

Practical Wisdom for Calvinists

by Darryl Erkel

Calvinists should be the model of humility and love, recognizing the blessings and privileges of being a Calvinist and avoiding pride and arrogance towards others.

Scripture: Proverbs 28:1, Luke 6:26, Romans 14:1, 1 Corinthians 4:7, 1 Corinthians 13:4, 1 Corinthians 15:58, Ephesians 6:10, Philippians 4:3, Hebrews 6:1, James 1:19, James 3:2

Topics: "Christian Humility", "Theological Tolerance"

Description

Darryl Erkel preaches on practical wisdom for Calvinists, emphasizing the need for humility, love, and patience towards those with different theological beliefs. He urges Calvinists to recognize the broader scope of salvation, avoid arrogance, and focus on essential Gospel truths rather than minor theological disputes. Erkel also highlights the importance of listening, learning from diverse theological traditions, and being productive in serving Christ with grace and generosity. He encourages Calvinists to be diligent in studying Scripture, discerning in theological matters, and prayerful in all aspects of life.

Transcript

Practical Wisdom For Calvinists

Practical & Theological Guidelines for Those

Who Embrace the "Doctrines of Grace"

The following practical and theological items, although they apply to every believer regardless of their particular theological tradition, are especially directed to those who adhere to Reformed/Calvinistic theology.

I. Recognize that Salvation is Broader than the Calvinist Camp.

1. All of us, at one time or another, were Arminian in our thinking. A professing Arminian may be just as unregenerate as a professing Calvinist, but one's adherence to Arminian theology does not necessarily exclude them from the kingdom of God. It is disturbing to hear some Calvinists assign all Arminians to the lowest abyss while conveniently forgetting that they too, at one time, were Arminians. Although the great 18th century evangelist, George Whitefield, had his differences with the staunch Arminian John Wesley, he was able to see the hand of God in Wesley's ministry and count him as a brother in Christ. Thus, we must be patient with our brethren and recognize that both ethical and theological maturity takes time. In

fact, there are some truths that, for whatever reason, we may not yet be ready to receive - as Jesus told His own disciples, "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" (John 16:12).

2. God commands us to accept one another in Christ, in spite of our differences (Romans 14:1; 15:7). If Christ has accepted our Arminian brethren, who are we to reject them? The 19th century Baptist preacher, C.H. Spurgeon, once said:

We give our hand to every man that loves the Lord Jesus Christ, be he what he may or who he may. The doctrine of election, like the great act of election itself, is intended to divide, not between Israel and Israel, but between Israel and the Egyptians - not between saint and saint, but between saints and the children of the world. A man may be evidently of God's chosen family, and yet though elected, may not believe in the doctrine of election. I hold there are many savingly called, who do not believe in effectual calling, and that there are a great many who persevere to the end, who do not believe the doctrine of final perseverance. We do hope that the hearts of many are a great deal better than their heads. We do not set their fallacies down to any willful opposition to the truth as it is in Jesus, but simply to an error in their judgments, which we pray God to correct. We hope that if they think us mistaken too, they will reciprocate the same Christian courtesy; and when we meet around the cross, we hope that we shall ever feel that we are one in Christ Jesus (New Park Street Pulpit [London: Passmore & Alabaster, Vol.6] p.303).

In another place, he also said:

Far be it from me to imagine that Zion contains none but Calvinistic Christians within her walls, or that there are none saved who do not hold our views (cited in Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* [Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1966] p.65).

3. Most Arminians reject the Doctrines of Grace out of gross ignorance, misunderstanding, or misrepresentation on the part of sincere, but misinformed Calvinist's. Thus, often they are not rejecting genuine Calvinism, but distortions of it. One's heart may be right, while one's head may be wrong.

