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# THE BLUE BANNER

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## Justification By Faith: What is Faith? Part Two by Richard Bacon

[Continued from previous issue.]

### III. Actions of faith

Faith has three elements: understanding, assent and trust. In those elements of understanding, assent and trust, there are also several actions. Faith acts. Faith is not merely passive. Faith does not just sit. Once God has implanted faith in us; once God has regenerated us such that we can believe, faith is active. Faith works. We must make detailed distinctions as we discuss the actions of faith. Faith has both a direct or active aspect and a reflexive aspect. Direct faith, or active faith, is something that acts outward, or reaches out, or trusts. Reflexive faith occurs as we think about the faith itself. This distinction is quite important because assurance of salvation is not the same thing as salvation. The knowledge that we believe is not the same thing as believing. If those two things were the same, then every doubt would become a “falling from grace.” So it is important to make the distinction between how we think about Christ and how we think about our own faith. Direct faith has the content of the gospel as its object. Reflexive faith looks to faith itself.

We maintain that there are seven actions of faith. The first three actions of faith are seen in knowledge, assent and trust. We must have knowledge or understanding. We cannot believe what we do not know. Knowledge as an action means that we have to know something before we can believe it. Assent means that we have to recognize that it is true. Can we believe that which is false? I put it to you that not only can we not truly believe that which is impossible, we also cannot truly believe that which is false. We may act upon something that is false, but we cannot have a biblical faith upon that which is false. The third action of faith is trust.

### A. We must know

There is a heresy present in the church today that teaches that it does not matter so much what you believe as long as you have enough faith. We of the Reformed faith maintain that knowledge is the beginning of faith. We must know something before we can believe it. I am going to demonstrate that principle to you from Scripture. What is eternal life? John 17:3 answers that question, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” If eternal life comes down to knowing God and knowing his son, then knowledge is very important to our faith. It is foundational. It is the beginning of our faith. It must be the basis for our faith. It is not the end of our faith, but it is the beginning. We must know God; we must know Jesus Christ, if we will have life eternal.

1 John 5:13, “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” It is so important that we have knowledge that the Apostle John wrote an epistle for that very purpose.

This is the text from which we have pursued the doctrine of justification. Isaiah 53:11 “By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many.” Not merely by Christ knowing his elect, but by our knowing Christ.

Hebrews 11:3, “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” Through faith we understand. Through faith we have knowledge.

Here are other passages that follow this theme. John 6:69, “And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” Colossians 2:2, “That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance

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of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.” 2 Timothy 1:12, “For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”

### **1. Faith is related to the Word of God**

Because faith is related to the Word of God, we must know and understand the Bible. Since faith is related to the Word of God, it is related to knowledge of God’s word. There is a relationship between the Word and knowing or “hearing” the Word. Romans 10:17, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” John 6:45, “It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.” But “hearing” in these contexts does not mean simply having vibrations in our ears — there is an implicit statement that we must hear to the point of understanding, even as 2 Timothy 3:15, “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

### **2. Faith requires a confession**

Faith requires knowledge because it requires a confession. Romans 10:9, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, ... thou shalt be saved.” Faith is not simply a mystical kind of knowledge, but a knowledge that can be expressed. The church has held to this in her creeds. “I believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth.” It is possible to blurt out nonsense but that is not the confession that Scripture requires. Scripture requires a knowledgeable confession. 1 Peter 3:15, “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” We are supposed to give an answer and a reason for the hope that is within us. That reason may not satisfy the other person. Just because you can give a reason, does not mean that the other person is going to be satisfied with your reason. If he has not been called, if his heart has not been prepared to receive the Word of God, he will not accept your reason. That does not change the fact that we are supposed to be ready to give a reason. That we are supposed to be able to give a reason implies that there is a reason. That there is a reason implies that faith requires understanding.

### **3. Knowledge and understanding are enjoined**

In Scripture, understanding is enjoined upon us. We are commanded to understand. Knowledge and understanding are required of us throughout Scripture. Deuteronomy 4:6, “Keep therefore and do them [“them” being the commandments of God]; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” That is not an admonishment to believe just anything without understanding it. It is quite the opposite. We are supposed to understand what we believe. We are admonished to know the commandments of God, so the nations — the heathen round about us — will look at what we are doing, and listen to what we are saying, how we are speaking and how we are thinking, and they will say, “That is really wise; that is quite profound.” In order such a thing to happen, we must have knowledge. We must have understanding.

Daniel 9:21-23, “Even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to shew thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision.” Note the order of things here in Daniel, for it is significant. First Gabriel informed Daniel — he passed along a body of information. Then he granted a sort of enlightenment. Daniel required more than a set of notebooks. Gabriel required Daniel to understand the content of the notebooks. We, too, must have a content to our faith and we must consider and understand the content.

I have to study my Bible to understand it better. I cannot just put my Bible under my pillow and wake up the next morning with greater understanding.

Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God.” You must work at it. Understanding requires work.

There are numerous other places where knowledge and understanding are required of us. John 5:39, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.” Acts 17:11, “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things

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were so.” 1 Corinthians 1:5, “That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge.” 1 Corinthians 10:15, “I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say.” Colossians 2:2-3, “That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

#### **4. Ignorance is the mother of error**

Ignorance is the mother of error and the destroyer of faith. Hosea 4:6, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” Isaiah 1:3, “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.” That is not a commendation; it is a condemnation. Psalm 32:9, “Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding; whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.” Matthew 22:29, “Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.”

The first act of faith is to know, to understand; to consider. We are not saying that this exhausts what faith is. It is important for you understand, however, that faith is not simply an emotion. Faith is not something you can generate from within yourselves. Faith, properly understood, begins with knowledge; it begins with understanding. Therefore we cannot say that anything is faith that does not have an object. We believe something. We do not “just believe.” And the object of justifying faith is the finished work of Jesus Christ.

#### **B. We must assent to what we understand**

It is possible to know that Christianity teaches the doctrine of the Trinity, and yet deny the truth of the doctrine. Assent is that which we might refer to as historical faith. How many of us have actually been to France? But how many of us believe that France actually exists even though we have not been there? All of us believe that France exists. That is an historical faith. It is an assent to the truth of the proposition that there is a country named France, even though we may not have any empirical evidence. Why does one who has not been there believe there is a place called France? Because he has heard testimony to that fact. Others whom he trusts have testified to him that France exists. This is called an historical faith. This is the only way we know history. Is it possible to know history empirically? No, we cannot know history empirically. The only way we can know

history is by way of testimony: the testimony of others who were alive and present: who were witnesses. This kind of faith is characterized as historical faith.

However, true scriptural faith is also based on testimony. True faith is not based on the evidence of our own senses. It is not based on what we can see with our eyes. 2 Corinthians 5:7, “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” Scriptural faith is based on testimony. Isaiah 8:20, “To the Law and to the testimony!” Our faith is based upon the testimony of God’s Word. There is, therefore, an historical aspect to Scriptural faith. We cannot look disparagingly upon historical faith. But we must understand that while historical faith is necessary, it is not sufficient. Historical faith cannot be missing, it cannot be absent; but its presence is not enough. Knowledge is necessary. Assent to the truth of that knowledge is also necessary.

