

Calvin for Today

Calvin for Today

edited by
Joel R. Beeke



Reformation Heritage books
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Calvin for Today

Copyright © 2009 Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

Published by

Reformation Heritage Books

2965 Leonard St., NE

Grand Rapids, MI 49525

616-977-0599 / Fax 616-285-3246

e-mail: orders@heritagebooks.org

website: www.heritagebooks.org

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Calvin for today / edited by Joel R. Beeke.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-60178-084-3 (hardcover : alk. paper) 1. Calvin, Jean, 1509-1564.

2. Calvinism. 3. Reformed Church--Doctrines. I. Beeke, Joel R., 1952-

BX9418.C366 2010

230'.42--dc22

2010004576

For additional Reformed literature, both new and used, request a free book list from Reformation Heritage Books at the above address.

With heartfelt appreciation for

Richard A. Muller

mentor, encourager, and friend;
Reformation and Post-Reformation scholar, and
promoter of an educated Reformed ministry

Contents

Abbreviations	ix
Preface	xi
Introductory Sermon	
1. What Kind of Love is This? — <i>David Murray</i>	3
Calvin and the Bible	
2. Calvin on the Word of God — <i>Jerry Bilkes</i>	15
3. Calvin on Preaching Christ from the Old Testament — <i>David Murray</i>	33
Calvin the Theologian	
4. Calvin on the Holy Spirit — <i>Joseph Pipa</i>	51
5. Redemption: Speaking Peace in the 21st Century — <i>Derek Thomas</i>	77
6. Union with Christ, the “Twofold Grace of God,” and the “Order of Salvation” in Calvin’s Theology — <i>Cornelis Venema</i>	91
7. Calvin’s View of Reprobation — <i>Donald Sinnema</i>	115
Calvin and the Church	
8. Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church — <i>Neil Pronk</i>	139
9. Calvin on Reforming the Church — <i>Derek Thomas</i>	155
10. Calvin and the Missionary Endeavor of the Church — <i>Michael Haykin</i>	169
11. Calvin on the Early Church — <i>Ligon Duncan</i>	181

Calvin the Ethicist

12. Calvin on Ethics — *Nelson Kloosterman* 195

13. Christian Marriage in the 21st Century: Listening
to Calvin on the Purpose of Marriage — *Michael Haykin* 211

Calvin and His Contemporary Impact

14. The Resurgence of Calvinism in America — *Ligon Duncan* 227

15. Twelve Reasons Calvin is Important Today? — *Joel R. Beeke* 241

Contributors 277

Abbreviations

- CO *Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia*. Eds. Guilielmus Baum, Eduardus Cunitz, and Eduardus Reuss. 59 vols. Corpus Reformatorum, Volumes 29–87. Brunsvigae: C. A. Schwetschke et filium, 1863–1900.
- Commentary* *Commentaries of Calvin*. Various editors and translators. 46 vols. Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1843–55; repr., in 22 vols., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979. Also, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*. Ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance. Various translators. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972.
- Institutes* *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Ed. John T. McNeill. Trans. Ford Lewis Battles. 2 vols. Library of Christian Classics, no. 20–21. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960.
- OS *Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta*. Ed. Peter Barth and Wilhelm Niesel. Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1926–52.

Preface

A study of the Western world in the past five hundred years reveals the overwhelming influence of individuals, for good or ill. World War Two, with its appalling loss of human lives, the horrific Holocaust, and the wholesale destruction of cities was largely due to one man, Adolf Hitler. As historian John Lukacs recently argued, that war might well be called “Hitler’s War.”¹ On a different note, the course of Western history since the Reformation would have been quite different if a Frenchman named Jean Cauvin, better known today as John Calvin, had not been forced into exile in Geneva. The republic of the United States, for instance, would have a very different structure.² Calvin rightly has been named one of ten people who defined the second millennium A.D.³

Not surprisingly, the five hundredth anniversary of Calvin’s birth in 2009 was celebrated in numerous conferences around the world. One of the more significant events was hosted by Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This conference was significant in bringing together a number of academic scholars and ministers who propounded Calvin’s theological ideas. The conference presenters are convinced it is important to remember Calvin because of his ongoing influence on the church and in the world, and

1. John Lukacs, *The Legacy of the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

2. See Mark J. Larson, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the State: A Reformed Doctrine and Its American Trajectory, The Revolutionary War, and the Founding of the Republic* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2009).

3. Alister McGrath, “Calvin and the Christian Calling,” in *The Second One Thousand Years: Ten People Who Defined a Millennium*, ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 66–75.

because Calvin was right in so many of his theological perspectives. Like Calvin, they believe remembering such theology is deeply beneficial to the church today. The fruit of their labor is what you hold in your hands.

The opening conference sermon, preached by David Murray, is the first chapter of this book, reminding us of Calvin's stress on the importance of preaching the Word. Then this book goes on to show how Calvin, who defined himself pre-eminently as a preacher of the gospel, can benefit aspiring preachers today (note especially chapters by Gerald Bilkes on Calvin as a Bible-centered man and David Murray on Calvin as an expositor of the Old Testament). Calvin was the finest theologian among a generation of Christian thinkers that included Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Heinrich Bullinger, Pierre Viret, Thomas Cranmer, John Knox, and Peter Martyr Vermigli. Of them, only Calvin was known as "the theologian," an epithet bestowed on him by Luther's co-worker Philipp Melancthon. This volume explores the contemporary importance of Calvin as the "theologian of the Holy Spirit," which is what B. B. Warfield once called Calvin (Joey Pipa). It also explores three other vital areas of his teaching as a theologian: redemption (Derek Thomas), union with Christ (Cornelis Venema), and reprobation (Donald Sinnema).

Love for the church was another hallmark of Calvin's theology. He affirmed with the early church fathers that no one can have God for his Father who does not have the church for his mother. Four chapters explore his ecclesiology: an overview of his thinking about the church (Cornelis Pronk); a study of how best to reform her (Derek Thomas); her mission (Michael Haykin); and finally, Calvin's interest in the ancient church (Ligon Duncan).

Those deeply shaped by Calvin's thought have sought to apply his theology to all human life and thought. This volume contains two studies in this regard: a general summary of Calvin's ethics (Nelson Kloosterman) and an examination of his thinking about marriage (Michael Haykin). Finally, two studies explore the impact of Calvin today: one traces the growing influence of Calvinism in America (Ligon Duncan) and the other, which closes the volume with a parting word about Calvin, offers twelve reasons why Calvin is important today.

Much more could be said about Calvin, of course. But, hopefully,

the chapters in this book will whet your appetite to learn more about walking with God as Calvin sought to walk.

In editing this volume, which is primarily designed for educated laypeople and ministers, I have let the speakers decide to what degree to retain the spoken style in their respective chapters, which explains why some of the chapters are a bit more formal than others. I hope you will enjoy the mixture.

I heartily thank all the speakers for their diligent work on their excellent addresses and their willingness to turn them into chapters. I thank Greg Bailey and Phyllis Ten Elshof for their invaluable assistance in editing this volume, Gary and Linda den Hollander for their able typesetting and proofreading, Amy Zevenbergen for another great cover design, Michael Haykin for his graciousness in assisting with this preface, and Pauline GeBuys for giving the book a final proofing. Thanks, too, to Chris Hanna and the staff at Puritan Reformed Seminary, who worked hard in planning a very successful first annual conference on behalf of our school. I am also deeply grateful for the kindness and understanding of my patient wife, Mary, and my dear children, Calvin, Esther, and Lydia. Without them, this work would not have been possible.

This book coincides with my completion of twenty-five years of seminary teaching and my first sabbatical, which is enabling me to complete a few projects like this book. For these years and decades, I owe wholehearted gratitude to our ever-faithful triune God who delights to be merciful to sinners (Micah 7:18). With all my heart, I confess with Samuel Rutherford that I don't know which divine person I love the most, but I do know that I love each of Them and need Them all. *Soli Deo gloria!*

—Joel R. Beeke



Twelve Reasons Calvin is Important Today

Joel R. Beeke

Honoring John Calvin may seem a little peculiar to people today. Calvin did not do anything as dramatic as heal a man with his passing shadow or nail his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* to the door of a cathedral. His teaching, which may be summarized as “the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves,” is hardly the kind of stuff that most would consider important half a millennium after it was written.

So why is Calvin important today? Why do we celebrate his legacy? What did he teach and do that merits perpetual remembrance in the church of Jesus Christ? I asked that question of three dozen Calvin scholars and friends. I received scores of pages in response. In this concluding article, I will share with you the gist of what I received.

Twenty-four of the thirty-six friends I contacted responded. Many of the respondents mentioned similar or identical reasons for Calvin’s continuing importance. For convenience, I have grouped all the responses under twenty-one headings, each corresponding to a role Calvin played. Nine of these were mentioned only once by my correspondents. They are:

- Calvin the historian, who unfolded redemptive history for us
- Calvin the polemicist, who combated error and heresy on every hand
- Calvin the pilgrim, who longed for home with eschatological hope
- Calvin the traditionalist, who respected tradition so long as it was biblical
- Calvin the catechist, who stressed the need to catechize children
- Calvin the deacon, who showed sympathy to the poor
- Calvin the vocationalist, who developed a sense of the sacredness of work
- Calvin the law-promoter, who taught the law as a rule of life for believers
- Calvin the author, who promoted God’s kingdom through scores of writings on an astonishing number of subjects

Though these nine roles teach us much about why Calvin is important today, I want to concentrate on the twelve that received more than one vote from my correspondents. I will briefly develop each of these, quoting heavily from this correspondence.¹ Behind each heading I have placed the number of correspondents who listed the role as one of the three primary reasons Calvin is still important to study today. The reasons follow the order of the number of responses, moving from the least to the most. I trust you will find these results as fascinating as I do.

