

# THE *October 15, 2003* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Special Reformation Issue:

*John Calvin*

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Volume 80 ♦ Number 2



## Special, Reformation Issue on Calvin

**F**or many years now, we have made the October 15 issue of the *Standard Bearer* a special issue commemorating the sixteenth century Reformation of the church. We have highlighted a Reformer, a doctrine, a controversy, or some other aspect of the Reformation, whether of that time or of a subsequent age.

It is high time that we feature John Calvin, the Reformer who completed the Reformation begun by Luther, spiritual and theological father of the Reformed churches, and one of the greatest men of God in the history of the church after the apostles.

The reader will learn something of Calvin's life and work from this special issue.

There is much more to learn. Those who desire to learn more of and from Calvin will appreciate knowing where to look. For Calvin's doctrine, the book to read is his 1559, final edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In

this work, Calvin explains in systematic form all the main doctrines of Scripture and guides the believer in his understanding of Scripture. Although the popular edition today is the McNeill/Battles edition (Westminster Press, 1960), the older Beveridge edition is a more accurate translation (Eerdmans, 1957). *Calvin's Calvinism* (Eerdmans, 1956; recently reprinted by the RFPA) contains two great treatises by Calvin, one on God's eternal predestination and the other on the secret providence of God. Calvin's commentaries on most of the books of the Bible are readily available, and often at a very reasonable price. They are generally sound, and useful to the layman in his study of the Word. Of late, a number of publishers are producing Calvin's sermons in English. Among them are the Banner of Truth (*John Calvin's Sermons on 2 Samuel*, and others) and Old Paths Publications (*Sermons on Election & Reprobation by John Calvin*, and oth-

ers). P&R has just published Calvin's *Sermons on the Book of Micah*.

Books on Calvin's life and work abound. Two outstanding works in English for the serious student are *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, by Francois Wendel (Collins, 1963), and *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought*, by T. H. L. Parker (Westminster/John Knox, 1995). A more popular book is Thea B. Van Halsema's *This Was John Calvin* (Baker, repr. 1990).

We would be sadly remiss if in our concentration on Calvin we overlooked his dutiful wife. The book to read on Mrs. Calvin is *Idelette: A Novel Based on the Life of Madame John Calvin*, by Edna Gerstner (Soli Deo Gloria, repr. 1992).

— DJE 

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# Election and Reprobation in the Sphere of the Covenant

... and Rebekah his wife conceived.

*And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the LORD.*

*And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.*

Genesis 25:21-23

**I**t is a thing that much troubleth men's spirits, when they see the estate of the world so confused, that the most part do manifestly despise God, and it seemeth that they have conspired with the devil, to the end to give over themselves to all mischief. For this is thought a thing greatly against reason, that GOD should create men to destroy them. Wherefore then is it, that he suffereth the greatest number so to fall? If it be said that this ought to be imputed not to God, but to those that of their own accord throw themselves so to perdition, yet this maketh no whit to the appeasing of those troubles, that we may conceive: For could not God remedy it? Why is it then that he doeth it not? They that allege a simple permission, that God layeth the bridle

upon every man's neck, and that everyone guideth himself according to his own free will: yet they cannot well undo this knot: to wit, why God hath not created men of another sort: and therefore he hath suffered that they should be so weak, yea and inclined to evil and corruption: and seeing that he knew their infirmity, wherefore is it, that he doth not help them and provide them some remedy? This therefore is to entangle ourselves in great torments and troubles. But it behooveth that we go yet farther: For it is certain (as the Scripture declareth) that there is nothing which doth not perish, saving that which God preserveth through his mere goodness and free bounty. But now, how cometh it to pass, that God chooseth only the tenth or the hundredth part of men, and leaveth all the rest, knowing well that they are swallowed up in hell and lost? Wherefore doth he not reach out his hand to help them, yea why hath he ordained them to destruction, as the Scripture speaketh? ...

... it is certain, that as he hath answered to our mother Rebecca, that which he knew to be expedient: So the Scripture likewise will not deceive us in this point: for it pronounceth clearly and manifestly, that God hath chosen us in Jesus Christ before the creation of the world, according to his good pleasure, the which he hath purposed in himself. There needs no gloss: behold God speaketh after

this sort, that the most rude and ignorant may know, what there is contained therein. God then hath chosen us (saith Saint Paul) and hereby he showeth that he hath discerned us from those which perish. And mark how his mercy towards us hath the greater glory. For what letted [*prevented*] that we should not remain in the same perdition that others did, but that God was merciful unto us, without any desert of ours?

But the better to express all, Saint Paul saith, that he did choose us in Jesus Christ: it followeth then that this is out of our persons. If we had been chosen in ourselves, God should have found some matter in us to have been induced to love us, and to have been inclined to have called us to salvation. But what? We are chosen without ourselves: that is to say: God had no regard to that we were or might be, but our election is founded in Jesus Christ. And moreover, he yet giveth a more ample declaration: that is, according to his good purpose, which he had determined in himself: it is certain that all that is according to the purpose of man, is manifestly excluded: and again when he saith in himself: this is to admonish us, that if we would know the cause why: it is as if we would make an Anatomy of God, and go even into his heart and sound all his secrets. And can we do this? What overweening [*high opinion*] is this? So then, when we shall suffer ourselves to be taught



of God, it is certain, that he will answer us, in such sort, as shall be necessary for us, concerning that which belongeth to our salvation: and namely we shall know that which surmounteth all man's understanding, how the one sort are elected, and the other rejected, and why the one have no doctrine, as the Papists and other infidels, whom God leaveth as poor blind ones, and why the other are enlightened through the Gospel. And farther, concerning those to whom the Gospel is preached, the one receive it with obedience, and they are touched therewith to the quick, and persevere in it to the end: and the other remain blockish, or rather will be full of outrage, to strive against God: or else will be fickle and give themselves over to all iniquity, throwing off the yoke, when they shall be brought into the good way. And from whence cometh this diversity? We must come to this fountain that the holy Scripture showeth us: that is, that the like grace hath not been showed to all. So then, behold our true wisdom that is, that we be God's good scholars: and we shall then be his scholars, when we seek to know nothing, but that he knoweth to be good and expedient for our salvation: and when we shall rest there, and learn to bring into captivity all our senses, and to keep an hard hand upon them. Then (say I) if we shall speak of the secret election of God, how he hath predestinated those whom he would to salvation, and how he hath cast off others: we shall never be troubled. And why so? because we having inquired of God's will, we will conclude, that we must keep ourselves to that which he showeth us, and to that which the Scripture importeth, where he hath given us sufficient testimony of that which he knoweth to be good for us. Fi-

*We must come to this fountain that the holy Scripture showeth us: that is, that the like grace hath not been showed to all.*

nally, there are so many testimonies of Scripture, to certify us of this doctrine that it must needs be, that all they that cannot rest there, must be as it were poisoned [*poisoned*] of satan, and that they have conceived the spirit of venom, of pride and rebellion, to the end not to be ordered under the will of God: and that, to be short, they would despise all doctrine and instruction, and close up their eyes against the full light, and have their ears stopped, albeit God hath spoken loud and clearly, and that they have occasion to content themselves so much the more. To heap up all the testimonies, is not needful: but this is sufficient that we have had a sum, yea most evident as I have already briefly showed.

Again we have also, whereof to bless God and to comfort ourselves in him, when we know rightly to apply this doctrine as it behooveth. For instead that these fanatical and light brains, who would seem to be so subtle and sharp in fighting against God, and against his truth, instead that they search how they may gain-say him, we must mark how God doth satisfy us, and to what end he directeth this doctrine and to what purpose he would have it serve us, that is: to know that we are elected, and not all. For in the first place, when we see, that we cannot receive the Gospel, unless it be by the special gift of God, this serveth to make us so much the more to magnify his goodness towards us, and to see his just judgment against the reprobate, when he depriveth them of this doctrine: as we see in the Papacy, that men are as brute beasts, who err and wander through deserts, without keeping way or path. Now concerning us, we have sure testimony, which ought so much the more to stir us up to esteem this singular grace towards us. And also when we see

some that have deaf ears, although it be daily declared unto them familiarly, and that which is requisite for their salvation be (as I may say) chewed unto them, they continue always in their estate: or rather they are not a whit touched, and they pass not to give over themselves to all licentiousness of life, as it were in despite of God: When we see this, it is certain, that our Lord hath so much the more bound us unto him, for that it hath pleased him to make us feel his goodness, and that we have taken such a taste of the hope of salvation which he hath propounded unto us: that we have renounced the world and whatsoever weakness there be in us, howsoever we are full of vices and corruption, nevertheless we hate the evil that is in us, and we delight in that which is good. When then we have this: it is certain, that if we be not harder than iron and steel, we ought to have all rebellion shivered and broken: and that we be inflamed with the love of God, and have our mouth open to bless and praise that so excellent and magnificent grace, which he hath showed towards us. See then the mark that the Scripture setteth before us....

... Mark then, the sum of that we have to learn: that is, when God declareth unto us his eternal election, and that he hath given us such a testimony, that we cannot doubt thereof: when he hath showed us that this is our benefit and salvation: and so that we take not too much liberty, to wrangle against him, and to enter in crooked and overthwart disputations, that then the whole shall profit us. For it is certain, that this is the true rejoicing of the faithful, to be instructed concerning this election of God. Moreover: when we see the wicked to cast forth their cavils against God, and their slanders to pervert all, and to bring this doctrine into hatred, let us not think it strange: for it must needs be that they declare themselves to



[be] reprobates. I have said, that we must rest ourselves in the everlasting counsel of God, whereby he hath chosen some, and cast off others. If now the reprobate come to fight against the truth of God, it is no new thing: For they are appointed to this, and it must needs be that they declare themselves to

be such as they are: and we must call to mind that sentence of Ose the which is put in the end of this Book: "The ways of the Lord are good and right" (Hosea 14:9): also "The righteous will walk in them, but the wicked shall fall therein." Now he addeth also: "Who is wise that will understand this?" The

Prophet showeth that when we speak of the judgments of God, it behooveth that we have a special wisdom to receive them: and shall this wisdom be found in all our brains? that is far off. So then it behooveth that we have a wisdom given us by the mere mercy of God.



Prof. Barrett Gritters

## Life of John Calvin, "Pastor and Teacher"

*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*

Ephesians 4:11,12

**G**reat gift to the church of Jesus Christ God gave in John Calvin. Great example for pastors is this unusual man, fit by providence to serve God's church at such a time. Great inspiration for all God's people, young people too, is Calvin, whose dedication and patient love for his fellow saints will move to tears. Truly, God gave him, pastor and teacher, for the perfecting of saints, the work of the ministry, the building up of the body of Christ.

Calvin was born in 1509, the fourth child of a church lawyer and his wife, in Noyon, France, a walled city of about 10,000. Such were the times in the sixteenth century that the likelihood of surviving childhood was not good.

