John Calvin's Perspective of Scriptural Exposition, Pneumatology, and Pentecostalism Today

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ABSTRACT

The great preacher of the reformation is John Calvin. Calvin influenced the world of biblical preaching through and with the Holy Spirit's influence during the reformation. Calvin is crucial for both evangelicals and Pentecostals today. The principles of his interpretation and exposition of the scripture need to be taken severe in our quest for the exposition of the scripture. There is no preacher and possibly none now who values the power and authority of doing exposition with the Holy Spirit's power like Calvin. Calvin was not just a scholar like Martin Luther the reformer, but he was a great and inevitable faithful expositor of God's word. Calvin did not underrate the Holy Spirit's role in reading the Bible because it is an illuminating spirit that shines more light for us to apprehend the revelation of God's word, which we have received. Therefore, this paper will analyze the expository perspective and the place of the Holy Spirit and its influence in Pentecostalism and the place of the Holy Spirit in apprehending and elucidating the Bible today.

INTRODUCTION

Calvin was a Guru of Literature of a different kind as an interpreter of the exegete. Just a few years before, Calvin would become internationally well-known for his

accomplishments in the exposition of biblical texts. He was already an interpreter of literature, though not yet of Scripture, because at that time, he was a great interpreter of ancient pieces of literature without possibly thinking of becoming the scriptural interpreter someday.[397]Nevertheless, it is relatively well-known that Calvin's abilities as a scholar of the art of interpretation enjoyed high recognition during the interpretation of the works of literature at his disposal before joining the biblical world of interpreters. He was highly respected and reserved as an interpreter. This thus appropriate to give concentration to Calvin as an exegete, i.e. as an interpreter of Scripture, particularly within the context of the celebration in 2009 of Calvin's birthday. Not only is the Calvin Year cause for much reflection on Calvin, his work and his influence, but these days are also marked by heated discussions on hermeneutics, Scripture and the authority of Scripture.

However, this paper focuses on Calvin's methodology that influenced interpreters today, especially the Pentecostal. There is a relationship between Pentecostalism and Calvinism when it comes to biblical interpretation. In recent decades the study of John Calvin has undergone numerous changes. After thorough training in interpreting classical literature as a philologist, he made his debut before turning, with a highly respected commentary on Seneca's "*De Clementia*" that shifted to the interpretation of Scripture with the Scripture. Therefore, the researcher will look at Calvin's interpretation and exposition of the Scripture with Scripture and the Holy Spirit's

[397] K.E Greene-McCreight, Ad litteram: how Augustine, Calvin and Barth read the "plain sense" of Genesis 1-3. New York: Peter Lang, 1999.Thompson, J.L. Calvin's exegetical legacy: his reception and transmission of text and tradition. (In Foxgrover, D., ed. The legacy of John Calvin. Papers presented at the 12th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society. Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 2000), 31-56 Mckim, D.K., ed. 2006. Calvin and the Bible. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

role that had influenced the interpretative power of Pentecostalism today.

JOHN CALVIN'S VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN READING THE BIBLE

John Calvin spent his time influencing the Holy Spirit's place on the pulpit for the engagement of God's word. Calvin' s central point was that the Spirit speaks through the Scriptures. Not that the Spirit was restricted to preaching the word and the sacraments, but that he could not be dissociated from either of them. The Spirit has been given to the church, not to bring new revelations, but to instruct us in the words of Christ and the prophets. According to Calvin, the Spirit seals our minds when we hear and receive the word of truth with faith, the gospel of salvation (Eph. 1: 13). He limits himself to guiding Christians and illuminating their understanding of what he has heard and received from the Father and the Son, and not from himself (John 16: 13).

Holy Spirit in interpreting the Bible, a subject that received attention in several of Calvin's sermons, biblical commentaries, letters, theological treatises and other works.[398]However, the subjective element suggested in the notion of the Holy Spirit's interpretation of the Bible for the reader seems to act as a deterrent to the idea that the guidance of the Spirit can serve as a hermeneutical principle, a religious premise that most theological traditions ascribe to. In his discussion of Calvin's willingness to value the guidance of the Spirit in interpreting the Bible, Floor concludes that it has become necessary to re-orient exegesis towards the person and to work of the Spirit.[399] He argues that the current

[398] S.J. Pand, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A passion for the kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 69-85.

[399] L. Floor, 'The hermeneutics of Calvin', in B.J. Van der Walt (ed.), *Calvinus Reformator: His contribution to theology, church and society*, Wetenskaplike bydraes van die P.U. vir CHO F3:17 (1982):81-191.

preoccupation with language and its significance in the hermeneutical process and methods related to understanding the word necessitates a change of direction in following Calvin.

Calvin avoided any interpretation with only intellectual preparation without the profound influence of God's Spirit. Mickelsen observed that many exegetes interpret the Bible in a mechanical and rationalistic way at the hand of several approaches without leaving any room for the intervention of the Spirit as the one who inspired the biblical authors and can inspire contemporary readers to understand aspects of the author's intention that might be hidden for these approaches.[400] Calvin argued of balancing the influence of the Spirit and the fitness of the interpreter as the Spirit was capable of using the writers to put down God's so also the interpreters. We ought to be opened enough for the total submission and impact of the Spirit in the life of the expositor.

