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A Defense of Calvinism as the Gospel

by
David J. Engelsma

**“Set for the defense of the gospel”
— Philippians 1:17**

Abraham Kuyper • J. H. Thornwell • B. B. Warfield • Herman Hoeksema

Martin Luther • John Calvin • Theodore Beza • Francois Turretini

John Knox • William Perkins • Franciscus Gomarus • Hendrik De Cock

Preface

Several reasons, we believe, ought to be given for the sending forth of this pamphlet:

- It is a basic explanation of Calvinism for the non-reformed.
- It is a call to nominal Calvinists to be, or become, what they profess to be.
- It is a simple statement for the coming generation of our own Protestant Reformed young people and young adults of what we believe, as Calvinists, and why.
- To explain that Calvinism is not abstract theology, but GOSPEL.
- And to win men to Calvinism by God's grace.

The listing of several "Calvinistic" worthies on the cover reminds the reader that we stand in a great tradition handed down to us by men who were, in very deed, gifts of God to His Church. God, the faithful Preserver of His church, has added to the "great cloud of witnesses" by whom we "are compassed about." (Heb. 12:1a).

"The Lord gave the Word: great the company of those that published it." (Psalms 68:11).

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A Defense of Calvinism as the Gospel

by Prof. David J. Engelsma

The term, "Calvinism," is not the name by which we Calvinists prefer to have our faith called; nor do we prefer to call ourselves "Calvinists." Calvin was the name of a man, a great servant of God, John Calvin. He was one of the Reformers by whom the Holy Spirit reformed the Church in the 16th century. To call ourselves "Calvinists" and our faith "Calvinism" leaves the impression that we follow a man and that these beliefs are the invention of a man. In fact, these terms originally were terms of derision used by our enemies, as were also the names, "Christian," and "Protestant." Therefore, from the very beginning, Calvinists called themselves "Reformed," or "Presbyterian." Thus, they deliberately distinguished themselves from the other great branch of the Protestant Reformation, the Lutheran Church, which did call itself by the name of a man (contrary to the wishes of Luther himself).

Nevertheless, "Calvinism" and "Calvinist" are useful terms, today. They are widely known, even though that be, in part, through the attack upon, and reproach of, Calvinism by its enemies. Also, the name, "Calvinist," is embraced by persons and churches who are not Reformed, or Presbyterian, but who confess those tenets of Calvinism which they call "the doctrines of grace." "Calvinism" has come to stand for certain doctrines, a certain system of truth. We have no objection to calling these doctrines "Calvinism" as long as two things are clearly understood. First, it must be understood that not the man, John Calvin, but Holy Scripture is the source of them. Second, it must be understood that we who embrace these truths are not disciples of a man, Calvin, but are concerned exclusively to follow God's eternal Son in our flesh, Jesus Christ, exactly by confessing these doctrines.

There are different ways of viewing Calvinism. Some have discovered political implications in Calvinism, e.g., strong

opposition to every form of tyranny. Others have found Calvinism important for economics. Max Weber thought to trace the spirit of capitalism to Calvinism, indeed, to Calvinism's doctrine of double predestination. We could examine Calvinism as a total world-and-life-view. It is more, much more, than a set of doctrines, and certainly much more than five points of doctrine. Like humanism or Marxism, Calvinism is a world-and-life-view with which a man takes a stand in every area of human life. Also, Calvinism involves one with the Church, the instituted Church, and is not only the personal beliefs of the individual; it is through and through ecclesiastical. With the early Church, Calvinism fervently holds that "outside the Church is no salvation."

At its heart, however, Calvinism is theology, true religion; and this means doctrine. This is how we will be viewing Calvinism, here. We limit ourselves to a consideration of Calvinism as the Gospel.

Calvinism is the Gospel. Its outstanding doctrines are simply the truths that make up the Gospel. Departure from Calvinism, therefore, is apostasy from the Gospel of God's grace in Christ. Our defense of Calvinism, then, will proceed as follows. First, we will show that Calvinism is the Gospel. This is necessary because of its detractors, who criticize it as a perversion of the Gospel. Second, we will defend it as the Gospel. In doing this, we carry out the calling that every believer has from God. Paul wrote that he was "set for the defense of the Gospel" (Philippians 1:17). I Peter 3:15 calls every believer to give an answer, an "apology," or defense, to everyone who asks us a reason for the hope that is in us.

