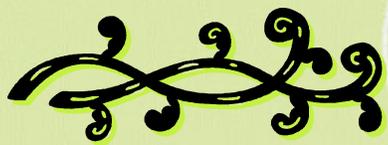


Master of Divinity
Research Project TH690



Grace before Duty

A Comparison of John Calvin and John Owen's Theology of the
Discipline of the Christian life



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Abstract

Discipline is almost a dirty word in twenty-first century Western culture. In today's hedonistic Western world, you would be hard-pressed to find a book outlining the discipline of the Christian life in the top-selling section of your local Christian bookstore. However, for John Calvin, a sixteenth century Reformer and John Owen, a seventeenth century Puritan, the discipline of the Christian life was at the heart of their theology.

There are some significant differences between John Calvin's (1509-1564) and John Owen's (1616-1683) theology of the discipline of the Christian life. They lived and worked in different times and were faced with distinctive theological challenges. Owen was influenced by Covenant theology and developed a unique theology of communion with God. Some Scholars have analyzed Calvin and Owen's theology and drawn a stark contrast between Calvin's unilateral and Owen's bilateral understanding of the covenantal relationship between God and the believer. This paper will demonstrate that such a polarization is unfounded. By examining the theology of Calvin and Owen, it is evident that both Calvin and Owen understand the relationship between God and believers as unilaterally made possible by God. God in His sovereign power and grace; predestines, justifies, regenerates, sanctifies and brings His people to glory. However, both also illustrate how a bilateral and mutual fellowship results as the fruit rather than a condition of this relationship. For both Calvin and Owen, the doctrine of union with Christ provides resolution for the dichotomy between man's response and God's work within the discipline of the Christian life. Therefore it will be seen that there is great continuity between Calvin's and Owen's theology of the Christian life. However, Owen's introduction of additional theological constructs results in a capacious theology of the Christian life which is at times ambiguous regarding the tension between grace and anthropological action. In contrast, Calvin never separates his discussion of the believer's response from his theology of the sovereign power and grace of God. Although Calvin's and Owen's theology are far from paradoxical, Calvin's concise exposition of the Christian life is superior to Owen's commodious theology.

Introduction

'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.' (Ephesians 2:8-10)¹

Scripture reveals that the Christian life involves a loving, obedient, disciplined and pious response to God's grace as shown in the person and work of Christ. Throughout the history of the Christian church, countless volumes have been written on the discipline of the Christian life. The English Puritans are renowned for their numerous theological works on discipline and duty in the Christian life. Their emphasis on a bilateral aspect to God's covenantal relationship with humankind is often contrasted with the unilateral emphasis of the Genevian Reformers.²

While John Calvin (1509-1564) is not well known for producing a lengthy code or pattern of moral conduct, his theology 'comes to focus in the Christian life'.³ For Calvin, the discipline of the Christian life is found in something greater than rule following, rather it is the duty of believers to 'present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is [their] spiritual worship' (Rom 12:1-2).⁴ Calvin the theologian, pastor and preacher, expounded an understanding of the Christian life which emphasized God's grace. How can sinful humanity engage in a relationship with a holy God? For Calvin, the answer is found in the Gospel, the good news of God in Christ Jesus. It is only by God's grace and sovereign power that people are

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture is taken the New Revised Standard Version of *The Holy Bible*, Zondervan: Michigan, 1989.

² In the context of a legal contract, the term *unilateral* is used to describe a situation where the obligation rests only on one party. Conversely, *bilateral* refers to a situation where both parties have binding obligations. Scholars have adopted these terms in their discussion of theologians understanding of the covenantal relationship between God and humankind. In a theological context, *unilateral* generally refers to an understanding of the relationship between God and man as conditional on God's grace and unconditional on the work of humankind. A *bilateral* understanding of the relationship between God and humankind suggests that there are some obligations required from both parties. It is arguable that Scripture presents a unilateral view of the justification and regeneration of believers, and yet an understanding of bilateral aspects of the relationship that is unilaterally made possible by God. These bilateral aspects are not conditions of the relationship, rather they are the fruit of the relationship.

³ John H Leith, *John Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, John Knox Press: Louisville, 1989, 24.

⁴ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Ford Lewis Battles (trans), Westminster John Knox Press: London, MCMLX, III, VII, 1, 689.

able to respond to God and again it is only by God's grace that these believers are able to persevere in the Christian life. Does this imply that people are helpless marionettes in God's elaborate puppet show? To the contrary, Calvin's theology elucidates how it is possible for God's people to truly love and obey Him. Calvin holds the Scriptural tension between God's action and human action together through the notion of 'union with Christ'. Calvin's understanding of union with Christ enables him to present a theology of the Christian life which emphasizes the power and grace of God and yet does not diminish the human role. Calvin portrays the loving, mutual and intimate relationship made possible through the sovereign power and love of God.

John Owen (1616-1683), the Puritan pastor and theologian, wrote a penetrating exposition of the Christian life which Ferguson argues speaks as powerfully today as it did in the seventeenth century.⁵ Owen has been praised for demonstrating the bilateral aspects of man's covenantal relationship with God, thereby providing an antidotal response to a unilateral theology of the Christian life. Thus, some scholars such as R T Kendall claim that the work of most Puritan theologians was discontinuous with Calvin's theology. Owen, writing in a different theological climate, was influenced and challenged by new theological developments. Owen's theological treatment of the Christian life is more extensive than Calvin's, distinguished by his covenantal framework which he uses to develop a theology of the believer's response through their communion with God.

Do the differences between Calvin and Owen's theology of the Christian life result in two antithetical understandings? This paper will illustrate that such a polarization is completely unfounded. An examination of Calvin's and Owen's theology reveals that there are important bilateral and unilateral dimensions to their understanding of the relationship between God and believers. Both Calvin and Owen argue that the relationship between God and believers is not conditional on the believer's obedience. God in His sovereign power and grace; predestines, justifies, regenerates, sanctifies and brings His people to glory. However, both also illustrate how bilateral and mutual aspects result as the fruit rather than a condition of this relationship. For both Calvin

⁵ Sinclair B Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1987, vi.

and Owen, the doctrine of union with Christ provides resolution for the dichotomy between man's response and God's work within the discipline of the Christian life.

This paper will examine previous scholarship which compares Calvin and Owen's theology of the Christian life with specific reference to significant developments such as Reformed Scholasticism and Covenant theology. We will then examine in turn, both Calvin's and Owen's theology of the discipline of the Christian life. Calvin and Owen's theology will then be compared and contrasted and it will be shown contrary to scholarship which suggests otherwise, that there is great continuity between them.

It is the contention of this paper that the apparent disparity between Calvin and Owen's theology of the Christian life does not result in incongruous doctrinal understandings. However, while their differences do not result in conflicting theologies, Owen's more complicated framework makes it more challenging for him to constantly hold in tension the Scriptural balance of God's role and the believer's role in the Christian life. Owen's capacious theology of the Christian life and use of covenant and communion as theological constructs, results in ambiguity which is easily misunderstood. While the work of both Calvin and Owen is to be highly commended, and any suggestion of polarization must be refuted, Calvin's concise theology of the Christian life is a more effective and internally consistent communication of Scriptural truth.

Part One

Calvin and Owen in Scholarship

Owen and other Puritans are often labelled as 'Calvinists'⁶, however, this does not necessarily imply continuity between their theology and the work of Calvin. As previously mentioned, some scholars such as Kendall argue that the work of most

⁶ The theology of John Owen and other Puritans is often labeled as 'Calvinist'. The terms 'Calvinist' and 'Calvinism' are used in several ways; they may refer to the actual teachings of Calvin, or to the theological ideas of religious bodies such as the Reformed Church or to a theology that grew out of the work of Calvin and other reformed theologians such as Zwingli but is actually a distortion of Calvin's original theology.

Puritans was discontinuous with Calvin's own theology.⁷ This discontinuity is often attributed to Reformed Scholasticism and the development of Covenant theology.⁸ However, George Harper finds Kendall's study to be erroneous and unfaithful to history.⁹ While Scholasticism and the development of Covenant theology were significant for seventeenth century theology, they did not necessarily result in a new theology discontinuous with that of the Reformers. As there was great diversity among the Puritans, it is imprudent to generalize. However, it is arguable that most Puritans, rather than seeking to be true to Calvin, sought to be true to Scripture, as Calvin, and faithful Christians before him had done.

Reformed Scholasticism

Unlike his medieval predecessors Calvin and the other Reformers sought to be faithful to Scripture rather than speculative Scholastic methods. This did not mean that they disregarded reason altogether. Calvin's *Institutes* are systematically presented and most Reformers acknowledged the role of reason in interpreting the Scriptures. However, their catch-cry *Sola Scriptura* articulated their desire to give authority to Scripture rather than reason.