Calvin already had two older brothers who had died in infancy. When he was only three, Calvin's mother passed away; and he was raised by a stepmother with his older brother, Charles, younger brother, Antoine, and two stepsisters.

His early education was the finest, manipulated as it was by his lawyer-father, financed by wages for church positions that he had obtained for Calvin, but which required no work. Then, at age fourteen, Calvin had opportunity to study with his friends, sons of a local bishop, in Paris under world-renowned scholars. He never returned to stay in Noyon, the city of his birth.

Originally, his father destined Calvin for theology and the priesthood. When his father saw that wealth was more likely in the practice of law, he directed his son in that way. Unconverted, according to his own confession, Calvin did not object. But he studied. It was only later that Calvin returned to the study of theology.

The Reformation was barely a few years old when Calvin was a boy. Zwingli was writing and

preaching the truth. Erasmus had translated the New Testament. Ministers whose names are unknown to us were preaching the reformed faith from the Scriptures. By this preaching, the Lord was changing hearts. Pope and bishops were angry at the changes. Nations were warring. Because church and state were so closely connected, the church was at the center. In the midst of this turmoil, God was preparing the young man Calvin to be a tireless scholar, an eloquent preacher, a brilliant theologian, a passionate warrior for the faith, and a humble pastor.

First, God would convert him. "By a sudden conversion, God subdued my heart," he confessed in the preface to his commentary on the Psalms. From then on, his passion was boundless for the cause of Jesus Christ. Till his death, this great gift of God to us served as an example for pastors today.

Are there young men reading this? Be encouraged, brethren, by the great joy this man found in suffering for the church of Christ as a pastor, and let these lessons from his life teach us about what it means to be a good pastor. But

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rather than learn of Calvin from a chronological study of his life, let's see five areas of Calvin's ministry that illustrate for us what kind of man, pastor and teacher, God made him to be.

### **Willing, in the Day of God's Power**

Like other pastors in God's church, Calvin was called to work where he had not chosen. Calvin had been committed to a quiet life of private study. But God dragged him, Jonah-like, to the center of the Reformation battle and the life of the church in a hostile city. Thrust into a position he did not seek, did not want, indeed, ran from, he found himself as a pastor in Geneva, Switzerland.

In 1536 (Calvin was 27 years old), when he was traveling back from his birth-place, where he had gone to settle the family estate after his father's death, war forced him to take a long detour that led him to the beautiful Swiss town of Geneva. Here, he would lodge for the night and be off in the morning to return to Strasbourg to write and study in peace. But God would have nothing of this. Pastors Farel and Viret, by whom God began reform in Geneva, looked him up and so pressed him to stay and help them in the work that he at last could not decline their "call." So began a life-time of self-denying but massively rewarding labor in the public pastorate among Christ's sheep.

After two years of "exile" (another long story you ought to read about in a good biography of Calvin), when Calvin was asked to return to Geneva, he wrote to his colleague Farel, "when I consider that I am not in my own power, I offer my heart a slain victim for a sacrifice to the Lord. I yield my soul chained and bound unto obedience to God...." To colleague Viret, about the same call: "There is no place under heaven of which I can have a greater dread." The decision was not pleasant, but

God's will was clear. He went back to Geneva. "I shall follow wherever God leads, who knows best why He has laid this necessity upon me."

Does a young man today run from the pastorate, try to ignore the thoughts God plants, even feel terrified at the possibility of the work of the ministry? So did John Calvin. Remember, though, these two truths: You cannot run from the Lord forever; and He will make you willing and joyful (see Ps. 110) in the day He stops you from running.

### **Capable, with the Spirit's gifts**

The man God mastered to be the theologian and organizer of the Reformation, to carry through what Luther began, was a bright and capable young man. Natural gifts that the Lord gave him were developed by a disciplined effort throughout his youth, so that his mind matured to be penetrating and his capacity for learning and memorizing became remarkable.

He learned the languages. Rising early each day to study, to his native French he added Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and learned them so that he was fluent in them. His grammar was impeccable. Logic and law were in his repertoire. Philosophy and history became familiar friends. Then, because God gave him rare memory and mind, he not only could recall most of what he read, but could grasp the big picture of God's revelation in Scripture and the history of the church in the world. He had natural gifts, indeed; but gifts that were developed through arduous work—the kind of work that should be required in today's good, Christian school.

The church needs scholars. Yes, the Lord does use men with few gifts. Most pastors have received from their Maker only a modest portion. Nor will the Lord of the church likely give us very many Calvins again. But God's church needs capable men to step

forward to do the kind of work that Calvin engaged in. What kind of influence would he have had, had he not known history, and been unfamiliar with the church fathers and councils? Who would have listened to a Calvin who used sloppy grammar? What bishops and other enemies of the faith would have been silenced in a debate by a man whose mind was weak and whose logic was unclear? The church needs scholars. The people of God must pray for them. Perhaps they ought to press, as did Farel and Viret, the young men who are pious and gifted, to consider the ministry.

Young men, even if no one presses you, God calls you to use your gifts for His cause. Are you seeking first the kingdom? Perhaps in the ministry of the gospel?

### **Apt to teach**

The exceptional gift that Jesus Christ gave to Calvin was an aptitude to teach the people. Reading his writing, one immediately senses his unique ability to make clear what is difficult. To this aptitude Christ added a heartfelt desire. The Lord gave Calvin a heart to teach the people. A first-rate theologian, Calvin was interested in the common folk learning the truth and seeing the light. So his first main work, his (relatively brief) 1536 edition of the *Institutes* (see Rev. Kleyn's article in this issue) was an attempt to reach the common member of the church.

Calvin's heart yearned to free the people from the bondage of their ignorance, to deliver them from the soul-terrorizing errors of Rome. For this, his instruction was antithetical, exposing in Luther-like fashion the folly of sacramentalism and the dead-end errors of works-righteousness. When he taught, the people heard from Scripture the truth of God's law, the believer's liberty, the Christian life, worship and images, prophecy and eschatology, and the magistrates. They learned what it meant to be a joy-

ful and obedient believer in God's wide world.

If the church today will prosper, will help the people of God to live in this late and evil day, she must have pastors who are teachers, who ask the question, as one pastor I know always asked himself as he took his walks, "How can I make this clear to the people of God?" She must train men who yearn with the heart of Calvin (Christ's own heart in him!) for a people who know the truth.

### **Humility and modesty**

Gifts without wisdom are worthless. Ability in a proud man is dangerous. The church has found too often, to her great sorrow, that if the Lord does not mix in wisdom and humility, modesty and selflessness, a man with few gifts is far preferable than the man who towers with ability but is arrogant.

The man God gave to the church from 1509 to 1564 was blessed with a sincere, selfless desire to serve Jesus Christ. Without pretense, desiring nothing more than the honor of his master, John Calvin humbly served his Savior.

Part of humility is a willingness to confess one's faults. Although Calvin struggled with acknowledging weaknesses like anyone else, the Lord gave him that gift as well. More than once he apologized to the city council (church and city government were tightly bound together in those days) for his quick temper and what he considered unrighteous anger. Also, when he and Farel were riding out of Geneva, expelled from their pastorates because pastors and city council could not agree, Calvin wanted to discuss the possibility that they had been less than wise in exerting the pressures for change. It is doubtful that their expulsion came because of lack of judgment; but the desire to examine himself and be open to the prospect is commendable.

The Reformer had no interest

in money and possessions, another necessary quality in pastors. His humility showed itself in a complete lack of desire for material things. Content with the barest necessities, Calvin would reject raises, return salary, refuse gifts, and often use part of his meager salary for the French refugees in Geneva. Once, when the other ministers asked Calvin to seek a raise for them, Calvin suggested to the city council that they lower his salary and give the difference to the other, poorer pastors.

The reputation of the Reformer as completely disinterested in money reached the pope. When Calvin died, Pope Pius IV said, "The strength of the heretic came from the fact that money was nothing to him." Cardinal Sadoleto, one of Calvin's chief antagonists, visited Geneva incognito to see the famous Protestant. When he knocked on Calvin's modest apartment door, he was astounded that Calvin himself answered the door, and not one of his servants who he assumed would have been scurrying about doing his master's bidding. The most famous man in Protestantism lived in a little house, answering his own door.

Let every aspirant to the ministry pray for such a spirit! And may God give the church such pastors!

### **Steadfast under pressures**

Probably the most wonderful grace given to Calvin was the grace of endurance in severest trials. What an example of a man of God who sacrificed himself for the church of Christ. No fool who sought a martyr's death, Calvin fled threats more than once, biding his time until he could return and be useful for God's kingdom. Yet the Reformer was willing to endure all things for Christ's sake.


He was literally chased from his own pulpit, threatened with swords on the streets, and driven from Geneva. Guns were fired outside his bedroom window. Calvin

faced opposition from the very council who called him, had his friends punished for protecting him. His dear friend and colleague, the blind pastor Claudet, was poisoned for standing for the truth. Evil rumors were spread thick and far about him. For the sake of the ministry, he risked his own life visiting the sick; he ministered to many at his own expense. Only one of his physical ailments would have driven most pastors to a bed of rest; Calvin endured, without complaint, a dozen. His own testimony was that he went twenty years without letup from headaches. He suffered arthritis, gout, malaria, and finally five years of tuberculosis. One story has a doctor recommending Calvin gallop hard on a horse to dislodge his kidney stones — but his hemorrhoids were so severe he could not bear to ride.

Yet he continued to labor, untiringly, for the cause of the One who delivered him from so great a death, and would yet deliver him. When friends begged him to rest, recover, he responded, "What, would you want the Lord to find me idle when He comes?"

None of this troubled the man of God, whose love for Christ and vision of His reward spurred him on to unceasing labor for the cause of God, "Who drew me out of the abyss ... to the light of the gospel, Who so far extended His mercy towards me as to use me and my work to announce the truth of His gospel. He will show Himself the Father of so miserable a sinner."

Lord of Thy beloved church, make us and fit us to be such servants of Thine! Raise up men for us with such hearts, offered promptly and sincerely to Thee.

After his 55-year young colleague Calvin passed away, Farel, now in his 70s, said to the group of friends gathered at the deathbed, "Oh, how happily he has run a noble race. Let us run like him, according to the measure of grace given us." 



# John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion

**A**n outstanding aspect of the work of John Calvin was the fact that he wrote voluminously. His writings include his exegetical commentaries on most of the books of the Bible, his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, his sermons and homilies, various catechisms and confessions, numerous polemical documents against opponents and errors, a number of apologetic writings in defense of specific truths, his ecclesiastical and liturgical writings, some minor treatises, and many letters.

Without a doubt, the most important writing of John Calvin was his theological work, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. As soon as it was published it was recognized as a most significant work. Even Calvin's main opponents, the Roman Catholics, realized its significance and immediately labeled it as heresy, ordering that it be burnt. But especially significant is that the Reformed understood its importance. They praised it as being the clearest and most powerful defense of biblical truth since the time of the apostles.

