



The Expository Genius of

John Calvin

STEVEN J. LAWSON



A Long Line of Godly Men Profile

ENDORSEMENTS

“Through an introductory study of John Calvin’s preaching, Steve Lawson provides a practical Homiletics I refresher course that can be read in one evening, but should be read annually for lifelong impact. Factual yet stimulating, simple yet penetrating, *The Expository Genius of John Calvin* contains many scriptural and theocentric golden nuggets and hands-on practical tips for beginning expositors and seasoned preachers alike. May God use it to revitalize Christ-centered and Spirit-empowered applicatory preaching in our needy day.”

—DR. JOEL R. BEEKE
President, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary
Grand Rapids, Mich.

“An infectious appreciation of the preaching of John Calvin from the pen of Steven Lawson. No one reading this volume can fail to appreciate the debt we owe to the ‘Genevan Reformer.’ Lawson has consulted the best of current scholarship and has produced a comprehensive distillation of the contours of the Reformer’s preaching and, with it, a compelling advocacy of consecutive expository preaching. A magnificent achievement.”

—DR. DEREK W.H. THOMAS
Senior minister, First Presbyterian Church
Columbia, S.C.

“Calvin’s commitment to ‘the word of God,’ whether as inscripturated or incarnate in Christ, is well-known. What has not been given its due, however, is his high regard for ‘words’—both the words of the Old and New Testament in their original languages and of the preacher in his sermons on the sacred text. Steve

Lawson's study treats the second closely, and this is where this book will prove most valuable and is most urgently needed."

—DR. HYWEL R. JONES
Professor emeritus, Westminster Seminary California
Escondido, Calif.

"The cure for the 'dys-exposition' that afflicts today's pulpits has been available for five hundred years, as Steve Lawson so clearly documents in *The Expository Genius of John Calvin*. Preachers reading this book will be moved to take to heart Calvin's encompassing belief in the sovereignty of God's Word—as to its total sufficiency and massive potency. Further, they will be inspired to pursue the deep, enriching paths of *lectio continua*. This is a beautifully written, powerful, and convincing book. It is a must read for all who aspire to preach the word."

—Dr. R. KENT HUGHES
Senior pastor emeritus, College Church
Wheaton, Ill.

"In this book, Dr. Steve Lawson has masterfully presented us with thirty-two keynotes that made Calvin the best preacher of the Reformation, all of them centered around the Word of God preached expositively. He describes for us in a powerful as well as profound way how Calvin brought his congregation upward to gaze upon God's glory as he preached verse by verse, then ended his sermons with prayers filled with the Word! Dr. Lawson is right in saying that because of the spiritual bankruptcy of our time, we need Calvin's once again. I would make this book recommended reading in courses such as homiletics and missions for any serious pastor and student of theology."

—DR. ALONZO RAMÍREZ
Professor, Biblical Reformed Seminary
Peru

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The Long Line of Godly Men Profiles

Series editor, Steven J. Lawson

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A **Long Line of Godly Men** Profile

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John Calvin

S T E V E N J . L A W S O N



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To John MacArthur—
faithful shepherd, peerless expositor,
defender of the faith.

For almost forty years, Dr. MacArthur has stood in the pulpit at Grace Community Church and has been the gold standard of biblical exposition for an entire generation of preachers. His masterful preaching through books of the Bible, as well as his New Testament commentaries, study Bible, seminary, college, missionary academy, and worldwide radio ministry, make him, I believe, the John Calvin of our day.

*For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord,
and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.*

(2 COR. 4:5, NASB)

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Standing on Holy Ground

To step into the pulpit is to enter onto holy ground. To stand behind an open Bible demands no trifling with sacred things. To be a spokesman for God requires utmost concern and care in handling and proclaiming the Word. Rightly does Scripture warn, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (James 3:1).

But sad to say, we live in a generation that has compromised this sacred calling to preach. Exposition is being replaced with entertainment, preaching with performances, doctrine with drama, and theology with theatrics. Desperately does the modern-day church need to recover its way and return to a pulpit that is Bible-based, Christ-centered, and life-changing. God has always been pleased to honor His Word—especially His Word *preached*. The greatest seasons

of church history—those eras of widespread reformation and great awakening—have been those epochs in which God-fearing men took the inspired Word and unashamedly preached it in the power of the Holy Spirit. As the pulpit goes, so goes the church. Thus, only a reformed pulpit will ultimately lead to a reformed church. In this hour, pastors must see their pulpits again marked by sequential exposition, doctrinal clarity, and a sense of gravity regarding eternal matters. This, in my estimation, is *the* need of the hour.

This book is the first of a series that will examine the varied ministries of noted men from church history. Given the pressing need in our time for powerful pulpits, preachers will be a key focus. The reason for this emphasis is simple—I can think of no better discipline for preachers today, apart from the study of Scripture itself, than to examine the biblical exposition of spiritual giants from the past.