While Calvin and other Reformers sought to break with the Medieval Scholastic reliance on reason, the scholastic method is thought to have gained influence again in the next generation of Protestant theologians. In the past, seventeenth century Protestant Scholasticism has been viewed as 'overly rationalistic at the expense of Reformation Biblicism, heavily dependent on Aristotelian philosophy, and organized around a central doctrine such as Predestination'.¹⁰ Calvin argued that Christians were predestined 'in Christ' by God to be saved by His grace. However, Wallace assert that in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Predestination was increasingly

⁷ R T Kendall, "The Puritan modification of Calvin's Theology", *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World*, W Stanford Reid (ed), Zondervan: Michigan, 1982, 197-214.

⁸ Randall C Gleason, *John Calvin and John Owen on Mortification, A Comparative Study in Reformed Spirituality*, Peter Lang: New York, 1995, 3.

⁹ George W Harper, "Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649", *Calvin Theological Journal*, 20 (1985), 261-2.

¹⁰ Amy Nelson Burnett, "The Educational Roots of Reformed Scholasticism: Dialectic and Scriptural Exegesis in the Sixteenth Century", *Dutch Review of Church History*, 84 (2004), 299.

divorced from its original Soteriological moorings in Reformed theology¹¹ and made the ‘organizing principle in Scholastic theological systems built around the divine degrees.’¹²

Donald McKim argues that this did not affect Owen’s doctrine of Scripture.¹³ Amy Burnett alerts us to the current consensus which suggests that ‘most Puritans belonged to a form of Protestant scholasticism ‘which reflected the Orthodox theologians’ deep familiarity with and commitment to the Scriptural text’.¹⁴ Sebastian Rehnman points out that while Owen may have been influenced by the Loci or Topical method of organizing his theology, the Covenant model has much greater significance for Owen’s theology.¹⁵ Through the Covenant model Owen sought to be more Scriptural and less systematic.¹⁶ Therefore any assertions that regard Reformed Scholasticism to have caused discontinuity between Calvin and Owen’s theology must be refuted.

Covenant Theology

Some suggest that the development of Federal or Covenant theology as an organizing principle for theology was the cause of a fundamental difference between the theology of Calvin and the later Protestants such as Owen. In 1980, J Baker argued that there were two opposing reformed views of the covenant, which he titled the Geneva and Zurich views. In recent years, Leonard Trinterud has also supported this view. They propose that the Genevian view as put forward by Calvin, understood the covenant to be ‘unilaterally based upon God’s unconditional promise and sovereign grace’, while the Zurich view as developed by Zwingli and built on by Bullinger ‘considered the covenant to be bilateral and, thus, conditioned upon the human response of

¹¹ As an example, Von Rohr points to Zanchius of Heidelberg who placed predestination in a metaphysical system. Von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, 4.

¹² Dewey D Wallace, Jr, “The Doctrine of Predestination in the Early English Reformation”, *Church History*, 43, 1974, 215.

¹³ Donald K McKim, “John Owen’s Doctrine of Scripture in Historical Perspective”, *Evangelical Quarterly*, 45 (1973), 199.

¹⁴ Burnett, 299.

¹⁵ Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen*, Baker Academic: Michigan, 2002.

¹⁶ Martin Klauber, “Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen” (A Review), *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 47 (2004), 364.

obedience'.¹⁷ The Zurich view is therefore thought to have provided the basis for Puritan Covenant theology.¹⁸

This view has been criticized by Anthony Hoekema¹⁹ who insists that Calvin also understands the relationship between God and believers to hold some mutual obligations for both parties. Lyle Bierma argues that there were no 'substantial differences in the way the covenant was understood in the Zurich and Genevian theological traditions'.²⁰ Thus the argument that Puritan covenant theology resulted from the Zurich view and is opposed to Calvin's theology is also flawed.²¹

It is likely that Caspar Olevianus' was responsible for the rise of Covenantal theology among the Puritans. Olevianus has been portrayed by Heinrich Heppe and Jürgen Moltmann as a founder of Covenant theology and one who helped to quell the damage of Scholastic Double Predestination.²² On the other hand, Baker asserts that Olevianus was himself a Double Predestinarian.²³ Bierma suggests that both are somewhat correct as Olevianus' Covenant theology was compatible with Predestination.²⁴ Bierma argues that Olevianus' Covenant theology holds together both the unilateral work of God and also the bilateral aspects of the relationship between God and his people.²⁵

John von Rohr rejects all claims that the Puritan Covenant theology contradicted divine sovereignty.²⁶ von Rohr argues that the Puritans understood the Covenant of

¹⁷ J Wayne Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition*, Ohio University: Athens, 1980, 27ff.

¹⁸ Leonard J Trinterud, "The Origins of Puritanism", *Church History* 20, 1951, 37-45.

¹⁹ Anthony H Hoekema, "The Covenant of Grace in Calvin's Teaching", *Calvin Theological Journal*, 2 (1967), 141.

²⁰ Lyle D Bierma, "Federal Theology in the 16th Century: Two Traditions?", *Westminster Theological Journal*, 45 (1983), 320-21.

²¹ Bierma, "Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century: Two Traditions?" 321.

²² Heinrich Heppe, *Dogmatik des deutschen Protestantismus im sechzehnten Jahrhundert*, Perthes: Gotha, 1857.

Jürgen Moltmann, "Zur Bedeutung des Petrus Ramus für Philosophie und Theologie im Calvinismus," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 68 (1957), 295-318.

²³ Baker, 203.

²⁴ Lyle D Bierma, "The Role of Covenant Theology in Early Reformed Orthodoxy", *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 21, (1990), 456.

²⁵ Bierma, "The Role of Covenant Theology in Early Reformed Orthodoxy", 457-9.

²⁶ von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*.

Grace²⁷ to be both unconditional and absolute, as it is God who promises and fulfills the conditions.²⁸ Bierma writes that while both Calvin and the later Puritans agreed that believers are to respond with love and obedience; they do so only because God graciously creates in them the ability to do so.²⁹ Richard Muller argues that there is no need to make a great doctrinal distinction between Calvinist and Covenant theology.³⁰

Therefore Reformed Scholasticism and the development of Covenant theology did not result in discontinuity between the Reformers and the English Puritans. Randall Gleason therefore argues in his comparison of Calvin and Owen, that while English Calvinism developed quantitatively beyond that of Calvin's thought it did not develop in a qualitatively contradictory fashion.³¹ This is backed by scholars such as Dewey Wallace and Sinclair Ferguson. Wallace maintains that the essence of Owen's theology is continuous with Calvin's. While he asserts that the Puritans developed their own 'peculiar forms' and modifications and additions to the Calvinist faith, the core of Calvin's theology remained central.³² He concludes that there is no real doctrinal discontinuity between Owen and Calvin, only differences related to the context and contemporary application.³³ Gleason and Wallace also argue that this continuity between Calvin and Owen is seen specifically in their theology of the Christian life.³⁴

In contrast to these scholars, Dale Stover declares that there are fundamental differences between Calvin and Owen's theology regarding the tension between grace and anthropological action in the Christian life.³⁵ He distinguishes between Calvin's christocentric focus on union with Christ and Owen's anthropological focus on duty.

²⁷ A full explanation of these terms will be provided later in the context of John Owen's Covenant theology.

²⁸ John von Rohr, "Covenant and Assurance in Early English Puritanism", *Church History*, 34 (1965), 202.

²⁹ Bierma, "Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century: Two Traditions?" 321.

³⁰ Richard A Muller, "Perkins' A Golden Chaine: Predestinarian System or Schematized Ordo Salutis?", *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 9 (1978), 78ff.

³¹ Gleason, 3.

³² Dewey D Wallace, Jr. "The Life and Thought of John Owen to 1660: A Study of the Significance of Calvinist theology in English Puritanism", (PhD Thesis, Princeton University, 1965), 7. In Gleason, 27.

³³ *Ibid*, 289-91.

³⁴ Gleason 32-33.

³⁵ Dale Arden Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen: A Study of the Role of the Holy Spirit in Relation to the Shape of a Theology" (PhD Thesis McGill University [Canada], 1967. In Gleason 27.

He argues that while Owen maintains that salvation is the result of grace alone, he turns his focus of the Christian life and sanctification to the believer.

As we examine the theology of Calvin and Owen, it will become apparent that Gleason, Wallace and Ferguson are correct to suggest that there is continuity between the thought of Calvin and Owen on the Christian life. It is evident that the influence of Reformed Scholasticism and Covenantal theology did lead to a radically different understanding of the Christian life in Owen's theology. However, the claims of scholars that see discontinuity between Calvin and Owen are not completely without foundation. Although a full and comprehensive reading of Owen's theology illustrates his commitment to the same Scriptural truths that Calvin put forth, Owen's more complicated and capacious theology leads to ambiguity. Calvin's concise treatment of the Christian life successfully communicates a scriptural understanding of God's role and the believer's role in the Christian life.

Part Two

John Calvin's teaching on the personal discipline of the Christian Life

Calvin's theology of the discipline of the Christian life emphasizes the grace of God while also acknowledging and encouraging the believer's response. Calvin's practical and theological understanding of union with Christ makes a place for both the believer's response and God's work of sanctification. Reformers such as Calvin were not motivated by mere doctrinal and intellectual dilemmas; they taught, preached and wrote in order to 'revivify the relationship of God's people with God'.³⁶ Calvin was not concerned with simply facts of God matched with a response to God. Calvin was concerned with the miraculous salvation of God through Christ that effected miraculous change in person's heart and life. Calvin writes of the Christian life in his well-known theological treatise *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*.³⁷ However, Calvin's pastoral and Biblical theology of the Christian life is also found in his commentaries, sermons and letters.

