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Coulibaly, Nouhoum. "Calvin's Teaching and Practice of Prayer." Th.M., Tyndale University College & Seminary, 2009.

**Calvin's Teaching and Practice of Prayer**

**by**

**Nouhoum Coulibaly**

**A thesis submitted to the Department of Theology in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Theology awarded by Tyndale  
Seminary**

**April 2009**

**Toronto, Canada**

**Tyndale Seminary**

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to Carl and Marcia Lee for their generous spiritual and financial support throughout my seven years of studies at Tyndale Seminary. I thank them for being God's answer to my prayers to obtaining theological training for the sake of the kingdom's work.

I also dedicate this work to my wife Karen and our two children, Joshua Carl and Esther Miriam for their unfailing support and patience during my Th. M. program at Tyndale.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to my advisor, Dr. Victor Shepherd, of Tyndale Seminary, for his excellent work in guiding me throughout the process of writing and defending this thesis. I also extend great thanks to Dr. Dennis Ngien for his encouragement and his pastoral care for me during some of the challenging times of my Th.M (Master of Theology) program.

I am ever grateful to Carl and Marcia Lee for paying for all of my tuition fees and living costs during my years at Tyndale Seminary. I can never forget to thank my dear wife, Dr. Karen Stel Coulibaly, for proofreading all of my writing in spite of her business as a mom and a medical worker. I would furthermore like to thank the Tyndale community: President Brian Stiller, the faculty, the staff, the librarians and all the students I befriended for their various and gracious support during my studies.

I would finally like to thank all of my family members and friends in Mali for their support. I am especially thankful for my parents, Timothee and Lydie Coulibaly, who prayed and fasted for me during forty days so that Tyndale's doors would be opened for me. Above all, I give thanks to our Almighty Lord Jesus Christ who has answered my many prayers by using people and circumstances to bring me where I am today.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: CALVIN'S REFUGEE LIFE	3
CHAPTER TWO: CALVIN'S TEACHING ON PRAYER	30
CHAPTER THREE: PROVIDENCE AND PRAYER IN CALVIN	99
CHAPTER FOUR: CALVIN'S PRACTICE OF PRAYER	122
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	177
BIBLIOGRAPHY	180

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study of Calvin's teaching and practice of prayer. Calvin is commonly identified in terms of his authorship of the *Institutes*, or in terms of his doctrine of predestination. For others, he is the instigator of Servetus' death. To be sure, Calvin is more than all of these. Timothy George writes, "Few people in the history of Christianity have been as highly esteemed or as meanly despised as John Calvin. Most Christians, including most Protestants, know only two things about him: He believed in predestination, and he sent Servetus to the stake."<sup>1</sup>

Our first goal is to present Calvin as a man of prayer, based on both his teaching and practice of this essential Christian discipline. Our second goal is to inform and enrich the prayer life of our reader through Calvin's teaching and practice of prayer. In his article, "John Calvin on Prayer", Dr. Victor Shepherd writes, "No one in the history of Christian thought has written as much as Calvin on prayer."<sup>2</sup> Agreeing with Shepherd's statement, we can learn much from Calvin on prayer.

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman and Homan Publishers, 1998), p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> Victor Shepherd, "John Calvin on Prayer" in Center for Excellence in Preaching (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 2007) pp. 1-9 [Published electronically].

This study is divided into four chapters. In the first chapter we shall endeavour to set forth and describe Calvin's life as a refugee. We will explore events that might have shaped him into a man of prayer. In chapter two we will focus on Calvin's systematic teaching on prayer. In chapter three we will expose some practical ways in which Calvin applied his own teaching on prayer. Lastly, in chapter four we will compare Calvin's doctrine of providence with his doctrine of prayer. The result of the comparative study will shed more light on our understanding of prayer in Calvin.

## Chapter One

### Calvin's Refugee Life

Calvin survived many troubles in his life. Many would classify him as a refugee in the 16<sup>th</sup> century socio- religious landscape. In this chapter, we will make a psychological study of refugees to determine if Calvin reflects the features of a refugee psyche. If Calvin does reflect the feature of a refugee, then we will determine whether his refugee life shapes him into a man of prayer. In his article, "John Calvin on Prayer", Victor Shepherd states, "Fewer still have understood the social/ psychological situation from which he wrote everything: the refugee who knows that life is precarious, political rulers can't be trusted, betrayal is always at hand; above all, an outer and inner homelessness that will dissipate only in the eschaton as the City of God, long promised God's people, is made theirs eternally."<sup>3</sup> Let us now explore Calvin's life in order to determine whether or not he fits into the category of a refugee.

#### **A. Definition of a Refugee: Does Calvin fit in?**

What is a refugee? In his definition of a refugee, Marsella writes,

In 1951, The United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defined a refugee as a person who has left their country of origin due to a

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<sup>3</sup> Victor Shepherd, "John Calvin on Prayer", p. 1.

‘well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion.’ However, many governments subsequently recognized persons to be refugees who were victims of war, violence, and other social and political disasters and who were forced to seek asylum.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the United Nations’ definition of a refugee, individual countries like the US have their own national definition. Marsella states,

The United States Immigration and Nationality Act of 1980 defined a refugee as the following:

A refugee, for our purpose, is any person who is outside any country of such person’s nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country because of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.<sup>5</sup>

In 1991 the United Nations expanded its definition of a refugee according to Marsella.

He writes:

A United Nations High Commission on Refugees working group reconsidered the definition of a refugee under the broader category of all people in need of service and protection. They included (1) persons covered by the 1951 Convention; (2) persons covered by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention/Cartagena Declaration; (3) persons forced to leave or prevented from returning because of man-made disasters; (4) persons forced to leave or prevented from returning because of natural or ecological

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<sup>4</sup> Anthony J. Marsella (2004). “Refugees”. In *“Encyclopedia of Psychology”* Vol. 7 New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 18-19.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony J. Marsella “Refugees”, pp. 18-19.

disasters or extreme poverty; (5) persons who apply to be treated as (1) or when applicable (2), but are found not to be in these categories; (6) internally displaced persons; and (7) stateless persons (Siem & Appleyard, 1991).<sup>6</sup>

A close look at the United Nations 1991 definition of a refugee shows that some new phenomena have been added to expand its former definition of 1951. Natural or ecological disasters or extreme poverty are examples of the new phenomena defining someone as a refugee.

Did Calvin's life show any features of Marsella's definitions of a refugee?

A brief exploration of Calvin's life will answer this question.

Calvin was born on July 10, 1509 in the city of Noyon, Northern France. Gérard Cauvin, his father, was a notary who was responsible for conducting the legal affairs of the cathedral chapter in Noyon. At the age of fourteen, Calvin's parents sent him to Paris to study for the priesthood at the Collège de la Marche. He had the privilege of a comprehensive training in Latin and rhetoric in his university years that would serve him well many years later when he became a teacher of the Word of God. After about a year, Calvin was judged ready to commence his liberal arts degree. He thus went to the Collège de Montaigu. He spent five years there. Around 1528, Calvin's father had a change of mind regarding

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.; pp.18-19.

his son's studies. Instead of encouraging his studies for the priesthood, Calvin's father sent him instructions to enroll at Orléans as a candidate for a degree in civil law. Elsie Anne Mckee gives us more details:

Who was the man Calvin, and what was the outwardly visible life story of this teacher of spirituality? Born on July 10, 1509, in Noyon, Picardy, a city in northern France that was the seat of a bishop, young John was the brightest son of Gérard Calvin (usually written Cauvin). Gérard's father had been a cooper or boatman in a nearby village, but the younger man moved to Noyon and worked his way up to become the bishop's notary. This meant that Gérard was able to launch his own children on paths of advancement, and so the three sons were destined for the priesthood. Because of young John's intelligence, he was given a good education with the sons of the Montmors family, relatives of the bishop; then he accompanied them to Paris for the next stage of his studies, where he (like other priests-to-be) was supported by the usual system of church benefices. After John completed the arts degree at the University of Paris, his father decided that he should become a lawyer instead of a priest, and so the young man moved to Orléans and then Bourges, the two great centers of legal training in France.<sup>7</sup>

Plainly, Calvin's family played a significant role in shaping his spiritual, academic, and professional journeys.

Calvin obeyed his father's wish by withdrawing from Paris to study Law at Orléans. There he spent the year studying under the distinguished jurist Pierre de l'Estoile. He also studied Greek under the Alsatian humanist Melchior Womar.

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<sup>7</sup> Elsie Anne Mckee, Ed. and Trans. *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001) pp. 6-7.

Calvin eventually returned to Paris to devote himself to humanist studies after the death of his father. Steinmetz elaborates,

In 1531 Calvin's father became seriously ill and Calvin returned as quickly as he could to Noyon. He arrived to find that both his father and brother, Charles, were under a sentence of excommunication. Gérard had quarreled with the cathedral chapter and Charles had, as a consequence, handled two of the officials of the chapter less gently than their dignity demanded. When Gérard died on May 26, 1531, it was only with some difficulty that Charles persuaded the chapter to allow his father to be buried in consecrated ground.

While Calvin mourned his father's death, he also experienced it as a liberation from the obligation to practice law. He returned to Paris to the Collège de France, where he studied Greek with Danès and Hebrew with Vatable. He was now free to put his legal books on the shelf and to devote himself to humanist studies.<sup>8</sup>

The death of Calvin's father was a trial for him in the sense that he lost someone very dear in his life. By the same token, his father's death allowed him to devote himself to the passion of his heart, his humanist studies. He did not impose his own desire on his father, but when he died, it seemed fitting to reconsider his true calling.

Calvin's eventual exile from France took root while studying in Paris. On All Saints' Day, 1533, he first came to the attention of the French authorities. Nicholas Cop, the rector of the University of Paris, one of Calvin's friends, attacked

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<sup>8</sup>David Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) p. 7.

the views of the Paris theologians in a sermon he preached. Some scholars believed Calvin played a role in Cop's speech preparation. Alexandre Ganoczy writes,

A significant incident occurred after the events following a speech the rector, Cop, made on the Feast of All Saints in 1533 at the opening of the academic year. Cop was a physician; however, his speech had a spiritual and theological character. It contained Erasmian thoughts on a Christian philosophy of life, Luther's theme of law and gospel, and, finally, the teaching of the justification of the sinner 'through faith without works of the law.'...

Who was behind this speech? Scholarly opinions differ. Some attribute to Calvin merely an advisory role; others think that Calvin wrote the speech himself; and others attribute to Cop, the Erasmian physician, a time of private study and a competence in theology similar to the young jurist. One thing is certain: Calvin felt solidarity with Cop and was able to affirm his statements. At any rate, the reaction of the opposition affected Calvin exactly as it did the university rector: both found themselves in that constantly shifting middle ground of loyalty to the church and a desire for reform. In the eyes of the Sorbonne occupying middle ground still meant schism and heresy.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, Calvin and Cop were hunted by the French Police. Steinmetz recounts,

Calvin, like Cop, managed to give the police the slip and walked out of the city of Paris disguised as a common laborer. During the next few months Calvin's movements are difficult to trace. He returned briefly to Paris, where he was granted an audience with the king's sister, Marguerite d'Angoulême, an interview which Beza later described as a great success.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Alexandre Ganoczy, "Calvin's Life" in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim Trans. David L. Foxgrover and James Schmitt (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2006) pp. 3-24.

<sup>10</sup> David Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, p. 9.

Thus, Cop's speech in 1533 triggered the cascade of events leading to Calvin's refugee life.

The affair of the Placards was another dramatic event in Calvin's life. What was the affair of the Placards about? Steinmetz explains,

In October 1534, posters attacking the Catholic doctrine of the Mass appeared overnight in several of the important cities in France; including Paris. The denunciations were violent and uncompromising, and one placard was even found in the king's bedchamber. This demonstration of the strength of the Protestant movement in France alarmed the French court. Unfortunately for the authors of the placards, the Protestant attack on the Mass coincided with a new treaty between the pope and Francis I. Francis decided to prove his loyalty to the papacy by arresting and executing the Protestants responsible for the placards. Over two hundred were arrested and twenty were executed, including Etienne de la Forge, a Parisian merchant with whom Calvin had once taken furnished lodgings.<sup>11</sup>

As a consequence of the "Placards affair" Calvin and his friend, du Tillet, out of fear for their lives fled to Basle, Switzerland. Nicholas Cop, the former rector of the University of Paris, had already found refuge in Basle the previous year. Basel, a university town, was where Calvin had hoped to find a quiet niche where he could devote his life to scholarship.

The disastrous *Placards* affair forced Calvin to find a safer country outside France, as Tavad confirms in these words,

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<sup>11</sup> David Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, p. 9.

*Placards*, or posters advocating a given theological position, were popular among the reformers, who could claim Luther's Ninety-five Theses as a precedent. But while the Ninety-five Theses were in Latin and intended for a scholarly disputation, the posters that were occasionally put in Switzerland and France had the more popular purpose of propaganda. Posters denouncing the Mass as an abomination, composed by a Frenchman, Antoine Marcourt, who at the time was preaching in Geneva, appeared simultaneously in the cities of Paris, Rouen, Orléans, Blois, and Tours. In addition, the same text was also posted up in some of the royal residences, including the château d'Amboise, where the king was himself staying at the time.<sup>12</sup>

Although the theological reason for posting the *placards* was understandable from the point of view of the Reformers, it was this act that precipitated Calvin's flight from France.

On the basis of this brief description of Calvin's journey, we affirm that Calvin was a refugee indeed. Calvin's flight from his native France to Basle places him in the category of a religious refugee according the United Nations' definition of a refugee of 1980 and 1991. Calvin and others like Cop were forced to leave France because they could have lost their lives had they remained there. Ganoczy comments,

In October, 1534, a crisis affecting church and state erupted. When Antoine Marcourt, a preacher from Neuchâtel who sympathized with Luther, initiated blatant attacks against the sacrifice of the Mass and publicized them in the form of placards, the men of the Sorbonne and Parliament urged the king to take up the harshest measures of punishment. Even such an upright

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<sup>12</sup> George H. Tavard, *The Starting Point of Calvin's Theology*, p. 14.

reformer as Guillaume Budé decidedly rejected Marcourt's dogmatic aggression. Thus there came a new wave of persecution, with imprisonments and executions. Calvin found himself forced to leave France. In January, 1535, he met with du Tillet and Cop in evangelical Basle.<sup>13</sup>

Calvin himself describes briefly the persecution that took place in France against new Protestants in these words:

Leaving my native country, France, I in fact retired into Germany, expressly for the purpose of being able there to enjoy in some obscure corner the repose which I had always desired, and which had been so long denied me. But lo! Whilst I lay hidden at Basle, and known only to a few people, many faithful and holy persons were burnt alive in France; and the report of these burnings having reached foreign nations, they excited the strongest disapprobation among a great part of the Germans, whose indignation was kindled against the authors of tyranny.<sup>14</sup>

Had not Calvin fled his native France for Basle, he could have faced martyrdom like other new Protestants who did not escape France. Hence, Calvin became a refugee outside France for his religious convictions

### **B. Manifestation of Some Consequences of a Refugee Life in Calvin**

There are consequences to being a refugee. They can be physical, mental or material consequences. Marsella describes some of these consequences in these words,

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<sup>13</sup> Alexandre Ganoczy, "Calvin's life" pp. 3-24.

<sup>14</sup> *Comm. Psalms: The author's preface*, p. xLi

Many refugees are victims of famine, torture, rape, brutality, and deprivation. Their future is uncertain, and their lives are often lived in quiet anguish and despair fighting poverty, pestilence, and disease....

In brief, refugees and dislocated persons face numerous sequential stressors that pose serious challenges to their mental health and well-being. These typically include (1) psychological trauma associated with war, political abuse, violence, persecution, and torture; (2) medical problems including possible brain damage, spinal and skeletal injuries, infections, and malnutrition; (3) dislocation and destruction of home and family life with related economic disadvantages; (4) uprooting; (5) sense of loss and bereavement; (6) migration; (7) transitional living in refugee camps and relocation centers; (8) resettlement; (9) acculturation and culture shock; and (10) possible racial and ethnic abuse, marginalization, and isolation.

Because of the many problems the refugee must face, mental health problems are now acknowledged to be among the most common, acute and chronic sequelae of the refugee experience. The refugee experience is associated with anxiety, fear, paranoia and suspicion, grief, guilt, despair, hopelessness, withdrawal, depression, somatization, substance abuse and alcoholism, posttraumatic stress disorders, anger, and hostility. In addition to psychiatric symptoms, there are also problems related to work, family, and marital adjustment, and in acculturation and assimilation. Life within refugee camps is associated with its own set of problems including a sense of loss, uncertainty, distrust, skepticism, helplessness, vulnerability, powerlessness, over-dependency, survivor guilt, violence, crime, and social disintegration.<sup>15</sup>

Not all refugees undergo these described consequences in the same way. Individual cases and circumstances vary. Which of these consequences did Calvin undergo as a refugee? In our view, two major consequences can be applied to Calvin's case.

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<sup>15</sup> Anthony J. Marsella (2004). "Refugees" in *Encyclopedia Psychology*. Vol. 7 (New York: Oxford University Press) pp. 18-19.

## 1. Dislocation and Resettlement

Calvin and du Tillet were first dislocated from France and resettled in Basle. They were betrayed on their first attempt to flee from France to Basle. Steinmetz informs us, “Their escape almost ended in disaster, when a treacherous servant stole one of their horses and all of their money. Luckily, another servant had a small sum of money, which he was willing to lend to Calvin to cover the expenses for the rest of the journey to Switzerland.”<sup>16</sup> They were now refugees outside of their homeland.

Calvin continued to pursue his passion for his new-found Protestant faith while in Basle. According to Ganoczy, “There existed in Basle at that time a healthy pluralism in matters of faith regarding reform. Erasmus lived there in seclusion. Oswald Myconius, a former colleague of Zwingli, led the community that between 1523 and 1531 received a well-structured and balanced reform of its church order under the direction of the monk Johannes Oecampadius, who had become a Lutheran.”<sup>17</sup> Calvin completed the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536) in Basle. The first edition of the *Institutes* had a dual purpose. In the prefatory address of the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* Calvin writes,

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<sup>16</sup> David Steinmetz, *Calvin In Context*, p.10.

<sup>17</sup> Alexandre Ganoczy, “Calvin’s Life” In *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, pp. 3-24.

When I first set my hand to this work, nothing was farther from my mind, most glorious King, than to write something that might afterward be offered to Your Majesty. My purpose was solely to transmit certain rudiments by which those who are touched with any zeal for religion might be shaped to true godliness. And I undertook this labor especially for our French countrymen, very many of whom I knew to be hungering and thirsting for Christ; but I saw very few who had been duly imbued with even a slight knowledge of him. The book itself witnesses that this was my intention, adapted as it is to a simple and, you may say, elementary form of teaching.

But I perceived that the fury of certain wicked persons has prevailed so far in your realm that there is no place in it for sound doctrine. Consequently, it seemed to me that I should be doing something worthwhile if I both gave instruction to them and made confession before you with the same work. From this you may learn the nature of the doctrine against which those madmen burn with rage who today disturb your realm with fire and sword. And indeed I shall not fear to confess that here is contained almost the sum of that doctrine which they shout must be punished by prison, exile, proscription, and fire, and be exterminated on land and sea.<sup>18</sup>

Calvin's *Institutes* did and still continues to fulfill his first purpose of giving theological instruction to his countrymen, but it is uncertain whether his second goal of convincing King Francis I about the Protestant beliefs was accomplished. The King of France had continued to persecute the Protestants even after the publication of various editions of the *Institutes*. The *Institutes* went through numerous, expanded editions in Latin (1539, 1543, 1550, 1553, 1559) and French (1541, 1545, 1551, 1560). The final Latin edition was much (five times) larger than the first.

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<sup>18</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes*, Preface, p. 9

In 1536 Calvin and du Tillet left Basle for a short stay in Ferrara, Italy.

Calvin was searching for a restful place where he could devote himself to the work God had put on his heart. Upon his return from Italy to Paris via Basle, he and the rest of his family decided to find refuge in the free imperial city of Strasbourg. The presence of French royal troops on the roads between Paris and Strasbourg, however, made the direct route difficult to take by refugee civilians like Calvin and his family. Therefore, Calvin avoided this danger by choosing a detour through the valley of the Rhone to the French speaking city of Geneva in Switzerland. Calvin's intention was to spend no more than one night in Geneva, while his former companion du Tillet was already living there. Informed by someone of Calvin's presence in Geneva, William Farel, the leader of the reform movement in Geneva, went to the house where Calvin was staying to tell him that he should remain in Geneva. In the preface to his commentary on the Psalms, Calvin explains:

As the most direct road to Strasburg, to which I then intended to retire, was shut by the wars, I had resolved to pass quickly by Geneva, without staying longer than a single night in that city. A little before this, Popery had been driven from it by the exertions of the excellent person whom I have named, and Peter Viret; but matters were not yet brought to a settled state, and the city was divided into unholy and dangerous factions. Then an individual who now basely apostatised and returned to the Papists, discovered me and made me known to others. Upon this, Farel, who burned with an extraordinary zeal to advance the gospel, immediately strained every nerve to detain me. And after having learned that my heart was set upon devoting myself to private studies, for which I wished to keep myself free from other

pursuits, and finding that he gained nothing by entreaties, he proceeded to utter an imprecation that God would curse my retirement, and the tranquility of the studies which I sought, if I should withdraw and refuse to give assistance, when the necessity was so urgent. By this imprecation I was so stricken with terror, that I desisted from the journey which I had undertaken; but sensible of my natural bashfulness and timidity, I would not bring myself under obligation to discharge any particular office.<sup>19</sup>

When Calvin first visited Geneva, the city was not part of Switzerland. Geneva was rather a free republic which had repudiated the authority of the Prince-Bishop, on the one hand, and on the other, of the Dukes of Savoy.

The Reformation was still at its early stage in Geneva when Farel met and recruited Calvin for ministry. Calvin was first appointed to be ‘reader in Holy Scripture.’ In that office, he would lecture or preach on the Bible without any other additional pastoral duties. A year later, Calvin was elected pastor and given the principal oversight of one of the city churches.

After Farel and Calvin laid the groundwork for the Genevan church, some difficulties and misunderstanding began to arise between the two and the majority of the Genevans. William G. Naphy informs us:

In 1538, Calvin became a victim of his foreign policy. Geneva’s ecclesiastical system was conformed to Berne’s by senatorial fiat. Even Calvin admitted that the changes were *adiaphora* (unimportant) but he and Farel vehemently opposed the means. They denied that the state had competence in religious affairs without regard to the ministers. The senate

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<sup>19</sup> *Comm. Psalms: The Author’s Preface*, pp. xlii-xliii.

was unwilling to be lectured on a foreign policy decision and, a lesson not lost on Calvin, had no need to be as the ministers were not united on the matter. Calvin and Farel remained opposed and were expelled.<sup>20</sup>

Knowing that Farel and Calvin were French citizens, the Genevans also began to inquire into Calvin's motivations on political grounds. Some of his enemies wondered out loud whether he had been sent to Geneva as an agent of the French government in order to undermine the independence of the Genevan republic. Advancing these kinds of accusations, the city council ordered Calvin and Farel to leave Geneva within three days. After the failure of their appeals first to Bern and then to the synod meeting in Zurich for a solution, they left Geneva. Hence, Calvin was forced to experience, once again, dislocation and resettlement as a refugee.

## **2. Uncertain Future and Withdrawal**

Expelled from Geneva, Calvin was in search of a new refuge. Calvin was uprooted once again as a refugee. Facing uncertainty for his future, Calvin hoped to withdraw from public ministry and to rest somewhere. Neither could he go back to his native France due to the continual persecution against the evangelicals there. Calvin thus faced an uncertain future. Zachman writes, "After the expulsion of Calvin and Farel from Geneva in 1538, Calvin thought he was no longer suited for

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<sup>20</sup> William G. Naphy, "Calvin's Geneva" in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald McKim, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2006) pp. 25-37.

the ministry and that he should instead pursue the life of quiet retirement from which he had been diverted by Farel in 1536.”<sup>21</sup> The uncertainty of Calvin’s future was short-lived, due to the fact that Bucer and Wolfgang Capito, two theological leaders in Strasbourg, invited him to join the ministry in Strasbourg. After some hesitation, he finally accepted a position as minister of the French-speaking church, a congregation that numbered at that time four to five hundred members. Calvin, finally, settled in Strasbourg. He describes:

By this means set at liberty and loosed from the tie of my vocation, I resolved to live in a private station, free from the burden and cares of any public charge, when that most excellent servant of Christ, Martin Bucer, employing a similar kind of remonstrance and protestation as that to which Farel had recourse before, drew me back to a new station. Alarmed by the example of Jonas which he set before me, I still continued in the work of teaching. And although I always continued like myself, studiously avoiding celebrity; yet I was carried, I know not how, as it were by force to the Imperial assemblies, where, willing or unwilling, I was under the necessity of appearing before the eyes of many.<sup>22</sup>

Hence, in obedience to divine vocation, Calvin once again got involved in public ministry at the French-speaking church in Strasbourg. He willingly risked forfeiting the freedom and the peace of mind he was longing for. Not only did Calvin accept the role of a pastor and teacher of the Word of God, but he was also called to teach

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<sup>21</sup> Randall C. Zachman, *John Calvin As Teacher, Pastor, And Theologian: The shape of his writings and thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), p. 22.

<sup>22</sup> *Comm. Psalms: The Author’s Preface*, p. xliii.

Scripture at Sturm's new academy in Strasbourg. At that academy, Calvin was able to refine his abilities as an interpreter of Scripture, as well as gain a vision of how to train and educate a new generation of pastors in the newly-born Protestant church.

In 1539, while Calvin was *still in Strasbourg*, the Genevan church received a letter from Jacopo Cardinal Sadoletto, Bishop of Carpentras in southern France, inviting it to rejoin the traditional faith, meaning the Roman Catholic Church. Unable to argue with Sadoletto, the Genevan church recognized that Calvin could rebut him. Steinmetz explains:

The Geneva authorities recognized the force of Sadoletto's arguments and their own inability to write a persuasive response. After lengthy consultations with Bern that stretched over several months and a vain attempt to persuade Pierre Viret to answer Sadoletto, the Genevese reluctantly concluded that Simon Sulzer should be sent from Bern to Strasbourg to ask Calvin to reply to Sadoletto on their behalf. In spite of some initial hesitation to embrace this unexpected and not wholly welcome invitation (it was difficult, after all, not to take modest pleasure in the public embarrassment of old enemies), Calvin decided that the matter was too important to be clouded by personal resentments and agreed to speak for the inarticulate and theologically tongue-tied citizens of Geneva.<sup>23</sup>

Ganoczy confirms,

Sadoletto's letter was sent from the Genevans to Basle and from there to Strasbourg with the urgent request that Calvin answer it. Calvin did so quickly and with theological mastery. Not only did he reject the accusation of schism with Luther's argument that the evangelicals did not separate

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<sup>23</sup> David Steinmetz, *Calvin In Context*, p. 16.

themselves from Rome, but further asserted that Rome had expelled the evangelicals. As a result it is the Romans who are the schismatics.<sup>24</sup>

Calvin set aside his personal resentment against his old enemies of Geneva and decided to respond to Sadoleto for the sake of the Gospel. Calvin writes, "I have never touched upon opposite opinions, unless where there was reason to fear, that by being silent respecting them, I might leave my readers in doubt and perplexity."<sup>25</sup> Even in his precarious position, Calvin set aside past differences to obey the current call of God on his life.

Shortly after Calvin's response to Sadoleto, the council of Geneva invited Calvin back to Geneva for full time ministry as before. Ganoczy asserts,

The great impact of Calvin's response to Sadoleto certainly contributed to the fact that the Genevans attached high expectations to the return of the expelled reformer. Accordingly they showed themselves to be generous. They offered Calvin and his wife an entire house and a good salary as well as benefits 'in kind'. Calvin's attitude may be described as sober and without illusions, but also without rancor or revenge. He made it clear to the council that he wanted only to serve the common good, but to do that it was necessary to achieve unity about a clearly formulated church order. Characteristic of his personal approach, Calvin continued his preaching at the place in the Bible where he had stopped three years before, as if nothing unusual had happened in the meantime.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Alexandre Ganoczy, "Calvin's Life", pp. 3-24.

<sup>25</sup> *Comm. Psalms: The Author's Preface*, p. xlix.

<sup>26</sup> Alexandre Ganoczy, "Calvin's Life", pp. 3-24.

Although surprised by this sudden turn of the Genevan church's invitation to return there, Calvin finally went back to Geneva by the summer of 1541. This would be his final ministry destination. Upon his return, he moved swiftly to implement a program of reform in the city. He also resumed his preaching and teaching of the Word of God, preaching twice on Sunday and once on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. He later restricted his weekday preaching to every second week. Calvin preached on the New Testament on Sundays, on the Old Testament on weekdays, and occasionally on the Psalms on Sunday afternoons. In addition to church business, Calvin maintained an active correspondence with both lay and clerical leaders in the church of France. When King Henry II ascended the throne in France in 1547, many Protestants were subjected to programmatic persecution. Calvin therefore maintained a great deal of correspondence with many of them to encourage them in their affliction and persecution. A few years later, Calvin's physical health failed rapidly until he died in May 1564.

In conclusion, the psychological exploration of refugees shows that Calvin's life did manifest characteristic features of a refugee. Describing Calvin as a refugee, Parker writes:

Strasbourg, not at this time belonging to France, but close to its eastern borders, a city that had early declared for the Reformation and yet showed remarkable toleration towards the varied shades of evangelical opinion and

towards Rome, had become one of the chief cities of refuge for the persecuted in France. There were some four or five hundred members of the French church of which Calvin now became a minister. A happy situation for him; a Frenchman among Frenchmen, a refugee among refugees, a poor man among generally poor men.<sup>27</sup>

Although Calvin never lived in a refugee camp, the persecution culminating in his flights from France and Geneva defines him as a refugee. As a refugee, Calvin experienced the psychological drama of uprooting, migration, resettlement, and acculturation. Through these experiences, Calvin sometimes felt anxiety, fear of failure (especially after his rejection from Geneva) and withdrawal. He finally died outside of his beloved homeland, France.

### **C. Calvin's Refugee Life and Prayer**

How did Calvin cope with the consequences of his refugee status? Was it one of the factors shaping him into a man of prayer?

