

The Theology of John Calvin. Part Three: The Christian's Conflict with the Devil.

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1. Origin and Nature

When we examine the writings of Calvin concerned with the origin of Satan, two points stand out. The sixteenth century has been referred to as 'the devil's golden age'¹ and many of the writings on demonology of that period, particularly those of Luther's disciples, were heavily influenced by popular superstition.² Calvin's writings, on the other hand, reflect little of the popular conception of devils and are remarkably free from superstition.³

The second point we notice is just how little he actually says about the origin of the devil. Calvin recognizes that Scripture does not provide us with enough material to provide a comprehensive demonology and so therefore refuses to be drawn into philosophical speculation. This is illustrated by the way in which, in his *Commentary* on Genesis 3, he identifies the serpent with Satan, and talks about his nature but not about his origin or fall, because it is not directly referred to in the text itself. Or again, if we look at his *Commentaries* on Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14, which are passages taken by some commentators to refer to the creation and fall of Satan, Calvin refuses to speculate on this and limits his interpretation of the text to a literal application to the King of Tyre and the King of Babylon respectively. His approach to demonology is therefore best summed up in these words:

'Some persons grumble that Scripture does not in numerous passages set forth systematically and clearly that fall of the devil's, its cause, manner, time, and character. But because this has nothing to do with us, it was better not to say anything, or at least to touch upon it lightly, because it did not befit the Holy Spirit to feed our curiosity with empty histories to no effect. And we see that the Lord's purpose was to teach nothing in his sacred oracles except what we should learn to our edification.'⁴

This approach of Calvin's governs his whole attitude to demonology and is the basis on which he is able to reject both the popular superstitions which plagued Protestant conceptions of Satan and the excessive speculation about evil angels so characteristic of Catholic theology.⁵

When Calvin does refer to the origin of the devil and demons, he does so to discredit dualism and to guard against the accusation of some, that Satan was created by God with his present evil nature. There is no room, in the theology of Calvin, for the view of Satan being, as it were, the God of evil and darkness opposed to the God of righteousness and light.⁶ Whilst Calvin may not say much about the origin of the devil, what he does say leaves us in no doubt that Satan was created by God (and is therefore subservient to Him) and that his present evil nature cannot be attributed to God in any way. We are, therefore, to content ourselves, as Calvin puts it, with a 'brief summary of the nature of devils: they were when first created angels of God, but by degeneration they ruined themselves, and became the instruments of ruin for others.'⁷ This alone, Calvin believes, is 'profitable to know,' because

this is all that can be deduced from Scripture. Where this is 'plainly taught' in Scripture as in 2 Pet. 2:4 and Jude 6

God has made known what is useful for us to know, that the devils were originally created to obey God, that they fell from grace through their own fault because they did not submit to God's rule; and therefore that the wickedness which cleaves to them was accidental and not organic to their nature, so that it cannot be attributed to God.⁸

In other words God did not spare those angels who sinned. They lost their original nature, and their defection was punished by God: 'Jude means that they paid the penalty for despising the goodness of God and lapsing from their original vocation.' They therefore 'left their proper habitation' and the 'dreadful picture of the penalty' as Calvin saw it, is brought out in these words which also tell us a little more about their nature and also their situation since their rebellion:

Not only had they been free Spirits but also heavenly dominations: now they are held in the grip of perpetual bondage. Not only had they enjoyed the glorious light of God, but His splendour was reflected in them, that they might diffuse themselves, like the rays of the sun, to every corner of the earth. Now however, they are plunged into darkness.

Since they apostatized and lost their dignity, their condition is now miserable,

wherever they may travel, they draw their chains after them, and remain involved in their own shades. And meanwhile their final torment is put off to the last day.⁹

We notice at this point, that Calvin, in the above quotation, is talking of 'devils' in the plural. Scripture makes plain, he argues, 'that there are not one, not two, nor a few foes, but great armies which wage war' against the Christian. But, as Christ is the Head of the Church and the fellowship of the Saints, so, in the theology of Calvin, Satan is the head of the 'impious and impiety itself'¹⁰ which includes fallen angels:

Christ contrasts Himself with the devil who is head of all the reprobate. All the devils are rebel angels, but Scripture in many passages ascribe headship to one who gathers to destruction all the ungodly as in one body.¹¹

We begin to see here, in Calvin's theology, the idea of two kingdoms being opposed to each other: 'the frequent mention of Satan or the devil in the singular denotes the empire of wickedness opposed to the Kingdom of Righteousness.'¹² For clarification, we must also note that Calvin interchanges his terminology using 'Satan' and 'the devil', 'devils' and 'demons' to describe the same.

Satan and demons, then, were created by God to serve and obey Him. They were not evil at this point, as Calvin, in accordance with Scripture, will not ascribe to God the creation of any evil or corrupt nature. The devil himself was not wicked by nature or creation, nor was he or is he equal to God. The malice which Calvin attributes to the devil's nature came 'not from his creation but from his perversion. For, whatever he has that is to be condemned he has derived from his revolt and fall.'¹³ Scripture makes it plain, Calvin argued, that Satan did not come forth in his present condition from God. To leave us in no doubt, Calvin takes as his final authority the words of Christ Himself:

For this reason, Christ declares that ‘when Satan lies, he speaks according to his own nature’ and states the reason, because ‘he abode not in the truth’ (John 8:44). Indeed, when Christ states that Satan ‘abode not in the truth,’ he hints that he was once in it, and when he makes him ‘the father of lies,’ he deprives him of imputing to God the fault which he brought upon himself.¹⁴

The reason therefore, that the devil is a liar, is because he chose to revolt from the truth. That he is a liar, to underline what has already been said, ‘arises not from his nature having been always contrary to truth, but because he fell from it by a voluntary fall.’¹⁵ We have made mention of the fact in Part Two that man sins of necessity but without compulsion. This, in fact, is rooted by Calvin in the revolt of the devil himself, ‘who can only do evil, yet sins with his will.’¹⁶ In Calvin’s theology, the term ‘necessity’ always leaves room for the term ‘voluntary.’¹⁷ To use a simple analogy to understand this concept in Calvin, people, he points out, eat necessarily but also voluntarily.

Satan’s rebellion is seen as irrevocable in that he is ‘without any hope of release’ as he was ‘long ago sentenced and doomed to Gehenna,’¹⁸ and, because of that, Satan is therefore the irreconcilable enemy of God. His aim is to bring the whole of creation in rebellion against God, thus destroying the order that was the hallmark of creation before the Fall. Man is central in Satan’s strategy in bringing about this rebellion:

Since he was the adversary of God he attempted to subvert the order established by Him, and because he could not drag God from His throne, he assailed man, in whom His image shone.¹⁹

As Satan is the ‘father of lies’ we should not be surprised to learn that, for Calvin, the whole of Satan’s strategy is based on falsehood. His attack on God’s truth is not just to injure God, but also to destroy man. In his *Commentary* on John, Calvin emphasizes the point that God’s truth is the only source of life for the soul of man and so, conversely, falsehood must lead to the death of the soul:

It is not surprising that Satan tries so hard to extinguish the light of truth, for it is the only life of the soul. Hence the chief and most deadly weapon for killing the soul is falsehood.²⁰

Calvin’s ‘definition’ of falsehood in this context, is quite simply ‘false conceptions about God.’²¹ This is one reason why Calvin, although not untouched by them in certain areas, had such a low view of the pre-Christian philosophers. So successful is Satan in his use of falsehood, that Calvin believed their theologies were not free of Satan’s deceptions. His main concern, however, is to attack truth and so his use of falsehood centres primarily on God’s Word. This strategy of Satan’s will be examined in greater detail a little later. It is mentioned at this stage simply to underline the extent to which Satan, in his nature, is diametrically opposed to the things of God.

The overthrow of God, if that were possible, remains Satan’s ultimate objective. Hall, pursuing his theme of spiritual warfare, stresses that man is the battlefield upon which the spiritual battle is to be fought. It is man’s fate that will determine the success or failure of Satan’s ‘cunning and powerful campaign to overthrow God’s creation.’²²

One final point needs to be covered at this stage, although by now it is really self-evident, and that is Calvin’s emphasis that Satan is a personal being. Arguing extensively from Scripture, he strongly emphasizes that both the devil and demons are ‘not impulses or affections of

minds' but rather 'minds or spirits endowed with sense, perception and understanding.' In the same passage he then quotes other Scriptures, which he believed made it abundantly clear that we are dealing with a personal being rather than 'evil inspirations.' As if that were not sufficient evidence he finally turns to the Scripture references which talk of the present and future punishment of the devil and his angels:

How meaningless would these expressions be, that the devils are destined for eternal judgment, that fire has been prepared for them, that they are now tormented and tortured by Christ's glory, if devils were non-existent!²³

The purpose of Calvin labouring this point is twofold: to refute the remarkably modern-sounding psychological interpretation which was current even in his day and to ensure that the Christian should not be caught unaware which, Calvin could see, was the inevitable consequence of a wrong view of the nature and being of Satan:

But it was worth-while to touch upon this point, also, lest any persons, entangled in that error, while thinking themselves without an enemy, become more slack and heedless about resisting.²⁴

2. Kingdom, Power and Authority

We have already stated that, for Calvin, man is central to Satan's strategy to overthrow God. Any power and authority that Satan has is inextricably bound up with man and what Satan achieved through the Fall. It is to this that we must now turn.

The fall, as we have mentioned already, was man's voluntary action for which he, like Satan, is held responsible. As Hall says, 'Calvin even uses the doctrine of free will before the Fall to seal man's responsibility for the terrible thing which happened to him.'²⁵ Man fell because of his own disobedience and is therefore without excuse.²⁶ At the same time, however, Calvin could view this disobedience or rebellion as being instigated by Satan. He was seen as 'the real enemy of the human race, the contriver of all evils, furnished with every kind of fraud and villainy to injure and destroy.'²⁷ Calvin's conclusion, however, emphasizing man's own responsibility, was that 'Adam willingly bound himself over to the devil's tyranny.'²⁸ The fall of man is therefore a fall into the hands of Satan, which is, in fact, a fall into slavery.

