

# The Theology of John Calvin. Part One: The Christian's Conflict with the World.

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## 1. The Origins, Order and Purpose of the World and the Consequences of the Fall

In his Commentary on Genesis and in particular his comments on the creation of the world, Calvin points out that although we are introduced immediately, as it were, to the act of creation, he is keen to draw our attention to the fact that we are not confined to this subject alone.<sup>1</sup> There are several important themes Calvin argues, that are interconnected in the book of Genesis, which, it will be seen, have a direct bearing on the subject matter of this study. These 'themes' are as follows:—(i) the world was founded by God; (ii) man fell by his own fault; (iii) man then restored through Christ. Calvin goes on to suggest that this, in fact, is 'the argument of the book:'

After the world had been created, man was placed on it as in a theatre, that he, beholding above him and beneath the wonderful works of God, might reverently adore their Author. Secondly, that all things were ordained for the use of man, that he, being under deep obligation, might devote and dedicate himself entirely to obedience towards God. Thirdly, that he was endued with understanding and reason, that being distinguished from brute animals he might meditate on a better life, and might even tend directly towards God; whose image he bore engraven on his own person. Afterwards followed the fall of Adam, whereby he alienated himself from God; whence it came to pass that he was deprived of all rectitude. Thus Moses represents man as devoid of all good, blinded in understanding, perverse in heart, vitiated in every part, and under sentence of eternal death; but he soon adds the history of his restoration, where Christ shines forth with the benefit of redemption.<sup>2</sup>

Calvin then goes on to describe man's salvation in terms of 'being rescued out of profound darkness' and obtaining 'new life by the mere grace of God.'<sup>3</sup> In other words, particularly when we also take into account the role of Satan in deceiving man to bring about his fall (which will be looked at in more detail under Part Three, 'The Devil'), we have, from the very beginning a clear picture of creation being involved in a spiritual conflict. At the outset, Calvin argues, the heavens and the earth, (the recognized divisions of the world), were created '*ex nihilo*'.<sup>4</sup> Calvin therefore refutes the arguments of those who maintained that unformed matter existed from eternity. For Calvin the Scriptures clearly taught that 'the world is not eternal, but was created by God'<sup>5</sup>, and that this creation was 'perfectly good; that we may know that there is in the symmetry of God's works the highest perfection, to which nothing can be added.'<sup>6</sup> Not for Calvin then, the view of Mani who held, along with certain philosophers, 'the necessary and independent existence of matter, which, in his view, was the origin of all evil.'<sup>7</sup> For Calvin, God's creation was intrinsically good and behind the creation of the world there was a divine order and purpose. In the very beginning, the world was created to serve man. This, for Calvin, is the whole purpose of God in His creation, 'because he furnished the world with all things needful, and even with an immense profusion of wealth, before he formed man. Thus man was rich before he was born.'<sup>8</sup> This same idea is brought out in the *Institutes* where Calvin says: 'God himself has shown by the order of Creation that he created all things for man's sake.'<sup>9</sup> If the world is therefore created by God<sup>10</sup>

to serve man, then it is also true to say, argues Calvin, that man was appointed by God to be 'lord of the world.' Whilst, from Gen. 1:26 this is true for Adam himself, Calvin argues that the use of the plural in that verse 'intimates that this authority was not given to Adam only, but to all his posterity as well as to him'.<sup>11</sup>

When however, we move on to Genesis chapter 3 and the fall of man, we are given a very different picture of creation. As a result of the sin of Adam we learn that the earth was cursed on account of Adam. For Calvin this curse is the opposite of the blessing of God referred to in Genesis 1:

As the *blessing* of the earth means, in the language of Scripture, that fertility which God infuses by his secret power, so the *curse* is nothing else than the opposite privation, when God withdraws his favour.<sup>12</sup>

At this point we begin to see the indissoluble bond that exists between man and the world. If, perhaps, we are surprised that the world, though innocent, should be punished in this way, then, Calvin would argue, we have not fully appreciated the nature of this bond. Calvin simply states that 'the ruin of man drives headlong all those creatures which were formed for his sake, and had been made subject to him.' Whilst Calvin may not attempt to explain this bond between man and his environment, he nonetheless clearly holds man responsible for the condition of creation as a whole after the Fall:

We may, it is true, infer from this how dreadful is the curse which we have deserved, since all innocent creatures from earth to heaven are punished for our sins. It is our fault that they struggle in corruption. The condemnation of the human race is thus imprinted on the heavens, the earth, and all creatures.<sup>14</sup>

Calvin, as we have noted, spoke of the world as a 'theatre' into which man had been placed. Picking up this metaphor of Calvin's, we could perhaps say that the conflict to which we have already referred is acted out or staged within the theatre of the world. Man is then the principal character, around whom the conflict centres, with the stage, as in any good theatrical production, very much a part of the overall drama. The weakness however, of pursuing this particular metaphor, is that the stage, in any production usually works in harmony with the characters; the most we could say about any theatrical setting is that it is involved in the drama and is, of itself, only passively creative. Certainly we would not expect, nor do we usually view the stage or settings as being actively opposed to the characters and the overall theme and aim of the drama. But this is in fact what Calvin is claiming. The world is now very definitely for Calvin working against man, and in addition to this, we also need to recognize that the world is no longer in its right relation with God, 'because God has bound its fate to man's'.<sup>15</sup>

It is for this reason, that it is more helpful and realistic to think in terms of the metaphor introduced by C.A.M. Hall. Not only, he argues, does creation furnish the background for the spiritual warfare, it 'is itself involved in it'.<sup>16</sup> In pursuing the metaphor of warfare, he goes on to liken creation to a landscape:

Just as a landscape does not merely provide a background for war but is itself damaged, so the whole creation is not merely the setting for spiritual warfare, but itself suffers participation in that struggle which centres in God's highest creature: man.<sup>17</sup>

We cannot help but notice the irony of the situation. In the first place the whole of God's creation was 'good' and was for the benefit of mankind, with man appointed as lord over creation. The created world, indeed the universe as a whole, was made manifest that man 'might seek no other God but him'<sup>18</sup> and enjoy the benefits of that creation which was established to serve mankind. Since the Fall however, the plan and purpose behind creation and the creation itself became hopelessly twisted and perverse. Man's whole life is now in disorder and confusion 'so that no clear or unambiguous trace of the original order of creation in which his life reflected the image of God has been left.'<sup>19</sup> Nor, as we have already discussed, is the disorder and confusion restricted to man alone, because, as Wallace also puts it, 'this fall of man into disorder is reflected in the universe around him and in his relations with his environment where the original order of nature has been corrupted.'<sup>20</sup> So corrupted is this order of nature, that the world, created originally by God for man to seek Him alone, has become man's 'god.' As a result of the Fall, natural man is now incapable of rising in heart and mind above this world. Far from seeking after God and desiring to worship Him, man's love is now 'for this present world, which brings him into such bondage to this world as prevents him from even seeking God truly.'<sup>21</sup> We are, as Calvin put it, 'inclined by nature to a brutish love of this world.'<sup>22</sup> In other words, the concern of man's mind is now continually directed towards earthly objects and the affections of the heart inevitably follow the leading of the mind. 'His heart is an insatiable gulf which it is impossible to fill to contentment with the things of this earth. Yet he goes on vainly seeking satisfaction in this earth.'<sup>23</sup> As a result of the Fall, the roles are now therefore completely reversed. The world, created to serve man, is now very definitely his master. Man is in bondage to and is enslaved by the things of this world. So powerful is this bondage, and so obsessed is man with earthly cares that 'while living to the world, they die to God,'<sup>24</sup> to the extent that man deceives himself by imagining that this world is really his rest forever.

As we would expect, Calvin speaks out very forcibly about the condition man now finds himself in, due to his own rebellion. He in fact develops the approach of the Apostle James, who likened love of this world to adultery.

Calvin approves of the comparison made by the Apostle James of such immoderate love of this world to adultery, for it is a violation of the marriage which God seeks to make with us when He seeks to espouse us to Himself as a chaste virgin, and a transference to a baser object of the affection which we owe to God.<sup>25</sup>

So serious is the condition, that, for Calvin, it is impossibly hard for any man, by his own strength, to rid himself of this love for the world that holds him in such bondage. To quote Wallace again:

Our minds are naturally so set on this earth and so much given up to its pleasures and cares that it is impossible for us even to taste the pleasures of eternity, the experience of which alone can deliver us from bondage to this earth.<sup>26</sup>

Thus far we have begun to see how, as a result of the Fall, the fate of man and the world are inextricably bound together and how the roles have been reversed to the extent that man is now in bondage to the world. This bondage is the common experience of all mankind to the extent that man is alienated from God, spiritually dead and unable to respond to God in any way. Calvin has a very high view of the power of this bondage which enslaves man, because, when he talks of the world, he has in mind not just the environment which surrounds man, but also, and in particular, what is in man by nature:

He [Peter] sets the corruption of the world over against the divine nature. He shows this to be not only in the environment which surrounds us, but also in our hearts, because it is there that the vicious, depraved desires hold sway, of which he describes the source and root by the word *lust*. Corruption is set in the context of the world, so that we know that the world is in us.<sup>27</sup>

The picture we are confronted with can perhaps be best summed up by the word ‘darkness’. Man lives in the world which now dominates him so that he is in bondage to it; spiritual death is now a ‘universal disease’ which ‘engrasps the whole world;’ man is alienated from God and in his nature is even an enemy of God,<sup>28</sup> controlled as he is by depraved desires. And when we add to all this that the cause of man’s corruption is the ‘dominion which the Devil has over us,’<sup>29</sup> we begin to see the appropriateness of the term ‘darkness.’ Calvin himself describes the condition of the world using that very term:

He [Paul] means that the devil reigns in the world, because the world is nothing but darkness. Hence it follows that the corruption of the world gives a place to the kingdom of the devil. For he could not reside in a pure and sound creature of God. It all arises from the sinfulness of men. By ‘darkness,’ as is well known, he means unbelief and ignorance of God, with their consequences. As the whole world is covered with darkness, the devil is the prince of this world.<sup>30</sup>

What we also notice from the above, is the ‘bond’ in Calvin’s theology between the world, the flesh and the devil. This is developed and brought out more clearly in his commentary on Ephesians where he states that ‘all men who live according to the world, that is, to the inclinations of their flesh, fight under the command of Satan.’ This ‘bond’ or overlap will be explored and developed as we progress.