Without any doubt, the analysis of Calvin's refugee life shows that his teaching skill was unveiled during that time. Calvin's gift of teaching is rooted in his formal education in France where he learned Greek, Hebrew, Latin, philosophy and law under the erudite professors of his time. Without neglecting the effect of Calvin's humanist education on his gift of teaching the Word of God, this gift was

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<sup>27</sup> Parker, *John Calvin: A Biography* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), p. 92.

unveiled and strengthened during his life outside France. Randall C. Zachman affirms,

From his association with other reformers of his days, the picture that emerges of Calvin is significantly different from the commonplace picture of Calvin. Calvin was first a highly learned person, trained and skilled in the interpretation of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin texts, deeply committed to the recovery of letters brought about by the labors of Guillaume Budé and Desiderius Erasmus.... Calvin was called to the public ministry of teacher and pastor by the prophetic Guillaume Farel, in the company of the moderate and self-controlled Pierre Viret. Calvin was called back to the ministry by his father in the ministry, Martin Bucer, who advanced his training both as pastor and interpreter of Scripture. Calvin was decisively shaped as a teacher by Johann Sturm and especially by Philip Melancthon, whose method of teaching via *Loci communes* Calvin followed in every edition of the *Institutes* from 1539 to 1559....In sum, Calvin saw himself as both a teacher and a pastor, called to restore the preaching of the gospel to the church of Christ, by restoring the right way to read Scripture both to pastors and to unlearned laity, in the company of other learned and godly teachers and pastors, such as Budé, Erasmus, Luther, Oecolampadius, Zwingli, Farel, Viret, Bucer, Sturm, Melancthon, and Bullinger.<sup>28</sup>

Evidently, not all of these teachers and pastors had the same degree of influence on Calvin's gift of teaching. For example, Zachman writes,

So far as I know, Bucer is the only person besides Luther to whom Calvin referred as his father, and it may be that Luther was Calvin's father in the doctrine of salvation, whereas Bucer was Calvin's father in the ministry.

Calvin especially learned from Bucer how rightly to order the polity and worship of the church, especially with the fourfold office of teacher, pastor, elder, and deacon, and how to order the community via discipline, which Calvin came to describe as the sinews of the body of Christ. Calvin also developed a deep appreciation for Bucer's skill as an interpreter of

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<sup>28</sup> Randall C. Zachman, *John Calvin As Teacher, Pastor, and Theologian*, pp. 26-27.

Scripture, demonstrating his great depth of learning and attention to context.<sup>29</sup>

In the course of his life and ministry outside France, Calvin came across people like Farel who challenged and influenced him to be an effective teacher of the Word of God. Before that time, Calvin recognizes that he was unpolished and a novice in the teaching of the Word of God. He affirms,

Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that although I did not altogether leave off other studies, I yet pursued them with less ardour.

I was quite surprised to find that before a year had elapsed, all who had any desire after purer doctrine were continually coming to me to learn, although I myself was yet but a mere novice and tyro. Being of a disposition somewhat unpolished and bashful, which led me always to love the shade and retirement, I then began to seek some secluded corner where I might be withdrawn from the public view.<sup>30</sup>

Calvin's gift of teaching the Word of God thus lay dormant until his exile time, when he met some godly preachers and teachers who gave him opportunities to confirm his gift. He asserts:

In short, whilst my one great object was to live in seclusion without being known, God so led me about through different turnings and changes, that he never permitted me to rest in any place, until, in spite of my natural disposition, he brought me forth to public notice. Leaving my native country, France, I in fact retired into Germany, expressly for the purpose of being able there to enjoy in some obscure corner the repose which I had

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>30</sup> *Comm. Psalm :The Author's Preface*, pp. x1-xli.

always desired, and which had been so long denied me...until at length William Farel detained me at Geneva, not so much by counsel and exhortation, as by a dreadful imprecation, which I felt to be as if God had from heaven laid his mighty hand upon me to arrest me.<sup>31</sup>

Denied the place of seclusion he was looking for, Calvin finally found himself a public preacher and teacher of the Word of God thanks to the instrumentality of people like William Farel.

After being rejected by Geneva, Calvin met another influential godly man.

He writes,

Martin Bucer employing a similar kind of remonstrance and protestation as that to which Farel had recourse before, drew me back to a new station. Alarmed by the example of Jonas which he set before me, I still continued in the work of teaching.<sup>32</sup>

Once again Calvin was given the opportunity to continue his ministry as a teacher of the Word of God in Strasbourg. Calvin never received those kinds of opportunities while he was in his native France.

Not only did the refugee life shape him to be a man who taught prayer, it also shaped him to practise prayer. From the beginning of Calvin's formal education in France to his refugee life outside France, the major life events we have already

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid.; pp. x1i-x1ii.

<sup>32</sup> *Comm. Psalms: The Author's Preface*, p. x1iii.

explored forced him to increasingly put all of his trust in God through prayer. He declares:

Surely, with good reason the Heavenly Father affirms that the only stronghold of safety is in calling upon his name. 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, and of his goodness, through which he receives us, miserably burdened with sins, unto grace; and in short, it is by prayer that we call him to reveal himself as wholly present to us. Hence comes an extraordinary peace and repose to our consciences. For having disclosed to the Lord the necessity that was pressing upon us, we even rest fully in the thought that none of our ills is hid from him who, we are convinced, has both the will and the power to take the best care of us.<sup>33</sup>

Calvin's confidence in God's will and power for his protection through prayer has sustained him throughout all his difficulties as a refugee. Prayer was not only theological subject matter for Calvin, but a powerful personal practice.

Several events cited here reassert the significance of the many dangers Calvin endured. For example, God was Calvin's refuge when he and his friend, du Tillet, were victims of a treacherous servant who stole one of their horses and all of their money while fleeing for their lives from France to Switzerland. In the same way, he was forced to trust God in prayer for his safety when he and Farel were ordered by the Council of Two Hundred to leave Geneva within three days. Calvin and Farel in vain appealed first to Bern and then to the synod meeting of Zurich for

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<sup>33</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 3.20.2.

help. Their lack of assistance must have strengthened Calvin's trust in the Lord Jesus Christ through prayer as the only means to help him through a difficult situation.

Calvin's life as a refugee made him comparable to King David on a lesser scale. Like David, Calvin learned to call upon God alone in prayer when being abandoned by his own people and left as a foreigner. As delineated in this chapter, Calvin's suffering did not stop when he left France. Calvin suffered many attacks from enemies inside and outside his own country during the course of his refugee life. In all of this, God was his only safety in prayer. That is why in his preface to the Psalms, Calvin does not hesitate to compare his journey with King David's. He writes,

For although I follow David at a great distance, and come far short of equalling him; or rather, although in aspiring slowly and with great difficulty to attain to the many virtues in which he excelled, I still feel myself tarnished with the contrary vices; yet if I have any things in common with him, I have no hesitation in comparing myself with him. In reading the instances of his faith, patience, fervour, zeal, and integrity, it has, as it ought, drawn from me unnumbered groans and sighs, that I am so far from approaching them; but it has, notwithstanding, been of very great advantage to me to behold in him as a mirror, both the commencement of my calling, and the continued course of my function; so that I know the more assuredly, that whatever that most illustrious king and prophet suffered, was exhibited to me by God as an example for imitation.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Comm. Psalms: The author's preface. p. xI.*

David and Calvin shared many elements in their respective refugee journeys.

David developed a life of prayer as a result of his sufferings in the course of his ministry. If Calvin sees in David an example to imitate, or even a man with whom he can compare himself, then David's experience of God in prayer is Calvin's personal experience in the midst of his sufferings. Considering the book of *Psalms* as a book of prayer, Calvin declares,

I have been accustomed to call this book, I think, not inappropriately, 'An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul;' for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the mind of men are wont to be agitated. The other parts of Scriptures contain the commandments which God enjoined his servants to announce to us. But here the prophets themselves, seeing they are exhibited to us as speaking to God, and laying open all their inmost thoughts and affections, call, or rather draw, each of us to the examination of himself in particular, in order that none of the many infirmities to which we are subject, and of the many vices with which we abound, may remain concealed....In short, as calling upon God is one of the principal means of securing our safety, and as a better and more unerring rule for guiding us in this exercise cannot be found elsewhere than in the Psalms, it follows, that in proportion to the proficiency which a man shall attain in understanding them, will be his knowledge of the most important part of celestial doctrine. Genuine and earnest prayer proceeds first from a sense of our need, and next, from faith in the promises of God. It is by perusing these inspired compositions, that men will be most effectually awakened to a sense of their maladies, and, at the same time, instructed in seeking remedies for their cure. In a word, whatever may serve to encourage us when we are about to pray to God, is taught us in this book.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Comm. Psalms: The Author's Preface*, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii.

By comparing his own life with David's, Calvin implies that his personal struggles as a refugee have likewise shaped him into a man of prayer.

However, having become a man of prayer, Calvin's reason for teaching and practising prayer was primarily theological. Anne Mckee writes,

In fact, Calvin's pastoral soul and his theology were not two things apart, but different manifestations of his experience of the human relationship with God. The biblical faith must be put into words so that people can know and confess what they experience, so they can teach and minister to others.<sup>36</sup>

Calvin's relationship with God was mainly expressed through prayer. In order to help other Christians experience that kind of relationship with God; he not only practised prayer but also undertook to teach other Christians about it. Let us now turn our attention to Calvin's systematic teaching on prayer.

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<sup>36</sup> Elsie Anne Mckee, *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety*, p. 22.

## Chapter Two

### Calvin's Teaching on Prayer

In this chapter, we will expound Calvin's systematic teaching on prayer. Our purpose here is to grasp firmly Calvin's understanding of prayer. In order to reach this goal we will proceed to answer the following questions:

- What is the nature of prayer?
- What is the importance of prayer?
- What are the rules of prayer?
- Who is our Mediator in prayer?
- Is there any model of prayer?
- What are the different kinds of prayer?

#### **A. The nature of prayer**

Calvin defines prayer as "the chief exercise of faith."<sup>37</sup> In the introduction to his commentary of Daniel chapter nine Calvin writes,

In this chapter Daniel will explain to us two things. First, how very ardently he was accustomed to pray when the time of redemption, specified by Jeremiah, drew nigh; and next, he will relate the answer he received from God to his earnest entreaties.... Whence we gather, that God does not here

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<sup>37</sup> *Comm.* Daniel 9:1-3.

promise his children earthly blessings, but eternal life, and while they grow torpid and cast aside all care and spiritual concern, he urges them the more earnestly to prayer. For what benefit do God's promises confer on us, unless we embrace them by faith? But prayer is the chief exercise of faith.<sup>38</sup>

Calvin's definition of prayer presses us to ask a further question: what does Calvin mean by "the chief exercise of faith?" To understand this definition, one must understand what he means by "faith".

Depending on the biblical context, the word "faith" can have different meanings. For that reason Calvin points out,

We must understand that the meaning of the word 'faith' is ambiguous. Often faith means only sound doctrine of godliness....On the other hand, it is sometimes confined to a particular object, as when Matthew says that Christ saw the faith of those who let the paralytic down through the tile roof [Matt. 9:2]....But now we ask, of what sort is that faith which distinguishes the children of God from the unbelievers, by which we call upon God the Father, by which we cross over from death into life, and by which Christ, eternal salvation and life dwells in us?<sup>39</sup>

Among various meanings of "faith" in Scripture, Calvin hereby stresses on the meaning of "faith" that distinguishes God's children from unbelievers.

For Calvin, faith is receiving Christ himself. The object of faith is Christ. In other words, there is no faith without Jesus Christ. Without faith in Christ one remains alienated from God the Father and devoid of his benefits. Calvin writes,

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<sup>38</sup> *Comm. Daniel* 9:1-3.

<sup>39</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.13.

First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us...for, as I have said, all that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him. It is true that we obtain this by faith.<sup>40</sup>

Shepherd highlights Calvin's definition of "faith" as receiving Christ by writing,

Just as Calvin insists that faith is but the instrument by which Christ is received or "put on" as our righteousness, he maintains, with utter consistency, that it is Christ who ever remains our righteousness.... Faith is Jesus Christ acting on the believer so as to determine the believer's existence "for Christ" (even as he remains, in himself, "against Christ").

In all this, however, faith is not the vessel by which the essence of God is received. Faith is the vessel which "receives" Christ only in the sense that Christ binds us in fellowship with himself in the power of the Spirit. Our existence is determined by this bond, but we are never deified. We are "set right" with God *as creatures*.<sup>41</sup>

It is important to highlight that by embracing Christ by faith does not transform the believer into Christ himself. Christ establishes a relationship with the believer by faith. Calvin often uses the words "participation" and "fellowship" to describe that relationship between Christ and the believer.

Faith, the receiving of Christ, is not based on ignorance. It is a knowledge that affects our minds and hearts. Calvin writes,

Faith rests not on ignorance, but on knowledge. And this is, indeed, knowledge not only of God but of the divine will. We do not obtain

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<sup>40</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.1.1.

<sup>41</sup> Victor Shepherd, *The Nature And Function Of Faith In the Theology of John Calvin* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1983), p.31.

salvation either because we are prepared to embrace as true whatever the church has prescribed, or because we turn over to it the task of inquiring and knowing. But we do so when we know that God is our merciful Father, because of reconciliation effected through Christ [II Cor. 5:18-19], and that Christ has been given to us as righteousness, sanctification, and life. By this knowledge, I say, not by submission of our feeling, do we obtain entry into the Kingdom of Heaven. For when the apostle says, ‘with the heart a man believes unto righteousness, with the mouth makes confession unto salvation’ [Rom. 10:10, cf. Vg.], he indicates that it is not enough for a man implicitly to believe that he does not understand or even investigate. But he requires explicit recognition of the divine goodness upon which our righteousness rests.<sup>42</sup>

The knowledge of faith, for Calvin, rests upon God’s Word. He affirms, “This, then, is the true knowledge of Christ, if we receive him as he is offered by the Father: namely, clothed with his gospel. For just as he has been appointed as the goal of our faith, so we cannot take the right road to him unless the gospel goes before us.”<sup>43</sup>

Thus, faith is inseparable from the Word of God. Calvin comments,

It must further be noted that faith has no other foundation than the doctrine of God. Paul does not state that faith arises from any kind of doctrine, but expressly limits it to the Word of God. This restriction would have been absurd if faith could rest on the opinions of men. All human inventions must therefore cease when we are dealing with the certainty of faith. Hereby also the popish spectre of implicit faith which separates faith from the Word is destroyed, and much more the detestable blasphemy that faith in the Word remains uncertain until the authority of the church supports it.<sup>44</sup>

Shepherd affirms:

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<sup>42</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.2.

<sup>43</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3. 2.6.

<sup>44</sup> *Comm.* Rom.10:17.

Calvin insists that faith never has or can have any other object, for 'there is a permanent relationship between faith and the Word.' Indeed, the Word is the foundation of faith; faith rests upon him, never upon itself: 'faith cannot be formed without hearing (Romans 10:17); that is, without understanding the Word of God; and he bids us "hear" before we come to him. Thus, whenever faith is mentioned, let us remember that it must be joined to the Word, in which it has its foundation.' Word and faith are inseparable as the sun and its ray.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, the relationship between faith and the Word of God is permanent.

God's Word is his promise to us. His promise is mercy or benevolence given to us in Jesus Christ. Jesus is God's Promise to us. All God's promises are fulfilled in the Promise, Jesus Christ. Calvin insists,

Again, it is not without cause that we include all the promises in Christ, since the apostle includes the whole gospel under the knowledge of him [cf. Rom. 1:17], and elsewhere teaches that 'however many are the promises of God, in him they find their yea and amen.' [II Cor. 1:20 p.]. The reason for this fact is at hand; for if God promises anything, by it he witnesses his benevolence, so that there is no promise of his which is not a testimony of his love....

But it is indisputable that no one is loved by God apart from Christ: 'This is the beloved Son' [Matt. 3:17; 17:5 p.], in whom dwells and rests the Father's love. And from him it then pours itself upon us as Paul teaches: 'We receive grace in the beloved' [Eph. 1:6p.]. It must therefore derive and reach us when he himself intercedes. Consequently, the apostle in one passage calls him 'our peace' [Eph. 2:14]; in another, Paul puts him forward as the bond whereby God may be found to us in fatherly faithfulness [cf. Rom. 8: 3 ff.]. It follows that we should turn our eyes to him as often as any promise is offered to us. And Paul rightly teaches us that all God's promises are confirmed and fulfilled in him. [Rom. 15: 8].<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Shepherd, *The Nature and Function of Faith in the Theology of John Calvin*, p.6.

<sup>46</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3. 2.32.

He also Comments:

*3Who being the brightness of his glory, &c.* These things are said of Christ partly as to his divine essence, and partly as a partaker of our flesh. When he is called *the brightness of his glory and the impress of his substance*, his divinity is referred to; to other things appertain in a measure to his human nature. The whole, however, is stated in order to set forth the dignity of Christ....

But still the things which are evident to our senses are fitly applied to God, and for this end, that we may know what is to be found in Christ, and what benefits he brings to us.

It ought also to be observed that frivolous speculations are not here taught, but an important doctrine of faith. We ought therefore to apply these high titles given to Christ for our own benefit, for they bear a relation to us. When, therefore, thou hearest that the Son is the brightness of the Father's glory, think thus with thyself, that the glory of the Father is invisible until it shines forth in Christ, and that he is called the impress of his substance, because the majesty of the Father is hidden until it shews itself impressed as it were on his image. They who overlook this connection and carry their philosophy higher, weary themselves to no purpose, for they do not understand the design of the Apostle; for it was not his object to shew what likeness the Father bears to the Son; but, as I have said, his purpose was really to build up our faith, so that we may learn that God is made known to us in no other way than in Christ....It hence follows, that we are blind as to the light of God, until in Christ it beams on us. It is indeed a profitable philosophy to learn Christ by the real understanding of faith and experience.<sup>47</sup>

Christ, the Promise of God, relates believers to the Father's promises, which are justification and sanctification. In his divinity, Jesus reveals God the Father and all

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<sup>47</sup> Calvin Comm. *Heb. 1:3*.

his benefits to human beings. In his humanity, Jesus identifies himself with the human condition except sin.

Calvin stresses that God's Word becomes efficacious for believers through the Holy Spirit. Because of the depravity of the human mind and heart and its inclination to vanity, we can never cleave fast to the Word of God on our own. Hence, a helper is needed to guide our minds and heart towards Christ. The Holy Spirit guides or helps believers by illuminating God's Word in their minds and hearts. Therefore, there is a permanent conjunction between the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Calvin writes,

Accordingly, without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the Word can do nothing. From this, also, it is clear that faith is much higher than human understanding. And it will not be enough for the mind to be illumined by the Spirit of God unless the heart is also strengthened and supported by his power....In both ways, therefore, faith is a singular gift of God, both in that the mind of man is purged so as to be able to taste the truth of God and in that his heart is established therein. For the Spirit is not the initiator of faith, but increases it by degrees, until by it he leads us to the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>48</sup>

Without the work of the Holy Spirit nobody can come to Christ. The Holy Spirit helps sinners to grasp "the mind of Christ". Therefore faith is the embracing of Jesus Christ given to us by the Father through the power and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, prayer, by being the exercise of faith, is necessarily related

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<sup>48</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.33.

or founded on God's Word, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. In prayer believers turn their eyes to the Father in Christ to receive his promises. Calvin maintains that the faithful do not so acquiesce in the promises of God as to grow torpid, becoming idle and slothful through the certainty of their persuasion that God will perform his promises, but they are rather stimulated to prayer. Thus, the true proof of faith is the assurance when we pray that God will perform what he has promised us.

In prayer, believers do not put their trust or confidence in prayer itself, but they put it in Christ alone. Likewise, believers receive God's promises or benefits in Christ alone. Calvin's definition of prayer as "the chief exercise of faith" then implies that prayer is subsequently and actively embracing Christ and consequently all of his benevolent promises. Parker comments:

...he had said previously: 'On Prayer, which is the chief Exercise of Faith and by which we daily receive God's benefits....' Yet prayer is not a seeking of God's blessings. Rather, it is a calling for his presence, for the presence of his Providence caring for us, of his power upholding us and of his goodness receiving us, who are laden with sin, into favour: 'in short, in which we call for himself wholly, that he may show himself to us as present with us.'<sup>49</sup>

The believer embraces Christ and his promises whenever he or she prays.

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<sup>49</sup> T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction To His Thought* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1995), pp.107-108.

## **B. The importance of prayer**

Why is prayer essential? Prayer is essential for Calvin for several reasons.

First of all, prayer is the way of receiving God's benefits invested in Christ alone. Calvin writes,

It is, therefore, by the benefit of prayer that we reach those riches which are laid up for us with the Heavenly Father. For there is a communion of men with God by which, having entered the heavenly sanctuary, they appeal to him in person concerning his promises in order to experience, where necessity so demands, that what they believed was not vain, although he had promised it in word alone. Therefore we see that to us nothing is promised to be expected from the Lord, which are not bidden to ask of him in prayers. So true is that we dig up by prayer the treasures that were pointed out by the Lord's gospel, and which our faith has gazed upon.

Words fail to explain how necessary prayer is, and in how many ways the exercise of prayer is profitable. Surely, with good reason the Heavenly Father affirms that the only stronghold of safety is calling upon his name. [cf. Joel 2: 32].<sup>50</sup>

Prayer is necessary, because it is a means by which believers receive God's hidden treasures or benefits. Therefore, one remains poor spiritually, if she or he does not pray. That is why unbelievers have no access to Christ and his promises. In Jesus Christ believers call upon God the Father to own his riches.

Secondly, Calvin maintains that prayer is important and necessary because it makes believers experience God's presence. Calvin understands prayer as an invocation in which believers flee to God in any necessity. In prayer believers

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<sup>50</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3. 20. 2.

invoke the presence both of God's providence, through which he watches over and guards their affairs. In the same way God sustains the weakness of sinners.

Therefore it is by prayer that believers call upon God to reveal himself as wholly present to them.

God's presence guards the believer in all circumstances. Moreover, Calvin insists that an extraordinary peace and repose come to us as a result of our experience of God's providence, power and goodness through prayer. Calvin continues, "For having disclosed to the Lord the necessity that was pressing upon us, we even rest fully in the thought that none of our ills is hid from him who, we are convinced, has both the will and the power to take the best care of us."<sup>51</sup> Our peace and rest are thus based on our conviction that God, both in his will and power, will take care of us when we pray. Calvin comments:

It is on good ground that he calls it the *peace* of God, inasmuch as it does not bend itself to the various shiftings of the world, but is founded on the firm and immutable word of God. It is on good grounds, also, that he speaks of its *surpassing all understanding or perception*, for nothing is more foreign to the human mind, than in the depth of despair to exercise, nevertheless, a feeling of hope, in the depth of poverty to see opulence, and in the depth of weakness to keep from giving way, and in fine, to promise ourselves that nothing will be wanting to us when we are left destitute of all things; and all this in the grace of God alone, which is not itself known otherwise than the word, and the inward earnest of the Spirit.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.2

<sup>52</sup> *Comm. Phil.* 4:7.

The assurance of God's promises in his Word gives believers inner peace and rest in prayer in spite of all the troubles they may be in.

Thirdly, prayer is necessary because it is the proper worship that God requires of his children. By invoking God, believers testify that they expect no good from any other source but God alone. In his catechism entry on prayer Calvin writes,

M. As the second part of Divine Worship, which consists in service and obedience, has been sufficiently discussed, let us now proceed to the third part.

S. We said it was invocation, by which we flee to God in any necessity.

M. Do you think that he alone is to be invoked?

S. Certainly; for he requires this as the proper worship of his Divinity.

M. If it is so, how can we beseech men to assist us?

S. There is a great difference between the two things. For when we invoke God, we testify that we expect no good from any other quarter, and that we place our whole defence in no other, and yet we ask the assistance of men, as far as he permits, and has bestowed on them the power of giving it.<sup>53</sup>

Since human beings were created and redeemed to worship God, prayer becomes a necessary component of that worship.

Refuting the argument that prayer may be expendable since God already knows, even without being reminded by our prayers, all the details of our human condition and misery; Calvin enumerates six main reasons for the necessity of prayer:

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<sup>53</sup> Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet, eds. *Calvin's Selected Works: Tracts and Letters*, Vol. 2. Tracts, Part 2, Trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), p. 70.

First, believers' heart must be fired with a zealous and burning desire ever to seek, love and serve God, while they become accustomed in every need to flee to him as to a sacred anchor.

Secondly, their hearts must not allow any desire and any wish at all of which they should be ashamed to make God a witness, while they learn to set all their desires before his eyes.

Thirdly, they must be prepared to receive God's benefits with true gratitude of heart and thanksgiving, benefits that their prayer reminds them come from his hand.

Fourthly, moreover, that having obtained what they were seeking, and being convinced that God has answered their prayers, believers should be led to meditate upon his kindness more ardently.

Fifthly, believers must embrace with greater delight those things which they acknowledge to have obtained by prayer.

Sixthly, our use and experience of prayer may, according to the measure of our feebleness, confirm God's providence, while at the same time we understand that his promises never fail us and of his own will opens the way to call upon him at the very point of necessity.

God's benefits or blessings that fallen humankind covets are received only through prayer. Because of their depravity, believers must look up to God through prayer to obtain his benefits. Prayer is thus ultimately necessary for Calvin, as Shepherd points out,

That God's benefits or blessings are sorely needed is never in doubt, for we are 'destitute and devoid of all good things'. By 'all good things' Calvin, it must be noted, isn't speaking morally; he's always aware that fallen humankind, 'totally depraved' in fact, is capable of a moral good essential to the preservation of the social order. Rather, Calvin is speaking theologically; he denies that fallen humans are capable of Kingdom-good, that righteousness which pleases God and glorifies him. For these 'good things' we must go 'outside ourselves' and get them 'elsewhere'. 'Elsewhere', of course is Jesus Christ.

...The fact that Christ, the overflowing spring, is gift in no way diminishes believers' need to *seek* in him what they have learned through the gospel to be vested in him. Calvin is unyielding here: prayer is anything but lackadaisical passivity or cavalier somnambulism; believers must resolutely 'dig up' by prayer the treasures of God's promises as surely as someone, informed of treasure buried in a field, will profit only if she pursues it.<sup>54</sup>

Without prayer, God's treasures will remain buried and therefore unused. Parker affirms,

Certainly Calvin suggests that he was drawing together in chapter xx all that he had said previously: 'On Prayer, which is the chief Exercise of Faith and by which we daily receive God's benefits'....

And from what follows it is plain that we must cast our minds back to the first chapter of Book I, for he now repeats what he had said there. Man is empty of all good things; he lacks everything that will assist in his salvation. Therefore, he must go outside himself and obtain from elsewhere what he

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<sup>54</sup> Shepherd, *Calvin on Prayer*, pp. 1-2.

lacks.... His view of prayer is simple. Fundamentally, it is asking God for what we lack. He conceives of a heavenly treasure-house of God, full of all good things. By means of prayer we reach those riches: 'For there is a certain communication of men with God by which, when they enter into the heavenly sanctuary, they appeal before him concerning his promises'. But then he alters the image to that of the treasure found in the field: 'by prayer we dig up the treasures which our faith has seen set out by the Gospel of the Lord'. 'Appealing to God' and 'digging up the treasure' are poetic ways of saying that we ask God for what he has promised.<sup>55</sup>

God's riches eclipse our poverty through prayer. We, fallen human beings, are destitute, miserable and in need of God's promises or blessings. In other words, our fallen condition does not give us another alternative apart from prayer. Lacking every heavenly good thing, we ought to seek for help from God the Father. Prayer is the only way to benefit from the promises God has made available to us in Jesus Christ alone.

### **C. The rules of prayer**

Calvin furthermore expounds what he calls "the four rules of right prayer". According to Parker, "When Calvin proceeds to set out four 'laws of right praying', he is treading a well-trodden path. But we must not take these as regulations for

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<sup>55</sup> Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought*, p.107.

those who would learn that strange practice called the ‘art of prayer’, but must refer them to the context of the *Institutio*.”<sup>56</sup> Calvin’s art unfolds as follows:

**Rule One: Prayer must be done with a single mind.**

Calvin insists that our full attention must be focused on God alone when we pray. Our heart and mind must set aside all invasive thoughts and cares. He writes, “These two matters are well worth attention: first, whoever engages in prayer should apply to it his faculties and efforts, and not, as commonly happens, be distracted by wandering thoughts. For nothing is more contrary to reverence for God than the levity that marks an excess of frivolity utterly devoid of awe.”<sup>57</sup> Calvin hereby urges believers to revere God when they contemplate him in prayer. Parker comments, “The first ‘law’ concerns the control of thoughts. Everything foreign to our purpose in the prayer must be driven out; we must, in a sense, rise above ourselves and not be constricted to the narrow limits of our inward emptiness. But more than this, our thoughts and wishes must not be allowed a free rein.”<sup>58</sup> Rule one begs the question: How can one control his or her thoughts to be single-minded in prayer? Calvin recognizes that, humanly speaking, one is unable

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<sup>56</sup> Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction To His Thought*, p.108.

<sup>57</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.5.

<sup>58</sup> Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction To His Thought*, p. 108.

to completely get rid of all sinful thoughts, especially the fears that push us to pray in the first place. He describes these inescapable fears and anxieties in these words,

Now I do not here require the mind to be so detached as never to be pricked or gnawed by vexations, since, on the contrary, great anxiety should kindle in us the desire to pray. Thus we see that God's saintly servants give proof of huge torments, not to say vexations, when they speak of uttering their plaintive cry to the Lord from the deep abyss, and from the very jaws of death [cf. Ps. 130:1]. But I say that we are to rid ourselves of all alien and outside cares, by which the mind, itself a wanderer, is borne about hither and thither, drawn away from heaven, and pressed down to earth. I mean that it ought to be raised above itself that it may not bring into God's sight anything our blind and stupid reason is wont to devise, nor hold itself within the limits of its own vanity, but rise to a purity worthy of God.<sup>59</sup>

Since human beings are unable to rise above their base musings in prayer, Calvin affirms that God gives us the Holy Spirit as our helper and teacher. He writes,

But because our abilities are far from able to match such perfection, we must seek a remedy to help us. As we must turn keenness of mind toward God, so affection of heart has to follow. Both, indeed, stand far beneath; nay, more truly, they faint and fail, or are carried in the opposite direction. Therefore, in order to minister to this weakness, God gives us the Spirit as our teacher in prayer, to tell us what is right and temper our emotions.<sup>60</sup>

Single-mindedness in prayer remains the work of the Holy Spirit. Calvin contends that our prayer must be conformed to God's will. Prayer is not an instrument we use to manipulate God for our selfish needs or desires. With the help and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, believers must pray according to God's will. God's Word reveals

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<sup>59</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.4.

<sup>60</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.5.

his will, purpose and heart. Scripture points believers to Jesus who alone reveals the Father's will. Therefore believers, for the sake of praying according to God's will, must be acquainted with Scripture. God never violates his will to satisfy our selfish wish.

