

THE COLLECTED WRITINGS OF
Stanley K. Fowler

VOLUME 1

In this collection of essays Dr. Stan Fowler offers serious, substantive theological engagement with some of the central, if perennially controversial, doctrines of the church—election and perseverance, divine sovereignty and human freedom, faith, justification and assurance, among others—along with a range of contemporary issues in moral theology. While many theologians avoid entering the fray of discourse on popular issues of doctrinal controversy, Dr. Fowler enters, candidly, ever charitably, ever measured. Doing so from a Reformed Baptist perspective, he demonstrates a commitment to reading Scripture with the church catholic, with close and careful readings of authors ancient and modern alike, from Augustine and Anselm to T.F. Torrance and Karl Barth. While charitable with each, he exhibits throughout a Berean-like commitment to evaluate all theological claims by the rule of Scripture “to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11). The result is clear, historically attuned, theologically rich expressions of the Christian faith for contemporary Christians. Read this collection of essays and it will be easy to understand why Dr. Fowler is lauded as a pastors’ theologian.

Lyndon Jost (PhD)

Associate pastor, Christ Church Toronto; director of the Reformed House of Studies, Wycliffe College, University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada

These volumes of writings by Stan Fowler are a tribute to his influence on many students over the years and his wider influence in the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Canada. It will be extremely useful to future historians who want to understand the theology of Baptists in Canada during the period of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The church needs more theologians like Stan Fowler, who seek to do theology well for the church.

Craig A. Carter (PhD)

Research professor of theology, Tyndale University, Toronto

What a gift this collection is. With theological care and precision, Fowler's writings are deeply rooted and ecumenically zealous as he carefully defines contested issues and explores the insights of not only his Baptist tradition but many other Christian voices. One needn't agree with each of his conclusions, soteriologically or ethically, to deeply benefit from the model he offers for engaging contested questions: Fowler's work is refreshingly thoughtful and biblical, wide-ranging and incisive, full of kindness and clarity.

Jessica Joustra (PhD)

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Dr. Stanley K. Fowler is one of the most articulate and thoughtful theologians I know. I felt the precision and power of his competence in a debate I held with him decades ago as I tried to defend a particular hermeneutical and eschatological view I held at the time. After the kind but thorough decimation of my arguments, we became friends, and later colleagues. This collection of essays very much reflects his careful thinking, his ability to see multiple sides of an issue and allow room for different thinking, and quietly, gently and firmly articulate his own position in the spirit of ongoing conversation and reflection within the Christian community. These essays and articles, while some are historically rooted in the times in which they were written, need to be read by all who wrestle seriously with the issues they address. Stan is truly "a theologian in service of the church."

David G. Barker (ThD)

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A Theologian in Service
of the Church

THE COLLECTED WRITINGS OF
Stanley K. Fowler

VOLUME 1

Soteriology, Moral Theology
& Contemporary Issues

EDITED BY

Michael A.G. Haykin
& Jonathan N. Cleland



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To Donna Fowler,
Charissa, Timothy, Daniel and Paul

—*MAGH & JNC*

Living by faith means sometimes we wait patiently for God to act, to fulfil his purposes and we continue to obey his will now while we wait for God to act.

Living by faith means believing God can do what is humanly impossible to achieve his purposes.

Faith means believing what God has promised but it doesn't mean creating promises for God.

Living by faith means I do the revealed will of God and I let God take care of the consequences.

We accept the reality of an uncertain future, we wait for God to fulfill his purposes, we believe God can do what is humanly impossible and we obey God, whatever the apparent results are going to be, and we trust God to deal with the long term effects.¹

¹ Sermon excerpts from a two-part message on Hebrews 11 by Stan Fowler at Crestwicke Baptist Church, Guelph, Ont., July 2021.

To all who live by faith and serve faithfully.

Because of the Lord's great love
we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
(Lamentations 3:22–23)

—SKF

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Foreword

I first met Dr. Stan Fowler as a young *seminarian* attending Central Baptist Seminary. I had come to Christ only eighteen months previously and recall eagerly attending Dr. Fowler's theological classes. He allowed students to ask frequent questions and go down "bunny trails" of theological inquiry. He unpacked the truths of Scripture with theological precision, exegeted carefully and clearly from Scripture. It was a time of theological discovery and spiritual formation.

As a young *ordination candidate* pastoring in my second church, my church called an ordination council. The council was well attended along with Stan and another professor from the newly formed Heritage College & Seminary. A fellow pastor later commented he had never been to an ordination council with so many questions (likely due to the candidate) and 50 per cent of them came from Stan and his friend from Heritage. For several years other pastors told me they were present at my council or had heard about my ordination council and mentioned, mostly in jest, they would make sure Dr. Fowler would not be invited to their council. I have fond memories of it. Stan modelled for me the importance of ensuring future pastors are theologically astute.

As a *Fellowship pastor* I would invite Stan to board retreats to teach my elders and deacons on current theological and cultural issues. He has an uncanny ability to make the complex very simple. He helped me underscore the importance of theological engagement with my church leaders while coming to terms with our local church's response to current issues.

As the *national president* of the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Canada (FEBCC) I went back to Stan several times for counsel on some delicate issues. Once again I received thoughtful counsel backed by Scripture. I recall his particular interest in supporting our national council in the preparation of our marriage and human sexuality policy. Stan was instrumental in the writing of the policy's appendix along with a few other keen minds. But, I especially recall his eager participation when asked to contribute to the dialogue concerning what became known as the "Baptism motion." If you know Dr. Fowler, you know he has written and taught much concerning baptism (eg. his book *Rethinking Baptism: Some Baptist Reflections*).

I have sorely missed my friend the past three years as The Fellowship has prayerfully considered amendments to our original 1953 Affirmation of Faith. His recent stroke has unfortunately silenced him, however, while he is unable to physically speak, my prayer is his voice will remain clear, calling us to biblical and theological integrity as churches through the papers and essays contained in this helpful and thoughtful volume. Stan remains: "Our theologian in service of the FEBC church."

Steven Jones

National president, The Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Canada

01

Editors' introduction

I (Michael) can still recollect the first time that I had a long conversation with Stan. It was following a chapel in 1985 on the second floor of the Jonesville Crescent building that once housed Central Baptist Seminary. I can recall distinctly recognizing a kindred spirit: here was a man, I thought, who takes theology seriously. And it has been a joy for me to serve with such a theologian of the church who has been entirely faithful in his calling.