As the name indicates, Calvinism is a certain teaching associated with John Calvin; it refers to Biblical doctrines that he propounded. Calvin was a Frenchman, born in 1509 and died at 55 in 1564, who lived during the Reformation of the Church, a contemporary of Martin Luther. He was converted from Roman Catholicism early in his life, "by a sudden conversion," he tells us in his preface to his commentary on the Psalms, "since I was too obstinately devoted

to the superstitions of Popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire," and labored on behalf of the Protestant Faith all the rest of his life. He lived and worked in Geneva, Switzerland as a pastor and theologian. His labor was prodigious. He preached almost daily; did an immense pastoral work; carried on a massive correspondence; and wrote commentaries, tracts, and other theological works. He is remembered especially for his great work on Christian theology, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (which still exercises great influence, which every professing Protestant could profitably read, and which every critic of Calvinism ought to have studied, if he wishes to be taken seriously), and for his commentaries on almost every book of the Bible. Calvin's Protestant contemporaries recognized his outstanding gifts, especially in theology and exposition of Scripture. They referred to him simply as "the Theologian."

Calvin's influence in all the world, already during his lifetime and ever afterwards, was tremendous. Luther, of course, stands alone, as the founder of the Protestant Reformation. But Calvin, benefiting from Luther, outstripped even Luther in influencing the Church of Christ in all the world.

In the history of the Church, Calvinism is the name for the faith of the Reformed and Presbyterian branch of the Protestant Reformation. These Churches were called "Reformed" in Germany, France, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. In England, Scotland, and the north of Ireland, they were called "Presbyterian." This faith was early expressed in written confessions, or creeds. Among the confessions of the Reformed Churches are the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession of Faith, and the Canons of Dordt. The great Presbyterian creeds are the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Westminster Catechisms. All of these confessions are in essential agreement.

The Reformed and Presbyterian Churches insisted that the teaching embodied in these creeds, that which is now called Calvinism, was the revelation of God in Holy Scrip-

ture. Calvinism bases itself on Scripture. It holds fully the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone). The doctrine of Scripture is the very foundation of Calvinism. It is a mistake, therefore, to define Calvinism apart from its belief concerning Scripture.

The Bible is the only authority in and over the Church. It is this because it is the inspired Word of God, as II Timothy 3:16 claims: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." As such, Scripture is the "infallible rule" (Belgic Confession, Article VII). It may not be ignored, questioned, or subjected to criticism, but must be received, believed, and obeyed. This is vital for Calvinism because Calvinism teaches many things about which man complains, "These are hard sayings, who can hear them?" For Calvinism, the question is not, "Will men in the 20th century like these things?" But the question is, "Does the Word of God say so?"

Calvinism is concerned to proclaim the Scriptures. The preaching of Scripture, both within the Church and outside the Church, is the central interest of Calvinism. It is false to conceive of Calvinism as a theoretical, abstruse science carried on by heady intellectuals in ivory towers. With the entire Reformation, it wanted, and wants today, to preach the Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes.

Calvinism, then, can rightly be viewed as certain basic doctrines, the so-called "five points of Calvinism." But even here, a word of caution is in order. Historically, it is something of a misnomer to call these doctrines "Calvinism." On these doctrines, there was no difference between Luther and Calvin. These two leading Reformers were in agreement in their teaching on the doctrines of predestination, the depravity of the fallen man, and justification by faith alone. Indeed, almost without exception, all of the Reformers embraced what we now call "Calvinism." Besides, the "five points of Calvinism," as five particular doctrines that

distinguish Calvinism, originated after Calvin's death. They were formulated by a Synod of Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, in 1618-1619, the Synod of Dordt, in response to an attack on these five doctrines by a group within the Reformed Churches that were known as the Remonstrants, or Arminians. This Synod set forth, confessed, explained, and defended these five truths in the Canons of the Synod of Dordt. But it was Calvin who developed these truths, systematically and fully; and therefore, they came to be called by his name.

