



RUTHERFORD HOUSE

READER

ISSUE: 1.1

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Welcome From the Director
 - Introduction to Calvin's
Commentary on the Psalms
- David Searle
 - The Purpose of The Bible
 - Introducing...
-



Welcome to the first issue of the new *Rutherford House Reader*! As you are probably aware in recent months the House has undergone a fair number of changes including selling the Claremont Park property, relocating to 1 Hill St, appointing a new director, building a new Trustee/staff team and, now, launching this new publication.

WELCOME

Rutherford House Reader Issue: 1.1

When the *Rutherford Journal for Church and Ministry* was suspended, we began inserting articles into our newsletter and we found that it became a bit crowded. So, we have created the *Reader*, which is a condensed version of *RJCM*, and have also redesigned/re-launched the newsletter. Both publications will be available in e-format and downloadable from the website; however, if you are on our email list, then you can receive an electronic copy in your inbox. For those of you who would prefer a hard copy, we can provide it in that form, as well.

So what is the *Reader*? Well, though the form takes a different shape the aim remains the same as its predecessor: to strengthen church leaders and future leaders for biblical ministry in Scotland. In each issue we want to inform you on current thoughts and trends that impact your ministry; encourage you in the work to which God has called you; and equip you to be the leader the church needs you to be. Additionally, we will include a variety of resources that are of immediate benefit to your congregation. Contributions will come from many

qualified persons in the UK and around the world who have a heart for church leaders. We hope it will be a blessing to you. Do let us know what you think. In this first issue I am pleased to feature a paper delivered by David Searle at the meeting of the Calvin and his contemporaries Study Group in April, 2009. David was warden at RH from 1993-2003, and his paper concerns his recently published work on Calvin's Commentary on the Psalms.



Jason M Curtis
Director,
Rutherford House

INTRODUCTION TO CALVIN'S COMMENTARY ON THE PSALMS

(Continued from front page)

and ministers bulk at the short scale of Calvin's five-volume commentary on the Psalms, (which forms part of a much larger twenty-two-volume set). Others tend to shy away from Calvin's writings, mistakenly thinking that such are the preserve of academics and theologians, and not of the whole church. Alas, nothing could be further from the truth!

This abridgement has been made with such people in mind. It is not intended to deprive readers of the full benefit of Calvin's unabridged text, but to edify those who otherwise might remain strangers to Calvin's practical and pastoral wisdom. Indeed, in the view of the publisher the editor's noble aim has been fully met, that in this single volume something of the unsurpassed excellence of Calvin's instruction will have been poured and made available to a wider public than would ever make use of the original massive and magisterial work.

Here, then, is a treasure chest containing a choice selection of the wonderful riches to be found in Calvin's commentary on the Psalms.



John Calvin in one of the many fine woodcut portraits of him (c. 1537 - the year in which he published his Commentary on the Psalms in Latin)

Your humble brother, John Calvin, for the Company of France.

—Translated from the French

Moreover although the Psalms are replete with all the precepts which serve to frame our life to every part of business, piety, and righteousness, yet they will principally teach and train us to bear the cross, and the bearing of the cross is a genuine proof of our obedience, since by doing this, we renounce the guidance of our own affections and submit ourselves entirely to God, leaving him to govern us, and to dispose of our life according to his will, so that the afflictions which are the bitterest and most severe to our nature, become sweet to us, because they proceed from him, in our world, not only will we here find general commendations of the goodness of God, which may teach men to repose themselves in him alone, and to seek all their happiness solely in him; and which are intended to teach true believers with their whole hearts confidently to look to him for help in all their necessities; but we will also find that the free remission of sins, which alone reconciles God towards us and procures for us settled peace with him, is so set forth and magnified, as that here there is nothing wanting which relates to the knowledge of eternal salvation.