#### **C. We must trust (Practical assent)**

The third action of faith is trust, or what we might call “practical assent.” We must not only assent to the truth of the testimony, we must act upon that truth. We must not be like a person who does not know how thick the ice is. He might believe the testimony of his friend who told him the ice was thick enough to hold him up, but he never steps onto the ice for himself. He just walks away. That is an assent to the truth, that is a knowledge of the truth, but it is not trust. As he places his own weight upon the ice, he not only has an assent, it is a practical assent. He has placed his trust in the ice. With respect to the gospel, this practical trust means that we judge the gospel to be true, we judge the gospel to be good, and therefore worthy of our love and desire. We desire the gospel. We desire the truth. We desire God’s Word. We embrace Christ’s death on our behalf. There is a longing for, a desire after the gospel. Romans 4:21, speaking of Abraham, characterizes this faith as, “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.” Abraham was fully persuaded. He was so fully persuaded that he was willing to give his own son to the altar. That is how “fully persuaded” Abraham was. It was a faith that acted upon an assent to the truth that God could raise Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Colossians 2:2, “That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.” Here again faith is characterized

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as a full persuasion. This idea of being fully persuaded and fully assured may be what has given some people the idea that apart from a full assurance there is no true faith. We reject that idea, but we say that normally faith will grow into a full persuasion. Remember the man in Mark 9:24, who said, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." We spend most of our days in some tension between faith and unbelief. Let's be honest with each other here for just a moment. Most of us spend our lives in a tension between believing and not believing. We sin daily in thought, word, and deed. We do not always believe what the Bible says about us. We do not always believe what God's Word says about his commandments. That tension still exists: we have faith, but we also have unbelief. Yes, we want to obey, yet we do not always obey. Paul spoke of himself in this dilemma in Romans 7:15, "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I."

We see full assurance of faith in Hebrews 10:22, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." These are acts of trusting. In the illustration of the ice, it is stepping out on the ice. But there the illustration breaks down a bit. We must move away from the ice illustration and apply it to the death of Christ.

We cannot simply generate our own belief in Christ. We cannot give ourselves faith in Christ. We cannot make ourselves have confidence in him the way we can work up a belief in the thickness of ice. A heathen can go ice skating. But the trust we have in Christ must come from God. We have to understand that this is a supernatural trust, because it must overcome our natural enmity toward the things of God.

#### **D. We must seek Refuge**

The fourth act of faith is seeking refuge. Seeking refuge is seeking pardon and salvation from Christ on his terms. The Old Testament type of this act of faith were the cities of refuge. There were certain Levitical cities within the nation of Israel in which a person who had unintentionally killed someone could find refuge. A person could not go to any city for refuge. A person had to go to the cities that God had appointed. So it is that when we take refuge in Christ we are seeking pardon and salvation from Christ on his terms. Not simply seeking pardon and salvation. Every one wants pardon and salvation. But most people want it on their own terms. However God has determined that you can have pardon

and salvation only on his terms. What is meant by seeking refuge on God's terms alone?

First of all we must approach to Christ alone. Matthew 11:28, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Christ commands, "Come unto me." He does not say come to a doctrine, but come to me. Doctrine is important. The knowledge aspect is certainly a key aspect of our faith. We must have knowledge before we can come to Christ. But we cannot simply rest in that knowledge. We have to go beyond the knowledge to seeking refuge where that knowledge reveals the refuge can be found. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest...learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." We must know we are sinners; we must assent to the truth of that proposition; we must acknowledge that salvation is found in Christ alone; and we must esteem Christ's work as altogether sufficient.

Second, we must find access to God by Christ alone. Romans 5:1-2, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Our hope is not just salvation. God is not in heaven worried about whether you are going to be saved. He has already decreed in eternity past whether or not you will be saved. God's concern in the gospel is not anthropocentric (centered in man). God's concern in the gospel is to bring glory to himself. The gospel brings glory to his mercy on those whom he saves, and glory to his justice both on those whom he saves and on those whom he reprobates. His justice is glorified in saving the ungodly because Jesus Christ still had to pay the penalty. If God simply winked at sin, that would not be glorifying to his justice. But he glorifies his justice in the fact that he poured out his wrath on his son. He will not forgive apart from that sacrifice being made.

Third, refuge involves not only approach, not only accessing, but also in seeking. Isaiah 55:1, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." There is seeking in that verse. Isaiah 55:6, "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." The implication here is that he will not always be findable, he will not always be near, so it necessary that we call upon him on his terms — while he is near, while he may be found.

We are to hunger and thirst after Christ and his righteousness. Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." Psalm 42:1, "As the hart panteth after the water

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brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.” Revelation 22:17, “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” Isaiah 55:1-2, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.”

The desire must be for Christ. The desire must be to receive Christ on God’s terms. That is what we mean by the term “seeking refuge.”

### **E. We must receive or embrace Christ**

The fifth act of faith is the last of the direct acts. The fifth act of faith is that of receiving or resting upon Christ alone as he is offered to us in the gospel. Our confession characterized this act as the “principal” act of justifying faith. Matthew 13:45-46, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.” He sells everything to get that one pearl of great price. The kingdom of God like that in the sense that we have to give up everything in order to embrace Christ. We have to push away everything else. We have to dis-embrace everything that we would trust of our own, in order to embrace Christ. John 1:12, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” In this context, what does it mean to “receive Christ?” Does it mean to “ask Jesus into your heart?” Does it mean say a sinner’s prayer? This verse says “even to them that believe on his name.” Receiving is an act of believing. John 1:13 goes on to say, “Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Not of the will of man, but of God. Romans 5:17, “For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.” Colossians 2:6, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.”

Our faith reclines upon Christ in Psalm 23:2, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.” This is that same idea as receiving and resting upon him. We recline on Christ.

Isaiah 10:20, “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.” Isaiah 48:2, “For they call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel; The LORD of hosts is his name.” Micah 3:11, “The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? none evil can come upon us.”

This receiving; this embracing; this resting is referred to in Ephesians 3:17 and John 15:5 as union with Christ. John 15:5, “...He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” Ephesians 3:17-19, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.”

This act of faith is receiving Christ. This act of faith is resting on Christ. This act of faith is reclining upon Christ. This act of faith is being joined with Christ. This is the act of faith that embraces Christ as he is offered to us in the gospel.

### **F. Reflexive faith is persuaded**

This is just the area where many people experience some problem. They are told to “just believe,” or to “trust your faith.” In fact, we must look at our faith and judge our faith. That is reflexive faith. Reflexive faith looks back upon itself, like in a mirror. Reflexive faith concludes that it has found Christ, and that Christ suits all of its needs. This is assurance. But this is not direct faith. Direct faith acts. Direct faith rests upon Christ. Direct faith receives Christ. Direct faith reclines upon him. Reflexive faith simply looks at itself and concludes, “I have found Christ and he is altogether lovely.” Galatians 2:20, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” Paul concluded in this verse that he found Christ and that Christ lived in him. How did he know? He knew by examining his faith. 2 Timothy 1:12, “For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have

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committed unto him against that day.” “I... am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” This verse expresses both direct faith and reflexive faith. It is a faith in Christ, yet it is also an assurance that Paul’s faith found Christ. That is what we mean by reflexive faith.

