## THE JOHN CALVIN BIBLE COMMENTARIES

# ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

### **Commentaries On St. Paul's Epistle To The Hebrews**

John Calvin

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www.jazzybee-verlag.de <u>admin@jazzybee-verlag.de</u>

#### John Calvin - A Biography

By William Barry

This man, undoubtedly the greatest of Protestant divines, and perhaps, after St. Augustine, the most perseveringly followed by his disciples of any Western writer on theology, was born at Noyon in Picardy, France, 10 July, 1509, and died at Geneva, 27 May, 1564.

A generation divided him from Luther, whom he never met. By birth, education, and temper these two protagonists of the reforming movement were strongly contrasted. Luther was a Saxon peasant, his father a miner; Calvin sprang from the French middle-class, and his father, an attorney, had purchased the freedom of the City of Noyon, where he practised civil and canon law. Luther entered the Order of Augustinian Hermits, took a monk's vows, was made a priest and incurred much odium by marrying a nun. Calvin never was ordained in the Catholic Church; his training was chiefly in law and the humanities; he took no vows. Luther's eloquence made him popular by its force, humour, rudeness, and vulgar style. Calvin spoke to the learned at all times, even when preaching before multitudes. His manner is classical; he reasons on system; he has little humour; instead of striking with a cudgel he uses the weapons of a deadly logic and persuades by a teacher's authority, not by a demagogue's calling of names. He writes French as well as Luther writes German, and like him has been reckoned a pioneer in the modern development of his native tongue. Lastly, if we term the doctor of Wittenberg a mystic, we may sum up Calvin as a scholastic; he gives articulate expression to the principles which Luther had stormily thrown out upon the world in his vehement pamphleteering; and the "Institutes" as they were left by their author have remained ever since the standard of orthodox Protestant belief in all the Churches known as "Reformed." His French disciples called their sect "the religion"; such it has proved to be outside the Roman world.

The family name, spelt in many ways, was Cauvin latinized according to the custom of the age as Calvinus. For some unknown reason the Reformer is commonly called Maître Jean C. His mother, Jeanne Le Franc, born in the Diocese of Cambrai, is mentioned as "beautiful and devout"; she took her little son to various shrines and brought him up a good Catholic. On the father's side, his ancestors were seafaring men. His grandfather settled at Pont l'Evêque near Paris, and had two sons who became locksmiths; the third was Gerard, who turned procurator at Noyon, and there his four sons and two daughters saw the light. He lived in the Place

au Blé (Cornmarket). Noyon, a bishop's see, had long been a fief of the powerful old family of Hangest, who treated it as their personal property. But an everlasting quarrel, in which the city took part, went on between the bishop and the chapter. Charles de Hangest, nephew of the too wellknown Georges d'Amboise, Archbishop of Rouen, surrendered the bishopric in 1525 to his own nephew John, becoming his vicar-general. John kept up the battle with his canons until the Parliament of Paris intervened, upon which he went to Rome, and at last died in Paris in 1577. This prelate had Protestant kinsfolk; he is charged with having fostered heresy which in those years was beginning to raise its head among the French. Clerical dissensions, at all events, allowed the new doctrines a promising field; and the Calvins were more or less infected by them before 1530.

Gerard's four sons were made clerics and held benefices at a tender age. The Reformer was given one when a boy of twelve, he became Curé of Saint-Martin de Marteville in the Vermandois in 1527, and of Pont l'Eveque in 1529. Three of the boys attended the local Collège des Capettes, and there John proved himself an apt scholar. But his people were intimate with greater folk, the de Montmor, a branch of the line of Hangest, which led to his accompanying some of their children to Paris in 1523, when his mother was probably dead and his father had married again. The latter died in 1531, under excommunication from the chapter for not sending in his accounts. The old man's illness, not his lack of honesty, was, we are told, the cause. Yet his son Charles, nettled by the censure, drew towards the Protestant doctrines. He was accused in 1534 of denying the Catholic dogma of the Eucharist, and died out of the Church in 1536; his body was publicly gibbeted as that of a recusant.

Meanwhile, young John was going through his own trials at the University of Paris, the dean or syndic of which, Noel Bédier, had stood up against Erasmus and bore hard upon Le Fèvre d'Etaples (Stapulensis), celebrated for his translation of the Bible into French. Calvin, a "martinet", or oppidan, in the Collèege de la Marche, made this man's acquaintance (he was from Picardy) and may have glanced into his Latin commentary on St. Paul, dated 1512, which Doumerque considers the first Protestant book emanating from a French pen. Another influence tending the same way was that of Corderius, Calvin's tutor, to whom he dedicated afterwards his annotation of I Thessalonians, remarking, "if there be any good thing in what I have published, I owe it to you". Corderius had an excellent Latin style, his life was austere, and his "Colloquies" earned him enduring fame. But he fell under suspicion of heresy, and by Calvin's aid took refuge in Geneva, where he died September 1564. A third herald of the "New Learning" was George Cop, physician to Francis I, in whose house Calvin found a welcome and gave ear to the religious discussions which Cop favoured. And a fourth was Pierre-Robert d'Olivet of Noyon, who also translated the Scriptures, our youthful man of letters, his nephew, writing (in 1535) a Latin preface to the Old Testament and a French one — his first appearance as a native author — to the New Testament.

