


JAY E. ADAMS, ERIC J. ALEXANDER, THABITI  
ANYABWILE, THOMAS K. ASCOL, JOEL R.  
BEEKE, JERRY BRIDGES, SINCLAIR B.  
FERGUSON, W. ROBERT GODFREY, D. G. HART,  
MICHAEL HORTON, PHILLIP R. JOHNSON,  
STEVEN J. LAWSON, JOHN MACARTHUR, KEITH  
A. MATHISON, BURK PARSONS, RICHARD D.  
PHILLIPS, HARRY L. REEDER, PHILIP  
GRAHAM RYKEN, DEREK W. H. THOMAS

**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*

JAY E. ADAMS, ERIC J. ALEXANDER, THABITI  
ANYABWILE, THOMAS K. ASCOL, JOEL R.  
BEEKE, JERRY BRIDGES, SINCLAIR B.  
FERGUSON, W. ROBERT GODFREY, D. G. HART,  
MICHAEL HORTON, PHILLIP R. JOHNSON,  
STEVEN J. LAWSON, JOHN MACARTHUR, KEITH  
A. MATHISON, BURK PARSONS, RICHARD D.  
PHILLIPS, HARRY L. REEDER, PHILIP  
GRAHAM RYKEN, DEREK W. H. THOMAS

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

EDITED BY BURK PARSONS

FOREWORD BY IAIN H. MURRAY



*Reformation Trust*  
PUBLISHING

A DIVISION OF LIGONIER MINISTRIES · ORLANDO, FLORIDA

John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, and Doxology

© 2008 by Burk Parsons

Published by Reformation Trust

a division of Ligonier Ministries

400 Technology Park, Lake Mary, FL 32746

[www.ligonier.org](http://www.ligonier.org)

[www.reformationtrust.com](http://www.reformationtrust.com)

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without the prior written permission of the publisher, Reformation Trust. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Cover design: Geoff Stevens

Interior design and typeset: Katherine Lloyd, The DESK, Colorado Springs, CO

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

John Calvin : a heart for devotion, doctrine, and doxology / edited by Burk Parsons.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN 978-1-56769-106-1

1. Calvin, Jean, 1509-1564. 2. Reformed Church--Doctrines. I. Parsons, Burk.

BX9418.J6132 2008

284'.2092--dc22

2008025945



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.*

Jay E. Aron



Tim J. Alexander

Stewart Lawson

Thelma M. Anyabwal

Justin

Tom Ascol



Paul R. Beeke

Jain H. Murray

Jerry Bridges



Guilain B. Furman



W. Robert Hoofey

Henry F. Reeder III

Dick

Philip Sykes

Michael S. Horton





## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Foreword – Iain H. Murray</i> . . . . .	xi
<i>Preface – Burk Parsons</i> . . . . .	xix
<i>Contributors</i> . . . . .	xxi
1. THE HUMILITY OF CALVIN’S CALVINISM	<i>Burk Parsons</i> . . . . . 1
2. WHO WAS JOHN CALVIN?	<i>Derek W. H. Thomas</i> . . . . . 19
3. CALVIN’S HEART FOR GOD	<i>Sinclair B. Ferguson</i> . . . . . 31
4. THE REFORMER OF FAITH AND LIFE	<i>D. G. Hart</i> . . . . . 43
5. THE CHURCHMAN OF THE REFORMATION	<i>Harry L. Reeder</i> . . . . . 55
6. THE PREACHER OF GOD’S WORD	<i>Steven J. Lawson</i> . . . . . 71
7. THE COUNSELOR TO THE AFFLICTED	<i>W. Robert Godfrey</i> . . . . . 83
8. THE WRITER FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD	<i>Phillip R. Johnson</i> . . . . . 95
9. THE SUPREMACY OF JESUS CHRIST	<i>Eric J. Alexander</i> . . . . . 109
10. THE TRANSFORMING WORK OF THE SPIRIT	<i>Thabiti Anyabwile</i> . . . . . 119
11. MAN’S RADICAL CORRUPTION	<i>John MacArthur</i> . . . . . 129
12. ELECTION AND REPROBATION	<i>Richard D. Phillips</i> . . . . . 141
13. REDEMPTION DEFINED	<i>Thomas K. Ascol</i> . . . . . 157
14. TRANSFORMING GRACE	<i>Keith A. Mathison</i> . . . . . 169
15. A CERTAIN INHERITANCE	<i>Jay E. Adams</i> . . . . . 179
16. THE BELIEVER’S UNION WITH CHRIST	<i>Philip Graham Ryken</i> . . . . . 191
17. THE PRINCIPAL ARTICLE OF SALVATION	<i>Michael Horton</i> . . . . . 201
18. THE TRUE CHRISTIAN LIFE	<i>Jerry Bridges</i> . . . . . 221
19. THE COMMUNION OF MEN WITH GOD	<i>Joel R. Beeke</i> . . . . . 231
<i>Index of Scripture</i> . . . . .	247
<i>Index of Subjects and Names</i> . . . . .	251





## 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

---

<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

---

- <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

**Jay E. Adams** is a teacher, speaker, and author. A former professor at Westminster Seminary California and a retired pastor, Dr. Adams has authored more than one hundred books, many of which have been translated into other languages. Among his publications are *Compassionate Counseling*, *From Forgiven to Forgiving*, and *Encouragement Isn't Enough*.

