

# The New Calvinism Considered

*New Calvinism*

By Jeremy Walker

sermonaudio.com

**Preached on:** Sunday, June 26, 2011

**Grace Church**

111 Lloyd Avenue

Downingtown, PA 19335

**Website:** [www.gracechurchdowningtown.org](http://www.gracechurchdowningtown.org)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/gracechurch](http://www.sermonaudio.com/gracechurch)

As we come to take up this theme, originally I was hoping that we would be able to deal with the theme of the New Calvinism back in October of last year, anticipating that Jeremy would be coming over for the pastor's conference that we would try to pull something together in conjunction with that trip. So it was back in July, August, some time last year that Jeremy and I were talking about the prospect of this, but then it turned out he was not coming. It was his dad's turn to come to the conference and so we ... the next opportunity of our brother coming was going to be in conjunction with the family conference down in Louisville, so very early on knowing that we arranged for this day.

And a little bit of a catalyst, Jeremy, I think there was a blog that you did that... of analyzing, what, some 20 points of very briefly. But in looking at that I thought, you know, I think it would be helpful for us to stand on our brother's shoulder's of the research he has already done and this is something he has been looking at over the course of time.

So that is a rather long introduction to say that I am very glad that Jeremy is here. I know that some sister in churches expressed to me the... yesterday that wished we were going to be there to hear the analysis of... May God help us to give ourselves to the consideration of the truths of his Word.

Jeremy, would you come?

Change of Voice:

Thank you. It is a privilege to be back here with you, at least you are familiar faces and, for me, an unfamiliar building. Delightful to see pastor Mitch and Nancy again and to see some friends that I haven't seen for a long time.

As pastor Mitch has already expressed, some of this goes back some way. I want to begin by trying to set out my qualifications for what I have been asked to do this morning. And you may think that they are somewhat meager, but I will give them nonetheless.

My primary qualification for doing this is that I have been asked to. I am a Christian. I am a pastor and I am part of a generation that has seen the New Calvinism really take off and grip, over a period of years. I first came across some of the men who are now known as New Calvinists shortly after John Piper first published *Desiring God*. A friend of mine was enthusing about this book and he told me, “You have to read this book. It will change your life.”

Well, I thought, ok, if that is being spoken of in this way, I should at least do this friend the honor of reading this material. And since then I have been engaged with it. A number of my peers have been very much taken up with it. I have felt the pressure to imbibe it, to embrace it, to be a part of it. I have been interested in it and engaged with it even though to some extent outside of it. It is largely an American phenomenon. And, as you will tell by my accent, I am from somewhere else.

So I have something of an outside perspective. New Calvinism in the UK is not exactly the same as it is in the US.

But I have appreciated much of what I have read, much of what I have watched. I have benefited from some of it and I have disagreed with some of it. And that has been a long process in which reading, listening, talking, going to conferences and so forth. My sense was this is important. As I say, there is a lot of pressure to jump on what may seem to be a band wagon and I didn't want to dismiss what was profitable, but neither did I thoughtlessly wish to embrace something that I needed to consider carefully.

And so it was out of that sort of tension and that process that I hope to bring some observations to you this morning.

So those are my qualifications. Secondly, my caveats, a few warnings, things to take into account as we look at this material. First of all, this is a personal and pastor assessment. I am not pretending that I have got any monopoly on insights into the men and the movement as a whole. I may be mistaken. There will be hundreds if not thousands of blog posts and books and videos that haven't read or watched or been a part of. So if I am ignorant and some point, if I am mistaken, I am quite happy to be corrected, to try and fine tune my understanding.

Secondly, I want to make clear that this is a fraternal and irenic assessment. In other words, I speak as a brother with a desire for peace. I am not here to do ... to attack lunatics and heretics and just to lay waste to everything that is before me even where I disagree.

Some of these people that I know, I know personally. They are good friends. And I am not here simply to trample them into the dust.

Thirdly, I am seeking balance. I am not here to do a hatchet job. It is potentially easy. My wife, who is American, will suggest that the British can be professional cynics. And you can be a little sarcastic. There is a caricature of New Calvinism that it would be easy

to mock even in a gracious brotherly spirit. And my brother and I mock each other a great deal in a gracious spirit. So I know that that is possible. I don't want to set up a caricature. And it is easy to do that, a parody of the New Calvinism, a straw man that you just knock down because it is easier than the reality. I think that is important to avoid. And neither am I setting out to accomplish a sort of a Reformed Baptist whitewash where we climb up above everybody else and, confident of our own complete superiority in all things, look down on everybody else and say, "We are the best. If only you were like us, how much better this world would be."

I am not here to ignore or to defend Reformed Baptists. I am here to deal with the New Calvinism and you can put that into your own context and apply it as you wish.

And the fourth and perhaps the most important caveat is that the New Calvinism is not monolithic, by which I mean it is not a single united entity. It is not just one thing. The New Calvinism is a spectrum. And, as I say, I have friends at points in that spectrum. It is a broad river with many currents, different eddies, with its depths and with its shallows.

Now that means that in a brief period such as I have got this morning, I have got to paint with a broad brush. I don't have the opportunity to do sort of detailed work and to finesse some of the comments I am going to make.