For Calvin, it was essential to emphasize that theology should limit itself to what the Bible teaches; Scripture remains the master and the exegete its servant. For Calvin, the preaching of the word alone is 'unfruitful'.[401] This is because our state as blind rebellious people intent on distorting the truth means that, in terms of speech-act theory, we cannot even understand the illocutionary act properly, let alone the perlocutionary effect desired by God. However, just as human discourse relies on rhetoric for the perlocutionary effect, God, through Scripture, uses his Spirit.[402]

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[400] A.B. Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 15

[401] John Calvin, "Short Treaty on the Holy Supper of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," in The Library of Christian Classics, Vol. xxii, Calvin: Theological Treatises, Trans., Rev. J. K. S. Reid (London: SCM, 1954), 74

[402] Kevin Vanhoozer, "The Bible: Its Relevance For Today," in God, Family and Sexuality, ed. David W. Torrance (Carberry: Handsel Press, 1997). 155-6.

Calvin never undermines the preacher with the power of the Spirit because through that, the sermon has access to the heart of the worst sinner and anyone in the church. So Vanhoozer writes, "This is, I believe, how Calvin and the Reformers understood the Spirit's illumination; the Spirit convicts us that the Bible contains God's illocutions and enables us to respond to them as we ought. The Spirit is the effective presence of the word, or, on my terms, the power of Scripture's efficacious perlocution." [403] Calvin's theology is an assumption that the Spirit is continually working in making the Bible effective today. The Holy Spirit does not add anything new, says Calvin: “the office of the Spirit promised to us is not to form new and unheard-of revelations…but to seal our minds the very doctrine which the gospel recommends.”[404]

Against the disdain for the Scriptures on the part of many 'Enthusiasts', Calvin cited the example of the apostle Paul. The latter, although caught up to the third heaven where he received extraordinary revelations (2 Cor. 12:2), still never held disdain for the Scriptures, as if they were an inferior form of revelation, but recognized them as being sufficient and adequate, by the grace of the Spirit, for illuminating the church in all things concerning the kingdom of God (2 Tim. 3: 15-17; cf 1 Tim. 4:13).[405] For Calvin, Paul's statement that we are ministers of a new covenant, of the Spirit who quickens (2 Cor. 3:6), is not a guarantee that the quickening power of the Spirit will always accompany our preaching. Pastors do not hold power to dispense the Spirit's grace to anyone they wish or at any time they want to. The Spirit turns the preached word into an effective Word through a sovereign act.[406]

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[403] Vanhoozer, "The Bible," 228.

[404] T. F. Torrence, "The Knowledge of God and Speech about Him According to John Calvin," in Theology in Reconstruction (London: SCM, 1965), 77.

[405] Wallace, Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament, 130.

[406] Calvin's Commentaries: The Second Epistle ... to the Corinthians, tr. T.A. Smail (Edinburgh, 1964), 43.

CALVIN AND THE BIBLE IN THE HANDS OF THE INTERPRETER

The Bible is God's breath in the preacher's hands and uses the preacher to breathe it to the congregation. It is God's wisdom from the beginning to the very end. Calvin believed that Scripture was to be understood as the 'eternal wisdom, residing with God, from which both all oracles and all prophecies go forth. The Word of God is not to be understood like a human word that is a fleeting movement of air, but rather it emanates from the very person of God himself. We cannot understand the personhood of God anywhere apart from the Bible. It is total submission of who God is and is not. Bible is a mind of God to and for humanity. Through the Bible, we hear God plain and clear.

Calvin believed unconditionally that the Bible was God's word, including everything written in the Bible.[407] God uses the same Spirit to speak to contemporary readers that served as the author of the Bible. God's authorship of the Bible can only be perceived by those people whose minds are enlightened by the Spirit. For that reason, believers are required to show the Bible the same respect they reserve for God because the Bible had its origins in God without any human mixing.[408] Bible is God's word because God is the brain behind the formation of the whole words. Remove God, and the Bible becomes the letters of men who are fallible and weak to sustain and understand God's dealings. Therefore, the power of the Bible

[407] . Opitz, “Scripture” in H.J. Selderhuis (ed.), *The Calvin handbook*, pp. 235-244, transl. R.A. Giselbrecht (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 237.

[408] W. Greef, "Calvin's writings", in D.K. McKim (ed.), The Cambridge companion to John Calvin, pp. 41-57(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004):42.

in the life of any Christian is a pretext of God's powerful presence within the passages.