CALVIN THE EDUCATOR

Reason #12: *Calvin models for us a proper recognition of the importance of education—especially seminary training, which is the backbone of the Christian enterprise (2).*

David Hall provides an apt summary of this point:

Calvin broke with medieval pedagogy that limited education primarily to an aristocratic elite. His academy, founded in 1559, was a pilot in broad-based education for the city....

Calvin's academy, which was adjacent to St. Pierre Cathedral, featured two levels of curricula: one for the public education of Geneva's youth (the college or *schola privata*) and the other a seminary to train ministers (*schola publica*).² One should hardly discount the impact that came from the public education of young people, especially in a day when education was normally reserved only for aristocratic scions or for members of Catholic societies. Begun in 1558,³ with Calvin and Theodore Beza chairing the theological faculty, the academy building was dedicated on June 5, 1559, with 600 people in attendance in St. Pierre Cathedral. Calvin collected money for the school, and many expatriates donated to help its formation. The public

1. These quotations, all of which are derived from personal e-mails sent to me in the summer of 2009, are not footnoted.

2. E. William Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1967), 112. The *schola privata* began classes in the fall of 1558, and the *schola publica* commenced in November 1558.

3. Public records for January 17, 1558, refer to the establishment of the college, with three chairs (theology, philosophy, Greek). See Henry Martyn Baird, *Theodore Beza, the Counsellor of the French Reformation, 1519–1605* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1899), 104.

school, which had seven grades, enrolled 280 students during its inaugural year, and the academy's seminary expanded to 162 students in just three years. By Calvin's death in 1564, there were 1,200 students in the college and 300 in the seminary. Both schools, as historians have observed, were tuition-free and "forerunners of modern public education."⁴ Few European institutions ever saw such rapid growth.⁵

The Geneva Academy had a critical role in sending missionaries all over Europe to proclaim the gospel and to organize Reformed churches. Philip Hughes writes:

Calvin's Geneva was something very much more than a haven and a school. It was not a theological ivory tower that lived to itself and for itself, oblivious to its responsibility in the gospel to the needs of others. Human vessels were equipped and refitted in this haven...that they might launch out into the surrounding ocean of the world's need, bravely facing every storm and peril that awaited them in order to bring the light of Christ's gospel to those who were in the ignorance and darkness from which they themselves had originally come. They were taught in this school in order that they in turn might teach others the truth that had set them free.⁶

Influenced by the academy, John Knox took the evangelical doctrine back to his native Scotland; Englishmen were equipped to lead the cause in England; Italians received what they needed to teach in Italy; and Frenchmen (who were the bulk of the refugees in Geneva) were trained to spread Calvinism to France.

Calvin's convictions about education were so influential during his lifetime that the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), a thoroughly Calvinist document, listed as God's first requirement for keeping the Sabbath holy the need to financially support the ministry and theological schools (Q. 103). Would we have listed this as the first item God requires in keeping the fourth commandment? Calvin and those whom he influenced gave seminaries priority because they realized

4. See Donald R. Kelley, *Francois Hotman: A Revolutionary's Ordeal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 270.

5. David W. Hall, *The Legacy of John Calvin* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2008), 13–14.

6. Philip Hughes, "John Calvin: Director of Missions," in *The Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. John H. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 44.

that without them, there would be no solid training of ministers or missionaries. Calvin reminds us that seminaries are the backbone of the church and the entire enterprise of God's kingdom on earth. Considering that Calvin's seminary, and nearly every sound Reformed seminary established since then, abandoned its biblical and Reformed moorings and became liberal within several generations after its founding, do we not have all the more reason today to support the few sound seminaries that exist with earnest prayer and generous giving?

CALVIN THE SOCIO-THEOLOGIAN

Reason #11: *Calvin models for us the wide-ranging impact of his theology on Western European and North American civilization, whether it be the rise of the Western democracies; the development of economic life and international commerce, scholarship, and scientific discovery; or the promotion of the values of human dignity, personal freedom, social justice, and the rule of law (3).*⁷

Andre Bieler writes: “[T]he sum of medieval knowledge was theology—the study of God. The sum of the knowledge of the Renaissance was humanism—the study and knowledge of humanness. Now, the science of Calvin is a theological and social humanism which includes a study of man and society through a twofold knowledge of man by man, on the one hand, and knowledge of man through God, on the other.”⁸ In other words, Calvin's writings display a rare combination of the legitimate fruits of human inquiry, science, and scholarship completed by—and interpreted in the light of—the unchanging truths of the Word of God.

Calvin discussed many aspects of man's life in society and in the world as a necessary corollary to his exposition of man's relationship to God and the way of salvation through Christ. For example, he devoted an entire chapter of *The Institutes* to a wide-ranging and thorough discussion of civil government.⁹

Significantly, in the light of subsequent debates and develop-

7. I thank Rev. Ray Lanning for his assistance on this section.

8. Andre Bieler, *The Social Humanism of Calvin*, trans. Paul T. Fuhrmann (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964), 12.

9. *Institutes* 4.20.

ments among Calvinists, Calvin held that “the Lord through the hand of Moses did not give that [Mosaic] law to be proclaimed among all nations and to be enforced everywhere.”¹⁰ Rather, God granted freedom to each nation to frame its own laws, according to its circumstances, so long as those laws “press toward the same goal of equity,” that is, the equity found in the moral law of God, “a testimony of natural law and of that conscience which God has engraved upon the minds of men...this equity alone must be the goal and rule and limit of all laws.”¹¹

As John T. McNeill writes: “Calvin sets the example of a positive attitude to government and a deep appreciation of the ruler’s office.... The aim of government is the public good, conceived in the broad sense of service to every human person in his welfare, his education, his opportunity to inherit the treasures of culture and religion.... [Yet,] Calvin is a realist in his political expectations. He sets the standards high; but he does not expect sinless perfection in political man.”¹²

Similarly, Calvin had much to say about the freedom of the individual, the stewardship of earthly goods, the dignity of labor, and the rights of working people. As a social force, he reformed the morals of great cities, established the rule of law, and opened the way for people to raise themselves by education and by the diligent use of their knowledge and abilities. Calvinism promoted and encouraged scholarship of all kinds, including scientific research. Calvinism also promoted the right of people to limit the powers of their governors and to change forms of government, if necessary.

But Calvin discussed none of these things in isolation from God and His Word. Rather, he placed his vision of man’s life in the world squarely in the context of man’s twofold identity as a creature made in the image of God and as a fallen sinner redeemed and delivered from bondage to sin through Jesus Christ. The potential for great achievement by the first identity is recovered and enabled only by the second.

10. *Institutes* 4.20.16.

11. *Ibid.*

12. John T. McNeill, “Calvin’s Ideas Still Politically Relevant Today,” in *Calvin and Calvinism: Sources of Democracy?*, ed. Robert M. Kingdon and Robert D. Linder (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Co., 1970), 75–6.

Admittedly, Calvinism's ideas of human freedom and dignity often ran ahead of the actual practice of Calvinists at any given point in time. Even today, some Presbyterians may not be altogether comfortable with the degree of personal freedom of faith and practice set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith, which says, "God alone is lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to His Word; or beside it, in matters of faith or worship."¹³

Nonetheless, Calvinism has been a great force for freedom wherever it has influenced people. Calvinism also has fostered economic development, advances in knowledge, political and social change, and establishment of the rule of law.

Many people today are unaware of the debt they owe to Calvinism for the personal freedom, economic opportunities, and cultural attainments that they value so highly. The emptiness of modern culture, the pessimism of the age, and the excesses of capitalism, socialism, and nationalism that have bedeviled our past and imperil our future prove the folly of separating Calvinistic values for society from Calvinism's vision of who man is, under God, and what he can be only in Christ, according to the Word of God.

Economist and lay theologian Douglas Vickers sums it up well: "The Reformation was first and essentially a theological movement that spread its influence to the socio-cultural level in its implications, chief among them being the sanctity of individual freedom. That influence has been tarnished, notably in its economic aspect, by a failure to recognize that sin is abroad in the world and in the hearts of men."

CALVIN THE EVANGELIST

Reason #10: *Calvin models for us how to teach and practice evangelism and missions (5).*

One of the most fallacious charges against Calvin is that he did not fuel a passion for evangelism and missions.¹⁴ Others assert that Calvin was responsible for relighting the torch of biblical evangelism

13. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, "Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience," 20.2.

14. William Richey Hogg, "The Rise of Protestant Missionary Concern, 1517–

during the Reformation¹⁵ and thus should be credited with being a theological father of the Reformed missionary movement.¹⁶ Views of Calvin's attitude toward evangelism and missions have ranged on the positive side from hearty to moderate support,¹⁷ and on the negative side from silent indifference to active opposition.¹⁸

Calvin's teaching and his practice both confirm that he was a model evangelist. Calvin taught evangelism in a general way by earnestly proclaiming the gospel and by reforming the church according to biblical requirements. More specifically, Calvin taught evangelism by focusing on the universality of Christ's kingdom and the responsibility of Christians to help extend that realm.