Now that means that I may say something like, "The New Calvinists are..." or, "The New Calvinists tend to be such and such." And if you know much about New Calvinism you could very quickly, well, I know one who doesn't do that, doesn't think like that. And it would... I hope I understand that that is true, but I have to deal in generalities to some extent, recognizing that there are exceptions that prove the rules, if you will. So a lot of this is going to be general lessons recognizing that there may be specific exceptions and I am talking about points on a spectrum. I am not trying to over generalize or make universal things that are not.

So those are my caveats. And I would ask you to take those into account as you hear some of these things.

Let's move on, now, to the qualities of the New Calvinism. How do you define this movement? Well, that is made difficult by the fact that it is a spectrum. Where do you start? Well, the first quality is Calvinism. And I am going to qualify even that. But let's say that this is a movement that is united by convictions about the sovereignty of God in salvation. That is why they are called the New Calvinists.

Now I don't think that is the same as being reformed. Calvinism is more necessarily than just the five points. The other things to take into account is not all New Calvinists are Calvinists. Do you know what an Amyraldian is? There was a French theologian of sort of the general Calvinist camp called Moses Amyraut and he developed what was basically a four point Calvinism which is presented to us sometimes today as unlimited limited atonement, that is, that Jesus Christ did for everyone, but only the elect believe.

Now Calvinism is defined by the five points of Calvinism, then not all the New Calvinists are Calvinists, because some of them do not believe in the limited atonement in that very specific sense.

But when you talk about the young, restless and reformed, this is the type that was put by Colin Hanson that was once prominent in describing this movement. Young, restless and reformed is a lot catchier than young, restless and mainly Calvinistic apart from those of us who are slightly Amyraldian as a working title. So Calvinism in the sense that one of the defining features of this movement is that ... a sort of a general unity around the nothing that God is sovereign in the salvation of sinners. So it is united around a view of soteriology that is essentially or toward Calvinistic.

But you could argue that actually the father figure, at least as they understand him, is probably more Jonathan Edwards than John Calvin. Ok? And it is Edwards mediated through Piper. That is where many of these men have got their understanding of Edwards from.

So Calvinism. Secondly, it is a movement of characters, figureheads, personalities, celebrities or gurus depending on how pejorative you wish to be about these men. Figureheads, I think, yes, positively. But as you work your way through that, there are those who do take them as gurus. There are, if you spend enough time in the sphere in which these men are working, there is a certain inner sanctum, as it were, where the key figures sit. If you go into some of the websites, these are the men who sit around in cool monochrome in 10 minute videos discussing the great actions and principles and movements and we sit there in humble awe as these men discuss these things and give us their opinion. They are established figures, the big names who need to be at all these conferences in order for it to be real New Calvinistic.

And then there are the rising stars, if you will, on coming generations. You will hear names like John Piper, Mark Dever, C J. Mahaney, Al Mohler, Mark Driscoll, Matt Chandler, Frances Chang, Kevin DeYoung, Ligon Duncan and then on the more on the fringes, perhaps, people like R. C. Sproul and John MacArthur who will be referenced by them, have connections within them, but do they really fit into that whole spectrum? There are some sort of ambivalent points. Tim Keller, Don Carson, Josh Harris, Wayne Grudham. These are the kind of names that will be in the mix. On the websites and the blogosphere, Justin Taylor, between two worlds and Time {} at {} dot com. The new Calvinism is very much engaged in the online world. You can follow thousands of different new Calvinistic blogs, but you do tend to find that most of them are rehashing the same kind of videos. The same references. They are all referring to one another.

And there is a danger here, two dangers. First of all the danger of mere imitation. The particular Baptist theologian Andrew Fuller early in his life the mark of a master plowman was to be able to drive a straight furrow across a field. And Fuller said, "Well, that is very easy, then. You just find a master plowman's line and you go along next to it."

So he grabbed a plow and went along the straight line that the master plowman had produced. And when he looked back he could see that although there was a degree of straightness because of the line that he had followed, he had actually ended up exaggerating all of the kinks in the master plowman's line. And Fuller said on that occasion he vowed at that moment never to be an imitator.

And the danger then of these figureheads who in the minds of some have become almost celebrities or gurus is that in following them where they are good, those who follow after them, may exaggerate them at their points of weakness or aberration. And I think that there is a disconnect between some of these men at the top of the hierarchy, if you will, who are men of profound mental and emotional depth who can hold things in tension in their thinking and practice that some of those lower down the tree struggle to do the same thing. So the tensions that may seem to be held fruitfully at the top, sometimes there is deviations lower down as people of lesser magnitude struggle to put things together.

So it is the danger of mere imitation and there is recognizing, too, that some of what happens on the ground is not quite what is being proposed at the top.

It is a movement of conglomeration. It is a movement of coalitions, of conferences, of networks and of networks of networks. So all of these men are operating together. It can seem a little bit nepotistic at times. They are all endorsing one another's books. They are all referring to and linking to one another's blogs and videos, Together for the Gospel, The Gospel Coalition, these are the kind of big overarching organizations that are holding some of these things together, the Acts 29 network, Sovereign Grace Ministries. It is an eclectic mix. It adds to this whole notion of the spectrum.