By 1527, when no more than eighteen, Calvin's education was complete in its main lines. He had learned to be a humanist and a reformer. The "sudden conversion" to a spiritual life in 1529, of which he speaks, must not be taken quite literally. He had never been an ardent Catholic; but the stories told at one time of his ill-regulated conduct have no foundation; and by a very natural process he went over to the side on which his family were taking their stand. In 1528 he inscribed himself at Orléans as a law student, made friends with Francis Daniel, and then went for a year to Bourges, where he began preaching in private. Margaret d'Angoulême, sister of Francis I, and Duchess of Berry, was living there with many heterodox Germans about her.

He is found again at Paris in 1531. Wolmar had taught him Greek at Bourges; from Vatable he learned Hebrew; and he entertained some relations with the erudite Budaeus. About this date he printed a commentary on Seneca's "De Clementiâ". It was merely an exercise in scholarship, having no political significance. Francis I was, indeed, handling Protestants severely, and Calvin, now Doctor of Law at Orléans, composed, so the story runs, an oration on Christian philosophy which Nicholas Cop delivered on All Saints' Day, 1532, both writer and speaker having to take instant flight from pursuit by the royal inquisitors. This legend has been rejected by modern critics. Calvin spent some time, however, with Canon du Tillet at Angoulême under a feigned designation. In May, 1534, he went to Novon, gave up his benefice, and, it is said, was imprisoned. But he got away to Nerac in Bearn, the residence of the Duchess Margaret, and there again encountered Le Fèvre, whose French Bible had been condemned by the Sorbonne to the flames. His next visit to Paris fell out during a violent campaign of the Lutherans against the Mass, which brought on reprisals, Etienne de la Forge and others were burnt in the Place de Grève; and Calvin accompanied by du Tillet, escaped — though not without adventures — to Metz and Strasburg. In the latter city Bucer reigned supreme. The leading reformers dictated laws from the pulpit to their adherents, and this journey proved a decisive one for the French humanist, who, though by nature timid and shy, committed himself to a war on paper with his own sovereign. The famous letter to Francis I is dated 23 August, 1535. It served as a prologue to the "Institutes", of which the first edition came

out in March, 1536, not in French but in Latin. Calvin's apology for lecturing the king was, that placards denouncing the Protestants as rebels had been posted up all over the realm. Francis I did not read these pages, but if he had done so he would have discovered in them a plea, not for toleration, which the Reformer utterly scorned, but for doing away with Catholicism in favour of the new gospel. There could be only one true Church, said the young theologian, therefore kings ought to make an utter end of popery. (For an account of the "Institutes" see ) The second edition belongs to 1539, the first French translation to 1541; the final Latin, as revised by its author, is of 1559; but that in common use, dated 1560, has additions by his disciples. "It was more God's work than mine", said Calvin, who took for his motto "Omnia ad Dei gloriam", and in allusion to the change he had undergone in 1529 assumed for his device a hand stretched out from a burning heart.

A much disputed chapter in Calvin's biography is the visit which he was long thought to have paid at Ferraro to the Protestant Duchess Renée, daughter of Louis XII. Many stories clustered about his journey, now given up by the best-informed writers. All we know for certain is that the Reformer, after settling his family affairs and bringing over two of his brothers and sisters to the views he had adopted undertook, in consequence of the war between Charles V and Francis I, to reach Bale by way of Geneva, in July, 1536. At Geneva the Swiss preacher Fare, then looking for help in his propaganda, besought him with such vehemence to stay and teach theology that, as Calvin himself relates, he was terrified into submission. We are not accustomed to fancy the austere prophet so easily frightened. But as a student and recluse new to public responsibilities, he may well have hesitated before plunging into the troubled waters of Geneva, then at their stormiest period. No portrait of him belonging to this time is extant. Later he is

represented as of middle height, with bent shoulders, piercing eyes, and a large forehead; his hair was of an auburn tinge. Study and fasting occasioned the severe headaches from which he suffered continually. In private life he was cheerful but sensitive, not to say overbearing, his friends treated him with delicate consideration. His habits were simple; he cared nothing for wealth, and he never allowed himself a holiday. His correspondence, of which 4271 letters remain, turns chiefly on doctrinal subjects. Yet his strong, reserved character told on all with whom he came in contact; Geneva submitted to his theocratic rule, and the Reformed Churches accepted his teaching as though it were infallible.

