



**Study guide for
CALVINISM
#NOT_FATALISM**

Calvinism: Argued in Outline

I. CALVINISM

B. B. Warfield defines Calvinism as theism and evangelicalism come to their own. That is to say, quite simply, that God saves sinners. He does not merely provide the possibility or opportunity for them to be saved. He does not “do His part” and leave man to do his part to accomplish salvation. No, God actually saves sinners, and that salvation is all of Him.

Cornelius Van Til says that Calvinism’s only system is to be open to the Scriptures. He adds, “*The doctrines of Calvinism are not deduced in a priori fashion from one major principle such as the sovereignty of God.*” This has been one of the most frequent arguments against Calvinism. The charge is that it fastens on to one Scripture principle, God’s sovereignty, and proceeds to develop a logical system based on that principle, with little or no regard to Scripture. As Van Til indicates, such a charge is groundless.

Here is a fair statement of the Calvinistic position.

We may here note the following Clarifications in particular:

1. The Five Points. What has just been said will make it clear that Calvinism is more than “five points.” The five points were actually answers to five points made by Arminians. Five-point Calvinism is frequently referred to as TULIP theology, using the T-U-L-I-P as an acrostic: Total Depravity; Unconditional Election; Limited Atonement (though Calvinists believe that Arminians, not they, limit the atonement; they prefer such terms as particular redemption or definite atonement); Irresistible Grace; Perseverance of the saints.
2. Calvinists believe in “the unrestricted, universal offer of the gospel” (Van Til). Key word is offer as in external call of the gospel. A Calvinist like Charles Spurgeon, would say, ‘It’s up to us to proclaim, up to God to save!’
3. They believe in human responsibility, emphasizing that the true meaning of this term must be taken from Scripture and not from human philosophy.
4. They believe that man has a “free will,” which means “Scripturally” that man acts according to the determination of the inclination of his own will. Thus he is a free agent. But the inclination of the human will since the fall is inveterately opposed to God (Rom. 8:7). All man’s acts of will proceed freely from this self-determination to sin. Calvinists hold that fallen man cannot originate a new inclination of will. Only God can do that when He regenerates a sinner.
5. Thus, as the Word of God teaches, salvation must be all of grace, originating with God in His eternal purpose and executed by Him without the merits or efforts of our fallen nature.
6. Paul’s great statement in Rom. 11:36 sums up the entire outlook of the Calvinist: “of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”

7. Needless to say, Calvinism did not originate with Calvin but has been given his name because of his work in restating the theology of Scripture. It is important to state this for (1) I am not denying Calvin was a bit of a nerd and terrible at running civil government and possibly burned a man at the stake for disagreeing with him, I mean heresy! Nobody's perfect, God use David, so yeah! (2) both Calvinism and Arminianism do not claim to follow their name sake but first and foremost to follow Christ. Both are Christian before they are anything else. On confessional grounds, each can call the other brother. (Unless one falls prey to a modern form of Pelagianism, promoted by "he who will not be named", at which time one brother becomes a heretic, just saying!)

What is so free about FREE WILL?

Free will has been defined in various ways, Calvinist believe on way is more biblical.

1. Free will has been called the freedom of indeterminacy, which holds that man's will is independent of all previous conditions. This is the claim that free will in man is a total freedom, unaffected by anything that occurred in the past, such as the fall. This is an unbiblical theory held by modern Philosophy, particularly those of the existential school of thought. Common among most
2. Free will in man has also been called the freedom of self-determination, or spontaneity. That is, man's free will consists in his ability to choose according to the disposition, inclination, or bias of his own will. This is the scriptural doctrine in Calvinist thought. Because of the fall, man's will is inclined away from God and disposed toward self and sin. Man cannot choose against the bias of his will. And the bias he has toward self and sin is a voluntary bias; it is not imposed upon him by God. Therefore, his choice is truly a free choice, one which carries with it the responsibility for making it.
 - a. Side note: This deals only with the gospel choice for God, it does not apply to all moral choices for an unbeliever can choose to do the natural or social good, they can even choose to do what we would call a morally good action. Yet they choose out of the wellspring of self-interest (even the self-interest of feeling like they are gaining God's good approval). Ultimately, They cannot choose the good to glorify God. Only a heart regenerated by the Holy Ghost and given a "new want to" can choose in such a way. Such is a motive springs only from a new disposition given by God, the Ghost!
3. When free will is understood in this way, it is easy to see how Reformed theologians can on the one hand teach the Biblical doctrine of predestination while on the other hand maintaining that man is a free and responsible moral agent.
4. Similarly, one can see how a Calvinist can speak of free will, while holding with Luther the doctrine of the bondage of the will: man acts according to the inclination of his will, but that inclination is ensnared by Satan and sin. In truth, unregenerate man's vaunted freedom of will is freedom to sin, freedom to become an ever greater slave to sin.
5. A third definition of free will, held by Arminian theologians, (yeah I am going there so buckle up!). They go beyond self-determination to include what is called the power of contrary choice. It is argued that to say that a sinner freely chooses to reject

Christ and remain in sin implies that he has the native capability of choosing to receive Christ.

6. This theory is based upon a fallacy. The power of contrary choice is not of the essence of free will, as may easily be shown. God is supremely free. He can choose to do good, but He cannot choose to do anything sinful. His freedom consists in choosing and acting according to the disposition of His will, without the power of contrary choice.
7. Self-determination alone then is the essence of free will. It is the sinner's free choice. Free choice is a choice in full accord with and proceeding from the voluntary disposition of his will. The moral responsibility for such a choice is derived, not from some fancied ability to make the opposite choice, but from the fact that it springs from the voluntary disposition of his will.

The issue of SELF-DETERMINATION

Responsible moral agency:

“When we say that an agent is self-determined, we say two things: (1) That he is the author or efficient cause of his own act, (2) That the grounds or reasons of his determination are within himself” (Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, 2:295).

The self-determination that renders man a responsible moral agent must be distinguished from the notion of the self-determination of the will. Self-determination of the will signifies that the will is always self-moved, with absolute freedom of choice, a freedom it may use completely arbitrarily.

The idea of a self-determined will is open to criticism on two grounds:

1. It separates the choices, or volitions, of the will from all the other constituents of a man's character, making the will operate, not on account of anything in the agent, but by its own inherent self-moving power.

“In this case, the volition ceases to be a decision of the agent, for it may be contrary to that agent's whole character, principles, inclinations, feelings, convictions, or whatever makes him what he is” (Hodge, 2:295).

