



Reformed theology – Reformed life-style

The topic assigned for these Jung-Am lectures is Reformed Theology and a Reformed Life-Style. It is a remit every Christian expositor would accept gladly, because the marriage between theology and life-style, which it suggests, is a profoundly biblical one. It is characteristic of the New Testament: expositions of God's revelation — who he is and what he has done for us — always lead to practical application to everyday life. In more technical theological language, the indicatives of grace (what God has done for us) always lead to the imperatives of gratitude (what we are to become in response).

But, of course, this pattern is not a novelty in the New Testament. It is deeply covenantal in character, and is already present and visible in the Old Testament, if we have eyes to see it. It is there in the opening chapters of the Bible, Genesis 1-2. God has been almost infinitely generous in what he has done as Creator; the only appropriate response is obedience to his wise commands. An identical structure is present in the Law of God in general and in the Decalogue in particular: Theology — who God is as the Lord who redeems his people from bondage in Egypt — carries implications for life, and for what his people are called to be (Exodus 20:1ff).

This indicative/imperative structure of God's self revelation pervades the entire Old Testament: '*Be holy, because I am holy*' (Leviticus 11:44) is, in one form or another, a constant refrain. Biblical theology is meant to produce a biblical life-style; covenant grace calls for covenant faithfulness; a holy God must have a holy people. Scripture could not be clearer.

We are to explore this theme in terms of our Reformed theology. In doing so, in this first study, we can surely do no better than to draw attention to some of the ways in which the great Reformer, John Calvin helps us to see more clearly what it means to know God and to live for his glory.

Theology and piety

In this context, it is worth reminding ourselves that reformation of doctrine has always gone hand in hand with revival of spiritual life and vitality. This was certainly true in the Reformation period. Calvin's biographers describe his brilliant participation in the frequent theological debates of the sixteenth century. The dramatic result of his intervention in one of these was that large numbers of priests turned to the Reformed faith, a moral cleansing took place among the local populace, a new spirit of godliness took hold of many people, and true religion began to flourish.

Sometimes this inviolable connection between what Scripture calls '*sound* (healthy or health-giving) *doctrine*' (2 Timothy 1:13) and the transformation of life is seen in quite dramatic ways; on other occasions in a less spectacular manner. But whether dramatic or quiet in its effects, true Reformed theology can never be coldly academic. If it is it ceases to be either biblical or Reformed.

This point is well illustrated by an interesting footnote to Calvin's *magnum opus*. When the first edition of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* was published in 1536, it carried the revealing sub-title: 'Containing the whole sum of piety'. Whether the words were written by Calvin himself, or by some anonymous copy-editor (in a day when the publisher's 'blurb' appeared on the title page, and not on the back cover of the book!), they are highly significant, especially in their Latin form, *summa pietatis*. They stand in marked contrast to the great (and in its own way, noble) tradition of scholastic theology with its focus on intellectual understanding rather than personalised knowledge.

The high point of theology in the middle ages was Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* (sum, or survey of theology). But Calvin did not write a *summa theologiae*; he wrote a *summa pietatis*, a survey of piety. He was concerned not merely with the instruction of the intellect, but with the

engagement of the heart and the whole person in devotion to the Lord. His work well illustrates his personal motto: *'I offer my heart to you, Lord, readily and sincerely'*.

Because of this, as Calvin's Institutes developed through its various rewritings from 1536 until 1559 into the large work we are familiar with today, its central theme was always the same: the true, evangelical knowledge of God, and how that affects and transforms our lives. He therefore constantly seeks to draw the reader into a personal appreciation of what is being expounded. Piety, devotion to God, not merely intellectual understanding, is always his goal since eternal life means knowing God, in Christ, through the Spirit. That, I think, is why people who are daunted by the thought of reading Calvin are usually amazed to discover how remarkably straightforward, practical and devotional his writing is.

True wisdom and knowledge

The opening words of the *Institutes*, little changed from the great statement which readers of their first edition encountered when they opened the much smaller six-chapter work in 1536, are these: *'Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves' (Inst. I.i.1.)*.¹

As Calvin scholars have often pointed out, the sentiment is an echo of Augustine who, many centuries before, had recorded in his *Soliloquies*: *'O God, who art ever the same, let me know myself and thee. That is my prayer' (Soliloquies II.i.1)*. The same idea underlies the even more famous words of the opening section of his *Confessions* *'You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.'*

Reformed theology, then — or at least the only Reformed theology John Calvin would have recognised — is about knowing God in such a way that we come to know ourselves and our world more fully. We learn not only to *'think God's thoughts after him'*, but also to live our lives as his moral image in *'true righteousness and holiness'* (Ephesians 4:24).

Such knowledge of God is, according to Scripture, our greatest privilege. It is the heart of eternal life, says Jesus: *'This is eternal life: that they may know you the only true God...'* (John 17:3). It is the fulfilment of the promise of the new covenant: *'I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord'* (Jeremiah 24:7). Says Jeremiah again, *'This is what the Lord says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth"'* (Jeremiah 9:23-4). Such knowledge of God is the very thing Paul prays for the Colossians:

We have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will ... And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.

(Colossians 1:9-11)

Here again we see that in all biblical thinking, theology, the knowledge of God, and life-style are inseparable.

How, then, is this worked out from Scripture, for example, by John Calvin and the other great teachers in the Reformed tradition? What is involved in knowing God?

As is well known, Calvin speaks of a *duplex cognitio Dei*, a twofold knowledge of God as Creator and as Redeemer. Logically we begin by speaking of God as Creator; but we must recognise that we do not now come to know him as Creator unless we have come to know him as Redeemer.

The knowledge of God the Creator

God is the Creator of all things. Everything, whether visible or invisible to us, comes from his hand and displays his handiwork. The heavens declare his glory (Psalm 19:1). In what he has made he has clearly revealed himself (Romans 1:20). The whole of creation carries his autograph and reveals his attributes. Furthermore, he has created man in, or as, his very image and likeness.

Man, as created, is therefore himself a further, fuller, clearer revelation from God and indeed of God.

This biblical teaching has two implications. The first shows us how to think about the nature of creation; the second about the experience of humanity.

Metaphors

Calvin gives us three metaphors to help us think about creation and its Creator:

- The *first* is that creation is a *theatre*. Calvin actually calls it a '*dazzling theatre*' and a '*beautiful theatre*' in which the glory of God is marvellously displayed (*Inst.* I.v.8; I.xiv.20). We have been placed in the world to contemplate the works of God and to be spectators of his majesty. We are to be an audience which responds to his glory. This, of course, has profound implications for the spirit in which we live as believers: it suggests that the wonders of creation are meant to give rise to the applause of praise in the human heart.
- The *second* metaphor is that creation is a *mirror*. God himself cannot be known by us as he is known to himself, immediately and directly apart from the medium of his self-revelation in the created order, in history and in Christ. More than once Calvin emphasises that it is only a fool who seeks thus to know the divine essence (e.g. in his *Commentary on Romans* at 1:19). No, God is known only by means of his revelation. His character is revealed in his deeds. We see him in them as in a mirror, by reflection. We see the '*immense riches of God's wisdom, justice, goodness and power*' in creation '*as in mirrors*' (*Inst.* I.xiv.21).