—JOHN CALVIN
[from his Preface]

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COMMENTARY
ON
THE
PSALMS



JOHN
CALVIN



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COMMENTARY ON
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JOHN CALVIN
ABRIDGED BY DAVID C. SEARLE

John Calvin was a practical and pastoral theologian. Like the Apostle Paul he worked tirelessly 'for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which according with godliness' (1 Tim. 2:15). For his knowledge of the truth was for living and living was for the glory of God. All of Calvin's preaching, teaching and writing was directed to this one great end, to save the church of Jesus Christ so that all may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory (1 Tim. 2:16).

This book is an abridgement of Calvin's commentary on the Psalms, reducing it to about one quarter of its original size. It is the result of a labour of love undertaken by one who has for some years used Calvin on the Psalms in his devotional reading of Scripture, and who has grown to appreciate Calvin's method of exposition. Its faithfulness to the biblical text, and his practical application of the truth to daily living.

But why abridge Calvin? The sad fact is that few teachers and preachers of the gospel today ever use any of Calvin's commentaries. Some busy pastors

(Continued on back page)

Although John Calvin's first commentary (on Romans) was published in 1537 when he was only 28 years of age, it is perhaps surprising that it was a further twenty years before his massive work on Psalms appeared in print—surprising because, as he tells us, he believed there was no better guide than the psalms for leading us to seek God and so to advance in our understanding of heavenly doctrine.¹ He tells us that, prior

to beginning work on his *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, he had expounded them three years earlier 'here in our small school' in Geneva. As the commentary took him two years to prepare and was completed and published in July 1557,² his teaching on this book will have been started in 1552.³ He tells us that many had urged him not to allow these lectures 'to be lost to the world'. His intention had been to write in French for

the benefit of 'my countrymen' but, using the notes which some of his students 'had taken down carefully, faithfully and not without great labour', he began in Latin 'in the way of trial' and, finding that the result 'corresponded to my desire far beyond what I had ventured to anticipate', he continued in Latin. A French translation by Calvin himself followed in 1558, with a revised, more accurate French edition appearing in

1563; the title-page described it as 'So carefully revised, and so faithfully compared with the Latin version, that it may be considered a new translation'.⁴ An English translation was published in 1571.

'An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul'

Calvin tells us that he had been accustomed to call *The Psalms* 'An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul', for 'there is not an emotion (*nullum affectum*) of which anyone can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror'. In the psalms, the Holy Spirit has delineated 'all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions (*motus*)' with which the human mind is often agitated. Here we find the prophets⁵ portrayed as laying open to God all their inmost thoughts and feelings (*sensus*), summoning us also to examine ourselves so that none of our weaknesses and guilty secrets may remain concealed. 'It is certainly a great benefit to us when all hidden places are discovered, and the heart is brought into the light, purged from that most baneful infection, hypocrisy.' Calvin then asserts that this book will train believers in earnest and genuine prayer, two requirements for which are 'a sense of our need' and 'faith in the promises of God'. Often in *the psalms* we witness 'one

standing, as it were, amid the invitations of God on the one hand, and the impediments of the flesh on the other, girding and preparing himself for prayer', thus teaching us in the midst of our doubts and distresses to resist and fight until we are able 'to rise up to God'. He continues that in the psalms we will constantly find believers who are almost overwhelmed by fear of failure, but who gain the prize only by strenuous exertions in prayer. As we meditate on such spiritual conflicts, we will see fallen humanity in its great weakness, but we will also see faith putting forth its power and resolving to fight through to victory.

