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**JOHN CALVIN**   
**A HEART  
FOR DEVOTION  
DOCTRINE &  
DOXOLOGY**

EDITED BY BURK PARSONS

FOREWORD BY IAIN H. MURRAY



## ENDORSEMENTS

“If you have neglected Calvin’s writings for fear they are too difficult or too dreary, this book will change your mind. It is a compendium of his thought presented, as we might expect from these writers, clearly, engagingly, and with a devotional warmth that encourages us to know the God whom we worship.”

—ALISTAIR BEGG  
Senior pastor  
Parkside Church  
Chagrin Falls, Ohio

“Deep calls to deep, and Burk Parsons’ rich and insightful work on John Calvin takes us both deep and wide into the heart of this extraordinary saint. Most of all, I’m grateful to God that a whole new generation of believers can now be introduced to one of the greatest theologians of all time. I highly recommend this book to all who are seeking a closer—and deeper—walk with our Savior!”

—JONI EARECKSON TADA  
Founder, Joni and Friends  
International Disability Center  
Agoura Hills, California

“I personally have benefited in the reading of this work, and most heartily commend it. The value of this book is that it brings out something of John Calvin’s own life and struggles, and then summarizes his doctrinal position, not just as an academic exercise, but in the true spirit of genuine Calvinism, which points men to Christ and justification by faith, producing godliness of life and true communion with God.”

—DR. MORTON H. SMITH  
Professor of systematic and biblical theology  
Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary  
Greenville, South Carolina

“On the five-hundredth anniversary of John Calvin’s birth, it is utterly fitting that a book of essays should appear that is designed for ordinary Christians, not scholars. The scholars will have their conferences, of course, and rightly so, but here is a collection of essays that will inform and move ordinary readers to grasp something of the profound gift God gave to the church in the person and ministry—and especially the writings—of Calvin. Read this book, then find yourself drawn toward many profitable and stretching hours reading Calvin’s *Institutes* and some of his many commentaries.”

—D. A. CARSON

Research professor of New Testament  
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School  
Deerfield, Illinois

“To my knowledge, there never has been a collection of authors of any edited volume under whose ministry I would rather sit than these. What stands out is that they are humble, holy men of God. Most of them are too old—too seasoned—to care about scoring points. Their lives witness to the preciousness of Christ and the importance of purity. Expect no bombast. Expect humble, measured admiration and wise application. This a good way to meet John Calvin: in the holy hearts of humble servants of Christ. The only better way would be to read the man himself.”

—JOHN PIPER

Pastor for preaching and vision  
Bethlehem Baptist Church  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

“Calvinism often gets bad press, and John Calvin must rank among the least understood—and most misunderstood—of all the great leaders in church history. We badly need a fresh look at both, one that rightly reveals Calvin not as a doctrinal demagogue, but as a loving pastor, passionate evangelist, and sympathetic counselor, and above all as someone concerned to have all his thinking and living rendered in terms of obedience to God.

This is it! Twenty modern pastors, preachers, and authors have combined their knowledge and skills to produce a book that will inform and inspire countless readers for years to come. I know of nothing quite like it and I commend it enthusiastically and without reservation.”

—JOHN BLANCHARD

Preacher, teacher, and apologist  
Author, *Does God Believe in Atheists?*

“Reading Burk Parsons’ new book, *John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, and Doxology*, was like following a great chef on an early-morning trip to the farmer’s market. Burk chose an incredible array of authors to speak to the most important themes of John Calvin’s life, and the combination has resulted in a veritable feast of delicacies and delights. Surely this book will help introduce one of history’s most gospel-centered men, Calvin, to a generation that wants to relegate him to dusty antiquity and dry orthodoxy. To read Calvin is to understand what a mind informed by the gospel and a heart enflamed with God’s grace is supposed to look like! Thank you, chef Parsons!”

—SCOTTY SMITH

Senior pastor  
Christ Community Church  
Franklin, Tennessee

“There is a fresh breeze blowing in these pages. A new generation has discovered the riches of biblical truth to be found in John Calvin’s work. Written in an inviting and accessible style, this book extends an invitation to all to come and learn as well. However, what they will learn will have far less to do with Calvin and far more to do with the centrality and greatness of the triune God whom he served. Calvin would have wanted it that way, and so do we.”

—DAVID F. WELLS

Senior research professor  
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary  
South Hamilton, Massachusetts

“Virtually all of the great Reformers of the sixteenth century were students of the great church father Augustine. If we are to experience another renewal of the church, a renewal that many of us see as much needed today, I believe it will come through those who have been careful students of John Calvin. If you want to know why I say this or have any doubt that Calvin is all that important, then read this fine book. It presents a veritable kaleidoscope of perspectives on the many-sided greatness of this man and his work. I highly recommend it.”

—G. I. WILLIAMSON

Pastor, editor

Author, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*

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D E D I C A T I O N

*The contributors dedicate this book to R.C. Sproul, who  
has inspired a new generation of reformers to know, love,  
and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

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## IAIN H. MURRAY

**W**e may be sure that the man who wanted no stone to mark his grave would want no festivities to mark the anniversary of his birth. Why, then, the present volume? The answer is that it is the work of God that is to be remembered. In John Calvin's words, "God's loving-kindness to us was wonderful, when the pure Gospel emerged out of that dreadful darkness in which it had been buried for so many ages."<sup>1</sup> For him, the Reformation was a movement from heaven that turned attention from a man-centered religion to God; the message was "Call no man Master. Cease from man and attend to the Word of God." The hope of this book is that the memory of Calvin will aid in the recovery of God-centered Christianity today.

On the opening page of every edition of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* stand the words that were the unifying motif of his life: "True and sound wisdom consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves." So he first wrote in 1536. The next year, at the age of 28, he spoke of "true piety" as "a pure and true zeal which loves God altogether as Father, and reveres him truly as Lord, embraces his justice and dreads to offend him more than to die."<sup>2</sup> Through all the years that followed, the emphasis remained the same: "It is necessary always to begin with this principle—to know the God whom we worship."<sup>3</sup>

Calvin saw himself as a sinner who owed all that he was to God. It was God who "subdued" his mind to the knowledge of Christ; his call to Geneva was "as if God from heaven had laid his mighty hand upon me to arrest me"; and the subsequent ministry, in all its successes and setbacks, was to him an illustration of the truth, "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand" (Prov.

