

CHAPTER TWO- FOUNDATION OF PREACHING IN CALVIN'S THEOLOGY

2.1 The Doctrinal Grounds Of Calvin's Preaching

Calvin is an important theologian during the Reformation age and the most influential Bible exegete in history. His Institutes of the Christian Religion (hereinafter, the Institutes) is the foundation of Protestant theology, and also a solid theological foundation for his own expository preaching. John Calvin says in the 1559 edition of his Institutes of Christian Religion:

That my object in this work has been, so to prepare and train candidates for the sacred office, for the study of the sacred volume, that they may both have an easy introduction to it, and be able to prosecute it with unfaltering step; for, if I mistake not, I have given a summary of religion in all its parts, and digested it in an order which will make it easy for any one, who rightly comprehends it, to ascertain both what he ought chiefly to look for in Scripture, and also to what head he ought to refer whatever is contained in it...The system here followed being set forth as in a mirror in all my Commentaries, I think it better to let it speak for itself than to give any verbal explanation of it.²²

Finally, not long before his death John Calvin composed his will and reflected back on the intention of his whole ministry, including the writing of the Institutes, which he himself 'rightly understood to be his most important book.'²³ In that document he stated that his desire was 'to teach his Word in all its purity, whether by sermons or in the writing, and faithfully expound Holy Scripture.'²⁴ All the efforts Calvin devoted in theology is for clearly explaining Scripture.

Most of Calvin's commentaries are records and summaries of his sermons. All of his sermons and exegesis have followed this systematic work (the institutes) as their theological foundation, so we can see that Calvin attached great importance to theological foundation of expository preaching. The Institutes provides a basic framework for understanding Scripture,

²² John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Translated by Henry Beveridge, The Online Library of Liberty, <https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/calvin-the-institutes-of-the-christian-religion> Pdf, P28

²³ Joel Beeke, *The Soul of Life: The Piety of John Calvin*, Published by Reformation Heritage Books, P9.

²⁴ Theodore Beza, *The Life of John Calvin*, P104.

while his commentaries explain the Bible verse by verse in the detail. According to Calvin, doctrine helps theological students and congregation to understand the Bible accurately, it serves as a compass or guide to direct servants of God how to interpret the Scriptures more clearly. Therefore, expository preaching and teaching must be built on pure theology from the Word of God. Otherwise, they will get caught up in various subjective errors or misinterpretation of the Bible. Calvin says: we must always raise our hands to defend the purity of its doctrine, and we must not allow it to be corrupted in any way whatever.²⁵ He has an insight into the importance of biblical theology to preaching. He knows that when sound biblical preaching vanishes from the church, doctrine and piety leave with it: "Piety would soon decay if the living preaching of doctrine should cease."²⁶

It is a shame that nowadays many liberal churches and charismatic churches do not value expository preaching that based on biblical doctrines, many preachers are deeply influenced by postmodernism such as anti-authority and human-oriented thoughts, they abandon the authority of biblical theology, their preaching is no longer theological, but mere technical. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a pastor deeply influenced by reformed theology, says so: the ultimate justification for asserting the primacy of preaching is theological. In other words I argue that the whole message of the Bible asserts this and drives us to this conclusion.²⁷

Therefore, to understand Calvin's biblical theological system is the basis to know the principles of his expository preaching. It is worth of time to briefly introduce the key doctrines of

²⁵ John Calvin, *John Calvin's Sermons on Galatians*, Translated by Kathy Childress , Published by Banner of Truth,1996, P154.

²⁶ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of Harmony*, trans. Charles William Bingham (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1979 reprint), P230

²⁷ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, P26

Calvin's biblical theology before we look into his preaching principles, for if we have errors in basic doctrines of the universal church, then we have deviated from the foundation of biblical truth, and preaching will rot in root and be corrupted from the source. Calvin reminds us: It therefore follows that this pretense of succession is vain unless their descendants conserve safe and uncorrupted the truth of Christ which they have received at their fathers' hands, and abide in it.²⁸

The 1559 edition of Calvin's *Institutes of Christian Religion* is structured into four sections on the basis of the Apostles' Creed. First, the knowledge of God and his creation (Doctrine of God); Then, section two is about Christ and his redemption (Doctrine of Christ). The third section describes the work of the Holy Spirit (Doctrine of Holy Spirit). And finally, the fourth section speaks of the Christian church and its functions and ministries (Doctrine of the Church). Let's take a very brief look at them.

2.1.1 The Doctrine Of God

The first chapter of the *Institutes* is about the knowledge of God the creator and his creatures. Calvin writes: Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.²⁹ He says that the right order is that we must first know God, the purpose of human existence is to know God and worship Him. Similarly, the purpose of our preaching is to help people know God, trust and worship Him. Therefore, first of all, our preaching must be based on a correct knowledge of God. B. B. Warfield comments that Calvin's doctrine of God is preeminent among the doctrines of

²⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 4.2.2, P1043

²⁹ Ibid, 1.1.1, P35

God given expression in the Reformation age in the commanding place it gives to the Divine Fatherhood.³⁰

First, Calvin teaches us that God is the creator, the Only and Most High Lord who sustains and rules over all things. Calvin states:

This I take to mean that not only does he sustain this universe (as he once founded it) by his boundless might, regulate it by his wisdom, preserve it by his goodness, and especially rule mankind by his righteousness and judgment, bear with it in his mercy, watch over it by his protection; but also that no drop will be found either of wisdom and light, or of righteousness or power or rectitude, or of genuine truth, which does not flow from him, and of which he is not the cause.³¹

God created all things, rule over all things and sustains all things. A true knowledge of the relationship between God and men, God and the world as well as God and the history is the key doctrine that will give us a true knowledge of Him, and help us to distinct orthodoxy from heresies.

Besides, Calvin focuses on the essence of the Trinity God. Since the East-West Schism, there were many different denominations emerged in 16th century, some of them were against the doctrine of Trinity. Nowadays there are thousands of different denominations, there are more opposition against this doctrine, such as unitarianism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormon Church, Christadelphia and other heresies, to name but a few. If we are wrong in the doctrine of God, how can we know God and ourselves? Preaching based on wrong doctrine of God will lead hearers as well as the preacher to a false god.

Doctrine of the Trinity distinguishes Christianity from other religions. No other doctrine can distinguish Christians from non-Christians in the same way the doctrine of the Trinity does. We believe that God is three persons in one, this knowledge of God comes from God's words. B.