Having made much of the instruction the psalms offer in the conflict of prayer, Calvin then chooses to mention some other prominent theological features of this Old Testament book. There is 'its infallible rule' in directing us in 'the right manner of offering to God the sacrifice of praise, which he declares to be most precious in his sight, and of the sweetest odour'. Further, although the psalms abound with guidance on holy and righteous living, 'they will principally teach and train us to bear the cross', which is 'a genuine proof of our obedience'; for in bearing the cross we renounce the impulses of our own desires and submit ourselves to God's will and rule. He tells us that we will discover how the bitter and

distressing trials of life become sweet to us when we have learned that all the issues of life are in God's fatherly hands; therefore we must place our whole confidence in the Lord and look to him alone for help in life's exigencies. The psalms also teach us where to find that full forgiveness of our sins which alone reconciles God towards us and procures for us lasting peace with him; for in this book 'there is nothing wanting which relates to eternal salvation'. So much for Calvin's own summary of some of the great themes embedded in *The Psalms*.

Distinctive doctrines

However, as one would expect, there are many other distinctive doctrines of Reformed theology which readers will repeatedly meet as they study this commentary. It is not that these expositions are in any sense a text-book of systematic theology; rather Calvin's theology is invariably practical and pastoral, arising spontaneously from the biblical text. I refer to several of these doctrines, but not in any particular order.

First, there is frequent reference to what Calvin calls 'general grace', that is, God's compassion for all of humanity.⁶ Expounding Psalm 95:7, he speaks of 'common providence' and of the 'common nourishment, support and government which [God] extends uncon-

ditionally to the whole human family' (1845).⁷ Several times (e.g. see Pss 16:3; 30:4; 31:19 etc.) he cites Matthew 5:45, '[God] makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good'; although unbelievers do not appreciate their Creator's goodness to them, it is not withdrawn from them. Psalm 145:9, *The Lord is good to all etc.*: 'Men's depravity does not prevent him showering his benefits upon them, even though they are not aware of it (Matt. 5:45). However, only believers enjoy a reconciled God (Ps. 34:5, 8); nevertheless, his *mercy is over even a fallen world*' (1845). Second, there is what is sometimes termed 'Calvin's accommodating God'. He held the view that from the heights and unfathomable depths of the Almighty's wisdom he condescends to speak to humankind as a mother uses baby-talk to the child at her breast, 'accommodating' himself to our limited capacity.⁸ I offer three examples. On Psalm 49:4 he writes, 'The point is that the Holy Spirit accommodates profound mysteries to our limited capacity so that all Scripture should be profitable for instruction and therefore none can plead ignorance.' On Psalm 78:1-4, 'If the Word is presented simply for the simple, some despise it as being too simple; if its mysteries are presented in their lofty majesty, others claim it is too difficult. Therefore the Spirit

tempers his style so that the truth is not hidden from those of limited ability, provided they are submissive and teachable'. Or again, on Psalm 148:3 he writes, 'We know that Moses and the prophets ordinarily speak in a popular style, suited to the lowest understanding' (all quotes 1845). Third, there is the divine inspiration of Scripture. There are over 220 references to the Holy Spirit in the 1845 translation of the commentary on *The Psalms*; the majority of these refer either directly or indirectly to the psalms being divinely inspired. For example, commenting on Psalm 8:1, he writes, 'The Holy Spirit, who directed David's tongue, doubtless intended by his instrumentality to awaken men from their torpor and indifference...' (1845). Or again, on Psalm 10:17, 'By these words, also, the Holy Spirit assures us, that what of old God granted to the fathers in answer to their prayers, we at the present day will obtain' (1845). The Holy Spirit is also 'accommodating': on Psalm 13:3, 'it has been already stated in a preceding psalm, and we will have occasion afterwards frequently to repeat the statement, that the Holy Spirit purposely accommodates to our understanding the models of prayer recorded in Scripture' (1845). Finally, a quotation from his comment on Psalm 18:7: 'Some think that these miracles were actually

