

# CALVIN 500 SERIES

500th Anniversary of the Birth of JOHN CALVIN  
(10 July 1509 – 27 May 1564)



## #2: The Flagship In The Reformation Fleet



On the 500 Anniversary of the birth of John Calvin - 10 July 2009 - 'Times Online' put up an article under the title:

'Calvin: still hot at 500 – Meet the New Calvinists, a generation of young Evangelicals thirsting for back-to-Bible basics.'

They noted: *"The 16th-century reformer John Calvin, perhaps unjustly famed for dourness and an elitist doctrine of pre-destination, is enjoying a huge revival in the Protestant world."*

They then quoted a number of statistics that seem to point to a resurgence of Calvinistic teaching in our day, including the facts that:

- 'Time' magazine put 'The New Calvinism' at No.3 in its 2009 list of the Top Ten ideas Changing the World, calling it *"Evangelicalism's latest success story"*;

- A 2007 survey found that 30% of all new pastors who graduate from the influential Southern Baptist Theological Seminary profess themselves Calvinist, and thus subscribers to his five key "doctrines of grace."

The article also referred to the ministries of Bible teachers such as:

- Dr. Albert Mohler, the head of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, who claims that any Christian seeking to define God biblically will be, *"drawn to conclusions that are traditionally classified as Calvinist"*;

- John Piper of the Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, the founder of the 'Desiring God' movement;

- and cited the experience of Collin Hansen, the youngest religion editor at the magazine and website 'Christianity Today,' who has made the claim that Calvinism, with its characteristic back-to-Bible basics, strongly appeals to a generation broken by "divorce, drugs or sexual temptation."

Hansen's book, 'Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists,' is the result of his two-year quest to discover whether the trend for Reformed theology he had spotted with College contemporaries was a one-off or part of larger movement.

He was aware that:

- Yale University had recently published a major biography of the popular 18th-century Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards,

- a "number of Calvinists" were occupying top positions in US seminaries,

- preachers like Piper sold millions of books and had vast following at events like the student-based evangelical 'Passion Conference.'

Therefore, in "*locales as diverse as Birmingham, Alabama and New Haven, Connecticut,*" he set out to discover, "*what makes today's young evangelicals tick,*" and thus the shape of tomorrow's Church.

He found a generation "weary of churches that seek to entertain rather than teach, longing after the true meat of the Word," and Calvinist pastors concerned at evangelical mega-churches seemingly modelled on businesses.

His conclusion was that the modern trend for Reformed Theology was not a one-off, but a strong, surging movement within Evangelicalism.

So ... is it true that the Reformation Fleet has been refitted and refloated? ... that John Calvin's teachings are the subjects of, "*a huge revival in the Protestant world*"?

Well, that is a debate for another day.

[What is undeniably true is that we need a New Reformation today.](#) The time is ripe - with the internet, facebook, email, and western society crumbling in its own decay and greed.

**In preaching this message, my main concern is, approximately 500 years ago when the Reformation Fleet left port, what was the fundamental principle that drove it along?** What made it tick, gave it success and enduring influence? (And, by extension, what can give the church of Jesus Christ new force and impetus today?).

[If we are to keep to the maritime imagery that we have chosen for this 'Calvin 500 Series', what was the 'Flagship' in the Reformation Fleet?](#)

A flagship is the lead ship in a fleet of vessels, a designation given on account of being either the largest, fastest, newest, most heavily armed or, for publicity purposes, the most well known.

In military terms, it is a ship used by the commanding officer of a group of naval ships. The term originates from the custom of the commanding officer (usually, but not always, a flag officer) to fly a distinguishing flag.

As with so many other naval terms, flagship has crossed over into common parlance, where it means:

- the most important or leading member of a group;
- the most prominent or highly touted product, brand, location, or service among those offered by a company. We hear talk about a “flagship brand,” or a “flagship product” of a manufacturing company, or the “flagship store” of a retail chain.

Car manufacturing companies usually have a “flagship” in the form of their most important car:

- The Mercedes-Benz S-Class is one example;
- the Jaguar XJ is another.

