



SECOND REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES
INTERNATIONAL YOUTH CONVENTION

MEMORIAL VOLUME

PORTRUSH 1964

Foreword

Following the success of the first International Youth Convention of Reformed Presbyterian Churches held in Scotland in 1962, it was unanimously decided by the Committee on Evangelism and Church Extension of the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland that a similar convention be held in Ireland in 1964. This decision was cordially endorsed by Synod at its meetings in June, 1963, and accordingly invitations were sent to the Reformed Presbyterian Churches of Scotland and America, and the great project was launched.

The year 1964 was peculiarly suitable for such a convention, for it marked the four hundredth anniversary of the death of John Calvin, the man to whom, under God, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in all its branches owes so much. It was therefore decided that Scripture teaching should be presented during the Convention under the theme—"Calvin and Calvinism."

The three convention committees—American, Scottish and Irish—worked most harmoniously together, and were able to arouse considerable interest in the matter. As a result 212 delegates assembled in the sea-side resort of Portrush, Co. Antrim, and

remained in conference from August 15 till August 29.

This book contains a report of the proceedings of the Convention. The addresses, as printed, are summaries of those given, for it was not found possible to print them in full. However, the summaries have been prepared by the original authors, and it is hoped that those who read them will derive the same spiritual benefit as those who were privileged to hear them.

Most of the photographs printed were taken by Rev. Kenneth G. Smith (Director of Christian Education for the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America) with his polaroid camera, while the Convention was in progress.

While this was a Youth Convention, and the programme was directed particularly towards young people, fine fellowship was enjoined with, and much grace was received from the ripe experience of those of more mature years. If it has served to bring the three branches of the Church closer together than ever before, and to make them realise that their oneness of heart and mind in the service of Christ is a fact, then it has achieved its purpose.

October, 1964.

Synopsis

Of the two hundred and twelve delegates who gathered together for the Second International Youth Convention of Reformed Presbyterian Churches sixty-one came from the United States, twelve from Scotland, one from Australia, one from Lebanon, one from Syria, and the rest from Ireland—so it was truly international. The blessing of God was evidently upon all travelling arrangements for, in spite of the fact that many had to come very long distances, all the members arrived in time, and settled down happily together.

Of particular note was the arrival of the American party, under Rev. Kenneth G. Smith. After an extensive tour in England and particularly Scotland, where they had been extensively entertained by the Scottish Church and visited many places of historical interest, they arrived at Aldergrove Airport, and were greeted by members of the Irish organising committee. On their arrival in Portrush, they, with Miss Adeebah Awad, delegate from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Syria were entertained to afternoon tea by the Chairman of the Portrush Urban Council. This council placed all the recreational facilities of the town at the

disposal of the convention—free, and by so doing contributed largely to its success.

Delegates stayed in five hotels which were all situated near to one another, fronting the sea. The hotels provided uniform satisfaction. Badges in the shape of the Blue Banner "For Christ's Crown and Covenant" were provided for convention members, each bearing the name of the person concerned. This made for easy acquaintance, and consequent fellowship.

One of the notable features of the Convention was unity of mind and heart. Another was the willing service which was rendered by so many people to make things run smoothly. Another was the witness made towards "Them that are without" which was focussed on the Open-air Psalm-singing held each night by the Arcadia, and attended by hundreds of people. Yet another was the programme for counsellors, the burden of which was carried by Dr. Roy Blackwood, which made a tremendous impact on the young people who gathered for it early morning after early morning. Success attended the Broadcast service which went out from the Northern Ireland transmitter on Sabbath morning, August 23. The tours,

which brought the delegates to many of our Irish Church Buildings, were enjoyed not only for the fellowship with the various congregations, but for the varied beauty of our Irish scenery. The hospitality which was arranged for overseas delegates for the week after the convention was much enjoyed, both by those who received the hospitality and those who gave it. One of the features of the post-convention week was a trip to Dublin, where delegates had an opportunity to see the work of the Irish Mission which is carried on there.

This book is placed in your hands with the hope that through it you will be able to enter into the activities of the convention, and share the Grace received through it.

The first meeting of the Convention was held in the Presbyterian Church Hall, Portrush, on Saturday, August 15, 1964, at 7.30 p.m. It consisted of a welcome to the delegates, and the reception of greetings from various sources. Rev. F. S. Leahy, Moderator of the Irish Synod, presided, and led in worship. The welcome from the Irish Church was voiced by the organiser, Rev. J. Renwick Wright (Dromara) and was acknowledged by Rev. Kenneth G. Smith on behalf of the American delegation and Rev. S. L. Reid on behalf of the Scottish. Greetings from other denominations in the vicinity were voiced by Rev. James Frazer, Presbyterian minister of Ballywillan (in the regrettable absence of Rev. K. M. Alexander, Presbyterian minister of Portrush, through illness). A tape containing greetings from Irish missionaries in Ethiopia was heard, and letters of greetings from Irish ministers in Australia and from an American minister were received. Later delegates made their way to the promenade near the Arcadia, where the first open-air psalm-singing was held beside the sea.

The next day the convention joined with the Glenmanus congregation in their morning worship, which the minister, Rev. Prof. Adam Loughridge led, and at which Dr. Roy Blackwood preached. In the afternoon an open-air service was held on Ramore Hill, led by Mr. Harry Tadley, at which Rev. J. Renwick Wright preached, and

testimonies were given by convention members. In the evening, some of the convention members were conveyed by bus to Ballymoney where they worshipped with the congregation there, the minister, Dr. Hugh J. Blair, preaching—and some remained in Portrush, to worship in Glenmanus, under the ministry of Rev. John White (College Hill, Beaver Falls, Pa.).

Monday morning, August 17, brought the first of the Bible studies on Habakkuk, given by Dr. Hugh J. Blair, and an address on "Calvin the Man" by Rev. J. Marcus McCullough. The chairman was Dr. Roy Blackwood. On each of the occasions when the Convention was in session such addresses were followed by group discussion.

As was the practice when the Convention was not on tour the afternoon was devoted to recreation.

In the evening, under the chairmanship of Rev. S. L. Reid, Rev. Prof. Adam Loughridge gave an illustrated lecture on the Irish Churches.

Tuesday, August 18, brought the first of the tours—which followed the Bann Valley, then went across to Larne, and home by the famous Antrim Coast road — visiting Glenariff glen on the way. Coffee was served to the delegates by the ladies of Cullybackey congregation and members of the Larne congregation provided ideal conditions for lunch. Tea was served in the Quay Road Hall, Ballycastle. The churches of Kellswater and Ballyclare were visited en route.

That evening a prayer meeting was held, in view of the Irish C.Y.P.U. Conference to be held the next day. The leader was Miss Violet Skelly (Dromara).

The Irish C.Y.P.U. Conference was held the next afternoon (Wednesday, August 19). Mr. David McConaghy, President of the Irish C.Y.P.U. Executive committee was chairman, and addresses were given by Rev. Prof. Adam Loughridge on "The History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church" and Rev. Kenneth G. Smith on "The Relevance of the Reformed Presbyterian Church To-day."

This conference was held in the Presbyterian Church building, to accommodate the large audience, which included many visitors from other Covenanter congregations and friends from other denominations. There

was a large attendance at the Thanksgiving meeting that evening—an index to the blessing received. Mr. James Anderson, colporteur-elect for the Irish Mission, led this meeting.

Dr. Hugh J. Blair continued his Bible Study in Habakkuk on Thursday morning, August 20, under the chairmanship of Rev. John White. Rev. F. S. Leahy spoke on “Calvinism—its doctrine of the Word.”

On Thursday afternoon many convention members made a trip to the Giant’s Causeway.

On Thursday evening, August 20, Films of Northern Ireland were shown by a representative of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, and an address which electrified the convention was given by Rev. Argos Zodiates. Mr. Zodiates was brought up in the R.P. Mission in Cyprus, and told in a most effective manner of the successes and difficulties of his work for Christ in Greece. Rev. J. Marcus McCullough was chairman.

On Friday morning Dr. Hugh J. Blair, under the chairmanship of Rev. A. R. Wright, gave his final Bible study in Habakkuk, and Rev. John Whyte spoke on “Calvinism—its doctrine of the Sovereignty of God.”

That evening a party along Irish lines was held most successfully in the Dunluce Hall—the Open-air Psalm-singing being postponed to a later hour, for which the majority of outsiders waited. It should be stated that at these psalm-sings ministers and others spoke of the Grace of God to them, and extended the Gospel invitation.

At 9.30 on the morning of Saturday, August 22, a tour left for Derry and Donegal. Proceeding via Coleraine it passed the Limavady R.P. Church, and arrived at the Faughan R.P. Church in time for coffee. Then via Londonderry it crossed the Border into Eire, and reached Convoy R.P. Church, where lunch was served. Then it crossed country to Letterkenny and passed through the lovely mountain-and-sea scenery of the Atlantic Drive, arriving in Milford R.P. Church, where tea was served. On return to Portrush a swimming gala was held in the indoor swimming pool of the Northern Counties Hotel.

There was a Broadcast Service from the

Convention on Sabbath morning, August 23. This was held in the Glenmanus Church. The service was led by Rev. J. Renwick Wright. Winifred Wilson (America) and David McConaghy (Australia) led in prayer. Adeebah Awad (Syria) Anne Crawford (Scotland) and Edward Donnelly (Ireland) read the Scriptures. Addresses were given by Revs. John White (Calvin the Man), S. L. Reid (Calvin the Theologian), and Prof. Adam Loughridge (Calvin the Evangelist). The choir had been trained, and the singing was led by Mrs. Kathleen R. Wright. This service was favourably received in many quarters. In the interval between it and the ordinary Glenmanus congregation’s morning service the convention was entertained to coffee by the ladies of the Church. This later service was led by Rev. Prof. Loughridge, and Rev. Kenneth G. Smith preached.

There was another open-air service on Ramore Hill that afternoon, led by Rev. J. Renwick Wright. The speaker was Mr. Harry Tadley, and testimonies were given by three convention members.

For evening worship convention members attended a special Re-opening service in the Garvagh Church, or the Glenmanus evening service.

On Monday, August 24, Dr. John O. Edgar began a Bible Study in Colossians, and an address on “Calvinism—its doctrine of Justification by Faith” was given by Rev. Prof. John McIlmoyle. The Chairman was Rev. Thos. Donnelly.

That evening the American delegation presented an illustrated lecture on our American churches, which was much appreciated.

Dr. Edgar continued his Bible Study in Colossians the next morning (August 25) and an address was given by Rev. Kenneth G. Smith on “Calvinism—its doctrine of the Priesthood of Believers.” The Chairman was Rev. S. M. Calderwood.

That evening a meeting for Consecration was held. The Chairman was Rev. Kenneth G. Smith and the speaker was Rev. A. R. Wright. The claims of Christ were presented in the power of the Holy Spirit, and young people were enabled to respond.

The final convention tour was held on Wednesday, August 26. It went straight to Belfast, where it passed Trinity Street

church, and stopped at Grosvenor Road church for coffee. Then it drove past Dublin Road church and Cregagh Road church, and on to Knockbracken, where a short stop was made. Then it proceeded to Dromara church, where lunch was served. The next stop was Loughbrickland church, and then on to Rathfriland church where tea was taken. On return to Portrush another swimming gala was held in the pool in the Northern Counties hotel.

Rev. R. B. Lyons acted as Chairman on Thursday morning, August 27, when Dr. J. O. Edgar continued his Bible study in Colossians, and Rev. W. Young spoke on "Calvinism in Life."

On Thursday afternoon many convention members availed themselves of a boat trip to the Skerries, the islands which lie in the Atlantic ocean a few miles from Portrush.

A party run on American lines was held on Thursday evening, in the Dunluce Hall, and once again a large number of people from outside waited till the later hour for the open-air psalm-singing and preaching of the Word.

The final Convention day was Friday, August 28. Dr. J. O. Edgar completed his Bible study in Colossians under the chairmanship of Rev. W. N. McCune, and Dr. Roy Blackwood spoke on "Calvinism and Evangelism."

In the afternoon Convention photographs were taken.

That evening Miss Adebah Awad showed films of the work of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Syria. A Brains Trust was held with Rev. J. Renwick Wright as chairman. The members of the Panel were Miss Betty Cromie (Ireland), Miss Esther Elliott (America), Mr. Peter Tavia (Lebanon), and Dr. Roy Blackwood (America). The questions which had been submitted by convention members, proved of outstanding interest, and were faithfully and adequately answered. Then the convention made its way to the promenade near the Arcadia, for its last act of witness—an act which many felt to be the climax of the whole proceedings.

Dispersal took place the next day (Saturday, August 29). Many overseas delegates were entertained till September 7 in the homes of the Irish Church, under a scheme prepared and carried through by Rev. Hugh Wright—a scheme which did much to strengthen even further the bonds that bind the Reformed Presbyterian Church together.

One of the most important events of the Convention and one that is likely to have far-reaching effects for good was a Conference between delegates from the American and Irish Synods, at which ministers of the Scottish Church were present.

Convention Addresses

Calvin the Man

John Calvin was born in 1509 in the important cathedral city of Noyen in north-eastern France. He grew up in a period of change in Church, College and culture. The revival of the study of ancient Greek and Roman authors had quickened and redirected academic thought. Scholars examined Roman ideals and often accepted them even when they were inconsistent with the teaching of the Church. There was widespread dissatisfaction with the Roman Catholic Church. The character of some priests, the greed of the Pope and the use of the Church as a means of making a living were showing it to be a fraud. Reform movements like that of Huss had been suppressed. The movement of Luther started in 1517, but could not be contained. Its teaching rapidly spread even to France and later affected the young Calvin at College in Paris. Many preferred the old and attacked the new ideas bitterly as did some of Calvin's early teachers. Others, like the scholar Erasmus, were content to remain inside the Roman Catholic Church but work off their frustration by bitter satire. Nevertheless there was much quiet piety among the people, especially the women. The mothers of both Luther and Calvin were celebrated for their godliness.

As Calvin's father was an official of the Cathedral Calvin grew up friendly with the local nobility, developing friendships which he continued at university, as well as the aristocratic tastes and reserve which marked his later character. His father directed his steps to the priesthood by getting for him a chaplaincy at the Cathedral when he was only twelve years old. This provided the money he needed during his student days.

In Paris at the age of fourteen he was taught at one of the most reactionary colleges, studying Protestant teaching to prove it wrong. A few of his friends were Lutheran in their convictions and one in particular, Olivetin, tried to persuade Calvin to repent but failed. Calvin was more interested in literature. Then his father was excommunicated by the Cathedral authorities for the way he had handled some estates. This, and his father's hope that he would earn more money and gain more fame, made him leave Paris for Orleans to study law. In Orleans and later at Bourges, Calvin was trained to think logically and to present his thoughts clearly and concisely. His intellect was stimulated as never before. He began to develop his graceful style of writing. These legal studies also helped Calvin to organise the Church at Geneva

later, seeing how fundamental was the relationship between the Church and the State. In the meantime under the influence of past talks with Olivetin, he began to study Greek under a convinced Lutheran tutor. He studied so intensively that he brought on himself an incurable disease, contributing to his early death in 1564. Later he began the study of Hebrew while continuing his legal studies.

We don't know exactly when Calvin was converted. It must have been before 1534 as he then surrendered his livings. He was twenty-four years old. He says "And at first, whilst I remained thus so obstinately addicted to the superstitions of the Papacy that it would have been hard to have pulled me out of so deep a quagmire by sudden conversion, God subdued and made teachable a heart which, for my age, was far too hardened in such matters. Having thus received some foretaste and knowledge of true piety, I was straightway inflamed by such a great desire to profit by it, that although I did not attempt to give up other studies I worked only slackly at them." He saw the reform not as a denial of Christianity but an attempt to return to the pure source of truth, and to rediscover the true majesty of the Church.

When in 1533 his friend, Cop, openly taught in Paris the Reformed doctrine of being saved by faith alone, he was forced to escape to Basle. There he was forced to prepare a brief statement of the Reformed doctrines to show the French authorities that his friends were not rebels. In this way the first edition of the classic, "The Institutes of the Christian Religion" was produced. There were to be fifteen editions before 1559.

After a brief visit to Noyen to wind up the family estate he passed through Geneva on his way to Strasburg where he hoped to settle to a quiet life of study. But in Geneva everything was in a ferment as the town had only recently expelled Italian political control and accepted Reformed teaching. Farel, however, saw that a greater man than himself was required to carry through the reformation and organisation of the Church. But Calvin in his shyness and desire for a quiet life refused to stay, until Farel in burning zeal for the Gospel, after

reasoning and pleading failed, placed a curse on him if he deserted. He stayed.

During his first stay of three years he began the work which he resumed from 1540 to 1564. His genius is seen most clearly in four fields. He took the text of the Bible and explained it clearly and simply, applying it to the needs of his people. He was also a great preacher. Thirdly, he reduced his doctrines to a system more thoroughly than others had done. Hence he wrote the Institutes and developed them over the years. It is clear from comparing the first edition of the Institutes with later editions that he was guided by his study of the Bible. It was after his study of Romans that his doctrine of Predestination was fully developed, not before. It can be added that Calvin was a keen student of early Church theologians, of whom Augustine influenced him most as an interpreter of the Bible. Fourthly he helped in the organisation of the Reformed Church outside Geneva. His labours were incessant. He delivered more than 300 sermons and lectures a year, and his correspondence, commentaries, controversial writings, and admonitions would form annually, during the period of thirty-two years, between two and three volumes. The following extract from a letter written to Farel in 1539, when he published his Commentary on Romans, gives us a clear view of the active character and persevering labours of the Reformer. "When the messenger called for my book, I had twenty sheets to revise—to preach—to read to the congregation—to write forty-two letters—to attend to some controversies—and to return answers to more than ten persons who interrupted me in the midst of my labours for advice." He maintained contacts with the French Reformers whom he tried to help as much as he could. He later had contacts with the English Reformers and the Protector in the time of Edward the Sixth. In Geneva itself he was busy in the struggle to free the Church from the control of the state.

The true Church had to have the right to excommunicate the unrepentant, irrespective of the punishment inflicted by the State. It was to be recognised by its preaching of Biblical teaching and its administration of the sacraments. It was a living community, a

Kingdom of Christ on earth. It was to contribute to the sanctification of all its members. To do this, as Calvin saw, it had to have the authority to exclude the unworthy from the benefits of Church membership. The civil authorities, fearing a religious tyranny, refused to give the ministers this right for many years. Opposition grew as magistrates realised what was involved in Calvin's position and as the opposition to him realised how strong it was. In the city elections of 1538 Calvin's opponents were elected. Calvin refused to let the state regulate Church affairs without consulting the ministers. He and Farel were banished.

Calvin left Geneva relieved, feeling he could retire again to a life of quiet study, thinking he had failed God in his public ministry because he was incapable of such work. The friendly insistence of Bucer prevented this, after letters and advice had failed. The threat of calling down a curse on him if he refused forced Calvin again into public life. He settled in Strasburg as pastor of the French exiles, helping in a new local College by teaching the Bible. At this stage he was preaching four times a week.

In the meantime Bucer had been making various attempts to get Calvin to marry. One attempt failed because Calvin wanted his wife to be able to speak French. But in 1540 he married the widow of one of his converts, a beautiful and sensitive woman. Their only child died soon after birth. His wife died after nine years of happy married life. He rarely allowed his feelings to come to the surface but this was an indication of how reserved and sensitive he was. He wrote after the death of his wife, "I repress, as much as I am able, the sorrow of my heart. With all the exertions of my friends, I effect less in the assuaging of my grief than I could wish; but I cannot express the consolations which I experience. You know the tenderness of my mind, or rather with what effeminacy I yield under trials; so that without the exercise of such moderation I could not have supported the pressure of my sorrow."