³⁶ Elsie Anne McKee, "General Introduction", In *John Calvin, Writings on Pastoral Piety*, Paulist Press: New York, 2001, 3.

³⁷ Hereby referred to as the *Institutes*.

Calvin's Influences and Sources

Calvin's theology of the Christian life was shaped and influenced by his commitment to Scripture, his reading of other theologians, his pastoral ministry and his refutation of Roman Catholicism and the Anabaptists.

Hermann Bauke's analysis of Calvin's theology (1922) revealed that it was both systematically coherent and Biblical.³⁸ Calvin's theology is not simply Biblical in the sense that he supports his assertions from Scripture, but rather it is loyal to the whole Bible story. Contrary to Stephen Thorson's suggestion of discontinuity in Calvin's theology, Calvin presented a thoroughly Scriptural and internally consistent systematic theology of the Christian faith.³⁹

Although, Calvin always gave chief authority to Scripture, the writings of early church fathers and later Christian scholars were influential in the development of Calvin's thought.⁴⁰ Both Augustine of Hippo's understanding of original sin and depravity and Bernard of Clairvaux's teaching on union with Christ were influential to Calvin's theology of the Christian life. Calvin quotes or names Bernard 46 times in the *Institutes* alone.⁴¹ Kay writes that Bernard was discovered by Calvin 'as a great ally even as his own thinking developed'.⁴²

A central theme in Bernard's theology is the discipline of love made possible through our 'union with Christ'.⁴³ He interprets 'the Song of Songs' as a love song between the bridegroom, Christ and his bride, the church or those whose souls thirst for God.⁴⁴ He argues that the image of this relationship illuminates our understanding of union

³⁸ Hermann Bauke, *Die Probleme der Theologie Calvins*, J C Hinrichs: Leipzig, 1922.

³⁹ Stephen Thorson, "Tensions in Calvin's View of Faith: Unexamined Assumptions in RT Kendall's Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 37 (1994), 424.

⁴⁰ The homilies of Basil, Chrysostom, Cyprian, Ambrose and particularly Augustine informed Calvin's theology. Ford Lewis Battles, "True Piety According to Calvin", Donald Kim (ed), *Readings in Calvin's Theology*, Baker Book House: Michigan, 1984, 202.

⁴¹ Brian Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality, John Owen and the Doctrine of God in Western Devotion*, Paternoster: Great Britain, 2007, 161.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Love of God and Spiritual Friendship*, Multnomah Press: Portland, 200.

⁴⁴ St Bernard, *On the Song of Songs*, A Religious of CSMV (trans & ed) A R Mowbray and Co: London, 1952, 28.

with Christ. Bernard explains that one must consider the nature of other relationships to fully grasp the splendour of this image.⁴⁵

‘A slave feels fear before his Lord; a hireling looks for wages; a pupil gives attention to his teacher; a son honours his father. But she who asks a kiss, she loves. Love is the highest of all our natural gifts, supremely so when it is rendered back to God, who is its source.The mutual sweet affection between the Word and the soul cannot more sweetly be expressed than by thus calling them the Bridegroom and the Bride. For between the bride and the bridegroom all is held in common; neither calls anything their own or possesses a single thing the other does not share. They have one inheritance, one home, one table, and one couch; they are in fact one flesh. First, then, the soul who loves is called the Bride’.⁴⁶

Bernard explains how Christian obedience and discipline is possible through union with Christ. United to Christ, we die to sin and rise to new life. Through union, Christ’s spirit is able to change our sinful will.⁴⁷ A truly grace-centred understanding of justification and sanctification as seen in the theology of Bernard, is fundamental to Calvin’s doctrine of the Christian life. Calvin draws on Bernard’s discussion of union with Christ and likewise develops his theology of Christian discipline within the context of union with Christ.⁴⁸

Calvin was possibly the most gifted and intellectually rigorous theologian of the sixteenth century. However, McKee declares that his reputation as an intellectual should not be passed on ‘shorn of the vital pastoral context’ in which he wrote his theology.⁴⁹ Ford Lewis Battles acknowledges that Calvin’s writings on the Christian life were influenced by his pastoral experience. Battles suggests that the Biblical writers included, much of the finest theology has been born out of pastoral need.⁵⁰ The portion of Calvin’s *Institutes* which deals with the Christian life⁵¹ was not included till the 1539 edition. Battles demonstrates that Calvin was influenced by his time in Strasbourg in 1538 and the difficulties in Geneva between 1536-38. He argues that during this time ‘a real growth in Calvin the churchman’ is evident in his ‘grasp of the practical problems both of individual Christians and of the church as the society

⁴⁵ St Bernard, *On the Song of Songs*, 28.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Dennis E Tamburello, *Union with Christ, John Calvin and the Mysticism of St Bernard*, Westminster John Know Press: Kentucky, 1994, 90.

⁴⁸ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, II, 24-5, 570-71.

⁴⁹ McKee, 2.

⁵⁰ Battles, “True Piety According to Calvin”, 204.

⁵¹ Calvin addresses the Christian life in chapters six to ten of book three of the *Institutes*.

of Christians'.⁵² During this time Calvin wrote his *Commentary on Romans* and began his *Commentary on Ephesians*. Calvin's announced intention for his writings on the Christian life reflect Paul's pastoral teaching; 'to show some order whereby the Christian man may be led and directed to order his life aright'.⁵³

Responding to Roman Catholicism was a major challenge which influenced Calvin's theology. Within the context of the Christian life, Calvin argues against 'the erroneous doctrine of indulgences' and the sacerdotal understanding of penance.⁵⁴ Indulgences were offered by the Roman Catholic (RC) Church in order to provide 'satisfaction' for sin. Calvin argues that this practice was contradictory to Scripture, which maintains that only the blood of Christ can provide forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43).⁵⁵ The Council of Trent (Session One, 1547) stated that when a believer sins, they may be again justified if they obey the sacrament of Penance and through sacramental confession and sacerdotal absolution along with 'satisfaction by fasts, alms, prayers, and the other pious exercises of a spiritual life'.⁵⁶ In reaction to the works-righteousness that Calvin saw in Catholic sacerdotalism, the Reformation watchword *sole fide* represented a needed turn to God's word, his grace and the believer's faith.⁵⁷

Calvin also responded to the Anabaptists who taught a perfectionist view of the Christian life. Calvin maintained that perfection is only 'granted to the faithful at the last judgment'.⁵⁸ While the Anabaptists suggested the visible church should only consist of those who are truly righteous, Calvin maintained that what defined the church and the Christian life was 'those who by confession of faith, by example of life and by partaking of the sacraments, profess the same God and Christ with us'.⁵⁹

⁵² Battles, "True Piety According to Calvin", 200.

⁵³ Ibid, 202.

⁵⁴ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, V, 1, 670.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ The Council of Trent, Session One, 1547, Chapter XIV, *On the Fallen and their Restoration*. Hanover Historical Texts Project, <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent>

⁵⁷ Thorson, 413.

⁵⁸ Niesel, 129.

⁵⁹ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV, I, 8, 1023.

The discipline of Christian Life

Now that we have addressed Calvin's influences and sources, we may turn to Calvin's theology of the Christian life. Calvin's theological understanding of the personal discipline of the Christian life is built on his theology of the Trinitarian God, Creation, Humanity, Sin, Christology, Soteriology, Sanctification and Eschatology. These have great implications for Christian life and practice. For Calvin, the chief end of the Christian life is the glory of God.⁶⁰ This glory shines principally in the Gospel of Christ (Heb 1:3) which gives renewed relationship between God and His people.⁶¹ Calvin's understanding is that the Christian life is thus, life in relationship with God.

'A common thread in Reformed thought was that of God's sovereign control of human life and history.'⁶² In his *Institutes*, Calvin writes that God, our creator, rules the world with his sovereign and loving power. Calvin maintains that God is glorified through the responsive love of His people.⁶³ However, this is impossible without God's grace due to Adam's fall into sin and the now degenerate condition of all humankind. Therefore, 'in order that believers may reach his goal', God must work both for and in his people.⁶⁴ Calvin maintains that it is by God's grace through Christ that we obtain forgiveness of sins, our regeneration and sanctification.

'Christ was given to us by God's generosity, to be grasped and possessed by us in faith. By partaking of him, we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father; and secondly, that sanctified by Christ's spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life'.⁶⁵

For Calvin, communion between God and man is the goal of eternity. God continually sanctifies believers (2 Cor 3:18)⁶⁶ and assigns them to a race of repentance, which they are to run throughout their lives' till the joyous occasion of the final resurrection

⁶⁰ John Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum: Joannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, Guilielmus Baum, Eduardus Cunitz, and eduardus Reuss, (eds) CA Schwetschke et Filium: Brunswick, 1863-97, Vol 26, 693. 209.

⁶¹ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, II, 1, 544.

⁶² John Von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, 2.