The influence of the *Institutes* at the time of the Reformation was powerful. And its influence has lasted. Ever since the time of Calvin this work has had a significant impact in practically every age of the church's history in the world.

Through it Calvin, by God's providence, laid the foundation for all subsequent Reformed theology.



John Calvin published the first edition of the *Institutes* in 1536. He referred affectionately to it as his "little book." This "little book," however, grew considerably throughout his lifetime as Calvin continued to edit and expand this work.

In all, five editions were published: in 1536, 1539, 1543, 1550, and 1559. Each new edition involved changes in size, in content, and also in the arrangement of the material. Calvin not only expanded on what he had already written, but also included new material that he had not previously treated. Calvin considered the 1559 edition, which was approximately five times the size of the original, the definitive and authoritative one.

These revisions did not come about because of changes in Calvin's thinking and doctrine. Rather, they are a result of development in Calvin's understanding of the truth. This development came through his continued reading of the church fathers, his involvement in various doctrinal controversies, and his continued study and exegesis of the Scriptures.

The various editions of the *Institutes* were also translated into other languages. Calvin wrote the originals in Latin, the language of the learned of his day. But Calvin himself also translated each edi-

tion, except for the first, into French. He did this because he wanted the common people, his fellow countrymen, to read and profit from what he had written.

Translations soon followed in nearly all the languages of Europe. This included various English translations, among which are the well known ones by Henry Beveridge (1845), and by Ford Lewis Battles (1960). Both of these are good translations and readily available today. They include detailed tables of contents as well as various indices (topical, textual, and authors quoted). These indices are certainly useful means for looking up and reading what Calvin has to say on specific truths.

By means of these many translations, the work received a large audience and was able to give positive direction to Reformed theology throughout the world. It was used by God both to preserve as well as to spread the truths of the Reformed faith.



The significance and value of the *Institutes* can be seen by considering the purposes Calvin had in writing this work. Calvin had especially two purposes.

One purpose was that the *Institutes* be a defense of the Reformed faith. The work is polemical. Calvin writes in order to expose errors and to answer accusations against the truth. This defense of the truth was needed in light of the severe persecution the Reformed received. Calvin there-



fore shows throughout the *Institutes* that the Reformed are not extreme. They are not heretics. They are not those who rebel against God-appointed rulers. They are to be distinguished from Roman Catholicism on the one hand, and from Anabaptism on the other. The *Institutes* demonstrate that what the Reformed believe and confess is soundly and thoroughly biblical.

Calvin's main purpose, however, was that the *Institutes* be a book of instruction.

Calvin discusses this purpose in his preface to his commentary on the book of Psalms. In this preface he speaks at length concerning his *Institutes*. He mentions that many, on account of their desire for pure doctrine, continually came to him in order to learn from him. Calvin admits that he preferred solitude and was but a novice in the faith. But the fact that so many came to him with the earnest desire to grow in their knowledge and understanding of the truth led Calvin to set it forth in writing so that others might learn it.

The title of his work is also significant as regards his purpose. The full title is as follows: *Institutes of the Christian Religion: Embracing almost the whole sum of piety, and whatever is necessary to know of the doctrine of salvation: A work most worthy to be read by all persons zealous for piety, and recently published.*

The word "Institutes" in this title means "instruction." That was Calvin's purpose. He wrote the work with the idea that it would serve as a means to educate others in the truth.

In the rest of the title, Calvin indicates that his work is a comprehensive summary of the main truths of salvation. It sets forth what is necessary for the child of God to know and believe "of the doctrine of salvation." Calvin's purpose was to give instruction in all the fundamental truths of the gospel.

In this sense the *Institutes* can

be considered a dogmatics, or a systematic treatment of doctrine. The contents demonstrate this, for Calvin writes concerning all the main doctrines of Scripture. Interestingly, he does not treat these doctrines, as most do, according to the six loci of Reformed dogmatics (Theology, Anthropology, Christology, etc.). Instead he uses a Trinitarian approach, similar to that which is found in the Apostles' Creed.

This was not true of all editions of the *Institutes*. In the earlier editions he dealt with the truth under such sections as the law, the Apostles' Creed, prayer, the sacraments, and the church. In the final edition, however, he made a significant change in structure, dividing the truth into the following four books: Of the knowledge of God the Creator; Of the knowledge of God the redeemer in Christ; Of the mode of obtaining the grace of Christ, the benefits it confers, and the effects resulting from it; Of the holy catholic church. The last two books really belong together as the truths concerning the Holy Spirit and His work. In this way Calvin divided and treated the doctrines of Scripture according to the three persons of the triune God.



On account of this purpose, there is much value and profit in reading and studying the *Institutes*.

That profit consists first of all in this work being a means to know and to be well grounded in the Reformed faith. Calvin was, by the grace of God, an outstanding leader in the Protestant Reformation. To know what Calvin taught and believed is to know what it means to be Reformed — to be a Calvinist. The *Institutes* are an important part of the heritage of the Reformed faith.

That profit also consists in the

fact that by reading the *Institutes* one can come to a better understanding of the Scriptures. Calvin was thoroughly biblical in his writings. In the providence of God, he was a masterful exegete of Scripture. And that exegesis is present not only in his commentaries, but also throughout the *Institutes*. In fact, Calvin himself, in his commentaries, often directs the reader to his doctrinal work for a further and more detailed discussion of certain truths. Anyone who desires, therefore, to know what the Scriptures teach and what the child of God must believe unto salvation does well to read the *Institutes*.

This is especially important and necessary because of the days in which we live. Not only is there doctrinal ignorance, but we also constantly hear the cry for compromise of the truth. On account of

these things, the danger is real that we too depart from the truth. We need, therefore, to be well read and well grounded in Reformed doctrine. The *Institutes* can help in that. Not only is it a tool to help us positively to know

the truth, but it is also a tool that, on account of its polemical nature, can help us know and be able to combat errors.

The profit of reading the *Institutes*, however, is due especially to the fact that Calvin was interested in instruction in "piety." He uses this word in his title, and does so deliberately. He does not call his work a "sum of doctrine" or a "sum of the truth," but a "sum of piety." By this term he refers to "godliness," or the "fear of God." Calvin understood that true doctrine and true piety are inseparable — true doctrine produces true godliness; true godliness is grounded in true doctrine.

Calvin did not view doctrine as mere cold and abstract propositions, but as the truth that is vital to godly living. It is the truth that

*To know  
what Calvin taught  
and believed  
is to know  
what it means  
to be Reformed.*




shapes believers to true godliness. Calvin writes the *Institutes* from that perspective, which contributes to making this work most beneficial for and applicable to all. It is a work not only for theologians, but for all believers.



Interest in Calvin's *Institutes*

seems to be waning. We live in a time of doctrinal indifference, a day in which many are ignorant of and have departed from the truths of Scripture and the Reformed faith. What contributes significantly to this is that few are interested in reading, let alone in reading good, solid, Reformed literature.

The *Institutes* ought to be read

by us. We must remember that Calvin intended that all read it. He wrote it as a book of instruction for all believers, and placed priority upon translating it into the language of the common people. He had every believer in mind when he wrote it. We would do well, therefore, to read the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. 

Prof. David Engelsma

## Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life

**J**ohn Calvin's description of the Christian life in book three of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* makes every charge that the Reformed faith minimizes holiness of life, not so much false as absurd.

What a grand, gripping, humbling, sobering, moving description of the Christian life this is. It is no wonder that this section of the *Institutes* was very soon published separately and that it still is published in English as a separate booklet, *The Golden Booklet of the Christian Life*.

Our ministers must preach this biblical description of the Christian life to the congregations. Preaching the Christian life as Calvin presents it is the preaching of doctrine. It is the preaching of doctrine in doctrine's necessary and glorious fruits and ends. Calvin expresses the right relation of doctrine and life:

To doctrine in which our religion is contained we have given the first place, since by it our salvation commences; but it must be transfused into the breast, and pass into the conduct, and so transform us into itself, as not to prove unfruitful (*Inst.*, 3.6.4, tr. Henry Beveridge, Eerdmans, 1957; all quotations from the *Institutes* in this and the following articles are from the Beveridge translation).

When we preach the Christian life, we should warn our people—and ourselves—that “doctrine is not an affair of the tongue, but of the life” (*Inst.*, 3.6.4).

Such is the compressed wisdom, beauty, and power of Calvin's treatment of the Christian life in this section of the *Institutes* that it defies any adequate summary. One can do justice to it only by reading it in its entirety. I urge every reader to do this: read chapters six through ten of book three of the *Institutes*. In this article, and a following, I call attention briefly to the main lines of this classic pattern of the Christian life according to a Reformed understanding of it,

quoting a few of the more striking statements about the Christian life by the Reformer.

What Calvin gives is the pattern of the Christian life. He is concerned to “point out the method by which a pious man may be taught how to frame his life aright, and briefly lay down some universal rule by which he may not improperly regulate his conduct” (*Inst.*, 3.6.1). This pattern is drawn from Holy Scripture. The pattern describes how the Spirit works in every one who is united to Christ by the bond of faith. The Spirit works in such a way that we are called to be active in approximating this pattern.

Because we are active in ordering our life according to the pattern revealed in Scripture and realized by the Spirit, Calvin begins with the *motivations* for living the Christian life. We should strive to be holy as the God to whom we are united is holy. Our life should express Christ. And every benefit God gives us calls us to an appropriate thankfulness (*Inst.*, 3.6.2, 3).

As regards the pattern of the Christian life, Calvin says that, “al-

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though the Law of God contains a perfect rule of conduct admirably arranged, it has seemed proper to our divine Master to train his people by a more accurate method, to the rule which is enjoined in the Law" (*Inst.*, 3.7.1). Plainly, the subject is the objective standard, or rule, that forms the Christian life of us all. Calvin holds up the law—the ten commandments—as “a perfect rule of conduct admirably arranged.” Here is the well-known “third use of the law”—the use of the law as rule of a holy life—characteristic of Calvinism. But the phrase advocating the law as the standard of the Christian life is concessive: “although.” The force of the sentence is to promote another, “more accurate method” that will shape us to the Christian life God intends for us. This “more accurate method” is the doctrine found especially in the New Testament, particularly Romans 12:1ff., that the elect believer is not his own, but God’s. That we belong to God is the implication of the exhortation in Romans 12:1, “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.”

Even more than the law, the truth of our belonging to God must pattern our life.

The great point, then, is, that we are consecrated and dedicated to God, and therefore should not henceforth think, speak, design, or act, without a view to his glory.... But if we are not our own, but the Lord’s, it is plain both what error is to be shunned, and to what end the actions of our lives ought to be directed. We are not our own; therefore, neither is our own reason or will to rule our acts and counsels. We are not our own; therefore, let us not make it our end to seek what may be agreeable to our carnal nature. We are not our own; therefore, as far as possible, let us forget ourselves and the things that are ours. On the other hand, we are God’s; let us, therefore, live and die to him (*Inst.*, 3.7.1).