19:21). This text was equally true of the blessings and trials of his personal life. When he consoled a fellow pastor on the death of his wife, it was with the lesson he had first preached to himself seven years before: “We unjustly defraud God of his right, unless each of us lives and dies dependent on his sovereign pleasure. . . . Our principal motive of consolation consists in this, that by the admirable providence of God, the things we consider adverse, contribute to our salvation, and that we are separated in the world only that we may be once more reunited in his celestial kingdom.”<sup>4</sup>

The piety that was recovered at the Reformation has sometimes been caricatured as a life of cold, austere obedience to God. Certainly Calvin taught, “Nothing pleases God but what he has commanded in his word; and the true principle of piety is the obedience which we ought to render to him alone.”<sup>5</sup> But the caricature rests on ignorance of the connection between the love of God and the gratitude of believing hearts. To glorify this gracious God and not to displease Him are necessarily the desires of those whom He redeems. The words of a later hymn writer come straight from the gospel of the Reformation:

*To see the law by Christ fulfilled  
And hear his pardoning voice  
Changes the slave into a child  
And duty into choice.*<sup>6</sup>

In reading Calvin, nothing challenges me more than the way in which the obedience due to God controlled his thinking and living. There were pastoral issues about which he knew how to be moderate and sensitive, but when issues concerned the glory of God, the worship of His name (“to be preferred to the safety of men and angels!”<sup>7</sup>), the purity of the church, and the truth of the gospel, he was resolute. For Calvin, to accept compromise when Scripture has spoken is to affront the divine majesty of the Author. What Scripture says, God says. We may assert this readily enough in our easygoing days, but for many in the six-

## FOREWORD

teenth century (as for some at the present time), to act upon it meant being ready to die. Calvin never hid from those to whom he preached that believing the truth could well be their preparation for prison and martyrdom. Not without reason has it been said that Calvinism is a message for hard times.

It is the knowledge that a Christian is identified with the cause of God that raises this perspective from any shade of gloom. Nothing in the short term, or in death itself, can mean defeat: God must win. It is the vision of God that changes everything. Calvin writes, "We shall never be fit for the service of God, if we look not beyond this fleeting life."<sup>8</sup> He adds, "When any person has fixed his eyes on God, his heart will be invincible, and utterly incapable of being moved."<sup>9</sup>

This means that work done according to the will of God, and by His enabling, will be lasting work. All else will be found to be "wood, hay, straw" when "the Day will disclose it" (1 Cor. 3:12–13). The most useful Christian life, therefore, is the one lived near to God. To those who obey and follow when He calls, the promise is sure: "I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (John 15:16). From these words, Calvin drew confidence: "The Church will last to the very end of the world; for the labour of the apostles yields fruit even in the present day, and our preaching is not for a single age only, but will enlarge the Church, so that new fruit will be seen to spring up after our death."<sup>10</sup>

"Lift your eyes and look to the heaven," says a Korean hymn; that is the direction in which our thought needs to be directed today. Our trifling concerns and our worldliness result from the poverty of our knowledge of God.

Jean Cadier, speaking of the need for deliverance from preoccupation with self, reports the following incident:

I am thinking of the man who said to me a short time ago as he came out of a lecture, "I have been converted through reading the *Institutes*." And when I asked him to tell me what exactly had

been the message which had effected this transformation in his life, he replied: "I learnt from reading Calvin that all the worries about health and about the uncertain future which had hitherto dominated my life were without much importance and that the only things that counted were obedience to the will of God and a care for His glory."<sup>11</sup>

As I think of the various authors of this book, and contrast their names with those of the comparative few leaders who were preaching and writing on these themes at the time of the last Calvin anniversary (the fourth centenary of his death in 1964), I see much to hearten us. Men have been raised up in the intervening years whose names, with few exceptions, were unknown in 1964. Since that time, also, a great number of Calvin's writings have become widely available and have found a new generation of readers across the world. We may say with Ezra, God has given us "a little reviving" (Ezra 9:8). Yet there are dangers for those who revere the memory of Calvin, and I will mention two that present themselves to me:

First, in our circles, piety and godliness are not the characteristics of Calvinistic belief to the extent that they ought to be. We believe that divine revelation has come to us in words and in propositions, and for these we must contend. But truth is only rightly believed to the extent that it is embodied in life. The gospel spread across Europe in the sixteenth century primarily through the witness of transformed people. To Christian women, facing martyrdom in Paris, Calvin wrote:

How many thousands of women have there been who have spared neither blood nor their lives to maintain the name of Jesus Christ, and announce his reign! Has not God caused their martyrdom to fructify? . . . Have we not still before our eyes, examples of how God works daily by their testimony, and confounds his enemies, in such a manner that there is no preaching of such efficacy as the fortitude and perseverance they possess in confessing the name of Christ?<sup>12</sup>

## FOREWORD

Too often, in our time, beliefs associated with the name of Calvin have been identified with the lecture hall and the academy. Ford Lewis Battles, to whom we owe the best current translation of the *Institutes*, has written: “All the forces contrary to a truly Reformed faith that stood in the way in the sixteenth century have their late-twentieth-century counterpart. Lukewarm Nicodemites and learned scoffers are in the very bosom of the church, and—I may say—the seminaries.”<sup>13</sup> I once had the misfortune to hear addresses on “the five points of Calvinism” delivered as though we were attending a chemistry lecture. In contrast, I am thankful that so many of the contributors to the present book are *preachers* first and foremost.

It is not by argument or teaching alone that the current scene can be reversed. “The kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power” (1 Cor. 4:20). “I will supplicate our heavenly Father,” Calvin writes to suffering Christians, “to fill you with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>14</sup> There alone is the source of witness that is not in word only. The explanation of the Reformation lies in one short sentence of John Knox: “God gave his Holy Spirit to simple men in great abundance.”<sup>15</sup>

Second, our example needs to be the best argument that belief in divine sovereignty does not weaken evangelistic preaching. There are prominent exceptions to the contrary—the names of some of them will be found in these pages—but in surveying the Christian scene at large, there is some justification for the idea that Calvinistic belief hinders evangelistic passion. Facing this perception, we would be mistaken to suppose we are free of blame. We have found it easier to be “teachers” and “defenders” of the truth than to be evangelists who are willing to die that men might be converted. Sometimes the impression can be given to other Christians that we regard “Calvinism” as co-terminus with Christianity and that we think all gospel preaching can be fitted into the five points. The five points are not to be depreciated, but God is incomprehensibly greater than our understanding, and there are other truths to be preached far beyond our capacity to harmonize.