Such was the stranger whom Farel recommended to his fellow Protestants, "this Frenchman", chosen to lecture on the Bible in a city divided against itself. Geneva had about 15,000 inhabitants. Its bishop had long been its prince limited, however, by popular privileges. The vidomne, or mayor, was the Count of Savoy, and to his family the bishopric seemed a property which, from 1450, they bestowed on their younger children. John of Savoy, illegitimate son of the previous bishop, sold his rights to the duke, who was head of the clan, and died in 1519 at Pignerol. Jean de la Baume, last of its ecclesiastical princes, abandoned the city, which received Protestant teachers from Berne in 1519 and from Fribourg in 1526. In 1527 the arms of Savoy were torn down; in 1530 the Catholic party underwent defeat, and Geneva became independent. It had two councils, but the final verdict on public measures rested with the people. These appointed Farel, a convert of Le Fevre, as their preacher in 1534. A discussion between the two Churches from 30 May to 24 June, 1535 ended in victory for the Protestants. The altars were desecrated, the sacred images broken, the Mass done away with. Bernese troops entered and "the Gospel" was accepted, 21 May,

1536. This implied persecution of Catholics by the councils which acted both as Church and State. Priests were thrown into prison; citizens were fined for not attending sermons. At Zürich, Basle, and Berne the same laws were established. Toleration did not enter into the ideas of the time.

But though Calvin had not introduced this legislation, it was mainly by his influence that in January, 1537 the "articles" were voted which insisted on communion four times a year, set spies on delinguents, established a moral censorship, and punished the unruly with excommunication. There was to be a children's catechism. which he drew up; it ranks among his best writings. The city now broke into "jurants" and "nonjurors" for many would not swear to the "articles"; indeed, they never were completely accepted. Questions had arisen with Berne touching points that Calvin judged to be indifferent. He made a figure in the debates at Lausanne defending the freedom of Geneva. But disorders ensued at home, where recusancy was yet rife; in 1538 the council exiled Farel, Calvin, and the blind evangelist, Couraud. The Reformer went to Strasburg, became the guest of Capito and Bucer, and in 1539 was explaining the New Testament to French refugees at fifty two florins a year. Cardinal Sadolet had addressed an open letter to the Genevans, which their exile now answered. Sadolet urged that schism was a crime; Calvin replied that the Roman Church was corrupt. He gained applause by his keen debating powers at Hagenau, Worms, and Ratisbon. But he complains of his poverty and ill-health, which did not prevent him from marrying at this time Idelette de Bure, the widow of an Anabaptist whom he had converted. Nothing more is known of this lady, except that she brought him a son who died almost at birth in 1542, and that her own death took place in 1549.

After some negotiation Ami Perrin, commissioner for Geneva, persuaded Calvin to return. He did so, not very willingly, on 13 September, 1541. His entry was modest enough. The church constitution now recognized "pastors, doctors, elders, deacons" but supreme power was given to the magistrate. Ministers had the spiritual weapon of God's word; the consistory never, as such, wielded the secular arm Preachers, led by Calvin, and the councils, instigated by his opponents, came frequently into collision. Yet the ordinances of 1541 were maintained; the clergy, assisted by lay elders, governed despotically and in detail the actions of every citizen. A presbyterian Sparta might be seen at Geneva; it set an example to later Puritans, who did all in their power to imitate its discipline. The pattern held up was that of the Old Testament, although Christians were supposed to enjoy Gospel liberty. In November, 1552, the Council declared that Calvin's "Institutes" were a "holy doctrine which no man might speak against." Thus the State issued dogmatic decrees, the force of which had been anticipated earlier, as when Jacques Gouet was imprisoned on charges of impiety in June, 1547, and after severe torture was beheaded in July. Some of the accusations brought against the unhappy young man were frivolous, others doubtful. What share, if any, Calvin took in this judgment is not easy to ascertain. The execution of however must be laid at his door; it has given greater offence by far than the banishment of Castellio or the penalties inflicted on Bolsec - moderate men opposed to extreme views in discipline and doctrine, who fell under suspicion as reactionary. The Reformer did not shrink from his self-appointed task. Within five years fifty-eight sentences of death and seventy-six of exile, besides numerous committals of the most eminent citizens to prison, took place in Geneva. The iron yoke could not be shaken off. In 1555, under Ami Perrin, a sort of revolt was

attempted. No blood was shed, but Perrin lost the day, and Calvin's theocracy triumphed.

"I am more deeply scandalized", wrote Gibbon "at the single execution of Servetus than at the hecatombs which have blazed in the autos-da-fé of Spain and Portugal". He ascribes the enmity of Calvin to personal malice and perhaps envy. The facts of the case are pretty well ascertained. Born in 1511, perhaps at Tudela, Michael Served y Reves studied at Toulouse and was present in Bologna at the coronation of Charles V. He travelled in Germany and brought out in 1531 at Hagenau his treatise "De Trinitatis Erroribus", a strong Unitarian work which made much commotion among the more orthodox Reformers. He met Calvin and disputed with him at Paris in 1534, became corrector of the press at Lyons; gave attention to medicine, discovered the lesser circulation of the blood, and entered into a fatal correspondence with the dictator of Geneva touching a new volume "Christianismi Restitutio," which he intended to publish. In 1546 the exchange of letters ceased. The Reformer called Servetus arrogant (he had dared to criticize the "Institutes" in marginal glosses), and uttered the significant menace, "If he comes here and I have any authority, I will never let him leave the place alive." The "Restitutio" appeared in 1553. Calvin at once had its author delated to the Dominican inguisitor Ory at Lyons, sending on to him the man's letters of 1545-46 and these glosses. Hereupon the Spaniard was imprisoned at Vienne, but he escaped by friendly connivance, and was burnt there only in effigy. Some extraordinary fascination drew him to Geneva, from which he intended to pass the Alps. He arrived on 13 August, 1553. The next day Calvin, who had remarked him at the sermon, got his critic arrested, the preacher's own secretary coming forward to accuse him. Calvin drew up forty articles of charge under three heads, concerning the