### **The FLAGSHIP of the Reformation Fleet is ..... ?**

Someone has remarked: *“Just as:*

- *the Methodist places in the foreground the idea of the salvation of sinners,*
- *the Baptist — the mystery of regeneration,*
- *the Lutheran — justification by faith,*
- *the Moravian — the wounds of Christ,*
- *the Greek Catholic — the mysticism of the Holy Spirit,*
- *and the Romanist — the catholicity of the church,*
- *so the Calvinist is always placing in the foreground the thought of God.”*

There is some truth (and I emphasise “some”) in that statement, ... though it by no means gives a complete picture of what drove John Calvin, or all those who have gone down a line similar to him.

- The central thought of Calvinism is **the great thought of God;**
- There is no doubt that Calvinism was the construction of a system of biblical teaching / theology with God at the centre; ...

... and **its fundamental principle is that God, Who has revealed Himself in His Word, is Sovereign over all things and deserves glory and majesty from all things.**

I suggest that the Flagship of the Reformation Fleet, carrying John Calvin, the Admiral of that Fleet, flies the distinguishing flag with these words emblazoned upon it, “Soli Deo Gloria” – “*For The Glory of God Alone!*”

- This Reformation slogan ‘Soli Deo Gloria’ was carved into the organ at Bach’s church in Leipzig and the composer signed his works with its initials.
- It is inscribed over taverns and music halls in old sections of Heidelberg and Amsterdam, a lasting tribute to a time when the fragrance of God’s goodness seemed to fill the air.

Plus, on board that grand vessel, the Scripture text, **Romans 11:36**, is given prominent place: “**For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to Whom be glory for ever. Amen.**”

**Romans 11:36** leaves nothing out. All things:

- originate from God,
- and centre on God,
- and refer ultimately to God.

## **[2] SOLI DEO GLORIA: THE FLAGSHIP IN THE REFORMATION FLEET.**

Benjamin B. Warfield said of John Calvin, “*No man ever had a profounder sense of God than he.*”

Everything is subservient to God's glory, and finds its place around that center, that fixed point.

[This was the key to Calvin’s life and theology.](#)

- “*The essential meaning of Calvin’s life and preaching,*” writes John Piper, “*is that he recovered and embodied a passion for the absolute reality and majesty of God.*”
- Steven J. Lawson, in “The Expository Genius of John Calvin’: “*In all of life, one supreme passion consumed John Calvin: the glory of God. All truth revealed in Holy Scripture, Calvin believed, was intended to make known God’s glory and to lead the reader to behold and adore His majesty.*”

*Likewise, sin was a frontal attack on the majesty of God; any motive, thought, or deed contrary to Scripture marred God’s glory. Calvin, then, saw it as his chief duty to uphold the honour of the divine name. The cornerstone of his theology, life, and ministry was soli Deo gloria—‘the glory of God alone.’”*

### **(a) THE GLORY AND MAJESTY OF A SOVEREIGN GOD: WHERE HE RECOGNISED IT.**

Everywhere, basically!

**“For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to Whom be glory for ever. Amen.”**

**• Calvinism places God at the centre of everything, including CREATION.**

In Section 1.51-3 of the ‘Institutes of the Christian Religion,’ John Calvin states that the, *“clarity of God’s self-disclosure strips us of every excuse ... . [H]e not only sowed in men’s minds that seed of religion of which we have spoken, but revealed himself and daily discloses himself in the whole workmanship of the universe.”*

It should be remembered that, back then, Calvin did not have the advantage of the incredible advances in science that we have today that cause us to be lost in wonder, love and praise at the handiwork of our almighty Lord!

From a tiny human cell, to the vast galaxies of outer-space, we see evidence of God.