⁶³ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, VII, 1, 689.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, III, III, 8, 602.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, III, XI, 1, 725.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, III, III, 8, 601.

when God and His people will be together for eternity.⁶⁷ Believers must be made holy, as God is holy (Lev 19:2, 1 Peter 1:15-16).

‘Accordingly we are restored by this regeneration through the benefit of Christ into the righteousness of God; from which we had fallen through Adam. In this way it pleases the Lord fully to restore whomsoever he adopts into the inheritance of life. And indeed, this restoration does not take place in one moment or one day or one year; but through continual and sometimes even slow advances God wipes out in his elect the corruptions of the flesh, cleanses them of guilt, consecrates them to himself as temples renewing all their minds to true purity that they may practice repentance throughout their lives and know that this warfare will end only at death.’⁶⁸

Although Calvin does not use the term ‘covenant’ in the same way and with the same frequency as later Covenant theologians, covenant was an integral feature in his thought.⁶⁹ Calvin’s understanding of the covenant implies ‘the self-binding of God through his Word of promise whereby he had chosen or adopted a people for himself’.⁷⁰ Calvin writes of the covenants spoken of in scripture especially the old and new covenants as discussed in the letter to the Hebrews. He understands there to be both continuity between them as they were both based in God’s grace and yet discontinuity due Jesus’ perfect fulfillment of the old covenant. Calvin’s main focus with relation to covenant is God’s faithfulness rather than man’s role. However, intrinsic to the purpose of the covenant is a bilateral dimension based on the relationship between God and man made possible through Jesus.

Calvin, acknowledges that ‘in all covenants of his mercy the Lord requires of His servants in return uprightness and sanctity of life’.⁷¹ However,

‘the godly, encompassed with mortal flesh, are still sinners, and their good works are as yet incomplete and redolent of the vices of the flesh, [God] can be propitious neither to [their uprightness or sanctity of life] unless he embrace them in Christ rather than in themselves’.⁷²

How then is the required sanctity of life achieved? Through union with Christ. Union with Christ brings mortification and vivification as the Spirit enables believers to put to death sin in their lives and seek to live for the glory of God.

⁶⁷ Ibid, III, III, 8, 602.

⁶⁸ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, 3, 8, 601.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Peter A Lillback, *The Binding of God, Calvin’s Role in the Development of Covenant Theology*, Baker Academic: Michigan, 2001, 141.

⁷¹ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, VII, 5, 808.

⁷² Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, VII, 5, 807.

Union with Christ

Through the scriptural doctrine of ‘union with Christ’, Calvin emphasizes the importance of Christ’s work not only *for* believers but also *in* believers. And yet it is through union with Christ, that Calvin also illustrates the bilateral aspects of the believer’s relationship with God. Scripture teaches that the believer is united to Christ (Romans 6, Gal 2:20, Col 2:20-3:4, 1 Cor 1:2, Eph 1:1, Phil 1:1, Col 1:1, Thess 1:1, 2 Thess 1:1).⁷³ Calvin refutes Osiander’s claim that our union with Christ effects a merging of our being with His, rather he writes that the Holy Spirit is the bond whereby, ‘Christ effectively unites us to himself’.⁷⁴

‘Christ is not outside us but dwells within us. Not only does he cleave to us by an indivisible bond of fellowship, but with a wonderful communion, day by day, he grows more and more into one body with us until he becomes completely one with us’.⁷⁵

This union with Jesus Christ produces a revolutionary change in the believer’s life. Union with Christ has two main purposes. Firstly Christ grants believers ‘participation in his righteousness’ and secondly He governs them ‘by his Spirit and direct[s] all [their] actions’.⁷⁶ Calvin claims that without this intimate union with Christ, God’s work of salvation would be in vain.⁷⁷ Union makes possible fellowship with God.⁷⁸

Calvin uses several images for describing union with Christ. These include; engrafting, fellowship, partaking, adoption, and the image of spiritual marriage. Through his most favoured image, engrafting, Calvin communicates the intimate relationship born from union with Christ.⁷⁹ ‘He engrafts us into His Body, so that from him we derive life.’⁸⁰ In his sermon 42 on Ephesians 5:31-33, Calvin states that

⁷³ The Apostle Paul makes many references to union with Christ, and being ‘in Christ’ which expresses a similar sentiment.

⁷⁴ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, I, 1, 538.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, III, II, 24, 570-1.

⁷⁶ Tamburello, 86.

⁷⁷ Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, Harold Knight (trans), The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1956, 124.

⁷⁸ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, VII, 5, 689.

⁷⁹ Tamburello, 85.

⁸⁰ John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, T H L Parker (trans), Wm B Eardmans Publishing Company: Michigan, 1965, 209.

we are ‘bone of our Lord Jesus Christ’s bone, and how we are his flesh’ because we live in him spiritually. ‘His flesh is our meat, his blood our drink’.⁸¹

‘Therefore, that joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our hearts – in short, that mystical union – are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body – in short, because he deigns to make us one with him. For this reason, we glory that we have fellowship of righteousness with him.’⁸²

Union involves mortification and vivification

Through union with Christ, believers live in fellowship with Christ and respond with love and obedience. However, although Christians are justified and freed through regeneration from bondage to sin,

‘they do not obtain full possession of freedom so as to feel no more annoyance from their flesh, but there still remains in them a continuing occasion for struggle whereby they may be exercised; and not only be exercised, but also better learn their own weakness.’⁸³

For Christians, sin has lost its dominion, but it still dwells in them.⁸⁴ Consequently the discipline of the Christian life must include mortification of sin as well as vivification in Christ which both arise from union with Christ for,

‘if we truly partake in his death “our old man is crucified by his power, and the body of sin perishes” (Rom 6:6) that the corruption of original nature may no longer thrive. If we share in his resurrection, through it we are raised up into newness of life to correspond with the righteousness of God.’⁸⁵

Self-Denial, Cross Bearing and Meditation on the Future Life

Calvin unpacks most of his teaching on the personal discipline of the Christian life in chapters six to ten of *The Institutes*. He covers topics such as; The Life of the Christian Man, The Denial of Ourselves, Bearing the Cross, Meditation on the Future Life and How We Must Use the Present Life and its Helps. These involve ‘specific

⁸¹ Calvin, “The Forty Second Sermon, which is the Tenth on the Fifth Chapter”, *Sermons on The Epistle to the Ephesians*, The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1962, 616.

⁸² Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, XI, 10, 737.

⁸³ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, III, 10, 602.

⁸⁴ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, III, 11, 603.

⁸⁵ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, III, 8, 601.

aspects' of mortification and vivification through union with Christ.⁸⁶ His purpose is 'to show the godly man how he may be directed to a rightly ordered life, and briefly to set down some universal rule with which to determine his duties'.⁸⁷

As believers are not their own masters, but rather belong to God, 'Denial of Ourselves' is central to the Christian life.⁸⁸ It is the basis for true love of God and others. It is made possible only through union with Christ. It involves mortification, the death of self-centeredness and also vivification of the love of God and neighbour. In this way, believers must follow Christ's teaching and example.⁸⁹ Believers depart from themselves so that they may devote themselves entirely to God.⁹⁰

'Bearing the Cross' is an element of 'self denial'.⁹¹ Calvin writes that Christians partake in the sufferings of Christ when they bear their cross (2 Cor 4:10, Phil 3:10, 2 Tim 2:11). All of Christ's disciples must bear their own cross (Matt 16:24). Christians share in Christ's suffering, death and resurrection (Phil 3:10-11). Like Christ, they learn obedience through suffering (Heb 5:8).⁹² As adopted children of God, Christians are lovingly disciplined by their Father (Heb 12:5-8).⁹³ Christians share in Christ's suffering so that they may also share in his glory (Acts 14:22).⁹⁴ Calvin explains cross-bearing in terms of discipline, chastisement and persecution. The discipline of the cross teaches Christians to rely on God, it leads them to further repentance and prepares them for the fellowship with God for which they were created.⁹⁵

Calvin exhorts believers to meditate on their future life.⁹⁶ Believers must try to resist the transient and unsatisfying pleasures of this life and instead focus on longing for their eternal life.⁹⁷ Meditation on the future life is not simply an anthropological action, rather 'there is a firm basis in Calvin's writings for interpreting meditation on

⁸⁶ Leith, 76.

⁸⁷ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, VI, 1, 685.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, III, VII, 1, 689.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, III, VI, 3, 686.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, III, VII, 1, 690.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, VIII, 1, 702.

⁹² *Ibid*, III, VIII, 1, 702.