2. It makes the power of contrary choice an essential element in self-determination. That is, a person cannot be held a responsible moral agent unless he has the ability to decide against the prevailing inclination of his will, thus originating a new inclination (see Free Will). But this power of contrary choice is not of the essence of moral responsibility and liberty. God is supremely free, yet He “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). He has no power to sin. Fallen man's inclination is selfish, sinful, and depraved. All his volitions proceed from that inclination. He is personally the author of these volitions, for they are in accordance with the prevailing inclination of his will. He has no power to originate a new inclination, as Arminians imagine. Only God can do that for him

(John 6:44; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). Thus godly volitions are the acts of a renewed will, for the “carnal mind” or unrenewed will is incapable of them (Rom. 8:7).

II. Clarifying the FIVE POINTS OF CONTROVERSY

Often mistakenly called “The Five Points of Calvinism.” In the years before the Synod of Dort, (1618–1619) (*not to be confused with the Synod of Dorks [1984] which concluded Leah was really Luke’s sister*). Before both of those synods (Dort and Dork) a group known as the Dutch Remonstrants (*not to be confused with the Ramones: a punk band worthy of the title, that is, if they cared about titles, but they don’t because they are punk!*). The Remonstrants opposed the accepted Calvinistic system. These Remonstrants were led by Jacob Arminius. He was a professor of theology at the University of Leyden from 1602–1609. The Remonstrants, also known as Arminians, set forth their position (1611) in five points. These are known as the five points of controversy, which defined the issues on which the followers of Arminius repudiated traditional Calvinistic theology. They are as follows:

[Cue the sound at the end of every law and order intro]

1. **Conditional Election:** From all eternity God determined to bestow salvation on those whom He foresaw would persevere to the end in their faith in Christ. Likewise, He determined to inflict everlasting punishment on those whom He foresaw would continue in their unbelief and resist to the end of their life His divine help.
2. **Universal Atonement:** The Lord Jesus Christ by His sufferings and death made atonement for the sins of mankind generally and of every individual in particular. However, only believers actually partake of the benefits of that atonement.
3. **Depravity:** Because of his natural corruption, man cannot think or do any good thing, and so true faith (by which alone sinners can partake of the benefits of Christ’s atonement) cannot proceed from the exercise either of man’s natural faculties or of his free will. It is, therefore, necessary to his conversion and salvation that he be regenerated and renewed by the operation of the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God through Jesus Christ. Evangelical Arminians still hold to the original Remonstrant statement on this subject, placing the work of the Spirit before the exercise of faith and repentance, though the Remonstrants themselves were led to more and more unscriptural positions by the successors of Arminius and Episcopius.
4. **Resistible Grace:** This divine energy of the grace of the Holy Spirit heals the disorders of corrupt nature and begins and perfects everything that can be called good in man, so that all good works in man are attributed to God and the operation of His grace. Nevertheless, such regenerating grace may be resisted and rendered ineffectual by the perverse will of the impenitent sinner.
5. **Fall from Grace:** Believers are furnished with abundant strength and help, sufficient to enable them to triumph over the seductions of Satan and the allurements of sin. However, by the neglect of this help, they may fall from grace, and if they die in

such a state, must finally perish. The Remonstrants were at first doubtful about this last notion of falling from grace, but later adopted it as an established doctrine.

The so-called Five Points of Calvinism were a direct answer to these points made by the Remonstrants. Calvinism does not consist of five points. The five points made by Calvinists were specific responses to the points raised by the Remonstrants. Calvinism goes far beyond them. (see below Calvin's General teachings from the Institutes)

III. The Calvinist Response

In response to the Five points of the Remonstrants, Calvinists (around 70 years after Calvin's death) as a response clarify and define the five point view of salvation Calvinist are know for today. Below is an explanation of each.

1.) ELECT, ELECTION

The words elect and election may be taken actively to denote God's choice, or passively to denote the privilege of being chosen by Him. The verb occurs 29 times in the NT. Once it refers to Mary's choice of the better part (Luke 10:42) and once to the apostles' choice of men to go to Antioch (Acts 15:22). In every other case it refers to God's choice: of the Jewish nation (Acts 13:17), of the apostles (Luke 6:13; John 6:70), of men for special service (Acts 15:7), or (and this in the vast majority of cases) of individuals to everlasting life (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:27; Eph. 1:4).

God's election of men to salvation is His eternal and sovereign choice of them to be His adopted children (Eph. 1:4; Rom. 8:29), not because of any foreseen merit or obedience on their part. Rather, the faith and obedience by which they, in time, enter into salvation through Christ are the result of election, not the cause of it (1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 1:9).

The noun occurs seven times in the NT. It is used to signify God's choice of Paul as an apostle (Acts 9:15), but in every other case it is used to signify His purpose or act in choosing men to salvation (Rom. 9:11; 11:5, 7, 28; 1 Thess. 1:4; 2 Pet. 1:10). As an adjective, elect refers not only to men but to Christ. He is "elect" or "chosen" in the sense that the Father appointed Him to the distinctive office of mediator (cf. 1 Pet. 2:4, 6).

2.) PARTICULAR REDEMPTION

The doctrine that the purpose of God in the work of Christ was actually to save His elect, not to make the salvation of all men possible. Christ died to purchase a people, not a possibility.

A few clarifying points on the Calvinist view of atonement are necessary.

Definition of atonement

The satisfaction of divine justice by the Lord Jesus Christ in His active and passive obedience (i.e., His life and death), which procures for His people, both a covering forgiveness and imputed righteousness issuing in a perfect salvation.

Characteristics of the Atonement (as it pertains to this subject).

1. Atonement is objective—i.e., it makes its primary impression on God, to whom it is offered.
2. Atonement is necessary. God has decreed it as the only way whereby He could be just and yet save sinners. Thus the necessity of the atonement is based on God's nature and God's will. By nature He is holy and must punish sin; by His gracious will He has decreed the salvation of His elect. Christ's work of atonement is the only way to execute that gracious purpose. "The Son of man must be lifted up" (John 3:14).
3. Atonement is definite—i.e., Christ made atonement with a definite purpose in view. That purpose was to save sinners. This view is in sharp contrast with the Arminian view that Christ's death merely made salvation possible. Definite atonement emphasizes that in His death Christ was actually the substitute and surety for all for whom He died.
4. Atonement was particular: it was made specifically for God's elect. Calvinists hold that Christ gave Himself for His church (Eph. 5:25) and laid down His life for His sheep (John 10:15). Arminians and universalists hold that He offered up a sacrifice equally for each and every man. The Calvinist asks, "Why then are not all men saved?" Arminians answer, "Because of the unbelief of some." To this the Calvinist replies, "Is not unbelief a sin? Is it not therefore covered by the death of Christ? Or, did He die for all our sin, except our unbelief?" The Calvinist position is that the blood of Christ is sufficient to save each and every man who ever lived, but is efficient to save only God's elect. John Owen's famous summary of the situation put it like this:
 - a. Either, Christ died for all the sins of all men—in which case all men must be saved;
 - b. Or, He died for some of the sins of all men, in which case none will be saved;
 - c. Or, He died for all the sins of some men—in which case, while some are lost, some will be saved.

