

NEW CALVINISM - THE HISTORY AND WHAT'S COMING UP: Zech 4:6



Tijdens de 14^e tweedaagse winterconferentie (jan. 2020) hield pastor C. Hand (UK) een lezing over 'New Calvinism'. Hieronder vindt u de tekst van zijn lezing.

Our subject today is I think of considerable importance to all who would identify themselves as Calvinist or Reformed. Something has been stirring especially in the United States. Out of that spiritual and philosophical upheaval, what we are calling 'The New Calvinism' has emerged. It is all quite recent. 'The New Calvinism' has appeared in the last twenty-five or so years. But it has grown quickly in influence. It has now impacted the Western church and beyond in very significant ways. Welcomed by some as a recovery of biblical truth, it has been treated by others as something demanding of us great caution.

Where do I fit in? I am among the concerned and cautious. I have been an observer of this phenomenon for twenty five years or so. While there are some things about it that we can appreciate, there are, I fear, too many things that we cannot appreciate. In fact we can put it more strongly than this. There are things about 'The New Calvinism' that should alarm us. I hope to mention some of these as we travel along. I will be calling them 'Worries that will not go away'. They look likely to still dominate what is upcoming in 'The New Calvinist Future' and will continue to define the movement. There are more aspects to this than we can properly cover in the time available. Plus I also want to alert you to some of the new developments. 'The New Calvinism' does not stand still. It is always in the process of transforming itself into the 'Newer and Newer Calvinism'. Each fresh emphasis or direction it takes has only served to increase the sense of alarm. What is the energizing and animating power behind it? Remember the challenge the Lord gave to the Pharisees which they refused to answer? They were called upon to decide whether the ministry of John the Baptist was of men or of God. They gave no answer. We should be bolder and not afraid. I believe 'The New Calvinism' ultimately is of men. And that is becoming clearer with each passing day.

In looking at the subject today, I am not coming with a mass of quotations from the various 'New Calvinists'. I hope to provide, in due course, another paper that will do that a little more. In the short time I have, I am hoping to give you some overall impressions gained over the years that I have been an observer. In particular, I want to highlight how we can discern the soul of this movement through the way it handles its internal troubles. It has experienced some crises along the way. I have been keen to see how these troubles have been dealt with. These help us to understand whether it has the capacity to change direction or not.

What I intend to do firstly is to confuse us all by looking at the variety to be found under the label 'The New Calvinism'. Is 'The New Calvinism' actually coherent? Or does its diversity better merit the title 'New Calvinisms'? I hope to show that it has a common denominator, even though this, as I also hope to show, does not really control the various directions the movement takes. The second task will be to provide some history and to try to identify some of the significant people involved. This is a story that overlaps with other stories including the movement we would call Reformed Charismatic. There are some personalities that share both labels. Another name for this phenomenon, especially in the States, is 'Young, restless, reformed'. So we will try to get some historical context for our object of study.

Thirdly, I will look at the phenomenon from various more critical angles. This is where we will look at some of the more recent things that have been happening among its ranks. It has reached now, I think, quite a crucial phase. Some of the tensions that have always been there among its fellow-travelers have become more acute just recently. It would be a rash man to make a prediction. But it is possible that some who have hitherto stood together may not stand so close together in the future. Indeed they might stand quite far apart. We will see what has brought us to this situation in a moment. So our first task is to try to define what it is we are looking at. This is easier said than done!

What is it?

It is a very reasonable thing to do, right here at the beginning, to try to understand what 'The New Calvinism' actually is. For it is a term, as is so often the case, more often found on the lips of critics and observers than those who are part of it. I think many of the 'New Calvinists' would reject the title, thinking it to be a little insulting as though they were inventing something a bit new and a bit suspect.

However the name may have arisen, there is something that this group of people have in common that binds them into a common allegiance. It is obvious really. The clue is, of course, in the 'Calvinist' part of the title. In fact it can be quite simply stated. What they all subscribe to is what we would call reformed soteriology.

As I am sure you know, this is the doctrine about how people are saved. Does man contribute anything to his salvation? If so, how much? Or is it all of God? Is the entire matter of his salvation, from beginning to end, actually dependent upon the will, power and purpose of God? Here we would be in agreement with the 'New Calvinists'. It is all of God. Salvation depends on His election of that number, known to Him in eternity, despite their total depravity, who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Irresistible grace enables them to repent and believe in the Christ who died on the cross. This is the cross where our Lord had particularly, deliberately and knowingly died to obtain for His people grace. He purchased pardon for sin, the gift of righteousness and the spiritual, gravity defying power to repent. And part of that purchased gift for the believer is the ability to persevere until the end, come what may.

We sum this all up, of course, as the Five Points of Calvinism. There is no place for God foreknowing that we would repent. Or accounting as part of our justification foreseen good works. It is all of sovereign grace. In terms of doctrines written down on paper, we would be in agreement with them. They believe what we believe. We believe what they believe. This is orthodox belief among Reformed believers even if some would resist the particular redemption part.

Their subscription to Calvinism, here expressed, has some other good outcomes. Their belief in the sovereignty of God would extend beyond sovereignty in salvation, to sovereignty in providence in general. So people within 'The New Calvinism' would happily read and subscribe to writers and preachers like C.H Spurgeon, Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, A.W. Pink and many others. They hold to orthodox creeds about the Person of God and the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. They hold to the vital importance of preaching as the God-ordained way for the spreading of truth. So there is great emphasis on preaching, the training of preachers, and the content of preaching. There is a clear desire to reach lost people, to evangelize and to engage in world mission. That comes through strongly. We would be happy with these emphases, at least as they might be worded in vision statements and the like. Many are strong believers in the local church, its work, its vocation, and its proper government. These would include people of a Presbyterian persuasion or a more baptistic persuasion. Mostly they would also subscribe to sound views on sanctification, and would not be perfectionists or supporters of second blessing types of holiness teaching. To cap it all, many of them are superb speakers, writers and communicators. None of this looks set to change anytime soon.