All that follows in Calvin’s description of the Christian life is a thorough, consistent working out of the truth of our belonging to God. In describing the Christian life, Calvin does not explicitly use the law as the rule, but New Testament teachings concerning self-denial, bearing the cross, and the like.

What immediately strikes everyone familiar with the Heidelberg Catechism is that Calvin’s rule for the Christian life is the same as the believer’s only comfort. The same truth that is the comfort of the gospel—belonging to God—decisively forms and shapes our Christian life.

What will the life be that conforms to the law and more especially to the truth that by the redemption of the cross and the renewal of the Spirit we are not our own but the Lord’s?

First, it will be a life of the service of God. “Let this, then, be the first step, to abandon ourselves, and devote the whole energy of our minds to the service of God. By service, I mean not only that which consists in verbal obedience, but that by which the mind, divested of its own carnal feelings, implicitly obeys the call of the Spirit of God” (*Inst.*, 3.7.1).

Second, the Christian life is self-denial. Calvin distinguishes self-denial toward the neighbor and self-denial toward God. As regards self-denial toward the neighbor, Calvin exposes our wickedness in seeking self and despising the neighbor (*Inst.*, 3.7.4). He grounds our love of the neighbor in “the image of God, which exists in all, and to which we owe all honor and love” (*Inst.*, 3.7.6). Calvin warns that outward deeds of goodness to the neighbor are not enough. We must have inward, sympathetic love of the needy neighbor. Christians should “put themselves in the place of him whom they see in need of their assistance, and pity his misfortune as if they felt and bore it,

so that a feeling of pity and humanity should incline them to assist him just as they would themselves” (*Inst.*, 3.7.7).

Self-denial toward God is resignation of ourselves and all we have to the Lord’s will (*Inst.*, 3.7.8). We are to depend only upon God’s blessing for the success of our earthly life. We must bear adversity patiently. Describing the troubles of life in vivid detail, Calvin writes that the believer can bear them without cursing God or resisting, because he has “resigned himself entirely to the Lord, placing all the course of his life entirely at his [God’s] disposal” (*Inst.*, 3.7.10).

At this point, certain observations are in order. What is this aspect of the Christian life but living our belief and confession of divine sovereignty? How radically different is the Christian’s self-denial toward God from the thinking of the world of the ungodly: “Assert yourself!” “Stand up for your rights!”

A third characteristic of the Christian life that the Spirit works in us and that we must strive for according to the pattern of belonging to God is bearing the cross. Calvin tells us that this is an aspect of self-denial. I make a confession. By this point in his description of the Christian life, Calvin has stretched me to my limit, and beyond. I am ready for his “Amen” to the Christian life. Whereupon Calvin says, “The pious mind must ascend still higher” (*Inst.*, 3.8.1).

“Still higher”?

“Still higher”!

“Still higher,” because although Calvin has already foretold for us a life of trouble, now he tells us that we must expect to share the sufferings of Christ. This is cross-bearing: sharing the sufferings of Christ. Every one of us, none excepted, must prepare for “a hard, laborious, troubled life, a life full of many and various kinds of evils.” The pain of these evils is



"the bitterness of the cross," that is, the bitterness of the cross of Christ in our lives (*Inst.*, 3.8.1).

Our cross is not atoning suffering. Rather, it is our sharing in the hatred and reproach of Christ by the wicked. "In maintaining the truth of God against the lies of Satan, or defending the good and innocent against the injuries of the bad, we are obliged to incur the offence and hatred of the world, so as to endanger life, fortune, or honor" (*Inst.*, 3.8.7). God imposes this cross upon us to prove our sonship: We obey God in love, when obedience is painful and costly.

Precious benefits come to us from bearing the cross. The cross teaches us not to depend on our flesh. Through the cross we experience God's faithful help, as we rest on Him alone. In response to the cross, we manifest our endur-

ance by grace. The biblical name for this endurance is patience. The cross in our life guards us against wanton rebellion against God, which is the danger when all goes well for the Christian. Calvin sees earthly prosperity as a threat to the Christian life.

Thus, lest we become emboldened by an over-abundance of wealth; lest elated with honor, we grow proud; lest inflated with other advantages of body, or mind, or fortune, we grow insolent, the Lord himself interferes as he sees to be expedient by means of the cross, subduing and curbing the arrogance of our flesh, and that in various ways (*Inst.*, 3.8.5).

The cross chastises us for our faults. And the cross bestows honor upon us. To suffer for the sake of Christ and righteousness is "the special badge of his [God's]

soldiers" (*Inst.*, 3.8.7). "We now see," says Calvin, "how many advantages are at once produced by the cross" (*Inst.*, 3.8.3).

Although Calvin grants that the cross inflicts real and deep sorrow, which sorrow on our part is not sinful, nevertheless, in view of the benefits of the cross, we can and should bear the cross *cheerfully* (*Inst.*, 3.8.8). Indeed, so Calvin concludes, the benefits of the cross enable and require us to be thankful for the cross, with all its bitterness. This is the explanation of the Bible's exhortations to Christians, to be thankful for *all things*, evil things as well as good things. The explanation is not that we enjoy the bitterness. We do not. Nor should we. But we are thankful for the cross in our life in view of the benefits God brings us through the cross.

... to be concluded 

Rev. Mark Shand

## Calvin on Justification

A man is said to be justified in the sight of God when in the judgment of God he is deemed righteous, and is accepted on account of his righteousness; for as iniquity is abominable to God, so neither can the sinner find grace in his sight, so far as he is and so long as he is regarded as a sinner. Hence, wherever sin is, there also are the wrath and vengeance of God. He, on the other hand, is justified who is regarded not as a sinner, but as righteous, and as such stands acquitted at the judg-

ment-seat of God, where all sinners are condemned.... A man will be justified by faith when, excluded from the righteousness of works, he by faith lays hold of the righteousness of Christ, and clothed in it appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as righteous. Thus we simply interpret justification, as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as if we were righteous; and we say that this justification consists in the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ (*Institutes*, III.11.2).

**J**ustification by faith alone was the fundamental distinguishing doctrine of the sixteenth century Protestant Reforma-

tion. It was regarded by all of the Reformers to be of central and paramount importance. Luther declared this doctrine to be the article of the standing or falling church and contended that "nothing can be yielded or surrendered [nor can anything be granted or permitted contrary to the same], even though heaven and earth, and whatever will not abide, should sink to ruin" (*Articles of Smalcald*, Art. 1).

Calvin described it as "the main hinge on which religion turns." He also described it as "the principle of the whole doctrine of salvation and of the foundation of all religion." At the outset of his treatment of justification in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,

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Calvin again emphasized the fundamental importance of this doctrine.

The doctrine of Justification is now to be fully discussed, and discussed under the conviction, that as it is the principal ground on which religion must be supported, so it requires greater care and attention. For unless you understand first of all what your position is before God, and what the judgment which he passes upon you, you have no foundation on which your salvation can be laid, or on which piety towards God can be reared" (*Institutes*, III.11.1).

There was no significant difference among the Reformers as to their essential understanding of this doctrine. The unity of thought and expression is reflected in the various formulations of justification in the Reformed creeds. (Cf. Augsburg Confession, 1530, Art. IV; French Confession, 1559, Art. XVIII; Belgic Confession, 1561, Art. XXII & XXIII; Heidelberg Catechism, 1563, Q & A, 60, 61; Second Helvetic Confession, 1566, chapter XV; Westminster Confession of Faith, 1643, chapter XI.)

The Reformers developed their understanding of this doctrine in opposition to the doctrine of justification espoused by the Church of Rome. The essence of the charge that the Reformers directed at the Church of Rome was that while she proclaimed accurately who Christ was and what He had accomplished with respect to the salvation of sinners, nonetheless, she perverted the gospel of the grace of God, maintaining erroneous and unscriptural views of the grounds on which, and the process through which, the blessings that Christ had procured on the cross were conveyed to sinners. At issue was whether justification was wholly attributable to the grace of God and to the work of Jesus Christ or whether it was proper to ascribe to men and to their powers an active and contributory part in their

salvation.

Rome's position with respect to justification had been crafted throughout the Middle Ages, with care being taken to maintain consistency with her underlying semi-Pelagian thinking that provided for the effective freedom of man's will as regards salvation. Though Rome's views on justification were many years prior to the Reformation, they were not given official sanction until the Council of Trent (1543-1563). The pronouncements of Trent on justification were characterized by vagueness, perhaps designedly so.

Trent's treatment of justification centered in the meaning of the term. Trent defined justification as being "a translation, from that state wherein man is born a child of the first Adam, to the state of grace, and of the adoption of the sons of God, through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, our Savior" (*Council of Trent*, Chapter IV). As the definition suggests, Rome viewed justification as incorporating the whole process of change that takes place in a man as regards his salvation, including his deliverance from guilt and depravity. That position is made even plainer in chapter VII, where Trent defined justification to be "not remission of sins merely, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man, through the voluntary reception of the grace, and of the gifts." The result was a confounding of justification and sanctification, with justification comprehending not only the remission of sin and deliverance from the guilt of sin, but also the sanctification or renovation of a man's moral nature.

According to Rome, the ground of justification lay, at least in part, in the inherent righteousness of the sinner and in his good works, the requisite grace being infused into the sinner. Therefore, inherent personal righteousness was the cause of justification, and baptism was the instrument by which it was communicated to the sinner. "If

any one saith, that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works; but that the said works are merely the fruits and signs of Justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof: let him be anathema" (*Council of Trent*, Chapter XVI, Canon XXIV). For Rome, justification was a cooperative effort involving both God and man.

Accordingly, Rome denied that sinners were justified by faith alone, faith being defined as "the beginning of human salvation, the foundation and the root of all justification." By this Rome meant that faith justified in the sense that it was the chief means for producing that personal righteousness which was the true cause or ground of justification.

If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified, in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will: let him be anathema (*Council of Trent*, Chapter XVI, Canon IX).

Rome's confounding of justification and sanctification also naturally led to the conclusion that justification was not an instantaneous act, but that it involved a gradual process that may not be completed even in this life.

Now that is a soul-destroying doctrine! There was and is no comfort in Rome's view of justification; no assurance of salvation; no confirmation that a sinner is right with God. It is no wonder that Luther despaired when, in keeping with Rome's dogma, he mistakenly concluded that "the righteousness of God," in Romans 1:17, referred to God's righteous anger against sin. Even Luther's out-monking of the monks could provide no solace to him. His works, no matter how great or zealously performed, could never satisfy the require-



ments of the law of God, and he knew it. Luther was able to find solace only when he came to understand that “the righteousness of God” in Romans 1:17 did not refer to the attribute of God’s righteousness, but rather to the righteousness that God graciously and freely gives to the sinner on account of Jesus Christ. Expressing his sense of relief, Luther wrote, “Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me.”