We know that conclusions (a) and (b) are unscriptural, and that (c) is an accurate statement of scriptural fact. Clearly, Christ died to make atonement for all the sins of His elect, His Church, His sheep, those given to Him by His Father (John 6:37; 17:2, 6, 9, 19).

5. Atonement is successful. What God aimed at in the atonement is exactly what He accomplished, and what He accomplished is exactly what He aimed at. Isaiah 53:11 tells us of the Lord's entire satisfaction with His sacrificial work. The great anthem of Rev. 5 allows no room for the thought that Jesus tried to accomplish a lot more than He actually did.
 - a. Also, the entire doctrine of gospel assurance depends on the fact that Christ's atonement cannot fail to accomplish its end. Christ did not

merely attempt to bear away our sin; He did it. He did not seek to redeem us; He did it. The cause and effect inherent in the message of the Cross is clear in such texts as 2 Cor. 5:21: "He [God] hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." All for whom Christ was made sin must of necessity be made the righteousness of God in Him. His suffering cannot be in vain.

3.) DEPRAVITY

By the fall, man became guilty (liable to punishment) and polluted (without original righteousness, having a positively evil bent). This pollution is usually considered under the headings Total Depravity and Total Inability.

Total Depravity

This term denotes that inherited pollution pervades the entire human character. Louis Berkhof points out what the phrase does not imply.

What It Does Not Mean

1. That every man is as thoroughly depraved as he can possibly become.
2. That the sinner is without an innate knowledge of the will of God or a conscience that discriminates between good and evil.
3. That sinful man does not often admire virtuous character and actions in others, or is incapable of disinterested affections and actions in his relations with his fellow men.
4. That every unregenerate man will indulge in every form of sin (e.g., sometimes one form of sin excludes another. For example Self-righteousness exclude a bag full of the fun-er ones. jk.)

What It Does Mean

1. That the inherent corruption extends to every part of man's nature, to all the faculties and powers, both of body and soul.
2. That there is no spiritual good, i.e., good in relation to God, in the sinner at all, but only perversion, which deserves God's wrath.
3. Total depravity is denied by Pelagians, Socinians, and some modern Arminians. It is upheld by all the Reformed churches and is clearly taught in the Word of God (John 5:42; Rom. 7:18, 23; 8:7; Eph. 2:1-3; 4:18; 2 Tim. 3:2-4; Tit 1:15; Heb. 3:12; Gen. 6:5; Isa. 1:6; Jer. 17:9).

Total Inability

Total Inability is the term used to describe the effect of the pollution of sin on man's spiritual powers. Reformed theologians admit that unregenerate man is able to perform natural and civil good. However, by nature no man can do anything either to change the bias of his will toward self and sin, or to meet the requirements of God's holy law and merit His approval. The Scripture plainly teaches total inability: John 1:13; 3:5; 6:44; 8:34; 15:4, 5; Rom. 7:18, 24; 8:7, 8; 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 3:5; Eph. 2:1, 8-10; Heb. 11:6.

4.) IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

The sovereign grace of God by which He favors His elect with effectual calling. It is irresistible in that it is no mere expression of desire that the elect soul should come to Christ and be saved, but an act of divine power that brings him to Christ. It is an indispensable link in the chain of God's eternal purpose (Rom. 8:29–30; cf. Psa. 110:3; Phil. 2:13).

The term irresistible grace has reference solely to the grace of God in regeneration. Many objections to the doctrine are based upon a misconception on this point, since the Bible very clearly speaks of people resisting divine grace. It is the external call (preaching of the Gospel) which man can reject.

Inward call: Grace coming inwardly by the spirit

The internal call is an effectual call of the Spirit, which is spiritual, irresistible, and directed only to the elect. It is distinct from the external call, which is general and which indiscriminately reaches all who hear the gospel. It is like Jesus calling Lazarus from the grave all heard "rise" yet what effectually called 'dead' Lazarus back to life was a spiritual, irresistible, and direct word.

One characteristic is important to note. The internal call has God as its author (1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Tim. 1:8, 9; Gal. 1:15; 1 Thess. 5:23, 24; 2 Thess. 2:13, 14; 1 Pet. 5:10). Specifically, it is God the Father who initiates salvation by the call of his sovereign grace (Rom. 8:30; 1 Cor. 1:9; Gal. 1:15; Eph. 1:17, 18).

5.) PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

The best description of this doctrine comes from the Westminster Confession

"They whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved. This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ; the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them; and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof" (Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. 17, sec. 1, 2).

This statement contains certain key elements:

1. God's elect will certainly be eternally saved.
2. Those who have once been regenerated by the Holy Spirit can never completely fall from that state and be lost.
3. This perseverance is the perseverance of God in His love and grace toward His people; it is not something which depends upon human power or activity. Berkhof defines it as "that continuous operation of the Holy Spirit in the believer, by which the work of divine grace that is begun in the heart, is continued and brought to completion."

4. Thus it is an aspect of the Spirit's sanctifying grace: it is perseverance in holiness. It is what is popularly known as the eternal security of the believer. But to avoid the idea that a person who once made a profession of faith but has since lived in sin with no marks of holiness about his life, can comfort himself in being eternally secure, the Reformed statement of the doctrine emphasizes the certainty of perseverance in holiness if we have truly believed—not the certainty of salvation if we once professed to believe. Possessors of eternal life are secure; mere professors have neither life nor security.
5. Nevertheless, true believers may fall into sin (Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. 17, sec. 3), causing great hurt, grieving the Spirit and even incurring temporal judgments; but they can never be abandoned by the Lord who chose and regenerated them.

The Scripture clearly teaches this perseverance of the saints: Rom. 11:29; John 10:28; Phil. 1:6; 2 Thes. 3:3; 2 Tim. 1:12; 1 Pet. 1:5.

Arminians reject it. Their views of election, the purpose of the death of Christ, grace, and free will all lead to this conclusion.

- a. A common objection to the doctrine is that it leads to laxity and even antinomianism, but such an objection makes little sense when the doctrine, viewed properly as a perseverance in holiness, which is the very opposite to justifying unholiness.
- b. Objections based on the warnings of Scripture or the exhortations to believers to strive are also based on a misconception of the doctrine or of the scope and meaning of the various texts. For example the passages in Hebrews, from a Calvinist perspective, are warnings to professing Christians, who are covert unregenerate members of the visible community of Faith.