4. Calvinism is not the Gospel. One is not saved by a proper understanding of election, Divine sovereignty, or the extent of the atonement. These issues, no doubt, are important, but they are not the core of the Gospel; they indirectly relate to the Gospel (as do many other Biblical teachings), but are not the essence of it. The puritan, John Bradford, stated: "Let a man go to the grammar school of faith and repentance, before he goes to the university of election and predestination." In the same way that it is wrong to detract from the Gospel message, so it is wrong to add to the Gospel message one's particular theology. Once again, this is not to deny that the five-points of Calvinism are not important matters; but simply to point out that the minute one makes mandatory for salvation a correct understanding of election, effectual calling, or the extent of the atonement (regardless of how true they might be), they are guilty of adding to the Gospel. This is usually the error of young, zealous Calvinists (although not always), but to use the words of James, "My brethren, these things ought not to be this way" (James 3:10).

II. Don't Make the Mistake of Accepting Everything "Reformed" or "Calvinistic."

1. Scripture alone is the final standard of authority for doctrine and practice (Isaiah 8:20; Acts 17:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:21), not Luther, Calvin, Owen, or any other great Reformed theologian. This is not to deny that these men - and men from other theological traditions - have made great spiritual contributions to the church, but only that they are not the final arbiters of truth. I know that many Reformed people would assent to this, but how many truly practice it? If we accept everything under the banner of "Reformed" or

"Calvinistic," without serious scriptural investigation, are we truly practicing "Sola Scriptura"? Let us not make a pope out of Calvin, Luther, or any other mere mortal (Jeremiah 17:5).

2. Be very careful about accepting entire systems of theology (e.g., Covenant theology, Dispensationalism). Most often, the truth is found somewhere in the middle - and usually, a system of theology contains a part of the truth, but not the whole of it. It appears that God has spread His truth throughout various theological traditions (Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, etc.) so that we might not put our trust in men or institutions, but in the testimony of God's Word.

3. The truth is, some aspects of Reformed theology are erroneous.

A. Infant Baptism. For a thorough evaluation and refutation of this doctrine, see Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism & The Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1978); T.E. Watson, *Baptism Not For Infants* (Worthing, England: Henry E. Walter, 1962); Alexander Carson, *Baptism: Its Mode and Subjects* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications [Reprint]); Greg Welty, *A Critical Evaluation of Infant Baptism* (Fullerton, CA: Reformed Baptist Publications, n.d.).

B. The Covenant of Grace. For a critique of this view, see Jon Zens, "Is There A 'Covenant of Grace'?" *Baptist Reformation Review* (Autumn - 1977, Vol.6/No.3), pp.43-53; Richard L. Mayhue, "Hebrews 13:20: Covenant of Grace or New Covenant: An Exegetical Note," *The Master's Seminary Journal* (Fall - 1996, Vol.7/No.2), pp.251-257.

C. The Reformed View of the Law. For an evaluation and critique of the traditional view of the Law and its relationship to the believer under the New Covenant, see Douglas J. Moo, "The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View," [Chapter 5] in *The Law, The Gospel, and the Modern Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993); "This is My Beloved Son, Hear Him!": *The Foundation for New Covenant Ethics and Ecclesiology*, [ed. Jon Zens] *Searching Together* (Summer - Winter, 1997, Vol.25/1,2,3); Fred G. Zaspel, "Divine Law: A New Covenant Perspective," *Reformation & Revival [Journal]* (Summer - 1997, Vol.6/No.3); Stephen Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith* (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1988); John G. Reisinger, *Tablets of Stone* (Southbridge, MA: Crowne Publications, 1989).