And then it is a movement of consolidation. And between when pastor Mitch first asked me to deal with this and now, I think you can see this river is broadening out and slowing down. Now one of its figureheads is very anti the idea of things slowing down. He says, "Things start as missions, then they become movements and then they become museums and we are on mission." I think it is already becoming a movement. I think it is slowing down. There is not the same buzz. There is not the same energy. There is not the same drive as once there was. The river is broader. It is slower. The enthusiasm has shifted slightly. I am not saying it is any less vigorous, but it is not the sort of the rushing mountain stream that it once was that tended to carry things before it.

And, interestingly, and, again, this is one of the advantages when you see these people refer to each other. One of the issues that is coming up more in the last even month or two is the idea of succession. Some of these father figures in the movement start talking about what is going to happen after them. And so I think that there is a slowing down and there is an awareness that we are entering into a period of transition with regard to New Calvinism. That is... and, as I say, that is just a kind of a sense I am getting. I couldn't be absolute about that, but I think that may be happening.

So I presume that by virtue of being asked to deal with this topic, some or all of you are

at least somewhat familiar with the New Calvinism as a whole or with specific manifestations of it. But I give you that as a kind of an overview of some of the things that I think are defining features of this movement.

Now what I want to do is go in two directions, first of all, commendations and then cautions and concerns, because, as I say, I am engaging with these brothers as brothers and as someone who has appreciated and learned from them as a whole.

Commendations then. They set out to be Christ centered and God honoring. Now, you and others may have a question about the degree of their success in being Christ centered and God honoring, but I think it is right to recognize that that is their sincere intention. The whole notion of Christian hedonism which is one of those sort of the springs of the movement as John Piper has set it forth, is that God should be glorified. And, you know, his recasting of the answer to the first question of the Shorter Catechism that man's chief end is to glorify God by enjoying him forever. And the buzz phrase is: God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. This is the kind of language that is quoted and that drives so much of the movement. It is one in which Christ is known and sought to be made known and God is to be glorified.

Now, again, the idea of what it means to glorify God is very much Jonathan Edwards mediated through John Piper. That is one of the sort of the keystones in terms of this understanding. But we cannot deny that this is a movement that is galvanized by concern for the supremacy of God in Christ and that the Lord of glory would be magnified in all things. That is a good thing. And that is something that we should embrace. We do embrace and we ought to embrace more and more.

Now we may fine tune some of this down the line, but let's recognize, I hope, that this is a sincere aim and it is heartily to be commended.

Then it is, secondly, a grace soaked movement. And, again, if you read the books, follow the blogs, listen to the conversations, it is gospel this and it is gospel that and it is gospel the other almost to the point where it gets a little bit inane. You know, there has got to be another adjective that you can use for some of these teachings from time to time. But the gospel is the great thing. And Christ and him crucified is very much at the heart of things. Grace has become and remained amazing to these brothers and sisters. There is a freshness. There is an enthusiasm that comes with discovery. For example, when you hear John Piper talk about Jonathan Edwards, it is the excitement of a man who has discovered something that he didn't know before and that gives him a vigor and it gives him an excitement. There is a freshness, then, about this. Many of these people are people who are coming into this movement who didn't understand the beauty and the splendor of God's grace in Jesus Christ. And so they are enthusiastic about it. There is a freshness to it. It is not old hat. It is new and delightful and therefore it is the vibrantly joyful movement. These people are excited about the fact that God has loved them in Christ, quite apart from their own deservings.

And so there is a contagious and attractive enthusiasm about this movement. They delight to be loved by God in Christ. It is grace soaked.

Thirdly, it is missional. Now you may or may not like that buzz word, but that is the one they use. It is a missional movement. It is passionately and sacrificially missional. They desire that the glory of God would be known in all the earth and so they seek to preach the gospel, to make disciples. There is a good and healthy emphasis on discipleship in many circles. They want to plant churches. They want to train preachers. Their concern is local, national and international. That is a good model. That is New Testament Christianity. That is to be heartily commended. And they are ready to overlook and overcome boundaries that may cripple other people.

They are reaching people. When I say they I am not trying to, you know, draw great walls between us. But some of these friends are reaching people that we are not. They are going to the places that we don't. They are dealing with people that we may be very scared of. They are having doors opened before them that have never opened to some of us. And they are taking those opportunities and they are going in to tell people about the Lord Jesus Christ. And I think that is wonderful and I wish that that were more characteristic of us.

Then it is a complimentary movement. Now by that I mean men as men, women as women in their proper place and sphere as God has appointed it. Now I want to qualify that slightly in two senses. First of all, it wouldn't necessarily be a complimentarianism with which all of us would entirely agree. There would be differences of emphasis and differences of perspective at certain points. And, secondly, I find it a little amusing that with all the things that New Calvinism is determined not to be about, complimentarianism in the realm of gender and male, female relationships and works is such a big thing for them.

In terms of, you know, we said it is not monolithic. I could almost have put this in the list of qualities. New Calvinists make a great deal about the fact that they are or intend to be biblically complimentary. Now that works itself out, has a corresponding influence on what it means, especially to be men, what it is to have a healthy family life and male leadership in the Church.