Calvin asserted that both God's sovereignty and our responsibility are involved in evangelism. The work of evangelism is ultimately God's work, not ours, but God uses us as His instruments. Calvin writes that the gospel "does not fall from the clouds like rain," but is "brought by the hands of men to where God has sent it."¹⁹ God "uses our work and summons us to be his instruments in cultivating his field."²⁰ The power to save rests with God, but He reveals His salvation through the preaching of the gospel.²¹ God's evangelism thus causes our evangelism.²² He allows us to participate in "the honor of constituting his own Son governor over the whole world."²³

1914," in *Theology of Christian Mission*, ed. G. Anderson (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 96–7.

15. David B. Calhoun, "John Calvin: Missionary Hero or Missionary Failure?" *Presbyterian* 5, 1 (Spr 1979): 16–33—to which I am greatly indebted in the first part of this section; W. Stanford Reid, "Calvin's Geneva: A Missionary Centre," *Reformed Theological Review* 42, 3 (1983): 65–74.

16. Samuel M. Zwemer, "Calvinism and the Missionary Enterprise," *Theology Today* 7, 2 (July 1950):206–216; J. Douglas MacMillan, "Calvin, Geneva, and Christian Mission," *Reformed Theological Journal* 5 (Nov 1989):5–17.

17. Johannes van den Berg, "Calvin's Missionary Message," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 22 (1950):174–87; Walter Holsten, "Reformation und Mission," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 44, 1 (1953):1–32; Charles E. Edwards, "Calvin and Missions," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 39 (1967): 47–51; Charles Chaney, "The Missionary Dynamic in the Theology of John Calvin," *Reformed Review* 17, 3 (Mar 1964):24–38.

18. Gustav Warneck, *Outline of a History of Protestant Missions* (London: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1906), 19–20.

19. *Commentary* on Romans 10:15.

20. *Commentary* on Matthew 13:24–30.

21. *Institutes* 4.1.5.

22. *Commentary* on Romans 10:14–17.

23. *Commentary* on Psalm 2:8.

According to Calvin, this convergence of divine sovereignty and human responsibility in evangelism means that we must pray daily for the extension of Christ's kingdom.²⁴ We should not become discouraged by a lack of visible success in evangelism but pray on, believing that "Christ shall manifestly exercise the power given to him for our salvation and for that of the whole world."²⁵ We must also diligently work for the extension of Christ's kingdom, knowing that our work will not be in vain.²⁶

We evangelize for many reasons, Calvin says: God commands us to do so,²⁷ God leads us by His own example,²⁸ evangelism is our duty to God,²⁹ we want to glorify Him³⁰ and please Him,³¹ we are grateful to Him,³² and evangelism is our duty to fellow sinners.³³

Calvin taught we must make full use of the opportunities God gives to evangelize. "When an opportunity for edification presents itself, we should realize that a door has been opened for us by the hand of God in order that we may introduce Christ into that place and we should not refuse to accept the generous invitation that God thus gives us," he wrote.³⁴ On the other hand, when opportunities are restricted and doors of evangelism are closed to our witness, we should not persist in trying to do what cannot be done. Rather, we should pray and seek other opportunities. "The door is shut when there is no hope of success. [Then] we have to go a different way rather than wear ourselves out in vain efforts to get through it," Calvin wrote.³⁵

Difficulties in witnessing, however, are not an excuse to stop try-

24. *Institutes* 3.20.42.

25. *Commentary* on Micah 7:10–14.

26. *Commentary* on Hebrews 10:24.

27. *Commentary* on Matthew 13:24–30.

28. John Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, trans. Arthur Golding (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), sermon on Ephesians 4:15–16.

29. *Commentary* on Isaiah 12:5.

30. Jules Bonnet, ed., *Letters of Calvin*, trans. David Constable and Marcus Robert Gilchrist (repr., New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 4:169.

31. *Ibid.*, 2:453.

32. *Commentary* on Psalm 51:16.

33. John Calvin, *Sermons of Master John Calvin upon the Fiftie Book of Moses Called Deuteronomie* (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), sermon on Deuteronomy 33:18–19 (Hereafter, *Sermons* on Deuteronomy 33:18–19.)

34. *Commentary* on 2 Corinthians 2:12.

35. *Ibid.*

ing. To those suffering severe restrictions and persecutions in France, Calvin wrote: "Let every one strive to attract and win over to Jesus Christ those whom he can."³⁶

Calvin practiced what he taught. His efforts can be categorized into four concentric circles. First, Calvin evangelized in his local congregation of Geneva, beginning with preaching. Calvin reached out to unsaved people through his preaching, impressing them with the necessity of faith in Christ and what that meant. Calvin made it clear that he did not believe everyone in his flock was saved. Though charitable toward church members who maintained a commendable outward lifestyle, he referred more than thirty times in his commentaries and nine times in his *Institutes* (only counting references within 3.21 to 3.24) to the small numbers of those who received the preached Word with saving faith. "If the same sermon is preached, say, to a hundred people, twenty receive it with the ready obedience of faith, while the rest hold it valueless, or laugh, or hiss, or loathe it," Calvin said.³⁷

Second, Calvin used preaching as a tool to spread the Reformation throughout the city of Geneva. On Sundays, the Genevan Ordinances required sermons in each of the three churches at day-break and at 9 a.m. At noon, children went to catechism classes. At 3 p.m., sermons were preached again in each church. Weekday sermons were scheduled at various times in the three churches on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. By the time Calvin died, a sermon was preached in every church nearly each day of the week.

Third, Calvin sought to evangelize all of Europe. The reputation and influence of the Genevan community spread to neighboring France, then to Scotland, England, the Netherlands, parts of western Germany, and sections of Poland and Hungary. Calvin increasingly viewed Geneva as a kind of model for the Reformed movement and for Christ's reign throughout the world.

Inspired by Calvin's ecumenical vision, Geneva became a nucleus from which evangelism spread throughout the world. In 1561 alone, 142 men were sent out from the Geneva Academy on missions to different places in the world.³⁸ That is an amazing accomplishment

36. Bonnet, *Letters of Calvin*, 3:134.

37. *Institutes* 3.24.12.

38. Philip Hughes, "John Calvin: Director of Missions," 45-6.

for an effort that began with a small church struggling within a tiny city-republic.

Finally, Calvin became involved in overseas missions, most notably, a mission effort among the Indians in Brazil. With the help of a Huguenot sympathizer, Gaspard de Coligny, admiral of France, and the support of Henry II, then king of France, Nicolas Durand (also called Villegagnon; 1510–1571) led an expedition to Brazil in 1555 to establish a colony. When trouble erupted in the new colony near Rio de Janeiro, Villegagnon turned to the Huguenots in France, asking for better settlers. He also appealed to Coligny, to Calvin, and to the church in Geneva.

The Company of Pastors chose two ministers and eleven laymen to send to Brazil. As Neal Hegeman writes:

The first Protestant congregation in the New World was started in Coligny, Brazil, in April of 1557.³⁹ The Coligny Expedition turned out to be short lived as the Vice Admiral Nicholas Durand de Villegagnon (1510–1571) betrayed the French Huguenots and the colonists. The fruit of the first Protestant entrance into the New World was the martyrdom of Jean du Bordel, Matthieu Vermeil, and Pierre Bourdon, who died at the hands of Villegagnon. These men wrote the “Coligny Confession,”⁴⁰ the first confessional and theological document to be written in the New World.

Later, the Portuguese destroyed the remainder of the settlement.

Calvin was clearly interested in spreading the gospel overseas, but that interest was limited by time constraints, his work at home, and by government restrictions. Nearly every door to the heathen world was closed to Calvin and fellow Reformers. The world of Islam to the south and east was guarded by Turkish armies, while the navies of Spain and Portugal prevented access to the recently discovered New World. Additionally, most of the governments in Europe were controlled by Roman Catholic princes, kings, and emperors.

The conclusion is seamless: both Calvin’s writings and practice

39. G. Baez Camargo, “The Earliest Protestant Missionary Venture in Latin America,” *Church History* 21 (1952):135–45.

40. Jean Crespín, “Los mártires de Rio de Janeiro,” trans. G. Baez Carmargo (México City: CUP, 1955), 109–114, as recorded in appendices of Cornelius Hegeman, “El Origen y el Desarrollo de las Iglesias y las Misiones Presbiterianas y América Latina y el Caribe (1528–1916)” (Miami: MINTS), 365ff.

showed his large heart for evangelism to extend the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. Establishing the heavenly reign of God upon earth was so important, Calvin said, that it “ought not only to occupy the chief place among our cares, but even absorb all our thoughts.”⁴¹

CALVIN THE PASTOR

Reason #9: *Calvin models for us how to faithfully pastor the sheep of God as under-shepherds of the Chief Shepherd (7).*

John Calvin was first and foremost a pastor. He faithfully pastored in Geneva for more than twenty-five years and in Strasbourg for three years. As Jim Garretson writes:

Calvin’s work as a pastor to his respective flocks has been a matter of growing academic interest in recent years. Biographers and historians alike have come to realize the profound pastoral focus that characterized his labors in Geneva and Strasbourg. The more one reads his letters and listens carefully to his sermons and treatises, the more one recognizes a shepherd who carried the burdens, hopes, and fears of his people upon his heart. His transparency and humility reveal a tender-hearted man who, like his Master, went about doing good while seeking to act in the best spiritual interests of those entrusted to his care.