D. Theonomy. In fairness, not everyone who is Reformed accepts Theonomy or Christian Reconstructionism. I have noticed, however, that many who embrace the Doctrines of Grace, make the unfortunate mistake of accepting Theonomy. For a critique of this unscriptural system, see Jon Zens, "Moses in the Millennium: An Appraisal of Christian Reconstructionism," *Searching Together* (Vol. 17:2,3,4 - 1988); [eds. William S. Barker & W.R. Godfrey] *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

E. The Protestant Reformers Persecuted the Anabaptists and Catholics as Well as Sanctioned the Use of the Sword Against their Opponents. The Reformers had no scriptural authority to malign, persecute, and even kill such groups as the Anabaptists and Roman Catholics. While this is no longer a practice among those who are Reformed, there were many prominent Reformation theologians who thought it was perfectly acceptable - even to the point of citing Scripture for its justification (e.g., Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, et al.). This, once again, demonstrates how important it is to not accept everything that comes from the pen of our Reformation heroes since, not only did they err in their interpretation of Scripture at points, but they sometimes engaged in great acts of sin. The late historian, William Warren Sweet, was correct when he said:

There is a widespread notion among Protestant groups that the separation of church and state, and thus religious liberty, was one of the immediate products of the Reformation, that the early Protestants were advocates of a large tolerance, and that religious liberty was but the logical development of the principles held by all the Reformers. Just where this notion arose is difficult to say, and no reputable historian of our times would endorse it. The fact is that the rise of Protestantism was accompanied by an unprecedented outburst of intolerance (Religion in Colonial America, p.320).

J.C. Ryle, a favorite author among many Reformed people, was quite candid in stating:

Any religion, like that of Mahomet, who made converts with the sword, is not from above but from beneath. Any form of Christianity which burns men at the stake, in order to promote its own success, carries about it the stamp of an apostasy. That is the truest and best religion which does most to spread real, true peace (Expository Thoughts on the Gospels [Vol.4], pp.387-388).

In light of these statements, one wonders what Ryle, and even Reformed people today, would think of Calvin, who had Michael Servetus burned at the stake, or of Zwingli's complicity in the drowning of the Anabaptists? These men, indeed, should have known better than to commit such evil deeds against other humans - particularly in the name of the Prince of Peace! But, as the old adage goes, "The best of men are men at best." For more on this, see Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1964); Leonard Verduin, *The Anatomy of A Hybrid* (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1976); William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans [Revised], 1996).

F. Rigid Clericalism/Unscriptural Ecclesiology. The Protestant Reformers as well as most Reformed churches today, have been unable to break with the strict clericalism which they have inherited from both Rome and Constantine. The Reformers were right in their soteriology (doctrine of salvation), but wrong in their ecclesiology (doctrine of the church). They rediscovered the Gospel, but were unable to fully recover the ecclesiology of the New Testament. Thus, in many respects, the Reformation was only a partial reformation. Not only did the Reformers fail to break with the rigid clericalism of their past (including the error of infant baptism), but church attendance in Protestant territories was compulsory. Thus, believers and unbelievers were forced to gather together under the same church membership:

It is one of the incredible paradoxes of history that the Reformers, who so boldly and effectively recaptured the Gospel of grace from its medieval distortion and restored the central message of justification by faith, should have retained the mass church of the mixed multitude, the territorial church of the Constantinian compromise, in which real faith was not a requirement for membership (H. Bender, *These Are My People*, p.70).

Unfortunately, much of the ecclesiology within our historic Reformed denominations is fraught with practices and cherished traditions which run counter to the New Testament. For further study, see Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth Publishers, 1986); William A. Beckham, *The Second Reformation* (Houston, TX: Touch Publications, 1995); Greg Ogden, *The New Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); Frank A. Viola, *Rethinking the Wineskin* (Brandon, FL: Present Testimony Ministry, 1997); Alex R. Hay, *The New Testament Order for Church and Missionary* (Published by the New Testament Missionary Union, 1947).

III. Don't View Any Period of Church History as Perfect (e.g., the Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century), Nor Any Particular Group of Christians (e.g., the Reformers, Puritans, Anabaptists).

1. We must value the spiritual contributions of different men and different periods of time within church history, but never idolize them.