The question which arises from this is why would God permit Adam to be tempted, seeing that He knew the outcome? To guard against Manichaeism and to protect the sovereignty of God, Calvin acknowledges 'that the evil did not take place except by His permission.' Nor will Calvin allow that God is in some way to be regarded as the cause of sin:²⁹

When I say, however, that Adam did not fall without the ordination and will of God, I do not so take it as if sin had ever been pleasing to Him, or as if He simply wished that the precept which He had given should be violated. So far as the fall of Adam was the subversion of equity, and of well constituted order, so far as it was contumacy against the Divine Law-giver, and the transgression of righteousness, certainly it was against the will of God; yet none of these things render it impossible that, for a certain cause, although to us unknown, he might will the fall of man.³⁰

Calvin therefore hides behind the mystery of predestination and in so doing, he grounds both the destiny of man and the activity of Satan in the providence of a Sovereign God. This, in

fact, is crucial to Calvin's understanding of the power and authority of Satan and, indeed, governs the whole of his thinking on this matter.

What Satan achieved through the Fall, under the providence of God, was, as has been mentioned earlier, a disruption of God's well-ordered creation. It is no exaggeration to say that, for Calvin, the fate of the whole world was tied to man who had been appointed to have dominion over it. The consequences of man's revolt on God's creation are threefold: 1. to pass from order to chaos; 2. to become corrupt and produce corrupt and evil beings; 3. to pass out of man's intended dominion and become his enemy. It is at this point that Hall suggests that these consequences threaten the sovereignty of Calvin's God. Creation appears to be out of His direct control; man, as it were, stands between God and the world, which suggests that God can, at best, operate through him. 'Calvin allows the rebellion of man, in effect, to negate all of the goodness of God's creation.'³¹

For Calvin, what is more serious than the disfiguring of the earth, is the slavery and corruption into which man has cast himself by his revolt against his Creator. We have discussed already the consequences of the Fall in terms of original sin resulting in the image of God in man being 'vitiating and maimed.'³² Not only did Calvin talk in these terms, but elsewhere speaks of the image of Satan 'into which they have degenerated,'³³ which underlines, very forcefully, the terrible condition of man as a result of the Fall in Calvin's theology.

Man now bears the image of Satan and is enslaved by him. In Calvin's understanding of the enslavement of man, Satan has 'efficient lieutenants and powerful allies.'³⁴ In the first place, there is sin. What Calvin has in mind here, is not the individual act of sin that is displeasing to God, nor even the 'root' which produces these fruits, but rather a cosmic power which holds death. Not in the sense of an individual tyrant, but rather a tool of Satan and sin's sway over fallen man. His will is 'captivated by Satan's wiles' and 'of necessity obediently submits to all his leading.' Indeed sin is regarded as the very 'foundation of Satan's kingdom.'³⁵ The second powerful ally is in their enslavement of man. Calvin expresses his understanding of the relation between death and man's spiritual slavery in these words:

. . . we see that he [Paul] says that *they were dead*, and states at the same time the cause of the death, namely, *sins*. He does not mean only that they were in danger of death; but he declares that it was a real and present death by which they were overwhelmed. As spiritual death is nothing else than the alienation of the soul from God, we are all born dead, and we live dead until we are made partakers of the life of Christ.³⁶

Then there is the flesh which Calvin clearly portrays as man's enemy on the one hand and Satan's ally on the other:

The liberty of the flesh. . . frees us from obedience to God, only to put us in bondage to the devil. It is, therefore, a despicable and accursed liberty, which triumphs in our destruction with unrestrained, or rather frenzied violence.³⁷

Finally there is the law which, despite its creation for a good purpose, can now only accuse, condemn and destroy. Quoting Augustine, Calvin says 'that if the Spirit of grace is absent, the law is present only to accuse and kill us.' He says that, not to dishonour or to detract from the law, but to highlight the real problem, namely man's deformed will:

Yet, since our carnal and corrupted nature contends violently against God's spiritual law and is in no way corrected by its discipline, it follows that the law which had been given for salvation, provided it met with suitable hearers, turns into an occasion for sin and death. For, since all of us are proved to be transgressors, the more clearly it reveals God's righteousness, conversely the more it uncovers our iniquity.

We could say that the law is in partnership with sin, death and the flesh—even with Satan himself, and are all at enmity with man. Man's corrupt nature strives violently against the law, yet the law remains 'to arm God's wrath for the sinner's downfall.'³⁸ So, in addition to the other forces railed against him, man is now even at enmity with God Himself. Whilst it is true to say that God remains primarily the enemy of iniquity, there is a sense in which He is also man's enemy; and 'carries out an active warfare against sinful rebels.'³⁹

If man can now be said to be an enemy of God, then it is also true to say that he has become an ally of Satan. Not that man is in any way treated as an equal to Satan, rather his relation to Satan is entirely that of a slave to a tyrannical master: 'It is indeed a dreadful condition when the devil has such power over us that he drags us as captive slaves here and there at his pleasure.'⁴⁰

We are certainly presented with a very pessimistic picture of man, and, whilst Calvin claims to be pessimistic only about fallen man apart from Christ, surely Hall is right to draw our attention to the fact that the severity with which Calvin portrays man's slavery is such as to overlook certain other biblical truths, such as, for example, God's constant mercy towards man as sinner:

Calvin seems in danger of losing by his severity the definitive things learned about God and man and the reconciliation effected in Jesus Christ, namely that God wills to redeem man as such, for man is His own beloved creature.⁴¹

Hall's observation however, does not sufficiently take into account the fact that Calvin was himself aware of the difficult relationship between God's love and His wrath in his own theology. On a number of occasions Calvin referred to 'some sort of contradiction' or 'inconsistency' between the love and wrath of God.⁴² The problem, as Calvin saw it, is perhaps best summarized in his commentary on Rom. 5:10:

We were enemies, he [Paul] says, when Christ presented Himself to the Father as a means of propitiation. . . . The Apostle, however, seems here to be contradicting himself. If the death of Christ was a pledge of the divine love towards us, it follows that we were even then acceptable to Him. But now he says that we were enemies.⁴³

The key to understanding Calvin's approach lies in his appeals to divine and human viewpoints in this matter. In one passage in the *Institutes* for example, after posing the contradiction and concluding with passages of Scripture which stress the wrath of God, Calvin goes on to say:

Expressions of this sort have been accommodated to our capacity that we may better understand how miserable and ruinous our condition is apart from Christ. For if it had not been clearly stated that the wrath and vengeance of God and eternal death rested upon us, we would scarcely have recognized how miserable we would have been without God's mercy, and we would have underestimated the benefit of liberation. . . . To sum up: since our hearts cannot, in God's mercy, either seize upon life ardently enough or accept it with the gratefulness we owe,

unless our minds are first struck and overwhelmed by fear of God's wrath and by dread of eternal death, we are taught by Scripture to perceive that apart from Christ, God is, so to speak, hostile to us, and his hand is armed for our destruction, to embrace his benevolence and fatherly love in Christ alone.⁴⁴

This concept of accommodation is also mentioned in Calvin's *Commentaries*,⁴⁵ and that underlines the importance which Calvin attached to the idea. It has, in fact, been suggested that the understanding of God's accommodation to the limits and needs of the human condition was a central feature of the interpretation of Scripture and of the entire range of Calvin's theological work.⁴⁶ There is, of course, a risk inherent in the concept of accommodation, in that if it is pushed too far, it can be overemphasized to the extent that 'God's wrath loses its objective reality.'⁴⁷ Calvin however, struck a careful balance to ensure that this was not the case.⁴⁸ Accommodation was, for him, only ever a partial answer, which was never allowed to deny or negate God's wrath. 'Accommodation is not the final answer. It cannot be, because Calvin took the holiness of God and the sinfulness of men and women with utter seriousness.'⁴⁹ What we need to hold before us, if we are to make sense of what some view as two contradictory ideas, is that if it were not for the precedent love of God, salvation would have been impossible. In other words, it was God who took the initiative and loved those whom He hated because of their sins. And, as Peterson concludes, 'here is the place for accommodation in this discussion.'⁵⁰

We simply note at this stage, that it is now true to say that fallen man's negative relationship with both God and Satan marks the lowest ebb of man's condition. Man appears to have no hope; if his servitude to Satan is his nadir, then it is equally true to say that it marks the zenith of Satan's power, 'because the success of his strategy for robbing God of His power resulted in the erection of a vast kingdom of evil—with Satan at its head.'⁵¹

To enable us to comprehend what it is that the devil has won and the actual extent of his kingdom, Calvin explains his understanding through one of the biblical titles for Satan, namely 'the prince of this world':

The devil is called the prince of this world, not because he has some kingdom distinct from God (as the Manichees imagined), but because by God's permission he exercises his tyranny in the world. Therefore, when we hear this title applied to the devil, let us be ashamed of our miserable lot. For however proud men may be, they are the possession of the devil until they are regenerated by the Spirit of Christ. For in the word *world* is here embraced the whole human race.⁵²

Calvin, as Hall points out, takes very seriously 'the biblical concept of an organic continuity of beings.'⁵³ As the Pauline metaphor of head and body designates a real organic union between Christ and the elect, so Calvin argues analogically that there is also the organic union between Satan and the ungodly: 'So the faction of the impious and impiety itself are depicted for us together with their prince who holds supreme sway over them.'⁵⁴

The real extent of Satan's kingdom, as Calvin understood it, is perhaps more clearly brought out in his *Commentary* on Ephesians 6:12, where we learn that we are not wrestling against flesh and blood. This, for Calvin, means that our difficulties are far greater than if we had to fight against man:

There we resist human strength, sword is opposed to sword, man contends with man, force is met by force, and skill by skill; but here the case is very different, for our enemies are such as no human power can withstand. . . . 'Our struggle is not bodily.'