Therefore, the Bible must be obeyed as God's word. Rossouw thinks that Calvin's basic presupposition in interpreting the Bible is that he was explicitly committed to obeying the Bible as the supreme norm for true Christian faith and religion.[409] The Reformation principle of sola scriptura was determinative in all his theological endeavours. In this sense, Calvin was a biblicist because of his consistent appeal to the Bible as the grounds upon which the formulation of the doctrinal rests. Calvin's purpose in studying the Bible was to determine the real intention of the Bible and to pass it on to the readers and listeners of his sermons and writings. His first business was to let the biblical authors say what they said, in Berkhof's opinion, instead of attributing to the author what the contemporary interpreter thinks they ought to have said.[410]

We must interpret the Bible with all senses of faithfulness and commitment as God's word to and for God's people. The Bible must be interpreted according to its own intention to do justice to it as the word of God.[411]Barth remarked that a purely historical understanding of the Bible as a writing of its own time for Calvin implied that one does not understand the sense of the Bible. What serves as a condition for understanding the Bible.[412]

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[409] H.W. Rossouw, "Calvin's hermeneutics of Holy Scripture", in *Calvinus Reformator: His contribution to theology, church and society*, Wetenskaplike bydraes van die PU vir CHO F3:17, pp. 149-180 (Potchefstroom: PU for CHE, 1982), 151.

[410] L. Berkhof, *Principles of biblical interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI:Baker, 1950), 27.

[411]C.F.C. Coetzee, "Die skopus van die Skrif by Calvyn", (unpublished ThM dissertation, Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1972),132.

[412] K. Barth, *Die Theologie Calvins*, (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1922), 389.

To do justice to the Bible as the word of God it is crucial that the text should be interpreted with careful consideration of the full context of the passage, including the historical determination, kerygmatic structure of focus, soteriological motive, eschatological focus, knowledge of revelation and theo-doxological finality. Barth argued that it was in Calvin's focus on the text in his attempt to uncover the deepest meaning that one finds the distinctive character of his exegetical skill that amounts to his objectivity.[413] He writes that one can learn from Calvin how to stick to the text, by concentrating on it with eager attention. Another element of Calvin's hermeneutics is his consistent focus on the line of the scopus of Scripture, which consists of God's gracious actions in Christ, without forcing Christological applications on some texts in the Old Testament. He believed in the typical significance of the Old Testament without sharing Luther's opinion that Christ can (and should) be found everywhere in the Old Testament.[414]

God's revelation in Christ was viewed as the culmination of a covenant that God already made with the first created people, continued in Israel and eventually running into the Christian church. His emphasis on the covenant kept his theology from a fundamentalist biblicism and legalism.[415]Coetzee added that his focus on the scopus also kept Calvin from the error of will, dualism, historicism and similar dangers, even though Calvin emphasised the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation process.[416] The Spirit alone can soften the hearts of human beings and open their eyes to understand the message of the Bible.[417] Human sinful depravity disables one

[413] Barth, Barth, *Die Theologie Calvins*, 526.

[414] Berkhof, *Principles of biblical interpretation*, 27.

[415] Bijlsma, R., 1960, *Schriftgesag en schriftgebruik* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1960), 191.

[416] Coetzee, "Die skopus van die Skrif by Calvyn",131.

[417] Floor, L., "The hermeneutics of Calvin", in B.J. Van der Walt (ed.), *Calvinus Reformator: His contribution to theology, church and*

to understand the Bible and only the Spirit can solve the challenge of human incomprehension of God's revelation. 'Carnality of life excludes (believers) from understanding, or progressing in, the deep things of God[418]

SPIRIT AND BIBLE

The Spirit of God is the one that is capable to explain the word of God to the depraved humanity in the image of the fall. No among of God's word is full of God's Spirit. Through God's word, we hear God speaks to us audibly through the conviction and conversion of our Spirit in agreement with his Spirit. Calvin further declared, "God is not to be separated from His Word."[419] God is his words, and his word is tantamount to him (john 1:1-10). As with all great men of God, the Scripture held a preeminent place, not only in Calvin's pulpit but in his heart as well. Calvin believed that when one attends to the Bible, one is listening to the voice of the Spirit.

The power of the Holy Spirit cannot be undermined with our power of understanding God's word. No matter the intellectual accuracy of the preacher, he needs the illuminative accuracy of the Holy Spirit to be able to give God's message uncompromisingly. Even when the exegete can do justice to the context of a passage, the illumination of the Spirit is still a condition for its correct interpretation. God works efficiently through God's own words, but these words are not efficient in themselves. The Spirit's voice cannot be heard without the word, whilst the word cannot fulfil its purpose without the Spirit.[420]

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society, Wetenskaplike bydraes van die PU vir CHO F3:17, pp. 181-191 (Potchefstroom PU for CHE, 1982),100.

[418] L.S. Chafer, *He that is spiritual*, rev. edn. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1967), 62.

[419] Barth, *Die Theologie Calvins*, 390

[420] K.J. Vanhoozer, *Is there a meaning in this text?* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 428.