### **G. Reflexive faith is consoled**

But the seventh act of faith also a reflexive act, is confidence and consolation. This act is a result of the reflexive act of faith. We have confidence and consolation. This is the sweetness of faith. Interestingly enough, according to our Westminster standards, the way we gain assurance is not by seeking assurance. Assurance is a by-product of our seeking Christ in his ordinances. As we seek Christ — as we seek to embrace him — assurance comes as a by product.

Westminster Confession of Faith XVIII:3. Duty of Diligence: “This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties, before he be partaker of it yet, being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of ordinary means, attain thereunto. And therefore it is the duty of every one to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure; that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance: so far is it from inclining men to looseness.”

“Infallible Assurance!” How amazing that the Westminster divines used this term. God will give you infallible assurance. Someone said that he would like to read the book of life to see his name written down there. So would we all. But that is not the kind of infallible assurance that God gives us. God gives the kind of infallible assurance that “doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties, before he be partaker of it.” Notice that a “true believer” might wait long. That is to say that one who has truly acted directly in embracing Christ as he is offered to us in the gospel may not immediately have this infallible assurance. “...yet, being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of ordinary means, attain thereunto.” How is it that we attain this infallible assurance? We use the means that God has set before us. What if we start to doubt that we are saved, and because of that, we decided not to go to church? We

would be doing exactly the opposite of what we need to do to receive this infallible assurance of which our confession rightly speaks.

The Confession concludes, “And therefore it is the duty of every one to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure.” How do we make our calling and election sure? By waiting upon the ordinances of God. Be there when the church doors are open. In fact, you should be standing outside the door waiting for the man with the church keys to come. We need to be eager for the preaching of God’s Word. That is what it means to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure. In our catechism we are instructed to make diligent use of all of the outward means of salvation (WSC 85 cf. WSC 88). Those outward means of salvation are the Word, sacraments and prayer. We are to make diligent use. We are to be at the church where the Word of God is being preached, where the sacraments are being rightly administered, where discipline is being duly exercised. We are to be submissive to the ordinances of God. The result of that diligent use is “...that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, in love and thankfulness to God.” The implication here is that if our assurance is not full enough, it is because our hearts have not yet been enlarged by his Word. Our hearts need to be stretched. Our hearts are stretched by undergoing afflictions and learning to trust in the Word of God. What are the afflictions we must undergo? The confession says, “many difficulties.” The confession tells us that sometimes it may even seem to us that God has turned his face away from us. Why? That we might learn the more to seek after him. Sometimes God turns his face away from us because we are in the midst of sin. Sometimes God turns his face away from us because we are in the midst of complacency. In either case, he would have us seek after him more diligently.

“...that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance.” The chief objection to the doctrine of justification by faith alone is that this assurance will cause the believer to live loosely. But our confession here teaches the opposite. Rather than this assurance being something that makes us live loosely, it stirs us up to our duties of obedience. Loose living is not the fruit of this assurance; being stirred up to our duties in obedience to God’s Word is the fruit of this assurance. It has an effect opposite to inclining men to looseness.

What we have seen is that while assurance and confidence are not of the essence of faith, nevertheless

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we ought so to work with faith as to arrive at assurance. We may not receive assurance on day one. We may not receive assurance on our last day. We may never arrive in this life at the full infallible assurance that our names are written down in glory. But that does not change our duty. Our duty is still to make diligent use of the means of grace. Our duty is to walk in his commandments. Our duty is to trust in Christ. Our duty is to rest in him. Our duty is to grasp hold of him. Our duty is to embrace him as he is offered to us in the gospel. Whether we ever have assurance does not change our

duty to rest in him and to call upon him while he may be found; to call upon him while he is yet near. Therefore, I press you to that duty. There is no duty to have that infallible assurance. We are not commanded to have the confidence that our names are written down in glory. But we do have a duty to make use of the gospel. We are commanded to make use of the Word, to make use of prayer, and to make use of the sacraments. And most of all we are commanded to that justifying faith which “receives and rests upon Christ alone for salvation as he is offered to us in the gospel.” (WSC 86)Ω

# Calvin in the Hands of the Philistines: Or Did Calvin Bowl on the Sabbath

by Chris Coldwell

*Thus it is that history is falsified and good men slandered*  
(David Hay Fleming)

## PART ONE

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

A remarkably durable anecdote about John Calvin, the great Protestant Reformer of Geneva, is often related by those critical of the Puritan view of the Sabbath.<sup>2</sup> The goal seems to be to demonstrate that the Reformers were not tainted with *that* ‘pharisaical’ of strictness in

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<sup>1</sup> The author can say with certainty, from a note he discovered, that he first read of this tale in a copy of David Hay Fleming’s *Critical Reviews*, which he purchased from David C. Lachman on January 30, 1984. It did not take long for him to run into the normal anti-Sabbatarian use of this tale. Later that year, after an evening worship service at the church that would become the First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett (FPCR), a fresh from seminary licentiate tried to use the tale as an excuse against strict confessional Sabbatarianism. Mr. Coldwell referred him to Hay Fleming; no doubt an unheeded piece of advice, as the man had accepted the tale as fact on the word of his seminary professor (Hay Fleming was unknown to him). The author has had an abiding interest in the tale ever since.

<sup>2</sup> This article is not a study of Sabbath views *per se*. See the following works for analysis of the Puritan and of Calvin’s view. James T. Dennison, *The Market Day of the Soul: the Puritan Doctrine of the Sabbath in England 1532-1700* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983). James Gilfillan, *The Sabbath viewed in the light of Reason, Revelation, and History, with Sketches of its Literature* (New York, [1862]). Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. *Calvin and the Sabbath* (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1962). See also the works by John Primus on page 8, footnote 9.

observance of the Lord’s day – particularly respecting abstinence from otherwise lawful sports and recreations on that day. One Lord’s Day, *it is said*, the Scottish Reformer John Knox, paid a visit to his friend Calvin in Geneva. The grave Scot found, to his surprise, as the telling would seem to indicate,<sup>3</sup> the austere Reformer of Geneva engaged in a game of bowls.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Whether Knox is portrayed as surprised seems to depend on whether the author repeating the tale is intent on not only casting Calvin as holding to much ‘looser’ Sabbath views than the Puritans, but the Scottish Reformer as well. The tale varies. One version relates that a chance visitor reported it. Others add that it was a Lord’s day afternoon. One of the most recent and more cautious references to the tale is by Tom Schwanda in his article, “The Unforced Rhythms of Grace, A Reformed Perspective on Sabbath,” *Perspectives*, vol. 11, no. 3 (March 1996), pp. 14-17. He writes:

“While Calvin appears to see recreation as inappropriate for Sundays, a strong oral tradition often repeated insists his actual practice was less severe. I have endeavored to trace the authenticity of this reference to no avail. However, the most frequent references indicate that when John Knox visited Calvin in Geneva he finally found him lawn bowling that Sunday afternoon. Once again it must be acknowledged there are no footnotes to substantiate this possibility.”

