

CONTENTS

Editor's Note: David W. Hall ix

Foreword: Eric J. Alexander xi

Abbreviations xv

1. Reformation, Calvinism, and Lessons Learned—
Nehemiah 8:1–4a and 9:1–3, 16–21 1
DAVID W. HALL
2. In Christ Alone—Philippians 3:8–12 21
SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON
3. Who Is the Wise and Faithful Servant?—
Matthew 24:45–51 41
HENRY LUKE OROMBI
4. In Praise of Predestination—Ephesians 1:3–6 51
BRYAN CHAPPELL
5. A Great Door for Spreading the Gospel—
1 Corinthians 16:5–9 69
PHILIP GRAHAM RYKEN
6. All the Glorious Offices of Christ—
1 Corinthians 1:29–31 85
PETER A. LILLBACK
7. Calvin's Cherished Text—John 17:3 101
W. ROBERT GODFREY

Contents

8. John Calvin and Guarding the Gospel—
Galatians 1:6–10 113
STEVEN J. LAWSON
 9. Three Great Intercessions—Romans 8:26–34 129
IAIN D. CAMPBELL
 10. The Christian Life—Philippians 2:12–13 145
J. LIGON DUNCAN
 11. God’s Sovereign Election—Ephesians 1:3–14 167
GEOFFREY THOMAS
 12. Cherishing the Church—Matthew 16:18b 191
JOEL R. BEEKE
 13. John Calvin and Psalm 110: The Psalm for Yesterday
and Today—Psalm 110 215
MARTIN HOLDT
 14. More Than Conquerors—Romans 8:35–39 225
EDWARD DONNELLY
 15. One of a Thousand—Job 36:1–4 237
HYWEL R. JONES
 16. Bowing before the Majesty of God—
Romans 11:33–36 251
DEREK W. H. THOMAS
- Index of Scripture 263
Index of Subjects and Names 267
Contributors 271

I

REFORMATION, CALVINISM, AND
LESSONS LEARNED—NEHEMIAH
8:1–4A AND 9:1–3, 16–21

DAVID W. HALL

Ann and I have been privileged to watch the unfolding, the maturing, and the cultivation of Calvin500. As we met last Sunday (July 5, 2009) for worship, we were in the church—that dates to the 12th century—in Calvin’s Geneva, and for the week we heard several dozen presentations by Calvin scholars and enjoyed fifteen of the finest expositions of Scripture in St. Pierre Cathedral over a five-day conference. I wish to thank the church for the privilege of allowing me to be involved and for your support. It was a high point for us to hear the echoes of psalms bouncing off the same walls, using some of the same tunes, prayers, concepts, and creeds as our forefathers did. We were blessed by being surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, who, at times, seemed very close.

DAVID W. HALL

Bob Godfrey spoke of Calvin's "cherished text," finding that Calvin often referred to John 17:3: "For this is eternal life: to know the only true God," which later became the motto of Harvard College. A humble Archbishop of Uganda mounted the stairs to the pulpit, only after making a sincere protest because he was awed by following Calvin, and brought us a bold message. Phil Ryken preached on the always-open door for the gospel.

Geoff Thomas, a Reformed Baptist, summed up the simplicity of predestination in a few questions between a pastor and a member:

Pastor: How are you saved? Parishoner: By God's grace.

Pastor: Did God save you or did you save yourself? Parishoner: God did.

Pastor: Did he do so on purpose or by accident?

Sinclair Ferguson called us to relate all things to Christ alone. And Ted Donnelly, from Northern Ireland, challenged us to live out Romans 8:35–39, even while not in luxury hotels as on a tour, but as with five young martyrs who were killed at Lyon at the hands of Roman Catholic persecutors in the 1550s, while Calvin tried to console them. They, like we, sang psalms to one another and summoned each other to heroic courage.

We heard many great quotes and illustrations at the conference, which is the major preaching conference for this commemorative cycle. Outstanding studies were presented, and much fellowship was renewed. Importantly, these messages provide a current apology for the vitality of Calvinism, and they are exemplars to modern audiences of what living Calvinism looks like and sounds like today.