During his second stay in Geneva he had even more difficulties than before. The opposition of the magistrates continued against Church discipline. The condition of the Reformed Churches in other countries

was dangerous as Scots were persecuted and Waldenses were massacred. In 1547 the Churches in Germany were overrun by the Catholic armies. At home there was a riot which could have caused Calvin's death but which was suppressed by his quick action and rebuke. Also the city was disturbed by the teaching of various visitors. Bolsec argued against predestination. Servetus denied the Trinity. The State ordered the Church to admit Bertelier to Communion. Calvin's response during the service was to say "For my part I will rather suffer myself to be killed, than allow this hand to stretch forth the sacred things of the Lord to those who are lawfully condemned as the despisers of God." This comment turned the crisis in Calvin's favour. In the meantime some Christians in France had been burned to death. Calvin was in poor health; on one occasion he was so ill that a report reaching Noyen encouraged the Catholics to exult over his death, prematurely. An attack on Geneva was threatened but averted.

His health deteriorated so that by 1563 he continued his work only by driving himself remorselessly. He had asthma, migraine, haemorrhoids later degenerating into ulcers, colic, a stone, quartan fever and gout. His reaction to those who advised him to rest was "What, would you have my Lord find me idle when he comes?" His lifelong practice had been to read a passage of Scripture in the evening and then to go to bed thinking on it in preparation for writing on it in the morning after undisturbed thought. I haven't been able to trace many references to his prayer-life but it is significant that during the last three weeks of his life when he was confined to bed he spent most of the time in prayer.

Much more could be written of his life but it can be found in the many books on Calvin. Let Beza, a contemporary of Calvin, have the last word, "I feel myself warranted to declare, that in him was presented to all men, one of the most beautiful and illustrious examples of the pious life and triumphant death of a real Christian; and as it is easy for malevolence to calumniate his character, so the most exalted virtue will find it difficult to imitate his conduct."

Quotations from—F. Wendel: Calvin; T. Beza:
The Life of Calvin. Translation by F. Gibson.

The Word

When you want to know what a man believes about a certain subject, you consult the writings of that man, if that is possible. To consult what others *say* he believes is not sure ground or sound method. We are now concerned with Calvin's doctrine of the Word, and we shall go to Calvin himself for a definition of this doctrine. His writings abound with references to the Scriptures as the Word of God, so we shall seek to classify some of these references.

1. *Calvin and the Inspiration of the Word:*

There are many views of inspiration in our day. They may be grouped as follows:

- (a) Dynamic inspiration, which refers inspiration to the writers rather than to what they wrote;
- (b) Partial inspiration, which asserts that the Scriptures are not all equally inspired; some parts are inspired and some are not; thus there is allowance for mistakes, errors and contradictions. Man decides what parts are inspired and what parts are not. On this view the *ideas* are inspired and not the words. This is based on the remarkable assumption that thoughts can be separated from words! Are you able to *think* independently of

language? The fact is that language (words) is the vehicle of thought, and if the correct words are not used the ideas are not accurately transmitted.

- (c) Plenary and verbal inspiration. It is plenary in that it is all inspired and verbal in that it is *verbally* inspired in the original manuscripts of Hebrew and Greek. This allows for copyists' errors in succeeding generations and recognises the task of reverent textual criticism in seeking to approach as closely as possible to what was originally written.

Today we possess a substantially accurate translation of the Scriptures, and for our comfort it should be noted that where there are differences in the extant manuscripts, no vital point of doctrine or redemptive history is involved. It must be emphasised that God in His providence has plainly watched over His Word and safeguarded it in a wonderful way. The vast labours of scholars for many years have established the astonishing preservation of the text. Where differences do exist they are of the following nature:

"From God our Father" . . . "from God the Father."

"For you all" . . . "with respect to you all."

"Yourselves to be dead" . . . "yourselves dead."

"Therefore if thine enemy hunger" . . . "if thine enemy hunger," etc.

Although verbal inspiration applies to the original MSS., not to the work of copyists and translators, the amazing fact is that the Scriptures have been handed down to us with such accuracy. When we pause to consider that the Bible has been copied during some thirty centuries, subjected to the catastrophes and captivities of Israel, even transported seventy years to Babylon, and that it has survived wave after wave of persecution, the staggering fact is not the minor differences which occur in the MSS. available, but the *overwhelming agreement*, an agreement which can only be accounted for within the direct providence of God, an agreement so great that you can take your Bible in your hand, and say with confidence, 'This is the Word of God.' (See Westminster Confession of Faith, Ch. 1, sect. 8.)

This orthodox doctrine of inspiration is frequently misrepresented as the 'dictation theory.' It is important to refute this charge. The writers of Scripture wrote in their own style, used their own vocabulary, did their own research work, expressed their deepest feelings and convictions and left the imprint of their own personality on all that they wrote. There is a great difference between the style and language of John and Paul. Verbal inspiration does not imply any dictation or mechanical theory, and Reformed theology is at pains to make this clear. It is, therefore, all the more regrettable that so many liberal scholars insist in repeating an old and empty charge. It is true that Calvin uses the word 'dictation,' but, as we shall see, he uses it figuratively, meaning that what they wrote was not their own word but God's. God so overruled the writing of the Scriptures that, although the writers used their own style and language and lived in their writings, they wrote precisely what God intended that they should write and were preserved from the errors common to all other writers.

If it be asked, 'How can this be?' the answer is, 'Because God is God.'

Calvin held to the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Scriptures; he believed that they were the Word of God in the highest and fullest sense, and the Bible made this claim for itself. The Reformed doctrine of inspiration is as much a doctrine of Scripture as any other doctrine by which we hold. Commenting on II Tim. 3:16—"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (lit. God-breathed) . . ." Calvin says, "This is a principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion, but, being organs of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare. Whoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him, first of all, lay down this as a settled point, that the Law and the Prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasure of men, but dictated by the Holy Spirit." If we take 'dictated' in the context of this passage we shall see the sense in which Calvin uses it. On the same verse he says, ". . . we owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God; because it has proceeded from Him alone, and has nothing belonging to man mixed with it." This is typical of Calvin. "It has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men." (*Institutes* I, vii 5). His writings abound with such statements. "Nothing is more certain," wrote Dr. B. B. Warfield, probably the greatest exponent of Calvin, "nothing is more certain than that Calvin held both to 'verbal inspiration' and to the inerrancy of Scripture . . ." (Calvin and Augustine, p. 61n). This needs to be stressed because current Barthian studies of Calvin are at pains to assert that he did not believe in verbal inspiration at any stage. Some of these studies are most valuable, but on this point we are compelled to differ. Examples of this reconstruction of Calvin may be seen in Dr. Niesel's 'The Theology of Calvin,' p. 31f; T. H. L. Parker's 'Portrait of Calvin,' p. 52f; Ronald S. Wallace's 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament,' p. 110-114; and Professor F. Wendell's 'Calvin,' p. 159f. All that

these men succeed in showing is that Calvin did not believe in the inspiration of the writings of copyists and translators.

Man is brought to recognise the Scriptures as the Word of God only by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit Who convinces and persuades the soul that the Scriptures are from God. This is Calvin's doctrine of the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti*, the witness of the Holy Spirit confirming the Scriptures to us as the Word of God. Always he was conscious of I Cor. 2:14, 15—"the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." To Calvin, men did not and could not know the Scriptures as God's Word as the result of reason, speculation or argument, but solely as they received the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. This was part of the Spirit's work in applying redemption to the souls of men. "Those who wish to prove to unbelievers that Scripture is the Word of God are acting foolishly, for only by faith can this be known" (Inst. I, 8:13). "For as God alone is a fit witness to Himself in His Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit" (Inst. I, 7:4). (See Westminster Confession of Faith, Ch. I: v., vi.)

II. Calvin and the Discipline of the Word:

"The Christian life," writes Ronald S. Wallace, "is for Calvin a life lived under the influence and guidance of the Word of God. A Christian is one who gives himself up in a spirit of utter docility to the teaching of the Word, to be ruled and disciplined by its precepts, even though its teaching and discipline is alien to our own corrupt nature." ("Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life," p. 215.) We see this in Calvin's comments on Psalm 19:7, where he deals with the words, "making wise the simple." Calvin translates, "instructing the babe in wisdom." Commenting on 'babe' Calvin writes, "... He shows by it what kind of scholars God requires, namely those, who are fools in their own estimation, (I Cor. 3:18), and who come down to the rank of children, that the

loftiness of their own understanding may not prevent them from giving themselves up, with a spirit of entire docility, to the teaching of the Word of God." In his sermon on II Tim. 3:16, 17, Calvin declares, "Whosoever will not show himself a rebel against God, and set Him at nought, must submit himself to the Holy Scripture." Later in the same sermon he says, "... let those who cannot suffer reproof, seek another master beside God, for they are not worthy to hear His Word. The world would gladly be spared; and we see many who are ready to burst with rage when they are threatened and corrected. They say they wish to be won by mildness. Then let them go to the devil's school; he will flatter, yea, and destroy them." "The Word of God," he says, "is not given to teach us how to talk, to make us eloquent and subtle, but to reform our lives, that the world may know that we are the servants of God. If we wish to know whether a man profiteth by the gospel or not let us mark his life: men may know how to talk, they may make a fair profession of godliness, and yet not have their lives correspond with the written Word of God." Calvin's writings teem with such statements. Under the discipline of the Word he included meditation, gratitude, self-examination and self-discipline. To Calvin the whole Christian life is controlled and moulded by the Word of God. He never disjoined the Spirit from the Word. God only speaks to us and guides us in and through His Word. "For by a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of His Word and of His Spirit so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our minds when the Spirit Who causes us to contemplate God's face, shines; and that we in turn may embrace the Spirit with no fear of being deceived when we recognise Him in His own image, namely, in the Word." (Inst. 1:9:3).

III. Calvin and the Preaching of the Word:

Preaching, to Calvin, meant expounding the Scriptures. He did not make the modern distinctions of doctrinal, ethical, devotional preaching, etc. Preaching consisted in the exposition of Scripture, be it a verse or a chapter. This gave Calvin his

great authority in the pulpit. He was God's messenger with God's message. "When we go into the pulpit, we ought to be assured that it is God that sent us, and that we bring the message which He committed to us." (Sermon on II Tim. 3:16, 17). To Calvin the gospel was a royal proclamation and the preacher was the King's herald. In Haggai 1:12 we read: "Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear the Lord." Calvin's comments on this passage are noteworthy. He concludes thus, "... the message of the prophet obtained as much power as though God had descended from heaven, and had given manifest tokens of His presence. We may then conclude from these words, that 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 nigh to us, face to face . . ." There could be no loftier view of preaching. The Word preached by man became God speaking. This occurs in his commentaries again and again. "This ought to add no small reverence to the Gospel, since we ought not so much to consider men as speaking to us, as Christ by His own mouth . . ." (Comment on Heb. 2: 11). "Among the many excellent gifts with which God has adorned the human race, it is a singular privilege that He deigns to consecrate to Himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that His voice may resound in them." (Inst., 4: 1: 5.) Such a high view of preaching could only be held on the grounds that preaching consisted in the exposition of Scripture. To Calvin preaching was the Word of God, the sign of His presence, the instrument of Christ's rule ("the sceptre of His kingdom"); it was effective to accomplish its commands and promises through the power of the Holy

Spirit; although he recognised a two-fold effect. It can either soften or harden. It can save or condemn. So on II Cor. 2: 15, 16, Calvin remarks, "The Gospel is never preached in vain, but has invariably an effect, either for life or death." To Calvin it was a solemn moment when the Word was preached, as well as joyful. Commenting on Matt. 10: 14 he says, "No crime is more offensive to God than contempt of His Word."

In the first chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith we have the classic definition of the Biblical doctrine of inspiration and revelation. It also happens to be the classic statement of Calvin's doctrine of the Word. He was one of the greatest preachers of the Word the Church has known, and he experienced all that he believed about the Word. In it God spoke to his heart. Through its preaching thousands were converted. He took God's Word as his only rule of faith and conduct and sought to be guided by Scripture and Scripture alone. "God subdued my heart to teachableness," he said; that was the secret of all his service for Christ.

We today possess the same Scriptures through which God taught John Calvin. Do we turn to them as our guide, authority and arsenal? There is a great need today for a return to the Scriptures, in the spirit of Calvin, to learn God's truth and know His revealed will. Today as we face infidel science on the one hand and aggressive cults on the other, our great need is *doctrinal reinforcement* and *total dedication*. If our young people are at all ignorant of any of the doctrines of the Reformed Faith, the fault is largely that of the Church in failing to teach. We are without excuse. Let us turn to God's Word with a new humility and interest, remembering that "all Scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." (II Tim. 3: 16).

The Sovereignty of God

The doctrine of the Sovereignty of God is a vast subject. I have chosen therefore, because of time and space to limit the subject and to leave out the relationship of sovereignty to free will or free moral agency.

May I suggest first that the doctrine of the sovereignty of God is relevant in this 20th century? Bertrand Russell, the eminent scientist, philosopher and sociologist, said: "I must adjust my life every day to live in a world of atomic bombs and crumbling empires." Again he wrote: "All the noon-day brightness of human genius is destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system and . . . the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute are yet so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand." When we read the literature of our day, men like Sarte, Salinger, and others tell us that our civilisation is moving toward a chaos. In a world so threatened by a cold war and Godless philosophies, Calvinism is not just a live option, but the only option. The heart of Calvinism is the doctrine of the Sovereignty of God. This message must be thrust into the foreground for two reasons: First, God's sovereignty is the only legitimate totalitarian government. God's supremacy

demands submission to His law. Secondly, that we might be reminded that God is in control. All events, great and small, are embraced in God's sovereign providence. All history is under His control and is moving towards His final judgment. History is not moving toward a chaos but a grand drama by which God will accomplish His holy designs and vindicate His glory. The people of God must see this truth and understand it. John Calvin said (Institutes I 17: 1), "That while the turbulent state of the world deprives us of our judgment, God, by the pure light of His own righteousness and wisdom, regulates all these commotions in the most exact order and directs them to their proper end." So we say that the topic, Calvinism and the Sovereignty of God, is relevant.

The central and formative principle of Calvinistic theology is the sovereignty of God. When we mention Calvinism to-day, the first thing people think of is Predestination. However, it is interesting to note that in the first Catechism which Calvin drew up (1537), predestination is only briefly mentioned. In the Confession of Faith, drawn up that same year, there is no mention of it at all. In the other Catechism and four Confessions attributed to Calvin, the doctrine is mentioned only in passing. And

in the first edition of *The Institutes*, it is given no important place even when he treats the matter of salvation. It was only in later editions after attacks had been made on the doctrine of predestination, that he enlarged upon this doctrine. We are not saying that predestination is unimportant but this demonstrates that the doctrine at the centre of all of Calvin's writing, the Sovereignty of God, was the formative principle of his theology. The highest point of the whole Biblical system is to be found in the sovereignty of God. Others, such as many Fundamentalists, consider the heart of the Bible to be the salvation of souls.

What is the meaning of Sovereignty? Sovereign means the right of absolute dominion. The right to act in reference to ourselves and others according to the dictate of our own will. An excellent example in this world is the old concept of an absolute monarch. What is an absolute sovereign or monarch? He is an autocrat, a ruler whose will is law. And no one has a right to dispute or disobey his will. So when we speak of the sovereignty of God, we mean His right to work all things after the counsel of His own will; to do what He wills with His own.

Let us now see wherein God's sovereignty consists. (1) The fact that God is the possessor of all. In the formula used by Melchizedek and Abraham we read: "He is possessor of heaven and earth." In Psalm 24: 1, we read, "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein." (2) His sovereignty consists in the right of dominion and rule over all. His kingdom is over all; He is God of the whole earth; He is the most High who rules in the Kingdom of men and gives to whomever He will. See Isaiah 54: 5, Daniel 4: 17, 25. (3) God's sovereignty consists in the all-pervasive and efficient exercise of government. God is not only the owner of all; nor does He simply have the right to dominion. But He also exercises government over all in accord with His nature. This sovereignty God exercises with omnipotent and irresistible efficiency. See Deut. 10: 17; 33: 26, Job 5: 12, 13; 12: 14, Daniel 4: 35, Isaiah 31: 3.

Let us go on now to see the specific way Scripture applies this all-pervasive and

efficient sovereignty. (a) It is in reference to the ordinary events of providence. God gives the rain. He maketh the sun to rise, grass to grow. He feeds the birds. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without His knowledge and will. God is actively involved in all the infinitesimal events of this universe. (b) It has reference to all earthly authority. He alone is God of all the kingdoms of the earth. He removes and sets up governments. He gives even unto the ungodly, power and strength. A glowing example of this is the division of Israel. It was fraught with dire consequences for the worship of the true God; yet it was brought about of the Lord to accomplish His purpose. He raises up Assyria as the rod of His anger. Not only does God ordain good governments, but also the corrupt government which violates the principles of government itself are within the government of God and fulfil His sovereign purpose. Thus all earthly authority is of God. (c) It has respect to good and evil. Even the sins of men come within the scope of His rule and providence. Job lost his flocks and herds and was smitten sore with boils. And yet he says: "Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?" We read in Proverbs 16: 4, "God hath made all things for Himself, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil."

Now we cannot avoid an acute question here raised by these pronouncements of Scripture. Is God actively involved in evil? God's providence has respect not just to evil in a generic sense but specifically to sin and wrongdoing. God often is spoken of in Scripture as blinding the minds of men, making them giddy, hardening the heart. This cannot simply be dismissed as the permission of God. God says: "I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy and harden whom I will." Calvin himself wrote: "These passages also many persons refer to permission, as though, in abandoning the reprobate. God permitted them to be blinded by Satan. But that solution is too frivolous, since the Holy Spirit expressly declares that their blindness and infatuation are inflicted by the righteous judgment of God. He is said to have caused the obduracy of Pharaoh's heart, and also to have aggravated and confirmed it. Some elude the force of

these expressions with a foolish cavil—that, since Pharaoh himself is elsewhere said to have hardened his own heart, his own will is stated as the cause of his obduracy; as though these two things were at all incompatible with each other, that man should be actuated by God, and yet at the same time be active himself. But I retort on them their own objection; for if hardening denotes a bare permission, Pharaoh cannot properly be charged with being the cause of his own obstinacy. Now, how weak and insipid would be such an interpretation, as though Pharaoh only permitted himself to be hardened! Besides, the Scripture cuts off all occasion for such cavils. God says, ‘I will harden his heart’” (*Institutes* I, XVIII: 2). The arch crime of all of history, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, involved cross and vile sin. Nevertheless, it occurred by the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.”

Yet we must hasten to add that the sovereignty of God is conditioned by the nature of God. He never does sin. He is undefiled and unpolluted by sin. Also this sovereignty must be seen in the light of man’s moral responsibility and guilt. Hence, we do not judge this doctrine by its reasonableness.

So we see with a new significance and impact that an inscrutable mystery surrounds the divine working of sovereignty. Eccl. 11: 5, “As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her with child; even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.” We bow in humble and intelligent ignorance because “His ways are not our ways.”

Let us look also at God’s sovereignty in the area of salvation. The best way this specific application of the sovereignty of God can be seen is for us to suggest the way in which Calvin presented the Gospel. He pointed out clearly that men have a need for salvation. They are wretched sinners, rebels against God who deserve to be cast into hell. This kind of presentation, evoked from people the question “What must I do to be saved?” How can I avoid this eternal disaster? The answer that is given is that we must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is precisely the point at which divine sovereignty comes to us. For we say

“Believe,” yet man by nature won’t believe. He loves his sin and hates God. Jesus said, “He who commits sin is the bondservant of sin.” What can you do to be saved? Nothing! Precisely nothing! There is not one solitary person who can do one solitary thing. Unless God changes that sin-loving, God-hating heart, there is no hope of salvation.

