

CHAPTER FOUR- CALVIN'S PIETY, ATTITUDE AND SPIRIT IN PREACHING

4.1 Preacher Is The Key Factor Of Preaching

While the theology and principles of preaching are important, what is more important in preaching is the preacher. Calvin says that, no matter how learned is a man in theology and truths, no matter how wise he is, without a pious heart that fearing God, all is vanity. Indeed, we shall not say that, properly speaking, God is known where there is no religion or piety.¹⁶³ As for Calvin, the ultimate goal of knowing God is to love God, thus a preacher should first really know God, fear God, and strive to practice his own preaching. Calvin's piety is outpouring in his theology, exposition and preaching. He also endeavors to practice what he preaches.

4.1.1 Godly And Earnest Prayer

The character and attitude Calvin values the best in his theology and ministry is piety. In his opinion a Christian's whole life should be treated as a training of piety. Calvin's concept of piety is rooted in the knowledge of God and includes attitudes and actions that are directed to the adoration and service of God.¹⁶⁴ When talking about his most important work, the Institutes of Christian Religion, Calvin says that the book's purpose was solely to transmit certain rudiments by which those who are touched with any zeal for religion might be shaped to true godliness.¹⁶⁵ Thus Calvin's piety is built on his biblical theological knowledge. Without true knowledge of

¹⁶³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 1.2.1, P39

¹⁶⁴ Joel Beeke, <https://calvin500blog.wordpress.com/2008/07/12/john-calvin-on-piety-part-one/>

¹⁶⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France, P9

God, so called godliness is a baseless house; without a zealous and godly heart, the ministry will be lifeless and fruitless.

Calvin attaches great importance and reverence to pulpit service. He thinks that every preacher should enter into the pulpit in solemn awe of God. If a preacher lacks a heart fearing God and a pious life, he will be incompetent at his preaching service. The power of preaching and the success of ministry depend greatly on a preacher's holy and godly life. For this reason, he believes that the pastor must keep a close watch over his life and doctrine. The man of God must cultivate a high view of God and tremble at His Word. Calvin writes, "No man can rightly handle the doctrine of godliness, unless the fear of God reign ... in him."¹⁶⁶ In Calvin's view, such piety is essential for a preacher of the Word of God. He states that a preacher should "speak not so much with the mouth, as with the dispositions of the heart".¹⁶⁷

A preacher needs not only to fill his head with the truth of the Word, but also to fill his heart with godliness, because to know God is for the purpose of fearing and trusting in God. Calvin says: For this sense of the powers of God is for us a fit teacher of piety, from which religion is born. I call "piety" that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces.¹⁶⁸ In other words, piety and love of God show our true knowledge of God and trust in Him. These two are necessary for a preacher, because our actions and life bear witness to the Word we have preached. The power of preaching comes from His Word, but godly prayer is also needed to seek the power and illumination of the Spirit. In Calvin's opinion, godly prayer is a necessity of Christian's life. His theological thoughts, wisdom in his writings, and power in his

¹⁶⁶ John Calvin, as quoted in Miller, *Calvin's Wisdom: An Anthology Arranged Alphabetically*, P145

¹⁶⁷ Ibid P256.

¹⁶⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 1.2.1, P41

preaching all derive from his godly and earnest life of prayer and devotion. Calvin frequently fasted and prayed, on one hand to seek earnestly the illumination of the Spirit, on the other hand to humble himself to depend entirely on God, lest him rely on his own strength and intelligence. In this way he disciplines his body, so that he may not be entangled in food and desires, but may write, preach and serve with a pure and absorbed heart.

The power of preaching, wisdom and every good gift are only received from God the Father through pious prayer, which is the only channel of communication between man and God. Since every believer should draw near to God in prayers, how much more should those, who are specially called by God to be His servants to shepherd His flocks, pray to God to receive power and wisdom for preaching? Calvin say,

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...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.¹⁶⁹

Calvin stresses on the life of prayer and devotion as much as on doctrines because he attaches great importance to application and practice of the faith. His endeavor to serve God faithfully throughout his life is inseparable from his fervent prayers. Calvin's concept of piety focuses not only on personal spiritual life, but also on how to be an imitator of Christ in family, in workplace, and in the serving field, rather than a closed-door spiritual practice like a Catholic monastery. Therefore, the reformation is not only the reform of theology, but also the reform of Christian's devotional life. This concept of piety has greatly influenced the protestants ever since, among them are England's puritans who followed and practiced Calvin's teachings of

¹⁶⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 3.20.2, P393

godliness, and strived to be pious in their life, their work, their preaching as well as all other aspects of life, so that God may be glorified through their testimony.