Therefore, it is true the spirit the word fulfils its role in the life of the church to Calvin. It is through God's spirit we understand God in personal terms without the interruption of our ignorance. Calvin emphasizes that the Spirit exclusively uses the words of the Bible to reveal God.[421]The Spirit alone can know the things of God, as 1 Corinthians 2:11 states, and this is the primary point of departure in Calvin's hermeneutics.[422] The implication is that readers of the Bible are dependent upon the Spirit for a correct interpretation. Therefore, there is no correct interpretation anywhere without the total submission to the God's spirit. Calvin is submitting all to the dominant impart of divine spirit in the life of the church and preacher in the interpretation and faithful exposition of God's word. They need the Spirit to discipline their thinking in order that their interpretation may honour God.[423]Spirit influences the human spirit and takes away its blindness and makes the human heart willing to subject itself to the yoke of Christ.[424]

The Spirit's illumination works in two ways: One way is through the person of the Son of God in his incarnation; the other way is hidden and occurs in believers' hearts when the Spirit reveals the word of God through their reading of the Bible. In both ways, the condition is that God opens readers' comprehension through the Spirit. In discussing Psalm 143:10, Calvin remarks that the Spirit (Magister veritatis) is our teacher, not only through the dead letter but also the

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421 G.C.Berkouwer, *De heilige Schrift I*, (Kampen: Kok, 1966), 181; G.M. Bilkes, "Calvin on the word of God", in J.R. Beeke (ed.), *Calvin for today*, pp. 15-32, Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books,2008),87.

422C. Kaiser, & M. Silva, *An introduction to biblical hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 23.

423 Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, 378.

424 J.Calvin, & W. Pringle, *Commentary on a harmony of the evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 3 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 375.

hidden work of the Spirit.[425] Both the preaching of the Word and the inner testimony of the Spirit were important elements in Calvin's hermeneutics. Both elements were seen as conditional in the interpretation of the Bible. There is an absolute need of the elements for the successful preaching of the gospel in all ramifications for clear identification of Christ in the life of a believer. The elements are powerful tools of transformation of the hearers and the dedication of the preacher.[426]

There is need to clarify that any preacher without the total influence of God's spirit is the preacher without the influence of God's power. No matter the level of the intelligence of the preacher, he can never touch life without the influence of the God's spirit. Calvin imagines that without faith, the word conveys nothing to the listener, a view that should be qualified because the Spirit can also use the word to bring unbelievers to repentance.[427]

The gospel of Jesus Christ cannot be comprehended in any other way than as the result of the testimony of the Spirit. Even more importantly, the gospel originates in the Spirit's testimony and the Spirit is the only true declarant that can unlock the meaning of the gospel.[428] Therefore, God's word is a powerful product of transformer through the agency of God's spirit for God's glory.

EXPOSITORY PREACHING OF JOHN CALVIN

The most significant expositor of the Reformation era was John Calvin (1509-1564). John Calvin quite likely was the most significant expositor of the Reformation era. The

[425]J. Calvin, *Commentary on the book of Psalms*, vol. V, transl. J. Anderson, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, (1557),1949), 50.

[426] Rossouw, "Calvin's hermeneutics of Holy Scripture", 171.

[427] Rossouw, "Calvin's hermeneutics of Holy Scripture", 167.

[428] DeVries, "Calvin's preaching", 110.

observation of some scholars is obvious: Calvin ordered the altars, long the centres of the Latin mass, be removed from the churches and that a pulpit, with a Bible on it, be placed at the focus of the building. This was not to be on one side of the room, but at the very centre, where every line of the architecture would carry the gaze of the worshiper to the Book which alone contains the way of salvation and outlines the principles upon which the church of the living God is to be governed. The church must be governed from the beginning to the very end by the Word of God.

.Calvin spent a lifetime expounding, explaining, exegeting and expositing God's Word. As a pastor in Geneva, he spent a year preaching through the Book of Job and three years in Isaiah. Other lectures led to his commentaries on Scripture. Calvin once said, "let us not take it into our heads either to seek out God anywhere else than in his Sacred Word, or to think anything about him his Word does not prompt that, or to speak anything that is not taken from that Word."[429] In the first edition of his Institutes, concerning ministers, Calvin wrote, "Their whole task is limited to the ministry of God's Word, their real wisdom to the knowledge of his Word: their real eloquence, to its proclamation."[430] In the preface to his Romans Commentary, Calvin stated, "that lucid brevity constituted the particular virtue of an interpreter."[431]

Then scholars like Parker summarize Calvin's method as follows: "The important thing is that the Scripture should be understood and explained, how it is explained is

[429] John Calvin, *Institutes in Christian Classics* (Gainesville: Bridge-Logos, 2005), 146.

[430] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (trans. and annotated by Ford Lewis Battles, reprint of 1536 ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 195.

[431] John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and the Thessalonians* (ed. by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973) 1

secondary."[432] He described the paramount duty of the expositor: "Since it is almost his only task to unfold the mind of the writer whom he has undertaken to expound, he misses his mark, or at least strays outside his limits, by the extent to which he leads his readers away from the meaning of his author."[433] And Calvin also defines the preacher's task of speaking for God in his comment on Isa 55:11: "The Word goeth out of the mouth of God in such a manner that it likewise `goeth out of the mouth' of men; for God does not speak openly from heaven, but employs men as his instruments, that by their agency he may make known his will."[434] Said Calvin, "Let us not take it into our heads either to seek out God anywhere else than in his Sacred Word, or to think anything about him that is not prompted by his Word, or to speak anything that is not taken from that Word."[435]

There are so many preachers who have been influenced and imparted through the expository authority of Calvin. It is obvious that Calvin influenced many of his contemporaries, including Henry Bullinger (1504-1575) [436]and John Knox (1513-1572).[437] Knox argued that he was called to "instruct . . . by tongue and lively voice in these most corrupt days [rather] than compose books for the age to come."[438]Several Anglican

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[432] T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 50

[433] Calvin, Romans 1.