Paul he argues, sets before us a 'formidable enemy' that we may understand that 'this is not an enemy to be despised.' And when Paul goes on to talk of 'powers,' and 'world rulers of the darkness of this age,' Calvin interprets it in this way:

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.

Paul's reference to 'spiritual wickedness' refers, Calvin argued, not only to 'the malignity and depravity of the devil,' but also to the fact that the 'enemy is invisible' and so therefore 'the danger is greater.' And Paul's phrase 'heavenly places' emphasizes that 'our life is menaced from above' and so 'this higher place from which we are attacked and assaulted causes us greater trouble and difficulty.' From his comments on Eph. 2:2, we see that Calvin links his understanding of 'heavenly places,' to Satan being described as 'the prince of the power of the air.' Our life is therefore menaced from above. Calvin then goes on to explain what is meant by 'above':

Nor do these words countenance the belief that the devil has created and keeps for himself the middle region of the air. Paul does not assign to them a fixed territory, which they hold and control, but merely indicates that they are engaged in hostility, and are higher in place.⁵⁵

Calvin's view of the kingdom and power of Satan can be best summed up in these words, that 'the devil displayed sacrilegious audacity, snatching God's earthly domain to himself as usurper'⁵⁶ and the net result of his rule is that 'so long as he holds the government, [he] confuses and disturbs everything so that there is a horrible and deformed confusion in God's works.'⁵⁷

We begin to see therefore, that Calvin seems to have a very high view of Satan and his powers, so much so that Hall is led to conclude that 'Calvin has placed Satan in a very exalted position among the enemies who enslave man.' This is warranted, Hall believes, if we look only at the gospels in isolation, because in the rest of the New Testament, particularly the Pauline Corpus, sin, death, the flesh and the law are the more frequently mentioned tyrants over man. Therefore he goes on to say: 'A present day attempt to deal with the problem of evil by writing a theology of spiritual warfare would probably have to consider these as at least equal partners in the evil entente.'⁵⁸

Hall, in fact, goes so far as to say, (which appears almost to contradict what he said earlier⁵⁹), that 'Calvin's elevation of Satan to royal status' above the other enemies of man shows him to be: '. . . more a child of sixteenth century Satanology and the medieval tradition behind it than his criterion of dependence on the Bible would admit.'⁶⁰ But the point surely that we need to bear in mind, is that Calvin is being biblical in giving royal status to Satan. He does not 'elevate' Satan to royal status, but rather seeks to be faithful to the epithets deliberately applied by the biblical writers to Satan. Calvin himself does not investigate etymologically the Greek word archōn. He simply receives 'prince' as an acceptable translation in preference

to 'ruler'. When we recognize that the root word *archōn* 'always signifies "primacy" whether in time: "beginning" or in rank: "power", "dominion", "office",⁶¹ 'prince' and 'ruler' therefore signify the same. And it is, of course, equally possible to argue that 'royal status' can also be attributed to 'ruler', so in that sense it is inaccurate to say Calvin 'elevated' Satan to royal status. He was, I would argue, simply attempting to convey a biblical truth. Nor must we forget the fact that nowhere in Scripture is either the term 'prince' or 'ruler' applied to sin, death, flesh or the law as a *title* as it is to the devil. As has already been mentioned, Calvin took these enemies of man seriously, but viewed them more as allies of Satan that are under his control and therefore serve his purposes. The way in which Calvin viewed these things as being subsumed under Satan is brought out in the following quotation: 'But I say, there is no obscurity in these words, and that all men who live according to the world, that is, to the inclinations of their flesh, fight under the command of Satan.'⁶²

Finally, in answer to any accusation, similar to Hall's, which suggests that Calvin has too high a view of the devil, we must not overlook the number of occasions in which Calvin goes to great lengths to emphasize that Satan does not possess a kingdom independently of God. Whatever power he has, which is considerable in Calvin's theology, he can only exercise his tyranny by 'God's permission.'⁶³

Any understanding of Calvin's teaching on the kingdom of Satan must be set in a theological context which is determined by his doctrine of God. In others words, Calvin seeks to establish and define Satan's power after taking into account the relation between his kingship and God's.

3. Power and Authority within His Kingdom

We have established that 'the devil stands under God's power' and that he can therefore 'do nothing unless God wills and assents to it.'⁶⁴ Calvin then goes on to differentiate between Satan's activity with the ungodly and the believer. As far as the ungodly are concerned, Calvin believed that Satan and his demons 'subdue and drag [them] away; they exercise power over their minds and bodies, and misuse them as if they were slaves for every shameful act.'⁶⁵ The way in which Calvin understands this as both Satan's activity on, and God's will for the wicked, is best illustrated by looking at Calvin's *Commentary* on Romans 1:28 where it is said that 'God gave them up unto a reprobate mind.' He grounds the conclusion he comes to in 'the just relation between sin and punishment,' which therefore emphasizes that man is still held responsible for his choices and actions, even in this situation.

Because they refused to have God in their knowledge, which alone directs our minds to true wisdom, the Lord gave them a perverted mind, which could not choose anything right. . . . He [Paul] means, therefore, that by a perverted choice, they had preferred their own vanities to God. Thus, the error by which they were deceived was self- chosen.

In his *Commentary* on 2 Thess. 2:11, in which he also refers to Rom. 1:28, he specifically links this deception with Satan:

So by His righteous judgement He gives up to a reprobate mind (Rom. 1:28) those whom He has appointed to destruction, so that they may as though hypnotized hand themselves over to be deceived by Satan and his ministers with their eyes tight shut and their mind devoid of reason.

If that is the position of the ungodly under Satan, in which Calvin seeks to take account of both God's will, Satan's activity and man's responsibility,⁶⁶ we must now move on to consider Satan's activities with the believer. Whilst Calvin was adamant that believers can never be 'conquered or overwhelmed' by Satan, he nonetheless concedes that Satan has considerable powers that 'exercise believers in combat, ambush them, invade their peace, beset them in combat, and also often weary them, rout them, terrify them and sometimes wound them.' Lest we should despair at the apparent power that Calvin ascribes to Satan, we must notice the preface to the above quotation: 'Now, because God bends the unclean spirits hither and thither at will, He so governs their activity that they exercise believers. . . .' In other words, victory is assured—'the never vanquish or crush them.' Although ultimate victory is assured, Calvin does not underestimate the intensity of the battle with Satan in the Christian life, because victory in its full and final sense, is, for Calvin, eschatological.

Often, indeed, are they distressed, but not so deprived of life as not to recover; they fall under violent blows, but afterward they are raised up; they are wounded, but not fatally; in short, they so toil throughout life that at the last they obtain the victory.⁶⁷

The key to understanding Satan's activities under the control of God, in the theology of John Calvin, lies in his understanding of 'exercising believers.' Temptation for Calvin, fell very clearly under this category: 'we do not . . . ask that we feel no temptations at all, for we need, rather, to be aroused, pricked, and urged by them, lest, with too much inactivity, we grow sluggish.'⁶⁸ Calvin, in the same section of the *Institutes*, then goes on to differentiate between God's purposes in 'exercising the believer' and the aims of Satan:

But God tries in one way, Satan in another. Satan tempts that he may destroy, condemn, confound, cast down, but God, that by proving His own children He may make trial of their sincerity, and establish their strength by exercising it; that he may mortify, purify and cauterize their flesh, which unless it were forced under this restraint would play the wanton and vaunt itself beyond measure. Besides, Satan attacks those who are unarmed and unprepared that he may crush them unaware. God, along with the temptation, makes a way of escape, that His own may be able patiently to bear all that He imposes upon them.

Calvin saw that there is great encouragement for the believer in that God 'not only supplies us with the resources we need,' but also 'sets a limit to the temptation'.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, believers are 'tested by all kinds of temptations,'⁷⁰ and he interprets temptation in a general way, to mean 'everything that is an enticement to us.'⁷¹

This 'pattern' or principle that Calvin saw in temptation can be seen especially in the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Calvin's understanding of that particular passage of Scripture is also instructive for us, in that Calvin highlights the strategies employed by Satan, which, Calvin argued, were applicable, not just to the temptation of Jesus, but to the temptation of all believers.

The first point we notice in Calvin's understanding of the temptation of Jesus, is the emphasis again on the sovereignty of God. The references in Matthew's and Mark's account of the Spirit leading Jesus into the wilderness was, for Calvin, evidence that God willed Jesus to be tempted. It was part of God's plan and purpose for the salvation of man to allow Jesus to be tempted by Satan. The activity of Satan is therefore governed by God. The purpose of God in allowing His Son to be tempted was two-fold, Calvin argued. In the first place, he had no doubt that 'God displayed in the Person of His Son, as on a brilliant screen, how hostile and

persistent an adversary Satan is against the salvation of man.⁷² Secondly, Calvin believed that Jesus willingly underwent the temptations, and met the devil in a trial of strength, 'that by His victory He might win us the victory.' This is crucial in the Christian's conflict with the devil in Calvin's theology, as can be seen from the importance Calvin attached to it: 'So as often as Satan attacks us, let us remember that we can in no other way sustain and repulse his assaults than by the protection of that shield.' It is here that we again note Calvin's pastoral concern as he immediately applies his teaching to encourage the Christian in his day-to-day Christian living:

But if Christ was tempted as the Representative of all the faithful, we should realize that the temptations that strike us are not fortuitous, or the turn of Satan's whim, without God's permission, but that the Spirit of God presides in all our trials, that our faith may be the better tried. So we may take sure hope, that God, who is the supreme Master of the ring, will not be unmindful of us, or fail to succour our weaknesses, as He sees we are unequal to them.