One of the painful lessons, however, is to observe how Calvin's church—once bustling, burgeoning, and exporting the faith—is now often marginalized in its own city and in the world. Sur-

rounded by obvious signs of modernity, hedonism, and unbelief, most of us questioned: what happened to the faith that once changed the world? How could it shrink, vanish, or succumb to the spirit of the age? Of course, we also ask—and to some degree, each of these sermons asked—how can we avoid that same fate? Also we ask: is it right to look back?

A Renewal or Reformation from Time to Time Is Necessary

In Nehemiah's time, there was a return to faith—a vital revival and reformation. The three primary features of it were: return to the Word, repentance from and recognition of sin, and refocus of priorities.

Calvin found and highlighted the same features. As I share my comments with you today, I want to begin and end with the book of Nehemiah—bookending some of my other thoughts.

I would hope that a celebration of a past event would stimulate folks to return faithfully to their faith and live it out. They may have to change some things, as in Nehemiah's time, and they may have to rebuild. But that is better than spinning farther and farther away from the truth.

That is, after all, the reason to have a commemoration: to call folks back to the strong and living aspects of a tradition. No tradition should be perpetuated if it is not thoroughly biblical and helpful. We should not, in these events, focus on the outward or glorify previous human beings. We should take their faith, their thought, their moral examples and benefit from those. Notwithstanding, we ought not to worship any ancestor, even a hero like Calvin. We should seek to learn from him and his disciples to the degree that they imitate Christ.

In this Old Testament example, we see: a strong decline, a rebuilding that follows that decline, and light that follows darkness.

DAVID W. HALL

The Heart of Calvinism Can Bring These: Three Points of Calvinism

If we expect Calvinism to endure and bring other reformations like the one in Nehemiah's time, we should make sure we know what we are talking about. For simplicity's sake, and rather than using the customary five points, I shall summarize Calvinism under three points that should be taught in the home, the church, and the school. The other sermons herein form a collage of how Calvinism may be rightly understood.

The Glory and Sovereignty of God

From the *Institutes'* beginning preface, John Calvin portrayed the human condition as "naked of all virtue," enslaved, blind, and weak. The purpose of this depiction was to preclude all occasion for self-glorifying and give all glory to God. Human beings, thought Calvin, should be stripped of "vainglory" to "learn to glory in the Lord."

Five centuries after Calvin's birth, John Piper suggests that a fitting symbolic banner over Calvin's work could be: *Zeal to Illustrate the Glory of God*. Whether in life or on his deathbed, Calvin professed to propound only "what I esteemed to be *for the glory of God*." At the 500th anniversary of Calvin's birth, Calvinism's essence is tied to "passion for the absolute reality and majesty of God."

Also, at Calvin's 400th anniversary Princeton giant Benjamin Warfield summarized: "No man ever had a profounder sense of God than [Calvin]." Whether it is "this relentless orientation on the glory of God" (Piper), or the "all-embracing slogan of the Reformed faith: the work of grace in the sinner as a *mirror for the glory of God*" (Vos), or Calvin's own words, the glory of God distills the meaning of Calvin's message.

Warfield summarized: "The Calvinist is the man who has seen God, and who, having seen God in his glory, is filled on the one hand, with a sense of his own unworthiness to stand in God's

sight as a creature, and much more as a sinner, and on the other hand, with adoring wonder that nevertheless this God is a God who receives sinners.”

Calvin described this world as *theatrum Gloriae*. For him, every aspect of life from work to worship and from art¹ to technology bore the potential to glorify God. Creation is depicted as a platform for God’s glory² or a “dazzling theater,”³ displaying God’s glorious works. Such comments support Lloyd-Jones’ later claim that for Calvin “the great central and all-important truth was the sovereignty of God and God’s glory.”

British evangelical James I. Packer concurs that Calvin’s Christianity rested on a vision of God enthroned and reigning majestically: “How often Calvin used the words ‘majesty’ and ‘glory’! How often he dilates on the greatness of God! The passion corresponded to the vision. It was the passion expressed in that great phrase which has become the slogan of Calvinism—*solī Deo gloria!*”

If the glory and sovereignty of God is the first note of Calvinism, the second enduring hallmark of Calvinism is the fall of man.

