corinthians 10:4-5: "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into

captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." "When we do not take His Word seriously," Calvin said, "it is a sign that we attribute no more importance to God than to a

barking dog."⁹ For that reason Calvin also carefully and repeatedly called the congregation's attention to their calling before that Word preached.

The Congregation and the Preaching

For one thing, God's people seek that preaching, desire it, and attend to it at every opportunity.

Calvin, in one of his sermons,

⁹ Jean Calvin, *Sermons on Jeremiah*, Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990, p. 201.

appeals to those who think the minister too long if he preaches for half an hour, and are yet willing to soak their ears night and day in "fables, lies, and things of no profit," to consider how necessary and glorious a thing it is to listen to the word that proclaims the length and breadth and height and depth of the love of Christ.¹⁰

God's people know that they cannot live without the Word of their Savior. Thus they approach that Word with attentiveness. Calvin didn't always observe that in the congregation. He addressed also that weakness in a sermon on Job 29:18-25:

...in the gospel we have infinite treasures of wisdom and knowledge. God shows Himself familiarly unto us; He will have us to be filled, even thoroughly filled, with all perfection of His doctrine; and He gives us so clear and certain understanding as can be possible. And yet, for all this, where is the reverence that Job speaks of? where is the desire? where is the amiable obedience? Nay, to the contrary, we see scornfulness, as I have touched already. Again, when the doctrine is preached, how many are there that give attentive ear unto it? ...there are very few folk in which the reverence is to be found that is spoken of here. And as for conforming themselves fully unto it, that is a very rare virtue.¹¹

To hear with attentiveness, God's people must approach the sermon properly prepared.

Calvin frequently advised the people not to eat too much breakfast before coming to the sermon. But most of the difficulties with respect to the physical condition

¹⁰ Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, Edinburgh, Oliver and Boyd, 1953, p. 119.

¹¹ John Calvin, *Sermons on Job*, p. 505. (modernization of the language is mine. sk.)

The preaching of John Calvin was the preaching of a man who lived in the consciousness of the majestic holiness of God....


of the congregation came at the afternoon sermon. 'Those three drunkards back there,' said Calvin upon one occasion, 'might just as well have stayed in the tavern, for all the good they are getting from listening to the Word of God.' Sunday afternoon dinners were also a frequent cause of indifference to the Word. 'How can any man profit from the Word when his belly is so full of wine and meat that it takes all of his effort just to stay awake?'¹²

¹² Nixon, pp. 65-66.

The congregation has a calling to receive that preaching with humble submission to the authority of God's Word, carefully discerning the application of God's truth to their own lives. In a sermon on II Timothy 3:16-17, Calvin said, "...God's Word deserves such reverence that each person shall range himself beneath it and listen to it peaceably and without contradicting." He goes on. "To sum it up, St. Paul here pronounces that men must not take out parts and bits that they approve of and what meets their

fancy in Holy Scripture. Without exception they should conclude that, since God has spoken in His Law and in His Prophets, they must keep to the whole."¹³

Upon such preaching and the hearing and submission to that Word of God the salvation and safety of the church depends.

How great is the need for such preaching in our day! May the Holy Spirit prosper us in this! 

¹³ Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, p. 9

Prof. Ronald Cammenga.

Calvin's Struggle for Church Discipline

Calvin's Initial Struggles Over Church Discipline in Geneva

From one point of view, Calvin's entire ministry in Geneva can be viewed as his struggle for the recovery of biblical church discipline. It was really with a view to the organization of the church and the establishment of discipline, recognizing his own inabilities in this area, that William Farel first persuaded Calvin to take up his ministry in Geneva.

It was August of 1536. Calvin was just twenty-seven years old. The city of Geneva at that time had a population of nearly 10,000 people. By the standards of the day it was a large and prosperous city. Prior to this, the city had committed to the cause of the Protestant Reformation and had

expelled the Roman Catholic clergy. William Farel, the leader of Geneva's company of pastors, recognized in the young Calvin the God-endowed gifts that were desperately needed in the Reformed church of Geneva.

From the beginning of Calvin's first stay in Geneva in August of 1536, the matter of church discipline was a contentious issue. It was contentious among the people, many of whom were not willing to have their lives ordered by the discipline of the church. Many of them were glad to be rid of Rome, and for this reason had supported the decision to become a Protestant city. But they resisted the application of the principles of the Reformation to the ordering of the church, and particularly to their lives.

But especially were the efforts of Calvin and Farel resisted by the Genevan magistrates, the two main ruling councils of the city.



Prof. Cammenga

It was because of their steadfast insistence on church discipline that barely a year and a half after Calvin began his work in Geneva, he and Farel were banished from the city. It was April of 1538.