Total depravity is one of the five points of Calvinism. This doctrine teaches that man, every man, is by nature sinful and evil — only and completely sinful and evil. There is in man, apart from God's grace in Christ, no good and no ability for good. By "good" is meant that which pleases God, namely, a deed that has its origin in the faith of Jesus, its standard in the Law of God, and its goal in God's glory. From conception and birth, every man is guilty before God and worthy of everlasting damnation. This is man's plight because of the fall of the entire human race in Adam, as Romans 5:12-21 teaches: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned . . ." Not only is every man guilty from conception and birth, but he is also corrupt, or depraved. This depravity is total. One aspect of this misery of man is the bondage, or slavery, of man's will. The will of every man, apart from the liberating grace of the Spirit of Christ, is enslaved to the Devil and to sin. It is *willingly* enslaved, but it is *enslaved*. It is unable to will, desire, or choose God, Christ, salvation, or the good. It is not free to choose good.

It is not Calvinism, that God forces men to sin or that men sin unwillingly, but that the natural man's spiritual condition is such that he cannot think, will, or do anything good. On this doctrine, Luther and Calvin were in perfect agreement. Luther, in fact, wrote a book called *The Bondage of the Will*, in which he asserted that the fundamental issue

of the Reformation, the basic difference between genuine Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, is this issue, whether the will of the natural man is bound or free. Calvinism shows itself as pure Protestantism by its confession concerning the will in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap. IX, III,IV:

Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto. When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, he freeth him from his natural bondage under sin, and by his grace alone enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good . . .

Another of the five points of Calvinism is the truth of limited atonement. There is deliverance for fallen men only in Jesus Christ, God's eternal Son in our flesh. This deliverance occurred in the death of Christ on the cross. His death was atonement for sins, inasmuch as He satisfied the righteousness of God, suffering the penalty of God's wrath in our stead who deserved that wrath because of our sins. Jesus' death was efficacious; it saved! It saved everyone for whom He died. It removed, in full, the punishment of everyone in whose stead Jesus died. He atoned for some, particular men, not for all without exception. His atonement was limited as regards the number of men for whom He died and whom He redeemed. They are "His people" (Matthew 1:21); His "sheep" (John 10:15: "I lay down my life for the sheep"); and "as many as (the Father) hast given (Jesus)" (John 17:2).

It is not Calvinism, that any, even one, who seeks salvation will be denied, but that the death of Jesus *saved*, that it was efficacious, that it was not in vain.

The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal Spirit once of-

ferred up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him. To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same . . . (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap. VIII,V,VIII)

Irresistible grace, or efficacious grace, is a third of the five points of Calvinism. This doctrine refers to the actual saving of fallen men by the Holy Spirit, in applying to them the redemption accomplished on the cross. This work of salvation is wholly the work of God; it takes place by grace alone. Negatively, this means two things. First, the salvation of a man is not something that any man deserves, or makes himself worthy of, in any way. Second, salvation is not a work that man accomplishes, in whole or in part. Man does not co-operate with God in bringing about his salvation. Positively, that salvation takes place by grace alone means that salvation is freely given to men by God, merely out of His love and goodness. Also, it means that this salvation is accomplished by God's power, the Holy Spirit. He regenerates; He calls; He gives faith; He sanctifies; He glorifies. This work of saving and the power of grace by which the Holy Spirit performs this work are efficacious. In carrying out this work, the Spirit and His grace do not make a man's salvation possible, but effectually save him. It is not on the order of a mere attempt by God that depends, ultimately, on the man whom God tries to save and that may, therefore, be frustrated and come to naught; but it is on the order of a work of creation that sovereignly and unfailingly makes the man whom God is pleased to save a new creature in Jesus Christ.

It is not Calvinism, that God forces men, kicking and screaming, into heaven, but that God makes a man willing, who before was unwilling. In the Canons of Dordt, the Reformed believer describes the saving work of irresistible

grace this way:

... it is evidently a supernatural work, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable; not inferior in efficacy to creation, or the resurrection from the dead . . . so that all in whose heart God works in this marvelous manner, are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated, and do actually believe . . . (III,IV,12)

The doctrine of the perseverance of saints, or "eternal security," as some call it, follows from the truth of irresistible grace. Not one person to whom God gives the grace of the Holy Spirit will perish, because that grace and Spirit preserve him unto the perfect salvation of the Day of Christ.