The idea of a collection of Stan's writings had been in the air since his stroke in 2021, when I (Michael) asked Jordan Senécal, our librarian at that time, in the early fall of 2021 to compile a list of Stan's writings for a potential volume. The following summer I (Michael) suggested to Jordan via a number of emails that he co-edit the volume with me. That did not transpire as planned, though, due to Jordan's decision to leave Heritage and return to his hometown of Montreal. The idea was rekindled the following fall, that of 2023, when Dave Barker asked Jon to co-edit the collection of Stan's essays for publication. I (Jon) was deeply honoured since Dr. Fowler was my supervisor for my Master's thesis at Heritage College & Seminary. In many ways

he has been a theological model of someone who serves Christ and his Church through serious theological study. Both of us are profoundly glad we could honour Stan and his legacy by publishing these books.

There are a number of people who are to be thanked for their help in making this book a reality. First and foremost, Donna Fowler (Stan's wife) and Charissa Redlich (Stan's daughter) were integral in helping provide us with Stan's writings. While many of them were in digital form, many of them we had only as hard copies, some of which were produced on a typewriter. Thus, we thank Ruth Engler for her work in digitizing many of Stan's papers, putting them into Word documents and reading them over for clarity. We also thank Jordan Senécal for his work in putting together an initial bibliography of Stan's writings and beginning the process of compiling his works. Finally, we thank Darryl Dash for his willingness to update his biographical sketch of Stan so that we might include it in this volume.

Due to the number and length of Stan's writings, we have decided to publish his writings in two volumes. This first volume is on Stan's papers on soteriology, moral theology and contemporary issues. The second volume will cover his writings on ecclesiology, sacramentology and eschatology. No distinction of this sort is ever perfect. Several of the papers could easily fit under two different categories. Nevertheless, we have done our best to structure and organize the papers in a way that is coherent and easily accessible and that balances the two volumes. Stan agreed to the publication of all the papers included and read through final drafts before publication.

The papers in these volumes are made up of previous publications, unpublished paper presentations, unpublished essays, ThD papers and Master's papers. Our desire has been to be as exhaustive as possible. In the case that a paper was used for something prior to publication (i.e., presented then published or submitted as a ThD paper then later published), we have included the published version only. Other papers and essays that were used later as a part of Fowler's monograph, *More than a Symbol*,

have not been included.¹ All papers that were previously published have been reprinted by permission.

Each chapter begins with a footnote to explain its origin. Due to the purpose of the volume, we have not updated the papers other than to make minor editorial changes. Hence, we have not added contemporary literature, nor have we substantially changed the language or formatting of each essay. This means that while most of the essays use footnotes, some of the essays reference sources in the body of the text. In the case that information has been added in the footnotes for the sake of the reader (outside of the introductory footnotes connected to the title) these additions will begin with “Editors’ note” and will be in square brackets. Seeing as these chapters come from different sources—some more academic in nature and some more popular level—the writing style will vary as well. This also means that “contemporary issues” refers often to the issues that were particularly relevant during the time that Stan wrote about them. As the dates of the papers in the two volumes span across a fifty-year period, the papers themselves offer insight as works of history. By publishing these papers, this history is made accessible, as these essays offer firsthand accounts of the debates and issues that were dealt with by a key Baptist theologian who spent most of his career in Ontario.

The works in these volumes display Fowler’s clear and cogent theological mind. They show careful attention to historical sources, a consistent desire to return to the Scriptures and exegete them carefully, a thoughtful and critical engagement with the scholarship of the time and an intent to bring these theological topics into conversation with contemporary societal issues and the life of the church. He is indeed “A Theologian in Service of the Church.”² Such careful theological engagement continues to be a need today.

Many of these essays have not received the readership they are due, and it is our hope that these volumes will help to change this.

¹ See Stanley K. Fowler, *More than a Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery of Baptismal Sacramentalism*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought 2 (Milton Keynes, UK: Pater-noster, 2002). This work continues to be cited and employed in scholarly literature.

² This title comes from Darryl Dash, “A Theologian in Service of the Church,” Dash-House (October 20, 2016; <https://www.dashhouse.com/theologian-service-church/>).

05

Calvin's doctrine of assurance¹

The name of John Calvin has become associated in the popular imagination with a strong doctrine of predestination. Although this particular understanding of election and predestination is by no means unique to Calvin and the doctrine does not dominate his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as is commonly assumed, it is of course true that Calvin taught a doctrine of unconditional election (or double predestination) which is rejected by most of the Christian Church. Although there are certain scriptural statements which seem to support Calvin's doctrine, there is a general reluctance to assert it because of the problems it seems to create.

One of the practical problems with the Calvinistic doctrine of election is its apparent conflict with the experience of personal

¹ This paper was typewritten but without a title page. The title and authorship are handwritten at the top of page one. It is one of Stan's ThD papers, but the professor it was written for and the exact date it was submitted is unknown. The date, however, would be similar to the other ThD papers in this volume.

assurance of salvation: if salvation depends ultimately on a secret eternal decree of God, how can anyone be sure of being an object of the decree to elect? For Catholics who follow the Council of Trent in its denial of the possibility of such assurance this would be no great problem, but it is a problem for Calvin and Calvinists, who cannot escape the clear scriptural indications that such assurance should be a normal part of Christian experience (see Rom 8:16; 1 John 5:13; etc.).

The problem of assurance came to occupy a major place in later Calvinism, especially in Great Britain among the Puritans. These theological descendants of Calvin were intensely interested in religious experience and “the care of souls,” and this brought them into regular contact with believers who were plagued by doubt about their own standing with God, and in this context, they developed a highly systematized understanding of the relationship between faith and assurance. The classic statement of Puritan Calvinism is, of course, the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), in which Chapter XVIII is devoted to the “Assurance of Grace and Salvation.” This four-paragraph statement declares that all believers have the right to be “certainly assured that they are in a state of grace,” which certainty is “not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion” but “an infallible assurance of faith.” It is, nevertheless, recognized that many who appear to be true believers do not experience this kind of assurance, and in fact, one “may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it.” The solution to this lack of assurance is provided by God “without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of ordinary means.” The normal means of gaining (or regaining) such assurance involves the perception that one has “that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may in due time be revived.”²

In other words, the Westminster variety of Calvinism asserts that assurance of election is possible, but it comes *indirectly* through a consideration of the *evidence* that one is truly regenerate. This

² “The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XVIII,” in *Creeds of the Churches*, ed. John H. Leith, 3rd ed. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 212f.

approach came to be called the *sylogismus practicus* (practical syllogism), which in explicit statement is something like this: (1) The elect are those who sincerely believe in Christ and live a holy life; (2) I give evidence of sincere faith and holy living; (3) Therefore, I am elect.