This sovereignty, in respect to salvation is not a mere vague foresight. The Scripture teaches us that faith itself is a gift of God. Not a gift in some mechanical sense, but a gift in the sense of an effective operation within the man. Turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 1: 1-6. The determining factor in this passage which describes election is “the good pleasure of His will.” In Romans 8: 29 we read, “For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate.” The word foreknow according to ablest Greek scholars means not to perceive or to take cognizance, but to know with a devoted interest. Professor John Murray of Westminster Seminary, translates this word foreloved. The question is simply this: Does salvation depend on man’s will or a sovereign act of God? Calvin expounded the doctrine of the Word of God that salvation is all of God.

Thus we have seen that the sovereignty of God is relevant, it is the formative principle of theology; its definition and finally the areas of its sovereignty. We need to recommit ourselves to this doctrine set forth by John Calvin. It is the source of hope in this chaotic 20th century. God is not dead but He is actively controlling history. Yet there is something deeply personal in this doctrine. It is your obligation in the light of this doctrine to bring all departments and every aspect of your life under the Lordship of Christ. God demands nothing less than total, unreserved commitment. This truth of the Word of God demands all you have and all you are. But we make our reservations. We say: You can have everything Lord, but I want to hold on to this one thing. God demands total surrender to His Lordship. John Calvin demonstrated this submission in his life by his motto. It was an open hand and in it a burning heart and under it the words: “I offer thee my heart, O Lord, promptly and sincerely.” Have you said that?

Justification by Faith

The Book around which we meet this morning is the Bible. Come from what nation we may it has a message for each of us and we take it as our infallible guide for faith and practice.

We might have commenced our study by singing a verse of a Psalm from that book inasmuch as there is no better way of impressing facts upon our minds than by singing. That may have been why God has placed so many of His important doctrines in the Psalms. Think for instance of the sovereign grace of God that lies immediately behind our subject of this morning. We find it in the familiar inspired song, Psalm 40—*He* took me from a fearful pit, *He* set my feet upon a rock. *He* put a new song in my mouth. *He* did it all, and the singer has only to lie confidingly on those loving arms that are able to reach down and lift from the fearful pit and from the miry clay. The verse however that I should have chosen as bringing directly before us our present subject would have been from Psalm 102 but as it is not in our selections, to avoid confusion in singing different versions we shall make do with simply quoting it. It is this:

“*He* from His holy place looked down,
The earth *He* viewed from heaven on high
To hear the prisoner’s mourning groan
And free them that are doomed to die.”

We take these words in order to get a background for the picture we wish to have before our minds. There are some who say that the Calvinistic idea of Justification is too legal. It smacks of the Law Court and the Judge and the sentence and the gaol. But we quote the Psalm as God’s background, because with Him on our side we are safe, and it does smack of the Law Court and the Judge and the sentence and the gaol. The Judge of all the earth has said: “Thou shalt surely die.” But there is one expression we must not lose sight of—“TO FREE.” That is our subject—how a man can be pardoned by the very Judge who has condemned him to death.

The whole world is in that prison house of sin. When *He* whose eye sees all things looked down His verdict was “They are all gone aside . . . there is none that doeth good, no not one.” We are all “in the same boat,” prisoners doomed to die. Looking over this happy audience to-day we might take a kind of negative comfort from the fact that at least we are in pleasant company. Personally I like young folks and I like to be with young folks—but not in gaol! But we can take a more positive comfort from that word FREE. We are a company of those who have professed to be freed from the doom of everlasting death. We hope that again we are “all in the same boat.”

If not, if even one is not, there is need of something even before we consider our subject. It is to take Paul's advice, "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the Faith."

This will give us the Conference spirit. Conference implies bringing together. We are talking together, thinking together of the marvellous mercy and the marvellous grace and the marvellous method by which God freed them that were doomed to die. We are far from dealing with the whole of God's wonderful plan of Salvation, or the whole of the Christian life. We want to pin-point one particular part. It is possible for a man to be in prison. He may be right up against the door. But he is inside. He is a prisoner. And it is possible for a man to be right up against that same prison door. But he is on the outside. He is a free man. What we want to pin-point is that thickness of the prison door through which a sinner doomed to die must be brought in order to enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God.

There is a quotation which is bound to be referred to somewhere in dealing with our subject. It may as well come in here. It is that of Luther in which he tells us that Justification by Faith is the article of a standing or a falling Church. He was not thinking of numbers. He was leaving many behind him in the darkness of Romanism. But he had come to realise that the Church which would be true to God's Word, the Church which would be a witness to the length and breadth and height and depth of the love of God, the Church which would fulfil her Commission and earn her Lord's description "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me" must have at the heart of her Theology the doctrine of Justification by Faith. We say "at the heart" and repeat that this is not the whole of Theology, just as the heart is not the whole of man. But it is a very vital part. If the heart ceases to throb the man is dead. If it is impaired he is severely limited in his ability to function. And not only is this doctrine at the heart of Theology but it is a Theology of the heart. We cannot tear it raw and bleeding from Regeneration. "A new heart also will I give you."

Diagnosis

We will need no Spiritual Cardiograph or Xrays to discover the disease of the human

heart. God has done all that and has written our case history into the Bible.

What are the effects of sin on the human race? There have been three main streams of thought running right from the beginning of the Christian Church down to the present day. There have been many tributaries, some muddy, some clear, but the three still remain distinctive. According to those who hold the first, Adam's sin belonged to Adam alone. Every person after that is just as able to keep the Law of God as Adam was if he so wills. Holders of this view were at first called after its chief exponent *Pelagians*. Some found it difficult to accept this position especially when they considered that the first man after Adam was a murderer and that in the world's long history no mere man had ever perfectly kept the Law of God. These held that Adam's sin affected human nature and man needed help coupled with a lowered standard before he could keep God's Law. Holders of this view were called *Semi-Pelagians*. Neither of these theories could stand the test applied by those who not only considered the history of mankind but who dipped deeply into the Scriptures and found God's verdict expressed in such terms as these—"You hath He quickened who were DEAD in trespasses and sins." Holders of this view were called *Augustinians*. These three views are often expressed thus:—

Pelagian—Man is WELL

Semi-pelagian—Man is SICK

Augustinian—Man is DEAD

The parallel names for the three are now *ARIAN*, *ARMINIAN*, and *CALVINISTIC*.

In commending Calvinism it is well to remember that John Calvin introduced no new Theology. Calvinism lay in the Word of God hundreds of years before Calvin was born. Calvin, the man, merely gave us the clearest systematic statement we have ever had of those doctrines which were re-discovered when the Reformation swept away the accumulated rubbish of the ages and laid bare the sparkling gems of Divine Truth revealed in the Word of God.

Our conception of what is wrong will colour our ideas as to the plan of Salvation. There must be a correspondence between the danger and the remedy. We would not think for instance of sending a submarine to

help a man stranded on the rocky face of the Alps or a Land Rover to rescue a man drowning at sea. So we get three theories as to the method of Salvation; (1) The Pelagian feeling that he is free from taint of Original Sin ought to be self-sufficient. He is willing to concede however that the Bible contains the best of teaching and that Christ is the perfect Example. He holds that these will be useful in counteracting the influence of environment in a sinful world. But surely he has forgotten that it was not environment which brought down Adam and Eve. Has he forgotten too the "wiles of the Devil" which certainly did bring our hitherto sinless first parents down to the pit of sin; (2) The Semi-Pelagianist believes (without any foundation for his belief) that God will give grace to be received or rejected, held or let go at will and that He will reduce the demand for a full obedience to the Moral Law and accept obedience to a lower standard. In this belief he hopes to be able to give an "Evangelical Obedience" which will merit Eternal Life. Has he forgotten the Sermon on the Mount in so much of which Christ deals with the Law of God and reveals depths of demands which even Moses never fathomed? There is no lowering of the standard there. And Christ abated not even a jot or tittle of that Law; (3) The Augustinian, determined to build his ideas of both sin and its remedy squarely on the Word of God, realises that as man is "dead in trespasses and in sins" God must re-create if man is to have life. Salvation is not something to be worked for, but something to be received. "The GIFT of God is Eternal Life."

The Atonement

If here we visualise the Cross and Resurrection of Christ and recall the Scriptural teaching as to what these meant we will be able to proceed with our subject; for Justification by Faith relates to the application to the sinner of the Redemption purchased by Christ.

Let us take a word at the time:

JUSTIFICATION

A good preparation for study will be to read the opening chapters of Paul's letter to the Romans. Note his well reasoned

conclusion. "Therefore being justified by faith." Paul has no doubts in his mind. We have said that this is the language of the Law Court. The opposite of justification is condemnation. The judge either justifies or he condemns. The question in the meantime is not one of character, for God is described as the One "who justifieth the ungodly." It is rather a question of relationship. How can man get into that relationship to God and His Law that he will be sure to get an acquittal in the Day of Judgment? This was God's problem too, and it was He Who solved it.

The word which describes man as fulfilling the functions for which he was made and consequently was free from condemnation is the word **RIGHTEOUS**. The physical parallel is that of all the parts and limbs of a man "fitly framed together," each fulfilling its proper task and the whole forming a fit and healthy body. But a limb, say an arm or a leg, may be dislocated, and no physiotherapy can enable that arm to put itself back into its socket, or enable one dislocated limb to restore another to its proper place. Help must come from the outside. Or if a watch falls heavily on a hard surface and a pinion is broken, no amount of shaking or pin-poking will make it go. It depends not on the watch but on the watchmaker whether it will ever work again or not. It must have a new pinion.

And man fell. His spiritual life was dislocated. He could no longer fulfil his function "to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever." It depends not on man but on his creator whether he will ever do so again. "If any man be in Christ Jesus he is a new Creator whether he will ever do so again. "If poem "created in Christ Jesus." "What a glorious device," says Dr. Guthrie, "is this Gospel of Justification by Faith." The Shorter Catechism defines what it is—"an act of God's free grace wherein He pardoneth all our sins and accepteth us as righteous in His sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone."

The arresting phrase here is:—"accepteth us as righteous." Is this mere make-believe? Is God playing a game of "Let's pretend?" Is He saying to sinners, "Let us treat with one another as if nothing had ever happened

to mar the beauty of the fair image in which man was created?" But no. Here comes in the "glorious device" of Christ as substitute. His death is counted as His people's death. His righteousness is put to their account.

At this point the objector comes along saying that it is unfair to punish one man for another man's faults and that it is impossible to transfer one man's righteousness to another. Stated in these terms this would be true. But the objector is fighting with a figment of his own imagination. This is not what takes place. We shall suppose that this same objector has been imprisoned for debt (Christ's simile for sin)—and someone who has both the wealth and the will to do so, comes along and pays what is owing, no injustice has been done. The judge is satisfied. The Law has no further claim. The prisoner may feel that he owes a deep debt of gratitude but he is a free man. It is true his benefactor's goodness of heart has not been transferred to him but he reaps the benefit in that the amount he owed has been placed to his account. His debt has been paid.

And Christ had both the wealth and the will to pay the sinner's debt. "He was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." He was God and became man. And as such He became the Covenant Head of the people He was to redeem. As Covenant Head He was representative of his redeemed in like manner as Adam was representative of the human race. "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." That covenant union is important. What Christ did He did for His people. "He was wounded for our transgressions." "He who knew no sin became sin for us." And so "as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." A heavy emphasis must be laid on the little word "in" twice used in the first of these quotations. Only as we are "in" Christ can we receive the benefit. That explains the intensity of Paul's desire "that I may . . . be found in him not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." His master mind had reasoned it out that

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

This was the vision John Bunyan got when he wandered in the meadows with "seven abominations" grappling for mastery of his heart. He felt that if he was to gain Salvation by his own efforts, the lamp of hope was burning low. But it kindled into flame as this sentence descended on his soul "My Righteousness is in Heaven."

Let us look up for a moment and admire this "glorious device" of Justification by Faith. But admiration will not be enough. This Righteousness of Christ is of no use to me until it is made mine any more than beautiful garments in the shop window, and I cannot pay for it. It is God that must clothe me with the "Robe of Righteousness." The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ.

How does He do it?

BY

This brings us to the 2nd word in the title of our subject—"by." It is a small word, yet important—small and important as the link that joins the engine to the train. Cut the link and the engine may puff forward with all its shining brightness and surging power unimpeded and unimpaired but the carriages are at a standstill and if I am in them so am I. Again it is God that forges the link that unites a sinner to the redeeming power that is able to lift from the fearful pit and from the miry clay. We see as we pass along more and more of how much we owe to the grace of God. "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God." That God-given faith is the link that binds. And we note that it is *by* faith, not on account of faith. Faith is the instrument used, not the reason why God saves.

FAITH

So we come to the 3rd word—Faith. This is the God-given reaction to the proffered gift. It is well to remember that it is more than simply faith in the abstract. Everyone exercises that every day. Without it no one would sit down on a chair, or step out on the pavement. Anyone who does so does it because he believes that these will bear his weight. Without at least a trembling faith

no one would travel on an express train or mount up in an aeroplane. The Shorter Catechism rightly reminds us that faith in Jesus Christ is a receiving and resting on Him alone for Salvation. It is the throwing of the whole weight on the finished work of Christ as our only hope.

It will only be fair to add the word "alone." Others as well as Calvinists have faith in Christ. The Arian trusts Him as the best teacher and example. The Arminian couples Faith with "Evangelical obedience." The Romanist has faith in the merits of Christ as obtaining pardon of his sins prior to baptism and as restoring an Original Righteousness that enables him to work as supervised by his Church for Salvation from that point onwards.

What then is "faith alone" in Jesus Christ? No need to take down a dictionary or even a work on Theology to find that out. Just look with me at a child in a mother's arms. Note well the look of contentment and fearless abandon of that "bairnie cuddled doon" on his mother's breast. I wonder had Christ a mental picture like that before Him when He said "Except ye . . . become as little children ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven."

Will you fancy yourselves with me on one side of a deep ravine, and we want to get to the other side where alone provision for all our needs is to be found. We come to a bridge and are well assured both of its strength to bear us and of the fact that there is no other way across. No amount of effort on our part will lighten the load we carry. There is nothing to which we can cling. We must rest our whole weight upon the bridge if we are to get across. This is Bible metaphor. God's Word teaches us that sin has separated between us and God. A chasm has been formed. And Christ says "I am the Way . . . no man cometh unto the Father but by me." In making the way He must have spanned the chasm, and He is the only bridge. We remember how Dives went down the wrong side of the ravine and missed the bridge only to find too late that the ravine had widened to an impassable gulf and there was no bridge farther down. This reminds us that faith belongs to life in this world. It is "the substance of things hoped for." It is the throwing of our whole

weight on the bridge while in this life trusting for all the blessings we need both now and in the life to come.

We think again of John Bunyan. "That word faith," he says, "put me to it." It was a word much to the fore in Reformation times. Bunyan could not get away from it, but what did it mean. Luther's experience had spot-lighted the verse, "The just shall live by faith." This phrase had been used by a prophet and repeated by an Apostle; had been written in the Old Testament and thrice quoted in the New; had been preached in Asia and in Europe; had been declared to Jew and to Gentile. And if John Bunyan at any time said to himself, "I'll turn away from all earthly theologians and go direct to Christ Himself," he was met straight away with this—"According to your faith be it unto you." So he looked again as he had looked before, and as that sentence once more descended on his soul "My Righteousness is in Heaven" he took his stand on the spiritual platform where Samuel Rutherford afterwards stood:

"I stand upon His merits, I know no other stand
Not even where glory dwelleth, in
Immanuel's Land."

Good Works

Have we shut out good works? If we are justified freely by God's grace, then it might seem that the greater the sin the greater would the grace appear to be. Paul rhetorically asks "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" He complains that he was being "slanderosly" reported as saying "Let us do evil that good may come." And if they were saying this in Paul's day we may be sure it will be said in our day too, for the Devil and his agents are not very original. What they proclaim to be modern and up-to-date is very often a rehash of old falsities.

But if we should so reason the Bible would contradict us at every step. Points like these will emerge from a study of God's Word:—

- (1) If we are Christ's redeemed we have been "chosen in Him before the foundation of the world *that we should be holy.*"

- (2) The driving purpose in God's heart in saving us is to enable us to do good works. "We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus *unto good works.*"
- (3) Reasoning on a par with what in every day affairs we would consider common sense we would conclude that this would be the end God had in view. Why do owners salvage a ship? Why do we rescue a drowning man? Not to leave them lying derelict on the shore but rather in the hope that they will be returned to their former usefulness.

If it is true that no effort of our own can save us, it is equally true that we are saved in order to be able to do something. If the apple tree is made good we expect the apples. If they fail to appear the gardener's pleading for another year's respite must give place to the imperative demand "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

Man restored to fulfil his purpose of glorifying God of necessity must bring forth fruit. Christ insists on this first of all by direct precept "Herein is My Father glorified that ye bear much fruit." This He backs up by His own example. "I have glorified Thee," He says, and how did He do it? "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." He identifies us closely with that example when He says "As the Father hath sent Me even so send I you." We are sent to finish the work given us to do. "There was a man sent from God whose name was John." He had a work to do and he did it. There was a man sent from God whose name was Jesus. He had a work to do and He did it. There was a man, a woman, a boy, a girl sent from God whose name was—yours or mine. We are failing to glorify God unless at the end of the day we can each say "I have finished the work given me to do."

Work is the key-note of the Bible. "Go work to-day in my vineyard" is the Master's imperative. We are to work not FOR but because of our Justification by Faith alone.

It would be sufficient to say that Justification by Faith is Scriptural and leave it at that. But even we can see that it is best. Among many advantages it:

- (a) gives to God all the glory. Our very helplessness as we lie on a Saviour's

loving arms magnifies the mystery of that love of God which "angels desire to look into."

- (b) gives to us a glorious assurance. We are depending on God, not on self.

If we might try to sum up with a mental picture the relative positions of holders of the three views of Justification already mentioned we would imagine three children at the edge of a cliff. Hundreds of feet below are the jagged rocks and boiling tides. Child number one walks self-confidently on the edge seemingly failing to realise how easily he may stumble. Child number two is a little less confident. He likes to know his father is near and that he can grasp a fatherly hand if and when he feels the need. But what if the childish fingers should lose their grip or he should slip over the edge at the moment when he has decided to let go and is "out of grace!" Child number three walks no less stumblingly yet with a strange peace in his mind and a warm glow of love in his heart kindled by the love of a father who walks beside him and firmly clasps in loving grip the childish hand held out to him.

I prefer to be child number three for I can almost imagine I hear the whisper of Christ in my ear, "My father . . . is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my father's hand."

So may I leave you gazing like John Bunyan into the glories of Heaven and as you see enthroned the One who was wounded for our transgressions and whose name is "Jehovah-Tzidkenu"—The Lord our Righteousness, you may be whispering in your hearts the words of Robert Murray McChesney,

"I once was a stranger to grace and to God,
I knew not my burden, I felt not my load.
When friends spoke in raptures of Christ on
the tree,
Jehovah-Tzidkenu seemed nothing to me."

But now: —
"Even treading the valley, the shadow of
death,
This watchword shall rally my faltering
breath,
For while from life's fever my God sets
me free,
Jehovah-Tzidkenu my death-song shall be."

The Priesthood of Believers

The principles of biblical truth taught by Calvin comprise a *system* of faith. Now a system can be likened to the electrical parts connected to one another on an automobile. that is, the battery, the dynamo (or generator), the coil, the spark plugs, etc. When one asks which is most important, the answer comes with difficulty for each is necessary in order that the ignition system function. Or in the making of a cake, a girl would have difficulty deciding whether the flour is more important than the shortening, since both are necessary. The recipe calls for each ingredient, and hence, the true value of each must be seen in the light of the whole.