This metaphor also carries practical implications for us: we can never understand (and must never view) the created order as though it were a closed system and therefore explicable in its own terms. We are meant to study it, to explore it and to love it, not as a thing in itself, but as a reflection of the glorious attributes of God.

- The *third* metaphor Calvin uses for creation is that of a *garment*. God is invisible in his being. He is the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). How then can we see and know him? Answer: because he accommodates himself to us and, as it were, clothes himself in the garments of creation. Thus, in Paul's words, the visible things unveil the invisible attributes of God (Romans 1:20): his eternity, his power, his deity, and his marvellous creatorhood.

The great Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck puts all this beautifully when he says: '*According to scripture, the entire universe is a creation and therefore a revelation of God. Nothing is atheistic in the absolute sense of the term*' (*Doctrine of God*, p. 42).

Eternity in our hearts

There is a further significant implication for our experience in the manner of God's work as Creator. He has made man as his image. The whole creation reflects God's glory, but man, supremely, is a mirror-reflection of God. He is the finest and clearest element of creation-revelation since, like God he is a rational and volitional being, and one who is capable of fellowship with God.

We are not only surrounded by divine revelation. We are also invaded by that revelation. Man is part of God's revelation; indeed, the apex of it. We cannot escape from the truth which our very being proclaims. This, as Ecclesiastes well says, is the burden God has placed upon us; he has set the need for the eternal in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11)!

Again it is a Dutch theologian who best expresses this. Abraham Kuyper writes: '*If the cosmos is the theatre of revelation, in this theatre man is actor as well as spectator*' (*Principles of Sacred Theology*, p. 264).

Consequently we cannot escape from the presence and power of God, as David indicates in Psalm 139. There is no 'where' we can go to hide from his presence. As his image-bearers, we are inescapably haunted by what Calvin calls the *sensus divinitatis*, a sense of God. We possess what he terms the *cognitio dei insita*, an implanted knowledge of God such that, '*No one can look upon himself without immediately turning his thoughts to the contemplation of God in whom he lives and moves*' (*Inst.* I.i.1.).

In the nature of the case, we may not be able to give a logically adequate account of this knowledge of God, or explain the psychological mechanism by which we know that he is. But this should not surprise us, for it is doubtful if we can provide such an account of our general knowledge of and awareness of the world and of ourselves. The Christian believer need not feel philosophically threatened by this limitation on his or her analytical powers. We are, after all, creatures.

This emphasis on the richness and clarity of the revelation of God's person and attributes is one of the most characteristic emphases of Reformed theology. It is rooted in Paul's important teaching in Romans 1:18-32 — a passage which, incidentally, has sometimes been thought to have played a key role in Calvin's own conversion from Rome to the Reformation, from the false to the true knowledge of God. It has a very important implication for our Christian witness.

What is this implication? It is as Paul says in Romans 1 that, surrounded and invaded by this sense of deity, mankind seeks to stifle and repress it. Consequently individual men and women seek to reject at the conscious cognitive level what they know to be true in the depth of their being.

Recognising this has given lasting stability and confidence to the witness of Reformed Christians. We know something about unbelievers concerning which they themselves are often in a state of denial: they are on the run from the God with whom they have to do, but they cannot escape from his revelation. They are engaged in a programme of self-deceit. Our task is to be instruments of the Spirit's work of unmasking them. Knowing these things gives us great confidence in our witnessing and our apologetics.

In a word, then, the doctrine of the knowledge of God as Creator has important implications both for our true spiritual enjoyment — we live in a theatre in which God has displayed his many attributes and his marvellous glory — and for the confidence and fruitfulness of our witness to others.

But in speaking of witnessing to others and of the apologetic implications of the knowledge of God the Creator, we have already run ahead of ourselves. For why are witnessing and apologetics necessary? The answer of Reformed theology, following Scripture, is: we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. We have rejected him. Now, in a fallen world, if we are to come to a living knowledge of God as Creator we must be brought back to him and first come to know him as God the Redeemer.

In thinking of the knowledge of God as Redeemer, four elements are central in the theology which Calvin expounded. They are: the tragic consequence of man's rebellion; the necessity of biblical inspiration; the centrality of Christ's redemption; and the nature of regeneration.

The consequence of man's rebellion

From one point of view, sinful man cannot escape from his knowledge of God. But that knowledge is a rebellious knowledge, possessed now only in the context of man's attempts to reject it. It is no longer an obedient or covenantal knowledge of God, a knowledge-in-fellowship with God. Hence Paul, who can say in one place that men *'knew God'* (Romans 1: 21), can also, without contradiction, characterise unbelievers as those who do not know God (as in 1 Corinthians 1:21; Galatians 4:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:5). They suppress the knowledge they possess and exchange the truth about God for the lie (Romans 1:18, 28).

For Reformed theology, the strong active language of this last statement of Paul has special significance: men have exchanged the truth about God for the lie. Behind all that the apostle says in Romans 1:18-32 lies the shadow of Genesis 1-3. The 'lie' here is, of course, an allusion to the narrative of Genesis 3, and the falsehood by which Eve was ensnared and deceived: *'You shall not surely die'* (Genesis 3:4, 13). But it goes further than that. For the motive of Satan in deceiving Eve was not simply to deny the authority of God's word; it was to distort the revelation, and therefore the character, of God himself.

God had said that the man and woman could eat from any tree in the garden except one (Genesis 2:16-17). But the serpent's words distorted that generous freedom: *'Did God really say, "You must not eat from any tree in the garden"?' (Genesis 3:1)*. The lavish kindness of God was thus

maligned. Satan was implying: *'Has God set before you this vast display of treasures only to tell you that you may have none of them? What kind of God would do that?'*

The 'lie' which was substituted in the Garden of Eden for 'the truth about God' involved the defamation of his character. Having accepted 'the lie' man has a distorted view of God, as well as a heart that rebels against him.

What, then, is our condition? This: we cannot escape from being aware of God's revelation — it surrounds us and inwardly haunts us; we cannot avoid being religious — we are made to worship; but we have repudiated the generous revelation of God in creation, twisted the character of God and rejected his word. There is no greater or more poignant tragedy than this.

In this context, one of the strengths of Reformed theology is the way it stresses the multi-faceted character of man's fallen condition in order to underline the depth of human perversity. We often think of the fall as a rebellion against God's law, and indeed it is. But it is also a rejection and denial of God's love and his generous provision — one might even say his grace, if Scripture and Reformed theology did not reserve that term for the demonstrations of God's love to us in our fallen condition. Man is not only unfaithful to God's Word and disobedient to God's command; he is ungrateful for God's lavish love. His ingratitude is both monstrous and blasphemous.