**Eric J. Alexander** is a retired pastor of St. George's-Tron Church in Glasgow, Scotland, and a council member of Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. He is a former president of the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (UCCF) in Great Britain, and he served as chairman of the Scottish Council of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship. Rev. Alexander preaches and teaches at conferences and seminaries in Europe and the United States.

**Thabiti Anyabwile** is senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands. Rev. Anyabwile is a conference speaker and author of several books, including *The Decline of African American Theology: From Biblical Faith to Cultural Captivity*, *The Faithful Preacher: Recapturing the Vision of Three Pioneering African-American Pastors*, and the forthcoming *What Is a Healthy Church Member?*

**Thomas K. Ascol** is senior pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Fla. He also serves as executive director of Founders Ministries and editor of *Founders Journal*. Dr. Ascol has written numerous articles and contributed to several books, including *Reclaiming the Gospel and Reforming Churches* and *A Puritan Speaks to Our Dying Nation*. He is also editor of the book *Dear Timothy: Letters on Pastoral Ministry*.

**Joel R. Beeke** is president and professor of systematic theology at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich. He is also pastor of Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation and editorial director of Reformation Heritage Books. Dr. Beeke has authored more than fifteen hundred articles for various periodicals and reference works, and has written or edited fifty books, including *The Quest for Full Assurance*, *Meet the Puritans*, *Walking as He Walked*, and *Heirs with Christ: The Puritans on Adoption*.

**Jerry Bridges** has served with the Navigators since 1955. He speaks regularly at conferences and seminaries throughout the country and serves as a council member of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. He is the author of several books, including *The Pursuit of Holiness*, *Trusting God*, *Transforming Grace*, and *Respectable Sins*.

**Sinclair B. Ferguson** is senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, S.C., and is distinguished visiting professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary. Dr. Ferguson is also a council member of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. He has written several books, including *In Christ Alone*, *The Holy Spirit*, *Taking the Christian Life Seriously*, and *The Sermon on the Mount*.

**W. Robert Godfrey** is president and professor of church history at Westminster Seminary California. He has taught at many colleges and seminaries, and frequently speaks at Christian conferences throughout the country. A council member of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, Dr. Godfrey has written several books, including *An Unexpected Journey*, *Reformation Sketches*, and *Pleasing God in our Worship*.

**D. G. Hart** is director of academic programs at the Intercollegiate Studies Institute in Philadelphia, Pa. Previously he served as dean of academic affairs and professor of church history at Westminster Seminary California, where he remains an adjunct member of the faculty. Dr.



## CONTRIBUTORS

Hart has written several books, including *A Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State*, and has co-authored several others with John R. Muether, including *Seeking a Better Country: 300 Years of American Presbyterianism* and *With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship*.

**Michael Horton** is J. Gresham Machen professor of apologetics and systematic theology at Westminster Seminary California. In addition to serving as editor in chief of *Modern Reformation* magazine and as host of the popular radio show *The White Horse Inn*, he is the author of numerous books, including *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology*, *Too Good to Be True: Finding Hope in a World of Hype*, and *Covenant and Salvation*.

**Phillip R. Johnson** is executive director of Grace to You in Panorama City, Calif., and is a pastor at Grace Community Church. He has been closely associated with John MacArthur for nearly thirty years and edits most of Dr. MacArthur's books. Rev. Johnson may be best known for the Web sites he maintains, including The Spurgeon Archive and The Hall of Church History.

**Steven J. Lawson** is senior pastor of Christ Fellowship Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala., and serves on the ministerial board of Reformed Theological Seminary and on the board of directors of The Master's College and Seminary. Dr. Lawson has authored many books, including *Famine in the Land*, *Foundations of Grace*, and *The Expository Genius of John Calvin*.

**John MacArthur** has served as pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, Calif., for nearly forty years and is heard on more than two thousand radio outlets worldwide on the radio program *Grace to You*. He is president of The Master's College and Seminary and has written numerous books, including *Charismatic Chaos*, *Faith Works*, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, and *A Tale of Two Sons*.

He is also the author of the twenty-six-volume *MacArthur New Testament Commentary* series.

**Keith A. Mathison** is an associate editor of *Tabletalk* magazine in Orlando, Fla., and is associate editor of *The Reformation Study Bible* (ESV). Dr. Mathison is author of several books, including *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope*, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*, *Given for You: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper*, and *Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?*

**Iain H. Murray** is a co-founder of Banner of Truth Trust in Edinburgh, Scotland, and is minister emeritus of the Australian Presbyterian Church. Rev. Murray has authored many books, including *A Scottish Christian Heritage*, *Evangelicalism Divided*, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography*, and *The Puritan Hope*.