Calvin cautions us here. In speaking of the indiscriminate invitations

of Christ in John 5, he observes, “He is ready to give himself, provided that they are only willing to believe.”<sup>16</sup> He can say that “nothing of all that God wishes to be saved shall perish”<sup>17</sup> and yet warn his hearers lest the opportunity of salvation “pass away from us.”<sup>18</sup> He speaks of Christ’s “great kindness” to Judas and affirms, “Christ does not lay Judas under the necessity of perishing.”<sup>19</sup> If on occasions, when in controversy with opponents of Scripture, Calvin unduly presses the implications of a doctrine, he guards against that temptation in his general preaching and teaching. He does not hesitate to teach that God loves those who will not be saved;<sup>20</sup> indeed, he writes that God “wishes all men to be saved,” and to the objection that God cannot wish what He has not ordained, it is enough for Calvin to confess: “Although God’s will is simple, yet great variety is involved in it, as far as our senses are concerned. Besides, it is not surprising that our eyes should be blinded by intense light.”<sup>21</sup> Our duty, he would say, is to adore the loftiness of God rather than investigate it.

Where Calvinistic truth is presented as though there is no love in God to sinners as sinners—that His only regard is for the elect—it is no wonder that evangelistic preaching falters. The preacher has to be possessed with a love for all or he will not represent the Savior in whose name he speaks. The men of Calvinistic belief who have stood out as evangelists and missionaries have always been examples of this. It was an eminent Welsh Calvinist, William Williams, Pantycelyn, who said, “Love is the greatest thing in religion, and if that is forgotten nothing can take its place.”<sup>22</sup>

Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, to whom, mainly, Britain owed the republication of the *Institutes* in 1949, used to advise us not to quote others unless we were sure we could not say it so well ourselves. Those who take up this book will soon notice that it is our inability to say it as well that lies behind the many fine quotations of Calvin in these pages. The lesson from that should not be lost. The best purpose will have been served if the reader comes to the conclusion, “I ought to be read-

## FOREWORD

ing Calvin himself!” As Dr. J. I. Packer said when the recovery of the doctrines of grace was only beginning in England, “The student will find that Calvin makes richer and more straightforward reading than all his expositors.”<sup>23</sup>

It would be a fine thing if we could all come to the decision that the Puritan leader John Cotton reached in the latter years of his ministry in Boston. Cotton Mather tells us that Cotton, on “being asked, why in his latter days he indulged *nocturnal studies* more than formerly, he pleasantly replied, ‘Because I love to sweeten my mouth with a piece of Calvin before I go to sleep.’”<sup>24</sup>

None of us would regret taking up the same habit. Above all, it is to be fervently hoped that these pages will be used to do far more than to mark an anniversary. Our prayer is that they will fall into the hands of a young generation, called to the service of Christ, and that numbers of them will take up the apostolic resolution, “We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4).

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 2:220.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Instruction in Faith*, trans. Paul T. Fuhrmann (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 22.

<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 5:500.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Letters of John Calvin*, ed. Jules Bonnet, trans. M. R. Gilbert (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Education, 1858), 3:236.

<sup>5</sup> Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, 1:218.

<sup>6</sup> From the hymn “Love Constraining to Obedience,” by William Cowper.

<sup>7</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Tracts* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1851), 3:260.

<sup>8</sup> Calvin, *Letters of John Calvin*, 3:128.

<sup>9</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 2:47.

## JOHN CALVIN

- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:121.
- <sup>11</sup> Jean Cadier, *The Man God Mastered*, trans. O.R. Johnston (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1960), 178.
- <sup>12</sup> Calvin, *Letters of John Calvin*, 3:365–366.
- <sup>13</sup> John Calvin, *The Piety of John Calvin*, trans. and ed. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 25.
- <sup>14</sup> Calvin, *Letters of John Calvin*, 3:232.
- <sup>15</sup> John Knox, *Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh: James Thin, 1895), 1:31.
- <sup>16</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, 1:261.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:407.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:305.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:72.
- <sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Calvin on John 3:16 and *Sermons on Deuteronomy*, trans. Arthur Golding (1583; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 167.
- <sup>21</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Twenty Chapters of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1850; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 2:247. For more on this subject, see John Piper, “Are There Two Wills in God,” in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).
- <sup>22</sup> This theme is well handled in relation to Calvin by R. C. Reed, *The Gospel as Taught by Calvin* (repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979). See also James McGuire, “A Kinder, Gentler Calvinism,” in D. Steele, C. C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2004), and Iain H. Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995).
- <sup>23</sup> Quoted in Cadier, *The Man God Mastered*, 187. For those looking for a starting point in the reading of Calvin himself, I would recommend J. Graham Miller, *Calvin’s Wisdom, An Anthology Arranged Alphabetically* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992).
- <sup>24</sup> Cotton Mather, *The Great Works of Christ in America* (repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 1:274.



## BURK PARSONS

**J**ohn Calvin was a churchman for all ages. He was a Reformer, a pastor, and a revolutionary. He was a selfless husband, a devoted father, and a noble friend. But above all Calvin was a man whose mind was humbled and whose heart was mastered by the Lord God Almighty. His life's prayer—"I offer my heart to you, O Lord, promptly and sincerely"—was an unwavering declaration of surrender to the Lord, whom he sought to love with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength. He saw himself first and foremost as a disciple of Jesus Christ, and he desired earnestly to be taught daily "in the school of Jesus Christ"<sup>1</sup> so that he might rightly know the Lord in order to "trust, invoke, praise, and love him."<sup>2</sup>

This, in essence, is also the purpose of this present volume—that the people of God might more fully trust, invoke, praise, and love the Lord. Calvin would have wanted readers to come away from this book not primarily with a greater knowledge of the life, ministry, and doctrine of the man John Calvin, but with a greater knowledge of all the doctrines of God and, what is more, with a greater knowledge and love of God Himself, leading to a life of sacrificial duty and overwhelming delight as citizens of His kingdom.

The pastors and teachers who have contributed to this volume in commemoration of Calvin's five-hundredth birthday have done so on account of their desire to honor the Lord by providing the church with an accessible book on the life, ministry, and doctrine of the man who was first and foremost a pastor to the people of God whom he served throughout his life.