**Consider a tiny human cell.** Each individual cell contains more information than Encyclopedia Britannica.

Lee Strobel writes that, *“one ‘simple’ cell is a high-tech factory, complete with:*

- artificial languages and decoding systems;*
- central memory banks that store and retrieve impressive amounts of information;*
- precision control systems that regulate the automatic assembly of components;*
- proofreading and quality control mechanisms that safeguard against errors;*
- assembly systems that use principles of refabrication and modular construction;*
- and a complete replication system that allows the organism to duplicate itself at bewildering speeds.”*

Calculations indicate that if a person could write out all of the information that can be stored in a sample of DNA the size of a pinhead, the result would be a pile of books that is 500 times higher than the distance from the earth to the moon!

In one microscopic cell, we see the work of God. “Soli Deo Gloria” – *“For The Glory of God Alone!”*

And *beyond* that miniature cell the genius of God can be observed **in every part of our galaxy-filled universe!**

**• Psalm 19:1** proclaims, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.”

**• Romans 1:20** says, “For the invisible things of Him [attributes of God] from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.”

Calvin, however, goes on to say in **Section 1.5.4-5** that, “*man turns ungratefully against God.*”

*“Here, however, the foul ungratefulness of men is disclosed. They have within themselves a workshop graced with God’s unnumbered works, and, at the same time, a storehouse overflowing with inestimable riches. They ought, then, to break forth into praises of Him but are actually puffed up and swollen with all the more pride ... .*

*How detestable, I ask you, is this madness: that man finding God in his body and soul a hundred times, on this very pretence of excellence denies that there is a God? ... . [T]hey set God aside, the while using “nature,” which for them is the artificer of all things, as a cloak. They see such exquisite workmanship in their individual members, from mouth and eyes even to their very toenails. Here also they substitute nature for God.”*

Calvin is brilliant in his insight! His comment was written centuries ago, but it still applies today.

Today people use the theory of ‘evolution’ as the explanation for the amazing things in the universe. The “pride” that Calvin mentions does not allow them to believe in a God. They want to be in control, but the idea of a God makes them feel small and powerless. So, they reject God, rob Him of His glory, and substitute nature/man in His place (cf. **Romans 1**).

• **Calvinism places God at the centre of everything, including REDEMPTION.**

Geerhardus Vos, the Princeton New Testament scholar, said that the, “*all-embracing slogan of the Reformed faith is this: the work of grace in the sinner as a mirror for the glory of God.*”

A couple of quotes from the great Calvinist Benjamin B. Warfield are appropriate:

*“From these things shine out upon us the formative principle of Calvinism. The Calvinist is the man who sees God behind all phenomena, and in all that occurs recognises the hand of God working out His will; who makes the attitude of the soul to God in prayer its permanent attitude in all its life-activities; and who casts himself on the grace of God alone, excluding every trace of dependence on self from the whole work of his salvation.”*

The same author, in another place, asserts that:

*“The Calvinist is the man who has seen God, and who, having seen God in His glory, is filled on the one hand with a sense of his own unworthiness to stand in God’s sight as a creature, and much more as a sinner, and on the other with adoring wonder that nevertheless this God is a God Who receives sinners. He who believes in God without reserve, and is determined that God shall be God to him, in all his thinking, feeling, willing — in the entire compass of his life-activities, intellectual, moral, spiritual — throughout all his individual, social, religious relations — is by the force of the strictest of all logic which presides over the outworking of principles into thought and life, by the very necessity of the case, a Calvinist.”*

Calvin’s ‘Institutes’ (Book 3, Chapter 13, Section 1-5), conveys the message, “*There is no “we” in glory.*”

You have seen the posters on the walls of schools – the picture of a triumphant football squad with the winning trophy, and below is the line, *“There is no I in team.”*

As spotty teenagers who love football we get the message – there is no room for those who are only out for themselves in a team sport.

In Chapter 13 of his ‘Institutes’ Calvin is teaching us that, when it comes to who gets the glory for our salvation, it is either us or God. There is no middle ground; there is no “we” in glory.

For whoever “glories in himself glories against God.” God would have every mouth closed before Him as the world stands in silence in their guilt (**Romans 3:19**). We should beware of attributing any part of our salvation to our own wisdom, inclinations or desires, *“for so long as a man has anything, however small, to say in his own defence, so long he deducts somewhat from the glory of God.”*

John Calvin, and all Calvinists, stress that the sovereignty, majesty and power of God is the only sure hope for the sinfulness, fickleness, and moral weakness of human beings—and the glory of God is the ultimate theme of preaching and focus of worship.