This complex character of man's sinful condition, and especially the recognition that the fall was a rejection of the kindness and generosity of God, gives rise to an important implication. The natural man often professes that his 'God is a God of love'. But biblical theology recognises that he does not — indeed he cannot — really believe that. He does not, because he has accepted the lie; he cannot, because part of the lie he has accepted is the way it presents God as malign and sinister in character.

The evidence that this is the case is plain for all of us to see. The natural man who makes this empty profession about believing in a God of love does not trust himself to that God, he does not pray joyfully to him, he does not worship him in songs of praise, he does not seek or love fellowship with him, he refuses to allow himself to be 'known' by him (Galatians 4:9). His lips claim one thing; his heart believes something quite different. Instead, as Calvin puts it, his nature *'is a perpetual factory of idols'* (*Inst.* I.xi.8); he will worship any god rather than the living and true God of Scripture.

Such is the tragic, perverse, ruined creature man has become. This conviction lies therefore at the heart of Reformed theology: sin needs to be taken with the utmost seriousness.

How, then, does the gospel provide a remedy for this condition? Because the effects of the fall are so diverse and complex, Reformed theology does not provide a simple, one sentence answer to the question: How does God restore man to fellowship with himself? Since the fall has intellectual, moral and psychological as well as social consequences, the remedy for it must also be manifold. It involves the work of Christ, the gift of the Scriptures and the ministry of the Spirit.

The necessity of Scripture

The intellectual effect of the fall means that although he is surrounded by divine revelation, man no longer appreciates it as a garment God wears to make his attributes visible, nor as a theatre of his glory, nor as a mirror reflecting his presence. Instead, Calvin says, we are at best like *'old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words'* (*Inst.* I.vi.1).

This is evident to the believer on every hand. He or she studies, perhaps, at a great institute of learning, and there encounters teachers with deep and wide scholarship. Yet, as Calvin unceremoniously puts it, when it comes to the true knowledge of God, they are as blind as bats. They cannot make spiritual sense of anything.

It is in such a context, Calvin says, that God has given to us the Book of Scripture in addition to the Book of Nature. Just as those *'bleary-eyed men ... with the aid of spectacles will begin to read*

distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God' (Inst. I.vi.1).

Scripture provides the lenses we need to know God again. Naturally, this should not be taken in isolation either from the work of Christ or from the ministry of the Spirit to cleanse our hearts and to give us spiritual illumination. But within that context, Calvin says the Scriptures are like spectacles; they bring everything into proper focus and order, because in them God reveals himself and his ways.

In order to do this, it is essential that Scripture should be breathed out by God and possess his authority. The Scriptures are truly recognised by us only when we give to them the kind of reverence we give to God, because there his living voice is heard (*Inst.* I.vii. 1). In the same spirit, the Scottish reformers, led by John Knox, in composing the Scots Confession in 1560, refer to Scripture as the very '*mouth of God*'. It has its origin in God.

This is not to say that Reformed theology denies what is nowadays called the humanity of Scripture; far from it, as Calvin's *Commentaries* everywhere indicate. But the chief concern, as must be the perennial concern of every Christian, is to recognise their divine character.

Not only is there divine authority in Scripture, but it also possesses the attribute of sufficiency. Nothing additional is needed for equipping the man of God, says Paul to Timothy (2 Timothy 3:16-17) — a point worth bearing in mind whenever the sects appear urging on us the importance of an additional book of revelation. More generally, the Reformed appreciation of the all-sufficiency of Scripture safeguards us against the errors of those who tell us that we cannot be complete Christians unless we have access to the 'truth' which some new piece of literature purveys.

The implications of this doctrine of Scripture are very far-reaching for the Christian life-style; but that is a subject for another occasion. But here we must underline that Reformed theology does not teach that it is the Scripture itself that saves. Consequently we must give attention to a third element in the knowledge of God the Redeemer:

The Centrality of Christ's Work

If we are to be restored to a living knowledge of God, what has been broken must be repaired and what has been lost in the fall must be restored. This is the work of the Mediator, Jesus Christ.

The central way in which Calvin and the Reformed tradition have described the work of Christ in restoring us to fellowship with God is in terms of his three-fold office as Prophet, Priest and King.

Adam was created to be the image of God and, in a sense, to serve him in three ways:

1. As God's appointed prophet he was to speak God's word and give God's direction to the whole creation. Thus, for example, Adam was to name the animals (Genesis 2:19-20).
2. As God's appointed priest he was to give intelligent expression to the worship of the whole of God's creation, as the conductor of an orchestra of nature, each creature playing its appropriate part in a grand symphony of praise.
3. As God's appointed king he was to have dominion over all things and govern them as God's representative on earth so that the whole creation might be ordered for God's glory.

By his sin, Adam became apostate and became incapable of fulfilling any of his ministries. Since we share in his fall, we too are apostate prophets, priests and kings. But, as the Old Testament hints, when the Christ would come — the one anointed by God not with oil but with the power of the Holy Spirit — he would fulfil each of these ministries in our place. Not only so, but he would bear the judgment the first Adam and his seed deserved for sin.

The heart of the gospel, then, in the theology of the Reformation, is found in what Calvin (and Luther before him) called '*the wonderful exchange*'. Christ took our flesh in the incarnation in order to take our place and bear our sins on the cross at Calvary. He lived a life of wholehearted obedience to his Father for our sakes, and then at Calvary bore our judgment. Christ, as Calvin puts it, took on '*the person*' of a sinner. He received what was ours, while by faith we receive what

is his; he experienced desolation and alienation from God on the cross so that we might be welcomed into the bosom of the Father.

This is the testimony of such passages as 2 Corinthians 5:21: Christ who knew no personal sin became sin (or a sin-offering) for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Calvin himself believed that this was the significance of the way in which the Gospels describe the judgment and suffering of Christ. He notes, in his brilliant and poignant exposition of the passion narrative, how frequently in his trial and crucifixion our Lord was declared by all parties to be utterly innocent, yet he was still executed as though he were guilty. This, he argues, is not accidental. God so governed the events of his Son's incarnation that they displayed his personal innocence. He died as if he were a sinner, only and precisely because he was dying in the place of sinners.

Other Reformed theologians have seen this vividly illustrated in the events of the night of Jesus' betrayal. In the upper room, he took the cup of fellowship with God in the Passover, and gave it to his disciples; he said he would not drink of the cup until he drank it anew in his Father's kingdom (Mark 14:23-25). In exchange, in Gethsemane he received from his Father's hand a cup from which he naturally shrank back. This was the cup described in the prophets as a cup of judgment and dereliction, the cup of God's condemnation of sin; the cup sinners should have drunk for themselves (Mark 14:33-36; cf. Isaiah 51:17, 22; Jeremiah 25:15,17; Habakkuk 2:16). But Christ took it, and he drank its last bitter dregs.