The inference here is not that Calvin discovered *certain* truths and then filled in the necessary gaps in order to consummate a system, but the reference is relevant because the doctrine of the priesthood of believers as such does not receive a distinct treatment by Calvin in his *Institutes*. G. D. Henderson points out that "Calvin does not use the phrase 'priesthood of all believers'." On the other hand this doctrine can be seen penetrating Calvin's system of faith, and study of his commentaries and life reveals unmistakably his conviction on the teaching of scripture in this regard. Nevertheless, the principle is generally an underlying assumption rather than a formal idea.

The Nature of the Doctrine

Those familiar with the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms immediately recognise a relationship between this doctrine and the offices of Christ, prophet, priest, and king. This delineation of the Messiah's Offices predated Calvin to Augustine and before, but Calvin made use of it. In his book, *The Burning Bush*, Henderson declares, "The Geneva Catechism of 1537 speaks of Christ as King and Priest . . . but that of 1545 sums up the work of Christ in these words, 'He was anointed by the Father to be a King, Priest, and Prophet.' The 1559 *Institutes* devotes a chapter to discuss Christ's offices of prophet, priest, and King, and says, 'We, though in ourselves polluted, in Him being priests (Rev. 1: 6), offer ourselves and our all to God, and freely enter the heavenly sanctuary, so that the sacrifices of prayer and praise which we present are grateful and of sweet odour before him'."

Further insight can be gained by Calvin's comments on certain Scripture. In connection with I Peter 2: 5 he said,

"It is a singular honour that God should not only consecrate us as a temple to Himself, in which He dwells and is worshipped, but that He also wills to make us priests. Peter mentions this

double honour in order to stimulate us to serve and worship God more earnestly. Among the spiritual sacrifices, he gives first place to the offering of ourselves, of which Paul speaks in Romans 12: 1, for we can offer nothing to God until we offer to Him ourselves as a sacrifice which is done by denying ourselves. Then afterwards follow prayers, thanksgiving, alms, and all the duties of religion."

It can be seen from this one comment that Calvin considered this doctrine very important to the practical side of the faith and this will appear more fully later. Speaking on Hebrews 13: 15 Calvin wrote,

"The apostle says that another form of sacrifice is left for us which is no less pleasing to God, viz., the offering to Him of the calves of our lips, as the prophet Hosea says (14: 3). The sacrifice of praise is not only equally pleasing to God but more so than all the outward things that were used under the Law, as clearly appears from Psalm 50 . . . As it is the apostle's plan to tell us what is the proper way of worshipping God under the New Testament he reminds us in passing that we cannot honestly call on God and glorify His name except through Christ as our Mediator. It is He alone who hallows our lips which are otherwise defiled to sing the praises of God, who opens the way for our prayers, who in short performs the office of Priest by standing before God in our name."

This passage and comment brings to the fore Calvin's point that this priesthood of believers rests solely on the believer's relation to Christ. At one point he said, "We are not otherwise made partakers of the spirit than through Christ, who is the true sanctuary and our only high priest." The doctrine therefore rests upon and flows from the union of believers with Christ, and only as Christ imparts His grace is this possible. Regarding I Peter 2: 9, Calvin wrote,

"He has chosen us, when He could find nothing in us but evil and vileness; He makes us His peculiar possession from being worthless dregs; He confers the honour of priesthood on the profane;

He brings the vassals of Satan, of sin, and of death, to royal liberty."

Calvin certainly saw the Church as the Scripture says, a "royal priesthood."

It is relevant at this juncture to enquire why it is not more clearly spelled out in the *Institutes* and elsewhere regarding this doctrine. The term "priesthood of believers" does not appear as such in the Westminster Confession nor Catechisms. It can be shown that the principle is fused with other statements, such as the chapter in the Confession on the Communion of Saints, or in the Larger Catechism in reference to union with Christ. But why is it not clearly stated?

The answer probably lies in the fact that with the introduction of this doctrine to the common people of Reformation days, the practices logically flowing from this principle of the believers' priesthood suffered great extremes. The Romanist hierarchy with its ironclad system of clerical priests had not allowed participation by the people themselves—not to mention other heresy keeping the commoner from real fellowship with God—and especially with Luther the misuses of the new "liberty" were prevalent after the Roman dyke broke. Calvin was more cautious and, especially due to the practices of the Anabaptists, seems to have avoided a strong emphasis as such on this doctrine. He laid great emphasis on an educated ministry as his doctrine of the visible Church developed, with its integrated concepts regarding the respective offices in the Church, particularly the minister. He has been criticised for this insofar as it perhaps led to a lack of needed emphasis among subsequent Reformers; but the pressures of his time could well explain his practice. Again it should be pointed out that his lack of putting this doctrine in one concise statement in no sense implies that Calvin did not believe in nor apply it. This will be recognised in the applications of this truth next considered. One other comment is fitting: the doctrines of the "prophethood" and "kingship" of believers are also Scriptural, and yet Calvin does not treat them separately either. Hence, his approach is consistent.

The Application of the Doctrine

It is in connection with Calvin's uses of this truth that one should have a broad understanding of all which he wrote, for it is extremely practical and affects the entire life and outlook of the believer. As already quoted, Calvin recognised a believer in Christ to be one who by virtue of his relation to the great High Priest, even Jesus, had the privilege, and even the right, to have access to the very presence of God. This is the legacy of every true Christian.

As a priest, however, his main responsibility centred on the offering of sacrifices—spiritual sacrifices inasmuch as it was a spiritual priesthood. So he said in his commentary on I Peter:

“Among the spiritual sacrifices, he gives first place to the offering of ourselves, of which Paul speaks in Romans 12: 1, for we can offer nothing to God until we offer to Him ourselves as a sacrifice which is done by denying ourselves. Then *afterwards* follow prayers, thanksgiving, alms, and all the duties of religion.”

Here then God speaks to all. To him who still seeks after God's fellowship and blessing, men are bidden to seek unto Christ in Whom is found that relationship as priests unto God. And to the one seeking to serve Christ, Calvin through God's Word bids to surrender his life as a “living sacrifice,” denying himself, taking up his cross, and following Jesus. With this sacrifice God is pleased. To what extent have you considered your relation to God as a “priesthood?” Have you offered yourself on the altar of His service?

Here we are reminded of the sharp contrast between Calvin's concept and that of the Romanist. To the Catholic the *external* priesthood of the Old Testament has been continued into a new *external* priesthood. This not only opposes Calvin and Scripture, but by its very application keeps the Catholic in a continued state of immaturity, if in the estate of grace at all. In regard to the difference between the Old Testament priesthood and the New Testament believer, Calvin wrote in his *Institutes*:

“How also could the right of the priesthood remain among them, the pollution of whose crimes rendered them

abominable to God, unless they had been consecrated in a holy head? Wherefore Peter makes a beautiful application of this observation of Moses, suggesting that the plenitude of that grace, of which the Jews enjoyed a taste under the law, is exhibited in Christ. ‘Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood.’ This application of the words tends to show, that they, to whom Christ has appeared under the Gospel, have obtained more than their forefathers; because they are all invested with sacerdotal and regal honours, that in a dependence on their Mediator they may venture to come boldly into the presence of God.”

Now this difference between the concepts of the true priesthood can still be seen in Romanist vs. Reformed doctrine. There is an entirely different approach to fellowship with God and personal service. In one case, there is the gloriously direct access through the one Mediator between God and Man, the man Christ Jesus; while in the other there is the immature concept of being dependent upon another person, viz., the Church's priest, through whom one must proceed. God is not, therefore, a reality for the latter. For two young people from each of these respective backgrounds to believe they can have a happy marriage, the Bible offers no hope at all. There can be no concord! God and his fellowship are not comprehended in similar fashion, hence life together is hardly “together.”

But the element of personal religion only leads on to the broader concept of worship in general. And here again Calvin sought to articulate the biblical truths and again this doctrine of the priesthood of believers comes into play. This can be recognised in terms of the simplicity of true worship. Jesus said that true worshippers worship God in spirit (or in the Spirit) and in truth. Calvin expresses himself to this end in his commentary on Hebrews (10: 19f):

“The way to heaven is open for us not only in symbol but in very truth by the mercy of Christ because He has made us a royal priesthood . . . And he shows that there is nothing in Christ and His sacrifice which is not spiritual or heavenly, so he wants what we bring for our part to correspond . . . Because of all this we

in our turn are to bring nothing which does not correspond since there must be a mutual concord between Priest and people. Outward washings of the flesh must therefore be done away with and the whole apparatus of ceremonies must cease."

Instead of these outward things, stress was laid in Geneva on the understanding of the Word of God on the part of the people, the practice of prayer, and the faithful observance of the sacraments. If the Church member is a "priest" commissioned to offer sacrifices of praise and service, then he must understand what he is doing. Calvin was an exponent of having the Word of God in the vernacular, the language of the people, so it might be read by them and discussed. It was this which led him to give such place to the trained ministry so that the congregation might as Ephesians 4: 13f states edify the whole body of believers. An ignorant congregation could not do this, and worship services cluttered by pomp and circumstance—and even foreign or archaic language—in no way alleviated that ignorance. Suffice it to say that this phase of Calvin's concept of the priesthood of believers needs rediscovery in this century when Churches seem to put the preaching of the Word in at least a secondary place and bring in all kinds of practices designed to give one a "religious experience," but keep him in ignorance of the truths of Scripture. Real fellowship with God in worship was to Calvin centred in the participation of the congregation with intelligent grasp of speaking to and listening to God.

Of course here again Calvin differed with Rome regarding the Mass and the administration of the sacraments. To Calvin the sacrament was *spiritual*, yet nonetheless real in imparting grace to the worthy participant. Here it should be observed that this grace was appropriated solely by faith, and this faith was not separate from the Word. Hence, in Geneva, as continues in the truly Reformed Churches to-day, the sacraments were not observed apart from the preaching of the Word. As priests the believers must know what they are doing; and since their priesthood is spiritual, biblical faith must be the emphasis. Some who have perhaps

wondered why communion services require a sermon could well think on this. Also this speaks to certain problems connected to private communion.

Now Calvin's concept of the "minister" was also affected by his doctrine of the priesthood of believers. As priests, true believers had the prerogative and privilege of direct access to God. This access was essentially one of praise and service, but it also included the role of teaching. In the Old Testament beside offering sacrifice, the priest was responsible for teaching the people the law of God as it states in Mal. 3: 7. That this teaching had a wider concept also shows itself in Exodus 19: 6 where God told His people they were to be a Kingdom of Priests—that is, as a kingdom they were witnesses to the world of Christ's redemption. The very ordinances and precepts observed by the nation Israel served to convince surrounding nations that here was a people set apart to be holy, sanctified, and dedicated in their relation to Jehovah.

Hence, as I Peter 2: 9 states, the Church becomes a vast kingdom of those set apart for fellowship with God, but with the responsibility to teach the will of God.

Calvin, however, did not apply this apart from his concepts of the visible Church. Calvin held strongly that God had appointed the office of the minister to be the chief person committed the task of teaching the Church. Henderson says, "Calvinistic standards were unhesitating and unanimous as to the divine origin and permanent necessity of the Ministry of Word and Sacraments; Ephesians 4 was decisive." The minister was held to be representative of the people, even as the priests of the Old Testament, as Numbers prescribes, were to be from among men, and it was the people's right as priests to choose their own minister. Hence, the practice of "calling" a pastor. Parenthetically, Calvin believed every minister should also have a divine call to this office.

Having observed a number of areas in which the doctrine of the priesthood of believers was applied by Calvin, consider one more area and its importance to-day. Significant reference is made to the nature of that fellowship which was cultivated

among the believers of Geneva under Calvin's ministry. Stress has adequately been laid on Calvin's clear interpretation of Scripture that as priests believers have bold access to the throne of God. Essentially here is the fellowship of the Church—a spiritual communion with God Himself, or as John says it, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ." Similarly, Acts 2: 42 indicates the New Testament Church continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and in "the fellowship," or as the New English Bible puts it, "shared the common life." This practice of sharing with one another what God has imparted from communion with Him may be the New Testament concept of the so-called teaching responsibility of the Levitical priest. Whether true or not, it was a fact that early in his ministry Calvin stressed this "sharing" fellowship. Cadier quotes one author who says "... the first Calvinist service was held in some hidden locality, caves or grottos. There Calvin gave the exhortation (that was what they called preaching at first), calling on the Holy Spirit that He might descend on this little flock assembled in His name. He would read some chapter of Scripture and immediately they would clear up, or rather muddle up their difficulties. Each one used to give his own opinion as they would at a private disputation." Cadier then adds this footnote, "Behind the sarcastic remarks of the Catholic author we can discern the picture of an informal gathering for worship and mutual edification." The precious practice of believer sharing with believer the fruit of his own fellowship with God was thus at one time Calvin's practice. Due to certain pressures, probably the Anabaptistic errors, the practice seems to have become more the activity of the ministers among themselves rather than among the members. Henderson comments on the short-lived character of this emphasis:

"... I wish to note the tendency which so early entered into the Reformed practice of practically abandoning the original emphasis on the priesthood of believers in this matter of exposition of Scripture and insisting upon educated ministers alone undertaking this work."

He indicates, however, that Knox gained some support from Calvin in establishing a biblical basis for "the Exercise" in his day when small groups would share their view and practice regarding portions of the Word. And also he affirms that Rutherford supported what in his day were called Conventicles, upholding private men's liberty in public praying and expounding of Scripture. So even though the practice may have been only to a small degree carried out by Calvin himself, certain followers, including Covenanters, gave place to this "sharing of the common life." Is it possible that we have lost this vestige of the New Testament "Koinonia" and hence stifled the free movement of God's Spirit among us?

It is no small concern to many how quickly following a preaching service the congregation's conversation turns to the mundane. It's as though the service was a "performance" rather than a "fellowship." Instead of persons coming to the house of God prepared to share with their "fellow priests" what God has shown them that week in their personal fellowship with Him, often the persons are mute when it comes to spiritual conversation. And this says nothing of the Scriptural injunctions to "exhort one another," "comfort one another," "edify one another," and so forth.

Surely God has intended congregations to be centres of great spiritual activity on the part of all. This includes the offering of sacrifices of praise, thanks, alms, and obedience God-ward, as Calvin urges; but also the sharing with one another on a corporate basis, with the intended purpose of strengthening the God-ward fellowship of others.

Conclusion

Let it be finally stated that the doctrine of the priesthood of believers as shown in Calvin's own personal life, his ministry, and his writings lies at the very core of the life of the Church. Here is revealed the vital union and fellowship the true Church enjoys with God in Christ. Here rests the warmth and zeal of the Church afire for God, for only by fellowship with God can one find solace for the soul, joy for the heart, understanding for the mind, and motivation for an

otherwise sluggish will. We to-day seem to comprehend so little of a life like Calvin's where prayer was not the brief plea of a moment, but the way he spent many of his hours and days in His Lord's presence. Calvin was not basically a scholar of the Word, but rather one who had been brought by grace into a vital relation with Christ, and thereby to being a "priest unto God." By that same grace every Christian has access to the same Christ and hence to the same God. But what have you done with

that priesthood? Have you offered sacrifices? And did you begin with yourself?

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Calvinism in Life

Doctrinal teaching or preaching of any kind is not very popular in some quarters. This is particularly true of the Biblical principles and dogmas so closely associated with the name of John Calvin. Many people have little interest in or sympathy with them. Some are decidedly hostile to them. They speak of Calvinism as a harsh and irrational creed.

Any creed that is founded upon and true to the Word of God is bound to contain things that are difficult to understand. The Word of God contains much that our finite minds and minds that are marred by sin cannot fully comprehend. So it is not surprising that a system of doctrine like Calvinism which is based on and keeps close to the Word of God contains much that is above reason and may even seem contrary to it.

This, however, does not justify the criticism that Calvinism is a harsh and irrational creed. Such a criticism is not borne out by the influence of Calvinism and by the fruits it produces in the life of the individual and in society. While, as we shall see, it does put iron into the blood of men and produces heroic natures, it is also a creed which makes strong men weep—and produces in abundant measure the gentler fruits of the Spirit and a great love for the souls of men.

We have Scriptural authority for judging the truth and value of a religious system by its influence on the life of its adherents and devotees and on society generally. Our Lord Himself said: "A good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit, neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes." Judged in this way Calvinism will more than hold its own with any religious system.

Calvin saw to it that the work of Reformation which Luther had started was solidly based on the Word of God. The Reformation which had begun under Luther swept rapidly over Europe. The work of Reformation, however, was not as thorough as it might have been. Even in Germany itself, despite the popularity of Luther, the work of Reformation was hindered by compromises with the Roman Catholic Church. In Switzerland the movement suffered severe checks owing to the quarrel between Luther and Zwingli. The time soon came when the first spiritual impulse of the Reformation had more or less spent itself and Romanism was beginning to show signs of revival.

It was at this critical juncture that Calvin, who had raised himself to the position of foremost influence among the leaders

of the Reformation, by the publication of his "Institutes," settled in Geneva and proceeded to carry out that great constructive work for Protestantism which was to be the main work of his life. Without Calvin and his teaching, Protestantism as it has existed over the past 400 years could scarcely have been the outcome of the Reformation. The "Institutes," which, as he himself says, aimed at nothing beyond furnishing a statement of faith of the persecuted Protestants, gave definiteness and strength to the Reformation movement. They made it what it eventually became—the greatest influence in moulding the lives of the most powerful nations in Europe as well as that of the greatest state in the New World.

One of the immediate consequences of the Reformation was an improvement in the morals of the people and a betterment in social life generally. Nowhere was this more marked than in Geneva. Geneva, we are told, was a gay and pleasure-loving city, just struggling into independent political life at the time when Calvin entered it. Under the influence and leadership of Calvin it became a city of God. "Before Calvin died, Geneva had become the wonder of Christendom for civil order, administration of justice, pure morals, liberal learning, generous hospitality and the flourishing state of its arts and industries." It has been said that he gave its church a trained and tested ministry, its homes an educated people who could give a reason for their faith, and to the whole city an heroic soul which enabled the town to stand fast as the citadel of refugees for the oppressed Protestants of Europe.

But Calvin's influence and the influence of his teaching were not by any means confined to Geneva. Geneva became a kind of strategic centre. Hither refugees fled and found asylum and returned later to their own countries more perfectly instructed in the Word of God. Students came to study at the Academy which Calvin founded and carried back to Scotland and England and other European countries an admiration of the sound learning of Calvin's university. In this way the spirit and traditions of Calvinism began to spread through the universities of Europe. In addition to returning refugees, many missionaries went from Gen-

eva to other lands carrying with them a pure Gospel.

While Calvin's influence was widespread in his life, it has continued to extend since his death, and to-day the followers of Calvin are to be found in all parts of the earth. Not only has Calvinism extended the sphere of its influence, but it has maintained its great influence for good and has been the means of untold blessing to multitudes of men and women and to the world at large.

Calvinism, on the setting forth and proclamation of the sovereign grace of God as taught in God's own Word, has under God proved its power to turn men and women from the ways of sin and from the power of Satan unto God. We have already seen that Calvinism played a very large part in the Reformation, and the Reformation was one of the greatest revivals in history. Men and women were turned in large numbers from darkness unto light and were humbled before God and led to cast themselves upon His mercy and to give themselves to Him in glad surrender.