It is not Calvinism, that one may do as he pleases and still be saved, or that a saint can never fall into sin. Against the charge that the doctrine of perseverance implies that one may do as he pleases and still go to heaven, Calvinism replies that the Holy Spirit preserves us by sanctifying us, by strengthening our faith, and by giving us the gift of endurance. As for the "melancholy falls" of Christians, the saints can, and sometimes do, fall into sin, even "great and heinous sins," but the indwelling Spirit, never wholly withdrawn from them, brings them to repentance. Calvinism imparts to all true believers the inestimably precious comfort of the "certain persuasion, that they ever will continue true and living members of the church; and that they experience forgiveness of sins, and will at last inherit eternal life" (Canons of Dordt, V,9).

All of the salvation described above has its source in God's eternal election. The truth of election is another of the characteristic Calvinistic doctrines. God has from eternity elected, or chosen, in Christ, some of the fallen human race — a certain, definite number of persons — unto salvation. This choice was unconditional, gracious, and free; it was not due to anything foreseen in those who were chosen. Reprobation is implied. God did not choose all men; but He rejected

some men, in the eternal decree. It makes no essential difference whether one views reprobation as God's passing by some men with His decree of election in eternity (which is, in fact, a Divine decision about their eternal destiny), or whether one views it as a positive decree that some men perish in their sin, their unbelief and disobedience. Election and reprobation make up predestination, the doctrine that God has determined the destiny of all men from eternity. This truth is regarded, not inaccurately, as the hallmark of Calvinism. The very heart of the Reformed Church is election, God's gracious choice of us sinners, guilty and depraved, worthy only of damnation, unto salvation.

Election is the fountain of all salvation! As such, it is the ultimate, decisive, convincing proof and guarantee that salvation is gracious — that salvation does not depend upon man, but upon God; that salvation is not man's idea, but God's; that salvation is not man's work, but God's; that salvation is not due to man's decision for God, but to God's eternal decision for man.

This is how Calvin himself viewed predestination — as the final, conclusive, incontrovertible testimony to, and guarantee of, gracious salvation. Therefore, in his definitive edition of the *Institutes* (1559), Calvin treated predestination at the end of Book III, after his treatment of redemption in Christ and his treatment of the application of redemption by the Holy Spirit. Calvin wrote:

We shall never feel persuaded as we ought that our salvation flows from the free mercy of God as its fountain, until we are made acquainted with His eternal election, the grace of God being illustrated by the contrast — viz, that He does not adopt promiscuously to the hope of salvation, but gives to some what He denies to others" (III,XXI,1).

This is Calvinism!

This is the Gospel!

The Gospel proclaims man's misery as total depravity,

including the bondage of his will. Ephesians 2:1 diagnoses the spiritual condition of the sinner, prior to the quickening of the Spirit of Christ, thus: "dead in trespasses and sins." Spiritually dead, the sinner is lacking all good, any ability for good, and both the power and the inclination to effect a change in this condition. Himself is helpless and his condition, hopeless — the helplessness and hopelessness of *death*. Romans 8:7-8 passes the same judgment upon fallen man: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." The "carnal mind" is human nature as it is by virtue of natural birth. Its condition is such that it is incapable of being in subjection to God's law. Those who are in the flesh are those who are not born again by the Spirit of Christ, those who are outside of Christ. Their spiritual condition is such that they are incapable of pleasing God; all that they are able to do is sin. For a sinner to will and to do of God's good pleasure, God must work in him both the willing and the doing, by the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:13).

The Gospel proclaims the death of Christ as a death that effectively redeems some men, rather than as a death that merely makes salvation possible for all men. Scripture teaches limited atonement. Jesus Himself taught this about His own death in John 10:15: "... and I lay down my life for the sheep." A little further in the same chapter, the Lord specifically states that some men are not included among "the sheep": "But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you" (v. 26). He died for some men, "the sheep," in distinction from other men, who are not of His sheep. Jesus described His death similarly in Matthew 20:28: "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for (Greek: 'in the stead of') many." The important point is not so much that He spoke of those for whom He died as "many," not as "all," as it is that he spoke of His death as the ransom given in the stead of others. By dying, He paid the ransom-

price to God on behalf of many sinners. He did this by taking their place, giving up his own life where theirs was forfeit. The effect of this death is that every one for whom He died is freed from sin, death, and hell. Not one for whom He died will perish. None *may* perish, for the ransom is paid. This Gospel (and there is no other) was preached already by the evangelistic prophet, Isaiah, in Isaiah 53: the suffering Christ bears away the iniquities of God's people by being smitten of God as their substitute.