Calvin's preaching power comes from his biblical exegesis of the Word as well as his reverence and fear of God, these two are completely involved in each other. He not only preaches the Word through his biblical exegesis, but also bear witness to the Word and power of God with his godly life. Calvin died at age 54 on May 27, 1564, in the arms of Theodore Beza, his successor.¹⁷⁰ Looking back on Calvin's life, Beza concluded: Having been a spectator of his conduct for sixteen years, I have given a faithful account both of his life and of his death, and I can now declare, that in him all men may see a most beautiful example of Christian Character, an example which it is as easy to slander as it is difficult to imitate.¹⁷¹

Calvin lived a very simple and poor life. When he died, all his wealth was less than 250 silver coins. Knowing that Calvin chose to live a poor life, both Paulus PP. III and Pius PP. IV marveled: That heresy's (Calvin) power is that money has no power over him. His power lies in his wholehearted reverence in serving God. The most important sign of faithful servant of God is that he completely cares about God's business, completely God centric, devotes himself to God's truth, God's gospel, God's will and God's glory. This is Calvin's motto: My heart I offer to you Lord, promptly and sincerely. He pays great attention to earnest prayers, fasting and meditation in life and ministry, to seek the power of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, as in his opinion this is the only fountain of power for God's servants.

¹⁷⁰ Steven Lawson, *The Expository Genius of John Calvin*, E-book, P36

¹⁷¹ Theodore Beza, *The Life of John Calvin*, E-Book, P117

4.1.2 Dependence On The Power Of The Spirit

Calvin says that by the Spirit-empowered preaching of men, "the renewal of the saints is accomplished and the body of Christ is edified,"¹⁷² without the power and co-working of the Spirit, man's work are but work of wood, hay and straw. Only through the work of the Holy Spirit can man accomplish the will of God. When a preacher preaches the Word of God, only if the Spirit carry along and illuminate sinners, can they be guided into all truth, and come to Christ to confess their sins, to repent and trust in God. Calvin is a minister who places so much emphasis on the Spirit that reform theologian B. B. Warfield calls him a theologian of the Spirit. Calvin says, we cannot even open our mouths before God without danger unless the Spirit instructs us in the right pattern of prayer. This privilege deserves to be more highly esteemed among us, since the only-begotten Son of God supplies words to our lips that free our minds from all wavering.¹⁷³

Unless drawn by the Holy Spirit, no one will come to Christ, no one will gain insight of the gospel. Calvin says:

Therefore, as we cannot come to Christ unless we be drawn by the Spirit of God, so when we are drawn we are lifted up in mind and heart above our understanding. For the soul, illumined by him, takes on a new keenness, as it were, to contemplate the heavenly mysteries, whose splendor had previously blinded it. And man's understanding, thus beamed by the light of the Holy Spirit, then at last truly begins to taste those things which belong to the Kingdom of God.¹⁷⁴

We are unable, by our own eloquence and knowledge, to make people understand the gospel and know our Savior. Only the Holy Spirit can pour God's Word into our hearts, because we are all

¹⁷² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 4.3.2, P1055

¹⁷³ Ibid, 3.20.34. P897-898

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 3.2.34, P582

blind, we cannot receive the Word of God unless the Holy Spirit illuminates our hearts. The work of the Spirit is the groundwork for sinners to know the truth of salvation.

Let us realize, in closing, that we cannot be Christians unless the Holy Spirit has first granted us the humility to confess that our salvation proceeds entirely from the grace of God. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2: 4-5: And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. Calvin says: preaching is the instrument and the authority that the Spirit uses in his saving work of illuminating, converting, and sealing sinners. “There is...an inward efficacy of the Holy Spirit when he sheds forth his power upon hearers, that they may embrace a discourse by faith.”¹⁷⁵

Although Calvin stresses on the work of the Spirit in the preaching, he does not overlook biblical exegesis of the word of God, because the work of the Spirit is inseparable from the Scripture inspired by himself. Calvin teaches:

Word and Spirit are joined together organically; without the Spirit, hearing the preached Word only adds to the condemnation of unbelievers. On the other hand, Calvin admonished those who emphasized the Spirit apart from or at the expense of the Word, saying that only the spirit of Satan separates itself from the Word.¹⁷⁶

The error of some Charismatics and mystics is that, they exalt the Holy Spirit’s illumination and the external manifestations of signs and wonders, but ignore the inner testimony of the Spirit as well as the biblical interpretation of the Bible inspired by the Spirit.

¹⁷⁵ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the first twenty chapters of the book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, Translated by Thomas Meyers, [Ezek. 1:3]. E-Book, P25-26, <http://www.ccel.org>

¹⁷⁶ Joel R. Beeke, *Reformed Preaching*, Published by Crossway 2018, P113. The original quote from: Willem Balke, “Het Pictisme in Oostfriesland,” *Theologia Reformata* 21 (1978): 320–27.

Calvin stresses on the significance of biblical expository preaching, because when we rightly preach the Word of God inspired by God the Spirit, he will powerfully work with us as he promised.

The Holy Spirit, Calvin said, is actively at work in the preaching of the Word, and this powerful ministry of the Spirit was the *sine qua non* (essential condition) of Calvin's expository ministry. He stated that during public proclamation, "when the minister executes his commission faithfully, by speaking only what God puts into his mouth, the inward power of the Holy Spirit is joined with his outward voice."¹⁷⁷

Preacher is the spokesman of God, proclaiming the Word of God to His people in Spirit. The help and co-work of the Spirit is indispensable, because only spiritual person can accept the Word of God, even the apostles must have the illumination of the Spirit of truth, who pour the Word into their hearts, so that they could truly perceive, trust and obey God in awe.