wrought, and performed exactly as they are here related; but it is not easy to believe this, since the Holy Spirit, in the narrative given of David's life, makes no mention whatever of such wonderful displays of divine power in his behalf' (1845). Acknowledging that the description of the storm is poetic in *genre*, he goes on to say that the metaphorical language of this and the following verses is to be understood as being highly hyperbolic. Nonetheless, those who read the Reformer's expositions will be left in no doubt regarding his firm conviction that all Scripture is given through the inspiration of the Spirit of God.⁹ Fourth, we find Calvin asserting that God's offer of grace is unconditionally made to the whole of humankind. Contrasting God's relationship with Israel 'under the law' with the reconciliation effected through Christ, on Psalm 81:12f. Calvin states: 'God, while he passed by all the rest of the world, was graciously pleased to bring the posterity of Abraham, by peculiar and exclusive privilege, into a special relation to himself. At the present day, I admit this distinction has been abolished and the message of the gospel, by which God reconciles the world to himself, is common to all men... God, in coming down to us by his word, and addressing his invitations to all men without exception, disappoints nobody. All who sincerely

come to him are received, and find from actual experience that they were not called in vain. At the same time, we are to trace to the fountain of the secret electing purpose of God this difference, that the word enters into the heart of some, while others only hear the sound of it' (1845). Psalm 86:5 reads, *For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving... to all who call upon you*, and Calvin comments: 'Although David magnifies the plenteousness of God's mercy, yet he immediately after represents this plenteousness as restricted to the faithful who call upon him, to teach us that those who, making no account of God, obstinately chafe upon the bit, deservedly perish in their calamities. At the same time, he uses the term all, that every man, without exception, from the greatest to the least, may be encouraged confidently to betake himself to the goodness and mercy of God' (1845). Fifth, what became popularly known through Max Weber's research¹⁰ as 'the Protestant work ethic' is clearly unfolded in this commentary: believers whom God prospers materially must live frugally and without undue ostentation, for a bountiful supply of this world's goods is given so that the wealthy can help those in need. Commenting on David's words, *You prepare a table before me* (Ps. 23:5), Calvin writes: 'There are lessons here for the wealthy, some of

whom have no sense or taste of God's goodness towards them; David's example admonishes them. Further, those who are more abundantly blessed with riches than others are bound to observe moderation no less than if they possessed only the minimum of life's necessities. By nature we are all inclined to excess; God's bounty to some is never to nourish in them this disease. All of us should follow Paul's rule when he says, "I know how to be brought low, and how to abound..." (Phil. 4:12). While David knew how to distinguish between the table God provided for him and a swine's trough, and while it is likewise lawful for rich men to enjoy what they possess, they should beware lest they be overcome by a surfeit of pleasures' (2009). On Psalm 104:14f. Calvin writes: 'Paul properly exhorts us to "make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Rom. 13:14). While considering God's bounty, there is another principle we must observe—moderation and voluntary restraint in the enjoyment of abundance. The rule with respect to food is to partake of it that it may sustain us, not oppress us. Greed and excess must be avoided. While God has given us wine that we may be merry, our mirth must be tempered with sobriety; we must never forget ourselves or dull our senses, otherwise how could we rejoice before the Lord

as we ought (Lev. 23:40)? We need sobriety so that when God is pleased to send sadness into our lives, we may be able to endure it. As for the rich, they are blessed with abundance that they may relieve the needs of their poorer brothers and sisters. Paul has given another rule: "I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need" (Phil. 4:12). We must learn contentment with what we have, and submissively wean ourselves from those luxuries that God may withhold from us. We must not aimlessly wallow in extravagances. God's fatherly kindness should be a mistress to teach us moderation' (2009). Sixth is the Reformer's conviction that because God is merciful towards all those whom he has created, believers also should imitate their heavenly Father and treat with kindness and generosity every man, woman and child we may encounter. On Psalm 68:4-6 he writes, 'David speaks of God's transcendent goodness and condescension towards widows and orphans, who undoubtedly represent those whom the world despises, for generally we pay attention to those from whom we expect some return. Although God does not dwell *in his holy habitation* to indulge his own ease but from his throne judges the world, nevertheless the poor are cheered that he draws near to them, inviting

them to come to him, providing for them and setting them free' (2009).