Reformed theologians in the English Calvinist tradition have traditionally assumed that the Puritan approach to assurance is a legitimate development of Calvin's thought,³ but recent scholarship has called into question this link between Calvin and Westminster and has argued that early in the development of Calvinism there was a significant departure from Calvin in regard to faith and assurance. One of the most influential studies is R.T. Kendall's Oxford thesis published in 1979 as *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*.⁴ Kendall deals mainly with the English Calvinists from William Perkins through the Westminster Divines, but all of his work is set against the background of his interpretation of Calvin. Kendall argues that the English Calvinist approach to assurance is a radical departure from Calvin in regard to the nature of faith, the extent of the atonement, and the contribution of good works.

The purpose of this study is to analyze Calvin's approach to the assurance of election and specifically to ask where, and to what extent, Calvin provides a foundation for the practical syllogism. In the process, I shall be evaluating Kendall's highly questionable reading of Calvin. This topic could profitably be studied from various angles: historical, theological and pastoral. However, the theological definition and pastoral implications will have to await further work. In this study, I am not primarily asking whether Calvin is right or what the pastoral implications are but only asking what was in fact Calvin's doctrine of assurance. To put it another way, was Calvin a Calvinist?

³ See, for example, B.B. Warfield, *Studies in Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), 148.

⁴ Kendall's thesis was originally presented for the degree of DPhil in 1976 under the title, "The Nature of Saving Faith from William Perkins (d. 1602) to the Westminster Assembly (1643–9)" and was subsequently published by Oxford University Press in 1979. The significance and influence of Kendall's work becomes evident through reading its reviews.

The problem of temporary faith

Before considering faith, atonement and good works in relation to assurance, it is necessary to briefly survey Calvin's doctrine of "temporary faith," which provides the theoretical basis for anxiety in a professed believer. The reality of temporary faith is indicated by both Scripture and experience. Scripturally, it is rooted in various New Testament texts, but especially in Luke 8:13, which is part of Jesus' explanation of the parable of the sower. The shallow, rocky soil is said to represent those who joyfully receive the message but only "believe for a while" and then fall away when tested. Experientially, there are many examples of persons who profess faith in Christ and give evidence of the genuineness of their faith, but at some point, they deny their profession. Within the system of Calvin, with his assertion of the final perseverance of all those in a state of grace, these cannot be cases of truly regenerate persons who surrender their faith and lose their regenerate status; they must instead be persons whose evidence of an experience of grace is spurious, persons who only *seemed* to be elect.

If Scripture teaches that all who believe in Jesus Christ are saved, then how can these reprobates believe even temporarily? Calvin's answer is to point out that the word "faith" (or "believe") is in itself ambiguous. Often in Scripture, the word denotes the trust in Christ wrought in the elect ("saving faith"), but the word has other connotations in some Scriptural texts. Sometimes it means merely assent to sound doctrine, which can be true even of demons (Jas 2); on other occasions it refers to belief in a specific object or divine provision (eg. belief that Jesus can or will perform a healing); and sometimes it signifies a special gift to perform miracles (the *charisma* of faith in 1 Cor 12).⁵ Therefore, there is no problem with applying the word "faith" to the experience of some of the reprobate, as long as it is recognized that this faith is qualitatively different from the faith of the elect.

Calvin argues that temporary faith can involve a very high level of spiritual experience. When working out his definition of true faith as opposed to temporary faith, he writes:

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), III.ii.13. All subsequent quotations from the *Institutes* are from the Battles translation.

For though only those predestined to salvation receive the light of faith and truly feel the power of the gospel, yet experience shows that the reprobate are sometimes affected by almost the same feeling as the elect, so that even in their own judgment they do not differ in any way from the elect.⁶

It is important for Calvin to emphasize the “almost” in the above statement. He further writes:

And I do not deny that God illumines their minds enough for them to recognize his grace; but he so distinguishes that awareness from the exclusive testimony he gives to his elect that they do not attain the full effect and fruition thereof.⁷

Calvin seems to say, then, that while self-deception is a reality for many of the reprobate who think they have true faith, there is a special awareness granted to the elect which assures them that they are not self-deceived.

Reformed theology in general has asserted that there is a work of the Spirit in the elect beyond the work of convicting sinners of their need, and this distinction is frequently phrased as the special call versus the general call. Calvin employs this distinction but allows for a more extensive work in the non-elect. He writes:

There are two kinds of call. There is the general call, by which God invites all equally to himself through the outward preaching of the Word—even those to whom he holds it out as a savor of death, and as the occasion for severer condemnation. The other kind of call is special, which he deigns for the most part to give to the believers alone, while by the inner illumination of his Spirit he causes the preached Word to dwell in their hearts. Yet sometimes he also causes those whom he illumines for only a time to partake of it; then he justly forsakes them on account of their ungratefulness and strikes them with even greater blindness.⁸

⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ii.11.

⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ii.11.

⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxiv.8.

Calvin's doctrine of temporary faith may solve the problem of interpreting apostasy, but it magnifies the problem of assurance. If the reprobate can receive even the special call of the Spirit, be thoroughly illumined to understand the truth of the gospel, feel that they are indeed elect, and give evidence approximating that of the elect, how can anyone have full assurance of election? If one questions his election, does that mean that he has only temporary faith, since the special awareness given to the elect is absent from him? Is it, then, possible to be sure of one's own damnation, because of the presence of doubt? If not, why not? Calvin provides more questions than answers on this point.

This problem of temporary faith is the very problem which the English Calvinist doctrine of assurance was designed to address; it was a pastoral problem which the Puritans took very seriously. Kendall, who wants to show a radical difference between Calvin and Calvinists, sees this correlation but writes this about Calvin:

Regrettably, he seems not to have anticipated the dilemma this teaching could create. Much less could he have known that a tradition would emerge that would incorporate his teaching and try to solve the problem it raises by a voluntaristic doctrine of faith. His own effort to solve the problem is less than satisfactory; had he fully perceived the pastoral implications he raised he might have shown how his own doctrine of faith could be retained without appealing to man's will as the ultimate ground of assurance.⁹

As even Kendall admits, Calvin does provide a basis for anxiety about one's elect status by means of his treatment of temporary faith. Kendall sees this as a lapse on Calvin's part that is essentially inconsistent with his understanding of faith and assurance, which is supposedly quite different from the Westminster understanding. That may be, but it is also possible that there is a much closer link between Calvin and Westminster than Kendall and others are willing to admit. I turn now to the specific points at issue: faith, atonement and good works in relation to assurance in Calvin's thought.

⁹ R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 22.