Erroll Hulse adds:

As a pastor, Calvin was exemplary in personal godliness, in family life, and in the ministry of prayer. His pastoral care for people is reflected in his letter writing, there being four thousand letters extant. Calvin stuck to his pastoral calling through trials of every kind and persevered through terribly painful physical afflictions.

When Sinclair Ferguson was asked at Ligonier Ministries’ pre-conference seminar on Calvin in March 2009, “What have you learned from Calvin’s life or writings?” he answered:

For me, Calvin has been the model of what a gospel minister in a local congregation should be. He preached every second week, preaching probably eight sermons, and the other week

41. Bonnet, *Letters of Calvin*, 2:134–5.

probably five. He counseled, but he understood that the counseling arose either out of emergency crises that he was able to help, or because under the ministry of the Word all the filth and sludge of human hearts came to the surface. I feel the church desperately needs to get back to the centrality of the ministry of the Word that characterized Calvin's preaching and pastoring. You just need to read his sermons to think, *You know, if I could take my lunchtime and listen to him for forty minutes, asthmatic as he was, struggling for breath, this would be mind-changing and life-changing.* Here is this totally unspectacular man, who never had a laugh in his church, patiently unfolding the Scriptures. It transformed lives pastorally and it gave multitudes of young men the courage to be martyrs for the gospel.

We are crying out for ministries like that—just ministers in local congregations feeding the people of God with the Word of God. And at the end of the day, this is all Calvin thought he was doing. He was a local pastor.

CALVIN THE PIETIST

Reason #8: *Calvin models for us how to bring all of life under the rubric of a biblical, comprehensive piety (8).*

Piety (*pietas*) was the primary reason Calvin wrote his *Institutes*. For Calvin, piety is best defined as the development of a right attitude to God. This attitude includes six things: true knowledge, heartfelt worship, saving faith, filial fear, prayerful submission, and reverential love. All of these have the glory of God as their goal. Calvin's notion of piety comprehensively impacted his worldview theologically, ecclesiastically, and practically.

Theologically, Calvin rooted piety in the believer's mystical union with Christ, which produces communion with Christ and participation in His benefits. He viewed the Holy Spirit and saving faith as the double bond of piety, for the Holy Spirit works piety in us through faith. Then, too, Calvin presented us with the central doctrines of salvation, justification, and sanctification through the grid of piety, for justification is imputed piety and sanctification is imparted or actual piety.

Ecclesiastically, piety is nurtured through the Word and the church. The Word gives content and shape to genuine piety. The church nurtures piety through preaching, which is our spiritual

food and medicine for spiritual health. The church also nurtures piety through members using their gifts to strengthen each other in the fear of God. The communion of saints encourages the growth of one another's gifts and love, since to grow in grace, Calvin said, we are "constrained to borrow from others."⁴² Calvin called the sacraments exercises of piety, for they help promote a right attitude to God. He defined them as testimonies "of divine grace toward us, confirmed by an outward sign, with mutual attestation of our piety toward God."⁴³ The Lord's Supper, in particular, prompts piety of grace received and given. Psalm singing also promotes piety, Calvin argued, for the psalms are "an anatomy of parts of the soul," and therefore relate to all of a believer's experiential life with God.⁴⁴ Calvin viewed the book of Psalms as the canonical manual of piety.

Practically, Calvin's section in the *Institutes* (3.6–10) on the Christian life strongly promotes piety. *Prayer* is the principal and perpetual exercise of faith and the chief element of piety, both privately and corporately. *Repentance*, which involves both mortification (the killing of sin) and vivification (coming alive to life and righteousness in Christ), is the way of piety. God has always intended to give repentance as a lifelong grace. *Self-denial* is the sacrificial dimension of piety by which we learn that we belong to God rather than to ourselves, and we are to learn to yield ourselves and everything we own to God as a living sacrifice. While self-denial focuses on inward conformity to Christ, *cross-bearing* centers on outward Christ-likeness. If Christ's life was a perpetual cross, ours also must include suffering.⁴⁵ Cross-bearing tests piety, Calvin said. Through cross-bearing, we are roused to hope, trained in patience, instructed in obedience, and chastened in pride. Through a *proper estimation of this life*, believers learn that they are stewards of this world and recognize that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift. Thus, they are called to unconditional *obedience* to God's will, which is the essence of piety.

For Calvin, piety involves the entire life of the devout believer and the entire family of the church community. Living piously means

42. *Commentary* on Romans 12:6.

43. *Institutes* 4.14.1.

44. *Commentary* on Psalms, vol. 1, p. xxxix.

45. Richard C. Gamble, "Calvin and Sixteenth-Century Spirituality," in *Calvin and Spirituality*, Calvin Studies Society Papers, 1995–1997, ed. David Foxgrover (Grand Rapids: The Calvin Studies Society, 2002), 34–5.

dedicating every minute to living *coram Deo* (in the presence of God) with intense consciousness, realizing that we must yearn for God every minute of our lives.

How urgently we need to recover this kind of pious living—and how richly Calvin’s own life models it for us! When Calvin died, Theodore Beza wrote, “Having been a spectator of his conduct for sixteen years...I can now declare, that in him all men may see a most beautiful example of the Christian character, an example which it is as easy to slander as it is difficult to imitate.”⁴⁶

Through Calvin’s influence, theology always pursued piety, for Protestant theology and spirituality focused on how to live the Christian life in solitude with God, in the family, in the fields, in worship, and in the marketplace. Few today realize the importance of this comprehensive piety. A few years ago, when I studied Calvin’s view of piety for a chapter in the *Cambridge Companion to Calvin*, I asked one of the world’s leading Calvin historians how I should commence my study. Her response was, “Why would you want to study that outdated subject?” Though sadly neglected, comprehensive piety, as much as anything else, is what makes Calvin so important today.

CALVIN THE COMMENTATOR

Reason #7: *Calvin models for us what good commentaries ought to be and thereby sets a high standard for all successive Protestant commentaries (9).*

Calvin’s *Commentaries* are a great gift to Christ’s church and laid a foundation for the dynamic theology of the Reformation. They show us that Scripture truly is the living Word. For accurate, reverent, and erudite exposition, Calvin has no equal. His method of exegesis has been followed by ministers of God’s Word until today, and the church has been blessed and edified as a result.

The *Commentaries* are a sterling example of the benefit of doing exegesis under Scripture’s authority. Calvin’s *Commentaries* are an exemplary display of the vital principle *Scripturam ex Scriptura explicandam esse* (“Scripture is to be explained from Scripture”). We must not “rush headlong and rashly” into Scripture, Calvin said, “because

46. John Calvin, *Tracts and Letters* (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), vol. 1, page c.

the Spirit, who spoke by the prophets, is the only true interpreter of himself."⁴⁷ We must be reverent, obedient, and teachable, he continued, for the whole world together cannot produce living faith through any interpretation of Scripture. Only the Holy Spirit can illuminate the humble soul seeking after the true knowledge of God.

As pastors and students of the Word, we would be wise to make use of the *Commentaries* in our ministries. As Paul Helm writes:

We should study his commentaries, one of Calvin's greatest permanent legacies to the church.... Calvin writes tersely and without any personal showiness. "I love brevity," he once said. He lets the Word of God do the work. He was granted great insight into the meaning of the text of Scripture, the intentions of the writers, and the scope of each passage. He produced a shelf full of commentaries, one on almost every book of Scripture, but each is made up of short comments on the text. For this reason, they are of timeless value.

The veteran preacher Al Martin says of Calvin's *Commentaries*:

Several years ago, someone asked me what I would do differently if I could turn back the clock some thirty to forty years and restructure my personal ministerial priorities. I said that I would purpose to read all of Calvin's commentaries in conjunction with my regular devotional reading of the Bible. Over the years, I have worked through many Puritan volumes in this way, taking just four or five pages each morning as part of my devotional exercises. I wish someone had directed me to do the same with Calvin's commentaries early in my ministry.

Finally, the Calvin scholar John Hesselink writes:

Contemporary biblical scholars often pay tribute to the special value of Calvin's *Commentaries* because of the theological insight and spiritual depth of Calvin's handling of biblical texts. As an Old Testament scholar, L.P. Smith, points out, "No modern commentator equals Calvin for penetrating the depths of the passage and pointing the way to its application by Christians to the problems of later time." It is noteworthy that the Barthian scholar, George Hunsinger, always reads Calvin's commentaries as well as modern ones in his preparation for the Bible class he

47. *Commentary* on 2 Peter 1:20.

teaches each Sunday at Nassau Presbyterian Church in Princeton. He writes, "The reason is that Calvin thinks theologically about what he reads and that he does so at a level of brilliance beyond anything that recent scholars have to offer."⁴⁸ This kind of testimony is repeated again and again by biblical scholars.