Having emphasized the ‘darkness’ to which Calvin refers, with both the world and the flesh being under the command of Satan, it is important to mention at this stage the glimmer of light that Calvin is always careful to hold before us, lest we should end up in gloom and despair. He is always careful to ensure that we realize that Satan’s power is not *the* supreme power. Satan yes, is powerful and a formidable adversary who is to be taken seriously, but, Calvin reminds us, he can do nothing against God’s will. In his Commentary on Ephesians 2, he puts it this way:

Paul does not allow him the supreme rule, which belongs to the will of God alone, but merely a tyranny which he exercises by God’s permission.<sup>31</sup>

The way in which the power of Satan is controlled and is allowed to work only with the permission of God, will be explored more fully in Part Three. We are nonetheless, to recognize that this world is very much under the power of evil, and when man aligns himself to the things of this world, the sin here for Calvin, is not just materialism or the denial of the spiritual world: it is very much more serious than that; it is ‘an active alliance with the Devil.’<sup>32</sup>

When we therefore consider the overall picture, we begin to see the hopelessness and seriousness of man’s position, with a whole host of forces opposing him, against which he is powerless to stand in his own strength. For whilst we are of the world, we are separated from the Kingdom of God and the grace of Christ, and as long as man lives for himself he remains condemned. But what man was unable to achieve in his own strength, God accomplished for man through the death of His Son. As Calvin says: ‘Christ therefore died for our sins to

redeem or separate us from the world.’<sup>33</sup> So obsessed is man with a love for this world, that ‘this vanity must first be torn out of us, that the love of God may reign within us.’<sup>34</sup> Until that happens, the Kingdom of God is utterly abhorrent to man and he is content to live for himself even though his whole life is ‘nothing but a wandering and straying’ or a ‘wandering in the darkness.’<sup>35</sup> With Calvin’s understanding of the bondage that man is in, not least to the world, we can begin to appreciate more fully how C.A.M. Hall can view the whole of Calvin’s theology ‘from the standpoint of spiritual warfare.’ For man to be liberated from the bondages and powers to which we have referred, must inevitably mean conflict!

## **2. Restoration of the Original Order and Purpose through the Death of Christ**

We must pause then, at this particular point, to consider this plan of redemption<sup>36</sup> and how it is that Christ’s death can separate man from the world. Put simply, the purpose of our redemption is ‘the restoration of the original order of man’s life.’<sup>37</sup> The work of Christ is to restore to man the image of God which was lost in Adam. Adam, having first been created in the image of God, reflected the divine righteousness. This image, defaced by sin, is now to be restored in Christ.<sup>38</sup> This regeneration is nothing other than the re-formation of the image of God in man, to recall him from his ‘wanderings’ referred to earlier. The work of the Spirit in man’s heart is therefore to begin to reform us to the image of God, which, for Calvin, was a gradual process:

... neither of these things happen all at once, but by continual progress we increase both in the knowledge of God and in conformity to His image.<sup>39</sup>

Calvin himself saw the comprehensive scope of the Spirit’s activity both in creation as well as redemption. The development of the *Institutes* reflects Calvin’s insight that the various saving activities of the Spirit are not apart from or in opposition to creation.

Redemption is the vindication of God the *creator*. The new creation in the Spirit is the restoration and consummation of creation; it includes the renewal of the entire life of the creature made in God’s image.<sup>40</sup>

The restoration of that image is to result in both the renovation of man and of the whole world. Calvin himself puts it this way:

We must . . . note that Christ was speaking only of the beginning of God’s Kingdom; for we now begin to be reformed to the image of God by His Spirit so that the complete renewal of ourselves and the whole world may follow in its own time.<sup>41</sup>

In moving on to consider this restoration, it is necessary for us now to examine Calvin’s understanding of the cross and the work of Christ. A detailed study of the atonement falls outside the scope of this study. Suffice it to say that, for Calvin, the cross of Christ is not just a sacrifice for sin, but a ‘royal victory.’ Indeed, Jansen talks of this victory as Calvin’s ‘most recurrent theme—the regal conquest of Christ over the devil, death and sin.’<sup>42</sup>

R.A. Peterson however, suggests that Jansen, in referring to the victory theme as ‘Calvin’s most recurrent theme’ is overstating the case. In saying that, Peterson is not attempting to minimize the importance of the victory theme in the theology of Calvin, but rather to see the theme in its proper proportion:

. . . the concept of Christ's saving work as a mighty victory occupied a large place in Calvin's thought and deserves a place in any consideration of his doctrine of the atonement.<sup>43</sup>

The importance of the victory is brought out by Calvin himself when he says:

Now this kind of redemption Christ shows to be necessary, in order to wrench from the Devil, by main force, what he will never quit till he is compelled. By these words He informs us, that it is vain for man to expect deliverance, till Satan has been subdued by a violent struggle.<sup>44</sup>

It is certainly true to say that later Calvinism tended to emphasize Christ's priestly office in its understanding of the atonement, which led to the atonement being described in sacrificial and penal terms. Calvin himself, however, never viewed the atonement simply in those terms. He always insisted that since it is the cross that effects the work of redemption, 'it must necessarily be a kingly as well as a priestly work.'<sup>45</sup> The relevance of Christ's priestly work, will become more apparent later. Our main concern at this point is to emphasize, as Calvin does, this 'royal victory,'<sup>46</sup> because, as Jansen puts it, it has

important implications for Christian life, for it points us beyond unresolved tension and dialectic conflict towards a positive and victorious life.<sup>47</sup>

This statement of Jansen is obviously extremely relevant to the subject under discussion. If, as we have said, man is helpless and held in bondage to the world and Satan, then it is only logical that we should shortly move on to establish exactly how this 'victorious life' that Jansen refers to, can be lived out by those who are regenerate. It becomes apparent in the theology of John Calvin, that the death and resurrection of Christ (which Calvin would never separate), is an event which is essentially 'practical,' in that it has intense relevance for the Christian life. 'Christ's death and passion should produce its fruit in us.'<sup>48</sup> In other words, the Christian is not only forgiven, vitally important though that is, but he is also liberated that he might enter into Christ's conquest. Not only are sin, death and Satan defeated by Christ's death and resurrection, but man is also freed, through conversion by the grace of God, so that his mind is no longer set purely on the things of this earth. He is then able to begin to taste 'the pleasures of eternity, the experience of which alone can deliver us from bondage to this earth.'<sup>49</sup>

But before moving on to discuss in detail the ways in which the Christian is to work out this 'victorious life' over the world, we must, as emphasized earlier, first explore and develop more fully the theme of restoration. What is of great significance for this paper is that not only is man to be restored to the image of God, but, Calvin argues, through the cross the whole of creation has been restored to its original glory and order. In his commentary on John 12:31, Calvin argues that 'judgement of this world' would be better translated 'reformation', as the Hebrew word means 'a well-ordered constitution.' He goes on to say:

Now we know that outside Christ there is nothing but confusion in the world. And although Christ had already begun to set up the Kingdom of God, it was His death that was the true beginning of a properly-ordered state and the complete restoration of the world.<sup>50</sup>

He makes a similar statement a little later in the same commentary:

For in the cross of Christ, as in a splendid theatre, the incomparable goodness of God is set before the whole world. The glory of God shines, indeed, in all creatures on high and below, but never more brightly than in the cross, in which there was a wonderful change of things

(*admirabilis rerum conversio*)—the condemnation of all men was manifested, sin blotted out, salvation restored to men; in short, the whole world was renewed and all things restored to order.<sup>51</sup>

One of the marks of true religion, which, Calvin maintains, is lacking under ‘superstition’<sup>52</sup> is orderliness.<sup>53</sup> This orderliness is to be seen, not just in the life of the Christian, but in the world itself. The restoration of the image of God in the Christian means, for Calvin, an ordered life, ‘for the pattern of the restored *imago Dei* is a pattern of order.’<sup>54</sup> The overcoming of disorder in this world is, for Calvin, ‘a fact of profound eschatological significance.’<sup>55</sup> The restoration of order in the world occurs now as the influence of the cross is experienced in society from day to day, but, having said that, Calvin also states that for the final, complete restoration of true order, both in man’s hearts and in the universe as a whole, we have to await the second coming of Christ:

Such is his intention when he says, *until the coming of the Lord*: the confusion which we see in the world today will not go on for ever, for the Lord, by His coming, will bring all back to order, and for that we must gather our spirits to have a good hope.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, as Wallace puts it, ‘the whole new attitude and behaviour of the regenerate man in obedience to the Word of God is indicative of the original pattern of man’s life as he was created in Adam.’<sup>57</sup>

As we concentrate on the Christian’s conflict with the world, the flesh and the devil, we are obviously more concerned with Calvin’s understanding of the restoration and renewal of this present world, prior to Christ’s second coming.

We have stated already, that the restoration of order in the world occurs whenever the influence of the cross is manifested in society.<sup>58</sup> We have also established that throughout the present world, in which Satan holds sway, there is confusion, disorder and disharmony. Yet, Calvin maintains, through the victory of the cross of Christ, reformation is constantly taking place. He can say this because, through the cross, ‘Satan is being cast out of his dominion and the power of evil is being subdued.’<sup>59</sup> This is how Calvin himself puts it in his commentary on John’s gospel:

Now we know that outside Christ there is nothing but confusion in the world. And although Christ had already begun to set up the Kingdom of God, it was his death that was the true beginning of a properly-ordered state and the complete restoration of the world.

We must also notice, however, that this right ordering (*rectitudo*) cannot be set up in the world, until first Satan’s kingdom is wiped out and until the flesh and whatever is against God’s righteousness is annihilated. Finally, the renewing of the world must be preceded by a mortifying. And so Christ declares that the prince of this world is to be cast out. For confusion and deformity arise because, while Satan exercises his tyranny iniquity is spread abroad. Therefore, when Satan has been cast out, the world is called back from its revolt to the rule of God. If anyone asks how Satan was cast out by Christ’s death, since he does not cease to go on making war, I reply that this casting out is not to be limited to any short time, but is a description of the remarkable effect of Christ’s death which appears daily.<sup>60</sup>

The death of Christ is therefore the commencement, in the present, of a well-regulated condition which will ultimately reach its inevitable climax in the renovation of the whole world. The signs of this re-establishing of the Kingdom of God are, for Calvin, whenever in

the life of regenerate man, there is true self-denial and mortification of concupiscence, brought about by communion with the death of Christ. Then there is restoration in order, where previously there had been confusion and disorder. This is how Calvin himself puts it:

We must first attend to the definition of the Kingdom of God. He is said to reign among men, when they voluntarily devote and submit themselves to be governed by him, placing their flesh under the yoke, and renouncing their desires. Such is the corruption of the nature, that all our affections are so many soldiers of Satan, who oppose the justice of God, and consequently obstruct or disturb his reign. By this prayer we ask, that he may remove all hindrances, and may bring all men under his dominion, and may lead them to meditate on the heavenly life.