**Burk Parsons** serves as minister of congregational life at Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Fla., and is editor of *Tabletalk*, the monthly Bible-study magazine of Ligonier Ministries. Rev. Parsons is also editor of the book *Assured by God: Living in the Fullness of God's Grace*.

**Richard D. Phillips** is senior minister of Second Presbyterian Church in Greenville, S.C. He is also a council member of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals and is chairman of the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology. Rev. Phillips' preaching is heard nationwide on the radio program *God's Living Word*. Among his twenty-one published books are his most recent titles, *What's So Great About the Doctrines of Grace?* and *Jesus the Evangelist*.

**Harry L. Reeder** is senior pastor of Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Ala. After completing his doctoral dissertation on "The Biblical Paradigm of Church Revitalization," he authored his first book, *From Embers to a Flame*. Dr. Reeder is devoted to the ministry of church

## CONTRIBUTORS

revitalization, hosting conferences in the United States twice a year called “Embers to a Flame.”

**Philip Graham Ryken** is senior pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, Pa., and is a teacher for the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. Dr. Ryken is broadcast nationally on the radio program *Every Last Word*. He has written or edited more than twenty books, including *What Is the Christian Worldview?*, *City on a Hill: Recovering the Biblical Pattern for the Church in the 21st Century*, and Bible commentaries on Exodus, Jeremiah, Lamentations, 1 Timothy, and Galatians.

**Derek W. H. Thomas** is John Richards professor of practical and systematic theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Miss. He is also minister of teaching at First Presbyterian Church in Jackson and editorial director for The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. Among Dr. Thomas’ many books are *God Strengthens: Ezekiel Properly Explained*, *Mining for Wisdom*, and *Praying the Saviour’s Way*. Along with John W. Tweeddale, Dr. Thomas is co-editor of a forthcoming book on the life, ministry, and doctrine of John Calvin.





# 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.

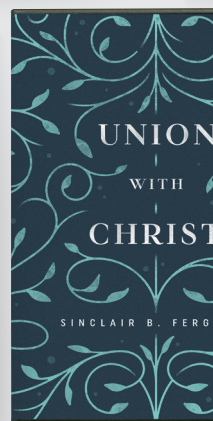
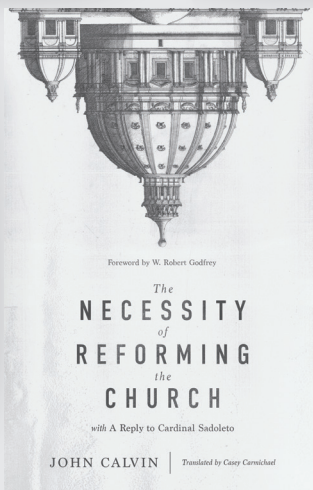
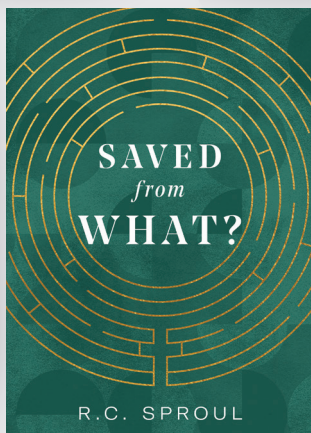
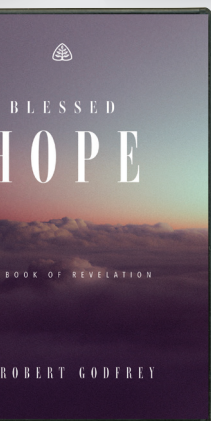
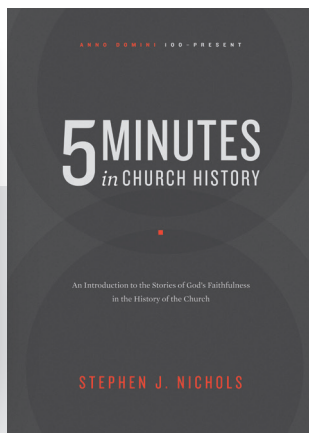
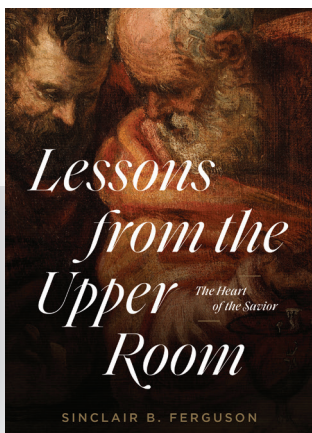
I began to study everything I could get my hands on regarding Calvinism. For years, I went to every theology conference I could afford, I read every issue of *Tabletalk* cover to cover, and I studied every book or pamphlet I could find on the subject. More important, throughout that time I pored over 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.

We want to see men and women around the world connect the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



Order your copy of this title, download the digital version, or browse thousands of resources at [Ligonier.org](http://Ligonier.org).



LIGONIER MINISTRIES