The Fall of Man

Calvinism, if it is to resemble Nehemiah’s reform, will manifest a stubborn realism and retain limited expectations. We expect neither the world nor ourselves to be perfect; we are not utopian. And the better Calvinists quickly learn that this applies to our own inner lives as well; for every morning, the first visage we see in the mirror is one of depravity. This is not something that we will outgrow nor end with an educational remedy. If we jettison the doctrine of sin, along with its necessary remediation only by Christ, we will not serve to reform or aid those around us.

1. *Institutes*, 1.11.12.

2. *Ibid.*, 1.14.20.

3. *Ibid.*, 1.5.8; 2.6.1.

DAVID W. HALL

Calvin's doctrine was a bracing tonic for the accumulated arrogance of the day, complete with its opulence and outer success. The Renaissance hubris would fall, however, like the subprime mortgage market in 2008. Calvin's faith in God, not man, filled that gap. The fallenness of human nature continues to exemplify Calvinism in all ages.

The third signature of Calvinism is calling to the world.

Calling to the World

All vocations can give glory to God. All walks of life can be noble, helpful, and God-oriented. The clergy have no corner on the marketplace, and many who are not ministers are and have been used for great things.

Vocation and daily work are good. Calvinism calls us out of the cloister, far from the hiddenness of the monastic life, and into the world with the shining, powerful message of God.

These make Calvinism different from every other religious scheme. And this is the faith that is spreading.

The Spread of Calvinism and Why It Doesn't Die

This week I wondered: do you think John Calvin might be surprised five centuries after his birth to find three men of African descent in his pulpit or to find more Calvinists in the Southern Baptist Convention than in the Presbyterian Church in America? It was sheer joy to note the participation by the many brothers and sisters below.

- ✦ Several of the "guardians" (deaconal assistants) at St. Pierre Cathedral were Turkish-Kurds, having come to the faith.
- ✦ Koreans and Chinese populated Geneva and may be the leading visitors to this area.

- ✦ The largest seating capacity for a sanctuary of any Reformed church (seating five thousand) is in the heart of downtown Jakarta, Indonesia, pastored by a Chinese Calvinist, Dr. Stephen Tong.
- ✦ Chinese Calvinism is growing, and may prove to be one of the most exciting stories of our century.
- ✦ Africans blessed us, with the sermon by a most humble Archbishop (of Uganda) Henry Orombi, with his assistant, Onesimus Asimwe. On another occasion, the Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi (of Ghana), the president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, welcomed us as brothers and sisters.
- ✦ Our church supports a strong Calvinist, the Rev. Jean Paul in Haiti with Reformation Hope International. He knows the hope for Haiti is the Reformed faith.
- ✦ We met Dr. Peter Vimalasekaran, originally from Northern Ireland, but who is leading a German Gypsy ministry in Fribourg.
- ✦ Sebastian Heck, from our presbytery and a former intern at Grace Presbyterian in Douglasville, Georgia, is replanting a Reformed denomination in Heidelberg, Germany.

Conferences on Calvin this year were held in unlikely places such as Rome, Italy; St. Petersburg, Russia; Prague; South Africa; Toronto; and Boston. Others met in Holland, France, New Zealand, Australia, and South Carolina and California.

Dr. Michael Milton of Reformed Theological Seminary (Charlotte, NC) calls this “Global Calvinism” because it is catholic/biblical Calvinism. And that Calvinism is spreading.

How Living Calvinism Is Expanding Today

Who would have imagined the following news stories in the first half of this year?

DAVID W. HALL

- ✦ The third most potent idea in a CNN/Time poll in April 2009 was “New Calvinism.”
- ✦ More books have been published on Calvin this year than in any other previous year. For example, Calvin500.com has released a CD that contains 97 volumes of Calvin materials.
- ✦ University campuses, especially in the East, are cropping up with independent young scholars who dare to question tradition, and in so doing find that Calvinism is one of the few ideological platforms that is both stable and capable of transforming dated structures.
- ✦ The *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *USA Today*, over this July anniversary week, each featured a piece on the significance of Calvinism, even if begrudgingly.
- ✦ National Public Radio did a story on “Calvinmania” sweeping Europe, while CBN carried a feature of Calvin’s anniversary.
- ✦ One thousand gathered in Boston over the July 4 weekend to recall the virtues and energy of the Reformation.
- ✦ Vibrant, local churches celebrated in their own ways; and many tours visited historic sites of the Reformation.