Calvin lived for three years in Strasburg. This was a three-year respite from the struggles in Geneva. It was an enjoyable three years, as Calvin pastored a French refugee congregation in

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the city. It was a productive period in Calvin's life. But it was also a time of preparation. For God used Calvin's stay in Strasburg to prepare him to resume his work in Geneva, especially his work on behalf of biblical church discipline.

The leading reformer in Strasburg was Martin Bucer; he had prevailed upon Calvin to come to Strasburg. Bucer was a leading proponent of biblical church discipline, and it was Bucer who influenced Calvin greatly and whose views Calvin adopted. Bucer's fundamental position is expressed in his statement: "There cannot be a church without church discipline."

After a three-and-a-half year exile from Geneva, Calvin was finally convinced to return to Geneva. He returned with the clear understanding that Geneva was persuaded of the necessity of church discipline and was committed to a return to biblical church discipline.

Calvin's Effort to Institute Biblical Church Discipline in Geneva

On Calvin's return after his banishment, he immediately set to work to institute anew discipline in the Genevan church. The day after his return, he and the other ministers began drawing up a definite order for the government and discipline of the church. The fruit of their work was the formulation of the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances of the Church of Geneva*, which was ratified and officially introduced into the church on November 20, 1541. This document is the earliest predecessor of the Church Order used until recently in most Reformed churches. The restoration of discipline and the office of ruling elder occupy a large place in these *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*.

A constant thorn in Calvin's side in his effort to restore dis-

cipline to the church of Geneva were the Libertines. They were a kind of political party in Geneva whose members included a large number of wealthy and influential citizens of Geneva. Many of them had embraced the Reformation with eagerness, but not out of any real zeal for the Reformed faith. Their main objective was to throw off the oppressive yoke of Roman Catholicism. Their battle cry was: "Liberty! No tyranny!" When it became plain that the new discipline introduced by Calvin was in many ways more rigorous and demanding than Rome had ever been, they reacted violently against the Reformation. At every turn they opposed Calvin, crying out against the new discipline as an infringement of their liberty and personal freedom. They had been largely responsible for Calvin's banishment several years before, and if they had had their way, he would have been banished again. Calvin once commented that compared to the Libertines, he considered the pope to be a pretty decent fellow. If you are familiar with Calvin's opinion of the pope, you can pretty much surmise what his feelings toward the Libertines must have been.

In his preface to his *Commentary on the Psalms*, Calvin rehearses his struggles with the Libertines.

Afterwards, for the space of five years, when some wicked libertines were furnished with undue influence, and also some of the common people, corrupted by the allurements and perverse discourse of such persons, desired to obtain the liberty of doing whatever they pleased, without control, I was under the necessity of fighting without ceasing to defend and maintain the discipline of the Church. To these irreligious characters and despisers of the heavenly doctrine, it was a matter of entire indifference, although the Church should sink into ruin,

provided they obtained what they sought—the power of acting just as they pleased (p. xlv, "The Author's Preface," *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 1).

In the end, Calvin's efforts on behalf of the recovery of discipline met with success, and the leaders of the Libertines were banished from Geneva.

Fundamental Features of the Discipline Calvin Restored

What were the fundamental features of the discipline that Calvin restored? We can point to six main features of the church discipline Calvin put in place in Geneva.

In the first place, the form of church discipline restored by Calvin was "Presbyterian," that is, rule over the local congregation by a body of elders. Calvin, along with the other Reformers, rejected the hierarchical system of the Roman Catholic Church. Over against the Romish view, Calvin insisted on the truth that Christ is the one King and Head of the church. No pope, no bishop, no church council may rob Christ of His crown rights. His rule of the church is rooted in and reflects His redemptive work on behalf of the church. Christ exercises His rule through His Spirit and Word. The Bible, therefore, is the constitution of all sound church government. It is the sole standard for the church's discipline.

In rejecting the hierarchical system of church government, Calvin brought the church back to the biblical pattern of the rule in each congregation entrusted to certain men whom Christ appoints to the office of ruling elder. Calvin resurrected the office of ruling elder. Each local congregation, he insisted, was autonomous, that is, self-governing. Within each congregation, and appointed from among the members of the congregation itself, the

rule and discipline of the church was entrusted to elders. Government by a body of elders, all of these elders themselves of equal authority, was a cornerstone of Calvin's biblical church discipline.

In the second place, Calvin insisted that in its work of discipline the church was self-governing and independent. Not only did Calvin face the opposition of the Libertines in Geneva, but he was also constantly at odds with the civil government, which always and again insisted on the final say in matters of discipline, especially excommunication. Many of the other Reformers, as Luther and Zwingli, somewhat due to force of circumstances, did give to the state a large role in the discipline of the church. And constantly Calvin was under pressure to do so as well. But Calvin steadfastly refused, and insisted on a sharp distinction between the state's sphere of authority and the church's sphere of authority.