CALVIN's General teachings from the Institutes

Education:

studied Latin grammar and the arts, Univ. of Paris, 1523-27 | 28 (or 1520-25);
studied civil law, Univ. of Orleans, 1528-29 (or 1525-29);
licentiate in law, Univ. of Bourges, 1529-31, or 1532;
studied Greek and Hebrew, Univ. of Paris, 1531-32; and studied or taught at the Univ. of Orleans, 1532-33.

Career:

Protestant refugee and author, Basel, 1534-36;
Minister, Geneva, 1536-38, Strasbourg, 1538-41, and Geneva, 1541-64;
founder of the Genevan Academy, 1559.

General Teaching

Calvin ranks second in influence only to Martin Luther among sixteenth-century Protestant reformers. He wrote polemical works and catechisms as well as commentaries on most of the books of the Bible. His Institutes of the Christian Religion-which follows the broad outlines of the Apostles' Creed and is shaped by biblical and patristic thought is the cornerstone of Reformed theology.

In the opening line of every edition of the Institutes, Calvin says, "Nearly the whole of sacred doctrine consists in these two parts: knowledge of God and of ourselves." For Calvin, self-knowledge leads us to be displeased with our-selves and thereby arouses us to seek God, while knowledge of God is required for a clear awareness of ourselves, and especially of our own folly and corruption. Rejecting as pointless all speculation about a God with whom we have nothing to do, Calvin says that genuine knowledge of God involves not only knowing that there is a God but also revering and loving God which Calvin calls "piety." True piety results from recognizing that we owe everything to God, are nourished by his fatherly care, and should seek nothing beyond him.

Calvin recognizes several means by which we gain knowledge of God. All humans have, by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity (*sensus divinitatis*). God has implanted in all people a "seed of religion," a natural awareness "that there is a God and that he is their Maker" (Inst., 1.3.1). God has also "engraved unmistakable marks of his glory" upon the universe so that no one can plead the excuse of ignorance. God displays his glory, moreover, outside the ordinary course of nature, providentially administering human society: declaring clemency to the godly, showing severity to the wicked, protecting the innocent, and caring for the poor in their desperate straits. Nevertheless, all people degenerate from the natural knowledge of God, not apprehending God as he reveals himself, but presumptuously fashioning a deity of their own imagining, thereby worshiping a figment rather than the true God. Although God represents himself in the mirror of his works with great clarity, we grow dull toward such clear testimonies and "forsake the one true God for prodigious trifles" (Inst.,

1.5.11). Our minds are like labyrinths of confusion, or like springs pouring forth gods we have invented for ourselves. Even philosophers adore a shameful diversity of gods. So if we were taught only by nature, we would end up worshiping an unknown god. Consequently, we need the witness of God himself, "illuminated by the inner revelation of God through faith" (Inst., 1.5-13,14). In a well-known passage, Calvin says, "Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision" can scarcely see until they put on spectacles, "so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God" (Inst., 1.6.1). God uses not only mute teachers, such as nature and providence, but also "opens his own most hallowed lips" (Inst., 1.6. 1). Thus, although it is fitting to contemplate God's works, as spectators in a "most glorious theater," it is also fitting to listen to God's Word in Scripture, since our feeble human minds cannot grasp God without being aided by his sacred Word (Inst., 1.6.2,4).

Calvin recognizes, however, that the Scriptures must be confirmed as the living words of God. Piety requires certainty and assurance that can be found neither in the consent of the church nor in arguments, but only in the testimony of the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit who spoke through the authors of Scripture must work in our hearts to persuade us that these authors faithfully proclaimed what God spoke to them. Once we have embraced Scripture, arguments that were not sufficient by themselves become useful aids: Calvin cites Scripture's ability to move us, its sublime thoughts, its antiquity, miracles that confirmed the teaching of Moses and others, the fulfillment of its prophecies, and the consent of the church as secondary aids to our feebleness. Still, Scripture can lead to "a saving knowledge of God only when its certainty is founded upon the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit," and not upon mere external arguments (Inst., 1.8.13).

In response to religious fanatics or enthusiasts who abandon Scripture and claim a new revelation from the Spirit, Calvin argues that God has forged a mutual bond between Word and Spirit: the Spirit, as the author of Scripture, attests the Word of God in Scripture and the Word leads us to recognize the true Spirit of God. Calvin also sees a connection between the revelation of God in creation and in Scripture: the knowledge of God set forth in Scripture has the same goal as the knowledge imprinted in creatures, inviting us "first to fear God, then to trust in him" (Inst., 1.10.1-2). So the Spirit leads us to the Word, which - like nature - is a mirror in which faith may contemplate the invisible God (Inst., 3.2.6). Rejecting any notion of faith as simple agreement with the gospel history or with the teachings of the church, Calvin insists that faith is "a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Inst., 3.2.7). Knowledge of the unseen God does not involve comprehension, as with objects of sense perception, but rather consists in assurance. Because unbelief is so deeply rooted in our hearts that we can only with hard struggle persuade ourselves that God is faithful, the assurance of faith depends on our feeling the sweetness of God's goodness toward us and experiencing it in ourselves. Then, when believers are shaken by temptations and doubts, they will "either rise up out of the very gulf of temptations, or stand fast upon their watch,"

confident of God's mercy to them (Inst., 3.2.21, 37). Calvin affirms that God created the world good and by his own free will. Like Augustine,* he rejects speculation about why God created the world when he did. Instead of focusing on the duration or sequence of the events of creation, he focuses on the spiritual value of observing that God created, out of nothing, an abundance and variety of creatures, each with its own nature and assigned functions; that God formed humanity as "the most excellent example of his works"; and that God has provided for the preservation of the entire creation (Inst., 1.14.20). Proper self-knowledge, says Calvin, involves knowing both that human beings as created had the moral knowledge and strength of will to choose between good and evil and that, as a consequence of the Fall, Adam's descendants lack the ability to carry out their duty. Still, we are not held liable for the transgression of another; the contagion imparted by Adam resides in us. Calvin's view of original sin reflects Augustine's teaching on the matter.