Like Luther, Calvin recognized the comfortless nature of Rome’s doctrine of justification. Speaking of Rome’s confusion of justification with sanctification and its consequential destruction of a believer’s comfort, Calvin wrote:

But as it is too well known by experience, that the remains of sin always exist in the righteous, it is necessary that justification should be something very different from reformation to newness of life. This latter God begins in his elect, and carries on during the whole course of life, gradually and sometimes slowly, so that if placed at his judgment-seat they would always deserve sentence of death. He justifies not partially, but freely, so that they can appear in the heavens as if clothed with the purity of Christ. No portion of righteousness could pacify the conscience. It must be decided that we are pleasing to God, as being without exception righteous in his sight. Hence it follows that the doctrine of justification is perverted and completely overthrown whenever doubt is instilled into the mind, confidence in salvation is shaken, and free and intrepid prayer is retarded; yea, whenever rest and tranquillity with spiritual joy are not established (*Institutes*, III.11.11).

The vagueness that characterized Trent’s position on justification and the comfortless nature of its pronouncements stood in sharp contrast to the clarity, simplicity,

and warmth of the writings of Calvin and the other Reformers on this subject. Calvin’s view of justification can be summarized in the following propositions:

- Justification is an act of God’s free grace, and as a forensic or legal act it does not change the inner nature of a man, but only the judicial relationship in which he stands before God — God accepting him as righteous in His sight.

- The ground for justification is not found in the inherent righteousness of the believer, but only in the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, which a sinner appropriates by faith — faith being that God-given power whereby the believer is united to Jesus Christ and becomes partaker of all His benefits, including having His righteousness put to his account.

- Justification is not a progressive work of God, rather it is a single, instantaneous act of God whereby the sinner is declared to be without guilt, so that the believer can be absolutely certain that his state before God is no longer one of wrath and condemnation, but one of favor and acceptance.

Calvin identified justification as a legal or forensic concept, distinct from sanctification. As such, Calvin viewed justification as the changing of a man’s legal state before God, but not his condition. Justification resulted in the declaration by God that a sinner was without guilt, in light of his having been clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Let us now consider the truth of what was said in the definition, viz., that justification by faith is reconciliation with God, and that this consists solely in the remission of sins. We must always return to the axiom that the wrath of God lies upon all men so long as they continue sinners. This is elegantly expressed by Isaiah in these words: “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities

have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear,” (Isaiah 59:1, 2.). We are here told that sin is a separation between God and man; that His countenance is turned away from the sinner; and that it cannot be otherwise, since, to have any intercourse with sin is repugnant to his righteousness.... When the Lord, therefore, admits him to union, he is said to justify him, because he can neither receive him into favor, nor unite him to himself, without changing his condition from that of a sinner into that of a righteous man. We add that this is done by remission of sins. For if those whom the Lord has reconciled to himself are estimated by works, they will still prove to be in reality sinners, while they ought to be pure and free from sin. It is evident therefore, that the only way in which those whom God embraces are made righteous, is by having their pollutions wiped away by the remission of sins, so that this justification may be termed in one word the remission of sins (*Institutes*, III.11.21).

Calvin maintained a clear and sharp distinction between justification and sanctification. However, he acknowledged that a radical change of character invariably accompanied justification.


We dream not of a faith which is devoid of good works, nor of a justification which can exist without them: the only difference is, that while we acknowledge that faith and works are necessarily connected, we, however, place justification in faith, not in works. How this is done is easily explained, if we turn to Christ only, to whom our faith is directed and from whom it derives all its power. Why, then, are we justified by faith? Because by faith we apprehend the righteousness of Christ, which alone reconciles us to God. This faith, however, you cannot apprehend without at the same time apprehending sanctification;... Christ, therefore, justifies no man without also sanctify-



ing him. These blessings are conjoined by a perpetual and inseparable tie (*Institutes*, III.16.1).

Calvin asserted that justification was by faith alone. By faith alone, Calvin did not mean that faith itself justified, but rather that faith was the instrument by which the believer was united to Christ and by which he appropriated Jesus Christ and His righteousness.

The Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone is essential to salvation. Therefore, it is disturbing to note that presently in North America and in Great Britain there is renewed debate as to the teaching of Scripture on this subject among those who profess to hold to the Reformed faith. What warrants very close scrutiny are the attempts being made to develop a view of justification that is not long by faith alone, but by faith

and works. Now that sounds ominously familiar. Reformed churches ought to bear in mind the note of warning issued by Francis Turretin with respect to the adulteration of justification by faith alone, a doctrine that he styled as of the principal rampart of the Christian religion. "This being adulterated or subverted, it is impossible to retain purity of doctrine in other places." 

Rev. Steven Key

## The Reform of Geneva

**J**ohn Calvin's role in the reform of Geneva was divinely ordained. Calvin himself did not seek it. In probably his most lengthy autobiographical sketch, found in the preface to his *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, he pointed out that he had no intention of staying in Geneva more than a single night, let alone becoming a leading figure there.

Calvin's plan was to go to Strasbourg. His heart was set on a sheltered life of private studies. He ended up passing through Geneva, because in God's wonderful providence the direct road from Paris to Strasbourg was blocked, making it necessary for Calvin to take a different and much longer, circuitous route to the south. So he arrived in Geneva unannounced. But even though only 27 years of age, Calvin was a well-known scholar and teacher by this time, and someone

who recognized him<sup>1</sup> made known to Farel that the author of the *Institutio* was in the city.

So the Reformer and pastor Guillaume (William) Farel became the instrument of God to set Calvin on a different path. Calvin wrote that Farel

immediately strained every nerve to detain me. And after having learned that my heart was set upon devoting myself to private studies, for which I wished to keep myself free from other pursuits, and finding that he gained nothing by entreaties, he proceeded to utter an imprecation that God would curse my retirement, and the tranquility of the studies which I sought, if I should withdraw and refuse to give assistance, when the necessity was so urgent. By this imprecation I was so stricken with terror, that I desisted from the journey which I had undertaken.<sup>2</sup>

A political reformation had already taken place in Geneva, in which the bishop of Savoy had been ousted, replaced by the rule of the magistrates. Following that political reform, the spiritual ref-

ormation of Geneva began to flourish, especially under the leadership of Farel and a colleague in the ministry, Pierre Viret. The council of the city suspended the Mass in 1535, and subsequently enacted several laws forbidding the practice of the Roman Catholic religion and requiring the priests to convert and to announce that the evangelical doctrine now preached in Geneva was indeed the holy doctrine of the truth. These ordinances were followed in the spring of 1536 by the exhortation to all citizens to attend to the sermons, in order to hear the true gospel. In other words, the magistrates were attempting by law to bring about a spiritual reformation. In that set

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1. Ironically, the one who so identified Calvin and who therefore was indirectly responsible for the influential place Calvin received in Geneva, though not himself identified by name, is said by Calvin to have been an individual who subsequently apostatized and returned to the Papists.

2. John Calvin, Preface to *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Baker Book House, 1979), p. xlii.

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ting Farel and Viret earnestly preached.

But as would soon be seen, true spiritual reformation cannot come by the imposition of laws. As might be expected, division abounded in the city, and there were many factions that from different perspectives were strong opponents of any spiritual reformation.

True reformation is entirely spiritual, the work of God by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men. And for such reformation God would have John Calvin play the leading role.

Calvin's work in Geneva began in the summer of 1536. He began his work there as a teacher, a noted teacher, the author of *Christianae religionis institutio*, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, published just a few months earlier.

The task of reform in Geneva was daunting. Calvin understood that such reform would involve reorganizing the church according to the Word of God, defending the autonomy of the church in relation to the civil magistrates (itself no easy task), as well as bringing change to the mind-set of the people concerning both doctrine and its effects upon morals and the Christian life.

Calvin turned to the work, recognizing only one hope for accomplishing this humanly impossible task. Such reform could come only by the power of the Word of God.

Philip Hughes tells us that it wasn't long before Calvin was compelled "by circumstances of controversy in the city...to add to his teaching commitments the responsibility of public preaching."<sup>3</sup> Thus he became known as a preacher and a pastor, and endeavored with his colleagues, especially Farel and Viret, to establish the church and city upon the foundation of biblical truth.

Calvin tells us in the Preface to his commentary on the Psalms that four months had scarcely passed when Satan reared his ugly

head in Geneva with intensity. There were troubles on two fronts. First, there was an Anabaptist influence in the city, which would mar the Reformation with extremism. This Anabaptist influence was rather soon turned away when Calvin and his colleagues thoroughly and publicly refuted their teachings by the Word of God. From a different front came other assaults upon Calvin and the reformers. There was "a certain wicked apostate, who being secretly supported by the influence of some of the magistrates of the city,"<sup>4</sup> stirred up opposition toward Calvin and his fellow Reformers. It was opposition that would soon seem to have the victory, in the ouster of both Farel and Calvin from Geneva.

The expulsion of God's servants from Geneva on April 22, 1538, not even two years after Calvin had begun his labors in the city, came from a dispute concerning the exercise of Christian discipline. Calvin saw that the biblical exercise of Christian discipline was a critical mark of the true church. He would place discipline alongside the two marks generally recognized by the churches of the Protestant Reformation — faithful preaching and the proper administration of the sacraments. At this time the exercise of discipline fell primarily to the pastors. The city council, however, insisting that discipline was theirs to exercise and knowing Calvin as the leading figure in this ecclesiastical exercise of discipline, found it presumptuous that a foreigner would take to himself and to the other pastors the right to excommunicate "respectable" Genevan citizens. On January 4, 1538, the city council decreed that the Lord's Supper not be refused to anyone. As the dispute between the pastors and the council escalated, Calvin and Farel refused to celebrate the Lord's Supper. The council in turn ordered them to stop preaching and, when they refused, expelled them from

the city. They were given three days to depart. The reform in Geneva would not come easily.

Who would not have supposed that this would have brought an end to the reformation in Geneva? But Theodore Beza, in recounting the history, writes:

On the contrary, the event showed the purpose of Divine Providence by employing the labors of his faithful servant elsewhere, to train him, by various trials, for greater achievements. Also, by overthrowing those seditious persons, through their own violence, the city of Geneva was purged of much pollution. So admirable does the Lord appear in all his works, and especially in the government of his Church!<sup>5</sup>

Calvin breathed a sigh of relief at his expulsion. He finally was relieved of the work he never wanted anyway, and saw his opportunity to settle into a quiet life of "ivory-tower" study. His intention, however, was not God's way. His "escape" from Geneva would be only temporary, while God continued to shape him for the continued work of reform there.

From the summer of 1538 to the summer of 1541, Calvin spent three blessed years in Strasbourg. God gave him time for development, and gave him further preparation for the work that yet lay before him. And though one might expect that his expulsion from Geneva would make him a bitter man, God spared him from the sin of such an attitude. Because the cause of God's truth and the Reformation was more important than any personal suffering, Calvin continued to seek Geneva's good even from afar. When the Cardinal Sadoletto craftily attempted to win the city back to the cause of Rome by way of a smooth letter addressed to "his most beloved Senate, Council, and people of Geneva," Calvin responded from Strasbourg with a letter of his own, coming to the defense of the



Genevan people and the cause of Christ by setting forth clearly the truth of Scripture showing the foundation of the Reformation. Calvin also continued correspondence with certain leading figures and church members in Geneva, encouraging them to patient steadfastness in the truth. But in Strasbourg Calvin was given the opportunity to develop his pastoral understanding as well as his preaching, and to discover that progress always tests patience, and there are times when progress is better made by careful and moderate dealing, and by depending on the work of the Spirit through the Word.