Faith and assurance

The Westminster Confession separates assurance from faith when it says, "This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long... before he be partaker of it."¹⁰ Calvin, on the other hand, defines faith in this way:

Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.¹¹

As a result, Tony Lane can say:

There is a sharp contrast between Calvin and the Westminster Confession in the matter of assurance of salvation. The Confession sees faith and assurance as closely related but distinct.... But for Calvin faith, by definition, includes assurance.¹²

Lane suggests there are two basic reasons for this difference between Calvin and Calvinists: a shift from a passive to an active view of faith, so that faith becomes a human act and one is left asking if the act has been done properly; and a shift of the grounds of assurance from the divine promise to "inward evidence of graces," resulting in prolonged introspection.¹³ This distinction between active and passive faith is the major theme of Kendall's book. In fact, he argues that the active or voluntaristic view of faith in English Calvinism is really crypto-Arminian and essentially a repudiation of Calvin.¹⁴ Another way in which Kendall phrases this distinction is to say that, for Calvin, assurance comes through a *direct* act of faith in which the sinner looks only to Christ, the "mirror of election," but for later Calvinists, assurance

¹⁰ "The Westminster Confession," ch. XVIII, para. III, 213.

¹¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ii.7.

¹² Tony Lane, "The Quest for the Historical Calvin," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 55 (1983): 103.

¹³ A.N.S. Lane, "Calvin's Doctrine of Assurance," *Vox Evangelica* 11 (1979): 48.

¹⁴ Kendall, *Calvin*, 211.

comes through a *reflex* act in which the believer looks at his faith and holiness to see evidence that his faith is genuine.

Beyond his basic definition of faith quoted above, there are other places in the *Institutes* where Calvin indicates that assurance is inherent in faith. In his elaboration of the meaning of faith he says:

Briefly he alone is truly a believer who, convinced by a firm conviction that God is a kindly and well-disposed Father toward him, promises himself all things on the basis of his generosity; who, relying on the promises of divine benevolence toward him, lays hold on an undoubted expectation of salvation.... No man is a believer, I say, except him who, leaning upon the assurance of his salvation, confidently triumphs over the devil and death.¹⁵

In his treatment of justification, he writes:

Scripture shows that God's promises are not established unless they are grasped with the full assurance of conscience. Wherever there is doubt or uncertainty, it pronounces them void. Again, it declares that these promises do nothing but vacillate and waver if they rest upon our own work. Therefore, righteousness must either depart from us or works must not be brought into account, but faith alone must have place, whose nature it is to prick up the ears and close the eyes—that is, to be intent on the promise alone and to turn away from all worth or merit of man.¹⁶

He adds in the same section that “Christ is called ‘King of peace’ and ‘our peace’ because he quiets all agitations of conscience.”¹⁷ Human faith is for Calvin simply the evidence of God's effectual call, and “This inner call is a pledge of salvation that cannot deceive us.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ii.16.

¹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xiii.4.

¹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xiii.4.

¹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxiv.2.

Since Calvin speaks of faith as incompatible with any doubt, but later Calvinists separate faith and assurance both logically and temporally, the immediate impression given is that two very different views are at work here. However, it is necessary to consider other comments by Calvin in which he clearly admits that true believers often struggle for assurance. After referring to the certainty which accompanies faith, he adds this clarification:

Surely, while we teach that faith ought to be certain and assured, we cannot imagine any certainty that is not tinged with doubt, or any assurance that is not assailed by some anxiety. On the other hand, we say that believers are in perpetual conflict with their own unbelief. Far, indeed, are we from putting their consciences in any peaceful repose, undisturbed by any tumult at all. Yet, once again, we deny that, in whatever way they are afflicted, they fall away and depart from the certain assurance received from God's mercy.¹⁹

This inner turmoil in which true faith struggles against doubt is displayed in many of the Psalms:

So David, even when he might have seemed overwhelmed, in rebuking himself did not cease to rise up to God. He who, struggling with his own weakness, presses toward faith in his moments of anxiety, is already in large part victorious.²⁰

Calvin argues that all true believers, like David, "when the weight of temptation bends down and almost crushes constantly rise up, although not without difficulty and trouble."²¹ This ambiguity in the experience of the believer is explained by Calvin in biblical language as the struggle between flesh and spirit:

This variation arises from imperfection of faith, since in the course of the present life it never goes so well with us that we are wholly cured of the disease of unbelief and entirely filled

¹⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ii.17.

²⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ii.17.

²¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ii.17.

and possessed by faith. Hence arise those conflicts; when unbelief, which reposes in the remains of the flesh, rises up to attack the faith that has been inwardly conceived.²²

It is clear, then that the apparent contradiction is not just between Calvin and Calvinists but within Calvin himself. On the one hand, he claims that true faith always includes certain assurance, but on the other hand, he admits that the mixture of faith and doubt is a normal part of Christian experience. This is probably not a genuine contradiction in Calvin's thought, because the two concepts occur in the same chapter of the *Institutes* in his attempt to define faith, not in distinct pieces of literature. A more reasonable explanation is suggested by Paul Helm in his reply to Kendall:

Calvin's definition of faith is not a report of how the word "faith" is actually used, either by himself or by others, but it is a recommendation about how his readers ought habitually and properly to think of faith.... Calvin is recommending to his Christian readers not to be satisfied with a degree of faith that is without assurance. There can be faith without assurance, but that degree of faith is to be sought that is accompanied by assurance.²³

Another way to explain this tension is to recognize that when Calvin states his definition of faith, he is talking about faith in itself, in abstraction. Thus the definition of faith is not a definition of persons who have faith. Faith *per se* is the opposite of doubt and thus includes assurance, but the *person* who has faith also has varying degrees of doubt in this life (as both Scripture and experience indicate). But this is simply another way of saying that believers may have a long and painful struggle before their experience is fully determined by faith and their assurance is complete.

Superficially, Calvin's *Institutes* and the Westminster Confession are in disagreement about the connection between faith and assurance, but the contradiction may be only apparent. Both agree

²² Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ii.18.

²³ Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 26.

that full assurance is the norm and goal for all believers. Both agree that the present experience of the believer is marked by ambiguity, with true faith struggling against doubt which arises from both indwelling sin and external circumstances. Both agree that true faith perseveres in its struggle and will ultimately show itself victorious and produce deeper assurance. That there are differences in terminology and emphasis is clear, but that the difference is radical and substantial is by no means clear.