In his doctrine of providence, Calvin insists that we see God's power as much in the continuing state of the universe as in its creation. God does not merely generally superintend everything or even direct a few particular acts, but regulates individual events so that they all proceed from his plan and "nothing takes place by chance," not even when a branch falls and kills a passing traveler (Inst., 1.16.4-6). Unlike the Stoic dogma of fate, says Calvin, the doctrine of providence sees God as the ruler of all things who "in accordance with his wisdom" has from eternity decreed what he was going to do and now carries it out (Inst., 1.16.8). If God wills everything that occurs, does he also will evil? Although Augustine and others (including much of the Reformed tradition) answer this question by distinguishing between God's active and permissive will, Calvin rejects the idea that God merely permits certain events, "as if God sat in a watchtower awaiting chance events, and his judgments thus depended upon human will" (Inst., 1.16.8, 1.18.1). In response to the charge that God would then have two contrary wills - a revealed will that forbids sin and a secret will that decrees evil actions- Calvin says that God's will is one and simple in him but appears manifold to us because we cannot grasp how God both wills and does not will something to take place. Calvin's affirmation of God's goodness in relation to evil events hinges on Augustine's insight that God is not limited to doing only what humans may do, or only what humans consider acceptable for God to do. Conceding that his doctrine of providence might seem harsh, Calvin defends it by saying that it is biblical and that it allows believers to have gratitude for favorable outcomes, patience in adversity, and freedom from worry about the future because they know that all things are ruled by their heavenly father.

Like Martin Luther, Calvin says that the doctrine of justification by faith is pivotal for true religion. Those who are justified have in heaven a gracious father, not a judge. God justifies by freely embracing sinners who are utterly void of good works and conveying such a sense of divine goodness that sinners will despair of works and rely wholly on God's mercy. The faith through which sinners are justified is a divine gift through which they receive God's mercy, not a work that qualifies them for salvation. Without the doctrine of justification by faith, says Calvin, we diminish God's glory by trusting in works rather than God's grace for salvation and we also generate spiritual anxiety by

lacking assurance of salvation. Only unmerited righteousness conferred as a gift of God can quiet consciences before God.

In his doctrine of predestination, Calvin identifies the twin dangers of either probing without restraint matters that God wills to remain hidden or avoiding what Scripture says. Based on biblical passages such as Paul's discussion of election in Rom 9-11, Calvin argues that predestination is God's eternal decree regarding each individual, foreordaining eternal life for some and eternal damnation for others. This divine decree is not based on God's foreknowledge of the holiness of the elect or the sinfulness of the reprobate but only in God's inscrutable will. God's sovereign election of some and reprobation of others reveals his glory, says Calvin, by showing his justice as well as by impressing upon the elect God's infinite mercy to them. In contrast to Calvin, many Reformed theologians hold that reprobation does not mirror election, since God actively chooses the elect, but leaves the reprobate in the ruin they incur by their sins.

Calvin argues that God has given each individual, not just the clergy, a calling or vocation "as a sort of sentry post" to prevent heedless wandering about throughout life. Each person, says Calvin, will fulfill his or her calling willingly, bearing its weariness and anxieties, if it is seen as a duty to God. "No task," says Calvin, "will be so sordid and base, provided you obey your calling in it, that it will not shine and be reckoned very precious in God's sight" (Inst., 3.10.6).¹

¹ 'Calvin,' Ronald J. Feenstra, Biographical Dictionary of Christian theologians edited by Patrick W. Carey, Joseph T. Lienhard (Westport. Greenwood Press 2000) 109-113

CALVIN, The Biblical Interpreter

John Calvin has long been recognized as one of the great theologians of the Christian tradition, largely because of the influence of his magisterial *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In recent decades Calvin's other writings, especially his exegetical works, have received increased scholarly attention. As a result his reputation as a major figure in the history of biblical interpretation is well established.

Calvin's name will forever be associated with Geneva, his adopted Swiss home, where he spent most of the last half of his life and where he died in 1564. But he was French by birth and upbringing. He was born in Noyon and was educated in Paris, Orleans and Bourges. He studied at the College de Montaigu in Paris as a youth, receiving an education that was intended to prepare him to study theology and enter the service of the church. Around 1528 he terminated his preministerial studies and began the study of law. Through his study at Orleans and Bourges he encountered the new approach to ancient legal texts advocated by humanists. While traditional legal scholarship was interested in the layers of glosses of earlier generations of interpreters, the humanist approach was especially attentive to the historical context in which the text was produced and to the linguistic and literary features of the text. In 1531 Calvin received his licencié *és lois* from Orans and returned to Paris, but not to pursue a career in law. He directed his energies toward gaining a reputation as a humanist writer and soon published his first work, a commentary on Seneca's *De clementia*.

The direction of Calvin's life changed dramatically in the early 1530s through what he describes as a "sudden conversion," which he says led him to reject papal superstitions. His only account of the transformation is a sketchy one found in the preface to his commentary on the Psalms, published a quarter of a century after the fact. He indicated that beginning with his conversion he had a zeal for the study of "true religion" and that his interest in other studies diminished. The early 1530s were a time of persecution of Protestants in France, and Calvin fled. In 1535 he arrived in Basel, where he hoped to find a peaceful life and devote himself to scholarly writing in the service of his newfound faith. He never experienced the quiet and leisure for which he longed, but in 1536 his aspiration to serve his new religious community as a scholar began to be realized when the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* appeared.

Calvin's life took an unanticipated turn in 1536 when, while traveling from France to Strasbourg, he was forced to make a detour to the south through the city of Geneva. His presence was made known to W. Farel, who had just led the city in its rejection of the papacy. Farel convinced a reluctant Calvin to remain in Geneva and help with the reform of the church. Except for a three-year exile (1538-1541), during which he pastored a congregation of French refugees in Strasbourg, the remainder of Calvin's life was spent in Geneva seeking to guide the church into a true reformation in accord with the Scriptures. In three decades of conflicts, accomplishments, disappointments

and illnesses, he preached, lectured or wrote on almost every part of the Protestant Bible.

Context

In the Renaissance the study of Bible, along with the study of other ancient literature, was undergoing revolutionary change through the labor of humanist scholars. Generally it may be said that a more historically and philologically grounded approach to biblical study was being developed. The increasing popularity of the new historical approach represented a break with the dominant methods of the past. Although it would not be accurate to suggest that all Christian exegetes prior to the sixteenth century lacked interest in the historical meaning of the Bible, it is clear that many Christian thinkers were not seriously concerned with interpreting the text historically. The popularity of proof texting and of allegorical exegesis bears eloquent witness to the perceived dispensability of historical exegesis.