Things get a little trickier when we ask how come this movement is called 'New'? What is new about it? It all sounds pretty orthodox, doesn't it? What is the problem?

One aspect of the 'New' element is not actually a problem. As we will see in the next section, particularly in the US context, there has been a renewed interest over the last thirty years in Calvinism. A whole new generation of Calvinists has emerged. A growing dissatisfaction with the shallow Christianity of so many churches in the US has led to a

desire and search for something deeper. People wanted something that corresponded more to the nature of the true God and true faith as found in the Bible. This people to the Old Calvinism and its literature. So, in some ways, it was 'Old Calvinism' but for a new generation. So that is part of what 'New Calvinism' means. In keeping with this, another word that has been used to describe this rediscovery has been 'resurgence'. It is a new resurgence of interest in Reformed teaching and teachers.

But there is more to the 'New' part than this alone. Its leaders and followers have felt at liberty to adopt certain ways of thinking and behaving, that combine their sound theology with more novel and suspect doctrinal distinctives. This has led some to pursue their evangelism and mission in ways that would have surprised their forbears that had held to Reformed theology. In so doing they have put themselves at odds with other Calvinists and arguably stepped outside the thinking and practices of the great men of the past. This has been undoubtedly 'new'. Calvinism has never been allied with some of the things that these new teachers have adopted. So this 'New' part has left many of us troubled. These concerns will form the basis of the third section. So 'New Calvinism' is to be recognized, less by the things that it shares in common with the historic emphases and teachings of Calvinism, and more by these new emphases, practices and behaviours.

Here we would have to admit that not every teacher among 'The New Calvinists' has adopted the exact same set of novel distinctives. There is considerable variety which makes this task of analysis all the harder. What is true of one teacher, or church or subset of 'New Calvinism' is not true of all. Some overlap in their approaches. Others are quite different. Some would actually share some of the concerns we have. What makes the phenomenon even more difficult to assess is that these people are prolific writers of books and blog posts, and preachers of sermons and conference addresses. The volume of material out there is huge. A lot of these people are extremely bright and capable people. They have plenty to say and are not shy about saying it. So it is impossible to do full justice to the sheer volume and variety of the shades of opinion. There is much that we will just have to miss out. You will know things about certain teachers and preachers that I have not come across. So I have come here to learn as well.

Well that is an attempt to analyze something that has lots of variety and differences. But next we turn to a little history.

Where did it all come from?

This is an interesting story in and of itself.

In part it is the unique story of evangelicalism in the United States. Coming from the UK, you might think that I would have some close affinity with the trends that produced 'The New Calvinism.' But that is not so. Some of this story from the United States is remote to me, coming from the UK, where talk of an evangelical sub-culture or the political

power and votes of the 'Moral Majority' comes from another planet. In the UK we have no such weight of numbers or influence as evangelicals in the US. Yet for all the number of evangelicals in the States, as I am sure you are aware, there is often a staggering lack of depth. Preaching has virtually no doctrine and offers no serious attempt to exegete the Bible. The pursuit of large numbers and the building of mega-churches dominate the agenda. Commercialism, shallow church growth thinking, seeker-sensitive approaches built around a man-centred theology, if we can call it theology, set the tone. Willow Creek, the 'Purpose Driven Church', and positive thinking with Bible texts prevail. Someone coined the US version of Christianity to be 'moralistic therapeutic deism'. God is there to make us feel good and act good. He is not the living and active God of the Bible. And that is before we have even mentioned the many Health and Wealth churches of the Prosperity Gospel in the US.

This is of course a huge generalization. But no wonder that a lot of, especially, young people were disappointed in all this. There had to be something more! Any casual reading of the Bible required it! The conscience demanded it! The soul craved something more substantial! And the restlessness induced by shallow and empty evangelicalism sent people searching out something better. And many of these migrants found what they were looking for in the literature of the past, the Calvinists of old, though, critically, as seen through the lens of the 'New Calvinism'. Here, as far as the recent arrivals could discern, was a new land. It was a land flowing with doctrinally rich milk and honey. Although Calvinism had received a bad press from the more explicitly Arminian churches in America, the sheer weight of biblical evidence proved the truth of these doctrines to a new and hungry generation. What could Word-Faith churches offer in comparison? Nothing. What could man-centred, 'felt needs' based preaching do to satisfy the longings of the soul? Nothing.

The exodus of young people into Calvinism gave rise to the term I mentioned a moment back - 'Young, restless, reformed.' The time in the US was right for these truths to be appreciated again by an often young, energetic, and hungry audience. These truths had not completely left the shores of the US in the preceding years. People like Tom Ascol of the 'Founders Ministries' within the Southern Baptists had kept Calvinism alive. But their place and influence was not to be as great as the influence others would have in shaping 'The New Calvinism'. So in 2009, *Time Magazine*, in an article by David van Biema, describing 'Ten Ideas changing the world right now', singled out 'The New Calvinism' as one of those ideas. So with this added publicity, a star was truly born and the momentum of the movement got an extra boost.

It is time now to introduce some of the names and ministries to whom the young people gravitated. And the increasing availability of modern technology was a huge aid in making this all happen. On-line resources and conversations taking place in public fora on the Internet meant that these teachings could be quickly found, digested and discussed. One of the biggest influencers was and is Dr John Piper, the now retired minister of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis. His influence is huge and many

would attribute their entry into the ranks of 'New Calvinism' to his books, blogs and preaching. He is a prolific and gifted writer and communicator and, rightly, is the subject of an entire address later on. Just about every conference appeared to have him headlining it. His seminal book, *'Desiring God'*, first published in 1986, has had a massive, although by no means helpful, impact. A Website of the same name has also had a significant effect.