³⁰ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Calvin's Doctrine of God*,
https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/warfield/warfield_doctrinegod.html

³¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 1.2.1, P41

B. Warfield says that John Calvin's Trinity is more insightful than early fathers' and expressions of theologians in creeds era. Calvin says,

God more clearly disclosed himself in the coming of Christ, thus he also became known more familiarly in three persons... Indeed, there is no doubt that Christ willed by this solemn pronouncement to testify that the perfect light of faith was manifested when he said, "Baptize them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" [Matt. 28:19 p.]. For this means precisely to be baptized into the name of the one God who has shown himself with complete clarity in the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Hence it is quite clear that in God's essence reside three persons in whom one God is known.³²

In other words, if we are not preaching Trinity God, then we are not preaching the true God.

Denying the Trinity makes it impossible to know the true God revealed in the Bible, because the Bible clearly reveals to us the mysterious nature of the Trinity of God. Only through a holistic knowledge of the Trinity God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, can we properly know God according to His own revelation. John Calvin believes that three persons of God are worshiped and glorified together, united mysteriously in one true God. But he also says that each of the three persons are distinct from the others, at the same time united in one. "For in each hypostasis the whole divine nature is understood, with this qualification that to each belongs his own peculiar quality."³³

The doctrine of the Trinity is essential to Christianity. Without confessing the trinity, neither the doctrine of creation nor redemption can stand. Trinity reminds us that Christianity is not centered on human needs or destiny, but on God and His glory. Calvin says: I cannot think on the one without quickly being encircled by the splendor of the three; nor can I discern the three without being straightway carried back to one.³⁴ Only in the three (persons) God reveals

³² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 1.13.16, P140-141

³³ Ibid, 1.13.19, P143

³⁴ Ibid, 1.13.17, P141

himself and is known. If we are not preaching a triune God, we fail to build the right doctrine of God, we are preaching a false god and guiding people into idolatry.

2.1.2 The Doctrine Of Christ

2.1.2.1 Christ's divinity and humanity

The Old Testament prefigures salvation of Christ in prophecies and the New Testament records the fulfillment of the Old. Christ is not only the center of the revelation of the Bible, he is also the foundation of the Church and the core of salvation, he is the core message of the good news preached by every called preacher. As mentioned earlier, Calvin says Christ is worshipped and glorified together with the Father as God. At the same time, he is the Word in flesh, has human and divine double natures in one person. To be our redeemer, he has to be truly God and truly man. In his commentaries of Romans Chapter 9, Calvin explains that Paul at last connects Christ's both natures together, where he says, that the Christ, who had descended from the Jew's according to the flesh, is God blessed forever.³⁵ Christ is complete in both Godhead and manhood. Although he is of one substance with us as regards his manhood, but his is without sin and absolutely holy. Hebrews 4:15 says who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Calvin writes,

Because he chose for himself the virgin's womb as a temple in which to dwell, he who was the Son of God became the Son of man—not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. For we affirm his divinity so joined and united with his humanity that each retains its distinctive nature unimpaired, and yet these two natures constitute one Christ.³⁶

³⁵ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to Romans*, Rom9:5, Translated and edited by The Rev. John Owen, E-Book, P149 <http://www.ccel.org>

³⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 2.14.1, P482

This is a great mystery, and the most suitable analogy, if one seeks to find it in the matter of man, is this: that the two substances which make up man are not confused, but rather the characteristic of each substance is preserved.

2.1.2.2 Christ is the only Savior and Mediator

All human being fall in Adam, the end for totally corrupted sinners is destruction. Calvin says: after the fall of the first man, no knowledge of God apart from the Mediator has had power unto salvation. For Christ not only speaks of his own age, but comprehends all ages when he says: "This is eternal life, to know the Father to be the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent".³⁷ Only Christ the Mediator is the bridge that connects sinners to God. The Jews regard sacrifices and tabernacle-centered worship as the only way to God's presence. But the book of Hebrew in the Bible clearly shows that the sin offering and the lamb prefigures Jesus Christ, and the temple where God meets with people is the shadow of Jesus's body that rise from the dead in 3 days. It was of the greatest importance for us that he who was to be our Mediator be both true God and true man. it was necessary for the Son of God to become for us "Immanuel, that is, God with us" and in such a way that his divinity and our human nature might by mutual connection grow together.³⁸ Because he becomes the only Mediator between God and men, we are able to come to the presence of God through him.

³⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 2.6.1, P341

³⁸ Ibid, 2.12.1, P464-465

2.1.2.3 The threefold office of Christ

In order that faith may find a firm basis for salvation in Christ, and thus rest in him, this principle must be laid down: the office enjoined upon Christ by the Father consists of three parts. For he was given to be prophet, king, and priest.³⁹ Calvin explains: the name of Christ contains his threefold office. Jesus is the prophet of God. Calvin says:

Although God, by providing his people with an unbroken line of prophets, never left them without useful doctrine sufficient for salvation, yet the minds of the pious had always been imbued with the conviction that they were to hope for the full light of understanding only at the coming of the Messiah.⁴⁰

Jesus is the supreme Prophet of God, in full wisdom he made manifest God's will which had been hidden in prophecies of prophets, he also fulfilled God's plan and salvation prophesied through prophets. Jesus is the great High priest. Jesus is superior to the earthly priesthood for he is holy and sinless. He is both the holy priest and the sacrifice that can truly take away sins. As a pure and stainless Mediator he is by his holiness to reconcile us to God. Thus we are without any merits of our own in salvation and good works, only by merits of Christ's atonement we are saved and purified. Jesus Christ is the King. Christ's kingship has been clearly prophesied in the Old testament. Calvin says:

God surely promises here that through the hand of his Son he will be the eternal protector and defender of his church... Here he asserts that, no matter how many strong enemies plot to overthrow the church, they do not have sufficient strength to prevail over God's immutable decree by which he appointed his Son eternal King...when any one of us hears that Christ's kingship is spiritual, aroused by this word let him attain to the hope of a better life...All the more reason, then, is there that we should one and all resolve to obey, and to direct our obedience with the greatest eagerness to the divine will! Now Christ fulfills the combined duties of king and pastor for the godly who submit willingly and obediently; on the other hand, we hear that he carries a "rod of iron to break them and dash them all in pieces like a potter's vessel" [Ps. 2:9 p.]⁴¹

³⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 2.15.1, P494

⁴⁰ Ibid, 2.15.1, P495

⁴¹ Ibid, 2.15.3-4-5, P497-501

Every disciple should also perform these three functions. As prophet, we should strive to search and inquiry the truth of God, and faithfully preach and witness the Word. In our priestly service, we must set our mind to live a holy life and present ourselves to God, and intercede with faith in Christ for all people. To exercise the function of a king, we should shepherd His flock, courageously wage war against sin and the devil in Christ, live a glorious and honorable life as a King, so that the victory and glory of Jesus the King of kings may be manifested in our bodies.