[434] 6John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (22 vols., reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 8, 2, 172.; Ronald S. Wallace, Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 82-95.

[435] Calvin, *Institutes in Christian Classics*, 113.

[436] Heiko A. Oberman, "Preaching and the Word in the Reformation" TToday 18 (1961) 26.

[437] 1John Knox, *The Works of John Knox* (6 vols.; Edinburg: Thin, 1845), also Dargan, History 1:513-14.

[438] Clyde E. Fant and William M. Pinson, *Luther to Massillon 1483-1742* (20 Centuries of Great Preaching, 13 vols.; Waco: Word, 1971) 2:189.

preachers, including John Jewel (1522-1571),[439] and many more preachers who preached massively for centuries and even contemporary ministers who value expository preaching.

Calvin agreed and argued that there should be nothing that ought to be held credible without being rooted in the very word of God. D'Aubigné notes, "In Calvin's view everything that had not its foundation the Word of God was futile and ephemeral boast, and the man who did not lean on Scripture ought to be deprived of his title of honor."[440] Scripture should and must serve as basic and root of every theological imaginations of all preachers. The great Reformer himself said, "As soon as men depart even in the smallest degree from God's Word, they cannot preach anything but falsehoods, vanities, imposters, errors, and deceits."[441] Man must hold the word of God with all seriousness and that alone will help any man to avoid every kind of error anywhere for any reason.

Calvin was resolute when he asserted, "A rule is prescribed to all God's servants that they bring not their own inventions but simply deliver as from hand to hand what they have received from God."[442] The word that a preacher received from should be given without any interruption by the preacher. It should be given as it was received. A preacher has no right to deviate from the word. Therefore, Calvin maintained, "No one then ought to be deemed a sound teacher, but he who speaks from God's mouth."[443] Then speaking from God's mouth means to speak from God's word without any form of interruption. It is

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[439] Erwin R. Gane, "The Exegetical Methods of Some Sixteenth-Century Anglican Preachers: Latimer, Jewel, Hooker, and Andrewes," AUSS 17 (1979) 33.

[440] J. H. Merle d'Aubigné, *History of the Reformation in Europe in the Time of Calvin* (vol. 7; 1880; repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 2000), 85.

[441] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations* (trans. John Owen; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 2:226–27.

[442] Calvin, *Jeremiah and the Lamentations,* 1:43

[443] Calvin, *Jeremiah and the Lamentations*, 3:168.

an act of faithfully exposing the word of God that makes one speaks from God's, mouth.

Calvin was unwavering concerning the priority of the Word of God in preaching. The sacred duty of the preacher, Calvin believed, is confined to "Thus says the Lord": "The minister's whole task is limited to the mystery of God's Word, their whole wisdom to the knowledge of His Word, their whole eloquence to its proclamation."[444] Word of God is the final submission of every preacher anywhere. As Calvin said, "If I do not carefully consider how I must apply Holy Scripture to the edification of the people, then I should be an arrogant upstart."[445] While to Calvin, any preacher who seems to add his words into God's word is arrogant and needs not to be a preacher because preaching is an act of declaring or proclaiming God's word and not man's words.

THE PRINCIPLES OF CALVIN'S BIBLICAL EXPOSITION

Calvin's consistency is tied with three key principles as this section will discuss: First Key Principle: Literal, Grammatical, and Historical Hermeneutics Many would agree that the best way of describing Calvin's hermeneutics and approach to the Bible would be that of literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutics. Calvin certainly did not approach the Bible like the RCC with its mystical view of multiple layers of meaning. Calvin's style shows that his desire to try and be concise and clear for the reader to gain good understanding,[446] with the real goal being as an expositor as being that of "unfolding the

[444] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion (1536 edition*), trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 195.

[445] John Calvin, as quoted in T. H. L. Parker, *Portrait of Calvin* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 81.

[446] Richard C. Gamble, "Brevitas et Facilitas: Toward an Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic," Westminster Theological Journal 47:1 (Spring 1985): 2

mind of the biblical writer."[447] Regardless of how some today might think about John Calvin, or of "Calvinism" as a system of theology, there is no question that he was the most important systematizer of theology in the 16th century—and perhaps even to this very day.[448]

Second Key Principle: The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture One of the reasons why we find such consistency in Calvin's exegesis and biblical theology is because of Calvin's strong commitment to the Inspiration and Authority of Scripture. As stated above Calvin believed that God gave the Bible as it stands, and that this record of God's revelation is to be understood as authoritative. Roger Nicole has said, "If anyone deserves to be called a 'man of the Bible,' surely John Calvin will qualify."[449] Calvin reminds the reader at various points that the Bible is infallible, but the church is not. One example Calvin cited in The Institutes is when Eugenius was deposed by the Counsel of Basel, or the fact that this counsel was actually summoned by two Popes.[450] On issues of textual transmission, one finds very little insight from Calvin,[451] but it certainly is clear that "he held the Scriptures in the highest esteem and believed them to be infallible in all their parts.[452]

Third Key Principle: Perspicuity and the God-Given Capacity to Recognize Revelation; as one would rightly expect, Calvin's dedication to literal hermeneutics includes, as noted, a high view of Scripture, but also a third key principle: man's God-

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[447] Justo Gonzalez, The Story of Christianity, vol. 2 (San Francisco: Harper, 1985), 61.

