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GOD'S IMPOSITION: THE CENTRALITY OF VOCATION IN
THE SPIRITUALITY OF WILLIAM PERKINS

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APPROVAL SHEET

**GOD'S IMPOSITION: THE CENTRALITY OF VOCATION IN
THE SPIRITUALITY OF WILLIAM PERKINS**

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All I have needed, Thy hand has provided. Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.

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PREFACE

It is my privilege to write on vocation, which is a topic that was of particular interest to William Perkins. In the course of my writing this dissertation, he has become my mentor and friend. His love for God and the church is inspiring. He writes in an incredibly detailed “plain style,” which prompts a range of responses in me. At times, I jump to my feet with hands held high in praise to God. At other times, I bow in prayers of repentance and intercession. He makes me laugh and cry. I find his works to be a treasure trove of theological insight communicated in practical terms. This supports his belief that “theology is the science of living blessedly forever.” Fortified by God’s grace, this “living” is a process that involves humility, diligence, trial, error, and an openness to experience all the joys of Christ Jesus. Through Perkins’s writings, I have a richer knowledge of God, I have a deeper appreciation of what it means to apprehend and apply the promises and benefits of Christ, and I have a greater delight in my vocation.

As a missionary, I thank my supporters who were faithful partners in praying and giving during the writing of this dissertation, especially, Ann-Britt, Janet, Zoe, Julie, Angel, and Bob. Steven, Kari, and Princeton hosted my visits to Louisville. I also thank my field office, SIM Nigeria, for its support as I persisted in this program.

For my advisory committee, I thank Dr. Donald Whitney for his passion for biblical spirituality, and I am grateful to Dr. Robert Plummer for his passion for a biblical understanding of vocation. Their insights contributed greatly to this project. My advisor, Dr. J. Stephen Yuille, provided indispensable input and guidance in the writing process and I also profited greatly from his biblical spirituality seminars. Having served on the foreign mission field himself, he was a beacon of grace and understanding as I completed this degree from Nigeria, England, Kentucky, Texas, and amid the Covid-19 pandemic. I

also appreciate Dr. Yuille and the team of editors from Reformation Heritage Books who completed a contemporary version of *The Works of William Perkins*. Most importantly, I thank God for this project, and I pray it will bring Him glory and encourage His church.

Dee Grimes

Katy, Texas

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

William Perkins (1558–1602) was committed to the Church of England.¹ He had no desire to “alter” the established church but sought to defend its theological standards while seeking to ensure that his fellow churchman pursued a lively devotion to Christ.² For this reason, Perkins identified himself as a theologian and apologist of the English church.³ Despite his commitment to the Church of England, he was labeled a “Puritan.” He was not a Puritan in an ecclesiastical sense,⁴ but he was in terms of his

¹ For this study I use William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014–2020).

² W. B. Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 63. For an introduction to the Elizabethan Church, see Patterson, chaps. 1–3; Paul Marshall, *A Kind of Life Imposed on Man: Vocation and Social Order from Tyndale to Locke* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), chap. 4.

³ Richard A. Muller, *Grace and Freedom: William Perkins and the Early Modern Reformed Understanding of Free Choice and Divine Grace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 9.

⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 1:xxxii. There is a great deal of confusion surrounding the meaning of the term “Puritan.” Perkins himself explains its misuse: “For the pure heart is so little regarded, that seeking after it, is turned to a byword, and a matter of reproach. Who are so much branded with the vile terms of Puritans and Precisions, as those that most endeavor to get and keep the purity of heart in a good conscience?” Perkins, *Works*, 1:205. See also *Works*, 5:456. Ian Breward explains that “Perkins applied the term to those who taught that it was possible to live without sin in this life.” Ian Breward, “The Significance of William Perkins,” *The Journal of Religious History* 4, no. 2 (December 1966): 117. Randall Pederson writes, “The word ‘precisionism’ to denote Puritanism dates the mid-sixteenth century as a term of derision. Soon after its introduction, however, it was often employed by Puritans to describe their way of life. One person was said to have commented to Richard Rogers (1550–1618), ‘I like you and your company very well, but you are so precise.’ Rogers replied, ‘O Sir, I serve a precise God.’” Randall J. Pederson, *Unity in Diversity: English Puritans and the Puritan Reformation, 1603–1689* (Boston: Brill, 2014), 68–69n123. Richard Greaves attributes the confusion to the term’s “multiplicity of meanings” in the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. Richard L. Greaves, “The Puritan-Nonconformist Tradition in England, 1560–1700: Historiographical Reflections,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 17, no. 4 (1985): 449. For the purpose of this thesis, the term *Puritan* is used in reference to those who desired to promote a life of godliness consistent with the Reformed theology of grace. For more on the term “Puritan,” see Ian Breward, “Abolition of Puritanism,” *The Journal of Religious History* 7, no. 1 (June 1972): 20–34; Patrick Collinson, “A Comment: Concerning the Name Puritan,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 31, no. 4 (October 1980): 483–88; Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999); Joel R. Beeke and Randall Pederson, *Meet the Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006); Pederson, *Unity in Diversity*, 25–26; Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1964), 15–30; Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge:

piety. As J. I. Packer states,

It was Perkins, quite specifically, who established Puritanism in this mold of an evangelical holiness movement seeking to implement its vision of spiritual renewal, national and personal, in the church, the state, and the home; in education, evangelism, and economics; in individual discipleship and devotion, and in pastoral care and competence.⁵

Perkins has been described as the “father of Puritanism,” “the prince of Puritan theologians,” and “the principal architect of Elizabethan Puritanism.”⁶ These descriptions are derived from various aspects of his life and ministry.⁷

The title “father of Puritanism” stems from his pastoral care as exhibited in his preaching and teaching. He labored to address what he viewed as deficiencies in the

Cambridge University Press, 1982); Dewey D. Wallace, Jr. ed., *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525–1695* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Margo Todd, *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010); J. Stephen Yuille, *Living Blessedly Forever: The Sermon on the Mount and the Puritan Piety of William Perkins*, (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), chap. 1, Kindle; J. Stephen Yuille, *Puritan Spirituality: The Fear of God in the Affective Theology of George Swinnock* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007); John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning and Education, 1560–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Paul R. Schaefer, *The Spiritual Brotherhood: Cambridge Puritans and the Nature of Christian Piety* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011); Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were*, EPub ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors: Addresses Delivered at the Puritan and Westminster Conferences 1959–1978* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987); Leif Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians in England, c. 1590–1640* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2014); Muller, *Grace and Freedom*, 13–14.

⁵ J. I. Packer, *An Anglican to Remember - William Perkins: Puritan Popularizer* (London: St. Antholin’s Lectureship Charity, 1996), 1–2.

⁶ See Joel R. Beeke, “William Perkins on Predestination, Preaching, and Conversion,” in *The Practical Calvinist: An Introduction to the Presbyterian and Reformed Heritage*, ed. Peter A. Lillback (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 206; Beeke, “William Perkins and His Greatest Case of Conscience: ‘How a Man May Know Whether He Be the Child of God, or No,’” *Calvin Theological Journal* 41, no. 2 (2006): 255; Beeke and Jan Van Vliet, “The Marrow of Theology By William Ames (1576–1633),” in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 54; Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisionist Strain: Disciplinary Religion & Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 68; Muller, *Grace and Freedom*, 9.

⁷ For biographical details, see Yuille, *Living Blessedly*, chap. 1; Joel R. Beeke and J. Stephen Yuille, *William Perkins*, Bitesize Biographies (Grand Rapids: EP Books, 2015); Michael Jenkins, “William Perkins,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, vol. 43 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 781–84; Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 469–80; Ian Breward, ed., introduction to *The Works of William Perkins*, Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics 3 (Appelford, UK: Sutton Courtenay, 1970), 3:3–131; Benjamin Brooks, *The Lives of the Puritans*, Rev. ed., (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1996), 2:129–36; Thomas Fuller, *Abel Redevivus: Or, The Dead Yet Speaking. The Lives and Deaths of the Modern Divines* (London: by Tho. Brudenell for John Stafford, 1651), 431–40; Thomas Fuller, *The Holy State* (Cambridge: Roger Daniel for John Williams, 1642), 88–93.

popular form of preaching in his day. Intent on providing efficient training, he produced *The Art of Prophesying* to instruct pastors in the right handling of Scripture.⁸ This work provided systematic instruction on how to exegete a passage and deliver a sermon in a simple and clear manner with the aim of producing Christ-like character in the listeners.

The title “prince of Puritan theologians” attests to Perkins’s foundational influence as pastor, mentor, and author. His pastoral career began in 1584 at Great St. Andrew’s Church in Cambridge, following his completion of the M.A. at Christ’s College. He served at Great St. Andrew’s as a lecturer and preacher for eighteen years, until his death at age forty-four.⁹ Through his role as a fellow at his alma mater from 1584 to 1595, Perkins influenced many students who became leaders in England and abroad.¹⁰ According to Joel Beeke, “Fellows were required to preach, lecture, and tutor students, acting as guides to learning as well as guardians of finances, morals, and manners.”¹¹ These responsibilities suited Perkins, for he believed that theology ought to

⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:281–356. For more on this work see Sinclair B. Ferguson, “Life and Ministry,” in *William Perkins: Architect of Puritanism*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Greg Salazar (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 12–37; Stephen Yuille, “The Wholesome Doctrine of Faith and Love,” in *William Perkins: Architect of Puritanism*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Greg Salazar (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 133–36; Joseph A. Pipa Jr., “William Perkins and the Development of Puritan Preaching” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1985); Andrew Scott Ballitch, “‘Scripture Is Both the Glosse and the Text’: Biblical Interpretation and Its Implementation in the Works of William Perkins” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017).

⁹ The Puritan “lectureship” was an institutional arrangement that expanded the ministry of the Word, which, to the Puritans, was the means for salvation and reform. According to Paul Seaver, the lectureship evaded traditional ecclesiastical hierarchy and restrictions because it was initiated and paid by the laity. Lecturers were invited to preach at times that did not conflict with normally scheduled sermons. Paul S. Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: The Politics of Religious Dissent, 1560–1662* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1970).

¹⁰ Some of his students included William Ames, William Brewster of Plymouth, Thomas Hooker of Connecticut, John Winthrop of Massachusetts Bay, and Roger Williams of Rhode Island. “More than a century later—Jonathan Edwards was gleaning insights from Perkins’s writings.” Perkins, *Works*, 1:xvii. Beeke comments that “nearly one hundred Cambridge men who grew up in Perkins’s shadow led early migrations to New England.” *Meet the Puritans*, 475.

¹¹ Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 471. Mark Shaw describes the significance of this role: “Christ’s College played a crucial part in the reforming of Cambridge and Church of England. What needs to be re-emphasized is the role of the fellows in the spiritual revolution at Cambridge. The influence of a John Bradford of Pembroke or a Thomas Cartwright are not to be minimized, but few roles were more strategic in the lives of students than that of the don [fellow]. It is not an exaggeration to state that, Puritanism at Christ’s owed its rise not to the Masters but to the fellows. And for the eleven years from 1584 to 1595 the chief attraction of Christ’s was Master Perkins.” Mark R. Shaw, “William Perkins and the New Pelagians: Another Look at the Cambridge Predestination Controversy of the 1590s,” *Westminster*

be applied to all of life and that it was indeed the “science of living blessedly forever.”¹² As a prolific author, Perkins demonstrated his theological acumen in twenty-four treatises published while living and thirteen treatises published posthumously.¹³ He produced commentaries on Scripture as well as significant works on doctrines such as predestination and assurance. He also wrote numerous practical works on matters such as the conscience, the family, the practice of witchcraft, and the use of prognostications.¹⁴

The title “principal architect of Elizabethan Puritanism” points to Perkins’s pursuit of both personal and ecclesiastical reform. As a pastor, he sought to strengthen the church through preaching God’s plan of salvation. He affirmed that sound doctrine ought to lead to godly practice. For Perkins, this should be most evident in one’s vocation. He maintains,

Man should use the place and office assigned unto him in a holy manner, performing the duties annexed unto it in faith and obedience, and eschewing those vices that usually attend upon it, with all care and circumspection. In this manner, God has disposed the whole estate of mankind for the accomplishment of the aforesaid end, the honor and glory of his name.¹⁵

Perkins believed that one’s vocation and one’s fulfillment of God’s purpose are inextricably intertwined. He rejected the false dichotomy between sacred and secular and affirmed that our vocation was spiritual—the unique life we are called to live as an

Theological Journal 58 (1996): 283–84.

¹² Perkins, *Works*, 6:11.

¹³ The exact number of Perkins’s total publications varies according to scholars. Based on the 1609 edition of Perkins’s *Works*, there are thirty-seven treatises. See William Perkins, *The Workes of That Famous and VVorthie Minister of Christ, in the Vniversitie of Cambridge, M. William Perkins*, 3 vols. (London: John Legatt, 1609). Thirteen of these works were published posthumously, according to Donald K. McKim, *Ramism in William Perkins’s Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 149–50.

¹⁴ Perkins’s works were published frequently and widely until 1635, and his influence continued unabated well into the next century. Samuel Morison notes that a “typical Plymouth Colony Library comprised a large and small Bible, Ainsworth’s translation of the Psalms, and the works of William Perkins, a favorite theologian.” Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Intellectual Life of Colonial New England*, 2nd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1965), 134.

¹⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:34.

expression of love for God and neighbor.¹⁶ This conviction informed Perkins's understanding of "good works," which are not to be restricted to serving the poor, helping the sick, preaching the gospel, etc.; rather, the chief way in which we perform good works is in the faithful execution of our particular calling.¹⁷ This concept of vocation is at the heart of Perkins's spirituality.

The Spirituality of William Perkins

In simple terms, "spirituality" refers to how we respond to God's work of grace in our lives or what we do with what we believe. Robert Michaelson asserts that the Puritans believed that "the calling was an area of response and obedience to God's grace and love in Jesus Christ."¹⁸ Indeed, informed by Scripture,¹⁹ Perkins affirms that

¹⁶ Peter Adam explains the Reformed spirituality of Perkins's day: "It was a spirituality firmly based on the Bible. It was a spirituality for ordinary people, and not for a spiritual elite. It was open to the world and to what we call secular work and duties. Peter Adam, *Hearing God's Words: Exploring Biblical Spirituality* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 28.

¹⁷ This is an important observation, for one's interpretation of good works impacts one's understanding of vocation. Roman Catholics argued that works must be done for salvation. The Reformed view affirmed that works were done as a result of salvation. For an example of misunderstanding "good works" in our vocations, see Elizabeth Mehlman, "The Work and Faith of Theological Scholars: Converging Lessons from James 2 and Luther's Doctrine of Vocation," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 22, no. 1 (2018): 97–109; R. Paul Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity: Vocation, Work and Ministry in a Biblical Perspective* (Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 1999), 82.

¹⁸ Robert S. Michaelsen, "Changes in the Puritan Concept of Calling or Vocation," *The New England Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (September 1953): 325.

¹⁹ Contemporary scholars call this approach "biblical spirituality" or "a spirituality of the Word." Biblical spirituality acknowledges God's Word as the authority and means of spirituality. Peter Adam concludes that spirituality is the way in which believers in the entirety of their lives respond to God as He has revealed Himself through His incarnate Word Jesus Christ. A true spirituality is a spirituality of the Word. *Biblical Spirituality*. This closely approximates Reformed spirituality, which Michael Haykin defines as "the outworking of the conviction that 'all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness' (2 Tim 3:16)." Michael A. G. Haykin, *The God Who Draws Near: An Introduction to Biblical Spirituality* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press USA, 2007), xii. Donald Bloesch adds, "Spirituality is inseparable from theology. Indeed, it could be defined as the living out of theology." Donald Bloesch, *Spirituality Old and New: Recovering Authentic Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 13. According to Alistair McGrath, "Spirituality is the outworking in real life of a person's religious faith." Alistair McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 2. See also Glen G. Scorgie, *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 27–33, 40–51, 146–52; Philip Sheldrake, ed., *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 289–91; Evan B. Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008); Christopher W. Morgan, ed., *Biblical Spirituality* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019); Donald A. Carson, "When Is Spirituality Spiritual? Reflections on Some Problems of Definition," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 3 (September 1994): 381–94. Evangelical spirituality takes different forms, such as "Biblicism—corporate and private devotion, Bible study, preaching

spirituality is primarily expressed in one's particular calling. He gives this subject his full attention in *A Treatise of the Vocations, or Callings of Men, with the Sorts and Kinds of Them, and the Right Use Thereof*.²⁰

Perkins begins by explaining that God issues two calls in the life of every believer. The first is a general call to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Flowing from the first, the second is a particular call (or vocation) in the home, church, and commonwealth. This particular call is “a certain kind of life, imposed and ordained on man by God for the common good.”²¹ Perkins's definition contains three important components: the nature of vocation, the author of vocation, and the purpose of vocation.

First, Perkins describes the nature of vocation as “a certain kind of life” which is unique and personal to each individual. He explains that we should “consider what our callings are and that we are placed in them by God, and therefore should practice the duties therein.”²² The act of “considering” involves searching out our God-given affections (what we enjoy doing) and our God-given gifts (what we do well). These reflect God's design and good purpose for us. Therefore, we cannot say that the type of work we choose to do is inconsequential as long as we do it for God's glory. To disregard our gifts and affections, or to choose a calling for another reason, is to disregard its personal nature.

Second, Perkins affirms that the author of vocation is God. Here, his commitment to God's authority comes into view. It has been noted that he “believed that

the Word; Prayer; Corporate worship; Holiness – Keswick movement ‘The Higher Life,’ often understood as elitism, with the spiritual life's importance surpassing that of physical and mental faculties; Cross of Christ – enabling disciples to pick up their cross and follow Jesus; Abstinence; Evangelism; Sabbath; Fellowship; Trinity; Faith; Repentance; Communion; Service; and Spirit renewal.” Sheldrake, *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 289–91. For a comparative analysis of Orthodox, Catholic, Progressive Protestant, and Evangelical views of spirituality, see Stanley N. Gundry and Bruce Demarest, eds., *Four Views on Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

²⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:31–107.

²¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:43.

²² Perkins, *Works*, 10:57, 59.

accenting the sovereignty of God and His decree gave God the most glory and the Christian the most comfort.”²³ Therefore, he insists that each Christian and his vocation are perceived in the mind of God in eternity.²⁴ It is by God’s design, then, that believers are able to do their part for maximum efficiency and effectiveness. He says, “Behold here a notable resemblance of God’s special providence over mankind, allotting to every man his motion and calling, and in that calling his particular office and function.”²⁵

Third, Perkins believes the purpose of vocation is “the common good,” which is expressed in three main areas of life: family, church, and commonwealth. Simply put, devotion to one’s vocation, while benefitting the individual, contributes to the well-being of society as a whole.²⁶ In Perkins’s estimation, it is the sphere in which the greatest commandment is put into action (Mark 12:28–31). Through the God-honoring fulfillment of our vocation, we demonstrate our love for God and neighbor.

Not only is our particular calling the chief means by which we love God and neighbor, it is the principal arena for our sanctification.²⁷ We honor God as we seek to obey Him amid temptations associated with our particular callings, such as the desire for wealth, power, and prestige, which incites envy, greed, and injustice. Learning to be faithful in the duties of our particular calling, Perkins writes, teaches “us much more to be constant in the general duties of Christianity.”²⁸ He was convinced that sanctification

²³ Perkins, *Works*, 6:xxix.

²⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 2:52–53.

²⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:44.

²⁶ Conversely, Perkins argues, it is an abuse of a person’s calling when he employs it merely for himself. Perkins, *Works*, 10:45.

²⁷ Beeke observes, “He [Perkins] wanted to explain how the elect responded to God’s overtures and acts, and how the second side of the covenant of grace—the will of man—developed experimentally from early faith to full assurance.” *Quest for Full Assurance*, 86–87. In other words, Perkins was interested in the Christian’s response to God as He has revealed Himself in His Word in the entirety of life, from the beginning of salvation, proceeding through sanctification and culminating in glorification.

²⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:100.

(or “the doing of the Father’s will”) stands in three things: faith, repentance, and new obedience.²⁹ Each of these is experienced daily in our vocation.

In his effort to promote application, Perkins employs a systematic method in communicating his theology of vocation.³⁰ While his *A Treatise on Vocations* (with its numerous sections and points) might initially appear to be an excruciatingly long list of exhortations and prohibitions,³¹ it is in actual fact a pastor’s thoughtful attempt to guide his congregants into a greater appreciation for God’s design for their particular callings and a consistent response of obedience to God—or what Perkins see as the spiritual life.³²

Thesis

While this dissertation contributes to a better understanding of both biblical spirituality and sixteenth-century English Puritanism, its primary objective is to provide a fuller analysis of William Perkins’s spirituality. His seminal work, *A Treatise of the Vocations, or Callings of Men, with the Sorts and Kinds of Them, and the Right Use Thereof*, demonstrates that his spirituality is rooted in his concept of vocation as “a certain kind of life, imposed and ordained on man by God for the common good.”³³

Biblical spirituality refers to the way in which believers respond to God’s grace

²⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 1:xxvi, 696. See also 4:225.

³⁰ Perkins’s treatise consists of three main sections that include 170 illustrative points—each denoted with sequential terms such as first, second, third, etc. See Donald K. McKim, “The Functions of Ramism in William Perkins’ Theology,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 16, no. 4 (Winter 1985): 503–17. McKim argues that Perkins’s “method” was greatly influenced by sixteenth-century French Christian philosopher Peter Ramus.

³¹ Patterson, *William Perkins*, 141–42.

³² Recent scholarship concerning vocation emphasizes the sanctification of the work as opposed to the sanctification of the worker. See Gene Edward Veith Jr., ed., *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002); Timothy Keller and Katherine Leary Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012); Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity*; Bethany L. Jenkins, “What Are We For?” in *The Gospel and Work* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), Kindle. It is necessary to distinguish between the theology of work and the theology of vocation (worker and coordinated works). Perkins highlights that a Christian’s personal preferences and gifts are designed by God, giving credence to the personality of the worker as an essential part of vocation.

³³ Perkins, *Works*, 10:43.

in the entirety of their lives. For Perkins, this response is summed up in vocation. He declares that God’s two calls for every believer—general and particular—work together.³⁴ Without the general call to salvation, our works in the particular call (in the home, church, and commonwealth) are ineffectual because they “do not proceed from an upright heart, nor are they done in obedience to God’s commandments, and for His glory.”³⁵ Conversely, without the particular call, our general call is mere hypocrisy, and we are guilty of pursuing a “form of godliness without the power thereof.”³⁶ In fact, Perkins writes his treatise because “few men rightly know how to live, and go on in their callings so as they may please God.”³⁷ This dissertation analyzes the theory behind Perkins’s beliefs but primarily considers his emphasis on the practical use of that knowledge, that is, God’s grace is most evident in our obedience (i.e., good works) in the context of our particular calling. This conviction shapes his vision of the Christian life.

History of Research

After the seventeenth century, Perkins was essentially a forgotten figure until historian Ian Breward introduced him to the academic world in the 1970s.³⁸ More recently, Richard A. Muller notes that “scholarship on Perkins has advanced, revealing

³⁴ Perkins uses the terms “personal” and “particular” interchangeably meaning “vocation” or “calling.” Concerning the general call, his terminology is potentially confusing. When speaking specifically of the general call to salvation, he differentiates between the general call (God’s invitation to salvation) and the effectual call (God’s drawing of the elect to salvation). Hence, the “general call” has two distinct meanings in Perkins’s works. His use here refers to the effectual call of salvation.

³⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:78. These reasons distinguish the regenerate’s works in their particular calling from the same in the unregenerate, all of which are under God’s sovereignty. See Charles H. George and Katherine George, “English Protestant Economic Theory: The World and Its Callings,” in *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation, 1570–1640* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 127. See also Perkins, *Works*, 7:19.

³⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:58.

³⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:43. This emphasis on practice, which honors God and evinces our salvation, is consistent throughout his works.

³⁸ Breward, “William Perkins,” 113–28. See also Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the 17th Century* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1965), 215n2.

him as an intellect of broad interests and widespread appeal in his own time, as an English churchman situated in the midst of ecclesial, academic, and confessional development and debate.”³⁹

A substantial part of scholarship has focused on Perkins as a theologian.⁴⁰ He

³⁹ Muller, *Grace and Freedom*, ix.

⁴⁰ Scholars recognize Perkins as a notable theologian; however, opinions differ concerning his ability and influence. Beeke argues that “scholars have classed Perkins with Calvin and Beza as third in ‘the trinity of the orthodox.’” “Greatest Case,” 255. See also Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution*, 216. Patterson maintains that Perkins by far published more and reached more readers than any of his contemporaries. However, he adds, “Perkins has been underestimated by most historians and, in particular, treated as peripheral to the mission of the established Church in the Elizabethan period. Rather, it is customary to describe John Jewel and Richard Hooker as the foremost apologists for the Church.” *William Perkins*, 63. Contemporary historian Leif Dixon believes that since Breward, scholars have left the task of Perkins research to professional theologians, who perceive him as “forbiddingly intimidating” based on his influence and the sheer output of work. *Practical Predestinarians*, 62. Breward states, “Perkins’s gift for rapid and retentive reading, clarity of thought, and expression, felicity with his pen, and influence in Cambridge enabled him to reach a wide audience and fill some gaps in the Elizabethan Church.” Breward, “William Perkins,” 116. Perry Miller recognizes Perkins’s meticulously sound and orthodox Calvin doctrine of which he delivered with an energetic evangelical emphasis. Perry Miller, “The Marrow of Puritan Divinity,” in *Puritan New England: Essays on Religion, Society, and Culture* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1977), 48. For literature on Perkins’s role as a theologian and numerous theological treatises, see Joel R. Beeke and Greg Salazar, eds., *William Perkins: Architect of Puritanism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019); Beeke, “William Perkins on Predestination, Preaching, and Conversion”; Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York: P. Lang, 1991); Lyle D. Bierma, “The Role of Covenant Theology in Early Reformed Orthodoxy,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 21, no. 3 (1990): 453–62; Lyle D. Bierma, “Federal Theology in the 16th Century: Two Traditions?,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 45, no. 2 (1983): 304–21; Ian Breward, “William Perkins and the Ideal of the Ministry in the Elizabethan Church,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 24, no. 3 (October 1965): 73–84; Richard L. Greaves, “The Origins and Early Development of English Covenant Thought,” *The Historian* 31, no. 1 (1968): 21–35; Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Later Reformation in England, 1547–1603*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Michael T. Malone, “The Doctrine of Predestination in the Thought of William Perkins and Richard Hooker,” *Anglican Theological Review* 52, no. 2 (April 1970): 103–17; Michael McGiffert, “Grace and Works: The Rise and Division of Covenant Divinity in Elizabethan Puritanism,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 75, no. 4 (1982): 463–502; Donald K. McKim, “William Perkins and the Theology of the Covenant,” in *Studies of the Church in History: Essays Honoring Robert S. Paul on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Horton Davies (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1983); Jens Moller, “The Beginnings of Puritan Covenant Theology,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 14 (1963): 46–67; Richard A. Muller, “Perkins’ A Golden Chaine: Predestinarian System or Schematized Ordo Salutis?,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 9, no. 1 (April 1978): 68–81; Muller, *Grace and Freedom*; Pederson, *Unity in Diversity*; Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life*, 2nd ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989); Paul R. Schaefer, “Protestant Scholasticism at Elizabethan Cambridge: William Perkins and a Reformed Theology of the Heart,” in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1999), 147–64; Mark R. Shaw, “Drama in the Meeting House: The Concept of Conversion in the Theology of William Perkins,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 41–72; Shaw, “William Perkins and the New Pelagians,” 267–301; Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., “The Doctrine of Predestination in the Early English Reformation,” *Church History* 43, no. 2 (June 1974): 201–15; Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*; Karen Bruhn, “Pastoral Polemic: William Perkins, The Godly Evangelicals, and The Shaping of a Protestant Community in Early Modern England,” *Anglican and Episcopal History* 72, no. 1 (March 2003): 102–27; William K. B. Stoever, *A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven: Covenant Theology and Antinomianism in Early Massachusetts* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1978). Dissertations and theses that contribute to an understanding of Perkins’s theology include: Richard A. Muller, “Predestination and Christology in Sixteenth-Century Reformed Theology” (PhD diss., Duke University, 1976); Charles Robert Munson, “William Perkins: Theologian of Transition”

played a significant role as a defender of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England.⁴¹ The order of salvation was his chief priority. Breward notes that “Perkins was concerned to safeguard the liberty and sovereignty of God, but was equally desirous that this should be seen and known to be gracious.”⁴² Perkins’s most significant contribution to this discussion was *A Golden Chain*,⁴³ in which he affirmed the supralapsarian view of predestination—the notion that God’s decree of election precedes His decrees of creation and man’s fall.

Some scholars have focused on Perkins’s theological method. He was not an innovator but stood in a tradition defined by others. His foremost concern was to see knowledge applied for God’s glory. He had the “ability to extract ideas from others, to combine them with his own insights and to relate the results to the needs of laity, ministers, and scholars over a wide range of subjects [which] helped embed Puritan piety and Reformed theology in the Church of England.”⁴⁴ According to Breward, what made

(PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1971); Pipa, “William Perkins and the Development of Puritan Preaching”; Mark R. Shaw, “The Marrow of Practical Divinity: A Study in the Theology of William Perkins” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1981); Rosemary Sisson, “William Perkins” (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 1952); C. J. Sommerville, “Conversion, Sacrament and Assurance in the Puritan Covenant of Grace to 1650” (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 1963); Lionel Greve, “Freedom and Discipline in the Theology of John Calvin, William Perkins, and John Wesley: An Examination of the Origin and Nature of Pietism” (PhD diss., Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1976); Andrew Alexander Woolsey, “Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly.” (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 1988); David M. Barbee, “A Reformed Catholicism: William Perkins’ Use of the Church Fathers” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2013); Ballitch, “Scripture”; Ian Breward, “The Life and Theology of William Perkins, 1558–1602” (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 1963); Victor Lewis Priebe, “The Covenant Theology of William Perkins” (PhD diss., Drew University, 1967).

⁴¹ See Patterson, *William Perkins*, chap. 3.

⁴² Breward, “The Ideal Ministry,” 79.

⁴³ In *A Golden Chain*, Perkins identified the order of salvation as predestination, effectual calling, justification, sanctification, and glorification. Four views of predestination existed at the time. First, the old and new Pelagians believed that God chose the elect based on His foreknowledge of an individual’s faith and works. Peter Baro, a main contender, was considered a new Pelagian. Second, the Lutheran view taught that God chose to save some despite their faith, and reject others based on His foreknowledge of their rejection of Him. Third, the semi-Pelagians believed that predestination was a result partly of God’s mercy and partly of man’s works. This was the Roman Catholic position. Finally, the Reformed position, of which Perkins declared that predestination is the decree of God, by which He has ordained all men to a certain and everlasting estate, that is, either to salvation or condemnation, for His own glory. Perkins, *Works*, 6:5.

⁴⁴ Breward, “William Perkins,” 116. Perkins’s reputation for developing earlier scholarship,

Perkins unique was his systematization of doctrine.⁴⁵ Paul Schaefer says that Perkins's theological method left some "scholars wondering if Perkins was a 'scholastic' a 'pietist' a 'primitivist' a 'humanist' or rather something else."⁴⁶

requires further investigation. Breward acknowledges Perkins's lack of originality. Paul Marshall says the same of Perkins's work on vocation in that he "fused" the English Reformation idea of calling with the Lutheran and semi-Calvinist ideas. *A Kind of Life*, 41. See also Louis B. Wright, "William Perkins: Elizabethan Apostle of 'Practical Divinity,'" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1940): 196; Miller, "The Marrow of Puritan Divinity," 48; Todd, *Christian Humanism*, 101, 147, 150, 164, 276; Bozeman, *The Precisionist Strain*, 84–85. Munson observes that Perkins "developed concerns for clarity and simplicity which were to color his entire approach to the problems of life and which were to make him a popular theologian among the people." "Theologian of Transition," 15. Perkins's method gained him favor with his readers. He was not concerned with theoretical originality. Muller adds, "as if originality were ever a characteristic of orthodoxy." *Grace and Freedom*, 186. Perkins's works reflected Scripture and accorded with his aim to uphold both theory and practice. John Calvin attests to the utility of developing former scholarship. He says, "There are at hand energy and ability not only to learn but also to devise something new in each art to perfect and polish what one has learned from a predecessor." He continues, this idea "prompted Plato to teach wrongly that such apprehension is nothing but recollection." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, John Baillie, and Henry P. Van Dusen (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 273. McKim recognizes Calvin's influence on Perkins's works, along with other Reformers such as Martyr, Beza, Zanchius, Olevianus, Tussanus, Junius, and Marloratus, and some Lutheran writers, such as Luther and Melancton. *Ramism in William Perkins's Theology*, 11–12. Calvin's explanation of vocation is precise, but brief, documented in two paragraphs and several footnotes. Regarding this brief treatment, Calvin says, "I will not delay to list examples. It is enough if we know that the Lord's calling is in everything the beginning and foundation of well-doing" *Institutes*, 724–25. Calvin's method differed from Perkins's, which routinely provides a plethora of examples. Thus, Perkins's work is a helpful addition to Calvin's. Lori Ferrell comments, "Calvin may have written the theological ur-text for sixteenth-century Protestant evangelists in England, but it was Perkins who provided the Institutes with a workbook." Lori Anne Ferrell, "Transfiguring Theology: William Perkins and Calvinist Aesthetics in Christopher Highley and John N. King, Eds.," in *John Foxe and His World* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 168. In fact, the diversity of his teachings and writings actually demonstrates "the depth of Perkins's learning and the breadth of his reading. His familiarity with the works of the moralists, historians, and philosophers" combined with his reliance on *Sola Scriptura* is commendable. Beeke and Yuille, *William Perkins*, 23–24. In addition, Perkins highly regarded interdisciplinary learning because he held to Calvin's conviction that "If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear [secular authors], unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God." *Institutes*, 273–74. Peter Sedgwick explains that William Ames differed from his tutor, Perkins. "Ames held that all those who were unregenerate had an evil conscience. Such a conscience did not give right judgement." Peter H. Sedgwick, "Ethics in the Later Reformation: William Perkins," in *The Origins of Anglican Moral Theology* (Boston: Brill, 2019), 197. In the end, Perkins's method was simple: under the authority of Scripture, he diligently sought God's truth and persisted in its application.

⁴⁵ Breward, "The Ideal Ministry," 77. For more on Perkins's systematic method, see McKim, "The Functions of Ramism." Perkins systematized the work of others to enrich understanding and facilitate practice. Muller observes, "The careful systematization of an idea tends to remove elements of tension and paradox resident in the initial, unsystematic formulation." Richard A. Muller, "Reassessing the Relation of Reformation and Orthodoxy: A Methodological Rejoinder," *American Theological Inquiry* 4, no. 1 (January 15, 2011): 6. See also Peter Lake, "Protestants, Puritans and Laudians," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 42, no. 4 (October 1991): 623. McKim notes, for example, that none of Perkins's predecessors "give the doctrine of covenant the precise formulation given it by Perkins." "William Perkins and the Theology of the Covenant," 95.