Calvin's first published work, his commentary on Seneca's *De clementia*, was very much what one might expect of a humanist interpreter. He corrected the Latin text; analyzed its structure, vocabulary and idioms; and sought to understand the text in its original historical and cultural context. In short, he studied the text historically. When he later took up the work of biblical interpretation, he retained this historical approach. When Calvin's interests changed from the interpretation of Seneca to the exegesis of the Bible, he became part of a community of Protestant interpreters who in varying degrees were influenced by the humanism of the Renaissance. Philipp Melancthon and Martin Bucer were among those who were most oriented toward humanism. Calvin explained in the preface to his commentary on Romans (the first of his biblical commentaries) that while he saw some virtues in the exegetical methods of his two friends, there was room for improvement. He faulted neither for failing to arrive at the true meaning of the text, but he gently criticized Melancthon for neglecting many points that deserve attention and Bucer for being too verbose. In his preface to the commentary on Romans he offered one of his few statements of exegetical principle: "The chief virtue of an interpreter lies in lucid brevity [in perspicua brevitate]. Since it is almost his only task to unfold the mind of the writer whom he has undertaken to expound, he misses his mark, or at least strays outside his limits, by the extent to which he leads his readers away from the meaning of his author. This is a statement of the goal of exegesis ("to unfold the mind of the writer") and of how to present the results of one's exegesis ("lucid brevity"). It does not explain how Calvin hoped to reach his goal.

Work

Calvin intended his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* for several purposes. It served a catechetical function for those who had rejected the papacy and turned to Protestantism. It served as a confession of the Protestant faith to the French king, Francis I, and thus functioned as an apologetic for many who were suffering persecution. In the final edition of the work (1560) Calvin indicated that he also intended the *Institutes* to serve as an interpretative key "to open a way for all children of God into a good and right understanding of Holy Scripture." While this function is in

part fulfilled by the many brief exegetical sections and proof texts in the Institutes, the work includes several extended sections that have an important bearing on the interpretation of Scripture. Book 1, chapters 6-9 discuss the authority of Scripture and the relation of the Word and Spirit. Book 2, chapters 7-11 discuss the law and the similarities and differences between the Old and New testaments.

Most of Calvin's preaching was in keeping with the tradition Ulrich Zwingli had introduced among the Swiss: verse-by-verse expositions of books of the Bible. He desired to accommodate his preaching to the understanding of his congregation, and his sermons were as a result generally free from references to the biblical languages and other technical matters and free from refutations of other interpreters. They thus reveal the substance of his beliefs but do not reveal a great deal about his method of interpretation.

Over the last fifteen years of his life Calvin preached extensively on Hebrews, Psalms, Jeremiah, John, Acts, Lamentations, Micah, Zephaniah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Job, 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy, Deuteronomy, Titus, 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, Isaiah, Galatians, Ephesians, the Synoptic Gospels, Genesis, Judges, 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel and 1 Kings. Most of his manuscripted sermons were lost in the early nineteenth century when they were sold, apparently in the belief that they were of little value. Some of the volumes were later recovered, but most were not.

In 1540 Calvin's first biblical commentary, a commentary on Romans, appeared. [his was followed by an interval of six years in which no commentaries were issued, probably due to the urgency of other tasks. The remainder of his commentaries on the epistles (1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, 1 Peter and 2 Peter, James, 1 John and Jude) were published over a five year period from 1546 to 1551. Calvin's commentary on Acts was issued in two parts (Acts 1—13 in 1552; Acts 14—28 in 1554). His commentary on John was published in 1553 and was followed by a commentary on a harmony of the Synoptic Gospels in 1555. Calvin's commentaries are extant for every portion of the New Testament except 2 John, 3 John and Revelation. T. H. L. Parker argues convincingly that Calvin produced no commentaries on these three writings.

Many of Calvin's Old Testament commentaries are edited transcripts of his lectures. In the late 1540s he began lecturing on the Old Testament, and all his known lectures are extant. In 1551 he allowed his lecture series on Isaiah to be published as his commentary on Isaiah. All his Old Testament commentaries were published over the next decade and a half; Genesis (1554), Psalms (1557), Hosea (1557), Isaiah (revision, 1559), Minor Prophets (1559), Daniel (1561), Jeremiah and Lamentations (1563), harmony of the last four books of Moses (1563), Ezekiel 1—20 (1565), Joshua (1565).

Calvin produced only three expositions of Old Testament books that were intended from the first for the written medium. In 1557 he published his Commentary on the

Psalms; in 1563, a Harmony of the Last Four Books of Moses. In 1565 his Commentary on Joshua was published posthumously. According to Parker, the three commentaries cover the same books as were discussed in the Congregations (weekly meetings of ministers and other interested persons) after 1549. This suggests that the Congregations served as the basis of the commentaries or vice versa.

Presuppositions.

The locus classicus for Calvin's view of the divine inspiration of Scripture is his exposition of 2 Timothy 3:16. There he argued that Scripture is authoritative because it has its source in God. Scripture came from prophets who were instruments of the Holy Spirit; it was "dictated by the Holy Spirit"; it "has nothing of human origin mixed with it." He elsewhere insisted that the Holy Spirit's involvement in the production of Scripture extends to the selection of what material to include in the biblical text and to the choice of the wording of the text.

That Calvin did not hold to a mechanical dictation view of Scripture is also evident. The inspiration of Scripture did not occur at the expense of the personalities of the human writers. His comments on the literary style of the biblical text reflect his belief that the human authors' minds remained active in the production of Scripture. He attributed stylistic variations in the Bible to the human writers. He rejected Pauline authorship of the epistle to the Hebrews because he found significant stylistic differences between it and the epistles he believed to be genuinely Pauline. He expressed doubts about the apostle Peter's authorship of 2 Peter because he did not recognize in it "the genuine language of Peter."

Since Calvin viewed Scripture as having a divine side and a human side, the question naturally arises: Is the meaning the interpreter is to seek that of the Holy Spirit or that of the human writer? Calvin's comments on Leviticus 11:13 point in one direction: The interpreter must always consider the intention of God. It was not uncommon for Calvin in his biblical commentaries to refer to the intention of the Holy Spirit as something that must be understood. A statement in his exposition of Psalm 8, however, points in a different direction: "I have now discharged the duty of a faithful interpreter in opening up the mind of the prophet." He frequently rejected interpretations he believed were foreign to the intention of the prophet. The most interesting examples of the intimate connections between the human and divine sides of Scripture are found in several instances in which Calvin attributed a statement to the human writer, then appears to have corrected himself and attributed it to the Holy Spirit. In his interpretation of Psalm 87 he wrote, "We must consider the intention of the prophet, or rather the object of the Spirit of God, speaking by the mouth of the prophet." For Calvin the intention, thoughts and words of the prophet and of the Holy Spirit in the production of Scripture were so closely related there was no practical way to distinguish them.

In the institutes Calvin wrote: "The covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same" (Calvin 1960, 2.10.2). He could hardly have chosen stronger words to describe how the dispensation of the patriarchs is related to the New Testament dispensation. The

differences between the revelation under the old and new covenants pale when compared with that which remains the same.