[448] Douglas, J. D., Comfort, P. W., & Mitchell, D. (1997, c1992). Who's who in Christian history. Illustrated lining papers. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House. Cited in electronic form without pagination with Libronix.

[449] Roger Nicole, "John Calvin and Inerrancy," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 25:4 (December 1982): 425.

[450] Calvin, *The deity of Christ and other sermons*, 26.

[451] Harold Lindsell, "Biblical Infallibility: The Reformation and Beyond," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 19:1 (Winter 1976): 28.

[452] Lindsell, "Biblical Infallibility," 29.

given capacity to reason and think and receive revelation from God. Calvin writes, "There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy.[453] This natural God-given ability is part of what has been called the sensus divinitatis.[454] N. H. Gootjes quotes Calvin (1.3.3) where Calvin writes, "Men of sound judgment will always be sure of this, that a sense of divinity, . . . which can never be effaced, is engraven upon human minds.[455]

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST AND THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE EXPOSITION OF CALVIN

The fullness of preaching comes as a result of the fullness of God's presence. God;s presence is very important in the expository preaching of Calvin. A preacher can never do without mobilizing the presence of God in the preaching. According to John H. Leith, "Calvin thought of preaching as the primary means by which God's presence becomes actual to us and by which God's work is accomplished in individual life and in the community."[456] Therefore, the result of every preacher to Calvin determine by the presence of God. Preaching is God speaking in the human voice of the preacher.

Leith quotes Stauffer, who "suggests that preaching for Calvin was not only a moment of worship, not only a task of the church, but also something of a divine epiphany. 'When the Gospel is preached in the name of God, it is as if God himself spoke in person [Third Sermon on Jacob & Esau].'[457] The word

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[453] Calvin, *The deity of Christ and other sermons*, 25.

[454] Leithart, "That Eminent Pagan: Calvin's use of Cicero in Institutes 1.1-5," 161.

[455] N. H. Gootjes, "The Sense of Divinity: A Critical Examination of the Views of Calvin and Demarest," Westminster Theological Journal 48:2 (Fall 1986): 340.

[456] Calvin, *The deity of Christ and other sermons*,15.

[457] A. Gerrish, Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 76

of a preacher definitely is an embodiment of God's word in preaching. The preacher definitely becomes an reincarnated God on the pulpit that whatever he says because it is the word of God then that is from God. God makes a preacher a mere container but he is content in that container.

Through the voice of men God's voice is heard audibly because they are his servants for his service. Moreover, Calvin sees it in another sense, "For, among the many excellent gifts with which God has adorned the human race, it is a singular privilege that he deigns to consecrate to himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that his voice may resound in them."[458] The word of God is resounding without man interruption in the voice of the preacher for the effective transformation of the hearers in all ramifications. Scholars argue that God's word has nowhere to resound except in the voice of men. God speaks though men for his words to be heard by men. Ronald S. Wallace offers a similar description of Calvin's view: "Usually when he [God] had a word to speak He spoke it through the medium of a prophet, whose speech, however, in the act of speaking, God so closely identified with His own Word that it may be said that the mouth of the prophet was the mouth of God Himself. In this case man's speech can really become God's Word in the event of its being communicated to those who are intended to hear it."[459]

Calvin's formation of the divine presence in preaching and his understanding of that presence in the sacraments is essential for exposition. "In preaching, the Holy Spirit uses the words of the preacher as an occasion for the presence of God in grace and in mercy. In this sense, the actual words of the sermon

[458] Leith, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Proclamation of the Word and Its Significance for Today in the Light of Recent Research," Review and Expositor, 86 (Winter 1989): 31.

[459] Gerrish, Grace and Gratitude, 76.

are comparable to the element in the Sacraments."[460] The Word f God is also "the instrument through which union with Christ is effected and his grace is imparted. The word of God … assumes the function that medieval theology ascribed to the sacraments. In this sense, it is sacramental word."[461] Indeed God "ordained his word as the instrument by which Jesus Christ, with all his graces, is dispensed to us."[462]

Christ's ministers preach the Word, and in this way Christ "gives His sacramental presence in the midst of His Church, imparts to men the grace which the Word promises, and establishes His Kingdom over the hearts of His hearers."[463] The preacher, Calvin dared to say, was the mouth of God, "for God does not wish to be heard but by the voice of his ministers"[464] The human activity of preaching the gospel is taken up by God as his own activity. Ministers are "like His hand, but He is the one author of the book."[465] For Calvin, this Word is living and active in its proclamation: "The sum of all this," he notes, "is that as soon as God opened His sacred mouth all our senses ought to be opened to received His Word, because it is not His will [through the public preaching of the gospel] to scatter His words in vain either to fade away or to fall neglected to the ground, but effectively to challenge the consciences of men, so as to bring them under His rule. He has therefore endued His Word with this power, to search every part of the soul, to scrutinize the thoughts, to decide between the affections, and indeed to show itself as the judge."[466]

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[460] John Calvin, "Short Treatise on the Supper of Our Lord," Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge (1849; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 166.