It might be a question, perhaps, whether Calvin was always himself consistent in maintaining this principle. But there can be no question about it that this was a principle for which he fought tenaciously. Again and again he refused to tolerate the magistrate's encroachment on the rights and duties of the consistory, especially in the exercise of excommunication. At one time he handed in his resignation from office and declared that he would sooner die than comply with the city council's demand that one who had been excommunicated by the consistory be granted the right to partake of the Lord's Supper.

In keeping with this sharp distinction that Calvin made be-

tween the jurisdiction of the state and that of the church, Calvin also maintained that in the carrying out of its authority the church must confine itself to the use of *spiritual* means. The sword and temporal punishments had no place in the church's exercise of her authority, of which things the Roman Catholic Church of Calvin's day made use in her efforts

to enforce her rule, as she does also today. Throughout history, it remained a temptation to the church to take up the sword in the cause of the gospel. Against this grave danger, Calvin insisted that the

church was shut up to spiritual means, exhortation, and admonition, with excommunication as the extreme remedy.


Third, Calvin taught that the objects of the church's discipline were those members of the church who erred either in doctrine or in life. Unbiblical views as well as ungodly living, unrepented of, called for the church's discipline. Neither heretics nor the unholy may be tolerated in the fellowship of the church. Both must be dealt with.

In the fourth place, it was an outstanding feature of the church discipline restored by Calvin that not only the lay members of the church but also the officebearers were subject to the discipline of the church. The practical fruit of the Roman Catholic hierarchical system was that the priests and clergy were virtually above discipline. It was practically impossible for concerned church members to do anything about wicked clergymen. At the time of the Reformation the church was at the mercy of unbelieving and vile priests and bishops. This same disgusting fruit of the Roman Catholic hierarchical system is evident in the sex scandals that have come to light in recent years.

All this was changed with the recovery of biblical church discipline. Not only were the officebearers in the local congregation entrusted with the duty of exercising church discipline among the members, but they were also themselves under the discipline of the church, including the ministers. Especially did Calvin insist on the supervision of the ministers by the elders. Ministers held their office in the local congregation. They were subject to the supervision of the elders and of their fellow ministers. And, if need be, ministers who showed themselves unfit could be removed from office.

Fifth, it was one of the outstanding contributions that Calvin made to the Reformed practice of church discipline that he clearly articulated the three main reasons for discipline. He did not only call the church to discipline, but motivated the church faithfully to exercise the key-power of discipline. Calvin saw that the purity and preservation of the church depended on discipline. Calvin also had an interest in the salvation and recovery of the erring church member.

But, last, Calvin especially, as in all things, sought the glory of God in the exercise of faithful church discipline. God is glorified by the church in the truth, that is, in purity of doctrine and in holiness of life. The church must discipline, therefore, in order that by this means the church may glorify God.

It was his zeal for the glory of God that sustained Calvin in his struggle for the recovery of biblical church discipline. He was willing to suffer reproach, death threats, personal indignities, banishment, and even death, if need be, for the sake of the reinstitution of proper church discipline. Where can such zeal for the glory of God be found today? 

Government by a body of elders... was a cornerstone of Calvin's biblical church discipline.

Calvin's Doctrine of the Covenant

Introduction

The doctrine of the covenant of grace is thrust to the foreground in Reformed and Presbyterian churches today by the heresy of the federal vision. The name itself of the false teaching indicates this, for "federal" means 'covenant.'

In the providence of God, who uses heresy to clarify and establish the truth of the gospel, the federal [covenant] vision brings to a head the controversy over the covenant in Reformed churches from the sixteenth-century Reformation of the church to the present day. Two distinct and antagonistic doctrines of the covenant have struggled for the mind of the church. One holds that God graciously establishes His covenant with all the baptized children of believers alike, so that the covenant and its fulfillment in the salvation of the children are conditional, that is, dependent upon the will and working of the children. The other covenant doctrine teaches that God graciously establishes His covenant with the elect children of believers, and with them only, so that the covenant and its fulfillment in the salvation of the children are dependent upon the will and working of God.

The fundamental issue in the controversy between the two doctrines of the covenant is whether the covenant of grace is governed by election.

The heresy of the federal [covenant] vision brings the ages-long

controversy between the two opposing doctrines of the covenant to a head, inasmuch as the federal [covenant] vision is, and claims to be, development of that doctrine of the covenant that cuts the covenant loose from election and, therefore, makes the covenant conditional. The federal [covenant] vision heralds this doctrine of a conditional covenant as the denial of justification by faith alone and, with this fundamental truth of the gospel, the denial of the doctrines of grace confessed by the Canons of Dordt.