## JOHN CALVIN

Although many Christians throughout the world are somewhat familiar with Calvin's doctrines, most are unfamiliar with the man who was so passionately dedicated to prayer and the ministry of the Word. Given all that the Lord accomplished in him and through him, his legacy to Christians in the twenty-first century is one of devotional, doctrinal, and doxological surrender to the Lord. As such, we would do well to heed the words of Calvin's longtime friend and biographer, Theodore Beza, who penned the following shortly after Calvin's death: "Since it has pleased God that Calvin should continue to speak to us through his writings, which are so scholarly and full of godliness, it is up to future generations to go on listening to him until the end of the world, so that they might see our God as he truly is and live and reign with him for all eternity. Amen. (19 August 1564)."<sup>3</sup>

### NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Letters of John Calvin*, ed. Jules Bonnet, 4 vols. (Eugene, Ore: Wipf & Stock, 2007), July 20, 1558.
- <sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Library of Christian Classics, XX–XXI (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 1.14.22.
- <sup>3</sup> Theodore Beza, *The Life of John Calvin* (1564; repr. Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1997), 140.



## Contributors

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# THE HUMILITY OF CALVIN'S CALVINISM

BURK PARSONS

*As the surest source of destruction to men is to obey themselves, so the only haven of safety is to have no other will, no other wisdom, than to follow the Lord wherever he leads. Let this, then, be the first step, to abandon ourselves, and devote the whole energy of our minds to the service of God. By service, I mean not only that which consists in verbal obedience, but that by which the mind, divested of its own carnal feelings, implicitly obeys the call of the Spirit of God.<sup>1</sup>*

—JOHN CALVIN

**I**t has not been my habit to refer to myself as a Calvinist; if memory serves, I have never done so, primarily because I don't think John Calvin would want me to. In fact, whenever another Christian asks me what I am (with the seeming hope of determining my particular denominational affiliation), I respond simply, "I am a Christian." Nevertheless, if I were ever truly pressed on the matter of being a Calvinist, I suppose I would respond by saying, "Yes, I am a Calvinist because I am a Christian, and I am a Christian because I believe the gospel."

The nineteenth-century Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon said it this way:

I have my own private opinion that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified, unless we preach what nowadays is called Calvinism. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else. I do not believe we can preach the gospel, if we do not preach justification by faith, without works; nor unless we preach the sovereignty of God in His dispensation of grace; nor unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable, conquering love of Jehovah; nor do I think we can preach the gospel, unless we base it upon the special and particular redemption of His elect and chosen people which Christ wrought out upon the cross; nor can I comprehend a gospel which lets saints fall away after they are called, and suffers the children of God to be burned in the fires of damnation after having once believed in Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

A question remains, however, for many Calvinistically challenged Christians throughout the world: “What is a Calvinist?” For many, the answer is as simple as a simplistic adherence to the five points of Calvinism. That may be a helpful starting point for some, but I would suggest it may not be the best place to start for most Christians in their pursuit of the fundamentals of Calvinism according to Calvin.

I still remember my first contact with Calvinism. When I was a student in college, a good friend of mine gave me a copy of a monthly Bible-study magazine called *Tabletalk*. On the cover of that issue was a picture of an infant with the words “Total Depravity” stamped across the baby’s smiling face. Shortly thereafter, I scheduled a meeting with my pastor and asked him whether he could explain what Calvinism is. His ten-second answer went something like this: “Calvinism is the doctrine that teaches that God picks those He wants and condemns those He doesn’t want.” He went on to talk about the biblical aberration of

the doctrine and why I should stay as far as I could from Calvinism and Calvinists. He then explained how we must study the Word of God alone in order to discern truth from error: “If you study Calvinism,” he admonished me “then you might become a Calvinist, but if you study the Word of God you will be able to combat any doctrine that is not biblical.” Although his description of Calvinism was overwhelmingly deficient, his exhortation was exactly what I needed to hear.

I began to study everything I could get my hands on regarding Calvinism. For years, I went to every theology conference I could afford, I read every issue of *Tabletalk* cover to cover, and I studied every book or pamphlet I could find on the subject. More important, throughout that time I pored over Scripture, examining what it had to say about all things purportedly Calvinistic. Though I fought against Calvinism with all the free will I could muster, when it came right down to it, it wasn't books, conferences, or even well-edited magazines that fundamentally convinced me of Calvinism; it was the clear teaching of the Word of God that did it—through and through. In the end, I had spent all my resistance on something, and on Someone, I could not resist.

Still, my understanding of Calvinism was somewhat incomplete. Sure, I affirmed the five points of Calvinism, and I could even biblically explain and defend each of them; I could say a few things about Calvin himself; and I could provide a general answer to the question “What is a Calvinist?” But alas, I soon discovered, such things do not add up to the sum total of what it means to be a fully confirmed Calvinist.

### **THE HEART OF CALVINISM AND GOD'S GLORY IN IT**

Since first hearing about Calvin and Calvinism, I have continued to examine what it means to be a true, dyed-in-the-wool Calvinist. Although my pursuit of Calvinism will be a lifelong task, during the past few years I have become increasingly concerned about how Calvinism is generally expressed by multitudes of my twenty-first-century Calvinist comrades.

I would suggest that there are many self-proclaimed Calvinists whose Calvinism runs only as deep as the five points, only as far as the last conference they attended, or perhaps only as long as the list of Calvinist theologians they can stack up against a similar list of non-Calvinists. They have perhaps found themselves prancing gleefully amid a valley of bright red tulips, but have not lifted their heads to behold the lush green forests and glorious mountains all around them.

Christopher Catherwood, in his book *Five Leading Reformers*, offers a word of warning to all Calvinists:

We must be “Bible Calvinists” not “system Calvinists.” We can all too easily get sucked into what we feel is a neat system of thought, and forget that we ought to make everything that we believe compatible with Scripture, even if that means jettisoning ideas that flow well in a purely logical sense but are nonetheless incompatible with what the Bible teaches. Although Calvin did not make that mistake himself, it is arguable that many of his followers have done so over the ensuing centuries—and I include myself, as a Calvinist, in that caution!<sup>3</sup>

Although I would argue that “Bible Calvinism” necessarily, and rightly, engenders “system Calvinism,” Catherwood’s admonition is one we all should heed with care. Calvin was a Christian who first and foremost lived and breathed the living and active Word of God, and all true Calvinists must follow his example.<sup>4</sup> Calvin labored over his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*—which is unquestionably the most majestic volume in all of human history next to sacred Scripture<sup>5</sup>—in order to help those preparing for the pastoral ministry to study the Word of God and have “easy access to it and to advance in it without stumbling.”<sup>6</sup>