nature of God, infant baptism, and the attack which Servetus had ventured on his own teaching. The council hesitated before taking a deadly decision, but the dictator, reinforced by Farel, drove them on. In prison the culprit suffered much and loudly complained. The Bernese and other Swiss voted for some indefinite penalty. But to Calvin his power in Geneva seemed lost, while the stigma of heresy; as he insisted, would cling to all Protestants if this innovator were not put to death. "Let the world see" Bullinger counselled him, "that Geneva wills the glory of Christ."

Accordingly, sentence was pronounced 26 October, 1553, of burning at the stake. "Tomorrow he dies," wrote Calvin to Farel. When the deed was done, the Reformer alleged that he had been anxious to mitigate the punishment, but of this fact no record appears in the documents. He disputed with Servetus on the day of execution and saw the end. A defence and apology next year received the adhesion of the Genevan ministers. Melanchthon, who had taken deep umbrage at the blasphemies of the Spanish Unitarian, strongly approved in well-known words. But a group that included Castellio published at Basle in 1554 a pamphlet with the title, "Should heretics be persecuted?" It is considered the first plea for toleration in modern times. Beza replied by an argument for the affirmative, couched in violent terms; and Calvin, whose favorite disciple he was, translated it into French in 1559. The dialogue, "Vaticanus", written against the "Pope of Geneva" by Castellio, did not get into print until 1612. Freedom of opinion, as Gibbon remarks, "was the consequence rather than the design of the Reformation."

Another victim to his fiery zeal was Gentile, one of an Italian sect in Geneva, which also numbered among its adherents Alciati and Gribaldo. As more or less Unitarian in their views, they were required to sign a confession drawn up by Calvin in 1558. Gentile subscribed it reluctantly, but in the upshot he was condemned and imprisoned as a perjurer. He escaped only to be twice incarcerated at Berne, where in 1566, he was beheaded. Calvin's impassioned polemic against these Italians betrays fear of the Socinianism which was to lay waste his vineyard. Politically he leaned on the French refugees, now abounding in the city, and more than equal in energy — if not in numbers — to the older native factions. Opposition died out. His continual preaching, represented by 2300 sermons extant in the manuscripts and a vast correspondence, gave to the Reformer an influence without example in his closing years. He wrote to Edward VI, helped in revising the Book of Common Prayer, and intervened between the rival English parties abroad during the Marian period. In the Huguenot troubles he sided with the more moderate. His censure of the conspiracy of Amboise in 1560 does him honour. One great literary institution founded by him, the College, afterwards the University, of Geneva, flourished exceedingly. The students were mostly French. When Beza was rector it had nearly 1500 students of various grades.

Geneva now sent out pastors to the French congregations and was looked upon as the Protestant Rome. Through Knox, "the Scottish champion of the Swiss Reformation", who had been preacher to the exiles in that city, his native land accepted the discipline of the Presbytery and the doctrine of predestination as expounded in Calvin's "Institutes". The Puritans in England were also descendants of the French theologian. His dislike of theatres, dancing and the amenities of society was fully shared by them. The town on Lake Leman was described as without crime and destitute of amusements. Calvin declaimed against the "Libertines", but there is no evidence that any such people had a footing inside its walls The cold, hard, but upright disposition characteristic of the Reformed Churches, less genial than that derived from Luther, is due entirely to their founder himself. Its essence is a concentrated pride, a love of disputation, a scorn of opponents. The only art that it tolerates is music, and that not instrumental. It will have no Christian feasts in its calendar, and it is austere to the verge of Manichaean hatred of the body. When dogma fails the Calvinist, he becomes, as in the instance of Carlyle, almost a pure Stoic. "At Geneva, as for a time in Scotland," says J. A. Froude, "moral sins were treated as crimes to be punished by the magistrate." The Bible was a code of law, administered by the clergy. Down to his dying day Calvin preached and taught. By no means an aged man, he was worn out in these frequent controversies. On 25 April, 1564, he made his will, leaving 225 French crowns, of which he bequeathed ten to his college, ten to the poor, and the remainder to his nephews and nieces. His last letter was addressed to Farel. He was buried without pomp, in a spot which is not now ascertainable. In the year 1900 a monument of explation was erected to Servetus in the Place Champel. Geneva has long since ceased to be the head of Calvinism. It is a rallying point for Free Thought, Socialist propaganda, and Nihilist conspiracies. But in history it stands out as the Sparta of the Reformed churches, and Calvin is its Lycurgus.

#### **COMMENTARIES ON ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS**

#### **TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE**

No doubt the Epistle next in importance to that to the Romans is this to the Hebrews. The truths explained in it might, indeed, have been deduced from other portions of Scripture; but it is a vast advantage and a great satisfaction to find them expressly set forth, and distinctly stated by an inspired Apostle.