So our faith is not dying out; or is it?

A Cautionary Tale: How the Mighty Are Fallen

One church told me that it, a Reformed Baptist congregation in Lausanne, is the only church in Switzerland to hold to the “doctrines of grace.” While some might dispute that, it at least reflects the severe dwindle that has characterized Calvinism for the past two centuries.

Many of you have heard the oft-repeated slogan that “the church is always but one generation away from extinction.” All it takes for the church to die is for one generation to drop the baton.

Few people attend St. Pierre parish, maybe one hundred fifty to two hundred per Sunday, with a very high median age.

In much of Geneva today, Calvin is an embarrassment. He was called by one tour guide in Chaminix: “Osama Bin Calvin.” That is how Calvin is respected in his own land.

The church can become secular in a hurry! This is the sad tale of Europe. Will ours end similarly?

What happened to a movement that was so vital, so revolutionary, so influential? God’s Word, the supernatural, evangelism, and discipleship were abandoned. Arts, culture, intellect, and leisure were substituted.

So back to Nehemiah and reformation. Nehemiah 1–7 provides the setting; then in chapters 8–9 we see four things:

1. Recovery of the Word—8:3–4 (note pulpit level in v. 5, which shows the proper emphasis)—and authority of the Word—8:8 (not human opinion).
2. Return to Holy Times/ Seasons—8:9. These people, once reformed, began to set aside the Sabbath for worship. The Feast of Booths (8:13) was celebrated as it had not been for a thousand years, since Joshua’s time!
3. Realistic appraisal of moral sin—9:2–3. They confessed their sin for a quarter of the day, and that after standing for the reading of God’s Word for a quarter of the day.
4. Admiration of how God worked in the past—9:6–15 and 17ff.

Why is memorializing important? Many of you have fond memories of earlier services, and often thinking back will trigger a certain feeling—sometimes even actions. Let me pose two self-reflective questions about memorializing how God works in the past.

First, does God instruct us to look backwards and remember the past? Or is this little more than backwards navel-gazing to aggrandize ourselves or our tradition?

DAVID W. HALL

Some might think this activity to be wrong in itself—a case of wrong focus. Of course, it probably is wrong to look back to the past if one seeks to enshrine it as automatically better than any other day or to think that one's own tradition or family is superior to all others. To focus on the past with an aim to find that no descendants measure up is perhaps closer to idolatry than to a godly remembering.

The belief that all is new also speaks against remembering the past. For if the new is always and automatically better, then there's little need in looking back to the past.

But both of those are abuses; does God ever say to look back and remember? We think so. Memorials are prominently featured in the early chapters of the book of Genesis:

- ✦ The rainbow at the end of the flood is a reminder that God would never send a flood like this again. Noah's altar signified that the seasons would continue.
- ✦ Several times, Abram builds an altar to mark an event (13: 4, 18). Once he even planted a tree to memorialize a treaty (21:33). Abraham purchased a cave at Machpelah to bury his wife Sarah; he would later be put to rest there.
- ✦ Isaac dug a well to mark God's promise and a treaty.
- ✦ When Jacob had a dream of how God would use him, he built a pillar of stones to mark where he'd had such a deep experience with God (28:18).

So it seems that all the patriarchs built memorials of some events, and they were good.

Passover also provided a call for and the prompt for remembering. The forerunner to the Lord's Supper was designed to be a part of an annual celebration. Each year, God wanted his people to remember a specific miracle: the deliverance from Egypt and the culmination of the ten plagues. God not only ordered that this be recalled every year, but also planted a prompt in the service. In order to ensure that

each family recalled this, God planned for the inquisitive younger family members to ask, “What do these stones mean?” (Josh. 4:6),⁴ and the parents would explain the miracle of the exodus, hopefully pointing to God’s providence and salvation by the blood. The Lord had his people remember this particular event for years.