4.1.3 Rigorous Learning And Equipment

Calvin is a learned and capable theologian and preacher, partly because he has been smart since childhood and has access to good education, but also because of his lifelong pursuit of study and research. Around age 11, Calvin studied Latin grammar in the college Dela Marche, preparing himself to read Latin classical literatures, and to get further equipment in philosophy, logic and rhetoric. Calvin was a hardworking student, receiving his master degree in Arts before 18 years old. Later, at the demand of his father, he went to Orleans to study civil law. This further trained Calvin's rigor and logic of thinking. The study of Roman law had also broadened Calvin's historical knowledge and laid a good foundation for his later systematic writing. During this time, Calvin studied Greek with Melchior Wolmar, a scholar deeply influenced by Lutheran Reformed theology, and soon he began to study Hebrew. Calvin's education

¹⁷⁷ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Psalms93-119 Translated by The Rev. James Anderson Psalms105:31, E-Book, P98. <http://www.ccel.org>

background laid solid foundation for his rigorous and logical expository preaching. Calvin has been constantly learning and equipping himself throughout his whole life, that enabled him to clarify and preach the word of God accurately.

Calvin had traveled over the whole field of knowledge, in so far as it had been explored in his day. From ancient and modern systems of philosophy, from civil and ecclesiastical history, as well as from the Greek and Roman classical he draws materials, and shows how he could employ with ease and power, and yet without the least ostentation or pedantry, his varied acquisitions for the illustration of sacred truth.¹⁷⁸

Calvin is really an evangelist who loves learning and tries his best to equip himself. As a minister of God's Word, rigorous learning and equipment are absolutely necessary. Calvin says:

If I should enter the pulpit without deigning to look at a book and should frivolously think to myself, "Oh, well, when I preach, God will give me enough to say," and come here without troubling to read or think what I ought to declare, and do not carefully consider how I must apply Holy Scripture to the edification of the people, then I should be an arrogant upstart.¹⁷⁹

Although Calvin has great knowledge and wisdom, he still humbles himself and continues to study the Bible and all knowledge. When he preaches, he only put a Bible in front of him, without a written sermon. However, the Bible in front of him is full of notes, because during normal times he has devoted a lot of effort in searching and commenting the Scriptures, so when it is time to preach he could proclaim directly from the original text, the historical background of the Bible, as well as his previous detailed research. Calvin says, learning joined with piety and the other gifts of the good pastor are a sort of preparation for it. Those whom the Lord has destined for such high office, he first supplies with the arms required to fulfill it.¹⁸⁰ The pastor,

¹⁷⁸ John Calvin, *Commentary the book of Psalms*, Translated by REV. James Anderson ,E-Book, Introductory Notice V1, <http://www.ccel.org>

¹⁷⁹ John Calvin, in a sermon on Deuteronomy 6:13-15, as quoted in T.H.L Parker, Calvin's Preaching, P81.

¹⁸⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 4.3.11, P1063

he (Calvin) wrote, "ought to be prepared by long study for giving to the people, as out of a storehouse, a variety of instruction concerning the Word of God."¹⁸¹

Calvin values the equipment in classical literature, rhetoric, philosophy, and logic, he values more the study of God's Word-the Scriptures. He says: it is by the reading of the Scripture that we make progress in piety and holiness of life. Whatever then is delivered in Scripture we ought to strive to learn.¹⁸² Our weakness does not allow us to be dismissed from her school until we have been pupils all our lives.¹⁸³ He also states that none will ever be a good minister of the Word of God unless he is first of all a scholar. If a minister aims to feed the congregation continuously by preaching from the pulpit, he must learn from Calvin to establish a lifelong study habit.

4.2 Serve With Whole Heart

4.2.1 Strive To Preach And Serve

William J. Bouwsma says: Throughout the annals of church history, few men have thrown themselves into their preaching more fully than this Genevan. With abounding energy and unwavering focus, he proclaimed the Word of God. Simply put, Calvin was "a driven man."¹⁸⁴ Calvin is indeed a servant of God who serves with all his heart and with all his strength

¹⁸¹ Calvin, as quoted in J. Graham Miller, *Calvin's Wisdom: An Anthology Arranged Alphabetically*, P256

¹⁸² John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to Romans*, Rom15:4, Translated and edited by The Rev. John Owen, , E-Book, P230 <http://www.ccel.org>

¹⁸³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 4.1.4, P1016

¹⁸⁴ William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (New York, NY, and Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1988), P20.

and with all his mind and with all his soul. He patiently led his congregation verse by verse through book after book of the Bible. Calvin preached from the New Testament on Sunday mornings, from the New Testament or the Psalms on Sunday afternoons, and from the Old Testament every morning of the week.¹⁸⁵ every other week. In this consecutive fashion, Calvin preached through most of the books of the Scriptures. He got up at 5a.m. every morning, preached 5 times a week, taught theology 3 times weekly, hosted a Bible study for elders and preachers every Thursday. He edited the content of the lectures recorded by scribe into Bible commentaries. He taught book by book in the Bible, expound each verse, each passage in details.