In condescension to our ignorance, it has pleased God, not only to give us what might have been deemed sufficient for our information, but also to add "line upon line," so that there might be every help given to those who have a desire to know the truth, and every reasonable accuse taken away from such as resolve to oppose it, and to follow the guidance of self-will, and the delusions of their own proud minds and depraved hearts. It might then, seem strange to us that defect, insufficiency, and obscurity have been ascribed to the Scriptures, did we not know that these have been made by such as wish Revelation to be otherwise than it is; they having imbibed errors and adopted superstitions to which it yields no countenance, but which it condemns in terms so plain, that they must be represented as defective or obscure in order to be evaded.

There are especially two parties who find this Epistle in no way favorable to them — the Papists and the Socinians. The Sole Priesthood of Christ, and his Sole Sufficient Sacrifice, are here so distinctly stated, that the former cannot resist the evidence except by the subtle arts of the most consummate sophistry; and the latter find it a very difficult task to neutralize the strong and clear testimony here given as to the Divinity of our Savior and his Atonement. Though these parties are wholly opposed to one another, yet, like Herod and Pilate, they unite in degrading the Savior — the one indirectly, by substituting others in his place; and the other in open manner, by denying his dignity and the character and efficacy of his death. But by both the Savior is equally dishonored.

There have been more disputes about this Epistle than any other portion of Scripture; but many of the questions which have been raised have been of a very trifling character, as though learned men were idle and had nothing else to do; and this has been the case, especially with the divines of the German school, not only with regard to this Epistle, but with respect to many other subjects.

Disquisitions called learned, have been written as to the character of this Epistle, whether it be properly an Epistle, or something that ought to be called by some other name!<sup>F1</sup> Then it has been a subject learnedly discussed, to whom in particular the Epistle was sent, whether to the dispersed Jews, or to those in Palestine — whether to a particular Congregation, or to the Hebrews in general?<sup>F2</sup> Such questions are comparatively of very little importance; and to spend time and talent in discussing them, is a work frivolous and useless; and not only so, but also mischievous, calculated to serve the purposes of Popery and Infidelity; for to render thus apparently important what is not so, and on which no degree of certainty can be obtained, is to involve men in a mist which may lead them astray.

Another subject has been much discussed, which is of no great consequence, as the inspiration of the Epistle is not thereby endangered, and that is the language in which the Epistle was originally written. An opinion prevailed among some of the Early Fathers that it was written in Hebrew, or rather in Syro-Chaldee language, and that it was translated into Greek by Luke, Clement, or Barnabas. It was stated as an *opinion*, confirmed by no authority, and founded mainly on two circumstances — that it was written to Hebrews,

and that its style is different from that of Paul in his other Epistles. Almost all modern divines regard this opinion as not well founded. The Greek language was in Paul's time well known throughout Palestine; the "General Epistles," intended for the Jews as well as the Gentiles, were written in Greek; and there is no record of any copy of this Epistle *in Hebrew*. As to the style, it differs not more from that of the other Epistles than what may be observed in writers in all ages, or what might be expected in Paul when advanced in years, compared with what he wrote in his younger days. It may be further added, that the Epistle itself contains things which seem to show that it was written in Greek: Hebrew words are interpreted, Hebrews 7:2; the passages quoted are mostly from the *Septuagint*, and not from the Hebrew; and there is the use of a word, rendered "Testament," in Hebrews 9:17, in the sense of a Will, which the Hebrew word never means.

There are only two questions of real importance — the canonicity of the Epistle, and its Author.

As to the first, it has never been doubted except by some of the strange heretics in the first ages. There is quite as much external testimony in its favor as most portions of the New Testament. It was from the first received by the Churches, Eastern and Western, as a portion of the Inspired Volume. It is found in the very first versions of the New Testament, the *Syriac* and the *Italic*. These versions were made as early as the end of the second century, about 140 years after the date of this Epistle.<sup>F3</sup> The testimony of the Fathers from the earliest time is uniformly the same in this respect. The Epistle is acknowledged by them all as a portion of Holy Writ.

But with regard to the Author there has been a diversity of opinion, though, when all things are duly weighed, without reason. From the *earliest times*, the Eastern Church acknowledge Paul as the Author. Some in the Western Church, in the third and the fourth century, did not regard Paul as the Author, but Luke, or Clement, or Barnabas. Jerome and Augustine in the fifth century, a more enlightened age than the two preceding centuries, ascribed to Paul the authorship; and since their time the same opinion has prevailed in the Western, as it did from the beginning in the Eastern Church. How to account for a different opinion in the Western Church during the third and the fourth century, is difficult. Some think it was owing to the Novalien Heresy, which some parts of this Epistle were supposed to favor, though without any good reason.

As far then as the testimony of history goes, almost the whole weight of evidence is in favor of Paul being the Author.

With regard to modern times, the prevailing opinion has been that it is the Epistle of Paul. Luther, indeed, ascribed it to Apollos — a mere conjecture. Calvin, as we find, supposed that either Luke or Clement was the author; for which there are no satisfactory reasons. Beza differed from his illustrious predecessor, and regarded Paul as the writer; and such has been the opinion entertained by most of the successors of the Reformers, both in this country and on the Continent, as proved by their confessions of Faith.