**Rule Two: We must pray from a sincere sense of need, and with penitence.**

The second 'rule' is that believers must in prayer feel their own poverty and so be moved to pray with an intense desire. Calvin advocates, "Let this be the second rule: that in our petitions we ever sense our own insufficiency, and earnestly pondering how we need all that we seek, join with this prayer an earnest- nay, burning – desire to attain it."<sup>61</sup> An ardent desire to pray must flow from a sincere heart. Therefore prayer should not be a mere custom or performance void of sincerity. For example, Calvin declares that nothing is more execrable to God than asking him pardon for our sins, while at the very time we either think that we are not sinners or not think that we are sinners. On the one hand, when we think that we are not sinners, then we sincerely believe that we do not need a Saviour or a Mediator. On the other hand, not thinking of ourselves as sinners, then, we think that we have already attained the stage of perfection on our own merit. Our words must truly reflect what we feel inside of our hearts when we pray. Calvin warns us,

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<sup>61</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.6.

Now the godly must particularly beware of presenting themselves before God to request anything unless they yearn for it with sincere affection of heart, and at the same time desire to obtain it from him. Indeed, even though in those things which we seek only to God's glory we do not seem at first glance to be providing for our own need, yet it is fitting that they be sought with no less ardor and eagerness. When, for example, we pray that 'his name be sanctified', we should, so to speak, eagerly hunger and thirst after that sanctification.<sup>62</sup>

There should not be hypocrisy in believers' heart regarding prayer. The content of their heart and the one of their words must be one before God.

Calvin rejects the claim that not all believers perpetually have the same urgent need for prayer. For him, although all believers might not have the same pressing needs in earthly matters, all believers must still continue to pray for the continuance of their spiritual supply. Since we are all sinners, however, we must come to God in prayer with repentance. He urges,

Lawful prayer, therefore, demands repentance....From this it follows that only sincere worshipers of God pray aright and are heard. Let each one, therefore, as he prepares to pray be displeased with his own evil deeds, and (something that cannot happen without repentance) let him take the person and disposition of a beggar.<sup>63</sup>

Repentance, therefore, is prerequisite to the sincere heart which burns with desire to be heard by God in prayer. By repentance Calvin means the forgiveness of sins

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<sup>62</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.6.

<sup>63</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.7.

that believers receive by faith from Christ. Once forgiven by Christ, believers are reconciled to God the Father. Calvin comments:

With regard to the meaning of the present passage, it is proper to observe, that the whole Gospel consists of two parts, - *forgiveness of sins, and repentance*. Now, as Matthew denominates the first of these *the kingdom of heaven*, we may conclude, that men are in a state of deadly enmity with God, and altogether shut out from the heavenly kingdom, till God receives them into favour. Though John, when he introduces the mention of the grace of God, exhorts men to repentance, yet it must not be forgotten, that repentance, not less than the inheritance of the heavenly kingdom, is the gift of God. As he freely pardons our sins, and delivers us, by his mercy, from the condemnation of eternal death, so also does he form us a new to his image, that we may live unto righteousness. As he freely adopts us for his sons, so he regenerates us by his Spirit, that our life may testify, that we do not falsely address him as our Father. In like manner, Christ washes away our sins by his blood, and reconciles our heavenly Father to us by the sacrifice of his death; but, at the same time, in consequence of 'our old man being crucified with him, and the body of sin destroyed,' (Rom. Vi. 6,) he makes us 'alive' unto righteousness.<sup>64</sup>

In repentance, believers are graciously reconciled to God the Father through the forgiveness of their sins in Christ.

**Rule Three: We must yield our self-confidence and humbly plead for God's pardon.**

In their sinful nature, human beings elevate themselves. Calvin maintains that human pride and arrogance are serious barriers to prayer. Therefore, humility has

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<sup>64</sup> Calvin Comm. Matthew 3: 2.

to be the hallmark of the believer who comes to God in prayer. In humility we recognize God's supremacy as well as our own human weakness. In prayer believers must abdicate all ideas of their own glory, all ideas of their own worth and all trust in themselves. As examples of self-denial in prayer, Calvin speaks of biblical figures like Daniel or David who submit themselves to God in prayer. He writes,

We have repeated examples of this submission, which levels all haughtiness, in God's servants; each one of whom, the holier he is, the more he is cast down when he presents himself before the Lord. Thus spoke Daniel, whom the Lord commended with so great a title: 'We do not pour forth our prayers unto thee on the ground of our righteousness but on the ground of thy great mercy. O Lord, hear us;...'

David also enjoins this humility by his own example: 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for no man living is righteous before thee'.<sup>65</sup>

Calvin reminds us of the residual depravity that dwells in all of us. Because of this tainted human core, we have no ground for arrogance and self-righteousness in God's sight. We can only cling to God's mercy enacted for us through Christ.

Calvin admits that knowing ourselves as sinners and consequently confessing our sins to God not only shows our humility before God, but it also prepares us for right prayer. He notes,

To sum up: the beginning, and even the preparation, of proper prayer is the plea for pardon with a humble and sincere confession of guilt. Nor should

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<sup>65</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.8.

anyone, however holy he may be, hope that he will obtain anything from God until he is freely reconciled to him; nor can God chance to be propitious to any but those whom he has pardoned.<sup>66</sup>

Believers must recall and confess their sins before God as often as they pray.

Calvin previously addressed this theme of confession when he talked about repentance in Rule Two. As stated, our reconciliation to God is effected in Christ. Shepherd clarifies Calvin's view on this subject when he writes, "God can forgive sin only because his anger has been dealt with. Calvin never suggests anything else. In his exposition of prayer he characteristically insists that Christ's death has 'appeased' the Father."<sup>67</sup> The forgiveness of sin in Christ is foundational to prayer, because it is the base of our humility and our open door to pray. Commenting on Calvin's third rule of prayer, Parker writes,

This is what we might call the "law" of justification by faith alone. Therefore, the basis for right prayer and the proper preparation for prayer is intercession for pardon and a humble and open confession of guilt. Hence prayer must be grounded on God's free mercy. Yet sometimes in Scripture the saints appeal to their own righteousness. This does not, however, mean that they were trusting in their righteousness, so that God had to repay them by granting their requests. Nor is prayer itself a meritorious work. The saints only showed that they were conscious of being God's children and as such might call on him as their Father.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.9.

<sup>67</sup> Shepherd, "*Calvin on Prayer*", p. 7.

<sup>68</sup> Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction To His Thought*, p. 109

Since human beings have no remedy for sin, they ought to humble themselves in confession and repentance to benefit from God's mercy manifested in Christ.

Calvin urges believers to uphold the holiness of God and their own humility in prayer.

**Rule Four: We should be animated to pray with the sure hope of receiving what we ask for.**

The fourth rule is an assurance that believers will obtain what they pray for because of God's faithfulness to his own promises. Calvin holds that we should pray with confidence that God will answer our prayers. He points out,

Therefore nothing is more in harmony with the nature of prayers than that this rule be laid down and established for them: that they not break forth by chance but follow faith as guide. Christ calls this principle to the attention of all of us with this saying: 'I say unto you, whatever you seek..., believe that you will receive it, and it will come to you' [Mark 11: 24 p.] He confirms the same statement in another place: 'Whatever you ask in prayer, believing...,'<sup>69</sup>

Calvin's assurance of obtaining God's promises by prayer is not void of all anxiety and fear that characterize the human condition. The assurance Calvin talks about transcends any temporal sufferings and sets our eyes and minds on the final deliverance from the schemes of the Evil One. For Calvin, such a great hope and confidence stimulate the believers to pray eagerly.

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<sup>69</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3. 20. 11.

Hope and confidence, Calvin vows, are owned by faith in the goodness of God. Yet, the assurance in God's promises and anxiety are simultaneously present in believers' lives as they pray. Parker comments, "The believer is in prayer both penitent and believing, both anxious and confident."<sup>70</sup> Calvin is talking about our trust or confidence in God's Word. God's Word is the beginning and end of our faith. Therefore, it is by faith that believers receive the assurance of their deliverance from evil today and tomorrow. This assurance gives them the strength and the courage to go through the physical hardship of this temporary pilgrimage on earth. For this reason Shepherd says, "Calvin admits that the predicament of believers - it is nothing less than cosmic threat - can find them 'troubled by the greatest unrest' and 'almost out of their senses'. Even here, however, their apprehension of God's goodness fosters hope for deliverance."<sup>71</sup> Calvin, therefore, insists that godly prayer arises from our awareness of both our human predicament and God's promises of provision.

Calvin does not intend his four "rules" of prayer to be strictly enforced, as if God would disregard any prayer in which they are not all applied. If that were the case, then God would be a harsh God, neither hearing nor answering "imperfect"

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<sup>70</sup> Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction To His Thought*, p. 109.

<sup>71</sup> Shepherd, "Calvin on Prayer", pp. 7-8.

prayer. To the contrary, be it in prayer or any other spiritual activity undertaken by human beings, God is a merciful Father. His mercy and grace, manifested in Jesus Christ alone, render our imperfect prayers acceptable. As a compassionate Father, he loves to listen to his children. After expounding these four rules of prayer, Calvin discusses the role of Jesus in prayer.

#### **D. Jesus: The Mediator of Prayer**

Everything Calvin has taught on prayer so far is founded on the role of Jesus Christ as the unique Mediator between God and believers. Jesus is the only Mediator God has given humankind to approach him in prayer. Calvin affirms,

Since no man is worthy to present himself to God and come into his sight, the Heavenly Father himself, to free us at once from shame and fear, which might well have thrown our hearts into despair, has given us his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, to be our advocate and mediator with him, by whose guidance we may confidently come to him, and with such an intercessor, trusting nothing we ask in his name will be denied us, as nothing can be denied to him by the Father. And to this must be referred all that we previously taught about faith. For just as the promise commends Christ the Mediator to us, so, unless the hope of obtaining our requests depends upon him, it cuts itself off from the benefit of prayer.<sup>72</sup>

Jesus is the only Mediator between God and human beings in prayer for several reasons. First of all, Jesus is our only High Priest who shed his blood on a cross for our sins. His death has appeased the wrath of God. Apart from Jesus, sinners face

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<sup>72</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 3. 20. 17.

an angry and dreadful God. God's judgment on sin separates human beings from God. Jesus Christ's blood washed away our sins. Thus, believers in Jesus can boldly approach God in prayer. They can do so, not because of their own merit, but because of the merit of Jesus Christ. They can approach God in prayer because "Christ interposed and converted a throne of dreadful glory into a throne of grace"<sup>73</sup>. Commenting on Calvin's view of Jesus as our sole Mediator in prayer, Parker writes,

This is the priestly office of Christ. As under the old Covenant the High Priest, with the names of the twelve tribes on his shoulders, entered into the sanctuary with the blood of sacrifice for the sins of the people, so Christ has entered into the presence of the Father with his own blood: 'that shadowy ceremony of the law taught us that we are all far from God's face and that therefore we need a Mediator to appear in our name and bear us in his shoulders and keep us bound on his breast so that we might be heard in his person. And our prayers must be cleansed by the sprinkling of blood, for otherwise they would never, as we said, be free from uncleanness' (xx. 18, 323). It is, then, not simply a matter of praying *through* Christ, but rather *with* Christ, of our prayers being united with his intercession for us. Thus Christ becomes the precentor who leads the prayers of his people. There can be no question of Christ's intercession removing the need for the prayers of believers, but rather of all their prayers depending on the intercession of their High Priest and being heard as one with his prayer.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.17.

<sup>74</sup> Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction To His Thought*, pp. 109-110.

Christ's priesthood is the central key in his mediation for us before the Father for our prayers. Calvin explains how Christ's intercession is related to his atonement in these words:

*And one Mediator between God and men.* This clause is of a similar with the former; for there is one God, the Creator and Father of all, so he says that there is but one Mediator, through whom we have access to the Father; and that this Mediator was given, not only to one nation, or to a small number of persons of some particular rank, but to all; because the fruit of the sacrifice, by which he made atonement for sins, extends to all. More especially because a large portion of the world was at that time alienated from God, he expressly mentions the Mediator, through whom that were afar off now approach.

The term universal term *all* must always be referred to classes of men, and not to persons; as if he had said, that not only Jews, but Gentiles also, not only persons of humble rank, but princes also, were redeemed by the death of Jesus Christ. Since, therefore, he wishes the benefit of his death to be common to all, an insult is offered to him by those, by their opinion, shut out any person from the hope of salvation.<sup>75</sup>

Calvin expounds:

*6. Who gave himself a ransom for all.* The mention of the redemption in this passage is not superfluous; for there is a necessary connexion between the two things, the sacrifice of the death of Christ, and his continual intercession. (Rom. Viii. 34). These are the two parts of his priesthood; for, when Christ is called our priest, it is in this sense, that he once made atonement for our sins by his death, that he might reconcile us to God; and now having entered into the sanctuary of heaven, he appears in presence of the Father, in order to obtain grace for us, that we may be heard in his name. (Ps. Cx.4; Heb. Vii. 17.) So much the more does he expose the wicked sacrilege of the Papists, who, by making dead Saints to be companions of Christ in this affair, transfer to them likewise the glory of the priesthood.

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<sup>75</sup> *Comm.* I Tim. 2:5.

Read the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, towards the conclusion, and the beginning of the fifth chapter; and you will find what I maintain, that the intercession by which God is reconciled to us is founded on the sacrifice; which, indeed, is demonstrated by the whole system of the ancient priesthood. It follows, therefore, that it is impossible to take from Christ any part of the office of intercession, and bestow it on others, without stripping him of the title of priesthood.<sup>76</sup>

It appears that for Calvin the priesthood of Christ necessarily includes both his sacrificial death for the sins of believers and his continual intercession for their needs in the presence of his heavenly Father.

God himself commands believers to pray in the name of Jesus alone with the promise to answer them. Calvin reminds us, “And as a rule has been established to call upon God, and a promise given that those who call upon him shall be heard, so too we are particularly bidden to call upon him in Christ’s name; and we have the promise made that we shall obtain what we have asked in his name.”<sup>77</sup> Calvin maintains that prayer in Christ’s name means prayer according to God’s own will by faith. The reason being Christ’s name does not contradict his own will. Thus, believers ought to pray in Christ name. He comments:

....The Apostle teaches further in this passage, that Christ is the peculiar object of faith, and that to the faith which we have in his name is annexed the hope of salvation. For in this case the end of believing is, that we become the children and the heirs of God.... He commends the faith which he mentioned

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<sup>76</sup> *Comm. 1Tim. 2:6.*

<sup>77</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.17.

by its fruit, or he shews that in which our confidence especially is, that is, that the godly dare confidently to call on God; as also Paul speaks in Eph. iiii. 12, that we have by faith access to God with confidence....

Let us, then, bear in mind this declaration of the Apostle, that calling on God is the chief trial of our faith, and that God is not rightly nor in faith called upon except we be fully persuaded that our prayers will not be in vain. For the Apostle denies that those who, being doubtful, hesitate, are endued with faith....

*According to his will.* By this he meant by the way to remind us what is the right way or rule of praying, even when men subject their own wishes to God. For though God has promised to do whatsoever his people may ask, yet he does not allow them an unbridled liberty to ask whatever may come to their minds; but he has at the same time prescribed to them a law according to which they are to pray. And doubtless nothing is better for us than this restriction; for if it was allowed to every one of us to ask what he pleased, and if God were to indulge us in our wishes, it would be to provide very badly for us. <sup>78</sup>

Based on Jesus' role as the unique sufficient Mediator in prayer, Calvin strongly rejects any recourse to angels or to the dead for help. Searching for help from any other source apart from Jesus in prayer is idolatry to Calvin. In his *Catechism of the Church of Geneva* Calvin defends his view by responding to the following question: "Are we hence at liberty to infer, that it is wrong to invoke angels and holy servants of the Lord who have departed this life?"<sup>79</sup> Here is his response:

We are not at liberty; for God does not assign to saints the office of assisting us. And in regard to angels, though he uses their labour for our salvation, he does not wish us to ask them for it.... For it is a sure sign of unbelief not to

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<sup>78</sup> *Comm.* I John 5: 13.

<sup>79</sup> Beveridge and Bonnet, *Calvin's Selected Works* Vol.2 Tracts, Part 2, p.71.

be contented with the things which God gives to us. Then if we throw ourselves on the protection of angels or saints, when God calls to himself alone, and transfer to them the confidence which ought wholly to be fixed upon God, we fall into idolatry, seeing we share with them that which God claimed entirely for himself.<sup>80</sup>

In brief, believers must not pray either to angels or the dead for help. Believers must not use dead saints or angels as their mediator to approach God in prayer. Scripture calls us away from all other “mediators” to Christ alone in prayer. It is a blasphemy to spend time asking for help from someone who cannot give it. Nobody can give us God’s favour through prayer, but Jesus alone.

How does Christ give us God’s favour? Christ does this by mediating God to us, to be sure, but also by mediating us to God. In this light Calvin declares, “So, then, let it remain an established principle that we should direct all intercessions of the whole church to that sole intercession.”<sup>81</sup>

Calvin maintains that Christ’s intercession does not prevent believers from offering up prayers for one another. Believers ought to intercede for one another in the name of Christ. Calvin comments:

What pertains to the office of intercession we also see is peculiar to Christ, and no prayer is pleasing to God unless this Mediator sanctifies it. Yet even if believers reciprocally offer prayers before God for the brethren, we have shown that this detracts nothing from Christ’s unique intercession. For all together, relying upon this, commend both themselves and others to God. We have, moreover, taught that it is inappropriately applied to the dead, of whom we nowhere read that they have been bidden to pray of us. Scripture

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.71.

<sup>81</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.19.

often urges us to do our duty by one another but has not one syllable of the dead. Indeed, James by joining these two exhortations – to confess our sins to one another, and to pray for one another [James 5:16] – tacitly excludes the dead.<sup>82</sup>

For Calvin, Scripture remains our sole authority regarding the teaching and practice of prayer. Calvin is convinced that the Scriptural evidence brought forward by the Romanists or the sophists in support of the mediatorial role of dead saints cannot stand up under examination. Whenever we pray in another name to God the Father apart from Christ's name, we count Christ's intercession worthless. Calvin explains the sufficiency and efficacy of Jesus' intercessory prayers for believers. He notes:

Besides, since we know that Jesus Christ has gone up into this heavenly glory, let us note why He is there: In the first place, that He may remind us of what is said, that He is in heaven, and that up there He is interceding for us before God His Father. And that, when we presume to pray to God we shall be rejected unless Jesus Christ is there in our name. Since He is there, He is our Intercessor and presents our prayers there and causes us to be answered, as if we had the privilege of saying what we have to do and to pour our heart before God. That is what we have seen in the Epistle to the Hebrews, that as the high priest entered the sanctuary for all men, also, since Jesus Christ is in heaven, we must be certain that He is there to intercede for us. For the high priest, when he entered the holy place, carried on his head (sic) the names of the children of Israel, and before him he carried twelve stones which signified the twelve lines of descent of the people to show that, although he entered all alone, yet it was for all. Also, since Jesus Christ has entered into heaven and He bears us there, although we are only brute beasts, and also He bears our names before God to show that He has us in His heart; we need not pray to God in doubt, but we may be assured that our prayers will be acceptable to Him, since we pray through Jesus Christ. And

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<sup>82</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.27.

if this were well understood, there would not be so many superstitions in the papacy. Why do they have so many patron-saints? Why do they have recourse to the Virgin Mary? Because they have never understood why Jesus Christ has gone thus into heaven. For if they had understood that He went up to be our Intercessor, they would not have said that they are not worthy to offer their requests to God and that therefore they must have other advocates. But they might have understood that since Jesus Christ is there in our name we can have access there without having patron-saints and advocates.<sup>83</sup>

Hence, all prayers must be prayed in and through Jesus Christ alone.

### **E. The Lord's Prayer: The Model For Our Prayers**

Calvin views the "Lord's Prayer" as a necessary model for guiding and helping believers in their prayers. He writes,

Now we must learn not only a more certain way of praying but also the form itself: namely, that which the Heavenly Father has taught us through his beloved Son [Matt. 6: 9 ff.; Luke 11: 2 ff.], in which we may acknowledge his boundless goodness and clemency. For he warns us and urges us to seek him in our every need, as children are wont to take refuge in the protection of the parents whenever they are troubled with any anxiety. Besides this, since he saw that we did not even sufficiently perceive how straitened our poverty was, what it was fair to request, and what was profitable for us, he also provided for this ignorance of ours; and what had been lacking to our capacity he himself supplied and made sufficient from his own. For he prescribed a form for us in which he set forth as in a table all that we need to ask.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *Sermon Acts 1:9-11.*

<sup>84</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.34.

The Lord's Prayer helps believers pray aright in their weaknesses. The Lord himself gives believers this model as an aid. It is not the words *per se* of this prayer that are important. The importance of the Lord's Prayer rather rests on the fact that it gives believers a framework for prayer and sets a limitation to earthly desires in prayer. Words are mere expressions of the soul groaning in prayer.

Calvin divides the Lord's Prayer into six petitions. The first three petitions are related to the glory of God. The latter three are related to those things necessary to humankind's salvation. Calvin moreover draws parallels between the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments. He asserts, "As the law of God is divided into two tablets, of which the former contains the duties of piety, and the latter the duties of charity, so in prayer Christ enjoins us to consider and seek the glory of God, and, at the same time, permits us to consult our own interests."<sup>85</sup>

### **1. First part of the Lord's Prayer: The glory of God**

In Calvin's understanding, Jesus has taught us to make the glory of God the priority of our prayers in the Lord's Prayer. Even prior to our petitions, our eyes must be lifted heavenward. Therefore, the Lord's Prayer begins with the phrase "Our Father who art in heaven." For Calvin, this expression teaches us about God's fatherly love toward us, and his boundless power. God's love and power constitute

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<sup>85</sup> *Comm. Mat. 6:9.*

the foundation on which believers can approach him with boldness and confidence in prayer. Who can call God his or her heavenly Father? In response, Calvin insists that only those who are God's adopted children by faith in Christ alone. Calvin asserts,

First, at the very threshold we meet what I previously mentioned: we ought to offer all prayer to God only in Christ's name, as it cannot be agreeable to him in any other name. For in calling God "Father," we put forward the name "Christ." With what confidence would anyone address God as "Father"? Who would break forth into such rashness as to claim for himself the honor of a son of God unless we had been adopted as children of grace into Christ? He, while he is the true Son, has of himself been given us as a brother that what he has of his own by nature may become ours by benefit of adoption if we embrace this great blessing with sure faith.<sup>86</sup>

Having become God's children by adoption by faith in Jesus Christ alone believers experience God's love and power in their lives. Calvin expounds:

And that is why He calls His disciples His brothers. Surely this is an honorable title. And so it was reserved for those whom our Lord Jesus had engaged as His servants. And there is no doubt that He has used this word to show the brotherly relation which He wanted to sustain toward them. And so he is united to us, as it is better declared by St. John. In fact, we are driven to what is said in Psalm 22, from which this passage is taken: I will declare Thy name to my brothers, which passage the Apostle, applying to the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, included not only the twelve Apostles in calling them brothers of Jesus Christ, but bestows the title on all of us in general who follow the Son of God, and He wishes that we share such an honor. That is why, also when our Lord Jesus says, 'I am going to My God and to your God, to My Father and to your Father,' it is not spoken for a small number of people, but it is addressed to the whole multitude of believers.

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<sup>86</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.36.

Now our Lord Jesus, although He is our eternal God, does none-the-less in His capacity as Mediator abase Himself to be near us, and to have everything in common with us, that is with regard to His human nature. For although He is by nature the Son of God and we are only adopted, and that by grace, still this fellowship is permanent, that He who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, through Him is also ours, to be sure, in different aspects. For we need not be raised as high as our Head. There must not be any confusion here. If in a human body the head were not above all the members, it would be a freak, it would be a confused mass. It is reasonable also that our Lord Jesus should keep His sovereign position, since He is the only Son of God, that is, by nature. But this does not prevent our being joined to Him in brotherhood, so that we can call upon God boldly in full confidence of being answered by Him, since we have personal and familiar access to Him.<sup>87</sup>

In spite of believers' union with Jesus as "sons of God", Jesus' relationship with his Father remains unique. Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God by nature, while believers are adopted in him. In their union with Jesus in one body, he remains above believers as their Head.

Calvin insists that people forfeit the Father's love and power in their lives when they reject his Son Jesus. No one can call upon God as his or her Father apart from Jesus Christ. Calvin writes, "For God regards us as sons, only in so far as we are members of Christ."<sup>88</sup>

The Holy Spirit is God's seal on believers as the witness of their adoption by faith in Jesus Christ. In a sermon Calvin asserts:

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<sup>87</sup> *Sermon Matt. 28:1-10.*

<sup>88</sup> Beveridge and Bonnet, *Calvin's Selected Works*, p.75.

Now we see, in summary, how this account serves us today. In the first place, to the end that we might receive the doctrine of the gospel as a certain and infallible truth it bears the mark of God and it is sealed by the Holy Spirit and is an excellent witness of our adoption. That, then, is how we are brought into obedience, seeing how God has given approval to His Gospel, both to be assured in order that our faith may no longer be variable, and that we be not always liable to change our words and our opinions, but that we walk always without swerving from the good path, until we have finished our course.<sup>89</sup>

Hence, once approved by God as his adopted children by the mark or the seal of the Holy Spirit, believers must walk in obedience to God.

Calvin explains why we call God “*our Father*” rather than “*my Father*” in particular. For him, each individual child of God can call him his or her own, but the Lord Jesus has used the common epithet “*our*” so that “he might accustom us to exercise charity in our prayers, and that we might not neglect others, by each caring only for himself.”<sup>90</sup> Believers, regardless of their race, nationality and social status, are all our brothers and sisters in Christ. Their joys and sorrows are ours, too. As brothers and sisters in Christ, they ought to support each other in prayer.

### **1. First Petition: Hallowed Be Thy Name.**

For Calvin, the substance of this petition is “to give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name, so that men may never think or speak of him but with the deepest

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<sup>89</sup> *Sermon Acts 2:1-4.*

<sup>90</sup> Beveridge and Bonnet, *Calvin's Selected Works*, p. 76.

eneration.”<sup>91</sup> Opposite to this veneration is the profanation of God’s name, which profanation happens when people do not revere him.

God is glorified when humankind acknowledges his wisdom, goodness, righteousness, power and all his other attributes. Calvin insists that God’s name is sanctified when he is glorified. The result of sanctifying God’s name is that believers embrace and obey his word by faith. Calvin stresses the wickedness of people who judge the works of God: “If any of us are chastised, they grumble, and murmur, and complain, and some break out into open blasphemies: if he does not grant our wishes, we think that he is not sufficiently kind to us.... In short, a part of the world profanes his holiness to the utmost of their power.”<sup>92</sup> The essence of the first petition is that believers must aspire to display reverence for God in their lives anywhere and at any time. They must avoid the profanity which characterizes the rest of the world. In sum, the petition points us to the holiness of God.

## **2. Second Petition: Thy Kingdom Come.**

Calvin defines the Kingdom in these words,

But even though the definition of this kingdom was put before us previously, I now briefly repeat it: God reigns when men, both by denial of themselves and by contempt of the world and of earthly life pledge themselves to his righteousness in order to aspire to a heavenly life. Thus

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<sup>91</sup> *Comm. Mat. 6:9.*

<sup>92</sup> *Comm. Mat. 6:9.*

there are two parts to this kingdom: first, that God by the power of his Spirit correct all the desires of the flesh which by squadrons war against him; second, that he shape all our thoughts in obedience to his rule.<sup>93</sup>

This petition is related to the first one with a slight nuance. If the first petition is focused on the reverence of God because of his holiness, this one calls believers voluntarily to obey God in their hearts and minds.

Calvin highlights the main role of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with God's Word, because no human being can voluntarily obey God in his or her own strength. God reigns over his children through his Word and the Holy Spirit. Obedience to God's Word in our lives displays our submission to God's authority and reign. Insisting on the link between the Word of God and the Holy Spirit in the kingdom of God, Calvin asserts:

Now, because the word of God is like a royal scepter, we are bidden here to entreat him to bring all men's minds and hearts into voluntary obedience to it. This happens when he manifests the working of his word through the secret inspiration of his Spirit in order that it may stand forth in the degree of honor that it deserves.<sup>94</sup>

God's kingdom is therefore established by the presence of the King. Those who are opposed to God's authority and kingship disobey and challenge his words every day.

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<sup>93</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.42.

<sup>94</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.42.

Calvin maintains that the second petition should withdraw God's children from the corruption of this world. Since this corruption separates us from God, through our disobedience to his Word and his Spirit, it prevents his kingdom from flourishing within us. To the contrary, for Calvin, the passion for God's Kingdom in our hearts and minds ought to invoke in us the mortification of our flesh, and also train us to endure the cross.

### **3. Third Petition: Thy Will Be Done on Earth As It is in Heaven.**

Calvin explains what he understands by "The will of God may be done" when he writes, "That all creatures may be subdued into obedience to him, and so depend on his nod, that nothing may be done except his pleasure."<sup>95</sup> Hence, our goal in prayer must be the fulfillment of God's will in our lives and in the universe.

This petition calls for a prompt and complete submission to God on earth as do angels in heaven. That is why Calvin says, "As the holy angels, who are his celestial creatures, have it as their only object to obey him in all things, to be always obedient to his word, and prepared voluntarily to do him service, we pray for such prompt obedience in men, that each may give himself up entirely to him in voluntary subjection."<sup>96</sup> Thus, in this petition, believers are taught to deny

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<sup>95</sup> Beveridge and Bonnet, *Calvin's Selected Works*, p.77.

<sup>96</sup> Beveridge and Bonnet, *Calvin's Selected Works*, p. 77.

themselves so that God can reign in them according to his pleasure. Here we wish nothing of our own, but to have our hearts, minds and spirits promptly and entirely governed by God's Spirit and will alone. The outcome is that we learn to love the things that please God and learn to hate those things God hates.

Calvin is convinced that believers promote their own advantage whenever we seek first God's glory in our prayer. Believers must testify and profess that they are God's children and servants by promoting his glory and his honour. He warns us,

Therefore, men who do not, with this desire and zeal to further God's glory, pray that "God's name be hallowed," that "his Kingdom come," that "his will be done," should not be reckoned among God's children and servants; and inasmuch as all these things will come to pass even against such men's consent, the result will be their confusion and destruction.<sup>97</sup>

A day is coming when God's *will* will be done on earth as it is in heaven in spite of the disobedience of unbelievers. When that day comes, their fate will be confusion and destruction. For those who seek his kingdom and glory, however, joy and fulfillment await.

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<sup>97</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.43.