There is seldom any record of the books, the themes and contents of the sermons Calvin preached before 1549, However, because Calvin's preaching was highly praised in Geneva, after 1549, the refugee group hired a professional scribe to record his preaching and bound them into volumes. According to statistics of Robert L. Reymond,

Calvin preached "189 sermons on Acts between 1549 and 1554, a shorter series on some of the Pauline letters between 1554 and 1558, and 65 sermons on the Harmony of the Gospels between 1559 and 1564. During this same time, on weekday mornings he preached series of sermons on Jeremiah and Lamentations up to 1550, on the Minor Prophets and Daniel from 1550 to 1552, 174 sermons on Ezekiel from 1552 to 1554, 159 sermons on Job from 1554 to 1555, 200 sermons on Deuteronomy from 1555 to 1556, 353 sermons on Isaiah from 1556 to 1559, 123 sermons on Genesis from 1559 to 1561, a short series on Judges in 1561, 107 sermons on 1 Samuel and 87 sermons on 2 Samuel from 1561 to 1563, and a series on 1 Kings in 1563 and 1564."¹⁸⁶

Calvin's daily work was extremely heavy. Calvin for his part did not spare himself at all, working far beyond what his power and regard for his health could stand. Beza commented:

¹⁸⁵ T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, P80

¹⁸⁶ Robert L Reymond, *John Calvin: His Life and Influence* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2004), P84.

during sleep he seemed almost awake, and spent a great part of the year in preaching, teaching, and dictating.¹⁸⁷

He was, as Wolfgang Musculus compared him to a bow always strung. Beza said his diet was very sparing, since during many years he took only one meal a day, assigning the weakness of his stomach as the cause. He lived nearly without sleep.¹⁸⁸ Calvin worked day and night, writing commentaries on the Bible, teaching, preaching, training and sending missionaries, administrating the church. He has no regard for his own physical health. His resolute will drove him to endure many ailments. For instance, he wrote to his physicians in 1564 to describe his colic, spitting of blood, ague, gout, and the "excruciating sufferings" of his hemorrhoids.¹⁸⁹ But worst of all seem to have been kidney stones that had to pass unrelieved by any sedative. Nevertheless, these physical setbacks scarcely slowed Calvin down. He was in the pulpit as often as health permitted, and was remarkably unwavering.

In his life of service Calvin was dedicated to witnessing and living out of the glory of God. And concerning his death Schaff says: "Calvin had expressly forbidden all pomp at his funeral and the erection of any monument over his grave. He wished to be buried, like Moses, out of reach of idolatry. This was consistent, with his theology, which humbles man and exalts God."¹⁹⁰ Even the spot of his grave in the cemetery at Geneva is unknown. There is only a normal stone tablet with J.C. (which is the abbreviation of John Calvin) to meet the curiosity of tourists.

¹⁸⁷ Theodore Beza, *The Life of John Calvin*, E-Book, P50

¹⁸⁸ Theodore Beza, *The Life of John Calvin*, E-Book, P63

¹⁸⁹ John Calvin, Editor by John Dillenberger, *John Calvin, Selections from His Writings*, P78.

¹⁹⁰ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Volume VIII: Modern Christianity. The Swiss Reformation*, E-Book P481

Calvin always persevered in ministry, never slacking before his audience of one. Charles H. Spurgeon confessed, "I do love that man of God; suffering all his life long, enduring not only persecutions from without but a complication of disorders from within, and yet serving his Master with all his heart."¹⁹¹ In his life of ministry, Calvin burned himself to shine for the Lord. He endeavored to preach the Gospel fervently by the power of the Holy Spirit, led people to the Lord, fed His flocks, so that people may live for the glory of God in awe of Him.

4.2.2 Endeavor To Live Out What He Preached

The way in which Calvin treats himself as a member of the congregation is shown by his customary use of “we” and not “you”.¹⁹² Calvin spoke to the congregation that the teaching must first be addressed to himself. Therefore, as the shepherd and leader of the flocks, Calvin not only preaches the Word of God to the congregation from a burning heart, urge them to obey His word, and put into practice the teachings of the Bible they have heard, but also set himself as an example for his congregation by living out what he believed and preached. He is very strict with himself in his preaching service. He says: It would be better for the preacher himself to break his neck going up into the pulpit, if he does not take pains to be the first to follow God.¹⁹³

Therefore, Calvin uses the strict requirements for himself to warn all preachers of the proper attitude of service. He exhorts the preachers:

Let the pastors boldly dare all things by the word of God...Let them constrain all the power, glory, and excellence of the world to give place to and to obey the divine majesty of this word. Let them enjoin everyone by it, from the highest to the lowest. Let them edify the body of Christ. Let them devastate Satan's reign. Let them pasture the sheep, kill the wolves, instruct and exhort the

¹⁹¹ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography, Vol. 2: The Full Harvest, 1860-1892*, P29.