Seventh, Calvin sternly warns against believers using the imprecatory psalms as a warrant for taking personal, unilateral action against any kind of wickedness or revenge in response to persecution. His message is clear. On Psalm 69:22ff. he writes: 'The next seven verses are imprecatory. Unlike those who are motivated by their passions to cry for revenge when they feel wronged, David prays under the guidance of the Spirit of wisdom, moderation and uprightness, for justice to be done before God's judgment seat. He is neither praying in self-vindication nor promoting his own personal interests. In our prayers, great discernment is needed to distinguish between those who have irrevocably turned their backs on God and those for whom there is yet hope of repentance. The guiding principle for our prayers (as well as avoiding blind impetuosity, one's own private interests and personal passion) is to seek only the glory of God. In short, we must clothe ourselves with the Spirit of Christ lest he rebuke us as he did his disciples (Luke 9:55 [see ESV margin]) (2009).' Those who make use of this commentary will encounter many other biblical truths, unfolded simply and yet without any weakening of their theological profundity: the relationship

of law to gospel; obedience as the condition of divine blessing, although the covenants, old and new, are always unconditional and arise from unmerited, gratuitous grace; the light of reason remaining in fallen humanity; believers living in peace with unbelievers, so far as they are able; the fallacy of free-will; children of believers; ecclesiology and much else besides.

Calvin's hermeneutics

Much has already been written on this subject.¹¹ I merely refer to a few points which readers using this commentary should be aware of. First, in his commentary, he constantly refers to the 'scopus' (target, goal, purpose) of the Psalmist. In other words, he is viewing each psalm as a whole and recognizing that the author is not simply setting down a random collection of thoughts but has a definite purpose and theme to unfold. A couple of examples will illustrate his use of the Latin word 'scopus' (occurring 112 times and usually translated in the 1845 edition as 'scope'). Commenting on the final sentence of Psalm 2, *Blessed are all who take refuge in him*, he writes: 'The pronoun him may be referred as well to God as to Christ, but, in my judgment, it agrees better with the whole scope of the psalm to understand it of Christ, whom the Psalmist before enjoined kings and judges of the earth

to kiss' (1845). On Psalm 9:20, *Put them in fear, O Lord*, he writes: 'The Septuagint translates [the Hebrew] "morah" as a lawgiver, deriving it from "yarah" which sometimes signifies "to teach". But the scope of the passage requires that we should understand it of fear or dread; and this is the opinion of all sound expositors. Now, it is to be considered of what kind of fear David speaks...' (1845).

At times the reader may question whether Calvin's interpretation of one or two verses is on the right track until, reading on, it becomes clear that he has in his mind the content and 'target' or 'goal' of the entire psalm; thus the reader finds that, in their context, the verses have been appropriately and accurately expounded. In my work of abridging the 1845 translation, I often asked myself whether Calvin had correctly understood a section or verse; as I proceeded, I generally found myself gladly submitting to his skill and wisdom as an expositor. In his 'Introductory Notice' to the 1845 translation James Anderson refers to Calvin's agreement with Melancthon's principle 'that Scripture cannot be understood theologically, unless it be first understood grammatically'.¹² Rejecting the highly misleading interpretations of most of his predecessors who constantly looked for hidden and mystical meanings in Scripture, 'Calvin set himself to the investigation