Calvin then goes on to explain how the reign of God in the heart of man is actually brought into being. The following extract shows us the understanding he had of the work of the Word and the Spirit in establishing this reign:

This is partly the effect of the Word of preaching, partly of the hidden power of the Spirit. He would govern men by His Word, but as the voice alone, without the inward influence of the Spirit, does not reach down into the heart, the two must be brought together for the establishment of God's Kingdom. So we pray that God will show His power both in Word and in Spirit, that the whole world may willingly come over to Him. The opposite of the Kingdom of God is complete disorder and confusion: nor is anything in the world well-ordered unless He arranges its thoughts and feelings, by His controlling hand. So we conclude, that the beginning of the Kingdom of God in us, is the end of the old man, the denial of self, that we may turn to newness of life.

What Calvin says here, particularly his reference to the 'end of the old man,' obviously has relevance for the second part of this study. 'The Flesh.' Indeed, he goes on at this point to talk of the way in which 'God reigns in another fashion . . . to tame the desires of our flesh.'<sup>51</sup>

### **3. Victory only through Communion with Christ**

The point we need to emphasize at this stage, is that all that Calvin has said here is grounded in the death of Christ. Without the death of Christ, nothing has changed, but through the death of Christ, God is now able to begin to restore all things to order. We also need to note the importance that Calvin attaches to man being 'in communion with Christ'. We could go so far as to say that the key to unlock all that has been achieved through Christ's death is contained in Calvin's understanding of regenerate man being 'in Christ,' because, for Calvin the victory that has been won through the cross<sup>62</sup> is a victory that has to be implemented through man and is effective only through regenerate man—those who are 'in Christ.' This concept of 'communion with Christ' is of vital importance if we are to understand, in the theology of John Calvin, the victory that is now possible for the Christian in his conflict with the world, the flesh and the devil. It is only as man is in communion with Christ, in other words, is in communion with the victor, that man can in turn implement and experience victory. We move on then, to explore this concept of 'communion with Christ.'

The reason for the confusion and chaos of the world is the fact that the image of God borne by man is horribly corrupted. Although the image was not totally destroyed, what remained was, for Calvin, 'so corrupted that whatever remains is frightful deformity.'<sup>63</sup> Before the Fall, man, in his integrity, had free choice by which, if he so desired, he could have attained eternal life. In other words, Adam could have remained in his original state of integrity if he



had wished to, as he stumbled only by his own will. The source of Adam's sin, was, for Calvin, faithlessness conjoined with pride. This resulted in man being not only deprived of the good that was in him, but placed within him a tendency and a desire towards sin. Calvin expressed this in no uncertain terms:

Whatever is in man, from the understanding to the will, from the soul even to the flesh, has been defiled with this concupiscence.<sup>64</sup>

In other words, whatever is in man is tainted by sin and includes both the reason and the will. The will in particular can now only strive after evil and yet, even after the Fall, reason and will continue to a degree, enough, at least, to distinguish man from the rest of creation. Nevertheless, man has now been deprived of free will and is subjected to every evil. Sin has corrupted the natural gifts in man and has abolished the supernatural. In losing the supernatural or spiritual gifts of purity of faith, integrity and righteousness, man, by his own actions, is cut off from heavenly things and is no longer able even to conceive them. Faith, love of God, love of neighbour and the desire for holiness are now completely alien to him. Man therefore has no free will to do good without the grace of God. He is a slave to sin. It is important that we stress again the hopelessness of man's position, that we then might more readily appreciate the importance of communion with Christ in Calvin's theology.

Man can do nothing to change either his situation or his nature. He sins voluntarily and is without excuse. It therefore follows, that if man sins as a result of an inner necessity and not because of some external constraint, it is his deformed will that must be rectified.

The restoration that Christ brings through his 'regal victory' is the conversion of the will to those who turn to him in repentance and faith. This work of regeneration is, in the theology of Calvin, directed only to the elect, who like the reprobate, are subject to sin<sup>65</sup> in exactly the same way until their conversion. Conversion for Calvin, is in fact, a turning back of the will, which frees man from the grip of sin, little by little, in such a way that it can never be regarded as complete in man's earthly existence.<sup>66</sup> Calvin does not say that the will is somehow strengthened by God to enable man to choose the good; rather he believed that the will had to be wholly transformed and renewed:

I also say that it is created anew; not meaning that the will now begins to exist, but that it is changed from an evil to a good will.<sup>67</sup>

The work of conversion is, for Calvin, solely the work of God. Prior to conversion, man, because of his sin, becomes an object of horror to God; more than that, man acquires a horror of God. Man is so trapped and enslaved by the things of this world, sin and Satan, that his only attitude to God is to want to escape from Him and deny His existence. A mediator is therefore needed and that mediator is of course, Christ.<sup>68</sup> Calvin's view of the atonement included the theme, as we have said, of 'royal victory', but, in addition to that, included the classic expression of the doctrine of satisfaction. Sin was a debt that had to be paid and Christ's substitutionary death on the cross meant that the debt was now paid and the hostility between God and man removed.<sup>69</sup>

Satisfaction then, in Calvin's theology, is a way of saying what has actually been achieved by substitution: 'It means that God has nothing more to say to us as sinners, for as sinners we have died.'<sup>70</sup>

In Book 3 of his *Institutes*, Calvin discusses the question of how man can enter into the benefits effected by Christ's death. The reason for this is because he believed that Christ's death was no more than potential grace and victory whilst we are separated from Christ. Man can only enter into a right relationship with God by the mediation of Christ. So, for man to enter into this right relationship with God, he must first enter into a relationship with Christ. Nothing that Christ possesses, nothing that he has achieved, either belongs to man or can be appropriated by him *until* he has been made one with Christ.<sup>71</sup> Communion with Christ becomes, for Calvin, the essential ingredient whereby man is able to receive and enter into all that Christ's death gained. Not that Calvin had in mind communion with Christ in any medieval mystical sense, concerned as he was to guard against any glorification of sinful man, but rather a spiritual union of the closest possible kind, a union which extends to the whole man, body and soul.

We can begin to see just how important is this union with Christ<sup>72</sup> in the theology of John Calvin and the relevance that it has for our study. Everything that is available for the Christian in his conflict with the world (and indeed the flesh and the devil), is available to him only in his communion with Christ. It is a union initiated by God; it is a union entered into by faith,<sup>73</sup> the gift of God and it is a union enjoyed by the Christian through the Holy Spirit of God.

Therefore it is not from man that the movement which ends in union with Christ can begin; its initiation goes back to Christ himself who works in us through the Holy Spirit.<sup>74</sup>

It is also important that we should notice the work of the Holy Spirit in the union with Christ, a work that Calvin went to great lengths to emphasize.<sup>75</sup> Not only is it the Holy Spirit who brings about this union, as we have already mentioned, but it is also the Holy Spirit who enables the Christian to understand what this union with Christ actually means. This spiritual union was not something that could be understood through 'idle speculation,' but only as Christ 'pours His life into us by the secret efficacy of the Spirit.'<sup>76</sup> It was a spiritual union for Calvin because God effects it by the power of His Spirit. In emphasizing this spiritual union Calvin rejects the idea that Christ's essence is blended with ours. We are one with Christ

not because He transfuses His substance into us, but because by the power of His Spirit He communicates to us His life and all the blessings He has received from the Father.<sup>77</sup>

The importance of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's conflict, will become increasingly apparent as we progress. What also will become more and more apparent is just how little place there is in Calvin's theology 'for a work of the Holy Spirit that is independent of the work of Christ.'<sup>78</sup>

#### **4. The Outworking of this Victory in the Christian Life**

Calvin held that man is in bondage, not just to the world (meaning the planet earth as well as its human inhabitants), but also to sin and Satan, to the extent that he is incapable of freeing himself. We have considered the importance of the death of Christ and all that was achieved through his death (the 'regal victory'), and how it is, through union with Christ, that regenerate man can partake of that victory. We must now move on to examine in more detail what was referred to earlier: namely the 'victorious life' to which Jansen referred. If, as already has been suggested, the death and resurrection of Christ is essentially practical in the

thinking of Calvin, what relevance does all this have in the Christian's conflict with the world? Or, to put it another way, what practical difference does this make in the life<sup>79</sup> of the Christian and his conflict with the world?

#### **4.1. Steadfastness of faith, the importance of the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit**

Having discussed at some length the importance of being in communion with Christ, Calvin is very careful to emphasize that this must be an on-going experience. If the Christian is to enter into Christ's victory, not only must he receive Christ at conversion, but he must continue to remain in Him. As he says in his commentary on Colossians, 'he [Paul] teaches them that their having once received Christ will be of no advantage to them unless they remain in him.' In the same passage, Calvin goes on to explain that Paul is urging the Colossians to stand against false teachers by adhering 'steadfastly to the doctrine which they had embraced.' 'Indeed,' says Calvin, 'we must act in such a manner that the truth of the gospel, when it has been manifested to us, may be to us a brazen wall to repulse all impostures.'<sup>80</sup> In other words, there is to be steadfastness of faith, particularly in and to the truth of the gospel.

Calvin has a very high view of the importance of faith<sup>81</sup> in the Christian's conflict with the world. That is not to say that Calvin would somehow expect the Christian to 'muster up' more faith in his own strength. Faith, for Calvin, is a gift from God entrusted to the Christian. We have talked already of the link in Calvin's theology between faith and the Word of God and for that faith to be developed and strengthened, then, as far as Calvin is concerned, the Christian must again return and keep on returning to the Word:

Faith ought to be upheld with such firmness as to stand unconquered and unwavering against Satan and all the devices of hell, and the whole world. We shall find this firmness solely in God's Word.<sup>82</sup>

To underline what he is saying, so that we can be left in no doubt as to the importance he attached to the Word, both for the Church and the believer, Calvin ends this particular section of the *Institutes* with these words: 'This rule pertains as much to the whole Church as to individual believers.'<sup>83</sup>

We discussed earlier the hopelessness of man's position outside of Christ in view of the powers assembled against him. Calvin recognizes this and expresses it very clearly when he says '. . . we should have been vanquished before the battle. . . .' but then goes on to say 'had not God promised us the victory.' The promise in this passage of 1 John is that 'everyone born of God has overcome the world' and commenting on this particular verse, Calvin states that John places this victory over the whole world in faith. The past tense (has overcome) is of vital significance for Calvin. As a result of that Calvin then goes on to say 'that we might feel certain, as if the enemy had already been put to flight.' The struggle for the Christian with the world will continue throughout his earthly life, but the following quotation from Calvin makes it clear that he believed the Christian to be a 'partaker of victory' through faith.<sup>84</sup> He could be so confident of what could be achieved through faith only because he believed it to be, not the work of man, but the *perpetual* work of the Holy Spirit.