Christ, then, has died to bear our guilt. Penal substitution, as Calvin saw, is the very core of the work of Christ.

But here Reformed theology provides us with a further important insight. Although it sees penal substitution as the heart of the matter, it does not limit its exposition of the atonement to one 'theory'. As evangelical students of historical theology, we affirm the Anselmic-Reformed doctrine of the necessity of satisfaction and reject the so-called Abelardian view which reduces Christ's work to revealing the overwhelming character of the love of God which therefore exerts its powerful influence on us. But we must not lose sight of the fact that, according to Scripture, the cross is the great demonstration of the love of God as such biblical verses as John 3:16, Romans 5:8 and 8:32 amply demonstrate.

Why is this significant? Because it explains why the message of the cross brings us to an understanding of and appreciation for the character of the God it reveals. Yes, the cross displays his holiness; but the cross is also the place where *'heaven's love and heaven's justice meet'*. Christ's death deals with our guilt, but it also undoes the twist that sin has produced in our theological thinking. It is the remedy for the terrible distortion of the character of God which we have seen took place in the fall. It brings us to believe what creation had in fact proclaimed: God is love!

But only through interpreting the death of Christ as a penal substitution do we come to believe this. The love of Christ compels us only because we understand that on the cross Christ died in our place (as Paul indicates in 2 Corinthians 5:14, 21). Here it is appropriate to underline a principle which has carried great weight in our Reformed theology, and one which has important ramifications for us as Christians. Christ did not die in order to persuade the Father to love us; he died *because* the Father loved us. The great Puritan theologian John Owen put it thus, recognising that even Christians may think of God the Father 'with anxious, doubtful thoughts':

What fears, what questionings there are of his good-will and kindness! At the best, many think there is no sweetness at all in him towards us, but what is purchased at the high price of the blood of Jesus.

(Works, II.32)

It is essential to understand the point Owen is making. If the cross reveals God, it reveals the love of the Father as antecedent to the cross. The atonement is not a work in which the loving Son persuades the Father to be gracious; rather, it demonstrates the quality of the love the Father already has for sinners. He *'so loved the world that he gave'*. When this is grasped these fears and doubts which lie deeply embedded in our thinking and feeling about God begin to be dissolved. But they are so only through Christ's *atoning* death.

In this way the message of the cross not only answers the need for the burden of our guilt to be removed, but also for the distortion in our view of God to be remedied. Once again we can become prophets, priests and kings — boldly proclaiming the gospel; joyfully engaging in heart-felt worship, praise and prayer; reigning in life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This, in turn, leads us to a final consideration:

The necessity of regeneration

God has given special revelation to us; he has given Christ on the cross for us; but in addition, it is essential for our restoration that he works inwardly on us by his Spirit. We need to be united to Christ if we are to experience new life. Without this, Calvin says, everything that Christ has done for us is of no avail to us (*Inst.* III.i.1).

The heart of this work is divinely-wrought regeneration. Here the sovereignty of God in salvation stands out in clearest relief, for God's work of regeneration is parallel to his original work of creation: it is the '*God who said "Let light shine out of darkness" who has made his light shine in our hearts to give us the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ*' (2 Corinthians 4:6). This is sovereign divine monergism *par excellence*.

Regeneration takes place against a background of human helplessness; we cannot contribute to our own salvation. We are no more capable of bringing ourselves to new birth than we were of bringing ourselves to natural birth. New creation can be achieved only by the sovereign work of the Spirit who — like the wind — blows where he wills (John 3:8).

In the history of Reformed theology the term 'regeneration' has been used to connote different aspects of this renewing work of the Spirit. More recently it has been used of the momentary action of God in which new life is inaugurated. Calvin, however, employed it in a very broad sense, to describe the whole process of transformation into the image of Christ from beginning to end (this explains his otherwise Arminian-sounding title to *Institutes* III.iii 'Our Regeneration by Faith: Repentance!').

In either usage, however, the central feature of this work of the Spirit is that in it he unites us to Jesus Christ as the One in whom all the blessings of God are to be found.

Paul speaks of this in the opening chapter of Ephesians (which, incidentally, seems to have been Calvin's favourite letter) when he traces the inward work of grace back beyond even the sovereign regenerating work of the Spirit to the sovereign electing work of God (Ephesians 1:3-14). In the context of expounding the expansive riches of our salvation, the apostle tells us that every spiritual blessing is ours in Jesus Christ. The fruit of regeneration, and its authenticating mark in our lives, will therefore be that we live in fellowship with him. We must therefore look to no other source for our spiritual blessing than Christ and Christ alone.

Nowhere does Calvin speak with greater eloquence than here, and in doing so he reminds us that Reformed theology is, at its best, always Christ-centred. Here is the Reformer at his most lyrical:

We see that our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ. We should therefore take care not to derive the least portion of it from anywhere else. If we seek salvation, we are taught by the very name of Jesus that it is 'of him'. If we seek any other gifts of the Spirit, they will be found in his anointing. If we seek strength, it lies in his dominion; if purity, in his conception; if gentleness, it appears in his birth ... If we seek redemption, it lies in his passion; if acquittal, in his condemnation; if remission of the curse, in his cross; if satisfaction, in his sacrifice; if purification, in his blood; if reconciliation, in his descent into hell; if mortification of the flesh, in his tomb; if newness of life, in his resurrection ... In short, since rich store of every kind of good abounds in him, let us drink our fill from this fountain, and from no other.

(*Inst.* II.xvi.19)

This, then, in brief, is the heart of Reformed theology and the foundation for a biblical, Reformed life-style. It reminds us that knowing God is our greatest privilege, and our highest calling. It accuses us of our rejection of God's good revelation of himself. It underlines the importance of the Scriptures as the divinely given spectacles by which we come clearly to see and know God and his works and ways in the world. It gives much of its creative energy to elucidating the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who became poor that we might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). It speaks of the work of the Spirit in regeneration and illumination.

Thus Reformed theology reminds us that all creation is for the glory of God alone (*solī Deo gloria*); that salvation is possible only by his grace (*sola gratia*); that we can come to know God only with the aid of the Holy Scriptures (*sola Scriptura*); that the path to justification is by faith alone (*sola fide*); and that all this is possible in Christ alone (*solo Christo*).

On another occasion we must explore the various implications of this for the Christian's life-style. But, for the moment, it is enough to remind ourselves of these great Reformation watchwords: God's glory, God's grace, God's word, God's Son, God-given faith — alone, yet never one without the others. And let us also remind ourselves of both the emblem and the motto of the father of Reformed theology, John Calvin, and make them our own. The emblem is a heart held out in the palm of an open hand; the motto: '*To you, O Lord, I offer my heart, readily and sincerely*'. Having received God's grace in Christ, there is no other way in which we can worthily respond.