To that end, this book will investigate the preaching of the great Reformer of Geneva, John Calvin. Future books in this series will delve into the ministries of other gifted preachers, such as Martin Luther, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, and others. These mighty men were used by God to reform the church, confront the world, and alter the flow of history. At the very epicenters of these extraordinary ministries were pulpits that were anchored to the Word. In a very real sense, these pulpits were the hinges upon which history turned.

As we look back upon those men and the momentous

STANDING ON HOLY GROUND

times in which they lived, certain questions must be raised: What marked the preaching of these influential men? What were their commitments in the public proclamation of the Word? The approaches these men took to the pulpit must receive our closest attention if we are to see another great movement of God in our day.

As we consider Calvin's life and work, we will survey the distinguishing marks of his pulpit ministry, consider the core presuppositions that undergirded his biblical preaching, and examine his personal preparation for the pulpit. Along the way, we will gain an overview of his preaching itself—his sermon introduction, interpretation, application, conclusion, and final intercession. In short, we will explore the distinguishing marks of Calvin's expository genius.

The goal here is not to take a sentimental journey—the hour is too desperate for such a triviality. Rather, the aim of this book is to raise the bar for a new generation of expositors. The method is to see what a commitment to biblical preaching looks like by examining the work of a man who was sold out to this sacred duty.

If you are a preacher or teacher, may you be challenged to a higher standard in your handling of the Word. If you are a supporter of one called to this ministry, may you know how best to pray. May all who read these chapters find them impactful and inspirational, mighty and motivational—all for the ushering in of a new reformation.

I want to express my gratitude to the team at Ligonier

THE EXPOSITORY GENIUS OF JOHN CALVIN

Ministries for their keen interest and involvement in this project. Tim Dick, president and chief executive of Ligonier, first saw the value in this book being placed in your hands. Greg Bailey, director of publications for Ligonier's Reformation Trust Publishing division, did a masterful job of fine-tuning my work, and Creative Director Chris Larson added his talented touch to the graphic design.

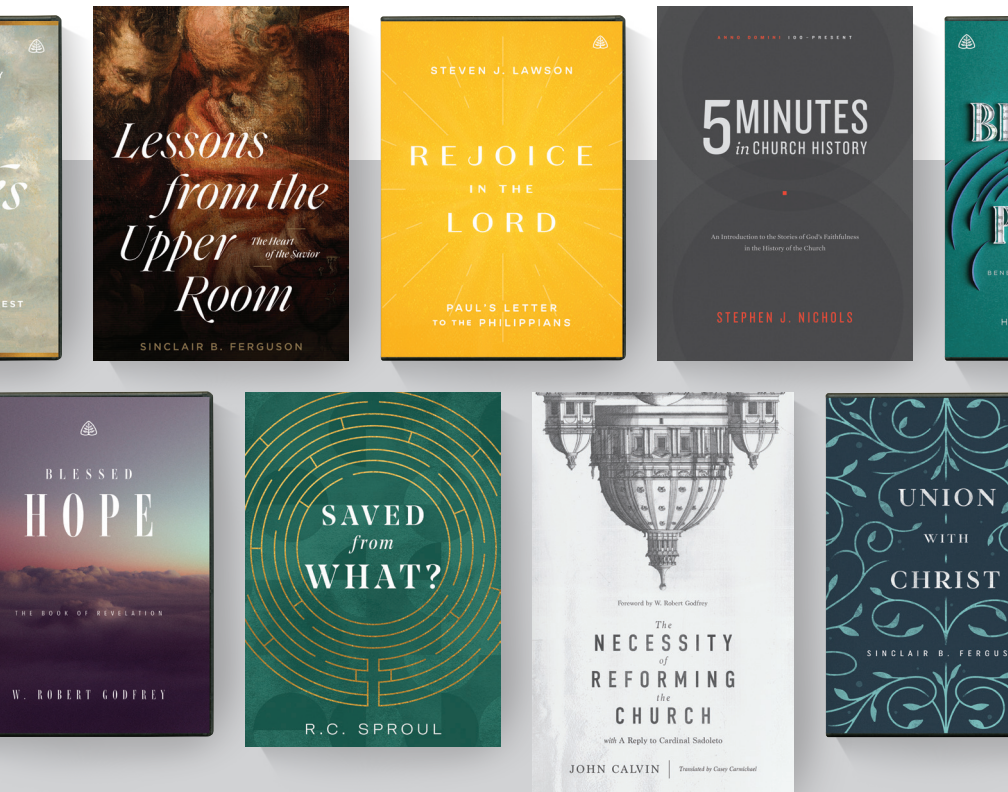
At Christ Fellowship Baptist Church, I want to thank the elders, pastors, and congregation, who urged me to pursue God's will in writing this book. I also want to thank my executive assistant, Kay Allen, who typed this document and coordinated the efforts, and Keith Phillips and Mark Hassler, who provided invaluable help in researching and working with the manuscript.

At home, my wife, Anne, and our four children, Andrew, James, Grace Anne, and John, have only encouraged me in my writing assignments. May all who read this book know the loving home environment in which I study and write.

Soli Deo Gloria.

—Steven J. Lawson
Mobile, Alabama
September 2006

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the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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