- In the work of **Creation**, this flag is flying: “Soli Deo Gloria” – *“For The Glory of God Alone!”*
- And in the work of **Redemption**, again, the pennant is to the breeze: “Soli Deo Gloria” – *“For The Glory of God Alone!”*

John Calvin said a man can no more obscure the glory of God than a madman can extinguish the Sun by writing “DARKNESS” on the walls of his rubber room.

And yet Calvin himself had to reclaim this teaching about the glory and majesty of God ... because, throughout the period of the Dark and Middle Ages, many a ‘religious madman’ / deluded servant of Roman Catholicism had written “DARKNESS” all over the walls of the Church!

## **(b) THE GLORY AND MAJESTY OF A SOVEREIGN GOD: FROM WHENCE HE RECLAIMED IT.**

John Calvin had to embark on a search to find the flag that billows from the top of the ‘Flagship’ of the Reformation Fleet – ‘Sola Deo Gloria.’

For Calvin, the need for the Reformation was fundamentally this: Rome had, *“destroyed the glory of Christ in many ways ...*

*- by calling upon the saints to intercede, when Jesus Christ is the one mediator between God and man;*

*- by adoring the Blessed Virgin, when Christ alone shall be adored;*

*- by offering a continual sacrifice in the Mass, when the sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross is complete and sufficient,*

- by elevating tradition to the level of Scripture and even making the word of Christ dependent for its authority on the word of man.”

John Calvin was converted in 1533; by 1534 he had **left Roman Catholicism**. He described Romish teaching as ‘the mire of superstition’ and ‘the sty of error,’ full of ignorance, pollution and impurity!

Calvin asks, in his Commentary on Colossians, “*How comes it that we are ‘carried about with so many strange doctrines’ (Hebrews 13:9)?*”

He answers: “*Because the excellence of Christ is not perceived by us.*”

## **CARDINAL SADOLETO**

When John Calvin and William Farel were expelled from Geneva in April 1538, Rome set its eye on Geneva and tried to reclaim it.

The Italian Cardinal Sadoletto wrote to the leaders of Geneva, urging them to reject the Reformed teachings they had embraced, and come back to Rome. The Cardinal began his letter with a long conciliatory section on the preciousness of eternal life, before coming to his accusations of the reformation.

The city elders asked Calvin to reply.

He did ... in six days during the autumn of 1539. It was one of his earliest writings and spread his name as a reformer across Europe. Luther read it and said, “*Here is a writing which has hands and feet. I rejoice that God raises up such men!*”

In Calvin’s response to Sadoletto, he said that the fundamental issue is not:

- justification,
- or priestly abuses,
- or transubstantiation (the Mass),
- or prayers to saints,
- or papal authority.

It was inevitable that each of these issues would come in for discussion. But beneath all of them, the fundamental issue for John Calvin, from the beginning to the end of his life, was the issue of **the centrality and supremacy and majesty of the glory of God**.

Rome attacks the glory of God, and, by its system of works, tries to put man in God’s place. Only justification by faith alone brings glory to God, because it alone makes salvation from, through and to God.

**This was the touchstone of truth for Calvin, and this was what damned Rome’s doctrine.**

Calvin wrote:



*“[Your] zeal for heavenly life [is] a zeal which keeps a man entirely devoted to himself, and does not, even by one expression, arouse him to sanctify the name of God.”*

(Paraphrase): *“It is not very sound theology to confine a man's thoughts to himself and not to let him [have] as the prime motive of his existence zeal for the glory of God. For we are born first of all for God and not for ourselves. For all things flow from him, and subsist in him, as Paul says in Romans 11:36. They ought to be related to Him.”*

He goes on and says to Sadolet that what he should do - and what Calvin aims to do with all his life - is *“set before [man], as the prime motive of his existence, zeal to illustrate the glory of God.”*

## JUSTIFICATION AND ROMAN CATHOLICISM

When Calvin eventually got to the issue of justification in his response to Sadoletto, he said, *“You ... touch upon justification by faith, the first and keenest subject of controversy between us ... . Wherever the knowledge of it is taken away, the glory of Christ is extinguished.”*

Once again we can see what is fundamental.