It is, of course, true that our warfare lasts all through our life, that our conflicts are daily, that new and manifold battles are every moment begun against us by the enemy from every side. But as God does not arm us for one day alone, and as faith is not of a day's duration but is the

perpetual work of the Holy Spirit, we are already partakers of victory, as if we had already finished the war.<sup>85</sup>

The reason why Calvin had such a high view of faith and could make the claims he did, was because he believed it was through faith that the Christian was able to appropriate the all-conquering power of God.

But this promise both arms us with the unconquerable power of God, and also, on the other hand, annihilates all the strength of men. For the apostle is not telling us that God not merely lends us His aid, so that, helped by Him, we may be equal to resisting. But he places victory in faith alone. But faith receives from another that by which it overcomes.<sup>86</sup>

In other words, the Christian is victorious, and can only be victorious, not through any strength, abilities or powers of his own, but because, by faith, he can, as it were, ‘borrow’ strength from Christ. Lest we should be in any doubt that his victory is in Christ and Him alone, Calvin says:

Only he is superior to Satan and the world and does not give way to his own flesh, who distrusts himself and rests on Christ’s power alone.<sup>87</sup>

At this point in his *Commentary* on 1 John 5, Calvin is also at pains to stress what is actually meant by the word ‘faith’. In company with Luther, he believed there were two aspects to faith. One was a general belief in the existence of God and the truth of the Scriptures concerning Christ, which, for Calvin, was never ‘true’ faith. The second aspect, which he believed to be true faith, he describes as:

a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence towards 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.<sup>88</sup>

Calvin believed that true faith was a gift of God to the elect;<sup>89</sup> a gift that was never to be presumed upon as though it were something we possessed ourselves. And although, as we have said, Calvin had such a high view of faith, this gift of faith to the elect which makes this essential link with Christ possible, was of itself, or no value whatsoever. Its value and importance, for Calvin, lay solely in its object and content—Jesus Christ. Calvin also believed that no matter how weak or deficient faith may be in the elect,

because the Spirit of God is for them the sure guarantee and seal of their adoption (Eph. 1:14; cf. 2 Cor. 1:22), the mark he has engraved can never be erased from their hearts.<sup>90</sup>

This further underlines the indissoluble bond between the Holy Spirit and the elect in Calvin’s theology.<sup>91</sup> Nor must we overlook the other bond previously referred to—that of faith resting upon God’s Word. For Calvin there was a permanent relationship between faith and Word, to the extent that he believed if faith should turn away from the Word, then no faith would remain. The Holy Spirit, who gives faith to the elect, is therefore dependent upon the Word to sustain and increase that faith. Conversely, the Word is dependent upon the Holy Spirit, for without the illumination of the Holy Spirit the Word can achieve nothing.<sup>92</sup>

But when we think of the importance of faith for the Christian in overcoming the world, we must never lose sight of the fact that it is always faith *in* the Lord Jesus Christ;<sup>93</sup> in other words a ‘living’ faith by which the Christian can appropriate Christ’s victory: ‘For by the

word faith he (John) means a living apprehension of Christ which applies to us His strength and office.<sup>94</sup>

This ‘living apprehension of Christ’ was for Calvin all important and all conquering. This living faith meant for Calvin that the Christian was therefore equipped to stand against the world; those who do not hold on to Christ will inevitably fall back into the world. That is why Calvin in his *Commentary* on Colossians urges the Christian to make progress in Christ:

Two things are to be observed in the apostle’s words: that the stability of those who rely upon Christ is immovable, and their course is not at all hesitant or liable to error; and this is a great praise of faith from its effect. Secondly, that we must make progress in Christ until we have taken deep root in Him. From this we may readily gather that those who do not hold to Christ, only wander in bypaths and are tossed about in disquietude.<sup>95</sup>

This ‘living apprehension of Christ’ includes for the Christian, Calvin argued, the promise of Christ’s presence. Not, of course, the presence that the disciples experienced during Christ’s ministry here on earth, but a real presence nonetheless, by his Spirit, provided we look through the eyes of faith:

But, if we are to enjoy this secret sight of Christ, we must not judge His presence or absence by carnal perception, but must look diligently at His power with the eyes of faith. In this way believers always have Christ present by His Spirit and see Him although they are physically distant from Him.<sup>96</sup>

It is interesting to note that Calvin here says the believer is ‘to look diligently at His power’. This again suggests the importance of the Word, for where else can the believer gain a true and complete picture of Christ’s power, but through the Word? There are other reasons too, why it is important for the believer to dwell on the Word, if he is to enter fully into all that has been achieved for him in Christ, to equip him for his conflict with the world.

It is important in the first place, as has already been referred to briefly, for the believer to know the truth of the gospel and have a right understanding of sound doctrine, so that he might not be ‘swayed’ or led astray by false teachers and their erroneous doctrines. False teachings should not surprise us, Calvin argues. In fact, he refers almost matter-of-factly to false doctrines, saying that we must accept and expect them as being inevitable. Since the world is wholly false, we cannot expect the world to do anything other than listen to and accept falsehood.

. . . the world embraces in the false prophets what it acknowledges as its own. We see the great propensity to vanity in men. Hence, false doctrines easily get in and spread everywhere. The apostle says that there is no reason why this should disturb us, for it is nothing new or unusual if the world, which is wholly false, should readily listen to falsehood.<sup>97</sup>

The matter-of-fact way in which Calvin talks of false doctrines being inevitable, should not be misinterpreted as complacency. He certainly regarded false doctrines as a normal part of the Christian’s experience in this world, but he was also careful to urge ‘firmness and steadfastness of faith’ through the Word, ‘in order that they may securely and confidently plant their steps in the faith which had been made known to them.’ Nor did we have in mind that this ‘steadfastness of faith’ should be in any sense purely static and immovable. It is something that must be living and vital<sup>98</sup> ‘to grow every day more and more’ rooted in gratitude to God for the gift of faith by whom it is given in the first place:

When he (Paul) adds, *with thanksgiving*, he would have them always remember from what source faith itself proceeds, that they may not be puffed up with arrogance, but may rather with fear rest in the gift of God. And certainly, ingratitude is most often the reason why we are deprived of the light of the Gospel, as well as of other gifts of God.<sup>99</sup>

But the Word of God is also important for the Christian in his conflict with the world for another reason. The death of Christ, as we have seen, separates the Christian from the world. The Christian, although still in the world, is no longer of the world. In other words, he now dwells in a hostile environment. The Christian is now hated by the world, not through any direct fault of his, but simply because ‘the world hates God and Christ.’<sup>100</sup> The world, made up of the reprobate and under the dominion of Satan is totally opposed to the things of God, including, in particular, the children of God. So hostile is the world and so opposed is Satan to the child of God, that even that blessing can be obscured:

This trial grievously assaults our faith, that we are not regarded as God’s children, or that no mark of so great an excellency appears in us, but on the contrary almost the whole world holds us in derision. Hence it can hardly be inferred from our present state that God is our Father, for the devil so manages everything that he obscures this benefit. He circumvents the offence by saying that we now are not yet acknowledged to be what we are, because the world does not know God, and so it is not surprising if the children of the world despise us.<sup>101</sup>

Whilst suggesting that there are certain benefits which can be obscured for the Christian by the opposition of the world, he nonetheless believed that there should also be some comfort for the believer in the actual experience of such hatred. Looking at his *Commentary* on John 15, we see that, for Calvin, being chosen out of the world (election) means ‘to separate.’ Being separate and having been chosen out of the world, should, Calvin argued, be a source of great encouragement, even joy for the believer.

Here is another consolation—that they are hated by the world because they have been separated from it. And this is their true happiness and glory; for this is how they have been rescued from destruction.

To *choose* means here to separate. Now, if they were chosen out of the world, it follows that they were a part of the world and that only by God’s mercy are they distinguished from the rest who perished.<sup>102</sup>

Whilst there is therefore some consolation in ‘separateness’ for the Christian, Calvin is always careful to balance this by also emphasizing that, in the world, the Christian will have to face many distresses and tribulations, so that they may be in some way prepared for what lies ahead. We begin to see the importance of endurance in the Christian life in Calvin’s theology. Not that he viewed endurance in purely negative terms, but advocated that it was possible for the Christian to experience peace even in the midst of afflictions. This peace however, was only to be found in Christ and in his teachings:

Therefore we should notice first this warning that all the godly ought to be convinced that their life is subject to many afflictions, so that they may be prepared for endurance. Since, therefore, the world is like a rough sea, true peace will be found nowhere but in Christ. Now we must note the manner of enjoying that peace which he describes here. He says that they will have peace if they advance in this teaching.<sup>103</sup>

Lest we should be left with the impression that, for Calvin, the Christian life was all affliction and tribulation which the believer was given the grace somehow to endure, we need to take account of Calvin's teaching on the Christian's new relationship to his earthly circumstances. There are usually heavy and negative overtones associated with endurance, and whilst this theme of endurance is important in the theology of Calvin, we must not lose sight of the positive benefits for those in Christ, which were of equal importance to him.

We have already established that those who are united to Christ enjoy a new relationship to the world and their environment. God now acts towards the regenerate in a special way. Not only is there the heavenly inheritance and other spiritual blessings, but also certain material blessings in the present life. Whilst it is true to say that God loves all men and maintains all men in His love,

nevertheless His main business upon which He exercises His counsel and His will is now the salvation of those who are united to Jesus Christ, and their preservation in the midst of all their temptations and trials and the assaults of Satan.<sup>104</sup>

Calvin in fact believed that the Old Testament promises of earthly prosperity were applicable to those who are now in Christ, although he argued that they were now given 'in a more sparing manner.'<sup>105</sup> These material blessings were, for Calvin, tangible signs of the restoration of the true order of the creation which in turn shows that the Kingdom of God has already begun to be restored in this present world. The special care and providence of God the Father, which was lost in Adam, has now been restored in Christ, although of course, the full, final and complete establishment of His Kingdom must still be awaited.

Having redressed the balance as it were, to show that in the midst of affliction and tribulation, the Christian can expect some material prosperity, Calvin is always careful to qualify this, by stressing that these blessings are realised for the Christian only in a very limited way.<sup>106</sup> The reason for this Calvin argued, is to ensure that the Christian should not be too much at home on this earth, so that he 'may desire with greater alacrity the everlasting dwelling-place of heaven.'<sup>107</sup> Affliction and tribulation, although tempered by material prosperity, will, nonetheless, still be more predominant in the Christian life.

We begin to see, that if the Christian is to be able to stand against the distresses and tribulations of this world, and if he is to experience real peace in the midst of these afflictions, and if he is to be equipped to endure, rather than succumb to the temptation to fall away, then he must be grounded in the Word of God. Calvin obviously believed that even though the Christian is no longer a part of the world, it is nonetheless possible for the Christian to lose sight of his benefits, through the inevitable pressures, influences and persecutions of the world.