of the grammatical and literal sense [of Scripture] by a careful examination of the Hebrew text, and by a diligent attention to the drift and intention of the writer's discourse'.¹³ It is this 'diligent attention to the... intention of the writer' which is one of the most important aspects of the Reformer's hermeneutic. Anderson (rightly, in my view) uses the word 'intention' to translate various Latin phrases which Calvin uses: 'prophetiae propositum', the prophet's intention; 'non voluit', it was not his intention'; 'prophetae consilium', the intention of the prophet; 'teneamus eius mentem', to understand his intention, etc.¹⁴ Together with his insistence on holding to the whole 'scopus' (purpose, goal) of the passage, this practice of understanding the grammatical meaning of a text and then seeking to penetrate through it to the author's intention ('propositum', 'consilium', 'eius mens') unquestionably marks out Calvin as quite revolutionary in both the accuracy and relevance of his exposition of Scripture. The importance of Calvin's method of first understanding and following through the intention behind the words of Scripture cannot be overemphasized. Readers who carefully follow Calvin's approach here and ask themselves if his exposition is true to the intention of the text (or at least to what is most likely to have been the author's inten-

tion), will find their understanding of Scripture—and their ability to use it faithfully in preaching—greatly deepened. Although his expositions are characterized by practical and pastoral applications and although frequently he is able to 'extrapolate' from the plain text to a fuller meaning (often by arguing that a phrase should be understood as 'synecdoche', the figure of speech in which a part is used for the whole¹⁵), his primary concern is always to establish the author's original intention. Only when he has ascertained that does he feel able to extract from it—with-out doing any violence to the text—wholly legitimate lessons and doctrines for the edification of both his readers and the church. Perhaps it was Calvin's conviction that it was the Holy Spirit who had inspired the text that enabled him to write with such authority. Be that as it may, his expositions unquestionably led the 16th century church into a new depth of understanding of the self-revelation of God in Christ Jesus. I must add a further point regarding the practical application Calvin draws from each psalm. Many of the psalms may be termed 'persecution prayers' (e.g. Psalms 52 to 59). As one reads the great Reformer's expositions, one becomes acutely aware of how relevant and poignant they must have been for those in his day who were subjected to ongoing and

severe persecution in France and for those who had fled to Geneva in fear for their lives and now sat under Calvin's ministry. It has often been remarked that his preaching and commentaries are surprisingly 'modern' considering that his material was delivered and published 450 years ago. Without any doubt, that is because he goes straight to the 'scopus' of the Word of God and applies it to the human condition. In doing so, he reads his own heart, implicitly alluding to his own fears, trials and conflicts.¹⁶ So, because human sinfulness, weakness and temptations have not changed one iota since the 16th century, the practical applications given throughout this book are as relevant as they have ever been since our first parents were alienated from their Creator. Finally, it remains to remark that Calvin has broken completely free of the pernicious practice of so many of the medieval schoolmen and clergy who allegorized biblical texts.¹⁷ Not only does he recognize and respect the particular literary *genre* he is expounding, interpreting each with an appropriate hermeneutic—treating *law* as 'law', *narrative* as 'narrative', *poetry* as 'poetry', *didactic* as 'didactic' etc, he also goes—as we have seen—unerringly to the purpose ('scopus') of the text, first explaining its primary meaning, then drawing out legitimate implications, both negative and

positive, but always eschewing human inventions, imaginations and absurd interpretations. His method, along with his warm pastoral heart (albeit, often with a correcting rod in his hand, faithfully administered!) makes his expositions relevant, poignant and challenging.¹⁸ In the task of abridging the work of a master theologian and pastor, I have sought as much

as possible to retain Calvin's simplicity of language, while expressing as accurately as I have been able the essence of his expositions. To any adventurous persons who may take up the full text, whether Anderson's translation or the original Latin, and seek to compare and evaluate my (too often) inadequate précis, I freely confess all shortcomings to be

entirely my fault—'mea culpa'. Nevertheless, as I have worked at this task, my constant prayer has been that something of the unsurpassed excellence of Calvin's instruction will have been preserved and made available to a wider public than would ever make use of the original massive and magisterial work.