¹⁹² T.H.L Parker, *John Calvin: A Biography*, published by Westminster John Knox Press in 2007, P123

¹⁹³ Ibid, P123

rebellious. Let them bind and loose thunder and lightning, if necessary, but let them do all according to the word of God¹⁹⁴

Calvin does not instruct and exhort preachers merely by words, but by his own example.

What he preaches he practices first. Thus his preaching, teaching and encouragement is of great power to strengthen and comfort believers. Calvin has faithfully shepherded the Geneva Church for 26 years. He showed his steadfast faith through his good example. During the last period of his ministry from 1541 to 1564, Calvin preached more than four thousand sermons, at the same time he was busy with lecturing, training preachers and missionaries, as well as other pastoral and civic duties. Despite of the heavy ministry and his physical pain, he still dedicated himself to the work of God. When he became bedridden, he had himself carried to church on a stretcher in order to preach. Nothing would keep him from the pulpit. Calvin values greatly the pulpit ministry. On his deathbed, Calvin said that his preaching was more important than his writings. Calvin stresses on the application of his preaching in daily life, he not only requires himself to be a doer of the Word, he also urges the congregation to do the same. James 1:22-23 says: But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. Calvin's interpretation of this verse is: the doer is he who from the heart embraces God's word and testifies by his life that he really believes, according to the saying of Christ...that a doctrine merely heard and not received inwardly into the heart avails nothing, because it soon vanishes away.¹⁹⁵ John Dillenberger commented,

The unifying root of all of Calvin's labors is his passion to display the glory of God in Christ. When he was thirty years old...he giving an account to God, and said, "The thing [O God]at which

¹⁹⁴ John Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973), p. xii (emphasis added).

¹⁹⁵ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, James 1:22-23, Translated and edited by The Rev. John Owen, E-Book, P160. <http://www.ccel.org>

I chiefly aimed, and for which I most diligently labored, was, that the glory of thy goodness and justice...might shine forth conspicuous, that the virtue and blessings of thy Christ...might be fully displayed.¹⁹⁶

Calvin indeed disciplined his body, preached, practiced and testified the Word of God by his life. Therefore, his preaching is powerful, rich in God's blessings, and the Holy Spirit works with him. But nowadays there are too many preachers who can preach but can not practice, thus are unable to make a good confession for our Lord. The preachers should not only preach the Word, believers should not only hear the word, both of them should also live out the Word as Calvin did. Calvin's preaching power lies not only in his rigorous examination and faithful interpretation of the Bible, but also in his dedication to bear witness to the Word with his life.

4.2.3 Preaching In Humble Boldness

As a preacher, Calvin places great emphasis on godly life. Among all the elements of a godly life, Calvin puts a high valuation on the character of humility, which he believes is one of the most important qualities of a Christian. He once said: if you ask me concerning the precepts of the Christian religion, first, second, third, and always I would answer, 'Humility.'¹⁹⁷ Calvin stresses the importance of Christian humility both in his Institutes and in his Commentaries.

Although Calvin is so talented to write the first edition of the Institutes of Christian Religion, which has brought him great fame, at the age of 27, he is extremely humble, without the slightest boasting. Much remains unknown about his family background, education, conversion, his service and life experience, because he rarely mentions his personal experiences in his writings and sermons, where he completely focuses on preaching and interpreting the word

¹⁹⁶ John Dillenberger, *John Calvin, Selections from His Writings*, P110.

¹⁹⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 2.2.11, P268-269

of God. He can boast of his wisdom and knowledge, but he never boasts, on the contrary, he is very modest, and is well aware of his weakness and incompetence as a servant of God.

In the first section of the opening chapter of the Institutes, Calvin writes:

Thus, from the feeling of our own ignorance, vanity, poverty, infirmity, and—what is more—depravity and corruption, we recognize that the true light of wisdom, sound virtue, full abundance of every good, and purity of righteousness rest in the Lord alone...we cannot seriously aspire to him before we begin to become displeased with ourselves.¹⁹⁸

Calvin teaches men to cast aside any self-confidence and humbly renders all glory to God, lest God close his ear to our prayers and use us no more because of arrogance and boasting in a very little. God willingly uses us who are but unworthy sinners to serve him and preach his Word, not because we are qualified or competent, but because of God's grace and power. God chooses us to preach His Word, in order that we may truly see our lowliness and unworthiness, so that we may truly humble ourselves before Him. Calvin says: since from the lips of men, as from the sanctuary, he gives his answers to men. This is the best and most useful exercise in humility, when he accustoms us to obey his Word, even though it be preached through men like us and sometimes even by those of lower worth than we.¹⁹⁹ When we are deeply aware of our unworthiness and incompetence, yet God still chooses us to preach His Word, how much more should we look to God in piety and awe, and preach His Word humbly and obediently in the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Calvin states, provided a devout attention be exercised, accompanied with humility and meekness, the spirit of discernment will be given us, who, as a faithful interpreter, will open to us the meaning of what is said in Scripture.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill 1.1.1, P36-37

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 4.3.1, P1054

²⁰⁰ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, 1John4:9, Translated and edited by The Rev. John Owen, , E-Book, P127, <http://www.ccel.org>

As the greatest theologian of the Reformation Movement and the founder of Protestant theology, Calvin has great influence on the reformed Church and even the whole Protestantism, he also has great influence on the development of politics, culture, education, economy and other fields in the world. Yet throughout Calvin's life, right up to his death, he never boasted of his personal achievement, he was a very humble servant.