According to Calvin, we are to be “daily taught in the school of Jesus Christ.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, we must be students of Scripture if we are to possess right and sound doctrine: “Now in order that true religion may

shine upon us, we ought to hold that it must take its beginning from heavenly doctrine and that no one can even get the slightest taste of right and sound doctrine unless he be a pupil of Scripture.”<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere Calvin writes, “Let us not take it into our heads either to seek out God anywhere else than in his Sacred Word, or to think anything of him that is not prompted by his Word, or to speak anything that is not taken from that Word.”<sup>9</sup> This, writes T. H. L. Parker, “is Calvin’s theological programme—to build on the Scripture alone.”<sup>10</sup>

The entirety of Calvin’s ministry was established fundamentally on the Word of God. In accordance with the Reformation credo *ad fontes*, “to the sources” (particularly to the only infallible source), Calvin’s *Institutes* was a summary of the Christian religion according to Scripture. This was Calvin’s theological *modus operandi*, as Calvin scholar Ronald S. Wallace maintains: “We could, of course, argue cogently that the whole of his later teaching and outlook developed from the Bible. He insisted always that tradition must be constantly corrected by, and subordinated to, the teaching of Holy Scripture.”<sup>11</sup>

Through the years, as I have spoken with fellow Reformed pastors throughout the world, I have often sensed their grief over the multitudes of so-called Calvinists who may have worked out some of the doctrinal difficulties of one point or another but have not even begun to grasp all the magnificent nuances of Calvin’s Calvinism. Such Calvinism is engendered and shaped by Scripture alone—and that makes it a Calvinism that begins with God, teaches us about God, and directs our hearts and minds back to God according to the way He deserves, demands, and delights in our worship of Him and our obedience to Him.<sup>12</sup> This is the threefold foundation of Calvin’s Calvinism: devotion, doctrine, and doxology—the heart’s devotion to the biblical God, the mind’s pursuit of the biblical doctrine of God, and the entire being’s surrender to doxology.<sup>13</sup> Calvin writes, “The glory of God so shines in his word, that we ought to be so affected by it, whenever he speaks by his servants, as though he were near to us, face to face.”<sup>14</sup>

**THE HEART OF CALVIN  
AND GOD'S SOVEREIGN MASTERY OF IT**

So what is true Calvinism according to Calvin? In one sense, Calvinism is as systematically profound as Calvin's life's work, as historically extensive as all that has been deduced from Calvin's writings during the past five centuries, and, as Calvin would have it, as doctrinally narrow as the sixty-six books of sacred Scripture.<sup>15</sup> A true Calvinist is one who strives to think as Calvin thought and live as Calvin lived—insofar as Calvin thought and lived as our Lord Jesus Christ, in accordance with the Word of God.<sup>16</sup>

As Christians, we understand that we are not our own but have been bought with a price. By His saving grace, the Lord has taken hold of our hearts of stone, regenerated and conformed them into spiritually pliable hearts, and poured into them His love by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.<sup>17</sup> This was Calvin's perception of the Christian life:

If we, then, are not our own [cf. 1 Cor. 6:19] but the Lord's, it is clear what error we must flee, and whither we must direct all the acts of our life.

We are not our own: let not our reason nor our will, therefore, sway our plans and deeds. We are not our own: let us therefore not set it as our goal to seek what is expedient for us according to the flesh. We are not our own: in so far as we can, let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours.

Conversely, we are God's: let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God's: let his wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions. We are God's: let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal [cf. Rom. 14:8; cf. 1 Cor. 6:19]. O, how much has that man profited who, having been taught that he is not his own, has taken away dominion and rule from his own reason that he may yield it to God! For, as consulting our self-interest is the pestilence that most effectively leads to our destruction, so the sole

haven of salvation is to be wise in nothing through ourselves but to follow the leading of the Lord alone.<sup>18</sup>

We are not our own; we belong to the Lord. That confession, in essence, is the heart of true Calvinism. Our salvation belongs to the Lord, from beginning to end (Ps. 3:8; Rev. 7:10). He has captivated our minds and has made His light to shine abroad in our hearts (2 Cor. 4:6; 10:5). Our whole being belongs to Him—heart, soul, mind, and strength. This is what Calvin proclaimed, and this is the foundation on which his life was established.

The Lord took hold of Calvin, and Calvin thus could not help but take away “dominion and rule from his own reason” and yield it to the Lord alone.<sup>19</sup> That is the glorious brilliance reflected by any study of Calvin. There was nothing in Calvin himself that was superhuman, super-theologian, or super-churchman. Calvin was a man whom God chose to call out of darkness and into His marvelous light so that he might go back into the darkness and shine brightly unto every generation of God’s people until Christ returns.

In truth, any study of Calvin is actually just a study of God’s work in the life of His servant in His kingdom. In the words of Calvin biographer Jean Cadier, Calvin was a man whom “God mastered.”<sup>20</sup> In mastering him, the Lord used His servant to accomplish all that He had sovereignly purposed. In mastering his heart, the Lord left Calvin with no choice but to offer his heart to God promptly and sincerely. Although Calvin understood that “man’s nature is a perpetual factory of idols,”<sup>21</sup> that the “mind begets an idol, and the hand gives it birth,”<sup>22</sup> and that man’s heart is deceitfully wicked above all things (Jer. 17:9), he could do nothing but present his heart to God with outstretched hands, offering himself wholly to Him.<sup>23</sup>

In everything, Calvin, more than simply dedicating himself, offered himself sacrificially to the Lord: his family, his studies, his preaching—his entire ministry (Rom. 12:1–2). He was a man who ministered not for his own glory, but for the glory of God (Ps. 115); he was a man who preached

not himself, but the Word of God (2 Tim. 4:1–2). According to Parker, Calvin “had a horror of those who preached their own ideas in place of the gospel of the Bible: ‘When we enter the pulpit, it is not so that we may bring our own dreams and fancies with us.’”<sup>24</sup> Calvin was not concerned with offering to his congregation the quaint meditations of his own heart. Although it has become popular in many churches for the pastor to strive to “pour out his heart” to his congregation, such was not Calvin’s aim in his preaching, for he had offered his heart to God alone. As a result, Calvin did not think it was profitable to share the ever-changing passions of his own heart, but to proclaim the heart of God in His never-changing Word. Calvin was not concerned that his congregants behold him but that they behold the Lord. This should be the aim of every pastor, and, if necessary, every pastor should place a placard behind his pulpit with the following words inscribed: “Sir, we wish to see Jesus” (John 12:21). Such was Calvin’s aim in his preaching and in all his life.<sup>25</sup>