He coined a new expression, *'Christian Hedonism'* to articulate, what he thought, was the essence of God's purpose for us. The chief end of man was to glorify God by enjoying him forever. It was a novel twist to the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Notice that. It is not that we glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. He makes glorifying God to hinge on our enjoying Him, however defined. This is one of the critical areas where 'The New Calvinism' shows its capacity for producing and consuming novel formulations. More of that in a later address although I will permit myself a few further observations in a minute.

But there are other big names besides John Piper. Another one is Dr Al Mohler. He moves in academic circles and is the President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, being elected to the post in 1993. This was not without incident. He took the Seminary back to its founding principles, including the inerrancy of Scripture and Calvinism. Most of the faculty objected and subsequently left. Calvinists replaced them and ministers training at the Seminary are now earthed in Calvinist doctrine. He broadcasts, blogs, and contributes to national newspapers and is a frequent conference speaker

Another name to know is Ligon Duncan, Senior Minister of First Presbyterian Church in Jackson Mississippi, until 2014. He is now the Chancellor of Reformed Theological Seminary. Again, he is often to be found as one of the main speakers at conferences. If we were to look for a Baptist of this persuasion, we could turn to Pastor Mark Dever of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington DC. Again, a frequent speaker at conferences, he is also known through his *9 Marks* programme that aims to equip church leaders to build healthy local churches.

A very big personality who rivals John Piper in stature is Tim Keller, Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, New York City. Like Piper, he is a prolific writer and, let me say it, a deep thinker, although perhaps not a helpful thinker, across a whole range of issues. His influence is immense and is arguably growing by the day. He has an audience well beyond the ranks of Calvinists. Moving on, we must also mention C.J. Mahaney. He used to lead a group of churches called Sovereign Grace Ministries but has now retired and relocated to Louisville, Kentucky from his previous base further north in Maryland. We should also add the name of well known Pastor and writer, John MacArthur. He associates with the people already mentioned while also maintaining a refreshing independence of view. This has meant at times he has been a trenchant critic of some of 'The New Calvinism's' emphases and directions.

There are also younger men like Kevin de Young and Matt Chandler, both of them Pastors of churches, writers and conference speakers. Until a few years ago we would also have had to include in this roll call, Mark Driscoll, once pastor of the now defunct Mars Hill Church in Seattle. About seven or eight years ago, he was about as big as it got in 'New Calvinist' circles. He pastored a huge church with its profile skewed to the younger generation. That made his ministry the envy of many. He was also energetically involved in a host of para-church organizations. His books, sermons, conference addresses and pronouncements were eagerly devoured.

Mark Driscoll was always, even when his 'New Calvinist' stock was at its highest, a controversial figure. His use of sexually crude language, vulgarity and swearing, plus his treatment of the sacred text in a flippant and, again, in a sexually explicit way, earned him plenty of negative publicity. He eventually crashed and burned. What happened? He experienced a high profile outing as an abusive and bullying man, guilty of dictatorially driving forward his church programme, regardless of anyone else. He was also found playing fast and loose with the church funds. He has left the ranks of 'The New Calvinists' and recently denounced Calvinism. But we need not fear for his future. He has, with the help of his friends, resurrected his ministry, albeit now moving in quite different church circles. We will return to him. Because, although he is no longer to be classed a 'New Calvinist', he is still of interest to us today as a figure who was regarded as acceptable in 'New Calvinism' circles. He shows us just how far New Calvinists are willing to stretch their definition of what is and what is not OK.

We have mentioned websites, like John Piper's *'Desiring God'*, having a strong influence in raising the profile of this movement. There are plenty of different para-church groups hosting websites with a variety of articles, podcasts, and sermons that are disseminated across the whole spectrum of social media. These para-church groups also keep busy organizing conferences. 'The Gospel Coalition' is one of the biggest of these. Formed in 2007, it has a massive on-line presence with a huge volume of material, provided by a whole range of writers and preachers, across a whole range of subjects. Sometimes the contributors are the big names we have just been mentioned. Sometimes they are lesser known Pastors or writers, and increasingly, women contributors. Another of these para-church groupings is 'Together for the Gospel'. This is a conference which takes place every two years, having started in 2008. Again, the same faces appear at these meetings as the big head-line speakers plus a host of other men and women who speak at the break-out sessions. Another influential body is 'Acts 29', a church planting and advisory body, equipping people for Christian service in the modern cultural context. All these groupings with their overlapping personnel and slightly different aims and purposes would agree about the sovereignty of God. This helps to explain the Calvinism element.

We could say so much more about the history and the people involved. It is a dynamic picture. 'New Calvinism' is an energetic, busy and activist movement. It did not get

where it is today without being these things. The more people it recruits, who then rise to positions of prominence, the more variety in its emphases and directions of travel emerge. 'New Calvinism' is not standing still, as I hope, in some modest way, to show you in a moment. It boasts a team of capable people, intellectually speaking, with impressive communication skills, and blessed with seemingly boundless energy. It is inevitable that there will always be something happening. There will always be a new subject being picked up and discussed differently to before. There will always be a new approach to a current issue. Some of these developments will be significant and point to big changes that lie ahead. Others are more temporary talking points which will soon fade away and be forgotten. It is always the challenge to us to try to discern between the two and expend our thought and biblical reflection on that which will be of enduring significance.