2.1.3 The Doctrine Of Predestination

It is true that predestination is not the central theme of the holy Scriptures, it is a major biblical doctrine, not human speculation. But If we would declare the Gospel in its purity and fullness we must be careful not to withhold from believers what is declared in the Scriptures concerning Predestination.⁴² The doctrine of predestination is the teaching that before the creation of the world, God decided the eternal destiny of all rational creatures.⁴³

God's choice to save certain sinners by grace is called election, and his choice to leave certain sinners to the damnation they deserve is reprobation. Predestination is part of God's decree, his eternal purpose in which he has decided all that will take place, ordaining everything for the manifestation of his glory.⁴⁴

Calvin said: we must guard against depriving believers of anything disclosed about predestination in Scripture, lest we seem either wickedly to defraud them of the blessing of their God or to accuse and scoff at the Holy Spirit for having published what it is in any way profitable to suppress.⁴⁵ Calvin believes that: We must know the doctrine of God's

⁴² Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, E-Book, P117/926

⁴³ Westminster Assembly, *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 3.3

⁴⁴ Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Help! I'm Struggling with the Doctrine of Predestination*, <https://www.crossway.org/articles/help-im-struggling-with-the-doctrine-of-predestination/>

⁴⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 3.21.3, P924

predestination and election, otherwise we cannot be properly convinced that our salvation flows from free mercy of God as its fountain. Therefore, those who do not understand the doctrine of predestination and election detract from the glory and sovereignty of God, and impairs the true humility.

Election and predestination are two sides of the same doctrine, which shows Calvin's full exaltation of God's sovereignty, and setting God's glorify as the highest goal of his theology, ministry. Calvin deals with predestination in Book 3, Chapter 21 of his Institutes, titled: Eternal election, by which God has predestined some to salvation, others to destruction. The doctrine of election and predestination is to answer the question "Why do some people believe the gospel when they hear the gospel, while others do not?" Calvin's definition of predestination is:

No one who wishes to be thought religious dares simply deny predestination, by which God adopts some to hope of life, and sentences others to eternal death... And this foreknowledge is extended throughout the universe to every creature. We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. ⁴⁶

Predestination is entirely God's work and sovereignty; it has nothing to do with man's free will. Before the creation of the world God predetermined everything that will be done. Such doctrine leaves no room for human free will, and it does make all humanists indignant. Calvin states:

For to say that "God purposed in himself" means the same thing as to say that he considered nothing outside himself with which to be concerned in making his decree. Therefore, he adds at once that the whole intent of our election is that we should be to the praise of divine grace [Eph. 1:6]. Surely the grace of God deserves alone to be proclaimed in our election only if it is freely given. Now it will not be freely given if God, in choosing his own, considers what the works of each shall be.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 3.21.5, P926

⁴⁷ Ibid, 3.22.3, P935

Predestination is clearly revealed in both the Old and the New testaments. Therefore, Christians and denominations that cannot accept Calvin's doctrine of predestination are rejecting the revelation of the Bible. They cannot fully attribute sovereignty to God, nor can they attribute all grace and glory to God. If expository preaching is not based on the doctrine of predestination, it will usually fall into the heresy of Pelagianism or Semipelagianism by over valuing the merits of men. Preachers will also rob God of his glory when they falsely believe that people's hearing and faith are come from their preaching ability.

2.1.4 The Doctrine Of Holy Spirit

2.1.4.1 Pneumatology must be in conformity with biblical revelation

Today there are many false teachings about Holy Spirit, which has caused great loss to the Church. In Calvin's time, there were also some people who frantically exalted the Holy Spirit, flaunted his gifts, even despised the Scripture inspired by Holy Spirit. Calvin severely refuted and criticized those teachers who interpreted and taught the doctrine of Holy Spirit casually.

Furthermore, those who, having forsaken Scripture, imagine some way or other of reaching God, ought to be thought have 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. Indeed, they will, I think, agree that the apostles of Christ and other believers of the primitive church were illumined by no other Spirit. Yet no one of them thence learned contempt for God's Word; rather, each was imbued with greater reverence as their writings most splendidly attest.⁴⁸

When refuting those who despise Scripture but blindly exalt the gifts of Holy Spirit, Calvin says:

Those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture

⁴⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 1.9.1, P93

indeed is self-authenticated hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning. And the certainty it deserves with us, it attains by the testimony of the Spirit.⁴⁹ The Holy Spirit will never go against the Scriptures, but always bears witness to the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit is the author of the Scriptures. the Holy is God, and yet it is necessary for him to be thought of as other than the Father. All Scripture is inspired by God, which means the Holy Spirit breathed out by God...He would have us recognize him in his own image, which he has stamped upon the Scriptures. He is the Author of the Scriptures: he cannot vary and differ from himself.⁵⁰ Thus when we preach about Holy Spirit and his work, we must make sure that our preaching is in accordance with the revelation and teaching of the Bible.

2.1.4.2 The main functions of the Holy Spirit

Calvin, as B.B. Warfield famously remarked, was “the theologian of the Holy Spirit.” Faith is not born in us apart from the Spirit. Grace saves and keeps, but it is not a substance received by us but the disposition of God toward us that is made known to us only through the Spirit. The Holy Spirit come to bear witness about Christ (1John5:7-8). no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. Calvin says: For we hold ourselves to be united with Christ by the secret power of his Spirit... For the fact that it comes about through the power of the Holy Spirit that we grow together with Christ, and he becomes our Head and we his members.⁵¹

The Holy Spirit sanctifies people. Where Paul says that the Thessalonians have been chosen by God "in sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth" [II Thess2:13], he is briefly

⁴⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill Ibid, 1.7.5, P80

⁵⁰ Ibid, 1.9.2, P94-95

⁵¹ Ibid, 3.11.5, P731

warning us that faith itself has no other source than the Spirit.⁵² Faith rests upon the knowledge of Christ. And Christ cannot be known apart from the sanctification of his Spirit.⁵³ Calvin states that the work of repentance, regeneration, cleansing, purification and justification are all accomplished by the Holy Spirit, the bond by which Christ effectually binds us to himself.