<sup>4</sup> Bowls is an old game played on a smooth green lawn with a ball of wood (now made of a composite material). It is rolled with the attempt to make it stop as near as possible to another ball. Hence the term ‘bowling on the green.’ The point is not that the game was an immoral pastime, but unlawful on the Lord’s day. The consensus of Puritan thinking on Sabbath recreations is represented by John Wells. Recreations on a Sabbath day “are impediments to duty.... Now how this should be otherwise, is not easily discernible; so do not recreations possess the mind, divert the intention, withdraw from spiritual duties, hinder the service of Christ, and fill the heart with froth and vanity?” John Wells, *The Practical Sabbatarian* (London, 1668), p. 28. Calvin’s view is similar.

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There appears to be no good reason for the tale's durability.<sup>5</sup> It has been repeated and used uncritically by Seventh-day Adventist apologists,<sup>6</sup> Calvin scholars who should know better, as well as by anti-Sabbatarian writers. Even when the tenuous origin of the tale is clearly evident to some of these authors, they still have boldly gone on to draw conclusions from it as if it were factual. Much of this no doubt is due to partisan bias against Calvin, or against strict views of Sabbath keeping, or both. However, surely those who hold to the Reformed faith, and hold the Reformer in esteem, would hesitate to assume as true a tale which runs counter to Calvin's published opinion? If the Reformer believed that sports and recreations on the Lord's day were permissible, then this tale would be merely a curiosity. Since that was not his belief, giving countenance to the tale leaves him vulnerable to the charge of inconsistency if not hypocrisy.

It is important to demonstrate the dubious nature of this tale as it clearly affects how some interpret Calvin's views. And while this article may not settle the issue once and for all, an attempt has been made to draw together as much material as possible to support this conclusion. No doubt some will think the amount of data gathered is excessive, but the tale's persistence calls for it. And, as one author cited later writes regarding another matter, "it is a shame not to know the whole of a small thing."

After briefly rehearsing Calvin's view of sports and pastimes on the Lord's day, this article will survey the relevant literature. The reasons for focusing mainly on English literature are practical ones. The author is not familiar enough with French or Latin to facilitate an easy compassing of that literature. While this may appear to be a significant oversight, as the main source for the bowling anecdote traces it to a local tradition in Geneva, this very fact also raises a strong probability that no evidence exists to be found that would substantiate the tale.

But the English literature is important to survey because the anecdote has spread and received currency since the 19th century in British and American works on the Sabbath. Also, the controversy over the Puritan

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<sup>5</sup> This is not the only Sabbath related tale that has persisted. Unfortunately, the bowling anecdote is not as easily dismissed as the false accusation that Calvin once had a consultation about changing the Lord's Day to Thursday. However, even the fact that Calvin's own words disprove this myth has not stopped it from being repeated as frequently as the bowling tale. See page 11 of this issue.

<sup>6</sup> J. N. Andrews, *History of the Sabbath and First Day of the Week* (Steam Press of The Seventh Day Adventist Publishing Association, 1873).

Sabbath in England created an environment that produced events and literature that have more than a tangential bearing on determining the verity of the tale. The Puritans made appeals to Calvin's position against recreation on Lord's days. Those accused of breaking the Sabbath by bowling, made counter-appeals to the permissive practice of Geneva. And there is an apparent reference at the time of the Westminster Assembly to Calvin bowling on the Lord's day. So there is plenty of material in the English literature to cover. Moving primarily backward in time, this will require reviewing:

1. 20th Century – Recent use of the bowling tale.
2. 19th Century – The anecdote appears in literature.
3. 17th Century – Searching for earlier references to this tale.
4. 16th Century – Aylmer bowls, and Knox Visits Geneva.

### Calvin's View of Sports and Pastimes on the Lord's Day

Calvin's view of the fourth commandment is well summarized by James T. Dennison:

On John Calvin's doctrine of the fourth commandment see especially *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II, viii. 28-34. The three points of his Sabbath doctrine are: (1) Sabbath is a figure of spiritual rest in Christ; (2) Sabbath serves as a day for public worship; (3) Sabbath serves as a day of rest for servants and beasts. Perhaps the best study of Calvin's view is Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.'s unpublished Th. M. thesis, *Calvin and the Sabbath* (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1962). Calvin's view may be called a 'practical Sabbatarianism' – an evaluation supported by the recent investigation of John H. Primus ... although Primus avoids the phrase.<sup>7</sup>

In his several writings on this topic, John Primus has probably done the most in recent times to set the record straight on Calvin and Lord's Day observance.<sup>8</sup> He demonstrates clearly from Calvin's 34th Sermon on Deuteronomy that while Calvin's doctrine of the fourth commandment differs from that of the Puritans, the ethic of how one is to observe the day is similar.<sup>9</sup> Primus

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<sup>7</sup> *The Market Day of the Soul*, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Tom Schwanda refers to Primus as "perhaps the most articulate and scholarly Reformed historian writing on the Sabbath today." "Unforced Rhythms of Grace," p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> John H. Primus, "Calvin and the Puritan Sabbath: A Comparative Study," in *Exploring The Heritage Of John Calvin: Essays In Honor Of John Bratt*, ed. David E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), pp. 40-75. *Holy Time. Moderate Puritanism and the Sabbath* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989). Also, "Sunday: The Lord's day as a Sabbath – Protestant Perspectives on the Sabbath," in *The Sabbath in Jewish and*



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writes, “Calvin calls for a literal, physical cessation of daily labor on the Lord’s Day, not as an end in itself, but to provide time for worship of God. Recreational activity should also be suspended, for such activity interferes with worship as certainly as daily labor does. ‘If we spend the Lord’s day in making good cheer, and in playing and gaming, is that a good honouring of God? Nay, is it not a mockery, yea and a very unhallowing of his name?’”<sup>10</sup> Calvin

argues that the Sabbath should be used not only for public worship and “hearing of sermons,” but also that “we should apply the rest of the time to the praising of God.” By “the rest of the time” he apparently means the rest of the day of worship, at least, the remainder of our waking hours. To use the Lord’s Day to full advantage will aid us in the continued reflection on God’s works, which is required throughout the week. It will “fashion and polish” us for the giving of thanks to God “upon the Monday and all the week after.” Conversely, if men desecrate the Lord’s Day they are likely to “play the beasts all the week after.” So we should not only publicly hear the sermon, but privately reflect on it. We must digest it and “bend all our wits to consider the gracious things that God hath done for us.” Calvin calls on God’s people to “dedicate that day wholly unto the him so as we may be utterly withdrawn from the world.” Even though we need not “keep the ceremony so straight as it was under the bondage of the law,” it is important for us to “consider how our Lord requireth to have this day bestowed in nothing else, but in hearing of his word, in making common prayer, in making confession of our faith, and in having the use of the Sacraments.”<sup>11</sup>

According to Calvin’s 34th sermon from Deuteronomy, recreations and games are to be put away for the entire Lord’s day. If the bowling anecdote is true, we must wonder if Calvin practiced what he preached? However, it is hoped the following survey will show that little credit should be placed in this story, at least until some firm evidence surfaces that indicates the story is more than hearsay. It would be idle speculation to use the tale to form some opinion of Calvin’s character. Certainly it should not be used to demonstrate his view of Lord’s day observance, when he clearly has preached contrary to the looser practice the tale has been used to support. We must rely on Calvin’s own words, not on what amounts to an urban legend, which may merely be a very old lie.