Now New Calvinists at times the masculinity that is presented almost becomes a bit of a caricature. There are times you sort of think, that is not just masculine, that is just a cave man. You know, he has got a hair breast beating and all this kind of stuff. But generally speaking they want men to be men. They want women to be women. They want that to be so in single life. They want that to be so in married life. They want that to be so in church life. They want that to be so in family life. And this is a good thing. This is a good and appropriate emphasis. And it is proving very attractive to men and to women.

As women find men who really are men and as men are given opportunity to be men, especially younger men who are finding models of masculine headship, of vigor, of passion, of endeavor in this movement. And it is deep answering unto deep which is one

of the reasons why it is a movement of so many young preachers. They have gathered in a sort of a spearhead of stable—usually—active, energetic and committed young men to carry the gospel out alongside of whom are many vigorous, active, energetic and committed women.

So I think that that is, in and of itself, a good thing. And then they are both immersed and inventive. They are immersed in many things. They are immersed in theology. They are readers. If you talk to some of the big publishing houses, even the more conservative ones. I have friends who tell me that one of their ... some of their major sales are in New Calvinist circles. They are lapping up high grade theology. They are reading big books and good books. They love to know more about God by and large. They are thinkers. They want to know how these things relate to the Church and to the world.

They are inventive and immersed in the online world. Many of them are what are called early adopters. Do you know that phrase? The latest smart phone technology comes out, they are the first people in line. Apple bring... it has got to be apple. If you own a PC, you are not a New Calvinist almost by definition, all right? I am just warning. If you own an Apple Mac, you are suspect. So tell it not in Gath, but I have seen pastor Lush carrying an iPad around.

So they blog. They are the cutting edge of technology in many respects. They are not afraid to use social media and to harness the power of that online interaction.

Now, again, you may have questions about the nature of that media, the impact of that media, the effect of the media on the very message that it carries, but they are saying, “Well, look. It is there. It is here. Let’s get it. Let’s use it. Let’s employ it in order to bring Christ and the gospel of Christ to bear on the people who are using these environments.”

So they will use both old and new media very effectively to propagate both the truth and the New Calvinistic take on the truth. And I am putting those things together, because it is very much the movement that carries along the gospel as they teach it. So those things sort of go in tandem when you see them using old and new technology. You know, it is the gospel and it is new Calvinism and it is almost ... it is not quite one and the same thing, but you don't really get them separate from each other.

So that makes them highly visible and very persuasive in the demographic group who are immersed in online culture. And that is almost anybody who is my age and younger.

I mean, when I first went to university, yeah, they were encouraging us to use computers to submit our essays. So that is... that is not... trust me. It is not that long ago. So it is really in the last, I guess, 10 to 20 years that so much interaction has moved online. Is there anybody who is in their mid 30s and younger is almost by definition immersed in that world unless they deliberately decided to step away from it. And that is the world that the New Calvinism substantially inhabits, which makes them very potent in that narrow sphere, but then also has issues, well, what if you are not part of that gang? What



if you don't live online? What if you wouldn't know what... I have a friend who calls it Twit Face. You are not quite sure if he is... I don't know. It is Twit Face.

Ok, well, whether it is Twitter or Facebook or whatever it is, or whatever it will become, these will be men and women who are going to be there first and they will be seeking to take advantage of these things to the glory of God in Christ. Ok.

So at least five. Those are not the only commendations. But I think they are five areas where I have appreciated and learned from some of the emphases of my brothers and sisters.

But I also have some cautions and concerns. And this is where I am wrestling with enjoying some of the emphases, with appreciating some of the lessons, with thinking through some of the engagement that these brother have with the world at large. Is there anything here of which also to take more careful account, anything I might wish to strain out, anything which needs to be tempered?

Let me suggest some of my cautions and concerns that may ring true with you. First of all, I think there is a tendency to pragmatism and commercialism. Now I enjoy the American entrepreneurial spirit, the go west, young man, mentality that you still have in a way that, perhaps, some Europeans do not have. But I sometimes wonder if in some parts of the New Calvinism it is the entrepreneurial spirit rung amok. It is pragmatism applied where pragmatism was never meant to apply. It is this almost ... sometimes a commercial attitude to doing church. Do you hear that phrase? How do you do church?

Well, the idea is to get big, to stay big and then to become bigger. So what do you do? You need to market well. And you need to make sure you have got the right people in place. And so if, you know, if brother Barry, for example, is getting in the way of progress and brother Barry is a deacon, well you remove him from the deaconate and you go and find somebody else who can actually do the job that brother Barry is not prepared or not able to do. And that is almost a commercial model. You know, you need to expand the business, so what do you do? You have got to find the right people. You get rid of the wrong people. You bring in the people with the right skill sets. You do the right job and then that way you are able to move things forward.

At points it seems to be like almost like a principle lack of principle. You know, the Bible doesn't speak to this so we are free to do whatever we please in this area. Now I am not saying that anybody would actually say that, but sometimes as you step back and look at it, you wonder if that is actually what is being said or how it actually works in practice.