By 1541 a political change had again taken place in Geneva, in which the supporters of the Reformers again gained the power. The result was an urgent request for Farel, Calvin, and Viret to return to the city. Farel would not be released from the church in Neufchatel. The church in Berne expressed a willingness to let Viret go for a brief period of time to assist the church in Geneva. The Genevese pleaded with Strasbourg for Calvin's release. In spite of the reluctance of the church in Strasbourg, as well as that of Martin Bucer, the Genevese persisted.

Calvin himself had no desire to return, and in fact looked upon such a return with terror. "Not a day passed in which I did not ten times over wish for death," he wrote, rather than return into the gulf and whirlpool of Geneva. But recognizing that the will of God often goes contrary to our own inclinations and self-interest, and when Bucer himself became convinced that God would have Calvin go and with fervency pointed Calvin to the example of Jonah, Calvin submitted. On September 13, 1541 he returned, to labor until death.

Calvin, in recounting his labors in Geneva after 1541 wrote, "Were I to narrate the various conflicts by which the Lord has exercised me

since that time, and by what trials he has proved me, it would make a long history."<sup>6</sup> The trials were innumerable, and would undoubtedly have taken Calvin down had he not had such a high view of the sanctity of the call to his office, and the authority of the Word of God.

All Calvin's labors toward reform in Geneva were rooted in the Scriptures.

His first order of business was to set in order the institute of the church. Calvin demonstrated that not only the doctrines of the church, but also the form of church government, must come from Scripture. He immediately obtained the consent of the Senate in Geneva to a form of ecclesiastical polity that was derived from the Word of God, and from which neither ministers nor people should be permitted to depart.<sup>7</sup> A regular presbytery with full ecclesiastical authority was established. Through much strife with the civil authorities, Calvin saw that the church in Geneva maintained her autonomy and particularly the important exercise of Christian discipline in distinction from any civil penalties that may come under the jurisdiction of the magistrate.


Preaching occupied the chief place in the reformation of the church in Geneva. In the Cathedral of St. Peter, where Calvin generally preached, Sunday worship services were held at daybreak, again at 9 A.M., and yet again at 3 P.M. The children were to be brought at noon for instruction. Shorter preaching services were also held on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings.

Much attention was given to teaching, also following the form of a Catechism that Calvin prepared. In addition, knowing the importance of education to the cause of the gospel, Calvin led the promotion of education with the establishment of the Academy of Geneva.

As part of the ecclesiastical ordinances, a diaconate was also es-

tablished. Calvin himself was instrumental in the establishment of a hospital in Geneva.

John Calvin saw the Word of God applying to every aspect of the Christian's life. He was convinced that the power of the gospel in the heart of God's elect will affect their family life, their church life, the handling of their finances, as well as their place in society and any role they may play in governing. But basic to all these is a true and healthy church. It was that above all else to which Calvin gave his attention.

While the reform of Geneva could itself only be limited, the influence of that reform was widespread. The work of the Genevan Academy founded by Calvin continued to spread its influence for the cause of the Reformed faith for decades even following the death of its founder. Also the refugees who had fled to Geneva returned home carrying the Reformed faith with them. From that point of view the spiritual reform of Geneva was but a microcosm of that mighty work of God throughout the continent of Europe and beyond, as the Spirit of truth continued to guide His church — and does so even today in our own churches. 

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3. Philip E. Hughes, ed., introduction to *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin* (Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), p. 5.

4. Calvin, Preface, p. xliii.

5. Theodore Beza, *The Life of John Calvin* (reprint edition, Milwaukie, OR, Back Home Industries, 1996), p. 30.

6. Calvin, Preface, p. xliv.

7. *The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, which is essentially the Church Order of Dordrecht (1618-1619), bears clear evidence of being greatly influenced by Calvin's Ecclesiastical Ordinances.

# Calvin the Preacher

## Calvin as a Preacher

**C**alvin is always remembered as a theologian, not always as a preacher. From the sixteenth to the twentieth century his sermons remained for the most part unpublished, and many of the manuscripts of his sermons were sold in the early nineteenth century for waste paper. Many, while extolling his virtues as a theologian and commentator, bewail his deficiencies as preacher. One writer, who seems not to have read Calvin's sermons, says:

The defects of Calvin's character showed themselves in his work as a preacher. There is a lack of sympathy and charm, deficiency of imagination, sparing use of illustration, no poetic turn, no moving appeal, no soaring elegance.<sup>1</sup>

To read Calvin's sermons is to find in them all the warmth, passion, and love of God that are the marks of a great preacher. In his tribute to Calvin, delivered from Calvin's own pulpit in Saint Peter's Church, Geneva, on the four-hundredth anniversary of Calvin's birth, Emile Doumergue said of him:

That is the Calvin who seems to me to be the real and authentic Calvin, the one who explains all the others: Calvin the preacher of Geneva, moulding by his words the spirit of the Reformed of the sixteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

Doumergue was correct.

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## Calvin's Career as a Preacher

Few preachers in any age have matched Calvin's output as a preacher. During the greater part of his years in Geneva he preached twice every Lord's Day and on alternate weeks every weekday as well. This adds up to something just short of 300 sermons a year, an amazing total, especially when one remembers that he was also lecturing nearly every weekday in the Genevan Academy.

Generally he preached from the New Testament on the Lord's Day, both morning and evening, usually continuing from the same book morning and evening, and from the Old Testament on weekday mornings. We know that he preached through the books of Genesis, Deuteronomy (200 sermons), Job (159 sermons), Judges, I and II Samuel (194 sermons), I and II Kings, all the Major and Minor Prophets (342 sermons on Isaiah and 174 on Ezekiel), all four Gospels, Acts (189 sermons), I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus, and Hebrews.

Of these his sermons on Genesis 14:13-22:14 (*The History of Melchisedech*), Genesis 25:12-27:38 (*Of the Free Election of God in Jacob and of Reprobation in Esau*), Deuteronomy, the Ten Commandments, II Samuel, Job, Psalm 119, Isaiah 53, Jeremiah, Micah, Galatians, Ephesians, I and II Timothy, and Titus as well as several selections of sermons (published under the titles, *The Mystery of Godliness and other Selected Sermons* and *The Deity of Christ and other Sermons*) have been republished in English in recent years. These sermons not only prove Calvin a sound expository preacher, a man of enormous

talent as a preacher, and one thoroughly in touch with his audience, but they are as fresh and profitable for reading today as they were when they were first delivered. There can have been, in the history of preaching, few who came anywhere near Calvin's stature as a preacher.

## Calvin's Preaching Style

In his preaching, Calvin followed what is sometimes called an analytical style, preaching from the text and working phrase by phrase and verse by verse through a whole book of the Bible. His sermons generally lasted from forty minutes to an hour and were delivered extemporaneously. He took no notes or manuscript into the pulpit and preached directly from the Greek or Hebrew text, giving his own translation of the Hebrew and Greek as he preached.

He usually had no introduction but simply began his sermons with the words, "We have seen," or a similar phrase. Even when he returned to Geneva after four years absence in Strasbourg, having been banished from Geneva through the machinations of his enemies, he began his first sermon after returning with the words, "As I was saying..." as though he had not been gone and as though nothing had happened.

Reading his sermons today one finds them doctrinal but without technical and academic terminology, down to earth, full of application, intensely practical, thoroughly exegetical and expository, and totally lacking in anything but sound interpretation of the Word of God. A few examples from his sermons on Isaiah 53<sup>3</sup> must suffice as illustrations of his vivid language, earthiness, and concern for his hearers.



Preaching on Isaiah 53:1-4, he says,

For today we like to count the votes, and many waverers look about them and say: "O dear! Only a little handful of men believe in the Gospel. If they were the larger party, I would join them willingly and gladly. But what is the good of joining forces with such a small group and leaving the multitude?" Now to destroy the force of these objections, the Prophet says that not just half a dozen or ten, but nearly everybody in general will refuse to obey our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup>

What could be more down-to-earth or practical than that?

Speaking of work-righteousness in a sermon on Isaiah 53:7, 8 he says:

These hypocrites altogether mock God and all religion and have never understood what it is to have transgressed the Law of God. And we see also how they think they can clear themselves. If they have sung a mass, if they have mumbled their prayers, if they have performed some fooleries and trashy trifles, God will be pacified, like a baby with a rattle.<sup>5</sup>

His sermons are not mere commentaries, but the Word of God taught and applied to God's people, for instruction, for edification, for rebuke, and for correction. In his preaching, Calvin certainly proved the truth of his own words: "Indeed, nobody is fit to teach in the Church, unless he voluntarily humbles himself, to be a fellow-disciple along with others."<sup>6</sup>

That he was in touch with his audience is illustrated not only by such examples but by many stories. He is reputed to have paused in the middle of a sermon on a Lord's Day morning and said: "Those three drunkards back there might just as well have stayed in the tavern, for all the good they are getting from listening to the Word of God." On another occasion: "How can a man profit from the Word when his belly is so full of wine and meat that it takes all of his ef-

fort just to stay awake?"<sup>7</sup>

### Calvin's View of Preaching

That Calvin saw the preaching of the gospel as the center of the life and work of the church is clear from his desire to move the pulpit to the front and center of the church where the mass altar had previously stood. He believed that the preaching was central in the church because it was God's way of saving His people, so much so, that he considered himself also a hearer:

When I mount the pulpit it is not to teach others only. I do not withdraw myself apart, since I should be a student, and the Word that proceeds from my mouth should serve me as well as you, or it is the worse for me.<sup>8</sup>

He believed this because he believed that the preaching of the Word was a means of grace for God's people — the main means of grace. "When we come together in the name of God," he said, "it is not to hear merry songs, and to be fed with wind, that is, with vain and unprofitable curiosity, but to receive spiritual nourishment."<sup>9</sup> For this reason he believed that preaching ought to be "without display," that God's people might recognize in it the Word of God and that God Himself and not the preacher might be honored and obeyed.

One cannot help but notice when reading Calvin's sermons that despite all efforts to prove that Calvin believed in the well-meant offer of the gospel, his sermons really prove otherwise. There is in them nothing of appeals, altar-calls, pleading with sinners, calls to the unconverted to accept Christ, but only plain and unvarnished exposition of the Word of God, accompanied by a quiet trust that God's Spirit will move and save the hearts of men through the preaching. They are for the most part unemotional, yet moving, simple, and straightforward exposition that touches the heart with saving


power. One would like to have heard him in person.