⁴⁶ Schaefer, "William Perkins," 148. R. T. Kendall complains that Perkins "defies traditional categorization." R. T. Kendall, "Living the Christian Life in the Teaching of William Perkins and His Followers," in *Living the Christian Life: 1974 Westminster Conference Papers (Reprint)* (Huntingdon, Camb.: The Westminster Conference, 1974), 46. Another scholar remarks that Perkins sought to see the "unity of salvation, and Scripture," but because of this his covenant theology was perceived as a sort of "theological schizophrenia," deemed a desperate but failed attempt to give 'historical, biblical, and

A third area of scholarship concerns Perkins's role as pastor. Andrew Ballitch states, "Perkins himself was considered a model pastor by many, faithfully laboring in his duties."⁴⁷ Louis Wright affirms that "the most noteworthy quality of his preaching was his sense of reality, his perception of the needs and capacities of his audience."⁴⁸ Dewey Wallace claims that "Perkins was one of several eager Puritan preachers who believed that taking the gospel of grace to the common folk throughout England was of the greatest urgency. They desired to place preachers in every English parish."⁴⁹ Perkins's capacity for all things pastoral led to his publication of *The Art of Propheying*, which became a standard training manual for pastors well into the eighteenth century.⁵⁰ He was convinced that God transforms the consciences of men and women through the proper preaching of His Word. "For God in the heart of every man hath erected a tribunal seat, and in his stead he hath placed neither saint nor angel, nor any other creature whatsoever, but conscience itself, who therefore is the highest judge that is or can be under God."⁵¹

existential moorings to the double predestination." Young Jae Timothy Song, *Theology and Piety in the Reformed Federal Thought of William Perkins and John Preston* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1998), 32, 29. See also Raymond A. Blacketer, "William Perkins (1558–1602)," in *The Pietist Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005), 45; Baird Tipson, *Hartford Puritanism: Thomas Hooker, Samuel Stone, and Their Terrifying God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 146, 152.

⁴⁷ Ballitch, "Scripture," 156–57.

⁴⁸ Wright, "William Perkins," 173.

⁴⁹ Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, 55.

⁵⁰ Breward notes, "The plain style of preaching was a potent homiletical influence in the Church of England during the seventeenth century, and while Perkins was not its originator (it is found in predecessors like Chaderton) he set it out in systematic form and related it carefully to Puritan theology and practice." "The Ideal Ministry," 81. Ballitch affirms that "from first to last, the exposition of Scripture dominated Perkins's endeavors." "Scripture," 4. Greg Salazar expounds on the Puritan style of preaching: "The term *experimental* comes from *experimentum*, meaning trial, and is derived from the verb *experior*, to know by experience, which in turn leads to 'experiential,' meaning knowledge gained by experiment. Calvin used experimental and experiential interchangeably since both words indicate the need for measuring experienced knowledge against the touchstone of Scripture. Experimental preaching seeks to explain in terms of biblical truth how matters ought to go, how they do go, and what the goal of the Christian life is." Perkins, *Works*, 6:xxvii.

⁵¹ Perkins, *Works*, 8:38.

A final focus of research has been on Perkins's ability as a practitioner.⁵²

Beeke explains, "While Perkins preached about God's sovereign grace toward his elect from eternity and God's covenant acts of salvation by which election is realized, he was particularly concerned in his practical theology with how this redemptive process became evident in the experience of the elect."⁵³ Perkins made significant contributions to the experiential implications of predestination, specifically that the doctrine provides assurance and cultivates perseverance.⁵⁴

Perkins's emphasis on practice was one of his distinct contributions; thus, throughout his works, the reader often finds large sections devoted to a particular

⁵² Although scholars agree that Perkins was a practical theologian, much less literature is available on his practical works compared to his theological works. For research on Perkins's practical theology, see Packer, *An Anglican to Remember*; Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*; Thomas Merrill, ed., *William Perkins, 1558–1602: English Puritanist: His Pioneer Works on Casuistry* (Nieuwkoop, The Netherlands: B. DeGraff, 1966); Munson, "Theologian of Transition"; Pipa, "William Perkins and the Development of Puritan Preaching"; Todd, *Christian Humanism*; Yuille, *Living Blessedly*; Coleman Cain Markham, "William Perkins' Understanding of the Function of Conscience" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt, 1967); Paul R. Schaefer, "The Arte of Prophesying by William Perkins," in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 38–51; Leland Ryken, "'Some Kind of Life to Which We Are Called of God': The Puritan Doctrine of Vocation," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 22, no. 1 (2018): 45–65; Louis B. Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (Ithaca, NY: Published for the Folger Shakespeare Library by Cornell University Press, 1958); Wright, "William Perkins"; Sedgwick, "William Perkins," chap. 7; Barbee, "A Reformed Catholike"; Chilton Latham Powell, "English Domestic Relations, 1487–1653: A Study of Matrimony and Family Life in Theory and Practice as Revealed by the Literature, Law, and History of the Period" (PhD diss., Columbia University Press, 1917); Charles H. George and Katherine George, "Callings," 117–43. In Perkins's attempt to reform Christian practice, his practical works were misunderstood by some as legalism. Rather, Perkins's "intense concern for the godly life arises alongside his equally intense concern to maintain the Reformation principle of salvation by grace alone." Perkins, *Works*, 1:xxxii. He believed, like most Puritans, that God's grace was always the initiator in salvation and in good works thereafter. Man's obedience was always a response to God's initiative. As a result, godliness is never about man acting in his own strength. In Patterson's words, "Faith is, to Perkins, a gift of God, but it is to be nurtured in a way that reflects the individual's willing response to God's forgiveness and grace." *William Perkins*, 76.

⁵³ Beeke, *Quest for Full Assurance*, 86–87.

⁵⁴ Based on Perkins's *A Golden Chain*, Muller explains that he taught that "the *ordo salutis* both originates and is effected in Christ." "A Golden Chain: Predestinarian System," 76. Dewey D. Wallace maintains that "the piety of predestinarian grace as an experience was particularly focused on providing assurance and certainty. It must be remembered that the powerful religious experience was always that of being chosen, not of being left out, and thus certainty and reassurance, not despair, were derived from the unique logic of this way-of-being-religious." Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, 196. Malone says that, according to Perkins, perseverance is possible as a result of predestination, for two reasons: the Holy Spirit offers internal testimony to the elect, and the fruits of the Spirit produces good works in the elect. "The Doctrine of Predestination," 114. "Perkins endorsed what can be called Reformed 'experiential predestinarianism,' which emphasized living an exemplary life, intense self-examination, and one's ability to know their standing before God." Pederson, *Unity in Diversity*, 69.

doctrine's practical "uses."⁵⁵ He "humbled the towering speculations of philosophers into practice and morality."⁵⁶ He did so because he was convinced that "the heart of the Christian life is intensely moral."⁵⁷ Christopher Hill adds that the responsibility of providing solutions to social and ethical problems fell to the theologians;⁵⁸ a call that Perkins answered. For instance, his pioneering work on casuistry supplied instruction for pious living. Mark Shaw declares, "It is there that Perkins himself combines theory and practice as he covers a wide range of theological/devotional, intellectual, social, economic, and political questions."⁵⁹ His "plain style" teaching, different from the pedantry common in Elizabethan ecclesiastical writing, emphasizes "dignity of learning" and "simplicity" for the common man's understanding.⁶⁰ Shaw maintains that Perkins's program was unique in that he sought national revival through the "theological method of practical divinity."⁶¹

This thesis considers Perkins's view of Christian practice in vocation; particularly, his conviction that God's grace is most evident in our obedience (i.e., good works) in the context of our particular calling. Wright asserts that it was Perkins who initially "distilled the essence of the gospel of work. In none of his writings is there a better example of the adaptation of his theological learning to the problems of the day than in the essay on vocations, which became a forerunner to later works on the same

⁵⁵ Dixon argues that "Perkins was a remarkably consistent writer, and he very rarely wrote treatises about only one thing: the headline subject quickly becomes reabsorbed into an all-encompassing worldview." *Practical Predestinarians*, 64.

⁵⁶ Sidney Lee, Leslie Stephen, and George Smith, eds., *The Dictionary of National Biography: From the Earliest Times to 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), 894.

⁵⁷ Shaw, "The Marrow of Practical Divinity," 149.

⁵⁸ Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution*, 218. Beeke affirms that Perkins thought it was the pastor's responsibility to educate on the balance between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. *Quest for Full Assurance*, 85.

⁵⁹ Shaw, "The Marrow of Practical Divinity," 27.

⁶⁰ Wright, *Middle-Class Culture*, 175.

⁶¹ Shaw, "The Marrow of Practical Divinity," 212.

subject.”⁶² Several scholars have provided brief analyses of Perkins’s treatise on vocations.⁶³ Others have made passing references to it in their broader analysis of the subject of vocation.⁶⁴ However, particular attention to his theology of vocation is lacking, especially its place in his comprehensive understanding of sanctification and good works. Thus, while engaging with the established body of research, this dissertation seeks to contribute to the discussion by considering how Perkins’s vision of vocation shaped his spirituality.

Methodology

Following an introduction to William Perkins, I set his understanding of vocation in the context of the medieval and Reformed traditions. From Perkins’s corpus of written works, in particular his *A Golden Chain*, I consider those doctrinal convictions that shaped his theology. This sets the theological foundation for an analysis of the principal parts of Perkins’s theology of vocation; namely, its personal dimension, practical demonstration, and soteriological implication. An understanding of these supports his major claim that vocation is the chief means of sanctification by which spirituality is made evident. I conclude with Perkins’s legacy, specifically how *A Treatise of the Vocations* influenced the generations that followed him.

Chapter 1 introduces William Perkins and *A Treatise on Vocations*. It places

⁶² Wright, *Middle-Class Culture*, 170, 175–76. Sedgwick adds, “Perkins returns repeatedly to vocation as a central concept, and to conscience, in the life of the individual.” “William Perkins,” 184.

⁶³ Wright, *Middle-Class Culture*, 170–200; Breward, “The Life and Theology,” 277–98; Michaelsen, “Calling,” 318–25; Patterson, *William Perkins*, 140–46; Munson, “Theologian of Transition,” 101–4; Peter J. Beale, “Sanctifying the Outer Life,” in *Aspects of Sanctification: Being Papers Read at the 1981 Conference* (London: Westminster Conference, 1981): 62–77; Charles H. George and Katherine George, “Callings,” 117–43; Shaw, “Drama in the Meeting House,” 243–74.

⁶⁴ Marshall, *A Kind of Life*, 41–45; Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity*, 77–80; William C. Placher, ed., *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), pt. 3, “William Perkins A Treatise of the Vocations,” Kindle; Todd, *Christian Humanism*, 148–65; Ryken, “Some Kind of Life”; Rosemary O’Day, *The Professions in Early Modern England 1450–1800: Servants of the Commonwealth* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 34–37.

him in his historical context and interacts with contemporary literature related to his theological legacy and the subject of vocation. It argues that Perkins's propensity for Christian practice contributes to his comprehensive understanding of vocation, which counters notions such as the sacred vs. secular dichotomy. According to Perkins, the particular call is the principle means by which God sanctifies believers.

Chapter 2 considers the way in which Perkins's theology of vocation develops from medieval and Reformed concepts. It demonstrates that Perkins aligns closely with the Reformed tradition, which destroys the wall between sacred and secular by insisting upon the dignity of all work, for God's glory. Further, breaking with the medieval tradition, the Reformers viewed vocation as a result of salvation not a prerequisite to it. A distinguishing feature of Perkins's view is his emphasis on God's design which encompasses all of life.

Chapter 3 considers those theological convictions that influence Perkins's view of vocation, particularly the belief that God is the imposer (or efficient cause) of callings. This is explained in the context of Perkins's views on God's decree of predestination, creation, salvation, and sanctification. Perkins's *A Golden Chain* stands within the stream of English Reformed theology (as articulated in the Thirty-Nine Articles) and he sees himself as a defender of the Church of England's theological standards. But he is equally concerned about how theology impacts all of life, especially how vocation is the ultimate expression of our experience of God's grace.

Chapter 4 attends to the personal nature of vocation by tracing Perkins's understanding of how we "experience" our particular calling. This begins with God's design, determined in eternity. Then it proceeds to (1) the selection of a vocation, (2) the entrance into a vocation, (3) the continuance in a vocation, and (4) the conclusion of a vocation. Perkins claims that choosing a vocation should be a product of a search for our gifts and affections. In addition, the wise counsel of godly advisors should affirm that a vocation best suits the individual, contributes to the common good, and glorifies God. It

is never too early to begin the discovery process. For instance, he warns parents that they “cannot do greater wrong to their children, and the society of men, than to apply them to unfit callings; as when a child is fit for learning, to apply him to a trade, or other bodily service. This is like expecting toes to work like fingers.”⁶⁵

Chapter 5 speaks to the purpose of vocation, or its practical demonstration in the home, church, and community. Breward notes that “Perkins wanted men to play their rightful role in God’s world through work.”⁶⁶ God intends that the good works in our vocations positively contribute to the world. Perkins explains this against the backdrop of competing motivations for riches, power, or recognition.⁶⁷ A vocation properly implemented will result in the individual’s transformation and it will benefit the common good.

Chapter 6 presents the soteriological implications of Perkins’s theology of vocation—that is, God’s purpose, love for God, love for man, and good works. Of particular interest is Perkins’s extensive discussion of “continuance” in vocation. Close to half of his treatise is devoted to this subject, particularly the virtues (faith and love) that enable it and the vices (covetousness, injustice, ambition, envy, and impatience) that impede it.

Chapter 7 considers the legacy of Perkins’s theology of vocation. His seminal work provided the foundation upon which an entire generation of ordinary Christians viewed their callings. It provided the theological framework for a vision of the Christian life (i.e., spirituality) that transcended the Atlantic and impacted Western culture down to the present day.

⁶⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:63.

⁶⁶ Breward, “The Ideal Ministry,” 83.

⁶⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:70.

CHAPTER 2

A THEOLOGY OF VOCATION

The theological debates of the late sixteenth century were critical to the developing Church of England.¹ Most notable were the diverging views on the authority of Scripture and the nature of salvation. Amid these debates, William Perkins gave his attention to practical questions concerning the Christian life. With a pastoral emphasis, he gave particular attention to the Christian's walk in *A Treatise of the Vocations, or Callings of Men, with the Sorts and Kinds of Them, and the Right Use Thereof*.² According to the historian, Ian Breward, it “marked the first extended account in English of the theological and practical implications of one's calling.”³ Perkins's contribution to the subject was timely for the development of Reformed spirituality. In contrast to the medieval position, he proposed that vocation flows from salvation and is, therefore, the context in which God sanctifies His church.⁴

¹ From 1539–1558, England's religion shifted four times between Catholicism and Protestantism. The following four decades proved as unstable politically, with the “Northern Rebellion in 1569, which sought to free Mary and ending with the Spanish Armada in 1588.” William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 7:xx. As a result, during Perkins's penning of *A Reformed Catholic* in 1598, “the Protestant Elizabethan Settlement was quite unsettled, both by Roman Catholics without and unsatisfied Protestants within. Evidence suggests the Catholic community continued, and Marian priests functioned as pioneers in sustaining the officially proscribed religion, finding patronage among the conservative laity, especially the gentry. For Perkins, then, it was not at all certain until late in his life that his people would ultimately turn from Rome” (xviii, xix). For a summary of doctrinal divides between the Roman Church and Protestantism evident in Perkins's works, see Stephen Yuille, “The Wholesome Doctrine of Faith and Love,” in *William Perkins: Architect of Puritanism*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Greg Salazar (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 121–27. For more on cultural context, see W. B. Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), chap. 1; Randall J. Pederson, *Unity in Diversity: English Puritans and the Puritan Reformation, 1603–1689* (Boston: Brill, 2014), chaps. 2, 6; Joel R. Beeke and J. Stephen Yuille, *William Perkins*, Bitesize Biographies (Grand Rapids: EP Books, 2015).

² Perkins, *Works*, 10:31–107.

³ Ian Breward, “The Significance of William Perkins,” *The Journal of Religious History* 4, no. 2 (December 1966): 125.

⁴ The essence of Perkins's spirituality is that after salvation, God's grace is most evident

The Medieval Tradition

The medieval concept of vocation developed during the fourth century. In the time of Constantine, Christianity became the official religion of Rome. As a result, the notion that personal choice is necessary for becoming a Christian gave way to the belief that people are born into the faith.⁵ This led to the rise of nominalism.

To address the prevalence of nominal Christianity, fourth century monasticism pursued a different approach. Based on their interpretation of Scripture,⁶ monastics chose to live out their faith in isolation. For example, Anthony of Egypt (251–356) sought to serve God in a context completely separate from the world.⁷ Karl Holl asserts, “Such a call meant not only renunciation; it was also highest grace. Whoever departed from the

through the Christian’s obedience in good works in the context of his or her vocation.

⁵ Karl Holl, “The History of the Word Vocation (Beruf),” trans. Heber F. Peacock, *The Review and Expositor* 55, no. 2 (April 1958): 128. Holl traces the historical meaning of the term vocation beginning with monasticism, to late scholasticism, Thomas Aquinas’s contributions, German Mysticism, and finally ends with Martin Luther’s theology of vocation.

⁶ For biblical support, monastics turned to Luke 14:26 (to forsake familial relationships, for loyalty is to God alone), Genesis 12:1 (to leave everything, as Abraham did in obedience to God’s call), Mark 10:17–23 (to sell everything and give to the poor), and Ephesians 4:1 (to walk in a manner worthy of one’s calling). Holl, “The Word Vocation,” 129–30.

⁷ Holl, “The Word Vocation,” 128. For more on the life of Anthony, see Athanasius’s *The Life of Antony*, which was one of the most influential books of the early church and a classic of Christian Spirituality. See also Bernard McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 49–54; Benedicta Ward, trans., *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks*, (London: Penguin Books, 2003), Kindle; Stanley N. Gundry and Bruce Demarest, eds., *Four Views on Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 47–51; William C. Placher, ed., *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), pt. 1, “Athanasius, The Life of Antony,” Kindle. Monasticism was prominent and pervasive stretching from Spain and England in the West to Syria and Egypt in the East. Solitary monastic communities or isolated hermits were commonly found in cities, towns, deserts, islands, caves, and on pillars. In addition to monasteries, the medieval Catholic institution included female convents. A spirituality developed that included prayer, solitude/silence, and asceticism, all evidenced in the Catholic counsels of perfection—vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Glen G. Scorgie, *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 618–20. The life of St. Benedict of Nursia (480–547), who was known as the Father of Western Monasticism, illustrates communal monastic living. Originally from Rome, Benedict desired a different life from that of the rampant paganism surrounding him. He saw his spirituality as something to be protected while lived out in a guarded community. He developed the Rule of Benedict to apply to his monastery at Monte Cassino, but in the 800s it became the rule for all Benedictan monks. See Timothy O. S. B. Fry, ed., *The Rule of Saint Benedict* (New York: Random House Vintage Spiritual Classics, 1998); Placher, *Callings*, pt. 2; Scorgie, *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 299–302. Nathan Finn suggests that monasticism is an important part of contemporary Catholicism and that many Protestants find the way of life fascinating. The life of twentieth-century Trappist monk and author, Thomas Merton, speaks to many Christians concerning the spiritual disciplines of prayer and contemplation. Nathan A. Finn, “Spiritualities in the Christian Tradition,” in *Biblical Spirituality*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 220–21; Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain: An Autobiography of Faith* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1998).

world shook off by that act his whole previous life and also all the sins of that life.”⁸ This lifestyle was not for everyone, but belonged to monks, nuns, friars, and priests.⁹

According to Leland Ryken, it was at this point that “medieval monasticism broke with NT Christianity, retaining the terminology of calling but changing its meaning and application.”¹⁰ Because of the sacrifice involved in renunciation, the nature of vocation was restricted to a certain few. Holl confirms that these beliefs not only

⁸ Holl, “The Word Vocation,” 130. Perkins condemned the act of renunciation: “The papists hold that a man, being in the state of grace, may not only keep all the commandments of the law, and thereby deserve his own salvation, but also go beyond the law, and do works of supererogation which the law requires not—as to perform the vow of single life [chastity], and the vow of regular obedience, [the vow of poverty], etc. ‘And by this means,’ they say, ‘men deserve a greater degree of glory than the law can afford.’” Perkins, *Works*, 7:107. For Calvin’s view of supererogatory works see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, John Baillie, and Henry P. Van Dusen (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 780–81.

⁹ Placher, *Callings*, pt. 2, “Introduction,” “What about Everybody Else?,” para. 3. Gene Veith concurs, “In the medieval church, having a vocation or having a “calling” referred exclusively to a full-time church work. IF a person felt a calling, this was a sign that he or she might ‘have a vocation,’ which meant becoming a priest, a monk, or a nun. The ordinary occupations of life—being a peasant farmer or kitchen maid, making tools or clothing, being a soldier or even a king—were acknowledged as necessary but worldly. Such people could be saved, but they were mired in the world. To serve God fully, to live a life that is truly spiritual, required a full-time commitment. The ‘counsels of perfection’ [vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience] could be fulfilled only in the Holy Orders of the church, in which a man or woman could devote every day to prayer, contemplation, worship, and the service of God.” Gene Edward Veith Jr., ed., *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 17.

¹⁰ Leland Ryken, “‘Some Kind of Life to Which We Are Called of God’: The Puritan Doctrine of Vocation,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 22, no. 1 (2018): 46. For the New Testament church, vocation or calling meant salvation and thereafter total submission to Christ. Christians worked and the type of work usually proceeded from family heritage. After conversion, work was done with faith in mind. The church recognized the value of diverse vocations. This view counters that of Greco-Roma culture which despised manual labor. Christian beliefs stemmed from three biblical examples: (1) Jesus’s example of working as a carpenter prior to His mediatorial work as Savior; (2) Paul’s example of being a scholar and tentmaker; and (3) Paul’s admonition: “If a man will not work, he shall not eat” (2 Thess 3:10). Jesus and Paul allowed no duality between sacred and secular. However, unbelievers in Jesus’s hometown doubted His teachings because He was a mere carpenter (Matt 13:53–58). Gordon Fee notes that in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians “in particular the concepts of calling as ‘vocation’ and calling as ‘election’ tend to blur somewhat. In 1:1 and 2 the concept of ‘vocation’ predominates. In 1:9 and 24 the ‘calling’ is the divine invitation to God’s ‘family.’ In the extended usage in 7:15–24 the idea is less clear. The calling is first that of becoming believers, but it seems also inherently to have the idea of ‘one’s station in life,’ thus meaning more than simply ‘vocation,’ that is, what one does. In any case the ideas are always closely related in Paul. One is called of God ‘into the fellowship of his Son’ (1:9), and such a call means that one lives out the implications of that calling as ‘God’s holy people’ (1:2), which also involves being and doing what one is and does as one who has been ‘called’ of God so to be and do (1:1; 7:15–24).” G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 29n7. See also Beth Felker Jones, “Called First to Christ: Early Christians Preached That Coming to Christ Changed Everything,” ed. Jennifer Woodruff Tait, *Christian History: Callings Work and Vocation in the History of the Church*, no. 110 (2014): 8–12; Alvin J. Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed The World: Formerly Titled Under the Influence*, ePub ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 195–98; Gregory C. Cochran, “Spirituality and Our Work,” in *Biblical Spirituality*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 271–72; Placher, *Callings*, pt. 1.

monopolized *vocatio* but also apportioned exclusive meaning to *religio* (to join a religious order) and *converti* (to become a monk). Thus, the monk was the only one with a *ruf* or a call, and spiritual calls were the only ones that existed.¹¹ This exclusivity allowed for only one exception: the nobility.¹² They were called by God to govern their people and serve as patrons of the church. By virtue of these roles, they received religious credit similar to that of the monastics.

As a result of this shift in the concept of vocation, several imbalances began to impact the church. First, the roles and responsibilities of ordinary believers were viewed as secondary in comparison to those of monastics. Justo Gonzalez traces the ecclesiastical developments related to monasticism and concludes, “The earlier practice of sharing goods among all believers, now abandoned by the church at large, became a fundamental dimension of monastic life. And the task of praying for the entire world, as the priestly people of God, was now entrusted to monastic houses.”¹³ In a sense then, monasticism dominated church participation in vital facets of Christianity—giving and praying.¹⁴

Second, the catechizing of all believers was replaced by the preparing of a select few for entering the monastery. Gonzalez explains, “This was part of a radical

¹¹ Further, the term *professio* meant not occupation or trade as commonly understood, but was designated to the monk who, considering his total renunciation of life and his own will to choose it, made a special offering worthy of God which was sufficient to gain grace for salvation. “This does not mean that the people of the world have thereby been excluded from salvation.” Holl, “The Word Vocation,” 131–34, 146. Dennis Martin affirms that monks and nuns were considered “professional” in their growth in holiness due to their choice of renunciation, which allowed space for intensified spiritual exercises. Scorgie, *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 114. Paul Stevens shares a similar contemporary view: “The only people who speak of being ‘called of God’ are ‘full-time’ missionaries and pastors.” R. Paul Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity: Vocation, Work and Ministry in a Biblical Perspective* (Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 1999), 72.

¹² Holl, “The Word Vocation,” 131. Veith offers a different interpretation in that kings were not entitled to vocation, but that their duty was secular. *God at Work*, 17. See also David C. Fink, “Liberating Those Who Work: Martin Luther Challenged Centuries of Vocational Reflection,” ed. Jennifer Woodruff Tait, *Christian History: Callings Work and Vocation in the History of the Church*, no. 110 (2014): 21; Jennifer Woodruff Tait, ed., “The Christian History Timeline: Hearing God Call in the Midst of the World,” *Christian History: Callings Work and Vocation in the History of the Church*, no. 110 (2014): 15–16.

¹³ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The History of Theological Education*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), chap. 5, para. 5, Kindle.

¹⁴ Perkins corroborates this. Perkins, *Works*, 10:55.

change: what [theological education] was earlier expected of most Christians and offered to them was now reserved for a smaller group of particularly devout Christians, the monastics.”¹⁵ Foundational Christian teaching was increasingly withheld from believers.

Third, the contemplative life (i.e., a devotional lifestyle focused on the spiritual discipline of contemplation) became the highest ideal for the Christian life, while ordinary believers gave themselves to the active life (i.e., manual labor). This *vita activa* was deemed to be inferior to the *vita contemplativa*. Here, the sacred vs. secular dichotomy began to emerge. Paul Marshall comments:

The Church Fathers began to draw more heavily on Greek and Roman motifs than on specifically biblical teaching. In the early part of the fourth century, Eusebius propounded a doctrine of two lives: ‘Two ways of life were thus given by the law of Christ to His Church. The one is above nature, and beyond common human living . . . permanently separate from the common customary life of mankind, it devotes itself to the service of God alone . . . Such then is the perfect form of the Christ life.’ The other is ‘more humble, more human, permits man to join in pure nuptials, and to produce children . . . it allows them to have minds for farming, for trade, and other more secular interests as well as for religion . . . a kind of secondary grade of piety is attributed to them.’ This pattern shaped much of subsequent Church thinking. So, for example, Augustine distinguished between an ‘active life’ (*vita activa*) and a ‘contemplative life’ (*vita contemplativa*). The *vita activa* took in almost every kind of work, including studying, preaching, and teaching. The *vita contemplativa* was reflection and meditation upon God and His truth. While both kinds of life were good, the contemplative life was of a higher order.¹⁶

¹⁵ Gonzalez, *Theological Education*, chap. 5, para 5. Gonzalez elaborates on the shift in general theological education. Due the explosion in people joining the church after Constantine made Christianity the official religion the catechumenate, which was originally a two-year program, was decreased to eighty days and then to forty days. There were not enough leaders to handle the demand for theological education. Furthermore, with less persecution, the catechumenate process and Christianity in general was less sharp during this era. At the same time, scholarship was achieved through great theological teachers such as “Athanasius, Eusebius of Caesarea, Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine.” The early fifth century, with the Germanic invasions, brought another influx of conversions, “but they were so lacking in disciplines of study, that the catechumenate either disappeared or was reduced to a minimum, requiring only that candidates for baptism know the Lord’s Prayer and a few other rudiments of the faith.” *Theological Education*, chaps. 3, paras. 1, 5; see also chap. 5.

¹⁶ Paul Marshall, *A Kind of Life Imposed on Man: Vocation and Social Order from Tyndale to Locke* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 18–19; see also Gundry and Demarest, *Four Views on Christian Spirituality*, 18–19; Donald Bloesch, *Spirituality Old and New: Recovering Authentic Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 57–59. Concerning Marshall’s claim about Augustine, Megan Devore argues that Augustine is often viewed as having presented a tension between rest and work because of the cultural significance of leisure and non-leisure, or the medieval view of the *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa*. She asserts that “this opposition is often in turn presented as leading to a purported spiritual elevation of certain professions during the medieval era.” Megan Devore, “The Labors of Our Occupation: Can Augustine Offer Any Insight on Vocation?” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 22, no. 1 (2018): 26. To the contrary, Devore points out a theology of work reflected in

The practitioners of the *vita contemplativa* were considered to be superior believers as they alone pursued a life of calling.¹⁷ Moreover, the pursuit of their calling was viewed as a means of salvation.¹⁸ Edwin Tait explains, “Medieval Christians believed the surest way of journeying to the heavenly homeland successfully was by belonging to a monastic community.”¹⁹ Holl explains that the monastic’s act of renunciation was understood to be a special offering to God and, therefore, a means to obtain grace for salvation. This does not mean that ordinary believers were excluded from salvation entirely, but that monasticism was a more certain way to salvation.²⁰ In Roman Catholic theology, the monastic’s sacrifice of renunciation and life of good works gain the merit necessary for salvation.

In the *vita contemplativa*, salvation is sought by means of Origen’s threefold path: purgation, illumination, and contemplation.²¹ According to Evan Howard, Origen’s

Augustine’s writings, letters, and sermons that undermines any dualistic separation of rest and labor. Augustine’s theology of work was attributed to God’s design for His order of things, which considered persons, time, place, and occupations. Work is personally fulfilling, and it should include a measure of contemplation, while it also benefits the church, neighbor, and community.

¹⁷ This distinction caused conflict among some monastics. For instance, later medieval Dominican theologian Thomas Aquinas, who was “called to the ‘religious’ life, but also to activities like teaching and writing, struggled to sort out the relations of the active and contemplative lives and the importance of the ‘religious’ life with its vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.” Placher, *Callings*, pt. 2, “Introduction,” “Theme and Variations,” para. 5. Sixth-century bishop of Rome Gregory I expressed similar concerns. See Edwin Woodruff Tait, “Duty and Delight: Medieval Christians Lived in a Tension between Action and Contemplation, Between This World and the Next,” ed. Jennifer Woodruff Tait, *Christian History: Callings Work and Vocation in the History of the Church*, no. 110 (2014): 15.

¹⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 7:107.

¹⁹ Tait, “Duty and Delight,” 15. Ambiguities exist because of variegated beliefs concerning salvation during this time. For a summary of pre-Reformation Catholicism, see Perkins, *Works*, 7:xi–xii. For a view of contemporary Catholicism, see Finn, “Spiritualities,” chap. 8.

²⁰ Holl, “The Word Vocation,” 134, 131. See also Veith, *God at Work*, 17; Tait, “Hearing God Call,” 18.

²¹ Origen (185–254) adopts much of his thinking from Plato and Plotinus, affirming that the ascent to “the One” is union with God. This ascent involves three stages in the spiritual life: (1) Pursuing virtue (purgation), as seen in the Book of Proverbs, (2) Contemplating creation (illumination), as seen in the Book of Ecclesiastes, (3) Contemplating the divine (union with God), as seen in the Song of Solomon. Scorgie, *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 646–48; Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition from Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 76–77. Origen believed that the soul is like God—immortal, pre-existent, and immaterial. The body on earth is of the material nature, so the soul’s objective is to endure the physicality of body-life awaiting full union with God. Thus, Mysticism is a path for knowing God through an ontological kinship between the soul of man and God. The discipline of

model “was developed largely in the context of monastic life.”²² The first step (purgation) includes the individual’s act of renunciation in becoming a monastic. The second step (illumination) is the individual’s devotion to the well-ordered regime of the monastic order. The third step (contemplation) is the individual’s experience of union with God—the bare communion of the soul with God.

In this system, good works are divided into two categories. The first category consists of those works which prepare the interior life for union with God. These include praying, reading, memorizing, and studying. The second category consist of those works which constitute the individual’s daily routine, e.g., manual labor.²³ These are important because they guard against idleness while sustaining life. However, they are inferior to those good works which belong to the first category.

After the fall of Rome in the fifth century, monasticism flourished across

contemplation facilitates this kinship. This idea of the soul’s pre-existence opposes the theological understanding of creation *ex-nihilo*. Creation *ex-nihilo* implies a great gulf between God and the soul of man, which is solved by God’s revelation through His Word, or Jesus Christ. Mysticism bypasses God’s revelation and counts on the conscious experience of God through the mind. Origenic spirituality is evident in Fry, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*; Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (New York: J M Dent and Sons LTD, 1919); Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God: Critical Edition* (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1994); Teresa Avila, *Interior Castle*, ed. E. Allison Peers (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1946), Kindle; Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*. The mystic essentially claims the problem is outside of man, but the solution is inside of man—to be discovered through union with God. Hence, monasticism seeks to escape the external problems of society in order to focus on the internal life. Because of the inherited belief that the soul is pre-existent, the credit due to Christ as God’s revelation and solution to the great gulf between man and God is completely denied or only partially given. Conversely, the Evangelical asserts that the problem is inside of man (sin), but the solution is outside of man (Christ). The Puritans reversed the threefold model and started with union with Christ (salvation), and through that union the Christian grows in the knowledge of spiritual truth through the illuminating work of the Spirit where ungodliness is purged and replaced with godly behavior until perfection is reached in heaven. For more on mysticism from an evangelical perspective, see Yuille, “The Wholesome Doctrine,” 131–32, 145–46; David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Fellowship with God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), chap. 8; McGinn, *Christian Mysticism*; Bloesch, *Spirituality Old and New*; Edmund P. Clowney, *CM* Christian Meditation: What the Bible Teaches About Meditation and Spiritual Exercises* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2002). For a distinction between Eastern and Western mysticism see Winfried Corduan, *Mysticism: An Evangelical Option?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1991), chap. 6. For a short summary of the spirit/matter dualism evident in Origen, see J. Stephen Yuille, “A Puritan, Spiritual Household: William Perkins and the ‘Right Ordering’ of a Family,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 8, no. 2 (2016): 171–73.

²² Evan B. Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 250.

²³ Holl, “The Word Vocation,” 128.

Europe.²⁴ William Placher asserts that monastics “became the heroes and heroines of ordinary Christians.”²⁵ They assumed control of education.²⁶ Their libraries became deposits of learning.²⁷ The monastery became the model for the rise of universities in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.²⁸ Coupled with the dominant role played by the Roman Catholic Church, it is no wonder that the monastic concept of vocation took center stage. Placher affirms that in “Europe for more than a thousand years, churches dominated—both physically and vocationally.”²⁹

Regrettably, the separation of the active life and contemplative life became entrenched in medieval society. In many instances, it led to abuse and oppression.³⁰

²⁴ Tait, “Hearing God Call,” 24.