### **THE HUMILITY OF CALVIN AND GOD’S GLORIOUS MAJESTY OVER HIM**

At the foundation of Calvinism according to Calvin is the reality that God is inherently holy and we are not.<sup>26</sup> Calvin’s doctrinal explanation of the depravity of man was not formulated by a cursory comparative examination of the state of mankind in the sixteenth century; rather, his understanding of man’s condition came as a result of his study of all the Bible has to say about the degenerate, humble existence of man after the fall and, in contradistinction, his study of the majestic holiness of God. In a section of his *Institutes* titled “True humility gives God alone the honor,” Calvin writes of our humility and God’s “loftiness” or “exaltation”: “As our humility is his loftiness, so the confession of our humility has a ready remedy in his mercy.”<sup>27</sup>

In his classic work *The Holiness of God*, R. C. Sproul recounts his conversion to God and the all-encompassing consequences of God’s majestic holiness on his own life: “Suddenly I had a passion to know

God the Father. I wanted to know Him in His majesty, to know Him in His power, to know Him in His august holiness.” He goes on to write, “I am convinced that [the holiness of God] is one of the most important ideas that a Christian can ever grapple with. It is basic to our whole understanding of God and of Christianity.”<sup>28</sup> These were the kinds of questions Calvin wrestled with throughout his Christian life: What does it mean that God is holy? What are the implications of God’s holiness for our study of doctrine? What are the implications of God’s holiness for our lives?<sup>29</sup> Calvin writes:

From what foundation may righteousness better arise than from the Scriptural warning that we must be made holy because our God is holy? . . . When we hear mention of our union with God, let us remember that holiness must be its bond; not because we come into communion with him by virtue of our holiness! Rather, we ought first to cleave unto him so that, infused with his holiness, we may follow whither he calls.<sup>30</sup>

We do not possess holiness inherently, Calvin explains; rather, it is the very holiness of God that overcomes us and enables us to follow the Lord. In his comments on Exodus 28, Calvin further explains this and describes the impurity of our own “holiness” as he considers Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer, wherein He prayed, “And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth” (John 17:19):

It is undoubtedly a remarkable passage, whereby we are taught that nothing proceeds from us pleasing to God except through the intervention of the grace of the Mediator; for here there is no reference to manifest and gross sins, the pardon of which it is clear that we can only obtain through Christ. . . . This is a harsh saying, and almost a paradox, that our very holinesses are so impure as to need pardon; but it must be borne in mind that nothing is so pure as not to contract some stain from us.<sup>31</sup>

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Calvin's doctrine of God humbled him. He took no pride in his formulation of that doctrine, for he could not boast in a holiness that was not his to boast about.<sup>32</sup> Rather, he boasted only in the majesty and holiness of God. It was that holiness that made him aware of his naturally depraved condition and drove him in his struggle to think, speak, and live as Jesus did. Just as we fail daily in our endeavor to follow our Lord perfectly, so did Calvin; yet he was a man of constant repentance who was more critically aware of himself and his own frailties than anyone else could have been, even admitting toward the end of his life: "I am, and always have been a poor and timid scholar."<sup>33</sup> Such statements by Calvin were not deceitfully contrived by a mind held captive by false modesty; rather, they overflowed from a mind that had been captivated and a heart that had been humbled by God's majesty shining through His Word. As John Piper observes:

So in his early twenties John Calvin experienced the miracle of having the blind eyes of his spirit opened by the spirit of God. And what he saw immediately and without any intervening chain of human reasoning, were two things, so interwoven that they would determine the rest of his life: The majesty of God and the Word of God. The Word mediated the majesty, and the majesty vindicated the Word.<sup>34</sup>

To his closest friends, Guillaume Farel and Pierre Viret, Calvin appeared to be a man of repentance and utter dependence on the Lord, "the wellspring of life."<sup>35</sup> In a sermon on 1 Timothy 3:16 and the apostle Paul's description of the mystery of godliness, we observe Calvin's attitude toward the miserable condition of our hearts and the majestic work of God in approaching us and conquering us:

There is nothing but rottenness in us; nothing but sin and death. Then let the living God, the well-spring of life, the everlasting glory, and the infinite power, come; and not only approach to us and our

miseries, our wretchedness, our frailty, and to this bottomless pit of all iniquity that is in men; let not only the majesty of God come near this, but be joined to it, and made one with it, in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ!<sup>36</sup>

We find no trace of despair or cynicism in Calvin; rather, we find a hope that does not disappoint because it is founded and focused on the majesty of God and His Word.<sup>37</sup> On this observation, Calvin's friend and first biographer, Theodore Beza, rightly asserts, "The reader who is truly seeking the glory of God will see this sense of majesty of which I am speaking permeating Calvin's writings."<sup>38</sup> Throughout his writings, Calvin admonishes readers to turn their attention from themselves to Scripture: "But I require only that, laying aside the disease of self-love and ambition, by which he is blinded and thinks more highly of himself than he ought [cf. Gal. 6:3], he rightly recognize himself in the faithful mirror of Scripture [cf. James 1:22–25]."<sup>39</sup>

With Calvin as our example in the endeavor of becoming discerning students and ready servants of the Word, we learn that the study of Scripture draws our arrogant hearts away from ourselves and unto the majesty of God in true faith. Concerning this often-neglected truth, Jonathan Edwards writes:

As we would therefore make the Holy Scriptures our rule, in judging of the nature of true religion, and judging of our own religious qualifications and state; it concerns us greatly to look at this humiliation, as one of the most essential things pertaining to true Christianity.<sup>40</sup>

In the footnote to this admonition, Edwards cites Calvin:

Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk. II, ch. 2, no. 11, says, "A saying of Chrysostom's has always pleased me very much, that the foundation of our philosophy is humility (Chrysostom, *De*

*profectu evangelii* 2 [MPG 51.312]). But that of Augustine pleases me even more: ‘When a certain rhetorician was asked what was the chief rule in eloquence, he replied, “Delivery”; what was the second rule, “Delivery”; what was the third rule, “Delivery”; so if you ask me concerning the precepts of the Christian religion, first, second, third, and always I would answer, “Humility.”’<sup>41</sup>

Humility is the supreme virtue according to Calvin, not only in attitude but in all of life.<sup>42</sup> The Christian’s humility should shine forth into the pompous darkness of this world. It is neither our eloquence nor our brilliance that directs men to God; rather, it is God who directs men to Himself through the seeming foolishness of preaching. Consequently, humility should conquer our minds and transform our hearts, arising from our study of God’s majesty in His majestic Word.