#### **4.2. Meditation**

As we continue our consideration of the importance of the Word in the Christian's conflict with the world, we notice in his *Commentary* on Matt. 5, for example, that Calvin talks of 'meditating on the Word.' He makes the point that there will be periods of respite from persecution for the Christian, and urges the Christian to use those 'seasons of repose and leisure' positively by meditating on 2 Tim. 3:12 ('shall suffer persecution') that they may be prepared for it in the future.

It is proper, then, when God is gentle with us in our weakness, and does not allow the wicked to harass us at their will, to ponder this teaching in the time of shade and ease, that we may be prepared whenever needs arise to go out into the arena; let us not meet our trial ill-equipped.<sup>108</sup>

This emphasis on not just the Word, but meditation on the Word, is a very important principle in the theology of Calvin. In other words, it is never sufficient for the Christian just to read the Word or hear the Word preached, unless it is accompanied with a serious determination to meditate on the Word read or heard. For the Christian to be negligent in this area ensures that ‘many errors creep in and the memory becomes rusted.’<sup>109</sup> The Word, then, must not be received in a superficial manner but must always be allowed, deeply and constantly, to influence the heart and mind of the Christian. To reinforce and underline the importance of meditation for the Christian in his understanding, Calvin reminds us that it was by long and assiduous meditation that the psalmists were strengthened to resist and overcome their temptations.<sup>110</sup> It is only by such meditation that the Word can become imprinted on or deeply fixed within the soul,<sup>111</sup> or deeply enclosed within the deepest recess of the heart,<sup>112</sup> so that the Christian might then be truly equipped and strengthened by the Word.

To Calvin, it is important for the Christian to meditate on the Word in any and every situation. At all times ‘our meditation should be to collect together every evidence we can of the goodness of God.’<sup>113</sup> Meditation on the Word is particularly important for the Christian when he is in the midst of adversity.<sup>114</sup>

The subject matter for meditation could be variable<sup>115</sup> as far as Calvin is concerned, provided of course, it is in the Word. Primarily he believed the Christian should exercise himself by meditating on the love of Christ, although he also frequently urges meditation upon the meaning of the passion and death of Christ. Not that this meditation was to be confined solely to the cross, because, as Calvin was well aware, meditation that begins on the cross is bound to lead to the contemplation of the risen Christ. But the whole point of meditation, on whatever subject, is to enable the Christian to overcome difficulties and temptations, to endure persecution and to be given courage and strength when tempted to fall away.

If we think for a moment specifically of the Christian’s conflict with the world, in addition to what has been said above, Calvin would no doubt urge the Christian to meditate on certain truths relating to his position in the world now he is separate from it, with particular reference to Christ’s special care and concern for him. Take, for example, some of the comments Calvin makes on John 17. As soon as the Christian begins to be deprived of outward help, he is to raise his mind to heaven, because ‘Christ keeps believers today no less than before.’<sup>116</sup> Christians are sent out into the world, so they need constantly to be reassured that they have been ‘equipped with the power of [the] Spirit, that they may be equal to such a burden.’<sup>117</sup> Or again, when the Christian feels isolated and worn down by the world which rejects both him and his God, it is then the Christian needs to know that Christ regards him ‘with a special affection.’<sup>118</sup> Calvin, however, does not restrict the Christian to meditating on the Word of God only. Take, for example, the special place Calvin gives to meditation on the future life, particularly in forming the attitude of the Christian to this present world and its claims and pleasures. Calvin constantly emphasizes that it is impossible for man, by his own strength, to rid himself of love for this present world. We have seen how those who are regenerate and in Christ, are liberated from the slavish love of the world, so that they can begin to taste the ‘pleasures of eternity.’ This is important in the theology of John Calvin because it is this experience alone which can deliver us from bondage to the earth. In other words, the Christian and the Christian alone is free to consider the ‘pleasures of eternity;’ he is then to



exercise that freedom to meditate on the future life, which Calvin believed, is such a blessed experience, that the Christian is further strengthened to withstand the still active claims and pleasures of the world.

This same principle is also important for the Christian for another reason. Although the Christian is a child of God, his present state is far short of the full glory of God's children, which is why Calvin goes on to say:

We are exposed to a thousand miseries and our souls to innumerable evils, so that we always find a hell within us. The more necessary is it that our senses should be withdrawn from the view of present things, lest the miseries by which we are on every side surrounded and almost overwhelmed should shake our trust in that happiness which as yet is hidden. For the apostle means that we act wrongly in estimating by the present state of things what God has bestowed upon us, when we ought with undoubting faith to hold to what does not yet appear.<sup>119</sup>

There is a natural and inevitable detachment from the world for the Christian in the understanding of Calvin, based on the Christian's relationship to Christ. It is as man becomes regenerate in Christ, that he is able, through participation by faith in the resurrection and ascension of Christ, to meditate on the future life. Detachment from this present world is restored to man in the gift of faith. His heart is then raised above the things of this world to the risen and ascended Christ, who is, of course, beyond this world. As we complete our consideration of the importance of meditation on the future life in the Christian's conflict with the world, we notice that 'the whole process of *meditatio futurae vitae* in the Christian life must be thought of as the restoration of the true order of nature.'<sup>120</sup>

The Christian is also to meditate on what could broadly be described as the 'glory of God.'<sup>121</sup> The glory of God for Calvin was not confined solely to the events of the Gospels but extends 'to the entire structure of the world.'<sup>122</sup> There is room therefore in Calvin's understanding of meditation, for the Christian thankfully to contemplate God's work in creation and for learning from its order. The place of natural theology in the devotional life is governed by the fact that in Christ are hid all treasures of wisdom and knowledge:

Beyond it there is nothing solid, nothing useful, nothing, in short, that is right or sound. Go abroad in heaven and earth and sea, you will never go beyond this without overstepping the lawful bounds of wisdom.<sup>123</sup>

Calvin also believed that there was a very real place for meditation on God's anger. Having the fear of God before our eyes, we may regulate our lives by it serving 'like a bridle to restrain [our] appetites and passions.'<sup>124</sup> Being aware that we live always under the One who sees and knows all we do and whose judgment we cannot escape, should serve to check and restrain our conduct. There is therefore a very real place for meditation of this sort for the Christian in his conflict with the world and its attractions and also of course, with his conflict with the flesh.

Calvin was, however, also aware that the cultivation of this kind of fear also had its dangers and limitations.

To contemplate solely the tokens of God's anger would plunge us into the dark death of despair, did we not at the same time discover anew that God is merciful, and thus become restored to life.<sup>125</sup>

An over-emphasis on the anger of God can generate a wrong kind of fear and awe of God which can, in fact, destroy all the confidence of our faith and stupefy us; but, by grounding it in the mercy of God, Calvin believed that meditation of this kind would play a significant part in the Christian's conflict, not only with the world, but also with the flesh and the devil.

### 4.3. Separation

If, as we said earlier, Christ came to separate the believer from the world, and if, through his relationship with Christ, the Christian is now detached from this world, what should be his attitude to this world, and what does 'separation' mean in practice? These and other related issues raised by such questions are important for Calvin, who urged his readers to work out the practical implications of detachment from this world,

not simply from motives of pure asceticism, nor merely as a necessary and regrettable condition imposed upon a man through his fall into concupiscence and through the prevalence of evil in his surroundings, but mainly because such an attitude is truly natural, to adopt it is to become truly human and to find the true meaning of this present life.<sup>126</sup>

It is the death and resurrection of Christ which makes detachment from this world possible, and it is the believer who is then called to participate in that death. Calvin believed that the Christian is exercised daily under the cross by God, that he may seek his true rest other than in this world.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, following on from what we have just discussed, the principle use of the cross in the theology of Calvin is also further to detach the Christian from this present life and to make him aspire towards the future life. The reason for the importance of the Christian identifying himself with and uniting himself to the death of Christ, is brought out clearly in Calvin's *Commentary* on Colossians:

No one can rise again with Christ, if he has not first died with Him. Hence he draws the argument from resurrection to death, as from a consequent to an antecedent, meaning that we must be dead to the world that we may live in Christ. Why did he teach that we must seek those things that are above? Because the life of the godly is above. Why does he now teach that the things that are on earth are to be set aside? Because they have died to the world. As if he said: 'Death precedes that resurrection of which I have spoken. Hence both of them must be seen in you.'<sup>128</sup>

The way in which God works in the life of the Christian to enable him to die to this world and truly live to Christ (resurrection) is by the sending of tribulation. Calvin argues that man, on the one hand, strives 'after heavenly immortality,' but, on the other hand, if we 'examine the plans, the efforts, the deeds of anyone, there you will find nothing but earth'. Because this 'double standard' applies to Christians too, Calvin goes on to say: 'To counter this evil the Lord instructs his followers in the vanity of the present life by continual proof of its miseries.' And then, a little later in the same section of the *Institutes*, he says:

Then only do we rightly advance by the discipline of the cross, when we learn that this life, judged in itself, is troubled, turbulent, unhappy in countless ways. . . From this, at the same time, we conclude that in this life we are to seek and hope for nothing but struggle; when we think of our crown, we are to raise our eyes to heaven. For this we must believe: that the mind is never seriously aroused to desire and ponder the life to come unless it be previously imbued with contempt for the present life.<sup>129</sup>

The Christian, as we have said, is not of this world because regeneration by the Holy Spirit means that the Christian is separated from the world. But he has, nonetheless, as Calvin

obviously recognizes, to live out that life in the world but in such a way as to have ‘contempt for the present life.’ We need now to examine this statement of Calvin’s to establish exactly what he meant by it.