## II. Second Part of the Lord's Prayer: Our Own Human Interests.

### 1. First Petition: Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread.

Calvin affirms that this petition goes beyond the daily bread itself. It includes everything our body needs, such as food and clothing. Human beings depend on God's providence for their provision and protection in everything. Calvin declares,

But by this petition we ask of God all things in general that our bodies have need to use under the elements of this world [Gal. 4:30], not only for food and clothing but also for everything God perceives to be beneficial to us, that we may eat our daily bread in peace. Briefly, by this we give ourselves over to his care, and entrust ourselves to his providence, that he may feed, nourish, and preserve us. For our most gracious Father does not disdain to take even our bodies under his safekeeping and guardianship in order to exercise our faith in these small matters, while we expect everything from him, even to a crumb of bread and a drop of water.<sup>98</sup>

God, Creator of our flesh and blood, is not indifferent to our physical needs.

Calvin insists, however, that God's children must always look beyond their bodily needs and ask him for the satisfaction of their spiritual ones. Human beings are more concerned about their material and physical needs than their spiritual ones. Urging God's children to focus their attention on their spiritual needs while asking for their daily bread, Calvin writes,

For since it has come about in some way or other through our wickedness that we are affected and tormented with greater concern for the body than for the soul, many who venture to entrust the soul to God are still troubled

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<sup>98</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.44.

about the flesh, still worry about what they shall eat, what they shall wear, and unless they have on hand abundance of wine, grain, and oil, tremble with apprehension. So much more does the shadow of this fleeting life mean to us than that everlasting immortality. Those who, relying upon God, have once for all cast out that anxiety about the care of the flesh, immediately expect from him greater things, even salvation and eternal life. It is, then, no light exercise of faith for us to hope for those things from God which otherwise cause us anxiety. And we benefit greatly when we put off this faithlessness, which clings to the very bones of almost all men.<sup>99</sup>

On top our earthly and material needs, salvation and eternal life must be our priority in prayer. Calvin, by no means, is opposed to praying God for the satisfaction of our physical needs. He claims that earthly needs or materials are “shadowy” or “fleeting”. Calvin insists, “Now even though forgiveness of sins is far more important than bodily nourishment, Christ placed the inferior thing first that he might bring us gradually to the two remaining petitions, which properly belong to the heavenly life. In this he has taken account of our slowness.”<sup>100</sup> Christ attends intimately to its every need.

Scale of wealth makes no difference in Calvin’s eyes. When asked, “Are the materially wealthy still entitled to pray this petition?”, in other words, “Is it still necessary for wealthy people to ask God for their daily bread?” Calvin’s answer is that, without any exception, everybody needs God’s blessing. Calvin comments:

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<sup>99</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.44.

<sup>100</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.44.

Though we live on *bread*, we must not ascribe the support of life to the power of *bread*, but to the secret kindness, by which God imparts to bread the quality of nourishing our bodies.

The precise object of Chris's reply is this: We ought to trust in God for food, and for the other necessities of the present life, in such a manner, that none of us may overleap the boundaries which he has prescribed. But if Christ did not consider himself to be at liberty to change *stones* into *bread*, without the command of God, much less is lawful for us to procure food by fraud, or robbery, or violence, or murder<sup>101</sup>

Poor and wealthy alike still need God's daily continuing blessing upon their handiwork. The core issue here is that both the materially poor and rich people need salvation. For that they must turn their prayers to God.

## 2. Second Petition (a): Forgive Us Our Debts.

Calvin maintains that "debts" stands for sins. He explains,

He calls sins "debts" because we owe penalty for them, and we could in no way satisfy it unless we were released by this forgiveness. This pardon comes of his free mercy, by which he himself generously wipes out these debts, exacting no payment from us but making satisfaction to himself by his own mercy in Christ, who once for all gave himself as a ransom [cf. Rom. 3:24].<sup>102</sup>

He adds, "In Matthew, sins are called debts, because they expose us to condemnation at the tribunal of God, and make us *debtors*; nay more they alienate us entirely from God, so that there is no hope of obtaining peace and favour except

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<sup>101</sup> *Comm. Matt.* 4:4.

<sup>102</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.45.

by pardon.”<sup>103</sup> Those who rely on their own merit to deal with their sins, Calvin points out, “share not at all in his free gift. And while they call upon God according to this form, they do nothing but subscribe to their own accusation, and even seal their condemnation by their own testimony.”<sup>104</sup> Self-righteousness is doomed to destruction. Calvin comments:

*We make him a liar.* He goes still further, that they who claim purity for themselves blaspheme God. For we see that he everywhere represents the whole race of man as guilty of sin.

Whoever then tries to escape his charge carries on war with God, and accuses him of falsehood, as though he condemned the undeserving. To confirm this he adds, and *his word is not in us*; as though he had said, that we reject this great truth, that all are under guilt.

We hence learn, that we then only make a due progress in the knowledge of the word of the Lord, when we become really humbled, so as to groan under the burden of our sins and learn to flee to the mercy of God, and acquiesce in nothing else but in his paternal favour.<sup>105</sup>

Christ alone is sufficient to pay for our sins, and he so opens the gates to heaven.

In the first part of the Lord’s Prayer, Christ highlights God’s absolute perfection, in its second part, human sinful condition is on display. This petition highlights the sinful condition of all human beings and their need of forgiveness in Christ alone.

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<sup>103</sup> *Comm. Mat.6:12.*

<sup>104</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.45.

<sup>105</sup> *Comm. 1 John 1:10*

The second petition is about the Lord pardoning our sins. No mortal, for Calvin, can be found righteous as not to require God's pardon. Anybody who thinks that he or she has no sin is already condemned by the Scripture. The only refuge left for all is to embrace God's mercy made in Christ alone. It is by the mercy of God that sinners obtain pardon. The wonder of our forgiveness in Christ is that "We are accepted, just as if we were righteous and innocent, and at the same time our consciences are confirmed in a full reliance on his paternal favour, assuring us of salvation."<sup>106</sup>

## **2. Second Petition (b): As We Forgive Our Debtors.**

Christ's mercy cannot help overflowing into mercy to our neighbour. What does the expression, "As we forgive our debtors." mean? Calvin explains,

This, rather, is our forgiveness: willingly to cast from the mind wrath, hatred, desire for revenge, and willingly to banish to oblivion the remembrance of injustice. For this reason, we ought not to seek forgiveness of sins from God unless we ourselves also forgive the offenses against us of all those who do or have done us ill. If we retain feelings of hatred in our hearts, if we plot revenge and ponder any occasion to cause him harm, and even if we do not try to get back into our enemies' good graces, by every sort of good office deserve well of them, and commend ourselves to them, by this prayer we entreat God not to forgive our sins. For we ask that he do to us as we do to others [cf. Matt. 7:12].<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Beveridge and Bonnet, *Calvin's Selected Works*, p. 79.

<sup>107</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.45.

Being forgiven while simultaneously refusing to forgive are mutually exclusive in God's eyes. Calvin clarifies that forgiving our debtors does not make us merit God's forgiveness. He instructs us:

**M.** Does the appended condition, viz., that he would forgive us as we forgive our debtors, mean that we merit pardon from God by pardoning men who have in any way offended us?

**S.** By no means. For in this way forgiveness would not be free nor founded alone on the satisfaction which Christ made for us on the cross. But as by forgetting the injuries done to ourselves, we, while imitating his goodness and clemency, demonstrate that we are in fact his children, God wishes us to confirm it by this pledge; and at the same time shows us, on the other hand, that if we do not show ourselves easy and ready to pardon, nothing else is to be expected of him than the highest rigour of severity.<sup>108</sup>

Forgiving other people who have violated us is not only for their benefit, but for ours. As we forgive them, so God will forgive us. Thus, Calvin persists that we ought to keep on forgiving people who have hurt us so that we can continue to dwell in the peace of mind and heart we need in prayer.

### **3. Third Petition (a): And Lead Us Not Into Temptation.**

This petition reminds believers of their weaknesses in the face of the Evil One. Satan engages their flesh to fight against God's Spirit in them, even after their regeneration in Christ. Calvin writes,

The sixth petition [Matt. 6:13], as we have said, corresponds to the promise that the law is to be engraved upon our hearts [Prov. 3:3; II Cor. 3:3], but

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<sup>108</sup> Beveridge and Bonnet, *Calvin's Selected Works*, pp. 79-80.

because we obey God not without continual warfare and hard and trying struggles, here we seek to be equipped with such armor and defended with such protection that we may be able to win the victory. By this we are instructed that we need not only the grace of the Spirit, to soften our hearts within and bend and direct them to obey God, but also his aid, to render us invincible against both all the stratagems and all the violent assaults of Satan.<sup>109</sup>

God himself does not tempt his children to sin against him. Calvin highlights the weakness of God's children, which leads them to seek God's help in prayer for victory. He writes, "We are conscious of our own weakness, and desire to enjoy the protection of God, that we may remain impregnable against all the assaults of Satan."<sup>110</sup> We have no strength for living a holy life, except so far as we obtain it from God. We must implore the assistance of God not to lead us into temptation, because we are still subject to a continual warfare in which the flesh is fighting against the Law of God. Describing the relationship between the flesh and the Law of God, Calvin comments:

He then sets before us an example in a regenerate man, in whom the remnants of the flesh are wholly contrary to the law of the Lord, while the spirit would gladly obey it. But first, as we have said, he makes only a comparison between nature and law. Since in human things there is no greater discord than between spirit and flesh, the law being spiritual and man carnal, what agreement can there be between the natural man and the law? Even the same as between darkness and light. But by calling the law spiritual, he not only means, as some expound the passage, that it requires

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<sup>109</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.46.

<sup>110</sup> *Comm. Matt.6:13*.

the inward affections of the heart; but that, by way of contrast, it has a contrary import to the word carnal....

But here a contrast is evidently set forth between the flesh and the spirit. And further, it is sufficiently clear from the context, and it has been in fact already shown, that under the term flesh is included whatever men bring from the womb; and flesh is what men are called, as they are born, and as long as they retain their natural character; for as they are corrupt, so they neither taste nor desire anything but what is gross and earthly. Spirit, on the contrary, is renewed nature, which God forms anew after his own image....

The perfection then of the doctrine of the law is opposed here to the corrupt nature of man: hence the meaning is as follows, 'the law requires a celestial and an angelic righteousness in which no spot is to appear, to whose clearness nothing is to be wanting: but I am a carnal man, who can do nothing but oppose it.'<sup>111</sup>

Calvin's struggle between Spirit and flesh mirrors the Apostle Paul's in Romans chapter seven. Sin, thus, obscures our view of right action, when underlying depravity corrupts every good intent.

Calvin proceeds to give further details about the meaning of the word "temptation". The word "temptation," for Calvin, could have a twofold meaning.

First, "temptation" is whatever provokes us to desire the transgression of the law of God. Answering to the question "What do you mean by the term *Temptation?*", Calvin says, "The tricks and fallacies of Satan, by which he is constantly attacking us, and would forthwith circumvent us, were we not aided by the help of God. For both our mind, from its native vanity, is liable to his wiles, and

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<sup>111</sup> Calvin's Commentaries, *Romans 1-16*, Vol. XIX, Ed. Henry Beveridge, Trans. Christopher Fetherstone (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), pp. 259-260.

our will, which is always prone to evil, would immediately yield to him.”<sup>112</sup> In another definition of “temptation” Calvin adds that the desire of transgressing the law of God not only comes from Satan; it also comes from our own inordinate desire. He expounds:

*When he is drawn away by his own lust.* As the inclination and excitement to sin are inward, in vain does the sinner seek an excuse from an external impulse. At the same time these two effects of lust ought to be noticed – that it ensnares us by allurements, and that it draws us away; each of which is sufficient to render us guilty.<sup>113</sup>

Thus, temptation happens whenever our own desire or Satan provokes us to turn aside from God by forgetting him either through wealth or poverty.

Secondly, Calvin defines the word “temptation” as an affliction, or test of God’s elect by God himself. God tests believers through disgrace, poverty, tribulation and other sorts of affliction. For Calvin, God uses temptation (affliction, trial or test) to rouse his elect from their spiritual sluggishness. Calvin comment:

*God did tempt Abraham.* James, in denying that anyone is tempted by God, (James 1:13) refutes the profane calumnies of those who, to exonerate themselves from the blame of their sins, attempt to fix the charge of them upon God. Wherefore, James truly contends, that those sins, of which we have the root in our own concupiscence, ought not to be charged upon another. For though Satan instills is poison, and fans the flame of our corrupt desires within us, we are yet not carried by any external force to the commission of sin; but our own flesh entices us, and we willingly yield to its

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<sup>112</sup> Beveridge and Bonnet, *Calvin's Selected Works*, p.80.

<sup>113</sup> *Comm.* James 1:14.

allurements. This, however, is no reason why God may not be said to tempt us in his own way, just as he tempted Abraham, - that is, brought him to a severe test, - that he might make full trial of the faith of his servant.<sup>114</sup>

It was for this same reason, for Calvin, that God tested Abraham in Genesis 22: 1 when God asked him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. This heavenly temptation ultimately strengthened Abraham and all the elect in their faith.

Calvin makes a clear distinction between God's temptation (test or trial of the elect) and Satan's temptation of God's children. He explains,

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 [I Cor. 10: 13; II Peter 2:9].<sup>115</sup>

Since God's children are weak in the face of Satan's continual temptation in which he seeks to bring on them destruction, confusion and condemnation; they must run to Jesus, the Mediator, for their help from God the Father. For that reason Calvin asserts,

Here we must carefully note that it is not in our own power to engage that great warrior the devil in combat, or to bear his force and onslaught.

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<sup>114</sup> *Comm. Gen. 22:1.*

<sup>115</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.46.

Otherwise it would be pointless or a mockery to ask God what we already have in ourselves. Obviously those who prepare for such combat with self-assurance do not sufficiently understand with what a ferocious and well equipped enemy they have to deal. Now we seek to be freed from his power, as from the jaws of a mad and raging lion [I Peter 5:8]; if the Lord did not snatch us from the midst of death, we could not help being immediately torn into pieces by his fangs and claws and swallowed down his throat. Yet we know that if the Lord be with us, and fight for us while we keep top still, 'in his might we shall do mightily' [Ps. 60:12; cf. 107: 14 and Comm.].<sup>116</sup>

We implore the Lord to fill us with his Spirit to give us his power to battle with Satan. Filled with the Holy Spirit, we are then able to overcome sin. For this reason Calvin says, "While we petition, then, to be freed from Satan and sin, we anticipate that new increases of God's grace will continually be showered upon us, until, completely filled therewith, we triumph over all evil."<sup>117</sup> Once again the Holy Spirit conquers flesh to effect our prayer.

#### **4. Third Petition (b): Deliver Us From Evil.**

Calvin does not give much detail regarding this petition, which is definitively linked to the second one "And lead us not into temptation". As already mentioned, Calvin establishes a direct connection between sin (evil) and temptation. In temptation, Satan uses our flesh to commit evil (sin). Satan, therefore, uses sin (evil) to destroy us. In his *Selected Works*, Calvin writes,

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<sup>116</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.46.

<sup>117</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.46.

M. But why do you pray not to lead you into temptation, which seems to be the proper act of Satan, not of God?

S. As God defends believers by his protection, that they may neither be oppressed by the wiles of Satan, nor overcome by sin, so those whom he means to punish he not only leaves destitute of his grace, but also delivers to the tyranny of Satan, strikes with blindness, and gives over to a reprobate mind, so that they are completely enslaved to sin and exposed to all assaults of temptation.<sup>118</sup>

Thus, believers pray to be delivered from sin's snare, introduced by the wiles of Satan.

Calvin clearly asserts that *evil* could be equated with both *Satan* and *sin*. He writes, "The word evil may either be taken in the neuter gender, as signifying the *evil thing*, or in the masculine gender, as signifying the *evil one*....But it may, with equal propriety, be explained as referring to *sin*."<sup>119</sup> He proposes,

It makes very little difference whether we understand by the word 'evil' the devil or sin. Indeed, Satan himself is the enemy who lies in wait for our life [I Peter 5:8]; moreover, he is armed with sin to destroy us. This, then, is our plea: that we may not be vanquished or overwhelmed by any temptations but may stand fast by the Lord's power against all hostile powers that attack us. This is not to succumb to temptations that, received into his care and safekeeping and secure in his protection, we may victoriously endure sin, death, the gates of hell [Matt. 16: 28], and the devil's whole kingdom. This is to be freed from evil.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Beveridge and Bonnet, *Calvin's Selected Works*, p.81.

<sup>119</sup> *Comm. Matt.* 6:13.

<sup>120</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.46.

Thus, the Lord Jesus himself delivers believers from temptation, Satan and the slavery of sin. Their victory over temptation, Satan and sin is made possible by God the Father through the victory of Christ's resurrection.

**5. Final Clause: “For Thine Is the Kingdom, And the Power, And the Glory, For Ever”**

The Lord's Prayer ends with this clause: *For Thine is the Kingdom, And the Power, And the Glory, For Ever*. Calvin elaborates as follows:

**M.** What is meant by the clause which is added, “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever?”

**S.** We are here again reminded that our prayers must lean more on the power and goodness of God than any confidence in ourselves. Besides, we are taught to close all our praises with praise.<sup>121</sup>

Thus, this final clause stands for two essential elements in prayer. First, it is a reminder for the believers that all their prayers must repose on God's power alone, and not on human efforts. Secondly, their prayers must end with praise as an expression of their faith in God, the Father. Here is how Calvin links this clause to faith for believers in their prayers, “Even though this is not extant in the Latin versions, it is so appropriate to this place that it ought not to be omitted – namely,

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<sup>121</sup> Beveridge and Bonnet, *Calvin's Selected Works*, p. 81.

that his ‘Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever’ [Matt. 6: 13, marg.]. This is firm and tranquil repose for our faith.”<sup>122</sup>

Concluding his teaching on the Lord’s Prayer as the sole and unique model for all believers, Calvin maintains, “Although we are free to pray in other words, and in another manner, we ought, however, to hold that no prayer can please God which is not referable to this as the only rule of right prayer.”<sup>123</sup> To Calvin, God the Father himself appointed our divine Master, Jesus Christ, to teach us what to pray for in our prayers following the content of the Lord’s Prayer. He insists,

And this prayer is in all respects so perfect that any extraneous or alien thing added to it, which cannot be related to it, is impious and unworthy to be approved by God. For in this summary he has set forth what is worthy of him, acceptable to him, necessary for us – in effect, what he would willingly grant.

For this reason, those who dare go farther and ask anything from God beyond this: first, wish to add to God’s wisdom from their own, which cannot happen without insane blasphemy; secondly, do not confine themselves within God’s will but, holding it in contempt, stray away farther in their uncontrolled desire; lastly, they will never obtain anything, since they pray without faith. But doubtless all such prayers are made apart from faith, for here the word of God is absent, upon which faith, if it is to stand at all, must always rely. But those who, neglecting the Master’s rule, give themselves over to their own desires not only lack God’s word but contend against it with all their strength. Therefore Tertullian has both truly and elegantly called it ‘the lawful prayer’ tacitly indicating that all other prayers lie outside the law and are forbidden.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.47.

<sup>123</sup> Beveridge and Bonnet, *Calvin’s Selected Works*, p. 81.

<sup>124</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.48.

For Calvin, nobody should go beyond the wisdom God has set forth here for our prayers. The reason is that outside the will of God recounted in the Lord's Prayer, there is no mandate from God, because those prayers are "lawless and illicit." Therefore it is important for every believer to understand the substance of the Lord's Prayer as a guideline for his or her daily prayers.

Calvin insists that the Lord's Prayer is a model by its content, instead of its form. We are not called to be stuck to his words but rather to the meaning it conveys. Here is his warning:

We would not have it understood that we are so bound by this form of prayer that we are not allowed to change it in either word or syllable. For here and there in Scripture one reads many prayers, far different from it in words, yet composed by the same Spirit, the use of which is very profitable to us. Many prayers are repeatedly suggested to believers by the same Spirit, which bear little similarity in wording. In so teaching, we mean only this: that no man should ask for, expect, or demand, anything at all except what is included, by way of summary, in this prayer; and though the words may be utterly different, yet the sense ought not to vary. Thus all prayers contained in Scripture, and those which come forth from godly breasts, are certainly to be referred to it.<sup>125</sup>

The meaning or the content of the Lord's Prayer, rather than its form remains our guide or boundary in prayer to God in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>125</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.49.

## **F. Kinds of Prayer**

Calvin outlines two different kinds of prayer, private and public.

### **1. Private Prayer**

In private prayer Calvin delineates the roles of petition and thanksgiving under the sovereignty of God.

#### **a. Interconnection of Petition and Thanksgiving**

Calvin highlights the interconnection of petition and thanksgiving in prayer.

He writes,

But even though prayer is properly confined to entreaties and supplications, there is such a close connection between petition and thanksgiving that they may conveniently be included under one name....

The reason why Paul enjoins us both to pray and to give thanks without ceasing [I Thess. 5: 17 – 18; cf. I Tim. 2: 1, 8] is, of course, that he wishes all men to lift up their desires to God, with all possible constancy, at all times, in all places, and in all affairs and transactions, to expect all things from him, and give him praise for all things, since he offers us unfailing reasons to praise and pray.<sup>126</sup>

Commenting on Calvin's interconnection of petition and thanksgiving, Parker writes,

Calvin returns to his positive teaching. Prayer and thanksgiving belong together, so that without gratitude prayer is feeble and lackluster. It is obvious that there should be giving of thanks when prayers have been clearly answered; but the thanksgiving should precede the answers and should be an integral part of prayer. The one praying prays from his faith,

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<sup>126</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.28.

and if from his faith then with trust in God's promises that he will hear the prayer and that whoever asks will receive. Even when the believer is in trouble and heaviness the thanksgiving is present, even if latent. More, thanksgiving is not a simple "thank you", but a whole attitude of ascribing all to God's kindness and hence of loving the Giver: "God's benefits not only claim the praise of the tongue but also win naturally our love... Praises which do not flow from this sweetness of love will never praise God" (xx. 28, 337).<sup>127</sup>

Thus thanksgiving rightly belongs in the midst of petition in prayer. Calvin

comments:

The term *requests* he employs here to denote desires or wishes. He would have us make these known to God by prayer and supplication, as though believers poured forth their hearts before God, when they commit themselves, and all that they have, to Him. Those, indeed, who look hither and thither to the vain comforts of the world, may appear to be in some degree relieved; but there is one sure refuge – leaning upon the Lord.

*With thanksgivings.* As many often pray to God amiss, full of complaints or of murmurings, as though they had just ground for accusing him, while others cannot brook delay, if he does not immediately gratify their desires, Paul on this account conjoins thanksgiving with prayers. It is as though he had said, that those things are necessary for us ought to be desired by us from the Lord in such a way, that we, nevertheless, subject our afflictions to his good pleasure, and give thanks while presenting petitions. And, unquestionably, gratitude will have this effect upon us – that the will of God will be the grand sum of desires.<sup>128</sup>

Hence, Calvin puts a clear distinction between petition and thanksgiving although he conjoins them.

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<sup>127</sup> Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction To His Thought*, p.111.

<sup>128</sup> *Comm. Phil. 4:6.*

Calvin defines petition as asking and beseeching God in such a way that believers seek first God's glory, and seek then benefits for their own advantage. He expounds, "In asking and beseeching, we pour out our desires before God, seeking both those things which make for the extension of his glory and the setting forth of his name, and those benefits which conduce to our own advantage."<sup>129</sup> Our requests must always aim at promoting God's glory and displaying his name; subsequently our needs will be addressed.

Calvin defines thanksgiving as a way in which believers praise God for his benefits to them and ascribe to God's generosity every good thing. He writes "In giving thanks, we celebrate with due praise his benefits toward us, and credit to his generosity every good that comes to us."<sup>130</sup> Praise resonates from a heart full of thanksgiving.

Calvin implores that thanksgiving as well as petition must be a continual aspect of believers' prayers. He portrays David among many other biblical figures as an example in continual thanksgiving to God for his generosity. He writes,

Accordingly, David, when he has perceived the Lord's generosity, beautifully declares a 'new song' has been put into his mouth [Ps. 40: 3]. By this he naturally hints that if we fail to offer him praise for his blessing, our silence is spiteful, since as often as he blesses us he provides us with

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<sup>129</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.28.

<sup>130</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.28.

occasion to bless him.... In this sense, David elsewhere speaks: ‘O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise’ [Ps. 51: 15; 50: 17, Vg.].<sup>131</sup>

The Lord thus helps believers to declare his praise where their faculties fail them.

**b. God: The Author of all Blessings**

Calvin persists that believers must praise and thank God without ceasing for all their blessings. All that they are, have, and do is to be committed to God, the sole source of their good and their only help. Calvin insists that believers are accursed of God when they rely on themselves and stop thanking God for his benefits. He even goes further to argue that we sin against God by not thanking him for all the blessings we receive. He declares,

But in the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving there can be no interruption without sin, since God does not cease to heap benefits upon benefits in order to impel us, though slow and lazy, to gratefulness. In short, we are well-nigh overwhelmed by so great and so plenteous an outpouring of benefits, by so many and mighty miracles discerned wherever one looks, that we never lack reason and occasion for praise and thanksgiving.<sup>132</sup>

Calvin teaches that in private prayer, believers defer to the secret judgment of God. Therefore, corporate prayers should not overtake the private realm of prayers. He warns us, “Again, he who neglects to pray alone and in private, however unremittingly he may frequent public assemblies, there contrives only windy

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<sup>131</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.28.

<sup>132</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.28.

prayers, for he defers more to the opinion of men than to the secret judgment of God.”<sup>133</sup> Calvin holds the same conviction regarding the importance of common prayers for believers. In other words, private and public prayers are equally important for Calvin.

## **2. Public Prayer**

### **a. Necessity of Public Prayer**

Calvin highlights the importance of public prayer. He writes, “This constancy in prayer, even though it has especially to do with one’s own private prayers, still is also concerned somewhat with the public prayers of the church.”<sup>134</sup> Since these prayers are public, Calvin requires that the congregation, by common consent, must agree upon certain hours (indifferent to God but necessary for the congregants) for their practice. Calvin’s goal here is maintaining unity, decency and order in public prayer for the upbuilding of the congregation itself. He points out,

Yet these can neither be constant nor ought they even to take place otherwise than according to the polity agreed upon by common consent among all. This I grant you. For this reason, certain hours, indifferent to God but necessary for men’s convenience, are agreed upon and appointed to provide for the accommodation of all, and for everything to be done ‘decently and in order’ in the church according to Paul’s statement [I Cor. 14: 40].<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.29.

<sup>134</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20. 29.

<sup>135</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.29.

Calvin highlights the difference that might exist among congregations regarding the frequency of public prayer. He writes, “But this does not preclude each church from being both repeatedly stirred up to more frequent use of prayer and fired by a sharper zeal if it is alerted by some major need.”<sup>136</sup> Consequently, each church must regulate its public prayer meetings according to its own local context.<sup>1</sup>

### **b. Dangers in Public Prayer**

Calvin draws our attention to the following dangers of public prayers:

#### **1. Vain repetitions**

Calvin thinks that vain repetitions must not be confused with persistence in genuine prayer. In talking of vain repetitions in prayer, Calvin is referring to the public prayer of the Roman Catholic Church of his time. He even goes on to compare the “repetitious prayers” of the Catholic Church of his day to the “Pharisee’s prayers”. For Calvin, vain repetitions mock God instead of pleasing him as real prayers. He writes,

Now these matters have nothing to do with the vain repetition that Christ willed to be forbidden to us [Matt. 6: 7]. For Christ does not forbid us to persist in prayers, long, often, or with much feeling, but requires that we should not be confident in our ability to wrest something from God by beating upon his ears with a garrulous flow of talk, as if he could be persuaded as men are....

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<sup>136</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.29

For that Pharisee who thanked God that he was not like other men [Luke 18: 11] doubtless praised himself in men's eyes, as if he would from praying latch on to renown for holiness. Hence that vain repetition which for a similar reason is in vogue today in the papacy. While some pass the time in saying over and over the same little prayers, others vaunt themselves before the crowd with a great mass of words. Since this talkativeness childishly mocks God, it is no wonder that it is forbidden by the church in order that nothing shall resound there except what is earnest and comes forth from the depth of the heart.<sup>137</sup>

The heart's cry in prayer is what matters to God.

## 2. Hypocrisy

Calvin warns against another danger in public prayer that he calls hypocritical prayer. He writes, "Near and similar to this corrupt element is another, which Christ condemns at the same time: hypocrites, for the sake of show, pant after many witnesses, and would rather frequent the market place to pray than have their prayers miss the world's applause [Matt. 6: 5].<sup>138</sup> He calls these prayers hypocritical, because in them the believers first seek the world's applause instead of the glory of God.

After warning us against these two dangers in public prayers, Calvin proceeds to describe what he calls true prayer in the public sphere.

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<sup>137</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.29.

<sup>138</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.29.

### c. True Prayer

In his teaching on prayer, Calvin reminds us of the goal of true prayer. He insists that the goal of prayer is not to mock God with vain repetitions or seek people's applause, but rather to arouse and bare our hearts to God; either to praise him or supplicate his help. He affirms,

But inasmuch as this goal of prayer has already been stated – namely, that hearts may be aroused and borne to God, whether to praise him or to beseech his help – from this we may understand that the essentials of prayer are set in the mind and heart, or rather that prayer itself is properly an emotion of the heart within, which is poured out and laid open before God, the searcher of hearts [cf. Rom. 8: 27].<sup>139</sup>

The ultimate goal of prayer is an emotion with the heart-searcher.

Calvin maintains that public and private prayer feed one another. He writes:

The Lord himself also, therefore, with good reason, when he determined to devote himself more intensely to prayers, habitually withdrew to a quiet spot far away from the tumult of men; but he did so to impress us with his example that we must not neglect these helps, whereby our mind, too unsteady by itself, more inclines to earnest application to prayer. In the meantime, as he did not abstain from praying even in the midst of a crowd if the occasion so presented itself, so we should lift up clean hands in all places, where there is need [I Tim. 2: 8].

Finally, we must consider that whoever refused to pray in the holy assembly of the godly knows not what it is to pray individually, or in a secret spot, or at home. Again, he who neglects to pray alone and in private, however unremittingly he may frequent public assemblies, there contrives only windy

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<sup>139</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.29.

prayers, for he defers more to the opinion of men than to the secret judgment of God.<sup>140</sup>

The symbiosis of private and public prayer thus causes the believer, alone or among the crowd, to lift up his or her eyes and heart to the one true God in Christ Jesus.