- Justification by faith is crucial.

- And the deep root reason why it is crucial is that the glory of Christ is at stake!

Wherever the knowledge of justification is taken away, the glory of Christ is extinguished. This is always the basic issue for Calvin.

**Therefore the unifying root of all of Calvin's labours is his passion to display the glory of God in Christ.**

When he was 30 years old, he described an imaginary scene of himself at the end of his life, giving an account to God, and said, *“The thing [O God] at which I chiefly aimed, and for which I most diligently laboured, was, that the glory of thy goodness and justice ... might shine forth conspicuous, that the virtue and blessings of Thy Christ ... might be fully displayed.”*

Twenty-four years later, unchanged in his passions and goals, and one month before he actually did give an account to Christ in heaven (he died at age 54), he said in his last will and testament, *“I have written nothing out of hatred to anyone, but I have always faithfully propounded what I esteemed to be for the glory of God.”*

## **THIS EMPHASIS NEEDS TO BE RECLAIMED AGAIN!**

Our world is full of ambitious people. They are not God-centred!

Nor is much of the professing ‘evangelical church’!

David Wells is sadly right when he says, *“It is this God, majestic and holy in His being ... who has disappeared from the modern evangelical world.”*

The apostle Paul declared (**Romans 15:20**), “Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation”

*“It has always been my ambition to preach the Gospel where Christ was not known.”*

What is the ambition and thrust of the evangelical movement?

- Is it to please God, or to please men?
- Is our happiness and joy found in God, or in someone or something else?
- Is our worship entertainment or worship?
- Is God’s glory or our self-fulfillment the goal of our lives?
- Do we see God’s grace as the only basis for our salvation, or are we still seeking some of the credit for ourselves?

• Robert Schuller (founder and former pastor of the Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove, California) actually says that the Reformation, *“erred because it was God-centered rather than man-centered,”*

• and Yale’s George Lindbeck observes how quickly evangelical theology accepted this new gospel: *“In the fifties, it took liberals to accept Norman Vincent Peale, but as the case of Robert Schuller indicates, today professed conservatives eat it up.”*

**We need to get back to ..... “Soli Deo Gloria” – “For The Glory of God Alone!”**

How can we expect the world to take God and His glory seriously if the church does not?

**(c) THE GLORY AND MAJESTY OF A SOVEREIGN GOD: HOW HE RELAYED IT.**

When John Calvin was converted to Christ, and his blind eyes were opened by the power of the Holy Spirit, what he saw immediately were two things, so interwoven that they would determine the rest of his life: the majesty of God and the Word of God.

**The Word revealed the majesty, and the majesty vindicated the Word.**

From that time on, he would be a man utterly devoted to displaying the majesty of God by the exposition of the Word of God.

To John Calvin, the chief vehicle in proclaiming the Glory and Majesty of God, was through the Might of the Word - that Word that was invested with all of God’s authority.

Calvin came to an inevitable conclusion:

- Since the Scriptures are the very voice of God,
- and since they are therefore self-authenticating in revealing the majesty of God,
- and since the majesty and glory of God are the reason for all existence,

it follows that Calvin's life would be marked **by invincible constancy in the exposition of Scripture.**

### **Everything was Exposition of the Scriptures.**

Calvin:

- wrote tracts, he wrote the great Institutes, he wrote Commentaries (on all the New Testament books except Revelation, plus the Pentateuch, Psalms, Isaiah and Joshua),
- gave Biblical lectures (many of which were published as virtual commentaries),
- and preached ten sermons every two weeks (Calvin preached over 3,000 sermons in total).

But all of it was exposition of Scripture!

Dillenberger said, “[Calvin] assumed that his whole theological labour was the exposition of Scripture.”