As I mentioned earlier, this has been mostly an American story. I think, in many respects, it is right to see it that way. The United States is the engine house of the 'New Calvinism'. That is where the epicentre of the theological and spiritual earthquake has been. It, of course, has a European, as well as an African, Asian and Australian, dimension too, all of which are deserving of study and comment in their own right. There is not quite the room for that today. Maybe that is someone's homework or even doctoral thesis to come.

So, just to say a few things about the UK, there are a lot of close connections that have formed between British Pastors and their American cousins. Though occurring earlier than in the US, the UK has also experienced its own resurgence of interest in Reformed doctrine. This was a story of the 1950's and 1960's and is associated very much with the ministry of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones and publishers like the Banner of Truth. The 'New Calvinists' in the US have been able to benefit from the theological and spiritual resources that the earlier UK resurgence made available. That legacy has been far from perfect, however. A feature of the UK resurgence was the creation of a fairly substantial body of people, pre-existing the arrival of 'The New Calvinism', who are what we now would call 'Reformed Charismatic'. In other words, they hold to the sovereignty of God in salvation, but also believe that spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues and prophecy continue into the present day. Whether he intended it or not, Dr Lloyd-Jones' teaching on the Holy Spirit helped give rise to this group of people. They and their successors have bonded strongly with the US branch of 'New Calvinism' which, as we shall see, is itself often charismatic in theology and practice.

The intellectual pedigree of people like John Piper and Tim Keller ensure they are frequent speakers at UK conferences and training programmes. Examples of UK groups forging links with the US include the Proclamation Trust, a training programme for preachers and teachers, and, what are called, Gospel Partnerships. These Partnerships are regionally based church planting and evangelism enterprises involving Anglicans and free churches. They have become very influential over the last seven years or so. Some Bible Colleges are strongly influenced by the 'New Calvinism'. These include the Union

Theological College in South Wales. Some of the Anglican churches have welcomed this strain of thinking as have a large number of more non-conformist churches of all kinds and classes. The links their web-sites recommend show the far-reaching impact of American-style 'New Calvinism'.

The traffic has not all been one way. Some UK Pastors have traveled to the US to take up posts with 'New Calvinist' churches across the Atlantic. UK Pastor and writer, Steve Timmis, is now the Chief Executive Officer of the Acts 29 church planting group we mentioned a moment ago. Other UK people are writers for 'The Gospel Coalition'. So links between the UK and American 'New Calvinists' is strong and probably growing. But, interesting as it might be, we must leave that dimension, somewhat unsatisfactorily hanging in the air there. For now we must look more critically at the phenomenon before us so as to get some feel for the dynamic driving it so that we can better understand where it is heading and why.

Worries that will not go away

It falls to us Christians to strive to be as objective as possible. We have to hold the evidence soberly before us and avoid either being too hasty in our evaluation, or too generous in our assessment. If I could make a personal comment here, I think, on the whole, people have erred on the side of generosity. They have been too quick to be comforted by the positive aspects I have mentioned. It is as though these more positive elements have blinded people to the faults and induced a sense of optimism for which I think there is no biblical ground. I say that as someone who has been skeptical of the movement since I first encountered it. And I am compelled to say my concerns have not decreased with the passage of time.

Put it like this. There has been something fundamentally wrong with how the movement as a whole comes across in its overall attitude; what its preferences and choices are; and what positions it takes on issues inside and outside the church. I find it, with an open Bible, wanting in all these departments. These things, when aggregated, undermine the value of subscribing to the worthy and good doctrines and practices that it professes to believe. In the end, those difficulties and contradictions have now come to define the movement and are presently interfering with its ability to credibly represent the Lord in our generation. Sadly I am not convinced that it has the spiritual resources to be able to reflect upon and change its course of direction.

Let us see why I have confirmed myself in this judgment and consider some of the aspects of 'New Calvinism' which help us understand why it embraces what it does and which explain to us where it might now be heading and why.

A wrong spirit

I offer this observation firstly and perhaps foremostly. There is something wrong about the spirit in which 'New Calvinists' in the main pursue their objectives and live out their convictions. This is where we interact with the text that is the heading for this address. Nearing the end of the period of revelation associated with the old covenant period, the prophet Zechariah, speaking by inspiration, gave instruction to the worthy descendant of David, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel. Zerubbabel lacked the crown of his father David but still carried the authority of leadership. The remnant had returned from exile, supernaturally delivered from the hand of the Babylonians by the utterly remarkable decree made by the pagan Persian-Mede Emperor Cyrus. The vision that preceded these words of the two olive trees represents, I think, the witness of the Lord's people, the church, supplied by the oil of the Spirit. Hence the stirring prophecy that follows.

This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit.' Says the Lord of hosts. "Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"
(Zech 4:6-7)

The work of setting the capstone of the soon to be rebuilt temple is in the passage as well as the idea that opposition will be overcome. Mountains will not stand in the way of the work. But being so small and impoverished, militarily weak and relatively defenceless, how will the work be done? Does it not need some power and might, some military muscle, some show of strength? "No," the Lord says, "It does not." What it does need is the power and working of the Spirit of God. Without that influence and control, nothing worthwhile will be accomplished or built.

It was a good lesson for Zerubbabel, leader of his people, to learn and learn well. For if he failed to hear the lesson and apply it, the troubles would flow from the top down and infect the thinking of all the people. They would look for human strength and power to do the work of God. And that would be a cardinal error. In other words, it would be done in the wrong spirit entirely.