Calvin maintains that the biblical term “house of prayer” commends public prayer to the believer. “House of prayer” for Calvin impels believers to foster a unity of faith in the church of Christ. He affirms,

Moreover, that the common prayers of the church may not be held in contempt, God of old adorned them with shining titles, especially when he called the temple the “house of prayer” [Isa. 56: 7; Matt. 21: 13]. For he taught by this term that the chief part of his worship lies in the office of prayer, and that the temple was set up like a banner for believers so that they might, with one consent, participate in it.<sup>141</sup>

### 3. The Significance of Church Buildings

Calvin maintains that public temples or church buildings command the practice of prayer. However, he insists that one must not overstate the importance of public temples as meeting places for God’s people. The lawful use of church buildings, for Calvin, excludes the belief that God is preeminently present there. It also excludes the belief in a special holiness inherent in them which makes believers’ prayers offered there more efficacious. On the contrary, Calvin insists

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<sup>140</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.29.

<sup>141</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3, 20, 29.

that the New Testament has interiorized the Old Testament teaching on the temple, which is that believers are all living spiritual temples of God.

Calvin declares,

If this is the lawful use of church buildings, as it certainly is, we in turn must guard against either taking them to be God's proper dwelling places, whence he may more nearly incline his ear to us – as they began to be regarded some centuries ago – or feigning for them some secret holiness or other, which would render prayer more sacred before God. For since we ourselves are God's true temples, if we would call upon God in his holy temple, we must pray within ourselves.<sup>142</sup>

Calvin thinks that believer's prayer excludes the veneration of church buildings.

Believers are commanded to call upon God without any distinction of place. Let

believers remember, therefore, that God does not dwell in temples made with

human hands, but in those hearts he has rendered his own.

#### **4. Speaking and Singing in Prayer**

Calvin maintains that God created our tongue for the sake of praising him in word and song. Furthermore, voice and song in prayer can only come from a deep conviction of the heart. God thus commands our prayer. Calvin expands,

Moreover, since the glory of God ought, in a measure, to shine in the several parts of our bodies, it is especially fitting that the tongue has been assigned and destined for this task, both through singing and through speaking. For it was peculiarly created to tell and proclaim the praise of God. But the chief use of the tongue is in public prayers, which are offered in the assembly of

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<sup>142</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.30.

believers, by which it comes about that with one common voice, and as it were, with the same mouth, we glorify God together, worshipping him with one spirit and the same faith.<sup>143</sup>

The tongue proclaims the glory of God, then, in song and prayer.

Calvin asserts that if the singing be of fitting in the sight of God and the angels, then believers' hearts will rise up into zealous intercession. However, they must be careful not to give the melody more attention than the words of the song.

To avoid such a danger, Calvin writes,

Augustine also admits in another place that he was so disturbed by this danger that he sometimes wished to see established the custom observed by Athanasius, who ordered the reader to use so little inflection of the voice that he would sound more like a speaker than a singer. But when he recalled how much benefit singing had brought him, he inclined to the other side. Therefore, when this moderation is maintained, it is without any doubt a most holy and salutary practice. On the other hand, such songs as have been composed only for sweetness and delight of the ear are unbecoming to the majesty of the church and cannot but displease God in the highest degree.<sup>144</sup>

The moderation of the melody and the supremacy of the words of the song are crucial to make them kindle believers' desire and eagerness for prayer.

Calvin then turns to the importance of the vernacular. Public prayer must be performed in the language of the people. Otherwise, it will not edify the body of Christ in their holy assemblies. Calvin writes, "From this also it plainly appears that

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<sup>143</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.31.

<sup>144</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.32.

public prayers must be couched not in Greek among the Latins, nor in Latin among the French or English, as has heretofore been the custom, but in the language of the people, which can be generally understood by the whole assembly. For this ought to be done for the edification of the whole church, which receives no benefit whatever from a sound not understood.”<sup>145</sup> Calvin blames the papists for not observing this rule of praying in the language of the people. Therefore, they run counter to Paul’s teaching. He says,

Those who have no regard for either love or kindness ought at least to have been moved a little by the authority of Paul, whose words are perfectly clear. ‘If you bless with the spirit,’ he says, ‘how can he who occupies the place of the unlearned respond to your blessing with “Amen,” since he is ignorant of what you are saying?... Who can marvel enough, then, at the unbridled license of the papists, who, after the apostle thus openly decries it, are not afraid to make their wordy prayers resound in a foreign language, of which they themselves often understand not one syllable, and do not wish others to understand either?’<sup>146</sup>

Unselfconsciousness; is, the absence of distraction through use of the vernacular, is a key component of true prayer.

Calvin ends his teaching on public prayer by emphasizing the role of feeling, thought and gesture in relation to prayer. He claims that tongue and mind should always be joined in prayer. He maintains that in private, unspoken prayers

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<sup>145</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.33.

<sup>146</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.33.

are sometimes the best. He also thinks that the customary bodily gestures (such as uncovering the head, raising the hands or kneeling) are attempts to heighten the believers' reverence toward God. On that condition alone, bodily gestures in private and public prayer are welcome.

### **G. Perseverance in Prayer**

Perseverance in prayer, for Calvin, is characterized by our obedience to God and our waiting patiently for God's answer. God does not act according to human agenda or time schedule. Sometimes believers have the impression that God is late in answering their prayers. While they are waiting for God's intervention, there is a great risk of giving up on God's faithfulness to his promises. Calvin teaches believers to persevere in prayer despite God's apparent silence. Calvin declares,

This, then, will be an ever-present consolation: that, if God should not respond to our first requests, we may not faint or fall into despair. Such is the wont of those who, carried away with their own ardor, so call upon God that unless he attends upon their first act of prayer and brings them help at once, they immediately fancy him angry and hostile toward them and abandoning all hope of being heard, cease to call upon him. Rather, by deferring our hope with a well-tempered evenness of mind, let us follow hard upon that perseverance which Scripture strongly commends to us.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.51.

We should never stop praying to God, even when we have not received from God answers to our past or current prayers. To the contrary, our hope in the certainty of God's promises in his word must keep us crying out to him with perseverance.

Scripture recommends us to persevere in our prayers. Calvin states, "For in The Psalms we can often see that David and other believers, when they are almost worn out with praying and seem to have beaten the air with their prayers as if pouring forth words to a deaf God, still do not cease to pray [Ps. 22:2]. For, unless the faith placed in it is superior to all events, the authority of God's Word does not prevail."<sup>148</sup> Our lack of perseverance in prayer is a sign of our lack of faith in God's word. David and other believers hereby exemplify unremitting faith in God's word through their persistence in prayer.

Calvin stresses the importance of persistent faith in prayer. Faith is crucial because it allows us to perceive spiritually the result of prayer where our human sense cannot. Calvin rejoices that faith makes us possess abundance even in poverty and comfort in spite of affliction. He comments, "For though all things fail us, yet God will never forsake us, who cannot disappoint the expectation and patience of his people. He alone will be for us in place of all things, since all good things are contained in him and he will reveal them to us on the Day of Judgment,

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<sup>148</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.51.

when his Kingdom will be plainly manifested.”<sup>149</sup> By faith we can endure our present earthly afflictions and persecutions until the Parousia. Therefore setting our eyes, by faith, on eternity stimulates our prayer. Calvin assures the believer, “Nevertheless, however they stand upon the assurance of that hope, they do not meanwhile cease to pray, for unless there be in prayer a constancy to persevere, we pray in vain.”<sup>150</sup> Believers accordingly must persevere in prayer, because God will always answer them according to his own will and time.

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<sup>149</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.52.

<sup>150</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.52.

## Chapter Three

### Providence and Prayer in Calvin

Calvin's doctrine of providence holds an importance place in his theology.

Tiessen writes,

Among the Protestant Reformers who perpetuated an appreciation for the general approach to God's providence that had been established in the work of Augustine, perhaps none has been more influential than John Calvin. His name has become identified with Protestant theologies that have a strong conviction that God is absolutely sovereign.<sup>151</sup>

We will first explore some elements of Calvin's doctrine of providence. Then, we will compare this doctrine with Calvin's doctrine of prayer. Our goal here is to further our understanding of Calvin's doctrine of prayer in light of what he upholds on the providence of God.

#### **I. Calvin and Providence**

##### **1. Conjunction of Creation and Providence**

Calvin establishes an inseparable connection between Creation and providence. Objecting to the philosophical view that God is "a momentary Creator," Calvin insists,

Moreover, to make God a momentary Creator, who once for all finished his work, would be cold and barren, and we must differ from profane men

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<sup>151</sup> Terrance Tiessen, *Providence and Prayer* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p.233.

especially in that we see the presence of divine power shining as much in the continuing state of the universe as in its inception. For even though the minds of the impious too are compelled by merely looking upon earth and heaven to rise up to the Creator, yet faith has its own peculiar way of assigning the whole credit for Creation to God. To this pertains that saying of the apostle's to which we have referred before, that only 'by faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God' [Heb. 11:3]. For unless we pass on to his providence – however we may seem both to comprehend with the mind and to confess with the tongue – we do not yet properly grasp what it means to say: 'God is Creator.'<sup>152</sup>

Stressing both God's role as the Creator and the conjunction of Creation to the providence of God in Calvin's theology, Timothy George writes,

Providence, then, was inseparably joined to creation and was itself a kind of continuation of the creative process (*creation continua*): 'We see the presence of divine power shining as much in the continuing state of the universe as in its inception'. ...The emphasis on God's direct, immediate activity in the world led Calvin to reject the traducianist theory of the origin of the soul. According to this view, which was held by Luther, the soul is transmitted from generation to generation through the process of human procreation. Calvin, on the other hand, believed that each time a child is given life, God creates a new soul *ex nihilo*. This meant that God must be very busy for each day He created thousands of souls every minute.<sup>153</sup>

Calvin's doctrine of providence is thus rooted in the belief that God is both the Creator and the eternal Sustainer and Governor of the universe. The non-believer makes God "a momentary Creator." Calvin comments:

To this I reply, - that though there has been an opinion of this kind among heathens, that the world was made by God, it was yet very evanescent, for as

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<sup>152</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.16.1.

<sup>153</sup> Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, pp. 206-207.

soon as they formed a notion of some God, they became instantly vain in their imaginations, so that they groped in the dark, having in their thoughts a mere shadow of some uncertain deity, and not the knowledge of the true God. Besides, as it was only a transient opinion that flit in their minds, it was far from being anything like knowledge. We may further add, that they assigned to fortune or chance the supremacy in the in the government of the world, and made no mention of God's providence which alones rules everything.... Hence most correctly does the Apostle ascribe such an understanding to faith; for they who have faith do not entertain a slight opinion as to God being the Creator of the world, but they have a deep conviction fixed in their minds and behold the true God. And further, they understand the power of his word, not only as manifested instantaneously in creating the world, but also as put forth continually in its preservation; nor is it his power only that they understand, but also his goodness, and wisdom, and justice. And hence they are led to worship, love, and honour him.<sup>154</sup>

Writing on Calvin's doctrine of providence, Parker asserts:

The name 'Creator' has not been fully understood when God is called only 'the Maker'. This is why chapter xvi begins with the title: 'By his Power God cherishes and guards the World which he made and by his Providence rules its individual Parts'.

That God is a 'momentary Creator', performing one single task, can be the opinion only of unbelievers. Faith sees that 'unless we go further, to his Providence, we have not yet really grasped what it means that God is the Creator.' Neither the universe as a whole nor its individual parts are activated by some 'universal movement', the philosophers' 'secret inspiration of God', but by God's individual Providence upholding, cherishing and caring for everything that he made, down to the least sparrow (Matt. 10: 29). What is lacking in the unbeliever's opinion is above all the scriptural insistence on God's special and Fatherly care for the individual.

From the outset it becomes clear that Calvin's concept of Providence is intended to be drawn from Scripture.... He will have none of the Epicurean or quasi-Epicurean separating of God from his creatures. Instead there is the

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<sup>154</sup> *Comm. Heb.* 11:3.

comforting doctrine that we and all things are in the hands of our almighty heavenly Father.<sup>155</sup>

Charles B. Partee confirms:

In the fourteenth chapter of the 1545 treatise, 'Contre la secte phantastique et furieuse des Libertines qui se nomment spirituelz,' Calvin says that we attribute to God an active power in all creatures. God created, governs, and maintains the world and disposes things as it seems good to Him.<sup>156</sup>

Calvin thus opposes the Stoics' and Epicureans' view of separating God the Creator from his ongoing governing, cherishing and supporting the whole universe and everything it includes. Calvin insists when philosophers or unbelievers separate God from the governing of the universe, they thus fail to give praise to him. God, for Calvin, deserves believers' praise, because God alone rules over all things.

Calvin maintains that the philosophers or the unbelievers fail to understand the providence of God because of their lack of faith. God's providence can only be understood by faith. Calvin Comments,

*3. Through, or by, faith we understand....* This is a most striking proof of the last verse; for we differ nothing from the brute creation, if we understand not that the world has been created by God. To that end have men been endued with understanding and reason, except that they might acknowledge their Creator? But it is by faith alone we know that it was God who created

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<sup>155</sup> Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought*, p.43.

<sup>156</sup> Charles B. Partee "Calvin on Universal and Particular Providence" in *Readings in Calvin's Theology*, pp.69-88.

the world. No wonder then that faith shone forth in the fathers above all virtues.<sup>157</sup>

By faith alone we apprehend that God is not only the Creator of the universe but we also understand that he is its sole Governor and Sustainer.

## **2. God's Providence Supercedes Fortune or Chance**

Calvin maintains that nothing happens apart from God's will. Believers, taught by Christ, must know that all events are governed by God's secret plan. Calvin declares, "If then, the providence of God is such that it extends to these little beastlets, it follows that nothing will happen unless God has ordained it."<sup>158</sup> Thus, Calvin excludes any notion of fortune or chance. He comments:

...There are here two things to be observed. First, Christ gives a very different account of the providence of God from what is given by many who talk like the philosophers, and tell us that God governs the world, but yet imagine providence to be a confused sort of arrangement, as if God did not keep his eye on each of the creatures. Now, Christ declares that each of the creatures in particular is under his hand and protection, so that nothing is left to chance....In the nature of things, I do acknowledge, there is uncertainty: but I maintain that nothing happens through a blind revolution of chance, for all is regulated by the will of God.<sup>159</sup>

Calvin refutes any notion of fortune or chance, because if true, then God is not in full control of the universe he created. The Stoics' notion of fortune is, then,

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<sup>157</sup> *Comm. Heb. 11:3.*

<sup>158</sup> *Sermon Acts 2:22-24.*

<sup>159</sup> *Comm. Matt. 10:30.*

nature's action without a divine intervention. Calvin's providence, by contrast, is God's intervention in every small occurrence in the universe for the fulfillment of his purpose.

Calvin insists that "fortune" and "chance" are pagan terms. He points out,

What then? You will ask. Does nothing happen by chance, nothing by contingency? I reply: Basil the great has truly said that 'fortune' and 'chance' are pagan terms, with whose significance the minds of the godly ought not to be occupied. For if every success is God's blessing, and calamity and adversity his curse, no place now remains in human affairs for fortune or chance.<sup>160</sup>

Whatever is commonly called "fortune" or "chance" by pagans is also ruled and governed by "a secret order."<sup>161</sup> Believers ought to say always that "God willed this" instead of saying that "fortune willed this" according to Calvin. He claims that the true cause of events can be hidden to us. The reason for this is "the sluggishness of our mind lies far beneath the height of God's providence."<sup>162</sup>

The word "fortune" therefore implies events of which human beings are ignorant of the cause or reason. God alone knows their causes and reasons. Calvin, however, insists on the distinction between the Stoics and believers in regard to their definition of "fortune". He comments:

...There are here two things to be observed. First, Christ gives a very different account of the providence of God from what is given by many who talk like the philosophers, and tell us that God governs the world, but yet imagine providence to be a confused sort of arrangement, as if God did not

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<sup>160</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.16. 8.

<sup>161</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.16. 8.

<sup>162</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.16. 9.

keep his eye on each of the creatures. Now, Christ declares that each of the creatures in particular is under his hand and protection, so that nothing is left to chance....In the nature of things, I do acknowledge, there is uncertainty: but I maintain that nothing happens through a blind revolution of chance, for all is regulated by the will of God.<sup>163</sup>

Parker affirms,

Calvin first opposes Providence to fate or chance. The common opinion has always been that events are fortuitous; 'but whoever learns from the mouth of Christ that all hairs of his head are numbered will seek further for causes and conclude that all events whatsoever are governed by the secret determination of God'. Even inanimate objects are included. Certainly, they have their individual properties, according to which they exist and are effectual; but they cannot exert their power apart from the hand of God being present to direct them.<sup>164</sup>

Calvin is convinced that "God's secret plan" or "God's ever-present hand" is behind every occurrence of the universe. Calvin hereby highlights God's sovereignty in the universe.

### **3. God Governs All and Everything**

Calvin insists that God never turns his back on the universe after its creation.

God does and will remain its sole governor. Calvin expounds:

It is true that some will speak well of the providence of God, but they will have only a foolish notion of it; for they think that He is resting high in the sky, and yet He leaves chance or nature to rule below. On the contrary it is here declared to us that God ordains everything and disposes of things just as it pleases Him. It is true that this is unfamiliar to us and that we cannot

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<sup>163</sup> *Comm. Matt. 10:30.*

<sup>164</sup> Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought*, p.43.

comprehend it, but we must be content to know that He is the Governor of it...<sup>165</sup>

Calvin claims that those who praise God for his omnipotence can doubly benefit from it as follows: First, God does good things for those who obey him. Secondly, believers safely rest in God's protection. However, Calvin is not saying that believers will not face hard trials. He affirms:

*19. Many are the afflictions of the righteous.* The Psalmist here anticipates the thought which often arises in the mind, "How can it be that God has care about the righteous, who are continually harassed with so many calamities and trials? For what purpose does the protection of God serve, unless those who are peaceably inclined enjoy peace and repose? And what is more unreasonable, than that those who cause trouble to no one should themselves be tormented and afflicted in all variety of ways?" That, therefore, the temptations by which we are continually assailed may not shake our belief in the providence of God, we ought to remember this lesson of instruction, that although God governs the righteous, and provides for their safety, they are yet subject and exposed to many miseries, that, being tested by such trials, they may give evidence of their invincible constancy, and experience so much the more that God is their deliverer. If they were exempted from every kind of trial, their faith would languish, they would cease to call upon God, and their piety would remain hidden and unknown. It is, therefore, necessary that they should be exercised with various trials, and especially for this end, that they may acknowledge that they have been wonderfully preserved by God amidst numberless deaths. If this should seldom happen, it might appear to be fortuitous, or the result of chance; but when innumerable and interminable evils come upon them in succession, the grace of God cannot be unknown, when he always stretches forth his hand to them. David, therefore, admonishes the faithful never to lose their courage, whatever evils threaten them; since God, who can as easily deliver them a thousand times as once from death, will never disappoint their expectation.

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<sup>165</sup> *Sermon Acts 2: 22-24.*

What he adds concerning *their bones*, seems not a little to illustrate the truth of this doctrine, and to teach us that those who are protected by God shall be free from all danger. He therefore declares, that God will take care that not one of their bones shall be broken; in which sense Christ also says, ‘the very hairs of our head are all numbered,’ (Luke xii. 7.)<sup>166</sup>

Thus, whether in good or bad time, Calvin maintains that believers’ confidence in God’s omnipotence must be unshakeable.

Calvin speaks of a “general” and “special” providence. By “general” providence and “special” providence, Calvin means that “the universe is ruled by God, not only because he watches over the order of nature set by him, but because he exercises especial care over each of his works.”<sup>167</sup> God’s “general” and “special” providence proves that he tends to the regulation of all occurrences, since they all and each proceed from his set plan. Partee sheds more light on our understanding of Calvin’s “general” and “special” providence when he writes,

The purpose of Calvin’s discussion of universal providence is not to define a common ground or territory between the believer and the unbeliever, but to insist that the whole order of nature is the result of the special providence of God. God does not govern by chance or a general operation in nature but by His special providence. It is true that the whole order of nature serves the will of God, but God can do more than nature, and His command changes the order of nature. In the Genesis Commentary, Calvin remarks that Joseph errs in binding the grace of God to the order of nature as if God does not often purposely change the law of nature in order to teach that what He freely confers upon man is entirely the result of His will. ...Thus God deals

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<sup>166</sup> *Comm. Psalms* 34:19.

<sup>167</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.16.4.

with His people both in an ordinary and common way and also in a wonderful and miraculous way....

Calvin admits that the carnal sense has some noetic value, but faith should not be content with a certain universal motion but understand God's particular providence (*singulari quadam providential*), and it is upon this particular providence that Calvin chiefly insists.<sup>168</sup>

God's special providence is related to human beings for the simple reason that God cares for them.

#### **4. Human Responsibility and God's Providence**

God's providence, for Calvin, does not make human responsibilities superfluous. God did not create human beings like puppets to undergo everything without any choice. Calvin comments:

Concerning the tree of knowledge of good and evil, we must hold, that it was prohibited to man, not because God would have him to stray like a sheep, without judgment and without choice; but that he might not seek to be wiser than became him became him, nor trusting to his own understanding, cast off the yoke of God, and constitute himself an arbiter and judge of good and evil. His sin proceeded from an evil conscience; whence it follows, that a judgment had been given him, by which he might discriminate between virtues and vices.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Charles B. Partee, "Calvin On Universal and Particular Providence" in *Readings in Calvin's Theology*, pp.69-88.

<sup>169</sup> *Comm. Gen. 2:9.*

Before the fall, God gave human beings the ability to “discriminate” between virtues and vices, but not to sin. Lane shed more light on Calvin’s understanding of the “Free will”. He writes:

The central issue is, of course, the freedom/bondage of the human will and human choice....

Unfortunately, the issue was obscured by the fact that Calvin, unlike Augustine, chose to reject the term “free choice”. Pighius seizes on this, assuming that because Augustine and the Fathers affirmed free choice while Calvin rejects it, Calvin is opposed to the Fathers. Calvin responds by saying that while he accepts free choice as Augustine defined it, he thinks that the term is best dropped because of possible misunderstanding. But he is willing to affirm that the will is free in the sense that we have wills which are not coerced but self-determined, choosing voluntarily, of their own accord.

In an important passage Calvin clearly defines his terms. The will is not free, namely having the power to choose good or evil. Neither is it coerced in the sense of being forcibly driven by an external impulse. Instead it is self-determined in that we will voluntarily, of our own accord. Yet, because of the corruption of the will it is in bondage and subject to a necessity of sinning. Much of Calvin’s work is devoted to explaining and defending these statements. Underlying the bondage of the will is the doctrine of original Sin, which surfaces a number of times in the debates. Calvin repeatedly criticizes Pighius’ understanding of the effects of Adam’s fall, accusing him of Pelagianism....

Calvin, by contrast, held that the fall affected every aspect of human nature. Fallen beings are in bondage to sin. Before the operation of God’s grace there is no good at all in human will. Because of this view Calvin was accused of Manichaeism, of teaching that God’s original Creation was evil. He responded: Human nature was good as originally created, but has become corrupted as a result of Adam’s fall.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> A. N. S. Lane, ed. *John Calvin: The Bondage and Liberation of the Will (A defense of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice against Pighius)*, Trans. G. I. Davies (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), XIX-XX.

Human will, for Calvin, being corrupt as a result of the Original Sin, is not capable making good choice on its own. Calvin thinks that “Profane people” have misunderstood their God’s given will.

The profane have a false perception of God’s pervasive plan. Therefore, they cannot blame God for all the evil in the universe by abdicating their responsibility in sin. Calvin is adamant that God’s providence is not a license for sinners to carry out their wicked plans and continue to blame God for them. Obeying God’s Law or his Word of love is an essential part of God’s providence. Calvin insists:

Now, concerning our having said that the wicked will execute nothing except what God has ordained, many would be able to reply. ‘Why? If that is so, we would have to say that God is the cause of evil, and that the wicked should be excused.’ Now to answer we must know in the first place what the will of God is, and even how He declares it to us in His Law. We know that He prohibits us from stealing. If I, then, go steal, for example, do I do His will? Certainly when the wicked are given to doing evil, it is not doing the will of God at all; for they well know that God reproveth all that. When, then, they do evil, there is a resistance to the will of God. By which it follows that God does not wish at all that they do evil, but He permits them to do it, and they are not at all excused thereby, inasmuch as they do it against His commandment. We must not say that God is the cause of evil, for He does not commit the vices that we commit. As also we see that He checks the devil by punishing those who are deserving of it....

We see what Job said in all his persecutions, ‘God had given it to me, God has taken it away from me, His name be blessed.’ And always he was pillaged by brigands. How does he understand that, then? Does Job accuse God of robbery? No. We must not understand it thus; for we know that the brigands are wicked men, and they come not only against the will of God, and in the intention of doing evil; but he looks higher, that this is not done

without the providence of God. So then, Job does not attribute the evil deed to God, but he knows the condition of the men. He sees that the Chaldeans and the Sabeans are as it were, the scourges of God. They pillage him, they rob him, they kill his servants, they lead away his beasts; briefly, they completely impoverish him, and nevertheless he always praises God, knowing well that this would not be done without His ordaining it. Thus we must do; for if the wicked persecute us, we must not regard them alone, but our faith must fly higher: namely, to know that the providence of God is over them. That is how we must judge the matter, and not enter into frivolous speculations about it.<sup>171</sup>

God's providence moreover does not absolve human beings from caution in the face of danger, nor excuse them from due prudence. Calvin declares, "We are not at all hindered by God's eternal decrees either from looking ahead for ourselves or from putting all our affairs in order, but always in submission to his will."<sup>172</sup> As human beings, God has given us the privilege to plan our lives in accordance with his will. Believers must make use of all the resources God has given them. They must be cautious and prudent in the face of dangers. Calvin is convinced that God's means and helps are indeed some of his providential gifts to humanity. When believers choose not to use them and consequently fall into danger, they cannot blame God for the consequences. Thus, Calvin's understanding of God's providence does not denigrate human responsibility.

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<sup>171</sup> *Sermon Acts 2:22-24.*

<sup>172</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.17.4.

## II. Contradictions between Calvin's doctrine of prayer and his doctrine of providence

Calvin's doctrine of providence seems to support his doctrine of prayer. He

Comments:

The second thing to be observed is, that we ought to contemplate Providence, not as curious and fickle persons are wont to do, but as a ground of confidence and excitement to prayer. When he informs us that *the hairs of our head are all numbered*, it is not to encourage trivial speculations, but to instruct us to depend on the fatherly care of God which is exercised over these frail bodies.<sup>173</sup>

Calvin also preaches, "But when we know that God governs everything, it ought to be a great comfort to us, and we can well lean upon it. We see, then, that it is a very necessary virtue that we know the providence of God."<sup>174</sup> Calvin hereby makes the providence of God a necessary virtue or ground for prayer for believers. Timothy

George writes:

Our discussion of Calvin's doctrine of providence would not be complete without looking at its pastoral implications. As a pastor in Geneva, and in his correspondence with thousands of Christians in widely differing circumstances, Calvin was an experienced 'director of souls' or, as we would say, spiritual counselor. He never tried to minimize or deny the reality of the suffering which confronts the believer. To Madame de Buldé, recently widowed and about to face the turmoil of being uprooted from her family and sent into exile, Calvin wrote: 'True it is, that we shall not cease to be subject to many troubles and annoyances; but let us pray him that

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<sup>173</sup> *Comm. Mat. 10: 30.*

<sup>174</sup> *Sermon Acts 2:22-24.*

having been strengthened by his word, we may have wherewithal to overcome them.’...

One of the prisoners wrote back to Calvin, describing how his letter had found its way into the prison and was read by ‘one of the brethren who was in a vaulted cell above me... as I could not read it myself, being unable to see anything in my dungeon.’ He expressed his gratitude for Calvin’s consolation, ‘for it invites us to weep and to pray.’ In this way the doctrine of providence, far from inspiring passive resignation in the face of evil, sustained countless men and women in moments of crisis, danger, and death.<sup>175</sup>

Like George, Hesselink writes, “(6) finally, it (God’s providence) serves as a personal confirmation of God’s providence.”<sup>176</sup> Thus prayer and providence are interrelated. Calvin hereby understands that providence is not only the solid ground for believers’ confidence in God, but also their source of excitement for prayer to him. Furthermore, providence is the instruction means for to believers to depend on the fatherly care of God.

In spite of Calvin’s enormous effort to establish a link between his doctrines of prayer and providence, a closer examination shows some serious contradictory points between the two.

A major contradiction between Calvin’s doctrine of prayer and his doctrine of providence is that while he emphasizes the centrality of Jesus Christ in prayer,

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<sup>175</sup> Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, pp. 211-213.

<sup>176</sup> John Hesselink, *Calvin’s First Catechism: A Commentary*, p. 130.

Calvin barely refers to the Person and Work of Jesus in his doctrine of providence. Nowhere in his writings on the providence of God does Calvin refer to the determinative role of Christ. Yet, throughout his massive writings, Calvin insists that there is no knowledge of God apart from Jesus Christ. For example, he comments:

*No man cometh to the Father.* This is an explanation of the former statement; for he is *the way*, because he leads us to *the Father*, and he is the *truth* and the *life*, because in him we perceive the *Father*. As to calling on God, it may indeed be said, with truth, that no prayers are heard but through the intercession of Christ; but as Christ does not now speak about prayer, we ought simply to understand the meaning to be, that men contrive for themselves true labyrinths, whenever, after having forsaken Christ, they attempt to *come to God*. For Christ proves that he is *the life*, because God, *with whom is the fountain of life*, (Ps. Xxxvi.9,) cannot be enjoyed in any other way than in Christ. Wherefore all theology, when separated from Christ, is not only vain and confused, but is also mad, deceitful, and spurious; for, though the philosophers sometimes utter excellent sayings, yet they have nothing but what is short-lived, and even mixed up with wicked and erroneous sentiments.<sup>177</sup>

By expounding his theology of God's providence apart from Christ, Calvin critiques and undermines his own teaching. Thus, his doctrine of God's providence is confusing and dangerous. In a sermon, Calvin preaches:

Now the common style of the Prophets has always been such that, when they wish to console sinners, they lead them to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. And not without cause; for if Jesus Christ is taken away from us, what shall we find in God? We shall find in Him a highness, which is to cast

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<sup>177</sup> *Comm.* John 14:6.

down all creatures; on account of which, when we have come to the knowledge of ourselves, we find there only vice and sin, and to present ourselves before the majesty of such a great Judge, we are able to understand only the justice and rigor of his vengeance, which is prepared for us on account of our iniquities. In fact, what will happen to those of us who except ourselves from the number of sinners, by saying that there is no need at all of recourse to the knowledge of Jesus Christ?<sup>178</sup>

By omitting Jesus Christ in his doctrine of providence, Calvin is exposing an unknown God. Apart from Jesus Christ nothing can be known of God's providence.