Our earlier study of the theme of Reformed theology and a Reformed life style had its focus on the *nature* of Reformed theology. We saw that the theme which is so central to Scripture, namely, the knowledge of God, is also central to Reformed theology. We were made in order to know God and to have fellowship with him. He is our Creator. He has made us for himself and our hearts are restless until they find their true rest in him (Augustine).

But because of sin man has fallen from this high calling. Now he needs a Redeemer, a Saviour, and God has graciously given him one in Jesus Christ. In order to be restored to the knowledge of God as our great Creator, we must therefore first come to know him as our Redeemer so that our lives may be restored to his purpose and for his glory.

We come now to ask the question: How can we live like this? What is the nature of a biblical and Reformed Christian life? How can we fulfil our chief end?

We can answer that question in three stages:

1. Scripture is our handbook and our guide and teacher.
2. Union with Christ lies at the heart of the Christian life.
3. Glorifying God is our calling and the new purpose of our lives.

We will examine these in turn.

Scripture is our handbook and our guide and teacher

We have already stressed the importance of recognising that Scripture is God's Word; it expresses the infallible character of God himself.

But what is Scripture *for*? What is it infallible *as*? 2 Timothy 3:14-17 gives us the answer. It is able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ; then it is able to equip us for Christian service. It is, therefore, not only vital to have a right doctrine of Scripture as God's Word; it is essential that we also *understand* and *apply* the message of Scripture. Reading it without understanding and obeying it is actually a misuse of it.

Understanding the Bible

The great biblical illustration of this is, of course, the Ethiopian Eunuch described in Acts 8. Philip's question to him was: '*Do you understand what you are reading?*' The evangelist knew that only when the Eunuch understood the message would he be able to know Christ and enjoy fellowship with God. So Philip got into the chariot with the Ethiopian, and began to expound to him the passage he was reading, Isaiah 53.

How do we come to share this experience, and come to understand the Scriptures as our 'guide and teacher' as John Calvin often used to express it? We can be grateful that at the time of the Reformation, the true method of interpreting and understanding the Bible was recovered for the church. It consisted of two basic principles:

1. Scripture should be read in its plain and 'literal' (*not* literalistic) sense. This implies that the ordinary meaning of a passage of Scripture is likely to be the true meaning. We read history as history, narrative as narrative, parable as parable, poetry as poetry. In this way we will be gradually led to an understanding of God's Word.

Why did the Reformed theologians stress this? Because a right understanding of the Bible had been seriously retarded in the Middle Ages by the so-called 'Four-fold sense of Scripture'. Under the lingering impact of the dualism between the heavenly and the earthly, the spiritual and the material which was so characteristic of the philosophies of the ancient world, the Bible had begun to be treated as though it were full of hidden and mysterious messages. It was thought to be more 'spiritual' to read it to discover these 'deeper meanings' instead of in its plain and obvious sense.

An illustration will clarify the point. We generally say that our Lord's parables have one central message. That message may be conveyed in a multifaceted fashion through the details of the parable. But individual parables should not be read as though they were works of systematic theology, in order to find every detail of the gospel! The message of the Good Samaritan parable, for example, is clear. Jesus explained it himself: *'Which of these men proved to be a neighbour to the man in need? You go and be like him.'*

But this was not enough for some of the ancient writers; they pursued the hidden, spiritual meanings in it, believing that these were of greater profit to the Christian. And so, in some interpretations of the parable, the traveller might turn out to be Adam, the thieves the devil, the Good Samaritan represented Jesus himself coming from heaven to earth, the donkey stood for the Holy Spirit, the two pennies became baptism and the Lord's Supper, the inn became the church, the innkeeper became the apostle Peter — and so on. But the actual function of the parable — to challenge to a radical Christian life style — tended to be lost in the process of interpretation. It is an approach to exposition which has continued to haunt the church.

In fact, each passage of Scripture was generally seen to have four meanings: *Literal* what the passage meant on the surface; *Allegorical*, what the 'spiritual' symbolism of its details might be; *Moral* how it should be applied; and *Anagogical*, what it had to say about the heavenly life.

The result was that the plain meaning of Scripture and its practical application became more and more obscured, and the strong message of Scripture was diluted. In the preaching of the Word, cleverness in showing the allegorical meaning was substituted for true biblical exposition, what Paul calls the clear manifestation of the truth (2 Corinthians 4:1-2).

Reformation theology saw through this, and called the church back to the plain and straightforward historical meaning of the text. It emphasised the perspicuity, the clarity of the essential message of Scripture. And so, in Reformed churches, much was done so that the ordinary person could know and understand his Bible — and like the psalmist in Psalm 119:98-99 be wiser than his enemies, and advance beyond his teachers.

2. Scripture should be understood in its redemptive-historical context. This is a much-used, perhaps today an over-used, technical expression. But it has value if we understand what it means: each passage of the Bible is to be understood in the context of the Bible as a whole, in the flow of the history of God's saving work recorded in the various periods of biblical history.

Scripture should be allowed to interpret Scripture. When we come to a passage, therefore, we do not see what meaning we ourselves can put into it, but what meaning the rest of Scripture helps us to draw out of it.

In this context, one of the most important issues in understanding the Bible is: What is the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament?

Old and New in relationship

In many ways this is the key question in interpreting the whole Bible, but various conflicting answers have been proposed in response to it. For example, it is still assumed with amazing frequency that the Old Testament teaches that salvation is by works, while the New Testament teaches salvation by grace. Alternatively, some Christians hold that God dealt quite differently with his people through different stages or dispensations of biblical history. But, of course, neither of these views can explain why the exposition of the gospel in the New Testament relies so heavily on the teaching of the various parts of the Old Testament, or why Paul takes such pains to show that the way of salvation he preaches is the very same way of salvation that Abraham and David experienced.

The Reformed answer to this vital question is clear. Since the Fall, God has revealed himself to his people in many, varied, fragmentary ways (Hebrews 1:1 ff); but he has brought them into fellowship with himself on the basis of a single principle — salvation by grace through faith. Writes Calvin: *'The covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same'* (Inst. II.x.2). God made a covenant of grace with his people, with Jesus Christ as its substance. He is the fulfilment of the promises of the Old Testament; he is the substance of which the sacrifices of the Old Testament were the shadows. But the way of salvation in both Testaments is one and the same, faith in the divine Saviour, as promised in the Old and incarnate in the New.

This was central in the pristine Reformed theology of Calvin. But he also understood that within this unity of God's saving work, there is also a certain diversity. He sees five important distinctions between the revelation of God's grace in the Old and the New Testaments. It may be helpful to list them:

1. God always wants his people to focus their attention on the heaven-given blessings of his grace; but under the old covenant, God encouraged them to do this by showing them his grace towards them by means of earthly benefits. The gift of the land as their inheritance, for example, was meant to serve as a mirror of their heavenly inheritance. True believers, in the Old Testament period, recognised this and looked beyond the land to what it symbolised. Thus David speaks of the Lord himself as his portion (Psalm 73:26) and his inheritance (Psalm 16:5).
2. In the Old Testament, types and ceremonies were used to signify Christ. These were shadows; Christ himself is the reality. Old Testament believers understood this and looked beyond the pictures to the reality.
3. Comparatively speaking, the Old Testament was more external in its teaching about grace, while the New is more internal.
4. Again, comparatively speaking, the Old Testament was a period of restriction by comparison with the New. As Paul explains in Galatians 3-4, those who were under the Mosaic Law were like children too young to be trusted with their inheritance: they received 'advance allowances', as it were; they did not enter into its rich fulness and freedom.