## 1. 20th Century – Recent use of the bowling tale

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*Christian Tradition*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenezi, Daniel J. Harrington, S. J., and William H. Sher (New York: Crossroads, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> *Exploring the Heritage*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* See *The sermons of M. John Calvin upon the fifth booke of Moses called Deuteronomie*, translated out of the French by Arthur Golding (London, 1583), pp. 204-205.

The “bowling story” has made its way into the Sabbath literature, often with the presumption that it is fact, and this not just in the less critical sort, but among the more scholarly as well. Some of the earlier writers at least give reference back to the 19th century authors who are the source for the use of the tale today. However, apparently a less careful approach is more common nowadays.

For instance, David Katz writes:<sup>12</sup> “Calvin made a point of playing at bowls on Sunday to demonstrate his own attitude to the question.” Katz’s support for this is Robert Cox’s *The Whole Doctrine of Calvin about the Sabbath* (Edinburgh, 1860), p. 91.<sup>13</sup> However, Cox does not mention the bowling tale. Nor does he there refer to the general practice of Geneva alleged by some to infer this claim. As this paper hopefully will demonstrate, there is no strong evidence to support the event even occurred, let alone that Calvin was *consciously* condemning stricter observance in doing such a thing. This kind of bold appeal to the tale is unfortunately more common than one would expect among scholars and those who unquestioningly rely upon them.

## Christopher Hill and Gary North

An instance of this is found in an appendix Gary North authored for R. J. Rushdoony’s *Institutes of Biblical Law*. He writes, Calvin “went lawn bowling after church on Sunday, a fact which later sabbatarians [sic] have chosen to ignore.”<sup>14</sup> For support North cites Christopher Hill’s *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*. Hill’s exact statement is:

So when Bownde published his notorious book in 1595, he was only extending a thesis on which there had previously been considerable agreement. His position, like that of Greenham, was substantially that of Calvin. The fact that Calvin had played bowls on Sunday worried some of the more zealous Sabbatarians, who did not

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<sup>12</sup> David S. Katz, *Sabbath and Sectarianism in Seventeenth Century England* (E. J. Brill, 1988), p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Cox, *The Whole Doctrine of Calvin about the Sabbath* (Edinburgh, 1860), p. 91. Cox’s three works on the Sabbath are discussed later in this article. See “Gilfillan and Cox” in part 2 of this article forthcoming (D.V.).

<sup>14</sup> Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law. A Chalcedon study, with three appendices by Gary North* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1973), p. 825. Sabbatarians are by no means justified in ignoring “facts.” But neither should anti-Sabbatarian authors rely on unsubstantiated rumor. It may be that there is ignorance on both sides of the Sabbath question regarding this tale. Or could it be that Sabbatarian scholars simply have not placed much weight in what amounts to hearsay? The very precise Scottish historian David Hay Fleming rejected it as fiction nearly 90 years ago (see “David Hay Fleming in part 2 of this article forthcoming (D.V.).

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approve of bishops who in this followed Calvin's example."<sup>15</sup>

North accepts as gospel the latter statement that Calvin bowled on the Lord's day, but objects to the close association of Calvin with the Puritan view. He writes: <sup>16</sup>

Hill erroneously attributes the later Puritan sabbatarian position to Calvin, although he is forced to admit that Calvin's willingness to bowl on Sunday worried more zealous sabbatarians. Unlike Knappen, Hill shows little sign of having read Calvin's own writings on the sabbath. He writes in a footnote on the same page that "[Richard] Baxter was also a little uneasy in his attempts to explain away Calvin's and Beza's laxness." Hill, *ibid.*, p. 170. It is perhaps understandable that Hill, as a Marxist scholar specializing in 17th-century English history, would not be familiar with the details of Calvin's writings. There is no excuse for the statement by Professor John Murray of Westminster Seminary, in a desperate attempt to avoid the thrust of Calvin's view of the sabbath, that Calvin's views have simply been misinterpreted. Murray's Scottish heritage just will not conform to Calvin's "lax" teachings, so he has chosen to rewrite Calvin. See Murray's letter to the editor, *The Presbyterian Guardian*, June, 1969.

North's anti-Sabbatarian bravado rings hollow, and demonstrates a shallow grasp of the relevant literature. This criticism of Murray is rather shameless.<sup>17</sup> Unlike North, the professor knew something about the literature on this subject.<sup>18</sup> Patrick Fairbairn and James Gilfillan were making the case that Calvin's view of the Sabbath had been misunderstood nearly 150 years ago. The position was long established when Murray made his comment, and has since received thorough attention by Calvin scholars such as John Primus.

North also places undo confidence in Knappen,<sup>19</sup> who himself places too much confidence in the anti-Sabbatarian, Episcopalian authors such as Pocklington and Cooper (see footnote 45 in part 2 of this article forthcoming (D.V.)). As they should not be relied upon

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<sup>15</sup> Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (New York: Schocken, 1967), p. 170.

<sup>16</sup> North, *ibid.* p. 827.

<sup>17</sup> Murray's letter itself was not an apologetic for the position, but merely a passing expression of it. He was writing on the topic of subscription to the Westminster Standards, and on the doctrine of the Sabbath as it related to that question. In closing he wrote, "One more word, Mr. Editor. I am convinced that Calvin's view of the Sabbath has been seriously misrepresented for lack of care in examining the totality of his teaching and proper analysis in this light of his statements in the Institutes. But, in any case, one wonders what Calvin's view has to do with the adoption of standards in terms of a formula which he did not frame?" *The Presbyterian Guardian*, June 1969, p. 85-86.

<sup>18</sup> *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 1. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976), p. 217-18. The reading list presented by Murray on these pages includes anti-Sabbatarian works, Sabbatarian works, and at least one book by a Seventh day Adventist.

<sup>19</sup> M. M. Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), pp. 442-450.

without great care, neither should Knappen, who blunders greatly in giving credit to Pocklington's easily refuted report, that Calvin once had a consultation about changing the Lord's day to Thursday. Hill makes this error as well (see below).<sup>20</sup>

As far as Hill's statement, North has it exactly backwards! Actually, Hill is wrong in giving credit to the idea that Calvin bowled on the Lord's day, and right in connecting the similarities between Calvin's view and that of the Puritans.

If Hill is taken to mean that the Puritan view and Calvin's are in all points "substantially" the same, then he is obviously wrong. However, it is clear Hill is dealing with the notion of the Sabbath as a day set aside for worship, not to idleness or a mere carnal rest. In that regard, the two views *are* essentially the same. One need only read the quotations made from Calvin and Bownd to see this is what Hill is comparing.<sup>21</sup>

True, Hill may not have been as familiar as necessary with Calvin's writings to avoid some mistakes. He was obviously not familiar enough with Calvin's Deuteronomy sermons to see the inconsistency in assuming Calvin bowled on the Lord's day. This is strange to say the least, as some of the authors Hill cites directly contradict the idea that Calvin allowed recreations on the Lord's day, citing these sermons as proof.<sup>22</sup>

It is unclear whether Hill is extrapolating Calvin's bowling practice from the alleged general practice of Geneva, or was led to make that deduction by knowledge of the bowling anecdote. He does not reference the tale at all, or any of the usual sources that cite it, nor does he provide any direct evidence for proving the "fact" that Calvin bowled on Sundays. His references are to works by Laud, Heylyn and Cooper, which, again, only allege a general practice in Geneva.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See below, page 11. Knappen also errs in accepting the anti-Sabbatarian spin put to the supper party Knox had with Randolph. *Ibid.* p. 447. See part two of this article forthcoming (D.V.).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* p. 170-171.