2. We must be willing to look at both the good as well as the faults of our spiritual and theological heroes.

3. We must seek to guard ourselves from the error of a party-spirit as well as from making a virtual pope out of Calvin or Luther - something which, by the way, the apostle Paul explicitly told us not to do (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:1-6; 4:1).

4. When we fail to realize the faults of our spiritual/theological heroes, or when we are guilty of idolizing the past, we end up:

A. Making man the measure or standard of righteousness, instead of the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. We fail to see the progression of church history and end up chained to the past - not recognizing that each period of history has its own unique contribution and blessing (including ours in the twenty-first century).

C. Romanticizing the past ("the good-old days"). We end up viewing history from a romanticized perspective, rather than from reality, which includes both great achievements as well as great down-falls. If even the Bible records the failures and sins of the greatest saints (e.g., David, Peter, et al.), why should we then ignore the faults of lesser saints throughout church history (e.g., Calvin, Luther, et al.)? Perhaps one of the major reasons why God allowed the failures of various biblical characters to be recorded, is so that we would not idolize such persons nor form theological parties around them. For those willing to look at the faults of our Reformation and Puritan heroes - not for the purpose of discrediting them, but for the purpose of seeing a true picture - I recommend the following: Thomas N. Smith, "The Perils of Puritanism," *Reformation & Revival [Journal]: Puritanism I* (Spring - 1996, Vol.5/No.2), pp.83-99; Jon Zens, "What Can We Learn From Reformation History?" *Baptist Reformation Review* (Autumn - 1978, Vol.7/No.3), pp.1-13; Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1964).

IV. Because We Have Been Given Greater Scriptural Insight, Calvinists Should Be the Model of Humility and Love.

1. Consider the grace and blessings which God has lavished upon you: He could have chosen to create you into a mouse or even a cockroach but, instead, chose to make you into a member of the human race; He could have chosen to plant you in the most remote and harshest place on this planet but, instead, chose to plant you in the free and prosperous land of America; He could have left you in sin and darkness but, instead, chose to redeem you and adopt you as His child through Christ Jesus; And He could have left you in your Arminian confusion but, instead, chose to graciously reveal the Doctrines of Grace to you. Therefore, do you have any excuse for pride or arrogance toward others - particularly toward our Arminian brethren? As the apostle Paul says, "For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

2. Because of the tendency to become prideful over the Doctrines of Grace (1 Corinthians 8:1), we must continually remind ourselves of the words of our Lord: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35; cf. John 15:12,17; Romans 12:3,10; 1 Corinthians 13:4,13; Ephesians 4:1-3,32; Philippians 2:1-4; Colossians 4:6; 1 Peter 3:8; 1 John 3:14-18;

4:11). For further study, I highly recommend: Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust [Reprint], 1969).

3. Seek to cultivate and improve such spiritual characteristics as patience, kindness, and non-retaliation. Robert Chapman, whom Spurgeon considered to be the most saintliest man he ever knew, once said: "There are many who preach Christ, but not so many who live Christ. My great aim will be to live Christ" (Robert L. Peterson, *Robert Chapman: A Biography* [Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1995] p.29). This, likewise, should be the goal of the Calvinist (or any believer for that matter).

4. The only way to reverse the common assumption that Calvinists are haughty and proud, is to simply not behave in this way.

5. Although those who adhere to the precious Doctrines of Grace should be ready always to articulate and explain their beliefs, we must be careful to not go looking for debates or disputes with our Arminian brethren - as Paul reminds us in *Philippians 4:3*, "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Let us also remember that we do not always have to have the last word, nor is it necessary to always "win the debate" - as Spurgeon wisely warned his own students at *The Pastor's College*:

In all probability, sensible conversation will sometimes drift into controversy, and here many a good man runs upon a snag. The sensible minister will be particularly gentle in argument. He, above all men, should not make the mistake of fancying that there is force in temper, and power in speaking angrily. A heathen who stood in a crowd in Calcutta, listening to a missionary disputing with a Brahmin, said he knew which was right though he did not understand the language - he knew that he was in the wrong who lost his temper first. For the most part, that is a very accurate way of judging. Try to avoid debating with people. State your opinion and let them state theirs. If you see that a stick is crooked, and you want people to see how crooked it is, lay a straight rod down beside it; that will be quite enough. But if you are drawn into controversy, use very hard arguments and very soft words. Frequently you cannot convince a man by tugging at his reason, but you can persuade him by winning his affections (*Lectures to My Students* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Reprint, 1977] Vol.1, p.188).