1564, a month before his death, Calvin said: With my whole soul I embrace the mercy which he has exercised towards me through Jesus Christ, atoning for my sins with the merits of his death and passion, that in this way he might satisfy for all my crimes and faults, and blot them from his remembrance... I confess I have failed innumerable times to execute my office properly, and had not He, of His boundless goodness, assisted me, all that zeal had been fleeting and vain... For all these reasons, I testify and declare that I trust to no other security for my salvation than this, and this only, viz., that as God is the Father of mercy, he will show himself such a Father to me, who acknowledge myself to be a miserable sinner.²⁰¹

From here we know that Calvin admitted himself to be a miserable sinner, and his only hope for forgiveness of sins is the grace of God and the blood of Jesus.

Calvin serves God with humility and gentleness throughout his life, but at the same time he is extremely brave and uncompromising in his criticism of any distortion and misunderstanding of the truth, he even risks his life to rebuke sins. He is especially brave and bold in preaching the truth, without fear of any difficulties or dangers.

In Calvin's time, the Roman Catholic Church condemned Protestantism as heresy and often persecuted and arrested Protestants, some of them were even burned. In 1533 Calvin's friend Nicholas Cop, the president of the University of Paris, delivered a speech with the "Sermon on the Mount" as the scripture. Because of his quotation of the Protestant ideas of Erasmus and Luther, he had to flee Paris, as did Calvin himself because it was said that the speech was written by him. Calvin therefore began his long exile, during which he often preached among the people, and his footprints were everywhere in Paris, Poitou, and Orleans. In

²⁰¹ John Calvin, *Selections from His Writings*, Edited and with an Introduction by John Dillenberger, P35-36

the face of the cruel persecution of the Roman Catholic Church, Calvin strengthened himself in the Lord, and disregarded for his life to preached the word of God on the way to exile.

Calvin often fought against the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope. As a reformer in Geneva, when he explained the Bible, he outspokenly exposed and criticized the Roman Catholic system of perversion of God's grace. He said: The Roman Catholic Church today continues the same kind of idolatrous practices that were common amongst the heathen, but in the name of the apostles and of the virgin Mary. The only things that have changed are the names of the idols! But superstition is as wicked and detestable today as it was amongst the first idolaters!²⁰²

When confronted with the attacks or even death threats from the libertines in Geneva church, Calvin did not fear or compromise, he firmly defended the truth in awe of God. In 1538, Calvin proposed a Bible-based church discipline. Many people in Geneva were irritated. In the end, Calvin was expelled because he refused to distribute the Lord's Supper to some libertines. He wrote to Viret:

“I...took an oath that I had resolved rather to meet death than profane so shamefully the Holy Supper of the Lord...My ministry is abandoned if I suffer the authority of the Consistory to be trampled upon, and extend the Supper of Christ to open scoffers...I should rather die a hundred times than subject Christ to such foul mockery.” The sermon had been preached, the prayers had been offered, and Calvin descended from the pulpit to take his place beside the elements at the communion table. The bread and wine were duly consecrated by him, and he was now ready to distribute them to the communicants. Then on a sudden a rush was begun by the troublers in Israel in the direction of the communion table. . . Calvin flung his arms around the sacramental vessels as if to protect them from sacrilege, while his voice rang through the building: “These hands you may crush, these arms you may lop off, my life you may take, my blood is yours, you may shed it; but you shall never force me to give holy things to the profaned, and dishonor the table of my God.”²⁰³

Calvin's life was in constant danger. On 16 December, 1547, groups of people frantically squeezed the door in the Senate house with cries of Calvin's death. Unaccompanied and

²⁰² John Calvin, *John Calvin's Sermons on Galatians*, Translated by Kathy Childress, P3.

²⁰³ Henry F. Henderson, *Calvin in His Letters*, P77-79. Published by Wipf and Stoch, 1996

unarmed, Calvin advanced through the midst of the groups, with his breast uncovered, he said: 'If you want blood, there are still a few drops here; strike, then!'²⁰⁴ He could often hear the shouts of the mobs gathering outside his house in Geneva and the sound of their rifles shooting. He faced exile and all kinds of death sentence that would come to him at any time. Persecutions and death threats surround him from libertines, the Romanists, as well as from politics and war. Calvin faced his enemies courageously in the Lord. Even though they shouted for his blood, he still preached boldly and faithfully, challenging sins and attacks with the Word of God. Calvin stated in the commentaries of the Acts: For the servants of God must be armed with invincible constancy of the Spirit, that they may never give place to the devil, nor to his ministers; as the Lord commanded Jeremiah to encounter with the reprobate with a face of iron.²⁰⁵