<sup>22</sup> In one instance, Hill cites within two pages of a very clear statement to this effect by George Hakewill, who is quoted in an installment of this article which will appear in a future issue of *The Blue Banner* (D.V.).

<sup>23</sup> Hill's footnote reads: "The practice of Geneva was quoted against excessive Sabbatarianism, e.g. by Laud (*Works*, II, pp. 252-5); by the translator of John Prideaux's *The Doctrine of the Sabbath* (1634), in his Preface (Sig. B3); and of course by Heylyn,\* *History of the Presbyterians*, p. 27. Cf. Marchant, *The Puritans and the Church Courts in the Diocese of York*, p. 37. Lady Brilliana Harley thought that it was because Calvin "was so earnest in opposing the popish holy days that he entrenched upon the holy Sabbath" (*Letters*, p. 63). Baxter was also a little uneasy in his attempts to explain away Calvin's and Beza's laxness (*Works*, XIII, p. 451). Aylmer played bowls on Sunday

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Baxter is also noted, but there is nothing in his work on the Sabbath directly accusing Calvin himself of loose practices, but rather the opposite.<sup>24</sup>

Hill refers to a quote in Marchant's, *The Puritans and the Church Courts in the Diocese of York*, which reads, "One interesting attestation was that he had said that 'it is not lawful to do anything on the Sabbath day whatsoever Mr. Calvin had said to the contrary.'" This obviously has reference to Calvin's writings and not to some rumor of what he may have done on the Lord's day. The *he* is one John Crosse, who Marchant believed reflected a "more popular and slightly less decorous Puritanism, which sometimes came under mild criticism." He calls Crosse "a complete nonconformist." It was alleged against him (1617-18) that:

John Crosse hath publicly and privately taught and defended or maintained all or most of the erroneous opinions following, viz. that all unpreaching ministers are dumb dogs, and damned persons and whosever goeth to hear them cannot be saved; Item that no preacher sanctifies the Sabbath unless he preach twice every Sabbath. Item, that it is not lawful to dress meat or do any such thing on the Sabbath day...<sup>25</sup>

The earlier Puritans had distanced themselves from the similar excesses of language in the Martin Marprelate tracts. Most if not all the Puritans writing about the Sabbath, would have disagreed with the extreme view expressed here, including Nicholas Bownd.<sup>26</sup>

The remaining reference Hill makes is to the *Letters* of Lady Brilliana Harley.<sup>27</sup> She writes to her son, "I am halfe of an opinion to put your brothers out to scoule. They continue still stife in theare opinions; and in my apprehension upon samale ground. My feare is least we

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afternoons. The practice was defended by Bishop Cooper in his *Admonition*, pp. 43-4." \*It is unclear why Hill phrased this as he did, as the translator of Prideaux and Heylyn are one and the same (Gilfillan, p. 120). The wording regarding the alleged Sabbath practices of Geneva are practically the same in the Prideaux preface and Heylyn's *History of the Sabbath*, his geographies, and his *History of the Presbyterians*.

<sup>24</sup> Hill is obviously referring to Baxter as one of those "worried" by the practice of Geneva. But whether "worry" is the proper term, the reader may judge from the quote provided in a forthcoming part of this article (D.V.). What the literature surveyed here actually demonstrates is that the Puritans were not worried about Calvin's practice, rather they used his teaching from Deuteronomy to refute the appeals made to the alleged looser practice of Geneva of the late 16th century.

<sup>25</sup> Ronald A. Marchant, *The Puritans and the Church Courts in the Diocese of York, 1560-1642* (London, 1960), pp. 35, 37.

<sup>26</sup> Nicholas Bownd, *Sabbatum Veteris et Novi Testamenti* (London, 1606), p. 202-204. Bownd allows for the appropriate dressing of meat, as does Twisse, *The Morality of the Fourth Commandment* (1641), p. 29.

<sup>27</sup> Letters of the Lady Brilliana Harley, Wife of Sir Robert Harley ... with introduction and notes by Thomas Taylor Lewis, A.M. (London: Printed for the Camden Society, 1854).

should falle into the same error as Calluin did, whoo was so earnest in oposeing the popisch hollydays that he intrenched upon the holy Saboth, so I feare we shall be so earnest in beateing downe theare to much villifyeing of the Common Prayer Booke, that we shall say more for it than euer we intended."<sup>28</sup>

This kind statement is not unique, that the Reformers overreacted against the Sabbath in their dislike for holy days.<sup>29</sup> However, even assuming that weight should be given the Lady's opinion, it is unclear what is in view in this "entrenching." There is really nothing in the statement that should lead one to conclude Calvin would have bowled on the Lord's day contrary to his preaching from Deuteronomy.

It matters little whether Hill is merely concluding Calvin bowled on Lord's days based upon the alleged general practice of Geneva, or whether he also was aware of the bowling anecdote. A knowledge of Calvin's statements in the Deuteronomy sermons should have given as much pause to draw the inference from the alleged practice in general, as it should in attributing any truth to the myth itself.

### Did Calvin Want to Change the Lord's Day to Thursday or Friday?

As indicated earlier, Hill takes Pocklington's charge much too seriously that Calvin wanted to move the Lord's day to Thursday.<sup>30</sup> This is another tale often repeated that needs to be laid aside. In this case, Calvin actually has responded to a similar charge that he wanted to move the Lord's day to Friday. He writes, "But a more serious charge is involved in the rumor that they have diligently spread about, of my intentions to transfer the Lord's day to the Friday. The truth is, that, for my part, I have never shown the least sign of lusting after such innovations, but very much the contrary."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Baxter is one instance of this. See footnote 84 in a forthcoming part of this article (D.V).

<sup>30</sup> Hill, p. 210. Gilfillan wrote regarding this accusation: "A charge, which was not even attempted to be sustained by a particle of evidence, and yet still figures in anti-Sabbatic works..." Gilfillan, p. 415.