Looking at this statement in isolation, we could very easily conclude that Calvin is urging his readers to take up a harsh ascetic lifestyle, to withdraw completely from the world and to enter into a monastic order. Nothing could be further from the truth.<sup>130</sup> In other writings, Calvin makes it clear that the Christian is free to enjoy the blessings of this life, provided the enjoyment does not in any way hinder his relationship with Christ. This is how Calvin puts it in his *Commentary* on John’s gospel:

He who is tied up by an immoderate desire for this present life and cannot leave the world without coercion, is said to love life. But he who despises this life and advances courageously to death, is said to hate life. Not that we should hate life absolutely, for it is justly reckoned among the highest of God’s blessings. But believers ought to lay it down cheerfully when it hinders their access to Christ. . . In short, it is not in itself wrong to love this life, provided we only journey in it as foreigners, always intent on our bourne.<sup>131</sup>

Unlike men in their fallen state, who, as we have seen<sup>132</sup> fix their mind and attention on this world, unable to rise above it and therefore making it their god, the Christian must be on his guard against excessive love of this earth. In other words, he is not to allow himself to enjoy, without restraint, the vain and perishable things of this world, lest they should draw him away from Christ. He should look for, and find, his joy in the gospel, rather than in the delights and pleasures of this world. The world after all is transitory, as indeed are all things in this world, including man himself. This, Calvin believed, is often overlooked and results in the misuse of the gifts of God, because too frequently the Christian entertains the delusion that he will go on forever in this world:

all the things which make for the enriching of this present life are sacred gifts of God, but we spoil them by our misuse of them. If we want to know the reason why, it is because we are always entertaining the delusion that we will go on forever in this world. The result is that the very things which ought to be of assistance to us in our pilgrimage through life, become chains which bind us. In order to shake us out of our stupor the apostle quite rightly calls us back to think about the shortness of this life. From this he infers that the way in which we ought to make use of all the things of this world, is, as if we do not possess them. For the man who thinks of himself as an alien sojourner in the world, uses the things of the world as if they belonged to someone else; in other words, as things which are lent for the day only. The point is that the mind of a Christian ought not to be filled with thoughts of earthly things, or find satisfaction in them, for we ought to be living as if we might have to leave this world at any moment.<sup>133</sup>

I have quoted the above passage at length, because it summarizes clearly Calvin’s position concerning the right attitude, for the Christian, to the things of this world. Whilst on the one hand Calvin urges a certain contempt for the things of this world, on the other hand, he is careful to mitigate that contempt in order to guard against an unqualified hatred of the world. There is therefore this paradoxical truth in Calvin’s theology: ‘that we are able to love this life truly only when we have truly learned first to despise this life’<sup>134</sup>, and it is through this paradoxical truth that the Christian is able to find the true meaning of this present life.

In the theology of Calvin, we also notice what is for him, the inevitable link between contempt for this world and self-denial. As Wallace puts it: ‘Therefore Calvin looks on

contempt for this world as a correlative of self-denial.’<sup>135</sup> Not only should the Christian learn to hate whatever it is of this world which draws him away from Christ, but he should also reflect the same attitude towards himself, if his love for this present world makes him indulge in self-love and give way to the power of concupiscence in his heart. The importance of self-denial will be explored more fully in Part Two. Suffice it to say at this point that, in his conflict with the world, the Christian is to recognize whatever it is of the world which holds him in bondage and to take the appropriate steps in self-denial to ensure that bondage is broken.

Calvin’s attitude to the blessings of this life is, perhaps surprisingly, very positive. The benefits of this life are not to be rejected, but rather used, enjoyed and acknowledged with thanksgiving and faith. He did not therefore believe that God is angry when men enjoy themselves, provided that enjoyment is in a holy manner. In other words, Calvin was not advocating a hard line asceticism when talking of self-denial, but rather that the Christian should be moderate in his desire for worldly pleasures. This theme of moderation is also important in the theology of Calvin. Moderation in the desire of worldly comfort is, for Calvin, ‘One of the main differences between the ungodly and the people of God.’ The people of God can ‘restrain immoderate and irregular desires for worldly comforts and pleasures, whereas the former [that is, ungodly] rush into excess in many varied ways.’<sup>136</sup> Moderation in the Christian life is therefore a sign of a well-ordered life, and is, for Calvin, visible evidence of the reality of the restoration of true order.

Having said that Christ came to separate the Christian from the world and having discussed the right attitude of the Christian to the world, we must further examine what Calvin meant by ‘separateness.’ The Christian, as we have said, is in the world, but not of the world. He is free to enjoy certain blessings of this present life, in moderation, and at the same time he is to hold this present life in contempt, to remain separate from this world.

Separation, in the first place, means that the Christian is to separate himself from unbelievers. The motivation for this should be gratitude to God for what he has done for the believer in Christ, to ensure that the light of the gospel is not quenched by the world:

Moreover He accuses of ingratitude all who do not separate themselves from unbelievers, even after they have been taught by the Gospel. For the higher the excellence of this blessing of being called from darkness into light, the less excuse have they who, through indolence or neglect quench the light once kindled in them.<sup>137</sup>

The primary motivation for separation however, should be the desire for holiness<sup>138</sup>. We see in the theology of Calvin how separation and sanctification are inextricably linked. The word sanctification ‘denotes separation’<sup>139</sup> (as well as election) as far as Calvin is concerned and the separation he has in mind is both negative and positive. It is negative in the sense that it involves a conscious decision of the will to separate, to some extent, from fellowship with the ungodly, which is then to be accompanied with the positive step of the believer actively seeking the fellowship<sup>140</sup> and company of those who fear God. We begin to see here the importance of the Church<sup>141</sup> in Calvin’s theology. The Church for Calvin is, quite simply, an elect<sup>142</sup> community separated from the world, such separation being one aspect of the biblical idea of holiness. The members of the Church must be separated from evil in order to be sanctified and separated from unrighteousness to become devoted to God. Such separation, Calvin believed, was natural and inevitable for the Christian, because, if he is really consecrated to Christ and living by faith, he will naturally ‘detest and abhor whatever is

incompatible with such a relationship to Christ.<sup>143</sup> The things which belong to this world are, after all, ‘completely at variance with God.’<sup>144</sup>

Whilst Calvin certainly believed that Christians should separate from the world, collectively within the confines of the Church, he was also careful to guard against the desire of some, such as the Anabaptists, of trying to form ‘an ideal community composed of the righteous and the saintly.’<sup>145</sup> Throughout his life, Calvin opposed the separation and rigorism of the Anabaptists who ‘transferred the emphasis from the purity of doctrine and confession to the purity of the believers.’<sup>146</sup> Recognizing that the Christian cannot clearly distinguish the righteous from the reprobate, and that Christians themselves remain sinners throughout their lives, Calvin therefore rejected the teaching of the Anabaptists,<sup>147</sup> as he believed it would be ‘presumptuous and practically impossible for access to the Church to be restricted to the perfect alone.’<sup>148</sup> Indeed, Calvin himself accepted that in the Church

are mingled many hypocrites who have nothing of Christ but the name and outward appearance. There are very many ambitious, greedy, envious persons, evil speakers, and some of quite unclean life.<sup>149</sup>

Nonetheless, because those who belong to the true Church<sup>150</sup> are known to God alone, Calvin argued that ‘we are commanded to revere and keep communion with the latter, which is called “church”, in respect to men.’<sup>151</sup> Although stressing therefore, the importance of the Church as the vehicle by which the Christian is to separate himself from the world, Calvin also recognized that the visible Church contained many people who were definitely ‘worldly’ within it. Whilst arguing on the one hand that the Church was to be holy, Calvin, on the other hand, recognized that it was unrealistic and contrary to the teachings of Scripture to expect a Church to be totally unspoilt by the world. In answer to the Anabaptists’ claim that the Church of Christ is holy (Eph. 5:6), Calvin said:

But in order that they may know that the church is at the same time mingled of good men and bad, let them hear the parable from Christ’s lips that compares the church to a net in which all kinds of fish are gathered and are not sorted until laid out on the shore (Matt. 13:47-58). Let them hear that it is like a field sown with good seed which is through the enemy’s deceit scattered with tares and is not purged of them until the harvest is brought into the threshing floor (Matt. 13:24-30).

This leaves Calvin to conclude that, if the Lord declares that the Church is to labour under this evil, ‘they are vainly seeking a church besmirched with no blemish.’<sup>152</sup>

There were in fact, a number of issues over which Calvin and the Anabaptists disagreed. Calvin was, however, wise enough to see that even those who disagreed with him

were pointing to needy areas. Anabaptist teaching influenced him up to a point. Calvin was concerned about the sanctified life, but not perfection; Church discipline, but not rigorism; independence from the state but not separation.

Whether Calvin correctly understood his Anabaptist opponents is open to debate, but he certainly took issue with them ‘on theology, ethics and religious experience. He denounced them because he understood them to substitute subjective religious experience for the objective written Word of God.’<sup>153</sup>

Having said that, this in no way minimizes the importance Calvin attached both to the role of the Church and the need for separation:

It is only within the fellowship of the Church that we can find ourselves in the true relationship of separation from this world, for separation from the world is not something we can achieve for ourselves as isolated individuals. Separation, like sanctification, is a work which God accomplishes with His Church.<sup>154</sup>

Separation must always be seen then, as a collective separation within the Church on the one hand, and separation from the world on the other. The Sacrament of Baptism<sup>155</sup> highlights this division for Calvin. Baptism is very much a sign of division between the Church and the world, separating those within from those without, which proclaims that salvation cannot be hoped for 'unless we be separated from the world.'<sup>156</sup> As Wallace puts it:

Not only does Baptism proclaim that such a separation is necessary, it also itself constitutes the way by which men can take the step which separates them from evil, and, along with the other ordinances of the Church, it actually effects that separation.<sup>157</sup>

When we remember that, for Calvin, the Sacramental signs must be regarded by faith as accompanied by what they signify, we can begin to understand why he thought it sacrilegious for a baptized person not to remain separate from evil:

And therefore all they that name themselves as belonging to the Church, and yet nevertheless are disorderly and dissolute persons shall one day feel what a sacrilege it is to have so profaned their Baptism, which God had ordained for their salvation.<sup>158</sup>

It is then, in and through the Church that believers are united in one body in order that they may become separated and then sanctified. Again, we must be careful to balance Calvin's teaching on the believer 'withdrawing' into the Church, with his teaching on the Church's relationship with the world.<sup>159</sup> Unless this is done, it could be argued that Calvin advocated an isolationist or insular approach of the Church to the world, which could, of course, lead to the Christian glorying in and taking pride in their isolation.

As we have already said, Calvin did teach that believers should not seek fellowship with the ungodly, but he also recognized that the Christian must inevitably associate, to some extent, with the un-godly<sup>160</sup> whilst he is in the world, as the world is made up of them:

It is true that one sun shines on all of us, we all eat the same bread and breathe the same air, and we cannot sever completely all connexion with them.