You sort of know the regulative principle of worship and that is opposed to the normative principle where if God hasn't forbidden it, you can do it. And sometimes it is almost, well, if God hasn't explicitly said this isn't a good idea, let's do it. Well let's try it. And it is the flip side, you see, of that desire to engage and to get the gospel out. What will work? Well, that must be good, because that is advancing the mission, isn't it?

And so things that you might say, “Well, actually there are biblical principles that play into that...” No, no, no, no. We have got to get the word out and we will use whatever means we can in order to accomplish that. And so there is a pursuit of bigness, of numbers, of profile, almost for its own sake.

When the *Time* magazine proclaimed the New Calvinism as one of the 10 ideas changing the world right now, immediately the blogosphere was just wow. We are important. We have got a seat at {?}. Really? Is that what it is all about? Is that what we are pursuing? Doesn't God actually delight to turn those kind of things on their heads? Not by might or by power, but by my Spirit, says the Word of God.

So statistics. They love statistics. You listen to some of the sermons and, you know, the introduction is: Here is the statistical reason why this is a good topic to deal with this morning.

I am holding my tongue now because I hear some of those statistics so often. I just want to kind of make fun of them and the... it is just I have heard that a thousand times. And, you know, this survey says this. And churches are like that. And so we need to just adapt and respond to what this latest survey says about the state of the Church or the state of the world.

There is a showmanship about some of it. There is an element of performance about some of it. There are sometimes gimmicks that creep in at points in the movement. And I do think that there are times in which or men in this movement who run the church more like a commercial enterprise than they do the body of Jesus Christ. So that is one of my concerns and cautions.

The second is an unbalanced view of culture. There is what is called Neo Kuyperian perspective. And perhaps the keynote is this phrase from Kuyper. “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ who is sovereign over all does not shout, ‘Mine.’”

Now how that translates into some parts of the New Calvinist spectrum is almost a sense that this world is neutral territory. It is no man's land and, therefore, culture is all up for grabs. We are conquering culture for Jesus Christ. And therefore nothing is out of bounds. We can take anything that this world produces and we can Christianize it.

So perhaps one of the classical examples would be something like musical forms. Well, we will take all the musical forms. We will take the uniform that goes with those musical forms. We will take the structures that communicate those particular things and we will do it as Christians, because the forms and the uniforms and the structures, they are all neutral and we just need to make that form carry a Christian message.

But I think that that is a sort of... it is over realized. They have gone beyond the scriptural norm. They are so concerned to be relevant and accessible that they have become sort of

slaves to hipness. It is almost achingly cool. You read some of these books and it is all defined by this narrow target audience.

We have got to reference the matrix. And then you have got to reference Lord of the Rings. And then we are going to go to the {?} bunch and we are going to reference Flannery O'Connor and then we are going to go for the intellectuals and we will talk about C. S. Lewis. So you get all these sort of little cultural buzz words, riding the wave of the latest big film series or the book that everybody is talking about. And there is a sense in which, look, they are doing something well here. They are looking into the sphere in which they are operating. They are understanding the language and the culture that they are dealing with and they are sincerely trying to bring the gospel to bear. But it sometimes ends up feeling like it is just a checklist to prove that I am cool and I have read all the latest books and I have seen all the latest films. You can't... well...

You see, I am trying not to be sarcastic and cynical at points. I better keep trying to do that. You can see it is not easy for me.

But this is sort of a range of reference, then, that seems to assume that the culture is up for grabs and we just need to use it as a vehicle to bring Christ to bear.

And there are two particular areas where I think we will find out it working itself out. One is worship and one is evangelism. Again, generally speaking, New Calvinism does not embrace the regulative principle of worship. It seems to me that the vast majority of New Calvinists believe that all of life is worship. That is one of the phrases you will hear time and time again. Now there is a sense in which that is true. Whether you eat, whether you drink do all to the glory of God.

But what happens if everything becomes worship? If everything is flattened out? Then there are no high points. And rather than everything being worship, nothing is worship. There are no peaks or troughs in our experience in terms of our coming before God to bring glory and honor to him. And that often leads, then, to an aping of the world, a very deliberate process in which our worship will be as much like the world's as possible, but we will just have Christian lyrics. So if our target audience is basically indie kids, we will get an indie style Christian band in to do a concert and they will sing Christian lyrics in this indie style and then we will come preach the gospel.

And they will do this at various different points in various different spheres.

So with regard to worship, there is a sense in which, well, we are always worshipping God and all of culture is up for grabs, so there is no distinction between the sacred and the profane. And that also then bleeds, obviously, into evangelism, because it is what attracts people, what seems to work. As long as they are coming to hear and as long as we have claimed this for Jesus, then it doesn't really matter what forms it takes.

Now I am not suggesting that people aren't being reached and people aren't being saved.

But I think this pragmatism together with this view of culture has a tendency to make evangelism adrift toward becoming more like the world in order to win the world.

And you might say the motive is good, but the means are wrong.