Calvin viewed the Old and New Testaments as one in substance. They proclaimed the same message. Against the Jews and the Anabaptists Calvin insisted that Christ is the true substance of the Old Testament. He did not, however, deny that Old and New Testament economies had their differences, and he believed that the New Testament is clearly superior to the Old Testament. While there is nothing contradictory in Calvin's twin affirmations of the unity and diversity of Scripture, the exegetical implications are potentially significant. If his emphasis on biblical unity dominated his exegesis, we might expect to find him embracing traditional christological interpretations of the Old Testament. If, however, his recognition of diversity played a major role in his exegesis, we might expect him to nuance or even reject a christocentric approach to the Old Testament. Some scholars have argued that Calvin's theology of the unity of Scripture as stated in the Institutes is betrayed by his historical exegetical practice as expressed in his commentaries.

Method

More than once Calvin stated in his commentaries that he was restrained in arguing against the interpretations of others. Some people have taken his words at face value and assumed that Calvin was reluctant to break with exegetical tradition, but in fact Calvin quite often found it necessary to oppose the views of others, including such heroes as *Augustine and Martin *Luther. He usually did not name commentators when he refuted their exegesis. In a letter defending himself against the charge that he had been overly critical of Luther's exegesis, he explained that he tried to protect the anonymity of those interpreters with whom he differed: "If others have gone wrong on something, I reprove it without mentioning names and without violence, and indeed I bury errors in silence unless necessity forces." Calvin's reticence to use names makes it difficult to identify with confidence the sources he may have used.

Calvin was quite at home with the Hebrew and Greek texts of Scripture. He was, according to Parker, confident enough of his knowledge of the biblical languages to preach from Greek and Hebrew texts of the Bible without using notes. In his days in law school, Calvin had learned the rudiments of Greek under the tutelage of M. Wolmar, to whom he would later affectionately dedicate his commentary on 2 Corinthians. He continued his Greek studies in Paris for a brief period under P. Danes. He regarded the Greek text as authoritative, though he also made use of Latin translations.

Calvin's use of Hebrew fits the pattern of what J. Friedman calls "the Strasbourg-Base-Zurich school of Hebraica." This school placed great value on the Old Testament exegete knowing the Hebrew language and favored a relatively restrained use of rabbinic sources to clarify the meaning of the Old Testament. Calvin probably began his Hebrew study under F. Vatable during his second stay in Paris (1531-1533). He later lived in Basel for a little over a year (1535-1536) and in Strasbourg for three years (1538-1541), studying Hebrew in both cities, perhaps drawing on the expertise of %s.

Minster in Basel and W. Capito in Strasbourg.

Calvin was competent enough in his use of Hebrew to attempt rather extensive word studies. He often based his interpretations on points of Hebrew grammar. He showed a sensitivity to peculiarities of Hebrew style, comparing or contrasting Hebrew idioms with Latin or Greek idioms.

Calvin did not believe that an understanding of the meaning of Greek or Hebrew words would lead the interpreter to a precise understanding of the text. Lexical and grammatical considerations were important in providing him with the interpretive “possibilities” of a text. Similarly the usage of a Hebrew or Greek term in different passages alerted the interpreter to the interpretative possibilities of the text being studied. But it was context that allowed one to move beyond the possibilities and settle on the “probable” meaning of a text.

Before the interpreter could apply the message of Bible to the person of the sixteenth century, Calvin believed, the meaning for the original writer and his contemporaries must be determined. The exegete should neither uproot a text from its immediate literary context nor neglect the historical environment in which the document was originally produced.

Though he sometimes chastised Jewish interpreters for failing to interpret the Bible contextually, it was far more likely that Calvin would criticize Christian exegetes for this fault. He frequently dissented from those christological interpretations of the Old Testament that he believed derive no support from the context of the passage. This insistence on the necessity and adequacy of contextual interpretation led A. Hunnius, a prominent Lutheran theologian, to accuse Calvin of Judaizing.

Calvin insisted that failure to interpret contextually may lead to the wrong application of Scripture. A proper contextual interpretation of Amos 6:5 (“who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp”) recognizes that it was addressing the condition of evildoers who were living overindulgently. The reader who lifts the verse out of context may draw the improper generalization that the verse should be understood as a blanket condemnation of music.

While strong philological skills and careful attention to context were important, Calvin believed, it was essential for the interpreter to read Scripture with the proper goal: that of finding Christ. The true meaning of the Old Testament could not be known apart from Christ, and the knowledge of Christ came through the work of the Spirit. The problem with Jewish exegesis was at its core a spiritual one—spiritual blindness. If, as Calvin taught elsewhere, the remedy for spiritual blindness is the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, then such illumination might be understood as a precondition of proper exegesis. If the Jews possessed the Spirit, they would understand that Christ is the substance of the Old Testament.

Illumination by the Holy Spirit and philological expertise were both needed by the biblical exegete. But they were not necessary in the same way. [the exegete needed

illumination in order to understand the meaning of the Old Testament in its true spiritual meaning, that is, as a witness to Jesus Christ. Apart from such illumination, any other understanding of the Old Testament was empty and useless. However, while spiritual illumination might guarantee that the interpreter would understand the message of the Old Testament as a whole, it in no way guaranteed that he would understand the meaning of any specific text. Augustine and Luther certainly understood the Old Testament's witness to Jesus Christ, yet in Calvin's view they often twisted the interpretation 'of individual texts away from their natural meaning. The best exegesis of the Old Testament combined piety (a product of the Holy Spirit) and scholarship.

Special Issues of Old Testament Interpretation

For the first millennium and a half of the church's history the scales of Christian biblical interpretation were often tipped away from a historical exegetical method as interpreters of the Bible grappled with the problem of how to understand the Old Testament in light of the reality that Jesus Christ had fulfilled what was promised or foreshadowed there. Historical interpretation did not consistently produce results that were doctrinally orthodox and spiritually edifying.

In three areas of Old Testament interpretation that often divided Jewish and Christian interpreters, Calvin's approach seems to reflect something of a middle way. In his treatment of allegory, typology and prophecy, he adopted a moderate position that he believed avoided the temptations that too often befell Jewish and Christian exegesis. He did not uproot the Old Testament from its historical soil, nor was he content to look only at the roots once the full flowering had taken place in Jesus Christ. He used the New Testament interpretation of the Old to establish the meaning of the Old Testament text. Yet he believed his Old Testament interpretations could be demonstrated to be correct through sound philological and historical reasoning as well.