As AD 325 was the hour of crisis for the truth of the Godhead of Jesus, as the early sixteenth-century was the hour of crisis for the truths of the bondage of the will and justification by faith alone, and as the early seventeenth-century was the hour of crisis for the doctrine of predestination, so the present time is the hour of crisis for the truth of the covenant of grace.

At this crucial hour, the Reformed churches are called to examine, and re-examine, the doctrine of the covenant. They must conduct this re-examination in the light of Scripture, especially Galatians 3, where the apostle imbeds justification by faith alone and the cross of Christ, which is the ground of justification, *in the covenant God established by promise with Abraham and Abraham's "seed" and where the apostle identifies Abraham's seed as "Christ" (v. 16) and those who are Christ's (v. 29).*

The churches do well also to let Calvin, who in many ways is the doctrinal, ecclesiastical, and spiritual father of the Reformed churches, shed light on the truth of the covenant.



Prof. Engelsma

The Fundamentals

John Calvin did not systematically, thoroughly, and perfectly clearly develop the biblical and Reformed doctrine of the covenant. One can, therefore, find inconsistencies in Calvin, especially in his commentaries. This is not strange. There is development of doctrine as the Spirit of truth guides the post-apostolic church into deeper, clearer, purer, fuller understanding of the biblical revelation. Invariably, the Spirit uses heretics and heresies in this process.

But Calvin did teach the doctrine of the covenant, and he taught it with regard to its fundamental aspects. So prominent is the covenant in Scripture that a biblical theologian such as Calvin had to reckon with, and explain, the covenant. In addition, Calvin was forced to pay close attention to the covenant in his defense of the faith against his Anabaptist (or, as Calvin referred to them, "Catabaptist") adversaries.

Calvin regarded the doctrine of the covenant as fundamental to the Christian faith. In his commentary on Zacharias' prophecy

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concerning the birth of Jesus in Luke 1:67ff., Calvin wrote, “[The prophets] all uniformly make the hope of the people, that God would be gracious to them, to rest entirely on that covenant between God and them which was founded on Christ” (*Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 1, Eerdmans, 1949, 70). He added, “Our chief attention is due to the signature of the divine covenant; for he that neglects this will never understand any thing in the prophets.” In keeping with his regard for the covenant as the source and meaning of Christ and His redemptive work, in the *Institutes* Calvin set his entire doctrine of Christ in the context of the truth of the covenant (*Institutes*, 2.10ff.).

Regarding the nature of the covenant, there is compelling evidence that Calvin viewed the covenant of grace as essentially the communion of the church and of the believer and his children with Christ. In addition to teaching that salvation is union with Christ and, thus, with the triune God, Calvin presented the covenant as a bond of fellowship between God and His people. Repeatedly, Calvin called the union of the believer with Christ, which for Calvin is the essence of salvation, “wedlock”: “that sacred wedlock through which we are made flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone” (*Institutes*, 3.1.3). “Wedlock” alludes to God’s marriage with Old Testament Israel (Ezek. 16) and to the New Testament church (Eph. 5), and this marriage is the covenant, as Calvin well knew. Marriage is a relationship of love.

In his commentary on the great covenant passage in Jeremiah 31, Calvin observed that the word “covenant” expresses that “God descends and appears in the midst of them, that he may *bind himself to his people, as he binds the people to himself*.” Regarding the words, “[I] will be their God, and

they shall be my people” — the formula of the covenant, expressing what the covenant is — Calvin stated, “Here God comprehends generally the *substance* of his covenant” (*Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations*, vol. 4, Eerdmans, 1950, 129, 133; emphasis added).

In viewing the covenant as a contract, or an agreement, or even as a “bargain” (as though the covenant of grace were similar to a business deal), many Presbyterian and Reformed churches have not followed this lead of Calvin, to the injury of covenant doctrine and life among them.

But the great issue between the two opposite doctrines of the covenant in the Reformed tradition is whether the covenant is governed by election.

Covenant and Election

In the theology of John Calvin, covenant and election are closely related; indeed, for Calvin the covenant is governed by election.

No one with the least knowledge of Calvin’s theology would deny that Calvin taught that the saving grace of God in Christ has its source in, and is determined by, election. But this is the grace bestowed by the covenant, especially the grace of justification on the basis of the cross, as Paul teaches in Galatians 3. That Calvin would locate the source of the grace of the covenant elsewhere than election is unthinkable, indeed absurd on the very face of it.

How closely covenant and election are related in Calvin’s mind is evident in his definition of predestination in the *Institutes*: “In actual fact, the *covenant of life* is not preached equally among men, and among those to whom it is preached, it does not gain the

same acceptance.... This variety also serves the decision of God’s eternal election,” etc. (*Institutes*, 3.21.1; emphasis added). The direct object of God’s predestination is “the covenant of life.”