In his last will and testament he said, *“I have endeavoured, both in my sermons and also in my writings and commentaries, to preach the word purely and chastely, and faithfully to interpret His sacred Scriptures.”*

[This was the ministry unleashed by seeing the majesty of God in Scripture.](#)

Emile Doumergue, the foremost biographer of John Calvin with his 6-volume life of Calvin, said, as he stood in the pulpit of John Calvin on the 400th anniversary of Calvin's birth, *“That is the Calvin who seems to me to be the real and authentic Calvin, the one who explains all the others: Calvin the preacher of Geneva, molding by his words the spirit of the Reformed of the sixteenth century.”*

Why this remarkable commitment to the centrality of sequential expository preaching? Three reasons are worthy of mention. They are just as valid today as they were in the sixteenth century.

#### **1. First, Calvin believed that the Word of God was a lamp that had been taken away from the churches.**

He said in his own personal testimony, *“Thy word, which ought to have shone on all thy people like a lamp, was taken away, or at least suppressed as to us ... . And now, O Lord, what remains to a wretch like me, but ... earnestly to supplicate thee not to judge according to [my] deserts that fearful abandonment of thy word from which, in thy wondrous goodness thou hast at last delivered me.”*

Calvin wrote the Duke of Somerset in England that the Anglican church needed more preaching and less reading. He said, *“Preaching should not be lifeless but lively, to teach, to exhort, to reprove ... not making a parade of rhetoric, only to gain esteem for themselves.”* (Letter to Somerset).

## **2. Second, Parker says that Calvin had a horror of those who preached their own ideas in the pulpit.**

He said, *“When we enter the pulpit, it is not so that we may bring our own dreams and fancies with us.”* He believed that by expounding Scripture as a whole, he would be forced to deal with all that God wanted to say, not just what he might want to say.

Calvin said, *“The minister is the very mouth of God”* (Sermon on **Deuteronomy 25**).

His preaching had distinguishing marks:

### **- i. Calvin’s pulpit was Biblical in content.**

Calvin was, *“the poster child for sola Scriptura!”*

Calvin had nothing to say - apart from the Word of God.

D’Aubigne said that, to Calvin, if anything did not have the Word for its foundation, it was futile, and those who would advocate this should be thrown out of the pulpit.

### **- ii. Calvin’s preaching was sequential in exposition.**

Calvin’s preaching was of one kind from beginning to end: he preached steadily through book after book of the Bible.

*He preached from start to finish, verse by verse. Not merely sola, but tota Scriptura.* There was no skipping either hard sayings or difficult doctrines with John Calvin.

He never wavered from this approach to preaching for almost twenty-five years of ministry in St. Peter’s church of Geneva - with the exception of a few high festivals and special occasions.

*“On Sunday he took always the New Testament, except for a few Psalms on Sunday afternoons. During the week ... it was always the Old Testament.”*

It gives us some idea of the scope of the Calvin’s pulpit when we consider that he began his series on **the book of Acts** on 25 August, 1549, and ended it in March of 1554.

After Acts he went on to:

- Thessalonians (46 sermons),
- Corinthians (186 sermons),
- Pastoral Epistles (86 sermons),
- Galatians (43 sermons),
- Ephesians (48 sermons)

... till May 1558.

Then there is a gap when he is ill.

In the spring of 1559 he began the 'Harmony of the Gospels' and was not finished when he died in May, 1564.

During the week he preached:

- 159 sermons on Job,
- 200 on Deuteronomy,
- 353 on Isaiah,
- 123 on Genesis and so on.

One of the clearest illustrations that this was a self-conscious choice on Calvin's part was the fact that on Easter Day, 1538, after preaching, he left the pulpit of St. Peter's, banished by the City Council. He returned in September, 1541 - over three years later - and picked up the exposition in the next verse.

**- iii. Calvin's preaching was exegetical in depth.**

That is, Calvin excavated the author's intent from the text itself.

Calvin himself said that the author's meaning was chief, and the expositor who strays from that, strays.

"Means to me" would not have worked with Calvin. The natural and obvious meaning was the true meaning - that is, the literal meaning (in contrast to the allegorization that characterized pre-Reformation "interpretation").