6. Christian love, however, does not exclude a proper and humble boldness. *Proverbs 28:1* reminds us that "the righteous are bold as a lion" (cf. *Acts 4:29,31*; *Philippians 1:14*).

V. Don't Major on the Minors. Be very Careful Where You Plant Your Flag.

1. There are some issues or controversies not worth getting involved in - at least not to the point of disrupting the unity and peace of the church.

2. If you end up majoring on things not truly essential, you will either ignore those that are important and worthy of your efforts - or - people will tend to not take you seriously on vital matters because of your propensity to make a big deal over insignificant issues. This would be the spiritual or theological counterpart of "crying wolf." I am amazed at how many Christians are obsessed with reclaiming America as a "Christian Nation" or who spend most of their available time warning other Christians of the threat of secular humanism or the latest conspiracy theory, yet cannot define the doctrine of justification (Martin Luther believed that justification was the article by which the church stands or falls). Many of these same people want the Ten Commandments to be the moral basis for our country, yet cannot even name them! Quite frankly, if the Devil can divert you to endlessly chase unedifying or non-essential issues, he has won

the day.

3. Don't allow others to drag you into their personal theological controversies.

4. In many cases, those who are in constant friction with others over relatively minor theological issues, do so because: (1) They are spiritually immature; (2) Lack discernment in recognizing what is essential or non-essential; and (3) They engage in unimportant disputes because they're not truly engaged in genuine spiritual warfare. It's akin to soldiers, during peace-time, who concentrate on the relatively petty details of shining shoes or making certain that their uniforms are always starched because there's no real war to fight. Thus, they spend much of their time concentrating on insignificant duties. Actually, the Christian who pursues "fruitless discussions" (1 Timothy 1:3-7) stands under the disciplining hand of God since, unlike the soldier who serves during peace-time, our war is not over, but continues to rage on until Christ returns (2 Corinthians 10:3-4; Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 Peter 5:8-9).

VI. Recognize That You Can Learn From Those Who Are Outside of the Reformed Camp.

A number of years ago, a young Calvinist fellow told me, "I only read Reformed authors!" My immediate response was, "Why limit yourself?" Apparently, he thought that God only teaches those who are Reformed or that they are the only ones who have anything worthy to say. The truth is, God can use the lowliest or most uneducated saint to teach us His truth - including our Arminian brethren. This doesn't necessarily mean that we have to agree with everyone we converse. It does mean, however, that we must be willing to listen to those outside of our theological tradition and to accept that which agrees with Scripture and reject that which doesn't. Don't limit the avenues which are available for your instruction and sanctification.

VII. Seek to Be A Man/Woman of the Text of Scripture.

That which separates the men from the boys, theologically speaking, is the ability to define and defend one's theology from the biblical text. Some Christians argue their case from philosophy or general theological assumptions, but the Christian who is able to articulate his views from Scripture itself will stand head over everyone else because, not only does he have a proper starting-point, but his arguments will carry greater weight because they come from God's Word. Instead of speaking in vague generalities about spiritual or theological matters, they are able to precisely and exegetically support their opinions because they are daily studying the contents of Scripture. To his own students, Spurgeon wisely advised:

There is one book which you all have, and that is your Bible; and a minister with his Bible is like David with his sling and stone, fully equipped for the fray. No man may say that he has no well to draw from while the Scriptures are within reach. In the Bible we have a perfect library, and he who studies it thoroughly will be a better scholar than if he had devoured the Alexandrian Library entire. To understand the Bible should be our ambition; we should be familiar with it, as familiar as the housewife with her needle, the merchant with his ledger, the mariner with his ship. We ought to know its general run, the contents of each book, the details of its histories, its doctrines, its precepts, and everything about it . . . A man who has his Bible at his fingers' ends and in his heart's core is a champion in our Israel; you cannot compete with him: you may have an armory of weapons, but his Scriptural knowledge will overcome you; for it is a sword like that of Goliath, of which David said, "There is none like it" (Lectures to My Students [Vol.1], pp.195-196).

VIII. In Purchasing Books, Be Selective and Purchase Only the Best.

A man's library is a good indicator of his thinking and theology. The wise believer, therefore, should not waste his money or time on the sensational and shallow. Although the words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 12:12 are true ("the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body"), this does not undermine the value of securing profitable books which help to inform our minds and clarify the meaning of Scripture (2 Timothy 4:13).

IX. The Calvinist, Above All Others, Should Seek to Be Productive in His Walk For Christ.

1. Knowledge brings accountability. The more knowledge that one has of the Word of God, the more accountable they are to live in obedience to it and to manifest the fruits which spring from that knowledge. Thus, there is no excuse for an unproductive and lazy Calvinist. Don't be a spiritual fat cow!

2. Don't settle for low levels of grace within your life. Seek to excel in your Christian walk - as Paul urges us in Romans 12:11, "not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:58; 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10; Hebrews 6:10-12).

3. Practice disciple-making. It amazes me how many people grow in the Doctrines of Grace and who excel in their grasp of God's revelation, but who never make any effort to disciple others. Think of the many experienced and older Christian men who never impart their wisdom and knowledge to younger men. In my opinion, this is a waste of the rich spiritual and intellectual resources which God has given to each one of us, as well as disservice to the body of Christ. For more on mentoring and disciple-making, see Paul D. Stanley & J. Robert Clinton, *Connecting* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1992); Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Church* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1990).

4. Be optimistic about your future and service unto Christ - as was William Carey, the founder of modern missions, who said: "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God."

5. The Calvinist should seek to be the model of hospitality and charity (Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9).

6. Be generous and liberal in your giving to others (Deuteronomy 15:10; 2 Corinthians 8:1-4; 9:7). William S. Plumer, "He who is not liberal with what he has, does but deceive himself when he thinks he would be more liberal if he had more." Henry Ward Beecher, "In this world it is not what we take up but what we give up that makes us rich."

X. Develop A Theology of Listening.

1. So often, when we converse with other believers, we tend to talk past each other because we have not learned the value and discipline of listening. James 1:19 tell us, "But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger."

2. I am persuaded that most of our doctrinal controversies throughout church history could have been solved or perhaps eased had Christians been more willing to listen carefully to one another.

3. Learn to be patient with the verbal blunders of others - "For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well" (James 3:2).

4. As hard as it may seem, learn to value the criticism that you receive from others. Spurgeon wisely advised his own students at the Pastor's College in London to not view criticism as necessarily a bad thing:

You must be able to bear criticism, or you are not fit to be at the head of a congregation; and you must let the critic go without reckoning him among your deadly foes, or you will prove yourself a mere weakling. It is wisest always to show double kindness where you have been severely handled by one who thought it his duty to do so, for he is probably an honest man and worth winning . . . The best of people are sometimes out at elbows and say unkind things; we should be glad if our friends could quite forget what we said when we were peevish and irritable, and it will be Christ-like to act towards others in this matter as we would wish them to do towards us . . . A sensible friend who will unsparingly criticize you from week to week will be a far greater blessing to you than a thousand indiscriminating admirers if you have sense enough to bear his treatment, and grace enough to be thankful for it. When I was preaching at the Surrey Gardens, an unknown censor of great ability used to send me a weekly list of my mispronunciations and other slips of speech. He never signed his name, and that was my only cause of complaint against him, for he left me in a debt which I could not acknowledge. I take this opportunity of confessing my obligations to him, for with genial temper, and an evident desire to benefit me, he marked down most relentlessly everything which he supposed me to have said incorrectly. Concerning some of these corrections he was in error himself, but for the most part he was right, and his remarks enabled me to perceive and avoid many mistakes. I looked for his weekly memoranda with much interest, and I trust I am all the better for them (Lectures to My Students [Vol.2], pp.169-170,175).