[461] Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude*, 84.

[462] Calvin, "Short Treatise on the Supper of Our Lord," 45.

[463] Calvin, "Short Treatise on the Supper of Our Lord,"47.

[464] Calvin, "Short Treatise on the Supper of Our Lord,"49.

[465] Calvin, "Short Treatise on the Supper of Our Lord,"53.

[466] T. H. L. *Parker, Calvin's Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 42

Although Christ is the only teacher appointed by the Father, he has nonetheless set pastors "in His place to speak as if out of His mouth. Thus the authority remains entirely with Him, and He is heard nevertheless in His ministers."59 In other words, "the authoritativeness [of biblical sermons] consists in the fact that God is present to declare his will; it is not simply an authoritative message from one remote."[467] Moreover, the authority resides in the message not the messenger."[468].

Joel Beeke charges that an "experiential effect of the Spirit permeates Calvin's theology, giving life to it. For Calvin, experiencing the work of the Spirit is more important than attempting to describe the essence of the Spirit, since the latter remains a mystery that we can never fully grasp."[469] Some Pentecostals have suggested as much. Andrew Gabriel writes, "For all their talk about the Holy Spirit, one might think that Pentecostals have a well-developed pneumatology. Instead, historically, Pentecostals have tended to focus on interpreting their experiences of the Spirit—such as Spirit baptism or the gifts of the Spirit—rather than on developing a formal and comprehensive pneumatology."5 Thus, Calvin is sometimes credited with reemphasizing the link between the Spirit and Word that had been neglected in medieval theology.[470] "For Calvin," Chen writes, "the Word and the Spirit of God are the two pillars of the Christian life. Churches' lives have to be implemented within the balancing and interlinking relationship between the Word and Spirit."[471]

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[467] *Parker, Calvin's Preaching*, 42

[468] T. H. L. *Parker, Calvin's Preaching*, 42.

[469] Joel R. Beeke, "The Holy Spirit." In *John Calvin: For a New Reformation*, edited by Derek Thomas and John Tweeddale, 369–96 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 373.

[470] Augustus Nicodemus Lopes & José Manoel Da Conceicao, "Calvin, Theologian of the Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Word of God." *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 15 (1997) 38–49.

[471] Yang-En Cheng, "Calvin on the Work of the Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts." *Taiwan Journal of Theology* (2005): 173– 206.

Calvin appeals to the character of Scripture as proof of divine inspiration. He claims this is reinforced on the heart by a "secret testimony of the Spirit," and at one point declares that "the testimony of the Spirit is superior to reason."[472] There should be no human reason that is above the power and influence of God's spirit because God's spirit controls reason and not the other way. Calvin appears far more open to subjective experience in his approach to understanding Scripture than many of his Reformed heirs. Therefore, he may prove a more fitting conversation partner for Pentecostals who seek to construct a hermeneutic unique to their pneumatologically driven tradition.[473] Pneumatogy is the solid doctrine of Calvin and the foundational control of his hermeneutical perception *per se*. It is not just that the Spirit inspires the truth contained in Scripture, but that he also persuades the reader of that truth.[474] In discussing the Spirit's role in the hermeneutical task, Bradley Noel points to this aspect of Calvin's thought, observing that "We are unable to believe that (the Word of God) is such without the inner witness of the Holy Spirit to its authenticity."[475] Calvin, though a firm believer in scriptural authority, taught that without the illumination of the Spirit, the Word remains a "dead letter." Even faith itself may only be wrought in the heart once the Spirit illuminates the Word.[476]

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[472] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2017), 1.7.4

[473]Myung Yong Kim, "Reformed Pneumatology and Pentecostal Pneumatology." *In Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity,* edited by Wallace M. Alston, Jr., and Michael Welker, 170–89 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 172.

[474] Beeke, Joel R., & Gary J. William. *Calvin: Theologian and Reformer* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2010), 25

[475] Bradley Truman Noel, *Pentecostal and Postmodern Hermeneutics: Comparisons and Contemporary Impact* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 149.

[476] Noel, Pentecostal and Postmodern Hermeneutics, 149.