The third thing, the third caution or concern. A troubling approach to holiness. And I was struggling with the right adjective here. Troubling may not quite be the right one, but I wasn't sure how else to sort of try and explain this. And there are two elements here under this troubling approach to holiness. The first is what I consider to be incipient Antinomianism. Antinomianism meaning essentially that they do not believe in the abiding validity of the moral law to those who are in Christ Jesus. And incipient because I think it is there in seed even if it is not yet fully broken out either in doctrine or in practice. And as so often the Lord's day, the Fourth Commandment is almost a first point in contact.

Now many of the leading lights in the New Calvinist movement would formally embrace what is sometimes called New Covenant Theology or would at least align themselves towards that movement. And essentially, as I say, this is the teaching that there is no abiding relevance of the moral law and that initial point of contact is very often the Lord's Day, the idea of a new covenant sabbath, if you will.

Now this is where we come back to the fact that these are holy men. And they seem to be able to hold things in tension that, frankly, I would struggle to do. And to pursue godliness while at the same time that... remember, they are not saying that there is no law. It is more if you know Richard Baxter's Neonomianism, I think there is something of that in it, the idea that we are no longer under law, we are under grace. And to some extent that we obey Christ, we follow Christ, but we are not obliged to follow the 10 Commandments.

Now the second element and it is related to this and, again, this has become clearer even in the last few weeks, there is an ongoing discussion about the nature of sanctification. And the two men who have engaged in this most recently are {?} who is down in Cape Coral, I think, in Florida and he is Billy Graham's grandson and Kevin DeYoung who is in Lansing, I think, in Michigan. And Kevin DeYoung is pushing for the more orthodox perspective, whereas {?} is concerned that there is too much or not enough grace and that we are sanctified by faith.

Now can you be sanctified without faith? Can you become more like Jesus Christ without faith? Of course you can't, because it is by union with Jesus Christ that the power that we have in him is working itself out in us. It is on account of our relationship to Christ the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our hearts and that we are then conformed to the image of God's Son.

So there is certainly a need for faith if we are to be sanctified, because that is what brings us into and keeps us in union with Jesus Christ. But we are not sanctified by faith. Rather, we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works

in us both to will and to do for his good pleasure. And there is a false dichotomy then being established between faith and duty or effort. And I think that some of this goes back to Mr. Piper. We glorify God by enjoying him forever. And there are times when you sort of think, why do you seem to be afraid of the words duty and obedience and commandment?

And, again, they are so concerned to talk about grace that it is almost as if there is an overreaction to some of these notions of effort and obedience and duty and commandment which are part of what we do as those who enjoy the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

I am liberated in order to be holy. And what is the patent and framework of my holiness? It is God as he makes himself know in Jesus Christ. Christ then being the perfect transcript, if you will, of what God is like and God's holiness being made known preeminently in his moral law.

Now that is my understanding. But where, you see, you have got this incipient Antinomianism and this concern that we don't evacuate grace and faith from the process of sanctification, you end up with men who holding some of these things in tension are holy men in themselves. But as you work your way down and out and historically as you see the succeeding generations follow, I think that those are tensions that are going to result in an increasing abandonment of new covenant holiness as the Bible makes it plain.

Now I am not suggesting that this is the intention, but because of their concerns not to become Legalists, if I call them Antinomians, ok, I am grossly uncharitable. That is just... how dare you call us Antinomians. Well, you probably think I am a Legalist, so all square there, at least. And the other... there was a very insightful comment on a blog the other day where there was a criticism of somebody who would see things more the way we see them who dared to use the word Antinomian. And somebody who doesn't hold to the abiding validity of the moral law, especially with regard to the Lord's day said, "Why are you getting so upset about the fact that they are using the word Antinomian? If they are right, that is what I am."

Now I believe I am right, so I don't believe that that word is wrong. But if this person is right, then I am an Antinomian. Now if my understanding and your understanding is right then this is seed form Antinomianism. And that is my fear. That is my caution and my concern. And in an environment like that, there is a danger that it will become very attractive to people who want the privileges and benefits and eased conscience of a Christian profession without the rigorous pursuit of godliness.

Now that is not the intention of these men. Please don't imagine that I am suggesting that, but with such an environment it may become a sort of a Christianized shelter for people who want to go along with some kind of Christianity without the rigorous demands of godliness being pressed into their consciences. That, I think is a caution and it flows out of this incipient Antinomianism and how can you over emphasize grace? You know, there is a good emphasis on grace. I am not suggesting this is a Romans six situation. Let

us sin, then, that grace may abound. That is not what I am suggesting about these brothers. What I am saying is that it is an atmosphere in which the kind of concern that Paul has among the Galatian churches may become apparent where you are making your liberty a cloak for license.

Do you see the distinction I am trying to make? Yeah? Ok.

Then a fourth caution or concern is a potentially dangerous Ecumenism, that is a concern for unity but perhaps at the expense of truth.

Now it is an eclectic movement. It is a spectrum and there men all the way along it who don't see eye to eye on certain things. And the fact that they can be united on things that are of critical and central importance is a wonderful testimony to Christian unity. It is a good and a healthy thing and peace among brothers is a genuine blessing and much to be desired and pursued.