The Holy Spirit gives gifts for the edification of the church, and unless they contribute to this they lose their grace.⁵⁴ The Spirit apportions to each one different gifts, neither to draw people to admire and follow the gift receiver, nor for his praise, but for the good and edification of the Church founded by Christ. Calvin emphasizes:

Whatever authority and dignity the Spirit in Scripture accords to either priests or prophets, or apostles, or successors of apostles, it is wholly given not to the men personally, but to the ministry to which they have been appointed; or (to speak more briefly) to the Word, whose ministry is entrusted to them.⁵⁵

In other words, when we are called to serve God, we receive all power and authority for obedience to Christ, we say what He wants us to say and do what He wants us to do, that is, to preach His Gospel, shepherd His flocks, and build up the church He has established.

However, nowadays some extreme Charismatic churches misinterpreted the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, calling themselves prophets and apostles, exalting gifts of tongues, signs and healings, fascinating and confusing believers with weird and false experiences, someone even claim that they have received new revelations. Calvin in his time was critical of those who extremely exalted the gift of the Holy Spirit but despised the Bible. J.I Packer says: Calvin had refuted in his Institutes the heresies and mistakes we are facing today. It will bring great harm to

⁵² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill Ibid, 3.1.4, P541

⁵³ Ibid, 3.2.8, P552

⁵⁴ Ibid, 3.2.9, P553

⁵⁵ Ibid, 4.8.2, P1150

the church if the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is misinterpreted and improperly applied, especially when at the same time the preaching of the Word is neglected. Calvin's explanation of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is well worth learning in our age.

2.1.5 The Doctrine Of Scripture

Calvin can be called one of the most biblical theologians since the Reformation age. His theology, exegesis and his entire religion system are based completely on the truths revealed in the Bible. He believes that all *scripture* is given by inspiration of *God*. Since God is eternally immutable, then the Bible has equal value or characteristic, and that the Old and New Testaments are fully compatible with each other, and can clarify each other in complete harmony. Here is a brief introduction to the four characteristics of the Bible presented by Calvin.

First, Unity. Calvin emphasizes the unity of the Bible, so he advocates Scripture interpret Scripture. He says if we carefully study the Bible, we will find the completely heavenly character of its doctrine, savoring of nothing earthly; the beautiful agreement of all the parts with one another⁵⁶. In his Institutes Volume Two he mentions again the unity of the Old and New Testaments, Now, in showing their similarity—or rather, unity—it would be superfluous to examine afresh the details that have already been reviewed.⁵⁷ Revelation in the Old and New Testament is unified and coherent.

Second, authority. Calvin says in the commentary on 2 Timothy 3:16:

First, he commends the Scripture on account of its authority; and secondly, on account of the utility which springs from it. In order to uphold the authority of the Scripture, he

⁵⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 1.8.1, P82

⁵⁷ Ibid, 2.10.2, P429

declares that it is divinely inspired; for, if it be so, it is beyond all controversy that men ought to receive it with reverence.⁵⁸

In the Institutes Calvin also says that the true faith revealed by the Bible should be held by all, in order that true religion may shine upon us, we ought to hold that it must take its beginning from heavenly doctrine and that no one can get even the slightest taste of right and sound doctrine unless he be a pupil of Scripture.⁵⁹ Because the church recognizes Scripture to be the truth of its own God, as a pious duty it unhesitatingly venerates Scripture.⁶⁰ Therefore, the authority of the Bible also implies its inerrancy and infallibility, because since the Bible was inspired by God himself, then of course God is absolutely infallible.

Third, Clarity. Not all things in Scripture are equally plain in themselves or equally clear to all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly stated and explained in one place or another in Scripture.⁶¹ So Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God...all things will tend to this end, that God, the Artificer of the universe, is made manifest to us in Scripture⁶² Therefore, Calvin in his expository preaching always uses the most concise and clear vocabulary and language, he interprets the Bible in a manner which is loyal to the original meaning of the Bible, or, as Calvin put it, let the Bible speak by itself. He

⁵⁸ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 2Timothy3:16, Translated and edited by The Rev. John Owen, e-book, P120 <https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin>

⁵⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 1.6.2, P72

⁶⁰ Ibid, 1.7.2, P76

⁶¹ Westminster Assembly, *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1.7

⁶² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 1.6.1, P70

also states that Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence of its own truth. as white and black things do of their color, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste.

Forth, sufficiency. For Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which, as nothing is omitted that is both necessary and useful to know, so nothing is taught but what is expedient to know.⁶³ The Bible is the complete revelation of God to man, nothing need to be added, nothing can be taken away. Thus if anyone preach so-called new revelations beside the Holy Scriptures, that is a very serious error. Calvin explains that since the Bible is inspired by God, then all the truths God revealed, by which God has sufficiently revealed and manifested himself to us, are inerrant, clear, immutable and supreme in authority. At the same time, the Bible inspired by God is sufficient for us to know all the truths and knowledge about creation, the fall, redemption, judgment, new heavens and earth.

2.1.6 The Doctrine Of The Church

John Calvin has devoted great length in his Institutes to discuss Ecclesiology and the principles of Church government and Ministry, because at the time of the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church had many errors in doctrines which led to extreme corruption, one main error was in ecclesiology. In place of the church the Romanists display certain outward appearances which are often far removed from the church and without which the church can very well stand.⁶⁴ The Romanists exalt Pope's authority, hold to the tradition and teachings of men instead of following the teachings of the Bible in Church government, ordination, and carrying

⁶³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill,, 3.21.3, P924

⁶⁴ Ibid, 4.2.3, P1043

out ministries, as a result the Church was led to disorder in government and corruption of authority.

The church is built on the authority of the Bible and subordinate to it, otherwise, the church will exalt man's authority which easily lead to errors and decay. But a most pernicious error widely prevails that Scripture has only so much weight as is conceded to it by the consent of the church. As if the eternal and inviolable truth of God depended upon the decision of men⁶⁵. It is upside down to place the authority of the church over the Word of God. The Scripture Ephesians 2:20 says: built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone. Calvin says that if the teaching of the prophets and apostles is the foundation, this must have had authority before the church began to exist.⁶⁶ Therefore, the authority of the church is derived from the Word preached by the prophets and apostles, that is, the Bible. The Church and religious leaders have no authority, nor can they assign any authority to the Bible, because it is inspired by God, and the Bible itself has the absolute authority, the Churches and pastors only need to acknowledge, accept and hold on to this authority. The Church, in Calvin's opinion, is built on the Bible, and should continuously reform and return to it.