What was true of the Reformation has been true of later revivals. The great revival, which more than a century ago swept Wales from end to end and raised her from the depths of ignorance and worldliness, was the outcome of the Calvinistic preaching of the Gospel. So also was the 1859 revival in Northern Ireland when the power of Divine grace was very manifest and multitudes of lives were radically and permanently changed. In more recent times, the revival in the Island of Lewis, off the Scottish mainland, was also the result of the faithful proclamation of the doctrines of grace, preceded and accompanied by earnest, believing prayer.

These facts show that there is no truth in the assertion that Calvinism is a hindrance to the preaching of the Gospel. When we think of such staunch Calvinists as George Whitfield, Jonathan Edwards and C. H. Spurgeon, we see at once that the doctrine of sovereign grace, when properly understood and applied, is most effective in the conversion of sinners.

Calvinism has also made a tremendous contribution to the cause of civil and religious liberty. At the Reformation it set men and women free from the bondage of

the darkness and superstition and error of the Roman Catholic Church. Geneva became known as a fortress of freedom. Not only was it a fortress of freedom itself. As someone has said, "it became the nursing mother of men and women who gladly laid down their lives for liberty, men and women who searched the Scriptures daily, in whose eyes all human power faded into insignificance when brought into collision with the Divine will, who feared the wrath of God a thousand times more than the displeasure of an earthly potentate." John Knox, for example, came back from Geneva to Scotland grounded in the doctrines of Calvin, prepared to fight unto the death for liberty in Church and State. The Huguenots, in a special sense Calvin's own children, made a gallant stand for liberty in the face of treachery and great cruelty. The struggle for liberty in Scotland was continued by other disciples of Calvin—the Covenanters, who refused to submit their consciences to kings who were despots, and by the stand they made and the sufferings they endured were the means of ushering in the Glorious Revolution, bringing a large measure of freedom in its train. In England, the Puritans and Independents, who made such a noble stand when the liberties of the people were in imminent peril, were, with scarcely an exception, Calvinists. So were the Pilgrim Fathers, who adventured into the unknown in search of a new home, where they would be free to worship God in the simple fashion directed in the Scriptures. They carried the seeds of liberty with them across the seas in the Mayflower, seeds afterwards sown in the Constitution of the United States and which brought forth fruit a thousand fold in the life of that free and virile nation. In 1939 and the years following, the Reformed Churches in Europe stood firm against the new Nazi paganism. In Holland, France, Norway, Denmark and Germany itself the Churches in the Calvin tradition were a bulwark of opposition. In even more recent days we have had the gallant stand of the Hungarian Presbyterians. There can be no doubt at all that the liberties, both civil and religious, enjoyed by the people of many lands to-day are in very large measure due to the influence of

Calvinism. The sovereignty of God is the only safeguard against tyranny. Wherever Calvinism holds sway, there you find a deep love of liberty and a resolute resistance to oppression and tyranny in any form.

Calvinism has not only put iron into the blood of men and women of many nations and made them heroic defenders of freedom, it has had a wonderful influence on character as a whole. Sir A. T. Davis, in his little book on Calvin, narrates a story told by a friend of his. The story is about an Oxford undergraduate who took his first essay, "Ideas of Truth" to his tutor. After reading the essay the tutor said: "Have you noticed that the idea of strict truthfulness is almost confined to the northern nations of Europe?" "Is it not a fact sir," replied the undergraduate, "that the idea of the importance of truthfulness is almost co-extensive with the spread of Calvinist doctrines?" The tutor was evidently surprised, but replied: "I think there is much truth in that." This story is worth remembering when we are trying to estimate the influence of Calvin on national life and character. There can be little doubt but that Calvinism had a lot to do with the formation of what have been called our honest British Protestant Virtues. One of the great impulses of Puritanism was the Calvinistic idea of a Divine order in society, of a Kingdom of God among men, of an earthly state organised in all respects in obedience to and in perfect harmony with the Divine will. It was Calvinism which produced the Shorter Catechism which has done so much to produce God-fearing men and women, and to influence character, particularly in Scotland and here in Northern Ireland. J. A. Froude summed it up well when, addressing the students of St. Andrew's University, he said: "Whatever exists at this moment in England or Scotland of conscientious fear of doing evil is the remnant of the convictions which were branded by the Calvinists into the people's hearts."

Calvinism has played a very large part in the development of a social consciousness and of social concern. Calvin would not have had much sympathy with what to-day is sometimes referred to as the social Gospel, but he did believe in and proclaim the social implications of the Gospel. He seriously

endeavoured to apply Biblical principles to contemporary society and he achieved, under God, remarkable success. He made Geneva itself a model township with clean streets, proper drainage, health regulations, hospitals and schools. His example and the influence of his teaching is a rebuke to the unbiblical otherworldliness of many professing Christians and to their indifference to the needs of those around them. Are we ready to acknowledge the social implications of the Gospel and to grapple with current evils? Are we ready to return to the full Gospel preached and applied by Calvin?

Political history generally has also been greatly influenced by Calvinism. It is sometimes said that Calvinism may be good enough as a theological system but that it has no political programme to offer beyond a few general truths concerning the sovereignty of God in all areas of life, and the obedience which citizens owe the government. It is claimed that Calvinism has never developed a political system of its own. This is not true. Not only has Calvinism developed political principles of its own, but politics in various localities have been based on these principles. To Calvin belongs the credit of having established a political system which has profoundly influenced all subsequent democratic institutions. In recent years, attempts have been made in a number of lands to revive the Christian view of the State largely on a Calvinistic basis.

Then, too, Calvinism has influenced the world of culture and learning. Calvin, for example, has been referred to as the father of French literature or the French language. His commentaries and sermons were not merely the most masterly productions of their kind, they contributed powerfully to the formation of the French language. He breathed into the French language a new life. Dr. Wylie, in "The History of Protestantism," writes: "It is hard to say how much the illustrious statesmen and philosophers, the brilliant historians and poets, who came after him, owed to him. They found in the language which he had so largely helped to make fit for their use, a suitable vehicle for their talent and genius. Than language there is no more powerful instrumentality for civilizing men and there is no more powerful instrument for fashioning

language than the Gospel." Calvin taught how needful Christianity is for culture. If culture is to accomplish its proper end and to develop in the right direction, it needs the guiding principles of God's Word and few people did more than Calvin to seek to have Christ recognised in the realm of culture.

One of Calvin's greatest legacies to the world was the Church which he organised. That Church "claims to be as cosmopolitan as the humanity for whom the Saviour died. Laymen have a voice in her councils, and peer and peasant meet on terms of equality in her courts. In an age of democracy, it is the most democratic and yet the sanest of all democratic institutions. Not only is it the most Scriptural, but experience is proving that it is also the most serviceable form of Church organisation."

These are some of the things Calvinism has accomplished. It has been said that, "Next to Paul, John Calvin has done most for the world"—or, as Calvin would have us say, not Calvin, but Calvin's God.

And yet, despite the record of Calvinism and the blessings that have flowed from it, it is not much in favour in many quarters to-day. Many Churches that were in the Calvin tradition have departed from it. Even many people who are still nominally Calvinists in creed and who enjoy many blessings that Calvinism has brought them, sit very lightly by it. They do not teach and proclaim it as they should, nor do they illustrate it in their lives.

There is some consolation in the fact that there seems to be a considerable revival of interest in Calvinism in some quarters and that some Churches which had come under the spell of modernism are beginning to return to the Calvinistic fold. May such revival of interest grow and increase because Calvinism or the systematic presentation of the great truths of God's Word is what the world needs to-day. There is a tragic self-complacency in modern Protestantism in face of the ill-concealed attempt on the part of the Roman Catholic Church to recover that despotic power over the souls of men from which the Protestant Reformation rescued a large section of mankind. A thorough going Calvinism is the only thing that will save modern Pro-

testantism. The teaching of Calvin is not only the strongest possible challenge to the errors and aggressiveness of the Roman Catholic Church but also to Arminianism, Communism and Materialism.

We have tried to show something of the influence of Calvinism in individual and social life, and have claimed that it alone can meet the need of the hour. It may be helpful to ask: "Wherein lies the strength of Calvinism?" "What is the secret of its powerful influence?"

It is in the fact that the essential spirit of Calvinism is an awareness of the majesty and sovereignty of God. The idea of God that people have is of great importance and determines to a large extent their conduct and way of life. "Your God is too small" is the title of a book by J. B. Phillips, published a few years ago. That is not true of the God of the Bible who is so truly and vividly set forth in the system of doctrine known as Calvinism. The sincere Calvinist is aware of the majesty and sovereignty of God and of his own unworthiness to approach Him. This is the foundation of his faith and worship and life, and it is productive of great blessings in his heart and life.

The Sovereignty of God lays a firm foundation for the assurance of Salvation. If salvation were dependent even to some extent upon ourselves and our own efforts, then we must despair of ever being saved. Since, however, God is sovereign in His grace as well as in all His other attributes, it means that salvation is of God from first to last. The plan of salvation didn't originate in the mind of man. It was planned by God. The Saviour is God-given. The Lord Jesus Christ, God's only begotten and well-beloved Son has purchased our redemption for us. He finished the work given Him to do.

Salvation is of God not only in its origin and purchase, but also in its application. God sends His Holy Spirit into our stubborn hearts, regenerating us and drawing us to the Saviour with a power that is irresistible. We only work out our own salvation because it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. He also keeps us day by day by His grace.

The state of the believer is therefore one of great security. It is as sure as the eternal purpose of God, which cannot be defeated. (See Romans 8: 29-39.)

The doctrine that salvation is of the Lord may be a stumbling-block to some but it is a great means of assurance to the child of God.

The doctrine of the Divine Sovereignty also gives comfort and courage and strength in times of crisis and trial in the believer's own life as well as in times of upheaval in the world. "This is the comfort of the believer," declares Calvin, "to understand that the heavenly Father doth so embrace all things with His power that nothing befalleth but by His appointment." In another place, he writes: "Our minds will be so stayed on the Providence of God that things present will not distract us. Consider how happy is the lot of God's children in this regard."

"The lives of men are as it were beleaguered by a host of misfortunes. Our very bodies are the seat of a thousand maladies and we carry everywhere with us the seeds of mortality; we cannot shiver or sweat without danger. Wherever we turn, hidden foes lurk, ready to deal a mortal blow. If we get into a ship, death is within a foot of us. A fire may leave you destitute or bring the roof on the top of you in the night. A man's crops are at the mercy of hail and snow, drought and all freaks of weather, threatening barren fields and famine. Amid such perplexities how can we avoid being discouraged with a knife at our throat all the time."

"If the providence of God shines in the heart of His servant, he will be freed from such tormenting thought and foreboding. We all have a natural fear of fate, and so can gladly entrust our future wholly to God. It is indeed wonderfully reassuring to reflect that the Lord controls all things by His power, directs them by His will and guides them by His wisdom, that nothing comes to pass but what He has predestined. Furthermore that He hold us in His safe-keeping and has given us into the charge of His angels, so that nothing can harm us, save what in His good pleasure He ordains."

Finally, Calvinism encourages holiness of life. It lays great stress on morals and

morality. When, as the Calvinist does, you place God at the centre of your system everything is made to end in God and in His glory. Even man's salvation becomes a means to a higher end, namely, to win for God a people zealous in good works.

There is another reason for the high development of moral life in Calvinism. It is the fact of total depravity. Believing man to be totally depraved, the Calvinist lays great stress on the need of the Holy Spirit not only in regeneration but also in sanctification. The effect on moral life of such dependence upon God's power is evident. The man who realises his hopelessness most will depend most upon God, and as a result will draw most upon the riches of God's grace for moral accomplishments.

There is one more observation that might be made about the Calvinistic emphasis on holiness of life. The Calvinist believes that when God saves man, He saves the whole man. The whole man must therefore be devoted to God's cause. He is God's, not

only when he is at Church, but when transacting business, or engaging in political or social activities of any kind. No sphere of his life may be excluded. God must control the whole life.

We cannot do better than close by quoting some words from Calvin's own Institutes: "We are not our own: let not our own reason and will dominate our thoughts and intentions. We are not our own: let us not seek what is profitable after the flesh. We are not our own: let us forget ourselves and our earthly surroundings. Rather, we are the Lord's: let His will and wisdom dictate all our actions. We are the Lord's: let all the parts of our life be directed with single-minded zeal towards Him as our supreme end. O what progress a man made who, recognising that he is not his own, has taken from his own reason the sovereignty and control, and resigned and surrendered himself to God. For as self-pleasing is a man's greatest bane, his surest haven lies in forsaking his own counsels and desires and following God alone."

Calvin and Evangelism

1 Current conditions of Evangelism in Twentieth Century.

"And the word of the Lord came unto me the second time, saying, What seest thou? And I said, I see a seething pot; and the face thereof is toward the north." (Jeremiah 1: 13). The "seething pot" of circumstances within which we must carry on the work of Evangelism in the 20th century can be partially summarised under five headings. 1—A spreading universalism pretends to be a new kind of Gospel which would teach us that souls are not really "lost" and then "saved," but rather that all are already "saved" and each has merely to accept what he already is and then go on to achieve perfection by 'drawing out' that goodness which is inherent. 2—A sort of mechanical ecclesiasticism is coincident with the emphasis on doctrine of union which teaches that we can achieve union without unity by forgetting or ignoring our doctrinal differences rather than trying to resolve them on the basis of Scripture. 3—A distorted Calvinism on one hand, would teach us that God not only does it all but that man is not to do anything except "wait." It misuses the very sovereignty of God, making it an excuse behind which spiritually lazy people hide. 4—A man-centred humanism on the other hand, would teach us that man himself must produce the results for God. It's a kind of humanistic activism which calls man to "turn the

tide for God" and is heard in those pulpits where preachers are "moralising" instead of proclaiming the Gospel. 5—An eccentric evangelism would centre our attention in an attack on Communism, or other Churches, or winning people to "our" position, to "our" personal following, or to "our" denomination, at the expense of centring it in Christ, "that in all things He might have the pre-eminence." It is within this "seething pot" 20th century circumstances that the practices and theological teachings of John Calvin must be studied, rediscovered, and reapplied if they are to be of practical benefit in our own work of Evangelism.

II—Calvin's Life and Practice of Evangelism

The record of known facts concerning Calvin's interest in Evangelism is both impressive and instructive. Beza, in his biography of Calvin, described his conversion in the following words:

Having been made acquainted with the reformed faith by a relation named Peter Robert Oviyet (who translated the O.T. into French) he had begun to devote himself to the study of the Holy Scriptures, and, from an abhorrence at all kinds of superstition, to discontinue his attendance on the public services of the Church.¹

Calvin, in a remarkable statement addressed directly to God, tells us how he resisted this personal evangelism.

*Every time that I looked within myself, or raised my heart to Thee, so violent a horror overtook me that there were neither purifications nor satisfactions which could in any way cure me. The more I gazed at myself the sharper were the pricks which pressed my conscience, to such a point that there remained no other solace or comfort than to deceive myself by forgetting myself. But because nothing better was offered me, I continued on the course that I had begun. Then, however, there arose a quite different form of doctrine . . . But I, offended by the newness of it, was scarcely willing to listen to a word of it and I admit that at the beginning I valiantly and courageously resisted it . . . But when my mind had been made ready to be truly attentive I began to understand . . . Being then grievously troubled and distracted, as was my duty, on account of the wretched state into which I had fallen and yet more on account of the knowledge of the eternal death which hung over me, I judged nothing more necessary to me after having condemned with groaning and tears my past manner of life, than to give myself up and to betake myself to thy way . . .*²

Calvin went on to describe the almost insatiable desire to study the Word of God that developed from that point on. He learned the Greek and Hebrew in order to get closer to the sacred literature, and Beza tells how it was his practice to read and study until midnight, "and on getting up in the morning, to spend some time meditating, and, as it were, digesting what he had read in bed, and that while so engaged he was very unwilling to be interrupted."

This part of Calvin's life might be summarised by saying (1) that he was himself the product of a kind of Evangelism known today as Personal Evangelism, and (2) that in Calvin's own experience there was little if any difference between hearing the message of salvation and studying the doctrines of the Christian faith; between the kerygma and the didache. He probably would not have agreed with C. H. Dodd when he said: *While the church was concerned to hand on the teaching of the Lord, it was not this*

*that made converts. It was kerygma, says Paul, not by didache, that it pleased God to save men.*³

In his commentary on Matthew 28: 19 Calvin told us more about the relationship he saw between Evangelism, Baptism, and Teaching.

*The meaning amounts to this, that by proclaiming the gospel everywhere, they should bring all nations to the obedience of the faith, and next, that they should seal and ratify their doctrine by the sign of the gospel. In Matthew, they are first taught simply to teach; but Mark expressed the kind of doctrine, that they should preach the gospel; and shortly afterwards, Matthew himself adds this limitation, to teach them to observe all things whatsoever the Lord hath commanded.*⁴

According to this Calvin believed that the work of Evangelism as taught by Christ involved 1st Discipling, 2nd Baptising, and 3rd Teaching the "all things," and it would appear that the practice of requiring new converts to remain outside the Church family until they had learned the "all things" or grown to spiritual maturity, was neither Scriptural nor Calvinistic. His commentary on standards of Church membership in Luke 3: 10 and his commentary on Matthew 3: 6 and Mark 1: 5 regarding auricular confession ("nor are we told that John left in charge to his disciples an ordinary rule for confession") also bear out this thought. It should be remembered however that Calvin repeatedly emphasised the importance and power of the solid teaching of the Word in the life of the young Christian.

In short, whoever does not fulfill the duties of a teacher acts wickedly and falsely by assuming the name of an apostle; and—what is more—the priesthood of the New Testament consists in slaying men, as a sacrifice to God, by the spiritual sword of the word. Hence it follows that they are but pretended and spurious priests who are not devoted to the office of teaching.

"Slaying men as a sacrifice to God, by the spiritual sword of the word" was Calvin's concept of Evangelism and in his own life experience, there was very little difference between the initial cutting, the proclamation of the Gospel, and the follow

up, the solid teaching of the Word. Further evidence of this point is to be seen in the huge library of his written works. His confessions, forms of worship, catechisms, commentaries, and institutes were teaching aids designed to help with this teaching of the Word. Beza said Calvin's first published form was used, "during divine service in order that the people might be gradually trained to the investigation of the truth."

We conclude from this that in spite of what others might say, Calvin was not trying to "convert" people by the power of his own reasoning or legal logic; nor was he trying to explain a plan of salvation in ways calculated to cause men to respond; but rather that he was seeking to serve as a catalyst—to bring the souls of men into such sharp, vital, thoughtful contact with the Word of God that a living Christ would be able to use it in drawing them to Himself. This same confidence in the power of the taught Word caused Calvin to accept spiritually young converts so readily. It was the power of the Word of God rather than the so called "high standards" of men that was to stimulate the spiritual growth of young converts and at the same time guarantee the purity of the Church. Wherever he went in his lifetime he instituted a series of schools or weekly classes for the study of the Bible and then, in his will, he left much of his worldly wealth to a school or academy in Geneva. From beginning to end the teaching of the Word and the work of Evangelism were one in Calvin's personal experience, his thinking and his practice.