²⁵ Placher, *Callings*, pt. 1, “Introduction,” “Athletes of the Desert,” para. 4.

²⁶ Tait adds that “Donations from lay people made monasteries great landowners, and their cultural and education activities gave them massive influence.” “Duty and Delight,” 16.

²⁷ Perkins commends the discipline of learning in early monasticism but complains of the variance to “monastic life now.” Perkins, *Works*, 7:395–96. For instance, early English monk Bede (672–735), known as The Venerable Bede, wrote over sixty books—theological treatises, expositions of Scripture, translations, natural history, and hymns. His major work was a five-volume Ecclesiastical History of the English people from Caesar’s invasion in fifty-five BC to his time. He claimed writing history was a spiritual discipline and he modeled the integration of intellect with love of Christ for the service of the church. A quoted prayer demonstrates his love for learning, “And I pray Thee, loving Jesus, that as Thou hast graciously given one to drink in with delight the words of Thy knowledge, so Thou wouldst mercifully grant me to attain one day to Thee, the fountain of all wisdom and to appear forever before Thy face.” Scorgie, *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 298.

²⁸ See Gonzalez, *Theological Education*, chap. 5; Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed*, 185–87.

²⁹ Placher, *Callings*, pt. 2, “Introduction,” para. 1.

³⁰ Perkins argues that the pope himself is the antichrist, and that the bishops “usurped civil authority.” Perkins, *Works*, 6:63–64. See also 10:34, 462. Moreover, the eleventh century inception of the Catholic penance system forced the sincere commoner who was seeking God to purchase indulgences for religious favor. Grievously, it was vocation-holders who sold indulgences thereby exploiting those without vocations. Priests were considered the purveyors of salvation for the common people for three reasons: (1) they led the church, (2) they were the sole mediators for Bible teaching, and (3) they distributed the sacraments. Penance is a Catholic sacrament, and it was believed that confession to a priest who proscribed acts of contrition would satisfy the penalty of sin. See Cochran, “Spirituality and Work,” 218. See also Patterson, *William Perkins*, 91–92. In *A Reformed Catholic*, Perkins discusses the extent of penance, “The opinion of human satisfaction is natural and sticks fast in the hearts of natural men. Hereupon when any have sinned and feel touch of conscience any way, their manner is then to perform some outward humiliation and repentance, thinking thereby to stop the mouth of conscience, and by doing some ceremonial duties to appease the wrath of God for their sins.” Perkins, *Works*, 7:63. Yuille summarizes the contrasting views of the Roman Church: “They affirmed the authority of Scripture *and* tradition, salvation by grace *et* effort, and justification by faith *et* works; moreover, it pointed people to Christ *and* saints, masses, pilgrimages, penances, and indulgences as the way to obtain favor with God.” “The Wholesome

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, two factors introduced change. First, the educational system expanded with the establishment of universities.³¹ Second, people began to critique the medieval social order, which consisted of “those who pray (priests, nuns, and monks), those who fight (nobles), and those who work (peasants).”³²

Owing to these two initiatives, people’s views of vocation began to expand to include philosophers, professors, policy makers, and beyond.³³ Berthold of Regensburg identified nine different levels of work.³⁴ Expectedly, he honors the superior callings of

Doctrine,” 138.

³¹ Gonzalez explains that the degraded education system was partly due to the growing corruption of the Roman Catholic Church. *Theological Education*, chaps. 4, 8. Schmidt comments that after the founding of the University of Bologna (1158) and the University of Paris (1200), “formal higher education had become permanently institutionalized.” *How Christianity Changed*, 186–87. Richard Muller describes twelfth century Medieval Scholasticism as primarily a matter of method or a new approach to learning, rather than a particular theology or philosophy. Richard A. Muller, “Reassessing the Relation of Reformation and Orthodoxy: A Methodological Rejoinder,” *American Theological Inquiry* 4, no. 1 (January 15, 2011): 5–6. Donald McKim adds that its formal disciplines are logic, ‘art of arts,’ physics, natural philosophy, and sciences. There is little regard for rhetoric and a desire for exactitude and precision that rested in its dependence on written sources and documents rather than classical literature. Donald K. McKim, *Ramism in William Perkins’s Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 18. Gonzalez states, Scholasticism is “the process of posing a thesis or question, then offering arguments and authorities that apparently contradict one another, giving an answer, and finally showing why the authorities that appear to take another position do not contradict what the professor has determined.” *Theological Education*, chap. 7, para. 7. John Morgan identifies it more simply as the “academic hair-splitting of the later Schoolmen.” John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning and Education, 1560–1640*, 64. Scholastics, who were perceived as masters of knowledge and argument, introduce another level of superiority in vocation. Thomas a Kempis explains: “All men naturally desire to know; but what avails knowledge without the fear of God? Surely, a humble laborer that serves God is better than a proud philosopher who neglecting himself labors to understand the course of the heavens? O, if men bestowed as much labor in the rooting out of vices, and planting of virtues, as they do in moving of questions [arguing], neither would there so much hurt be done, nor so great scandal be given in the world, nor so much looseness be practiced in Religious Houses [convents and monasteries].” Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (New York: J M Dent and Sons LTD, 1919), part 1, chap. 2, 4; chap. 3, 9.

³² Placher, *Callings*, pt. 2, “Introduction,” para. 1.

³³ Holl credits the new evaluation of secular work to the teachings of the thirteenth century German mystics, such as Meister Eckhart. “The Word Vocation,” 141–43.

³⁴Holl, “The Word Vocation,” 138. German preacher Berthold (1220–1272) imitates Pseudo Dionysius’s fifth-sixth century model of the nine angelic choirs. Dionysius believed that all reality springs from the Trinity, producing the celestial hierarchy and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Each of these is triadic and descends orderly from God’s model. His Celestial hierarchy included seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominions, powers, authorities, principalities, archangels, and angels. His ecclesiastical hierarchy: mysteries of the church, those who administer the mysteries, and those who receive the mysteries. His hierarchy is significant for “one level receives as much divine light as possible from its superior and passes on the light to its inferior.” See Charles H. George and Katherine George, “English Protestant Economic Theory: The World and Its Callings,” in *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation, 1570–1640* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 143; Scorgie, *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 697–99. Todd explains another medieval model: The Great Chain of Being, which is a philosophical view claiming the grand order of life is held within the cosmos from “Neo-platonic theory... the Chain of Being

priests, monks, and nobles, yet at the same time he acknowledges tailors, doctors, and tradesmen. Even members of the contemplative life themselves, such as the Franciscans and Dominicans, began to challenge the traditional order by engaging with the world.³⁵ The “*Beguines* (women) and *Beghards* (men) lived in communities devoted to prayer and charity.”³⁶ These nuns and monks held jobs associated with the active life, attended regular churches, and refused to take official vows.³⁷ Jennifer Tait notes, “Starting around 1300 Europe began to transition to a more city-based economy with a rise in trade, culture, and what would eventually be called the ‘middle class.’”³⁸

Still, the hierarchical social order or “station” endured.³⁹ Ultimately, people’s destiny was determined by their class (by birth). Marshall affirms that destiny was viewed as God’s indifferent order:

This medieval conception was that God appointed—called—men to a particular estate in society. This did not imply that the work of an estate was itself a calling, the focus of the divine command, but merely that it was a place where God had

divides aetherial (from heaven) from aerial (of the air) beings, and aerial from terrestrial, placing each in its proper sphere. . . . What this means at the level of human society is that the essential inequality of persons is ensconced in a theoretically rigid hierarchy of birth in which movement of an individual out of his allotted social space is necessarily regarded as his attempt to flout the authority of the Forger of the Great Chain - a challenge to the natural order of the universe.” *Christian Humanism*, 179–80. Dewey Wallace explains what would later become the Evangelical understanding of social order. The doctrine of predestination “gives confidence that the world is not ruled by fate, but that God is in control and that his promises are sure.” Dewey D. Wallace, Jr. ed., *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525–1695* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 23.

³⁵ Placher, *Callings*, pt. 2, “Introduction,” “Theme and Variations,” para. 6.

³⁶ Placher, *Callings*, pt. 2, “Introduction,” “Theme and Variations,” para. 6.

³⁷ Tait confirms that “over time a critical mass of lay Christians had come to take the summons to live out their baptismal calling in the world with deadly seriousness. That was why Martin Luther’s radical solutions [concerning vocation] soon gained so much traction.” “Duty and Delight,” 19.

³⁸ Tait, “Hearing God Call,” 24. Albert Mohler discusses another contributing factor: the effects of the “Black Death,” or the Great Plague (1346–53). It is estimated that 40–60% of the European population died. Because of this, “workers became scarce and a raise in wages set the stage of the middle-class, which is the backbone demographically of western civilization.” Albert Mohler, “The Economist: Will the Rich World’s Worker Deficit Last?” The Briefing (Blog), August 19, 2021, <https://albertmohler.com/2021/08/19/briefing-8-19-21>.

³⁹ Holl argues that even amid the changing views, the lower classes were there merely to serve and support the higher. “The Word Vocation,” 139. Karl Barth agrees, “According to the view prevalent at the height of the high Middle Ages [secular work] only existed to free for the work of their profession those who were totally and exclusively occupied in rendering true obedience for the salvation of each and all.” As quoted in Marshall, *A Kind of Life*, 22.

commanded people to be to serve him. It merely reinforced the belief that God had appointed the orders of society and commanded each to serve in their due degree.⁴⁰

By contrast, Erasmus proposed a hierarchy based on virtue, not heredity.⁴¹ “Equality at birth simply allows for the potential of wisdom, moral uprightness and ruling ability in a given individual, irrespective of class or condition of birth.”⁴² For many, society was to be reformed “from below by an emphasis on behavior, rather than repressed from above by an insistence on obedience to prescribed outward forms.”⁴³

In summary, the early monastics sought to live out their love for God with sincerity. Because of widespread laxity within the church, they believed that dedication to God required separation from society. This is how they understood their *calling*. Despite their laudable motives, their concept of vocation becomes problematic for the following reasons.

First, it led to exclusivity by restricting vocation to the contemplative life pursued in the controlled environment of the monastery. Holl remarks, “The aristocratic feeling which controlled the monk, in spite of sincere humility, allowed the representatives of this class to accept their own favored position as a matter of course.”⁴⁴

Second, it confused the pursuit of the monastic calling with the pursuit of salvation. These two become inseparable. Vocation (i.e., the monastic life) was considered to be a favored position exclusive to those who practice the contemplative life as a means to salvation.

⁴⁰ Marshall, *A Kind of Life*, 21.

⁴¹ Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536) is known for his edition of the Greek New Testament published in 1516. “He also translated that text back into Latin, which was extensively used by the Reformers.” Scorgie, *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 431.

⁴² Todd, *Christian Humanism*, 188.

⁴³ Margo Todd, *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 178–80. The Renaissance humanist movement fought against clericalism by seeking to expose the ignorance and immorality of the clergy. Todd explains that in the later Middle Ages there was a reduction of the semi-magical role of the cleric to the level of spiritual guide and a ridiculing of the cults of saints and relics, pilgrimages and indulgences (181).

⁴⁴ Holl, “The Word Vocation,” 148.

Third, it relegated ordinary believers to a secondary class (i.e., the active life). This has two obvious repercussions. First, due to the inferior nature of the *vita activa*, the idea of serving God was separated from the ordinary roles and responsibilities of everyday life. Placher expresses well a biblical understanding of vocation: “God has called me to do [something] with my life, and my life has meaning and purpose at least in part because I am fulfilling my calling.”⁴⁵ This sentiment is missing from medieval concepts of calling. Divine service is restricted to the *vita contemplativa* and, therefore, the lives of ordinary believers are of little importance. Second, due to the perceived inferior nature of the *vita activa*, ordinary believers have little hope of obtaining salvation. Their only recourse is to devote themselves to the church’s oppressive penitential system.

Despite the developing views of vocation in the later middle ages, this paradigm—sacred (contemplative life) vs. secular (active life)—remained entrenched. It had serious implications for Christian spirituality—the way people respond to God’s grace in the entirety of their lives. For those engaged in the active life, God’s plan of salvation favors a select few who belong to an entirely different social order. Moreover, the roles and responsibilities of everyday life are of secondary importance because the greatest feats of Christian service are reserved for those who belong to monastic orders. This view of vocation undermines God’s wisdom and goodness, and seriously minimizes the ordinary believer’s service of God. Although there were some improvements to this false dichotomy in the late middle ages, the full remedy would await a major turning point in the history of the church—the Reformation.

The Reformed Tradition

The subject of vocation might seem trivial standing next to the Reformation

⁴⁵ Placher, *Callings*, “Introduction,” para. 5.

pillars *sola fide* and *sola scriptura*. But, in fact, it is inseparable from these truths. Throughout the middle ages, vocation was defined within the parameters of the *vita contemplativa* and, as a result, salvation was reserved for the domain of clerics. By championing *sola fide* (salvation by grace through faith in Christ) and *sola scriptura* (the authority of Scripture over ecclesiastical tradition), the Reformers re-defined vocation.⁴⁶ They insisted that vocation was not an exclusive concept but applicable to the entire priesthood of believers. Jordan Ballor writes, “For Calvin, as for Luther, the justification of all believers by grace through faith undercut any basis for arrogance [in one vocation over another].”⁴⁷ Megan Devore asserts that “a benchmark transformation occurred in the 16th century, when a novel envisioning of *vocatio* as ‘one’s specific occupation or profession’ is often said to have arisen.”⁴⁸ For Reformers, every believer possesses a vocation to serve God for the good of the church.

Luther formulated his theology of vocation as a defense against monasticism.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ For more on the Reformed view of vocation, see Veith, *God at Work*; Marshall, *A Kind of Life*, 22–26; Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity*, 73–79; Tait, “Hearing God Call”; Placher, *Callings*, pt. 3.

⁴⁷ Jordan J. Ballor, “Doing Much Good in the World: The Reformed Tradition Emphasized Laboring in One’s Calling for God and for Neighbor,” ed. Jennifer Woodruff Tait, *Christian History: Callings Work and Vocation in the History of the Church*, no. 110 (2014): 28. See also Robert S. Michaelsen, “Changes in the Puritan Concept of Calling or Vocation,” *The New England Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (September 1953): 325.

⁴⁸ Devore, “The Labors of Our Occupation,” 23. See also Michaelsen, “Calling,” 315–18.

⁴⁹ For Luther’s theology of vocation see Martin Luther, “Treatise on Good Works,” in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. XLIV, *The Christian in Society* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955), 15–114; Martin Luther, “The Three Kinds of Good Life for the Instruction of Consciences,” in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. XLIV, *The Christian in Society* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955), 233–42. In his “Treatise on Good Works,” Luther explains that good works should proceed from the first good work – faith in Jesus Christ. Good works cannot earn salvation. For provision or compensation for good works, see Martin Luther, “Exposition of Psalm 127, for the Christians at Riga in Livonia,” June 8, 2019, <http://lutheransandcontraception.blogspot.com/2010/09/luther-on-psalm-127.html>. Luther warns about unbelief, worry, and covetousness. God is to be trusted to provide for the individual household and the comprehensive community. See also Gustaf Wingren, *The Christian’s Calling: Luther on Vocation* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1958). Wingren first clarifies Luther’s theoretical categories prior to the practical implications of vocation. Through Luther’s theories on (1) the bondage and free-will, (2) the inward and external man, (3) the earthly and heavenly realms, and (4) the downward reaching character of vocation, Wingren concludes that vocation’s purpose is to serve one’s neighbor. Wingren notes, “It is the neighbor who stands at the center of Luther’s ethics, not God’s kingdom or God’s law or ‘character’” (46). Though, in the final section Wingren asserts that serving one’s neighbor reflects one’s love for God and God’s plans for his kingdom on earth. It may be a matter of terminology, but these apparent contradictions seem problematic because Wingren’s work is heavily cited. See also Veith, *God at Work*; Marshall, *A Kind of Life*, 22–24; Steven A. Hein, “Luther on Vocatio: Ordinary Life for Ordinary Saints,” *Reformation and*

In contrast to the exclusivity of the monastic order, Luther held that vocation is determined by an individual's station (social standing). This was a direct challenge to the monastic ideal.⁵⁰ Monastics affirmed that the sacrifice of renunciation is necessary for the Christian life (vocation). Furthermore, they viewed this sacrifice as extraordinary and, therefore, the kind of life that ultimately pleases God. Luther rejected this premise by teaching the *ordinariness* of the Christian life. Steven Hein elaborates on Luther's thought: "A life of faith is mundane in its appearance. He [Luther] urged the Christian to leave behind the exercises of monastic life and various acts of pious self-denial in a struggle for holiness. The righteousness of Christ shall be your holiness."⁵¹

Luther taught that believers should not feel compelled to become monastics or change their stations in life.⁵² The issue that plagued Luther was not that a change in vocation is necessarily wrong, but that all believers should be convinced that their particular station (whatever it is) provides the means to serve God.⁵³ Luther employed

Revival 8, no. 1 (Wint 1999): 121–42; David Kotter, "Milkmaids No More: Revitalizing Luther's Doctrine of Vocation from the Perspective of a 'Gig' Economy," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 22, no. 1 (2018): 85–95; Miroslav Volf, "Work, Spirit, and New Creation," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 41, no. 1 (2017): 67–86.

⁵⁰ In his commentary on Psalms 127, Luther rants over the misuse of vocation: "Take those seducers, the priests and monks, who have so oppressed us with their insolence and violence that we have to pant as if hounded by devils; who in addition have slain our bodies and souls with their poisonous doctrines, and herded them into hell. These are the very ones to whom we have in the past not only given more than enough, but we have even given them lands and people, cities and castles, and made of them greater lords than any among us." Martin Luther, "Commentary on Psalms 127," in *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. XLV, *The Christian in Society* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955). Stevens explains, "The Reformers were developing a theology of calling against the backdrop of medieval monasticism through which persons elected a superior way. They [Reformers] did not speak of the monastic life as 'vocation' because this was not the summons of God but the self-chosen election of certain Christians. To this both Luther and Calvin reacted vigorously, even to the extent of saying that the one place one could not live the Christian life was in the monastery." *The Abolition of the Laity*, 75.

⁵¹ Hein, "Luther on Vocatio," 121.

⁵² Marshall comments that German author, Johann Tauler, agrees that one should not aspire to contemplation or a monastic estate. *A Kind of Life*, 22. Because of the stagnate nature of social order, changing one's vocation was virtually impossible. Veith claims, "The Reformation theologians emphasized the equality of vocations before God. They lived, of course, in a hierarchical society with strict pecking orders—peasant, bourgeoisie, noble, king, emperor—and rigid class boundaries. In that time, choosing a vocation was largely moot. Your station in life was pretty much the same as your parents." *God at Work*, 69.

⁵³ Luther is misinterpreted as rigid because of his ideas on station, which he bases on 1 Corinthians 7. See Volf, "Work, Spirit, and New Creation," 73–74; Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity*, 79;

two paradigms to define the purpose of vocation. The first is his theology of the two kingdoms—heaven and earth.⁵⁴ The purpose of vocation is to serve God in heaven by serving our neighbor on earth. He rejected the idea that vocation has anything to do with an “other worldly” agenda. Luther believed that clerics were too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use because they had reversed their priorities.⁵⁵ It is not God who needs our good works, but our neighbor. The second paradigm is Luther’s concept of God’s masks. The invisible God meets the needs of His people through visible service (vocation), or through the diverse “masks” that Christians wear while working.⁵⁶

Luther’s ideas on vocation cast a new vision of the Christian life. In sum, our vocation is the means by which we live out the Christian life. Luther does not provide an exhaustive treatment of vocation, but his strong opposition to the sacred vs. secular dichotomy was pivotal to the change that was coming.

John Calvin agreed with Luther’s understanding of vocation or “station.”⁵⁷ Distinctions “between callings have to do with considerations of worldly authority and responsibility, but are not an indication of more or less worth in God’s sight.”⁵⁸ Calvin recognized both realities—while social order is unavoidable, God sees his children

Marshall, *A Kind of Life*, 25. Actually, by leveling stations he seeks liberation from the rigid religious structure that had formerly limited vocation.

⁵⁴ Wingren, *The Christian’s Calling*, part 3, chap. 1.

⁵⁵ Wingren interprets Luther as follows: “Monks want to be free where they should be bound and bound where they should be free.” *The Christian’s Calling*, 101. In other words, monks want to be free in heaven where they should be bound by God’s magnificent presence and bound on earth with ascetic living where they should be free to serve others.

⁵⁶ For Luther’s mask analogy, see Wingren, *The Christian’s Calling*, 137; Veith, *God at Work*, 23–24.

⁵⁷ For Calvin’s theology of vocation, see *Institutes*, 724–25; 689–701; 719–23; J. Calvin and W. Pringle, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 442–45; John Calvin, “Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:20,” in *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John W. Frasier (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949); John Calvin, *Calvin: Commentaries Psalm 127*, ed. J. Haroutunian and L. P. Smith (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958); Marshall, *A Kind of Life*, 24–26; Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were*, Epub ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), chap. 2; Ryken, “Some Kind of Life.”

⁵⁸ Ballor, “Doing Much Good in the World,” 28.

equally. Paul Stevens suggests that Calvin added an “emphasis on predestination, that God has sovereignly assigned Christians these places.”⁵⁹ Hence, it is due to God’s providence that station provides the shape of social order. This acknowledgment prevails in Calvin’s thinking, and it provides believers with confidence to fulfill their vocational duties.⁶⁰

Gregory Cochran affirms, “Calvin’s concerns [on vocation] were more concrete than Luther’s. Luther was taking aim at the papacy and ecclesiastical powers, while Calvin was working with a particular church in Geneva to put into practice what the Scriptures teach.”⁶¹ Calvin believed that practice flows from predestination, or the truth that God chose the elect to be sanctified.⁶² The intent of sanctification “is that, humbled and cast down, we may learn to tremble at his judgment and esteem his mercy. . . . We have been chosen to this end: that we may lead a holy and blameless life.”⁶³

⁵⁹ Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity*, 76. Supplanting one’s station was not Calvin’s main concern. Though he offered an opinion concerning 1 Cor 7:20, “Now it were a very hard thing if a tailor were not at liberty to learn another trade, or if a merchant were not at liberty to betake himself to farming. I answer, that this is not what the Apostle intends, for he has it simply in view to correct that inconsiderate eagerness, which prompts some to change their condition without any proper reason, whether they do it from superstition, or from any other motive.” “Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:20.”

⁶⁰ Lack of assurance and confidence in one’s station could easily be a product of the volatile times. John Walchenbach explains, “This conviction that one is called gave courage to people in a society in dramatic flux. In sixteenth-century Geneva, structures from medieval society had broken down, peasants were given new powers, refugees streamed into the city fleeing persecution, and a feeling of uncertainty pervaded the changing order.” John R. Walchenbach, “Vocation,” in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 387–88.

⁶¹ Cochran, “Spirituality and Work,” 271. Additional authors corroborate Calvin’s expectations of a practical use of vocations. “He [Calvin] was interested at one and the same time in cultural, economic and social problems. He stressed the vocation of the laity in society, their responsibilities in the conduct of public affairs, and with this in mind he drafted directives applicable to concrete and specific situations.” Monique Bauer-Lagier, Ofelia Ortega, and Pierre Dominice, “The Ethical Responsibility of Christians in Society,” *Ecumenical Review* 39, no. 1 (January 1987): 64.

⁶² Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, 7.

⁶³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 960. An interesting contrast between Calvin’s and Luther’s views of predestination has implications for their views on vocation. For instance, Wallace attests that “this formula of election to holiness, of sanctification as at least the early penultimate goal and purpose of God’s predestination (the ultimate goal, of course, was the state of blessedness, or glorification), was foreign to Luther’s outlook and has been regarded as the specific contribution of Martin Bucer, but is certainly echoed in Calvin.” Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, 7. Luther’s focus in vocation is primarily serving one’s neighbor. Hein states that “Luther’s economy for faith and works is to place your faith in God and send

By connecting vocation with predestination and sanctification, Calvin emphasizes the opportunity it provides for growing in holiness. In other words, vocation (or, station) not only contributes to the greater social order but also to the personal order within a Christian's life.⁶⁴ God appoints specific vocations as a safeguard to our fickle tendencies "so that man may not heedlessly wander throughout life."⁶⁵ Boundaries in vocation are a positive source of order because they help believers to avoid restlessness, which produces disharmony "among the several parts" of the Christian life.

Calvin believed that boundaries erected through vocations support harmonious relationships. The first is our relationship with God.⁶⁶ Through vocation, God "safeguards" the elect from "wandering." In response to God, our obedience in vocation leads to harmony (or, maturity) as we grow in awareness of His plans for us. As a result, we grow in "holiness" and experience contentment rather than "wandering" or being drawn away by our "fickle tendencies." The second is our relationship with others.⁶⁷ Calvin argued that disharmony occurs when we exceed God's vocational boundaries. The "wandering" and "fickle" person is distracted by ambition, greed, and covetousness, which causes strife not only within himself but with God and others. Conversely, a proper

your works off to your neighbor." "Luther on Vocatio," 133. By contrast, Calvin emphasizes opportunities for godly growth in vocation. For example, through obedience in vocation Calvin attests that restlessness turns to contentment and ambition learns the value in limits. This is important because Perkins follows Calvin's example in integrating predestination, sanctification, and vocation.

⁶⁴ Calvin appeals that "God always has the best reason for his plan: either to instruct his own people in patience, or to correct their wicked affections and tame their lust, or to subjugate them to self-denial, or to arouse them from sluggishness; again, to bring low the proud, to shatter the cunning of the impious and to overthrow their devices." *Institutes*, 211. For more on God's providence see, *Calvin: Commentaries Psalm 127*, 339–43; *Institutes*, 210–28.

⁶⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 724–25.

⁶⁶ In his commentary, Calvin states, "A calling in Scripture means a lawful mode of life, for it has a relation to God as calling us. This [calling] is the source from which other things are derived,—that everyone should be contented with his calling, and pursue it, instead of seeking to betake himself to anything else." "Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:20."

⁶⁷ In his commentary on the Parable of the Talents, Calvin notes that a vocation properly executed results in relational fruit such as "general edification," "charity," "joy of thy master," and "mutual communication between men." *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, 2:442–45.

execution of vocation provides harmony in life, which ensures a good stewardship of relationships and duties.⁶⁸ According to Calvin, this dual achievement is owing to the utility of callings.⁶⁹ In his commentary on the Parable of the Talents, he employed market terms—progress, yield, labor, manage, gain, and profit—to stress success in work and blessing in life.⁷⁰ He concluded that faithful and diligent labor in our calling is useful, pleasing to God, and beneficial to society.

With the usefulness of vocation in mind, some scholars assert that Calvin is preoccupied with “works.” “For Calvin, in the heart of a bustling city, the whole tenor of callings was much more aggressive and busy. His readers and hearers were to work, to perform, to develop, to progress, to change, to choose, to be active, and to overcome until the day of their death or return of their Lord.”⁷¹ But Calvin’s endeavor for progress must be set in the context of his emphasis on God’s loving providence in equipping the saints to serve Him and others. Calvin argues that “we are not to use these blessings indulgently, or to seek wealth greedily, but to serve dutifully in our calling. A look at the Giver of the gift prevents narrow-mindedness and immoderation.”⁷²

In summary, the Reformation freed vocation from traditional medieval restrictions. Luther defined vocation against monastic exclusivity by assigning dignity to all stations, whereas Calvin described vocation as a believer’s practical response to God which leads to harmony in life.⁷³ Both emphasized that vocation is the venue in which we

⁶⁸ Veith offers a contemporary explanation of disharmony within activity: “More often, acting outside of vocation is morally innocent, but it results in ineffectiveness, frustration, and wasted time.” *God at Work*, 139.

⁶⁹ Marshall, *A Kind of Life*, 25.

⁷⁰ Calvin and Pringle, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, 2:442–45.

⁷¹ Marshall, *A Kind of Life*, 26.

⁷² Calvin, *Institutes*, 721.

⁷³ Marshall, *A Kind of Life*, 24.

honor God and serve neighbor. It is upon this foundation that William Perkins developed his theology of vocation.

Perkins's A Treatise on Vocation

By Perkins's day, Protestants viewed vocation as the privilege of the entire priesthood of believers. Perkins built on this in two ways. First, he developed the position that our vocation is the chief means of our sanctification. Second, he articulated his position in a treatise entirely devoted to the subject. This was new. Luther and Calvin had primarily articulated their views on vocation in the context of their commentaries. By contrast, Perkins provided an extensive treatment in *A Treatise of the Vocations, or Callings of Men, with the Sorts and Kinds of Them, and the Right Use Thereof*.

Perkins's claim that vocation is the context for the entirety of sanctification is radical. It rests on three insights. First, he believed that "theology is the science of living blessedly forever."⁷⁴ Perkins was not a speculative theologian; rather, he was chiefly concerned about how truth impacts us.⁷⁵ In other words, he insisted that doctrine and practice are inseparable. Our priority is the knowledge of God, but true knowledge always transforms.⁷⁶ Theology, therefore, always has an affective dimension—blessing.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 6:11. Perkins's definition resembles that of his mentor, Peter Ramus, who said, "Theology was the 'art of living well.'" Quoted in McKim, *Ramism in William Perkins's Theology*, 22. See also Peter H. Sedgwick, "Ethics in the Later Reformation: William Perkins," in *The Origins of Anglican Moral Theology* (Boston: Brill, 2019), 196.

⁷⁵ Louis Wright asserts, "As in all of his [Perkins] writings, he soon disposes of abstractions and quickly gets down to concrete problems." Louis B. Wright, "William Perkins: Elizabethan Apostle of 'Practical Divinity,'" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1940): 180. Tony Lane comments that "following the lead of Bucer, he [Perkins] stressed the importance of Christian experience." Tony Lane, *A Concise History of Christian Thought*, Rev. ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 203–4. See also R. T. Kendall, "Living the Christian Life in the Teaching of William Perkins and His Followers," in *Living the Christian Life: 1974 Westminster Conference Papers (Reprint)* (Huntingdon, Cambs.: The Westminster Conference, 1974), 46.

⁷⁶ Yuille elaborates on this point: "He [Perkins] would have been distinctly uncomfortable with the notion of 'pure theology'—the idea that someone might study theology as an academic discipline without any concern for its situational application." "Spiritual Household," 160n12.

⁷⁷ This expectation of blessing is reflected in article XVII in the Thirty-Nine Articles. See J. Stephen Yuille, *Living Blessedly Forever: The Sermon on the Mount and the Puritan Piety of William Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), chap. 3, Kindle; Patterson, *William Perkins*,

Second, Perkins connected theology to vocation. He writes, “The common good of men stands in this, not only that they live, but that they live well in righteousness and holiness and consequently in true happiness. And for the attainment hereunto God has ordained and disposed all callings [vocations], and in His providence designed the persons to bear them.”⁷⁸ The essence of Perkins’s spirituality (or, his vision of the Christian life) is that theology must be lived out in the context of vocation thereby resulting in a happy community.⁷⁹

Third, Perkins distinguished the Christian life into two calls.⁸⁰ The first is the general call, which is God’s call of the elect to salvation by grace through faith in Christ. The second is the particular call (or, vocation) which extends throughout life. Thus, between conversion and glorification stands vocation, or the process of sanctification.⁸¹

The order of salvation was widely debated and discussed in Perkins’s day.⁸² In

66. Paul Schaefer offers additional insight into Perkins’s definition of theology. “With science, he declared his affinity with a tradition which viewed theology as a branch of scholarly pursuit. With living blessedly forever, Perkins declared that when it left the academy, it concerned itself with matters that affected the deepest recesses of the heart.” Paul R. Schaefer, “Protestant Scholasticism at Elizabethan Cambridge: William Perkins and a Reformed Theology of the Heart,” in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1999), 148.

⁷⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:45.

⁷⁹ Perkins’s priority of happiness counters common Puritan stereotypes. For instance, Theodore Bozeman summarizes the exactitude that drove Puritan life as harsh, legalistic laws under the guise of free and undeserved pardon. “Religion, whatever else it may be, is a plan of stringent denial and control. Christianity, whatever else it may be, is a sternly regulatory system.” Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisionist Strain: Disciplinary Religion & Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 85, 3. In fact, Perkins, aside from other Puritans, promoted joy to contend against the traditional ascetic living deemed spiritually superior by the Roman Catholic Church. Perkins et al. did not perceive a subjective happiness based on feelings, but an objective blessedness based on the supreme good. Stephen Yuille, “‘Blessedness’ in the Piety of William Perkins: Objective Reality or Subjective Experience?” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 1, no. 2 (July 2009): 157.

⁸⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:49–60.

⁸¹ Perkins defines the order of salvation in *The Golden Chain*: (1) Election, (2) Effectual Calling, (3) Justification, (4) Sanctification, and (5) Glorification.

⁸² Anti-Catholic polemics were common. *The Reformed Catholic*, one of Perkins’s first polemical works compares the Catholic and Reformed understandings of justification. Many believed that both traditions could be consolidated. Perkins responds by identifying similar beliefs between the two, but by and large emphasizes the differences. See Shawn D. Wright and Andrew S. Ballitch, preface to Perkins, *Works*, 7:xi–xxxv. Yuille summarizes the contrasting beliefs in “The Wholesome Doctrine,” 121–27. See also Mark R. Shaw, “William Perkins and the New Pelagians: Another Look at the Cambridge Predestination Controversy of the 1590’s,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 58 (1996): 267–301.

particular, the issue of good works loomed large. Do we perform good works “for” salvation or “as a result of” salvation? Perkins was adamant that the Christian life is only possible because of God’s sovereign grace in Christ. Thus, good works are done within the context of vocation, after justification.⁸³ He says, “Vocation is not for works, but that we might do good works.”⁸⁴ To that end, Perkins explains that we must allow “ourselves to be ruled by the word of God in the works of our calling.”⁸⁵ In this, God’s purpose for believers is fulfilled as they “practice” good works in their vocations.

Vocation is “a certain kind of life, imposed and ordained on man by God for the common good.”⁸⁶ This means that vocation originates with God, applies to all believers, and is meant to contribute to the common good.⁸⁷ It includes a “certain kind of

⁸³ Perkins, *Works*, 4:63. See also Yuille, “The Wholesome Doctrine,” 153.

⁸⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 2:52. This assertion is significant against the backdrop of the Catholic perception of vocation.