When it comes to the actual strategies employed by Satan in the temptation of Jesus, we notice, in the first place, the suggestion of Satan that 'these stones become bread' is seen by Calvin as 'a direct attack on Christ's faith.'⁷³ It was a subtle attack in which Satan sought to encourage Christ to lose faith in God and to follow his own interests 'other than God's Word allows.' This type of attack, Calvin believed, is a common ploy of the enemy in his strategy against God's people:

Now we see what kind of temptation this was, which Satan still uses every day in his attack upon us, for it was not an unusual temptation that the Son of God wished to undergo, but He wished to share our battles with us, that we must be armed with the same defence, and have no doubt that we have the palm of victory in our grasp.

What Calvin also draws our attention to is Christ's strategy in resisting Satan. Christ, he says, 'uses the Scripture as a shield against him.'⁷⁴ So important is the Word of God for the Christian in his conflict with the devil in Calvin's theology, that he likens the suppression of Scripture to 'robbing God's people of their arms, with which alone they may manage to protect their salvation.'

Following the sequence of temptations as given in Matthew's account, Calvin goes on to suggest that the aim of the second temptation, from Satan's point of view, was to get Christ to 'over-reach the just limit, and wildly lift himself up against God.' Having first tried to bring Christ down to desperation when He was destitute of food, he now 'urges Him to an inflated and vain assurance, to overlook the resources at hand and, without the need for it, to fling Himself into an open test, that would break all bounds.' Again, Calvin moves straight into the application for the Christian:

Now, we know we should not be shattered by the pressure of complete loss of means, but should depend on God's confidence. But neither may we be cocksure and lift ourselves up higher than God allows us. So we understand Satan's purpose, that Christ in trying out His divinity should intrude upon God, without thought or respect.⁷⁵

What Calvin draws our attention to particularly is 'Satan's evil device of using Scripture's testimony falsely.' This, Calvin believed, is an abuse Satan constantly uses as he seeks to draw us into his clutches 'by the fallacious pretext of Scripture.' This highlights in Calvin's thinking, the constant attack by Satan on the Word of God. He seeks to bring in distortions and emphasize the so-called ambiguities to the extent that the Christian will then be tempted

to discard Scripture: ‘Satan profanes God’s Word, and strives to turn it to our ruin; yet, as it has been divinely appointed for our salvation, will it not be our own incapacity that spoils its saving power—if anything will?’ We are therefore to learn to handle Scripture as Christ did in His temptation, who did not allow Scripture (His defence against the first temptation), to be ‘shaken off him or torn down’ by Satan’s abuse of Scripture, but rather ‘throws back Satan’s slander with a blow from Scripture in return.’

The subtlety of Satan’s use of Scripture is also emphasized by Calvin in his comments on the promise quoted by Satan, ‘He shall give his angels charge,’ *etc.* On this point, ‘Satan was not a liar,’ because the angels were appointed to look over and guard Christ as they are all the faithful. The lie comes in the distortion of Ps. 91:11 (‘In all thy ways’) whereby Satan presents the angels’ protection in such a way as to suggest that ‘if you take a death leap against God’s will, the angels will defend your life.’⁷⁶

Christ’s reply ‘Thou shalt not tempt the Lord’ emphasizes for Calvin the importance of obedience in the Christian life. It is only as we are obedient that we can expect God’s promise to be efficacious for us:

Christ replies that our hopes are to have no other basis than the promise of God, that He promises His assistance where the faithful humbly commit themselves to His governments, for we cannot have reliance upon God’s promises other than by obedience to his commands.⁷⁷

Having briefly touched upon the subtlety of Satan in his use of God’s Word, it is perhaps not inappropriate to expand on this by including Calvin’s comments on 2 Cor. 11:14,⁷⁸ where Paul talks of Satan ‘masquerading as an angel of light.’ The point that Calvin is at pains to emphasize is that Satan ‘would achieve nothing if we were aware that he was our mortal enemy and the destroyer of our salvation.’ The corruption of Satan and his hatred for God and His elect is therefore made plain in that he ‘always covers himself with some disguise in order to trick us and does not immediately show us his horns, as the common saying goes, but rather takes pains to appear to be an *angel of light*.’⁷⁹ One of Satan’s favourite disguises Calvin believed, was to seek to imitate God, as part of his overall strategy to lead people away from the truth: ‘Satan is in many ways an imitator of God, in order by a false likeness to insinuate himself into the minds of simple folk.’⁸⁰ The subtlety and perversity of these attacks is brought out by Calvin in these words: ‘Even when he drives us to gross crimes, he still uses some plausible pretext to get us off our guard and draw us into his nets. He attacks us under the appearance of good, and even in the very name of God.’⁸¹ We are not to be surprised therefore, says Calvin, that if Satan, the head of evil men, can transform himself in this way, so also will his ministers. The Christian is to be on his guard against ‘deceitful workers,’ to the extent that ‘they must be carefully and thoroughly examined to prevent us from accepting them as true servants of Christ, because at first sight they have a superficial show of excellence.’⁸² The Christian must therefore be on his guard ‘against false appearances’ even in the servants of Christ. Not that Calvin was urging the Christian to come to hasty conclusions or to have a judgmental attitude and approach, but rather that he should patiently ‘look for things of greater importance.’ The subtlety of Satan is such and his hatred of God’s plan of salvation is so intense, that the Church is seen by Calvin as a prime target for the strategies of the devil. Calvin in fact, longs for this truth to be ‘deeply impressed upon the minds’ of all Christians that: ‘Satan is continually striving by every means to hinder or obstruct the upbuilding of the Church. We should be more intent on resisting him.’

That resistance should take ‘more care to maintain sound doctrine’ of which Satan actively seeks to deprive us, and we should also ‘know the source of the hindrance whenever the course of the gospel is delayed.’ Yet having said that, Calvin, in defence again of the sovereignty of God, is quick to say:

He says elsewhere (Rom. 1:13) that *God* had not permitted him, but both statements are true. Although Satan does his part, God still retains supreme authority to open up a way for us as often as He pleases against the will of Satan and despite his opposition. Paul, therefore, rightly says that God does not permit him, although the hindrance comes from Satan.⁸³

Returning to the third of the temptations of Jesus, the purpose of Satan in this temptation, argued Calvin, was for Christ ‘to seek the inheritance which God promised His children other than at God’s own hands.’ It was in this temptation that Satan attempts to snatch ‘God’s earthly dominion to himself as usurper’ as though they can only be gained by his favour. Again we note Calvin’s application:

That we daily must fight the same imposture, is the experience of individual Christians. . . . Though we set our defence, our resource, our supply upon God’s blessing alone, yet our senses are continually titillated and seduced into finding extra means from Satan, as if God alone were not enough.⁸⁴

Christ’s defence, which is to be our defence, is again to use Scripture, ‘as no rushwork shield, but as a wall of bronze’ because it is God alone who ‘is to be worshipped and served.’⁸⁵ We noticed at the beginning of this section on the temptations of Jesus, that Calvin emphasized the sovereignty of God. We note at the end of his commentary on this passage how he again refers to and emphasizes the Sovereignty of God. Because God is sovereign, He alone must be worshipped and He alone must be served. And in addition to that, the sovereignty is again seen by Calvin in the way in which the devil left Christ ‘having completed every temptation,’ as mentioned in Luke’s account. As we would expect, Calvin is quick to use this to encourage the Christian:

. . . Christ won no rest or truce until He was sharply tested by every sort of conflict. He adds that Christ was left only for a time, that we should know that the rest of His life was not altogether free of trials, but Satan’s force was divinely restrained, that he should not persist in troubling Christ. Thus God deals with all His own. If at times He allows them to be sharply vexed, in due course He eases their undue struggle, that they may breathe a little, and gather their strength, yet He does not spare them to indulge in idleness, but only to prepare themselves for new battles.⁸⁶

It is interesting to note that Calvin chooses to translate Luke 4:13 as ‘when the devil had completed every temptation,’ which suggests that in the temptations of Jesus, Calvin saw the pattern of all temptations that can befall believers. But, more importantly, having been subjected to ‘every temptation’ of the devil, and ‘touched with the feeling of our infirmities,’ yet He was ‘without sin’ (Heb. 4:15). Christ, then, has put on our feelings along with our flesh, that we might ‘grasp the concern He has for our salvation,’ and in taking our infirmities on Himself, ‘whenever we are tempted by them we should be assured that He is unfailingly present with us.’⁸⁷

As we began this particular section on the power of Satan within his kingdom, we noted that Calvin argued that Satan and his demons exercised power over ‘minds and bodies,’ particularly in the ungodly. We made mention of the fact that in refusing to have God in their

knowledge, the Lord gives the ungodly over to a ‘reprobate’ or ‘perverted’ mind to the extent that both their minds and bodies become ‘slaves for every shameful act.’ But there is another way in which Satan exercises his power over minds and bodies, through possession and sickness, and it is to this that we must now turn.

When we consider ‘possession’ in Calvin’s theology, what is most noticeable is how little he actually has to say on the subject. That is not to say that he did not take demon possession seriously, but it does re-emphasize the matter-of-fact manner he adopted in his whole approach to demonology.⁸⁸ In the *Institutes* for example, whilst mention is made on four occasions to exorcism,⁸⁹ Calvin refers to it only in passing and appears more concerned to highlight the abuse of exorcism by the Church in his day. Demon possession, it is true, is referred to in *Inst.* 1:14:14, but again it is mentioned as a matter-of-fact and only in passing, to reinforce his main point, that ‘there are great armies that wage war against us.’ He does not attempt anywhere in the *Institutes* to explain or describe in detail this particular aspect of Satanic activity.