### Analysis of Calvin the Preacher

In spite of D'Aubigne's criticism of Calvin's sermons ("They are considered by many persons the weakest of his productions, and it is hardly thought worthwhile even to glance at them"<sup>10</sup>), it was under Calvin's preaching that Geneva became, in the words of John Knox, "the most perfect school of Christ on earth." Of his preaching Beza said, "Every word weighed a pound" (*tot verba, tot pondera*), and the evidence is there to prove Beza correct.

His own confession on his deathbed was:

I protest before God that not rashly, and not without being persuaded of the truth, have I taught you the doctrine which you have heard from me; but I have preached to you purely and with sincerity the Word of God according to the charge which he gave me concerning it.

His preaching proved it. 

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1. Edwin Charles Dargan, *A History of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), vol. I, p. 448.

2. Quoted from Leroy Nixon, *John Calvin, Expository Preacher* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), p. 38.

3. *Sermons on Isaiah's Prophecy of the Death and Passion of Christ* (London: James Clarke, 1956).

4. *Sermons on Isaiah's Prophecy*, pp. 61, 62.

5. *Sermons on Isaiah's Prophecy*, p. 96.

6. *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), vol. I, p. 272 (Acts 9:26).

7. Nixon, *John Calvin*, pp. 65, 66.

8. Quoted from Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 294.

9. *The Mystery of Godliness and Other Selected Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), p. 56.

10. Quoted from *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973), pp. v, vi.

# Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination,

## Or Magnifying God's Grace by Double Predestination

*We shall never be clearly persuaded, as we ought to be, that our salvation flows from the wellspring of God's free mercy until we come to know his eternal election, which illumines God's grace by this contrast: that he does not indiscriminately adopt all into the hope of salvation but gives to some what he denies to others.*

J. Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xxi, 1

*Dearly beloved brethren, we must not be amazed if the article of the everlasting predestination of God, be so assaulted and fought against by Satan's maintainers, seeing it is the foundation of our salvation, and also serveth for the better magnifying of the free goodness of God towards us.*

J. Calvin, *Sermons on Election and Reprobation*, Old Paths, 1996, p. 305

A description of the teachings of John Calvin cannot be given without including his doctrine of predestination. For this truth is fundamental to his theology, flowing throughout it like a crystal-clear brook. In this article we do not refer to the doctrine of general predestination, that is, that God sovereignly predestines all things that take place in time and history. This too Calvin taught. Rather we limit ourselves to God's sovereign predestination of His rational, moral creatures, in particular, man. For this is the doctrine so critical to Calvin's Calvin-

ism — still today — but which also comes with so much criticism and controversy.

Controversy has long surrounded Calvin's doctrine of predestination. Not only were there those in his day who ridiculed his teaching on predestination, but also today theologians argue over the nature of his doctrine and over the place that predestination had in Calvin's theology. For one thing, some have argued that predestination was not the center of his teaching as others had held (cf. *Calvin, The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, F. Wendel, Collins, 1965, pp. 263ff.). Others have claimed that Calvin's doctrine of predestination underwent a significant change following his death. They argue that Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva, changed Calvin's doctrine from a warm, biblical presentation to a coldly logical and rationalistic teaching (cf. *A Life of John Calvin, A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture*, A.E. McGrath, Baker, 1990, pp. 211ff.). And then too, there is the controversy involving the place where Calvin dealt with predestination in his theology. Much is made of the fact that he did not treat election and reprobation in connection with the doctrine of God (theology, as was done later in Reformed theology), but in connection with the doctrine of the church (ecclesiology, cf. below) and the doctrine of salvation (soteriology). This is supposed to indicate that Calvin's doctrine was not as dominant and strong as in later Calvinism. But this is simply not true, as Calvin's treatment of the doctrine in these places demonstrates.

Where he decided to deal with God's predestination did not weaken the doctrine in the least.

But whatever one's view on these issues may be, one thing is certain and acknowledged by all sincere historians and theologians: Calvin plainly and powerfully taught God's predestination of mankind, both election and reprobation. He taught it from the beginning of his public ministry, and he continued to develop and clarify it throughout his lifetime. The truth of double predestination is found in the first edition of Calvin's *Institutes* (1536). There he wrote, in connection with the doctrine of the church, that the "holy catholic church" is "the whole number of the elect." And a few paragraphs later he stated,

Consequently, the Lord, when he calls his own, justifies and glorifies his own, is declaring nothing but his eternal election, by which he had destined them to this end before they were born. Therefore no one will enter into the glory of the Heavenly Kingdom, who has not been called in this manner, and justified, seeing that without any exception the Lord in this manner sets forth and manifests his election in all men whom he has chosen (F.L. Battles, transl., Eerdmans, 1986).

In subsequent editions of the *Institutes* (1539, 1554, 1559) Calvin gave the truth of predestination more and more room, as Wendel points out (*Calvin*, p. 264). In that final edition we find Calvin's fullest and finest exposition of the doctrine, as it covers four chapters in the third book, sixty-seven pages



in the McNeill/Battles edition (vol. 2, Westminster, 1960). Here the reader will find all the classic aspects of the doctrine treated: God's absolute sovereignty in electing His people and in rejecting all others of the human race; the unconditional nature of God's sovereign choice (without regard to fore-known character or works, as in Jacob and Esau, Romans 9:11); the sovereign mercy and justice of God revealed in the two-sided decree (mercy to the elect, justice to the reprobate); the Christ-centered focus of God's election, as He chose His people in His Son and prepared all their salvation in Him and Him alone; the unchangeable and effectual character of God's decree, such that the salvation of the elect is absolutely secure, while the damnation of the reprobate is equally sure. To give just a sampling from this edition, this is how Calvin defined predestination at the beginning of his treatment:

We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death (p. 926).

It is striking and interesting that Calvin also included the doctrine of double predestination in his Catechism for the church in Geneva, a catechism written especially for the instruction of the youth of that city (first published in 1537). In it he tied it to the doctrine of the church, as in the early edition of the *Institutes* ("What is the Church? The body and society of believers whom God hath predestined to eternal life," *Selected Works*, H. Beveridge, ed. & transl., Baker, 1983), but also to the two-fold effect of the preaching of the gospel. There he wrote,

The seed of the Word of God takes root and grows fruitful only in those whom the Lord, by his eternal election, has predestined to be his children and heirs of the heavenly kingdom. To all others who, by the same counsel of God before the constitution of the world, are reprobate, the clear and evident preaching of the truth can be nothing else but an odour of death in death (Wendel, p. 266).

Calvin's clear teaching on the truth of sovereign predestination can be traced first of all to the fact that he was preeminently a biblical theologian. We know that Calvin was also a great systematizer of the faith of the church, and that he applied those skills in laying out the truth of God's sovereign predestination. That is evident from his treatment of it in his *Institutes*. But he taught and systematized only what he found in the sacred Scriptures. Calvin preached and wrote so much about predestination precisely because he based all he did on the Word of God, where that truth is revealed throughout. As he worked with the Bible, whether it was Genesis (cf. *Sermons on Election and Reprobation*) or Romans (cf. his commentary on this book), the truth of sovereign predestination was clearly revealed to him. Through the power of the Word it became the convicting belief of his own heart, such that he felt compelled to preach it, teach it, and defend it with pulpit and pen. In fact, at the beginning of his treatment of this doctrine in the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin criticized those who wanted to keep predestination "buried," i.e., avoided and suppressed because it was too deep a doctrine (he had in mind, among others, the Lutheran theologian Melancthon). And he appealed to the Scriptures to defend teaching it to the church:

Therefore to hold to a proper limit in this regard also, we shall have to turn to the Word of the Lord, in which we have a sure rule for the

understanding. For Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which, as nothing is omitted that is both necessary and useful to know, so nothing is taught but what is expedient to know. Therefore we must guard against depriving believers of anything disclosed about predestination in Scripture, lest we seem either wickedly to defraud them of the blessing of their God or to accuse and scoff at the Holy Spirit for having published what it is in any way profitable to suppress (*Institutes*, p. 924).

Another factor in Calvin's strong teaching on predestination was his passion for the glory of God in the sovereignty of His grace. As the two quotes at the beginning of this article show, Calvin believed that no doctrine serves more to bring out the greatness and glory of God's sovereign grace than the truth of His eternal election of His people in Jesus Christ. His writings state this repeatedly and consistently. Calvin was convinced that the most powerful way to refute the heresy of free will and all salvation by the work of man is to uphold the doctrine that God has sovereignly chosen His people to salvation from all eternity and included in that election all the means unto and blessings of that salvation. When salvation is grounded in God's sovereign will, the will of man is put in its proper place. And, of course, this is the answer to all free-willism yet today. The contemporary Reformed church must continue to uphold (return to upholding!) the doctrine of God's sovereign predestination, or she will cave in to the errors of free will.

And thus too Calvin's doctrine of predestination was developed and refined in the fires of spiritual battle. This is the third factor in his uncompromising exposition of the truth concerning election and reprobation. As today the doctrine of sovereign predestination is hated and attacked, so it was in Calvin's time too. He responded to two attackers against the truth of predesti-


tinuation. First of all, there was the Roman Catholic divine Albertus Pighius, who promoted salvation by the free will of man and predestination on the condition of foreknowledge. Calvin replied to him in 1543 and 1552 (cf. below), setting forth God's sovereign election as the answer to all attempts to have man contribute to his salvation. Secondly, Calvin did battle against Jerome Bolsec, a renegade and radical Protestant who despised predestination as "godless and blasphemous" (cf. *The Creeds of Christendom*, P. Schaff, vol. 1, pp. 474ff.). Calvin took up the pen against him in two documents, the *Consensus of Geneva* (1552), which is "an elaborate theological argument for the doctrine of absolute predestination, as the only solid ground of comfort to the believer" (Schaff, p. 475). And second, in a treatise entitled "Of the Eternal Predestination of God" (1552), now published in *Calvin's Calvinism* (Reformed Free Publishing Assn., 1989). Here too is his

mature doctrine laid out, made sharp and strong by the attacks of the enemy. It is a marvelous defense of sovereign grace through a defense of God's sovereignty in predestination. (We urge the reader to read this treatise!)

As we end this discussion of Calvin's doctrine of predestination, we want to show how warm and pastoral he was in teaching this truth to the saints of God. He taught that the believer can and must receive the assurance and comfort of his election. For this truth makes his salvation absolutely safe and secure. Yet this certainty of one's election is not to be severed from Christ and faith in Him. And so, where he ties election to Christ, this is what he writes:

If we seek salvation, life, and the immortality of the Heavenly Kingdom, then there is no other to whom we may flee, seeing that he (Christ, CJT) alone is the fountain

of life, the anchor of salvation, and the heir of the Kingdom of Heaven. Now what is the purpose of our election but that we, adopted as sons by our Heavenly Father, may obtain salvation and immortality by his favor? ...But if we have been chosen in him, we find not the assurance of our election in ourselves; and not even in God the Father, if we conceive him as severed from his Son. Christ, then, is the mirror wherein we must, and without self-deception may, contemplate our own election. For since it is into his body the Father has destined those to be engrafted whom he has willed from eternity to be his own, that he may hold as sons all whom he acknowledges to be among his members, we have a sufficiently clear and firm testimony that we have been inscribed in the book of life (cf. Rev. 21:27) if we are in communion with Christ (*Institutes*, p. 970).