CALVIN THE CHURCHMAN

Reason #6: *Calvin models for us what it means to maintain a high view of the church and her worship without idolizing her or falling into the absolutism of Rome (10).*

While breaking with the clericalism, authoritarianism, and absolutism of Rome, Calvin maintained a high view of the church: "If we do not prefer the church to all other objects of our interest we are unworthy of being counted among her members," he wrote.⁴⁹ Calvin agreed with Cyprian and Augustine, who said, "He cannot have God for his Father who refuses to have the church for his mother."⁵⁰ To this Calvin added, "For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels."⁵¹ So the church is essential for spiritual nourishment and maturation.

Calvin teaches us today that we must avoid a church that is an absolute authority, an infallible teacher, and a center of habitual grace. But we also must avoid a church that is a center for rallies, entertainment, rehabilitation, or politics; in short, one that becomes a music hall, a social institution, or an evangelistic circus. Instead, Calvin calls us back to Scripture to consider what Christ has said about His church.

In the past, Reformed believers profoundly cherished the church. Today, that sense of appreciation is waning. Many Protestants have a depreciated view of the church as Christ's institution.⁵² This lower view of the church is fostered by a misunderstanding of what the

48. *Theology Today* 66, 2 (July 2009):131.

49. *Institutes* 4.1.1.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*, 4.1.4.

52. John Murray, "The Church—Its Identity, Functions, and Resources," in *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 1:238.

church truly is as Christ's institution. It disregards Jesus' words to Peter: "Upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). Calvin would say that we cannot really understand what the church is and why we should appreciate her until we truly understand the meaning of those words. In Matthew 16, Jesus teaches us three critical truths about the church: first, her *status* belongs to Christ ("my church"); second, her *substance* is founded on Christ ("upon this rock"); third, her *success* is due to the workmanship of Christ ("I will build")—all of which should increasingly move us to cherish the church.⁵³

Calvin's ecclesiology impresses us with the truth that Christ is the Head of the church. The living church is the bride of Christ here on earth, which Christ will perfect and bring to glory. Calvin loved the church dearly and often expressed anxiety over her lack of progress in sanctification and grace.

Calvin modeled what it means to be a real, biblical churchman. Garretson writes:

Calvin's work as a churchman remains an important example to today's Christian leader. His was a pastoral theology rooted in the life of the church for the sake of the church. It came to expression in a beehive of activity at the local, regional, and international levels as he tried to constructively contribute to the advancement of Reformation principles with friend and foe alike. His labors as pastor and preacher kept him focused on the spiritual welfare of the church as it is nurtured through Word and sacrament; all his efforts as pastor and churchman were infused with these convictions as he sought to apply God's intentions for His church and society at large.

Too many churches today overlook what Calvin and the Reformation had to say about worship. John Thackway warns us:

The danger today is that we focus on Calvin's doctrine and omit its proper application to the issues of our day. Divine worship is one example. So much Calvin celebration material this year has not included this. It is a strange anomaly in some places, that Calvinistic doctrine can be preached from the pulpit and yet charismatic-style worship can ascend from the pew.

53. Cf. Joel R. Beeke, "Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken," in *Onward, Christian Soldiers: Protestants Affirm the Church* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1999), 23–67.

Psalm singing was a critical part of worship, Calvin believed. As Hall writes:

One of Calvin's early initiatives was to translate music designed for use in public worship into the language of the day. Realizing that what people sing in a holy context has an enduring impact on how they act, Calvin wanted worship—in all its aspects—to be intelligible. Shortly after his settling in Geneva, he urged a talented musician, Clement Marot, to translate the psalms into mid-sixteenth-century French. Calvin wanted participants in worship, not only the clergy, to be able to understand and reiterate the truths of Scripture—this time in poetic structure. His democratizing of holy song and other elements of worship made parishioners participate in divine liturgy.⁵⁴

CALVIN THE TRINITARIAN

Reason #5: *Calvin models for us how to hold an exalted Trinitarian view of God (11).*

Calvin was utterly God-centered in his theology and life. True Calvinists should thus be filled with a holy obsession with the triune God, as He has revealed Himself in the Scriptures, in all His majesty, sovereignty, and grace. Ferguson says:

What seems to dominate the development of the *Institutes* is Calvin's immense Trinitarianism: the unity of the Trinity, his appreciation of the distinctives of each person within the Trinity, and his appreciation of how God Himself is the gospel. That leads him to the high-water mark of Christological thought that you get in Calvin. In some areas of his thinking it seems as though he is the first Christian writer to get this just right. Today, we have very much lost this consciousness of Trinitarianism. It is very difficult for twenty-first-century people to understand why the early fathers fussed so much about how they described the Trinity. Their answer was, "We love Him so much that it is our responsibility to describe Him as magnificently as we can." That was something that really gripped Calvin, and is one of the great things we need to learn from him today.⁵⁵

54. Hall, *The Legacy of Calvin*, 32.

55. Sinclair B. Ferguson, remarks during question-and-answer session, Ligonier Ministries National Conference, Orlando, Fla., March 21, 2009.

First, then, Calvin focused on the fatherly sovereignty of God. Calvin had an exalted view of God in His predestinating grace, His providential government, and His preeminent glory. Curt Daniel writes:

Calvin is known (and unfortunately hated by some) for his rediscovery of the great truth of the sovereignty of God. Some would specifically point to Calvin's appreciation of the majesty of God. I would add that twenty-first-century Christians would do well to emulate his reflection of the seriousness of God. Calvin preached no silly godling but rather an awe-inspiring Lord that towers over the universe. Calvin reminds us to approach the triune God in reverence and not presumption or religious triteness.

Such a view of the majestic heavenly Father has profound consequences in the life of a believer. Maurice Roberts says:

When I read the *Institutes* as a young believer, it was Calvin's doctrine of God that shook me most. I had not until then considered what it means that God is sovereign in every way. I recall the amazement and profound shock that stunned me at the time when I first came to see that God is infinitely in control of all things and knows even my own inward thoughts. It staggered me to think that I had come to Christ only as a result of a divine decree of election. God therefore might have left me in my sins to perish had He chosen to reprobate me. It seems commonplace now to think of God as sovereign in every way, but then it was a shock and one with profound consequences for my own spiritual development. It is Calvin's view of God which, in my opinion, is most needed in the world today.

Second, Calvin focused on Jesus Christ. To Calvin we owe the Reformed development of Christ in His threefold mediatorial office as Prophet, Priest, and King, as well as much of our doctrine of divine Sonship and, perhaps most of all, our focus on believers' mystical union with Him. As David Willis-Watkins writes, "Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ is one of the most consistently influential features of his theology and ethics, if not the single most important teaching that animates the whole of his thought and his personal life."⁵⁶

56. David Willis-Watkins, "The *Unio Mystica* and the Assurance of Faith

Calvin did not intend to present theology from the viewpoint of a single doctrine. Nonetheless, his sermons, commentaries, and theological works are so permeated with the union-with-Christ doctrine that it becomes one of his primary focuses for Christian faith and practice.⁵⁷ Calvin inferred this when he wrote, "That joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our hearts—in short, that mystical union—are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed."⁵⁸

This union must be our starting point in understanding spiritual life.⁵⁹ This union is possible because Christ took on our human nature, filling it with His virtue. Union with Christ in His humanity is historical, ethical, and personal, but not essential. There is no crass mixture (*crassa mixtura*) of human substances between Christ and us. Nonetheless, Calvin states, "Not only does he cleave to us by an indivisible bond of fellowship, but with a wonderful communion, day by day, he grows more and more into one body with us, until he becomes completely one with us."⁶⁰ This union is one of the gospel's greatest mysteries.⁶¹ Because of the fountain of Christ's perfection in our nature, the pious may, by faith, draw whatever they need for

According to Calvin," in *Calvin Erbe und Auftrag: Festschrift für Wilhelm Heinrich Neuser zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Willem van't Spijker (Kampen: Kok, 1991), 78.

57. E.g., Charles Partee, "Calvin's Central Dogma Again," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18, 2 (1987):194. Cf. Otto Gründler, "John Calvin: Ingrafting in Christ," in *The Spirituality of Western Christendom*, ed. Rozanne Elder (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1976), 172–87; Brian G. Armstrong, "The Nature and Structure of Calvin's Thought According to the *Institutes*: Another Look," in *John Calvin's Magnum Opus* (Potchefstroom, South Africa: Institute for Reformational Studies, 1986), 55–82; Guenther Haas, *The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1997).

58. *Institutes* 3.11.9.

59. Howard G. Hageman, "Reformed Spirituality," in *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*, ed. Frank C. Senn (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 61.

60. *Institutes* 3.2.24.

61. Dennis Tamburello points out that "at least seven instances occur in the *Institutes* where Calvin uses the word *arcanus* or *incomprehensibilis* to describe union with Christ" (2.12.7; 3.11.5; 4.17.1, 9, 31, 33; 4.19.35; *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994], 89, 144). Cf. William Borden Evans, "Imputation and Impartation: The Problem of Union with Christ in Nineteenth-Century American Reformed Theology" (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1996), 6–68.

their sanctification. The flesh of Christ is the source from which His people derive life and power.⁶²

Finally, Calvin is the theologian of the Holy Spirit. As Helm notes:

We should always remember that Calvin is the theologian *par excellence* of the Holy Spirit. This means two things: he discredited, in the most thorough and emphatic way, the Roman Catholic medieval doctrine of grace as divine assistance in the production of human merit (channeled through the sacramental system of that church). He replaced it with an emphasis upon the joint operation of the Word of God and the Spirit of God. The Spirit applies the Word's message of sovereign grace to dead sinners through the mediatorship of Jesus Christ; He brings regeneration, illumination, penitence and justifying faith, and the graces of sanctification. So the ministry of the church is the ministry of the Word and two sacraments, and the invocation of the Spirit to make it fruitful, in place of the supposed *ex opere operato* power [literally, by the work performed, hence, containing operative power] of seven sacraments.