The same apparent reluctance to discuss in detail his understanding of demon possession is also noticeable in Calvin’s *Commentaries*. In a number of instances where demon possession is specifically mentioned in a passage of Scripture, Calvin makes no comment at all.⁹⁰ Nor does he attempt to comment in detail on Christ rebuking the unclean spirit in Matt. 17:14-18, Mark 9:14-27 and Luke 9:37-43, except to say that we should not be surprised to learn that the devil should savage the man ‘for the nearer the light of Christ’s grace comes and the more effectively it works, the more impotently does Satan rage.’⁹¹ He does briefly say, however, that the man’s ‘tongue and ears were possessed by Satan.’⁹² No comment at all is made at this point about the disciples’ inability to cast out the demon themselves in Matt. 17:16, Mark 9:18 and Luke 9:40, and no comment is made on Mark 3:13-19 concerning the appointing of the disciples and the authority given to them to cast out devils. That Calvin believed this was an authority possessed by the disciples is clear from his comments on Matt. 17:19. The disciples came to Jesus and asked him privately why it was they had been unable to cast out the demon. Calvin points out that the disciples had earlier possessed the power of the Spirit to work miracles, but that they lost that power ‘because they suffocated it with sloth.’⁹³ In such a situation and against such an enemy there is ‘a need for extraordinary faith.’ In other words ordinary faith is not sufficient. ‘Strenuous efforts are required,’ so prayer and fasting are seen as the necessary remedies for ‘languid faith.’ The seriousness of the battle as Calvin saw it, is brought out in these words:

‘You,’ he says, ‘are soft exorcists. You engage in a sort of unreal and make-believe battle. But you are up against a real antagonist who will only be overcome by the most strenuous efforts. Therefore your faith must be stirred up by prayers. And because you are slow and cold in praying you need also to have the assistance of fasting.’

From the following comment, it is apparent that Calvin accepted that this authority over demons was not restricted to the Apostles alone, but was an important and recognized ministry passed on down through the Church:

But since He affirms that that kind of demon can only be cast out by prayers and fasting, the meaning is that where Satan fixes deep roots and has ruled by a long possession, or where he attacks with unbridled fury, victory is hard and difficult and we must fight with all our strength.⁹⁴

We begin to get an indication of how Calvin actually viewed demon possession itself from the only two comments he makes of any substance in his *Commentaries* on Luke 4:33 and Matt. 8:23. When Luke talks of a man who had the spirit of an unclean devil, Calvin views this in terms of a particular influence of the devil on the soul of the man, under the permission of God:

This expression has the same effect as if Luke had said he was stirred up by the influence of the devil. By God's permission, Satan had laid hold on the faculties of his soul, to force him at his fancy both to speech and to movements of other kinds. So they are called demoniac in whom and through whom demons speak.⁹⁵

That is the nearest Calvin comes to defining what he actually understands demon possession to be. His other comments on the demoniac of the Gadarenes, are concerned initially with the evil purposes of Satan:

. . .the unclean spirit kept the poor man at the tombs, to rend him with unending terror at the gloomy spectacle of death, as though, cut off from the company of men, he were already leading his life among the dead. We also learn that the devil does not torture men only in this present life, but pursues them even in death, where indeed his reign flourishes.⁹⁶

Calvin shows his familiar pastoral concern by warning of the misery and horror of being subject to Satan's tyranny. The distress of the soul is as much to be feared as the torment of the body, however fierce and cruel it be.⁹⁷ But again, to counter what he has just said, lest we should have an unbalanced picture of Satan and his powers, Calvin states that Christ's casting out of the unclean spirits shows us 'that the whole kingdom of Satan is under the command of Christ.'⁹⁸

This really is Calvin's main purpose. He deliberately refuses to get drawn into speculation about demon possession, "so that he can concentrate on the victory of Christ and the fact that Satan can do nothing—except with God's permission. He carries forward this principle, and applies it in a general sense to those who are not literally possessed by saying:

For albeit we are not tormented by the devil, yet he holds us as his slaves, until the Son of God claims us from his domination. Naked, torn and unsightly, we wander afar, until he restores us to our sane and ordered mind.¹⁰⁰

The above quotation and the earlier reference to Calvin viewing possession as a particular 'influence of the devil,' could perhaps lead us to conclude that Calvin believed that devils were not real spirits, but rather depraved passions of men. Nothing could be further from the truth. Whilst it appears that he deliberately played down demon possession, he was under no illusion as to the reality of evil spirits and their ultimate aim:

. . . how do you transfer avarice, self-seeking, cruelty, perfidy . . . into swine? No, we should realize that unclean spirits (being doomed to destruction) are the foes of the human race, and aim to drag who they may into the same pit as themselves.¹⁰¹

Calvin's reluctance to over-dramatize demon possession gives us a useful insight into his view of sickness. In his *Commentaries* on Matt. 17:14-18 and Mark 9:14-27 where a man brings his son (described as a 'lunatic' by Matthew and as one who had a 'dumb spirit' by Mark) to Christ for deliverance, Calvin concludes that the son must both have been a lunatic and have had a dumb spirit.¹⁰² Because the son was a lunatic (which Calvin also describes as

epilepsy) his illness would increase or decrease, Calvin believed, ‘according to the course of the moon,’ but goes on to qualify this by saying:

Yet this does not mean that Satan does not mix his attacks with natural means. And so I consider that this man was not deaf and dumb naturally, but that his tongue and ears were possessed by Satan. Then, when the weakness of his brain and nerves made him liable to epilepsy, the sickness was made worse by the same Satan.¹⁰³

It is from this that we can begin to see the number of ways Satan has to harm us, unless he is restrained by God. It is in this way that Satan can use the weaknesses of the flesh and soul, which, of course, includes the mind and the will, to torment us: ‘All the weaknesses of the flesh and the soul, which we feel to be innumerable, supply him with darts to wound us.’¹⁰⁴

The inference from what has just been said about Satan using ‘natural means,’ seems to suggest that there was a sense in which Calvin regarded some sickness as ‘natural.’ His comments on the healing by Jesus of the man born blind (John 9) do not ascribe the cause of the blindness to Satan, nor is the cause to be sought directly in the man’s sin or his parents’. Thus Calvin can say:

. . . God sometimes has another purpose than punishing men’s sins when He sends them afflictions. Consequently, when the causes of afflictions are hidden, our curiosity must be restrained so that we may neither injure God nor be malicious to our brethren.

In this particular instance, the reason this man was born blind was for the ultimate glory of God, because through his deliverance, ‘the wonderful goodness of God was reflected.’¹⁰⁵

The sense in which Calvin viewed some sickness as natural is brought out even more clearly in his *Commentary* on Matt. 12:22, where he says ‘it is, of course, true that many are blind and dumb from natural causes.’ But in this particular case he differentiates between natural causes and the activity of Satan, seeing the two in this instance, as entirely separate:

But this man seems to have gone blind and been deprived of the use of speech without anything being wrong with his optical nerves or the shape of his tongue. But it is not surprising that there is permitted to Satan such licence in harming the physical senses when all the faculties of our soul are corrupted or perverted by the righteous permission of God.¹⁰⁶

Even when Calvin talks of illness as ‘natural’ he is careful to emphasize that all troubles, including sickness, to which the human race is liable ‘come from sin’¹⁰⁷ so in that sense it is impossible to entirely separate ‘natural’ sickness from Satan.

Calvin also talks of the more overt activity of Satan who ‘afflicts men mostly with unusual and unnatural ills.’ But, here again, he is careful to emphasize the sovereignty of God: ‘Not that Satan rules in men by his own free will, but God concedes to him an ability to hurt. Moreover . . . He chiefly wishes Satan’s tyranny to be recognized in extraordinary afflictions . . .’¹⁰⁸ The woman in question had been bound by Satan for eighteen years and in the miracle of her healing ‘Christ shows both His power and His grace’ and ‘proclaims authoritatively that liberation lies in His hand.’¹⁰⁹ That Calvin believed this liberation was to be effective for all mankind, even if delayed, is brought out in his concluding remarks on this miracle: ‘And this long space of time shows us that, although the Lord may not heal our miseries at once, we must not despair.’¹¹⁰ It is to this liberation that we must now turn.

4. Christ's Victory over Satan

We have made mention already of the fact that Calvin viewed Satan as the head of a vast kingdom of evil in direct and hostile opposition to the Kingdom of God. We have noted too, that Calvin believed man to be powerless, in his own strength, to withstand the onslaughts of the devil. Yet we have also seen, particularly in the last section, that Christ was able, not only to withstand the onslaughts of Satan, but actually to overcome them. The key to understanding how the Christian can partake in that victory himself, lies in Calvin's appreciation of the victory won by Jesus Christ over Satan: 'Such is our weakness and such is the power of his fury, how could we stand even in the slightest against his manifold and continuous attacks, unless we relied upon the victory of our leader?'¹¹¹ To put it in a nutshell, 'Christ, by dying conquered Satan . . . and triumphed over all his forces, to the end that they might not harm the Church.' Unless this were the case, Satan would do away with the Church 'a hundred times over.' Calvin in fact, finds God's promise to redeem the elect spoken at the very beginning of Satan's dominion in Genesis 3: 'But because one stronger than he has descended from heaven, who will subdue him, hence it comes to pass that, in the same manner, the whole Church of God, under its Head, will gloriously exult over him.'¹¹² Picking up this theme of election, Hall puts it this way:

Thus man's only possibility of escape from Satan's prison lies in God's purpose and promise to deliver him through the 'lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world.' The power of God alone can break the control of the forces of evil over man.¹¹³

Thus we can say that, in Calvin's thought, Satan's kingship is broken by Christ's action in order for the Kingship of God to be proclaimed and His Kingdom established.