The Gospel proclaims an irresistible grace, as the power that saves elect sinners. It cannot be otherwise, if the sinner is "dead in trespasses and sins." Having taught this in Ephesians 2:1, the apostle goes on to teach irresistible grace in verses 4,5: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)." The saving of the sinner, in every case, is God's raising him from the dead, comparable to Jesus' wonders of raising the physically dead. Now two things are true about resurrection: it is the act of God alone, in which the one who is raised does not co-operate; and it is effectual — God never fails to accomplish the resurrection of any whom He purposes to raise. In verse 10 of this chapter, Paul likens the work by which we were saved to the work of creation, thus making clear that this work is exclusively the work of God the Creator, and not at all the work of the creature that is created: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works . . ." Jesus explained that salvation takes place by the sovereign drawing-power of Almighty God, in John 6:44: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him . . ."

The Gospel proclaims the perseverance of the saints. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

I and my Father are one” (John 10:27-30). Jesus gives eternal life to every one of His sheep; and not one of those saints shall ever perish. It is impossible that anyone could pluck a saint out of God’s hand, that is, cause a regenerated child to fall away to perdition. The reason is not the strength of the saints, but the power of the grace of God (“my Father . . . is greater than all”). These words of Jesus make plain that the comforting truth of perseverance depends upon election and irresistible grace. The saints persevere, *because the Father gave them to Jesus* and *because Jesus gives* (not: tries to give, but: *gives*) them eternal life.

As the source and foundation of salvation, the Gospel proclaims Divine election. This truth is on the very face of the entire Old Testament Bible: God chose Israel unto salvation, rejecting the other nations. The mediator of the old covenant tells Israel, “the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you . . .” (Deut. 7:6-8).

In perfect harmony with this obvious truth of the old covenant, the Mediator of the new covenant traces every aspect of His salvation back to Divine election. His life-giving death stems from election: “that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him” (John 17:2). His priestly pity and intercessory prayer are regulated by election: “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine” (John 17:9). His saving revelation of the truth to men depends upon election: “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world . . .” (John 17:6). The coming of men to Him in true faith is effected by election: “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me . . .” (John 6:37). His preservation of men in faith and His resurrection of these men in glory are due to election: “. . . that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at

the last day” (John 6:39).

Election has a prominent place in the Gospel preached by the apostles. It is the cause of the salvation of every one who is saved, and the source of every blessing of salvation: “. . . the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings . . . according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world . . .” (Ephesians 1:3,4). Upon eternal predestination was forged the golden (and unbreakable) chain of salvation: “Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Romans 8:30). The entire river of the mercy of God in Jesus flows out of His will of election; and the sovereign graciousness of this will is illustrated by this, that God hardens some men according to His eternal decree of reprobation: “Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth” (Romans 9:18).

There can be no ignoring of these doctrines, called “Calvinism”; if they are not preached and confessed, they are denied. Every preacher, every Church, every member of every Church must take a stand regarding them, and does take a stand. It is impossible not to. For they are writ large on the pages of Scripture, as essential elements of the Gospel. Whoever rejects Calvinism embraces the only alternative to Calvinism — a system of doctrine that is opposed to Calvinism in every point.

Does a man reject total depravity? Then he believes that fallen, natural man yet retains some good and some ability for good, specifically a will that is able to make a decision for Christ; that man outside of Christ is not dead in sins, but merely sick, that is, not dead, but alive.

Does a man reject limited atonement? Then he believes that Jesus died for each and every human being without exception. Because both Scripture and the hard facts of life teach that some men do perish in hell, this advocate of universal atonement believes that the death of Jesus did not actually atone for sins at all, but merely made atone-

ment possible; that the cross was not the payment of the ransom in the stead of every one for whom Christ died, but merely an example of love; that the suffering of the Son of God did not effectually satisfy the justice of God by bearing sins away, but merely . . . ? Did what? Anything at all? And if not, was He really the eternal Son of God in the flesh?