David C Searle
Arbroath
2009

Endnotes

- ¹ Calvin's Introduction to his *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson (Edinburgh, 1845; republished Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1949), p. xxvii. Unless otherwise indicated, the following quotations are taken from the Introduction, pp. xxv-xxix.
- ² He had begun writing in June 1555 and completed the work in March 1557 (*Prolegomena*, CO 31.10); cf. W. de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin* (Eng. trans., Baker, Grand Rapids, 1993) p. 105.
- ³ CO 31.10.
- ⁴ Introduction to Anderson's 1845 translation, p. xv.
- ⁵ Latin 'prophetae'; throughout his commentary, Calvin frequently refers to the Psalmist as 'the prophet' who is inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- ⁶ *Institutes*, 2.2.17, n. 63, 64.
- ⁷ Quotations from the 1845 translation are indicated (1845) and from my abridged version (2009).
- ⁸ See *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.13.1.
- ⁹ Those interested to read further on this subject should consult Calvin's sermons on 2 Timothy 3:15-16, *John Calvin's Sermons on Timothy and Titus*, 23rd and 24th Sermons (Facsimile of 1579 translation, Banner of Truth, Edinburgh), pp. 921-945; also Ronald S Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of Word and Sacrament* (Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, Fifth impression, 1995).
- ¹⁰ The German Sociologist, Maximilian Carl Emil Weber's work on this subject is, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905).
- ¹¹ See also the assessment of Weber's thesis by Sir Fred Catherwood, *The Christian in industrial society*, Appendix: 'The Weber-Tawney thesis' (IVP, Leicester, 1980), pp. 172-184. See, for example, T.F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin* (Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1988); T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching* (T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1992).
- ¹² *Calvin's Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Introductory Notice, vol.1, p. vii.
- ¹³ *Idem*, p. viii.
- ¹⁴ In the order given, Pss 104:30; 36:10; 49:10; 119:105.
- ¹⁵ See the Foreword above for comment on Calvin's frequent use of 'synecdoche'.
- ¹⁶ In his Introduction to the *Commentary* Calvin wrote: 'Now if my readers derive any fruit and advantage from the labour which I have bestowed in writing these commentaries, I would have them to understand that the small measure of experience which I have had by the conflicts with which the Lord has exercised me, has in no ordinary degree assisted me, not only in applying to present use whatever instruction could be gathered from these divine compositions, but also in more easily comprehending the design of each of the writers,' p. xxxix.
- ¹⁷ For example, when Thomas à Becket was assassinated in 1170 in Canterbury Cathedral by followers of Henry II, the Archbishop of York preached a sermon the following Sunday on the lamentable state of the church, taking as his text the cry of the Shunammite's son when he was taken ill and before he died, 'My head! My head!' (2 Kings 4:18f.). One of many examples of Calvin dismissing a fanciful interpretation is found in his comment on Psalm 49:4: 'I see little force in the idea suggested by several interpreters of the Psalmist having employed his lyre that he might render a subject in itself harsh and disagreeable more engaging by the charms of music. He would merely follow the usual practice of accompanying the psalm with the lyre.'
- ¹⁸ Professor Paul Helm helpfully pointed out to me out regarding 16th centuries expositions: 'It was the fashion to "interrupt" Bible exposition to insert learned *scholia* on points of doctrine. Vermigli, for example, has one on the resurrection of the body going to 30,000 words before he resumes the exposition.'

THE PURPOSE OF THE BIBLE

".....you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus. All Scripture is God breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17)

People use the Bible in different ways: Some as a 'lucky dip' – to randomly put a hand in the hope of pulling out something helpful; some as a set of 'Tarot cards' – to gain an insight into the future; some as a cross-word – to entertain an idle mind; some as a rabbits foot – to have at hand to bring luck; and some as a spring board – to give extra 'lift' to a point of view!

However, whatever use we might put it to, if it is 'God-breathed', the most important question is – 'How does God want us to use it?'