⁸⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:80. Perkins’s pioneering emphasis on practice informed by Scripture led the way to it becoming a common expectation in the church. See J. I. Packer, *An Anglican to Remember - William Perkins: Puritan Popularizer* (London: St. Antholin’s Lectureship Charity, 1996), 1–2; Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 86–87. Perkins’s source of authority is revealed as he writes, “The body of Scripture is a doctrine sufficient to live well.” Perkins, *Works*, 6:11. Wright observes, “Perkins looked upon the Bible as the ultimate authority in every matter concerning man’s life, but he had an extraordinary capacity for adapting the wisdom of the Scriptures to everyday needs, without falling into impractical ritualism.” “William Perkins,” 184. Perkins’s loyalty to Scripture is an interesting detail given that he was trained in the medieval Scholastic method and in his context of academia and church leadership reliance on Scripture was not the norm. Ralph Cudworth explains, in his introductory letter of Perkins’s Galatians commentary, that the schoolmen (Scholastics) set aside Scriptures and preferred vain speculations in their intellectual quests, so much so that “we should not have had among such a multitude of writers one poor comment upon the Bible for diverse hundred years.” As well, Catholics, such as Aquinas and his followers believed Scripture to be too simple and underserving of attention. “Aquinas (1224–1274) was a medieval theologian and author of the *Summa Theologica*, a massive scholastic investigation of various questions based on the Bible, church fathers, and Aristotelian logic.” Perkins, *Works*, 2:4–5n9. According to Randall Pederson, “Edward Dering, a young Cambridge scholar, began his sermon in the courts of Queen Elizabeth in 1569 expressing his gratitude that the English had been freed from the spiritual bondage of the previous reign, and that the preaching of God’s word was more free and available to the people.” Pederson, *Unity in Diversity*, 54. This liberty allowed for the development of what scholars distinguish as Protestant scholasticism. Joel Beeke notes there was often “a false caricature of Protestant scholasticism as a rigid system of rationalistic theology built on fatalistic predestination with the methods of Aristotle. This straw man is set against the warm, biblical teachings of the Reformers like Calvin. In reality, Protestant scholasticism was not a philosophy but an academic method of discussing questions about biblical truth. It presented largely the same theology and piety as the sixteenth-century Reformers but in a different style.” Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 542n21.

⁸⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:43.

⁸⁷ Perkins condemned what was deemed a spiritual vocation, or a solitary life in the monastery

life,” meaning God uniquely creates and saves each believer for his or her vocation. Perkins identified diverse vocations: merchants, officials, husbands, and wives,⁸⁸ parents, children, pastors, farmers, and lawyers. He did not see vocation and occupation as synonymous expressions.⁸⁹ On the contrary, his list includes vocations (e.g., social and domestic roles) which extend beyond occupations. Rosemary O’Day writes, “The essential point is that any individual was subject to several particular callings which applied to social and family roles as well as to occupations.”⁹⁰

Robert Michaelson notes that Perkins’s treatise on the subject of vocation was “an index of the importance of the concept of calling during the reign of Elizabeth.”⁹¹ Perkins understands that due to the medieval dichotomy between theology and practice, the ordinary Christian may find the path toward integration difficult to navigate. Thus, to make his arguments intelligible and memorable,⁹² Perkins utilizes Scripture, simple subjects, and concrete examples.⁹³ His treatise is unique in its ability “to merge intricate

because it did not contribute to the common good. He did not condemn ancient monasticism, but he believed that the “popish monks” of later times had turned vocation into a self-serving pursuit. Because they were not “annexed to any particular church,” they neglected any positive contributions to the church. See Perkins, *Works*, 7:77, 395–96; 10:34. Louis B. Wright concludes that Perkins, and those like him, “saw in ascetic retirement from the world of activity only a relic of popish superstition.” Louis B. Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (Ithaca, NY: Published for the Folger Shakespeare Library by Cornell University Press, 1958), 170.

⁸⁸ Yuille observes Perkins’s four ends of marriage, the last of which is “that the parties married may thereby perform the duties of their calling.” “Spiritual Household” 169–70. Marriage is a vocation.

⁸⁹ See Marshall, *A Kind of Life*, 41; Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity*, 79.

⁹⁰ Rosemary O’Day, *The Professions in Early Modern England 1450–1800: Servants of the Commonweal* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 35. See also Patterson, *William Perkins*, 141.

⁹¹ Michaelson, “Calling,” 318.

⁹² Perkins published a work was on the subject of memory, *Against Alexander Dickson or The Antidicson* (1584). “The Antidicson was a response to what historians identify as one of the most heated controversies during this time. The main reason why Perkins chose to strenuously oppose Dickson was his conviction that his system of memory [“a very alluring method of arranging topics scrupulously”] was not only erroneous, but spiritually harmful.” *Works*, 6:xxv–xxvi, 483. Perkins believed that practice, or a proper use of knowledge, resulted from a mastery of the topic, which required memorizing the details and specifics. Conversely, staying on the theoretical or general level profits nothing. Perkins, *Works*, 6:483.

⁹³ McKim explains the components of Perkins’s systematic method, which was modeled after Ramism: (1) universal/general principles and definitions, (2) distribution of parts and special explanations, (3) definition of singular parts, and (4) clarification by means of examples. McKim, *Ramism in William*

theology with practical piety.”⁹⁴ He discusses how Christians can (1) discover their God-ordained calling, (2) handle wealth and riches, and (3) avoid common vices associated with vocations, such as covetousness and injustice.⁹⁵

Conclusion

Amid the initial efforts of reform, Perkins seized the opportunity to teach that vocation is God’s chief means of sanctification. His refusal to divide theology from practice emerged from his belief that God saves every Christian for his or her vocation for His glory. He contests the dichotomy that was dominate for thirteen hundred years and argues that vocation is the context in which good works are to be done, fostering personal contentment and societal good. Perkins’s thoughts on vocation underscore his theological beliefs about God and His plan for the elect.

Perkins’s Theology, 27.

⁹⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 1:xxxiii; Breward, “William Perkins,” 113.

⁹⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:60–64, 80–91.

CHAPTER 3

THE DOCTRINAL FOUNDATION

Perkins was a towering theologian.¹ Regarding the relationship between God’s sovereignty and human agency, his theological acumen is particularly noteworthy. While his contribution to the discussion depended in large part upon his Reformed predecessors, he did provide fresh insight into the harmonizing of divine causality and human liberty.² He was inclined to this subject because, in the words of Joel Beeke and Stephen Yuille, he believed “the Reformed theology of grace, the golden chain, was crucial to the development of true Christian piety.”³ To be sure, the mind properly persuaded of God’s grace cannot but produce a loving and lively devotion. This devotion, Perkins believed, is

¹ William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 6:11. For introductions to, and analyses of, Perkins’s theology, see Richard A. Muller, “Perkins’ A Golden Chaine: Predestinarian System or Schematized Ordo Salutis?,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 9, no. 1 (April 1978): 68–81; William K. B. Stoever, *A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven: Covenant Theology and Antinomianism in Early Massachusetts* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1978), 15; Andrew Ballitch, “‘Not to Behold Faith, But the Object of Faith’: The Effect of William Perkins’s Doctrine of the Atonement on His Preaching of Assurance,” *Themelios* 40, no. 3 (2015): 445–58; Andrew S. Ballitch, “God the Son in the Theology of William Perkins,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 9, no. 2 (July 1, 2017): 147–64; John V. Fesko, “William Perkins on Union with Christ and Justification,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 21 (2010): 21–34; Louis B. Wright, “William Perkins: Elizabethan Apostle of ‘Practical Divinity,’” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1940), 171–96; Mark R. Shaw, “William Perkins and the New Pelagians: Another Look at the Cambridge Predestination Controversy of the 1590’s,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 58 (1996): 267–301; W. B. Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 69–75; Baird Tipson, *Hartford Puritanism: Thomas Hooker, Samuel Stone, and Their Terrifying God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), chap. 6; Paul R. Schaefer, “Protestant Scholasticism at Elizabethan Cambridge: William Perkins and a Reformed Theology of the Heart,” in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1999), 147–64.

² Richard A. Muller, *Grace and Freedom: William Perkins and the Early Modern Reformed Understanding of Free Choice and Divine Grace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 2, 184.

³ Joel R. Beeke and J. Stephen Yuille, preface to *The Works of William Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 1:xxx. Perkins believed true Christian piety was under threat from Arminianism within the church and Roman Catholicism at large. Shawn D. Wright and Andrew S. Ballitch, preface to Perkins, *Works*, 7:xii–xviii. See also Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., “Puritan Polemical Divinity and Doctrinal Controversy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chap. 12; Mark R. Shaw, “Drama in the Meeting House: The Concept of Conversion in the Theology of William Perkins,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 41–72.

demonstrated in a certain kind of life that is imposed by God upon each Christian for the purpose of doing good works.⁴ Thus, this chapter investigates the theological foundation behind Perkins's conviction—specifically his view on (1) the nature of God, (2) the decrees of God, (3) the doctrine of predestination, (4) the order of salvation, and (5) the doctrine of sanctification (that degree of the order of salvation wherein true piety exists).⁵

The Nature of God

In *A Golden Chain*,⁶ Perkins defines theology as consisting of two chief parts: the nature of God and the works of God.⁷ As for God's nature, Perkins celebrates His diversity in unity.⁸ The three persons are but one God, each with His proper manner of existing and working. According to Charles Munson, "Perkins sees the Godhead first in terms of its internal activity and then in terms of its external relations to the created order."⁹ The Father is unbegotten, and His work is to initiate action. The Son is begotten, and His work is to execute action. The Spirit is spirated, and His work is to complete

⁴ This dissertation argues that Perkins's spirituality is rooted in his understanding that God's grace is most evident through our obedience in good works in the context of vocation.

⁵ For simplicity's sake, this chapter focuses primarily on Perkins's *A Golden Chain*, while also consulting *An Exposition of the Creed, The Manner and Order of Predestination, Commentary on Galatians, Commentary on Jude, The First Book of the Cases of Conscience, A Treatise considering whether a Man is in a State of Damnation or Grace, and A Grain of Mustard Seed*.

⁶ Perkins's *A Golden Chain* was first published in Latin (1590) and then in English (1591). As Joel Beeke observes, much of Perkins's theology was granted creedal sanction in the Westminster Assembly (1643–1649). Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 84. See also Beeke, "Faith and Assurance in the Heidelberg Catechism and Its Primary Composers: A Fresh Look at the Kendall Thesis," *Calvin Theological Journal* 27, no. 1 (April 1, 1992): 39–67; R. T. Kendall, "The Puritan Modification of Calvin's Theology," in *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World*, ed. W. Stanford Reid (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 199–214. Opinions vary as to Perkins's primary objective in *A Golden Chain*. Some argue it is a straightforward defense against the rise of Arminianism within the Church of England. Others view it as a polemic directed at the Church of Rome, specifically aimed at its errors concerning God's plan of salvation. For more on the various views, see Jonathan D. Moore, "Predestination and Evangelism in the Life and Thought of William Perkins," 9–10; Young Jae Timothy Song, *Theology and Piety in the Reformed Federal Thought of William Perkins and John Preston* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1998), 43.

⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 6:11.

⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 2:14; 6:20.

⁹ Charles Robert Munson, "William Perkins: Theologian of Transition" (PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1971), 71.

action, effecting it as from the Father and the Son.¹⁰ The three are coequal, distinguished not by degree, “though in regard of order one is before another.”¹¹ Perkins states, “The Father sends the Son to be our redeemer. The Son works in His own person the work of redemption. And the Holy Ghost applies the same by His efficacy.”¹² But the “action of sending” does not make “the persons unequal” but only shows a “distinction and order” among equals.¹³

This triune God is, according to Perkins, a simple and incomparable being. He is eternal, infinite, and indivisible, filling and transcending all things.¹⁴ His life is His perpetual activity in wisdom, will, and power.¹⁵

For Perkins, knowing God is “one of the most special points in Christian religion” because His wisdom is “wonderful.”¹⁶ It is not based on notions abstracted from creation itself. Rather, “by His own essence, by one eternal and immutable act of understanding,” God does, “distinctly and perfectly know Himself and all other things though infinite, whether they have being or not.”¹⁷ His wisdom consists of foreknowledge. Perkins explains, it “is not properly spoken of God, but by reason of men

¹⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 6:21–22. See also Stephen Yuille, “The Wholesome Doctrine of Faith and Love,” in *William Perkins: Architect of Puritanism*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Greg Salazar (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 144.

¹¹ Perkins, *Works*, 5:268.

¹² Perkins, *Works*, 2:221. “Perkins refers to the common Western view that in the Trinity, the person of the Father is the fountain of all, for He begets the Son and from Father and Son proceeds the Spirit.” Perkins, *Works*, 2:26n25. See also 10:83; Patterson, *William Perkins*, 72.

¹³ Perkins, *Works*, 5:268. Perkins elaborates, “Christ as God is equal to the Father. The Son is made eternally subject unto the Father not as He is God, but in regard of His humanity.” Perkins, *Works*, 4:257. See also 2:21; 4:54–55; 6:48; Ballitch, “God the Son in the Theology of William Perkins,” 147–64; See also Yuille, “The Wholesome Doctrine,” 143–45.

¹⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 6:13–14.

¹⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 6:15.

¹⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 5:352.

¹⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 6:15.

to whom things are past or to come.”¹⁸ Man’s foreknowledge is unoriginal because it involves learning, anticipating, and responding, whereas God’s foreknowledge is original because it is “one eternal and immutable act” whereby He knows all things. God’s wisdom also consists of counsel “by which He does most rightly perceive the best reason of all things that are done.”¹⁹ The counsels of God are eternal and according to His good pleasure. They encompass all creation and extend to each person’s life. Perkins writes, “God has determined what He will do with every man, and that He has in His eternal counsel assigned every man his office and condition of life. For there is in God a pleasure whereby He may do with every man what He will.”²⁰

A consideration of God’s wisdom naturally leads to His will, whereby “He both freely and justly with one act wills all things.”²¹ His will reveals His love and hatred.²² His love is evident first in the approval of Himself, and second in His approval of His creatures (as they are good). His hate is directed toward His creatures who love iniquity. The will of God also reveals His grace and justice. God “orders rightly all things in His actions,” and He rewards with “gentleness or anger” according to the creature’s work done on earth.²³

The third aspect of the divine life is power: God is able to perform every work that does not contradict His nature. His power is absolute, whereby He can do more than He performs or wills to perform. His power is actual, meaning He causes all things to be what He freely wills.²⁴

¹⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 6:15.

¹⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 6:15.

²⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 2:52–53.

²¹ Perkins, *Works*, 6:15.

²² Perkins, *Works*, 6:16.

²³ Perkins, *Works*, 6:17.

²⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 6:17–18. See also Stoeber, *A Faire and Easie*, 87–90.

This triune being, whose life is His perpetual activity in wisdom, will, and power, is altogether glorious. Perkins declares, “God’s glory or majesty is the infinite excellency of His most simple and most holy divine nature.”²⁵ Due to His “infinite excellency,” God far transcends man’s finite understanding. Nevertheless, as Perkins explains, “We are to know God, not as He is in Himself, but as He has revealed Himself unto us in the covenant of grace. We must acknowledge the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and seek to grow in the knowledge and experience of this.”²⁶

The Decrees of God

The second part of theology, according to Perkins, concerns God’s work—specifically, “His decree or the execution of his decree.”²⁷ God’s decree is His determination of all things.²⁸ Perkins writes, “The Lord according to His good pleasure has most certainly decreed every thing and action, whether past, present, or to come, together with their circumstances of place, time, means, and end.”²⁹ God’s “principal end” in so doing is the manifestation of His glory (Rom 11:36).³⁰

God executes His decrees by two means. The first is His operation. Things do not come to pass because “God did foreknow them,” but because “He decreed and willed

²⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 6:19. See also Munson, “Theologian of Transition,” 70–74.

²⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 2:221; 9:14. Perkins claims that ultimately God’s glory, God’s triunity, and the incarnation are mysteries that far transcend human comprehension. Perkins, *Works*, 4:263; 2:220; 5:337, 368. Randall Pederson remarks, “The Puritans embraced classical Christian theism that conceded to the limits of human understanding in comprehending God. In this sense, the precisionists mirrored the metaphysical thought of Thomas Aquinas, who, via the patristics, upheld the belief that God was both grasped in the sense that one could know him, love him, and be loved by him in the Incarnation, but that it was impossible, given the limits of human finitude and reason, to comprehend him in his essence.” Randall J. Pederson, *Unity in Diversity: English Puritans and the Puritan Reformation, 1603–1689* (Boston: Brill, 2014), 69.

²⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 6:23.

²⁸ Chapter 3 of the Westminster Confession (1646) echoes Perkins’s understanding of God’s eternal decrees.

²⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 6:23.

³⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 6:23; 4:264. Other “ends” include salvation and the common good. Perkins, *Works*, 6:47; 8:656–57.

them.”³¹ God’s decree, therefore, is “the first and principle working cause of all things, which also is in order and time before all other causes.”³² This means that all second causes (including man’s being and actions) are dependent on the first cause (God’s operation), though it does not override human liberty but orders it towards determined ends.³³

It is Perkins’s vision of a good and gracious God that underscores his view of divine causality and human liberty.³⁴ God wills only good; therefore, to will as God wills is true liberty. Conversely, to choose evil is not freedom, but “impotency.”³⁵ Perkins states, “When God begins to regenerate us, He makes us then willing, being otherwise by nature unwilling. In respect of time, they (conversion and the ability to will) are both done together; but in respect of order of nature first the will begins to be turned of God before it can will to be turned. For every cause is before his effect, if not in time, yet in priority of nature.”³⁶ Regeneration breaks the bonds of the flesh (fallen human nature), thereby freeing the mind to understand, the heart to desire, and the will to choose.³⁷

³¹ Perkins, *Works*, 6:24, 352–53. See also 2:26. Perkins adds, “Indeed, there is in God a knowledge of things that possibly may be, though they never be; and this knowledge goes before God’s decree. Yet the divine knowledge of things that certainly shall be follows the will and determination of God.” Perkins, *Works*, 6:398. Perkins refers to Anselm. Perkins, *Works*, 6:337.

³² Perkins, *Works*, 6:24. See also 2:21; 5:358; 6:398.

³³ Perkins, *Works*, 6:24.

³⁴ Ian Breward, “William Perkins and the Ideal of the Ministry in the Elizabethan Church,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 24, no. 3 (October 1965): 79.

³⁵ Perkins explains, “Liberty and freedom of will in God is perfect liberty. Therefore to will that only which is good, so it be freely without compulsion, is true liberty. And he that can only will that which is good, does more freely will good and has more liberty than he that can will either good or evil.” Perkins, *Works*, 2:57. See also 7:13–19; 10:52. Gustaf Wingren observes a similar thought in Luther. See Gustaf Wingren, *The Christian’s Calling: Luther on Vocation* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1958): 106. By contrast, the Roman Catholic position ascribed to the will power to choose good, and this ability plays a part in gaining salvation. See Tipson, *Their Terrifying God*, 150–52; Perkins, *Works*, 6:418–19.

³⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 6:420. See also Leif Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians in England, c. 1590–1640* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2014), 271–72; Muller, *Grace and Freedom*, 189. Muller adds that experientially “the effect can be known before the cause is recognized” (142). For instance, man may have a desire to believe before he recognizes the cause—God’s grace.

³⁷ As a result of the fall, the image of God in Adam was corrupted leaving the mind darkened, the affections hardened, and the will enslaved. Yuille, “The Wholesome Doctrine,” 142.

Richard Muller explains, “The intervention of grace in order to ensure the regeneration and ongoing work of the Spirit in the elect is the single case of a divine determination of human acts, and it does not do violence to the will but, rather, enables the will to act freely in new obedience, according to its renewed nature.”³⁸ Simply put, with God as first cause, free will is not limited but established.³⁹

The second means of executing God’s decree is His operative permission. Muller suggests that this idea is Perkins’s distinct contribution to the discussion concerning the relationship between divine and human willing.⁴⁰ According to Perkins, God “only permits one and the same work to be done of others as it is evil.”⁴¹ When it comes to that which is good, God (the first cause) works with second causes to effect it. However, when it comes to that which is evil, God (the first cause) willingly permits second causes to effect it. He chooses not to hinder the second cause, and He works against it by “detracting the grace which is had or not giving that which it wants.”⁴²

Perkins illustrates all this in the case of Adam. God gave Adam the first grace—to be able to will and do that which is good. However, He did not give Adam the second grace to persevere in willing and doing the same. Rather, He willingly permitted (one and the same work) and did not hinder Adam’s choice to disobey. Perkins adds this explanatory word: “[God] is not to be blamed of us [as the author of evil], though He confirmed him [Adam] not with new grace, for He is debtor to no man to give him so

³⁸ Muller, *Grace and Freedom*, 187–88. See also Shaw, “Drama in the Meeting House,” 64.

³⁹ The Westminster Confession, 3:1. See also Stoeber, *A Faire and Easie*, 97; Muller, *Grace and Freedom*, 187, 191; Song, *Theology and Piety*, 12; Patterson, *William Perkins*, 72–73.

⁴⁰ Muller, *Grace and Freedom*, 185. Muller contends that Perkins’s second greatest contribution on the subject of divine and human willing is the development of Augustine’s four estates of humanity: (1) innocence—sinless but able to sin; (2) corruption—sinful and not able not to sin; (3) regenerate—able to sin and not to sin; (4) glorified—not able to sin (185–86). See Perkins, *Works*, 6:405ff., xix.

⁴¹ Perkins, *Works*, 6:24.

⁴² Perkins, *Works*, 6:25. See also 6:337–38.

much as the least grace, whereas He had already given a plentiful measure thereof to him.”⁴³ Ultimately, in Adam’s case, it was God’s will to expose the weakness in the most excellent man without His abiding assistance.⁴⁴

Perkins is also careful to explain that, in some sense, God’s operative permission of evil is good because it serves both to punish sinners and test saints.⁴⁵ This means that the end in view is always good. Perkins admits that the relationship between the end (good) and the means (evil) is incomprehensible to us.⁴⁶ An appropriate response, therefore, is to revere God for the righteous effects (that is, mercy and justice) of His perfect will. God’s permissive will is always for His glory and the church’s good.

The Doctrine of Predestination

The first of God’s decrees is predestination.⁴⁷ “God has ordained,” says Perkins, “all men to a certain and everlasting estate—that is, either to salvation or condemnation, for his own glory.”⁴⁸ As Beeke explains, Perkins supported his definition

⁴³ Perkins, *Works*, 5:85. See also 6:407. For more on first and second causes, see Perkins’s description of God’s special (approving) and general (permissive) wills, Perkins, *Works*, 1:308; 4:486; 5:45; 6:322.

⁴⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 5:85. See also 1:89.

⁴⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 6:399, 400.

⁴⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 5:85. See also 4:265; 6:398.

⁴⁷ This doctrine was the foundation of Perkins’s theology, which provoked substantial criticism. Concerning this doctrine, Munson claims that Perkins was a “transitional figure between high Calvinism and the later Federal Theology.” “Theologian of Transition,” ii, 62, 70. The question of discontinuity extends to Perkins’s covenant theology, doctrine of assurance, and casuistry. Richard Muller is unconvinced that there is such a marked contrast between Perkins and his predecessors. He writes, “The ways in which Reformed writers interrelated the doctrines demonstrated multiple theological foci in their theologies—not that there were no differences between the various theologies examined. In fact, the differences were consistently noted, beginning with significant differences among the major codifiers of Reformation theology, requiring a more nuanced approach to the issue of continuity and discontinuity rather than a simplistic registering of sameness or difference.” Richard A. Muller, “Reassessing the Relation of Reformation and Orthodoxy: A Methodological Rejoinder,” *American Theological Inquiry* 4, no. 1 (January 15, 2011): 4–5. See also Fesko, “Union and Justification,” 22. For further views on continuity, see Shaw, “William Perkins and the New Pelagians,” 275, 277; Beeke, “Faith and Assurance,” 39–67. For views on discontinuity, see Ian Breward, “The Life and Theology of William Perkins, 1558–1602” (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 1963): 60, 200, 201; R. T. Kendall, “Living the Christian Life in the Teaching of William Perkins and His Followers,” in *Living the Christian Life: 1974 Westminster Conference Papers (Reprint)* (Huntingdon, Cambs.: The Westminster Conference, 1974), 46.

⁴⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 6:26. After *A Golden Chain* (1591), Perkins wrote another work devoted to

by appealing to “[Theodore] Beza’s argument that the end is first in the intention of the agent. Thus, God first decided the end—the manifestation of His glory in saving and damning—before He considered the means, such as creation and the fall.”⁴⁹ This sequence, wherein the elect and reprobate are chosen before the creation and fall, is known as supralapsarianism. In brief, the creation and fall are simply the means by which God determines to glorify Himself in His decree of predestination.⁵⁰ By His grace, God predestines some to salvation: “that book of life wherein are written the names of the elect.”⁵¹ In their case, God’s “justice is tempered with mercy” in the forgiveness of their sins.⁵² The elect are chosen based on God’s wisdom and will.⁵³

the subject of predestination, *The Manner and Order of Predestination* (1598). Perkins, *Works*, 6:273–381. Ballitch believes that this treatise “is his most academic piece on the subject, providing an extended polemic against Arminianism and drawing from the church fathers to support his positions.” “Not to Behold Faith, But the Object of Faith,” 451. Wallace claims, “Predestination was the ultimate bulwark in the protection of the central theme of Protestantism, justification by grace through faith.” “Puritan Polemical Divinity,” 214. See also Munson, “Theologian of Transition,” 74; Pederson, *Unity in Diversity*, 278. Predestination’s dual result—salvation or reprobation—is called “double predestination,” which is found in Article 17 of the 39 Articles (produced in 1563 and authorized by parliament in 1571). For more, see Yuille, “The Wholesome Doctrine,” 136–38; Patterson, *William Perkins*, chap. 3; Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 121.

⁴⁹ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 121.

⁵⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 6:256. The “supralapsarian” view observes the following order in the divine decrees: (1) predestination; (2) creation; and (3) fall. Conversely, the “infralapsarian” proposes: (1) creation; (2) predestination; and (3) fall. Wallace indicates that in infralapsarianism “it could be more readily affirmed that no one was damned apart from their sins.” “Puritan Polemical Divinity,” 218. This was the question that theologians were seeking to answer, “Whether God takes sin into account in His decision to elect some to salvation.” J. V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2016), 201. See also Pederson, *Unity in Diversity*, 136–37.

⁵¹ Perkins, *Works*, 6:47.

⁵² Stoeber, *A Faire and Easie*, 88. Tipson submits that “theologians like Perkins understood divine glory morally. Divinity manifested itself most clearly in the attributes of mercy and justice.” *Their Terrifying God*, 149.

⁵³ See Perkins, *Works*, xvii–xx; Patterson, *William Perkins*, 84–86; Wallace, “Puritan Polemical Divinity,” 214–16. There were four alternative views of predestination: (1) The Pelagians believed that God chose the elect based on His foreknowledge of their faith and works. Peter Baro, a main contender, was considered a new Pelagian, as well as Jacobus Arminius. (2) The Lutherans taught that God chose to save some through their faith, and reject others based on His foreknowledge of their rejection of Him. (3) The semi-Pelagians (or Roman Catholics) believed that predestination was partly a result of God’s mercy and partly a result of God foreseeing man’s works. (4) The reformed position held that God has ordained all men to a certain and everlasting estate, that is, either to salvation or condemnation, for His own glory. Perkins, *Works*, 6:5. See also Song, *Theology and Piety*, 41–42; Patterson, *William Perkins*, 71; Fesko, “Union and Justification,” 28.

All who are predestined to eternal life believe “because God enables them to do so.”⁵⁴ They believe through God’s appointed means which is the preaching of the gospel. Perkins writes, “There be two wills in God: one, whereby He determines what He will do unto us or in us (predestination); the other, whereby He determines what we shall do to Him (the gospel).”⁵⁵ For this reason, Perkins believes that the gospel is to be preached to all people at all times in all places.⁵⁶ Leif Dixon states that “while predestination may, in the end, be fundamentally exclusivist and divisive, in this world it actually brings everyone together.”⁵⁷

As for the reprobate, Perkins affirms that God predestines them to condemnation, thereby demonstrating the perfection of His justice in punishing sin to the fullest extent. For Perkins, “this serves to show the liberty of God’s will in the dispensation of supernatural benefits. For in that God chooses this man and not that, it declares the liberty and very great perfection of God (Matt 20:15; Eph 1:5, 11).”⁵⁸ Recognizing that this is a difficult doctrine, Perkins turns to Paul (Romans 9) and Augustine to emphasize God’s incomprehensibility while affirming that His will is the efficient cause.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Patterson, *William Perkins*, 82. See Perkins, *Works*, 5:332; 6:176–78. Perkins says it is possible to know our election by the testimony of God’s Spirit and the testimony of our spirit. *Works*, 5:337. He expounds three grounds of assurance in *Works*, 8:155–58. Beeke concludes that the doctrine of assurance was developed to combat dead orthodoxy and to alleviate despair among genuine believers. Joel R. Beeke, “The Greatest Case of Conscience,” in *William Perkins: Architect of Puritanism*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Greg Salazar (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 57–94.

⁵⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 5:360. These are God’s “secret and revealed wills.” See Yuille, “The Wholesome Doctrine,” 136–38.

⁵⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 6:310. For more on Perkins’s view of preaching, see 6:174, 371; 9:75; 10:334–43; J. Stephen Yuille, “Ready to Receive: Humbling and Softening in William Perkins’s Preparation of the Heart,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 5 (July 1, 2013): 91–106; Paul R. Schaefer, “The Arte of Prophesying by William Perkins,” in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 47–48.

⁵⁷ Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians*, 78.

⁵⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 6:316, 361.

⁵⁹ Paul claims, “O man, who art thou, which disputeth with God!” (Rom. 9:20)” Augustine in like manner says, “Who created the reprobates, but God? And why, but because it pleased Him? But why pleased it Him? O man, who art thou that disputest with God?” Perkins, *Works*, 6:255. See also John

Perkins was outspoken in his condemnation of semi-Pelagianism.⁶⁰ He writes, it is “flat to hang God’s will upon man’s will, to make every man an emperor, and God his underling, and to change the order of nature by subordinating God’s will, which is the first cause, to the will of man, which is the second cause, whereas by the very law of nature the first cause should order and dispose the second cause.”⁶¹ In short, severing God’s foreknowledge from God’s decree is “a device of man’s brain” which dishonors God’s majesty.⁶² Munson summarizes Perkins’s doctrine of predestination as follows: “In the final analysis, predestination must be primarily understood not in terms of what it does or does not do for man, but rather in terms of its ultimate purpose—the glory of God.”⁶³ Muller echoes this sentiment when he writes, “Reformed doctrine is not merely anthropological and soteriological but primarily theological in significance.”⁶⁴

Unsurprisingly, Perkins’s doctrine of predestination has elicited various responses. Some have been positive. Dewey Wallace, for example, contends that “that the powerful religious experience was always that of being chosen, not of being left out and thus certainty and reassurance, not despair, were derived.”⁶⁵ Comfort and assurance are

Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, John Baillie, and Henry P. Van Dusen (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 922–23.

⁶⁰ Semi-Pelagianism maintains that, in order to communicate His goodness and love to all His creatures, God did four things: (1) He decreed to create man righteous in His own image; (2) He foresaw the fall of man after creation, yet so as He neither willed nor decreed it; (3) He decreed the universal redemption of all and every man actually by Christ, so be it they believe in Him; and (4) He decreed to call all and every man effectually, so that (if they will) they may be saved. Perkins, *Works*, 5:355–56; 6:351ff. Perkins asserts, “They make the prescience (foreknowledge) of man’s faith and unbelief to be the impulsive cause of God’s decree. This is erroneous by the doctrine of all churches, unless they be popish.” *Works*, 5:357, 359. See also 6:220–41; Song, *Theology and Piety*, 42–43.

⁶¹ Perkins, *Works*, 5:360.

⁶² Perkins, *Works*, 5:356, 360.

⁶³ Munson, “Theologian of Transition,” 74. See also Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 121.

⁶⁴ Richard A. Muller, “The Placement of Predestination in Reformed Theology: Issue or Non-Issue?” *Calvin Theological Journal* 40, no. 2 (November 2005): 186.

⁶⁵ Dewey D. Wallace, Jr. ed., *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525–1695* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 194–96. See also Joel R. Beeke, “William Perkins and His Greatest Case of Conscience: ‘How a Man May Know Whether He Be

inherent in the decree.⁶⁶ Perkins held that hope is anchored in the truth that salvation rests in the unchangeable good pleasure of God.⁶⁷ Mark Shaw remarks, as “a skillful spiritual adviser,” Perkins used this doctrine to encourage others.⁶⁸ It is a great comfort to know that every detail of our lives was in the mind of God before the foundation of the world, and that God effected His good plan for us by means of the Son and the Spirit coming into this world (Eph 1:4; 2:10). All this is intended to elicit love and obedience. For Beeke, Perkins’s explanation of predestination resulted in a “biblical, warm, Reformed piety,” not a “cold-hearted, dry theology.”⁶⁹

Others have not been so favorable in their assessment of Perkins’s doctrine of predestination. R. T. Kendall, for example, contends that it rings of determinism: “We must see that Perkins conceived election and reprobation as the static, unchangeable decree of God, the consequence of which was an unalterable destiny of particular men either to salvation or damnation. Both elect and reprobate, however, are born into the state of damnation; therefore it behoves all men to make certain that they are of that state, hence elected.”⁷⁰ In Baird Tipson’s assessment, “Perkins had become identified in the

the Child of God, or No,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 41, no. 2 (2006).

⁶⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 5:352–55. Similarly, Calvin writes, “Those who rightly and duly examine it (predestination) as it is contained in his Word reap the inestimable fruit of comfort.” Calvin, *Institutes*, 969. See also Beeke, *Quest for Full Assurance*, 95; Pederson, *Unity in Diversity*, 278. Dixon asserts that it “gives life meaning, direction – and, above all, certainty.” *Practical Predestinarians*, 2.

⁶⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 6:264.

⁶⁸ Shaw, “William Perkins and the New Pelagians,” 284. Shaw asks, “How could the doctrine of predestination produce anything but a carnal security?” He says, “The Calvinist response was to say as John Owen put it years later that the idea of sovereign grace can indeed produce carnal presumption but the experience of it never does” (292).

⁶⁹ Beeke, “Greatest Case,” 258.

⁷⁰ Kendall, “The Christian Life,” 46. According to Muller, Kendall was not “sufficiently cognizant of the relationship between Perkins’s theology and pietism.” Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 131–32. Kendall’s general criticism stems from an assumption that “God’s sovereignty is incompatible with human responsibility and activity.” Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 452. Kendall’s understanding of the works of God and man, before and after salvation, differs from Perkins. For more on the Kendall thesis, see Beeke, “Faith and Assurance,” 39–67; Shaw, “Drama in the Meeting House,” 45–47; Muller, *Grace and Freedom*, 138–43; Ballitch, “Not to Behold Faith, But the Object of Faith”; Pederson, *Unity in Diversity*, 264.

popular mind with a doctrine of predestination that portrayed God as capricious and tyrannical.”⁷¹ Muller confirms Perkins’s reputation as a “thoroughgoing determinist,”⁷² and Perry Miller suggests that Perkins’s teaching on God’s sovereignty was at least “palliative, in that it lessened the area of human inability.”⁷³

Some of Perkins’s own contemporaries had a similar reaction. In his “Epistle to the Reader,” in the *Manner and Order of Predestination*, Perkins acknowledges that some were deeply offended by his doctrine.⁷⁴ He was aware that the main point of contention was his portrayal of God’s absolute sovereignty. For Perkins, however, the issue ultimately comes down to our view of God. He warns:

Things in respect of being must have dependence on the will of God or on themselves, or on some other thing. If they depend on themselves for their being, they are gods. If they depend on any other thing without and beside God, that thing is god also. It remains therefore that all things and acts in the world considered as acts have their being by a dependence on God as on the highest cause or the cause of causes.⁷⁵

In short, a denial of God’s sovereignty in salvation and life is a denial of His deity. Perkins believed that God’s will alone “is the beginning of the goodness of things.”⁷⁶ He is the efficient and sustaining cause of all things. God’s bringing forth of His decree is His efficiency. William Stoever explains, “God proceeds as he has previously determined, and so his efficient power is said to be ‘ordinate.’ This ordination, moreover, includes the

⁷¹ Tipson, *Their Terrifying God*, 152.