2.1.6.1 Marks of the true Church

Calvin says there are two marks of the true Church:

The pure ministry of the Word and pure mode of celebrating the sacraments, which are sufficient pledge and guarantee that we may safely embrace as church any society in which both these marks exist. The principle extends to the point that we must not reject it so long as it retains them, even if it otherwise swarms with many faults.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 1.7.1, P75

⁶⁶ Ibid, 1.7.2, P75

⁶⁷ Ibid, 4.1.12, P1025

However, in Calvin's time, the Romanists emphasized the outside rituals of Mass, but ignored the preaching of the Holy Word, thus caused the church to decay. Calvin in his ecclesiology regards the pure ministry of the Word as one mark of the true church. Therefore, preaching in reformed church become the most important part of the worship. Because the Word is being valued and exalted, the church is renewed. When it comes to sacraments, Calvin mainly elaborated on the two sacraments instituted by the Lord: baptism and Eucharist, and pointed out the error of Romanists idea of seven sacraments. He carefully refuted the wrong Eucharist view of the Catholic, but his view is also different from Luther and Zwingli. Calvin's view on Eucharist is most balanced and biblical. The purpose of continuously reforming the church according the Bible is for the church to preach the Word of God, govern the church and administer the sacraments as revealed by God, and clearly know God's will and do it. The preaching of the Word and the performance of the sacraments are considered by Calvin to be two signs of the true Church.

2.1.6.2 The visible and invisible Church

Calvin points out there are two kinds of Church: the visible and the invisible. He thinks that we should not only see the church in this world, but also see the invisible church before God which includes all the saints on earth and all the elect since the creation.

The church includes not only the saints presently living on earth, but all the elect from the beginning of the world. Often, however, the name "church" designates the whole multitude of men spread over the earth who profess to worship one God and Christ. ... therefore, that the former church, invisible to us, is visible to the eyes of God alone, so we are commanded to revere and keep communion with the latter, which is called "church" in respect to men.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 4.1.7, P1021

Because the visible Church is a fellowship of sinners, inevitably there will be a lot of problems in the Church. Jesus also says that there are both wheat and weed growing together in the field, when the harvest comes, the Lord will send his angels to separate the wheat from the weeds. So believers should not leave the visible Church because of its imperfection, on the contrary, we should desire and look for the perfect invisible Church. Therefore, according to Calvin, we must not abandon a church, rather, we should learn how to deny ourselves, serve one another through love, mold our will and characters, unit with saints in the fellowship of Christ in the Church. Because the Church is the body of Christ, there is interrelation and interdependence between members.

2.1.6.3 The offices and government of the Church.

Calvin states that, neither the apostle Peter, nor the Pope, but our Lord Jesus Christ is the true head of the body, the Church. Whenever a sinner is regarded as the absolute authority, and holds great power, it will inevitably lead to great corruption. Since Christ does not live bodily among us, he uses the ministry of men, by making them his representatives and tools, to teach and shepherd his flock. He says:

Those who preside over the government of the church in accordance with Christ's institution are called by Paul as follows: first apostles, then prophets, thirdly evangelists, fourthly pastors, and finally teachers [Eph. 4:11]. Of these only the last two have an ordinary office in the church; the Lord raised up the first three at the beginning of his Kingdom, and now and again revives them as the need of the times demands.⁶⁹

In particular, Calvin stresses that teachers are like the prophets of ancient times, and pastors are like apostles, which means now we have no more apostolic and prophetic offices, but their functions. Calvin elaborated in details on the functions and responsibilities of each office, how to

⁶⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 4.3.4, P1056

elect and appoint elders, deacons, and supervisors according to biblical principles, the methods of selecting and appointing pastors, and how to govern the church entrusted by Christ, how to shepherd the flock, perform sacraments, as well as care for the sick and the poor. Calvin thinks that ecclesiastical office of pastors and teachers are indispensable. Their work includes faithful interpretation of Scripture, admonitions, exhortations and edification of the congregation etc. He also supports the priesthood of every believer, every Christian should be an evangelist to build the Church of God.

2.2 Five Solas And Preaching

The two main appeals of the early reformation are Sola Fide and Sola Scriptura, which Philipp Melanchthon says to be the essence and formal principles of the reformation. Martin Luther derives several exegetical principles from the above appeals. According to Sola Scriptura, Luther believes that he must first emphasize the meaning of the Scriptures in history to be the right answer: only the historical meaning can bring true and sound doctrine. The second principle developed from Sola Scriptura is Scripture interprets Scripture. Luther says that the Scripture is his own interpreter. The other Reformation principle is Sola Fide, from which Luther concludes, first, that true understanding of Scripture can only occur by experiencing the Word and second that the whole bible is about Christ.⁷⁰

Calvin learns from Luther and inherits from him a lot. These two reformers are in complete agreement about Sola Grace, Sole Faith, and Sole Scripture. They also agree that the Bible is its own interpreter and Christ its center. However, despite the broad consensus, Calvin's approach to

⁷⁰ Dan McCartney & Charles Clayton, *Let the reader understand: A guide to interpreting and applying the bible*, P94

interpretation is quite different from Luther who is primarily concerned with the issue of salvation, focusing on the salvation of men through justification by faith in Christ. Calvin acknowledges justification by faith in Christ, but he has a broader view and perspective, focusing on the sovereignty of God's glory. Calvin therefore attaches great importance to the teaching of Sola Grace and Soli Deo Gloria. So the five Solas are emphasized in both Calvin's theological exegesis and his sermons, and closely related to the principles of his preaching.

2.2.1 Scripture Alone (Sola Scriptura) Is The Absolute Authority

The main reason for the decay of the Romanists during the Reformation age is the authority of the Church and the Pope was placed above the authority of the Word. The Church corrupted as biblical exegesis was neglected. Luther and Calvin knew that the truth of the Bible was obscured in the pope's despotism and complicated sacramental rituals. Calvin says,

A sacrament consists of the word and the outward sign. For we ought to understand the word not as one whispered without meaning and without faith, a mere noise...it should, when preached, make us understand what the visible sign means. therefore, was practiced under papal tyranny involved a monstrous profanation of the mysteries. ⁷¹

So we cannot understand the true meaning of the sacraments if we ignore the preaching of the Word, which must be completely faithful to Scripture and based on revelation of the Bible.