About the middle of the seventeenth century there seems to have been a revival of the controversy; for in the year 1658 the younger Spanheim wrote an elaborate treatise on the subject, in which he canvasses the whole evidence, both historical and internal, and affords the strongest ground for the conclusion that Paul was the writer of this Epistle. Since that time, till late years, his arguments were regarded by most as conclusive. But some of the German divines, who seem to have a taste for exploded opinions, have again revived the question, produced afresh the old arguments, and added some new ones to them. But a second Spanheim has appeared in the person of Professor Stuart, of America, who has published a learned Commentary on this Epistle, and prefixed to it a long Introduction, in which he has fully entered into the subject, and more fully than his predecessor. The labor and toil which this Introduction must have cost its author, were no doubt very great; for every argument, however frivolous, (and some of the arguments are *very* frivolous indeed,) is noticed, and everything plausible is most clearly exposed.

The evidence both external and internal is so satisfactory, that an impression is left on the mind, that Paul was the author of this Epistle, nearly equal to what his very name prefixed to it would have produced. Indeed the writer can truly say, that he now entertains no more doubt on the subject than if it had the Apostle's own superscription.<sup>F4</sup>

As to the date of this Epistle, it is commonly supposed to have been written late in 62 or early in 63, about the time that Paul was released from his first imprisonment at Rome.

There seem to be especially two reasons why Paul did not commence this Epistle in his usual manner: first, because he was not specifically an Apostle to the Jews, but to the Gentiles; and secondly, because the contents of the Epistle are such that it was not necessary for him to assume his Apostolic character; for the arguments are founded on testimonies found in the Old Testament, and not on his authority as a commissioned Apostle. His main object appears to have been to show and prove that the Gospel is but a fulfillment of the ancient Scriptures, which the Jews themselves received as divine. His arguments and his examples are throughout borrowed from the Old Testament. This is a fact that is too often overlooked, to which Macknight, in an especial manner, very justly refers.

The Epistle begins by indicating a connection between the Old and the New Testament: both are revelations from the same God; He who spoke by the Prophets in the Old, speaks by His Son in the New. Then the obvious and inevitable conclusion is, that the New is but the Old completed. It is on this ground that the whole argument of the Epistle proceeds.

Having thus clearly intimated the connection between the two Testaments, the Apostle immediately enters on his great subject — the superiority of Him who introduced the perfected dispensation over all connected with the previous incomplete, elementary, and, in a great measure, symbolical dispensation, even over angels and Moses and the Levitical high-priest. And this subject occupies the largest portion of the Epistle, extending from the *first* chapter to the 19th verse of the *tenth* chapter. From that verse to the end of the Epistle, we have exhortations, warnings, examples of faith and patience, admonitions, directions, and salutations.

Then the Epistle divides itself into two main parts: —

**1.** The didactic, including the *ten* first chapters, with the exception of the latter part of the tenth.

**2.** The parainetic or hortative, from the 19th verse of the tenth chapter to the end of the Epistle.

The first part may be thus divided, —

**1.** Christ's superiority over angels — warnings -objections answered, ch. 1 and 2.

**2.** Christ's superiority over Moses — warnings as to faith and the promised rest, ch. 3 and 4:13.

**3.** Christ's superiority over the Levitical high-priest, as to his appointment, the perpetuity of his office, his covenant, and the efficacy of his atonement, ch. 4:14, to 10:19.

The second part admits of these divisions, -

**1.** Exhortation to *persevere*, derived from the free access in a new way to God; from the awful fate of apostates; and from their own past example, ch. 10:19-37.

**2.** Exhortation to *faith* and *patience*, derived from the example of the ancient saints, ch. 10:38, to the end of ch. 11.

**3.** Exhortation to encounter *trials* and *afflictions*, derived from the example of Christ; and from the love of God, as manifested by afflictions, ch. 12:1-13.

**4.** Exhortation to *peace* and *holiness*, derived from our superior privileges, and the aggravated guilt of no electing Him who speaks to us from heaven, ch. 12:14-29.

**5.** Various directions and cautions, requests and salutations, ch. 13.

The former part, the didactic, has many digressions, and hence the difficulty sometimes of tracing the course of the Apostle's reasoning. But it was his practice as appears from his other epistles, to apply, as it were, the subject, as he proceeds. Having in the *first* chapter proved the superiority of Christ over angels, he points out at the beginning of the *second* the great danger of disregarding his doctrine, and of neglecting his salvation, an inference drawn from what had been previously proved. He then proceeds with the same subject, Christ's superiority over angels, answers an objection derived from his human nature, and shows the necessity there was that he should become man; as he could not otherwise have sympathized with lost creatures, nor have atoned for their Sins. Here he first refers to him in express terms as a priest.

Then in ch. 3 he proceeds to show Christ's superiority over Moses; and having done so, he goes on in verse 7 to warn the Hebrews against following the example of their forefathers, who, through unbelief, lost the land of promise; and he pursues this subject to the end of the 13th verse of ch. 4.