Calvin is a preeminent example of a man dependent on the Spirit of God for the interpretation of Scripture. This is especially true when we consider that Calvin did not have scores of other Protestants to lean on as we do today. He was reliant on the works of the fathers and the Scholastics. The church in our time is greatly in need of examples of Spirit-led pastors and teachers. Regardless of the distracted spirit of worship, the church today continues with the same dependence on the Spirit for illumination, justification, sanctification, and the communion of saints as in Calvin's day.

For Calvin, then, a wonderful harmony exists between the three persons of the Trinity. Hesselink captures this well when he writes:

Calvin was thoroughly Trinitarian. No one was more overwhelmed by the majesty and glory of God than he. At the same time, Jesus Christ and His salvific work are at the center of Calvin's theology. Yet, it is still quite appropriate to dub Calvin "the theologian of the Holy Spirit," as did B. B. Warfield, Werner Krusche, and others. "For Calvin, every apprehension of God depends on the activity of the Spirit.... At the edges and limits

62. *Commentary* on John 6:51.

of Calvin's thought the Spirit takes over" (John Dillenberger). However, for Calvin, the Spirit can never be separated from the Word; nor can Christ be separated from His Spirit. Thus, Calvin's focus on the Spirit is always circumscribed by the doctrine of the Trinity. Herein is another distinctive contribution of Calvin to the church.

CALVIN THE PREACHER

Reason #4: *Calvin models for us how to preach God's Word faithfully and powerfully in an expository, experiential, and applicatory manner to God's glory, the edification of believers, and the salvation of the lost (12).*

For Calvin, to live was to preach. William Bouwsma writes: "He preached regularly and often: on the Old Testament on weekdays at six in the morning (seven in winter), every other week; on the New Testament on Sunday mornings; and on the Psalms on Sunday afternoons. During his lifetime he preached, on this schedule, some four thousand sermons after his return to Geneva: more than 170 sermons a year."⁶³ Preaching was so important to Calvin that when he was "reviewing the accomplishments of his lifetime on his deathbed, he mentioned his sermons ahead of his writings."⁶⁴

Calvin called the preaching office "the most excellent of all things," commended by God that it might be held in the highest esteem. "There is nothing more notable or glorious in the church than the ministry of the gospel," he concluded.⁶⁵ In commenting on Isaiah 55:11, he said, "The Word goeth out of the mouth of God in such a manner that it likewise goeth out of the mouth of men; for God does not speak openly from heaven but employs men as his instruments."⁶⁶

The primary motivation behind Calvin's preaching was the conviction that the preaching of the Word of God *is* the Word of God. Preaching is the Word of God because its content is the Word of God. The preached Word does not rival the written Word but rather derives its authority from it. In T. H. L. Parker's words, preaching has no authority in itself, but rather borrows its authority from the

63. William Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford, 1988), 29.

64. *Ibid.*

65. *Institutes* 4.3.3.

66. *Commentary* on Isaiah 55:11.

written Word and thus becomes the Word of God inasmuch as it remains faithful to God's revelation.⁶⁷ Preaching, for Calvin, is also the very Word of God because the preacher is sent by God Himself. This high view of the ministry means that each true preacher is a specially commissioned ambassador of God (an image Calvin liked to use) and thus is the mouthpiece of God to His people.

Despite the emphasis Calvin placed on the importance of preaching, the minister of the Word is not alone in his work. Calvin believed that the Holy Spirit is the "internal minister" who uses the "external minister" in preaching the Word. The external minister "holds forth the vocal word and it is received by the ears," but the internal minister "truly communicates the thing proclaimed [which] is Christ."⁶⁸ Thus, God Himself speaks through the mouth of His servants by His Spirit. "Wherever the gospel is preached, it is as if God himself came into the midst of us," Calvin wrote.⁶⁹ Preaching is the instrument and the authority that the Spirit uses in His saving work of illuminating, converting, and sealing sinners. "There is...an inward efficacy of the Holy Spirit when he sheds forth his power upon hearers, that they may embrace a discourse [sermon] by faith."⁷⁰

Calvin preached series of sermons based on various Bible books, striving to show clearly the meaning of a passage and how it should impact the lives of his hearers. Much like a homily in style, his sermons had no divisions or points other than what the text dictated. As Paul Fuhrmann writes, "They are properly homilies as in the ancient church: expositions of Bible passages [in] the light of grammar and history, [providing] application to the hearers' life situations."⁷¹

Calvin was a careful exegete, an able expositor, and a faithful applier of the Word. His goals in preaching were to glorify God, to help believers grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ Jesus, and to unite sinners with Christ so "that men be reconciled to God by the

67. T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 23.

68. John Calvin, *Tracts and Treatises*, trans. Henry Beveridge (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 1:173.

69. *Commentary on Synoptic Gospels*, 3:129.

70. *Commentary on Ezekiel* 1:3.

71. Paul T. Fuhrmann, "Calvin, Expositor of Scripture," *Interpretation* 6, 2 (Apr 1952):191.

free remission of sins.”⁷² This aim of saving sinners blended seamlessly with Calvin’s emphasis on scriptural doctrines. He wrote that ministers are “keepers of the truth of God; that is to say, of his precious image, of that which concerneth the majesty of the doctrine of our salvation, and the life of the world.”⁷³

The image of the preacher as a teacher motivated Calvin to emphasize the importance of careful sermon preparation. How he accomplished that with his frequent preaching and heavy workload remains a mystery, but he obviously studied every text he expounded with great care and read widely what others had said about it. He then preached extemporaneously, relying heavily on his remarkable memory. Calvin taught that no one will ever be a good minister of the Word except he first be a scholar.

On average, he would preach on four or five verses in the Old Testament and two or three verses in the New Testament. He would then consider a small portion of the text at a time, first explaining the text, then applying it to the lives of his congregation.

Calvin’s sermons were fairly short for his day (perhaps due to his asthmatic condition), ranging from forty to sixty minutes. He reportedly spoke “deliberately, often with long pauses to allow people to think,” though others pointed out that he must have spoken rapidly to complete his sermon on time.⁷⁴

Calvin’s style of preaching was plain and clear. In a sermon titled “Pure Preaching of the Word,” Calvin said, “We must shun all unprofitable babbling, and stay ourselves upon plain teaching, which is forcible.”⁷⁵ Rhetoric for its own sake or vain babbling must be shunned, though true eloquence, when subjected to the simplicity of the gospel, is to be coveted. When Joachim Westphal charged Calvin with “babbling” in his sermons, Calvin replied that he stuck to the main point of the text and practiced “cautious brevity.”⁷⁶

72. *Commentary* on John 20:23.

73. John Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness* (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 122.

74. Philip Vollmer, *John Calvin: Theologian, Preacher, Educator, Statesman* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1909), 124; George Johnson, “Calvinism and Preaching,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 4, 3 (July 1932):249.

75. Calvin, *The Mystery of Godliness*, 55.

76. John C. Bowman, “Calvin as a Preacher,” *Reformed Church Review* 56 (1909):251–2.

Calvin's sermons were not short on application; rather, the application was often longer than the exposition. He taught that preachers must be like fathers who divide bread into small pieces to feed their children. Short, pungent applications, sprinkled throughout his sermons, constantly urge, exhort, and invite sinners to act in obedience to God's Word. "We have not come to the preaching merely to hear what we do not know, but to be incited to do our duty," Calvin said to his listeners.⁷⁷

Parker suggests that Calvin's sermons follow a certain pattern: (1) Prayer; (2) recapitulation of the previous sermon; (3a) exegesis and exposition of the first point; (3b) application of the first point and exhortation to obedience of duty; (4a) exegesis and exposition of the second point; (4b) application of the second point and exhortation to obedience of duty; (5) closing prayer, which contained a brief, implicit summary of the sermon.

John Gerstner says that although Calvin often followed this structural order, he frequently departed from it because "he was so eager to get at the application that he often introduced it in the midst of the exposition. In other words, application was the dominant element in the preaching of John Calvin to which all else was subordinated."⁷⁸

In short, Calvin provides us with one of the greatest models of biblical preaching. Jim Garretson writes:

Calvin's model of preaching continues to provide a helpful historical example of what disciplined, expository, experimental, applicatory preaching looks and sounds like. His published sermons evidence a God-honoring, Christ-exalting, Spirit-empowered example of biblical-theological preaching that is direct, discriminating, and profoundly personal in application. The reader of his sermons quickly feels that this is a man who knows, feels, and has experience of the things of which he is preaching. This personal dimension gave great force to his words as preacher, and people were swept up into the realities that were theirs in and through Christ Jesus.