The concept of 'King' and 'Kingdom'¹¹⁴ is very prevalent in Calvin's theology, and is apparent in the two ways he sought to explain the meaning of the saving work of Christ. One method Calvin used was to employ the concept of Christ's threefold Messianic office (munus triplex) of prophet, King and priest.¹¹⁵ The other method was to use six biblical themes of the Atonement, including that of 'Christ the victor.'

We begin by briefly considering Calvin's presentation of the kingly office of Christ. Calvin believed that 'Christ was called Messiah especially with respect to, and by virtue of, his kingship.'¹¹⁶ The nature of His reign is 'spiritual in nature'¹¹⁷ and began when He was here on earth, but was not truly inaugurated until his ascension although, as Peterson says, 'the full and outward manifestation of Christ's Kingship is eschatological and will take place at His second coming.'¹¹⁸

Certain spiritual benefits for the believer follow on from this, to the extent that Calvin can say: 'Christ enriches his people with all things necessary for the eternal salvation of souls and fortifies them with courage to stand unconquerable against all the assaults of spiritual enemies.'¹¹⁹ The Holy Spirit has anointed Christ as King¹²⁰ and Christ in turn gives of His Holy Spirit to help believers in their spiritual need, hence the reason, Calvin believed, that if believers rely on the same power of the Holy Spirit, 'let us not doubt that we shall always be victorious over the Devil, the world and every kind of harmful thing.' These benefits, as a result of Christ's spiritual reign 'extend to the whole body of the church, and to each member.'¹²¹

So high a view did Calvin have of the kingly office of Christ, that he believed it ‘guaranteed’ the safety of the Church. When we remember, as mentioned earlier, that the Church is a prime target of Satan’s,¹²² Calvin believed, again revealing his ever-present pastoral concern, that this was a source of great strength and encouragement to the believer:

. . . no matter how many strong enemies plot to overthrow the church, they do not have sufficient strength to prevail over God’s immutable decree by which he appointed his Son eternal King. Hence it follows that the devil, with all the resources of the world, can never destroy the church, founded as it is on the eternal throne of Christ.¹²³

The benefit that follows from this for the individual believer, is that no matter what confronts him, Christ is in control,¹²⁴ able to meet his every need and to sustain him in every situation:

The Father has given all power to the Son that he may by the Son’s hand govern, nourish, and sustain us, keep us in His care, and help us. Thus, while for the short time we wander away from God, Christ stands in our midst, to lead us little by little to a firm union with God.¹²⁵

Victory is therefore now possible because of the ministry of Christ as King on behalf of His people. Thus, as we have said, the believer has nothing to fear and will ‘always be victorious over the devil.’ This emphasis on victory is in fact very pronounced in the theology of Calvin and has, argues Peterson, ‘been too often unnoticed.’¹²⁶

It is impossible to gain a full picture of the atoning work of Christ in the theology of Calvin, by just considering the threefold offices of Christ. They must be considered alongside Calvin’s teaching on the biblical themes of Christ’s work.¹²⁷ It follows therefore, that if we wish to appreciate the breadth of Calvin’s teaching under the general heading of ‘kingship,’ we must also take into account his teaching on the biblical theme of ‘Christ the Victor,’ indeed, it becomes essential, particularly if Peterson is right in his assertions that ‘Calvin’s teaching can be appreciated as one of the most comprehensive presentations of the work of Christ in the history of Christian doctrine.’¹²⁸ Peterson’s treatment of Calvin’s ‘Christ the Victor’ theme¹²⁹ is relevant to all sections of this paper but particularly for the believer in his conflict with the devil. It is the practical outworking of this victory in the Christian’s life which we must now consider.

5. The Outworking of this Victory in the Christian Life

It is not possible to treat the three parts of this paper in isolation. There is, inevitably, some overlap. This is particularly true when we consider the steps the Christian has to take to overcome in his conflict with the world, the flesh and the devil. Much has already been said about the importance of faith, the Word of God, the work of the Holy Spirit and the interdependence of each. We have also discussed the importance of meditation, separation, sanctification and the role of the Church. We have seen too, the part that self-denial, mortification of the flesh and vivification of the Spirit have to play in this conflict. This overlap is due to the fact that Calvin himself did not view the three in isolation. This is something in Calvin’s theology that Wallace has carefully noted:

Moreover the world, so organised, is under the dominion of Satanic power, and it is through the fascination of the world that the Devil obtains tyrannical sway over the human heart. Therefore a Christian man, in seeking to separate himself from evil, must hold himself apart from that

aspect of the life of this world which seeks to involve him in the life of self-love and in the service of the flesh and the Devil.¹³⁰

It is therefore true to say that much of what has already been said in Parts One and Two applies equally to the Christian's conflict with the devil. To avoid repetition, however, we will henceforth restrict ourselves to an examination of those elements of spiritual warfare where Calvin himself appears to consider an awareness of the devil and his ways as being particularly important.

We begin by considering the role of Satan in the area of temptation. At first sight there appears to be a contradiction in Calvin's thinking. On the one hand he acknowledges that all the wickedness men do is 'incited by Satan'¹³¹ and yet, on the other hand, he is quick to point out that 'the human heart does not need to be incited by any external temptation,'¹³² such is the power of concupiscence. In his *Commentary* on John 13:2, Calvin talks in terms of men's passion being 'a furnace' which 'is influenced by Satan's bellows.' He goes on to paint a very vivid picture: 'But though men's passion (*concupiscentia*) is inflamed by Satan's bellows, it does not cease to be a furnace in itself. It has the fire burning within itself and it greedily receives the draught of the bellows.'¹³³ There is, in fact, no contradiction; Calvin simply guards against the possibility of man, in some way, regarding himself as not being responsible for his actions. And whilst Calvin has unregenerate man in mind in the picture that he paints, it is something of which the Christian must also be aware. The furnace remains, even in the Christian, and Satan is always very near at hand, with the bellows at the ready! As Wallace puts it: 'The man of faith continually finds himself in a conflict which exercises his faith, and which demands from him both constant watchfulness and an ever-growing dependence on the Word of God.' The difference between the ungodly and the Christian is that, for the believer, temptation is always positive in that it is allowed by God to build up and exercise faith. As Wallace goes on to point out 'faith cannot exist except under tension and conflict with evil.'¹³⁴ This link between temptation and faith has already been touched on in section 3 (pages 304f.) as has the fact that Christ's conflict with evil foreshadows the believer's own unceasing trial and temptation. We also made mention of the fact that, in the temptations of Jesus, Calvin saw the pattern of all temptations that can befall believers.

The pattern that emerges from the temptations of Jesus could be summarized in this way: 1. an attack on Christ's faith to encourage Him to lose faith in God and to follow His own interests; 2. an attack to encourage Christ to disobey God; 3. an attack to get Christ to doubt that God alone was able to meet His every need. It is just these sort of attacks that the believer has to face in his own Christian experience. Satan tempts in such a way as to lead the believer to unbelief, which in turn, will result in doubt and disobedience.

When talking of unbelief, we notice again the link between the flesh and the devil in Calvin's theology. Our temptation to unbelief springs not only from the weakness of the flesh 'since our heart especially inclines by its own natural instinct toward unbelief'¹³⁵ but also, as Wallace summarizes Calvin;

through the insinuations of the Devil, who comes to us in the midst of the combat and makes faithless insinuations, suggesting that God has withdrawn the support of His Spirit and instigating us to despair. The Devil desires nothing more than . . . to put it in our heads that God has cast us off.¹³⁶

One example of the way in which Satan seeks to dishearten believers is ‘when he unsettles them with doubt about their election.’¹³⁷ Against this and any temptation to despair, our faith must stand firm and refuse to yield: ‘It becomes us to wrestle against despair, in order that our sorrow, incurable though it may seem, may not shut our mouths and keep us from pouring out our prayers before God.’¹³⁸ We should perhaps make mention of the fact that Calvin was well aware of the pastoral problem of believers with weak assurance, but he never concluded that faith and assurance should be separated. He did not view assurance as a second stage in the Christian life, subsequent to and distinct from faith.¹³⁹ For Calvin, the search for assurance leads the believer not to a second stage beyond his acceptance of the gospel (looking within for faith and its evidences) but simply back to the Gospel itself. Assurance for Calvin is based not on anything in ourselves, but on Christ and the promises of God. ‘If faith is a personal trust and confidence in the gospel there is no need to look further for assurance. Trust in Christ means trust that he is my Saviour, both now and for eternity.’¹⁴⁰

Faith, as has already been mentioned, is the gift of God to the elect¹⁴¹ and faith, in this conflict, is again to arm and fortify itself with the Word of God. The high view that Calvin had of election and faith, particularly in the believer’s struggle with Satan, is brought out in his *Commentary* on 1 John, where John states ‘this is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.’ ‘World’ here for Calvin has a wide meaning, including ‘all the stratagems of Satan.’ He goes on to say:

... we should have been vanquished before the battle had not God promised us the victory. . . . For the apostle is not telling us that God merely lends us His aid, so that, helped by Him, we may be equal to resisting. But he places victory in faith alone.¹⁴²

Unbelief, Calvin argued, ‘does not hold sway within the believers’ hearts, but assails them from without.’¹⁴³ Therefore it cannot ‘mortally wound them . . . but merely harasses them, or at most, so injures them that the wound is curable.’ Faith then, concludes Calvin, as Paul teaches, ‘serves as our shield.’ It is perhaps interesting to note that Calvin aligns himself very much with the teaching of Augustine concerning the effectiveness of faith in overcoming Satan. In the same section of the *Institutes* he goes on to quote from Augustine: ‘However great are the devices, as Augustine says, that the devil throws up against us, while he holds no lodgement in the heart, where faith dwells, he is cast out.’¹⁴⁴ The strong emphasis which Calvin places on the vital link between faith and the Word of God in this aspect of spiritual warfare is strikingly brought out by him in his *Commentary* on the armour of God in Ephesians 6. Whereas Paul separates faith and the Word of God (vv. 16 and 17 respectively) Calvin says: ‘I call them one, because the Word is the object of faith and cannot be applied to our use but by faith. And again, faith is nothing and can do nothing, without the Word.’ He recognizes however, that Paul only separates them to allow himself to speak freely on military armour. That Paul should liken a sword and a shield to faith and the Word of God was, for Calvin, extremely significant. The sword and the shield were ‘chief instruments of warfare’ and therefore in spiritual warfare faith and the Word of God ‘hold the highest rank.’ ‘By faith we repel all the attacks of the Devil, and by the Word of God the enemy himself is slain outright.’ In other words, the Word of God, being efficacious in the Christian, is more than sufficient ‘for repelling and putting to flight the enemy.’ The high view Calvin had of the Word of God in the Christian’s conflict with the devil, is brought out in these words:

And those that take from a Christian people the Word of God, do they not despoil them of their necessary armour, so that they perish without a struggle? There is no man of any rank who is not bound to be a soldier of Christ. But who can fight unarmed and swordless?¹⁴⁵

Rather than be ‘unarmed and swordless,’ Calvin expected every Christian to learn to handle the Word of God correctly in this aspect of spiritual warfare. The way in which Christ himself used Scripture in His battle with Satan in the wilderness, was to be the pattern for every Christian.