In similar fashion recall the words of the apostle Paul in Second Corinthians,

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted – you may well put up with it!
(2 Cor 11:3-4)

There is a simplicity that is in Christ Jesus that might be missing in the Jesus or the gospel preached. Likewise there might be something missing or wrong in the spirit in which He is preached or which can be seen in those who preach Him. That spirit rubs off on those who listen. People may well put up with it! On the one hand, it might be preaching, done in such a manner, aiming at particular effects, which manifests the genuine Holy Spirit. The manner, the content, and the results would show it was the work of the Holy Spirit. That is the Spirit that the hearers had received when Paul preached. Or, on the other hand, the preaching of Christ, even if it is an orthodox Christ, can be wrapped up in packaging which is full of boasting and hubris. That appeared to

be the way the teachers in Corinth conducted themselves, their spirit. Not the Holy Spirit but human might and power. See how Paul in 2 Corinthians 11 goes on next to defend himself from the proud boasts of the false teachers. They were putting Paul down and elevating themselves. That was their spirit and the spirit the people had received. This is what Paul goes on to say,

For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles. Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things. Did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? (2 Cor 11:5-7)

These people were regarding Paul as inferior to them because he was not the strong man, lording it over them, making big claims and boasts about himself. Paul did not charge for preaching the gospel. These false teachers obviously felt entitled to cash handouts as a way for people to show their appreciation for the great and gifted men that were in their midst. This is a different spirit to the Holy Spirit. This is a different spirit to the Christ that Paul preached and different to the imperatives that should follow from the preaching of the true Christ. And here is the big word in our present discussion to take away from what Paul is saying here. 'Did I commit a sin in humbling myself...?' (V7). Humbling myself. Note that carefully - humility and its derivatives. That is the Christ of the gospel is it not?

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. (Phil 2: 5-8)

That is the true Christ of the gospel, the Christ that saves, the Christ whose mind, or spirit if you like, is to be in us. And what is the thought that screams at us from this passage? He humbled Himself. He took the form of a bondservant. That is the spirit of true Christianity. That is the spirit in which we are to conduct ourselves in ministry and which we are to receive from one another. Humility is one of the key hallmarks of authentic Christian ministry and ministers. Getting us to this elevated view of Christ, Paul in Philippians has made his plea to these dear believers in this way,

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. (Phil 2:3)

Not selfish ambition. Not conceit. Instead it is about lowliness of mind. In other words, there is to be the absence of pride and the presence of humility. And here is a big take-away today. I find this humble spirit lacking across the board in 'New Calvinism'. And I fear that lack is fatal and will prevent 'The New Calvinism' from being able to evaluate itself and change for the better. This vital spirit, this humble attitude of heart, is missing. That is a serious thing. It is not an optional extra. Because if the spirit in which 'The New Calvinism' is immersed is wrong, everything else will be wrong. Even what it seems to get right will still turn out wrong. It will not be able to assess its mistakes and repent. In fact, lacking humility, it will be insulated against such self-examination and be condemned to learn nothing and repeat its mistakes in the future. That spirit informs everything, including the kind of gospel that is preached, the attitudes that are modeled and encouraged, the things that 'New Calvinism' permits itself rather than denies itself.

Here are my observations. It is too confident of its own accomplishments, in its abilities, its qualifications, its size, its influence. Its leaders are too sure of themselves, have too much to say, are too confident of their own conclusions. Humility is a vital part of repentance. Only humble people repent. In the parable, it was the tax collector who humbled himself and went home justified (Luke 18:14). There is not enough humility around 'The New Calvinists'. For all the talk of grace, it is not clear that grace travels with them. For all the talk of the Five Points of Calvinism, it is not clear that they have grasped the heart of Calvinism and its humbling effect on the soul. Its hold on Calvinism might have sparked a revolution of the intellect. In other words, they have traded their seeker sensitive or Purpose Driven shallowness for something higher. But the revolution has been less evident in the heart.

We mentioned Mark Driscoll a moment ago. He took hubris, self-opinion, the art of being the big man, to new heights. He had swagger, confidence, and supposedly told it as it was. He did not need to worry about trivial matters that occupied small minded legalists who worried about his crude language, his inappropriate use of sexual imagery, his over-the-top authoritarian leadership style. And people loved it. John Piper was solidly with him, brimming over with appreciation. John MacArthur, to his credit, was highly critical but his was a fairly lone dissenting voice among the big names. The rest were happy to be on platforms with him and have him come to their conferences. And then he crashed to earth. Now was the moment to discover the heart of 'The New Calvinism'. Would there be an inquest or an inquiry into how Driscoll was allowed to behave the way he did? Would the big names stop and ask questions of themselves? Why did they tolerate him when he was so obviously out of order? Would the movement as a whole show the capacity to show humility and change?

No. There was hardly a peep to be heard from his fan club. Nobody said sorry, that they should have seen this coming and taken Driscoll off their conference platforms earlier. Nobody acknowledged that there was a need to look into the soul of the movement to inquire how it could have got this one so badly wrong. There was no humility, no repentance, no apology. It was as if there was nothing to learn. Apart from a comment from Tim Keller, there was no admission of failure. Too many of them were happy with the big man with the big church and the big following. It was a historic moment to learn something important and the movement, as a whole, passed the opportunity up. That attitude continues to this day and shapes what we might expect upcoming in the future.

The antinomian spirit

This fatal complacency can be understood better if we now talk about 'The New Calvinism's' antinomian tendencies. For many, but not all, it is 'Out with the Ten Commandments', especially the observance of the Sabbath. 'Out with biblical concepts such as duty and obedience'. Instead we can trust ourselves to get it right. We have Christ. We have the Holy Spirit. What more can we possibly want? What more can we

possibly need? Sanctification will follow as day follows night without the need to refer ourselves to the rule of the Ten Commandments, or to feel ourselves under obligation to obey, and keep ourselves in check. That, for many in the 'New Calvinism' is all legalism.