When Steve Lawson, author of *The Expository Genius of John Calvin*,

77. Bonnet, *Letters of Calvin*, 3:134.

78. John H. Gerstner, "Calvin's Two-Voice Theory of Preaching," *Reformed Review* 13, 2 (1959):22.

was asked during the 2009 Ligonier Ministries National Conference what he had learned from Calvin, he said:

To understand Calvin is to understand him as preacher. He was many things—theologian, author, statesman, reformer—but on the four hundredth anniversary [of his birth]...what was reinforced was *Calvin the preacher*. I think that is what is so desperately needed in the church.... Calvin is just a preacher of the Word, but he was committed to verse-by-verse exposition, which required even greater mental energy to make every text sit up and walk and to give life to the congregation. That impresses me as I study Calvin—his devotion to the pulpit and to the preaching of the Word of God.

CALVIN THE CHRISTIAN

Reason #3: *Calvin models for us how to live an experiential Christian life of suffering and persecution in humility and godliness (13).*

Listen to what several colleagues write about Calvin's life. Malcolm Watts notes:

Calvin was a theologian of *the heart*. Spiritual experience really began for Calvin when "by a sudden conversion, God subdued and brought my heart to docility." Thereafter, as he grew in grace, he discovered that the Lord graciously admits us to "greater familiarity with himself." "How then is it possible for thee," he once wrote, "to know God, and to be moved by no feeling?" When under "the heavy affliction" of his wife's death, Calvin was able to write to Guillaume Farel that the grief would "certainly have overcome me had not He who raises up the prostrate, strengthens the weak, and refreshes the weary, stretched forth His hand from heaven to me."... Calvin was profoundly experimental. He would have had no sympathy whatsoever with that contemporary "Calvinism" that despises the spiritual feelings of the heart. Instead, he would surely impress on us—we who are so lacking in life within—that the vital essence of authentic Calvinism is "to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."

Tom Ascol writes:

Calvin has left a great legacy for the church by virtue of his personal testimony of grace, humility, industry, and perseverance through desperate times. It is far easier to vilify him than it is

to consider his life carefully in light of his historical context. In a hard age when church and state were in complete upheaval, he maintained a steady course as a faithful pastor. Despite his preference to “die a hundred other deaths” than to give himself to pastoral ministry in Geneva, he nevertheless took up that cross and bore it well. Despite threats, opposition, sickness, and mistreatment from those who should have been his supporters, he pressed on in his calling to shepherd the people of Geneva, strengthening the church through consistent preaching and teaching, and leading them to send out missionaries to preach the gospel in hard places.

Howard Griffith says:

Calvin is important today as an example of the spiritual life. Paul tells us to live in this good creation, remembering that “the fashion of this world passeth away” (1 Cor. 7:31). It has always been difficult for the church to do this—to live with joy in this world, avoiding asceticism—yet willingly to give up good things for the sake of Christ’s kingdom. Calvin, it seems to me, is a remarkable example of that. He urged Christian freedom, yet he owned almost nothing. He gave others rest in Christ, but he worked himself to death doing it. I think he did this because he really understood the life-giving power of suffering with Christ. He embraced the cross of discipleship and found the resurrection power of the Spirit.

Donald McKim writes:

In Calvin’s view, the Christian life was all about denying one’s self and serving God by serving other people. Calvin wrote: “We ought to embrace the whole human race without exception in a single feeling of love; here there is no distinction between barbarian and Greek, worthy and unworthy, friend and enemy, since all should be contemplated in God, not in themselves” (*Institutes* 3.7.6). This was Calvin’s expansive definition of the neighbor and love.

Calvin’s impact is on our head, heart, and hands: what we believe; where our confidence is found; how we love and serve others. This covers all our bases. Calvin’s theology can nurture our faith, can nourish our lives, and can call us forth into wider arenas of service today.

Martin Holdt says:

Calvin was an example of consistent godliness throughout his life. When he expressed his devotion to Christ as “my heart a sacrifice for God,” he was epitomizing Romans 12:1 in his life. What loyalty to Christ! There was no letup to the very end of his life. Humility alongside godliness is in short supply in the ministry today, but the life of Calvin is an inspiration to follow him as he followed Christ.

Al Mohler remarks:

When people think of Calvin in terms of his biography, what is often missed is the suffering of the man. Calvin suffered almost every day of his adult life. He was a man who had infirmities, sickness, physical strains, and stresses and pains that would go beyond what we would even discuss in this context. He had to read and study under the most excruciating of circumstances. He had emotional and relational sufferings—suffering of the heart, suffering of being rejected, suffering of opposition, suffering in his family life, which was very tragic. There was death—losing his wife after such a short time, and the grief that comes from loneliness. When you know that, what strikes you is the joyfulness of his writings and of his piety.

Ferguson notes:

Another striking thing about Calvin was that his friends would die for him. They just loved him to death. He had an amazing number of friends, as his correspondence demonstrates. In some of his correspondence, you just get little moments when he kind of breaks through the pain barrier. He’ll say, “We read this and we had a really good laugh.” They obviously loved him, and he loved them deeply. That is, in many ways, the measure of the man by contrast with the caricature we get of him.

Finally, Thackway writes:

In addition to his massive intellect, Calvin’s heart religion is deeply moving and challenging. His self-effacing outlook is linked to this: for if knowing and serving God is one’s sole end, promoting self will be irrelevant. His insistence on a plain coffin and unmarked grave shows whom he wanted everyone to remember when he was gone.

CALVIN THE THEOLOGIAN

Reason #2: *In bequeathing The Institutes of the Christian Religion to us, Calvin models marvelous systematic theology by combining the best of exegetical, doctrinal, historical, and pastoral theology for the church rather than for the academy (14).*

Within a few short years of his conversion and amid the mounting persecution of Protestants, especially in France, Calvin wrote the first edition of the most substantial and foundational statement of the Reformed faith, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), a six-chapter book. Enlarged editions followed, culminating in his final eighty-chapter definitive edition in 1559—which virtually amounts to a new book.

Calvin's *Institutes* are still important to us today for several reasons:

First, they are of great historical value. For centuries, they have served as a gift to God's church, inspiring and edifying both pastors and pilgrims. Stephen Westcott writes:

John Wicliffe (in part), Martin Luther, William Tyndale—all these were used of God to give the Bible back to the people, but if the boy who followed the plow was to know more of Christ than the lordly prelate, Calvin knew that he needed more than just the Bible in his hand. He needed guides and teachers, pastors and preachers. They, in turn, required training, and that necessitated a concise method of extracting the core truths of Scripture, and then fitting them together into a comprehensive scheme: a logical and systematic arrangement to confound the gainsayers and a framework to ground a lifetime of Bible study upon. Calvin provided that in his *Institutes*—not as a book to rival the Bible, but a handbook to help understand the Bible, a handmaid to Bible study, a servant to lead into the depths and wonders of the Bible scheme of redemption. Calvin was the first true Reformed dogmatician, the pioneer Reformed systematic theologian. All Calvinist "systematics" since his day have merely followed in his steps and attempted to refine his work.

Second, they are of great foundational value. Calvin gets at the basics with his emphasis on two-fold knowledge, beginning his *Institutes* with the statement: "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge

of God and of ourselves.”⁷⁹ For Calvin, the knowledge given us in Scripture of God and of ourselves is the beginning and end of theology. The knowledge of God is the issue; the knowledge of ourselves is derivative. McKim writes:

What really counts in life is two things: knowing God and knowing ourselves. These two things are related. Calvin says we cannot gain a true knowledge of ourselves unless we have first looked on the face of God. What really counts about who we are in life is who we are in relation to God. We are to know God, and by this Calvin does not just mean to believe or know that there is a God. He means we are to know who God is, the nature and character of God. As Calvin puts it: “We ought to observe that we are called to a knowledge of God: not that knowledge which, content with empty speculation, merely flits in the brain, but that which will be sound and fruitful if we duly perceive it, and if it takes root in the heart” (1.5.9). Not just “brain knowledge,” but “heart knowledge” of God—that’s what counts, says Calvin. This basic sense of reality is as true for us today as it was in Calvin’s time. Calvin guides us in our most basic beliefs.

Third, they are of great didactic and catechetical value. Mohler writes: “Calvin was a teacher in his *Institutes* and everywhere else. He understood that the church needs to be a learning people. The church should be a school.... At the end of the day, I want to die like Calvin died, studying to the end, preaching and teaching and learning until there comes that day when we see no longer through a glass darkly.”

Fourth, they are of great practical value. Mohler referred to this when asked why Calvin was still important during a question-and-answer session at the 2009 Ligonier Ministries National Conference:

One particular aspect of Calvin’s life that helps to explain why he is so relevant today is that he was the combination of the systematician and the pastoral theologian, the preacher and the teacher, the founder of institutions, and the reformer of the church. Certainly we can look back with much appreciation to Martin Luther, but Luther did not leave us a systematic theology. If you look back to the great figures of the church, no one seems to have left anything like all of what we have from Calvin....

79. *Institutes* 1.1.1.

Here is Calvin's responsibility, considering what was at stake. He understood the gospel of the Lord Jesus and the church was at stake. The crucial questions were: Where is the true church? What is the true gospel? How would a church be established upon the Word of God? The theological maelstrom in which all of this happened, the confrontation with Rome, meant that Calvin was doing theology with his life at stake. This wasn't an esoteric ivory tower endeavor for him. He understood that life and death hung in the balance and that the integrity of the church and of the gospel was in the balance.