Calvin says, it is worth-while to say something about the authority of Scripture, not only to prepare our hearts to reverence it, but to banish all doubt...Hence the Scriptures obtain full authority among believers only when men regard them as having sprung from heaven, "as if there the living words of God were heard. ⁷² The Scriptures is inspired by God's Spirit. the Holy

⁷¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 4.14.4, P1279

⁷² Ibid, 1.7.1, P74

Spirit has taught us nothing but what it behooves us to know...to seek to know nothing concerning it, except what Scripture teaches us: when the Lord closes his holy mouth, let us also stop the way, that we may not go farther.⁷³

Exposition must be faithful to the Bible author, read out the meaning of the Scripture rather than read in preacher's own understanding. Calvin says in the dedication of the Commentaries on the book of Romans, (for an expounder)it is almost his only work to lay open the mind of the writer whom he undertakes to explain, the degree in which he leads away his readers from it, in that degree he goes astray from his purpose, and in a manner wanders from his own boundaries.⁷⁴

The Scriptures is the only foundation of all believers' faith and their evangelism. 2 Timothy 3:16 says: All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. Calvin states,

There is nothing in Scripture which is not useful for your instruction, and for the direction of your life. This is an interesting passage, by which we understand that there is nothing vain and unprofitable contained in the oracles of God; and we are at the same time taught that 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...that whatever is taught us conduces to the advancement of religion.⁷⁵

Calvin shares Luther's opinion on the Bible, that the Bible itself is clear, and that the job of a preacher or teacher is merely to teach the meaning of the text in a simple and clear way. Luther and Calvin both object to baseless allegorical interpretation, but Calvin is more steadfast and consistent, for Calvin not only criticizes this mode of explaining of the Scriptures, he himself

⁷³ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to Romans*, Rom9:14, Translated and edited by The Rev. John Owen, E-Book, P149 <http://www.ccel.org>

⁷⁴ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to Romans*, The Epistle Dedicatory John Calvin to Simon Grynaeus, Translated and edited by The Rev. John Owen, E-Book, P149 <http://www.ccel.org>

⁷⁵ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to Romans*, Translated and edited by The Rev. John Owen, E-Book, P230 <http://www.ccel.org>

rejects this method. Luther, however, although warning against allegorical interpretation, he continues using this kind of interpretation sometimes. In regarding to the Canon of Scripture, Calvin is convinced that the entire Bible is inspired by God and is absolutely inerrant, all books of it has equal authority. Luther, however, has some criticism of the book of Ruth and James in the Canon. Calvin says he thinks everything pertaining to Christianity was prescribed and included in the Scriptures. Therefore, expository preaching must only take the Bible as its foundation and norm.

2.2.2 Grace Alone (Sola Grace) Is The Means Of Salvation

When we preach the Word of Salvation, we should give no space for men's deeds or self-righteousness, because if we add anything to salvation by grace, we are not preaching Christianity salvation, but a false idea of salvation that is similar to paganism. Calvin says: God begets and multiplies His church only by means of His Word...It is by the preaching of the grace of God alone that the church is kept from perishing.⁷⁶ When the Romanists proclaimed the merits of men's good deeds, the Church gradually deviate from relying on God's grace alone, eventually corrupted to the point of selling indulgence.

The salvation Calvin preached is salvation by grace alone, because it is impossible for us to earn salvation by our good deeds. The apostle Paul says: you are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace (Galatians 5:4). Calvin remarks: that nothing is set before faith but mere grace... If grace be everything that we obtain by faith, then every regard for works is laid in the dust...that the promise then only stands firm, when it

⁷⁶ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Vol. 1, trans. By the Rev. James Anderson, Psalm22:30-31, E-Book, P242 <http://www.ccel.org>

resumes on grace.⁷⁷ Paul established this truth, that is there would be no salvation without God's grace, without salvation God's grace would not be manifested.

Moreover, unless we first receive the righteousness that is given to us, we would not have been called by God's grace, nor have we received the hope of salvation. Unless people know for certain that the Lord is full of grace, none of them can be listed among those saved. Paul does by no means ascribe the praise of our salvation to ourselves, but derives it altogether from the fountain of God's free and paternal love towards us. Calvin says,

(We are) being justified freely, etc. A participle is here put for a verb according to the usage of the Greek language. The meaning is, — that since there remains nothing for men, as to themselves, but to perish, being smitten by the just judgment of God, they are to be justified freely through his mercy...he says, that we are justified freely, and further, by his grace; and he thus repeats the word to show that the whole is from God, and nothing from us. It might have been enough to oppose grace to merits; but lest we should imagine a half kind of grace, he affirms more strongly what he means by a repetition, and claims for God's mercy alone the whole glory of our righteousness.⁷⁸

It is merely by God's grace, rather than by merit of sinners' deeds, are calling, repentance, rebirth, conversion and sanctification fulfilled. Of course, this is not to deny the duty and good deeds that man should perform after being saved, but good deeds also depends on God's grace. For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). Calvin explains, this is the true engine for bringing down all haughtiness — this the sword for putting an end to all pride, when we are taught that we are utterly nothing, and can do nothing, except through the grace of God alone. Only when we truly understand the doctrine of grace alone will we truly understand and preach that man is completely depraved and has no merit for good deeds, then are our teaching and preaching correct and biblical, and will we fully render glory to God.

⁷⁷ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to Romans*, Translated and edited by The Rev. John Owen, E-Book, P76 <http://www.ccel.org>

⁷⁸ Ibid, P61-62 <http://www.ccel.org>

2.2.3 Faith Alone (Sola Fide) Is The Way To Receive God's Grace

The doctrine of justification by faith alone can be regarded as an important cause and core of the Reformation debate. It is a powerful refutation presented by Martin Luther, who based on the teaching of the Bible, to protest against the Romanist's doctrine of good works as an element of salvation and its selling of indulgence. The Romanists teach that both faith and works are necessary for salvation. Calvin, like Martin Luther, emphasizes the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Whether Christian religion is true or false is determined by the doctrine of faith. The key factor that lead to Church corruption during the Reformation age is the false teaching of the doctrine of faith, as a consequence, the Church spent too much effort on outside ceremonies and good deeds. Teaching a correct doctrine of faith is crucial for both preachers and believers. We are not justified by law, nor by any of our good works, but by the faith which God has given us, so that sinners can receive His righteousness in Christ. Paul said that for with the heart one believes and is justified (Romans 10:10). We are justified because we believe the grace God given us in Christ. Calvin says: Faith is a supernatural gift from God, so that those who otherwise would not have believed can receive Christ through faith. As regards justification, faith is something merely passive, bringing nothing of ours to the recovering of God's favor but receiving from Christ that which we lack.⁷⁹

Calvin emphasizes that the faith in "justification by faith" should not be interpreted as an act, as if it were faith itself that justifies us; for if so, faith becomes the good work that reconciles us to God for salvation. Instead, faith is the tool or channel that unites Christ with us, who are, essentially, justified by the death of Christ on the cross and his resurrection. Through faith alone we obtain free righteousness by the mercy of God. Calvin states, God alone justifies; then we

⁷⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 3.13.5, P768

transfer this same function to Christ because he was given to us for righteousness. We compare faith to a kind of vessel; for unless we come empty and with the mouth of our soul open to seek Christ's grace, we are not capable of receiving Christ.⁸⁰ Thus justification is a free gift given by God in Christ, even faith itself is God's grace and gift, sinners have no merits to boast for.