And this again is fatal. It is totally divorced from historic mainstream Calvinism for a start. Our forebears for the most part fought strenuously against antinomianism and insisted on the continuing role of the law, as witnessed in the Ten Commandments, for the believer's sanctification. But those conclusions are little respected today. Instead there is an over-reliance upon ourselves that we can get it right, that we have the knowledge and the power to live properly without having to reference things like obedience, the law, or cultivating a spirit of gratitude and dependence. It shuts off people from self watch, or a healthy suspicion about the kind of people we are, and how sin can be deceitful and overpower us when we least expect it. It explains how Driscoll could be tolerated. It was too confident in its powers of discernment, too sure its heart was in the right place when the evidence was screaming at its leaders and camp followers that it was tolerating indefensible things and people. This remains a defining feature as 'The New Calvinism' travels on into the future. We cannot expect it to discern correctly the character of people or defend itself from other impostors.

John Piper is the subject of a separate address. I will not therefore dwell long on this. But his *Christian Hedonism* is a journey into antinomianism. For him, sin is less about rebelling against the commands of God. Rather it is about us looking for pleasure outside of God. It is less about breaking the laws of God. It is more about disobeying God's invitation to find our pleasure and satisfaction in Him. And how do we define happiness? How indeed? In the end, it really all comes down to feelings. And that is why Piper is happy to go on record and endorse charismatic experiences of the wildest and wackiest kind. Extravagant emotions, however obtained, get a free pass, even if they were obtained from the 'Toronto Blessing', an outbreak of extreme charismaticism in the 1990's, or from a health and wealth preacher. No place for obedience as part of the process and outcome of sanctification. Seek out your pleasure in God, and the rest will apparently follow.

And have people done a thorough audit on Piper's *Christian Hedonism*? Have the big names that are honoured to appear at *Desiring God* conferences or to have Piper speak at their own gatherings used their considerable theological expertise and reading to do a proper overhaul and appraisal of this concept? No. No, they have not. They have mostly stayed silent.

John Piper is not alone among 'The New Calvinists' in his sympathy for all things charismatic. Following on from this, many have observed, that the 'New Calvinists' are, by and large, very comfortable with the idea of tongues and prophecy continuing today. As an aside, I would assert that modern day tongues and prophecy are based, in part, on an inflated estimate of our ability to discern true Spirit-inspired revelation. For the

record, I believe these sign gifts ceased with the apostolic era. But if you reject that point of view, then somewhere you are backing yourself to get it right with tongues-speaking and prophecy, to be able to discern what is real and what is not. In other words, we think we are a bit too smart to be deceived, a trademark of the antinomian spirit.

So, to use the term we used earlier, a lot of 'New Calvinists' would call themselves Reformed Charismatics or, more clumsily, continuationists. The big name offering theological *gravitas* to this position is the theologian and writer of a well received Reformed Systematic Theology, Professor Wayne Grudem. His formulation of the case why we should expect sign gifts such as tongues speaking and prophecy to continue into the present day has fully persuaded many. He has persuaded others more skeptical of his case to at least sign non-aggression treaties regarding charismatic phenomenon. Among those who are card-carrying charismatics we might cite C.J. Mahaney, Matt Chandler, and, guess who, Mark Driscoll. Those sympathetic, but not exactly known for publically speaking in tongues or prophesying, would include John Piper and another theologian, Don Carson. John MacArthur has been an outspoken critic of the charismatic movement and the phenomena attributed to the Holy Spirit. Others smile on benignly at their charismatically inclined friends and fellow conference speakers but agree to disagree without making an issue of it all.

So the charismatic movement rolls on among 'The New Calvinists' and will continue so to do into the future. John Piper, as already mentioned, has spoken warmly about some really wacky things and wacky people. These include the so-called Lakeland Revival in the US of 2008 when the outrageous antics of the tattooed evangelist, Todd Bentley, made the headlines for all the wrong reasons. Bentley was subsequently 'rested' from ministry following sexual scandal when he left his wife to go off with and then marry one of his staffers. His method of imparting the Holy Spirit to people in the Prayer Line was to dummy a punch in the midriff while shouting 'Bam'. Like Driscoll, scandal has not sidelined him. He is back in ministry, although once again he is facing fresh accusations of sexual impropriety. It was not a particularly good judgment call John Piper made there.

This marriage of Calvinism to charismaticism will continue on into the future. Upcoming is probably a willingness to embrace more, not less charismatic teaching and practice. Jackie Hill-Perry, a female poet and rapper, is someone we will come back to in a moment. She is fast emerging as a significant player in 'The New Calvinism'. Yet in August last year, she appeared at a conference organized by Christine Caine of Hillsong, a charismatic church movement with connections to all kinds of false teachers. Jenn Johnson, daughter-in-law to Bill Johnson of the ultra charismatic Bethel Church in Redding California, led the worship. Jackie Hill-Perry caused dismay when she called Jenn Johnson a 'friend'. Bethel Church showcases the most extreme charismatic thinking and practice that is out there. But not a problem for Jackie Hill Perry. None of the big

names have corrected her. They have stayed silent. Upcoming will be more of the same drift into further communion with the charismatic cause, I fear.

Cultural appropriation

A further evidence of over-confidence among the 'New Calvinists' in their capacity to make sound choices can be seen in their eager take-up of contemporary culture. Though not true of all, it is certainly true of many that they embrace cultural forms from the non-Christian world and set them to work, supposedly, for the kingdom of God. There is a certain fearlessness and lack of caution about what is OK and this has led to some disturbing results.