<sup>31</sup> "To the Segneurs of Berne, Lausanne, March 1555." *Letters of John Calvin*, edited by Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet (Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1858), volume 3, p. 165. This was one of the lies spread by Jerome Bolsec in his "violently abusive" life of Calvin, *Histoire de la Vie, Moeurs, etc., de Jean Calvin* (Lyons, 1577). It is doubtful that Calvin had a desire to change the Lord's day to Thursday (rather than Friday) in light of this statement. See criticism of Pocklington's worth as an author below under 17th century. Heylyn also repeated this Sunday to Thursday accusation, spread by one John Barclay. Twisse seriously questioned the veracity of this man. *Morality of the Fourth Commandment* (1641), p. 35. Cox, perhaps disappointed that it

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## John T. McNeill

It is truly disappointing to find a Calvinist scholar such as John T. McNeill, also making uncritical use of the bowling incident and drawing conclusions regarding Calvin's character from it. McNeill writes, "He not infrequently joined in a game of quoits; a chance visitor reported that John Knox, calling at his house once on a Sunday, found him playing bowls."<sup>32</sup>

McNeill provides no clear reference for the tale in *The History and Character of Calvinism*. The manner of the book is to have little if any footnoting, referring the reader to a long list of sources in the back. A partial check of most all the works in English, and a few of the many French works (such as Doumerguer), did not turn up a reference to the bowling anecdote. Apparently, either Doumerguer<sup>33</sup> or Williston Walker<sup>34</sup> is McNeill's source for Calvin's playing quoits. Walker writes:

Sometimes, chiefly when urged by his friends, he would play a simple game, quoits, in his garden, or "clef" on the table in his living room. ... But his few recreations were briefly enjoyed.

For these facts Walker references the life of Calvin by Nicholas Colladon.<sup>35</sup> He then cites Emile Doumerguer, who references the same. "Doumerque, iii, 527-563, has made the utmost possible of this side of Calvin's character. In the game of *clef* the keys were pushed on a table, the aim being to bring each contestant's nearest to the further edge without falling off." Doumerguer, who "has made the utmost possible of this side of Calvin's character," does not mention the bowling incident in the section referenced by Walker, dealing with "Calvin at Home." Nor does he mention it under his comments on the fourth commandment in volume four of his monumental work. In the places cited

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had no firmer verification, and apparently ignorant of Calvin's letters, wrote: "A story has long been current that Calvin once had consultation about transferring the dominical solemnity to the Thursday. Quite consistently with his doctrine in the Institutes, this might well have happened under some provocation from the "false prophets" whom he there stigmatizes; but I find no earlier or weightier authority for the statement than that of John Barclay, a Roman Catholic writer in the reign of James I." *Whole Doctrine*, p. iv

<sup>32</sup> John T. McNeill, *The History And Character Of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 233. Quoits is sort of like horseshoes.

<sup>33</sup> Emile Doumerguer, *Jean Calvin, les hommes et les choses de son temps*, 7 vols (Lausanne, 1899-1927). It is a significant mark against this tale that Doumerguer does not mention it.

<sup>34</sup> Williston Walker, *John Calvin, the Organizer of Reformed Protestantism*, 1509-64 (New York, 1906), pp. 433, 434.

<sup>35</sup> *Joannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia*, eds. G. Baum, E. Cunitz, E. Reuss, volume 23 (Brunsvigae: C. A. Schwetschke, 1879). *Vie de Calvin par Théodore de Bèze et Nicolas Colladon*, pp. 109, 113.

in *Vie de Calvin par Nicolas Colladon*, there is no mention of bowls on the Lord's day. Regarding Calvin playing games, Doumerguer writes:

And Beza adds a last trait, which completes the others: Calvin did not retreat before the familiarity of games. Without doubt, after his meals, most often he walked a quarter hour, a half-hour at most, in the room, chatting with whomever kept him company, then he retreated to his closet to study. But when his "familiar friends" incited him, when "it came to pass and in familiar company," he recreated in playing "pallet, keys, or other sorts of lawful game by our laws and not proscribed in this republic."<sup>36</sup>

Unfortunately, McNeill has proved to be a perpetuator of this Calvin myth. His stature as a Calvin scholar evidently lends to an uncritical acceptance of the bowling anecdote as fact. Raymond Blacketer writes regarding Calvin's view of recreation and the Sabbath:

John T. McNeill reports that Calvin was known to occasionally take some brief time for himself in order to engage in various forms of amusement, even on the Lord's day! ... Given the strict and too often legalistic Sabbatarian tendencies of Calvinism, John Calvin's actual view of the Lord's day stands in striking contrast. Later Calvinistic tradition and teaching with regard to the "Christian Sabbath" does not at all reflect what the Reformer actually taught regarding the Lord's Day. John Calvin was no Sabbatarian.<sup>37</sup>

Blacketer cites John Primus for his contention that Calvin was no Sabbatarian. But in making the above statement, he clearly ignored the demonstration by Primus that Calvin's ethic of Lord's day observance amounted to a "practical" Sabbatarianism, to use Dennison's phrase.

Clearly scholars such as McNeill and Hill have directly or indirectly given credibility to this anecdote, which has led lesser men to simply repeat it, who in turn are uncritically relied upon by others. In this way the tale lives from one generation to the next. This uncritical acceptance and reliance on the bowling story is what makes tracing its history so necessary.

## To Be Continued

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 547. Doumerguer is referencing *Opera*, v. 21, p. 113. The author thanks Michael Dolberry for providing French translation for this article.

<sup>37</sup> Raymond Andrew Blacketer, *John Calvin's Doctrine of Christian Liberty and Some Implications for Pastoral Care: A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary for the Degree of Master of Theology*, May, 1992, pp. 135-137.

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## From our Readers

We appreciate the many letters of thanks we receive for the work of the various FPCR ministries. As they are an encouragement to us, we wish to share the following extracts with readers of *The Blue Banner*.

From Southaven MS. "What a blessing and joy it is to receive and to listen to Pastor Bacon's messages on tape. I thank you very much, and pray our heavenly Father to continue to bless you all. It is an encouragement to know God's truth is being preached so faithfully."

From Salem, OH. "Thank you for placing me on *The Blue Banner* mailing list. ... The tape "The Substitute" (Isaiah 53:4-6) has been a tremendous help to me and my fifteen year old daughter.... The salvation gospel of the Holy Scripture you so patiently teach on this tape, presents a rightly divided message that the Holy Spirit works through His Word alone; to draw His elect to faith and understanding by the sovereign gift of God's grace alone; through the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ alone....I shared your tapes about dating and courtship with a teacher at school who was very impressed with the teaching from Scripture that you presented to your congregation. He can't understand why more clergy, professing submission to Scripture, don't teach likewise to this generation of adults, parents, and young people under their shepherding. The ways of the world have taken over the direction and teaching of the church. The secular world has done an excellent job of evangelizing the church.... You have a great Web site ... Your in-depth teaching is a great help to me in understanding what God has given us in the Holy Scriptures."

From a Chatsworth, GA teen. "Thanks again for your books! I'm glad I know you and people like you that are willing to help someone of my age.... I'm reading Evans' doctrine book and a shorter book about Hermeneutics. I think those items are 2 of the main things any Christian should know first — The overall main topics of the Bible and how to correctly interpret Scripture....I just mainly wanted to send you a letter personally to thank you. I do appreciate your help."

From Santa Ana, CA. "Thank you for all your prayers, and the tapes of your sermons and editions of the Blue Banner have always been happily received and well used. God has truly blessed me through this time and finding your gifts in my mailbox was often just the boost need to 'get me through' so to speak. Besides, I have also learned much from listening to your sermons!"

Email from Oklahoma City, OK. "Thank you so much for sending me your series on Hebrews. God has truly gifted you with the ability to preach, teach, and exhort....Thanks again for you ministry. You have helped to encourage me in this desert here in OKC."