Atonement and assurance

The doctrine of limited atonement (sometimes called definite atonement or particular redemption) was clearly affirmed by Calvinists in, for example, the Canons of Dort (1618) and the Westminster Confession (1646), but there is a continuing debate about the view of Calvin himself. Kendall is perhaps the most enthusiastic proponent of the view that Calvin affirmed universal atonement, that this doctrine is central in Calvin's doctrine of assurance, and that this is a fundamental difference between Calvin and English Calvinists. Kendall begins his chapter on Calvin by declaring, "Fundamental to the doctrine of faith in John Calvin is his belief that Christ died indiscriminately for all men."²⁴ Calvin refers in *Institutes* III, i, 1 to what Christ "has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race," and Kendall argues that this "assumes that the question of the scope of the atonement is beyond controversy."²⁵ This is seen as foundational to the doctrine of assurance in that, "Had not Christ died for *all*, we could have no assurance that *our* sins have been expiated in God's sight."²⁶ Kendall suggests that Calvin's commitment to universal atonement can be seen in his commentaries on Isaiah 53:12; Hebrews 9:28; and Romans 5:15, among others.²⁷ Although other scholars agree that Calvin is distinguished from his followers by his commitment to universal atonement, Kendall uniquely relates this to the problem of assurance.

²⁴ Kendall, *Calvin*, 13.

²⁵ Kendall, *Calvin*, 13, n. 2.

²⁶ Kendall, *Calvin*, 14.

²⁷ Kendall, *Calvin*, 13, n. 3.

The evidence, however, is not all on one side. Helm argues, "There are passages in Calvin which show that he held the doctrine of limited atonement, even though the doctrine does not gain the prominence in his writings that it did during later controversies."²⁸ In addition to specific texts, Helm argues, the logic of Calvin's system demands a limited atonement. The three basic principles of Calvin which are considered determinative are these: (1) Christ's death procures *actual remission* of sins. For Calvin, the atonement is a substitutionary sacrifice, a real satisfaction of divine justice which effectually redeems those for whom it is offered by bearing the full penalty of divine wrath. (2) All the elect (and only the elect) have their sins actually remitted. If so then they must be the only ones for whom Christ offered satisfaction. (3) It was the express intent of Christ, in dying, to atone for the elect. That is, the atonement is designed to render effectual the decree of election. If atonement and election are related to the same goal, then it follows that the atonement (though infinite in value) is *designed* only for the elect.²⁹

There are really two issues here: first, what Calvin in fact taught (explicitly or implicitly) about the extent of the atonement; and second, what is the relevance of this for assurance of election. In trying to answer these questions, the *Institutes* are of little help, in that the issue was not systematically debated in Reformed theology prior to the Arminian controversy. What is more useful is to look at Calvin's commentaries on biblical texts which speak of Christ's death in universal terms, and when we do that, it can be seen that Calvin frequently nuances this universality in ways that point to limited (definite) atonement.

1 John 2:2 provides a classic proof-text for universal atonement if there is one, with its statement that Christ is "the atoning sacrifice (*hilasmos*) for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." With respect to the meaning of "world" here, Calvin says:

The design of John was no other than to make this benefit common to the whole Church. Then under the word *all* or

²⁸ Helm, *Calvin*, 18.

²⁹ Helm, *Calvin*, 13–23.

whole, he does not include the reprobate, but designates those who should believe as well as those who were then scattered through various parts of the world. For then is really made evident, as it is meet, the grace of Christ, when it is declared to be the only true salvation of the world.³⁰

This appears to be an explicit denial of unlimited atonement, interpreting its universality in *qualitative-geographical* terms (all *kinds* of people in all nations, the Church universal) and in terms of its *exclusivity* (the *only* way of salvation in the whole world). This is reinforced by Calvin's comments on the same verse in his controversy with the monk Georgius over predestination:

For this, the common solution does not avail, that Christ suffered sufficiently for all, but efficaciously only for the elect.... Wherever the faithful are dispersed throughout the world, John extends to them the expiation wrought by Christ's death.... It is incontestable that Christ came for the expiation of the sins of the whole world. But the solution lies close at hand, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but should have eternal life (John 3:15).³¹

The final sentence above is capable of more than one interpretation, but seems to mean that the atonement is specifically provided only for *all who will believe* (i.e., the elect). This is confirmed by Calvin's continuing reply to Georgius:

For the present question is not how great the power of Christ is or what efficacy it has in itself, but to whom He gives Himself to be enjoyed. If possession lies in faith and faith emanates from the spirit of adoption, it follows that only he is reckoned in the number of God's children who will be a partaker of Christ. The evangelist John sets forth the office of Christ as nothing less than by his death to gather the

³⁰ John Calvin, *Commentaries: The Catholic Epistles*, trans. and ed. John Owen (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 173.

³¹ John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. J.K.S. Reid (London: James Clarke & Co., 1961), 148f.

children of God into one (John 11:52). Hence, we conclude that, though reconciliation is offered to all through Him, yet the benefit is peculiar to the elect, that they may be gathered into the society of life.³²

John 1:29, in which Jesus is identified as “the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” is handled similarly, first in terms of ethnic universality:

And when he says, the sin OF THE WORLD, he extends this favour indiscriminately to the whole human race; that the Jews might not think that he had been sent to them alone.... Each of us may be convinced that there is nothing to hinder him from obtaining reconciliation in Christ, provided that he comes to him by the guidance of faith.³³

Second, in terms of the exclusivity of Christ:

But John leads us back to Christ alone, and informs us that there is no other way in which God is reconciled to us than through his agency, because he alone *takes away sin*. He therefore leaves no other refuge to sinners than to flee to Christ.³⁴

There are, admittedly, several places in his commentaries where Calvin writes in a way that points toward unlimited atonement. In regard to the “justification of life for all men” in Romans 5:18, he writes:

He makes this favour common to all, because it is propounded to all, and not because it is in reality extended to all; for though Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world, and is offered through God’s benignity indiscriminately to all, yet all do not receive him.³⁵

³² Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination*, 149.

³³ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, trans. William Pringle, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1847), 60, 64.

³⁴ Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 65.

³⁵ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. and ed. John Owen (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1849), 211.

In interpreting various Scriptures which relate the atonement to "many," Calvin points out that "many" should not be contrasted with "all." Concerning Isaiah 53:12 he says:

He alone bore the punishment of many because on him was laid the guilt of the whole world. It is evident from other passages, and especially from the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, that "many" sometimes denotes "all."³⁶

Concerning the blood "poured out for many" in Mark 14:24:

By the word *many* he means not a part of the world only, but the whole human race; for he contrasts many with *one*; as if he had said, that he will not be the Redeemer of one man only, but will die in order to deliver *many* from the condemnation of the curse.³⁷

And on Hebrews 9:28:

He says the sins of *many*, that is, of all, as in Rom. 5:15. It is yet certain that all receive no benefit from the death of Christ; but this happens, because their unbelief prevents them.³⁸

This internal tension in Calvin's thought illustrates his close adherence to Scripture and resistance to speculation and excessive systematizing, and thus we must guard against reading a position into Calvin's system. However, it does not seem unwarranted to conclude that Calvin is on the side of limited atonement. As is noted above, when commenting on 1 John 2:2 and John 1:29, he explicitly limits the meaning of "world" to something like "all kinds of people in the world," i.e., he affirms an ethnic universalism of the elect. When he says in other places that "many" means "all," one must not assume that this is intended as a statement

³⁶ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah*, trans. William Pringle, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1843), 131.