Considering the woeful degeneracy of the Jews under the old covenant, which might seem to imperil the covenant, Calvin assured his readers that “[God’s] freely given covenant, *whereby God had adopted his elect*, would stand fast” (*Institutes*, 2.6.4; emphasis added).

Calvin insisted that the promise of the covenant is for the elect only, so that God establishes the new covenant with the elect, and with them only: “This is that... covenant which God promises that He will not make with any but His own children and His elect people, concerning whom He has recorded His promise that ‘He will *write His law in their hearts*’ (Jer. 31:33). Now, a man must be utterly beside himself to assert that this promise is made to all

men generally and indiscriminately” (*Calvin’s Calvinism*, Eerdmans, 1956, 100).

The preaching of the gospel to the physical offspring of believers is governed by election with regard to its saving purpose and

efficacy. Commenting on Isaiah 54:13, “all thy [Israel’s] children shall be taught of the LORD,” that is, the saving of the children of Abraham, Calvin explained, “The Gospel is preached indiscriminately to the elect and the reprobate; but the elect alone come to Christ, because they have been ‘taught by God.’” He added, “Therefore to them [the elect] the Prophet undoubtedly refers” (*Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, Eerdmans, 1956, 146).

As this last citation demon-

...in the Reformed faith of John Calvin the covenant has its source in, is governed by, serves, and magnifies the gracious election of God in Christ.

strates, it was nothing less than a principle of Calvin's interpretation of the Old Testament that Galatians 3 and Romans 9 determine who the true children of Abraham and the legitimate house of Israel are, to whom God is gracious, to whom He directs the gracious covenant promise, and with whom He establishes His covenant. "[The apostle] by no means makes the fleshly seed the legitimate children of Abraham, but counts the children of the promise alone for the seed." Calvin was not content to identify the "legitimate children of Abraham" by their faith. For "[the apostle] ascends higher into the mind of God, and declares that those were the children of promise whom God chose before they were born" (*Calvin's Calvinism*, 56).

Because, and only because, the covenant is governed by election is the covenant sure and steadfast. The source of the covenant is the sovereign, gracious will of


God in eternity, not the bound will of totally depraved infants. The covenant depends upon the promising God, not at all upon the working children. By divine decree, the covenant is founded upon Christ and His cross, not upon conditions performed by little children. "Though men were a hundred times perfidious, yet God never changes, but remains unchangeable in his faithfulness; and we know that his covenant was not made to depend on the merits [that is, works—DJE] of men" (*Jeremiah*, vol. 5, 343).

The covenant with Abraham, Christ, and the elect, which is the subject of Galatians 3, is unconditional: "God gave it [the inheritance promised and bestowed in, by, and as the covenant] to Abraham, not by requiring some sort of compensation on his part, but by free promise; for if you view it as conditional, the word *gave*... would be utterly inapplicable"

(*Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, Eerdmans, 1957, 98).

Covenant in Calvin is not a doctrinal device with which to weaken, obscure, ignore, oppose, and in the end destroy God's decree of predestination, as it is in many contemporary Reformed theologians. On the contrary, in the Reformed faith of John Calvin the covenant has its source in, is governed by, serves, and magnifies the gracious election of God in Christ.

The evil today in Reformed covenant theology is not that some few "identify" (as the foes of election deceptively, but foolishly, charge—no one has ever "identified" covenant and election) covenant and election, to the praise of the electing God.

But the evil—the very great evil—is that many tear covenant and election apart, to the praise of willing and working man. 

Rev. Chris Connors

Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination (1)

Introduction

Adore with astonishment the secret counsel of God, through which, those which seemed good to Him are elected, and the other rejected!¹

That was our believer/theologian's approach to predestination. He prostrated his mind and heart before the God of the Word; and because he heard

God speaking so clearly of His eternal predestination, Calvin believed it, taught it, and preached it! Calvin *practiced* *Sola Scriptura*!

That reforming principle demanded predestination; and it delivered us from bondage to Rome's semi-Pelagianism! Predestination, you see, is both the fountain of grace and the death knell to human merit; predestination is what gives us the other great *solas* of the Reformation: *grace alone*, in *Christ alone*, through *faith alone*, to *God's glory alone*. **GRACE ALONE!** That is the triumphant cry of the Reformation. Calvin took us to its source—the eternal predestination of God. He drove his peg into that



Rev. Connors

mighty truth and anchored us in the free grace of God.

Calvin's doctrine of predesti-

¹ Calvin, *Calvin's Calvinism*, RFP, 1987, 84. "Let those who thus come to Christ remember that they are 'vessels' of grace, not of merit."

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nation stands at the very heart of the Confessions of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches.² The

² *The Westminster Confession*, chapter 3 reads:

I. God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

II. Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass, upon all supposed conditions; yet hath he not decreed any thing because he foresaw it as future, as that which would come to pass, upon such conditions.

III. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.