The last section of the didactic part commences at ch. 4 and extends to verse 19 of the tenth chapter; it occupies nearly *six* chapters, and contains several episodes, so that it is sometimes no easy matter to trace the connection.

He begins this portion by calling attention to Christ as a high-priest, whom he had before represented as such at the end of ch. 2; where he mentions *two* things respecting him — that he became man, in order that he might atone for sin, and in order that he might be capable of sympathizing with his people. But here he refers mainly to the *last*, to his sufferings; and in order to anticipate an objection from the fact that he was a suffering Savior, he mentions his appointment, which, according to the testimony of David in the Book of Psalms, was to be according to the order of Melchisedec. Without going on with this subject, he makes a digression, and evidently for the purpose of making them more attentive to the explanation he was going to give of Melchisedec as a type of Christ in his priesthood.

This digression contains several particulars. To arouse their attention and stimulate them, he blames them for their ignorance, mentions the danger of continuing satisfied with the knowledge of first principles, and the impossibility of restoration in case of apostasy; he gives an illustration of this from unproductive land after culture and rain; reminds them of their past commendable conduct, and encourages them to activity and zeal by an assurance respecting the certainty of Gods promises, ch. 5:12, to the end of ch. 6.

In chap. 7 he proceeds with Melchisedec as the type of Christ in his priestly office. Christ is a priest according to his order, not according to that of Aaron; then Aaron *must* have been superseded. According to the testimony of David, Christ's priesthood excelled that of Aaron in two things — it was established by an *oath*, and it was to he perpetuated "forever," ch. 7 to the end of the 25th verse.

He now goes on to the other part of this subject, to speak of Christ as making an atonement for sin, ch. 7:26, having before spoken of him as a sympathizing priest from the circumstance of having been a sufferer. While speaking of his expiation, he refers to the covenant of which he was the Mediator, for expiations depended on the covenant. Respecting the new covenant, he quotes the express words of Jeremiah; and it included the remission of sins, and remission of sins necessarily implies an expiation. Then in the *ninth* chapter he refers to the old covenant, the tabernacle, and its services, and proves the insufficiency of these services, they being only typical of what was to come. From the *tenth* chapter to the 19th verse he pursues the same subject, and shows that the sacrifices under the Law were insufficient for the remission of sins, and that this could only be obtained through the Mediator of the new covenant promised by God through his prophet Jeremiah, chapter. 7:26, to chapter.10:19.<sup>F5</sup>

Here the Apostle completes the *first* part, having stated at large in the last portion of it the claims of Christ as a highpriest, and these claims are fully confirmed by the testimonies of the ancient Scriptures. His arguments are such that it is impossible really to understand and believe the Old Testament and to deny the New; the latter being most evidently the fulfillment of the former. The Old Testament distinctly speaks of another priesthood different from that of Aaron, and of another covenant different from that made with the children of Israel, and of one which would confer the remission of sins, which the other could not do. Now these are the testimonies not of the New but of the Old Testament; and the New exhibits a priest and a covenant exactly answerable to the priest and the covenant which the Old Testament refers to and describes. Nothing can be more plain and more conclusive than the Apostle's arguments on this subject.

The parainetic or hortative portion of the Epistle, extending from chap. 10:19 to the end, requires no further explanation.

We especially learn from this Epistle that the distinctive character of the old dispensation was symbolical, and of the new spiritual. The old abounded in forms, rituals, and ceremonies; the new exhibits what these things signified and typified. To have recourse again to symbols and rituals, is to prefer darkness to light, to reverse the order of things, and to disregard a favor which kings and prophets in ancient times desired to enjoy. This is not only an evidence of fatuity, but it is also ingratitude and sin, and it ought never to be deemed as innocent or harmless. Having the glorious light of the Gospel, let us walk in the light, and never regard "beggarly elements" as things to be perpetuated and admired.

This Commentary was translated into English by Clement Cotton, from the French Version, and was published in 1605 under the following title: — "A Commentarie on the whole Epistle to the Hebrews. By Iohn Calvin. Translated ovt of French. *The Lawe was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Iesus Christ.* John 1:17. Imprinted at London by Felix Kingston, for *Arthur Iohnson*, and are to be sold at his shop neere the great North doors of Pauls, at the signs of the white Horse. 1605." Like his translation of Isaiah, that of the Commentary on the Hebrews, "though not altogether suitable to modern taste, is faithful, vigorous, idiomatic, and not inelegant."

The "Epistle Dedicatorie" to Cotton's patron, Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, and his Address "to the Reader," have been reprinted as a specimen of the style of such performances at that period.

#### J. O. THRUSSINGTON, August 1853

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE ROBERT EARLE OF SALISBVRIE, VICOVNT Cranbourne, Baron of Essendon, Principall Secretarie to the Kings most excellent Maiestie, Master of the Court of Wardes and Liueries, and one of his Highnesse most Honourable Priuie Counsell.