In his book *The Expository Genius of John Calvin*, Steven J. Lawson observes the humility of Calvin in his preaching: “As a preacher, Calvin’s primary aim was to communicate to the common person in the pew. He was not seeking to impress his congregation with his own brilliance, but to impact them with the awe-inspiring majesty of God.”<sup>43</sup> In his life and ministry, Calvin preached Christ and Him crucified—He preached the gospel, in season and out of season.

Yet Calvin’s estimation of himself and his own efforts was rather dismal, even at the end of his life. His only consolation was this: the fear of the Lord was in his heart. On Friday, April 28, 1564, four weeks before his death, Calvin, the 55-year-old pastor of St. Peter’s Church in Geneva, stood before an assembly of ministers and elders in Geneva and offered words of farewell. Toward the end of his address, he acknowledged the following:

I have had many infirmities, which you have been obliged to bear with, and what is more, all I have done is worthless. The ungodly will seize on that, but I repeat that all that I have done has been worthless and that I am a miserable creature. But cer-

tainly I may say this: that I have meant for the best, that my vices have always displeased me, and that the root of the fear of the Lord has always been in my heart. You may say “he meant well” and I pray that my evil may be forgiven and that if there was anything good you may confirm yourselves by it and have it as an example.<sup>44</sup>

### **THE LEGACY OF CALVIN FOR TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY CALVINISTS**

In the daily service of shepherding Christ's flock, I often find myself turning to my spiritual forefathers for answers to the most difficult matters in the church's life and doctrine. Even though our forefathers are at home with the Lord, by our mutual faith they provide us with words of comfort, encouragement, and caution. As I reflect on the doctrinal, ecclesiastical, and personal hardships they faced, and take into account the Lord's sustaining work in their lives, I am humbled and challenged by their united voices, which seem to admonish us from the heavens, urging us to fight the good fight, to be faithful till the end, and to honor the Lord above all.

Among the many faithful voices from the past, there seems to be one that rises above them all. It is the voice of a man who desperately wanted us to hear not his own voice but the voice of God in His Word. It is precisely on account of the humility the Lord had instilled in the mind of Calvin that I am drawn to him. In fact, there is not a week that passes that I do not think about the example Calvin set forth for us and for Christians in every generation. And in life and ministry, as I have considered Calvin the man, I have observed the following things: Calvin was a man who died to himself and sought to take up his cross daily so that he might serve the Lord and the flock God had entrusted to him (Luke 9:23).<sup>45</sup> He was a man who did not think of himself more highly than he should have, but sought to esteem others better than himself (Rom. 12:3; Phil. 2:3).<sup>46</sup> He was a man who did not seek to

please men first and foremost, but sought to please God ultimately and completely (Col. 1:10; 3:23).<sup>47</sup> He was a man who strove not to live for his own kingdom but for the kingdom of God (Matt 6:33; 21:43).<sup>48</sup> He was a man who sought to be faithful in the eyes of God, not successful in the eyes of the world (Rev. 2:10). He was a man who did not desire his own glory, but desired to seek the glory of God in all he did (1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17).<sup>49</sup> He was a man who did not try to develop a system of theology that complemented the Word of God; rather, he strove to derive his theology from the Word of God for the right worship, enjoyment, and love of God.

Considering all of this, Calvin is among the greatest men of all time. However, his greatness, as B. B. Warfield recognized, was not in his service to himself but in his surrender to God: “Here we have the secret of Calvin’s greatness and the source of his strength unveiled to us. No man ever had a profounder sense of God than he; no man ever more unreservedly surrendered himself to the Divine direction.”<sup>50</sup> This is Calvin’s greatness—his ultimate surrender to God. In this is Calvin’s legacy for those of us who desire not simply to wear the five-pointed badge of Calvinism, but who desire to clothe ourselves in the humbling power of the gospel (1 Peter 5:5). Let us not be so easily satisfied with a simple insignia of a simplistic Calvinism; rather, let us drape ourselves with Calvin’s Calvinism, a Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered, God-glorifying, gospel-driven Calvinism that shines so brilliantly that the deceitful darkness of sin would be conquered in our hearts so that, in turn, we might shine as the light of Jesus Christ to this dark world—for His kingdom and His glory.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 3.7.1. (Henceforth, all citations from the *Institutes* are taken from the Battles edition; see endnote 4 below.)

## THE HUMILITY OF CALVIN'S CALVINISM

- <sup>2</sup> From Charles Haddon Spurgeon's *A Defense of Calvinism*, quoted by J. I. Packer in his "Introductory Essay" to John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (London: Banner of Truth, 1959), 10.
- <sup>3</sup> Christopher Catherwood, *Five Leading Reformers* (Fearn, Tain: Christian Focus, 2000) 104.
- <sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Library of Christian Classics, XX–XXI (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 3.7.5.
- <sup>5</sup> Or, as John Murray called the *Institutes*: "the *opus magnum* of Christian Theology" (John Murray, "Introduction," in Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, 1). Ford Lewis Battles, a translator of Calvin's *Institutes*, admonished his students as they commenced their study of the *Institutes*: "You are about to share in one of the classic experiences of Christian history . . . on the deceptively orderly and seemingly dispassionate pages that follow are imprinted one man's passionate responses to the call of Christ. If [you] keep ever before [you] that autobiographical character of the book, the whole man will speak to you in every truth" (Ford Lewis Battles, *Analysis of the Institutes* [Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2001], 14).
- <sup>6</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.
- <sup>7</sup> John Calvin, *Letters of John Calvin*, ed. Jules Bonnet, 4 vols. (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2007), July 20, 1558.
- <sup>8</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.6.2.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.13.21.
- <sup>10</sup> T. H. L. Parker, *Portrait of Calvin* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 52.
- <sup>11</sup> Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva, and the Reformation* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 1998), 4.
- <sup>12</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.6.2: "All right knowledge of God is born of obedience." In his *Systematic Theology*, Louis Berkhof writes, "Thomas Aquinas expressed himself as follows: *Theologia a Deo docetur, Deum docet, et ad Deum ducit*" ("Theology is taught by God, teaches God, and leads unto God") (Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 390). The language of worshiping God according to the manner in which He "deserves, demands, and delights in" is borrowed from Dr. Scotty Smith of Christ Community Church in Franklin, Tenn.
- <sup>13</sup> See Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva, and the Reformation*, 210–218.
- <sup>14</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948–50), 4:343.
- <sup>15</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.7.1; 3.5.8.
- <sup>16</sup> Lester De Koster writes: "We know that Christianity is a multi-faceted thing. Only God knows in how many ways his spirit enriches the world. Calvin/Calvinism is one of them" (Lester De Koster, *Light for the City* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], x).
- <sup>17</sup> Cf. Jeremiah 31:33; Romans 5:5; Ezekiel 11:19.