Justification cannot be gained by works of the law...and you see that it is received by faith. You see finally that a satisfaction is introduced where he says that we are justified from our sins through Christ. Thus, when the tax collector is said to have gone down from the Temple justified.⁸¹ In Calvin's opinion, by faith we can understand the gospel and come to Christ to receive the righteousness God imputed to us.

Faith is closely related to hearing the message. Paul says that faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ (Romans 10:17). Calvin's sermons and exegesis therefore focus on a clear interpretation of the Bible and a search for knowledge of God through faith. He writes: We must be reminded that there is a permanent relationship between faith and the Word. He could not separate one from the other any more than we could separate the rays from the sun from which they come. For this reason, God exclaims in the Book of Isaiah: Hear me and you soul shall live.⁸²

It is impossible to have true faith if the preaching of the Word is neglected. This is why the Reformed tradition established by Calvin regards preaching as the most important service in the Church. Faith comes from the Word of God.

The same Word is the basis whereby faith is supported and sustained; if it turns away from the Word, it falls. "Therefore, take away the Word and no faith will then remain...God makes use of

⁸⁰John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 3.11.7, P733

⁸¹ Ibid, 3.11.3, P728

⁸² Ibid, 3.2.6, P548

man's help in this or works by his own power alone, he always represents himself through his Word to those whom he wills to draw to himself.⁸³

However, the faith Charismatics talking about does not come from the Word of God, but from an implicit faith. This is an erroneous view of faith, a deviation from the teachings of the Bible. Some extreme Charismatic preachers teach that as long as you have faith, your illness will be healed, your dreams come true, God will grant you riches, success, health, happiness and length of years only if you believe. Nowadays, many churches, both in the west and in the east, have been influenced by this erroneous view of faith. Calvin refutes,

For faith does not certainly promise itself either length of years or honor or riches in this life, since the Lord willed that none of these things be appointed for us. But it is content with this certainty: that, however many things fail us that have to do with the maintenance of this life, God will never fail. Rather, the chief assurance of faith rests in the expectation of the life to come, which has been placed beyond doubt through the Word of God.⁸⁴

God gives us faith to enable us to understand His Word, so that we can receive the saving grace of Jesus Christ. If our faith is based not on God's Word, but on our own desires or imagination, such faith is baseless and incompatible with the teachings of the Bible. Faith must be built on God's Word, so rightly preaching the word of God is the basis for building faith. Therefore, preachers need to pay attention to the learning and teaching of biblical doctrines, because ignoring of it can never establish a correct Christian faith. Charismatics usually ignore the systematic learning and teaching of faith and other important doctrines. Calvin states,

Credibility of doctrine is not established until we are persuaded beyond doubt that God is its Author...The prophets and apostles do not boast either of their keenness or of anything that obtains credit for them as they speak; nor do they dwell upon rational proofs. Rather, they bring forward God's holy name.⁸⁵

⁸³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 3.2.6, P549

⁸⁴ Ibid, 3.2.28, P574

⁸⁵ Ibid, 1.7.4, P78

Here Calvin means that the Word of God is higher than man's rationality and reasoning which are limited and depraved. However, Calvin is not anti-rational, he himself is a quite rational and logical person. Charismatic Churches exalt implicit faith, personal feelings and spiritual gifts, they do not interpret the Bible objectively and rigorously, do not pay much attention to the study and teaching of theology and doctrines, they are relatively extreme anti-intellectualism. Calvin points out: Faith rests not on ignorance, but on knowledge. And this is, indeed, knowledge not only of God but of the divine will...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.⁸⁶ It is not sufficient to believe implicitly without trying to understand or examine the Word of God.

Faith is a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Faith rests upon a certain knowledge of divine will from the Word of God. This is Calvin's definition of faith. Calvin always links faith closely to the knowledge of God, through faith the power of gospel, the divine will and the attributes of God are known. A correct concept of faith is the key to the establishment of a true Christian belief and a bridge for us to receive salvation and know Christ. It is of great importance for preachers to learn, teach and preach Calvin's biblical doctrine of faith, otherwise we are leading people to destruction.

2.2.4 Christ Alone (Sola Christus) Is The Center And Focus Of Preaching

The focus of covenant theology and history of salvation is Jesus Christ. For the Old and New Testaments are about the promises and fulfillment of Christ's salvation. The covenants in

⁸⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 3.2.2, P545

the Old Testament all point to the covenant of Christ in the New, the new testament fulfills the old. Therefore, preaching is to interpret the Bible, so that people can know Christ and imitate him, the only Mediator who reconcile men with God the father. Calvin states that the whole of gospel is summed up in Christ. He believes that all of Scripture pointed to Christ, and, specifically, to Christ's death and resurrection for sinners, whenever we take the sacred books into our hands, the blood of Christ, ought to occur to our minds, as if the whole of its sacred instruction were written therewith.⁸⁷ The Scriptures is the logos of God that revealed in words, while Christ is the logos itself that become flesh. The Reformers perceived that the preaching of the apostles and evangelists was also called “the Word of God” or “the Word of the Lord” ,so that it was necessary to regard the terms gospel, preaching and word of God as synonymous.⁸⁸ Expository preaching is to proclaim the salvation that Jesus Christ has done for us, so that sinners can know that they are justified in Jesus. When they know this truth, they can trust in Christ, and imitate him to live a holy and godly life. Calvin states in the commentaries of the 1st Corinthians: for he overthrows all the wisdom of the world, that the preaching of the Cross may alone be exalted...For all the wisdom of believers is comprehended in the cross of Christ.⁸⁹ Thus Paul said: for I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). The core of the apostle Paul's preaching is Christ, and through proclaiming him, he may be known as the executor in the creation of God the Father, and the only Mediator between God and men in the covenant of grace.