In Joshua, remember what may be learned from 4:6–7. As Israel crossed the Jordan River, each tribe had a representative carry a stone “to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant . . . These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.” Later in that chapter, God wanted those in the future to inquire and learn of God’s acts (4:21).

God wanted his people to remember great lives, miracles in nature, the exodus, the crossing of the Jordan, and other significant acts. The reason is two-fold: (1) we are ever so forgetful, and most of us treat each new day as divorced from yesterday—we tend to think we’re the first ones ever to face something new; and (2) God knew that the retelling of these things would help keep us on track. Some things, indeed, do deserve a retelling, while many should not be repeated at all.

But the point is this: the Lord does not expect his truths to be carried on without some retelling. If we assume that everyone automatically knows everything, we need not rehearse events. But human beings are not that way, and to fail to memorialize—to move into neutral—may lead not only to forgetfulness but to decay. The reality is that we all have to repeat some things.

Next ask a second question: why is this activity important, and how does it help us?

We get out of the “total present tense” and take a long-term view. It is good to know that the whole world does not revolve around us and just us. Not only is there a very large world out there, but there is also a very long span of time that God has

4. All quotations of Scripture in this chapter are from the NIV.

DAVID W. HALL

been working. If one lives only in the “now,” he’ll likely not plan, likely not make judgments except for the short run. If we get too present-tense-focused, we may also get very selfish.

The Lord commends a long-term view for us, and one of the things that helps is if we look back at the past to learn how previous saints dealt with certain issues. We can find that we have friends from the past. We may discover good counselors, and church history can keep us from many a mistake. In fact, most heresies are old ideas brought back by someone who thinks he’s created a new idea. Some knowledge of the past helps us.

We also compare ourselves to God’s standards; that is good.

If you return to Nehemiah 9, note also three warning signs in 9:16: presumptiveness, rebel/obstinate, and disobey.

Could this be an anatomy and could it not be that the first (presumptiveness) begins a declension that follows in similar trajectory? This might be a warning catalogue. Do you begin a spiritual decline with overconfidence? Presumptiveness? Thinking that God will only bless you and never be displeased with you?

Then do you move to being set in your sin, happy to rebel?

Finally, do you move into being obstinate as a rule toward the things God is calling you to?

Also, Nehemiah 9:26–29 shows how extremely patient God is, and yet we rebel and turn our backs toward him.

This is why periodic renewals are important and needed!

And if such gatherings are used to call us back to God and his ways, then they are positive.

History may, in fact, show that a long cycle of decline has bottomed, and Calvinism is on the way back! A couple of young British authors now have a book on the *New York Times* best-seller list that is entitled *God Is Back!* Could that be some of the future of Calvinism? If, as we think, it is a genuinely superior system of doctrine, then once irrational factors are muted, it should regain ground. We may be witnessing that cyclical revival, following two centuries of loathing by hostile critics.

Notwithstanding, since none of us are endowed with predictive prophetic gifts, maybe we can begin with a review of highlights in the area of success and failure. These might protect us and keep us on track as we face the future.

What Worked and What Didn't Over the Half Millennium: Five Huge Success Stories

Receiving immigrants and persuading them. Calvin's Geneva doubled in population during his lifetime, and he welcomed Italian, Polish, French, and English exiles. He was probably not strategic enough to consider how they would return to their homelands, radiating the truths learned in Geneva. More likely, he was simply doing his Christian duty, but he did not insist on ethnic homogeneity. Calvin disciplined all *ethnoi*, knowing that being in *imago Dei*, each could be an ambassador.

Spreading Calvinism through educational centers. Calvin's Academy, which was modeled on those in Lausanne and Strasbourg, taught thousands and trained the next generation of leaders. Over time, wherever Calvinist ministers planted churches (Nyon, Neuchatel, Lyon, etc.), academies popped up. Calvin sensed early on that "ideas had consequences," and he sought to cultivate those.