Does a man reject irresistible grace? Then he believes that God's call to salvation and the grace of the Holy Spirit depend upon the acceptance of the sinner by the exercise of his "free will," so that God's grace can be defeated and fail. Further, he believes that, whenever a sinner does come to Jesus in true faith and receives salvation, this is not due to the grace of God, but to the good will of the sinner.

Does a man reject the perseverance of saints? Then he believes that every believer can fall away and perish at any time, including himself.

Does a man reject predestination? Then he believes that the ultimate source and foundation of salvation is man's choice, decision, and will.

In the end, there are two, and only two, possible faiths. The one maintains that all mankind lies in death; that God in free and sovereign grace eternally chose some; that God gave Christ to die for those whom He chose; that the Holy Spirit regenerates them and calls them efficaciously to faith; and that the Spirit preserves these elect, redeemed, and reborn sinners unto everlasting glory. This is Calvinism.

The other faith maintains that fallen man retains some spiritual ability for good, some life; that God's choice of men depends upon their exercise of the ability for good that is in them; that Christ's death depends upon that good in man; and that the attainment of final glory depends upon that good in man. This is the enemy of Calvinism. This is the enemy of the Gospel! For Calvinism proclaims salvation by grace; the other faith preaches salvation by man's will and works and worth.

Calvinism is the Gospel! God's Gospel is the message of wholly gracious salvation. This does not mean that

Calvinism is unoffensive. On the contrary! Calvin himself took note, long ago, of the offensiveness of the truth that he taught, with reference specifically to total depravity:

I am not unaware how much more plausible the view is, which invites us rather to ponder on our good qualities than to contemplate what must overwhelm us with shame — our miserable destitution and ignominy. There is nothing more acceptable to the human mind than flattery . . . if a discourse is pronounced which flatters the pride spontaneously springing up in man's inmost heart, nothing seems more delightful. Accordingly, in every age, he who is most forward in extolling the excellence of human nature, is received with the loudest applause. (*Institutes*, II,1,2)

But the offensiveness of Calvinism to men is nothing other than the offense of the cross of Christ. In Galatians 5:11, Paul speaks of "the offense of the cross," an offense that ceases only in the preaching of a cross-denying heresy. The cross of Christ, which is the very heart of the Gospel, is not pleasing to man, or acceptable to him. "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness" (I Corinthians 1:23). The cross, as the cross of the eternal Son of God in our flesh, shows the extent of fallen man's misery: he can be saved only by the death of the Son of God. Words finally fail to do justice to the greatness of the misery of the sinner, brought out by the cross: utterly lost, completely ruined, totally depraved. The cross shows that salvation is of the Lord, wholly of Divine grace, and not at all of man. As the cross of the Prince of life, the cross is powerful to save. Nothing and no one can nullify or defeat the blood and Spirit of Christ crucified. The Gospel of the cross is this message: "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Romans 9:16).

Just because this is the message of Calvinism, Calvinism is offensive to men. It is offensive to proud man to hear that he is spiritually dead, totally devoid of anything pleasing

to God, unable at all to save himself, nothing more than a child of wrath. But this is the judgment passed upon him in Calvinism — and in the Gospel. It is offensive to proud man to hear that salvation is exclusively God's free gift and sovereign, gracious work. But this is what Calvinism — and the Gospel — proclaim.

Just because of this, Calvinism is good news! It is Gospel, glad tidings! As the message of grace, it comforts us and all those who, by the grace of the Spirit, believe in Christ. Only this message provides hope for lost, sinful, and otherwise hopeless men. There is salvation, only because salvation is gracious.

Defending Calvinism is simply a matter of defending the Gospel. Therefore, we do not defend it apologetically, or defensively, or even as if its fortunes were doubtful, dependent on our defense. As the truth of God, Calvinism stands, and will stand — victorious, invincible. God Himself maintains it; and God Himself sends it forth on an irresistible course of conquest throughout the world.