It is worth recalling Calvin's experience; as a Catholic earlier in life, granting sole authority to the testimony of Scripture seemed absurd to him until the Spirit illuminated the Word, testifying to its authority.[477] Linked to this notion is Calvin's doctrine of conversion; namely, that the Spirit imparts the gifts of repentance and faith, as they cannot flow from the unregenerate heart.[478] Calvin teaches that, "those whom God is pleased to rescue from death, he quickens by the Spirit of regeneration; not that repentance is properly the cause of salvation, but because, as we have already seen, it is inseparable from the faith and mercy of God."[479]

PENTACOSTAL BIBLE'S READING AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Most of the Reformers have understood the "illumination of the Spirit" as essential in reading the Bible. Calvin is one of the reformers that took the illumination of the Holy Spirit very serious in his reading of the Bible. As highlighted the position of Calvin above, it is obvious that he is much closer to be a father of Pentecostalism. Moreover, the Pentecostalism goes too far beyond what even Calvin might understand as a principle truth in reading and expositing the Bible.[480]

Reading the Bible may not stop with an understanding of the words, concepts, and events. It must rather seek so arrive at the transcendent realities to which the language testifies. More than reason is needed to comprehend the message of the Bible; the light of the Spirit is also needed. And as one grows

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[477] Beeke and William, Calvin: Theologian and Reformer, 25–27

[478] Paul Helm, *Calvin at the Centre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 208.

[479] Helm, Paul. *Calvin at the Centre, 209.*

[480]F L Arrington, "Hermeneutics, Historical perspectives on Pentecostal and charismatic," in Burgess, S M & McGee, G B (eds.). *Dictionary* Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 382; Thomas, J C Woman, "Pentecostals and the Bible: An experiment in Pentecostal hermeneutics," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* (1994); 49, 55.

in the life of the Spirit, the capacity to understand and experience the realities described in the Bible also grows.[481] "No one but the Holy Spirit provides the bridge that enables the ancient author and modern interpreter to meet and to span the historical and cultural gulf between them. The heart of the biblical text remains ambiguous until it is illuminated by the Holy Spirit."[482]And through the Spirit the Biblical drama becomes the believer's own story, by means of a powerful life-changing encounter with the Spirit, with the believer enlisted into the cast, and given a role in the plot.[483]

Therefore, The Bible is to be implemented, demonstrated and realized rather than understood. The emphasis is on the practice, the experience of the modern believer, of the divine reality that the Bible witnesses to. The aim of Pentecostal preaching is to change lives, and situations and narratives in the Bible provide excellent material to demonstrate this change brought about by the working of the Spirit. The Bible is used to demonstrate and actually bring about the change that God intends for people through the Spirit's anointing on them. Participants in the worship service also expect that something dramatic would happen to them or at least to some of those attending the service. While Prote stants emphasize orthodoxy, Pentecostals stress orthopraxy.[484]

The orthopraxy of Pentecostalism differs from the understanding of Calvin's hermeneutical and expository approach. Character and societal transformation through communicating the powerful words of God with the real influence of the Holy Spirit is the concern of John Calvin. The

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[481] C. Pinnock, "The recovery of the Holy Spirit in evangelical theology," *Journal of Practical Theology* (2004):16-17.

[482] Arrington, "Hermeneutics, Historical perspectives on Pentecostal and charismatic,"105.

[483] M.S. Clark, "An investigation into the nature of a viable Pentecostal hermeneutic," (DTh dissertation, University of South Africa1997a), 164.

[484] M.S. Clark, , H.I. Lederle, et al., *What is distinctive about Pentecostal theology?* (Pretoria: University of South Africa. 1989):64.

Power of the Holy Spirit is not limited to the physical miracles of John Calvin as it is in Pentecostalism today. Their concern is the physical manifestation of divine power as the evidence of the influence of the Holy Spirit. In the last instance, the sermon is not concerned with the characters or the world of the text but God, who in the lives of modern believers acts as Savior, Healer, Baptizer in the Spirit and Comforter. In many instances, the outcome of the sermon exceeds the subjective effect of the text through the resulting moving of the Spirit in people live.[485]

For the most part, Pentecostals read the Bible instead, expecting that what happened to people in the Bible will be reproduced in their lives. They see the Bible most at times as a source of divine-magical power in every situation. The Biblical history is expected to be repeated, and the aim in services is not to teach doctrine or confessions but to experience and act.[486]

CONCLUSION

After the whole research and writing of this paper, it was evident that John Calvin was a great preacher. Both evangelicals and Pentecostals cannot easily forget his impact. His influence in the field of exposition cannot easily be forgotten. Notwithstanding, Calvin had a lot of flaws too. He misunderstood some things about the means and methods of biblical exposition and seemed not to balance to what extent we should claim the Holy Spirit illumination to avoid some forms of mysticism.

By observing the influence of Calvin on Pentecostalism and the concept of Pneumatology in their view of understanding and expositing the scripture for better application, we

485 Clark, Lederle, et al., *What is distinctive about Pentecostal theology?* 67.

486 Clark, "An investigation into the nature of a viable Pentecostal hermeneutic, "40.

understood that the extreme is always what we see today. The claiming of the Holy Spirit has stopped many from studying and understanding the background of the biblical texts and the background of the text's influence toward the understanding of the text itself. Therefore, Calvin lacked balancing with the researcher. It is seen among the Pentecostals today that they usually claim that they do not need seminary or theological training to be better expositors of God's word.

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