But one of the things that is often spoken, you get the notion of state and national boundaries. Ok? National boundaries, we are all Christians together. State boundaries there are distinctions between denominations. Some of us are more confessional. Some of us are more charismatic. Some of us are Baptists. Some of us are paedobaptists and these are considered to be state boundaries. They are lower walls, but we are all in this together. We are all one nation, as it were, we are all Christian.

Now, that begs a question. Who gets to decide which are the state boundaries and who gets to decide which are the national boundaries? I would suggest that it is not necessarily just the people who like the idea of state and national boundaries, because our perspective on what may be a state boundary may be different to some of theirs.

Now this leads to some very strange bedfellows. I am concerned ... I am not trying to single out individuals, but in terms of giving examples, in the last few years John Piper's Desiring God Conference amongst men who many of us would be more than willing to hear preaching and I think of some I would cross oceans to hear the man pray, let alone preach the Word of God. Yet at the same time you have got men there like Douglas Wilson and Rick Warren. And they are receiving what is, in essence, the Piper stamp of approval. And remember that Mr. Piper is one of the men who is prominent. He is one of the figureheads of this movement. And I would suggest to you that such men as Doug Wilson and Rick Warren, however attractive their personalities may be and however impressive their profiles may be, the faith and practice of those men seems to me to put them beyond the pale of historic, biblical Christianity. And to bring those men in and to give them one of the preeminent platforms in this movement, I think, is an exceedingly dangerous thing.

Again, because although Mr. Piper may be able to say, "Well, I will take this, but I won't take that," the sense that one often gets is, then, well, if Doug Wilson is good to go then Rick Warren must be a good guy. So let's read everything they have written and perhaps without any discernment let's take those things on board.

So I think while the desire for Christian unity, keeping the walls low enough to shake hands over, that is a good thing in itself. I think there is a potentially dangerous Ecumenism in which some of these men are reaching beyond the bounds of what is safe and orthodox in terms of credible, biblical Christianity.

I need to press on, just a couple of more. I think there is a genuine tension with regards to spiritual gifts. And this is being identified within the movement as a potential fault line. And some of those we have got to make sure that this doesn't end up splitting us. And I think they are right to recognize that tension.

Now so far the idea of spiritual gifts of the nature of the continuing work of the Spirit of Christ seems to be a moot point. Let's not talk about it. Just pretend it is not an issue.

There was a book called *Risking the Truth* by Martin Downs, a friend of mine from the UK in which he interviewed a number of key figures, confessional men for the most part, some of whom are working at least on the fringes of this movement. The only contributor to that set of interviews who suggested that the charismatic influence was a danger was Conrad N. Bailey, an African pastor. No one else even seemed to want to address the fact that actually this is a point of tension and this is a point of potential and I would think actual divide. It is a significant issue. Who is this person the Holy Spirit and what does he do? And how does he do it and when does he do it? And is there any difference between what he was doing in the days of the apostles and what he is doing now? And there are some men who would be very close to where we are, but I think the broad stream of New Calvinism is essentially a continuationist stream. And I don't like that language. I am not a cessationist. I don't believe, in an absolute sense, that the Holy Spirit has stopped working. We depend upon him absolutely every moment in our worship, in our living. He is the one by whom Christ is made known to us. When we sing, when we pray, when we worship, when we... we need the Holy Spirit and we are in danger of being driven into a corner where we basically say, "Well, we are so worried about abuses with regard to the Holy Spirit that we give him up."

Well, you have him. WE will be real absolute cessationists and you are the continuationists. You are the one who believe he is still around and still doing things. And that is a caricature. It is a caricature of us that we must not embrace.

What is the nature of his work? What is its degree? What is its extent? Are we to expect prophecies, healings and miracles?

Now when people come together at some of these big conferences some of those things get just put aside. Everybody gets together and you think, well, there is a lot of unity here. But when people go back to their individual churches there are radical differences about the approaches to these things. And I think that this has to do, to some extent, with the whole nature of authority and revelation. Where does God speak to us? Now that can become a real flash point. And I think it has to the potential to do so. And I fear that there is a desire to hold together things that don't really belong together.

You may hear the phrase reformed charismatic. Some would suggest that that is... those two things are mutually exclusive and you may have the question, well, which one is going to take the ascendancy.

And then I think there is a degree of arrogance and triumphalism. I say that exceedingly conscious that we are prone to the very same spirit. Let me suggest what I mean. While recognizing our own frailties in this area, this is a young and seemingly successful movement and when you are young and successful what happens? You get a big head. And you kind of think that you are right and that you just need to keep going and that everything will eventually fall before you. And I fear, then, that especially with some of those who are coming behind some of these figureheads that there is a sense that it is all just {?} and it is all just going to keep going this way. And that kind of over... that triumphalism can breed an over confidence.

So at times you will see men speaking as if they are the ones who just reinvented the wheel. I remember a staggering assertion on a book on the Church in which the suggestion seems to be made that no one had really taken the doctrine of the Church seriously since the 16<sup>th</sup> century until this book was written. And I think there may be one or two. Did he just not read them? But, you know, and again, there is enthusiasm. Hey, look. I am discovering these things. That is great. So have other people.