Fifth, they are of great spiritual value. Calvin wrote his *Institutes* as a "sum of piety," not as an academic, speculative, dogmatic treatise. He was concerned that our theology should express itself in piety, and that piety be rooted in Scripture. He wanted all our activity to be doxology that flows out of our theology. The *Institutes* establish Scripture as a standard by which we express our faith in worship and guard our faith against error and hypocrisy. For Calvin, the purposes of theology, doxology, piety, and activity of the church are all inseparably connected. This combination promotes a genuine biblical spirituality that is acutely needed today.

Sixth, they are of great contemporary value. In a time of rampant religious pluralism, Calvin's *Institutes* serve, Hesselink notes, as "a necessary corrective for what passes for theology today. *The Institutes* are far more readable than much modern theology, and like most classics, they never grow old or stale. Wherever people long for theology that is biblical, balanced, edifying, and thoroughly Trinitarian, the *Institutes* will be read with appreciation and profit."

No one in church history has matched Calvin as a theologian for pastors and people. It is no wonder Philipp Melancthon called him simply "the theologian." All of Calvin's theological writings are rich, readable, and real. His *Institutes* are magisterial; in some places, they are definitive and sublime. Calvin also gives us room to grow as we stand on his shoulders, for theological service to God's Word requires new life and the cultivation of this new life in the Spirit. As Phil Eveson says, "Calvin's astounding capacity to present the gospel truths rediscovered at the Protestant Reformation and the Christian way of life based upon them in a clear and winsome way is particularly important as our present generation struggles to come to terms with the clash of world views."

CALVIN THE EXEGETE

Reason #1: *Calvin models for us how to handle the text of Scripture with conscientious fidelity (16).*

Whether in his commentaries, sermons, *Institutes*, other theological treatises, letters, church meetings, or interactions with people, Calvin strove to be governed by sound exegesis of the Scriptures. While admitting his failures on his deathbed to his fellow pastors and the members of the town council and asking for their forgiveness, Calvin could say with a clear conscience, "I have not falsified a single passage of the Scriptures, nor given it a wrong interpretation to the best of my knowledge."⁸⁰

Calvin was extremely cautious in interpreting Scripture so as not to yield to his preconceived notions and desires. Consider how careful he was to make Christological applications of many texts in the Psalms that seem to be patently messianic. As Walt Chantry says, "Because he was rigidly bound by the text of Scripture, his exposition of texts often surprises us."

Ligon Duncan writes:

Calvin was the best exegete in the history of Christianity. This is not to say that he was always right in his interpretation, or that the church has no exegetes who have surpassed him in a variety of areas in the last half millennium, but who can rival him among the great theologians for comprehensiveness, accuracy, and succinctness of biblical interpretation? Not Augustine. Not Aquinas. Not Luther. Not Owen. Not Edwards. Not Barth. Only Warfield matches his reliability (but not his scope of exposition, nor his brevity). Who among the great preached and commented so well on so much of the Bible as Calvin? None.

One reason why Calvin was such a great exegete is that he was committed to being governed by Scripture rather than governing Scripture himself. He was a servant of the Word who bowed under its authority.

Al Martin writes:

[Calvin was] ready to embrace in faith all that God has spoken, and also in faith to be content when God is silent. The following

80. John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* (Audubon, N.J.: Old Paths, 1994); http://worldwidefreeresources.com/upload/CH320_SG_09.pdf

words of Calvin are oft repeated in his writings. He says, "Let us, I say, permit the Christian man to open his mind and ears to every utterance of God directed to him, provided it be with such restraint that when the Lord closes His holy lips, he also shall at once close the way to inquiry. The best limits of sobriety for us will be not only to follow God's lead in learning, but, when He sets an end to teaching, to stop trying to be wise."

How much we need to learn today as Christians, and especially as preachers, that to acknowledge ignorance where God has not given us light is not shameful. Rather, as Martin concludes, "it is an expression of a humble mind that gladly embraces God's declaration that 'the secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law' (Deut. 29:29)."

Stephen Westcott enlarges this thought:

Calvin's relation to the Bible is the hinge upon which his God-given success swung open. It is not nearly enough to say that for Calvin the Bible was central and authoritative: it was almighty God speaking directly to him, and his awed reaction was like that of Samuel, "Speak, LORD, for thy servant heareth." He was hungry and thirsty for the Word, to make it the very fabric of his own being: and then to offer its riches and wonders to the whole earth, so far as it was in his power to do so. Hence his great series of commentaries, opening and enforcing Scripture, and his equally great series of expository sermons, often covered the same ground but with greater human application and pathos. In both Calvin brings all of life under the searchlight of the Bible, and the corollary of reformation in the individual, the family, and the state flow naturally from this.

Hart says: "Calvin was a remarkable expositor of God's Word. His commentaries, sermons, and lectures show a keen attention to Scripture. He obviously knew and interacted with church fathers. He also knew the value of systematic teaching, that is, of theology proper. That's why he is so well known for the *Institutes*. But for all of his humanistic and Christian learning, Calvin devoted his intellectual energies to understanding God as He has revealed Himself in His holy Word."

It is no wonder, then, that so many have called Calvin an exegete of the Word, a theologian of the Word, or a preacher of the Word.

What has been said of John Bunyan—"Prick any vein in his body, and his blood will be bibline"—could be said even more profoundly of Calvin. He reminds believers today of our great need to be thoroughly submissive to the Word of God in all that we think, say, do, and teach.

CONCLUSION

To gain a true appreciation of Calvin's life and legacy is next to impossible in a single book. Scarcely is there an area of life in modern history and Western civilization that is not permeated by Calvin's influence. Not just church, theology, missions, and worship, but education, government, economics, industry, and social work bear the imprint of Calvin's thought. Some have said that Calvin had the greatest influence of any individual in the last millennium or since the close of the New Testament canon. The nineteenth-century Scottish church historian William Cunningham writes, "Calvin was by far the greatest of the Reformers. He is the man who next to Paul has done most for mankind."⁸¹ Spurgeon is even stronger: "Among all those who were born of women there has not risen a greater than John Calvin. No age before him ever produced his equal. And no age after him has seen his rival.... The longer I live the clearer does it appear that John Calvin's system is the nearest to perfection."⁸² The English scholar Lord John Morley says: "To omit John Calvin from the forces of Western civilization is to read history with one eye shut."⁸³

Calvin was the foremost leader of the sixteenth-century Reformation. During his lifetime, his teaching affected hundreds of thousands of people—as did his numerous books, which were printed by the thousands even when they were banned.⁸⁴

Today, a fresh hunger for Calvin and Calvinism's biblical doctrine and spirituality is helping the Reformed faith spread throughout the world. Calvinism has a bright future, for it offers much to those who

81. William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 292.

82. Charles Spurgeon, *Autobiography* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1992), 2:372; Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 79n.

83. Cited in *Christian History*, 5, 4 (1986):2–3.

84. Hall, *The Legacy of Calvin*, 33–5.

seek to believe and practice the whole counsel of God as revealed in the Scriptures. Calvinism offers a complete theology, a complete way of life, a complete kind of piety. As Tony Lane says: “Calvin offers a model of a theology that is orthodox without being Fundamentalist, a theology that combines respect for tradition with ultimate loyalty to Scripture, and a theology that combines careful exegesis and theological acuteness. Calvin belongs to the first rank of *both* theologians and exegetes.”

To this, Mark Johnston adds: “Perhaps the greatest thing of all that Calvin has left the church is an appreciation that all of life is religion. In a generation for whom life has become carved up into isolated compartments—for Christians as much as for anyone else—we desperately need to be reminded that our chief end and most comprehensive enjoyment in life is always and only God Himself!”

Finally, Duncan summarizes well why Calvin is important today:

Calvin is important today because he presented a unified, gospel-based exposition of the Christian life that is thoroughly biblical, deeply christological and vitally practical—and desperately needed even in the Reformed community. For Calvin, our theology, doxology, piety, and activity are all of a piece. They are inseparably connected. He was concerned that our theology express itself in piety, and that our piety be rooted in biblical theology. He wanted all our activity to be doxology, and to flow from our theology, and for our doxology to reinforce our theology and piety.

Let me close by answering a question you may be asking if you have not read Calvin up to this point: *Where shall I begin?* I recommend that you begin with three edited books that get to the heart of what Calvin was all about: *The Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life*, which is an extract from Calvin’s *Institutes* (3.6.5–10) on how to live as a Christian in this world; *The Soul of Life: The Piety of John Calvin*, which presents forty-five bite-size pieces of Calvin with chapters on his life and piety; and *365 Days with Calvin*, which provides small doses of Calvin’s commentaries and sermons, with practical applications appended to each day’s portion.⁸⁵ All three of

85. John Calvin, *The Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1952); Joel R. Beeke, ed., *“The Soul of Life”: The Piety of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009); Joel R. Beeke, ed., *365 Days with Calvin*

these books are easy to read. But don't stop there. Having gotten a taste of Calvin, you will be surprised how easy it will be to transition to Calvin's *Institutes*, which may look daunting, but is anything but. Read a section or two of the *Institutes* every day and complete the book in one year. You will not be sorry. Upon completion, you will be, by the Spirit's grace, a far more informed, mature, Christ-centered, and sanctified believer than when you began.

(Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008, and Leominster: Day One Publications, 2008).