Nevertheless, there is much grace, joy and freedom in the Old Testament. How can that be? It is of course because Old Testament believers trusted in the coming Saviour who would be fully revealed in the New Testament; they drew on the future fulfilment of the promise in order to enjoy it in their own day. Thus Calvin again comments that the patriarchs 'so lived under the old covenant as not to remain there, but ever to aspire to the new, and thus embraced a real share in it' (Inst. II.xi.10).

5. The final contrast between the Old and the New Testaments is that the Old had special reference to one nation, the Jews; in the New, the message of grace is preached freely to all. There is now no difference between Jew and Gentile, for the Father has begun to fulfil his promise to his Son: *'Ask of me and I will give you the nations for your inheritance'* (Psalm 2:8).

The role and meaning of the law

In this context two important questions arise: What, then, is the place of the law in the life of the Christian. The classical Reformed answer has always been that the law has a three-fold use: It

convicts us of sin; it restrains our wickedness, and it serves as a guide to godliness because it is an expression of God's character. By contrast with Lutheranism in particular it is in this third use of the law that it comes into its truest and highest function.

The second important question is: How, then, are we to understand the commandments? Here again, we gain a great deal of help by listening to Calvin, who suggests a series of principles of interpretation which will teach us to use God's law in personal Christian living:

Since the law of God is spiritual in nature (Romans 7:14), it deals with motives as well as actions. Thus, in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ is not giving us a new law in addition to the old; he is simply expounding the true meaning and significance of God's ancient law. Christ did not add to the law, he restored it to its true integrity. As we examine the law in the light of Jesus' exposition of it, we learn to keep several principles in view:

1. We must examine the reason for the commandment. What is its purpose? Thus, for example, the purpose of the commandment to honour our parents is to teach us that honour should be given to those to whom God has assigned it. We must ask: To whom has God assigned honour? And accordingly give them the honour that is their due.
2. We must go on to ask: What is forbidden in this command? Whatever God forbids is displeasing to him. The commandments thus set our lives within a healthy boundary line and enable us to live in a way that pleases the Lord.
3. We should notice that the significance of the commandments cannot be limited to what is forbidden by them. They are expressed negatively because of our sin; but they imply exhortations to do the opposite of what is forbidden. Thus, we are not only to refrain from lying, but our speech is to be seasoned with salt, as Paul indicates (Colossians 4:6); our tongues are to become instruments of blessing rather than cursing.

We must never forget, then, that God's law is proclaimed within the context of God's grace: He is the Lord the Redeemer, *therefore* we are to obey his commandments.

So much, then, for understanding the Bible. But this emphasis on understanding always leads to a further emphasis which is characteristic of Reformed theology:

The exposition of Scripture

Occasionally the traditional chapter divisions in our Bibles (which are not, of course, part of the original text of Scripture) obscure the meaning of a passage. One such passage is 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5. We often appeal to the closing verses of chapter 3 as proof texts for the inspiration and authority and value of Scripture. It is God-breathed and useful for teaching, reproving, correcting and training in righteousness.

What we may have a tendency to overlook is that Paul goes on to tell Timothy that he is to '*Preach the Word ... correct, rebuke and encourage with ... careful instruction*' (2 Timothy 4:1-2). The echo of the language of 2 Timothy 3:16 in 2 Timothy 4:2 is significant. The way in which God's Word shows its usefulness is when its message is expounded and applied in these ways. That is why (according to Ephesians 4:7-16) ministry of God's Word is central to the growth of the entire church. Preaching, biblical exposition, is vital to our individual and corporate spiritual wellbeing.

It is interesting to see the enormous emphasis the apostle Paul placed on preaching and teaching. For two years he taught in Ephesus in the lecture hall of Tyrannus, probably for several hours each day from about 11.00 a.m. in the morning, presumably during the siesta time in the middle of the day. Later he told the Ephesian elders that he had preached the whole counsel of God to them in that time. In those two years or so the Ephesians must have heard something like the equivalent of hearing forty years of three sermons of forty minutes each week! A life-time of exposition in a couple of years! Why such an emphasis on preaching? In order to show Christ in his fulness from all the Scriptures in their riches. It is through such exposition of Scripture, as Paul writes to Timothy, that God instructs our minds, rebukes our consciences, heals our wounded spirits and equips us to serve him for his glory.

The great reformers like Luther and especially Calvin and the later Puritans saw this. Calvin preached an average of five sermons each week to his congregation. He returned to the pattern used by some of the earlier church fathers, like Augustine and John Chrysostom, preaching series of expository sermons on entire books of the Bible.

As is well known, between 1538 and 1540 Calvin was banished from the city of Geneva. Invited to return, he agreed to do so contrary to all his natural feelings. Doubtless the congregation assembled for his first sermon thereafter waited with baited breath, anticipating fireworks from the pulpit! But Calvin simply took up for exposition the next verse in the passage on which he had been preaching before he was exiled. He wanted the people to hear what God, not Calvin, had to say. His feelings were not important; the exposition of the whole of God's Word was!

This is a great vision and needs to become ours too: the preaching of a whole Christ as he is seen in the whole Bible, to make us wholehearted Christians. We still need that vision. It has largely been lost in the Western churches. We need to ask ourselves whether we still have it or not. The preaching of God's Word has power to transform our lives. We need to encourage such life-nourishing preaching. We need to pray that we will see more of such preaching in our churches today.

We have already stressed the importance of rightly handling the Word of God if we are to make consistent progress in living in a way that is appropriate to those who belong to the kingdom of God. This leads us to consider two further principles which are foundational to all Reformed theology and to the life-style to which it leads.

Union with Christ as the means of conformity to His image

The doctrine of union with Christ lies at the heart of the Christian life, and since the time of Calvin has been central to Reformed theology. All that Christ has done for us, says Calvin, is of no benefit to us so long as we remain outside of Christ (*Inst.* III.i.1). Only when we are united to him does what he has done for us become ours.

Calvin learned the importance of union with Christ from the teaching of the Gospels and the Epistles. In the writings of the apostle Paul the phrase 'in Christ' or its equivalent is definitive of what it means to be a Christian: to be united by the Spirit to Jesus Christ.