⁸⁷ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last book of Moses arranged in the form of a Harmony*, Translated and edited by The Rev. Charles William Bingham, E-Book, P203 <http://www.ccel.org>

⁸⁸ T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin, A Biography* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), P116

⁸⁹ John Calvin, *Commentaries of the Epistles of Paul the Apostle the Corinthians, 1Corinthians*, Translated and edited by The Rev. John Pringle, E-Book, P17, P33 <http://www.ccel.org>

The church pulpit should preach centering on Christ, because errors in preaching and exegesis and all kinds of heresies are meant to distract us from this center. Calvin reminds us: every kind of superstition, all monstrous errors, in a word, all corruptions in religion, arise from this, that men abide not in Christ alone; for it is not in vain that Paul teaches us, that Christ is given to us by God to be our wisdom...we must acquiesce in Christ alone.⁹⁰ The error of the Romanists is, instead of worship Christ alone, they honored also the Virgin and other saints, and placed too much emphasis on ceremonies and the merits of good works. Calvin proclaims: *Christ is all, and in all*, that is, Christ alone holds, as they say, the prow and the stern — the beginning and the end. Farther, by Christ, he means the spiritual righteousness of Christ, which puts an end to ceremonies.⁹¹ Therefore, only Christ is the focus of expository preaching, because only through Christ can we know God the Father and His will. We cannot be saved unless in Christ.

As Paul said, for other foundation can no man lay...that Christ is the only foundation of the Church...that the Corinthians had been rightly founded upon Christ through Paul's preaching. For it was necessary that they should be brought back to Christ alone. If they do not adhere to Christ alone — that very thing would make them covenant-breakers.⁹²

If we are to interpret the Word of God according to the purpose He gives it to us, we must make sure that we point out to the congregation how the Holy Spirit bears witness to God's Son Jesus and His mission of salvation and redemption throughout the Bible, so that in our preaching, and in our audience's response, to God our Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be all the glory.

⁹⁰ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, Translated and edited by The Rev. John Owen, E-Book, P199 <http://www.ccel.org>

⁹¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*, Translated and edited by The Rev. John Pringle, E-Book, P109 <http://www.ccel.org>

⁹² John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 1:13*, Translated and edited by The Rev. John Pringle, E-Book, P31 <http://www.ccel.org>

2.2.5 To God Alone Be The Glory (Soli Deo Gloria) Is The Ultimate Goal Of Preaching

Calvin's preaching not only focuses on Christ, but also centers on God, aiming at the glory of God alone as purpose of our life. If we say that Luther's theology focuses on the issue of salvation, stressing on the truth of justification by faith, then Calvin's theology focuses on the glory of God, holding that the purpose of all Christians' work, service, and life is to glorify God. As preachers, our purpose in preaching is also to help people know God and trust Him, and to fear and glorify Him throughout their lives. Calvin says: if we desire to enjoy so great a benefit as there is in Christ, it will not henceforth be right in us to entertain any other thought but that of promoting the glory of God; for which purpose Christ has connected us with himself.⁹³ Christ is the lively image of the Father, so we ought first to cast our eyes on him; and for this reason, too, he descends to us, that our faith, beginning with him, may rise to God. The focus on Christ is to bring us into the center of God. Christ is the Word of God in flesh, without Him we cannot know the supreme God. Because it acknowledges him as Lord and Father, the pious mind also deems it meet and right to observe his authority in all things, reverence his majesty, take care to advance his glory, and obey his commandments.⁹⁴

For Calvin, the highest goal of preaching is to glorify God.

(As he lifted high the banner of soli Deo Gloria.) The purpose for which we live in this world, which is this, that we may mutually show forth to one another the glory of God. Having been employed in this exercise to the end of our life.⁹⁵ We hence see how the majesty of God is, as it were, indissolubly connected with the public preaching of his truth.⁹⁶

⁹³ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, Translated and edited by The Rev. John Owen, Romans 7:4, E-Book, P109 <http://www.ccel.org>

⁹⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 1.2.2, P42

⁹⁵ John Calvin, *Commentaries of the book of Psalms*, Translated and edited by The Rev. James Anderson, E-Book, P304, Psalm 30:9 <http://www.ccel.org>

⁹⁶ John Calvin, *Commentaries of the book of Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations*, Translated and edited by The Rev. John Owen, E-Book, P155, Jeremiah 5:13 <http://www.ccel.org>

Calvin expresses this view in many of his commentaries, that the supreme purpose of his theology, his exegesis and his ministry and life is to glorify God in all things. But our doctrine must tower unvanquished above all the glory and above all the might of the world, for it is not of us, but of the living God and his Christ.⁹⁷

Nowadays, Charismatic churches in their preaching often focus on the Holy Spirit, seeking the gift of tongues, signs and healings. Jesus Christ and him crucified is no longer the focus of their service, worship and sermons. They preach not to glorify God, but to exalt their spiritual gifts, their motivation is to meet their own desires and glory. Calvin says:

But the mark of sound doctrine given by our Savior himself is its tendency to promote the glory not of men, but of God. Our Savior having declared this to be test of doctrine, we are in error if we regard as miraculous, works which are used for any other purpose than to magnify the name of God.⁹⁸

We are consecrated and dedicated to God in order that we may thereafter think, speak, meditate, and do, nothing except to his glory. A preacher called by God to speak for Him should be consecrate, should exalt God through preaching the Bible so that people may see the beauty of God. The Holy Spirit was given for the glory of God, just as man was created for the glory of God. Calvin states, thus not only do our hearts breathe the praise of God, but our tongues also and all members of our body resound his praise in every way they can...all our faculties are employed to serve God's glory, which ought to lack nothing, and by our example others are aroused to the same efforts.⁹⁹ Calvin also believes that unless a man sees the glory of God he will not desire to worship Him who is glories and honorable. He says that unless we give up glorifying ourselves completely, we will never be truly glorified in Him.

⁹⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, Prefatory address to King Francis, P17

⁹⁸ Ibid, P9

⁹⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed, J.T. McNeill, 4.15.13, P1314

Under the influence of our post-modern era, people are self-centered and pursue self-satisfaction and realization. Even the pastors and sermons of the Church are also affected. But Soli Deo gloria is calling us to strive to center on God in all aspects of our life, for Soli Deo gloria is the only correct ultimate goal of life. As Calvin says, for the godly have nothing more as their own than the work of promoting the glory of the Lord, with which is connected all their happiness.