In the verse above, the Apostle Paul writes to Timothy and underlines God's intended use for 'Holy Scripture'. He says it has two functions - to
1] Save from death - 'make wise for salvation'

Man was created in God's image for fellowship with him. However, sin brought death and separation from God (**Genesis 2 & 3**). We therefore, need to be 'saved' from this eternal state of death and receive eternal life. God uses the Bible to teach us the way of salvation,

The Bible is our introduction to God. It's all about him and its primary function is as his 'autobiography'. It is the account of the way in which he has revealed himself to and saved humankind. This salvation is given 'by grace through faith' (**Ephesians 2:8,9**) and this 'faith comes from hearing the message' of the Bible (**Romans 10:17**).

It is as we hear and believe this message that God meets with us in person and fellowship is restored. Jesus said, 'this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent.' (**John 17:3**)

2] train for life - 'training in righteousness'
It is God's intention not only to save us, but that we should be like him, too. He wants to

change us and the Bible is his means of doing this.

Thus, it not only has the power to save us from the consequences of sin, it gives us ability to overcome it too. By the work of the Spirit, as the Word is read and believed, it enables a person to stand firm against temptation. 'The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit' (**Ephesians 6:17**).

This 'weapon' is used by the Spirit when we read the Bible in faith. As we do, God speaks to us through his Word – 'rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness'. The effect of faithful obedience is, bit by bit, to transform the reader into the likeness of Jesus' (**2 Corinthians 3:17,18**).

Therefore....

REMEMBER –The purpose of the Bible is to save from death and train for life.

ACT – Read the whole Bible faithfully, expecting to learn about God and be changed by Him.

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INTRODUCING SAM TORRENS

Barclay Viewforth Church



On Sunday 16 August I ceased to be the minister of Edinburgh: Barclay and became minister of the newly united Edinburgh: Barclay Viewforth Church of Scotland. After the Service of Union in which I was inducted again my eldest daughter asked if that makes me a "Rev, Rev!!"? No, but it does bring opportunities and challenges. The great challenge has been to bring together harmoniously and pastorally two worshipping communities, recognising the pain and grief felt by Viewforth who experienced the closure of their building. This has been made easier by three practical steps. Firstly, as soon as the Union was agreed Barclay closed its morning services and went to worship with the people

of Viewforth seeking to show friendship and to be with them in humility and love, withdrawing in time for the congregation to grieve together as they vacated their building. Secondly, the united charge employed and deployed all the various members of staff including the highly regarded Viewforth Locum, Rev Shirley Fraser, in agreeable and profitable ways. Many Viewforth members cared for by Shirley over the vacancy have followed her into the Union. Thirdly, Viewforth Church were supportively aware that the united leadership have a church

planting vision and that the right to call an associate minister towards this end is enshrined in the Basis of Union. The Union, therefore, means there are new opportunities and possibilities with funds available to progress the work already envisaged and started by the separate congregations. Beyond these practical things, please pray that our God will breathe more of the reviving Spirit into our fellowship, ministries and mission so that our love for the Lord Jesus will saturate everything we seek to do.



‘[What] has occurred is that the use of story is what people in the congregation respond to. Its truth is shown in relationships. By story, I am not just talking about illustrations. I am talking about, as much as possible, the whole sermon being grounded in where people live. It is the sense that you are talking about people, people interacting with people, and people interacting with God.’



Haddon Robinson
Professor of Preaching,
Gordon-Conwell
Seminary

One of my seminary professors used to say, ‘Men, you preach to people, not to pews’. We heard that line most often when one or several of us had just delivered a less than inspiring word that, had the church been empty, would have had virtually the same impact. But Robinson pleads for something better: for preachers to communicate in such a way that people are transformed by the fact that God has entered the story of their lives in the person of Jesus Christ—that God’s story has entered my story, and it’s the only thing that matters. That’s no small task! How shall we do this? If we indeed want to preach to people and not to pews, then we must learn where they are, understand how God’s word addresses them, then communicate that word in a way that they remember what we say and are changed by it. As I said, no small task, but a critical one for your church and for the church in Scotland. May God give us grace!



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