Calvinism is the Gospel for every age. It is the truth for which and by which the Reformation of the Church of Jesus Christ took place in the 16th century. The Gospel has not changed since that time; Jesus Christ in His truth is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever. But the truth of the Gospel is largely lost and buried in the Protestant Churches in our day, including many who pride themselves on being "fundamental" and "evangelical." The Gospel is perverted by a message that is essentially the same as that message against which the Reformation fought and which on its part bitterly opposed the Reformation. In those days, Rome preached a salvation that had to be earned by man's own works, as indeed it still preaches today; Rome taught that men were righteous before God, in part, by their own works, as indeed it still teaches today. In our day, the Protestant Churches teach and preach that salvation depends upon man's own will; they proclaim that the sinner must

achieve his own salvation by willing. This “gospel” of much of Protestantism and the “gospel” of Rome are one and the same. Essentially, there is no difference between them. This is the reason why many Protestant Churches, preachers, evangelists, and people find it possible to co-operate closely with the Roman Catholic Church, especially in the work of evangelism; and this is the reason why a great reunion with Rome on the part of many Protestants is in the offing. Rome says, “Salvation depends upon man working;” modern Protestantism says, “Salvation depends upon man willing.” Both are saying the same thing: “Salvation depends upon man.” The apostle lumps both of these variations of the same basic doctrine together in Romans 9:16, and condemns them: “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.”

Having condemned these heresies, Paul declares that the source of our salvation is God showing mercy — *only* God showing mercy; he proclaims that salvation depends upon God showing mercy — *only* upon God showing mercy. This is the message of Calvinism; and because it is, our defense of Calvinism is a bold, uncompromising, unashamed defense. We say of Calvinism what B. B. Warfield once said of it: “the future of Christianity — as its past has done — lies in its hands.”

We repudiate the false accusations made against Calvinism, and the caricatures made of it. Men say of Calvinism that it is destructive of good works and of the law of God, that it produces careless Christians. Men say that it is destructive of zeal for preaching and missions. Men say that it is terrifying to poor consciences, that it is cold and hard, and that Calvinists are all head and no heart.

These are old charges, hoary with age. You will find them, almost word-for-word, lodged against the apostle, Paul, and the Gospel that he preached (cf. Romans 3:8; 3:31; 6:1ff.; and 9:19ff.).

Would that men were not so ready to accept the caricature

of Calvinism contrived by its enemies, but rather let Calvinism speak for itself, in its confessions. Read the Heidelberg Catechism, or the Westminster Catechisms, and see for yourself whether Calvinism is hard and cold and cruel, or whether it is warm and comforting. Read the Belgic Confession, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, and see whether Calvinism goes lightly over the law of God and over the good works of the Christian man, or whether it trembles before the law, stresses sanctification, and insists on the necessity of good works. Read the Canons of Dordt, the Reformed creed that is unsurpassed in its statement of predestination and in its defense of salvation by grace alone, and see whether Calvinism cuts the nerve of a lively preaching of the Gospel, including the serious call of the Gospel to all who come under the preaching. See also the tenderness of the Reformed Faith towards penitent sinners, and its deep pastoral concern for afflicted consciences.

At the same time, we Reformed people and churches must refute the caricatures of Calvinism by our life and deeds. This also belongs to an "apology for Calvinism." We do well to take heed to ourselves, as well as to our doctrine. Are we zealous for good works? Are we ready to preach the Gospel to every creature and to give an answer to every man that asks us a reason for the hope that is in us? Do we manifest ourselves as joyful, hopeful, confident saints? This we will do, by God's grace, if we live out of the truth of Calvinism, that is, the Gospel.

We have a powerful motive for defending Calvinism. For one thing, as the Gospel it is the only hope for sinful men — the only power of God unto salvation, the only means of the gathering and preserving of the Church.

Even more compelling, Calvinism glorifies God. The glory of God is the heartbeat of Calvinism, and the heart of hearts of every Calvinist. Calvin's enemies have always seen this and have sneered at him as "that God-intoxicated man." Calvinism gives the magnificent answer to the question, "What is the chief end of man?": "Man's chief end is to

glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.” (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Quest. 1) But the glory of God is the goal of the Gospel, that is, the goal of God Himself through the Gospel: “. . . to the praise of the glory of his grace” (Ephesians 1:6). His glory He will not give to another (Isaiah 42:8). “Of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things;” to Him, therefore, be glory for ever. (Romans 11:36)