Calvin risked his life for preaching the truth, so were his students and followers, as well as later Reformed preachers. Calvin sent missionaries from Geneva to many countries, from France to Brazil. Many were killed within few months, and most of the young people sent to France were martyred, but the Geneva church continued to send missionaries out. Philip Schaff said: It is by the combination of a severe creed with severe self-discipline that Calvin became the father of the heroic races of French Huguenots, Dutch Burghers, English Puritans, Scotch Covenanters, and New England Pilgrims, who sacrificed the world for the liberty of conscience.²⁰⁶ They endured intrepidly all kinds of persecutions, and even sacrifice their lives for the sake of gospel, like the prophets in the Old Testament who took their lives in their hands to reproach kings; also

²⁰⁴ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Volume VIII: Modern Christianity. The Swiss Reformation*, E-Book, P308-309.

²⁰⁵ John Calvin, *Commentaries upon the Acts of the Apostles: Volume 1 (Act 1-13)*, Acts 13:46, Translated and edited by Henry Beveridge, , E-Book, P394 <http://www.ccel.org>

²⁰⁶ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Volume VIII: Modern Christianity. The Swiss Reformation*, E-Book, P155.

like the apostles in the New Testament who risked their necks for preaching gospel to the point of death. For Calvin, humility and courage are twin characters which are indispensable for a preacher. Humility is the secret of receiving power from God to preach boldly, and courage is the steadfast hold to the truth.

4.2.4 Expounding With Rigorous Logic

Calvin's exegesis is very biblical, and is a model of rigorousness, logical compactness, consistency and completeness. Schaff the Christian historian said of Calvin: He is one of the greatest interpreters of Scripture who ever lived. He owes that position to a combination of merits. He had a vigorous intellect, a dauntless spirit, a logical mind, a quick insight, a thorough knowledge of the human heart.²⁰⁷ It was the education that Calvin received since childhood, and his constant effort in reading and research throughout his life that made him such an excellent exegesis and pastoral theologian. Beza, his co-worker and successor, commented on Calvin's commentary: Calvin's great excellence as a commentator consists in his giving, first, a concise, clear, full, and minute view of the scope, drift, and connection of the whole passage he is explaining, with the accuracy and precision of uncommon logical sagacity and acuteness.²⁰⁸

However, some Christians and pastors who tends towards anti-intellectualism today are against rational and logical thinking. For example, some extreme Charismatics follow their intuition and blind faith, interpret the Bible with their personal subjective feelings and what they called the Spirit has said to them. They reject to examine the context of the Bible with objective reason, and ignore rigorous and logical analysis of the background and the intended meaning of

²⁰⁷ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Volume VIII: Modern Christianity. The Swiss Reformation*, E-Book, P175,

²⁰⁸ Theodore Beza, *The Life of John Calvin*, E-Book, P80

the original text, so there is an inevitable misinterpretation of the Bible. Preachers and pastors, as shepherds of believers, should be imitators of Calvin, focusing not only on the study of the Bible, but also on the training of knowledge and logic; not only has the heart of a shepherd, but also has profound and rigorous knowledge of theology.

Calvin's preaching, commentaries, and theological doctrines are logical, rigorous and biblical. Especially for some doctrines that are prone to misunderstanding and controversy in the history of the church, such as: fall, election, and predestination etc., Calvin's exposition is clear and rigorous in both biblical interpretation and logical analysis, far exceeding the theologians before him. Calvin's expository preaching is based on his biblical theology which is so logically rigorous. Of course, Calvin also says that reason is depraved and limited. We do not prove the Word of God through reason and logic, because the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason, for as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit.²⁰⁹ The knowledge of faith consists in assurance rather than in comprehension.²¹⁰ Calvin means that man is completely depraved and dead in the trespasses and sins. Therefore, the function of reason is also polluted. Depraved discernment cannot lead men to trust in God, only the faith and enlightenment given by God can do it.

Calvin does not deny the common gifts that God bestows on man. On the contrary, Calvin values it very much. He says: reason is proper to our nature, it distinguishes us from brute beasts.²¹¹ He writes: if the Lord has willed that we be helped in physics, dialectic, mathematics,

²⁰⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 1.7.4, P79

²¹⁰ Ibid, 3.2.14, P560

²¹¹ Ibid, 2.2.17, P276

and other like disciplines, by the work and ministry of the ungodly, let us use this assistance. For if we neglect God's gift freely offered in these arts, we ought to suffer just punishment for our sloths.²¹² For Calvin, these natural gifts are good in themselves because they come from God, but he also stresses that because of the fall, man is no longer holy, all these natural gifts must base on a solid foundation of truth.