³⁷ John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, trans. William Pringle (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1846), 214.

³⁸ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, trans. John Owen (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1843), 220.

about the later debate over the extent of the atonement. In fact, in his comments on Hebrews 9:28, he says this himself:

At the same time this question is not to be discussed here, for the Apostle is not speaking of the few or of the many to whom the death of Christ may be available; but he simply means that he died for others and not for himself; and therefore he opposes many to one.³⁹

Given Calvin's warning, there is no apparent reason to take his comments about "all" in these passages as an indication that he denied definite atonement.

Furthermore, even if Calvin did affirm unlimited atonement, there is no way to defend Kendall's assertion that it is the centre of Calvin's doctrine of assurance. Charles Bell asserts with Kendall that Calvin held to unlimited atonement, but he cautions that the paucity of references in the *Institutes* to the relation between atonement and assurance leads one to question whether the connection is as important as Kendall maintains.⁴⁰ More to the point, universal atonement cannot by itself play this crucial role in assurance if all are not elect, as Roger Nicole points out:

It is not sufficient since on Kendall's showing, all covered by the atonement will not be saved; assurance, if it is to be reliable, needs to be grounded in something that actually makes a difference between the saved and the lost.⁴¹

Universal atonement, even if Calvin taught it, could not logically give personal assurance unless salvation is universal. Calvin unquestionably sees Christ's priestly work of atonement as the ground of *salvation*, and thus he exhorts his readers to look to Christ rather than to human merit, but this is not equivalent to saying that the atonement in itself is the ground of *assurance* that one is among the elect and thus has a personal share in the

³⁹ Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul*, 220.

⁴⁰ M. Charles Bell, "Calvin and the Extent of the Atonement," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 55 (1983): 121.

⁴¹ Roger Nicole, "John Calvin's View of the Extent of the Atonement," *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985): 205.

priestly work of Christ. That which redeems the elect is not the same as that which identifies the elect.

Good works and assurance

Calvin's doctrine of temporary faith creates a situation in which the distinction between the elect and the reprobate is severely clouded. How, then, can one be sure that he is elect and not merely deluded? English Calvinists developed a rather thorough approach to the problem centred in the practical syllogism. This approach assumes (on the basis of scriptural exegesis) that certain signs inevitably accompany election and regeneration; specifically, that a life characterized by good works done for the glory of God indicates that one's faith is genuine. To put it another way, sanctification is the proof of justification. To what extent does Calvin provide the basis for this link between good works and assurance?

Wilhelm Niesel indicates that it has been generally maintained that Calvin provides the logical foundation for this practical syllogism, but he argues that if we look for such an opinion in Calvin, "we shall not find it in the least."⁴² He recognizes that Calvin refers to the *signa posteriora* of election but says that Calvin does not mean by this "our attitude or our works" but rather "God's 'objective Word, his calling,' which means in the last resort, Christ, whom we encounter in the Word in virtue of the Holy Spirit."⁴³ He further recognizes that Calvin discusses the essence of the practical syllogism in response to Catholic theologians, and seems to treat it positively. Niesel offers this evaluation:

Thus Calvin concedes to the Roman theologians that our works may have a certain significance for the conviction that we are saved, but only when we have first of all fully and sufficiently recognized that it is through the sole mercy of God that we are saved.... And in conclusion he really cancels the small concession which he was able to make to his opponents. For what else does it mean when he says that our works,

⁴² Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, trans. H. Knight (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956), 170.

⁴³ Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 171.

because they are so intertwined with our sins, arouse in us despair rather than certainty? This is not what is usually meant by espousing a doctrine.⁴⁴

Kendall follows Niesel and sees in Calvin no basis for assurance of justification (or election) through sanctification. He writes:

That which Calvin does not do, then, is to urge men to make their calling and election sure to themselves. He thinks Christ's death is a sufficient pledge and merely seeing Him is assuring.... Indeed, "if you contemplate yourself, that is sure damnation."... Moreover, "when the Christian looks at himself he can only have grounds for anxiety, indeed despair."⁴⁵

The same basic conclusion is stated by Max Weber when he says that for Calvin, "The elect differ externally in this life in no way from the damned."⁴⁶

Helm's reply to Kendall argues that in fact English Calvinism is true to Calvin on this point. He summarizes his understanding of Calvin thus:

While the believer has not to trust in himself for salvation—this would be salvation by human merit—nevertheless he may find in himself evidence that he has trusted in Christ for salvation. While his own state is most certainly not the foundation of his salvation—Christ is the foundation—his own state may be evidence that he is in Christ, as the birth certificate is evidence of a person's date of birth.⁴⁷

Lane takes a middle course and argues:

Calvin recognized that our works can strengthen or confirm our confidence, as evidences of God's work in us, and that

⁴⁴ Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 173–175.

⁴⁵ Kendall, *Calvin*, 25f.

⁴⁶ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 110.

⁴⁷ Helm, *Calvin*, 28.

they are a test of the genuineness of faith. But once they become the primary ground of assurance a *de facto* justification by works has been introduced which will lead either to despair or to a false self-confidence.⁴⁸

I turn now to a search for the real Calvin. There are three basic places to look for Calvin's treatment of works and assurance: there is first his exposition of works and justification over against Tridentine Catholic theology (*Inst.* III, xiv, 18ff.); second, there is his defense of unconditional election and assurance of such election (*Inst.* III, xxiv, 4–5); and third, there are his commentaries on the scriptural texts which seem to ground assurance of salvation in good works.

In response to Catholic critics, Calvin shows that the affirmation of justification by faith alone does not deny that there is some kind of relation between works and the experience of grace. He writes:

The agreement lies in this: that the saints, when it is a question of the founding and establishing of their own salvation, without regard for works turn themselves solely to God's goodness.... A conscience so founded, erected, and established is established also in the consideration of works, so far, that is, as those are testimonies of God dwelling and ruling in us.... Therefore, when we rule out reliance upon works, we mean only this: that the Christian mind may not be turned back to the merit of works as to a help toward salvation but should rely wholly on the free promise of righteousness. But we do not forbid him from undergirding and strengthening faith by signs of the divine benevolence toward him.⁴⁹

Works, then, do not merit election, but they do give proof of it:

When, therefore, the saints by innocence of conscience strengthen their faith and take from it occasion to exult,

⁴⁸ Lane, "Calvin's Doctrine of Assurance," 35.