⁷² Though, in actuality, “his expositions of the doctrines of grace and free choice presumes a fundamental liberty of nature.” Muller, *Grace and Freedom*, 186.

⁷³ Perry Miller, “The Marrow of Puritan Divinity,” in *Puritan New England: Essays on Religion, Society, and Culture* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1977), 46–48.

⁷⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 6:304. Troubled by this, he promises to address each of their complaints. “I do not [now] exhibit to you a view and picture of this doctrine composed of these principles and do publish the same, that I might to my power help out those that stick in the difficulties of this doctrine of predestination” (6:304). Perkins maintained that division (over doctrine) in the church was the result of a “remaining natural ignorance or blindness” in some members. Perkins, *Works*, 9:172.

⁷⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 6:399. See also 6:324–25. For Perkins’s explanation of God’s will for His good pleasure (secret or hidden) and God’s signifying (revealed) will, see 1:451–53; 6:375–76, 397–404; 10:316. See also Muller, *Grace and Freedom*, 68–74.

⁷⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 6:399.

means through which he exercises his power as well as the ends toward which he exercises it.”⁷⁷ Hence, via “order of nature,” God’s decree establishes the invariable basis for His executive plan of redemption, which we experience diversely in “order of time.”⁷⁸ Munson adds, “This nature of God, this internal activity, this life of God, this operation on behalf of man, is God's glory.”⁷⁹

The Order of Salvation

Having articulated God’s decree of predestination, Perkins explains the means by which it is executed in the lives of the elect. He remarks, “The elect were also elected to those subordinate means whereby, as by steps, they might attain this end [eternal life], and without which it were impossible to obtain it.”⁸⁰ These “subordinate means” include four “degrees”: (1) effectual call, (2) justification, (3) sanctification, and (4) glorification.

Perkins affirms that Christ, in His mediatorial office, is the foundation of election and, therefore, the foundation of these means.⁸¹ His position stood in marked contrast to Roman Catholicism which affirmed that man’s merit contributes in part to salvation. Perkins counters, “They call Him a Savior, but by our merits we may be our own saviors.”⁸² Muller explains that “prior to Perkins’s time no one had so meticulously placed the Person of the Mediator in such a central systematic relation to the decree [of predestination] and its execution. The *ordo salutis* both originates and is effected in Christ.”⁸³

⁷⁷ Stoever, *A Faire and Easie*, 89.

⁷⁸ Stoever, *A Faire and Easie*, 89. Muller attributes Perkins’s “eclectic view of divine and human willing” to his ideas of order of nature and time. *Grace and Freedom*, 191–92.

⁷⁹ Munson, “Theologian of Transition,” 72.

⁸⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 6:47. See also 5:335; 8:628.

⁸¹ Perkins, *Works*, 6:47. See also 6:47–64; Calvin, *Institutes*, 431.

⁸² Perkins, *Works*, 7:3.

⁸³ Muller, “A Golden Chaine: Predestinarian System,” 71, 76, 77. Ballitch states that

By means of His humiliation and exaltation, Christ secures all that is applied to the elect. This leaves no room for human merit and encourages the sinner to turn to God in faith.⁸⁴ Perkins writes, “In the evangelical covenant, the promises that are made are not made to any work or virtue in man, but to the worker—not for any merit of his own person or work but for the Person and merit of Christ.”⁸⁵ This is the case because Christ “is the knot and bond of both covenants.”⁸⁶ Perkins affirms that Christ fulfilled the covenant of works by establishing the covenant of grace.⁸⁷ Both covenants “make sense of the relationship between God and man.”⁸⁸ Both are unilateral in establishment and bilateral in administration.⁸⁹ Both include conditions: the covenant of works requires

“Perkins’s most explicitly Christological work is *An Exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles*, and after that his *Commentary on Jude*. As a man of his time and tradition, he [Perkins] articulated his Christology in the context of Christ’s work, specifically His role as mediator. However, he had a robust understanding of the Person of Christ.” “God the Son in the Theology of William Perkins,” 148, 162, 164. Song observes that “Perkins’s high view of predestination has been interpreted by some scholars as a sign of ‘withered Christology,’ often associated with high Calvinism or Protestant scholasticism.” *Theology and Piety*, 44. See also Shaw, “Drama in the Meeting House,” 49. Muller reports that Hall, Breward, and Kendall agree that Perkins’s system of predestination departs from Calvin’s Christocentric teaching, for the supralapsarian view of predestination presupposes that Christ is subordinate to the decree of election. *Christ and the Decree*, 131–32. On the other hand, Muller continues, “The development of early orthodoxy in the Reformed Church of the sixteenth century did not involve the rejection of the Christological focus of the theology of the Reformation ... [but] ‘led to the development of a Trinitarian-Christological structure capable of governing and enclosing the doctrine of predestination.’” Richard A. Muller, “Predestination and Christology in Sixteenth-Century Reformed Theology” (PhD diss., Duke University, 1976): iv. See also Muller, “Reassessing”; Beeke, “Faith and Assurance,” 53; Beeke, *Quest for Full Assurance*, 84; Pederson, *Unity in Diversity*, 70, 265; Schaefer, “William Perkins,” 147–64.

⁸⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 2:54; 4:262; 6:48.

⁸⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 7:55.

⁸⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 6:54–55. Perkins states that Christ is the “substance of the covenant.” *Works*, 5:12. Shaw confirms that for Perkins, “the background of the covenant of grace was election in Christ as its formal cause and the work of Christ as its material cause.” “Drama in the Meeting House,” 51.

⁸⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 6:65. Perkins notes two types of covenants and the seals thereof: (1) the covenant of works and the law; (2) the covenant of grace and the sacraments. The elements in the sacraments, “can strengthen assurance in God’s promises.” Beeke, *Quest for Full Assurance*, 97.

⁸⁸ Pederson, *Unity in Diversity*, 71; Song, *Theology and Piety*, 55. Wallace states, “Covenant or federal theology appealed to Puritans because it was based on a central theme of biblical narrative, accentuated both the divine initiative and human obligation, and, like the order of salvation, was easily related to piety.” Wallace, “Puritan Polemical Divinity,” 210. Miller suggests that this contract is as “two partners in a business enterprise.” “The Marrow of Puritan Divinity,” 50. See Perkins, *Works*, 4:105–06.

⁸⁹ According to Muller, conversion is “the point of reconciliation” at which the monopoleuric and dipoleuric aspects of covenant theology unite. Richard A. Muller, “Covenant and Conscience in English Reformed Theology: Three Variations on a 17th Century Theme,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 42, no. 2 (1980): 310–11. For more on covenant theology see Song, *Theology and Piety*; Stoeber, *A Faire*

obedience to the law and, subsequent to the fall, satisfaction as a penalty for sin,⁹⁰ while the covenant of grace requires faith in Christ and repentance of sin.

The covenant of grace “is grounded in God’s gracious being and promises.”⁹¹ According to Muller, it “provides the point of contact between God’s promise and man’s inability.”⁹² In other words, all that God requires of man “God Himself provides by His grace.”⁹³ Because of this covenant, the elect “experience” the four degrees of election (or what Perkins calls “the declaration of God’s love”).⁹⁴

The first “degree” is effectual calling. It is the means by which the sinner is severed from the world and welcomed into God’s family. Union with Christ is central to this, for God gives the sinner to Christ, while Christ and all His benefits are given to the sinner.⁹⁵ Perkins explains that this “most near and real union” is spiritual, in that Christ

and Easie; Donald K. McKim, “William Perkins and the Theology of the Covenant,” in *Studies of the Church in History: Essays Honoring Robert S. Paul on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Horton Davies (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1983); McKim, “William Perkins and the Christian Life: The Place of the Moral Law and Sanctification in Perkins’ Theology,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (April 1987): 125–31; Beeke, “Greatest Case,” 264–66; Miller, “The Marrow of Puritan Divinity”; Bierma, “The Role of Covenant Theology in Early Reformed Orthodoxy”; Munson, “Theologian of Transition”; Michael McGiffert, “Grace and Works: The Rise and Division of Covenant Divinity in Elizabethan Puritanism,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 75, no. 4 (1982): 463–502; Victor Lewis Priebe, “The Covenant Theology of William Perkins” (PhD diss., Drew University, 1967); Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life*, 2nd ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989); Carol Man Fen Chen, “A Historical, Biblical, and Theological Interpretation of Covenants: Unconditionality and Conditionality in Relation to Justification and Sanctification” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019); Shaw, “Drama in the Meeting House.”

⁹⁰ Stoeber, *A Faire and Easie*, 83. Perkins asserts, “Christ’s satisfaction comprehends His passion and fulfilling the law.” Perkins, *Works*, 6:56. See also 1:261. Christ’s intercession “is the means of applying the satisfaction.” For Perkins’s view of universal grace, including: (1) universal election, (2) universal redemption, and 3) universal vocation, see Perkins, *Works*, 5:360–65. See also 6:353–60.

⁹¹ Beeke, “Greatest Case,” 266.

⁹² Muller, “A Golden Chaine: Predestinarian System,” 79. See also Perkins, *Works*, 6:xxxv.

⁹³ McKim, “William Perkins and the Theology of the Covenant,” 95. See also Tipson, *Their Terrifying God*, 162; Perkins, *Works*, 4:260–61. Perkins perceived comfort as a positive corollary of the covenant. Perkins, *Works*, 4:105–06. See also Beeke, “Greatest Case,” 265–66.

⁹⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 6:170–219. Later Puritans expanded the *ordo salutis* to include predestination, election, calling, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification. Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, 7; Wallace, “Puritan Polemical Divinity,” 210. Perkins himself varies his explications of the degrees of the *ordo salutis*. See Perkins, *Works*, 2:52; 8:478ff. A brief summary can be found in Shaw, “Drama in the Meeting House,” 53–70; and Beeke, *Quest for Full Assurance*, 88–98.

⁹⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 6:172–73. See also 4:260; 5:367.

takes us to Himself by the Holy Spirit and we take Christ to ourselves through faith.

In terms of our experience of this effectual calling, it begins by hearing God's Word.⁹⁶ The heart is then mollified (or softened) and thereby prepared to receive God's grace. This occurs by means of (1) knowledge of God's law, (2) knowledge of original and actual sin and its due punishment, (3) compunction (or pricking) of the heart—namely, a sense and feeling of the wrath of God, and (4) holy desperation to obtain eternal life.⁹⁷

The final step is faith, which Perkins describes as “the miraculous and supernatural faculty of the heart apprehending Christ Jesus being applied by the operation of the Holy Ghost and receiving Him to itself (John 1:12).”⁹⁸ This operation of the Holy Spirit is effectual, meaning it is “not something that the will can either choose or refuse.”⁹⁹ There are five steps in this “begetting of faith”:

(1) The knowledge of the gospel by the illumination of God's Spirit (John 17:3). To this in such as are truly humbled is annexed a serious meditation of the promises in the gospel stirred up by the sensible feeling of their own beggary. And after the foresaid knowledge in all such as are enlightened comes a general faith, whereby they subscribe to the truth of the gospel. This knowledge, if it be more full and perfect, is called the full assurance of understanding; (2) Hope of pardon, whereby a sinner, albeit he yet feels not that his sins are certainly pardoned, yet he believes that they are pardonable (Luke 15:18); (3) A hungering and thirsting after that grace which is offered to him in Christ Jesus, as a man hungers and thirsts after meat and drink (John 3:35; 7:37); (4) The approaching to the throne of grace, that there, flying from the terror of the law, he may take hold of Christ and find favor with God (Heb 4:16). This approach has two parts: a) a humble confession of our sins before God particularly, if they be known sins; and generally, if unknown (Ps 32:5); b) the craving pardon of some sins with unspeakable sighs and in perseverance (Rom 8:26); (5) An especial persuasion imprinted in the heart by the Holy Ghost whereby

⁹⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 6:174. For Perkins's works on preaching, see Perkins's *Art of Prophesying, and Calling of the Ministry*, 10:195–356. See also Sinclair B. Ferguson, “Life and Ministry,” in *William Perkins: Architect of Puritanism*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Greg Salazar (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 12–37; Yuille, “The Wholesome Doctrine,” 133–35; Joseph A. Pipa Jr., “William Perkins and the Development of Puritan Preaching” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1985); Andrew Scott Ballitch, “‘Scripture Is Both the Glosse and the Text’: Biblical Interpretation and Its Implementation in the Works of William Perkins” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017).

⁹⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 6:175; 8:467–72. See also Yuille, “Ready to Receive,” 91–106.

⁹⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 6:175. See also 5:11.

⁹⁹ Muller, *Grace and Freedom*, 141–42.

every faithful man does particularly apply to himself those promises which are made in the gospel (Matt 15:28).¹⁰⁰

As Shaw notes, by means of these five steps, “Perkins sought to make the distinctions necessary to rest assurance on the most preliminary degrees of faith in Christ and to keep the gaze of the Christian away from their own works as much as possible.”¹⁰¹

This reception of Christ through faith leads to the second “degree” of election: justification.¹⁰² It is the believer’s positive judicial standing before God, based solely upon the obedience of Christ. It involves the remission of sin and imputation of righteousness. Man is passive, in that he simply receives Christ through faith.¹⁰³ According to Perkins, union with Christ, adoption, justification, and inward conversion are four special works of God’s grace that occur simultaneously and definitively in the life of the believer.¹⁰⁴

This is markedly different from the third “degree” of election: sanctification which occurs by “measures and degrees.”¹⁰⁵ It is a life-long process of mortification and vivification, “whereby such as believe, being delivered from the tyranny of sin, are by

¹⁰⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 6:176–78. See also 5:13–14; 8:472–74; Yuille, “Ready to Receive,” 91–106; Shaw, “Drama in the Meeting House,” 60–62. Some suggest that the combined mollifying of the heart and degrees of faith indicate preparationism, though Perkins acknowledged that man was “stark dead in sin” and could in no way prepare himself for conversion. Perkins, *Works*, 9:167. See 8:xxiii–xxiv, 643–47; Beeke, *Quest for Full Assurance*, 90–91; Pettit, *The Heart Prepared*, 15–18, 61–65; Muller, *Grace and Freedom*, 138; Shaw, “Drama in the Meeting House,” 54–58.

¹⁰¹ Shaw, “William Perkins and the New Pelagians,” 287. See also Beeke, *Quest for Full Assurance*, 85, 86; Beeke, “Greatest Case,” 264; Kendall, “The Christian Life,” 48, 56; Miller, “The Marrow of Puritan Divinity,” 48; Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the 17th Century* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1965), 217.

¹⁰² Perkins, *Works*, 6:181–85. See also 4:61–64; Yuille, “The Wholesome Doctrine,” 152–53.

¹⁰³ See also Miller, “The Marrow of Puritan Divinity,” 46. Regarding this passive reception, Muller explains, “Grace regenerates the will so that it responds actively to the grace.” *Grace and Freedom*, 190. Perkins explains that as an heir and fellow with Christ, the believer has power to live out his new adopted status; his afflictions are turned into trials, or “fatherly chastisements,” that enrich spiritual growth. He becomes a steward over God’s creation, and angels attend him for his good. Perkins, *Works*, 6:184–85; 8:481.

¹⁰⁴ Perkins distinguishes “order of nature” and “order of time.” Here, he notes that “though these four works of grace are in one instant, as for order of time neither goes before nor after [the] other. And yet, in regard of order of nature, union with Christ, justification, and adoption, go before the inward conversion of a sinner.” Perkins, *Works*, 8:644. See also Muller, *Grace and Freedom*, 142.

¹⁰⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 8:644. See also 2:293; 9:12, 174.

little and little renewed in holiness and righteousness.”¹⁰⁶ This righteousness and holiness (the moral image of God) was lost in the fall,¹⁰⁷ but is now renewed in the believer.¹⁰⁸

This renewal touches the mind, memory, conscious, will, and affections. Due to the virtue inherent in Christ’s death and resurrection, whereby He gained victory over the power of sin, we are enabled to mortify sin in our lives .¹⁰⁹ Christ causes the believer to “endeavor and purpose to live according to God’s will. The efficient cause of them both is the Holy Ghost, who does by His divine power convey Himself into the believers’ hearts and in them by applying the power of Christ’s death and resurrection creates holiness (Job 33:24–25).”¹¹⁰

The last “degree” of election is glorification, whereby the believer is fully sanctified. Perkins says that in “perfect glory, we shall be most like to Christ—namely, just, holy incorruptible, glorious, honorable, excellent, beautiful, strong, mighty, and nimble.”¹¹¹ Death, therefore, is the beginning of glorification, as the soul proceeds to heaven to “partly glorify God and partly wait and pray for the consummation of the kingdom and full felicity in body and soul.”¹¹²

The Doctrine of Sanctification

What separates sanctification from the other “degrees” in the order of salvation is its emphasis on works. This was a crucial theological distinction acknowledged by

¹⁰⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 6:186–89. See also 2:293.

¹⁰⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 6:27, 37–40.

¹⁰⁸ In Jude, Perkins defines sanctification as “an inward change of a man justified, whereby the image of God is restored in him.” Perkins, *Works*, 4:30. See also Yuille, “The Wholesome Doctrine,” 142–43.

¹⁰⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 9:10–11.

¹¹⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 6:187. See also Schaefer, “William Perkins,” 160.

¹¹¹ Perkins, *Works*, 6:217. See also 5:411ff.

¹¹² Perkins, *Works*, 6:213. For Perkins’s eschatology, see 6:212–19, 258–61, 445–74. For an explanation of rewards and losses, see 10:102–07, 396–98. For Perkins’s treatise on dying well, see 10:399–458. For more on judgement, see 9:111–22.

Reformed divines.¹¹³ Reflecting on the gospel’s long-time presence in England (over forty years), Perkins complains that the lives of too many believers seem to be void of the fruit of God’s grace—namely, good works.¹¹⁴ This is one of the factors that led him to develop a robust doctrine of sanctification. Some have classified his treatises as “complaint literature.”¹¹⁵ A more suitable title would be “endeavor literature” because what really motivated Perkins was the desire to see God glorified in the sanctification of His people.¹¹⁶ He says that the faithful “are bound to obedience not as it is satisfactory [for salvation], but as it is a document of faith and a testimony of their gratitude toward God or a means to edify their neighbors.”¹¹⁷ For this reason, Perkins repeatedly encourages believers to make their election sure by means of producing good works by God’s grace. This has led some scholars to describe him as an experiential (or practical) predestinarian.¹¹⁸ His desire to cultivate obedience is rooted in two key-principles: (1) God’s grace is the efficient cause of all; and (2) we endeavor by faith to learn and apply the promises and benefits of Christ.

Sanctification, like justification, is of God’s grace. Perkins argues that God’s grace is “the first, middle, and last cause of grace in us and every good act. This doctrine is the foundation of humility, for it teaches us to ascribe all to grace and nothing to

¹¹³ Stoever, *A Faire and Easie*, 110.

¹¹⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 2:337, 346; 5:10.

¹¹⁵ Schaefer, “William Perkins,” 154.

¹¹⁶ Munson remarks that Perkins’s productivity as an author from 1588–95 met the demands of a growing reading public looking for practical theology. “Theologian of Transition,” 47.

¹¹⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 6:182.

¹¹⁸ See Beeke, *Quest for Full Assurance*, 84–85; Pederson, *Unity in Diversity*, 69; Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians*, 63–64. Kendall calls him an “experimental predestinarian.” “The Christian Life,” 46. Peter Sedgwick explains that opposed to a credal predestinarian, “Kendall meant that Perkins rested his account of predestination on the experience of being saved, not of true belief.” Peter H. Sedgwick, “Ethics in the Later Reformation: William Perkins,” in *The Origins of Anglican Moral Theology* (Boston: Brill, 2019), 178.

ourselves.”¹¹⁹ Perkins responds to the notion that the believer’s will is the starting point for some good things by insisting that it is merely an agent in receiving grace and an instrument in dispensing it.¹²⁰ This safeguards against any possible objection that Perkins’s emphasis on works minimizes God’s grace.¹²¹ Observing the sequence in the order of salvation, Perkins maintains that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone. In sanctification, however, he also affirms that, due to the initiating and enabling power of God’s grace, the believer can continually perform good works.¹²²

Union with Christ

Union with Christ is the means by which God’s grace is transmitted to the elect.¹²³ This union is not only *positional* (justification, adoption, etc.), but *transformational* whereby the believer is enabled to grow in sanctification.¹²⁴ Compared

¹¹⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 2:21–22. Perkins pens an astute description of the plan of salvation solely in terms of the first and second grace. See 8:141–42.

¹²⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 2:21–22. See also 6:425ff.

¹²¹ See Shaw, “Drama in the Meeting House,” 68; Yuille, “Ready to Receive,” 102. Beeke argues that Kendall saw Perkins as a voluntarist due to his emphasis on faith in apprehending and applying Christ. Beeke explains that by the term “voluntarist,” Kendall understood Perkins to teach that saving faith was a work or “an act of the will in contrast to a passive persuasion in the mind.” *Quest for Full Assurance*, 92n32, 93; Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 48. Kendall misunderstood Perkins’s distinction between the role of faith and works in justification and faith and works in sanctification. Kendall also opposes Perkins’s idea that a reprobate’s ‘temporary faith’ can produce piety. For Kendall, this elicits confusion and anxiety for the reprobate and the elect. Perkins appealed to Herod and Judas as examples of those who appeared to understand and appreciate God’s Word, though they were reprobate. Saul offered apparently genuine repentance, as did Pharaoh. Thus, Perkins asserts that a temporary faith can appear pious. But more prominent throughout Perkins’s works is his theological understanding that the producer of true piety is God, as reflected in the oft-cited verse 2 Peter 1:10. Of this verse, Kendall concludes that Perkins never quite succeeded in his teachings on assurance. However, it is Kendall who neglected the context of the verse (1:3)—for it is God who has undeniably granted the elect everything they need for godly living. See Perkins, *Works*, 8:451–64; Kendall, “The Christian Life.” For more on the Kendall thesis, see Muller, *Grace and Freedom*, 138–43; David M. Barbee, “A Reformed Catholike: William Perkins’ Use of the Church Fathers” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2013): 232ff. For more on temporary faith, see Perkins, *Works*, 5:9–13; Shaw, “Drama in the Meeting House,” 62–66.

¹²² Perkins quotes Augustine, “For we have by this grace of God in the receiving of that which is good and in the constant keeping of the same not only power to do that which we will, but also will to do that which we can.” Perkins, *Works*, 6:371. See also Pederson, *Unity in Diversity*, 70.

¹²³ Perkins, *Works*, 5:369.

¹²⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 10:xxxiv. See also Chen, “The Covenants,” 5. For more on union, see Fesko, “Union and Justification,” 21–34; Pederson, *Unity in Diversity*, 72–75; Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, chap. 30; J. Stephen Yuille, *The Inner Sanctum of Puritan Piety: John Flavel’s Doctrine of*

to the immediacy of the effectual call and justification, sanctification is a lengthy process whereby the faithful are “little and little renewed in holiness and righteousness.”¹²⁵ Union with Christ engages man’s cooperation, for Christ is the fountain of grace. Being joined to Him, the redeemed successfully endeavor in good works.¹²⁶ According to Perkins, it is an enabling union for five reasons.¹²⁷

First, it is admirable (or authentic). Christ and His experiences become ours, meaning we grow up together with Him, completely and eternally (Eph 2:20–22). From the point of effectual calling, Christ is the head of the saints in “a real union, and by its virtue the cross and passion of Christ is as verily made ours as if we had been crucified in our own persons.”¹²⁸ In Perkins’s estimation, reflection on Christ’s passion transforms the elects’ disposition toward sin.¹²⁹

Second, this union is “near and real,” meaning it is a conjoining of two things by the “communion and operation” of the Spirit (Phil 2:1). Definitively, union with Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Third, this union involves the whole person. Perkins clarifies that it is not only the soul that is united to Christ, but the whole person with the whole Savior who is God and man.¹³⁰ This conviction is a tremendous rebuttal of monasticism’s notion of “the great divide between spirit and body, between spiritual and physical.”¹³¹

Mystical Union with Christ (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007).

¹²⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 6:186.

¹²⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 5:371.

¹²⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 6:172–73. See also 2:136–37; 8:478; Yuille, “The Wholesome Doctrine,” 138–39, 141–42.

¹²⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 2:132–33; 6:173.

¹²⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 6:59.

¹³⁰ See also Perkins, *Works*, 5:368; 6:369.

¹³¹ Gregg Allison notes that Plato compartmentalized life into categories: mind and spiritual matters over the body and physical matters. Gregg R. Allison, “Spiritual and Embodied Disciplines,” in *Biblical Spirituality*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 241. Yuille discusses

Fourth, this union is immediate for salvation and life (John 6:53). Perkins asserts, “For salvation and life depends on that fullness of the Godhead: Christ in His humanity, and Christ in His divinity—the Word.”¹³² Two conclusions arise from this statement. First, Christ’s human and divine natures make His work efficacious for the elect’s reconciliation to God, on earth and in heaven.¹³³ Namely, salvation and life depends on both Christ’s deity and humanity. Second, salvation and life are one entity. This means that virtue is actualized in life for the one united with Christ, that is to say, genuine salvation necessarily leads to transformation.¹³⁴

Finally, this union is spiritual (or mystical).¹³⁵ The Holy Spirit applies Christ to us. For our part, we receive Christ through faith. In this way, the Holy Spirit gives life to every member, thus uniting us together in Christ’s mystical body (1 John 4:13).¹³⁶ Such is the essence of union with Christ by which God’s grace is transmitted to the elect for salvation and life.

Faith in Christ

For Perkins, the elects’ reasonable response is to receive “by faith” what God has provided. Beeke calls this the “genius of Perkins’s theology.”¹³⁷ Perkins states:

Perkins’s rejection of the spirit/matter dualism. “The Wholesome Doctrine,” 145–46; J. Stephen Yuille, “A Puritan, Spiritual Household: William Perkins and the ‘Right Ordering’ of a Family,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 8, no. 2 (2016): 171–73. For more on Perkins’s discussion on the battle between the flesh and the spirit, see Perkins, *Works*, 9:169–70, 176.

¹³² Perkins, *Works*, 6:173. See also 5:407.

¹³³ For a discussion on Christ’s natures, see Perkins, *Works*, 6:50–52; Ballitch, “God the Son in the Theology of William Perkins,” 147–64.

¹³⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 5:366. See also 6:285.

¹³⁵ For more on the mystical union with Christ, see Fesko, “Union and Justification,” 21–34; Pederson, *Unity in Diversity*, 72–75.

¹³⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 5:368–69.

¹³⁷ Beeke, “Greatest Case,” 267. Beeke acknowledges Perkin’s genius in his description of faith’s passive and active responses to the gift of God’s grace in the person of Christ. For Perkins’s description of faith, see Perkins, *Works*, 2:120–21; 4:90–92; 5:8–19; 6:175–80; 8:465–78. See also Beeke, *Quest for Full Assurance*, 89–95; Barbee, “A Reformed Catholike,” 232ff.

This faith is a new grace of God added to regeneration after the fall and first prescribed and taught in the covenant of grace. And by this one thing faith differs from the rest of the gifts of God, as the fear of God, the love of God, the love of our brethren, etc. For these were in man's nature before the fall; and after it, when it pleases God to call us, they are but renewed. But justifying faith admits no renewing. For the first engrafting of it into the heart is in the conversion of a sinner after his fall.¹³⁸

In other words, faith is not a part of the renewed image of God, as is love.¹³⁹ Rather, God creates faith anew in the elect. As an operation of the Holy Spirit, under the covenant of grace, faith enables the believer to realize salvation and life.

Perkins clarifies faith's double occupation in the order of salvation: "Faith goes before conversion in order of nature, yet in the order of teaching and practice, they are both together."¹⁴⁰ In other words, faith is alone in justification; it is an "instrument" by which Christ is apprehended. Secondly, not distinct from faith in justification, faith as "a way" accompanies sanctification whereby godly virtues are quickened—love, hope, repentance, etc.¹⁴¹ Therefore, faith is the means by which we "apprehend the saving promise with all the promises that depend on it."¹⁴² Perkins explains that it is the property of faith to apprehend and apply Christ's promises and benefits.¹⁴³ Christ's benefits are His merit, virtue, and example.¹⁴⁴ Even a small "endeavor" toward realizing these benefits is the seed of faith, which is the work of the Spirit, and thus acceptable to God.¹⁴⁵

Of weak faith, Perkins affirms, "If we truly apprehend, though not strongly, it

¹³⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 5:11.

¹³⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 6:286–87.

¹⁴⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 2:25. See also 10:92.

¹⁴¹ Perkins, *Works*, 2:123. See also 4:73; 5:13; 7:284; Yuille, "The Wholesome Doctrine," 153–54; Fesko, "Union and Justification," 32. Perkins also describes faith as a virtue in terms of commitment and steadfastness. Perkins, *Works*, 9:12–13.

¹⁴² Perkins, *Works*, 5:11.

¹⁴³ Perkins, *Works*, 2:58; 4:261; 6:xxxvi, 154, 173, 175; 7:28, 42–44; 8:585, 651–52. See also Beeke, "Greatest Case," 266–67.

¹⁴⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 9:7.

¹⁴⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 2:172–73. See also 1:195; 6:178–79.

suffices,” like a man with a disabled hand—it can still grasp though not as well as a strong hand.¹⁴⁶ Admittedly, weak faith “is the common faith of true believers. For in this world, we rather live by hungering and thirsting, than by full apprehending of Christ. And our comfort stands rather in this, that we are known of God, than that we know God.”¹⁴⁷ Perkins directs the believer’s confidence to God and His promises. For instance, he asserts, “To whom God gives Christ [justification], to them also he gives all things needful for this life [sanctification].”¹⁴⁸ Simply put, faith in the immediacy of the effectual call and justification is apprehending and applying the promises and benefits of Christ in knowledge. Faith in sanctification is the building up of that knowledge through the pattern of apprehending and applying Christ’s promises and benefits in practice, which, according to Perkins, necessitates constant invocation and repentance.¹⁴⁹ This pattern becomes the means by which “secret unbelief, secret hypocrisies, and spiritual pride are exposed.”¹⁵⁰

By the process of sanctification, says Perkins, the believer endeavors “little by

¹⁴⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 2:120–21. See also 6:178–80; 8:651–52; Beeke, *Quest for Full Assurance*, 91. Perkins refers to the man from Mark 9:24 who asks Christ to help his unbelief. “Faith is imperfect and mixed with the contrary: unbelief; presuming, doubting, etc.” Perkins, *Works*, 9:173. See also 2:67.

¹⁴⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 2:120. This citation is from Perkins’s last written work, and it evidences a more compassionate tone. Thomas Fuller recognized this shift in Perkins’s writing: “In his older age he altered his voice, and remitted much of his former rigidity, often professing that to preach mercy was that proper office of the Ministers of the Gospel.” Thomas Fuller, *The Holy State* (Cambridge: Roger Daniel for John Williams, 1642), 90. See also Schaefer, “The Arte of Prophesying,” 41; Beeke, *Quest for Full Assurance*, 91–92. Perkins explains that this distinction between weak and strong faith is helpful to refute the papists “who suppose that we [Protestants] teach that every faith is a full persuasion.” Perkins, *Works*, 2:121.

¹⁴⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 5:13. Perkins’s words mirror 2 Peter 1:10 which asserts that God gives believers all that is needed for a life of godliness, while believers must pursue godliness. Kendall accuses Perkins of making faith a new work of the will in apprehending and applying the benefits of Christ. “The Christian Life,” 52. By contrast, Shaw states, “Perkins can maintain that while faith is something which man truly ‘does’ by engaging mind and conscience in apprehending and applying Christ it is at the same time the gracious work of the Spirit of God.” “Drama in the Meeting House,” 64.

¹⁴⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 2:25. By invocation, Perkins means prayer. Repentance initially manifests itself as a part of regeneration, though it is an ongoing practice as well, for it “in order of nature, follows faith (justification) and sanctification.” Perkins, *Works*, 6:190–91. For more on repentance, see 8:147–48; 9:79–180; Shaw, “Drama in the Meeting House,” 56, 66–68.

¹⁵⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 2:29. See also 4:322.

little” to produce new obedience. Having put on the armor of God,¹⁵¹ the believer is ready for the devil’s assaults.¹⁵² He attacks by seeking to provoke (1) presumption, (2) unbelief, and (3) the sins of the flesh.¹⁵³ Perkins declares, “It is true that every man has all sins in him, but yet through the work of God, restraining corruption in some, and renewing grace in others, it comes to pass, that each man is more inclined naturally to some sins than to others, which thing Satan does observe most diligently.”¹⁵⁴ Amid this struggle, the believer must learn to deny self by patiently enduring God’s fatherly chastisements.¹⁵⁵ He must also persist in prayer.¹⁵⁶ Mindful of the difficulties in the process of sanctification, Perkins declares, “it is not an easy matter.”¹⁵⁷

Indeed, the difficulties cause many to doubt their salvation. Perkins assures his readers that doubt is a normal thing for the child of God.¹⁵⁸ The tumults of sin and temptation can seemingly overwhelm the regenerate. Coupled with their inclination to doubt God’s goodness, these can be difficult seasons,¹⁵⁹ in which it is as though “something as heavy as a mountain is lying on the man’s breast.”¹⁶⁰ But the Holy Spirit

¹⁵¹ Perkins, *Works*, 6:192. As God’s armor, Perkins identifies (1) truth, (2) justice, (3) evangelical obedience, (4) faith, (5) the Word of God, and (6) continual and fervent prayer with watching.

¹⁵² Perkins, *Works*, 6:192–93.

¹⁵³ Perkins, *Works*, 6:194–202. Perkins includes preservatives and remedies for each assault. These assaults mirror those that Christ endured in the desert. Perkins, *Works*, 1:71–165. See also 9:169–80.

¹⁵⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 1:107. See also 9:96–104. For his doctrine of sin, see 6:30–46; 8:120–36.

¹⁵⁵ Perkins quotes Chrysostom who says, “When we are corrected of the Lord it is more for our admonition than damnation, more for a medicine than for a punishment, more for a correction than for a penalty.” Perkins, *Works*, 7:61.

¹⁵⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 6:206–11. In the category of self-denial, Perkins also considers apologetics, martyrdom, and relief of the poor.

¹⁵⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 9:176.

¹⁵⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 9:173.

¹⁵⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 8:466.