Calvin called interpretations "allegorical" when they disregarded the historical context or when they interpreted the details of a biblical text apart from a consideration of the immediate literary context. Allegorical exegesis was the antithesis of historical exegesis. His severest criticism, apart from his criticism of Jewish interpreters, was reserved for those who allegorized Scripture excessively. He contrasted his own method (which was concerned only with what is useful) with the allegorical approach of other interpreters (which served simply as a display for their cleverness). Allegorical interpretation, he insisted, originates with the devil. It was a means by which Satan had attempted to undermine the certainty of biblical teaching.

In light of his harsh critique of allegorical interpretation, it is striking that Calvin sometimes approved of what he clearly regarded as an allegorical understanding of the text. He believes that many of the Old Testament promises of a future kingdom were meant to be taken allegorically. His principle for determining which Old Testament passages are allegories was this: If there has been no historical fulfillment of the promise, one should look for a fulfillment that is not literal. Since New Testament reality was often presented in an earthly, shadowy form in the Old Testament, it is reasonable to look for a spiritual interpretation of prophecies that were not literally fulfilled. Calvin's

approach did not reflect a lack of concern for historical exegesis. On the contrary, he would argue that his view was necessitated by that concern—specifically by his failure to find an earthly, historical fulfillment of the promises of the text.

Typology for Calvin was true prophecy, albeit shadowy and somewhat obscure. God chose to accommodate his revelation to the weakness and ignorance of his people in Old Testament times by presenting spiritual truth under earthly symbols. The symbols did not set forth the full truth but directed the people toward the truth. The symbols varied, but in almost every instance they were intended as pictures of the redeemer who was to come. Calvin believed an understanding of the symbolic nature of persons and institutions was indispensable if one was to profit from the study of the Old Testament.

Calvin depended on two basic arguments in his attempt to substantiate his typological exegesis: first, the New Testament writers provide sound guidance when they treat Old Testament texts as prophecies that are fulfilled in Jesus Christ; second, the language of the Old Testament sometimes does not suit the reign of David or any other Old Testament figure, yet it perfectly suits the reign of Christ. He believed that typological interpretation, as he practiced it, rested on a solid, defensible base. The Jews, he insisted, were able to cite no adequate Old Testament referent for the texts he interprets typologically; thus a christological interpretation was necessary. To fellow Christians he argued that one should not tear a text out of its historical context in order to apply it to Christ; it must have a historical referent nearer to the time of the original audience. The Jewish approach robbed Jesus Christ of his honor; the traditional Christian approach robbed the Old Testament of significance for its original Audience.

Calvin opposed the exclusivity of the either/or mentality that he believed characterized much Jewish and Christian exegesis of Old Testament prophecies. He often advocated what he called the “extended” meaning of the text. His was an inclusive approach that found the beginning of the historical fulfillment of prophecy in Old Testament times, yet saw the complete fulfillment coming only in Jesus Christ or in the Christian church.

Calvin believed that his interpretations of Old Testament prophecies could be justified against the traditional approaches of Jews and Christians alike. He rejected Christian interpretations when they ignored the historical meaning of the text. He rejected Jewish interpretations because he believed the language of the text could not possibly be understood as having been completely fulfilled in Old Testament times.

Use of the New Testament as Exegetical Guide

Though Calvin charged that Origen was the source of confusion and uncertainty in the handling of Scripture, he agreed with him on one point: the New Testament is a reliable guide in interpreting the Old Testament. This, Calvin argued, was true because the Holy Spirit was responsible for all of Scripture, and the Spirit was best able to interpret the Spirit’s own words. The Holy Spirit’s authorship of all Scripture did not yield for Calvin an unambiguous hermeneutic. But it did have great hermeneutical significance. Calvin

could not imagine sober historical interpretation of the Old Testament operating apart from the context provided by the New Testament writings.

Calvin conceded that the New Testament writers sometimes appeared to twist the Old Testament to meanings that were foreign to the original writer's intention. In some places they appeared to be overly subtle and made apparent mistakes in quoting the Old Testament. Calvin sometimes solved the difficulty by arguing that it was not the intent of the New Testament writers to interpret the Old Testament texts they cited. Sometimes they simply used the Old Testament for illustrative purposes. Since it was not their intent to offer a historical interpretation, they should not be regarded as misconstruing its meaning. In other places he believed that the New Testament writers' seemingly forced-use of the Old Testament was intended to be an interpretation. In such cases he allowed the New Testament to guide him in his view of what the Old Testament writer must have understood and intended.

The role of the New Testament in guiding Old Testament exegesis is nowhere more apparent than in Calvin's interpretation of the Decalogue. His treatment of the sixth commandment is representative of his general approach. The commandment "Thou shalt not kill" included much more than a prohibition of murder. The word kill was a synecdoche for all violence and aggression. Calvin found confirmation in the teaching of Jesus for his belief that "negative precepts" or prohibitions in the Bible should be understood to include the opposite affirmations. While the sixth commandment may appear only to have prohibited murder, it also instructed us that we are to defend the lives of our neighbors. Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:22 that hateful thoughts and words deserve judgment was intended to be an exposition of the genuine sense of this commandment. The apostle John confirmed this teaching in 1 John 3:15, where he wrote that whoever hates his brother is a murderer.

Significance

P. Schaff designated Calvin the "founder of modern historical-grammatical exegesis." In Schaff's judgment, Calvin's exegesis was more oriented to matters of language and history than was the exegesis of those who preceded him. But Calvin was probably not all that different from other interpreters of his day who were influenced by humanist concerns and methods. His contribution is probably best seen in the remarkable clarity and compactness with which he packaged the fruits of his labor and in the moderation and balance reflected in his exegesis.

In recent years many commentators have found Calvin's exegetical writings to be helpful. Brevard Childs recommends Calvin's commentaries on Genesis and Psalms as sober, literal and even brilliant expositions. C. E. B. Cranfield praises Calvin for his solid exposition of Romans—for his faithful, simple and succinct effort to unfold the mind of the writer.

Some scholars have suggested that a tension exists in Calvin's approach to biblical interpretation between a traditional Christian approach that emphasizes the divine side of Scripture and its unity and a more modern approach that recognizes the human

element and diversity to be found in Scripture. Ironically, it may be the fact that Calvin did not resolve the tensions that accounts for the current popularity of his commentaries with many Christian biblical interpreters. His affirmation of the human side of Scripture suggests that there is hope of interpreting Scripture through the use of familiar methods; his affirmation of the divine side of Scripture suggests that once interpreted, the message of Scripture is of eternal importance. ²

² "Calvin, John" D.L. Puckett, Dictionary of major biblical interpreters, Ed. Donald K. McKim (Downers Grove. Inter-varsity academic press, 2007) pg. 287- 293