What Calvin clearly taught, was that whilst believers cannot avoid ordinary dealings with the ungodly, they must avoid 'participation in actions which Christians cannot lawfully share.'<sup>161</sup> His belief was that, if the Christian has intimate fellowship with the ungodly, they are much more likely to influence him for evil than the Christian is likely to influence them for good. 'Our main reason for maintaining such separation from the society of the ungodly is simply that it is dangerous.'<sup>162</sup> The Christian, in his conflict with the world, is not to deceive himself by imagining he is stronger than he really is. As Wallace points out, Calvin often appears to argue against the Christian indulging himself in the world's pleasures, even if there is no law forbidding it, on the grounds that it is wrong if it is dangerous:

Therefore it is no use asking Calvin where such things are forbidden in Holy Scripture. A drunkard could also ask, "where is wine-drinking forbidden?" Such an approach would justify drunkenness for wine-drinking is not forbidden. The obvious answer is, 'You can take what you can hold.' But Calvin obviously regards dancing, etc. as a universally dangerous pastime leading men to an excess they cannot avoid, and this is why it is generally wrong in his eyes.<sup>163</sup>

The Christian then, cannot avoid dealings with the ungodly, but can and must avoid fellowship with the unclean works of darkness. And because the Church is a gathering of people who have come out of the world, the Christian is to seek to ensure that the Church itself, is cleansed as far as possible from evil.<sup>164</sup> The toleration of evil within the Church must inevitably weaken and negate the witness of God's people. For this reason, the private efforts of each man in his own sphere of Church life are required if the Church is to be purified. At the same time, Calvin acknowledged that it is God alone who can truly cleanse the Church,<sup>165</sup> which He will do in his own time. In the meantime, the Christian is to bear with evils which it is not in his power to correct. This toleration however is not to extend to errors of doctrine:

For the situation is not like that in morality, where vices which cannot be mended have to be endured. But ungodly errors which infect the purity of the faith must certainly not be endured.<sup>166</sup>

The reason why this was so important in the theology of Calvin, was because of his understanding of the importance of the Church in the Christian's collective conflict with the world.<sup>167</sup> The Christian is elected and separated within the Church, not solely for the purpose of his own individual satisfaction and salvation, but primarily so that collectively they might be witnesses:

. . . all believers ought to strive to bring together the Church on every side by whatever ways they can. It is on this condition that we are called by the Law that everyone should seek to bring others, should strive to lead the wanderers back to the road, should stretch forth a hand to the fallen and should win over the outsiders.<sup>168</sup>

This is Calvin's corrective to guard against the Christian becoming proud in his isolation or privileges. Separation from the world should make Christians tireless in toiling to share their faith with others, that they in turn might be won out of the world for Christ. The witness that Calvin has in mind, is not simply the witness given by isolated individuals, but 'within and through the witnessing fellowship of the Church. The Church is the sphere in and through which the witness of Christ's people to Himself is most potently given.'<sup>169</sup>

The Christian's conflict with the world also includes then, this dimension of rescuing others out of the world and leading them to salvation in Christ, to continue the process of restoration of true order. Recognizing that this too is a battle, and knowing also the Christian's propensity towards defeat and despair in the midst of affliction, Calvin urges the Christian to consider the 'examples of the saints' who endured great hardship for the sake of the gospel:

For although we may readily agree that we ought to endure affliction for the Gospel's sake, our knowledge of our own weakness makes us tremble and we think we shall be unable to do what we ought. When that happens we should remember the example of the saints which should help to make us more courageous.<sup>170</sup>

This is to include not only the saints of the past, but also the examples of the living saints. Every Christian, Calvin taught, should play his part in this, as he believed there was mutual

strength and encouragement for the body of Christ as a whole, in the midst of this conflict, as each Christian adds his 'own witness and testimony in thanksgiving before the assembly of God's people.'<sup>171</sup> As Calvin himself said: 'It is highly necessary that every one should publicly celebrate his experience of the grace of God, as an example to others to confide in him.'<sup>172</sup>

(To be continued).

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Endnotes:

- 1) Cf. Calvin J. *Commentaries* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984, p. 64.
- 2) *Ibid.*, p. 64f.
- 3) *Ibid.*, p. 65.
- 4) Niesel, W. *The Theology of Calvin*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1956, p. 63: 'The Statement that he brought the world into being out of nothing proves Him to be the One who above is eternal and self-existent'.
- 5) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Gen. 1:1.
- 6) *Ibid.*, Gen. 1:31
- 7) *Ibid.*, Gen. 3:1, footnote no. 4.
- 8) *Ibid.*, Gen. 1:26.
- 9) Calvin J. *Institutes* 1:14:22. Niesel, *op.cit.*, p. 63f. 'This of course does not imply the greatness of man: we are intended rather to recognize in consequence the power and the goodness of the eternal self-existent God.'
- 10) Partee, C. *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977, p. 46. When talking of creation, Partee makes the point that 'Philosophers do not understand God's work in creation' and goes on to say, when talking of Plato and Aristotle, that 'neither philosopher has a doctrine of creation'. Calvin actually criticizes the Platonic view 'that God is the architect rather than the creator of the world', p. 47. Cf. Calvin. J. *Commentaries*, John 1.3.
- 11) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Gen. 1.26
- 12) *Ibid.*, Gen. 3:17.
- 13) *Loc. cit.*
- 14) *Ibid.*, Rom. 8:21.
- 15) Hall, C.A.M. *With the Spirit's Sword. The Drama of Spiritual Warfare in the Theology of John Calvin*. Zurich: P.G. Keller, 1963, p. 42.



- 16) *Ibid.*, p 42.
- 17) *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- 18) Calvin, J. *Institutes* 1:14:1.
- 19) Wallace, R. S. *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1959, p. 106.
- 20) *Loc. cit.*
- 21) *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- 22) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 3:9:1.
- 23) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 123.
- 24) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Psalms 119: 144.
- 25) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 124.
- 26) *Loc. cit.*
- 27) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, 2 Pet. 1:4.
- 28) *Ibid.*, Eph. 2:2.
- 29) Van Buren, P. Christ in our Place: The Substitutionary Character of Calvin's Doctrine of Reconciliation, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd. 1957, p. 6. Cf. Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, 1 John 4:10.
- 30) *Ibid.*, Eph. 6:12.
- 31) *Ibid.*, Eph 2:2.
- 32) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 204.
- 33) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Gal. 1:4.
- 34) *Ibid.*, 1 John 2:15.
- 35) *Ibid.*, John 11:9.
- 36) Milner, B.J. *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, Leiden: E J. Brill, 1977, p. 46. Since the world was created for the sake of man, and together with him glorified God, and since it fell with man in his detection from original righteousness, so now its restoration is contingent upon the salvation of man, *i.e.*, the Church. Cf. Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Psalms 96:10.
- 37) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 107.
- 38) Niesel, *op. cit.*, p. 128. Christ 'has died the one decisive death and He alone has overcome death with the effect that in Him the divine image in man is restored. Our part is to share in His death and resurrection.'

- 39) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, 2 Cor. 3:18.
- 40) Gaffin, R.B. 'The Holy Spirit', *The Westminster Theological Journal* Vol. 43. 1980/81, p. 61.
- 41) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Luke 17:20.
- 42) Jansen, J.F. *Calvin's Doctrine of the Work of Christ*, London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1956, p. 88.
- 43) Peterson, R. A. *Calvin's Doctrine of the Atonement*, Phillipsburg: The Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1983, p. 46, note 1.
- 44) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Matt. 12:29.
- 45) Jansen, *op cit.*, p. 89.
- 46) Calvin's 'Christus Victor' theme obviously has direct relevance not only to the Christian's conflict with the world, but also his conflict with the flesh and the devil.
- 47) Jansen, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
- 48) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Isaiah 53:11.
- 49) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 124.
- 50) Calvin, J. *Commentaries* John 12:31.
- 51) *Ibid.*, 13:31.
- 52) Calvin, J. *Institutes* 1:21:1.
- 53) Milner, *op. cit.*, p. 11, note 2. Calvin's yearning for order shows 'the influence of Stoicism upon the young humanistic scholar'. See also Partee *op. cit.*, p. 111. For a summary of the way in which Calvin opposes the Stoic philosophy, see pp. 116-125.
- 54) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
- 55) *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- 56) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, James 5:7.
- 57) Wallace, *op cit.*, p. 111.
- 58) See Höpfl, H. *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- 59) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
- 60) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, John 12:31.
- 61) *Ibid.*, Matt. 6:10.
- 62) Calvin believed his doctrine of salvation to be entirely Scriptural and basically Augustinian. Partee claims that it 'cannot be judged completely successful' even though he cannot come up

with a superior alternative. His complaint is that Calvin's emphasis 'falls on Trinitarian distinctions rather than on God's unity in the work of salvation', *op. cit.*, p. 89.

- 63) Calvin, J. *Institutes* 1:15:4.
- 64) *Ibid.*, 2:1:8.
- 65) 'While the actualization of sin lies in man, Calvin also insists that it is absurd to say that God saves the elect and the reprobate damn themselves'. As Partee goes on to point out, 'this is certainly a paradox if not an outright contradiction. The cause of election and reprobation is not in man but in God. The cause of reprobation, though hidden, must be considered just.' *Op. cit.*, p. 81. See the following pages for further discussion on Calvin's theology concerning the elect and reprobate, particularly the problems it raises.
- 66) See Niesel, *op. cit.*, p. 128f. for an outline of the eschatological character of Calvin's teaching on communion with Christ.
- 67) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 2:3:6.
- 68) Niesel, *op. cit.*, p. 27, 'The goal of our Biblical study must be Jesus Christ: He is the Mediator in whom alone God communicates Himself to us'.
- 69) Satisfaction, in Calvin's theology, does not 'imply any opposition between Father and Son, for that would be an opposition of God within Himself'. See van Buren, *op. cit.*, p. 74ff. for an explanation of Calvin's view of satisfaction. We note, too, that the unity of the Father and the Son is ensured in Calvin's theology, 'not by any force of monothelism, but by the obedience of Christ, His obedience even unto the death of the cross', *ibid.*, p. 37. *Cf.*, p. 9ff.
- 70) *Ibid.*, p. 78.
- 71) *Ibid.*, p. 95. This union with Christ is described by van Buren as 'Incorporation' which he links to substitution. 'Incorporation means the realization of substitution. It focuses attention even more strongly on our total dependence on our Substitute'.
- 72) Partee, *op. cit.*, 'Calvin's view of the *summum bonum* as union with Christ is not indebted to the philosophers'.
- 73) Van Buren, *op. cit.*, p. 100: 'The principle work that the Holy Spirit accomplishes, according to Calvin, is the gift of faith, the opening up of man to receive Christ and to know what Christ is for him'. *Cf.* Calvin, J. *Institutes* 3:1:4.
- 74) Wendel, F. *Calvin*, Glasgow: Collins, 1980, p. 239.
- 75) Gaffin, *op. cit.*, p. 61: 'This Spirit-worked union gives a share in all Christ's saving benefits. Without it we have nothing, neither justification, nor sanctification, nor anything else. The application of redemption in its entirety is suspended on the work of the Holy Spirit in sovereignly uniting sinners to the exalted Christ'.
- 76) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, John 14:20.
- 77) Van Buren, *op. cit.*, p. 99.
- 78) *Ibid.*, p. 97.