Calvin's omission of Jesus Christ makes him use the notion of "secret will" or "secret plan" in God's providence. This notion of "secret will" or "secret plan" raises another contradiction between Calvin's doctrine of providence and his doctrine of prayer. He writes, "Not always does a like reason appear, but we ought undoubtedly to hold that whatever changes are discerned in the world are produced from the secret stirring of God's hand. But what God has determined must necessarily so take place, even though it is neither unconditionally, nor of its own peculiar nature, necessary."<sup>179</sup> Is there any other secret-will or secret-plan not yet revealed in Jesus Christ? If there is a will or plan in God not manifest in Jesus Christ, then looking to Jesus Christ is pointless with respect to knowing God and even coming to him for our needs in prayer. How do we know that his "secret will"

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<sup>178</sup> *Sermon Acts 2: 13-17.*

<sup>179</sup> Calvin, *Inst.* 1.16.9.

or “secret plan” is not monstrous? Describing the absence of the person and work of Jesus in Calvin’s doctrine of providence, Hesselink writes,

Calvin takes exactly the same tack in the *Institutes* but in a much more elaborate manner. What we have in section 3 of the Catechism is a description of God the Creator, which is the subject of book I of the *Institutes*. There is no mention of Christ in section 3, even though its title is “What We Must Know of God.” As we shall see later, Calvin will insist we cannot know God apart from Jesus Christ who is the heart, soul, purpose and end of the Scriptures. So this is one of the oddities of Calvin’s approach to the knowledge of God which, not surprisingly, has caused some consternation among Calvin interpreters.<sup>180</sup>

More than an oddity, we share the serious consternation of Calvin’s interpreters for the reason nobody can come to God without Jesus Christ. The contradiction resides in the fact Calvin has clearly taught us how to come to God in prayer, that is Jesus alone. But he never tells how to approach God or how to know him in his doctrine of providence. How can we go to a providential God who is not manifested to us in his only Son Jesus? Calvin clearly tells us in his doctrine of prayer that we can come to God the Father in Jesus Christ alone by faith. Whereas in his doctrine of providence, Calvin does not tell believers how they can benefit from the providence of God the Father. Therefore, a major contradiction remains between Calvin’s doctrine of prayer and his doctrine of providence.

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<sup>180</sup>Hesselink, *Calvin’s First Catechism: A Commentary*, p. 49.

Thirdly, it appears that Calvin's main teaching of God's providence renders human prayers useless. Regardless of human prayers, "God's secret plan," or "his ever-present hand" will always accomplish his will in people's lives and in the universe. Calvin writes,

And I did not pass over this in silence but said it, for perhaps what is commonly called 'fortune' is also ruled by a secret order, and we call a 'chance occurrence' only that of which the reason and cause are secret. Indeed, I said this: but I regret having thus mentioned 'fortune' here, since I see that men have a very bad custom, that where one ought to say 'God willed this,' they say, 'fortune willed this.' In fine, Augustine commonly teaches that if anything is left to fortune, the world is aimlessly whirled about. And although in another place he lays down that all things are carried on partly by man's free choice, partly by God's providence, yet a little after this he sufficiently demonstrates that men are under, and ruled by, providence; taking as his principle that nothing is more absurd than that anything should happen without God ordaining it, because it would then happen without cause. For this reason he excludes, also, the contingency that depends upon men's will; soon thereafter he does so more clearly, denying that we ought to seek the cause of God's will. How the term 'permission,' so frequently mentioned by him, ought to be understood will best appear from one passage, where he proves that God's will is the highest and first cause of all things because nothing happens except from his command or permission.<sup>181</sup>

Calvin hereby minimizes prayer by pointing out that "all things happen by God's plan, and that nothing takes place by chance..." Calvin insists, "Therefore we must consider that as Jesus suffered nothing without Divine permission, so all that will

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<sup>181</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.16.8.

happen to us comes from God.”<sup>182</sup> Yet, Calvin urges believers to pray. He

comments:

*Ask, and it shall be given you.* It is an exhortation to prayer: and as in this exercise of religion, which ought to be our first concern, we are so careless and sluggish, Christ presses the same thing upon us under three forms of expression. There is no superfluity of language, when he says, *Ask, seek, knock*: but lest the simple doctrine should be unimpressive, he perseveres in order to rouse us from inactivity. Such is also the design of the promises that are added, *Ye shall find, it shall be given to you, and it shall be opened*. Nothing is better adapted to excite us to prayer than a full conviction that we shall be heard. Those who doubt can only pray in an indifferent manner; and prayer, unaccompanied by faith, is an idle and unmeaning ceremony. Accordingly, Christ, in order to excite us powerfully to this part of our duty, not only enjoins what we ought to do, but promises that our prayers shall not be fruitless.

This ought to be carefully observed. First, we learn from it, that this rule of prayer is laid down and prescribed to us, that we may be fully convinced, that God will be gracious to us, and will listen to our requests. Again, whenever we engage in prayer, or whenever we feel that our ardour in prayer is not sufficiently strong, we ought to remember the gentle invitation, by which Jesus Christ assures us of God’s fatherly kindness. Each of us, trusting to the grace of God’s confidence in prayer, and will venture freely to call upon God ‘Through Jesus Christ our Lord, in whom (as Paul says) we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him,’ (Eph.iii. 11,12).<sup>183</sup>

Calvin hereby states that prayer is important and even necessary, since it is the key to lasting change in our lives, especially the change that exposes God’s hidden

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<sup>182</sup> *Sermon Acts 2:22-24.*

<sup>183</sup> *Comm. Mat. 7:7.*

treasure. Calvin indicates that without prayer, these treasures or promises will not be received or fulfilled in our lives.

Another contradiction between both doctrines is that providence seems to encourage human passivity, while the doctrine of prayer encourages human activity.

Calvin writes:

Indeed, Scripture, to express more plainly that nothing at all in the world is undertaken without his determination, shows that things seemingly most fortuitous are subject to him. For what can you attribute more to chance than when a branch breaking off from a tree kills a passing traveler? But the Lord speaks far differently, acknowledging that he has delivered him to the hand of the slayer [Ex. 21: 13]....

He points out that, even though the rich are mingled with the poor in the world, while to each his condition is divinely assigned, God, who lights all men, is not at all blind. And so he urges the poor to patience; because those who are not content with their own lot try to shake off the burden laid upon them by God.<sup>184</sup>

Calvin hereby encourages believers to be patient and perseverant under the burden that God, in his providence, has determined for them. Here, prayer appears useless since God has already determined the poor person's case. Elsewhere in his doctrine of prayer, Calvin exhorts:

It is, therefore, by the benefit of prayer that we reach those riches which are laid up for us with the Heavenly Father. For there is a communion of men with God by which, having entered the heavenly sanctuary, they appeal to him in person concerning his promises in order to experience, where necessity so demands, that what they believed was not vain, although he had

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<sup>184</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.16. 6.

promised it in word alone. Therefore we see that to us nothing is promised to be expected from the Lord, which we are not also bidden to ask of him in prayers. So true is it that we dig up by prayer the treasures that were pointed out by the Lord's gospel, and which our faith has gazed upon.

Words fail to explain how necessary prayer is, and in how many ways the exercise of prayer is profitable.<sup>185</sup>

Obviously, unless the poor supplicate to God in order to dig out his riches, they will remain poor in spite of God's providence. Hence, the contradiction between Calvin's doctrine of prayer and his doctrine of God's Providence is exposed. Calvin urges to pray in order to unveil God's hidden treasures or promises. In God's providence, Calvin urges the poor to wait patiently. Here Calvin's doctrine of providence looks like the philosophers' determinism.

Calvin's self-contradiction raises questions such as: Should we pray to God for healing, knowing that his secret hand is behind our sickness? Should we pray to God for our healing while knowing that God is already aware of our need of healing? The dilemma escalates. If nothing happens without God's will, then is God responsible for evil in the universe? Parker summarizes partially our concerns in these words,

We return to the Christian's attitude to Providence. How does such a doctrine affect our life? We might shift the blame for our sins from ourselves to God – all things happen by God's will, so how could I help sinning? We could let it drive us to despair and ultimately to suicide – 'this

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<sup>185</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*. 3.20 2.

is my destined fate'. We could, on the other hand, neglect to take precautions against dangers – God has determined the hour of my death and there is no point in seeking to evade it (General Gordon!). We could regard it as only reasonable to give up praying – if God has predestined everything, prayer is redundant. Finally, we could lapse into complete irresponsibility and amorality.<sup>186</sup>

However, Parker's answer, in alignment with Calvin own view, contradicts our argument. Parker writes, "But God has given us both foresight and the means to preserve life. It is, therefore, our duty to use the means. Prudence and sound advice are not all inconsistent with Providence, for 'they are breathed into men by the Lord and subserve his Providence'"<sup>187</sup> Calvin's constant answer to these questions is that God cannot be blamed for our, illnesses, sins or desperations. Therefore, prayer is still necessary within God's providence. Calvin writes, "*Even when God uses the deeds of the godless for his purposes, he does not suffer reproach.* In this way, also, the other objection is solved, or rather vanishes by itself.." <sup>188</sup> Calvin's message here is that believers must use whatever means God gives them within his providence. Prayer, a God-given means to be used by human beings, is not inconsistent with God's providence in Calvin and Parker's views.

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<sup>186</sup> Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction To His Thought*, p.48.

<sup>187</sup> Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction*, 48.

<sup>188</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1:18.4.

## Chapter Four

### Calvin's Practice of Prayer

Calvin did not merely teach on prayer, but also practised prayer to “exercise his faith” in Jesus Christ. Calvin used prayer in every aspect of his ministry. Anne Mckee affirms,

The teaching is only the tip of the iceberg of the practice that permeated every day of the pastor's life. Calvin seems to have accompanied almost every public act with prayer, and many of those words of praise and petition were recorded. The Lord's Prayer is of course the model prayer for Christians; Calvin recited it and paraphrased it in his liturgy, explained it in his catechism, and taught it in his *Institutes*....<sup>189</sup>

In this chapter we will expound the content of some of Calvin's private and liturgical prayers for their theological meaning. For that reason we will focus our attention on a few of his prayers among many others. Calvin's prayers can be classified into two groups: the formal prayers and the extemporaneous prayers.

#### **I. The Formal Prayers**

Calvin's ministry took place at a time when the church was in crisis. In the new Protestant church it was difficult to imagine what the training of ministers and lay Christians was like before seminaries were created as in the modern era.

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<sup>189</sup> Elsie Anne Mckee, *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety*, p. 29.

Zachman comments,

John Calvin was well aware of the dire consequences of this lack of ministerial formation. According to Calvin, neither bishops nor priests were skilled in the interpretation of Scripture or particularly adept at teaching the Summary of the doctrine that leads to genuine piety. 'Those who were regarded as the leaders of faith neither understood thy Word, nor greatly cared for it. They drove unhappy people to and fro with strange doctrines, and deluded them with I know not what follies'. Due to the neglect of Scripture and its teaching by the leaders of the church, Calvin thought that the ordinary people in the church were liable to believe anything that their pastors told them, leading to the superstitious worship of God.<sup>190</sup>

This troubled spiritual climate motivated Calvin to write prayers for both private and corporate use. Because of the restriction of space in this thesis, we will expound one of Calvin's formal prayers for private use and another one for corporate use.

#### **A. Formal Prayer for Private Use**

##### **Prayer For The Morning.**

My God, Father and Preserver, who of thy goodness hast watched over me during the past night, and brought me to this day, grant also that I may spend it wholly in the worship and service of thy most holy deity. Let me not think, say, or do a single thing that which tends not to thy service and submission to thy will, that thus all my actions may aim at thy glory and the salvation of my brethren, while they are taught by my example to serve thee. And as thou art giving light to this world for the purposes of external life by the rays of the sun, so enlighten my mind by the effulgence of thy Spirit, that he may guide me in the way of thy righteousness. To whatever purpose I apply my mind, may the end which I ever propose to myself be thy honour and service. May I expect all happiness from thy grace and goodness only. Let me not attempt anything whatever that is not pleasing to thee.

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<sup>190</sup> Randall C. Zachman, *John Calvin As Teacher, Pastor and Theologian*, p. 11.

Grant also, that while I labour for the maintenance of this life, and care for the things which pertain to food and raiment, I may raise my mind above them to the blessed and heavenly life which thou hast promised to thy children. Be pleased also, in manifesting thyself to me as the protector of my soul as well as my body, to strengthen and fortify me against all the assaults of the devil, and deliver me from all the dangers which continually beset us in this life. But seeing it is a small thing to have begun, unless I also persevere, I therefore entreat of thee, O Lord, not only to be my guide and director for this day, but to keep me under thy protection to the very end of life, that thus my whole course may be performed under thy superintendence. As I ought to make progress, do thou add daily more and more to the gifts of thy grace until I wholly adhere to thy Son Jesus Christ, whom we justly regard as the true Sun, shining constantly in our minds. In order to my obtaining of these great and manifold blessings, forget, and out of thy infinite mercy, forgive my offences, as thou has promised that thou wilt do those who call upon thee in sincerity.

(Ps. Cxliii.8.) – Grant that I may hear thy voice in the morning since I have hoped in thee. Show me the way in which I should walk, since I have lifted up my soul unto thee. Deliver me from my enemies, O Lord, I have fled unto thee. Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God. Let thy good Spirit conduct me to the Land of uprightness.<sup>191</sup>

A close analysis of these written prayers for private use demonstrates that Calvin has tried to apply his own teaching on prayer in the daily spheres of his life. They also demonstrate that prayer enveloped every aspect of Calvin's life.

Private prayers are necessary to commence and complete the day. The "Morning Prayer" cited and his "Evening Prayer" elsewhere clearly show that they were written for private use. The pronouns "I" and "My" prove that Calvin has

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<sup>191</sup> Henry Beveridge, ed. and trans., *Calvin's Selected Works*, Vol.2 Tracts Part 2. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), pp. 95-96.

personal prayers in mind. He encourages personal prayers when one gets up every morning and when one retires every evening.

As to the content of prayer for private use, Calvin teaches that prayer is composed of supplication and thanksgiving. He insists that supplication and thanksgiving must go hand in hand. Calvin has applied that teaching by emphasizing first supplication, in general, in his written prayers of the morning and evening. He uses the word “Grant” for supplication and the words “We give thanks...for” for thanksgiving in his written prayers.

In his teaching on prayer, Calvin claims that the Lord’s Prayer was given as a model in its content for the believer. In these written prayers above, one can see that Calvin has clearly followed the Lord’s Prayer as his model. As unveiled in the Lord’s Prayer, Calvin points his reader to the glory of God in the first part of his prayer. Then the second part of the prayer focuses on human benefits without detaching those benefits completely from God’s glory. He insists that the human benefits must help us long for the higher benefits, which are the spiritual ones. We observe this in his written prayer of “Blessing at Table” when he says:

Grant, also, that we may always both with true heartfelt gratitude acknowledge, and with our lips proclaim thee our Father and the giver of all good, and while enjoying bodily nourishment, aspire with special longing of heart after the bread of thy doctrine, by which our souls may

be nourished in the hope of eternal life, through Christ Jesus our Lord.  
Amen.<sup>192</sup>

Earthly food, then, while necessary to life, is merely a shadow of the heavenly bread God longs to lavish on the believer through prayer.

The centrality of Jesus Christ as the only and unique Mediator of our prayers to God the Father is evident in Calvin's prayers. Highlighting the centrality of Christ, Calvin frequently ends his prayers by the expression "Through Christ Jesus our Lord" or "Through Jesus Christ thy Son". Christians ought to pray to God only through Jesus Christ. To pray through anything else or anybody else is idolatry for Calvin. Thus nobody can approach God the Father without the person and the work of Christ on the cross for our sins.

#### **B. Formal Prayer For Corporate Use**

Calvin believes that private prayers need to be balanced with corporate prayer in a church setting. He has written prayers for corporate use in a church service setting that he has called "Form of prayer for the Church". Yet, he does not want people to merely repeat his written prayers. Pastors and the people of the church are free to use words suitable to their local context. He writes,

On ordinary Meetings the Minister leads the devotions of the people in whatever words seem to him suitable, adapting his address to the time and

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<sup>192</sup> *Calvin's Selected Works*, p. 97.

subject of the Discourse which he is to deliver, but the following Form is generally used on the Morning of the Lord's Day.<sup>193</sup>

In the order of service, a Psalm is sung by the whole congregation after this introductory prayer of the Sunday Service. Then after the song, the minister engages in prayer to beg God to give the congregation the gift of the Holy Spirit so that the Word of God may be faithfully expounded to His own glory and to the edification of the Church through their submission and obedience of mind. For such a prayer, Calvin composes, "The Form of Prayer suitable for this the minister selects for himself at pleasure."<sup>194</sup> Calvin does not offer any form of written prayer for that particular prayer of the Minister. However, he offers a long form of written prayer to be used after the sermon.

### **1. Formal Prayer After the Sermon at Sunday Service**

Having finished the Sermon, he exhorts the people to pray, and begins thus:

Almighty God, heavenly Father, thou has promised us that thou wilt listen to the prayers which we pour forth to thee in the name of thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and we have been taught by him and his apostles to assemble ourselves together in one place in his name, with the promise that he will be present with us to intercede for us with thee, and obtain for us whatever we shall, with one consent, ask of thee on the earth.

Thou enjoined us to pray first for those whom thou hast appointed to be our rulers and governors, and next to draw near and supplicate thee for all things which are necessary for thy people, and so for all men. Therefore trusting to thy holy commands and promises, now that we come into thy

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<sup>193</sup> *Calvin's Selected Works*, p. 100.

<sup>194</sup> *Calvin's Selected Works*, p. 101.

presence, having assembled in the name of thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ, we humbly and earnestly beg of thee, O God, our most gracious Father, in the name of him who is our only Saviour and Mediator, that of thy boundless mercy thou wouldst be pleased to pardon our sins, and so draw our thoughts to thyself, that we may be able to invoke thee from our inmost heart, framing our desires in accordance with thy will, which alone is agreeable to reason.

We therefore pour out our prayers before thee, O heavenly Father, in behalf of all rulers and magistrates, whose service thou employest in governing us, and especially for the magistrates of this city, that thou wouldst be pleased to impart to them more and more every day of thy Spirit, who alone is good, and truly the chief good, so that feeling fully convinced that Jesus Christ thy Son, our Lord, is King of kings and Lord of lords, like as thou hast given him all power in heaven and on earth, so they too may in their office have an eye above all to his worship and the extension of his kingdom, governing those under them (who are the work of thy hands and the sheep of thy pasture) according to thy will, so that we, enjoying stable peace both here and in every other part of the world, may serve thee with all holiness and purity, and freed from the fear of our enemies, have ground to celebrate thy praise during the whole period of our lives.

Next, O faithful Father and Saviour, we recommend to thee in our prayers all whom thou hast appointed pastors over thy faithful, and to whose guidance thou hast committed our souls; whom, in fine, thou hast been pleased to make the dispensers of thy holy gospel; that thou wouldst guide them by thy Holy Spirit, and make them honest and faithful ministers of thy glory, making it all their study, and directing all their endeavours to gather together all the wretched sheep which are still wandering astray, and bring them back to Jesus Christ the chief Shepherd and Prince of bishops; and that they may increase in righteousness and holiness everyday; that in the meanwhile thou wouldst be pleased to rescue all thy churches from the jaws of ravening wolves and all hirelings, who are led only by a love of fame or lucre, and plainly care not for the manifestation of thy glory, and the salvation of thy flock.

Moreover, we offer up our prayers unto thee, O most gracious God and most merciful Father, for all men in general, that as thou art pleased to be acknowledged the Saviour of the whole human race by the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ thy Son, so those who are still strangers to the

knowledge of him, and immersed in darkness, and held captive by ignorance and error, may, by thy Holy Spirit shining upon them, and by thy gospel sounding in their ears, be brought back to the right way of salvation, which consists in knowing thee the true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. We beg that those on whom thou hast deigned already to bestow the favour of thy grace, and whose minds thou hast enlightened by the knowledge of thy word, may daily profit more and more, being enriched with thy spiritual blessings, so that we may all together, with one heart and mouth, worship thee, and pay due honour, and yield just service to thy Christ, our Lord, and King, and Lawgiver.

Furthermore, O Author of all consolation, we recommend to thee all thy people whom thou chastisest in various ways: those afflicted by pestilence, famine, or war; individuals also pressed by poverty, or imprisonment, or disease, or exile, or any other suffering in body or mind, that wisely considering that the end which thou hast in view is to bring them back into the right path by thy rod, they may be imbued with the sense of thy paternal love, and repent with sincere purpose of heart, so as to turn unto thee with their whole mind, and being turned, receive full consolation, and be delivered from all their evils.

In a particular manner, we commend unto thee our unhappy brethren who live dispersed under the tyranny of Antichrist, and deprived of the liberty of openly calling upon thy name, and who have either been cast into prison or are oppressed by the enemies of the gospel in any other way, that thou wouldst deign, O most indulgent Father, to support them by the strength of thy Spirit, so that they may never despond, but constantly persevere in thy holy calling: that thou mayest be pleased to stretch out thy hand to them, as thou knowest to be best for them, to console them in their adversity, and taking them under thy protection, defend them from the ravening of wolves; in fine, load them with all the gifts of thy Spirit, that their life and death may alike tend to thy glory.

Lastly, O God and Father, allow thyself to be entreated of us, who have here assembled in the name of thy Son Jesus, for the sake of his word, (*only when the Supper is dispensed add "and of His Holy Supper,"*) that we, truly conscious of our lost original, may at the same time reflect how greatly we deserve condemnation, and how much we add to our guilt every day by impure and wicked lives; that when we recognize that we are devoid of all good, and that our flesh and blood are plainly averse to discern the

inheritance of thy kingdom, we may with full purpose of heart and firm confidence devote ourselves to thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and only Saviour and Redeemer; that he, dwelling in us, may extinguish our old Adam and renovate and invigorate us for a better life; that thus (*the remainder is a paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer- Hallowed be thy name*) thy name, as it excels in holiness and dignity, may be extolled in every region and in every place; that at the same time (*thy kingdom come*) thou mayest obtain right and authority over us, and we learn more and more every day to submit to thy authority, so that thou mayest everywhere reign supreme, governing thy people by the scepter of thy word and the power of thy Spirit, and by the strength of thy truth and righteousness crushing all the attempts of thy enemies. Thus may all power and every high thing that opposes itself to thy glory be daily effaced and destroyed, until thy kingdom is made complete in all its parts, and its perfection thoroughly established, as it will be when thou shalt appear as judge in the person of thy Son. May we with all creatures (*thy will be done*) yield thee true and full obedience, as thy heavenly angels feel wholly intent on executing thy commands. May thy will thus prevail, none opposing it; and may all study to obey and serve thee, renouncing their own will and all the desires of the flesh. And be pleased, (*give us this day our daily bread,*) while we retain the love and fear of thee in all the actions of our lives, to nourish us of thy goodness, and supply us with all things necessary for eating our bread in peace and quietness; that thus seeing the care which thou takest of us, we may the better recognize thee as our Father, and expect all blessings at thy hand, no longer placing hope and confidence in any creature, but entirely in thy goodness. And since in this mortal life we are miserable sinners, (*forgive us our debts,*) labouring under such infirmity that we constantly give way and deviate from the right path, be pleased to pardon all the sins of which we are guilty in thy sight, and by this pardon free us from the liability to eternal death which lies upon us: let not our iniquity be imputed to us, just as we ourselves, obeying thy command, forget the injuries done to us; and so far from wishing to take vengeance on our enemies, study to promote their good. In time to come (*lead us not into temptation*) be pleased to support us by thy power, and not allow us to fall under the weakness of our flesh; and seeing that our strength is so feeble that we cannot stand for a single moment – while at the same time so many enemies beset and attack us, while the devil, the world, sin, and our flesh make no end of assailing us – do thou strengthen us with thy

Holy Spirit, and arm us with the gifts of thy grace, that we may be able firmly to resist all temptations and sustain this spiritual contest, till having gained the complete victory, we may at length triumph in thy kingdom, with our Prince and Protector, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.<sup>195</sup>

After this lengthy prayer, the Apostles' Creed was repeated by the whole congregation. In addition, whenever the Lord's Supper was celebrated, Calvin would add another prayer of thanksgiving.

### **C. A Theological Examination of Calvin's Formal Prayers (Private and Corporate)**

As already mentioned Calvin's formal prayers are long in their form and follow the order of the Lord's Prayer. Beyond their external forms, we will focus on examining Calvin's formal prayers to understand their theological teaching. We will pay particular attention to what Calvin has to say about the nature of God in the Trinity and the human condition in these prayers.

#### **1. The Nature of God**

##### **A. The Fatherhood of God**

Regarding the form of address to God in these prayers, Calvin emphasizes his Fatherhood. In his morning prayer Calvin addresses God in these words: "My God, Father and Preserver...." Likewise, in his formal prayer for corporate use after the

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<sup>195</sup> *Calvin's Selected Works*, pp. 101-105.

Sunday sermon Calvin addresses God as follows: “Almighty God, heavenly Father....”

Calvin’s understanding of God’s Fatherhood involves several components. He writes, “Now, as it would be the folly and madness of presumption, to call God our Father, except on the ground that, through our union to the body of Christ, we are acknowledged as his children, we conclude, that there is no other way of praying aright, but by approaching God with reliance on the Mediator.”<sup>196</sup> For Calvin, God can be called Father only because of Jesus Christ; his only-begotten Son. Christ, through his death and resurrection for their sins, reconciled believers to His Father. In Christ alone and his work for them, believers have become God’s adopted children. Therefore they can approach God through Christ alone and address him as their ‘Father.’ He declares,

For in calling God ‘Father,’ we put forward the name ‘Christ.’ With what confidence would anyone address God as ‘Father’? Who would break forth into such rashness as to claim for himself the honor of a son of God unless we had been adopted as children of Grace in Christ? He, while he is the true Son, has of himself been given us as a brother that what he has of his nature may become ours by benefit of adoption if we embrace this great blessing with sure faith. Accordingly, John says that power has been given to those who believe in the name of the only-begotten Son of God, that they too may become children of God [John 1:12].<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> *Comm. Mat.* 6:9.

<sup>197</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.36.

God's name 'Father' is always associated with Jesus Christ because Father and Son are one in essence. Calvin insists that Christ was manifested in the flesh and has been called the Son of God, not only in that he was the eternal Word begotten before all ages from the Father, but because he took upon himself the person and office of the Mediator. As Mediator, Christ joined us to God. Christ shares the same divine essence with the Father. Thus Christ is God with respect to eternal essence.

Calvin describes the manner in which sinners become *sons of God*. He insists that sinners become God's children by faith alone in Christ, the Mediator. He comments:

*Who believe in his name*. He expresses briefly the manner of *receiving* Christ, that is, *believing in him*. Having been ingrafted into Christ by faith, we obtain the right of adoption, so as to be the *sons* of God. And, indeed, as he is the only-begotten Son of God, it is only so far as we are members of him that this honour at all belongs to us. Here again the notion of the Papists about the word *power* is given to those who already *believe*. Now it is certain that such persons are in reality *the sons of God*.<sup>198</sup>

Believers in Christ are thus called sons of God.

Calvin maintains that God's fatherhood is the expression of his love for believers. Assured of God's Fatherly love, believers can boldly and fully trust God in their prayer. Calvin exhorts,

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<sup>198</sup> *Comm. John 1:12* .

Therefore God both calls himself our Father and would have us so address him. By the great sweetness of this name he frees us from all distrust, since no greater feeling of love can be found elsewhere than in the Father. Therefore he could not attest his own boundless love toward us with any surer proof than the fact that we are called ‘children of God’ [I John: 3: 1]. But just as he surpasses all men in goodness and mercy, so is his love greater and more excellent than all our parents’ love.<sup>199</sup>

God, the Father, will never fail his children who come to him in prayer as an expression of their trust. Therefore, Calvin’s understanding of God as “Our Father” portrays God’s love and faithfulness to us as his adopted children rendered such by solely by faith in the Son of God.

Calvin also insists that God’s love expressed as favour in Christ for his children ought to kindle in them the desire for purity. He comments:

*Behold.* The second argument is from the dignity and excellency of our calling; for it was not common honour, he says, that the heavenly Father bestowed on us, when he adopted us as his children. This being so great a favour, the desire for purity ought to be kindled in us, so as to be conformed to his image; nor, indeed, can it be otherwise, but that he who acknowledges himself to be one of God’s children should purify himself. And to make this exhortation more forcible, he amplifies the favour of God; for when he says, that *love* has been *bestowed*, he means that it is from mere bounty and benevolence that God makes us his children; for whence comes to us such a dignity, except from the love of God? Love, then, is declared here to be gratuitous. There is, indeed, an impropriety in the language; but the Apostle preferred speaking thus rather than not to express what was necessary to be known. He, in short, means that the more abundantly God’s goodness has been manifested towards us, the greater are our obligations to him, according to the teaching of Paul, when he besought the Romans by the

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<sup>199</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3. 20. 36.

mercies of God to present themselves as pure sacrifices to him. (Rom. Xii.1). We are at the same time taught, as I have said, that the adoption of all the godly is gratuitous, and does not depend on any regard to works.<sup>200</sup>

While believers continue to enjoy their favour and gracious adoption as God's children, they are at the same required to be conformed to God. Therefore, all God's children must live in a manner worthy of their new adoption in Christ.

### **B. God's Mercy and Grace in Jesus Christ**

Calvin's formal set of prayers also unveils God's nature as full of mercy and grace. Calvin insists that God's mercy and grace are expressed in Jesus alone. In his *Morning Prayer*, Calvin speaks of God's mercy and grace by phrases such as: "May I expect all happiness from *thy grace and goodness* only.... As I ought to make progress, do thou add daily more and more to the gifts of *thy grace* until I wholly adhere to thy Son Jesus, whom we justly regard as the Sun, shining constantly in our minds" (Calvin's Morning Prayer). The same idea of *God's mercy and grace* comes out in his corporate prayer after the Sunday sermon as follows:

...our most *gracious Father*, in the name of him who is our only Saviour and Mediator, that of *thy boundless mercy*.... *O most gracious God and most merciful Father*, for all men in general, that as thou art pleased to be acknowledged the Saviour of the whole human race by the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ thy Son... (Corporate prayer after Sermon).

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<sup>200</sup> *Comm.* I John 3: 1.

Calvin understands God's mercy and grace in Jesus Christ as God's gift for our salvation and sustenance. Fallen human beings could not save themselves from sin and death. God's act of mercy and grace is that God took upon himself the penalty of our sins by the sacrificial death and resurrection of his Son Jesus. He died in our stead to enact God's love for us. Calvin expounds,

Thus, surely, we shall more closely approach the nature of faith; for it is after we have learned that our salvation rests with God that we are attracted to seek him. This fact is confirmed for us when he declares that our salvation is his care and concern. Accordingly, we need the promise of grace, which can testify to us that the Father is merciful; since we can approach him in no other way, and upon grace alone the heart of man can rest....