⁴⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xiv.18.

from the fruits of their calling they merely regard themselves as having been chosen as sons by the Lord.⁵⁰

Calvin emphasizes that the legitimate place of works in giving assurance is always secondary:

(Fear of the Lord and good works) are matters that have no place in laying a foundation to strengthen the conscience but are of value only when taken *a posteriori*.... For there is nowhere that fear which is able to establish full assurance. And the saints are conscious of possessing only such an integrity as intermingled with many vestiges of the flesh. But since they take the fruits of regeneration as proof of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, from this they are greatly strengthened to wait for God's help in all their necessities, seeing that in this very great matter they experience him as Father. And they cannot do even this unless they first apprehend God's goodness, sealed by nothing else than the certainty of the promise. For if they begin to judge it by good works nothing will be more uncertain or more feeble; for indeed, if works be judged of themselves, by their imperfection they will no less declare God's wrath than by their incomplete purity they testify to his benevolence.⁵¹

Therefore, Calvin opposes his Catholic critics by allowing works only a secondary role in assurance, but he stands equally opposed to some neo-Calvinists by allowing works a legitimate place as "signs of the calling by which they realize their election."⁵²

The same kind of approach is seen when Calvin treats the doctrine of election directly. He opposes all attempts to be assured of election through special revelations or speculative inquiry into the divine decree. Election is "in Christ" and assurance of election comes through the experience of being united with Christ by faith, in which works are secondary signs. He writes:

⁵⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xiv.19.

⁵¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xiv.19.

⁵² Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xiv.20.

We shall be following the best order if, in seeking the certainty of our election, we cling to those latter signs which are sure attestations of it.... Let this, therefore, be the way of our inquiry: to begin with God's call, and to end with it.

Still, this does not prevent believers from feeling that the benefits they receive daily from God's hand are derived from that secret adoption... since God wills to confirm to us by this, as by a token, as much as we may lawfully know of his plan.⁵³

Calvin is careful to emphasize that the signs of election are only *signs* pointing to Christ as the ground of salvation. This is clear in his famous statement about Christ as the *speculum electionis*:

But if we have been chosen in him, we shall not find assurance of election in ourselves; and not even in God the Father, if we conceive him as severed from his Son. Christ, then, is the mirror wherein we must, and without self-deception may, contemplate our own election. For since it is into his body the Father has destined those to be engrafted whom he has willed from eternity to be his own, that he may hold as sons all whom he acknowledges to be among his members, we have a sufficiently clear and firm testimony that we have been inscribed in the book of life if we are in communion with Christ.⁵⁴

This focus on Christ as the ultimate ground of assurance rules out excessive introspection which would make the life of the believer the primary proof of election, but Calvin is equally opposed to the Barthian notion that *all* humans are elected in Jesus Christ the elect Man. Election "in Christ" means for Calvin (as for Paul) that we are elect "*if* we are in communion with Christ," and good works have their place for Calvin as signs that this professed communion is not spurious.

Turning now to Calvin's commentaries, we find that when he deals with scriptural texts that link holy living to assurance of salvation, he takes the texts at face value and does not offer strained interpretations. Consider first his treatment of Romans 8:14:

⁵³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxiv.4.

⁵⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxiv.5.

This is a confirmation of what has immediately preceded; for he teaches us, that those only are deemed the sons of God who are ruled by his Spirit; for by this mark God acknowledges them as his own people....

But it is right to observe that the working of the Spirit is various: ...but what he means here is sanctification, with which the Lord favours none but his own elect, and by which he separates them for sons to himself.⁵⁵

And on 1 John 2:3:

John then takes this principle as granted, that the knowledge of God is efficacious. He hence concludes that they by no means know God who keep not his precepts or commandments.⁵⁶

He is careful to avoid perfectionism by saying that those who obey God in this way are those who “strive, according to the capacity of human infirmity, to form their life in conformity to the will of God.”⁵⁷ In the same comment, he proceeds to reiterate the distinction between meritorious works and evidential works:

But we are not hence to conclude that faith recumbs on works; for though everyone receives a testimony to his faith from his works, yet it does not follow that it is founded on them; since they are added as an evidence. Then the certainty of faith depends on the grace of Christ alone; but piety and holiness of life distinguish true faith from that knowledge of God which is fictitious and dead; for the truth is, that those who are in Christ, as Paul says, have put off the old man (Col 3:9).⁵⁸

On 1 John 3:6 he writes:

We may know that faith in Christ and knowledge of him are vainly pretended, except there be newness of life. For Christ

⁵⁵ Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul*, 294–295.

⁵⁶ Calvin, *Commentaries: The Catholic Epistles*, 174.

⁵⁷ Calvin, *Commentaries: The Catholic Epistles*, 175.

⁵⁸ Calvin, *Commentaries: The Catholic Epistles*, 175.

is never dormant where he reigns, but the Spirit renders effectual his power.⁵⁹

In the same context (1 John 3:14), he asserts that love for the brethren (one specific form of good works) is a *sign*, although not a *cause*, of regeneration.⁶⁰

The *locus classicus* for the practical syllogism is 2 Peter 1:10, which after an exhortation to increase in godliness adds the exhortation to “make your calling and election sure,” which will be accomplished “if you do these things.” Calvin’s comments on this text provide a clear foundation for the strengthening of assurance by good works:

It is one proof that we have been really elected, and not in vain called by the Lord, if a good conscience and integrity of life correspond with our profession of faith.... Every one confirms his calling by leading a holy and pious life.... Purity of life is not improperly called the evidence and proof of election by which the faithful may not only testify to others that they are the children of God, but also confirm themselves in this confidence, in such a manner, however, that they fix their solid foundation on something else.... The import of what is said is, that the children of God are distinguished from the reprobate by this mark, that they live a godly and holy life, because this is the design and end of election.⁶¹

In view of these statements of Calvin, it is difficult to see how Niesel⁶² and Kendall⁶³ can both confidently assert that Calvin’s exegesis of this crucial text lends no support to the Puritan approach to assurance.

In summary, there is no apparent justification for driving a wedge between Calvin and Calvinists on the question of works and assurance. The Puritans may indeed have endorsed a higher degree of introspection than Calvin, or they may have looked for

⁵⁹ Calvin, *Commentaries: The Catholic Epistles*, 210.

⁶⁰ Calvin, *Commentaries: The Catholic Epistles*, 217–218.

⁶¹ Calvin, *Commentaries: The Catholic Epistles*, 376–377.

⁶² Niesel, *Calvin*, 178.

⁶³ Kendall, *Calvin*, 25.

a different class of good works, or this particular part of the search for assurance may have been more important to them, but none of this denies a fundamental agreement. Calvin, in agreement with his followers, affirms that holy living is the ultimate goal of election (as taught by Paul in Ephesians 1); that holiness is thus an inevitable effect of regeneration; and that a life of good works is therefore a sign of election and an important part of the experience of assurance.