Logic and reasoning must be used in preaching. Calvin has received very good training in classical literatures and logical rhetoric since he was a child. Therefore, because of the accuracy and irrefutability, his expository sermons and commentaries have become one of the most valuable and systematic references in the Christian Church. Therefore, it is very necessary for preachers to be trained in logic, rhetoric, dialectics and narration, etc. Reverend Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who was deeply influenced by Calvin's theology, said that preaching is burning logic and eloquent reasoning. Calvin's exegetical preaching is very objective and has taken full advantage of reason and logic to preach the Word of God biblically.

4.2.5 Sincere Love For God And Others

We have been commanded to love God with all our heart, with all our mind, and with all our soul. Unless, then, all the powers of the soul are intent on loving God, we have already abandoned obedience to the law.²¹³ Calvin's preaching is worth imitating, not only in his biblical theology and rigorous exegesis, but also in the fact that he has actually lived out his preaching, and that he is a good shepherd rather than a hired hand, for he really has a father's heart. If a preacher pursues all knowledge, but ignores fervor and godliness towards God, and have no love,

²¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 2.2.16, P275

²¹³ Ibid, 2.8.58, P421

then he cannot be a good testimony to the Lord. Calvin states: Knowledge is good in itself; but as piety is its only foundation, it becomes empty and useless in wicked men: as love is its true seasoning, where *that* is wanting it is tasteless.²¹⁴ He quotes the saying of Augustine: Love so follows knowledge that no one can love God perfectly who does not first fully know his goodness.²¹⁵ In other words, if we have a true knowledge of God, we will certainly have a passion for loving God, fearing God, and glorifying God, and of course we will also be imitators of Christ to love neighbors as ourselves. Calvin has repeatedly emphasized that the purpose of knowing God is to grow in piety, to love and glorify God. The Bible says: Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love (1 John 4:8). To know God means to have fellowship with God, and to love God. Calvin says: Love will give every man the best counsel. Everything undertaken apart from love and all disputes that go beyond it, we regard as incontrovertibly unjust and impious.²¹⁶

Calvin was so full of God's love that he sacrificed himself to care and shepherd the church of God. He says:

The welfare of this church, it is true, lay so near my heart, that for its sake I would not have hesitated to lay down my life; but my timidity nevertheless suggested to me many reasons for excusing myself from again willingly taking upon my shoulders so heavy a burden. At length, however, a solemn and conscientious regard to my duty, prevailed with me to consent to return to the flock from which I had been torn; but with what grief, tears, great anxiety and distress I did this, the Lord is my best witness.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostles to the Corinthians*, Corinthians 8:1, Translated and edited by Henry Beveridge, , E-Book, P135 <http://www.ccel.org>

²¹⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 2.7.5, P354

²¹⁶ Ibid, 4.20.21 P1509

²¹⁷ John Calvin, *Commentaries on book of Psalms*, The Author's Preface by John Calvin, Translated and edited by The Rev. James Anderson, Geneva, July 22, 1557, E-Book, P20. <http://www.ccel.org>

Calvin confronted the attacks from the Anabaptists, from apostates under secret support of city officials, and from the libertines in Geneva Church. The attacks were so fierce that Calvin could barely stand. He was even expelled by the Geneva church for a period. Although it has brought him so many persecutions and attacks, Calvin, in the Lord, continued to serve the Geneva Church with tears, love and perseverance. Calvin was busy with the management of the church and many civic duties every day, and he also wrote devotionals late into the night, even so, he still took time to visit the sick and prisoners and comfort the sad. He also showed great concern for the persecuted in France and other places, often wrote letters to comfort, encourage and strengthen them, and earnestly interceded for them.

Of course, Calvin often severely rebuked those debauched and sinned Christians in his sermons. In this way he showed his sincere love for them. Many of Calvin's sermons consist of advice and rebuke from love, which is very necessary, for the Bible also teaches that God disciplines the one He loved. People must be exhorted and rebuked with love.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 13: If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. Calvin explains:

I explain it rather as referring to the diversity of languages, which the Corinthians held in much esteem, measuring everything by ambition — not by fruit. “Make yourself master,” says he, “of all the languages, not of men merely, but even of Angels. You have, in that case, no reason to think, that you are of higher estimation in the sight of God than a mere cymbal, if you have not love... The main truth in the passage is this — that as love is the only rule of our actions, and the only means of regulating the right use of the gifts of God, nothing, in the absence of it, is approved of by God, however magnificent it may be in the estimation of men. For where it is wanting, the beauty of all virtues is mere tinsel — is empty sound — is not worth a straw — nay more, is offensive and disgusting.”²¹⁸

²¹⁸ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostles to the Corinthians*, Corinthians 13:1-3, Translated and edited by Henry Beveridge, E-Book, P135. <http://www.ccel.org>

Sincere love for God and others is indispensable for all services including pulpit service. Paul says love is greater than faith, not as being more meritorious, but because it is more fruitful, because it extends farther, because it serves more, because it flourishes forever.²¹⁹ Therefore, to be a good shepherd not only requires eloquence of speech and knowledge, but also need to be filled with love for God and others, and care for the flocks in the church of God. A preacher with the love of Christ who gave himself for sinners, will surely preach the Word with a burning heart, so that he may share with others in blessings of the gospel.

²¹⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 3.18.8, P829