Again, 'I will sing thy name for thy mercy and thy truth.' [Ps. 138: 2] I pass over what we read in the Prophets along the same line, that God is kind and steadfast in his promises. For it will be rash for us to decide that God is well disposed toward us unless he give witness of himself, and anticipate us by his call, that his will may not be doubtful or obscure. But we have already seen that the sole pledge of his love is Christ, without whom the signs of hatred and wrath are everywhere evident.<sup>201</sup>

In his commentary on Ephesians, Calvin further clarifies his thought on God's mercy and grace. Calvin writes,

8. *For By grace are ye saved.* This is an inference from the former statements. Having treated of election and of effectual calling, he arrives at this general conclusion, that they had obtained salvation by faith alone. First, he asserts, that the salvation of the Ephesians was entirely the work, the gracious work of God. But then they had obtained this grace by faith. On one side, we must look at God; and on the other, at man. God declares, that

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<sup>201</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.7.

he owes us nothing; so that salvation is not reward or recompense, but unmixed grace....

9. *Not of works.* Instead of what he had said, that their salvation is of grace, he now affirms, that affirms, that 'it is the gift of God.' Instead of what he had said, 'Not of yourselves,' he now says, 'Not of works.' Hence we see, that the apostle leaves nothing to men in procuring salvation. In these three phrases, - *not of yourselves*, - *it is the gift of God*, - *not of works*, - he embraces the substance of his long argument in the Epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians, that righteousness comes to us from the mercy of God alone, - is offered to us in Christ by the gospel, - and is received by faith alone, without merit of works.<sup>202</sup>

God's grace and mercy in Jesus Christ are thus received by faith alone. That faith also comes to us as a free gift from God himself by his Word. In connecting God's grace and mercy to faith, Calvin comments,

When, on the part of man, the act of receiving salvation is made to consist in faith alone, all other means, on which men are accustomed to rely, are discarded. Faith, then, brings a man empty to God, that he may be filled with the blessings of Christ. And so he adds, *not of yourselves*; that, claiming nothing for themselves, they may acknowledge God alone as the author of their salvation.<sup>203</sup>

Following his teaching on prayer, Calvin reminds us that faith, with regard to our salvation, is "a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the *freely* given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit."<sup>204</sup> The firm and certain

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<sup>202</sup> *Comm. Eph. 2:8-9.*

<sup>203</sup> *Comm. Eph. 2:8.*

<sup>204</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.7.

knowledge of God's benevolence towards us are revealed by God himself in his Word. The Holy Spirit quickens God's Word in our mind and heart to receive his grace and mercy in Christ. Commenting on Romans 10:17 regarding the connection of faith and the Word of God, Calvin writes, "It must be further noticed, that faith is grounded on nothing else but the truth of God; for Paul does not teach us that faith springs from any other kind of doctrine, but he expressly restricts it to the Word of God; and this restriction would have been improper if faith could rest on the decrees of men."<sup>205</sup> Based on the free gift of God's mercy and grace, the believer approaches God to claim the benefits included in Christ. Therefore, in their prayers, believers appeal to God's benevolence in Jesus Christ.

### **C. God the Holy Spirit: Our Guide in Christian Life**

Calvin emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit as a guide and a light in Christian life. Here are different ways he expresses it in his morning prayer: "And as thou art giving light to this world for the purposes of external life by the rays of the sun, so enlighten my mind by the effulgence of thy Spirit, that he may guide me in the way of righteousness" (Calvin's Morning Prayer). Calvin also concludes his morning prayer by referring to the Holy Spirit as a conductor. He writes, "Let thy good Spirit

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<sup>205</sup> *Comm. Rom. 10:17.*

conduct me to the Land of uprightness.” We see the same emphasis on the Holy Spirit as a guide and a light in Calvin’s prayer after the sermon. Calvin writes,

...be pleased to impart to them more and more every day of thy Spirit, who alone is good, and truly the chief good, so that fully convinced that Jesus Christ thy Son, our Lord, is King of kings...that thou wouldst guide them by thy Holy Spirit, and make them honest and faithful ministers of thy glory...by thy Holy Spirit shining upon them, and by thy gospel sounding in their ears...to support them by the strength of thy Spirit, so that they may never despond, but constantly persevere in thy holy calling...governing thy people by the scepter of thy word and the power of thy Spirit...do thou strengthen us with thy Holy Spirit, and arm us with the gifts of thy grace.... Amen (Calvin’s Corporate Prayer after Sermon).

In his prayers, Calvin clearly describes the role of the Holy Spirit as the one who guides, illuminates and strengthens believers.

How does the Holy Spirit accomplish these things in believers? Calvin maintains that the Holy Spirit guides, illuminates and strengthens believers only through Scripture because Spirit and Word belong inseparably together. To counteract people who separate Scripture and the Holy Spirit, Calvin writes,

Furthermore, those who, having forsaken Scripture, imagine some way or other of reaching God, ought to be thought of as not so much gripped by error as carried away with frenzy. For of late, certain giddy men have arisen who, with great haughtiness exalting the teaching office of the Spirit, despise all reading and laugh at the simplicity of those who, as they express it, still follow the dead and killing letter. But I should like to know from them what this spirit is by whose inspiration they are borne up so high that they dare despise the Scriptural doctrine as childish and mean. For if they answer that it is the Spirit of Christ, such assurance is utterly ridiculous....

Therefore the Spirit, promised to us, has not the task of inventing new and unheard-of revelations, or of forging a new kind of doctrine, to lead us away from the received doctrine of the gospel, but of sealing our minds with that very doctrine which is commended by the gospel.<sup>206</sup>

The Holy Spirit takes the Word of the Father and of the Son and seals it on our minds and hearts. In so doing he illuminates, guides and strengthens us in the Son and his Word. He writes,

But if through the Spirit it is really branded upon hearts, if it shows forth Christ, it is the word of life [cf. Phil. 2:16] “converting souls, . . . giving wisdom to the little ones,” etc. [Ps. 18:8, Vg.; 19:7, EV]. What is more, in the very same place the apostle calls his preaching ‘the ministration of the Spirit’ [II Cor.3:8], meaning, doubtless, that the Holy Spirit so inheres in His truth, which He expresses in Scripture, that only when its proper reverence and dignity are given to the Word does the Holy Spirit show forth His power. And what has lately been said – that the Word itself is not quite certain for us unless it be confirmed by the testimony of the Spirit- is not out of accord with these things. For by a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of His Word and of his Spirit so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our minds when the Spirit, who causes us to contemplate God’s face, shines; and that we in turn may embrace the Spirit with no fear of being deceived when we recognize him in his own image, namely, in the Word. So indeed it is. God did not bring forth his Word among men for the sake of a momentary display, intending at the coming of his Spirit to abolish it. Rather, he sent down the same Spirit by whose power he had dispensed the Word, to complete his work by the efficacious confirmation of the Word.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.9.1.

<sup>207</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.9.3.

Without the work of the Holy Spirit, God's Word falls on the dead mind and heart of the sinner. To be noted here is what Parker says about Calvin's understanding of the conjunction of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit,

Although the Word of promise is from God and has authority, we are sinners and blind to its truth. In itself the written or spoken Gospel is powerless. As Calvin says frequently in his sermons, it can beat on our ear-drums without any effect until the Spirit bores through those drums into our minds. And not only our minds, but also our hearts: 'what the mind has taken in must be poured across into the heart; for if God's Word flutters only in the upper reaches of the brain it is not being received by faith.'

All along it is a question of enlightenment. First, the Word itself comes from God as light into darkness. Then the Holy Spirit opens the ears to hear the truth, so to say, and teach inwardly, and that not simply by way of education but by illumination of minds and hearts to perceive the truth of Christ and accept it as one's own.<sup>208</sup>

As already mentioned, the conjunction of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God is indispensable for understanding the role of the Holy Spirit in prayer. Only through the Word of God the Holy Spirit enlightens, guides and empowers the believers in their prayer to the Father in Jesus Christ. The main reason for this is that prayer is related to faith according to Calvin's own definition of prayer. Hesselink informs us,

Prayer is integrally related to faith because a 'man duly versed in true faith' recognizes his spiritual poverty and his need of God's continued help.... Faith is thus the foundation and necessary condition of genuine prayer. 'Faith grounded upon the Word is the mother of proper [*rectae*] prayer....

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<sup>208</sup> Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought*, p. 83.

Prayer rightly springs from faith, and faith from hearing God's Word [Rom. 10: 14, 17]'. In his commentaries Calvin frequently mentions the special relationship between prayer, faith, and the Word. In one place he likens Scripture, particularly its promises, to the fuel that stirs up the desire to pray.<sup>209</sup>

Scripture, God's promises, stirs up in the minds and hearts of believers prayer when the Holy Spirit does his work of enlightening God's Word to them. Therefore without the help of the Holy Spirit, believers will not know what to pray for. Hence, Calvin emphasizes the importance of seeking the guidance, enlightenment and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in their prayers. Calvin asserts,

And indeed, Paul, when he enjoins us to pray in the Spirit [I Cor. 14: 15], does not stop urging us to watchfulness. He means that the prompting of the Spirit empowers us so to compose prayers as by no means to hinder or hold back our own effort, since in this matter God's will is to test how effectually faith moves our hearts.<sup>210</sup>

The Holy Spirit not only helps believers compose their prayers according to God's will, but he also empowers them. Commenting on Romans 8: 26, Calvin writes:

*26. And in like manner the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity.* To prevent believers from objecting that they are too weak to be equal to bearing so many heavy burdens, he sets before them the aid of the Spirit, which is abundantly sufficient to overcome all difficulties. There is, therefore, no reason for any to complain that the bearing of the cross is beyond our strength, since we are strengthened by power from heaven....Since experience shows us that unless we are supported by the hand of God, we

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<sup>209</sup> John Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), p.129.

<sup>210</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.5.

are soon oppressed by innumerable evils, Paul admonishes us that, though we are weak in every part and various infirmities threaten our fall, there is sufficient protection in the Spirit of God to prevent us from ever being destroyed or being overwhelmed by any accumulation of evils....

*But the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us.* Although it may not yet appear in fact that our prayers have been heard by God, Paul concludes that the presence of heavenly grace already shines forth in the very zeal for prayer, because no one of his own accord conceives devout and godly prayers. Unbelievers do indeed blurt out their prayers, but they merely mock God, because there is no sincerity or seriousness in them, or correctly ordered pattern. The Spirit, therefore, must prescribe the manner of our praying. Paul calls the groans into which we break forth by the impulse of the Spirit *unutterable*, because they far exceed the capacity of our intellect. The Spirit of God is said to *intercede*, not because He stirs up in our hearts the prayers which it is proper for us to address to God. In the second place He affects our hearts in such a way that these prayers penetrate into heaven itself by their fervency. Paul has spoken in this way for the purpose of attributing the whole of prayer more significantly to the grace of the Spirit. We are bidden to knock. But no one of his own accord could premeditate a single syllable, unless God were to knock to gain admission to our souls by the secret impulse of His Spirit, and thus open our hearts to Himself.<sup>211</sup>

The Holy Spirit helps believers in their weakness to know how to pray according to God's will and God's grace. Without the help of the Holy Spirit, we cannot "pray" at all.

## **2. The Human Condition**

In his prayers, Calvin describes the human condition and the purposes after which humankind ought to strive.

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<sup>211</sup>*Comm. Rom.8:26.*

### A. Human Sinful Nature and God's Forgiveness

Calvin invariably acknowledges the sinful nature of humankind in his prayers.

Therefore, confession of sin and plea for God's forgiveness are essential components of his prayers. For example, in his morning prayer Calvin writes,

...Be pleased also, in manifesting thyself to me as the protector of my soul as well as my body, to strengthen and fortify me against all the assaults of the devil, and deliver me from all the dangers which continually beset us in this life....

In order to my obtaining of these great and manifold blessings, forget, and out of thy infinite mercy, forgive my offences, as thou has promised that thou wilt do those who call upon thee in sincerity (Calvin's Morning Prayer)

Calvin stresses the same confession of sin and demand for God's forgiveness in his prayer after the sermon. He writes,

... that of thy boundless mercy thou wouldst be pleased to pardon our sins...to bring them back into the right path by thy rod, they may be imbued with the sense of thy paternal love, and repent with sincere purpose of heart, so as to turn unto thee with whole mind, and being turned, receive full consolation, and be delivered from all their evils... allow thyself to be entreated of us, who have here assembled in the name of thy Son, for the sake of his word, (*only when the Supper is dispensed add 'and of His Holy Supper,'*) that we, truly conscious of our lost original, may at the same time reflect how greatly we deserve condemnation, and how much we add to our guilt everyday by impure and wicked lives; that when we recognize that we are devoid of all good, and that our flesh and blood are plainly averse to discern the inheritance of thy kingdom, we may with full purpose of heart and firm confidence devote ourselves to thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and only Saviour and Redeemer; that he, dwelling in us, may extinguish our old Adam and renovate and invigorate us for better life... (Calvin's Corporate Prayer after Sermon).

God's forgiveness meets humanity's sin in the repentant heart.

Calvin, in his prayers, draws our attention to the human condition in several ways: First of all, human beings are lost in their sin because of the original sin from Adam's seed. Calvin describes human sinful nature as follows:

Man was first formed to God's image and likeness, that in his adornments, with which he had been resplendently clothed by God, he might look up to their Author and might worship him with fitting gratitude. But since, relying on the very great excellence of his own nature, and forgetting its origin and ground, he tried to elevate himself beyond the Lord, he had to be deprived of all God's benefits on which he was stupidly priding himself, so that stripped and bare of all glory, he might recognize God whom he, rich with God's bounty, had dared despise. Therefore, all we who take our origin from Adam's seed, when God's likeness is wiped out, are born flesh from flesh. For although we consist of soul and body, we savor of nothing but flesh. Consequent, whatever way we turn our eyes, we can see nothing but what is impure, profane, and abominable to God. For man's prudence, blind and entangled in limitless errors, ever wars against God's wisdom. Our depraved will, stuffed with corrupt feelings, hates nothing more than righteousness. Our strength, weakened for every good work, madly dashes off into wickedness.<sup>212</sup>

Calvin traces back our human sinful nature to pride. As a result, humankind is deprived of all God's benefits. Our depravity has also led us into wickedness since we do not have any strength of our own to do any good before God. Commenting on Romans 3:23 Calvin writes,

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<sup>212</sup> Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary*, Featuring Ford Lewis Battles's translation of the 1538 Catechism (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), p.9.

...But he takes as granted that everyone, conscious of his sin, when he comes before the tribunal of God, is confounded and lost under a sense of his own shame; so that no *sinner* can bear the presence of God, as we see an example in the case of Adam....Since we are all sinners, Paul concludes, that we are deficient in, or *destitute* of, the praise due to righteousness.<sup>213</sup>

Thus original sin plagues humankind.

Secondly, Calvin insists that our sins have grave consequences in God's sight.

Sin, by corrupting human nature, leads to death and separation from God. Death and separation from God come to sinners as a result of God's wrath and judgment.

Calvin instructs us,

In the Scriptures sin is called both that corruption of human nature, the source of all vices, and also the origin of wicked desires and the evil deeds which come forth from these desires, such as murder, theft, adultery, and the like. We are, therefore, sinners from the womb, born all of us for God's wrath and vengeance; grown up, we subsequently heap upon ourselves a heavier judgment; at last we proceed through our whole life to death. For if there is no doubt that all iniquity is hateful to God's righteousness, what do we poor folk expect from his sight save the surest confusion, such as his indignation bears toward us who are both pressed down under a huge weight of sins and befouled with limitless dregs?<sup>214</sup>

Since the consequences of sin are too heavy for human beings to alleviate on their own, they are forced to look somewhere else for a solution.

Thirdly, Calvin insists that God alone can restore sinful people to salvation and life in and through the person and the work of his Son, Jesus Christ. Our need for

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<sup>213</sup> *Comm. Rom. 3 :23.*

<sup>214</sup> Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary*, p.10.

salvation begins first with the knowledge of sin and its dreadful consequences. By the same token, the knowledge of sin and its consequences strips us of our “own” righteousness to make us depend on God’s righteousness in Jesus for our salvation.

Calvin affirms:

This knowledge, though it strikes man with terror and overwhelms him with despair, is nevertheless necessary for us in order that, stripped of our own righteousness, cast down from confidence in our own power, deprived of all expectation of life, we may learn through the knowledge of our poverty, misery, and disgrace to prostrate ourselves before the Lord, and by the awareness of our own wickedness, powerlessness, and ruin may give all credit for holiness, power, and salvation to him.

From this knowledge of ourselves, which shows us our nothingness if it seriously lodges in our hearts, is provided a ready access also to a truer knowledge of God. Indeed, it has already opened the first door into his kingdom, when it has overthrown those two most harmful plagues of all, carefree disregard of his vengeance and false confidence in our own capacity. For we then begin to lift up our eyes, formerly glued to earth, heavenward; and we who were resting secure in ourselves now long for the Lord. Although our wickedness deserved something far different, yet on account of his inexpressible kindness he, the Father of mercy, willingly offers himself to us thus afflicted and stricken. And he knows by what steps to extricate us from our weakness, and calls us back from error to the straight path, from death to life, from disaster to safety, from the devil’s sway into his own kingdom.<sup>215</sup>

Jesus characterizes God’s kindness, mercy, love and justice for sinners. Jesus alone justifies and sanctifies us by reconciling us to his Father. Calvin comments,

But as he has already taught us, that sin produces nothing but death; so now he subjoins, that this gift of God, even our justification and sanctification,

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<sup>215</sup> Hesselink, *Calvin’s First Catechism: A Commentary*, p.10.

brings to us the happiness of eternal life. Or, if you prefer, it may be thus stated, - 'As the cause of death is sin, so righteousness, which we obtain through Christ, restores to us eternal life.'

It may however be hence inferred with certainty, that our salvation is altogether through the grace and mere beneficence of God. He might indeed have used other words – that the wages of righteousness is eternal life; and then the two clauses would correspond: but he knew that it is through God's gift we obtain it, and not through our own merits; and that it is not one or a single gift; for being clothed with the righteousness of the Son we are reconciled to God, and we are by the power of the Spirit renewed unto holiness. And he adds, *in Christ Jesus*, and for this reason, that he might call us away from every conceit respecting our own worthiness.<sup>216</sup>

Calvin thus expresses his desire of being sanctified from sin in his prayers. Christ, who justifies sinners in the first place, is furthermore the only one who sanctifies.

Shepherd writes,

Jesus Christ cannot be divided; no benefit of his can be separated from any other, nor can his benefits be separated from his person. He who is the believer's effectual Priest must be the believer's effectual King; he who is the believer's righteousness is the believer's sanctification. Calvin never tires of referring to I Cor. 1:30: he whom the Christian "puts on" is put on in the totality of his reality. Throughout the *Commentaries* Calvin iterates that the sum of the gospel consists in the forgiveness of sins (free reconciliation) and repentance (newness of life).

Since all benefits flow from the One who is mercy, Calvin, as expected, affirms mercy to be the 'whence' of repentance....

Christ is our sanctification. As in the case of justification this does not mean that one is sanctified through the exercise of an 'ability' to 'put on' Christ; the 'ability' is conferred only as Jesus Christ in his power confers the actuality: 'for Christ gives us the Spirit of regeneration for this cause, that he may renew us inwardly, to the end that new life may afterward follow the newness of mind and heart... it is a thing as impossible for men to convert

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<sup>216</sup> *Comm. Rom.6:23.*

themselves as to create themselves.’ Jesus Christ is the believer’s entire sanctification.<sup>217</sup>

Sanctification remains the believer’s life-long enterprise. We see that fully expressed in Calvin’s Morning Prayer and his prayer after the sermon. Our Sanctification begins with the awareness of our wickedness and depravity in sin and the acknowledgement that Jesus alone can set us free. Thus, confessing our sins and entreating God’s forgiveness in Jesus Christ are crucial in Calvin’s private and corporate prayers.

### **B. God’s Purpose for Human Beings**

Calvin’s prayers show that humankind was created and redeemed to glorify God in all of life. Human beings are justified and sanctified for a purpose. Calvin expresses the purpose of humanity’s creation, justification and sanctification with various expressions in his prayers. First, Calvin writes in his morning prayer:

...grant also that I may spend it wholly in the worship and service of thy most holy deity. Let me not think, say, or do a single thing that which tends not to thy service and submission to thy will, that thus all my actions may aim at thy glory and the salvation of my brethren, while they are taught by my example to serve thee....To whatever purpose I apply my mind, may the end which I ever propose to myself be thy honour and service. Let me not attempt anything whatever that is not pleasing to thee....Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God (Calvin’s Morning Prayer).

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<sup>217</sup> Shepherd, *The Nature And Function Of Faith In The Theology Of John Calvin*, pp. 35-36.

Calvin expresses the same desire in his prayer after the sermon in these words:

...that we may be able to invoke thee from our inmost heart, framing our desires in accordance with thy will, which alone is agreeable to reason... bring them back to Christ the chief Shepherd and Prince of bishops; and that they may increase in righteousness and holiness everyday...so that we may all together, with one heart and mouth, worship thee, and pay due honour, and yield just service to thy Christ, our Lord, and King, and Lawgiver...defend them from the ravening of wolves; in fine, load them with all the gifts of Spirit, that their life and death may alike tend to thy glory...(Calvin's Corporate Prayer after Sermon)

It follows from these prayers that Calvin's characteristic goal in life is to glorify God by worshiping and serving him with all his mind and heart. Confession of sin and repentance are the steps by which God brings believers to that goal. Calvin asserts, "Now, nowhere but in God can one find eternal and immortal life. Hence the chief concern and care of our life ought to be to seek God, to aspire to him with our whole heart, and to rest nowhere but in him."<sup>218</sup> Calvin's prayers here earnestly express his desire and whole heart's aspiration to seek God and to rest in Him alone.

Knowing that human beings are weak because of their sinful nature, Calvin teaches that they ought to entreat God himself to help them achieve the goal of worshiping and serving him alone. He writes,

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<sup>218</sup> Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary*, p.7.

His forbidding us to have us to have other gods means that we are not to give to another than himself what belongs to God. And he adds: 'before his face' in order to make clear that God wills himself to be acknowledged not only by outward confession but also to be held in truth within the depths of the heart. Now these things belong to the one God and cannot be transferred to another without sacrilege; that we are to worship him alone; we are to rely upon him with complete faithfulness and hope; whatsoever is good and holy we are to recognize as received from him; and we are to direct all praise for goodness and holiness to him.<sup>219</sup>

Our reliance on God alone with complete faithfulness and hope for achieving our goal of worshipping and serving God is better expressed when we pray to God. It is God's will for us to ask him for good things. Since God himself has created human beings to worship and serve him alone, then it fits well within his will for us to pray for these things. Calvin comments:

*Your Father will give good things.* This is expressly mentioned by Christ, that believers may not give way to foolish and improper desires in prayer. We know how great influence, in this respect, is exerted by the excesses and presumption of our flesh. There is nothing which we do not allow ourselves to ask from God; and if he does not humour our folly, we exclaim against him. Christ therefore enjoins us to submit our desires to the will of God, that he may give us nothing more than he knows to be advantageous....

Instead of *good things* in the last clause, Luke says the Holy Spirit. This does not exclude other benefits, but points out what we ought chiefly to ask: for we ought never to forget the exhortation, *Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all other things shall be added to you,* (Matth. Vi.33.) It is the duty of the children of God, when they engage in prayer, to strip themselves of earthly affections, and to rise to meditation on the spiritual life. In this way, they will set little value on food and clothing, as compared to the earnest and pledge of their adoption, (Rom. Viii.15; Eph.

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<sup>219</sup> Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary*, p.11.

i.14:) and when God has given so valuable a treasure, he will not refuse smaller favours.<sup>220</sup>

Calvin believes that the goal of the entire Christian life is to glorify God. Glorifying God supersedes all personal earthly needs. Therefore praying to God to achieve that goal is what believers ought to do. That is what we clearly see laid out in Calvin's Morning Prayer and his prayer after the sermon. Highlighting Calvin's emphasis on glorifying God, Beeke writes,

The goal of piety – that God may be glorified in us – is that for which we were created. It thus becomes the yearning of the regenerate to live out the purpose of their original creation. The pious man, according to Calvin, confesses, 'We are God's: let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God's: let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal.'

God redeems, adopts, and sanctifies his people that his glory might shine in them and deliver them from impious self-seeking. The pious person's deepest concern therefore is God himself and the things of God - God's Word, God's authority, God's gospel, God's truth. He yearns to know more of God and to commune more with him.<sup>221</sup>

Glorifying God, for Calvin, is obeying God's Word. In that regard, Beeke pursues,

But how do we glorify God? As Calvin writes, 'God has prescribed for us a way in which he will be glorified by us, namely, piety, which consists in the obedience of his Word. He that exceeds these bounds does not go about to honor God, but rather to dishonor him.' Obedience to God's Word means taking refuge in Christ for forgiveness of our sins, knowing him through his

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<sup>220</sup> *Comm. Mat.7:11.*

<sup>221</sup> Joel R. Beeke, "Calvin on piety" in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. Kim, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.127.

Word, serving him with a loving heart, doing good works in gratitude for his goodness, and exercising self-denial to the point of loving our enemies. This response involves total surrender to God himself, his Word, and his will.<sup>222</sup>

Calvin's desire for himself and for all believers in these prayers is to offer their hearts sincerely to God, God's Word, God's authority and God's will in everything. Since that desire can only be fulfilled by God alone, believers must look up to the Mediator, Jesus Christ, for communion in prayer. In Christ alone believers can live as willing worshipers and servants of the glorified God, who is their Father and Lord.

## **II. The Extemporaneous Prayers**

Prayer was always a component of Calvin's lectures. His lectures started and ended with prayer. He lectured on the Bible to his seminary students on alternate weeks. Some of his lectures were written down by his hearers. Thus, the written lectures of Calvin became known to us as his commentaries on both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Unfortunately, many of Calvin's lectures prayers were omitted when these lectures were reworked into commentaries.

However some of these prayers were retrieved and included by some editors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Anne Mckee comments:

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<sup>222</sup> Joel R. Beeke, "Calvin on piety" in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, p. 127.

Calvin began each lecture with the same one sentence prayer and closed each day with a fairly short prayer related to the theme of the biblical text he had been expounding. The prayers were recorded with the lectures, but they were omitted when the lectures were revised as commentaries. Thus Calvin's prayers on biblical lectures were preserved only for the expositions of the Old Testament books that retained the lecture format in the sixteenth century Latin editions, or in some seventeenth-century reprints. There are *Praelectiones* with prayers for all the prophets except Isaiah, that is, for Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel (1-20), Daniel, and the Minor Prophets. These prayers were usually not included in later Latin printings; the editors of the nineteenth-century *opera Quae Supersunt Omnia* dropped them. They were, however, retrieved by the editors of the Calvin Translation Society and included in their nineteenth-century English translations and the twentieth-century reprints.<sup>223</sup>

We are indebted to the editors of the Calvin Translation Society for their diligent work of retrieving and including these prayers in their nineteenth-century translations and the twentieth-century reprints. Otherwise, many of Calvin's English readers not conversant in Latin would not been aware of his strong emphasis on prayer. These prayers at the beginning and the end of each lecture clearly display Calvin's belief in the practice of prayer in his teaching ministry. Although he was a talented and skilled person in biblical languages (Hebrew and Greek) and in Latin, Calvin knew that his true success in his biblical lectures depended on God. The best way to show his dependence on God, instead of self, was by prayer. Here are some of Calvin's lecture prayers.

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<sup>223</sup> Elsie Anne Mckee, ed. and Trans. *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), p.240.

### A. Calvin's Prayer at the Beginning of his Lectures

"May the Lord grant, that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of his heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to his glory and to our edification. Amen."<sup>224</sup>

### B. Some Prayers Concluding Calvin's Old Testament Lectures (Biblical Order)

Lecture 1, Ezekiel 1:1-3, Vol. 18, p. 21

Almighty God, you deemed your people worthy of the continued grace of your Spirit when they were cast forth from their inheritance, and you raised up a prophet from among the very dead to recall them to life when they were already without hope. Therefore, grant, I pray, that although the church today is miserably afflicted by your hand, you will not leave it without consolation, but show us that even in the midst of death we are to look for life from your mercy, to the end that we may bear all your chastisements patiently, until, reconciled to us, you are pleased to show us that you are our Father, and so at last we may be gathered into that blessed kingdom where we will enjoy our complete happiness, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Lecture 32, Daniel 7:1-2. Vol. 2, p. 17.

Grant, Almighty God, since thou exposest us to various distresses in this world, for the purpose of exercising our faith and patience: Grant, I say, that we may remain tranquil in our station, through reliance on these promises. When storms gather around us on all sides, may we never fall away and never despond in our courage, but persevere in our calling. Whatever may happen, may we recognize thee as carrying on the government of the world, not only to punish the ingratitude of the reprobate, but to retain thine own

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<sup>224</sup> *Comm. Hosea. Vol. 1 (Unnumbered Preface)*

people in thy faith and protection, and preserve them to the end. May we bear patiently whatever changes may happen to us, and may we never be disturbed or distressed in our minds, till at length we are gathered into that happy rest, where we shall be free from all warfare and all contests, and enjoy that eternal blessedness which thou hast prepared for us in thine only begotten Son – Amen.<sup>225</sup>

Lecture 2, Hosea 1:3-4, Vol.1, p. 60.

Grant, Almighty God, that as we were from our beginning lost, when thou wert pleased to extend to us thy hand, and to restore us to salvation for the sake of thy Son; and that as we continue even daily to run headlong to our own ruin, - O grant that we may not, by sinning so often, so provoke at length thy displeasure as to cause thee to take away from us the mercy which thou hast hitherto exercised towards us, and through which thou hast adopted us: but by thy Spirit destroy the wickedness of our heart, and restore us to a sound mind, that we may ever cleave to thee with a true and sincere heart, that being fortified by thy defence, we may continue safe even amidst all kinds of danger, until at length thou gatherest us into that blessed rest, which has been prepared for us in heaven by our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.<sup>226</sup>

These introductory and closing prayers resonate throughout Calvin's teaching ministry on the Prophets in general.

More than a theologian and a teacher of the Word of God, however, Calvin also considered himself as a pastor. Zachman affirms,

Calvin understood himself to be called to two offices: the office of teacher, and the office of pastor. The teacher has as his audience future pastors of the church, not only in Geneva but also throughout Christendom, as well as educated and theologically interested laity, especially magistrates. The

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<sup>225</sup> *Comm.* Daniel 7:1-2. Vol.2, p.17.