From Southaven, MS. "I thank God that He led me to FPCR's web site. Aren't computers wonderful when they are used to glorify Jesus? Just keep up the good work Richard, and if I never make it to Rowlett, I feel sure we'll meet in paradise. Looking forward to hearing your next message."

From New Wilmington, PA. "I wish to thank you for the cassette tape with the message from Isaiah 53, entitled, *The Substitute*. This too, is one of my favorite books of the Old Testament."

Email From Anaheim, CA. "I want to thank you so very much for your letters and the articles on your web site. The LORD has surely challenged me through the vehicle of the ministry He has given to you. I believe that now I have a better grasp of the Regulative Principle and its consequences."

Email From San Juan, Puerto Rico. "I am very much interested in learning more about the Grand Debate. I'm an avid student of Reformed theology and John Calvin....Please put me on your mailing list."

Email from Charlotte, NC. "As a seminary student and as a student pastor, I greatly appreciate your kindness expressed in ministry. The newsletter and email are a great benefit to me and my family."

Email from Kansas. "I have found your website most edifying. Thank You. Keep up the good job of spreading abroad the doctrines of Grace and Reformation."

Email. "I...wanted you to know how much I appreciate your clarity on the issues presented on the 'Calvin Board' — you seem to know just how to dissect the issues with acuteness and precision without being aggressive — the Lord has blessed you with unique skills! Your love for the Lord and fairness show forth in your writings!"

Email from Jackson, TN. "I found your information on the web in the article *The NIV: Simply a Bad Translation*. Thank you for your time and your determination for God's glory."

From Penbroke Pine, FL. "I enjoy your web site...I have enjoyed Gillespie and all the books you have published...and the Blue Banner.... Thanks."Ω

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**Blue Banner Special.** *The Blue Banner* subscription is half price. Through September 30, 1998, pay only \$7.50 for a year subscription and receive a free Westminster Shorter Catechism Memory Card set as well. A great deal! See order form on the back page of this issue.

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## Justification by Faith

Tape Series and Tract Available

This tract (part of which is reproduced in the current Blue Banner) was excerpted from Pastor Bacon's series on the subject of justification. The entire sermon series expounds the doctrine of justification, the doctrine of justification by faith (the original Protestant version and not the insipid "evangelical" version) and various objections to the biblical view. The tapes are available from Blue Banner Ministries, PO Box 141084, Dallas TX 75214 for \$2.50 each or the entire set of seven tapes may be ordered for \$15.95 plus postage.

- 971207X Justifying Many
- 971214X Justification By God
- 971221X Justification By Faith Part 1
- 971228X Justification By Faith Part 2
- 980111X Objections Considered Part 1
- 980118X Objections Considered Part 2
- 980201X Objections Considered Part 3

Full copies of *Justification by Faith: What is Faith* is also available in booklet form at \$2.50 each or \$1.50 each for 10-24, \$1.00 each for 25 or more.

## Sermons of Richard Bacon

12/21/97 through 6/28/98. CD Rom. See list of sermons on page 15.

This is a collection of Sermons and Scripture expositions, and other items from FPCR's preaching ministry in real audio format. Requires a multimedia PC with a web browser and the Real Audio Player software installed. Real Audio software is available free over the Internet, Internet access required. \$19.95. This collection contains the following:

- Over 50 Sermons and Lectures
- Pastoral Prayers and Communion addresses
- Nearly 100 Scripture Readings and Explanations of: Mark 9-16, 1 Corinthians 1-14, Luke 1-24 (d.v.), Ezekiel 1-40 (d.v.), Jeremiah 42-51, Lamentations.

## Blue Banner Ministries

*The Blue Banner* is one of the ministries of First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett. Other

ministries include the books and tracts published through *Blue Banner Books* and

FPCR's Web site on the Internet.

<http://www.fpcr.org>. None of these ministries is self-supporting. If we have ministered to you through any of these, consider sending a donation to help us

defray our operating costs.

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# Sermons by Richard Bacon

The following sermons are on *The Blue Banner* CD Rom (see page 14)

1998	MORNING SERMON	AFTERNOON SERMON
Dec 21, 97	Bringing Sons to Glory Part 3 (Heb. 2:10)	Justification by Faith #1 (Isa. 53:11)
Dec 28, 97	Our Faithful Captain (Heb. 2:10)	Justification by Faith #2 (Isa. 53:11)
Jan. 4	Ye Were Sometimes Darkness (Eph. 5:8)	Now Are Ye Light (Eph. 5:8)
Jan. 11	The Necessity of Christ's Suffering, Hebrews 2:10	Justification by Faith Part 3 (Isa. 53:11)
Jan. 18	He that Sanctifieth (Heb. 2:11)	Justification by Faith Part 4 (Isa. 53:11)
Jan. 25	Does Baptism Mean Immersion? (Acts 22:16)	Does Baptism Mean Immersion Part 2 (Acts 22:16)
Feb. 1	They Are All One, Heb. 2:11	Justification Part 5, Isa. 53:11
Feb. 8	A Triple Testimony Part 1 (Heb. 2:12)	Calling Officers Part 1
Feb. 15	A Triple Testimony Part 2 (Heb. 2:13)	Calling Officers Part 2
Feb. 22	A Triple Testimony Part 3 (Heb. 2:13)	Calling Officers Part 3
March 1	The Evil and Dangers of Congregationalism (Ps. 106:17)	I Have Set Watchmen (Isa. 62:6)
March 22	Destroying the Destroyer (Heb. 2:14-15)	Christ's Conflict & Conquest (Isa. 53:12)
March 29	Taking on the Seed of Abraham (Heb. 2:15, 16)	The Memorable Means of Victory (Isa. 53:12)
April 5	A Merciful and Faithful High Priest (Heb. 2:16-18)	The Nature and Fruit of Christ's Victory (Isa. 53:12)
April 12	Consider Christ (Heb. 3:1)	The Nature of Christ's Victory (Isa. 53:12)
April 19	The Apostle and High Priest of our Profession (Heb. 3:1)	"The Fruits of Christ's Victory" (Isa. 53:12)
April 26	The Embassy of Christ (Heb. 3:1)	Pouring, Numbered, Bearing, Interceding (Isa. 53:12)
May 3	Who Was Faithful (Heb. 3:2)	Bearing and Interceding #1 (Isa. 53:12)
May 10	More Glory Than Moses (Heb. 3:3)	Bearing and Interceding #2 (Isa. 53:12)
May 17	Christ's Greater Glory (Heb. 3:3-6)	Christ's Unique Intercession (Isa. 53:12)
May 24	Hold Fast (Heb. 3:6)	Gathered with Great Mercies (Isa. 54:1-10)
May 31	If You Will Hear His Voice (Heb. 3:7)	No Weapon Shall Prosper (Isa. 54:17)
June 7	More Lessons From the Wilderness (Heb. 3:7-11)	The Sure Mercies of David (Isa. 55:1-5)
June 14	The Church in the Wilderness (Heb. 3:7-11)	Guarding Our Tongues (Eph. 5:4)
June 21	Abraham's Seed (Baptism Sermon, Gal. 3:27-29)	Challenges of Discipleship (Luke 9:62)
June 28	Trying Our Trust (Heb. 3:7-11)	God's Sure Word of Grace (Isa. 55:6-11)