This is where we might have expected its stated theological preferences to have exerted a greater influence over the kinds of choices that have been made. We would have thought that if Reformed theology was having a controlling effect over the choice of what aspects of modern culture to embrace, there would have been some different results. After all, the God as described in Calvinism is a high and holy God and we are here to live for His glory. That means we are to be a holy people '...working out our own salvation with fear and trembling...' (Phil 2:12). For a start, much of dress-wear in the pulpit is smart casual or, simply, casual. The style is to move away from formality and to portray a God who is comfortable with us approaching and worshiping Him wearing what we would wear for a b-b-q rather than what we might wear for an important interview or work meeting. It is as though they are making a big thing about how comfortable they are in their relationship with God and how delivered they are from feeling that their behaviour is irreverent or lacking the fear of God, things which belong to some twilight world of legalism.

But what is offered to a great God is also deeply questionable. Most 'New Calvinists' would feel happy to use music of a modern idiom as part of worship. While not all would employ the charismatic house specialties of speaking in tongues or prophesying, most would happily participate in an act of worship as more often seen in a charismatic church. The music is very emotional and invites people to have experiences. These can vary from elation and excitement, to serenity and tranquillity, from being energized and excited, to being reflective and mentally still. These are the components of a typical worship experience in a charismatic church setting. This is what some of the 'New Calvinist' churches employ, including some of the big conferences. It is worldly. In that regard the church risks becoming a creature of fallen culture rather a colony of heaven on earth.

Its main leaders have been too promiscuous in their cultural tastes and have been comfortable buying up significant portions of the world's cultural real estate and reckoning to put it to use for the kingdom. A blatant example of this is here we have seen some of the movers and shakers in 'New Calvinism' drawing on the world of hip-hop and using rap music as part of a 'worship experience' or to help the listener,

whether in the privacy of their own home or in church, to absorb truth and feel 'in the Spirit'. The music from this stable was designed originally to excite the feelings of young people through the dance rhythms and the undoubted sexual arousal they provided in order to deflect them from the gang culture of New York in the 1980's.

Furthermore, if people believe they are experiencing God when they are simply feeling the power of the music, it is a high road to presumption. To conclude one is a Christian in good standing with God because of the depth of sincerely felt feelings can be catastrophic. It circumvents searching for true marks of grace, such as holiness and love for the brethren, and risks basing assurance and measuring one's spiritual maturity and growth by the quantity and quality of musical experiences. That there is precious little appetite or willingness among the 'New Calvinists' to overhaul or review this kind of thinking is perhaps an indication that it has already achieved its spiritually deadening and deceiving effect among them. 'The New Calvinism' will not be able to insulate itself from any future charismatic explosion or have the theological tools to protect its followers from the call to expect tongues, prophecy, dreams or bizarre guidance. That weakness travels on into the future.

People have also detected an unhealthy desire among 'New Calvinists' to sound and look attractive to the world. 'New Calvinism' does chase the latest trends and seeks to look good to the world at large, especially the younger demographic. Too many of its people have watched the latest films, are ready to talk about the latest trends and fads, and make a studied effort to be witty and clever-sounding. It is like a wife trying on new things in the changing rooms of a clothes store and then coming out to her husband and asking, 'Do I look good in this?' To appeal to the world and its scientifically credentialed people, 'New Calvinists' like John Piper and Tim Keller have shed any convictions that the world was created in six days. Likewise Keller is not convinced that people of other religions who have not heard of Christ do not find their way to heaven. The idea that the world might be dangerous and that we need to be separate from it is not a big idea with 'New Calvinism'. It is too comfortable in the world, whether the world of popular culture or unbelieving science. It is too eager to please it and look for its applause. It will keep doing this in the future so that its standards and expectations will continue to fall with regard to language and behaviour as it simply lacks the capacity to review itself and reform.

A cultural mandate

Some branches of 'New Calvinism' have greater ambitions than simply to reflect and copy culture or appeal to it and look good by it. They want, not only to reflect culture, but also to shape it. This is where we can see some very radical upcoming trends emerging. This emphasis has been described as neo-Kuyperianism. In other words, following a reading of Abraham Kuyper, it attempts to implement the idea that there is no part of human existence where the Lord does not assert His sovereignty. Whether

the results achieved at the hands of the 'New Calvinists' would have pleased Abraham Kuyper is perhaps debatable.

When this cultural mandate is joined to the already mentioned tendency to find what the world likes, and then adopting it as our own, we can see that this is going to lead to difficulties. And indeed it has. This is very much the domain of people in the US like Tim Keller. He may be the most well thought-out representative of the appetite for greater political engagement. But he is not alone in this. Leading members of the Southern Baptist Convention in the US, many of whom have overlapping membership of the 'New Calvinism', are fully signed up to this as well. It is a more outspoken, controversy-courting, politically committed kind of engagement.

Whereas Christians in the past might have been allowed liberty to weigh up and consider proposals about alternative forms of taxation, immigration policy, health care or environmental protection, and vote for political parties accordingly, the terms of this understanding have now shifted. Now, leading figures within 'New Calvinism' feel able to speak out on a wider range of issues and feel that they are mandated to do so by gospel imperatives. Their work is no longer simply the proclamation of gospel and Bible truth. They feel their calling now requires them to engage in politics to effect social change. Christ's influence and rule is to be brought to bear on all subjects. The controversy arises when we ask 'What would Jesus do about taxation, carbon emissions, or the functioning of an advanced capitalist economy?' and then attempt to answer the question.

The election of Donald Trump, and the platform on which he is perceived to be standing, has undoubtedly spurred this on. We may all have thoughts on that and I am not going to risk controversy here by weighing in with my own thoughts. But the direction taken by 'New Calvinists' who have adopted this stance has been, broadly speaking, sympathetic to the critique of Trump, and particularly sympathetic to the positions of the Democratic Party in the US. The concerns of, what might be called, the Social Justice Movement have been embraced. Protesting about abortion and pressuring Congressmen and women about the matter have dropped down the scale in terms of perceived importance. The issue is not being pursued with the energy and conviction that it used to be. In fact, this wing of 'New Calvinism' is comfortable with the aspirations of feminism, including a measured support for some of the aims of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender community. There is some sympathy shown for the demands of the secular gay community, including the right for gay people to adopt children, and an effort to include same sex attraction within the pale of acceptable Christian affections.