*"Substance over style, steak over sizzle,"* was Calvin's belief.

He said nothing was of more importance than, *"a literal interpretation of the Biblical text."*

**- iv. Calvin's preaching was familiar in language.**

Calvin's words were straightforward and his sentences simple.

This is why we have so much of his material: he was simple to understand. His goal was to make the Biblical text as clear as possible to his hearers.

Calvin said the preacher was like a father, dividing up the bread so the little children could eat it. He did not parade his intellect and estrange his hearers. Calvin employed metaphors, images, proverbial and colloquial expressions.

Mind you, there was no fluff, no fancy introduction, no opening joke or illustration at the commencement of his messages ... Calvin just dug in.

• Lawlor read some random opening sentences; they all 'hit the ground running and hit hard.' They established the context and stated the theme.

- Beza remarked that Calvin's *"every word weighed a ton."*

**- v. Calvin's preaching was pastoral in tone.**

Calvin never lost sight of the fact that his calling was primarily that of pastor, and realised that his work as theologian and biblical commentator really served his work as pastor. Nor did he forget that many of his hearers were exiles.

It was "we" and "us," not merely "you."

Calvin would also confront and rebuke from the pulpit, in a fatherly tone.

Once, he rebuked the Huguenots, even, saying it would have been better had they remained in France under popery, than to come under the sound preaching of the Word and live as if Scripture does not speak to them.

... He knew when to thunder!

**- vi. Calvin's preaching was evangelistic in passion.**

[The stereotype of Calvin and Calvinism as killing missions is false and slanderous.](#)

*"Would to God [that Calvinism] would 'kill missions' as it did in Calvin's day,"* Lawson quipped pointedly. He proclaimed his hearers all under condemnation, and bid them have no rest until they found rest in Christ alone.

**- vii. Calvin's preaching was God-centered in conclusion.**

Virtually every sermon ends with the exact same last paragraph:

*"Now let us fall before the majesty of our great God, acknowledging our sins, and asking that He would make us increasingly aware of them,"* that we should shun them and be overwhelmed with the greatness of Christ, and place our trust in Him, and grow in that trust and grace. He lifted the whole congregation *coram Deo*, before the face of God, leaving them before God to do business with God.

Then Calvin would pray.

**3. Third, Calvin saw the majesty of God in His Word - he believed with all his heart that the Word of God was indeed the Word of God, and that all of it was inspired and profitable and radiant with the light of the glory of God.**

In Sermon number 61 on Deuteronomy he challenges us:

*"Let the pastors boldly dare all things by the word of God ... . Let them constrain all the power, glory, and excellence of the world to give place to and to obey the divine majesty of this word. Let them enjoin everyone by it, from the highest to the lowest. Let them edify the body of Christ. Let them devastate Satan's reign. Let them pasture the sheep, kill the wolves, instruct and exhort the rebellious. Let them bind and loose thunder and lightning, if necessary, but let them do all according to the word of God."*

The key phrase here is, *“the divine majesty of this word.”*

This was always the root issue for Calvin. How might he best show forth for all of Geneva and all of Europe and all of history the divine majesty?

Again I quote Geerhardus Vos who, in 1891, asked this question:

*“Why has Reformed theology been able to grasp the fullness of Scripture unlike any other branch of Christendom?”*

He answered:

*“Because Reformed theology took hold of the Scriptures in their deepest root idea ... . This root idea which served as the key to unlock the rich treasures of the Scriptures was the preeminence of God’s glory in the consideration of all that has been created. It is this relentless orientation toward the glory of God that gives coherence to John Calvin’s life and to the Reformed tradition that followed.”*

While the Roman Catholics emphasized the Mass, and the Anglicans emphasized liturgy, Pentecostals emphasise an experience of the Holy Spirit, some churches emphasise program and activity, Calvinists always emphasised preaching. The climax of the Reformed service is the preaching. Calvin believed preaching can change the world and the human heart when the Holy Spirit got hold of it. In our day, we need to renew our emphasis on preaching.