Implanting Calvinists in strategic leadership sectors. Many of the refugees to Geneva were from the nobility. Accordingly, Calvinism spawned more disciples in the ruling class in various countries than most other branches of the Reformation. Leaders like Admiral Coligny, and readers like the King of Poland, were impressed with Calvin's reforms. Seeking strategic leaders is one of the successes that early Calvinists experienced.

Fueling Calvinism by infusing economies. Calvinism virtually transformed the commerce and business of the day. Modern, market-based economies finally were liberated and found their

DAVID W. HALL

buttresses in the Calvinistic work ethic, in the tendency to invest, and through the business leaders of Reformed churches. Calvinism likely would not have spread without this favorable economic climate, and it used it optimally.

Codifying truth via catechisms, classic works, and regular preaching. Calvinists were quite successful in crystallizing the faith. They formed catechisms and adopted creeds wherever they went. As such, their extent quickly became multigenerational, all very logo-centric, and preaching became the news of the day—good or otherwise.

Such were some of the Calvinist methods that succeeded and that will probably guide us for the future.

However, there were and are glaring errors as well.

Notorious Calvinist Failures

Pettiness, censoriousness. From the earliest disagreement with Luther (due to the stridency of Dr. Luther as much as anything), Calvinists have, regrettably, been notorious for splitting hairs and communion with each other. Often there is more concern about a leader's status and recognition, and it is not uncommon to have a judgmental demeanor that hardly attracts converts. Focusing mainly on one's agenda has been a large Calvinist failure.

Racial discrimination. In certain geographical areas, some of God's children were viewed as second- or third-class citizens by aristocratic Calvinists. Calvin himself, of course, did not succumb to this, but some disciples actually crafted ingenious and self-serving rationales to discriminate against races. Future Calvinism, if it is to succeed, must not repeat this mistake.

Class-orientation, as if only upper classes could benefit from Calvinism. Similarly, because many of the original Calvinists were wealthy or from the nobility or aristocracy, it was an easy confu-

sion to think that to be a prerequisite or fruit of Calvinism. In fact, to the degree that Calvinists are mono-classists, they will lose people to the socialism of the day.

Affair with Unitarianism and Socinianism. Calvinism, perhaps because of its emphasis on the mind, became quick prey to new rationalistic movements. Socinius and his children, the Unitarians, quickly recovered much territory that Calvin's disciples won, and it never returned to the Calvinist column. While we wish to harness the intellect, both compromise with the world and arrogance from educational successes can lead future Calvinism astray.

Attempting to rule by force (e.g., as the Servetus case points up). Calvinists must recall that "though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet," and that we cannot force human consciences to agree with or submit to our faith. Often the zeal that accompanies Reformation movements becomes quite regrettable down the road. Mature statesmen and wise counselors must call those back from the brink if they move into conquering by political or external might.

So as we face the future, seeing both Nehemiah's and Calvin's reforms, we should be careful to apply biblical truth and not imitate the culture of our day.

One very difficult thing to resist is the altering of the ancient faith in the attempt to make it relevant. It is hard to make the case that Calvinists have been very good at this. All too often the church or its leaders are seduced by the sirens of contemporaneity. How tempting to be conformed to the patterns of this world. Perhaps this 500th celebration will remind us to use delicate care in translating the faith, for something precious can be lost in the translation. However, it must be translated.

The faith that echoes the name of Calvin might be tested by these five hallmarks:

DAVID W. HALL

1. It downplays the grandeur of unredeemed man. Sin, in other words, must always be preached.
2. It champions the power of God (not institution or self) to change our world. Calvinism does not depend on technique but on spiritual power.
3. It opposes wrong schemes of earthly power (hierarchicalism); it espouses dispersed power.
4. It calls us to take our living faith into the marketplace of ideas.
5. It is Trinitarian, calling us to carry the cross and to trust the Spirit.