⁹³ *Ibid*, III, VIII, 6, 706.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, III, VIII, 1, 702.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, III, VIII, 702-712.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, III, IX, 1, 712.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, III, IX, 2, 714.

the future life in the Johannine sense of present participation in eternal life here on earth.⁹⁸ Calvin writes that the bodily life does not prevent Christians from enjoying by faith, a heavenly life where they may sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6) and be fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God (Eph 2:19).⁹⁹

In *On Scandals* (1550), *Excuse to the Nicodemites* (1544) and *What a Faithful Man...Ought to do Dwelling Amongst the Papists* (1543) Calvin examines what Reformed Christians must do when ‘pressed to conform to the religious practices and beliefs of the unreformed church’.¹⁰⁰ Here the advice of denying self, following God, bearing your cross and letting the hope of the life to come give meaning for the present life, are put to the test in realistic situations. Calvin does not apply a definite rule but rather asks that people be directed by God’s word and ask the Lord to direct them in true wisdom to their duty and then obey with all their power.¹⁰¹

Means of Grace

In addition to union with Christ, God gives believers certain aids, or means by which they are strengthened in their Christian life. God’s word, the sacraments and the church, strengthen individual believers in their Christian life.

Calvin teaches that the Christian life is lived under the discipline of the word of God. Calvin maintains that God is actually present and works through His word which is the power of salvation for every believer (Rom 1:16).¹⁰² Believers must be governed by the authority of God’s word.¹⁰³ In his commentary on the Psalms, Calvin asserts that believers glorify God by living guided, directed, disciplined and inspired by His word.¹⁰⁴ Believers are to read God’s word and engage in self examination. Christians must love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. Thus, Christians must not

⁹⁸ Leith, 80.

⁹⁹ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, IX, 25, 1, 987.

¹⁰⁰ Battles, “True Piety According to Calvin”, 208.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 209.

¹⁰² Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, II, 29-33, 575-81.

¹⁰³ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries, A Harmony of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, Vol 1*, A W Morrison (trans), WM B Eerdmans Publishing Company: Michigan, 1972, (Commentary on Luke 1:6) 6.

¹⁰⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Rev James Anderson (trans), Calvin Translation Society: Edinburgh, 1845. (Psalm 19, Vol 1, 317; Psalm 50, Vol 2, 258-281; 119, Vol 4, 409.)

simply obey God's word, they must also give it the chief place in their mind and affections.¹⁰⁵

What about the Law? Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law. The end of the Law is that people should love God. The point of the Law was to foster hope of salvation in Christ until His coming. Calvin summarizes the function of what he calls the 'moral law' in three parts; firstly, the law shows the righteousness of God and also our unrighteousness. Secondly, the law works to deter and restrain evil men, and thirdly, it exhorts the faithful to live a godly life.¹⁰⁶

Calvin writes that 'we have in the sacraments another aid to our faith related to the preaching of the gospel'.¹⁰⁷ Calvin views the two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper as outward signs,

'by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we in turn attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels and before men'.¹⁰⁸

Calvin understood corporate fellowship and worship to be as important as individual discipline.¹⁰⁹ 'In order that preaching of the gospel might flourish, [God] deposited this treasure in the church'.¹¹⁰

'Calvin drove himself to teach and shape the whole community in the patterns of life that would nourish its relationship with God and reflect its confession, and he did this most prominently by public and corporate means.'¹¹¹

For many twenty-first century Christians, there is a tendency to interpret spirituality in individualistic terms and to neglect the corporate dimensions of the Christian faith.

Calvin understood there to be personal aspects to faith, and there are times when he

¹⁰⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary on Psalms*, 119: 2

¹⁰⁶ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, VII, 6-12, 354-61.

¹⁰⁷ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV, XIV, 1, 1276.

¹⁰⁸ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV, XIV, 1, 1277.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV, I, 1, 1011-12.

¹¹¹ McKee, 4.

specifically addresses individuals in his writings. However, each believer was always viewed as a member of the church, the body of Christ, the community of faith.¹¹²

Calvin maintains that together as the body of Christ, Christians gain mutual strength and encouragement in their battle in the midst of conflict with the world and aim to increase in godliness.¹¹³ In Calvin's writings on church discipline, he emphasizes the duty of believers to help each other when they fall into sin. Believers must therefore engage in mutual discipline and admonish one another when they fail to perform their duty to God.¹¹⁴

Therefore, the Believer's response of love and obedience is made possible by God through regeneration and union with Christ and continually shaped by God through his word, sacraments, the community of believers.

Conclusion of Calvin's View

By God's unilateral grace, through union with Christ, believers may engage in a mutual relationship with God. Although believers respond to God with love and obedience, Calvin views 'works' as God's gifts rather than simply human effort.¹¹⁵ They are the fruit of God's call on the lives of believers.¹¹⁶ Believers are 'consecrated and dedicated to God in order that we may thereafter think, speak, meditate, and do, nothing except to his glory'.¹¹⁷

Calvin's understanding is that the Christian life is life in fellowship with God rather than a purely duty-based life.¹¹⁸ Calvin argues that the basis of the believer's relationship with God is unilateral and not conditional on the believer's response. However, his teaching on denying self, cross bearing and meditation on the future life illustrate that Hoekema is correct to declare that Calvin also understands the Christian

¹¹² McKee, 4.

¹¹³ Adrian Hallett, "The Theology Of John Calvin", *Churchman*, 105 (1991), 132.

¹¹⁴ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, VI, VII, 2, 1230.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, III, XIV, 20, 786.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, III, XIV, 18, 785

¹¹⁷ Ibid, III, VI, 1, 690.

¹¹⁸ Leith, 82.

life holds some mutual roles for God and man.¹¹⁹ As Bierma has argued, Calvin resolved the tension between God's sovereignty and the believer's duty by emphasizing that while faith and obedience are conditions which Christians are obligated to fulfill, they do so only because God graciously creates in them the ability to do so.¹²⁰

Part three

John Owen's Teaching on the Discipline of the Christian Life

The Puritan concern with discipline and godly living 'was a way of realizing in the community the consequences of gracious election and the joys and demands of holiness'.¹²¹ Gavin McGrath illustrates that although the Puritans were known to emphasize discipline and self-examination, they always understood their response as within the realm of the Covenant of Grace.¹²² Puritan theologian John Owen (1615-1683) energetically argues that a Christian's obedient response was the result of God's grace. Using a covenantal framework Owen emphasizes union with Christ which allows renewed communion with God, from which the discipline of a godly life flows. For Owen, holiness is both God's gift and man's duty.¹²³

The Theological Milieu of John Owen's Times

While Owen was not swayed by Scholastic methods, he was impacted by the movements that arose as a result. The rise in emphasis on Predestination as a Scholastic organizing principle for theological systems influenced two opposing streams, Arminianism, and Antinomianism. Owen was faced with the challenge of responding to both of these along with other developments such as Quakerism.

¹¹⁹ Hoekema, 141.

¹²⁰ Lyle D Bierma, "Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century: Two Traditions?" 321.

¹²¹ Dewey D Wallace, Jr, *Puritans and Predestination, Grace in English Protestant Theology*, The University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1982, xi.

¹²² Gavin J McGrath, *But we Preach Christ Crucified, The Cross of Christ in the Pastoral Theology of John Owen, 1616-1683*, St Antholin's Lectureship Charity Lecture, 1994, 16.

¹²³ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, William H Goold (ed), The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1965, Vol 3, 386.

Owen responded against Arminian thought which was anthropologically centred.¹²⁴ He argued that human ‘nature is fearfully and universally depraved by the entrance of sin’ and thus only those who God unconditionally elects and calls are able to turn to him.¹²⁵ In contrast, Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) claimed that God’s election was the election of Christ to be Saviour and that all who freely believe in Christ become elect by virtue of their status in Christ.¹²⁶ Arminians believe that regeneration is the ‘fruit of man’s choice to co-operate with the divine influences’.¹²⁷ John Wesley, who continued in the Arminian tradition, maintains that regeneration is the ‘first point’ of a gradual sanctification, which may increase more and more unto the perfect day’.¹²⁸ It is man’s responsibility to keep acting upon God, for ‘God does not continue to act upon the soul, unless the soul re-acts upon God’.¹²⁹

Owen refutes this writing that for our ‘affections to be spiritual and the spring of our being spiritual minded, it is required that they be changed, renewed and inlaid with grace, spiritual and supernatural.’¹³⁰ In response to Arminian thought, Owen was faced with a great challenge to encourage believers to be active in the Christian life and yet assured that their salvation and sanctification are in God’s hands.

While Arminianism argued that the Orthodox Calvinists minimized human ability, Antinomians¹³¹ challenged the Orthodox for giving too much attention to human choice and responsibility’.¹³² Antinomianist theology denied the usefulness of the law for Christian believers. Antinomianists such as John Saltmarsh (1612-1647), Tobias Crisp (1600-1643) and John Eaton (1575-1642) emphasized Christ’s role and argued

¹²⁴ Owen also sought to respond to a form of puritan piety which encouraged much human effort. Bates, Howe and William Perkins placed a high emphasis on discipline and obedience as obligation. Likewise John Downname wrote a *Guide to Godlynesse* (1662), practical instruction for godly living.

¹²⁵ Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, Vol 3, 641.

¹²⁶ Arminius, as quoted in Bruce A Ware “The Place of Effectual Calling and Grace in Calvinist Soteriology, Thomas R Schreiner & Bruce A Ware, (eds) *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will, Volume 2*, Baker Books, 1995, 341.

¹²⁷ L Berkof, *Systematic Theology*, The Banner of Truth Trust: London, 1941, 478.