¹⁶⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 9:171.

cannot be lost; hence despair is neither “total nor final.”¹⁶¹ It is not total because faith fights against despair.¹⁶² It is not final, because by grace the believer recovers through repentance as the Holy Spirit rekindles good motions in the mind, heart, and body. We endure with Christ as our companion and advocate.¹⁶³ We are sure that those “justified by His merits should by this means continue in the state of grace. Now Christ’s intercession preserves the elect in covering their continual slips, infirmities, and imperfect actions by an especial and continual application of His merits, that by this means man’s person may remain just, and man’s works acceptable to God.”¹⁶⁴

Perkins is convinced that the grace of God, union with Christ, and faith in Christ (apprehending and applying His promises and benefits) empowers the believer to pursue sanctification. “A truly justified person,” says he, will most certainly “grow in holiness.”¹⁶⁵ Those who claim to apply Christ’s saving promise (justification) without continually turning themselves to Him in practice (sanctification) are guilty of

¹⁶¹ Perkins, *Works*, 6:427; 9:171. See also 4:445; 6:263; 9:169–73.

¹⁶² Perkins, *Works*, 9:173. Perkins notes the remarkable nature of faith: “Strange is the band of faith knitting Christ and His members together, which the anguish of spirit cannot unloose (Pss 77:2–3, 103:1; Job 13:15).” *Works*, 8:466–67. See also 1:194–96.

¹⁶³ Perkins, *Works*, 6:205, 250; 8:601.

¹⁶⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 6:60. In these words, Perkins denies the Catholic belief that assurance of salvation is not possible and the Arminian position that a man can lose his salvation.

¹⁶⁵ Schaefer, “William Perkins,” 157. See also Yuille, “The Wholesome Doctrine,” 154; Leif Dixon, “William Perkins, ‘Atheisme,’ and the Crises of England’s Long Reformation,” *Journal of British Studies* 50, no. 4 (October 2011): 799. Beeke affirms the validity of Perkins’s emphasis on secondary grounds of assurance [good works], they “were evidence of the primary grounds: the sovereign work of the Father, the redeeming work of the Son (the object of faith), and the applying work of the Spirit.” *Quest for Full Assurance*, 93. Shaw summarizes Perkins’s view of sanctification in two points. (1) The Christian life is essentially moral, meaning there will be visible evidence of God’s work in the believer through new obedience. (2) It is optimistic. While not caving to naïve perfectionism, one can be triumphant in the struggle for new obedience, based on God’s “stubborn grace” in them. “Drama in the Meeting House,” 52. Indeed, genuine faith and repentance produces new obedience. However, according to Stephen Yuille, Perkins believes that many “make the mistake of satisfying themselves with ‘a general persuasion of God’s mercy.’ But this ‘general persuasion’ (i.e., presumption) is not the same as genuine faith and repentance. It may produce ‘reformation of life,’ but it never produces ‘new obedience.’ Why not? It never touches the ‘thoughts, will, and affections.’” J. Stephen Yuille, *Living Blessedly Forever: The Sermon on the Mount and the Puritan Piety of William Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), chap. 8, “Doing the Father’s Will,” “The Conclusion,” para. 5, Kindle. See Perkins, *Works*, 1:698–99.

misapplication, and therefore deceive themselves.¹⁶⁶ The tendency to disconnect sanctification from justification is presumption. Perkins highlights the prevalence of presumption: the devil “oft prevails by bringing men to desperation, but a thousand perish through presumption, almost for one by desperation.”¹⁶⁷

For Perkins, many seem to assume (erroneously) that Christ’s work in justification can be separated from His Spirit’s work in sanctification.¹⁶⁸ This mindset reveals a deficient theological understanding. “Christ and his Spirit are never severed,” says Perkins. Moreover, “saving faith, laying hold on Christ’s righteousness, for man’s justification, is never severed from sanctification by the Spirit.”¹⁶⁹ As the efficient cause,

¹⁶⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 2:25; 4:544; 9:11. He expresses this dichotomy between doctrine and practice consistently yet variously. For instance, he calls it a sort of atheism. Perkins, *Works*, 3:64. See also 1:126, 514–15, 727; 2:23, 28, 123; 6:400; 9:17. See also Shaw, “Drama in the Meeting House,” 65–66. Beeke calls this “dead orthodoxy, which minimized the seriousness of sin and regarded mere assent to the truths of Scripture as sufficient for salvation.” *Quest for Full Assurance*, 18; “Greatest Case,” 264. Yuille discusses Perkins’s issue with the “‘carnal,’ ‘common,’ ‘ignorant,’ ‘formal,’ and ‘drowsy’ Protestant. This individual becomes the object of Perkins’s apologetic focus because he fuels the papist’s contention that Protestants hold to doctrines that ‘tend to looseness of life and carnal liberty.’” “The Wholesome Doctrine,” 151. In Perkins’s rebuttal against papist accusations, he outlines twenty-one “grounds of doctrine to be believed,” and eleven “grounds of doctrine to be practiced.” Yuille summarizes these “grounds” (148–49n92,93). See Perkins, *Works*, 4:47–92.

¹⁶⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 1:127.

¹⁶⁸ Evidence of this dichotomy ranges in application. For instance, scholar John Fesko provides an example more subtle in nature. He defends Perkins’s evaluation of the importance of both justification and sanctification, though he concludes that “for Perkins, the believer’s good works could never sustain the scrutiny of divine judgment because sanctification is always imperfect—justification, on the other hand, is always perfect because it rests upon the work of Christ and is immediate and complete the moment a person believes. Hence, though justification and sanctification are both benefits of union with Christ, Perkins gives justification priority in redemption and in the *ordo salutis*.” Fesko, “Union and Justification,” 33. This is a subtle example because it could simply be a matter of terminology, i.e., “priority.” The connotation amounts to valuing one degree of the *ordo* over another. Perkins placed justification first in the *ordo*, but it was not of higher priority or value than sanctification. Perkins states that “justification frees from punishment of sin; sanctification, from corruption and sin itself.” Perkins, *Works*, 4:104–05. Moreover, Perkins also believes that “it is God’s will that the work of sanctification, or regeneration, should be imperfect in this life, and remain unfinished till death.” *Works*, 8:208. Perkins’s understanding of “order” lends some insight. God and His works represent “order of nature” and are always primary. Everything else is secondary, but important, i.e., the practical layers in the divine decree *ad extra* that manifest in the believer’s life in “time” through diverse, subjective experience. As a result, Perkins generally uses sequence to enhance perception of experience, rather than to imply value—inferiority or superiority. In other words, no part of the *ordo* is better or worse than the other, it is all divinely significant and necessary to effect salvation. See also Yuille, “The Wholesome Doctrine,” 141–42.

¹⁶⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 1:262; 4:544. See also Kendall, “The Christian Life,” 49; Song, *Theology and Piety*, 32, 55. Song’s primary argument is that contrary to traditional theological categories, Perkins sought unity among all of God’s covenantal dealings with His people. Andrew Alexander Woolsey, “Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly.” (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 1988): 2:212; Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians*, 64–65.

God and His works cannot be compartmentalized.¹⁷⁰ Perkins writes, “In God’s decree, the end, and the means that bring men to that end, go always together; and therefore, that such as are ordained to salvation are ordained to justification and sanctification.”¹⁷¹

God and His works represent an “order of nature” and are thus immutable and inseparable. Though, in order of time, based on the ends that God purposes to accomplish, the effects of the divine decree *ad extra* occur through diverse and subjective experience in life.¹⁷² Despite the theological meaning inherent in each “degree” based on “order of nature,” due to their experience “in time,” believers may misjudge the value of each. For instance, justification might be perceived as superior because it is first in sequence. Additionally, the subjective nature of sanctification might lead some to create an unwarranted cleavage between faith and practice. To correct this misapprehension, Perkins consistently emphasizes the unity of God’s works and, therefore, the need for practice. The believer must endeavor to live by faith; he must endeavor to “apprehend” and “apply” Christ’s promises and benefits in all of life.¹⁷³

Nurturing the Knowledge of God

Such application of necessity involves the mind. The work of the Holy Spirit begins in the mind and extends to the conscience, will, and affections.¹⁷⁴ In this way, knowledge moves beyond mere theoretical speculation and shapes our practice.¹⁷⁵ For this reason, says Perkins, “we must learn to force our natures to the duties of godliness;

¹⁷⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 5:85.

¹⁷¹ Perkins, *Works*, 1:308. See also 6:242.

¹⁷² Stoever, *A Faire and Easie*, 125.

¹⁷³ Perkins, *Works*, 2:23.

¹⁷⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 8:644.

¹⁷⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 9:10–11. See also Yuille, *Living Blessedly*, chap. 9, “The Forgetful Hearer.”

yea, even sweat and take pains therein.”¹⁷⁶ One of the chief “duties of godliness” is meditation on Christ’s passion.¹⁷⁷ This makes the believer more sensitive to his sinful tendencies and compels him to choose obedience. Yuille adds, “There is nothing more soul-satisfying than contemplating our interest in Him. He is ‘a perfect Christ, a perfect Redeemer.’”¹⁷⁸

Closely coupled with meditation is the practice of self-examination. On the opening page of *A Golden Chain*, there is what Paul Schaefer calls “an interiorizing turn.”¹⁷⁹ Perkins asserts, “We know God by looking into ourselves.”¹⁸⁰ He explains that this knowledge of God is not general (like the devils have) but personal; it is “a special knowledge whereby I know God to be my God.”¹⁸¹ Perkins claims that it is the role of the conscience to join the believer with God, who becomes a partner in this growing

¹⁷⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 9:176.

¹⁷⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 6:59. In a short treatise called *The Right Knowledge of Christ Crucified*, Perkins suggests that meditation on Christ’s passion “is a most notable means to breed repentance and reformation of life.” Perkins, *Works*, 9:1–22. For more topics for meditation, see 2:53; 6:176, 179; 8:382–85; 9:17, 244–45; 10:52.

¹⁷⁸ Yuille, “The Wholesome Doctrine,” 141. See Perkins, *Works*, 4:57.

¹⁷⁹ Schaefer, “William Perkins,” 156. Kendall understands Perkins’s idea of self-examination as an emphasis on man relying on his own ability to do good. Overall, Kendall objects to the “works” that Perkins claims can increase one’s assurance—sanctification, the practical syllogism, and the reflex (introspection) act. “The Puritan Modification,” 208–9. See also Perkins, *Works*, 8:xix; Beeke, “Faith and Assurance,” 66; Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisionist Strain: Disciplinary Religion & Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 106. Concerning the syllogism, Perkins explains, “That the syllogism has some value in strengthening the memory can be proved to us by the following, namely that its elements are joined together one after another in an orderly arrangement, and all of them are fitted and bound together mutually.” Perkins, *Works*, 6:530, 531–36. He demonstrates with Matthew 16:18: “Those that are built upon the rock cannot fall way utterly. But those which truly believe are built upon the rock. Therefore, those which truly believe do not utterly and wholly fall away.” Perkins, *Works*, 6:363. See also Donald K. McKim, *Ramism in William Perkins’s Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 31; Beeke, “Greatest Case,” 269–72; Stoeber, *A Faire and Easie*, 126–29; Barbee, “A Reformed Catholike,” 248–52. Ballitch, “Not to Behold Faith, But the Object of Faith,” 446–47.

¹⁸⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 6:11. See also 4:262; 5:337. Calvin relayed the same idea. Calvin, *Institutes*, 183, 367. Puritan Preacher, Richard Baxter (1615–1691) says, “Self-examination is an inquiry into the course of our lives, but more especially into the inward acts of our souls and trying of their sincerity by the Word of God.” Richard Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest* (London: Printed for Thomas Underhill, and Francis Tyton, 1656), 138.

¹⁸¹ Perkins, *Works*, 5:20.

knowledge.¹⁸² Essential to godliness, self-examination exposes our natural unbelief, reminds us of our dependance upon God's grace, and leads us to call upon God "earnestly and with tears."¹⁸³

Moreover, Perkins asserts that searching ourselves is "a principle duty in repentance, even the beginning and foundation of all true grace," whereby God becomes our "chief treasure."¹⁸⁴ As a result, we are "freed from the bondage and tyranny of sin and Satan, and little by little enabled through the Spirit of Christ to desire and approve that which is good, and to walk in it."¹⁸⁵ By faith (apprehending and applying Christ's promises and benefits), those in Christ will produce new obedience by certain "measures and degrees."¹⁸⁶ Perkins remarks:

We must labor for the power of this knowledge in ourselves, that we may know Christ to be our Savior, and may feel the power of His death to mortify sin in us, and the virtue of His resurrection to raise and build us up to newness of life for knowledge in the brain will not save the soul. Saving knowledge in religion is experimental, and he that is truly founded upon Christ feels the power and efficacy of His death and resurrection, effectually causing the death of sin, and the life of

¹⁸² Perkins, *Works*, 8:9. See also Barbee, "A Reformed Catholike," 232–48.

¹⁸³ Perkins, *Works*, 6:263. In addition to "calling earnestly upon God," Perkins distinguishes eight other effects of sanctification: (1) to grieve for our offences against God, (2) to hate sin and strive against it, (3) to desire the grace of God and merit of Christ (4) and then consider each most precious, (5) to love the preacher of God's Word, (6) to desire and long for Christ's coming and judgement of sin, (7) to seriously run from sin and live in the newness of life, and (8) to persevere. See also Beeke, "Greatest Case," 271. See also Perkins, *Works*, 1:194–96.

¹⁸⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 9:91, 94; 1:725. Perkins believes that "we must value Him at so high a price that He must be unto us better than ten thousand worlds." Perkins, *Works*, 9:6. See also 1:529.

¹⁸⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 8:483.

¹⁸⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 8:644. Three hallmarks of Perkins doctrine of sanctification are "endeavor," "little by little," and "new obedience." For "endeavor," see 1:115, 195, 197, 205, 727; 2:50, 120, 172–73; 5:14–15, 71; 6:263, 427; 7:49, 105; 8:158, 652, 656; 9:12; 10:53, 87. Perkins's admonition to "endeavor" is counter-cultural. The term was often associated with "Puritans," which was an offensive term. Perkins admits, "For the pure heart is so little regarded, that seeking after it, is turned to a byword, and a matter of reproach. Who are so much branded with the vile terms of Puritans and Precisions, as those that most endeavor to get and keep the purity of heart in a good conscience?" Perkins, *Works*, 1:205. Despite social pressure, Perkins continued to promote the endeavor toward purity. For "new obedience," see 1:696, 725n987; 2:23, 29; 6:190–91; 10:53. According to Beeke, the connection between endeavor and new obedience is the point where Perkins "linked divine election and Reformed piety." *Quest for Full Assurance*, 96–98. See also Shaw, "Drama in the Meeting House," 68–70; Ballitch, "Scripture," 158. For "little by little," see Perkins, *Works*, 2:293; 6:186; 7:28; 8:467; 9:171.

grace which both appear by new obedience.¹⁸⁷

Conclusion

Everything that has been noted above is encapsulated in Perkins's famous diagram, found in *A Golden Chain* (see figure 1).¹⁸⁸ At the top of the diagram stands the triune God. The Son is eternally begotten of the Father, and the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son. For His eternal glory, the triune God decrees the predestination of the elect to eternal life and the reprobate to eternal death. This is followed by the decrees of creation and the fall. Continuing down the middle of the diagram, we discover "CHRIST the Mediator of the Elect." His mediatorial work involves His humiliation (i.e., "fulfilment of the law," "accursed death," "burial," and "bondage under the grave") and exaltation (i.e., "resurrection," "ascension," "sitting at the right hand," and "intercession") whereby He establishes the covenant of grace by fulfilling the covenant of works (precept and penalty) on behalf of the elect.

The left column highlights the four "degrees" of predestination—namely, effectual calling, justification, sanctification, and glorification. Shaw notes, "The child of God can grab that link in the golden chain and feel with certainty the tug of all the rest."¹⁸⁹ By the effectual call, the elect of God receive Christ through faith.¹⁹⁰ As a result,

¹⁸⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 1:725. See also Yuille, "Ready to Receive," 102ff.

¹⁸⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 6:9. Lori Ferrell commends Perkins's didactic efforts. "Linking the theology of election to subjectively measured standards of behavior and feeling, the user of *A Golden Chain* could find soteriological proof of the very act of following its directions." Lori Anne Ferrell, "Transfiguring Theology: William Perkins and Calvinist Aesthetics in Christopher Highley and John N. King, Eds.," in *John Foxe and His World* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 168. Ballitch remarks, "This infamous chart has resulted in an unfair caricature of Perkins as a scholastic theologian who could not possibly back up his abhorrent system with Scripture. When actually reading his work, one quickly finds that Perkins had biblical warrant for his supralapsarian logic." "Scripture," 197. Muller compares Perkins's diagram and theological support to that of Beza's in "A Golden Chaine: Predestinarian System."

¹⁸⁹ Mark R. Shaw, "The Marrow of Practical Divinity: A Study in the Theology of William Perkins" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1981), 166.

¹⁹⁰ Some note that the Holy Spirit is conspicuously absent from Perkins's *A Golden Chain*. See Muller, "Predestination and Christology," 331. However, Perkins clearly states that union with Christ, and faith for that matter, are works of the Holy Spirit. Perkins sees the three persons of the Godhead as one in being and will. They are incapable of separation; therefore, it is impossible to overlook one person when considering their mutual yet diverse work in redemption. Perkins asserts, "All the outward works of the

they commune with Christ in His mediatorial work. The result is positional—justification (i.e., remission of sin and imputation of righteousness). The result is also transformational—sanctification (i.e., mortification, vivification, and repentance). For Perkins, sanctification is primarily manifested in new obedience (or good works) which, by faith and Christ’s intercession, is chiefly manifested in our personal calling. This, then, is the doctrinal foundation that informs Perkins’s view of vocation as the chief means by which the elect glorify God while they journey to life eternal. It is to the precise nature of vocation that we now turn.

Trinity, and all attributes, are to be understood inclusively, that is, without exception of any of the persons. When God is considered absolutely, or by Himself, the three persons are comprehended.” Perkins, *Works*, 10:317.

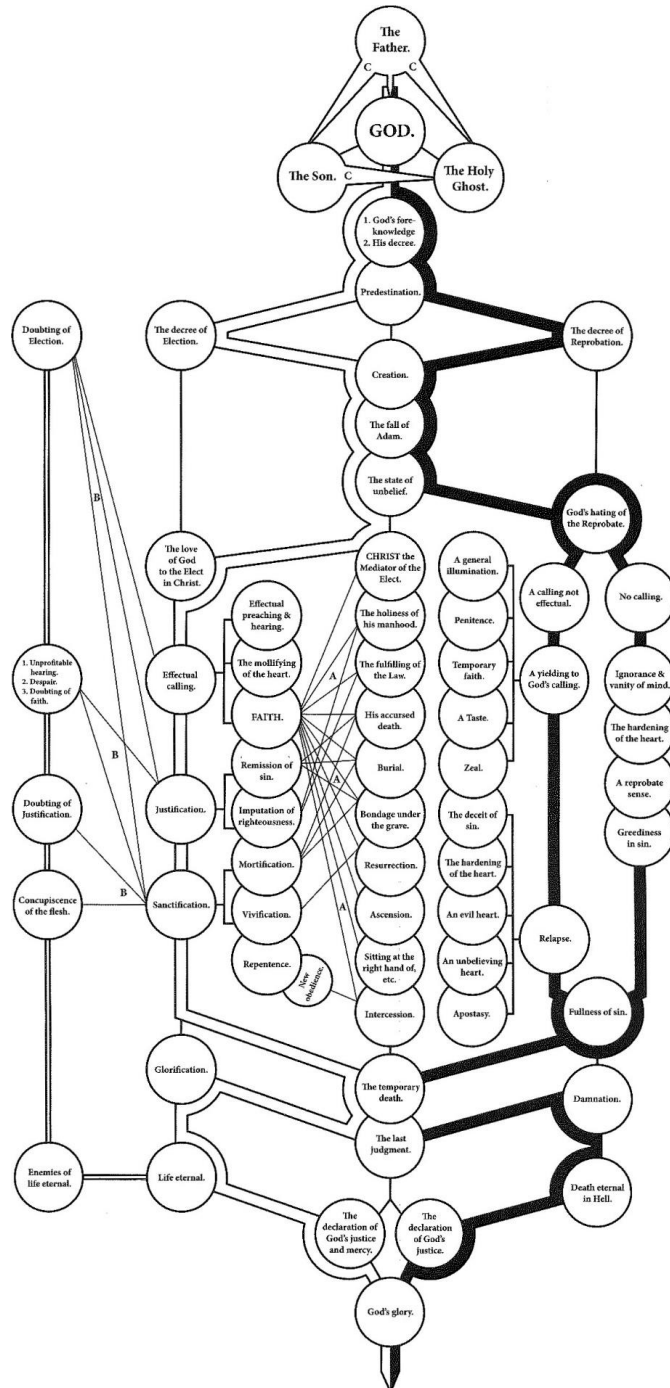


Figure 1. A golden chain

CHAPTER 4

THE PERSONAL DIMENSION

It is Perkins's assessment that God, in accordance with His eternal counsel and good pleasure, has designed everyone's personal call.¹ The decree of predestination is a central feature in Perkins's theology of vocation. In terms of experience, the personal (or particular) call to vocation follows the general call to salvation.² Yet, according to the divine decree, the saint's vocation is appointed before time began. As God chose the elect for salvation, He ordained their abilities and works on earth. Therefore, creation and the personal dimensions by which believers participate in it are a part of God's predetermined plan.³ To recognize this is to embrace the intrinsic value and purpose in every believer's daily employment.

Another way Perkins communicates this reality is by affirming that God is the efficient cause of all personal callings. Our vocation, therefore, is the expression of His prior will.⁴ God desires for us to know Him as sovereign Lord and serve Him in our

¹ William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 2:52–53.

² Moreover, at times Perkins uses the term “vocation” for both calls—the general and particular calls. Unaware of this designation, a reader can misinterpret Perkins's meaning—implying salvation in some cases and the particular calling in others. G. D. Fee suggests that Paul used the same type of interchange in 1 Corinthians. “In this letter the concepts of *calling* as “vocation” and *calling* as “election” tend to blur somewhat. G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 29n7. Further, in Perkins's writings, “Personal call,” “particular call,” “particular office,” “calling,” and “vocation” are interchangeable terms.

³ See Charles Robert Munson, “William Perkins: Theologian of Transition” (PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1971), 103–4; William K. B. Stoever, *A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven: Covenant Theology and Antinomianism in Early Massachusetts* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1978), 4–5.

⁴ Based on 1 Corinthians 1, Fee explains that “for Paul, God's action is always the prior one. His own position in Christ, as well as his ministry, is predicated on God's call, which is but the expression of God's prior will. *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1987, 29. William Placher's view varies slightly. He

vocations, thereby edifying one another.⁵ As believers abide in their callings, they learn to perform their duties in a holy manner, avoiding common temptations “incident unto every calling.”⁶ This is an important part of the process of sanctification, as well as instrumental to ensuring God’s blessing. Perkins remarks, “For if He [God] provided our callings when we were not, He will much more aid and bless us in them now while we have a being.”⁷

Perkins challenges the popular notion that man charts his own path by sheer desire and determination and insists that God executes His plans in the world by means of our personal calling.⁸ In great wisdom, God establishes order in life and society, which “by certain degrees tends directly to the advancement of His own glory.”⁹

In *A Treatise of the Vocations or Callings of Men, With the Sorts and Kinds of Them, and the Right Use Thereof*,¹⁰ Perkins defines vocation as “a certain kind of life, ordained and imposed on man by God for the common good.”¹¹ Perkins’s appreciation of

attributes the origins of Perkins’s emphasis on causes to Aristotle, who explained “the ‘efficient cause’ is the source of a thing’s being or motion; the ‘final cause’ is the purpose or goal for which it was made.” William C. Placher, ed., *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), pt. 3, “William Perkins A Treatise of the Vocations,” para. 1, Kindle.

⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:33.

⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:92.

⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 2:53.

⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:44. Stoever comments that Perkins’s practical theology “is predicated on the double affirmation that the world is susceptible of godly ordering and that human faculties, properly disposed, are capable of ordering it.” *A Faire and Easie*, 5. Paul Stevens offers a contemporary appraisal: “Without any theology of vocation we lapse into debilitating alternatives: fatalism; luck; karma; nihilism; and, the most common alternative today, self-actualization.” R. Paul Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity: Vocation, Work and Ministry in a Biblical Perspective* (Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 1999), 72.

⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:33. See also 1:455.

¹⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:31–107.

¹¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:43. For treatments of Perkins’s treatise on vocations, see Munson, “Theologian of Transition,” 101–4; Louis B. Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (Ithaca, NY: Published for the Folger Shakespeare Library by Cornell University Press, 1958), 170–200; Ian Breward, “The Life and Theology of William Perkins, 1558–1602” (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 1963): 277–98; Robert S. Michaelsen, “Changes in the Puritan Concept of Calling or Vocation,” *The New England Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (September 1953): 318–25; W. B. Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 139–46; Paul Marshall, *A Kind of Life*

the personal nature of vocation (“a certain kind of life”) arises from his perception of God’s original design. He believes that God blesses saints in their vocations when His design is honored and executed by their making (1) a good choice, (2) a good entry, (3) a proper continuance, and (4) a respectful exit.

God’s Design

While man’s personal calling is perceived in the mind of God in eternity, its first practical demonstration is found in the creation account.¹² Adam was called “to obey God and dress the garden.”¹³ His calling, according to Perkins, is one of seven observations to be “regarded in the excellent estate of innocency.”¹⁴ The others include Adam’s location, integrity, dignity, subjection, nourishment, and free choice.¹⁵ Adam’s calling entails his duties, but these additional details are indicative of the personal manner by which Adam reveals God’s image of righteousness and holiness while executing wisdom and justice in the world.¹⁶

Imposed on Man: Vocation and Social Order from Tyndale to Locke (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 41–45; Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity*, 77–80; Rosemary O’Day, *The Professions in Early Modern England 1450–1800: Servants of the Commonwealth* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 34–37; Placher, *Callings*, pt. 3, “William Perkins A Treatise of the Vocations”; Peter J. Beale, “Sanctifying the Outer Life,” in *Aspects of Sanctification: Being Papers Read at the 1981 Conference* (London: Westminster Conference, 1981): 62–77; Charles H. George and Katherine George, “English Protestant Economic Theory: The World and Its Callings,” in *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation, 1570–1640* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 117–43; Mark R. Shaw, “The Marrow of Practical Divinity: A Study in the Theology of William Perkins” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1981), 243–74.

¹² Perkins, *Works*, 6:26–31; 5:64–68.

¹³ Perkins, *Works*, 6:31. See also 4:89; Charles H. George and Katherine George, “Callings,” 132; Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity*, 78. In the “Creational or cultural mandate,” God’s image-bearers exercise creative rulership on earth. Robert Plummer, “A New Testament Professor’s Rediscovery of the Doctrine of Vocation,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 22, no. 1 (2018): 13.

¹⁴ For more on the four estates of humanity, see Perkins, *Works*, 6:405ff., xix; Richard A. Muller, *Grace and Freedom: William Perkins and the Early Modern Reformed Understanding of Free Choice and Divine Grace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 185–86.

¹⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 6:30–31.

¹⁶ Perkins comments, “The Lord gives a particular commandment to him [Adam] and all his posterity, which binds all men to walk in some calling, either in the church or commonwealth (Gen 3:19).” *Works*, 10:54.

Perkins explains that, under the covenant of grace, believers receive a double call.¹⁷ The first is to salvation. Perkins draws on the Reformed notion that justification by faith alone (the general call) levels all men before God. He remarks, “God’s church is a company of men ordained to salvation, taken from under the power of the devil.” Thus, “No man is to stand upon his gentility or glory in his parentage for nobility and great blood, but only rejoice in this, that he is drawn out of the kingdom of darkness and from under the power of Satan and placed by Christ Jesus in the kingdom of grace.”¹⁸ By God’s saving work, the image is restored prompting newness of life in wisdom, affections, and good works.¹⁹ Believers are thus enabled to perform new obedience in four Christian duties: (1) prayer and thanksgiving; (2) serving for the good of the church; (3) serving others; and (4) walking worthy of their calling in Christ.²⁰

The second call is to a vocation. Perkins explains that the “temporal life” is preserved and maintained by an honest calling.²¹ Of Perkins’s double call, Robert Michaelsen envisions a sort of rhythm. “God calls: man responds. Man responds first of all by specifically religious acts, such as those described by Perkins [the four Christian duties], but he also responds in his work and in his whole life.”²² It is the particular office that “arises from that distinction which God makes between man and man in every

¹⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 1:455; 4:89; 10:49–60.

¹⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 4:476. See also Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the 17th Century* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1965), 237. Christopher Hill iterates that with Perkins began a shift in mental attitude; “there was a common depreciation of mere aristocracy of birth as contrasted with the aristocracy of spirit.” Hill’s critical context claims that the “Puritan revolution” was more akin to the English “bourgeois revolution,” which prioritized the needs of the middleclass majority over others (236–37). For another view of the “bourgeois” majority, see Paul S. Seaver, *Wallington’s World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985), 133.

¹⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:10–15.

²⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:49–53.

²¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:15ff. See also 1:658–59. Joel Beeke explains that the Puritan concept of vocation fills “ordinary life with new spiritual motivations.” Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 534.

²² Michaelsen, “Calling,” 319.

society.”²³ He adds, “God manifests His fatherly care over us by the employment of men in His service according to their several vocations for our good.”²⁴ The main end of our lives is to serve God by serving others. This requires a broad range of diverse callings, which contribute to the whole. These distinctions (as ordained by God) are strategic, fashioned for the greatest efficiency and according to the nature of His creation—that is, the personal characteristics of each person. In other words, they are for our good.²⁵

Distinctions within the Personal Call

God-given distinctions among vocations are twofold.²⁶ The first is most evident in the church. God imparts spiritual gifts to believers (1 Cor 12). In Perkins’s estimation, the bestowal of diverse gifts is reserved for the church, but the use of these gifts (via callings) is “proportionately beneficial in every society.”²⁷ The second distinction is evident in society: outward order. Some people are above or under others, not all are equal.²⁸ Charles Constantin suggests that Perkins denies dignity to those in “lesser” callings, stating, the “husbandmen, laborers, and the like did not deserve and should not aspire to expect the same degree of deference shown to a magistrate or a merchant.”²⁹ However, the evidence proves otherwise.

First, Perkins insists that every member of society contributes to the whole.

²³ Perkins, *Works*, 10:53. The diversity of particular offices proceed from Scripture, i.e., work in the family, church, and commonwealth. Perkins, *Works*, 4:89. Offices that are not specifically noted in Scripture are deduced from its general laws and commandments. Perkins, *Works*, 10:44–45.

²⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 10:58.

²⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:45.

²⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:53–54.

²⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:54. See also Marshall, *A Kind of Life*, 39. We must use our gifts impartially, inside and outside of the church, because no man can discern the elect from the non-elect. Perkins, *Works*, 4:25.

²⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:54. See also 4:140–41.

²⁹ Charles Constantin, “The Puritan Ethic and the Dignity of Labor: Hierarchy vs. Equality,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40, no. 4 (1979): 546.

“There are many wheels in a clock made by the art and handiwork of man, and each one has its several motions, some turn this way, some that way, some go softly, some apace. And they are all ordered by the motion of the watch.”³⁰ It is God who “orders” all things to accomplish His purposes. A ruler or teacher, for instance, is owed deference simply because God appointed him to that position.³¹ Moreover, we are to honor all persons in their diverse offices, whether they are our “superior, equal, or inferior,” says Perkins.³²

Contrary to popular opinion, God-given distinctions in vocation facilitate dignity. Inward gifts are expressed in meaningful work that supports others, while outward order contributes to the good of all. As diverse parts maintain the physical body, so diverse vocations are designed to maintain societies. In this, a division of labor exists whereby unity and efficiency are established, not compromised.

Perkins’s presentation of “distinctions” emphasizes the principles of unity, diversity, and efficiency. He observes these same principles in the internal activity of the Godhead.³³ Perkins admits that the Trinity is a “mystery unsearchable,” yet, his expectation is that “we are to know God, not as He is in Himself, but as He has revealed Himself unto us, and seek to grow in the knowledge and experience of this.”³⁴ The purpose of this section is to consider that “knowledge” and “experience”; notably, that Perkins’s Trinitarian theology influences his view of vocation.³⁵

³⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:44.

³¹ Perkins, *Works*, 2:53.

³² Perkins, *Works*, 8:437.

³³ According to Munson, “Perkins sees the Godhead first in terms of its internal activity and then in terms of its external relations to the created order.” “Theologian of Transition,” 71. Perkins’s view of the nature of the Godhead is also noted in chapter 3.

³⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 2:221; 9:14. Perkins claims that ultimately God’s glory, God’s triunity, and the incarnation are mysteries that far transcend human comprehension. *Works*, 4:263; 2:220; 5:337, 368. See also Stephen Yuille, “The Wholesome Doctrine of Faith and Love,” in *William Perkins: Architect of Puritanism*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Greg Salazar (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019): 143–45.

³⁵ Perkins says that theology is the science of living blessedly forever. Perkins, *Works*, 6:11. He derives opportunities for practice from theology. For instance, in his treatise on the family he insists that

Perkins celebrates God's diversity in unity.³⁶ The three persons are but one God, each with His proper manner of existing and working.³⁷ Perkins believes that the Father is unbegotten, and His work is to initiate action. The Son is begotten, and His work is to execute action. The Spirit is spirated, and His work is to complete action, effecting it as from the Father and the Son.³⁸ Perkins explains, "All are equal in degree, though in regard of order one is before another."³⁹ By order, he does not mean hierarchy in the usual sense; rather, he means distinction. He states, "The Father sends the Son to be our redeemer. The Son works in His own person the work of redemption. And the Holy Ghost applies the same by His efficacy."⁴⁰ But the "action of sending" does not make "the persons unequal" but only shows a "distinction and order" among equals, says Perkins.⁴¹

Diversity is evident in their manner of working. For instance, the office of the

the excellent estate of marriage can be practiced because it was "instituted upon a most serious and solemn consultation among the three Persons in the Holy Trinity (Gen 1:26)." Perkins, *Works*, 10:121. See also J. Stephen Yuille, "A Puritan, Spiritual Household: William Perkins and the 'Right Ordering' of a Family," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 8, no. 2 (2016): 165. According to David Barbee, "Perkins' doctrine of faith is stated intentionally to reflect the Trinitarian underpinnings of his theology." David M. Barbee, "A Reformed Catholic: William Perkins' Use of the Church Fathers" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2013): 238. Therefore, this discussion is not meant to divide and dissect the persons and practices of the Godhead, as related to Social Trinitarianism. As Andrew Ballitch states, "To speak about what Christ could do on His own is an improper concession to Social Trinitarianism. Perkins does not appear to consider such a conception of the Trinity." Andrew S. Ballitch, "God the Son in the Theology of William Perkins," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 9, no. 2 (July 1, 2017): 160.

³⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 2:14; 6:20.

³⁷ "The glory of the persons is distinct from the other, as the persons themselves are by their personal properties." Perkins, *Works*, 4:263. See also Yuille, "The Wholesome Doctrine," 143–45.

³⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 6:21–22. See also 4:263. Yuille, "The Wholesome Doctrine," 144. Perkins adds, "The Father is not the Son or the Holy Ghost, but the Father alone; and the Son is not the Father or the Holy Ghost, but the Son alone; and the Holy Ghost is not the Father or the Son, but the Holy Ghost alone." Perkins, *Works*, 6:20.

³⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 5:268.

⁴⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 2:221. "Perkins refers to the common Western view that in the Trinity, the person of the Father is the fountain of all, for He begets the Son and from Father and Son proceeds the Spirit." Perkins, *Works*, 2:26n25. See also 10:83; Patterson, *William Perkins*, 72.

⁴¹ Perkins, *Works*, 5:268. Perkins elaborates, "Christ as God is equal to the Father. The Son is made eternally subject unto the Father not as He is God, but in regard of His humanity." *Works*, 4:257. See also 2:21; 4:54–55; 6:48; Ballitch, "God the Son in the Theology of William Perkins," 147–64.

Son is “to have the administration of every outward action of the Trinity from the Father by the Holy Ghost.”⁴² Perkins’s point is that Christ has His particular office; His work demonstrates His unique person and purpose. As for the Holy Spirit, Perkins states that union with Christ and faith are His works.⁴³ While distinct, the persons of the Trinity are inseparable; therefore, it is impossible to overlook one person when considering their mutual yet diverse work in redemption.⁴⁴

Perkins highly regarded “works” (divine and human). He perceived in God’s life “perpetual activity in wisdom, will, and power.”⁴⁵ God is always at work in His plan of redemption. Andrew Ballitch affirms, “As a man of his time and tradition, he [Perkins] articulated his Christology in the context of Christ’s work, specifically His role as mediator. However, he had a robust understanding of the Person of Christ.”⁴⁶ Indeed, Perkins states, God the Father called the Son “from all eternity to perform the office of the Mediator.”⁴⁷ In fulfilling His role in redemption, Christ’s works are personal to Him (they confirm His identity), yet they are still owing to the Trinity. In sum, Perkins regards both—person and works.

The principles we gather here are reflected in Perkins’s explanation of

⁴² Perkins, *Works*, 6:48. For more on the power of the Trinity administered through the Son, see 4:138.

⁴³ Perkins, *Works*, 6:173, 175. In *Exhortation to Repentance*, Perkins writes almost exclusively from the perspective of the Spirit, who leads believers in repentance. Perkins, *Works*, 9:79–122. Elsewhere, “The Spirit moves men to good works, and this motion of the Spirit, is in and by the Word of God.” Perkins, *Works*, 1:235.

⁴⁴ “All the outward works of the Trinity, and all attributes, are to be understood inclusively, that is, without exception of any of the persons. When God is considered absolutely, or by Himself, the three persons are comprehended.” Perkins, *Works*, 10:317.

⁴⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 6:15. Perkins regards the same faculties and measure of activity in the believer, Sabbath rest excepting; six days work and one day rest. Perkins, *Works*, 10:54, 97; 4:89. Thus, his propensity toward work is not legalism or asceticism, rather it reflects his effort to follow God’s model.

⁴⁶ Ballitch writes, “God the Son in the Theology of William Perkins,” 148, 162, 164. For more on Perkins’s views concerning Christ’s Person and works see Mark R. Shaw, “Drama in the Meeting House: The Concept of Conversion in the Theology of William Perkins,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 49.

⁴⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 6:47.

vocation; these principles empower the right use of vocation. Believers are distinct according to their persons and works. Yet, their unity is sure because it is based on the general call of salvation, which makes “Christ our head.”⁴⁸ Equal before God, though for the purpose of maintaining society, the personal call permits distinctions in gifts and outward order. Perkins claims, “For if all men had the same gifts, and all were in the same degree and order, then all should have one and the same calling. But in as much as God gives diversity of gifts inwardly, and distinction of order outwardly, hence proceed diversity of personal callings.”⁴⁹ God-given distinctions are for our good; they demonstrate unity amid diversity and enable us to glorify God and serve others in the most efficient way.⁵⁰

General Rules for the Personal Call

Perkins lists five rules that apply to every calling. First, all people possess a personal calling (public or private). Based upon the “measure of gifts” God has given them, they work in the family, church, or commonwealth.⁵¹ For Perkins, vocation extends beyond the restricted world of monks and friars.⁵² God is working through every believer

⁴⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 6:172. Perkins expresses unity in terms of Christian equity, without which “society cannot endure.” He relates this equity to the nature of God. *Works*, 10:366. See also Ian Breward, “The Significance of William Perkins,” *The Journal of Religious History* 4, no. 2 (December 1966): 124.

⁴⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:54.

⁵⁰ Perkins affirms that it is the responsibility of “all Christian persons generally” to build up the church. Perkins, *Works*, 10:51.

⁵¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:54–56. See also 1:238, 453, 455, 464; 4:89–90; 5:67; 6:137; 8:656; Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution*, 226. Perkins argues that “even the angels of God have their particular callings, in that they do His ‘commandments in obeying the voice of his word.’ [Ps 103:20].” *Works*, 10:55. For the Puritan, “The call to work is neither optional nor corporate, but imperative and personal,” remarks Chad Burchett, “Serious Joy: The Puritan Heritage of Leisure,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 10, no. 2 (July 2018): 224.

⁵² They stood in the tradition of ascetic retirement from the world, whereby they served only themselves. Perkins, *Works*, 7:76–77. In addition to monks and friars, Perkins identifies three other groups who neglect their callings: (1) long-term beggars; (2) those who use their livings for selfish indulgence; and (3) servants without a backup plan. Perkins, *Works*, 10:55–56. See also 4:90.

in every place.⁵³

Second, “every man must judge that particular calling, in which God has placed him, to be the best of all callings for him.”⁵⁴ According to Perkins, believers must (1) trust in God’s good plan, and (2) resist comparing themselves to others (personally and materially) while striving for contentment in their personal calling.⁵⁵ Often times, differences in vocation (social order) incite discontent. Perkins warns, “When we begin to dislike the wise disposition of God, and to think other men’s callings better for us than our own, then follows confusion and disorder in every society.”⁵⁶

By way of example, Perkins appeals to Cain and Abel. Both were “farmers and herdsmen, and in their particular offices their work complemented one another for the common good.”⁵⁷ However, when Cain compared his work to Abel’s, he feared losing his “right and dignity.”⁵⁸ Perkins concludes that this lack of contentment led to disorder, adding, “The greatest disorders that have fallen out in the church of God” are a result of discontent in one’s calling. The same is true of the commonwealth.⁵⁹ We must strive, therefore, to believe that God’s design in vocation is the best for us.

Third, the general call and particular call should be joined together.⁶⁰ The persistent practice of these two callings is evidence of our “election and salvation.”⁶¹ It is

⁵³ See Wright, *Middle-Class Culture*, 170.

⁵⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 10:56, 100.

⁵⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 6:137–38.

⁵⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:56.

⁵⁷ Robert Plummer, “Doctrine of Vocation” (Paper, My Work Vocation Conference, Highview Baptist Church, Louisville, November 11, 2016).

⁵⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:56–57. Perkins cites other biblical examples of those who lacked contentment: Absalom, the sons of Zebedee, and the other disciples. He points to the “bishops of the Church of Rome” as a contemporary example.

⁵⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:57. See also Constantin, “The Puritan Ethic,” 547.

⁶⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:57–59.

⁶¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:59.

due to “God’s pleasure,” Perkins asserts, that He chooses to use men as instruments to serve one another, which is the main end of our lives.⁶² To be “unblameable both before God and man,” we must search for our particular calling and “proceed to practice its duties.”⁶³ We must also incorporate the duties of the first and second tables in our vocations—at church and home, with family and friends, in the sight of strangers, and in town and abroad.⁶⁴ This rule encapsulates the primary reason for Perkins’s writing of *Vocations*. He says, “Few men rightly know how to live and go on in their callings so as they may please God.”⁶⁵

A fragmented life is the result of either a lack of knowledge or a refusal to obey in one’s personal calling. Perkins includes examples of both. First, the person in a humble position may view his work as meaningless. However, he can derive contentment and comfort from the unity of his general and particular calls. Although, the work may be base and the monetary rewards minimal, “the reward from God’s hand” will not be lacking.⁶⁶ Second, those who employ their callings for their own “honors, pleasures, profits, and worldly goods, live to another end than God has appointed, and thus they serve themselves, and consequently neither God nor man.”⁶⁷

Perkins affirms that, without the general call, the personal call is “nothing else

⁶² Perkins, *Works*, 10:58.

⁶³ Perkins, *Works*, 10:59.

⁶⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 10:57. See also 1:391; 4:90; 7:76–77; 8:656–57. Perkins correlates this joining of the general and particular calls to the second commandment, i.e., a proper demonstration of “outward worship unto God.” See *Works*, 1:665. His all-encompassing vision of vocation set the trajectory for the Puritan movement, as is evident in the numerous treatises (dealing with this subject) that emerged in the following century. By way of example, see George Swinnock, *Christian Man’s Calling, or, A Treatise of Making Religion Ones Business* (London: R.W. for Dorman Newman, 1668). Stephen Yuille provides a detailed analysis of this work in *Puritan Spirituality: The Fear of God in the Affective Theology of George Swinnock* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007).

⁶⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:43. As noted in chap. 3, he expresses this dichotomy between the general and particular calls (or salvation and life) in various terms. See 2:23, 25, 28, 123; 4:544; 6:400; 1:126, 514–15, 727; 9:11, 17.

⁶⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:58.

⁶⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:58.

but a practice of injustice and profaneness.”⁶⁸ The general call without the personal call may appear godly but it is without power. It is, according to Perkins, “a dangerous and lamentable course of life.”⁶⁹ To sever the calls (or to consider the personal call extraneous) is to live a life without the comfort of God. It results “in shame and confusion” unless, as Perkins admonishes, the believer repents and joins both calls. This rule “serves to teach all men the right way to reform their lives.”⁷⁰

Fourth, public servants must first reform their private lives.⁷¹ Perkins cites Moses who had a fault in his private family.⁷² God enabled Moses to make amends, so that he could be a credible public governor.

Fifth, “a particular calling must give place to the general calling of a Christian when they cannot stand together.”⁷³ Perkins describes a scenario in which a master (a zealous papist) asks his servant (a Protestant) to commit acts that are contrary to his religious beliefs. The directive is clear: the servant must honor and obey God over his earthly master. Therefore, despite possible repercussions, the believer must not compromise his faith. This rule is circumstantial.⁷⁴ Perkins is not, in general, prioritizing the general call over the personal call. Some scholars interpret this rule as such.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:58.

⁶⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:59.

⁷⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:59.

⁷¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:59.

⁷² See Exodus 4:24–26. Moses was preparing to become governor of the Israelites. However, God was ready to judge him for disobeying the conditions of the covenant concerning circumcision. This fault had to be corrected prior to Moses walking forward in the duties of his calling.

⁷³ Perkins, *Works*, 10:59–60. See also 8:14–15.

⁷⁴ See also Perkin’s third point in *Works*, 10:187. Perkins refers to this fifth rule in another circumstance: ending a marriage. “When both calls cannot stand together, the general call to God and the particular call to marriage or single life, the latter must give place to the former.” *Works*, 10:165.

⁷⁵ Leland Ryken notes that “the Puritans emphatically declared that the general calling to conversion and life in Christ was more important than our callings in the marketplace of life.” Leland Ryken, “‘Some Kind of Life to Which We Are Called of God’: The Puritan Doctrine of Vocation,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 22, no. 1 (2018): 50; Michaelsen argues that the “choice of vocation is secondary so long as he [the believer] serves God in it.” “Calling,” 323–24. Essentially, these

However, this interpretation refutes Perkins's third rule that the general and personal calls should always be united.

To close this section, Perkins divides callings into two categories. The first is composed of those which provide structure to society: "master, servant, husband, wife, parents, children, magistrates, subjects, minister."⁷⁶ The second is composed of those which supply the needs of the first: husbandmen, merchants, doctors, soldiers, lawyers, tailors, carpenters, etc. They contribute to society's "good, happy, and quiet estate."⁷⁷

Perkins is not suggesting that the first category is more important than the second.⁷⁸ His point is that the first category of vocations forms society, whereas the second maintains it.⁷⁹ Both are essential. Charles Munson correctly states that, according to Perkins, the diversity of callings is the "very fabric" of a well-established society.⁸⁰

The Right Use of Personal Calls

For Perkins, the principal point of any personal calling is that it is used "in a

interpretations claim that the call to salvation is of superior importance, thereby they dismiss (or dichotomize) God's intentional design for the believer's personal calling. Modern expressions of this same dichotomy can be found in: Gregory C. Cochran, "Spirituality and Our Work," in *Biblical Spirituality*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 274; Bethany L. Jenkins, "What Are We For?" in *The Gospel and Work* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), chap. 1, "Our Vocational Assignments," para. 5, Kindle. This is a nuanced formulation of the gap between belief and practice. The calls should be unified due to their "order of nature." Perkins believes that both calls were designed by God in eternity. Therefore, both calls are spiritual, and hence are incomparable; each holds its place in the believer's experience of redemption. The general is the source of the personal call since it is first in order of nature and time. That is, the general call directs and provides all that is necessary for the personal call, which when rightly used evinces the general call. In comparing them simply based on sequence, vocation's second place implies that obedience in works is secondary in God's evaluation. This is not the case. The particular call is never secondary, or irrelevant; it is the best way a believer serves God and the common good.

⁷⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:60.

⁷⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:60.

⁷⁸ Breward incorrectly concludes that "some callings were socially more valuable than others." The first sort, then, were essential, but the second sort were merely helpful for the "good order of a commonwealth." "The Life and Theology," 282. Marshall's interpretation echoes Breward's, though Marshall correctly notes that this distinction is a "functional one." See *A Kind of Life*, 43.

⁷⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 4:89.

⁸⁰ Munson, "Theologian of Transition," 103.

good and holy manner.”⁸¹ God does not favor this or that calling or this or that work, for all are by His design. But He does look “at the heart of the worker.”⁸² Perkins remarks, “The action of a shepherd in keeping sheep, performed, as I have said, in its kind, is as good a work before God as is the action of a judge in giving sentence or a magistrate in ruling or a minister in preaching.”⁸³ Regardless of social position, the right use of a personal calling is of great value, which includes (1) a good choice, (2) a good entry, (3) a good continuance, and (4) a good exit.⁸⁴

A Good Choice

To begin with, we make a “good choice” of our calling when it is “grounded upon the moral law.” It must positively contribute to the family, church, or commonwealth. When this is the case, “it may be had, used, and enjoyed with good conscience.”⁸⁵

Second, we must choose a calling best suited for us by considering our affections (what we enjoy doing) and our gifts (what we do well).⁸⁶ Perkins explains:

Good choices are made when men try, judge, and examine themselves, to what things they are apt and fit, and to what things they are not. And every man must examine himself of two things: first, touching his affection: secondly touching his gifts. For his affection, he must search what mind he has to any calling, and in what calling he desires most of all to glorify God. For his gifts, he must examine for and to what calling they are most fit.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:60. Remembering his master in heaven, the Puritan worker seeks to glorify God by the way he does the works of his calling, states Beale, “Sanctifying the Outer Life,” 72.

⁸² Perkins, *Works*, 10:61. See also 1:238; 8:151.

⁸³ Perkins, *Works*, 10:61. See also 1:238; 8:529.

⁸⁴ Perkins explains each point and provides examples of wrong use and remedies as well as warnings.

⁸⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:61.

⁸⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:62–63.

⁸⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:62. O’Day notes the similarity in Perkins’s advice to that of “Erasmus, English humanists, who advised that through self-knowledge (attained through education and pursuit of the cardinal virtues) a man could discover the nature of his duties. The humanist creed stressed action and

The process of trial and reflection is essential to self-knowledge. Discovering personal affinities and competencies is not a selfish pursuit but a means to discover what is best for us. In this, God provides multiple opportunities because He is most glorified as we use our gifts and affections frequently and efficiently. Perkins affirms, “The Holy Ghost signifies that all our goodness and all our dexterity to this or that office is merely from God because we are sanctified, dedicated, and set apart in the counsel of God from all eternity.”⁸⁸ Richard Douglas expresses Perkins’s symmetrical thought as follows: “Vocation is in one sense imposed, but in another it is chosen according to one’s gifts.”⁸⁹ Conversely, choosing a calling without giving attention to one’s suitability, in Perkins’s estimation, results in disorder akin to a bone that is out of joint.⁹⁰

Recognizing the difficulty of self-examination, Perkins writes, “Because many men are partial in judging their inclination and gifts, the best way for them is to use the advice and help of others who are able to give direction herein and discern better than they.”⁹¹ Perkins harmonizes the input of advisors with God’s imposition. God imposes a personal calling “mediately,” that is, He uses people as instruments to identify and confirm personal callings in others.⁹² The counsel of devoted advisors aids the discovery of abilities and purifies motives.

By way of example, Perkins sees this in the relationship between parents and

doing, but it also insisted that man was called by God to act.” *The Professions*, 35. Margo Todd’s thesis claims that the Puritan theology of vocation draws from its contemporary humanist context to grant dignity to all people. Margo Todd, *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). In addition to human dignity, however, the Puritan’s final end was God’s glory.

⁸⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 2:52.

⁸⁹ Richard M. Douglas, “Talent and Vocation in Humanist and Protestant Thought,” in *Action and Conviction in Early Modern Europe; Essays in Memory of E. H. Harbison*, ed. Theodore K. Rabb and Jerrold E. Seigel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 296.

⁹⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:61.

⁹¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:62.

⁹² Perkins, *Works*, 10:45. See also 10:16, 272; 2:16. In other words, God calls “ordinarily” by His church. Perkins, *Works*, 10:272. Perkins says that God also imposes “immediately,” by Himself alone. For instance, God called Adam, Abraham, Moses, and the apostles immediately. Perkins, *Works*, 10:45.

children.⁹³ It is never too early to notice God’s design for a life. Perkins explains that Athanasius, “that famous bishop,” from a very early age was practicing the works of a minister by the seaside with his friends, “examining and baptizing them according the solemn order” he had witnessed in the congregation.⁹⁴ Perkins declares, “Parents cannot do greater wrong to their children, and the society of men, than to apply them to unfit callings; as when a child is fit for learning, to apply him to a trade, or other bodily service...this is like expecting toes to work like fingers.”⁹⁵ He explains the value of both physical and mental gifts. As for mental capacity, adults and children alike are prone to either “active” or “passive” understanding. Recognizing the difference is useful in determining our callings.⁹⁶

Following his first two points, choosing a lawful and suitable calling, Perkins addresses how to choose a calling when a person is fit for more than one.⁹⁷ Paul advises the Corinthians to seek after the best spiritual gifts, that is, those gifts that best build up the body (1 Cor 14).⁹⁸ Based on this example, Perkins argues that we must seek for the best callings that most edify the church.⁹⁹ As a slave must seek freedom when offered it (1 Cor 7:21),¹⁰⁰ so too we are free to pursue that area of service that is most beneficial to the family, church, and commonwealth, and most glorifying to God.

⁹³ Perkins, *Works*, 10:62–63, 176–78. Perkins commends a practice evident among the Athenians. Parents took their children to markets and observed their delight and affinity with certain tools and or occupations. Perkins remarks, “It will not be amiss for Christians to be followers of the heathen in this or any other commendable practice.” *Works*, 10:62.

⁹⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 10:63, 177.

⁹⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:63.

⁹⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:63.

⁹⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:63–64.

⁹⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:64. See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, Rev. ed., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 723.

⁹⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:100.

¹⁰⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:63.

Perkins provides a second illustration, which he calls a “special rule” for university students.¹⁰¹ “If gifts will serve, a choice must be made of the calling of a prophet [pastor] or a teacher; and it must have the first place above all other academic callings.”¹⁰² Perkins has high regard for the calling of a pastor,¹⁰³ because prophecy (i.e., preaching) is the only gift that both edifies believers and converts unbelievers.¹⁰⁴ This is not to suggest that the calling of a pastor is more pleasing to God than any other calling.¹⁰⁵ It is, however, to recognize that it is a high calling by virtue of how it benefits man and glorifies God. Perkins revered God’s Word and recognized the weighty responsibility of expositing Scripture because it contains that subject matter which is superior to all other things.¹⁰⁶

The public ministry of preaching is the most edifying due to Scripture’s ability to transform lives—eternally and temporally. For this reason, the preaching of the gospel

¹⁰¹ Breward believes that Perkins’s treatise targeted university students for two reasons: 1) they had some choice in calling (whereas others had less options) and 2) Perkins hoped they would lead England’s spiritual renewal. “The Life and Theology,” 283.

¹⁰² Perkins, *Works*, 10:64. By other academic callings, he means “schoolmasters, physicians, lawyers.”

¹⁰³ In *The Calling of the Ministry*, Perkins uses preferential language for the calling. See *Works*, 10:208, 212, 215, 220, 221, 224, 226, 228, 237, 260, 261, 263, 276.

¹⁰⁴ Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2014, 723. Fee suggests that “the real issue is not with tongues and prophecy as such, but with the building up of the community; and this can be effected only by means of understandable utterances, prophecy being the primary representative.”

¹⁰⁵ In *Vocations*, he states that the “greatest callings are in the church and the commonwealth.” Perkins, *Works*, 10:63. Elsewhere, he says, “Now if we compare work to work, there is a difference between washing dishes and preaching the Word of God; but as touching to please God, none at all.” “The preaching of the gospel is the principal means to work” salvation, and “it is an excellent privilege to bring men” to salvation. *Works*, 8:529; 1:222.

¹⁰⁶ Perkins remarks that “the doctrine touching the certainty of the Word is of great use.” Perkins, *Works*, 2:40–41. See *The Art of Prophecy*, 10:281–356. See also 10:195–280; Paul R. Schaefer, “The Arte of Propheying by William Perkins,” in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 38–51. Further, it is the Holy Spirit who illuminates God’s Word to the preacher, who is God’s mouthpiece. Perkins, *Works*, 2:14–16, 37–39; 6:60–61, 116–18; 9:172; 6:xl–xlii; 10:243. In line with Perkins’s views, Sinclair Ferguson expands on the Puritan priority of preaching, due to its capacity for comprehensive transform. “The receptor of preaching is never merely mind but the whole complex person.” Sinclair B. Ferguson, “Life and Ministry,” in *William Perkins: Architect of Puritanism*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Greg Salazar (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 21. The authority that undergirds such preaching proceeds from the content—the holy Word of God (19).

is the most loving act of service that can be extended to another person.¹⁰⁷ As it happens, the church in Perkins's day was in dire need of pastors.¹⁰⁸ In *The Calling of the Ministry*, he encourages young men to consider the importance of this office, while exhorting them to examine their gifts and affections to determine if the ministry is a "good choice" for them.¹⁰⁹ The calling itself is not the end.¹¹⁰ The union of the believer's God-given gifts and affections with the right call and its proper use is the desired end. Therefore, the

¹⁰⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:222–25. Fee argues that Paul's admonishment to prophesy in 1 Corinthians 14 is "singularly in light of the exhortation to love that preceded it" in chapter 13. Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2014, 725. Perkins believes that "the end of all teaching is to turn men unto God, and thereby to bring them to glorify God." *Works*, 1:242.

¹⁰⁸ Ian Breward highlights that pastors were in great demand, though their compensation was among the lowest in the Elizabethan government. Therefore, parents sent their least promising children to the ministry. Ian Breward, "William Perkins and the Ideal of the Ministry in the Elizabethan Church," *The Reformed Theological Review* 24, no. 3 (October 1965): 78. See Perkins, *Works*, 3:37–38; 10:212.

¹⁰⁹ On the last pages of the treatise, Perkins considers "The Commission," or choosing and entering God's call to be a preacher. In three short pages, he echoes his instructions from his vocation treatise. He first exhorts the believer to examine his conscience for willingness—or inclinations and affections. Second, the believer should seek the church's affirmation of his sufficient gifts and abilities. In this process, the believer can avoid entering the ministry with "foul presumption, whereby he would be without God's blessings and protection." Perkins, *Works*, 10:278–80. An interesting note is the order of Perkins's *The Calling of the Ministry*. He begins with dignities and duties of the call and ends with instruction on the discovery of the call. In the vocation treatise, the order is opposite. He begins with discovery of the call. In the vocation treatise, the order is opposite. He begins with discovery and carries on with entering and continuing in the duties. The variance could be for a couple of reasons. Because of his personal experience as a pastor, his teaching content concerning duties is exponential. It also may speak to his belief that one must be called to be a pastor, because his explication is brutally honest about the dignities and the dangers involved in the call. See also Perkins, *Works*, 1:222–42; 2:14–15; 4:95–96.

¹¹⁰ A calling should not be sought for the "high social and/or spiritual status," which was the Corinthian's strategy, which Paul denounced according to Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1024. On a similar note, Perkins does have a category for extraordinary callings. Perkins, *Works*, 10:66–69; 1:136; 2:41–42. He explains that Luther's office was ordinary, but his execution of it was extraordinary. Perkins's argument is interesting, for it is Luther who argued against the view of "extraordinary" callings which were typically reserved for monks. Monastics affirmed that the sacrifice of renunciation is necessary for the Christian life (vocation). They viewed this sacrifice as extraordinary and, therefore, it was the kind of life that best pleases God. Luther rejected this premise by teaching the ordinariness of the Christian life. Steven Hein elaborates on Luther's thought: "A life of faith is mundane in its appearance. He [Luther] urged the Christian to leave behind the exercises of monastic life and various acts of pious self-denial in a struggle for holiness. The righteousness of Christ shall be your holiness." Steven A. Hein, "Luther on Vocatio: Ordinary Life for Ordinary Saints," *Reformation and Revival* 8, no. 1 (Wint 1999): 121. Perkins explains that due to the abuses prevalent in the "Romish church, by a special instinct and extraordinary inspiration of the Spirit, Luther restored the gospel to its former purity." Perkins, *Works*, 10:66–67. Perkins also notes biblical examples such as Abraham, Moses, the apostles of Christ, Elijah, Aaron, and Philip. Perkins argues that extraordinary calls are necessary when ordinary calls fail. They are discerned not by miracles but by preaching and modeling the doctrine of the prophets and apostles. Plus, God gives a special measure of "knowledge, zeal, wisdom, constancy, courage, and other gifts" (67–68). In the end, Perkins made space for the concept and terminology of "extraordinary callings" based on Scripture, which opposed the Catholic meaning. But his teaching was primarily directed to the everyday, ordinary callings.

pastoral office is the “best” calling for the man who possesses the necessary gifts and desires. To do anything else would be second best for him, because preaching is most edifying to others.

Perkins’s appraisal of what constitutes the “best” calling for an individual includes serious consideration of what best matches the person’s ability and what best contributes to society’s good. After all, Perkins emphasizes, it is the diversity of ordinary callings that collectively meets the spiritual and physical needs of a society.¹¹¹ Therefore, according to Perkins, we make a good choice of a calling when it is consistent with God’s Word, suited to our gifts, desires and abilities, and (in terms of the common good) is the most beneficial of all the options before us.

A Good Entry

Having made a good choice, we must make a good entry into our personal calling. This necessitates two things, both of which serve to confirm that we have made a good choice. First, a person must “know in his conscience that God has placed him there.”¹¹² This confidence is important because it provides comfort in adversity. “When our conscience cannot say thus much, the comfort is gone.”¹¹³ We arrive at this certainty when we possess the ability to do the work. God imparts gifts of “competence” (skill) and “convenience” (knowledge and dexterity).¹¹⁴ A “trial of gifts” confirms these things. If an individual is unable to perform the duties of a particular calling, then God has not called

¹¹¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:58.

¹¹² Perkins, *Works*, 10:64.

¹¹³ Perkins, *Works*, 10:64.

¹¹⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 10:64. These are gifts in addition to spiritual gifts. To clarify his use of the term “gifts,” akin to the fruit of the Spirit, Perkins mentions other gifts such as the “fear of His name, the love of His majesty, the gifts of prayer, faith, patience, and others that He [Christ] would have tried in the entrance of their [the disciples] callings, and exercised in the continuance therein unto the end.” Perkins, *Works*, 1:89.

him to that work.¹¹⁵

Second, we must be confirmed by others in the calling. This necessarily involves those who are in positions of authority, such as “parents and masters in private families, the governors of the church for ecclesiastical callings, [and] the magistrate and men of authority for civil [callings] in the commonwealth.”¹¹⁶ Their recognition of an individual’s suitability for a job ensures a good entry. Perkins notes that these two checks also aid in avoiding abuses, such as showing favoritism, buying and selling offices, and engaging in corruption. Perkins chides, “He who buys his office must say his money called him rather than God.”¹¹⁷

At this point, Perkins addresses several potential problems that might arise when seeking to make a “good entry” into a calling.¹¹⁸ For starters, what do we say to the person who has entered a calling for the wrong reason? Perkins answers, “He is not to forsake his place, but to repent of his bad entrance, and to do the duties of his calling with diligence and good conscience.”¹¹⁹ God will either bless his work or call him in time to a different vocation. Second, what do we say to those who are concerned about their “desire” for a certain vocation? Perkins responds by affirming that it is always acceptable to desire a particular calling for God’s glory and man’s good.¹²⁰ By contrast, “It is

¹¹⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 1:94. Contemporary author Gene Veith echoes Perkins’s thought: “More often, acting outside of vocation is morally innocent, but it results in ineffectiveness, frustration, and wasted time.” Gene Edward Veith Jr., ed., *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 139. Another way to say it is that failures are not necessarily “weaknesses” to overcome, rather the work is simply not part of God’s plan for that individual.

¹¹⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:65.

¹¹⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:65. Of the buying and selling of offices, Perkins argues, it is a grievous thing. Even unbelievers, such as Alexander Severus, Seneca, and Justinian, forbid it. *Works*, 10:65.

¹¹⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:66–72.

¹¹⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:69. Perkins refers to William the Conqueror, who took the throne by force. But later, he instituted just laws and gained the following of the people, thus becoming a just prince. See also Breward, “The Life and Theology,” 284.

¹²⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:70. Perkins appeals to 1 Timothy 3:1, as a case in point.

unlawful to desire work with a vain or greedy mind, for pleasure, or for lucre's sake."¹²¹ Therefore, if the motive is honorable, desire is a good thing. Third, what do we say to those who have entered two callings or trades at the same time? Is this permissible?¹²² Perkins makes allowance of this, as long as (1) neither calling contradicts what is permissible according to God's Word, (2) neither calling hinders the execution of the other, and (3) neither calling undermines the common good.¹²³ That said, in a densely populated community, it is "inconvenient," for one individual to occupy multiple livelihoods to the detriment of others.¹²⁴ Due to "presumption," people are tempted to overstep their abilities by "daring to enterprise things beyond their callings and above their power, which multiplies their anxieties."¹²⁵ Perkins warns, "He who does enlarge himself to bear the most offices, the fewer shall he discharge."¹²⁶

In sum, a good entry into a vocation necessitates (1) testing one's ability, and (2) receiving an endorsement from others. These serve to confirm God's "imposition" of a particular calling. This is the way to make a good choice and a good entry into a vocation.

A Proper Continuance

Perkins devotes a significant portion of his treatise to explain what it means to

¹²¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:70. See also 6:118.

¹²² The question does not concern holding a familial role and vocational role simultaneously. For Perkins, all familial roles are callings, as are all vocational roles such as merchants, government officials, pastors, tradesmen, farmers, physicians, publishers, and lawyers. Perkins refers to the Old Testament patriarchs—they were priests, prophets, civil judges, and family men. Perkins, *Works*, 10:71–72. As O'Day observes, "The essential point is that any individual was subject to several particular callings which applied to social and family roles as well as to occupations." *The Professions*, 35. See also Patterson, *William Perkins*, 141. The question really concerns the legitimacy of holding two jobs.

¹²³ Perkins, *Works*, 10:71–72.

¹²⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 10:72.

¹²⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 9:222; 10:3.

¹²⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:72.

persevere in a personal calling.¹²⁷ There are multiple trials and temptations that threaten to undermine what it means to serve God and man in a vocation. Perkins's conviction that our personal calling is the means of sanctification, accounts for the attention he gives to this subject. Mark Shaw affirms that "sanctification is ultimately worked out in the rough and tumble of daily work."¹²⁸ In brief, to continue well, believers must know (1) the works of their calling, and (2) the way they are to be done.

Perkins says that a good work possesses three essential properties. First, a work must be associated with our particular calling. He believes that the Spirit "teaches us to search for the proper works of our callings and then afterwards do them."¹²⁹ However, some barely perform their own works but due to "vain curiosity" venture into the works of other men.¹³⁰ Rather, Perkins urges each believer to follow Paul's advice to "live in peace by doing his own business (1 Thess. 4:11)."¹³¹ Second, it must profit the worker and the commonwealth. By "profit," Perkins means the work should contribute to people's basic needs. Conversely, works that lead to vanity or indulgence are unprofitable.¹³² Third, it must be necessary.¹³³ There are two kinds of works: principal and less principal. It is important to prioritize those works that are the essence of the calling over those that are less important. For example, Perkins describes the minister who is responsible for reading [studying] and preaching. However, the principal duty is to preach, therefore, the activity or content of study cannot detract from the practice of

¹²⁷ For comparison's sake, of the total pages devoted to all four stages, the continuance section represents 60%. Choosing a calling is 6%, a good entrance 19%, and a good exit 15%. Perkins, *Works*, 10:61–107.

¹²⁸ Shaw, "The Marrow of Practical Divinity," 272.

¹²⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:73.

¹³⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:73.

¹³¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:73.

¹³² Perkins, *Works*, 10:74.

¹³³ Perkins, *Works*, 10:74–77. See also 8:369–70; Marshall, *A Kind of Life*, 42–43.

preaching.¹³⁴

As for the manner of performing good works, Perkins emphasizes holiness and constancy (or perseverance). Regarding the former, he affirms that a double sanctification is required—first for the worker and second for the work.¹³⁵ The “blind divinity of the world” claims it is sufficient to live peaceably, work diligently, and not to harm anyone, but this simply is not true.¹³⁶ Without God’s work of regeneration, and our constant cleaving to Him through the power of the Holy Spirit (sanctification), even our best works deserve condemnation.¹³⁷ “The good thing done by a natural man (unregenerate) is a sin in respect of the doer because it fails, both for his right beginning—which is a pure heart, good conscience, and faith unfeigned—as also for his end, which is the glory of God.”¹³⁸ For the work of our calling to be blessed, the worker must be sanctified (or saved).

In addition, the work (or action) must be sanctified.¹³⁹ By this, Perkins means that it (and the motivation behind it) must be lawful. He cites Luke 18:10, where the publican and the Pharisee enact the same lawful work—prayer. But the former does it in humility, while the latter does it in pride.¹⁴⁰ Because the Pharisee’s action was motivated

¹³⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 10:75. Perkins elaborates on this example: “It is the fault of many students who, setting themselves apart for the work of the ministry, do first give themselves to study the fathers and ancient writers, whereas their first principle duty is to be soundly instructed in the Word of God, and to ground themselves in the main points of religion, that they may be able to know what is true, what is false, what is to be done, [and] what is not to be done, in all matters, whether they concern faith or manners. And when this good foundation is laid, then the foresaid helps may with good success be adjoined.” Perkins, *Works*, 10:75.