We should pray: *“Lord, give me ears to hear the gospel, and a heart to respond. Bless the preacher who preaches to me, Lord. Lift them up as only You can.”*

#### **(d) THE GLORY AND MAJESTY OF A SOVEREIGN GOD: BY WHAT HE REINFORCED IT.**

John Calvin allowed the truth to adorn his life; he lived it out!

This all-absorbing desire for God’s glory showed itself in his life in the form of:

##### **(i) HUMILITY.**

Though his name evokes powerful images — most of them being negative — ‘John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine & Doxology,’ edited by Burk Parsons, offers a rich portrait of a man whose example and teaching remain vitally relevant today.

In the preface, Parsons writes:

*“Above all Calvin was a man whose mind was humbled and whose heart was mastered by the Lord God Almighty. His life’s prayer — ‘I offer my heart to you, O Lord, promptly and sincerely’ — was an unwavering declaration of surrender to the Lord, whom he sought to love with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength. He saw himself first and foremost as a disciple of Jesus Christ, and he desired earnestly to be taught daily ‘in the school of Jesus Christ’ so that he might rightly know the Lord in order to ‘trust, invoke, praise, and love Him’.”*

(ii) COURAGE.

The picture of Calvin is of someone pale, and thin - not a handsome knight or warrior.

Yet Calvin displayed tremendous courage.

He stood up to his foes in Geneva. He wrote what he thought, often rebuking others who were in powerful positions to hurt him.

**Courage was produced by Calvin's view of God.** Remember he taught that we are in God's hands, and we do not need to fear death. As Calvin put it above, death is the final cleansing from this life and the final step in growth. Calvin also spoke of answering God's call even if that call leads to persecution or death.

Such trust in God was evident in Calvin's thinking and the way he lived.

**Abraham Kuyper in his 'Lectures on Calvinism' attributed a huge change in singing to the Genevan Psalter.** He points out that the major music at the beginning of Calvin's day was the Gregorian chant that had abandoned rhythm and harmony. However, the common music sung in plays and in bars did not abandon rhythm and harmony.

Louis Bourgeois, Calvin's friend, took the rhythm and harmony into church.

Louis was one of three composers for the tunes of the 1551 Genevan Psalter (along with Guiliam Franc and Pierre Davantes). Calvin approved and even helped write the above song. One of the classic works is "Old Hundredth" that is the most used tune of the doxology.

**I Greet Thee who my sure Redeemer Art  
my only Trust and Saviour of my heart,  
Who pain didst undergo for my poor sake;  
I pray Thee from our hearts all cares to take.**

**Thou art the King of mercy and of grace.  
Reigning omnipotent in every place.  
So come, O King, and our whole being sway;  
Shine on us with the light of Thy pure day.**

**Thou hast the true and perfect gentleness,  
No harshness hast Thou and no bitterness.  
O grant to us the grace we find in Thee,  
That we may dwell in perfect unity.**

**Our hope is in no other save in Thee;  
Our faith is built upon Thy promise free;  
Lord, give us peace, and make us calm and sure,  
That in Thy strength we evermore endure.**

(1551 Genevan Psalter)



The Genevan Psalter was used by the Pilgrims in America, the Puritans, the Scottish Presbyterians, and the Reformed Church of England. The Roman Catholic Council of Trent forbade such common songs which were seen as beneath the artistic dignity of the chant.

Calvin recognised the gift and the power of music. Early Calvinists were known for singing psalms even in tough circumstances.

T. H. L. Parker, in his introduction to a book about Calvin wrote:

*“I am eager for people to know Calvin ... because he took the Bible so seriously, and because what he saw on every page was the majesty of God and the glory of Christ. Calvin continues to inspire me because of his relentless focus on the greatness of God ... . In the end, Calvin’s manifold ways of inspiring us have the effect they do century after century because he saw the gospel so clearly and made Christ so central ... . If Jesus Christ, in all His majesty and excellence, is kept in clear view, the church will be kept from many errors. Therefore, Calvin continues to inspire and serve the church five hundred years after his birth ... .”*

**SOLI DEO GLORIA!**