Another important weapon given to the Christian that he might be fully equipped in his struggle with the devil’s temptations, is, of course, prayer. We have seen already the importance of faith in the Christian’s conflict with the devil. Prayer and faith are very closely interconnected in Calvin’s theology. Prayer, he believed, is ‘the chief exercise of faith’¹⁴⁶ and is simply the expression of living faith. Where there is faith there will also be prayer—the two go hand in hand. The exercise of prayer was seen by Calvin as sure evidence of faith; without prayer faith cannot be genuine.¹⁴⁷ More than that, Calvin believed that prayer was given so that faith can be kept alive and active.¹⁴⁸ We note too, that the same Spirit who creates faith in the heart constrains the believer also to pray and that for prayer to be a genuine expression of faith, it must be founded upon the Word of God.¹⁴⁹ We therefore see just how closely prayer is related to faith and the Word of God, the ‘chief instrument’ in spiritual warfare.

Calvin believed that all prayer must arise out of human need. Whilst it is true that in all prayer the glory of God and not just the relief of human need must be the first motive, nevertheless we would ‘defraud God of His honour did we not refer every cause and every situation in which we are involved to Him and leave Him to determine the issue.’¹⁵⁰ We must therefore, not be ashamed of making our need the pretext of our prayers, hence the relevance of prayer in the context of temptation. This is further brought out where Calvin discusses the necessity of prayer. The exercise of prayer, he believed, was profitable in many ways. The stronghold of safety for the believer is to call upon the name of the Lord (Joel 2:32).

By so doing we invoke the presence both of his providence, through which he watches over and guards our affairs, and of his power, through which he sustains us, weak as we are and well-nigh overcome . . . it is by prayer that we call him to reveal himself as wholly present to us.¹⁵¹

Hence the reason for Calvin saying: ‘Whenever, therefore, we are assailed by any temptation, let us betake ourselves forthwith to prayer, as to a sacred refuge.’¹⁵² Having put on the armour of God, the Christian is not fully equipped unless he prays. The Christian is to ‘fight by prayer’ which was, for Calvin, ‘the true method’ because it was in this way that ‘we obtain from God every blessing’¹⁵³ to enable us to stand victorious against any temptation, including even unbelief and doubt.

Calvin also recognizes that ‘we obey God not without continual warfare and hard and trying struggles.’ In discussing the sixth petition of the Lord’s prayer, he says: ‘Here we seek to be equipped with such armour and defended with such protection that we may be able to win the victory.’ We need both the grace of the Spirit¹⁵⁴ to soften our heart that it might be directed to obey God and His aid ‘to render us invincible against . . . all the stratagems and all the violent assaults of Satan.’ The forms of temptation Calvin argued, are both ‘many and varied.’

For wicked conceptions of the mind, provoking us to transgress the law, which either our own inordinate desire suggests to us or the devil prompts, are temptations, as are the things not evil of their own nature yet which become temptations through the devil’s devices, when they are so thrust before our eyes that by their appearance we are drawn away or turn aside from God.

Whether the temptations are aroused in us by our own desires or by the devil's guile, the believer is to pray to God his Heavenly Father, that he may/might not yield on either count: 'We pray, rather, that he sustain and encourage us by his hand so that, strengthened by his power, we may stand firm against all the assaults of our malign enemy, whatever thought he may introduce into our minds.'

In closing we need to note that Calvin never says the Christian is to ask that he feel no temptations at all. Without them, he believed we 'grow sluggish.' The Lord 'tests His elect, chastising them by disgrace, poverty, tribulation, and other sorts of affliction.' But lest the Christian should be anxious or discouraged by this, Calvin goes on to point out that

God tries in one way, Satan in another. Satan tempts that he may destroy, condemn, confound, cast down, but God, that by proving his own children he may make trial of their sincerity . . . Besides Satan attacks those who are unarmed and unprepared that he may crush them unaware. God, along with the temptation, makes a way of escape, that his own may be able patiently to bear all that he impose upon them.¹⁵⁵

Besides, the Lord knows, Calvin believed, 'when the time is ripe to remove the godly from temptation;' the Christian must 'hold on patiently in times of temptation.'¹⁵⁶

Whenever talking of the Christian's conflict with Satan, Calvin is always careful to warn the believer that he must not consider doing battle with his spiritual adversary in his own strength. 'Those who prepare for such a combat with self-assurance do not sufficiently understand with what a ferocious and well-equipped enemy they have to deal.' The Christian prays to be free from his power, recognizing that, if it were not for the Lord, he would be 'torn to pieces . . . and swallowed down his throat.' Let it be enough, Calvin concludes, that in this battle especially, 'we stand and are strong in God's power alone.'¹⁵⁷
(Concluded).

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Endnotes:

- 1) 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. 55.
- 2) *Ibid.*, p. 63. 'The theological conception which Luther had of the "ancient foe" of God and man is to be divorced from that of some of his followers, They exaggerated it so ridiculously that they robbed his teaching of all usefulness.'
- 3) For example: Calvin went so far as to connect the devil with France's extravagant finery, without actually talking in terms of the 'clothing devil' of the Lutherans *Cf. ibid.*, p. 64.
- 4) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 1:14:16.
- 5) For a fuller account of the historical/theological background of demonology see Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-64.

- 6) As Niesel points out, Calvin attacks ‘in particular the suggestion that there are two principles in the world: God and the devil. Such a creed undermines the creative glory and sovereignty of God—in fact the very divinity of God—and must therefore be rejected.’ Niesel, W. *The Theology of Calvin*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1956, p. 63. Cf. Calvin, J. *Institutes*: 1:14:3.
- 7) *Ibid.*, 1:14:16.
- 8) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, 2 Pet. 2:4.
- 9) *Ibid.*, Jude 6.
- 10) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 1:14:14.
- 11) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Matt. 25:41.
- 12) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 1:14:14.
- 13) *Ibid.*, 1:14:16.
- 14) *Loc. cit.*
- 15) Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
- 16) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 2:3:5.
- 17) This distinction is also made by R. Niebuhr, albeit with different terminology who held that man sins ‘inevitably’ and ‘responsibly’. See *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. 1. (London: Nisbet & Co. 1942) pp. 266-276. See also footnote 13, Calvin, J. *Institutes* 2:3:5. (See also Niesel, *op. cit.*, p. 86f.).
- 18) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Matt. 25: 41.
- 19) Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
- 20) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, John 8:44.
- 21) Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 67.
- 22) *Ibid.*, p. 68.
- 23) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 1:14:19.
- 24) *Ibid.*, 1:14:19.
- 25) Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 68. Cf. Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 1:15:8.
- 26) In Calvin’s theology, ‘man is not responsible for his salvation, but he is somehow responsible for his damnation.’ Man falls by his own fault, yet as God’s providence ordains. ‘Thus Calvin attempts to meet the objection that the sinner should be excused since he cannot do otherwise than sin by admitting that man falls by God’s ordination but suggesting that it is also by his own fault. Calvin does not explain how this can be understood.’ Partee, C. *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977, p. 80. In such instances we do well to note the comment of Lance who says: ‘The mark of the true disciple is the willingness to accept biblical paradox

and not seek to reconcile it in the direction of one pole or another.’ A. Lance, ‘The Quest for the Historical Calvin’, *The Evangelical Quarterly* Vol. LV (1983), p. 113.

- 27) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Gen. 3:1.
- 28) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 2:5:1.
- 29) Cf. Niesel, *op. cit.*, p. 76f.
- 30) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, *loc. cit.*
- 31) Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
- 32) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Gen. 1:26.
- 33) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 1:14:18.
- 34) Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-73.
- 35) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 2:4:1.
- 36) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Eph. 2:1.
- 37) *Ibid.*, Rom. 6:20.
- 38) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 2:7:7.
- 39) Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
- 40) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, 2 Tim. 2:26.
- 41) Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
- 42) Cf. Calvin, J. *Institutes* 2:16:2.
- 43) For an analysis of the various attempts that have been made to resolve this problem in Calvin’s thought, cf. Peterson, R. A. *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Atonement*, Phillipsburg: The Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1983 p. 7, note 26.
- 44) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 2:16:2.
- 45) Cf. Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, 1 John 4:10.
- 46) In his paper on Calvin’s understanding of accommodation, F. L. Battles states that from his study of the *Institutes* in which every aspect of accommodation has apparently been set forth, nowhere ‘is it the topic of a separate locus; rather, it is everywhere assumed as a working principle.’, article entitled ‘God was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity’ in *Interpretation*, Vol. XXXI Jan. 1977, p. 19, note 1.
- 47) Peterson, *op. cit.*, p. 8. See also his footnote 28.
- 48) Cf. Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 2:16:3.
- 49) Peterson, *op. cit.* p. 8.