IV. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite that it can not be either increased or diminished.

V. Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his free grace and love alone, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace.

VI. As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ; are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

VII. The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby

doctrines of grace, or five points of Calvinism,³ have rightly become the common-places for biblical Christianity.

Calvin's Doctrine Outlined

First off, let's glance at Calvin's big picture. Calvin locates predestination in the eternal covenant between God as Father, and God the Son appointed to the office of Mediator. He writes in the *Institutes*:

The elect are said to have been the Father's before he gave them to his only begotten Son. ...the Father's gift is the beginning of our reception into the surety and protection of Christ.... [T]he whole world does not belong to its Creator except that grace rescues from God's curse and wrath and eternal death a limited number who would otherwise perish. But the world itself is left to its own destruction, to which it has been destined....

That is the pattern of Calvin's thought, a pattern from which he never deviates.

1. Calvin's definition of Predestination.

In his treatise on eternal predestination (1552) over against a certain Albertus Pighius, who,

he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice.

VIII. The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men attending to the will of God revealed in his Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel.

³ Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, Perseverance of the saints.

in Calvin's words, "attempted... to establish the free-will of man, and to subvert the secret counsel of God by which he chooses some to salvation and appoints others to eternal destruction." He writes:

Now, if we are not really ashamed of the gospel, we must of necessity acknowledge what is therein openly declared: that God by His eternal goodwill (for which there was no other cause than His own purpose), appointed those whom He pleased unto salvation, rejecting all the rest; and that those whom He blessed with this free adoption to be His sons He illumines by his Holy Spirit, that they may receive the life which is offered to them in Christ; while others continuing of their own will in unbelief, are left destitute of the light of faith, in total darkness (*Calvin's Calvinism*, 31).

To deny predestination was, in Calvin's judgment, to "be ashamed of the gospel." In fact, for Calvin, without predestination there can be no gospel: "Let us take away election," he says, "and what shall there remain? As we have declared, we remain altogether lost and accursed."⁴

2. Calvin taught double predestination.

Calvin never uses this terminology, however. He would have thought it a redundancy to speak of *double* predestination!⁵ He believed that the one cannot

⁴ *Sermons on Election and Reprobation* (New Jersey: Old Paths Publications, 1996), 39.

⁵ *Calvin's Calvinism*, 45. "There is, most certainly and evidently, an inseparable connection between the elect and the reprobate. So that the election, of which the apostle speaks, cannot consist unless we confess that God separated from all others certain persons whom it please Him thus to separate. Now, this act of God is expressed by the term predestinating."

exist without the other. "Many," he says, "as if they wished to avert a reproach from God, accept election in such terms as to deny that anyone is condemned. But they do this very ignorantly and childishly, since election itself could not stand except as set over against reprobation" (*Institutes*, 3.23.1).

3. Calvin held election and reprobation to be equally absolute and unconditional.⁶

Modern moderate Calvinism, embarrassed by absolute sovereignty and fearing lest the whole truth be too offensive to those of universalist persuasion, is strangely silent regarding reprobation, or else it leaves the impression that reprobation is based upon foreseen sin. Calvin had no time for such finagling: "That they were fitted to destruction by *their own wickedness*," he wrote, "is an idea so silly that it needs no notice" (CC, 76). Rather, "it must be confessed by all that...[the] difference made between the elect and the reprobate...proceeds from the alone secret will and purpose of God" (CC, 77).

To the objection that such an exercise of sovereignty makes God a tyrant, Calvin replies: "With Augustine I say: the Lord has created those whom He unquestionably foreknew would go to destruction. This has happened because He has so willed it. But why He so willed it is not for our reason to enquire, for we cannot comprehend it" (CC, 32). For Calvin, God's will is "so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever he wills, by the very fact that he wills it, must be considered righteous" (*Institutes*, 3.23.2). Indeed, reprobation itself "has its own equity,

unknown indeed, to us, but very sure."⁷

4. Calvin's understanding of foreknowledge.

His opponents, like the universalists of our day, "barked and yapped" about God choosing and rejecting on the basis of foreseen faith and free-will. In Calvin's judgment, "such kind of men have no drop of the fear of God" (*Sermons on Election and Reprobation*, 38). To present God as limited and reactive was, to Calvin, a form of blasphemy.⁸ "God foresees future events only by reason of the fact that he decreed that they take place" (*Institutes*, 3.23.6).

5. That leads us to Calvin's doctrine of election.

He writes:

Scripture clearly shows, we say, that God once established by his eternal and

⁷ *Institutes*, 3.23.9 And he insists, at the same time, that it is perverse for sinners to suppress the cause of their condemnation, which is nothing other than their own sin, in order to cast the blame upon God. Calvin's point is that no sinner shall ever arrive in hell, except it be in that he walked all the way there in his own sin.