¹²⁸ John Wesley, “Sermon CVII, On God’s Vineyard”, In *The Works of John Wesley, Volume VII*, 205.

¹²⁹ John Wesley, “Sermon XIX, The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God”, In *The Works of John Wesley, Volume V*, 233.

¹³⁰ Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, Vol 7, 411.

¹³¹ The term Antinomianism comes from the Greek, *ἀντι* meaning against and *νομος* meaning law. Luther originally coined the term in his debate with his former student Johann Agricola. Agricola denied the usefulness of the law for those under the covenant of grace.

human action was irrelevant. This resulted in moral laxity. Owen sought to resolve this tension and illustrate the role of duty in the Christian life.

Owen was also challenged by the Quakers. George Fox, a Quaker argued that believers were enlightened by the divine light of the Spirit in their hearts which would lead them to all truth and holiness.¹³³ Owen responded to the Quakers primarily in *Pro Sacris Scripturis Exercitationes adversus Fanaticos* (1659) where he emphasizes the priority of the Scriptures in the Christian life.¹³⁴ Owen's theological treatment of the Christian life must be read with his challenges in mind. 'Owen tried to define a middle ground, and this was no easy task'.¹³⁵

The Discipline of the Christian Life

Owen's theology of the discipline of the Christian life rests on his Scriptural understanding of God's sovereign rule and plan of salvation for humankind. Kay argues that Owen's covenant theology provides a helpful framework in actualizing a Trinitarian and Biblical theology of the overarching narrative of the Bible.¹³⁶ He understood the mutual covenantal relationship between God and humans to be the purpose of God's salvation. The end of every covenant that God 'takes us into with himself' is 'that man might serve him aright, be blessed by him, and be brought unto the everlasting enjoyment of him – unto his glory'.¹³⁷

While the term 'covenant' is often understood as an agreement between two parties, as Owen argued, Scripture uses the term to convey both unilateral and bilateral dimensions. Owen argues that the Old Testament term **בְּרִית** can mean a promise rather than a mutual agreement.¹³⁸ The New Testament term **διαθήκη**, carries the notion of God's will or testament as well as mutual covenant. Thus Owen's adherence

¹³² Gavin J McGrath, *But we Preach Christ Crucified, The Cross of Christ in the Pastoral Theology of John Owen, 1616-1683*, St Antholin's Lectureship Charity Lecture, 1994, 8.

¹³³ George Fox, *The Journal of George Fox*, John L Nickalls (ed), Religious Society of Friends: Philadelphia, 1985, 34-5.

¹³⁴ Owen, John. *Biblical Theology, The History of Theology from Adam to Christ, (The Nature, Origin, Development and Study of Theological Truth In Six Books)*, Soli Do Gloria Publications: PA, 775-854.

¹³⁵ Gavin J McGrath, 9.

¹³⁶ Kay, 194-5.

¹³⁷ Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, Vol 6, 471.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, Vol 11, 218.

to Covenant theology did not necessarily result in a purely bilateral understanding of the believer's relationship with God.

Owen's use of Covenant theology provides him with a framework to express both God's role and the believer's role in the discipline of the Christian life. Owen writes of several Biblical covenants. He writes of the Covenant of Works¹³⁹ which was made with Adam. Adam's failure to keep the covenant conditions resulted in the guilt and sinful state of all humanity.¹⁴⁰ The Covenant of Grace is made between the Father and the Son.¹⁴¹ Jesus fulfills the Covenant of Grace and therefore gives believers renewed communion with God¹⁴² through the Covenant of the Mediator.¹⁴³ While Owen also speaks of the Old Mosaic Covenant, he does so with reference to both the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. It illustrates humankind's failure in the first covenant and yet is also a part of the Covenant of Grace as fulfilled in Jesus.¹⁴⁴ The main difference between the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace is that the second is based in the Lord's promises and is not conditional on man's obedience.¹⁴⁵ This dichotomy is presented similarly in The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646).¹⁴⁶ The Covenant of Grace is executed by the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁷ While the Covenant of Grace is unilateral in its instigation and execution, the Covenant of the Mediator allows for a bilateral dimensions. Through the Covenant of the Mediator which is effected through union with Christ, Owen creates a framework from which he can build a theology of duty and discipline in the Christian life.

¹³⁹ This covenant is sometimes referred to as the covenant of creation/life/nature.

¹⁴⁰ John Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 28. and Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, Vol 5, 275.

¹⁴¹ Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, Vol 10, 237.

¹⁴² John Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 618.

¹⁴³ Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, Vol 2, 179.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, Vol 6, 471.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, Vol 10, 236.

¹⁴⁶ The Westminster Confession of Faith, (1646) speaks of two covenants. The covenant of works where life was promised to Adam on the basis of his perfect obedience. Through the fall, human beings showed that they were incapable of living by that covenant and 'the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace: wherein he freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ'. It is the Holy Spirit who makes people 'willing and able to believe'

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), chapter 7, <http://www.reformed.org/documents>

¹⁴⁷ Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, Vol 9, 418.

Union with Christ

Owen explains that the ultimate function of the covenant is bringing men and women into union with Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁸ Like Calvin, Owen writes extensively of the Scriptural notion of union with Christ. Through union the believer ‘is reckoned to have done *in* and *with* Christ whatever his Lord accomplished’.¹⁴⁹ Upon being united to Christ, believers are ‘really and habitually purified and sanctified’.¹⁵⁰ The basis of this union with Christ is in the incarnation where Christ took our flesh and blood and suffered, dying for us. It is through His life, death and resurrection that people are able to be saved, united and given eternal life.¹⁵¹ The believer is bound to Christ by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, under the calling of the Father.¹⁵² The believer’s ‘participation is first by the work of the Spirit, to an actual interest in the blood of the Son; whence [they] have acceptance with the Father’.¹⁵³ This union brings freedom from the dominion of sin, son-like obedience, spiritual service, title, boldness to approach God and discipline, such as mentioned in Hebrews 12:3-6.¹⁵⁴

Communion with God

Like Calvin, Owen delights in the works of Bernard, citing him many times.¹⁵⁵ Bernard’s deeply Trinitarian vision of relationship with God, as seen in his commentaries on Song of Songs is developed by Owen into a specific theological construct – ‘communion’ with God.¹⁵⁶ Through his understanding of communion with God, Owen emphasizes a relationship of mutual delight.¹⁵⁷ Through union and thus communion with the Trinitarian God, man is able to enjoy a mutual love relationship.¹⁵⁸

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, Vol 2, 8.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, Vol 13, 22-23.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, Vol 3, 517.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, Vol 13, 23.

¹⁵² Ibid, Vol 13, 24.

¹⁵³ Ibid, Vol 2, 180.

¹⁵⁴ John Owen, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, Kregal Publications: Michigan, 1968, 246-250.

¹⁵⁵ Kay, 162.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 167.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 168.

¹⁵⁸ Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, Vol 2, 137.

Owen understands union with Christ to bring renewed communion with God. While union with Christ is a direct Scriptural concept, Owen's theology of communion with God is developed from the Scriptural notion of fellowship *κοινωνία* (1 John 1:3).¹⁵⁹ Through his theology of communion, Owen creates a detailed vision of the fellowship that believers share with the Trinitarian God. Owen writes that believers enjoy distinct communion with each person of the Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹⁶⁰ Our communion is 'through Christ (*δια Χριστου*)', 'by the Spirit (*εν Πνευματι*)' and 'unto the Father (*προς τον Πατερα*)' (Eph 2:18).¹⁶¹ Communion with God allows Owen to have a thoroughly Trinitarian view of the Christian life.¹⁶² For Owen, communion with God expresses itself through obedience and worship.¹⁶³ Therefore, in Owen's theological system, firstly God communicates Himself to people, then union with Christ establishes their relationship with God. The resulting overflow of union is communion – the believer's returning to God what is required and accepted by Him.¹⁶⁴

Duty and Discipline

Owen speaks of the believers response in communion with God in terms of duty and discipline. Owen argues that 'whatever, God worketh in us in a way of grace, he prescribeth unto us in a way of duty.'¹⁶⁵ Owen insists that our 'universal obedience and good works' are not conditions of our salvation, yet they are 'indispensably necessary', as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have 'ordained' them, holiness is the 'especial end of the peculiar dispensation' of God and it is the reason for believer's election.¹⁶⁶ It is 'the particular end of the electing love of the Father' and the 'exceeding love of the Son' and the 'very work' of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶⁷

¹⁵⁹ This term is used with relation to the fellowship among believers (Acts 2:42) and our participation in Christ through the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 10:16) fellowship in the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:13) fellowship in the gospel (Phil 1:5) and our fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3).

¹⁶⁰ Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, Vol 2, 9.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, Vol 2, 10.

¹⁶² Carl Trueman, *The Claims of Truth, John Owen's Trinitarian Theology*, Paternoster Press: Carlisle, 1998, 213.

¹⁶³ Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, Vol 2, 11.

¹⁶⁴ Kelly M Kopic, *Communion with God, The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen*, Baker Academic: Michigan, 2007, 157.

¹⁶⁵ Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, Vol 3, 433.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, Vol 2, 182.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, Vol 2, 182-3.