It would be a serious mistake however, to assume that Calvin was merely content to write books and conduct public services, preaching or teaching as it were to the column of air in front of his pulpit. He referred to the importance of "hand-to-hand" or mind to mind personal contact as an important aspect of this kind of teaching Evangelism. It had been important in his own conversion and from the first years of his Christian life at the law school at Orleans, according to Beza, ". . . all in that city who had any desire to become acquainted with a purer religion, often called to consult him." He particularly insisted upon providing opportunity for laymen to participate in the teaching

situation of the sharing meetings and his entire life work could have been described as a ministry of personal training. One indication of the extent of this ministry is to be seen in what remains of the tremendous volume of personal correspondence Calvin carried on with the ecclesiastical, political, educational, and social leaders of Europe. Almost every new volume was introduced as a letter to a particular person or group of people. Knox was one typical, better known, example of Calvin's personal ministry. He returned to Scotland saying that Calvin's school in Geneva was the nearest thing to the school of the apostles since the days of the apostles. The city magistrates at Geneva found it necessary to make special provision for the hundreds of students who came from other countries to Calvin's school. It is no small tribute to his vision and no small rebuke to our own "Congregationalism" or "Denominationalism" to find that very few of these men became members of Calvin's congregation or denomination. In France alone the number of Reformed Churches increased from one in 1555 to 2,150 in 1561 and the great majority of those reformed pastors were trained in Geneva. "Send us wood" wrote Calvin, "and we will send you back arrows." Similar records could be found of his contribution to other countries. The entire reformation shows the impact of the results of Calvin's work of Evangelism.

One of Calvin's methods of Evangelism is of particular importance in our Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Sharing Fellowship. In commenting on the word *koinonia* which summarises this practice and principle, Calvin pointed out that Erasmus rendered the Greek word "Society" and went on to indicate that the word was used in three ways: (1) As the Father has "fellowship" with the Son, (2) So we have "fellowship" with the Son, and (3) So we may also have "fellowship" with other believers. Calvin made specific provision for this particular kind of Fellowship-Sharing in the services in Geneva; Knox carried the principle back to Scotland and insisted upon it, particularly in his First Book of Discipline and in his later letters, as a practice essential to the work of Reformation. Our Covenanter forefathers put it into practice in the United

"Societies" of South Western Scotland during the Killing Times and those Societies were the germ and fabric from which the Reformed Presbytery was later formed.

From all of this we derive three lessons important to our own work of Evangelism in the 20th century. First, Calvin himself was the product of Personal Evangelism. Second, he equated, or nearly equated, the teaching of the Word with the proclamation of the Gospel, and this not only influenced his Gospel Message, it also made him bolder than we are about accepting new converts for baptism. Third, he repeatedly emphasised the importance of the Fellowship-sharing type of meeting as a medium or means of Evangelism and Follow-up.

III—The Theological Content of Calvin's Message of Evangelism

It is not surprising to find that after men had learned to reject the near-absolute powers of the Medieval Roman Catholic Church, in favour of the absolute authority of Scripture, they gloried in their new found freedoms. Entirely apart from the Anabaptistic extremes there were at least five different schools of Atonement theologians branching out from reformation years. 1—The Military Theory came out of pre-reformation theology, teaching that Christ paid a ransom to Satan for the elect. 2—The Mystical Theory taught a kind of spiritual-mystical union with Christ, apart from God's revealed will. 3—The Moral Influence Theory taught that Christ was a great man, a perfect example for us to follow. The effects of atonement are seen as terminating on man, acting on man for God. Horace Bushnell belonged to this school of Socinian theology and it is still alive to-day. 4—The Governmental Theory was proposed by Hugo Grotius, a Dutch theologian who had been trained in International law. It had an interesting influence in the Edwardian School of New England Theology in the United States. Grotius placed an extraordinary emphasis on God's moral law and Government. Law and Government must be preserved inviolate, and therefore an atonement became necessary. Atonement acts almost impersonally to preserve moral law and government. 5—The Penal Substitutionary doctrine of Atonement dates back

into pre-reformation days at least as far as Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*. It considers Christ to be our substitute, with the Atonement acting on God for man.

John Calvin belonged to this last branch or school of reformed theologians. He taught us that Jesus Christ by His sufferings and death gave perfect satisfaction to the law and justice of God on behalf of elect sinners, and on account of that they are delivered from condemnation.

It is also not surprising to find that still other "Reformed" theologians who lived after Calvin, such as Turretin, Gerhardt, and Quenstedt, in debating and defending Calvin's theology, frequently carried it far beyond where Calvin himself had left it. In doing so some, I believe, have destroyed elements essential to Calvin's message of Evangelism. There were at least three schools of penal-substitutionary atonement theologians tracing their roots back to Geneva, and innumerable variations and adaptations of their theology. Their writing on this subject have been criticised.

*It displays an incredible want of co-operation on the part of theologians; so much so that the memory is unequal to the task of mastering the variations, even of views which follow one type.*⁵

From all this let us receive severe warning to the effect that "all that glitters is not gold." Not all "reformed theology," or theology stemming from the Reformation, is Scriptural. It is to be feared that there are those who are hiding behind the phrase "Re-formed Theology" simply because they have never yet formed their own theology, as Calvin demanded they should do, through their own diligent systematic study of the Scriptures. It is also to be feared that much material going by the name of Calvin to-day would not be claimed by him.

One of Scotland's old masters of theology, Wm. Hastie, in his book on *The Theology of the Reformed Church in its Fundamental Principles*, has pointed out that "The great strength of the Re-formed Theology lies in truth, in its deep apprehension of the sovereignty of God . . ." Later he added that "Whoever understands the word grace, in its connection with God's universal manifestation and revelation of Himself in the

world . . . comprehends in principle the whole system of the Reformed Theology.”⁶ John Calvin had a clear understanding of these two words and they were vital influences in his work of Evangelism. On one hand they were immediately involved in his breaking free from the Roman Church and on the other hand they held him in a careful, reverent discipline that avoided the extremes of freedom that were, then and later, so prevalent. They continue to be essential in maintaining our balance between legalistic formalism and spiritual expressionism in the work of Evangelism to-day.

It is obvious however that not everyone is thinking the same thing when they refer to Calvin’s doctrine of the Sovereignty of God. Even his translators have differed in the emphasis they have brought out. Calvin used the Latin *arbitrium* in describing God’s Sovereignty. By this he did not mean a capricious or despotic freedom, but he did mean that God was perfectly free to act in response to His own perfect will and that such actions did not precipitate conflict insofar as God’s various attributes were concerned.

Necessity

That note of Sovereignty is a particularly important factor in Calvin’s doctrine of the necessity for Atonement. Grotius the Dutch lawyer had insisted that the Atonement had been necessary in order to satisfy the demands of moral law and government, as it were, over the heads of the people. Regardless of the redemption of souls, law and government must be preserved inviolate. A. H. Strong emphasised the point that the Atonement was absolutely necessary in order to resolve the “may” or “must” struggle between God’s mercy and God’s justice. He traced that schizophrenic struggle right back up into the Godhead and there showed how the Cross reconciled God to Himself. But John Calvin went behind all these to trace the whole necessity for Atonement directly to God’s own free antecedent will and decision to save sinners. Not the preservation of law and government, not the resolution of a struggle between Divine attributes, but the Sovereign will of an omnipotent, omniscient God was the antecedent purpose in the work of Atonement, and the *primum mobile* of it all

was God’s Sovereign love. Here Calvin quoted Augustine on this subject, “In a manner wondrous and divine He loved us even when He hated us.” I doubt very much if Calvin would have said as C. Hodge did say in his book on Atonement that “God’s immutable nature demands the punishment of sin and therefore Christ . . .” Calvin would have said, “God’s Sovereign will decreed the salvation of some sinners, and therefore Christ . . .”

True enough Calvin insisted that *after* God had resolved to save men then at least four things rendered Christ’s atoning death on the Cross a necessity: viz. 1—the perfections of God including all His attributes. 2—the nature of God’s moral law. 3—the inefficacy of any other means of salvation, and 4—the promises of Scripture. But these are relative, moral necessities, for Calvin they all hinge dependently on God’s absolute sovereign decision to save souls and he never loses sight of that point. After God had made His great Sovereign decision, then and not until then, these other things become reasons for Christ’s dying on the Cross. And every conception of God as the Supreme Being which excludes this notion of volition is both defective and absurd. To act necessarily is, properly speaking, not to act at all, but to be acted upon. And God cannot, in matter of man’s salvation, be said to have acted from necessity. It originated in the exercise of His will. It was not salvation by justice, so much as it was, as Paul has described it, “Salvation by grace” that lay behind Calvin’s message of Evangelism.

Value

That same note of sovereignty is to be seen breaking through Calvin’s doctrine of the substance or value of Atonement. Turretin demanded that Christ must suffer “to the uttermost farthing” every little pain and misery the redeemed souls would have suffered if they had gone to hell as they deserved, for eternity. John Owen insisted that Christ must have suffered the *idem* and *tantundem* of the sufferings of the elect, and although Charles Hodge criticised Owen for his “excessive” demands here, Hodge himself called for Christ to suffer “precisely the very same when considered as penalty.”

Calvin certainly did emphasise the fact that Christ's death was a penal substitutionary, expiatory satisfaction sufficient for the sins of all whom Christ came to redeem. But when Calvin wanted to emphasise the infinite intrinsic value of Christ's sacrifice, he did not emphasise the measurement of the pains, so much as he emphasised Christ's divine appointment, His supreme Dignity and Purity and His perfect voluntary freedom. More important than these even was the exercise of God's will in His Sovereign decision to accept Christ's sacrifice. Mozeley well stated the contrast between Calvin's doctrine and that of others at this point when he said, "Merit dependent on God's good pleasure is a very different conception from satisfaction demanded by justice," and this is undoubtedly another example of Calvin's anxiety for the complete revelation of God's Sovereignty.

Here again Calvin's interest in this note of *arbitrium* in God's Sovereignty has left an element essential to the work of Evangelism because the overall impression is that the Atonement consisted in a penal substitution which would command full respect for moral law and government, but that it had never been intended merely to satisfy the demands of the law, as it were, without regard to the souls of the people. He never makes the rigid demand that Hodge makes that *either* we trace the Atonement back to that immutable nature of God which "demands the punishment of sin," *or* else we must trace it "to motives originating in the moral condition and necessities either of the individual sinners or of the moral universe in general." Calvin always maintains a definite eye open to the particular personal needs of those souls which are dead in sin—needs which God by His Sovereign decision to save, has Himself already recognised.

Extent

Calvin's doctrine of the *extent* of Atonement shows the most important marks of the influence of this doctrine of Sovereignty. And here Calvin's confidence in God's Sovereignty makes him far more cautious than many of those who followed him in "Reformed Theology."

It was not a question of whether or not Christ *could* provide salvation for more or less souls, it was a question of who it was Christ *intended* or *willed* to save. And that subject was part of the very nature of Atonement. In the same way that there could not be a colour "red" without some thing to *be* "red," or a shape "round" without some thing to *be* "round," so there could not be an "Atonement" without people who were to *be* "atoned" for. Everything began then with the facts concerning what we might describe as "post-destination," or those for whom, in the final analysis, Atonement had actually been made. Those who were in heaven were there because Christ had intended or willed it so, and to assume otherwise was slanderous because it meant that either Christ did not have the wisdom or He did not have the power, to carry through with all that He had willed. In the Institutes Calvin reasons from these known facts concerning post destination.

*If all men in general bowed the knee before Christ, election would be general; now in the fewness of believers a manifest diversity appears.*⁸

From there he goes on immediately to point out that "God's free election has been only half explained until we come to individual persons, to whom God not only offers salvation but also assigns it that the certainly of its effect is not in suspense or doubt." Calvin refused to begin by speculating or theorising about God's decrees of election in predestination but later took up that subject in conjunction with facts known about post destination, using it as he said "to arouse and goad us eagerly" on into our own Christian life, and as a doctrine important to the assurance of our salvation. He had words of severest criticism for those who walk with easy and arrogant speculation into what he called "the abyss of divine decrees."

*Let this, therefore, first of all be before our eyes: to seek any other knowledge of predestination than what the Word of God discloses is not less insane than if one should purpose to walk in a pathless waste, or to see in darkness.*⁹

In his commentary on Isaiah 6:10 wherein God tells Isaiah that his preaching will be

rejected and some will become blind because of it; in his explanations of the same passage as quoted by Christ in the Gospels; in commenting on Paul's statements in Acts 2:23 and Rom. 11:8; and in his statements concerning the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, Calvin is very careful to point out that it is not by God's direct intervention that these hearts were hardened, but that it was their own rejection of His pleading which actually hardened their hearts. Over and over again he emphasises the point that "the blame" for this blindness must *not* be traced back to God but laid squarely upon the people rejecting the amazing kindness of God. In referring to the rejection of the Jews Calvin illustrated the relationship he saw between God's will and man's responsibility.

Yet if you inquire into the first cause, we must come to the predestination of God. But as this purpose is hidden from us, we must not too eagerly search into it; for the everlasting scheme of the divine purpose is beyond our reach, but we ought to consider the cause which lies plainly before our eyes, namely, the rebellion by which they rendered themselves unworthy of blessings so numerous and so great.

With respect to the *theory* which says that God had two absolutely equal and opposite decrees, one for the damned and one for the elect, Calvin said:

*We fully believe that God's will is simple and one; but as our minds do not fathom the deep abyss of secret election, in accommodation to the capacity of our own weakness, the will of God is exhibited to us in two ways.*¹⁰

He went on to indicate that the advent of Christ would reveal the impropriety of all such language.

Turretin however marched very boldly into this whole area, explaining to us in great detail how Christ had "decreed that reprobates should not be saved," insisting that Christ must obey what he described as "the law of contraries," and therefore set his "will not to die for reprobates" in

precisely the same way that He had set his will to die for the elect. Hodge followed him to the extent of describing how Christ "decreed other obstacles shall not be removed" from the path of some souls.

This is the very thing Calvin, because of his respect for the sovereignty of God, will not do. Others may enjoy searching eagerly for theories regarding decrees of predestination, but insofar as the elect are concerned Calvin presents that doctrine as a stimulus to personal Christian living and a basis of assurance of salvation. Insofar as the non-elect are concerned others may enjoy slamming the lid on hell, turning the key on their logical locks and then piling all the attributes of God on top as though they were obstacles which must be overcome before any soul might be saved, but John Calvin saw God's attributes and His will and His moral law and Government not as foes to man's salvation but as friends to man's salvation—the absolute guarantee and assurance of his salvation. When he referred briefly to the plight of the damned, he did so with fear, awe and trembling, and refused to speculate or theorize other than to say that "the blame" must finally reside wholly with them. Here again, God's Sovereignty broke through, lending a note of personal warmth and vitality, love, and concern, to the whole message of evangelism.

The issue is important in making a free Gospel Call and I fear that systematic theology has already had some harmful influence on our practical theology at this point. If Christ has decreed the damnation of some in precisely the same way that He has decreed the salvation of others, then each time I issue a Gospel Call, I find my will and desire in conflict with His. The "explanation" concerning my not knowing who is or is not of the elect cannot obviate the problem because it works both ways. If Christ is working directly to harden a heart, and I am working, although altogether without knowing it, directly against Him, to see that same heart melted, then I am in conflict or even rebellion with His will. But if, as Calvin insisted, the blame for the hardening rests in their rejection of that call and not on any direct immediate hardening process of Christ's, then I can make that

call quite freely and openly, although as Calvin said of Isaiah's message, that it would be with sorrow, fear and even trembling—nevertheless with freedom.

When the doctrine is misunderstood it tends to choke and stifle the very message of Evangelism. On the other hand, when we find the Sovereignty of God breaking through the rigid brittleness of the logical system, then we have once again that note of personal warmth, concern and freedom in making clear a Gospel claim, which was an important factor in all Calvin's work of Evangelism.

FOOTNOTES

¹*Tracts Relating to the Reformation by John Calvin. With His Life by Theodore Beza.* Calvin Translation Society. 1844. Vol. I, p. xxii.

²*Calvin's Commentary on the Psalms.*

³Dodd, C. H., *Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, p. 6.

⁴Calvin John, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists.*

⁵Ritschl, as quoted by J. K. Mozley in *The Doctrine of the Atonement*, p. 166.

⁶Hastie, pp. 160, 166.

⁷*Atonement*, p. 42.

⁸*Institutes*, III, xxii, 7.

⁹*Ibid*, III, xxi, 2.

¹⁰Calvin's *Commentary on Matt. 23:37.*

The man, John Calvin

The 20th century looks at Jean Calvin as a cold, morose, calculating theologian. This is untrue. He had a genius for friendships and was a man who had a warm personal commitment to, and trust in, a living Christ.

He was born in Noyen, France, on July 10, 1509. His formal education at Paris, Orléans and Bourges, extended from 1523 to 1533. In each of his intellectual endeavours he demonstrated "extraordinary gifts of understanding and memory, ready speech, and a passion for knowledge." That which made the Calvin we know was an inner transformation by which all these resources were directed to new ends. Calvin was always very reticent to give the details of his conversion, for his sole aim was to give "God alone the glory." However, there are several fragments which demonstrate the nature of his experience. He reacted against the admitted abuses in the Roman Catholic Church and of his day and wrote:—¹ *"At first although I was so obstinately given to the superstitions of the papacy, that it was extremely difficult to drag me from the depths of the mire, yet by a sudden conversion He (God) tamed my heart and made it teachable . . ."*

On May 4, 1534, Calvin resigned his benefice and from that date Calvin's every

utterance unambiguously put him on the side of the Reformation and an advocate of the Evangelical cause in France. This certainty of being laid hold of by God was from then on to dominate Calvin's whole life. Herein we see the very heart of his whole system, not simply a protest but rather a discovery of the living God, the author of all grace and of every perfect gift. In a letter Calvin wrote:—² *"And when my mind had been ready to be truly attentive, I began to understand, as if someone had brought me a light, in what a mire of error I had wallowed and had become filthy, and with how much mud and dirt I had been defiled. Being then grievously troubled and distracted . . . , I judged nothing more necessary to me after having condemned with groaning and tears my past manner of life, than to give myself up and to betake myself of Christ's way . . ."*

From the point of His conversion on, Calvin felt that God had claimed him for lifetime service in a sacred ministry. Calvin's conversion was a commitment and dedication and he expressed this in his personal emblem, a flaming heart on an extended hand with the motto: "I offer Thee my heart, Oh Lord, promptly and sincerely."

Calvin's personal piety demonstrates that he had a warm faith in Christ. Theodore Beza

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wrote: —³ *“He was my preceptor. I cannot sufficiently praise his learning, piety and other virtues . . . Having been for sixteen years a witness to his labours . . . I now unhesitatingly testify, that every Christian may find in this man the noble pattern of a truly Christian life and Christian death . . .”*

His manner of living was unpretentious and frugal and his whole life one of single-minded devotion to the cause of Christ. At a time when he was severely weakened by sickness, his friends pleaded with him to relax his labours but he replied: “What, would you have the Lord find me idle?” In spite of a frail body and almost unremitting ill health he never spared himself but gave himself freely and fully to the service of God and man. He said: “the welfare of this Church lay so near to my heart that for its sake I would not have hesitated to lay down my life.” So the life of Calvin displayed a warm, vibrant walk with Jesus Christ.

John Calvin was no selfish prig who sat in the banquet halls of salvation unconcerned about the rest of the world. He desired to give his fellow believers a book that would confirm and clarify their beliefs and at the same time serve as an apologetic to confute their detractors. In response to this desire, he wrote the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The book in its first edition was intended for believers and inquirers rather than for the academic reader. Throughout its various editions and expansions it retained its appeal to the laity. Each day of every other week Calvin preached in Saint Pierre and he lectured in theology three times a week. He laboured constantly with his pen, preparing his commentaries on the books of Holy Scripture. His extensive

correspondence reached high and low in many countries. His other activities included making himself available to the vast number of visitors who sought him out, instructing the clergy, guiding the affairs of the consistory, and willingly when requested, giving his counsel to the civic leaders. We often think that the modern missionary movement began with Carey and Paton. But John Calvin was intent on preparing suitable men to be sent out to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because of the dangers involved, these men were sent out in secret, often given an assumed name. So the Gospel was spread often secretly to Italy, back to France, to Hungary, and in 1561 two pastors went to Brazil to bring the Gospel to the South American Indians. By 1561 there were 150 missions established. This in itself is a remarkable testimony to the vision, zeal and labours of John Calvin.