Some of the writers at 'The Gospel Coalition', such as Sam Alberry and Jackie Hill-Perry, identify as being attracted to people of the same sex, although, for the record, Jackie Hill-Perry is herself now married to a man. But such attractions are now coming to be regarded as not sinful *per se* and so there is no need to command that these feelings

should be repented of. Elements of the 'New Calvinism' are distancing themselves from mainstream evangelical ethics and, either from personal conviction, or from the already noted desire to appeal to the world, or a bit of both, are making less protest against the onward march of LGBT ideology.

Now nobody can deny the unhappy experiences, historically, that there have been in the United States on matters of race relations. Nobody can deny either that the church has often been found supporting evil discrimination rather than modeling the biblical truth of our oneness in Christ superseding all racial or ethnic differences. But 'New Calvinists' have been too ready to make concessions here in the name of social justice. The perceived evils of white male privilege have often dominated thinking and the elevation of women and people from other than white backgrounds has been pursued, at the expense, at times, of Bible teaching about the roles of men and women in the church. For some, the rectifying of perceived historic injustices, racially defined, is part of what it means to preach the gospel. From this, it is mandated that there should be reparations made by present day white people for historic discrimination against and bad treatment of black people.

This has left people wondering, does this mean that we soft-pedal calling particular ethnic groups to repent because they are to see themselves through the eyes of victimhood rather than through the eyes of a holy God who calls all men everywhere to repent? And I cannot help smiling at the implications of railing against white privilege. Remind me again, what is the ethnic background of this John Calvin fellow whose name is linked with this movement? Come to that, should we actually be listening to the likes of Jonathan Edwards, C.H Spurgeon, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, steeped as they must have been in assumed white privilege? The irony of it all is something to behold.

Again, these are matters that demand we treat them with delicacy. Far more needs to be said than I can possibly say here, but the question of immigration and open borders is also a live issue among 'New Calvinists'. Amnesties for illegal immigrants are looked for by some, which is a central plank of many Democratic Presidential hopefuls. Onlookers as well as some who hitherto, despite reservations, have kept close to 'New Calvinism', question these more progressive, politically activist stances that are being taken. Whether Open Borders, complete with the attendant dangers of importing Islamic terrorists or devout observant Muslims bent on not integrating, is prudent is a live issue for people further afield than the US. The willingness of some 'New Calvinists' to enter controversial areas and make strong statements from pulpits or virtual pulpits has left a lot of people, including erstwhile friends of 'New Calvinism', profoundly worried about the direction of travel. You may or may not be familiar with the name of George Soros. He made millions from the UK's chaotic departure from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, a forerunner to the Euro, back in 1992. His incredible wealth now supports a number of progressive causes across the globe. He also helps funds organizations that Russell Moore, himself a keen Democratic Party supporter, is part of, looking at issues to do with immigration and promoting Open Borders.

And this is where the present fault lines are opening up. People are asking what is the church to be about – winning souls or social action? Is it there to fight social justice issues, such as redistributing wealth, which Tim Keller would aim for, or calling sinners to repent and leaving the power of the Holy Spirit to effect changes to spending patterns? At the moment, I think, the movement is undergoing great pressure. The new currents of thinking are testing old loyalties and friendships. Some people are having their invitations to conferences revoked. ‘New Calvinism’ has reached a cross roads. In the end what is to have the casting vote? Is it the spirit of the world - a desire for acceptance, building something here on earth with political might and power, an accommodation to the sexual mores of the present evil age -is this to be the controlling force? Is it this confidence in their own might and power, this confidence in their own intellectual resources to be able to discern the way ahead? Or is it something we might recognize more as authentic Calvinism? No, let’s go further, authentic Christianity? That is the choice facing men and women, especially in the US.

But it faces us all. ‘The New Calvinism’ may conceivably implode over its U-turn on some vital moral issues and its embrace of progressive points of view. But the questions it raises about how we go about our service and ministry will remain. It is a test of our loyalty. Will we build with the resources of human might and power? Or, instead, will we have a humble gospel-spirit, and trust in the resources that lie at the heart of true Calvinism, a God of extraordinary holiness, a Saviour of extraordinary love, a Spirit of extraordinary power, able to work in weak and feeble followers like us?

I cannot think of a more important choice that you as future and present ministers presently face. For I do not mean to flatter us, for in the end, we all know it is of grace that we know or understand anything. It is only God who makes us to differ. But our doctrinal heritage is a gift of God. It has been preserved for us through thick and thin, through all the insults and the willful mischaracterization of men. This core of doctrine relates us to God in such a way that we can gain spiritual wisdom because of the clarity with which these truths enable us to behold and respond to Him. While protesting that they are friends of this doctrinal heritage, ‘New Calvinism’, in the round, is in the process of destroying it. And they cannot see that this is what they are doing.

Were that legacy to be lost, the loss to the church, to our societies, to the rest of the world, who in so many ways, rightly or wrongly, still look to us here in the West for help and guidance, would be incalculable. I urge myself and I urge us all, do not fail in this task, before God. Instead uphold something of great spiritual value. Hear the word to Zerubbabel. It is the Holy Spirit we need, His wisdom, His truth as it is in Christ Jesus, not the might and power of man. It is a spiritual battle we are in. Where do you and I stand?

C. Hand