‘There is a twofold bottom of the necessity of our obedience and personal holiness: - God hath appointed it, he requires it; and it is an eminent immediate end of the distinct dispensation of Father, Son and Holy Ghost in the word of our salvation. If God’s sovereignty over us is to be owned, if his love towards us be to be regarded, if the whole work of the ever-blessed Trinity, for us, in us, be of any moment, our obedience is necessary’.¹⁶⁸

Owen differentiates between imputed obedience, which allows believers to be counted righteous and justified and ‘obedience done to God’ which is done out of gratitude to Him for His grace and according to His will (Eph 2:8-10).¹⁶⁹ Although Owen argues that obedience is ‘the workmanship of God’ (John 15:5),¹⁷⁰ this division, his introduction of communion as a theological construct rather than simply a truth related to our union, and his separation of the Covenant of Grace (fulfilled by Jesus) and the Covenant of Redemption, allow him to speak of duty in isolation from union with Christ. Throughout his theological writings on the Christian life there are many sections that emphasize duty and yet do not mention grace. Owen’s theology clearly connects grace and duty. However, his use of these constructs leads to many long discourses where upon a superficial reading, grace and duty appear divorced.¹⁷¹ This thus results in misunderstanding regarding Owen’s theology of grace and duty.

The two main duties of the Christian life are to mortify sin and to honour Christ.¹⁷² The central text for Owen’s teaching on the duty of mortification is ‘If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live (Rom 8:13).¹⁷³ Owen concludes that since sin is still ‘acting and labouring to bring forth the deeds of the flesh’, believers must labour to put to death sin.¹⁷⁴ Mortification is the believers habitual war against sin and lust.¹⁷⁵ Mortification involves constantly meditating on ‘the excellence and majesty’ of God and humbly laying aside our pride.¹⁷⁶ In his sermons *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, Owen speaks of the need to search out sin in your life and mortify it by a disciplined Christian life, looking to God’s word, praying and being lead by the Spirit. It is the Spirit who accomplishes mortification and thus

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, Vol 2, 183.

¹⁶⁹ John Owen, *Communion with God*, The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1991, 138.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 131.

¹⁷¹ This can be seen in John Owen’s writings on Duty in *The Works of John Owen* and his books *Communion with God* and *Mortification of Sin*.

¹⁷² Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 69-70.

¹⁷³ John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin*, The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 2004, 1.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 7.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 32.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 87-88.

prayer is an essential discipline for the Christian life.¹⁷⁷ Christians can not progress in the Christian life without killing their sin.

Owen insisted that in addition to mortification, those who have communion with Christ, seek to honour Him by watching over their hearts and making sure that nothing but Christ creeps into their affections.¹⁷⁸ Above all, Owen argues that ‘diligence in the contemplation of the glory of Christ’ and ‘exercise of our thoughts about it’ are fundamental to all acts of duty.¹⁷⁹ Believers must thus engage in spiritual worship and put their minds toward their heavenly future.¹⁸⁰ ‘Heavenly mindedness’ was a prominent theme in seventeenth century Puritan theology. Owen wrote that the holy and spiritually minded person should think often of heaven, for that was where they already lived within their soul.¹⁸¹ In Owen’s *The Grace and Duty of being Spiritually Minded*, (1681) he argues that believers must set their minds not on sin but rather on the Spirit of life (Rom 8:6). Owen made a connection between believer’s thoughts and affections, thus in order to change the heart, right thinking is necessary component of the exercise of spiritual affections.¹⁸²

Word and Sacrament

Owen continually emphasizes the importance of the centrality of God’s word both read and preached in the discipline of the Christian life.¹⁸³ The life of Christ must be an example for believers, and God’s word must be their rule.¹⁸⁴ For Owen, Scripture contains everything necessary for salvation. It is,

‘the word of God, or a divine revelation, and our understanding of the mind and will of God as revealed in them, are the two springs of all our interest in the Christian religion. From them are all those streams of light and truth derived whereby our souls are watered, refreshed, and made fruitful to God.’¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 128.

¹⁷⁸ John Owen, *Of Communion*, Goold, Vol 2, 148. In Gavin McGrath, *Grace and Duty in Puritan Spirituality*, Grove Books Limited: Nottingham, 1991, 13.

¹⁷⁹ John Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, Wilbur M Smith, (ed), Mood Press: Chicago, 1949, 107.

¹⁸⁰ John Owen, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, Kregal Publications: Michigan, 1968, 262.

¹⁸¹ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, Vol 7, 497.

¹⁸² Mark A Yarhouse, “John Owen on Mindedness”, *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 20 (2001), 345.

¹⁸³ Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 45.

¹⁸⁴ Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, Vol 3, 649.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 121.

Believers must constantly commit themselves to prayer and to the searching of the Scriptures.¹⁸⁶ Owen suggests that by reading God's word, believers will know how and what to pray.¹⁸⁷ This prayerful Bible reading is combined with 'due meditation on God's glorious excellencies'.¹⁸⁸ Owen, like other Puritans, 'found the discipline of self-examination by Scripture, followed by the discipline of confessing and forsaking sin and renewing one's gratitude to Christ for His pardoning mercy, to be a source of great inner peace and joy'.¹⁸⁹

Owen spoke of the importance of the word of God and the Sacraments in the discipline of mortification and honouring Christ. In his *Greater Catechism*, Owen defines the sacraments as 'visible seals and pledges, whereby God in [Christ] confirmeth the promises of the covenant to all believers'.¹⁹⁰ Owen maintains that there is intimate communion with Christ in the Lord's Supper.¹⁹¹ Thus in obedience to Christ, Owen urges believers to partake in this 'especial communion with Christ'¹⁹² as a central part of their Christian discipline.

Conclusion of Owen's View

Owen presents a distinctly Trinitarian understanding of the Christian life. He applies himself with passion and vigour to the task of encouraging believers to respond with love and obedience. As King notes, Owen clearly recognizes both the sovereignty of God and the necessity of human action.¹⁹³ There is obvious continuity between Calvin and Owen's theology of the Christian life. Owen demonstrates the unilateral role of God in justification and sanctification. However, he also makes room for the believer's response through his understanding of the Covenant of the Mediator and communion with God. Unfortunately, Owen's use of communion with God as a theological construct rather than simply a theological truth disconnects his discourse

¹⁸⁶ Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, Vol 4, 321.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, Vol 4, 321-2.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, Vol 4, 322.

¹⁸⁹ J I Packer, *Among God's Giants, The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, Kingsway Publications: Eastbourne, 1991, 27.

¹⁹⁰ Owen, *The Works of John Owen, Great Catechism*, Vol 1, 490.

¹⁹¹ Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, Vol 8, 560.

¹⁹² Ibid, Vol 8, 560.

¹⁹³ David M King, "The Affective Spirituality of John Owen", *Evangelical Quarterly*, 68, (1996), 224.

on duty from his theology of union with Christ. This results in a capacious theology of the Christian life which is at times ambiguous and easily misunderstood.

Part Four

Comparison and Critique

Biblical, Systematic and Practical Issues

In order to assess both Calvin and Owen's views we must address a Scriptural understanding of the Christian life. Scripture teaches that all humankind is bound by original sin, unable to love and obey God (Rom 8:6-8). But God in His goodness and grace works all things according to His sovereign will and purpose. He has blessed believers through Jesus Christ, predestining them for justification and glory (Rom 8:28-30, Eph 1:3-14). Those who respond with faith and accept are a 'chosen people' (1 Pet 2:9). Their justification is purely the result of God's work for them and in them through Christ (Rom 5:1-2). The life they live is through faith in Christ (Gal 2:20). It is through the believer's union with Christ that they are able to die to sin and rise to new life in Christ (Rom 6:3-10). Through the Spirit, believers 'seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another' (2 Cor 3:18). Because of their union with Christ, (often referred to as being 'in Christ'), believers are able to prayerfully seek the fruit of the Spirit (Col 3:12-17) and persevere in faith, knowing that nothing can snatch them from the Father's hand (John 10:27-9). Therefore, while there is a place for the believers response through their union with Christ, Scripture teaches that God unilaterally predestines, justifies and sanctifies His people. This Biblical theology is present and foundational for both Calvin and Owen's theology of the Christian life.

For both Calvin and Owen, the theology of the Christian life is dependent on their Scriptural understanding of the Trinitarian God, Creation, Humanity, Sin, Christology, Soteriology and Eschatology. While Owen differed in his use of a Covenant theology framework, both Calvin and Owen affirmed God's purposes in establishing a relationship with His people. Both affirmed sinful depravity as a post-

Adamic reality that can only be remedied by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. And both understood that a believer's relationship with God is made possible through their union with Christ in which the Holy Spirit is the bond. Through the Spirit, and by virtue of this union, believers are able to respond to God with love and obedience. However, this relationship awaits perfection in the second coming of Christ and the eternal resurrection.