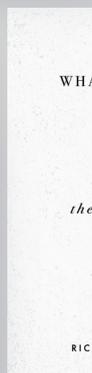
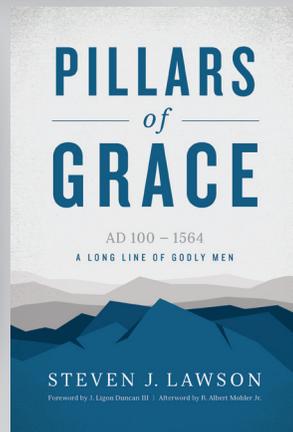
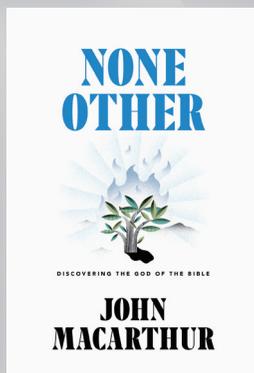
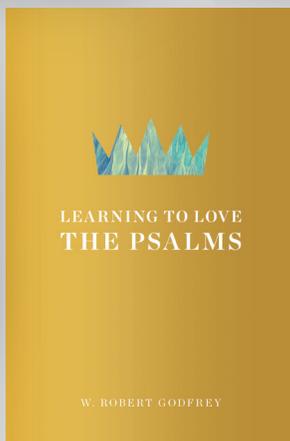
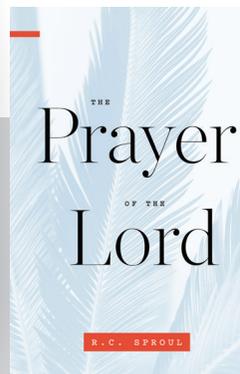
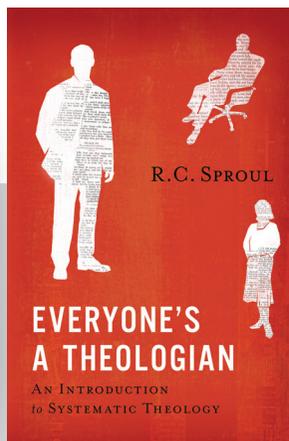
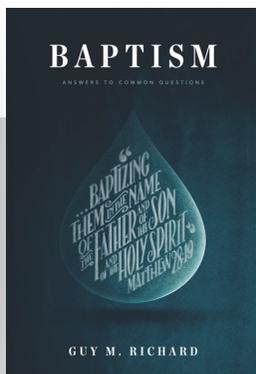
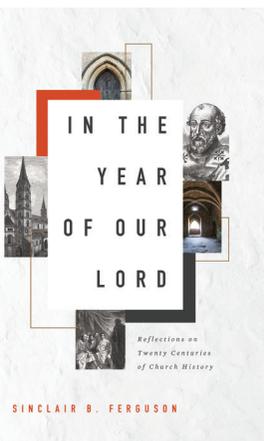
## JOHN CALVIN

- <sup>18</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.7.1.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Jean Cadier, *Calvin: The Man God Mastered*, trans. O. R. Johnston (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960).
- <sup>21</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.11.8.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Incidentally, in his list of qualifications for elder, the apostle Paul uses similar language, saying, “If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Tim. 3:1). The word *aspires* is a translation of the Greek word *oregomai*, which carries the idea of stretching out of one’s self in order to touch or to grasp something, to reach after or desire something.
- <sup>24</sup> Parker, *Portrait of Calvin*, 83.
- <sup>25</sup> Steven J. Lawson, *The Expository Genius of John Calvin* (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2007), 128–129.
- <sup>26</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.6.2; 3.20.41.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., 2.2.11.
- <sup>28</sup> R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1997), 12.
- <sup>29</sup> For instance, on the matter of “imperfection and endeavor of the Christian life,” Calvin writes, “the beginning of right living is spiritual, where the inner feeling of the mind is unfeignedly dedicated to God for the cultivation of holiness and righteousness” (Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.7.5).
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., 3.6.2.
- <sup>31</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Last Four Books of Moses, Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, trans. C. W. Bingham (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 202.
- <sup>32</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.7.4.
- <sup>33</sup> G. R. Potter and M. Greengrass, *John Calvin* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), 172–173; translated from G. Baum, E. Caunitz, and E. Reuss, *Corpus Reformatorum (Opera Calvini)*, 59 vols. (Braunschweig [Brunswick]: 1863–84), vol. 37, cols. 890–894.
- <sup>34</sup> John Piper, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2000), 127.
- <sup>35</sup> Theodore Beza, *The Life of John Calvin* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1564, 1997), 12–13.
- See also Richard Stauffer, *The Humanness of John Calvin*, trans. George Shriver (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 47–71.
- <sup>36</sup> John Calvin, “The Mystery of Godliness,” in *The Mystery of Godliness and Other Sermons* (Orlando: Soli Deo Gloria, 1999), 12–13.
- <sup>37</sup> John Kromminga writes of Calvin: “He engages in searching examinations of human frailties, speaking plainly and without compromise about the depravity of man. But throughout he manifests also sturdy confidence in the grace of God which overcomes human sin” (John H. Kromminga, *Thine Is My Heart* [Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1958, 2006], Introduction).

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- <sup>38</sup> Beza, *The Life of John Calvin*, 140.
- <sup>39</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.2.11.
- <sup>40</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale Divinity Press, 1959), 314–315.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, n1.
- <sup>42</sup> Calvin writes, “The chief praise of Christians is self-renunciation” (John Calvin, *The Commentaries of John Calvin on the Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003], 2:233).
- <sup>43</sup> Lawson, *The Expository Genius of John Calvin*, 85.
- <sup>44</sup> Potter and Greengrass, *John Calvin*, 172–173.
- <sup>45</sup> Calvin writes, “He who has denied himself has cut off the root of all evil, so as no longer to seek his own; he who has taken up his cross has prepared himself for all meekness and endurance” (Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.15.8).
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.2.11; 2.2.25.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.14.7.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.15.5; 4.20.26.
- <sup>49</sup> Piper writes, “I think this would be a fitting banner over all of John Calvin’s life and work—zeal to illustrate the glory of God” (John Piper, “The Divine Majesty of the Word: John Calvin, The Man and His Preaching,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 3/2 [Summer 1999], 40).
- <sup>50</sup> B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1932, 2000), 24.

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