One earlier historian (Ford Lewis Battles) in 1976 summarized well how Calvinism could continue, first by denying that he was advocating an “antiquarian enterprise,” then by posing and answering this question:

Can the form of Christianity commonly known as Calvinism survive in the modern world? It cannot survive unless, first, it is known; secondly, believed; thirdly, practiced. Calvin, the theologian, was captive to his own time and place, but also transcends the sixteenth century. The more I study that great interpreter of Jesus Christ, the more contemporary I discover him to be, and the more dated I find so called ‘contemporary theology’ to be.⁵

Based on this, future success will probably not deviate from past successes. Wisdom—and if we learn anything from these commemorations—suggests that we emphasize the following as we move forward:

1. Hold to God’s truth from age to age. Be confident enough in it that the tendency to compromise diminishes in com-

5. Jim O’Brien, “Ford Lewis Battles: 1915–1979, Calvin Scholar and Church Historian Extraordinary,” *CTJ* 15, 2 (November 1980): 187.

parison to the greatness of God. The awareness that the church, our lives, and Scripture itself is enduring inspires perseverance, even when times are tough.

2. Always target the education of the next generations.
3. Seek to translate into the vernacular, without neutering the content (printing, Internet, media, etc.).

As Chesterton put it, while lamenting both passivity and the infatuation with idea-novelty: “If you leave a white post alone it will soon be a black post. If you particularly want it to be white you must be always painting it again; that is, you must be always having a revolution. Briefly, if you want the old white post you must have a new white post.”⁶ He was likely correct to warn that if past virtues were not championed, they would inevitably deteriorate due to adverse conditions. He understood that if things are simply left alone, those are abandoned to a torrent of change. Chesterton seemed to grasp something of why God wants memorials.

4. Century in and out, strong local churches will keep the flame burning. Calvin knew there were no substitutes for the local church.
5. Mission and colonizing are regular parts of our lives.

So our memorial is hardly out of place or counterproductive. It is but a launchpad.

In the case of this volume, these sermons came from a memorializing event. Calvin500 convened in Calvin’s Geneva in order to have sermons preached from Calvin’s pulpit. The symbolism of intent and continuity could hardly be missed. And these sermons were offered as attempts to repaint a homiletical fencepost.

In these, we hear the echoes of Calvin’s voice through a host of talented preachers—many of these will be the finest of their

6. G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (London: Lane, 1909), 210–11.

DAVID W. HALL

generation. Each, I think, upholds the wisdom of Ford Battles' advice on the conditions necessary for Calvinism to have a future: "first, it is known; secondly, believed; and thirdly, practiced." That sage advice sums up the goals of this present work. These also provide a fine example of thriving Calvinism.

Why will Calvinism last? Not because of John Calvin but because of how close he drew to the enduring truths God gave us.

Perhaps we can phrase the challenge this way: are we building Christ's church for the next five hundred years so that people in 2509 will look back on us as we have been noting the contributions of those born in 1509? What kind of Christians we are and our children will be, from this point on, will be of considerably more consequence than the thoughts or births of those five hundred years earlier.

There is a story of an Austrian nobleman, who, raised from the ranks of the common people, was taunted once by a group of haughty princes because of his lack of pedigree. "Gentlemen," however, he replied, "you are correct; you are descendants; I am an ancestor." Wouldn't you rather be the ancestor of a new Reformation like Nehemiah's and Calvin's than the descendant of an old one? Most of us would prefer to lend our hands toward the building of five hundred glorious years of future history than merely be the products of five hundred years of great history past.

Is It Calvin's Faith or God's Word That Lasts?

Finally, each should make sure that we know Christ the Redeemer and that we need his mediatorial work on our behalf. Most of us could use strong and more regular reminders that we are needy sinners and that God in his Word provides the way.

Let us not have overconfidence, presumptiveness, lethargy, or indifferentism. Calvin said: "Faith cannot be long mulled to sleep

without being at last quenched.”⁷ What is needed from this commemoration, as it was in Nehemiah’s time, is to declare a “truceless war” against anything that attacks the worship, truth, or honor of God. Will you join together for that?

I ask each of you, in every way possible, to lend your hand to that great calling. As debtors to God’s mercy, let us renew ourselves to God’s Word, holy times and seasons, repentance from sin, rebuilding the future, and learning from God’s past.

Delivered July 12, 2009, at Midway Presbyterian Church,
Powder Springs, Georgia.

7. W. Robert Godfrey, *John Calvin: Pilgrim and Pastor* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), Kindle edition, Location 2461–74.