- 79) Partee, *op. cit.*, p. 89: Whilst Calvin emphasized that salvation was ‘already accomplished’ that did not ‘remove the imperative or urgency of ethical action’. *Ibid.*, p. 75: ‘Calvin’s exposition of salvation is not merely a goal toward which ethical conduct aims as with philosophers. Salvation is already present as the context within which man acts’.
- 80) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Colossians 2:6.
- 81) Yet it should be noted that the word ‘faith’, in Calvin’s theology, shows we have not yet attained what Christ procured for us by His death. Van Buren, *op. cit.*, p. 106: ‘Hence it follows that, on the part of God, our salvation is completed, while the full enjoyment of it is delayed till the end of our warfare’.
- 82) Calvin, J. *Institutes* 4:8:8.
- 83) Leith, J.H. ‘John Calvin—Theologian of the Bible’ *Interpretation* Vol. XXV, No. 3. 1971. p. 330. Calvin is certainly reticent concerning his own Christian experience, but ‘there is significant indication that hearing the voice of the living God in the Scripture was basic to it’. This may well help us to understand the tremendous emphasis which Calvin placed on the Word of God.
- 84) Van Buren, *op. cit.*, p. 116. The completeness of this victory is brought out when he says ‘United to Christ by His Spirit through faith, we are united to Him in His Resurrection as we have been united to Him in His death. He is and remains our substitute. Therefore, He lives in glory in our place and for us. Death itself cannot take this from us.’
- 85) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, 1 John 5:4.
- 86) *Loc. cit.*
- 87) *Ibid.*, 1 John 5:5.
- 88) Calvin, J. *Institutes* 3:2:7.
- 89) Partee, *op. cit.*, p. 76f. ‘Calvin’s intention to locate salvation entirely in God is clear and commendable, but its development is finally incomprehensible, as Calvin recognizes,’ leading as it does to such questions as: Why does God bestow grace on a few which could be justly denied to all? Why does God correct the Vice in the elect but not in the reprobate? Why does God not save all men? and so forth.
- 90) Calvin, J. *Institutes* 3:2:12.
- 91) Milner, *op. cit.*, p. 61f. The bond between the two is brought out clearly by him when he says: ‘It is simply by believing in the gospel, then, that election is known, because faith itself. . . , as the work of the Holy Spirit, is the only sign of election. Whereas it was necessary to say earlier: only the elect are effectually called; now it is necessary to say: election is known only through effectual calling (faith)’.
- 92) Niesel, *op. cit.*, p. 39.1, ‘Calvin’s opinions about the relation of Word and Spirit are governed by the insight that the one theme of Holy Scripture is the incarnate Word itself’. See pp 30-39 for a fuller description of the relation between Word and Spirit.
- 93) Van Buren, *op. cit.*, p. 100: ‘Where faith is found, there is God in Christ at work as the Spirit, and therefore the assurance of union with Christ’.

- 94) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, 1 John 5:5.
- 95) *Ibid.*, Col. 2:6.
- 96) *Ibid.*, John 14:19.
- 97) *Ibid.*, 1 John 4:5.
- 98) Milner, *op. cit.*, p. 9. This organic view is carried through to Calvin's understanding of the Church. This growth, including a historical understanding of the Church, 'is not cancerous, but harmonious and purposive' and significantly 'implicit in the notion of organism . . . is the conception of order'.
- 99) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Col. 2:7.
- 100) *Ibid.*, John 17:16.
- 101) *Ibid.*, 1 John 3:1
- 102) *Ibid.*, John 15:19.
- 103) *Ibid.*, John 16:33.
- 104) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 132.
- 105) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Psalms 128:3.
- 106) *Cf. ibid.*, 85:13.
- 107) *Ibid.*, 37:9.
- 108) *Ibid.*, Matt. 5:10.
- 109) *Ibid.*, Joshua 1:8. *Cf.* Psalms 119:15
- 110) *Cf. Ibid.*, Psalms 39:2; 38:15.
- 111) *Cf. Ibid.*, 19:11.
- 112) *Cf. Ibid.*, 119:116.
- 113) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 225.
- 114) *Cf.* Calvin. J. *Commentaries*, Psalms 77:11.
- 115) Van Buren, *op. cit.*, p. 113. Calvin was, however, always careful to guard against any suggestion that Christ is simply our pattern and that we are to follow His example as our own. Meditation for Calvin never included the simple idea of the imitation of Christ, because that overlooked the 'whole significance of His substitutionary character and our incorporation into Him by the Power of His Spirit'.
- 116) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, John 17:12.
- 117) *Loc. cit.*, v. 18.

- 118) *Loc. cit.*, v. 25.
- 119) *Ibid.*, 1 John 3:2.
- 120) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 125.
- 121) *Ibid.*, p. 220.
- 122) *Loc. cit.*
- 123) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*. Eph. 3:18
- 124) *Ibid.*, Psalms 36:1.
- 125) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 223.
- 126) *Ibid.*, p. 125.
- 127) *Cf.* Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Psalms 147:6.
- 128) *Ibid.*, Col. 3:3.
- 129) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 3:9:1.
- 130) *Cf.* Niesel, *op. cit.*, p. 141.
- 131) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, John 12:25. Note the Augustinian theme of the Christian as the alien journeying through this world and using its blessings only with a view to reaching his home in the next world.
- 132) See p. 104.
- 133) *Ibid.*, 1 Cor. 7:29-30.
- 134) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 130.
- 135) *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- 136) *Ibid.*, p. 170.
- 137) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, John 12:46.
- 138) Van Buren, *op. cit.*, p. 112. When Calvin talks of the holiness of Christians, he means primarily 'the holiness of Christ, in whom every Christian has his being and only secondarily the holiness they actually achieve'. There are therefore two aspects of holiness. In the first place we are holy because Christ is holy, 'the primary aspect of sanctification which rests solely on substitution', and a second aspect which takes place in us as we are 'renewed to true holiness by the Spirit'.
- 139) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, 1 Cor. 1:2.
- 140) Niesel, *op. cit.*, p. 188. The Church for Calvin was 'not a rigid institution but a living organism, a fellowship of mutual service and helpfulness. The thought of the Body of Christ, of the communion of saints, is necessarily bound up with the view that the church is the mother of believers' . . . with 'Jesus Christ alone as its ruler and head'.

- 141) Milner, *op. cit.*, p. 58. Important because the Church for Calvin 'is the history of the restoration of order in the world; now we may say that the deepest ground for this lies in his conception of the church as the sphere of the regenerating activity of the Spirit'.
- 142) Niesel, *op. cit.*, p. 191: 'According to Calvin's theory of the church, the fact of its election gives to the church its peace and certainty and the impetus which it needs for its ministry in this world'. Milner sees the Church as 'the point of intersection between the world and the elect'. *Op. cit.*, p. 171.
- 143) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 203.
- 144) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, 1 John 2:15.
- 145) Wendel, *op. cit.*, p. 297.
- 146) Balke, W. *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962, p. 230. For a fuller account of Calvin's differences with the Anabaptists over separation, see pp. 228-235.
- 147) Wyneken, K.H. 'Calvin and Anabaptism' *Concordia Theological Quarterly* XXXVI, January 1965, p. 29. Calvin believed that the faulty perfectionism of the Anabaptists cast its shadow over their theology. It affected both their attitude toward civil authority, and their ecclesiology and also had an adverse effect, he believed, on their personal beliefs and piety. This leads Wyneken to conclude: 'This is perhaps the outstanding insight developed consistently in the anti-radical polemics of the Institutes'.
- 148) Wendel, *op. cit.*, p. 298.
- 149) Calvin, J. *Institutes*: 4:1:7.
- 150) See Niesel, *op. cit.*, p. 191f. The concept of the invisible Church of all the elect within the visible Church formed an integral part of Calvin's theology of the Church. The same concept was present in Augustine. See also Milner, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69. There are those who claim that the Platonic view of the sensible and intelligible realms may be applied to Calvin's doctrine of the visible and invisible Church (and also his doctrine of the Church and sacraments). Partee, *op. cit.*, p. 112, cites this 'as an example of the tendency to find affinities between Calvin and Plato where none seem to exist'. To follow his argument see p. 112 ff.
- 151) Calvin, J. *Institutes* 4:1:7.
- 152) *Loc. cit.*, 13.
- 153) Smeeton, D.D. 'Calvin's Conflict with the Anabaptists' *The Evangelical Quarterly* Vol. LIV, 1982, p. 54.
- 154) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 204.
- 155) Calvin advocated the baptism of adults who were strangers to the Christian Church and the baptism of children of believers. For a discussion of his views of baptism compared with the Anabaptism position see Balke, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-223.
- 156) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, 1 Peter 3:21.

- 157) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 205.
- 158) Calvin, J. *Sermons*, Eph. 2: 13-15.
- 159) Milner, *op. cit.*, p. 195: 'The conception of the church as the restoration of order in the world means that the church cannot be thought of apart from the world, or as a secure corner of redemption in it. That is so, because the order which is being restored in the church is nothing else than restoration of the *imago dei* in man. . . The restoration of man will thus entail the restoration of order in the world.'
- 160) Balke, *op. cit.*, p. 276. Calvin opposed the Anabaptist idea of separation from the world. He considered that 'total separation from the world to be impossible'. For a fuller account of the differences between Calvin and the Anabaptists on separation from the world, see pp. 275-278.
- 161) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, 2 Cor. 6:14.
- 162) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 235.
- 163) *Loc. cit.*, note 2.
- 164) See Niesel, *op. cit.*, p. 197f. for an outline of the importance of Church discipline in Calvin's thinking. For the role of the Spirit in discipline see Milner, *op. cit.*, p. 177f.
- 165) Niesel, *op. cit.*, p. 195: 'Calvin rejected in an impassioned way the delusive ideal of a spotless church. For in church life it is not a question of striving to attain an ideal community but of accepting the life in fellowship which Christ bestows upon us. What is at issue is the living reality of Christ, not the formation of a circle of pious men'. Cf. Calvin, J. *Institutes* 4:1:13. Calvin agreed with the Anabaptists regarding the necessity of discipline. 'He was not interested in the purity of the church as such. He was motivated rather by a respect for the 'honour of God' and a pastoral concern for the sinner'. Balke, *op. cit.*, p. 223. For the differences between Calvin and the Anabaptists on discipline, see pp. 223-228.
- 166) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Matt. 13:24.
- 167) Niesel, *op. cit.*, p. 209: 'Calvin was under no illusions about the fact that the church is committed to warfare in this world and must always be militant. The power of endurance is not promised to the church as such, but only to the church in so far as it abides in Christ'.
- 168) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Heb. 10:24.
- 169) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 238.
- 170) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, 2 Cor. 1:6.
- 171) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 239.
- 172) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Psalms 26:12.