<sup>226</sup> *Comm.* Hosea 1:3-4. Vol.1, p.60.

office of teacher entails both the teaching of the summary of the doctrine of piety, as in Melanchthon's *Loci* or Calvin's *Institutes*, and the exposition of Scripture in commentaries. The office of pastor has as its audience ordinary Christians in a particular congregation, who may know only a vernacular language and may even be unable to read. The pastor teaches the young rudiments of the doctrine of piety in the Catechism, and then expounds Scripture and applies it to the life of the congregation, not only in public worship, but also in private visitation.<sup>227</sup>

Considering himself a pastor to ordinary people, Calvin made countless efforts to encourage people to apply Scripture in their public and private lives. One of the means he used to do so was to correspond by letters with many people in and outside of Geneva that he considered either as his "disciples" or colleagues as theologians, pastors or teachers. Scrutiny of these letters shows that they were a venue of prayer for the recipients who, sometimes, were going through difficult times in their lives. Evidently prayer permeated every aspect of Calvin's teaching and pastoral ministry.

We will proceed to examine some of his so-called extemporaneous prayers.

### **C. Examination of Calvin's Extemporaneous Prayers**

Calvin's extemporaneous prayers are shorter in comparison to his formal written prayers such as the prayers for the morning and after the sermon at Sunday services. Most of the previous theological themes treated in the formal prayers are also found

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<sup>227</sup> Randall C. Zachman, *John Calvin As Teacher, Pastor and Theologian: The Shape of His Writings and Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), p.13.

in the extemporaneous prayers. However, they differ in the fact that they are usually associated with the context and subject of Calvin's biblical exposition of the day.

One of the characteristics of these extemporaneous prayers is the way Calvin concludes them. Their conclusion has generally an eschatological focus, with a clear view of the coming reign of Jesus Christ. For example, Calvin concludes his prayer on:

- 1) Ezekiel 1:1-3 by saying, "...and so that at last we may be gathered into that blessed kingdom where we will enjoy our complete happiness, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen" (Calvin's closing prayer on Ezekiel 1:1-3).
- 2) Daniel 7:1-2, by saying, "...till at length we are gathered into that happy rest, where we shall be free from all warfare and all contests, and enjoy that eternal blessedness which thou has prepared for us in thine only begotten Son. Amen" (Calvin's closing prayer on Daniel 7:1-2).
- 3) Hosea 1:3-4 by saying, "...until at length thou gatherest us into that blessed rest, which has been prepared by our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen" (Calvin's closing prayer on Hosea 1:3-4).

Calvin's prayers here demonstrate his expectation of the second coming of Christ. Christ's second coming implies several important elements for Calvin.

First, Christ's return is the ultimate fulfillment of believers' salvation. He writes,

Whatever has so far been explained concerning our salvation calls for minds lifted up to heaven, so that 'we may love Christ, whom we have not seen, and believing in him may rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy' until, as Peter declares, we receive 'the outcome of our faith' [I Peter 1:8-9]. For this reason, Paul says that the faith and love of the godly have regard to the hope that rests in heaven [Col. 1:4-5]. When, therefore, with our eyes fast fixed on Christ we wait upon heaven, and nothing on earth hinders them from bearing us to the promised blessedness, the statement is truly fulfilled 'that where our treasure is, our heart is' [Matt. 6:21].<sup>228</sup>

Commenting on the same benefit of Christ's second coming, Calvin writes:

*But, or, moreover, the end of all things is at hand.*

Though the faithful hear that their felicity is elsewhere than in this world, yet, as they think that they should live long, this false thought renders them careless, and even slothful, so that they direct not their thoughts to the kingdom of God. Hence the Apostle, that he might rouse them from the drowsiness of the flesh, reminds them that the end of all things was nigh; by which he intimates that we ought not sit still in the world, from which we must remove. He does not, at the same time, speak only of the end of individuals, but of the universal renovation of the world; as though he had said, 'Christ will shortly come, who will put an end to all things.'<sup>229</sup>

Thus the eschaton is for Calvin a time when the faithful believers will be in a new world. To be sure, Calvin does not deny the new age of believers' salvation has already begun with the first coming of Christ.

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<sup>228</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.25.1.

<sup>229</sup> *Comm. IPet.4:7*.

Calvin insists that the expectation of Christ's second coming must urge believers to prepare themselves for sanctification in prayer. He comments:

It is, then, no wonder that the cares of this world overwhelm us, and make us drowsy, if the view of the present things dazzles our eyes: for we promise, almost all of us, an eternity to ourselves in this world; at least, the end never comes to our mind. But were the trumpet of Christ to sound in our ears, it would powerfully rouse us and not suffer us to lie torpid.

But it may be objected and said, that a long series of ages has passed away since Peter wrote this, and yet that the end is not come. My reply to this is, that the time seems long to us, because we measure its length by the spaces of this fleeting life; but if we could understand the perpetuity of future life, many ages would appear to us like a moment, as Peter will also tell us in his second epistle. Besides, we must remember this principle, that from the time when Christ once appeared, there is nothing left for the faithful, but with suspended minds ever to look forward to his second coming.

The *watchfulness* and the *sobriety* to which he exhorted them, belong, as I think, to the mind rather than to the body. The words are similar to those of Christ: 'Watch ye, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.' (Matt. XXV.13.) For as an indulgence in surfeiting and sleep renders the body unfit for its duties, so the vain cares and pleasures of the world inebriate the mind and render it drowsy.

By adding *prayer*, he points out an exercise especially necessary, in which the faithful ought to be particularly occupied, since their whole strength depends on the Lord; as though he had said, 'Since ye are in yourselves extremely weak, seek of the Lord to strengthen you.' He yet reminds them that they were to pray earnestly, not formally.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> *Comm.* I Pet. 4:7.

Calvin thus highlights the importance of prayer as a necessary means for believers to prepare themselves in expectation of Christ's second coming. His own prayers do not come short of that hope. Quistorp writes:

Thus the last day is for Calvin indeed a day in time, but as the last day of this time world it is also the dawn of quite another aeon, of the new world and time of God to which our time measurements are no longer applicable and which is thus essentially beyond all human calculation. This stress on the necessity of constant preparedness may endanger the element of pure expectation. It can eliminate the mood of expectation. In spite of the centring of his whole theology on hope, no direct expectation of the end is to be found in his work such as we find in that of Luther, who very concretely hoped to experience 'the dear Last Day'. For Calvin on the contrary the characteristic note is rather one longing for redemption – a longing that is satisfied in the prospect of provisional personal salvation in death. In his regard his prayers are especially typical as we meet them in connexion with lectures, for although they have mostly an eschatological ring the emphasis is on the imminent blessed rest in heaven, which is to be regarded as the center of our hopes and which, as we saw, implies the rest of the soul after death.<sup>231</sup>

Calvin hopes for a restful gathering of all God's children at the eschaton. What does Calvin mean by "rest"? For Calvin's scholars like Quistorp, by "rest", Calvin implies the rest of the soul after death. Without denying completely Quistorp's assertion, we think that by "rest" Calvin means the hope of glorious restoration Christ has promised to believers in heaven. This is the fulfillment of the hope of eternal life in Christ inaugurated at Christ's first coming. Calvin comments:

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<sup>231</sup> Heinrich Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, Trans. Harold Knight (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1955), p.111.

*5 For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven.* For the hope of eternal life will never be inactive in us, so as not to produce love in us. For it is of necessity, that the man who is fully persuaded that a treasure of life is laid up for him in heaven will aspire thither, looking down upon this world. Meditation, however, upon the heavenly life stirs up our affections both to the worship of God, and to exercises of love....

There is, however, an instance of *metonymy* in the use of the term hope, as it is taken for the thing hoped for. For the hope that is in our hearts is the glory which we hope for in heaven. At the same time, when he says, that there is a *hope* that is *laid up for us in heaven*, he means, that believers ought to feel assured as to the promise of eternal felicity, equally as though they had already a treasure laid up in a particular place.<sup>232</sup>

Calvin describes heaven as a restful place in comparison to our present life here on earth. The Christian life on earth, for Calvin, has no rest because it is besieged by violent temptations and trials. The hope of eternal life comforts believers in the midst of their numerous trials. Calvin comments:

*10. Take, my brethren, the prophets.* The comfort which he brings is not that which is according to the common proverb, that the miserable hope for like companions in evils....

The life of men is indeed indiscriminately subject to troubles and adversities; but James did not bring forward any kind of men examples, for it would have availed nothing to perish with the multitude; but he chose the prophets, a fellowship with whom is blessed. Nothing so breaks us down and disheartens us as the feeling of misery; it is therefore a real consolation to know that those things commonly deemed evils are aids and helps to our salvation. This is, indeed, what is far from being understood by the flesh; yet the faithful ought to be convinced of this, that they are happy when by various troubles they are proved by the Lord. To convince us of this, James reminds us to consider the end or design of the afflictions endured by the prophets; for as in our own evils we are without judgment, being influenced

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<sup>232</sup> *Comm.* Col.1:5.

by grief, sorrow, or some other immoderate feelings, as we see nothing under a foggy sky and in the midst of storms, and being tossed here and there as it were by a tempest, it is therefore necessary for us to cast our eyes to another quarter, where the sky is in a manner serene and bright. When the afflictions of the saints are related to us, there is no one who will allow that they were miserable, but, on the contrary, that they were happy.

Then James has done well for us; for he has laid before our eyes a pattern, that we may learn to look at it whenever we are tempted to impatience or despair. And he takes this principle as granted, that the prophets were blessed in their afflictions, for they courageously sustained them. Since it was so, he concludes that the same judgment ought to be formed of us when afflicted.<sup>233</sup>

Hence, rest, for Calvin, comes when at the final resurrection Christ fully frees

believers from the assault of temptations, sin and the bondage to earthly things.

Calvin thus uses his prayers as means of meditation upon that blessed resurrection.

He comments:

*5. For if we have become united.* Paul confirms the argument which he had previously given by using plainer expressions. The comparison which he introduces removes all ambiguity, since our ingrafting signifies not only our conformity to the example of Christ, but also the secret union (*arcanam coniunctionem*) by which we grow together with Him, in such a way that He revives us by His Spirit, and transfers His powers to us. Therefore, as the graft has the same life or death as the tree into which it is ingrafted, so it is reasonable that we should be as much partakers of the life as of the death of Christ. If we are ingrafted into the likeness (*in similitudinem*) of Christ's death, and His death is inseparable from his resurrection, our death will therefore be followed by our resurrection. But the words can be interpreted in two ways – either that we are simply ingrafted into Christ into the likeness of His death, or that we are simply ingrafted into His likeness....

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<sup>233</sup> Calvin's Comm. James 5:10.

*Become united (insiticii facti).* This word has great emphasis, and clearly shows that the apostle is not exhorting us, but rather teaching us about the benefit which we derive from Christ. He does not require from us any duty which our care or diligence can achieve, but speaks of the ingrafting which is accomplished by the hand of God.<sup>234</sup>

The believer's union with Christ is already effective as soon as he or she is ingrafted by God's own hand into Christ (the Head of the church) and the rest of his body (the Church) through the gift of faith. For Calvin, the nature of this union with Christ is becoming like Christ in character. He writes:

Let us now attend to what the Angels said. '*You will see Him coming from heave as you have seen Him going there,*' – to signify that we must not wait for him except when He will come on the day of Judgment. All this ought not only to wrest all superstition from us, but it ought to draw us to him in heaven.... Since we know that Jesus Christ is on high, we must learn to renounce the world, to be united to Him. It is a long distance from him to us, and we shall be separated from Him, unless we take the means that St. Paul gives us, which is to put off these earthly members, which he explains afterwards, and says that they are luxuries, avarice, gluttony, pride, envy and all such things....Do we wish, then, to be sharers in this ascension? We must not be separated from Him. But how shall we be joined to Him? We must put off these earthly members and things which hold us here below. Some are given to luxury, others to vengeance, others to gluttony, and others to other vices. Although faith raises us on high, our affections must follow it, in order that we may renounce all the world and all things which could hinder us from being united to our Head. This is why it is said that He will come just as He was seen to go to heaven – in order that we may learn to unite ourselves to Him through the affection of our hearts.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> *Comm. Rom.6:5.*

<sup>235</sup> *Sermons Acts 1:9-11.*

Here is what Parker writes regarding Calvin's view of the final resurrection:

Believers must, therefore, keep in their minds the eternal blessedness which is the aim of resurrection. The wonders of it are too great for us to grasp until the day when we shall see the Lord face to face. The greatest wonder of all is that it is not simply the enjoyment of blessings, but the enjoyment of God himself. All blessedness is contained in this, that 'the Lord shall share with the elect his glory, power, righteousness, nay, shall give them himself to be enjoyed and, what is even more excellent, shall in a certain manner grow into one with them.'<sup>236</sup>

Hence, the ultimate happiness of believers at the final resurrection will be their union with God himself. As a result of our union with God, we will share his glory, power, and righteousness. However, our union with God will never transform us into divine creatures. We will still remain human beings, but glorified in Christ.

Quistorp asserts:

For Calvin, the consummation consists primarily in the ultimate blessedness of believers who are justified and sanctified by Christ, and also attain through Him the heavenly glory and felicity which is the crown of His saving work. The eternal blessedness of the elect springs from the culmination of the communion with Christ, their Head, which implies perfect fellowship with God, as a result of which they see Him face to face and are partakers of His nature. 'Once we are reconciled with the Lord we have before us the prospect of eternal communion with Him.' We shall be forever with the Lord; that is the hope of eternal life. The Christ who is to come imparts to us in that perfected fellowship the fullness of His divine glory, so that we become entirely transformed into His likeness in body and soul. 'We shall be conformed to the heavenly life of our Lord Jesus Christ...He comes to enable us to participate in His glory so that everything in Him to which must be ascribed all dignity honour and praise... may be

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<sup>236</sup> Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought*, p. 125.

communicated to us. In brief, Paul declares that our Lord Jesus in no sense reserves His glory to Himself but possesses it only in order to radiate it to all the members of His body.’

Of course there remains a certain distinction between Him and us: the perfection of communion with Christ is no mystic union but the complete transformation into His image, which spells not identity but resemblance.<sup>237</sup>

Thus, believers will resemble Christ in his character at the eschaton without becoming Christ himself. Calvin comments:

*We shall be like him.* He does not understand that we shall be equal to him; for there must be some difference between the head and the members; but we shall be like him, because he will make our vile body conformable to his glorious body, as Paul also teaches us in Phil. iii.21.<sup>238</sup>

Calvin insists our union with God at the eschaton is guaranteed by Christ’s own death and resurrection. Calvin expresses this reality in his prayers by the phrases “until at length thou gatherest us into *that blessed rest, which has been prepared by our Lord Jesus Christ*” or “and so that at last we may be gathered into that blessed kingdom where *we will enjoy our complete happiness, in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

Calvin writes:

Now whenever we consider the resurrection, let Christ’s image come before us. In the nature which he took from us he so completed the course of mortal life that now, having obtained immortality, he is the pledge of our coming resurrection. For in the miseries that beset us [cf. II Cor. 4:8-9], ‘we carry in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may... be manifested in us’ [II Cor. 4:10 p.]. And to separate him from ourselves is not permissible

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<sup>237</sup> Quistorp, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Last Things*, pp.171-172.

<sup>238</sup> *Comm.* I John 3:2.

and not even possible, without tearing him apart. From this, Paul argues: ‘If the dead do not rise up again, then Christ did not rise up again’ [I Cor. 15: 16]. For he takes it as an agreed principle that it was not for himself alone that Christ was subjected to death, or that he obtained victory over death by rising again. Rather there was begun in the Head what must be completed in all the members, according to the rank and station of each.<sup>239</sup>

Because Christ, through his death and resurrection, has already assured eternal life, our hope of perfect communion is unshakable. Christ’s priesthood has opened the door of perfect communion for the believers at the eschaton. Calvin comments:

*The second time without sin*, The Apostle urges this one thing, - that we ought to be disquieted by vain and impure longings for new kinds of expiations, for the death of Christ is abundantly sufficient for us. Hence he says, that he once appeared and made a sacrifice to abolish sins, and that at his second coming he will make openly manifest the efficacy of his death, so that sin will have no more power to hurt us.<sup>240</sup>

Describing Calvin’s understanding of eschatology and Jesus Christ, David E.

Holwerda writes,

Jesus Christ stands at the center of Calvin’s perspective on the Christian life. Everything said about self denial, cross-bearing, and contempt for this life, as well as everything Calvin says about the history of the world and its future, is determined by the person and work of Jesus Christ. Calvin makes no attempt to speculate directly about world history as such, because its meaning and future are determined by the redemption accomplished by Christ.

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<sup>239</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.25.3.

<sup>240</sup> *Comm.* Heb.9:28.

The advent of Christ, including His death and resurrection, is for Calvin the decisive point at which the renewal of the world has occurred.<sup>241</sup>

Parker confirms:

If Christ's Resurrection is the guarantee of that of believers, it follows that we must be fully convinced that he really did rise from the dead. Calvin therefore sets out the New Testament evidence for Christ's Resurrection. This follows familiar lines and we need not detail the evidence.<sup>242</sup>

Hence without Christ's own resurrection there is no hope for our resurrection. Since Christ indeed arose from the dead, our resurrection is certain. Therefore our union with God is also certain in Christ alone.

Calvin maintains that by faith in Christ alone believers will receive at the eschaton things they do not see now. Once again, faith is found and rooted in Christ alone. Calvin comments:

*At the appearing of Jesus Christ, or, when Jesus Christ shall be revealed. This is added, that the faithful might learn to hold on courageously to the last day. For our life is now hidden in Christ, and will remain hidden, and as it were buried, until Christ shall appear from heaven; and the whole course of our life leads to the destruction of the external man, and all the things we suffer are, as it were the preludes of death. It is hence necessary, that we should cast our eyes on Christ, if we wish in our afflictions to behold glory and praise. For trials as to us are full of reproach and shame, and they become glorious in Christ; but that glory in Christ is not yet plainly seen, for the day of consolation is not yet come.*

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<sup>241</sup> David, E. Holwerda, "Eschatology and History: A Look at Calvin's Eschatological Vision" in *Readings in Calvin's Theology*, Ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984) pp.311-342.

<sup>242</sup> Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction To His Thought*, p.123.

8. *Whom having not seen*, or, whom though ye have not seen. He lays down two things, that they loved Christ whom they had not seen, and that they believed on him who they did not then behold. But the first arises from the second; for the cause of love is faith, not only because the knowledge of those blessings which Christ bestows on us, moves us to love him, but because he offers us perfect felicity, and thus draws us up to himself. He then commends the Jews, because they believed in Christ whom they did not see, that they might know that the nature of faith is to acquiesce in those blessings which are hid from our eyes.<sup>243</sup>

We see that the right and power of raising the dead is assigned to the person of Christ, demonstrating his divine majesty. Describing God's omnipotence to revive dead people, Calvin writes,

We have said that in proving the resurrection our thoughts ought to be directed to God's boundless might. Paul briefly teaches this: 'To change our lowly body,' he says, 'to be like his glorious body, according to his power which enables him . . . to subject all things to himself' [Phil. 3: 21 p]. Accordingly, nothing could be more unfitting than to be thinking of something that can happen in the course of nature, when there is set before us an incalculable miracle, which by its greatness overwhelms our senses.<sup>244</sup>

Hence based on Christ's own resurrection and God's omnipotence, believers must contemplate their own resurrection in faith and hope. Describing hope, Calvin writes:

If faith (as we have heard) is a sure persuasion of the truth of God, a persuasion that cannot lie to us, deceive us, or vex us, then those who have grasped this assurance expect that it will straightway come to pass that God will fulfill his promises, since according to their opinion they cannot but be

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<sup>243</sup> *Comm.* 1 Peter 1:7-8.

<sup>244</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.25.4.

true. To sum up, hope is nothing else than the expectation of those things that faith believed to have been truly promised by God.

Thus faith believes God to be truthful; hope waits for him to show his truth at the right occasion. Faith believes God to be our Father; hope waits for him ever to act as such towards us. Faith believes eternal life has been given us; hope waits for it to be revealed. Faith is the foundation on which hope leans; hope nourishes faith and sustains it. For as no one can expect from God anything unless he has previously believed God's promises, so on the other hand ought we by patiently hoping and waiting to sustain and cherish the weakness of our faith, lest it wearily fall.<sup>245</sup>

It is then by faith that believers will continue to wait upon Christ their Lord for the final resurrection because they know that he is faithful to his promises. While they are waiting for that happiest time to come, Calvin insists that they must continuously meditate on it in everything, especially in their prayers. Quistorp affirms,

Faith and hope are therefore for Calvin closely related ideas. They are co-relative the one with the other. 'Faith is the foundation on which hope rests, hope feeds and supports faith.' Faith is in fact a being convinced of the truth of the promises and as such necessarily merges in the expectation of their fulfillment. 'Thus faith is certain that God is true; hope expects that at the seasonable moment He will manifest His truth.... Faith believes that eternal life is given us. Hope expects that at some time eternity be disclosed.' Faith is the mother of hope; it gives birth to it. The latter cannot exist without faith. But on the other hand faith cannot live without hope.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary*, p.27.

<sup>246</sup> Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, pp.16-17.

It is by faith in Jesus that we free are set free from the bondage of sins, believers then hope to enjoy the full fruition of their faith at the eschaton. That is Calvin's prayers are all about.

### **III. Lessons from Calvin's Practice of Prayer**

The exposition and examination of some of Calvin's prayers teaches us several things. Our study has been limited to a few private and corporate prayers in Calvin's set of prayers available today. Hesselink informs us, "Unfortunately, there is no complete collection of the Reformer's prayers, but we do have access to some of his set prayers for special occasions, such as a morning and evening prayer, a prayer before one goes to work, a grace before meals, and the prayers he ordinarily used before and after his sermons."<sup>247</sup> Based on the prayers examined in this thesis, here are three salient points for our personal and corporate practise of prayer:

#### **1. Our Prayers Must Be Shaped by Biblical Theology**

The examination of Calvin's prayers demonstrates that the content of his prayers was shaped by a theology rooted in his understanding of the Word of God.

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<sup>247</sup> John Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), p.137.

They also inform us that Calvin did not merely teach about prayer, but he also practised prayer in his own life. Joel R. Beeke states,

John Calvin's Institutes have earned him the title of 'the preeminent systematician of the Protestant Reformation.' His reputation as an intellectual, however, is often seen apart from the vital spiritual and pastoral context in which he wrote his theology. For Calvin, theological understanding and practical piety, truth, and usefulness are inseparable. Theology first of all deals with knowledge – knowledge of God and of ourselves – but there is no true knowledge where there is no true piety... Calvin's piety is fundamentally biblical, with an emphasis on the heart more than the mind.<sup>248</sup>

Piety, for Calvin, includes prayer. Calvin's prayers reflect his own biblical and theological teaching about prayer as exposed in the two previous chapters. In content and form his prayers were mostly guided by the Lord's Prayer.

Although differing in structure and nature Calvin's formal and extemporaneous prayers were nevertheless all shaped by his theological understanding of Scriptures. Hesselink comments:

These prayers are longer than the very brief extemporaneous prayers Calvin offered after each of his lectures on the prophets, and differ somewhat in their nature. In the former the following characteristics stand out:

1. *The form of address to God.* It is not so much the sovereignty or majesty of God but rather the fatherhood of God that is prominent. For example, "My God, my Father and preserver"; "O Lord God,

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<sup>248</sup> Joel R. Beeke, "Calvin on Piety" in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*. Ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2006), pp.125-152.

most merciful Father and Savior”; or “Let us call upon our good God and Father”.

2. *Confession of sin.* Invariably Calvin acknowledges specific sins, even in these generic prayers: indolence, torpor, the cravings of the flesh, greedy affection or desire of gain, distrust (of God), and lack of patience.

3. *An appeal to God’s mercy and grace in Jesus Christ.* May it please God “to look upon us in the face of his well-beloved Son our Lord Jesus.” “May I look for all happiness only to thy grace and kindness.” “Increase the gifts of thy grace to me from day to day, while so much the more I cleave to thy Son Jesus Christ, whom we justly call the true Sun, perpetually shining in our hearts.”

4. *A request for God’s guidance, particularly that of the Holy Spirit.* “As thou dost illumine this world by the sun..., so enlighten my mind by the illumination of thy Spirit and guide me through him in the way of righteousness.” “So govern my heart that I may willingly and eagerly set myself to profit...” “May it please God to guide with his Holy Spirit all kings, princes, and magistrates...”

5. *Exhortation to glorify God in all of life.* “May all my actions conduce to the glory of thy name (and the welfare of my brethren).” May we “serve and honor God by glorifying his holy name in all our life...” May God give his faithful ones who are persecuted “such a true steadfastness that his holy name may be glorified by them both in life and death.” And in his evening prayer Calvin prays that while sleeping God will keep him “chaste and pure” and “safe from all perils, so that even my sleep may yield glory to thy name.”<sup>249</sup>

Thus Calvin supplicates the Trinitarian God, by prayer grounded in a Scriptural theology, to save him and keep him on life’s daily tumultuous journey.

The Word of God is central in Calvin’s prayers. Calvin, in his teaching and practice of prayer, has shown us how our prayers must be informed, inspired and

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<sup>249</sup> John Hesselink, *Calvin’s First Catechism: A Commentary*, pp.137-138.

guided by the Word of God. Hence, praying according to God's Word is praying according to his will.

## **2. God's Glory Must Be Our Ultimate Goal In Prayer**

Calvin's prayers focus primarily on God's glory and the edification or the sanctification of believers, rather than material or physical satisfactions.

Commenting on the purpose of prayer according to Calvin, Beeke writes,

Despite the shortcomings of believers, prayer is required for the increase of piety, for prayer diminishes self-love and multiplies dependence upon God. As the due exercise of piety, prayer unites God and humanity – not in substance but in will and purpose. Like the Lord's Supper, prayer lifts the believer to Christ and renders proper glory to God. That glory is the purpose of the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer as well as other petitions dealing with his creation. Since creation looks to God's glory for its preservation, the entire Lord's Prayer is directed to God's glory.<sup>250</sup>

Calvin, by any means, does not neglect the satisfaction of material and physical needs in his prayers. He rather believes, according to the teaching of the Lord's Prayer, that God will indeed satisfy our material needs when we remain primarily focused on his glory in our prayers.

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<sup>250</sup>Joel R. Beeke, *Calvin on Piety*, pp.125-152

### 3. Prayer Must Be a Way of Life

Prayer for Calvin was a way of life rather than something one does on occasion. Calvin's written prayers for private use and his liturgical prayers for corporate worship show us that prayer was his constant practice, indeed, his preoccupation. Yet Calvin was not renowned as a man of prayer in the same way that other historical church figures who, for example, would spend three to four hours praying every morning or would spend forty days in fasting and prayer at least once a year. Nevertheless, we can call Calvin a man of prayer simply because he linked prayer to everything he did. Commenting on I Thes. 5:17, Calvin writes, "But since every day, and indeed every moment, there are many things which can disturb our peace and drive away our joy, he bids us pray without ceasing. We have spoken elsewhere of this constancy in prayer."<sup>251</sup> Calvin strove to live a life of prayer himself, biblically, theologically, ecclesiastically, and practically. Beeke captures well Calvin's prayer life in these words,

For Calvin and the Reformers of sixteenth-century Europe, doctrine and prayer as well as faith and worship are integrally connected. For Calvin, the Reformation includes the reform of piety (*pietas*), or spirituality, as much as a reform of theology. The spirituality that had been cloistered behind monastery walls for centuries had broken down. Medieval spirituality was

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<sup>251</sup>*Comm.* I Thess. 5:17.

reduced to a celibate, ascetic, and penitential devotion in the convent or monastery. But Calvin helped Christians understand piety in terms of living and acting everyday according to God's will (Rom. 12:1-2) in the midst of human society. Through Calvin's influence, Protestant spirituality focused on how one lived the Christian life in the family, the fields, the workshop, and the marketplace. Calvin helped the Reformation change the entire focus of Christian life....The worship of God is always primary, for one's relationship to God takes precedence over everything else. That worship, however, is expressed in how the believer lives his vocation and how he treats his neighbors, for one's relationship with God is most concretely seen in the transformation of every human relationship. Faith and prayer, because they transform every believer, cannot be hidden. Ultimately, therefore, they must transform the church, the community, and the world.<sup>252</sup>

Calvin has taught us how prayer must be lived in every day circumstances and in every momentary event in life. One cannot restrict prayer to isolated places such as monasteries or behind closed doors, but it should rather be a way of life that primarily glorifies God and transforms believers in humility and holiness. Calvin was a man of prayer because he taught, preached and practised prayer constantly so that God's name, in Jesus, can be glorified in his life and the lives of other believers.

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<sup>252</sup>Joel R. Beeke, "*Calvin on Piety*", p.145.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

As highlighted in the introduction of this work, our goal was to show that Calvin was a man of prayer on the basis of his teaching and practice of that doctrine. Our second goal was to learn from his teaching and practice of prayer. In summary of our work we submit the following salient points:

1. Calvin was shaped into a man of prayer not only by his personal experience as a refugee outside his native France, but primarily by theological reasons to see believers praying according to God's way.
2. Calvin defines prayer as "The chief exercise of faith". In other words, prayer is the chief exercise of believing in Christ. In his teaching on prayer, Calvin highlights the determinative role of Christ as our sole Mediator and High Priest. Without the person and the work of Christ no one can approach God for and in prayer. Christ, through his death for our sins and resurrection to life, has given us access to the Father for our prayers.  
Calvin's teaching on prayer is well rooted in Scripture. Christian prayer, for Calvin, must be done according to God's word which

reveals his will to believers. Calvin points believers to the content of the Lord's Prayer as their model of prayer.

3. Although Calvin tries to highlight the interdependence between providence and prayer, we have found a major contradiction between both in his theology. While the person and work of Christ are central and determinative in Calvin's doctrine of prayer, they are rarely mentioned in his doctrine of providence. This begs the question: What can we know about God apart from Jesus Christ?
4. In practice, Calvin's prayers shows evidence of his attempt to apply what he has taught on prayer. Therefore, Calvin did not merely preach or teach about prayer, but he also practised it according to his biblical and theological understanding. In their content, most of Calvin's prayers show evidence that they were done according to the pattern of the Lord's Prayer. Secondly, Calvin's prayers show that he is more concerned about his spiritual needs (sanctification and union with Christ at this present age and at the eschaton) than his physical and earthly ones.

In conclusion, we claim that in spite of Calvin's major contradiction between his doctrine of prayer and his doctrine of providence, Calvin has taught us about the

importance of prayer in the Christian walk. Believers are born in Christ by faith as God's adopted children. Calvin insists that prayer is the chief exercise of that same faith in Christ. Exercising faith in Jesus by prayer, believers experience God's sanctification by living according to God's word and will. Hence, Calvin's teaching and practice of prayer uphold the importance of God's word in the continuously sanctified lives of believers.

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