- 50) *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- 51) Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
- 52) Calvin, J. *Commentaries* John 14:30.
- 53) Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
- 54) Calvin, J. *Institutes* 1:14:14.
- 55) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Eph. 6:12.
- 56) *Ibid.*, Matt. 4:8.
- 57) *Ibid.*, John 16:11.
- 58) Hall, *op. cit.*, p.78.
- 59) *Loc. cit.*
- 60) *Loc. cit.*
- 61) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittell, Vol. 1, pp. 478-489.
- 62) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Eph. 2:2.
- 63) *Ibid.*, John 14:30.
- 64) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 1:14:17.
- 65) *Ibid.*, 1:14:18.
- 66) In dealing with the problems of the responsibility involved in God's delivery of men to Satan, Calvin's key to the solution is the principle of co-action (co-operation rather than coercion). This method originated with Augustine, and it means that 'in one action it is possible for God, the elect, wicked men and Satan all to work simultaneously, each with his own design and authority and his responsibility corresponding to these.' Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 81. Cf. Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 2:4:2.
- 67) *Ibid.*, 1:14:18.
- 68) *Ibid.*, 3:20:46.
- 69) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, 1 Cor. 10:13.
- 70) *Ibid.*, 2 Pet. 2:9.
- 71) *Ibid.*, 1 Cor. 10:13.
- 72) *Ibid.*, Matt. 4:1.
- 73) *Loc. cit.*, v. 3.

- 74) *Ibid.*, Luke 4:4.
- 75) *Ibid.*, Matt. 4:5.
- 76) *Loc. cit.*, v. 6.
- 77) *Loc. cit.*, v. 7.
- 78) See also *Ibid.*, 2 Thess. 2:9.
- 79) *Ibid.*, 2 Cor. 11:14.
- 80) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 1:8:2.
- 81) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, 2 Cor. 11:14.
- 82) *Loc cit.*, v. 13.
- 83) *Ibid.*, 1 Thess. 2:18.
- 84) *Ibid.*, Matt. 4:8.
- 85) *Loc. cit.*, v. 10.
- 86) *Loc. cit.*, v. 11.
- 87) *Ibid.*, Heb. 4:15.
- 88) One possible explanation is the low-key approach that Calvin had to the miraculous in general. He was conscious of the fact that he belonged to a very different world from the apostles. 'The miraculous was not simply banished, it was replaced by rational human effort.' P. F. Jensen, 'Calvin, Charismatics and Miracles,' *The Evangelical Quarterly* Vol. LI No. 3, 1979, p. 135. In fact he tended to discount all miracles because he believed they would 'disturb the completeness of a faith now delivered.' *Loc. cit.*, p. 142. Calvin's scepticism concerning the miraculous betrays his humanist background and his suspicion of subjective religious experience.
- 89) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 4:15:19; 2:8:22; 4:19:14; 4:19:22-23.
- 90) See for example his *Commentaries* on Matthew 8:14-18; on Mark 1:29-39; on Luke 4: 38-44 and also on Matthew 15: 21-28 and on Mark 7:24-30.
- 91) *Ibid.*, Mark 9:20.
- 92) *Ibid.*, Matt. 17:17.
- 93) *Loc. cit.*, v. 19.
- 94) *Loc. cit.*, v. 21.
- 95) *Ibid.*, Luke 4:33.
- 96) *Ibid.*, Matt. 8:23.

- 97) *Ibid.*, Mark 5:3.
- 98) *Loc. cit.*, v. 6.
- 99) It is probable that Calvin's caution concerning demon possession and exorcism stem from his rejection of the contemporary Roman Catholic view that there is a specific task of exorcism in relation to a specific condition of demon possession, to be exercised now. When Calvin does make the material relevant to the present, it is very much in terms of prayer. In other words, a general weapon against demonic activity, rather than a specific spiritual gift related to a specific condition.
- 100) *Ibid.*, Luke 8:38.
- 101) *Ibid.*, Matt. 8:31.
- 102) In his *Commentary*, Matt. 17:17 he says that both accounts 'are in agreement that he was dumb and driven to frenzies at various times.' Whilst the two accounts agree on the latter, it is hard to see how Calvin can conclude that Matthew says that the boy was dumb.
- 103) *Loc. cit.*
- 104) *Loc. cit.*
- 105) *Ibid.*, John 9:3.
- 106) *Ibid.*, Matt. 12:22.
- 107) *Ibid.*, John 9:1.
- 108) *Ibid.*, Luke 13: 10-17.
- 109) *Loc. cit.*, v. 12.
- 110) *Loc. cit.*, v. 15.
- 111) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 1:14:18.
- 112) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Gen. 3:15.
- 113) Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 82.
- 114) For Calvin, the Kingdom of God was understood as the renovation of the Church. The Church is conceived as the restoration of order in the world. We therefore have in Christ, 'both a renewal and a perfection of that restorative process.' Linking this process to the ascension and Christ's subsequent reign over the Church, Calvin henceforth refers to the 'Kingdom of Christ' extending to the ends of the earth and which pertains to all men, as well as to the Church . . . 'but it brings salvation to none but the elect.' B. J. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977, p. 169f.
- 115) There is some debate as to whether Calvin presented a twofold (excluding the office of prophet) or threefold Messianic office. See Peterson, *op. cit.*, p. 27, note 2 for a fuller discussion of the differing views. Peterson concludes however; 'I am compelled by such evidence to side with the majority of Calvin's scholars who regard the threefold Messianic office of Christ as an important element in Calvin's theology.' J. F. Jansen, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Work of Christ*,

London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1956, p. 164, note 1, believes that the prophetic office is a later addition, which Milner suggests, leads Jansen 'to minimize the importance of the prophetic [teaching] office for Calvin.'

- 116) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 2:15:2.
- 117) *Loc. cit.*, v. 3.
- 118) Peterson, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
- 119) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 2:15:4.
- 120) *Cf.* Peterson, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
- 121) *Loc. cit.*
- 122) 'The church is, of course, not at home in the world . . . ; it is therefore threatened by every sort of danger and enemy without and within.' Niesel, *op. cit.*, p. 208.
- 123) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 2:15:3.
- 124) God's care for believers is the basis of both the doctrine of providence and predestination. It is not easy to specify the relation between these two doctrines in Calvin's theology. 'The problem is whether predestination is an aspect of the doctrine of providence or whether providence is a part of the doctrine of predestination, or are they two similar, but separate doctrines?' 'This topic,' Partee points out, 'has long been the subject of debate.' *Op. cit.*, p. 143. He himself concludes that 'it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate Calvin's doctrine of predestination from his view of special providence.' *Ibid.*, p. 143.
- 125) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 2:15:5.
- 126) Peterson, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
- 127) Previous studies on Calvin's doctrine of the Atonement have failed to do justice to the breadth of Calvin's teaching by concentrating, generally speaking, on either the offices or the biblical themes. Peterson seeks to 'fill the gap in the Calvin literature.' *Ibid.*, pp. ix, x.
- 128) *Loc. cit.*
- 129) *Cf. ibid.*, pp. 46-54. for Peterson's full treatment of Calvin's 'Christ the Victor' theme.
- 130) Wallace, R. S. *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1959, p. 204. See also Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, 1 John 2:15.
- 131) *Ibid.*, John 13:2.
- 132) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
- 133) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, John 13:2.
- 134) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 251.
- 135) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 3:2:20.

- 136) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 257.
- 137) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 3:24:4. Calvin, in fact, not only stressed ‘the positive attributes of the soul’s condition in the elect, but he was also quite cognizant of the difficulties centering in unbelief.’ J. C. Smith, ‘Calvin: Unbelief in the Elect,’ *The Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. LIV, 1982 p. 14.
- 138) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 257.
- 139) ‘In the following century some of Calvin’s followers did separate them in this way and this, together with a departure from Calvin’s ground of assurance, led to a widespread loss of assurance.’ A. N. S. Lance, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of Assurance’ *Vox Evangelica* XI, 179, p. 33.
- 140) *Ibid.*, p. 49.
- 141) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 3:2:12.
- 142) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, 1 John 5:4.
- 143) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 3:2:21. Smith makes the point ‘that Calvin considers unbelief the root of evil, not *vice versa*. By doubting the promises of God the forces of evil (which God controls) are able and allowed to enter, while confidence in God’s mercy, despite all appearances or troubles, is the crux, even from the beginning of the race, of regeneration and its victory over sin.’ J. C. Smith, ‘Calvin: Unbelief in the Elect’, *The Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. LIV, 1982, p. 24.
- 144) *Loc cit.*
- 145) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Eph. 6:16.
- 146) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 3:20.
- 147) *Cf. loc. cit.*, v. 1.
- 148) *Cf. loc. cit.*, vv. 3-4.
- 149) For a summary of how Calvin believed prayer should be ‘controlled, formed and inspired by the Word of God,’ see Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 276ff. Niesel brings out very clearly this link between faith, the Word and the Spirit when he says: ‘the faith which is grounded in the work of Christ and supported by the word of promise . . . springs from the operation of the Holy Ghost within us,’ *op. cit.*, p. 155.
- 150) Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 280.
- 151) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 3:20:2.
- 152) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, Philippians 4:6.
- 153) *Ibid.*, Eph. 6:18.
- 154) Niesel draws our attention to a ‘circular argument’ which has relevance for each section of this thesis: ‘There is no prayer without the first fruits of the Spirit, *i.e.* without communion with Christ. But then it is also true that we cannot belong to Christ and abide in Him without constant prayer.’ *Op. cit.*, p. 158.

155) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 3:20:46.

156) Calvin, J. *Commentaries*, 2 Pet. 2:9.

157) Calvin, J. *Institutes*, 3:20:46.