May we find our own blessed assurance of election to salvation in Christ in this way. 

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Evangelism Activities

**T**he Evangelism Society of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI recently served as host for a very important, interesting, and thought-provoking debate between Dr. Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary and author of the recent book *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace*, and Prof. D. Engelsma, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament studies at our Theological School. Professor Engelsma is also editor of this periodical, and you may remember that he originally wrote twelve editorials critiquing Dr. Mouw's book. These editorials have since been published in book form under the title

*Common Grace Revisited*. First we extend to Southeast the sincere thanks of the standing room only crowd of some 3000 who filled Sunshine Ministries' auditorium to the brim to hear the question "Is the Doctrine of Common Grace Reformed?" debated. We also do well to pass along our thanks to the two men who held our attention for a little over three hours with concerns that are critical for the future of the church today.

Saturday, September 6, the *Grand Rapids Press* featured an article on the front page of its Religion Section outlining the basic differences between the two sides of this question. Dr. Mouw was quoted in this article as saying that the doctrine answers "the basic question, What do Christians have in common with non-Christians? God might even take delight in the way non-Christians serve His purpose." The article goes on to

quote Prof. Engelsma, "If you stand back and observe the church worldwide, I don't think anyone would say the condition of the church is overly healthy. Is the church presently in danger of becoming thoroughly worldly?"

These two sides of the question on common grace were explained in greater detail that evening. Each man was given thirty minutes to state his position, either for or against common grace. This was followed by a 15-minute rebuttal. Then questions, first from each participant to the other, and then in conclusion from the audience. For someone like myself, who has grown up with constant reminders of the doctrine of common grace and the importance its denial has in our churches, the evening was very worthwhile. It not only served as a review of the major elements of the doctrine and our objection to

*Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.*



them, but it also gave opportunity to hear firsthand some of the basic arguments for the doctrine. In addition, it was also very encouraging to see so many young people in the audience. As the moderator for the evening, Mr. Rick Noorman, pointed out, the average age of the audience was certainly younger than expected. The question was of interest to at least three generations of church members, which is something to be thankful for.

Again, thanks to Southeast for doing all the work organizing the evening. It certainly was appreciated. And again, thanks to Dr. Mouw and Prof. Engelsma, who conducted themselves in a Christian way towards each other and for giving the audience something to think about. It was indeed a lively dialog between two of today's most knowledgeable authorities regarding this vital topic.

### Congregation Activities

**T**he Council of Southeast PRC set Thursday, September 18, for the ordination and installation service of pastor-elect William Langerak.

Everyone in and around our churches in West Michigan was invited to attend a classical/sacred music concert featuring piano, organ, voice, and cello at First PRC in Grand Rapids on September 10. A collection was taken for Foreign

Missionary Assistance.

Members of Byron Center, MI PRC were invited to meet in their fellowship hall on the fourth Sunday of each month to sing around their piano on an informal basis. Bringing a plate or something to drink was optional.

All households and individuals of Grace PRC in Standale, MI received a letter regarding adult societies at Grace. The elders and pastor encouraged all to attend a society for personal enrichment and the blessing also of others.

### Mission Activities

**R**ev. J. Mahtani, missionary to Pittsburgh, PA, visited the Covenant of Grace PR Fellowship in Spokane, WA from September 11-16. September 12 Rev. Mahtani spoke on "Preaching and Witnessing in our Pittsburgh Mission." Saturday morning he planned on meeting with all the heads of households regarding the mission work in Spokane and how to apply what he has learned in Pittsburgh to their situation.

### Denomination Activities


**A**t the September 10 meeting of Classis East a letter was received from the Contact Committee concerning continuing developments with a former OCRC congregation in Wingham, Ontario, that has now requested affiliation with

our churches. Two elders from this congregation were present to observe the meeting of classis. It is the intention of the consistory of this 13-family congregation to request membership in our denomination at the next meeting of Classis East in January.

On September 16 the members of the League of PR Adult Bible Study Societies met together at First PRC in Holland, MI for an inspirational lecture, a short business meeting, and fellowship. Prof. R. Decker spoke on "The Bible — God's Book," based on II Timothy 3:16. An offering was taken for the Asian Reformed Theological School of Singapore.

### Minister Activities

**F**rom a trio consisting of Rev. W. Bruinsma, Rev. C. Terpstra, and Rev. R. VanOverloop, Hudsonville called Rev. Bruinsma. The council of Hull, IA PRC formed a new trio for missionary to Ghana. From that trio, consisting of Rev. M. Dick, Rev. J. Laning, and Rev. R. Miersma, Hull called Rev. Miersma.

Mr. Paul Goh, who graduated from our seminary this spring, was examined by the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore all day Saturday, August 30. He sustained the examination and was declared a candidate for the ministry of the Word and sacraments. Pray for him as he awaits a call. 

## Announcements

### NOTICE!!

With gratitude to God for preserving us for the past fifty years, a number of our area churches are planning lectures for October 30 and 31: the first, by Prof. Russell Dykstra on "Tried by Fire: Why the Protestant Reformed Churches Had to Endure the Split of 1953"; the second, by Prof. Herman Hanko, on "Conditional Theology and the Road Back to Rome." These lectures will be at Faith Protestant Reformed Church (7194 20<sup>th</sup> Ave., Jenison, MI) at 7:30 P.M. Come, and bring a friend.

### LECTURE

The Evangelism Committee of South Holland Protestant Reformed Church in South Holland, IL invites all to attend a Reformation Day lecture on October 31 at 7:30 P.M. in their church sanctuary by Prof. R. Dykstra on the subject: "Tried by Fire: Why the Protestant Reformed Churches Had to Endure the Schism of 1953." Refreshments will be served afterward.

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies' Society of the Hudsonville PRC expresses its Christian sympathy to Donna Boven and family in the passing away of their dear mother and grandmother,

#### MARIAN KUIPER.

May they find comfort in the words of Paul found in Romans 8:38, 39, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Andrew Lanning, President  
June VanOverloop, Secretary



## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On October 16, 2003 our parents, **GORDON AND EILEEN TERPSTRA**, will celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. We, their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, give humble thanks to God for His faithfulness to them in their covenant of marriage and for their godly example to us. We pray that the Lord may continue to bless them with faithful love as they go on in their lives together.

"As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever" (Isaiah 59:21).

- ❖ Suzanne Looyenga
  - James & Lisabeth VerHey
  - Elise & Colin
  - Brendan & Kelly Looyenga
  - Mikaia & Lynnae
  - Brianna, Caitlin, Meghan, & Drew
- ❖ Thomas & Luanne Schipper
  - Jason, Dirk, Nicole, Andrew, & Betsy
- ❖ Rev. Charles & Verna Terpstra
  - Corey & Brenda Terpstra
  - David & Amber Decker
  - Chloe
  - Kimberly, Thad, Kyle, & Justin
- ❖ Todd and Val Terpstra
  - Gordon, Jillian, Ian, Madelyn, & Jaclyn
- ❖ Jeffrey & Kathy Terpstra
  - Lindsey, Kelsey, Michael,
  - Melanie, & Allison

Grand Rapids, Michigan

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The senior Adult Bible Study of Byron Center PRC expresses its Christian sympathy to Len and Marcia Holstege in the passing away of Marcia's father,

**ANDY DE YOUNG.**

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Leroy DeVries, Bible Leader  
Ardith Oomkes, Secretary

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Southeast PRC expresses Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. George Slopsema in the death of his sister,

**TRESSA SLOPSEMA.**

May they be comforted in God's Word, "My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (Psalm 73:26).

Rev. Bill Langerak, Pres.  
Doug Mingerink, Clerk

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With gratitude to our heavenly Father, the children and grandchildren of

**ROGER and PHYLLIS KING**

announce their 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on October 18, 2003. We are so thankful for them and for the many years of covenant instruction they have passed on to us. We give thanks to God for the years He has given them together, and pray that He will continue to bless them in the years ahead.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them" (Psalm 103:17, 18).

- ❖ Lou and Cheryl Regnerus
  - Luke, Jade, Leah, Glen, Carly
- ❖ Jack and Marcia Kroeze
  - Matthew, Rachel
- ❖ Mike King
- ❖ Bill and Lori Smeda
  - Ashley, Caitlin, Lauren
- ❖ Dave and Susan King
  - Justin, Crystal (in glory), Caleb,
  - David, Darin

Grand Rapids, Michigan

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With gratitude to God, on August 27, 2003, our parents and grandparents,

**PETE and JAN POORTENGA,**

celebrated their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

We are thankful to God for their years of matrimony together. We pray God's continued blessings for them.

The Lord has blessed us with parents faithful to the truth as shown to us in our many years of godly instruction and loving guidance. Psalm 32:11

- ❖ Todd and Val Terpstra
  - Gordon, Jillian, Ian, Madelyn, Jaclyn
- ❖ Jerry and Judy Fynaardt
  - Mitchell, Alex, Caleb, Kyle
- ❖ George and Ranae Vroom
  - Danielle, Nickolas, Dylan
- ❖ Steve and Joanne McNary
  - Sierra
- ❖ Bryant and Deanna VanOverloop

Lansing, Illinois

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On August 31, 2003

**REV. CHARLES and VERN A TERPSTRA**

celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. We, their children and grandchild, are grateful to our heavenly Father for the godly example we have in our parents. It is our prayer that God may continue to bless them in their marriage and care for them in the years to come. To God alone be the glory.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

- ❖ Corey and Brenda Terpstra
- ❖ David and Amber Decker
  - Chloe
- ❖ Kimberly, Thad, Kyle, & Justin Terpstra
  - Zeeland, Michigan

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On October 22, 2003 our parents, **PHIL and JOANNE LOTTERMAN**, will celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, D.V. We, their children, are thankful for their love for each other rooted in the love for the Lord as demonstrated in their love for the church in which they have been so active for these many years. Our prayer is that they may experience many more years together for the glory of God. "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Psalm 90:8).

- ❖ Ken Lotterman
  - Jeremy, Joshua, Kendra, Angela
- ❖ Ron and Lori Lotterman
  - Scott, Caleb, Melanie
- ❖ Dale and Trish Bekkering
  - Kristen, Andrew, Cameron, Katie

Jenison, Michigan

## REMINDER:

Heritage Christian High School in South Holland, IL is now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year of operation, teaching a full course load as a four year high school. As we plan for the 2004-2005 school year, we ask qualified Protestant Reformed teachers to consider our need of one additional staff member. Interested individuals, please contact our Administrator, Ralph Medema at (708) 339-1733 [Ralph.medema@heritagechs.org] or Education Committee Chairman, Andy Birkett at (708) 895-8214 [andy@preferredwindowanddoor.com]."