Paul learned this when he was still the persecutor, Saul of Tarsus. He thought he was only persecuting Christians. But when Jesus spoke to him on the Damascus Road, he said, '*Saul, why are you persecuting me?*' In that moment Saul had his first lesson in the doctrine of union with Christ: Jesus' followers were so united to him that to persecute them was to persecute Jesus himself! To be a Christian means to be 'in Christ'. Thus, when, in Romans 16:7, Paul speaks of two of his kinsfolk, Andronicus and Junias, who were 'in Christ' before he was, he simply means that they became Christians before he did.

But what are the implications and consequences of this union? Two of them deserve special attention:

Union with Christ in his death and resurrection

Union with Christ means that we come to share in his death to sin and his resurrection to new life. By uniting us to Christ, God the Father means to conform us to the image of his Son. This is the destiny he has in store for us (Romans 8:29).

Again it is Calvin who expounds this with greatest depth, doubtless because in the doctrine of union with Christ he had discovered a key biblical grid within which he could interpret his own Christian experience. He tells us that as those who are united to Christ we experience both an inward and an outward mortification and vivification, a dying and a rising with our crucified and resurrected Saviour.

Inwardly, in Christ we have died to sin and are no longer under its dominion (Romans 6:1ff); inwardly we are raised with Christ and walk in newness of life through his risen power. This does not mean we are sinless. But since Christ reigns in grace where sin formerly reigned, we have

been set free from the dominion, the domination, the tyranny of sin. We are no longer its slaves. This is a vitally important thing for us to know if we are to live the Christian life joyfully and triumphantly.

The great Puritan, John Owen, saw the importance of this, when he said that all pastoral problems involve either persuading those who have never been converted that they are dead in trespasses and sin, and that sin reigns over them; or persuading those who are true believers and have therefore died to sin in union with Christ, that they have died to sin and are no longer under its dominion. They are now alive to God.

But union with Christ in his death and resurrection also affects us in important ways outwardly. For throughout this life we have to bear the Cross as disciples of Jesus Christ. But, like Christ, our sufferings are shaped by God to bear spiritual fruit. Paul speaks of this in 2 Corinthians 4:10-12, when he says that he always carries around in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in his mortal body: 'death works' in the apostle, so that 'life works' in others.

Doubtless Paul learned this as he reflected on his own conversion. The structure of Acts 7:58-8:3 suggests a connection between Stephen's death and Saul's subsequent conversion, as though to say: Stephen's death was not a waste but an investment; death worked in Stephen with the consequence that life worked in Saul of Tarsus. Stephen carried around in his body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus might be produced in Saul. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

It is almost out of place for me to remind Korean Christians of this principle. I recall an incident during a seminar at Westminster Seminary on Calvin's theology of the cross when one of our Korean students told us how reading the Reformer's teaching in the *Institutes* on 'life under the cross' had given him renewed appreciation of his family inheritance: '*You see*' he explained, '*my grandfather was martyred for Christ*'. As Calvin says, commenting on 1 Peter 1:11, God has fashioned the church from the beginning in such a way that the Cross is the way to victory and death the way to life.

But we not only share outwardly in Christ's death; we will also share, outwardly, in his resurrection. We look forward to that day when he will raise our mortal remains from the dust, and these bodies of humiliation will be changed to become like the body of his glory (Philippians 3:20-21). Indeed, our outward mortification serves to encourage us to look forward to and long for that great day.

This is why what Calvin calls 'meditation on the future life' is a central part of the Christian life-style. He advises us in this context to beware of the this-worldly horizon of the radical premillenarian view of the ancient Chiliasts that Christ will come and reign for a thousand years. For such teaching Calvin reserves some of his harshest words: it is a '*fiction ... too childish either to need or to be worth a refutation*' (*Inst.* III.xv.5). Here, following Augustine, Calvin calls on us to fix our eyes not on this world, but on the world to come.

Calvin held that the Mosaic administration of the Sabbath Day pointed believers to Christ's death and resurrection and to their fellowship in them. That Mosaic symbolism has now been fulfilled. But we still use the Sabbath to order our worship and regulate our lives. Yet we do so as those who already enjoy the union with Christ to which it formerly pointed forwards. That is why the Christian's Lord's Day is the day of resurrection, the first day of the week. We already experience communion with our crucified and risen Lord and carry it into every day of the week.

It is not possible to expound this theme at greater length in one brief study. Suffice it to commend Calvin's own rich exposition of it in his *Institutes*, Book III. Those who have never read Calvin before, and find that even the mention of his name daunts them are often amazed and then overjoyed to discover the wonderful combination of depth and simplicity in his writing.

Union with Christ implies adoption as sons

Union with Christ means that we are brought into God's family as his adopted sons and daughters. The One who chose us in Christ also adopts us into his family through him (Ephesians 1:4-5), in

order that he might be the firstborn of many brethren (Romans 8:29). In many ways this is the highest of our present privileges as Christian believers. It is, as John Murray eloquently expressed it, *'the apex of redemptive grace and privilege'*.

It was not until the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647 that the doctrine of adoption was given its proper place in the church's confessions. But it is interesting to notice, as one reads through Calvin's writings, that the word *adoptio* (adoptive sonship), appears with great frequency. For Calvin it conveys the essence of the Christian life, so much so that he calls the title *'the Spirit of adoption'* (Romans 8:15) *'the first (i.e. supreme) title'* for the Holy Spirit.

This sonship is the key to Christian assurance — to know that God loves us as a Father, and that he accepts and rejoices in our works of service and labours of love. It is a great encouragement to intercession: in our petitions we ask our Father to do what he has promised in his word. Because we are his sons and daughters, we can be bold and joyful in approaching him.

Our adoption is also the key to understanding many of our experiences in the Christian life. Fathers train their children and discipline them. This pattern sheds light on the trials and difficulties of the Christian life (as Hebrews 12:7 reminds us). Thus, another great Puritan pastor, John Flavel, tells us that afflictions act like the sun on garments hung out to bleach. They cleanse the children of God and make them holy in their Father's service.

These considerations bring us to the last of our three major headings. We have seen that reformed life style is guided by the Scriptures; it is also lived in union with Christ in which we are more and more being made like him. Now we must consider how Christians are:

Called to glorify God as the chief purpose of life

What is to be the attitude of the Christian to the present world order?

Our natural instinct is to seek a simple answer to this question. And there is one: we are called to glorify God in the world. But that, in turn, is really a multi-faceted statement. For the Reformed Christian (again following Calvin), it consists of three elements, which must always be taken together:

1. The Christian is called to develop a healthy contempt for this present world insofar as it is under the reign of sin

We are by nature inclined to have what Calvin calls a 'slavish' and a 'brute like' love of this world. We lose our senses in it, and discover that we are no longer able to use it as our servant. It becomes our master and spoils our appetite for spiritual realities and for the world to come. We become sluggish in our pursuit of the knowledge of God.