On the day of his death, a little more than 400 years and two months ago, Theodore Beza wrote: “On this day, with the setting of the sun, the brightest light in the world and he who had been the strength of the Church was taken back to heaven.” This life speaks powerfully to us to-day. How can we but blush with shame when we see his commitment to Christ, his devotion, his singleness of purpose, his willingness to put aside personal preferences, to go against the ecclesiastical tide, to denounce error, to preach the truth without apology. This should not be considered a strange phenomenon but rather the characteristic of every disciple of Christ. To God alone be the Glory.

1. *Commentary on the Psalms*, 1558.
2. *Letters and Tracts*, pp. 170-171.
3. *Life of John Calvin*, pp. 5 and 104.

Calvin, the Theologian

"To God alone be the glory." That is the keynote of Calvin's theology. For many years the public image of Calvin as a theologian has been rather biassed against him. He has been generally associated with the doctrine of Predestination, which teaches that God has planned and directs every moment of our lives, and also what our eternal destiny shall be. Calvin did teach Predestination; and some of you will recoil from such an idea. You will feel that John Calvin's life must have been sheer slavery, and that his sense of logic drove him beyond what the Bible teaches. You will feel that Calvinism threatens to deprive you of all that freedom which you so dearly love; and that it would bring you into a servitude to the Almighty, against which you rebel.

But when Calvin thought of the Sovereignty of God, and applied it to his life, to him it had the essence of irresistible love. At about twenty years of age, through his study of the Bible, he became strongly convicted about his own sin. He saw that by his sin he had rebelled against God, and deserved the ultimate penalty for sin, death, spiritual death. But another message from the Bible gripped his soul, and gave him new hope. This was that God so loved the world, that he sent His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to die for

his people, and to save them from their sin. His soul was gripped by the knowledge of the greatness of the Love of God that reaches down to save undeserving sinners from their sin. He called this Love, Sovereign Grace. So for his salvation, to God alone belonged the glory.

Calvin saw in this the sovereign grace that justifies the sinner through faith. God justifies the sinner on account of the merit of Jesus Christ's atoning death. Because Jesus Christ suffered the punishment due to the sin of his people, God no longer holds their sin against them, but justifies them. The Bible shows this as a justification that is accepted by the sinner through Faith. Romans 5: 1—"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." It is not on account of our faith that God justifies us; but it is through faith that we accept the justification which God holds out to us as a free gift.

Here we are led to think on another point of doctrine which Calvin stressed, the responsibility of man. We are called upon to repent from our sin, i.e., to turn from sin, hating it, and desiring new life. Then we are to believe the Gospel, accepting God's offered salvation by faith. This responsibility is laid on all who hear the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking in their souls, convicting

them of their sin, and persuading them about Jesus Christ as their Saviour. The sovereign grace of God reveals to us our need of salvation, and Jesus as the Saviour whom God has provided for us; but apart from our faith, we cannot say that God has saved us.

This brings to our attention another point of Calvinism. We can be very definite that God has saved us. Some people say that we never can be sure that we have been saved. But the Bible teaches otherwise. The whole of the New Testament rings with assurance. We have assurance, and linked with it we find Calvin stressing the final perseverance of the saints. This means that the sovereign grace of God that saved us, is the grace that keeps on saving us from Satan's power, and that will keep us from falling into Satan's grip again. Satan has no power against those who are trusting in the sovereign grace of God. He may tempt them, but God keeps them from falling.

We have not dealt with all the points of Calvin's theology. In referring to his evangelistic labours, we will see how his preaching of this Gospel was accompanied by great cleansing of public and private life in Geneva. The lives of the people were changed by the Word of God, and so the Word of God showed them that there must be a practical outworking of this change in social and political affairs. One particular point of doctrine which this brought out is that the civil magistrate is responsible to God to give judgement according to the standards of God's Law. The civil ruler is God's servant.

We have seen in these things something of what made Calvin one of the greatest seminal figures in Christian history. He stands as one whose keen insight into the Word of God has made God's redemptive purpose in Jesus Christ clearer to the world. With Paul the apostle, Augustine, Luther, John Knox, and others, he calls us to faith in that Saviour, who is the only way to God.

Calvin, the Evangelist

An Evangelist has been well defined as one who presents the Lord Jesus Christ to sinners in the power of the Holy Spirit that they might put their trust in Christ as Saviour and serve Him as their Lord. On these terms John Calvin was a true evangelist. He had no background build-up such as we are familiar with to-day. The praise was simple, the emotional appeal was absent, but the Word of God was preached with faithfulness and power, and so successful was the preaching that the vice ridden city of Geneva became, in less than a generation, a model for the world of his day. His work made it plain that the effectiveness of evangelism depends, not on equipment or technique, but on a faithful and thoughtful exposition and application of the Word of God.

A study of Calvin's sermons reveals the skill and power as well as the content and motive of his evangelistic ministry. In his preaching, he made it plain, first of all, that our Salvation was planned by a Sovereign gracious God. Man, being a sinner, could not help himself, or make himself acceptable in God's sight. But God had pity on sinners and in His love and mercy sent His Son to be their Saviour. In a notable sermon on Isaiah 53, Calvin declares that Christ was afflicted by the hand of God for our

iniquities. "For," says he, "unless we consider the judgment of God upon sin, the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ will be useless and we cannot receive any fruit from it. But as the Lord Jesus has not been spared, but rather has suffered the righteous judgments of God upon Him, we can be assured that He will no longer pursue us and punish us."

Further, Calvin proclaimed the sufficiency of Christ's death as a ransom for the sins of His people. A Sovereign God provided complete atonement. Christ died to save sinners, not to make it possible for them to be saved. Salvation therefore does not depend on Christ's work plus our goodness. It depends upon Christ alone. "There is," says Calvin "no intelligence in us to walk uprightly, but there is a single way which God approved, and which leads us to salvation. If we follow our own road, we turn away from Christ, but when we go to Him, we go to one in whom believers of all time without exception have found their refuge."

In preaching the Gospel, Calvin emphasised that Salvation can only be experienced when it is applied to the believer by the power of the Holy Spirit. This work of the Spirit is God's effectual calling of the sinner. It enlightens the sinner's mind to know

Christ; it renews his will to obey Christ; and it persuades and helps him to trust Christ as his Saviour. In hearing the call of the Gospel, the sinner is convicted of his sin, and turns from it to God in true repentance.

These are the facts of the Gospel that Calvin preached—Salvation planned by a sovereign God, purchased by a gracious Saviour, and applied to the heart and conscience of the sinner by the Holy Spirit of God. These great facts he proclaimed fervently and passionately as he pleaded with men to come to Christ. He did not, as his critics and sometimes even his friends erroneously suppose, neglect this all important duty of an evangelist. Like the preacher portrayed in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, he had his eyes lifted up to heaven, the best of books was in his hand, the law

of truth was written on his lips, the world was behind his back, and he stood as if he pleaded with men. Listen to his plea as he concludes a sermon on Isaiah 53.

"Let us then come boldly to our Lord Jesus Christ, and He will surely suffice for us. God is not satisfied to have sent His Son and to have exposed Him to death, but daily declares to us that Jesus Christ, who had his side pierced, to-day has His heart open that we may be certain of His love and that He should draw us to Himself. Having confessed our poverty, let us never doubt that He is sufficient to give us such a remedy. To-day, seeing that some rail and mock, others rise up in pride and presumption and hope in vain by their righteousness to satisfy God, let us renounce such blasphemies and in true repentance and faith seek our Lord Jesus Christ."

Bible Studies

Habakkuk

It might well be asked why the Book of Habakkuk was chosen for Bible study at the Convention. The book is small, in some parts difficult to understand, and apparently with little to say to our modern world. And yet are not those cogent reasons for giving our attention to the study of it? It is small: therefore we should be able to grasp its message in a short series of studies. It is difficult in some parts: therefore we need to study it to find God's message for us in it. It seems irrelevant to our times: and yet its message of God's sovereign rule over the world is the one message above all others that we need to hear to-day.

Let me put it to you like this. Have we any answer to someone who asks for an explanation of a world where evil seems to prosper, and God does nothing; where faithfulness to God has nothing to show for it, except failure; where violence and destruction seem to be the inevitable end to civilisation? If *Habakkuk* can give us an answer to these problems, is it not a book for to-day? And if, as well, it has an answer for our individual doubts and fears, will not our study of it be worthwhile?

Habakkuk's prophecy is set in the last days of the Kingdom of Judah, about 600 B.C. King Josiah had made a

valiant attempt at reformation—an attempt which met with some success. But the reformation was little more than superficial, and after Josiah's death in battle, it soon became evident that the desire for better things had never really taken hold of the heart of the nation. Josiah's son, Jehoahaz, reigned for only a few months, and then was deposed in favour of Jehoiakim, a selfish, tyrannical, godless ruler; and in his reign pagan practices crept back and the old evils broke out again. Meanwhile, a new, mysterious, invincible power was gathering like a storm-cloud in the north—the Chaldeans, who had become the dominant power in world politics. Against this background—of lawlessness at home and violence abroad—Habakkuk's prophecy is set, and in it we find the stubborn questionings of a thoughtful mind.

The key verse of the book is *Habakkuk* 2: 4—"Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith." Note the two parts of it—(a) "His soul which is lifted up is not upright in him," referring to the Chaldeans (and all who are self-sufficient); (b) "The just shall live by his faith," referring to God's faithful people. (a) is illustrated by the "Woes" of chapter 2; (b) is illustrated by the history of faith in chapter 3.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

1. *The First Problem*—Why is the lawlessness and iniquity prevalent in Judah unchecked? (Chapter 1: 2-4).

2. *The Solution*—The Lord points to the Chaldeans whom He has raised up to chastise Judah (Chapter 1: 5-11).

3. *The Second Problem*—How can God use so wicked an instrument to accomplish His purpose? (Chapter 1: 12-17).

4. *The Solution*—(a) *Evil is self-destroying* (Chapter 2: 5-20). The wickedness and violence of the Chaldeans will come back upon themselves; (b) *The Life of Faith*—(i) God's answer may seem to be delayed, but it will come (Chapter 2: 3); (ii) History is evidence of God's purpose of salvation for His people (Chapter 3: 3-15); (iii) The believer can trust in spite of everything (Chapter 3: 17-19).

STUDY I

WHY DOES GOD NOT DO SOMETHING?

Key Verse—Habakkuk 1: 2—"O Lord, how long . . . ?"

At the heart of Habakkuk's problem—and ours—is the question, "Is God indifferent to what is happening in the world?" And in the book as a whole we find a three-fold answer, centering around the three words, patience, dependence, and confidence.

I. *Patience*. God's message to Habakkuk is, "Though the vision tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not be late" (2: 3). And Habakkuk was prepared to do just that: "I will stand upon my watch . . . and will watch to see what he will say unto me."

We so often grow impatient, especially as we see how slowly the world is moving towards God's way. We like to see conspicuous results, and when they are not forthcoming, we doubt and question. We get impatient with the slowness of progress in our own spiritual living, and sometimes despair of any real attainment. God says, Wait for it, for it will surely come. We see

it in history. It is a fact of history that attempted reformation before Luther's time was broken more than twenty times, but it did come at last, when God's hour had struck. We may see it in our own lives. Though spiritual advancement seems so desperately slow, it will come if we are prepared to trust. Marcus Dods used to comfort himself in his slow progress in the Christian life with a picture from chemistry. "Into a liquid is dropped one drop of a second, and there is no result; another, and another, many others, one by one, apparently in vain; and then one more, precisely like the rest, and of a sudden, not as the outcome of that last alone, but as the culmination of the whole seemingly useless process, everything is changed!" Suddenly or slowly, it will come, and it will not be late.

II. *Dependence*. God's message (in Chapter 2: 4) is "The just shall live by his faith." That was the great watchword of Paul's experience, and Luther's great watchword in the Reformation—"The just shall live by faith." It might be said that Habakkuk had no idea of such an application when he uttered this word to his disheartened people. He was only telling them to hold on to their faithfulness and to their faith in a righteous God and they would find in the end that God was worth the trusting. And yet Habakkuk meant more than that. There is a contrast in the verse—the contrast between the pride and self-reliance of the Chaldeans and the dependence of the man who trusts in God alone. The Chaldeans had a place in God's purpose for His people, but their pride and self-sufficiency could have only one end—doom and destruction, so clearly portrayed in the subsequent verses of chapter 2. They shall come down to inevitable destruction, but the just shall survive, shall live, by his faith. For the secret of life is utter dependence. That is precisely what Paul means when he finds his great doctrine of justification by faith alone in this passage. His controversy was with those who thought that man by his own efforts could do something for his own salvation: that way, says Paul, lies doom and destruction; self-trust will always be fatal. The secret of life is complete dependence on God: "the just shall live by faith."

That is true not only at the beginning of the Christian life, but all the way through. "The just shall live by faith." And the answer to every problem lies in committal. Not only "Wait *for* God in patience," but "Wait *upon* God in utter dependence."

III. *Confidence*. Supposing the worst comes to the worst, what then? Habakkuk faces that possibility. "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (3: 17, 18).

There was a day when Martin Luther stood face to face with death, and knew that one word from the Pope would seal his doom. And the Pope's messenger tried to drive that chill message home to his heart, and sought to frighten him with angry words. "The Pope's little finger," he shouted, "is stronger than all Germany. Do you expect your princes to take up arms to defend you—a wretched worm like you? I tell you, No! And where will you be then? Tell me that! Where will you be then?" "Then, as now," cried Luther, "in the hands of Almighty God." There is the answer to all life's problems—a faith that can trust God even when the world lies in ruins about our feet, and all our dearest hopes are smashed for ever, a faith that can see the crops rotting in the fields and the herds cut off from the stalls, and can still raise its song of praise to God.

In the last resort it came down to this, that Habakkuk was absolutely sure of God. Notice the name by which he refers to God—"the God of my salvation," or as Moffatt translates it, "the God Who saves me." In the end our confidence hangs on that. The God Who gave us Christ is the God on Whom we can depend to the uttermost. Will you trust Him? Then you will know that nothing can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, and even if the worst comes to the worst, you will still be able to rejoice in the Lord and joy in the God of your salvation.

STUDY II THE FACT OF SIN

Key Verse—Habakkuk 1: 12—"O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment, and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction."

Can nothing be done about the violence that is so characteristic of the world to-day? We see evidence of it on every side—juvenile delinquency, vandalism, brutality, class warfare, race strife. All these are symptoms of the sick world in which we live. Is there anything we can do about it? The opening verses of *Habakkuk* tell us what one man did. He prayed, and kept on praying. And in answer to his prayer, he learned that God was about to do something—something that to many people would seem quite incredible. But before we go on to that, let us be quite sure that we know what the heart of the problem is. It is *sin*. We will never get anywhere in trying to deal with the problem of modern violence until we come to see what the crux of it is—not man's relationship to man, important as that is, but man's relationship to God.

These first two chapters of *Habakkuk* have sin as their subject—the fact of sin, the consequences of sin, and the punishment of sin. We have two kinds of sin here—the sin of God's people and the sin of God's enemies: verses 2—4 of chapter 1 refer to Judah; the other references to sin in these chapters refer to the Chaldeans.

I. *The Evidence of sin.*

The evidence of sin in Judah was clear enough: violence, iniquity, strife and contention all revealed a nation that was out of touch with God. Can we not see the same things in our civilisations today?

The evidence of sin in the Chaldeans was seen in an arrogant trampling over all other peoples; the vivid picture of a fishing net at the end of chapter one shows how overwhelming was their aggression. And that, too, has often been seen on the pages of history.

II. *The Consequence of sin.*

The consequence of the arrogant sin of the Chaldeans was manifest: it was seen in the desolation which marked their progress

everywhere they advanced. "They made a wilderness and called it peace." No fortress could stand against them, for they simply piled up sloping ramparts and took it (1: 10), possessing dwelling places that were not theirs.

But the consequence of Judah's sin is still more significant: we find it in verse 4 of the first chapter. It was that God's law and God himself were brought into disrepute: the law was paralysed and justice was non-existent. That is one of the most serious consequences of the sin of God's people: through it, as in the case of King David, the enemies of the Lord are given cause to blaspheme. That was the thing that caused most concern to Habakkuk. He was thinking of God's good name, and it was because of that that he was so concerned that God should act. Is that our concern?

III. The Punishment of sin.

It is here that the distinction between the sin of Judah and the sin of the Chaldeans is most clearly marked. It is the distinction between chastisement and punishment.

Why did God send the Chaldeans upon Judah? His purpose was to chastise His people that He might bring them back to Himself. As we learn from verse 12 of chapter 1, the Chaldeans had been appointed by God to judge and correct Judah, but not to exterminate it.

The place of chastisement in Christian experience is clearly shown in Hebrews 12: 6ff. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."

But a problem still remains for Habakkuk. Why should such wicked people as the Chaldeans be the instrument of God's chastisement of His people? The first part of the answer to this problem is found in the remainder of chapter 2. Evil is self-destroying. The restless ambition and ruthless lust for conquest of the Chaldeans will be their ruin. Chapter 2 contains five 'taunt-songs' all bringing the same message that the very arrogance and

cruelty of the Chaldeans will be their downfall. They have held many nations captive, and compelled them to give pledges (instead of 'thick clay' in v. 6); but the day is coming when these captive nations will turn on Chaldea. The very stones and wood out of which Chaldea's fortress have been made will cry out against her for her greed and injustice. All the achievements of her cruelty and bloodshed will come to nothing, but the glory of the Lord will cover the whole earth. The rulers of Chaldea had made their neighbours drink, so that they might gain the advantage over them—was vodka a decisive factor in the disastrous agreement made by Churchill and Eisenhower with Stalin at Yalta?—but now they will drink God's judgment, and the shame will be theirs. So the punishment of idolatry will be manifest when the idols of heathen nations are seen for the empty, useless things which they are. There is all the difference in the world between punishment like this and the chastisement of God's people which is restorative.

IV. The Essence of Sin.

The essence of sin in Judah was an unwillingness to listen to and believe God's word. Paul quotes verse 5 of chapter 1 in Acts 13: 31 in his sermon to the Jews of Pisidian Antioch, when he warns them against unbelief.

The essence of sin in the Chaldeans was an arrogant self-sufficiency. "Their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves" (1: 7). "He shall pass over"—transgress—"and offend, imputing this power unto his god" (1: 11). They even worship the instruments they use. "Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag" (1: 16). And the picture they present is a picture of a society entirely self-sufficient—a picture frighteningly like the society in which we live today.

Is there any hope? Whether our sin be unbelief or self-sufficiency, our one hope lies in utter dependence on God: "the just shall live by his faith."

THE LIFE OF FAITH

Key Verse — *Habakkuk* 3: 3 — “God came . . .”

Habakkuk has given a vivid account of the way in which the violence and cruelty of the Chaldeans will come back on their own heads. “Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him” (2: 4), and so he must come down to destruction. But on the other hand, “the just shall live”—shall survive—“by his faith.”

But how can Habakkuk convince himself that that is true? How can he bring to his perplexed and troubled heart the assurance that God’s plan and purpose will be worked out for His people? He knows that the fulfilment of God’s purpose may take a long time (2: 3). And so in the beginning of chapter 3 he prays for a speedier accomplishment of God’s purpose. God has acted in the past; he has heard the report of it, and his heart is awed by it. But the years are going on, and he prays, “O Lord, revive (renew) thy work in the midst of the years.” And then he goes over in his mind the wonderful things that God has done in the past history of his people; he sees God’s sovereign rule in all the events of history. And it is *that* which confirms his assurance that the just shall live by faith.