But they are saying, “We came to this for the first time. I have discovered Edwards. Let me tell you what Edwards says.”

Well, other people have been reading Edwards before. And they have also got some perspectives on what Edwards says. Some of these areas of theology, their handling of history I think at times can give the impression if you just read history properly you will see that it vindicates the New Calvinism.

We have the same problem. When you read history what you tend to find are the examples that say that you are doing exactly the right thing right now. At least I, well, you know, oh, wow, I am vindicated. I am justified. History proves that I am right. They are doing the same thing. And it is not a legitimate way of handling the past.

There is also a tendency to only dialogue and receive criticism within their own circles. There is a sort of a... it is a closed circle. We talk to each other. We talk about each other. We interact with each other, but if you are somebody who has been placed outside for some reason and you have the temerity to suggest that one of the figureheads may have something wrong, then you can really get it in the neck.

But the issue isn't whether something is working or failing or whether it is big or small. It is whether it is right or wrong. And I do think that there are times in which the sense that this is young and vigorous and moving can blind some of my brothers to some of the inherent weaknesses and can close their ears to those of us who desire their good and believe that we have something to offer them as much as they have something to offer us.



And that brings me to my conclusions. I am over time, I believe. May I have five minutes? Thank you. My conclusion essentially is this. Be Calvinists. Don't be New Calvinists or Old Calvinists, whatever those distinctions really mean. Live before God rather than before men. You do not need to capitulate and just jump on the band wagon because it is going past at speed. You don't need to panic and circle the wagons. You don't need to lash out. I have had band wagons and circled wagons. I am not sure what you do with a wagon when you lash out with it, but you get my sense. Maybe you put those big blades on the wheels and drive them toward the enemy.

We may not always agree with them, but remember that we are dealing, I believe, almost invariably with brothers and sisters in Christ. Ok? What that means is that recognizing that we are united in Christ, although we have differences of opinion, some of them significant, that our God is their God and that he is in control, that none of Christ's will be lost, that the purposes of our heavenly Father are being accomplished in the earth and that his kingdom is advancing. And our responsibility is to live before God to his praise and glory and to set our own house in order first and to ensure that our doctrine and our practice marry, that we manifest degrees of heat and of light that coordinate, that compliment one another.

I am not saying we know it all, but we don't do it all, because knowing and doing, telling and showing give us the platform that will enable us to serve our friends who differ from us in other respects.

C. H. Spurgeon speaking of the attitude of some toward John and Charles Wesley, Arminians, said, "I am afraid that most of us are half asleep and those that are a little awake have not begun to feel. It will be time for us to find fault with John and Charles Wesley not when we discover their mistakes, but when we have cured our own, when we shall have more piety than they, more fire than they, more grace and more burning love, more intense unselfishness. Then and not until then may we begin to find fault and criticize."

And I try to embrace that spirit in speaking these things. I think our first responsibility is to set our own house in order and to live in accordance with the light that we have received and to stir up our fires of grace and of piety and of holy endeavor. And that is something that I want to look at to some extent in the sermons that will follow today.

But be Calvinists. I presume that you believe what you believe because you actually believe it. Do you know what I mean by that? This isn't just something that is take it or leave it, but you thought through your convictions. You have searched the Scriptures to see whether the things spoken to you are so and that you have anchored yourself at these points of doctrine and their corresponding practice, because these things you are persuaded are true before God and that you will live accordingly.

Well, brothers and sisters, if you have done that with a good conscience, then hold fast to your convictions and live them out to the praise and the glory of God. Enjoy these things.

Enter into the sweet realities of the God that we know in his Son Jesus Christ and graciously defend them. You are not obliged to give them up any more than our New Calvinist brothers are obliged to give things up just because we disagree with them.

This is {?} then for us to speak to them and, God willing, to be ready both to learn where we have something to learn and to teach where we have something to teach. The New Calvinism is in some respects a splendid and many colored thing. It contains within it some fearful tensions. It has within it some wonderful prospects. And it contains within it some significant dangers.

And remember that the fad will no last. I am not saying it is all a fad. But there is an appetite for novelty that will take people on to this movement and the novelty won't last forever. And I suspect that when the freshness and the novelty wears off you will be left with people asking at least two questions. Some will say: What next? And they will look for the next fad and they will jump aboard and they will be carried on to whatever else seems new and stimulating. And some will ask: What more? What else is there? Am I missing? And this is the God that I want to know, that I want to serve. How can I know him more? How can I know him better without losing that sense of wonder, because of God's love and grace towards me in Christ Jesus?

And we need to so live and to so speak that when somebody asks what more, we have got a relationship that enables us credibly to offer something more.

So be Calvinists. Don't panic. Don't capitulate. Don't lash out. Live before God. Serve him and be ready to serve his saints wherever you find them.

Thank you.

Shall we pray together? Shall I close in prayer?

*Merciful and gracious Father, we thank you for this opportunity to consider these things. We pray you would give us wisdom. Where we are wrong, oh God, change us. Where we are right, keep and maintain us. We pray, oh God, that we may learn what it is to serve you in our generation. Oh God, help us to wrestle with these things to the praise of your name through Christ Jesus we ask it. Amen.*