5. Criticism Will:

A. Keep you humble. Criticism helps to deflate swollen-egos.

B. Inform and educate you.

C. Keep you dependent upon your heavenly Father.

D. Help to confirm that you are not a man-pleaser - as Jesus warned His own disciples: "Woe to you when all men speak well of you" (Luke 6:26).

XI. Don't Allow Your Past Failures to Hinder Your Service to God.

1. It's important to remember that the greatest of men within redemptive history have had their short-comings and failures, yet we still used by God. Therefore, "Let us press on to maturity" (Hebrews 6:1; cf. Philippians 3:12,14).

2. Don't allow yourself to fixate on the failures and sins of your Christian life, but look to the greater work of sanctification that God is doing in your life. Soldiers don't quit! John Owen, "Think of the guilt of sin, that you may be humbled. Think of the power of sin, that you may seek strength against it. Think not of the matter of sin . . . lest you be more and more entangled."

3. While it is granted that a Christian may act hypocritical at times, a genuine believer will not continuously live a life of hypocrisy (1 John 3:9-10). Henry Scudder, in his classic work, *The Christian's Daily Walk*, writes:

Uprightness being part of sanctification, is not fully perfect in this life; but is mixed with some hypocrisy, conflicting one against the other. It has degrees, sometimes more, sometimes less . . . A man is not to be called an upright man, or a hypocrite, because of some few actions wherein he may show uprightness or hypocrisy: for a hypocrite may do some upright actions, in which he does not dissemble, though he cannot be said to do them in uprightness; as Jehu destroyed the wicked house of Ahab, and the idolatrous priests

of Baal, with all his heart (2 Kings 10). And the best man may do some hypocritical and guileful actions, as in the matter of Uriah, David did (1 Kings 15:5). It is not the having of hypocrisy that denotes a hypocrite, but the reigning of it, which is, when it is not seen, confessed, bewailed, and opposed. A man should judge of his uprightness rather by his will, bent, and the inclination of his soul, and good desires, and true endeavors to well doing in the whole course of his life, than by this or that particular act, or by his power to do. David was thus esteemed a man according to God's own heart, no otherwise; rather by the goodness of the general course of his life, than by particular actions: for in many things he offended God, and polluted his soul, and blemished his reputation (pp.159-160).

XII. Recognize That Your Greatest Power is Found in Prayer.

E.M. Bounds once said, "To give prayer the secondary place is to make God secondary in life's affairs." In his book, *The Weapon of Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Reprint, 1991), he further stated:

The men to whom Jesus Christ committed the fortunes and destiny of His church were men of prayer. To no other kind of men has God ever committed Himself in this world. The apostles were preeminently men of prayer. They gave themselves to prayer. They made praying their chief business. It was first in point of importance and first in results. God never has, and He never will, commit the weighty interests of His kingdom to prayerless men, who do not make prayer a conspicuous and controlling factor in their lives. Men who do not pray never rise to any eminence of piety. Men of piety are always men of prayer. Men who are not preeminently men of prayer are never noted for the simplicity and strength of their faith. Piety flourishes nowhere so rapidly and so rankly as in the closet. The closet is the garden of faith (p.33).

Written by Darryl M. Erkel (1998)

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/darryl-erkel/practical-wisdom-for-calvinists/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net