⁸ *Institutes*, 3.21.5. Calvin had a higher view of God. He saw the God of Scripture to be infinite, eternal, omnipotent, self-sufficient, sovereign. Thus his extended definition of foreknowledge as it is in God: "When we attribute foreknowledge to God, we mean that all things always were, and perpetually remain, under his eyes, so that to his knowledge there is nothing future or past, but all things are present. And they are present in such a way that he not only conceives them through ideas, as we have before us those things which our minds remember, but he truly looks upon them and discerns them as things placed before him. And this foreknowledge is extended throughout the universe to every creature."

unchangeable plan those whom he long before determined once for all to receive salvation...this plan was founded upon his freely given mercy, without regard to human worth.... Now among the elect we regard the call as a testimony of election. Then we hold justification another sign of its manifestation, until they come to glory in which the fulfillment of that election lies (*Institutes*, 3.21.7).

Calvin emphasized three things about this election:

1. Election is...in Christ.

Calvin sees God as turning His eyes upon Christ, arrayed in

His threefold office (*Institutes*, 2.15.1-6), as the complete basis of salvation for the elect (*Institutes*, 3.22.2).⁹

Four points of emphasis appear. First, God has made Christ to be the "fountain of life, the anchor of salvation, and the heir of the Kingdom of heaven" (*Institutes*, 3.24.5). Second, election incorporates particular sinners *into* Christ's salvation. Third, "God had no regard to what we were or might be, but our election is founded in Jesus Christ" (*Sermons on Election and Reprobation*, 55). And fourth, God opens His fatherly mercy and kindly heart to His elect in Christ.¹⁰

⁹ "...since among all the offspring of Adam, the Heavenly Father found nothing worthy of his election, he turned his eyes upon his Anointed, to choose from that body as members those whom he has to take into the fellowship of life. Let this reasoning, then, prevail among believers: we were adopted in Christ into the eternal inheritance because in ourselves we were not capable of such great excellence" (*Institutes*, 3.22.1).

¹⁰ A further point of emphasis in Calvin is adoption. Election and adoption are almost synonymous in his mind. Election is the eternal

To present God as limited and reactive was, to Calvin, a form of blasphemy.

⁶ Calvin's Calvinism, 75. "...according to His sovereign and absolute will"-that is Calvin's maxim.

Election, then, is the eternal aspect of union with Christ. The elect are placed *in Him* eternally in order that they might be *united to Him* in time, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.¹¹ Out of this truth Calvin draws the sweet doctrine of Christ as the mirror in whom believers must find the assurance of their own election. “If we seek God’s fatherly mercy and kindly heart, we should turn our eyes to Christ...for we have a sufficiently clear testimony that we have been inscribed in the book of life if we are in communion with Christ” (*Institutes*, 3.24.5).

2. Election is, therefore, completely unconditional.

It would not be possible to overemphasize just how completely Calvin repudiated conditional election. This is what Calvin preached:

Paul would frustrate whatsoever men might bring of themselves, and show that nothing has dominion herein, but the only mercy of GOD!... So then, let us not pretend that we can either will or run: but it behooveth that God find us as lost, and that he recover us from that bottomless pit, and that he separate us from them with whom we were lost, and to whom we were alike (*Sermons on Election and Reprobation*, 42).

That “grace...is ultimately rendered effectual by the will of man,” he writes, is a “fiction” (CC, 46). “To make faith the cause of election,” he writes, “is

adoption of children by the Father, who opens His heart to them in and through Christ. This is the way Calvin views the relationship of the “covenant.” The covenant relation is filial – and the relationship it affords is filial love and communion.

¹¹ *Institutes*, 3.1.1. Thus, when Calvin explains how the elect receive the grace of Christ, he begins with the work of “the Holy Spirit as the bond that unites us to Christ.”

altogether absurd, and utterly at variance with the word” (CC, 45).

3. Election is the singular fountain of grace.

“...all benefits that God bestows for the spiritual life...flow from this one source: namely, that God has chosen whom he has willed, and before their birth has laid up for them individually the grace that he willed to grant them” (*Institutes*, 3.22.2).

Following the divine logic of Romans 8:29-30, Calvin traces grace from unconditional election like a stream from its fountain-head. At times he follows it down to us from eternal predestination, through effectual calling, to justification; and he shows us that it must issue, without fail, in glorification! (*Institutes*, 3.21.7). At other times he teaches us to trace grace back upstream from faith, to effectual calling, and from calling to Christ in whom is our adoption by the Father. This is how he put it: “God calls and justifies, in His own time, those whom He predestinated to these blessings before the foundation of the world” (CC, 112). Effectual calling is a testimony and sign that manifests election (*Institutes*, 3.21.7), and “faith is the special gift of God, and by that gift election is manifested to, and ratified in, the soul that receives it” (CC, 97). Furthermore, any glimmer of holiness in the saints is referred, “to the election of God, as waters are traced to their fountain” (CC, 154). Salvation is, therefore, the working of God’s purest grace – from beginning to end!