In this respect the Christian is called to be radically different from his contemporaries. He sees the world in its fallenness and corruption, on the one hand; and on the other he has caught sight of the glorious majesty of God and of what John Newton called the *'solid joys and lasting treasures'* of the world to come. He knows that at God's right hand there is fulness of joy and that pleasures for evermore are to be found in his presence. He cannot look at this world with the same desires and fascination the ungodly man or woman has. We no longer live for ourselves, but for him who loved us and gave himself for us.

2. But the Christian has also been set free to explore this world because God, his Father, is its Creator

We have already seen that the knowledge of God the Redeemer does not mean that we ignore his creation, but rather that we are restored to the knowledge of him as Creator. This was an important point made by the Reformed theologians of the sixteenth century. There were radical reformers who despised all knowledge of the arts and sciences, believing that the people of God should have nothing to do with a fallen creation. That tradition is still alive in Christendom. It is, unfortunately, creation-denying as well as world-denying in the pejorative sense. But when we come to see, with Calvin, that this world was made by God to be a theatre for his glory, a

mirror of his character, a garment to make visible his invisible attributes, then we not only read the Book of Scripture, but also the Book of Nature in order to observe his ways. Of course, only in the light of the Book of Scripture (the divinely given spectacles) can we read the Book of Nature aright. But by doing so we discover, as the English hymn-writer George Wade Robinson has put it, that:

*Something lives in every hue
Christless eyes have never seen.*

Thus, Christians discovered in the wake of the Reformation that they had nothing to fear as they engage in the hard sciences. Indeed, as has often been pointed out, there seems to be an important connection between the discovery of this teaching and the enormous impetus that was given to scientific research and experiment in the post-Reformation period. We know this is our Father's world, and we are confident that by exploring it in the light of his Word we will see more and more of his wonders and be able to say that the heavens themselves declare the glory of God.

The same is true for those who study what we call the humanities, in various ways examining the activities of God's most ingenious (and now, sadly, perverse creation), man; his history, his literature, his psychology. Here the believer alone is able to penetrate fully to what lies behind and explains humanity's great artistic, musical and literary achievements. They are the result of God's creating love and now his sustaining and restraining common grace to his fallen and marred image. No wonder man thinks, creates, says and writes marvellous things. He is the image of God. No wonder too, now that he is fallen and rebellious, that he also creates and writes foul and evil things; *pessimum corruptio optimi est* — the worst is always the corruption of the best, as the old Latin proverb says.

3. The Christian is also free to use God's world for God's glory, and to enjoy it

Because the Christian is not enslaved to the world, and is careful not to allow the world to spoil his appetite for the things of God, his taste buds are not dulled to the blessings God has already given in this world.

We find this biblical balance well-expressed by Calvin in the way he handles the words of 1 Corinthians 10:31 (*'whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God'*). In his sermon on this text, he reminds us that God has given us not merely the essentials, only the bare necessities. Rather he has lavished on us an abundance of good things, for us richly to enjoy. In this sense, all things are ours (1 Corinthians 3:21). In his commentary on the same passage he sweetly underlines the way in which Paul teaches that *'there is no area in the whole of life, however insignificant it may be, that we ought not to devote to the glory of God'*.

Calvin was astute enough to recognise that it was possible to exercise a mistaken rigour in this world, as well as an erroneous laxity. In this respect he was somewhat different from Augustine, whose experience as a Manichaean no doubt influenced him towards the more ascetic view that while we may *use* things in this world, we should avoid *enjoying* them.

But how can we escape falling into one or other of these two harmful extremes of over-scrupulous rigorism on the one hand and license and laxity on the other? Here is Calvin's answer:

Let this be our principle: that the use of God's gifts is not wrongly directed when it is referred to the end to which the author himself created and destined them for us, since he created them for our good and not for our ruin. Accordingly, no one will hold to a straighter path than he who diligently looks to this end. (Inst. III.xx.2)

God's creation, Calvin concludes, is full of wonders; these are not only useful for us, but attractive to us. We have a marvellously generous Father! But how, then, can we live with this world's goods without being ensnared by them? Here is the great reformer's answer, expressed in a series of four principles. They are well worth remembering:

- i. Recognise God as the source of every good gift. If we do, our lusts will be restrained, since we cannot simultaneously express gratitude to God and display unrestrained greed in consuming his provision. Thankfulness to him will enable us, as Paul teaches, to use the blessings of this world as though we did not possess them (1 Corinthians 7:29-31).
- ii. When you have few of this world's goods, learn contentment with your heavenly Father and in his present provision. Unless desires for 'more' are curbed when we have little, we will be incapable of a proper stewardship if we should ever have an abundance. We must always remember that everything we have is a stewardship. It is not the abundance of our possessions but the quality of our stewardship that is of cardinal importance. All we possess is his, not ours. Only those who have learned contentment when abased will experience that contentment if they later abound (Philippians 4:11-13).
- iii. Remember what your calling in life really is. You have been called to live in God's presence and for his glory. If you do this, you will never be ensnared by the unruly passions of the flesh or by the pride of life.
- iv. Learn to live calmly in God's world because you believe in God's gracious sovereignty and you know that he is your Father.

The anchor of such a Reformed life style is found in Paul's words in Romans 8:28-29. We know that God works everything together for the good of those who love him, who are called according to his purpose, which is, ultimately, to conform us to the likeness of Christ. Christians know that they live in a world full of darkness and danger. But it is not dark to their Father; therefore it cannot, ultimately, be dangerous for them. For their God works everything together for their good.

Only the person who believes in a genuinely sovereign God can have that confidence. That is what underpins a Reformed lifestyle. It means to know, and to be able to make your own, the answer to the first question of the Shorter Catechism. What is my chief end? My chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever.

The great American Reformed theologian B. B. Warfield tells a wonderful story which wonderfully illustrates the practical effects of all that we have been considering. It serves as a fitting conclusion to our review of the relationship between Reformed theology and the lifestyle it produces.

We have the following bit of personal experience from a general officer of the United States Army. He was in a great western city at a time of intense excitement and violent rioting. The streets were overrun daily by a dangerous crowd. One day he observed approaching him a man of singularly combined calmness and firmness of mien, whose very demeanour inspired confidence. So impressed was he with his bearing amid the surrounding uproar that when he had passed he turned to look at him, only to find that the stranger had done the same. On observing his turning the stranger at once came back to him, and touching his chest with his forefinger, demanded without preface: 'What is the chief end of man?' On receiving the countersign, 'Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever' — 'Ah!' said he, 'I knew you were a Shorter Catechism boy by your looks!' 'Why, that was just what I was thinking about you,' was the rejoinder.¹

Such Christian character is the rich fruit of biblical teaching. Let us long, pray and labour that by God's grace we may see it in ourselves and in others. For the acid test of Reformed theology is precisely that it produces this quality of Reformed life-style!

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All quotations from the Institutes are from J. T. McNeill, Ed., F. L. Battles, Trans., *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols. (London & Philadelphia, 1960).

¹ B.B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, vol. 1, ed., J. E. Meeter, Philipsburg, New Jersey, pp. 383-4.