Habakkuk’s prayer in poetical form — ‘upon Shigionoth’ refers to the metre of it—shows us three different aspects of God—the God of History; the God of Sovereign Power; the God of Salvation.

I. The God of History. The Bible is concerned not merely with individual salvation, but with the whole world and its destiny, and the God Who is revealed in it is the God of history. The third chapter of Habakkuk gives a synopsis of the early history of Israel and uses it as a guarantee of continued blessing. God’s glory seen at Sinai (v. 3), the plagues in Egypt (v. 5), the division of Canaan (v. 6), the terror of surrounding nations (v. 7), the cleaving of the Red Sea (vv. 8, 15), the giving of water from the rock (v. 9), the sun and moon standing still for Joshua

(v. 11), the conquest of the cities of the land (vv. 13, 14)—all these events were evidence of God in history and a powerful argument for faith. We have a more powerful argument than Habakkuk could know, for in Christ God broke into history and divided history in two. *God came . . .*

II. The God of Sovereign Power. What is emphasised in this chapter is not what Israel did, but what God did. God was in control of all the things that happened, and His sovereign power was working out His purpose for His people. In the panorama of kings and governors, principalities and powers, imperial policies, movements of history, God was coming to fulfil His plan and purpose for the world; and Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus and all the rest were His instruments to do His will. In the history of the world God came—and God comes still—to reveal His sovereign power.

III. The God of Salvation. God’s ultimate purpose is the salvation of His people. “Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed” (3: 13). Bible history is the history of salvation: the redemption from Egypt was the pattern of all that happened in the centuries which followed, and found its ultimate fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

Some scholars have thought that the last three verses of the book are a later edition, since they do not mention the problem of the Chaldeans at all. But apart from the fact that it may well have been the Chaldean invasion which caused the famine and desolation described in these verses, what we have in these verses is one man making particular application of the truth of God’s sovereign power in salvation to his own special case. This is not an abstract problem any more: it is not merely a problem on the broad canvas of world history. It is the answer of the Word of God to one man’s individual need. The God Who holds the nations within the grasp of His sovereign control is the God Who holds and controls each life that He has made. If He is the God of my salvation, I can be very sure that nothing can separate me from His love which is in Christ Jesus my Lord.

Colossians

LECTURE I

The letter to the Colossians was written while Paul was a prisoner in Rome. He had never visited the church at Colossae but he knew of it and the problems that existed there, through word which had been brought to him by Epaphras. It is thought that Epaphras may have been a convert of Paul during his ministry at Ephesus and that it was he who had established the Colossian church. If this is true it is easy to see something of the joy and happiness that came to Paul when he heard of the work that was going forward.

There was, however, a disturbing note along with the good news, for there were errors which had crept into the teaching of the church. Paul's chief motive in writing the book was to set forth the truth in a positive manner, that it might stand in marked contrast to the errors that were being propagated. The letter was written about 62 or 63 A.D. and was carried to Colossae by Tychicus and Philemon. Within the letter the request is made that this letter also be read to the church at Laodicea and that a letter written to the church at Laodicea, in turn, be read at Colossae. The message of the book has a strong resemblance to that of Ephesians and bears

evidence that both letters were written by the same person. In both books there is a strong emphasis upon the combating of error. Further evidence of prevailing error is seen in Acts 20: 29, 30 where Paul in addressing the elders of Ephesus in his farewell speech said, "For I know that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter among you, not sparing the flock."

The greeting, (vs. 1-3) is simple and short. Paul identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God. This is his badge of authority. Timothy is also included in the greeting. Since Timothy was a native of this region he was perhaps well known to the Colossians and the people would be happy to hear this mention of him.

The letter is addressed to saints and faithful brethren. The term "saint" did not mean that one had achieved a degree of sanctity above others. It is simply a New Testament term which is applied to believers in Christ. The words "grace, ~~mercy~~ and peace" also appear in the greeting. There is no richer word in the New Testament than "grace." It represents all that is included in the redemptive word of Jesus Christ. Dr. A. T. Robertson declares that it is a word so full of meaning that "one despairs of defining it."

Paul's words of greeting are followed by words of thanksgiving (vs. 3, 12). Gratitude follows greeting in all of Paul's epistles, except in Galatians, where it is followed by denunciation. In this case, Paul's gratitude grows out of the good news he has heard about the Colossians from Epaphras. He is also grateful for the love which the Colossians are showing to all the saints.

Paul wanted these people to know that they had been much in his prayers (vs. 9-14). It was his desire that they be filled with the knowledge of God's will. He is here striking a key note of the epistle. Later he expounds more fully the doctrine of the fullness of Christ . . . "That in him should all the fullness of the Godhead dwell." Berkeley translates it, "And in Him who is the head of all principedom and authority, you are enjoying fullness of life."

One of the noteworthy expressions in the prayer is the petition "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God. This is essentially a statement that creed and conduct must go together, that where there is doctrine there must also be ethics.

It is a pity when piety is divorced from practice. A certain grocer who lived over his place of business was heard to call down to his helper one morning, "James, have you watered the milk?"

"Yes, sir," was the helper's reply.

Again the grocer asked, "Have you put the chicory in the coffee?"

When James replied in the affirmative, the grocer was then heard to say, "Then come up for worship."

In contrast to this we cite the words of an African Christian who spoke of a missionary and said, "He walks as he talks."

Another aspect of Paul's prayer is the petition for power for the task . . . "Strengthened with all might according to his glorious power." The people in Colossae were going to meet problems they could not handle except for the strengthening of God. It is the strength of which Paul wrote to the Philippians, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Verse 24 of the first chapter is very difficult to explain. What does Paul mean when he writes . . . "and fill up that which

is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church?" Was the sacrifice of Christ not complete that Paul must also suffer? The explanation of this passage is that when Christ's children suffer, he suffers with them and in that sense his suffering is not finished. In II Timothy 4: 16, 17 Paul writes, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me . . . notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me."

From Scottish history we have the story of the two Margarets. When the tide was about to overwhelm Margaret Lachlison, Margaret Wilson was asked what she thought of her friend. Her answer was, "What do I see, but Christ wrestling there? Think ye that we are sufferers? No, it is Christ in us; for he sends none a warfare to their own charges." That day the two Margarets were helping to fill up that which was behind of the afflictions of Christ. From the days of Paul until the present many have been accounted worthy of suffering, and in the hour of suffering they had the assurance of Christ suffering with them.

LECTURE II

THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

In the first two chapters Paul sets forth the truth as a means of combating error. The main theme is found in 1: 18, "That in all things he might have the pre-eminence." The meaning is that Christ is in all things and above all things and that every man should give first place in his life to Christ. This thought is further expressed in 1: 27, 28, "Christ in you the hope of glory."

Some Areas in which Christ is Supreme

1.—CREATION, 1: 16.

The problem of origins is one which confronts every thinking person. Is the Biblical account true, or must we look to nature for the answer? This passage not only teaches the Divine creation but also shows the part Christ had in creation. In 1: 16, 17, 20 Paul shows that we live in a Christ-centred universe which was brought into being by Him, and that He is the effective agent in keeping the creation in operation. Williams

translates vs. 17, "By him all things are held together."

2.—HEAD OF THE CHURCH, 1: 18.

The headship of Christ applies to all true believers. As the body receives its directions from the head, so also the church which is the body of Christ receives direction from Him. In an age in which Christ is relegated to a position of little importance in many churches, and doctrines and policies are based upon that which seems expedient to men, it is essential that emphasis be placed upon seeking the mind and will of Christ in all matters.

3.—IN RESPECT TO HIS GODHEAD, 1: 19; 2: 9.

Paul declares that Christ, even in His human form, was not lacking in deity, that He was God and Man, with two distinct natures in one person. We are told that "It pleased the father that in Him should all fullness dwell. When a vessel is full, no more can be added. Christ was so filled with deity that nothing more could be added. This statement of truth is a direct thrust against the Gnostic heresy which was so prevalent in the first century.

4.—IN HIS VICTORY OVER THE POWERS OF EVIL, 1: 13; 2: 15.

The "principalities and powers" referred to here are the formidable enemies that have held men in subjection and prevented men from serving God. The word "spoiled" suggested the way in which a victorious army brings the opposing country into absolute subjection. The expression, "Made a show of them," is in the New English Bible translated, "He made a public spectacle of them, and led them as captives in a triumphal procession." Albert Barnes relates that it was a common custom in those days for a conquering nation to have a triumphal procession and place captives on parade before the people.

5.—IN HIS RESURRECTION, 1: 18; 2: 12.

The reference to the resurrection is incidental, but Paul never underestimated its importance. It was the preaching of the

resurrection that continually got Paul into trouble. It was the resurrection that had spoiled principalities. Men could deny the resurrection but they could not disprove it; they could find no answer for the empty tomb.

6.—IN HIS WORK OF RECONCILIATION, 1: 14, 20, 21; 2: 13-15.

Note the key expressions in these verses, "Redemption," "Reconciliation," "Having made peace," "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances." Christ's work was to buy back or redeem. He alone could do this work and it was only by the giving of His own life, the shedding of His own blood.

Warnings about False Philosophies, 1: 28

Paul was deeply concerned about the errors which had crept into the church, but he did not deal with them until he had set forth the positive teachings concerning Christ. When men are rooted and grounded in the truth they will not be inclined toward error.

1.—VAIN DECEIT, 2: 4, 8, 20.

There is always the danger that men will hear only the words they want to hear. Paul warns about "enticing words." It is the same thought expressed in Timothy when he speaks of those "having itching ears." In "Living Letters" it is stated, "I am saying this because I am afraid that someone will fool you with smooth talk."

2.—GNOSTICISM, 2: 8.

The "philosophy of men" to which Paul refers is probably Gnosticism, which swept through the Christian church during the early centuries. The Gnostics claimed to have secret knowledge, and the aim of the system was to reduce Christianity to a philosophy and to relate it to Pagan teachings. They taught that all matter is evil and that the God of the Jews was not the real God but only an inferior being. They further held that Christ was but mere man and was not the Son of God who came down to earth.

3.—JEWISH RITUALISM, 2: 11-13.

Many Jews who had been converted to Christ wanted to retain the ceremonialism of the Old Testament. This was the specific problem in the Council held at Jerusalem (Acts 15). Paul wanted the Colossian Christians to understand that it was not the surgical operation of circumcision that was important, but rather the circumcision of the heart.

4.—ASCETICISM, OR DENIAL OF SELF, 2: 16.

There were some who believed that the way to achieve holiness was through the denial of self. It was tied in with the belief that flesh is evil and that the flesh must be punished to find favour with God. Consequently, some were engaged in a burdensome observance of the Sabbath and denied themselves food and drink. Behind it was the thought that if something brought pleasure it must in itself be sinful.

5.—ANGEL WORSHIP, 2: 18.

The worship of angels was a practice that developed during the later period of Judaism. It is condemned in this passage and also in Hebrews 1, Rev. 19: 10 and Rev. 22: 9. It is also significant that the practice was condemned by the Council of Laodicea which met in 394 A.D. It is apparent that some of the Christians were by-passing Christ and were worshipping angels instead.

The term "will worship" seems to sum up the errors which are mentioned. It is the age-old desire of degenerate men to choose their own means of salvation, which in truth constitutes a denial of Christ as Lord and Mediator. Paul's aim was to turn men from error by presenting to them Jesus Christ, the Pre-eminent One, to whom all allegiance belongs.

LECTURE III

RISEN WITH CHRIST

The third chapter begins with the words, "If ye then be risen with Christ . . ." The word "if" carries an inference. If the

things set forth in the second chapter are true, if the believer has been buried with Christ in baptism, there are things which must follow. Chapter 2: 11-13 deals with burial in baptism. What is symbolised in this action? There are three elements which are present: death, burial and resurrection. This is what has happened to the believer. There has been a death of his old nature, and there has been a putting away or burial of the life of sin. But there is also a resurrection, a new nature or spirit which is found within the believer. Baptism is the sign or picture of the change that has taken place, but it does not effect the change.

I—THE NATURE OF THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST.

Before there can be the new life in Christ there must be the death of the old sinful ~~(nature)~~. In Romans 6: 6 Paul writes, "Knowing this, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." Crucifixion suggests a violent death, and it is a violent struggle that takes place before the old nature is subdued. It means that after the death of the old nature one will no longer delight in sin. "*Living Letters*" interprets it in the words, "You should have as little desire for this world as a dead person does. Your real life is in heaven with Christ and God."

It is not enough to put off the old nature. One must also put on the new nature which is in Christ. Vs. 10 reads, "And have put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." This transformation does not always come easily or quickly. Paul had a dramatic experience on the Damascus road, when his old nature died, but it didn't mean that all his troubles with sin were past. It was Paul who wrote, "For the good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." (Romans 7: 19). Putting off the old man and putting on the new may be a long process, but we need have no doubt of the final outcome if one has made a surrender to Him. We have the promise in John 1: 12, "To as many as received Him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God."

The new nature comes to men regardless of race or station in life. Vs. 11 states that it

matters not about circumcision or uncircumcision, whether one is a Jew or a Greek, a Barbarian, a Sythian, bond or free. It means that whether one is rich or poor, whether one is a servant or a master, he can obtain salvation. The Gospel broke down all class distinctions. It is summed up in the expression, "Christ is all and in all."

II—THE PRACTICAL RESULTS SEEN IN THE NEW LIFE.

As surely as night follows day, changes will be observed in the person who is risen with Christ. Paul therefore names specific sins which will be overcome. These are listed in 3: 5-9.

Over against the sins which must be put away, Paul also lists certain virtues which must also be evident in the one who has committed his life to Christ. These things are stated in 3: 12-15. They are essentially the same as the "fruit of the Spirit" to which Paul refers in Galatians 5: 22. As stated in John 15: 5 "He that abideth in Me, and I in Him, the same bringeth forth much fruit."

The expression in Vs. 15, "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts," is of particular interest. The word translated "rule" literally means, "Let an umpire sit and govern you." It suggests a picture of the human heart with the struggle between good and evil going on within it. But when the "Peace of God" is the umpire, it means that the decision must eventually go to the side of righteousness. Satan may vigorously protest the decision, but try as he may he cannot reverse the decision of the umpire; Satan is serving in a losing cause.

Another characteristic of the one who is risen with Christ is that he will be thankful. Paul puts it in the form of a command, "Be ye thankful." Thanksgiving is a virtue that is unknown among heathen people. If a Christian lacks the spirit of thanksgiving, there is something defective in his spiritual experience.

In order that he may grow and develop spiritually the Christian must be a student of the Word. Paul writes, "Let the word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom." It is essentially the same thought as that expressed in the First Psalm where the

"blessed man" is spoken of as "delighting in the law of God." The encouragement is also given to "teach and admonish one another." Much of the church's programme is built around this point. The Sabbath School, Vacation Bible School, Bible Study groups, family worship and the services on the Sabbath are designed to instruct in the things of God's Word.

Paul also gives instruction as to what should be used in God's praise, "Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." This passage clearly sets forth the exclusive use of the Psalms in worship. The Septuagint version of the Old Testament was in Greek and in it there are various headings for the Psalms. Some are called Psalms, some are called hymns and others are designated as spiritual songs. Thus, we find that Paul is enjoining the Colossian Christians to use in praise the one hundred and fifty Psalms that are found in the Old Testament.

LECTURE IV

WALKING WITH CHRIST

Col. 3: 18; 4: 18

The last of Paul's letter is intensely practical. Theological discourse should not obscure Christian duties but instead bring them into sharper focus. John Calvin was a foremost theologian, but his theology did not remain in the realm of the abstract. It is interesting to observe that he was deeply interested in the social application of the Gospel in the city of Geneva. Likewise, Paul makes it clear that the truth in Christ must be applied in the many relationships of life.

Paul's emphasis upon works is in keeping with the words of Jesus, "By their fruits ye shall know them." Or, as James wrote, "Faith without works is dead." Whenever the new birth occurs in a person something is bound to happen. A woman related that her husband had a violent temper before his conversion and was so abusive of the cat, that the cat would hide whenever the man came into the room. But after conversion the change was so marked that the cat knew the difference and it was not long until the cat would come purring and rubbing against the man's leg.

I—THE CHRISTIAN'S DAY TO DAY CONDUCT.

The first place where evidences of the new birth should be seen is in the home. Paul recognised the family home as a place of happiness. When God created man he created a man and a woman. Each was to complement the other, and the family was to become a basic unit in society. Maclaren has written that "domestic life as seen in thousands of Christian homes, is purely a ~~Christ's~~ creation, and would have been a new revelation to the heathenism of Colosse, as it is to-day in many a mission field."

Paul's first injunction is to the wife, who is to be submissive to her husband. This however does not mean that she is to have a degraded position or to be a slave for her husband. The husband on the other hand is to love his wife. It is a reciprocal relationship with each loving and sacrificing for the other. It is significant that in Scripture the relationship between Christ and the church is symbolised by marriage. Christ is the bridegroom and the church is the bride. This comparison places the marriage relationship in the highest possible light. It is only when people marry in the Lord that relationship can attain its highest glory.

The next relationship mentioned is that between children and parents. As stated by one translator, "Children are to keep on obeying their parents, for this is well pleasing to the Lord." We live in an age when children are throwing off more and more parental authority. But so often the child that rejects this authority comes to regret his insubordination.

Closely related to the duty of children to the parents is the duty which parents have to their children. A translation of this passage reads, "Fathers, stop irritating your children, that they may not lose heart." Parents cannot command the love and respects of children by outbursts of temper or by making unreasonable demands. There must be firmness and love in every command. Happy is the boy or girl whose parents live consistent lives, and show forth the evidences of Christ living within.

Another area of application which is of especial interest to the Colossian Christians was the relationship between slaves and masters. In many cases in those times the slaves were a part of the household. They

worked on the farm and did household work. Paul is saying that there is not to be a great gulf between them, but that they will find a common ground through their relationships in Christ.

II—THE CHRISTIAN'S WITNESS BEFORE THE WORLD.

The 5th verse is a key verse. In "*Living Letters*" it is paraphrased, "Make the most of your chances to tell others the Good News." In the New English it is rendered, "Behave wisely toward those outside your own number: use the present opportunity to the full." The Gospel is something that must be shared, and we are to share it with those who are outside our own group. There is a tendency toward exclusiveness within a denomination, or within a particular denomination.

Paul's ministry was essentially a ministry to "outsiders." He did not confine his teaching to people who had a Jewish background; he did not remain in one city very long, but was reaching out. He witnessed to those in Asia, but he also desired to witness to those in Rome. He did not confine his ministry to those of a particular social caste. The Gospel proclaimed by Paul was for the rich or the poor, the slave or the master, for Caesar or for the members of Caesar's household.

Paul requests that the people at Colosse pray for him in his ministry. "Continue in prayer and watch in the same with thanksgiving." He also admonishes his reader to "walk wisely." This is given in the New English version as "behave wisely." Every casual meeting with a non-Christian is an opportunity to testify for Christ and if one fails to use the opportunity it will be lost forever.

In conclusion Paul names certain people who were with him and for whom he sends greetings. This adds a warm personal touch to the epistle. He has a special interest in everyone whom he names. He especially commends to them Tychicus and Onesimus, who were to carry the epistle to Colosse, and who would speak directly in behalf of Paul.

The letter ends with the words, "Grace be with you." It is Paul's benediction upon a group of people "Whom having not seen, he loved."

SECOND INTERNATIONAL YOUTH CONVENTION OF REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES

Time of Meeting

August 15 till August 29, 1964.

Place of Meeting

Presbyterian Church Hall, Mark Street,
Portrush.

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Rev. Kenneth G. Smith.

Organiser for Scottish Church

Rev. S. L. Reid.

Organiser for Irish Church

Rev. J. Renwick Wright.

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