This says something about Calvin’s understanding of grace.

...whenever Calvin’s context has anything to do, even remotely, with salvation or the gospel, he has grace hooked into predestination.

Grace, in Calvin’s mind, always “*delivers*” God’s children into Christ’s hands and possession (CC, 51). Much ado has been made of Calvin’s mention of a “common” or general kindness of God manifest in His providential dealings with all His creation. But whenever Calvin’s context has anything to do, *even remotely*, with salvation or the gospel, he has grace hooked into predestination. For Calvin, when it comes to salvation, the idea of grace flowing to those whom God has passed by and left outside Christ as objects of His righteous hatred – was a falsehood to be demolished.¹² Calvin

sees a predestinating God – the omnipotent volitional being – who is eternally putting forth His favour to Christ and those particular sinners He has chosen to eternal life in Him. He sees grace as God’s purposeful, personal, irresistible, saving favour.¹³

And it also says something about Calvin’s view of what is God’s purpose, or desire, with the preaching of the gospel.

Calvin refutes Pighius’ idea that God sends the gospel to be preached to all men because He

¹² Calvin’s *Calvinism*, 75. “When Pighius holds that God’s election of grace has no reference to, or connection with, His hatred of the reprobate, I maintain that reference and connection to be a truth. Inasmuch as the just severity of God answers, in equal and common cause, to that free love with which He embraces His elect.”

¹³ Calvin’s *Calvinism*, 150. How? “Does He bind their bodies, I pray you, with chains?” asks Calvin, “Oh, no! He works within; He takes hold of their hearts within; He moves their hearts within; and draws them by those, now, new wills of their own which He has Himself wrought in them.”

desires the salvation of all men.¹⁴ What Calvin writes in response applies to any and every hint of universalism. "The great question," he says, "lies here: did the Lord by His eternal counsel ordain salvation for all men?"¹⁵ Obviously not—predestination unfolded in providence proves otherwise. Therefore he concludes: "the mercy of God is offered equally to those who believe and to those who believe not, so that those who are not divinely taught within are only rendered inexcusable, not saved" (CC, 95). Calvin did not believe that the gospel is sent to all because God

¹⁴ Calvin's *Calvinism*, 93-94. Pighius objects: special and particular election is false, "because Christ, the Redeemer of the whole world, commanded the gospel to be preached to all men, promiscuously, generally, and without distinction. But the gospel is an embassy of peace, by which the world is reconciled to God, as Paul teaches. And, according to the same holy witness, it is preached that those who hear it might be saved."

¹⁵ Calvin's *Calvinism*, 95. "It is quite manifest that all men, without difference or distinction, are *outwardly called* or invited to repentance and faith. It is equally evident that the same Mediator is set forth before all, as He who alone can reconcile them to the Father. But it is as fully well known that none of these can be understood or perceived but by faith, in fulfillment of the apostle Paul's declaration that 'the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth,' then what can it be to others but the 'savour of death unto death?' as the same apostle elsewhere powerfully expresses himself."

desires the salvation of all! He withstood that idea. Calvin believed that God desires salvation of all the *elect*, and because they are scattered among the reprobate, He causes His gospel to be heard by all men. He believed that the outward call is the means

by which God saves His elect by grace, and brings the reprobate to their appointed end in the way of their own wicked unbelief (*Institutes*, 3.24.12). God's desires are never unfulfilled.

... to be continued. 

Announcements

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With thanksgiving to God, our parents,

**HENRY and SHIRLEY
BERGMAN**

will mark their fortieth anniversary on November 11, 2009. With confidence we can say, "LORD, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations" (Psalm 90:1).

- ❖ Randy and Barb Moorman
Stephanie, Matt, Jon, Nate
- ❖ Tom and Mindy Bergman
Jack, Samuel, Tessa, Quinn
- ❖ Julie Bergman
- ❖ Dan Bergman

Hudsonville, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC express their Christian sympathy to Len and Tammy Holstege and their children, Samantha and Steven, in the death of their son and brother,

DERRICK HOLSTEGE,
and of Tammy's mother,
JOSEPHINE FARRELL.

"I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust" (Psalm 91:2).

Rev. William Langerak, President
Tim Pipe, Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

November 2009

Date	Topic	Text
November 1		"Limited Atonement" John 10:14, 15
November 8		"Irresistible Grace" John 6:44
November 15		"Preservation of the Saints" John 17:11, 12
November 22		"Yet Will I Rejoice in the Lord" Habakkuk 3:17-19
November 29		"The Desert Shall Blossom As the Rose" Isaiah 35:1, 2