#### Grace and peace be multiplied

Right Honorable, such has been the singular care and fatherly providence of God over his church in these last times: that according to his own most gratious promise (through the means of preaching and writing) knowledge has overflowed in all places, as the waters that cover the sea. Hence it is come to pass, that even this nation also, albeit utterly unworthy to receive so much as the least sprincklings of this knowledge, has not withstanding been replenished and filled therewith, almost from corner to corner. Many chosen and worthy instruments has the Lord raised up here and there for this purpose. But amongst the rest, none for whom there is greater cause of thankfulness, than for that rare and excellent light of this age, *Mr. Calvin*: whether in respect of the large and many volumes, which with unwearable pains he has written, or the exceeding fruits which the Churches have thereby gained. So that all of sound judgment will acknowledge, that God had poured out upon him a principal portion and measure of his spirit to profit with all, 1 Corinthians 12:7. Whereof, as his whole works give sufficient proofs, so his Commentaries especially. For besides his sincerity and faithfulness in delivering the true and natural sense of the holy Scriptures; he has this as peculiar to himself, that with his faithfulness and sincerity he always matches an exceeding plainness and gravity: whereby his Reader may obtain that he seeks, both with great ease, and with very little loss of time.

Divers of these his Commentaries, Right Honorable, have been already translated to the great benefit of this nation: others yet remain untranslated, which doubtless would be no less beneficial. The which, as I have earnestly desired; so, had gifts and means been in any measure answerable, it had been performed ere this. For the present, I have been bold to give your Honor a small taste thereof in these my poor first fruits: wherein although my pains are no way sufficient to commend the same unto your Honor, yet I doubt not but the matter itself will be found worthy of your H. patronage. For where are the natures and offices of Christ so largely described; the doctrine of the free remission of sins in Christ's blood better established, or faith with her effects more highly commended, than in this Epistle to the Hebrews?

Now as touching the reasons, Right Honorable, that have moved me hereunto, they are briefly these; First, I was not ignorant what singular love and affection your Honor bare to the author of this Commentary for his work's sake, whereof many also are witnesses. Unto which, if your Honor should be pleased to add a second favor in Patronizing these his labors, I thought it would be a special means to revive his memory again, now almost decayed amongst us.

Secondly, I was persuaded that if your Lordship, whom it has pleased the Almighty so highly to advance, being also a favorer and defender of the truth, and of all good causes; would permit this works to pass under your Honors protection: that it would be both better esteemed, and the more acceptably received of all.

Lastly, my good Lord. As I cannot conceal that deep and inward affection of love and duties which I owe unto your Honor, in regard of the near employments which sometimes a dear friend of mine had about your Lordship in your young years: so by this dedication it was my desire to testify part of a thankful mind, in respect that you have not suffered neither length of time, nor your H. weighty affairs in matters of state, to wear the same out of your Honorable remembrance: as by the great favors your H. has lately showed in that behalf, does plainly appear.

Thus in most humble manner craving pardon for my great boldness, I humbly end; beseeching the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth, to pour out the abundance of all blessings both upon you and yours in this life, and to crown your H. and them with immortal blessedness in his kingdom of Gloria, through Christ.

Your Honours in all humble and dutifull affection ever to bee commanded,

#### **Clement** Cotton

#### **TO THE READER**

Dear Christian Reader, among the many helps wherewith God has furnished thee for the furtherance of thy godly Meditations and spiritual growth in Christ, I pray thee accept of this amongst the rest; of which (if I may so speak) thou has been too long unfurnished. Diverse good and godly men have labored, some by their own writings, and some again by translating the works of others, to store thee with Sermons and Expositions in English, upon all the books of the New Testament, this Epistle to the Hebrews lonely excepted: which lack, rather than it should be unsupplied, has caused me (the unfittest I confess at many thousands) to undertake the translation of the Commentary ensuing: which being finished, I have been bold (for thy benefit Christian Reader) now to publish. Hoping therefore of thy friendly allowance and acceptance of these my poor endeavors: I beseech thee, if thou reap that benefit thereby, which I heartily with thou may, to give God the praise, and

to help me with thy prayers. Thus commending thee and thy studies to the grace of God, I bid thee farewell.

*Thine ever in Christ, C.C.* 

#### **EPISTLE DEDICATORY**

#### JOHN CALVIN

#### TO THE MOST MIGHTY AND MOST SERENE PRINCE,

#### SIGISMUND AUGUSTUS,

by the Grace of God, the King of Poland, Great Duke of Lithuania, Russia, Prussia, and Lord and Heir of Muscovy, etc.

There are at this day many foolish men, who everywhere, through a vain desire for writing, engage the minds of ignorant and thoughtless readers with their trifles. And to this evil, most illustrious King, is added another indignity that while they inscribe to kings and princes their silly things, to disguise, or at least to cover them by borrowed splendor, they not only profane sacred names, but also impart to them some measure of their own disgrace. Since the unreasonable temerity of such men makes it necessary for serious and sober writers to frame an excuse, when they publicly dedicate their labors to great men, while yet there is nothing in them but what corresponds with the greatness of those to whom they are offered, it was necessary to make this remark, lest I should seem to be of the number of those who allow themselves, through the example of others, to render public anything they please,