Those who claim that the later Calvinist approach to assurance is a fundamental departure from Calvin have to deal with Calvin's actual comments in some way. The typical approach is to concede that Calvin does say some things that sound like the practical syllogism, but to emphasize that Calvin sees this as only a *secondary* witness to one's election, with the primary focus being the experience of grace through faith in Christ alone.⁶⁴ All this can readily be granted, but how does this distinguish Calvin from Calvinists? What Puritan divine ever suggested that one could claim assurance of election on the basis of good works apart from faith in Christ? The practical syllogism is to be used, after all, by *believers*. It presupposes personal trust in Jesus Christ and is thus secondary. The Westminster Confession, for example, denies the meritorious character of good works just as explicitly as Calvin does.⁶⁵

Conclusion

Sometimes Calvin seems to say that assurance of election is simply not a problem, for the faith which God grants to the elect includes assurance of one's standing in grace, which is to say that one who doubts his election betrays thereby his lack of true, saving faith. But this is an incomplete summary of Calvin's doctrine of assurance. His definition of *faith* as inclusive of assurance is not equivalent to the definition of a *believer*. His fuller explanation of faith recognizes that faith is always mingled with doubt, and thus the believer may approximate infallible assurance but never experience it absolutely in this life.

⁶⁴ See, for example, Niesel, *Calvin*, 174; Lane, "Calvin's Doctrine of Assurance," 34f.

⁶⁵ "Westminster Confession," ch. XI, par. XVI, 208.

Calvin also treats at length the reality of "temporary faith." He is forced by both Scripture and experience to admit that some who profess Christian faith and give some evidence of genuineness eventually show themselves to be spurious Christians. Their experience can reach such heights that they sincerely feel themselves to be regenerate, but they are self-deceived. If this is true, then something beyond confession of faith is needed to validate one's election.

Calvin is forced by scriptural exegesis to see good works done in obedience to God's commands, a life of holiness, as a necessary and powerful sign of one's election to be a child of God. In other words, the proof that one has been converted is found in one's present convertedness. He carefully and emphatically reminds us that good works are not the *cause* of our election and are in no way meritorious, but with equal clarity, he asserts that such works are a necessary *sign* of our election.

Therefore, the rigid distinction that some have made between Calvin and Calvinists with regard to assurance is vastly overstated. Although there are differences between Calvin and the later use of the practical syllogism, these differences are basically in emphasis rather than substance. On this point at least, Calvinism is properly seen as a development of Calvin, not a radical departure.

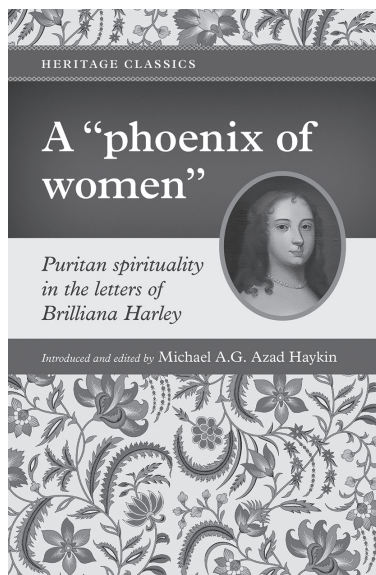
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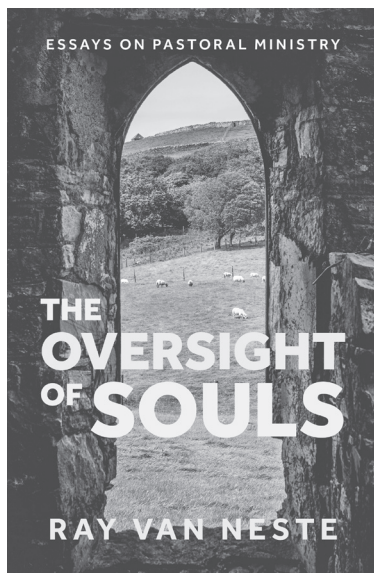
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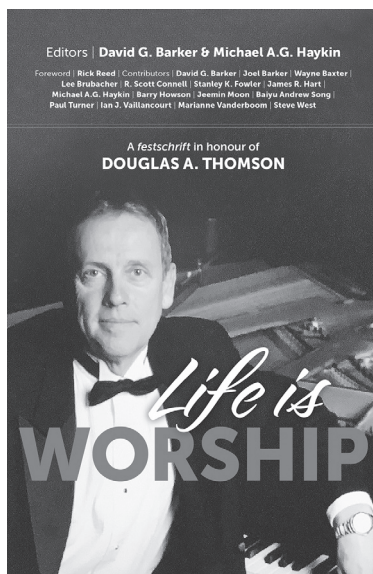
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**Editors: David G. Barker &
Michael A.G. Haykin**

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Topics include expositions of psalms and hymns, the theology of worship, spirituals, hallmarks of a worship leader, friendship in the composition of hymns, lament, etc.—even some sermons for Easter weekend. It is hoped that these essays will encourage discussion, promote the development of an understanding of the theology around worship, challenge readers to think deeply about this crucial area and, most of all, bring glory and praise to our great God.



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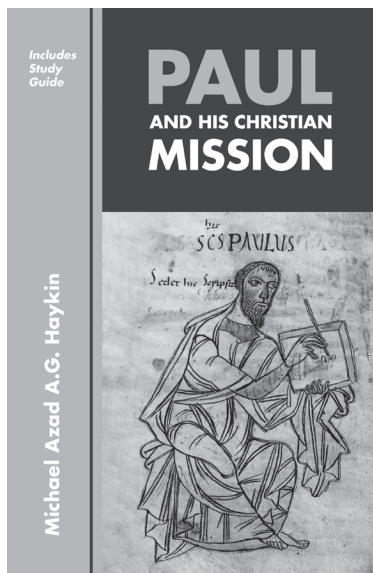
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By Michael Azad A.G. Haykin

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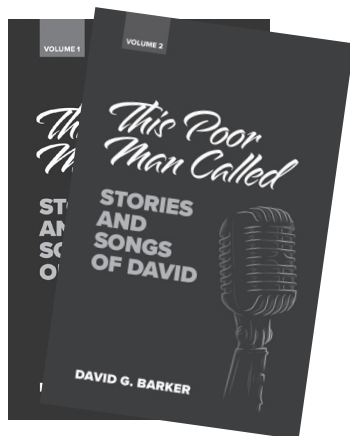
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Volume 1 & Volume 2

By David G. Barker

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