Practically, both Calvin and Owen's grace-focused theology of the Christian life provides great assurance for believers. Their writings on mortification and vivification are as relevant for Believers today as they were for their original audiences. Packer writes that it was upon reading Owen's *The Mortification of Sin* that he realised the seriousness of sin and his need to repent and daily engage in a disciplined life involving the mortification of sin and the fortification of his relationship with God.¹⁹⁴ Leith argues that Calvin's doctrine of the Christian life has great contemporary relevance in our time where there is an unclear link between faith and life.¹⁹⁵ Bruce Winter argues that contemporary evangelical piety has been affected by the doctrine of hedonism and the popular notion that joy is equal to personal happiness.¹⁹⁶ Unlike modern literature where discipline has become a dirty word and many books focus on the 'feel good' factor, Calvin and Owen were not afraid to make clear theological concepts of 'discipleship, cross-bearing, denying oneself and losing one's life'.¹⁹⁷ 'Suffering and adversity are not seen as something of a disaster in the Christian life'.¹⁹⁸ Calvin and Owen's encouragement to focus on the true joy we have in our future life with Christ is essential medicine for today's Western society which is driven by a consumerist 'present moment' focus.

Comparison of Views

The theological writing of Calvin and Owen surveyed in this paper, illustrates some differences between their theologies of the Christian life. As Ferguson has

¹⁹⁴ J I Packer "John Owen Put Me Straight", *Christian History & Biography*, 2006 (89),50.

¹⁹⁵ Leith, 27.

¹⁹⁶ Bruce W Winter, *Pilgrims Progress and Contemporary Evangelical Piety*, St Antholin's Lectureship Charity: London, 1997, 8.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

highlighted, there are semantic differences between Calvin and Owen¹⁹⁹ and these combined with their respective contemporary influences, Owen's covenant framework and a focus on the notion of communion with God result in an apparent discontinuity between Calvin's and Owen's theologies. However, any suggestion that these differences result in a fundamental doctrinal difference between their theologies is unjustifiable. Both Calvin and Owen present Scriptural understandings of the Christian life which emphasise God's unilateral role of faithfulness in the covenant and the believer's role of response which is graciously made possible by the power and mercy of God through Jesus Christ.

Calvin and Owen use several key theological terms in varying ways. As Gleason acknowledges, the term 'regeneration' is used quite flexibly by Calvin, where as Owen makes a keener separation of regeneration and the ongoing Christian life and sanctification.²⁰⁰ Likewise, Owen uses the term 'vivification' to represent the Spirit's quickening at the point of conversion, where as Calvin uses the term to describe an action of the Christian life. Owen refers to a similar concept as 'honoring Christ'. While Owen makes great use of the term 'duty', Calvin favours the term piety. However, despite these semantic differences, they are both seeking to communicate a similar Scriptural view of the Christian life.

Calvin's treatise on Christian growth in and through Christ, strives to take a middle, Scriptural ground between the 'two tiered' Roman Catholic understanding of the Christian life and the Anabaptist doctrine of 'instant perfection'.²⁰¹ Owen, on the other hand, responded to Arminianism, Antinomianism and Christian legalists and Quakers. Owen therefore developed a quantitatively greater treatise on the Christian life which left itself open to some misunderstanding regarding the tensions between the divine and human role. Thus we can agree with Wallace, who notes that there are some differences related to the context and contemporary application,²⁰² and that Owen has developed some of his own 'peculiar forms' and modifications.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ Ferguson, *John Owen and the Christian Life*, 34-35.

²⁰⁰ Gleason, 152.

²⁰¹ Battles, "True Piety According to Calvin", 202.

²⁰² In addition, Christopher Smith suggests that Owen's millennial expectations prompted his emphasis on discipline and duty in the Christian life. While this will not be discussed in this paper, it should be noted that of greater significance was Owen's emphasis on anticipating the Lord's coming and eternal life with him and this prompted an emphasis on personal holiness.

Calvin and Owen differ in their use of the notion of ‘covenant’. Emerson and Osterhaven assert that Calvin is not a Covenant theologian in the way the term is usually understood ‘but many of the implications of Covenant theology are present in Calvin’s theology’.²⁰⁴ Likewise Helm sees the fundamental principles of Owen’s Covenant theology in Calvin’s theology.²⁰⁵ Calvin’s main focus with relation to covenant is God’s faithfulness rather than man’s role. However, intrinsic to the purpose of the covenant in Calvin’s theology is a bilateral dimension based on the relationship between God and man made possible through Jesus. Owen differentiates between a Covenant of Works, of Grace and of the Mediator. While for Owen, salvation is secured through the unconditional unilateral Covenant of Grace, a bilateral relationship of communion with God and human response through duty is found in the Covenant of the Mediator. As Calvin does not make a separation between a Covenant of Grace and a Covenant of the Mediator, he never separates the believers response from God’s grace and power through union with Christ. While Owen’s covenantal framework may be helpful in making the Scriptural narrative understood, the differentiations of a covenant of Works, Grace and the Mediator are not clear in Scripture. This framework does not result in a radically different theological understanding to Calvin’s theology, however, Calvin’s simpler explanation better protects against the danger of overemphasizing duty and divorcing discipline from the grace of God.

Calvin understood union with Christ to be the direct cause of the Christian life and response. Likewise Owen understood union with Christ to be what makes the Christian life possible. However, Owen added another variable. Owen argued that due to union with Christ, believers are able to have communion with Christ, and, through this communion, may respond to God with love and obedience. Kopic asserts that this methodology involves ‘constantly moving between theology and anthropology,

Christopher R Smith, “Up and be Doing’, The Pragmatic Puritan Eschatology of John Owen”, *Evangelical Quarterly*, 61 (1989), 349.

²⁰³ Dewey D Wallace, Jr. “The Life and Thought of John Owen to 1660: A Study of the Significance of Calvinist theology in English Puritanism”, 289-91. In Gleason, 26.

²⁰⁴ M Eugene Osterhaven, “Calvin on the Covenant”, *Readings in Calvin’s Theology*, Donald K McKim (ed), Baker Book House: Michigan, 1984, 91.

²⁰⁵ Paul Helm, “Calvin and the Covenant: Unity and Continuity”, *Evangelical Quarterly*, 55 (1983), 65-81.

between Christology and praxis'.²⁰⁶ Like his covenantal framework, Owen's introduction of communion as a separate construct allows him to speak of the believer's duty in isolation of the power of Christ through union. Owen's theology is therefore easily misunderstood as anthropocentric. Calvin also argues that the Gospel offers communion with Christ.²⁰⁷ However, he does not make this an independent theological construct. While both Calvin and Owen emphasize the mutual relationship made possible by God, under Calvin's framework, communion and anthropological action are never divorced from his discussion of God's grace through union with Christ.

Conclusion

There are, therefore, some differences in the ways Calvin and Owen communicate their theology of the Christian life. However, to the discerning scholar, it is obvious that despite these differences, Calvin and Owen are communicating a similar message of God's grace. Like Calvin, Owen professed the doctrines of predestination, grace, union with Christ and God's work through the Spirit. Owen understood both the unilateral and bilateral dimensions of the relationship between God and His people and the implications for the Christian life. The principle of grace and 'union with Christ' provide the means for the Christian life in both Calvin and Owen's theology. Both Calvin and Owen believed that being united to Christ involved mortification of sin and vivification in Christ and both emphasized these as the central bilateral aspects of the discipline of the Christian life.²⁰⁸ Therefore we can agree with Gleason when he concluded that there is 'no real doctrinal discontinuity between Owen and Calvin'.²⁰⁹ We can also agree with Lane, Helm and Gleason who confirm that while Owen's theology of the Christian life developed quantitatively beyond that of Calvin's thought, it did not develop in a qualitatively contradictory fashion.²¹⁰

Although there is continuity between Calvin and Owen's theology of the Christian life, it is apparent that Calvin's clear and concise presentation of the Christian life is

²⁰⁶ Kopic, 157.

²⁰⁷ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, I, 1,537.

²⁰⁸ Although he used different terms to express the notion, Owen expressed a similar sentiment.

²⁰⁹ Gleason, 159.

²¹⁰ Gleason, 3.

superior to Owen's commodious theology. Battles comments that Calvin's treatise on the Christian life is a 'marvel of brevity'.²¹¹ And this is indeed Calvin's self-stated purpose. In contrast to Owen's capacious style, Calvin writes that if he attempted to speak more 'amply' it might not 'be so successful'.²¹² Unlike Owen who uses the theological concepts of covenant and communion to make sense of the Scriptural data, Calvin works more directly from the Scriptural text. Calvin is never without a reference to God's role and keeps his theology of the Christian life tightly bound to the grace and power of God. Owen's use of covenant and communion as theological concepts, sometimes leads to the apparent divorce of anthropological action from God's grace. This results in misunderstanding and the critique of scholars such as Stover who argue that there is a fundamental differences between Calvin and Owen's theology regarding the tension between grace and anthropological action in the Christian life.

Owen's theology is to be commended for its Trinitarian understanding of the Christian life and the passion and vigor with which he applies himself to the task of encouraging Christians to respond with love and obedience. However, Calvin's precise theology is most adept in its representation of the Scriptural teaching of the unilateral grace of God which makes possible the response of the believer in the discipline of the Christian life.

²¹¹ Battles, "True Piety According to Calvin", 202.

²¹² Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, VI, 1, 685.

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