¹³⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:77–80. See also “a general faith” and a “justifying faith” in 1:236.

¹³⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:79. See also 10:20; 3:33–34.

¹³⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:78–79. See also 8:398–99.

¹³⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 7:19. These reasons distinguish the regenerate’s works in their particular calling from the same in the unregenerate, all of which are under God’s sovereignty. See Charles H. George and Katherine George, “Callings,” 127.

¹³⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:79ff. In this concept of a double sanctification, Perkins reveals that a theology of vocation is more comprehensive than the theology of work.

¹⁴⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:79. See also 9:93. Due to the Pharisee’s inability to find any sin of which to repent, Perkins identifies him as a “superficial searcher.”

by pride, his work was unsanctified.

There are two ways in which a work is sanctified: Scripture and prayer.¹⁴¹ Perkins believes that daily time in God’s Word makes a person more “skillful in the works of his calling.”¹⁴² When we are ruled by Scripture in vocation, vices (such as injustice) are exposed and discouraged, while virtuous practices (done in faith and love) are prompted and perpetuated.¹⁴³ As for prayer, Perkins proposes that believers should pray “for ability and good success.”¹⁴⁴ They should also offer prayers of thanksgiving.¹⁴⁵ Asking for the Father’s blessing should precede all works. In short, Scripture and prayer sanctify the works of every calling.

Inasmuch as works should be done in holiness, they should also be done with perseverance. A good choice of, and a good entry in, a vocation is irrelevant if endurance is lacking. As soldiers remain faithful to their post, so believers should persevere in their calling (1 Cor 7:20).¹⁴⁶ Perkins acknowledges three obstacles: ambition, envy, and impatience. He warns that Satan will take advantage of each: “If a man be impatient of poverty, he [Satan] will seek to carry him to picking and stealing; if a man be prone to covetousness, he [Satan] will provoke him to fraud and oppression; if he be inclined to ambition, Satan will puff him up with pride and vainglory.”¹⁴⁷ These impediments can be

¹⁴¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:80. See also 1:237–38; 6:96–97. For more, see “Of the Scriptures,” 8:236–49. As well, *How to Live, and That Well*, is a powerful teaching on the manner by which God’s Word moderates our faith in life. 10:1–29.

¹⁴² Perkins, *Works*, 4:322. See also 7:66.

¹⁴³ Perkins, *Works*, 10:80–93.

¹⁴⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 10:93. See also 1:501. For more on prayer, see 1:405–504; 2:257–64; 5:417–79. See also J. Stephen Yuille, *Living Blessedly Forever: The Sermon on the Mount and the Puritan Piety of William Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), chap. 6, Kindle.

¹⁴⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:93.

¹⁴⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:94.

¹⁴⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 1:107.

remedied with sufficient compensation, vacations, and necessary changes.¹⁴⁸ Thus, to persevere, namely, we must know the works of our callings and perform them diligently.

A Respectful Exit

When it is necessary to leave a particular calling, two things must be observed.¹⁴⁹ The first concerns the timing and manner of the exit. Whether a civil or ecclesiastical calling, we must seek God’s will. By contrast, the “wills of men for the attainment of greater wealth, pleasure, and preferment” cannot be the impetus for resigning from a calling.¹⁵⁰ As a mark of Christian witness, one should “resign in and with the testimony of a good conscience, which is when our conscience bears witness that we have in the works of our callings kept ourselves unblameable, and have endeavored in all things to do the will of God.”¹⁵¹

Second, Perkins is adamant that every man will give an account of the works of his calling before the Lord. “Few are truly persuaded of this last and great account because it is deferred. But we ought to be of better resolution, and prepare ourselves for it.”¹⁵² People will give an account for their actions as they relate to the general calling, but they will also give an account for their actions as they relate to their personal calling. Everyone will be answerable to God for in His “infinite knowledge and providence,” He has recorded all our thoughts, words, and deeds (Matt 25:20–21).¹⁵³

For this reason, Perkins exhorts his reader to prepare. Believers do so by making good use of what God has entrusted to them, namely, their personal callings. As a

¹⁴⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:96–100.

¹⁴⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:101–07.

¹⁵⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:101.

¹⁵¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:103.

¹⁵² Perkins, *Works*, 10:103. See also 1:449; 4:72.

¹⁵³ Perkins, *Works*, 10:104.

shop owner keeps meticulous records of expenses and revenues, believers should draw up bills of receipts and expenses as they relate to their personal callings. The receipts reflect the things they have enjoyed (e.g., graces, blessings, and gifts—both material and spiritual).¹⁵⁴ The bill of expenses reflects their sins. In this accounting process, “we find that our reckonings will be far short of that which God requires.”¹⁵⁵ This realization should motivate us to “shake off that spiritual drowsiness which possesses our minds.”¹⁵⁶ “While the day of grace remains,” we should strive toward new obedience in our callings, thereby preparing to make a good account before our God.¹⁵⁷

Conclusion

God’s design for vocation is from eternity, and it is personal, it is “a certain kind of life” by which each of us serve God by serving others. Perkins advises the believer to recognize that God is “the most wise and absolute Former and Creator of His works.”¹⁵⁸ Therefore, we must honor “God’s wise disposition,” and consider our own callings to be perfectly fitted for us.¹⁵⁹ Perkins gives so much attention to our ability to know and obey in our personal callings due to his overarching desire to see God glorified in every part of our lives, which consequently best serves and benefits the common good.

¹⁵⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 10:105.

¹⁵⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:105–6.

¹⁵⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:106. Richard Lovelace explains, “The problem that confronts the Puritans as they look out on their decaying society and their lukewarm church is not simply to dislodge the faithful from the slough of mortal or venial sin, but radically to awaken those who are professing but not actual Christians, who are caught in the trap of carnal security.” Richard C. Lovelace, “The Anatomy of Puritan Piety: English Puritan Devotional Literature, 1600–1640,” in *Christian Spirituality*, ed. Louis K. Dupré and Don E. Saliers, 3rd ed. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1989), 303.

¹⁵⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:107. Perkins’s cases of conscience are another aid in preparation. He says, “The temporary judgment that is given by the conscience is nothing else but a beginning (or a forerunner) of the last judgment.” *Works*, 8:12.

¹⁵⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 8:413.

¹⁵⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:56.

CHAPTER 5

THE PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION

The England of Perkins's day was slowly emerging from sixty years of struggle.¹ Under the former Roman Catholic regime, religion had been compulsory but lacked an emphasis on individual application. As a result, religious freedom caused some confusion for the developing Protestant church.² Stephen Yuille suggests that the

¹ Religion shifted four times in twenty years. Mark Shaw also notes the volatile economic and political conditions that occurred over the next forty years. From 1558–1569 recovery, consolidation, experiment, and new enterprise; from 1569–1572 crisis and tension; from 1574–1585 lighter taxation and reduction of the national debt which stimulated large amounts of new enterprise; and from 1585–1604, the years Perkins published works, war with Spain. Mark R. Shaw, “The Marrow of Practical Divinity: A Study in the Theology of William Perkins” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1981), 258–59. Paul Sever adds, from about 1525, England saw a “century of inflation—during which food prices rose almost 500 percent while craft wages barely doubled.” Paul S. Seaver, *Wallington's World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985), 130. England was experiencing the long-range effects of accelerated population growth, which prompted a “Reformation of manners,” according to Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisionist Strain: Disciplinary Religion & Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 41. Seaver elaborates: in the early 1600s 73 houses were crowded into a parish of less than one and a half acres. *Wallington's World*, 131. Margo Todd discusses a social movement led by “humanists,” who disdained the former “ecclesiastical corruption,” and sought to “rescue” and empower the people. Margo Todd, *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 22. As a result, Perkins developed his teaching to account for: (1) a developing Protestant church, (2) the former tyrannical authority of Roman Catholicism and its continued influence which caused doubt and confusion in many, (3) an extreme case of poorly trained and paid preachers, (4) daily encounters with an emboldened English people who were “blasphemers and scoffers in the street, outside the pub, inside the church, and so forth,” and (5) the general uncertainty in the land where ideas of “hypocrisy, secrecy, and manipulation” were becoming common place. For more on cultural context, see Leif Dixon, “William Perkins, ‘Atheisme,’ and the Crises of England’s Long Reformation,” *Journal of British Studies* 50, no. 4 (October 2011), 791, 797–98; Raymond A. Blacketer, “The Rhetoric of Reform: William Perkins on Preaching and the Purification of the Church,” in *Scholasticism Reformed: Essays in Honour of Willem J. van Asselt*, ed. Maarten Wisse, Marcel Sarot, and Willemien Otten (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 234. See also William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 7:xx, xviii, xix; Randall J. Pederson, *Unity in Diversity: English Puritans and the Puritan Reformation, 1603–1689* (Boston: Brill, 2014), chaps. 2, 6; Stephen Yuille, “The Wholesome Doctrine of Faith and Love,” in *William Perkins: Architect of Puritanism*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Greg Salazar (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019): 121–27; Joel R. Beeke and J. Stephen Yuille, *William Perkins*, Bitesize Biographies (Grand Rapids: EP Books, 2015); Charles George and Katherine George, “Protestantism and Capitalism in Pre-Revolutionary England,” *Church History* 27, no. 4 (December 1, 1958): 351–71; Charles H. George and Katherine George, “English Protestant Economic Theory: The World and Its Callings,” in *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation, 1570–1640* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), chap. 3.

² Now free from Roman Catholic oppression, belief systems and practices emerged which were diversely influenced by monasticism, mysticism, asceticism, charismatic apocalypticism, ‘pure church’

Elizabethan reign “provided the much needed climate for English Reformers to solidify the church’s position,” even amid ongoing Roman Catholic pressure.³ The people’s consciences were no longer subject to the “tyranny of the Roman Catholic confessor,” but to God, claims Peter Sedgwick.⁴ Because of this, as Mark Shaw notes, there was a shift in strategy—one “dedicated to breeding convictions rather than imposing conformity.”⁵ Perkins steered this shift, due to his ability to apply “the wisdom of Scripture to every conceivable issue”; his works were “extremely popular,” for “they offered insight on dealing with the problems of daily living.”⁶ In sum, historian Ian Breward argues, “Perkins re-directed Puritan energies; when individual response had such an important role in freeing men from the clammy grip of the past.”⁷

In his *Treatise of the Vocations*, Perkins’s objective was “to lead men to play their rightful role in God’s world.”⁸ “The dogma of vocation” was welcomed by clergy and laity alike to solve existing social problems within England’s “rapidly developing

movements, such as the Waldensians and Lollards, separatists, familists, and the Anabaptists. The Elizabethan Settlement (1558–1603) provided some stability by establishing the Act of Supremacy (also the Act of Uniformity), the Book of Common Prayer, and the Thirty-Nine Articles. W. B. Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), chap. 1.

³ Yuille explains, “The Catholic Jesuits, called ‘the black horsemen of the pope’ infiltrated society for the express purpose of restoring the old religion.” J. Stephen Yuille, “A Puritan, Spiritual Household: William Perkins and the ‘Right Ordering’ of a Family,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 8, no. 2 (2016): 177; See also “The Wholesome Doctrine,” 122.

⁴ Peter H. Sedgwick, “Ethics in the Later Reformation: William Perkins,” in *The Origins of Anglican Moral Theology* (Boston: Brill, 2019), 192.

⁵ Mark R. Shaw, “William Perkins and the New Pelagians: Another Look at the Cambridge Predestination Controversy of the 1590’s,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 58 (1996): 289. Shaw states that Perkins’s “A Golden Chain (1590) would remain the key document signaling the shift in strategy.” Bozeman also notes this “shift of emphasis from structural reform to experiential piety.” *The Precisionist Strain*, 69. See also Ian Breward, “William Perkins and the Ideal of the Ministry in the Elizabethan Church,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 24, no. 3 (October 1965): 83.

⁶ Yuille, “Spiritual Household,” 163.

⁷ Ian Breward, “The Significance of William Perkins,” *The Journal of Religious History* 4, no. 2 (December 1966): 120.

⁸ Breward, “The Ideal of the Ministry,” 83.

commercial life.”⁹ This doctrine, Charles George submits, was English Protestantism’s “most significant contribution to a new view of society and of man’s place in society.”¹⁰

In their vocation, Christians engage with three societies—the family, church, and commonwealth.¹¹ Perkins explains:

There are several members in these bodies. They are men walking in several callings and offices, the execution whereof must tend to the happy and good estate of the rest, yea of all men everywhere, as much as possible. The common good of men stands in this, not only that they live, but that they live well in righteousness and holiness and consequently in true happiness. And for the attainment hereunto God has ordained and disposed all callings, and in His providence designed the persons to bear them.¹²

The personal call unites these “bodies.” In other words, it unites the gospel to everyday life. Leland Ryken claims that Perkins’s model, “compared to what we ourselves ordinarily practice and articulate in regard to vocation, represents a very high degree of integration.”¹³ George expresses this more fully, “Every Christian must completely acknowledge and accomplish the integration of his own calling to a worldly task with the general calling to Christianity.”¹⁴ In critical appraisal (still nonetheless true), Historian Christopher Hill affirms that “Perkins’s views on society were not an *ad hoc* addition to his theology, but an organic part of it.”¹⁵ By contrast, the one who disengages theology

⁹ Louis B. Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (Ithaca, NY: Published for the Folger Shakespeare Library by Cornell University Press, 1958), 170.

¹⁰ Charles H. George and Katherine George, “Protestantism and Capitalism,” 361.

¹¹ Labeled by contemporary authors the “three inter-related estates” and the “holy trinity of middle-class solidarity.” See Peter J. Beale, “Sanctifying the Outer Life,” in *Aspects of Sanctification: Being Papers Read at the 1981 Conference* (London: Westminster Conference, 1981): 63; Wright, *Middle-Class Culture*, 177.

¹² Perkins, *Works*, 10:45.

¹³ Leland Ryken, “‘Some Kind of Life to Which We Are Called of God’: The Puritan Doctrine of Vocation,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 22, no. 1 (2018): 63–63.

¹⁴ Charles H. George and Katherine George, “Callings,” 135.

¹⁵ Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the 17th Century* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1965), 226, 217–18. Hill accuses Perkins of beginning “a bourgeois revolution,” because his primary audience was the “sober, hard-working, industrious, middle class in town and country,” who were chosen for salvation, while beggars were deemed wicked. Hill finds Perkins’s doctrines of predestination and justification particularly harsh, and he believes

from his work, according to Perkins, “abuses his calling, seeking wholly his own and not the common good.”¹⁶

Perkins repeatedly rejects a common saying of his day, ““Every man for himself, and God for us all,”” because it is the “common fault of the world, for men to serve themselves.”¹⁷ In contrast, as Louis Wright notes, “Perkins preaches the necessity of shaping one’s vocation to serve the best interests of church and commonwealth, and he identifies the highest good of the individual with the common good.”¹⁸ Indeed, according to God’s design, the integration of our faith and personal callings is most beneficial. With that in mind, this chapter analyzes Perkins’s view of the practical demonstration of vocation in the commonwealth, the church, the family, and the individual’s personal life.

The Commonwealth

In God’s great wisdom, says Perkins, order is established in the commonwealth through our particular callings, which “tend directly to the advancement of His own glory.”¹⁹ Perkins illustrates this with “two regiments.”²⁰ The first is the spiritual regiment, or the regiment of Christ, whereby all believers are equal before God (the general call). The second is the civil, or inward, regiment, which involves superior and inferior

the same of Perkins’s doctrine of vocation, i.e., his emphasis on diligence and warnings against idleness. To the contrary, Perkins’s theology is reflected in his views because he believes that God’s sovereignty becomes evident in man fulfilling the duties of his calling, which brings Him glory and edifies society.

¹⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:45–46. Perkins identifies six sorts of men who live by this worldly motto: (1) usurers, (2) engrossers, (3) idle persons, i.e., beggars, (4) riotous persons, (5) dishonest tradesmen, and (6) drowsy and carnal Protestants. *Works*, 2:350. This pattern is evident in monasticism, as well. Perkins condemns monks and friars who sought the state of perfection in a solitary life of fasting and prayer. But, “this monkish kind of living is damnable. Contrariwise, these are general duties of Christianity, and further, every man must have a particular and personal calling, that he may be a good profitable member of some society and body.” *Works*, 10:55.

¹⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:46, 93; 2:350. See also 1:199, 432, 641; 2:385; 3:354; 4:235; 5:320, 436.

¹⁸ Louis B. Wright, “William Perkins: Elizabethan Apostle of ‘Practical Divinity,’” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1940): 182.

¹⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:33. See also 1:455.

²⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 4:140–41. See also 8:535ff.

positions (the particular call).²¹

Paul Stevens asserts that the Puritans (Perkins included) were the first to develop this distinction between the general and personal calls, and in so doing they “secularized the particular call.”²² Since Perkins’s concept of work includes all lawful activities, he “often spoke of callings as though they were simply occupations,” such as a magistrate, minister, carpenter, etc.²³ However, Perkins does not “secularize” vocation; rather, he “sanctifies” it.²⁴ He affirms that our spirituality touches the whole of our lives. To exclude the spiritual aspect of life from our secular involvement is to deny God’s design for vocation. Rather than reducing religion, Perkins advances the value of vocation in the secular setting. To be sure, Perkins’s understanding of the particular call is

²¹ Breward concludes, “This doctrine of the two kingdoms [regiments] was used by Perkins to reconcile the orders of creation and redemption, and to demonstrate that God was not a split personality, but worked in all things for his own glory.” Ian Breward, “The Life and Theology of William Perkins, 1558–1602” (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 1963): 279. On the other hand, Sedgwick understands Perkins’s paradigm to mean “there is no concept of a unified self, because the salvific action of Christ destroys any idea of there being continuity between the social and the spiritual self.” “William Perkins,” 201. However, Perkins claims, “When you are a temporal person, you put not off the spiritual, therefore you must ever love; but when love will not help, you must with love execute the office of the temporal person.” Perkins, *Works*, 8:536. Paul Marshall suggests that in Perkins’s era, “The doctrine of vocation had often been used to justify submitting to, and requiring submission to, established political authorities.” Paul Marshall, *A Kind of Life Imposed on Man: Vocation and Social Order from Tyndale to Locke* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 10. See also Edmund S. Morgan, introduction to *Puritan Political Ideas, 1558–1794* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2003). However, Perkins believes that “the regiment of civil societies” is evidence of God’s existence. For without God’s imposed outward order, there would be none. Perkins, *Works*, 6:12.

²² R. Paul Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity: Vocation, Work and Ministry in a Biblical Perspective* (Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 1999), 77.

²³ Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity*, 79. In a similar vein, Marshall notes that Perkins simply fused the two ideas of duties and occupations. *A Kind of Life*, 41. Their observations are partially true. In other treatises, Perkins gives more attention to the callings of the pastor and domestic roles. However, due to Perkins’s pastoral emphasis, it is not hard to believe that he may have tailored his vocation treatise to benefit lay people, recognizing the vast quantity of hours and effort they devoted to these vocations.

²⁴ Perkins expounds the third commandment as follows: we ought to “sanctify the works of our callings.” Perkins, *Works*, 6:96. Rosemary O’Day remarks that much of Perkins’s teaching became standard professional practice: personal service for the common good; the process of being trained and tested by other professionals; diligence; a code of ethics; the expectation of a sufficient income while avoiding that being the primary motivation for work; the avoidance of greed and ambition. She says, “At the root of his teaching, however, was the belief that the call to profess and perform such a service came directly from God and that the accountability of the professional was to God.” Rosemary O’Day, *The Professions in Early Modern England 1450–1800: Servants of the Commonwealth* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 37. Write confirms, “That idleness is a sin, diligence a necessity, efficiency a duty, and persistence a heavenly virtue were then unquestioned axioms, and they have come to be cardinal points in the modern creed of success.” Wright, *Middle-Class Culture*, 181.

that it should shape our attitude toward the commonwealth, that is, our beliefs and behaviors concerning authority, ethics, prosperity, and wealth.²⁵

Authority

Perkins had a high regard for civil authority.²⁶ He remarks that the magistrate is the “vicegerent of the Lord,” and his principal duties are to uphold the commandments of both tables, the practice of pure religion, and the observance of the Sabbath.²⁷ Perkins expected the magistrate to dispense justice not with extremity but “mercy,” which was the “badge” of the Christian commonwealth.²⁸ Moreover, he expresses gratitude that, compared to other nations, England’s prince was “religious, whereby it comes to pass that these blessings of salvation we enjoy not in secret or by stealth, but we have it countenanced by authority.”²⁹

²⁵ Perkins’s concept of social order emulated that of his mentor, Laurence Chaderton. He believed that vocation was a stabilizing force against “most of the evils of unrest in the commonwealth.” Wright, *Middle-Class Culture*, 175n14. Peter Lake notes that Chaderton’s view of a profitable society was based on the right execution of personal callings—the interdependence of a variety of gifts and outward order. Any breaches were the result of pride, envy, and ambition—all of which, he claimed, were evident in Satan’s fall because he was not content with the state God provided him. Lake asserts that “for puritans like Chaderton it [vocation] played an absolutely central role in controlling the radical tendencies inherent in Presbyterianism.” Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 297n11. See also 28–29, 35, 139–40, 146–47. Lake’s account is primarily about the life and ministry of Laurence Chaderton. Because there is little material recorded on Chaderton, Lake includes insights about his disciples [Perkins]. For a summary of Chaderton’s views, see (139–40).

²⁶ See Perkins, *Works*, 1:151–53; 3:263; 4:137ff.; 6:106–10; 7:387–93; 8:435; 10:43, 367. Perkins rejects the argument of the Anabaptists who claim that Christ purchased liberty for the elect, therefore, they are not subject to any earthly authority. Perkins explains that “the liberty which Christ has procured us is liberty of conscience, freedom from the power of sin, Satan, death, hell, and condemnation, and therefore spiritual; but not from temporal and civil subjection” *Works*, 4:141. See also Breward, “The Life and Theology,” 278–79; Ian Breward, “William Perkins and the Origins of Reformed Casuistry,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (1968): 10; Shaw, “The Marrow of Practical Divinity,” 243ff.

²⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 5:154; 10:75. For “vicegerant,” Perkins explains, “Moses is called Aaron’s god [Ex. 4:16], the devil and all idols are called gods [2 Cor. 4:4], [then] the answer is this: they are not properly or by nature gods, for in that respect there is only one God. But they are so termed in other respects. Magistrates are gods because they are vicegerents placed in the room of the true God to govern their subjects. Moses is Aaron’s god because he was in the room of God to reveal His will to Aaron.” *Works*, 5:20.

²⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:388. See also Shaw, “The Marrow of Practical Divinity,” 252; Perkins, *Works*, 10:367–71. According to Hill, Perkins’s idea of a national church or the “dual conception of the Church, as in a general sense the whole population, but in a particular sense the elect only, is an essential feature of Calvinist thought.” *Puritanism and Revolution*, 228–29.

²⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 9:107. In Perkins’s *A Treatise on whether a Man is in Damnation or Grace*,

Some scholars identify a tension between the expectation for theologians to educate the population in social and ethical reform and the tendency for the average lay person to honor government over ministers.³⁰ This tension, however, was not evident in Perkins. Shaw observes Perkins's "high view of the magistrate and his critical role in preserving both the diversity of callings as well as the unity of conscience and covenant."³¹ According to Muller, this demonstrates Perkins's "willingness, indeed, an intention, to frame his theological work within the bounds of the Settlement, at the same time that his piety leaned toward personal experience and further reform."³²

Honoring authority is a means of honoring God, and the latter facilitates reform. Perkins's conviction issues from his understanding of personal callings:

Personal callings are assigned us of God. Hence, we are taught to yield obedience to our rulers and teachers because they that are our rulers and teachers were separated from the womb to be so—and that by God Himself, without the will of man. Hence we may gather assurance of God's protection and assistance in our callings, for in that He has appointed us our callings, He will also defend us in them (2 Cor 3:6; Isa 49:2), as long we walk in them with diligence and good conscience.³³

Under this principle, Perkins recognized that civil and ecclesiastical authority were one and the same. Moreover, part of the work of our callings is to honor others while they

"Christian" praises God for his mercies that he "was born in days of knowledge," whereas just a generation before men were "born into ignorance and superstition." He also thanks God for his Christian parents, rather than "Turks or Jews, or some other savage people." Perkins, *Works*, 8:564–65.

³⁰ Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution*, 218. Shaw, "The Marrow of Practical Divinity," 270.

³¹ Shaw, "The Marrow of Practical Divinity," 251.

³² Richard A. Muller, *Grace and Freedom: William Perkins and the Early Modern Reformed Understanding of Free Choice and Divine Grace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 11–12. See also Shaw, "The Marrow of Practical Divinity," 270.

³³ Perkins, *Works*, 2:53. Other scholars articulate that Perkins's reverence waned in times of corruption, see Sedgwick, "William Perkins," 183; Leif Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians in England, c. 1590–1640* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2014), 79–80. Besides his labeling the Roman Catholic Church the whore of Babylon, Perkins never outright disapproved of governmental authority. In fact, Perkins argued that "we are to be admonished to obedience because every higher power is the ordinance of God (Rom 13:1). We must yield obedience, although they be cruel and wicked." Perkins, *Works*, 6:107–08. We have already discussed Perkins's belief that when God's law is opposed by human law, the believer is to first and finally obey God. Scripture is our ultimate authority. For Christian practice, Perkins writes, "The body of Scripture is a doctrine sufficient to live well." Perkins, *Works*, 6:11. Wright observes, "Perkins looked upon the Bible as the ultimate authority in every matter concerning man's life." "William Perkins," 184.

work in their callings. “Man is to honor everyone in his place, whether he is his superior, equal, or inferior,” says Perkins.³⁴ In the words of Peter Beale, this means that “believers are subject for the Lord’s sake to human institutions.”³⁵ Through God’s design of personal callings, reverencing civil authority and seeking spiritual reform are not incompatible.

Ethics

Another factor in the pursuit of reform was what William Stoever called the “Puritan ethic,” which Perkins defined as “the saint’s ‘particular calling’ to worldly diligence in service of God and the common good.”³⁶ Perkins’s frequent admonitions to pursue new obedience in good works (by God’s grace)³⁷ leads Shaw to conclude that “the heart of Christian life is intensely moral.”³⁸ Wright agrees, “Work is the handmaid of morality.”³⁹ Perkins insists that obedience to the moral law is “a document of faith,” because it is the believer’s “testimony of gratitude toward God” and “a means to edify neighbors.”⁴⁰ Diligence and morality coalesce in the particular call.

³⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 8:437.

³⁵ Beale, “Sanctifying the Outer Life,” 74.

³⁶ William K. B. Stoever, *A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven: Covenant Theology and Antinomianism in Early Massachusetts* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1978), 5.

³⁷ Again, any good work accomplished is because of God’s initiating grace followed by man’s obedience, thus making the believer the instrument of God’s grace. Perkins states, “This doctrine is the foundation of humility, for it teaches us to ascribe all to grace and nothing to ourselves.” Perkins, *Works*, 2:21–22. See also 6:412.

³⁸ Shaw, “The Marrow of Practical Divinity,” 149. Shaw adds, “Beneath his doctrine of calling, beneath all of his social ethic is Perkins’s conviction that ‘character is destiny.’ Poverty as well as prosperity are in Perkins’s eyes moral issues not simply economic subjects. Some flaw or force of character usually explains the reasons for failing or succeeding” (272). Sedgwick comments that “Perkins is an out-and-out Calvinist, or Reformed ethicist, for whom moral theology is only for the elect, and is closely related to the assurance of being elected.” He continues, “Perkins is an outstanding example of someone both deeply Protestant and yet consciously standing in the tradition of moral theology. That is something new since the destruction of monastic learning, the revolt against scholasticism at the universities and the break with Rome in the three decades from the 1530s to the 1550s, during which moral theology in England ceased to exist.” “William Perkins,” 179, 184.

³⁹ Wright, “William Perkins,” 182.

⁴⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 6:182. See also 8:14; Joel R. Beeke, “William Perkins and His Greatest

Any honest calling requires the execution of the moral commands to honor God and others. As Shaw observes, this means that for Perkins the “key to practical holiness” is the decalogue.⁴¹ Of marketplace callings specifically, Perkins argues that the “sins [against] the sixth, seventh, and eighth commandments” are most burdensome.⁴² Perkins’s detailed exposition of the commandments includes a negative part (what not to do) and an affirmative part (what to do).⁴³

In Perkins’s analysis, the sixth commandment teaches us not to hinder but to preserve the lives of ourselves and others—in mind, body, and soul. For this, we must execute “our particular callings” with compassion for others, for they [our particular callings] are “instruments of mercy.”⁴⁴ For the souls of others, “we must seek all means” to share the gospel with them.⁴⁵ For the physical and emotional well-being of ourselves and others, we must account for our heart, words, countenance, gestures, and actions. “Evil dealings in bargaining,” for instance, was a crooked execution of one’s calling and a “national sin.”⁴⁶ Perkins insists that we should “avoid injuries and maintain peace” by fulfilling promises and agreements “with Christians and unbelievers” alike.⁴⁷

Case of Conscience: ‘How a Man May Know Whether He Be the Child of God, or No,’” *Calvin Theological Journal* 41, no. 2 (2006): 275–76. Sedgwick falsely concluded that Perkins [and Protestant divines in general] taught that good works were necessary after salvation (ethical living) so believers would not lose their salvation. “William Perkins,” 195.

⁴¹ Shaw, “The Marrow of Practical Divinity,” 216.

⁴² Perkins, *Works*, 9:110.

⁴³ For the decalogue, see Perkins, *Works*, 1:665–66; 6:104–50. For more on the moral law, see 1:243–63; 8:14–15. See also J. Stephen Yuille, *Living Blessedly Forever: The Sermon on the Mount and the Puritan Piety of William Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), chap. 5, Kindle.

⁴⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 1:201. The “magistrate,” “minister,” all “private men,” the “rich man,” the “tradesman,” “master,” and “servant” should use their callings with mercy.

⁴⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 6:122. To witness to the gospel, or build up the church, is a general Christian duty to be implemented in the context of vocation. Perkins, *Works*, 10:50–51. See also 1:448.

⁴⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 9:110. We should not injure but in mercy assist the “impotent, feeble, poor, strangers, fatherless or widows.” Perkins, *Works*, 6:115. See also 1:198–203, 272; Yuille, *Living Blessedly*, chap. 3.

⁴⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 6:114–15, 120. See also 2:350.

The seventh commandment promotes purity. Perkins suggests modest apparel that matches our callings.⁴⁸ As a matter of commodity, “men, as their calling, work, and trade of life is different, so do they apparel themselves. It makes a confusion of such degrees and callings as God has ordained, when as men of inferior degree and calling cannot be by their attire discerned from men of higher estate.”⁴⁹ Believers should not try to appear to be something they are not. In sum, they should seek moderation, sobriety, and contentment while avoiding wantonness, excess, lust, vanity, pretense, and discontent.⁵⁰

The eighth commandment states that we are responsible for preserving our neighbor’s goods.⁵¹ Perkins complains that unjust dealings proceed from the heart (covetousness) and are manifested in deed (e.g., bargaining with false measures and weights).⁵² He exhorts his reader: “Labor to approve yourselves sincere hearted men,” being “careful and diligent about your business, without deceit or lying.”⁵³ We should walk honestly in our “callings,” buying, selling, lending, and giving, according to the law

⁴⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 6:129.

⁴⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 6:130, 128. For more on excessive attire, see 1:564; 2:347; 3:204–05; 8:406–16; 9:222; 10:51, 74, 84; Shaw, “The Marrow of Practical Divinity,” 275–84; Wright, “William Perkins,” 177.

⁵⁰ Yuille explains, “Simply put, the issue is not delights, such as food, drink, or recreation. Perkins has no qualms with such outward pleasures. They are good because God ordained them. The problem arises when the creature becomes “earthly treasure”; in other words, when the creature turns the soul from God, resulting in immoderate desire. This can happen with any number of things, such as ‘honor, greatness, authority, praises, money, houses, lands, cattle, meat, drink, sleep, apparel, sports, friends, relations, and life itself.’” Yuille, *Living Blessedly*, chap. 7, “Longing After Worldly Things,” “A Proper Perspective of the Creature,” para. 2.

⁵¹ Perkins, *Works*, 6:133. See also 1:666. Shaw, “The Marrow of Practical Divinity,” 261.

⁵² Perkins, *Works*, 6:133–37. See also 10:81–90. “Perkins criticized usurers, oppressors, engrossers and users of fraudulent weights and measures because they fail to unite their two callings, the general and the particular, thereby they serve themselves, not God or their fellows,” according to Todd, *Christian Humanism*, 156. See Perkins, *Works*, 10:58–59. See also 1:353–54; 5:394; 10:91. At England’s largest marketplace, the Stourbridge Fair, Cambridge, Perkins preaches that unjust dealings is one of five national sins hindering England’s prosperity. Perkins, *Works*, 9:110. He says, “Equity should lead in all dealing and bargaining with another.” 10:363.

⁵³ Perkins, *Works*, 9:110; 1:555.

of the land and God's Word.⁵⁴

Finally, to guard against the sins of idleness and sloth a man must be diligent in his calling.⁵⁵ God bestowed His gifts upon us for one end—to “be employed in His service and to His glory, and that in this life.”⁵⁶ Furthermore, “to them who employ their gifts, more is given, and from them who employ them not, that which they have is taken.”⁵⁷ As we work with diligence in accordance with Scripture, the commonwealth is grounded in ethical behavior.

Prosperity

Perkins's teaching on prosperity is summed up in a Puritan metaphor: “the market day of the soul.” By this, the Puritans meant the Sabbath day,⁵⁸ when spiritual nourishment is received through hearing God's Word, celebrating the sacraments, and praying. By means of a proper observance of the Sabbath, the church prospers. Despite the emphasis on the spiritual benefits of the Sabbath, Perkins made no distinction between the sacred and the secular. The market day metaphor, first, indicates the Puritan pursuit to sanctify all activity for God's glory. Second, it demonstrates the Puritan regard

⁵⁴ He notes that the virtues of “contentation and thriftiness” should be practiced. Perkins, *Works*, 6:137; 10:373. “Honesty, thrift, diligence, and perseverance are virtues to be cultivated and honored,” says Wright, “William Perkins,” 182. See also Perkins, *Works*, 10:372.

⁵⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:47–48.

⁵⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:48. By “in this life,” Perkins agrees with Luther, who refutes the monastic concept of deferring service to God until heaven. See Gustaf Wingren, *The Christian's Calling: Luther on Vocation* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1958): part 3, chap. 1. Wright adds, “To the Reformation preacher, diligence in one's daily duty was a service to God more acceptable than monastic holiness.” *Middle-Class Culture*, 173, 180–81. Robert Michaelsen identifies the Puritan ideology (in contrast to medieval monastic ways), “If the zealous Christian cannot work out his religious fervor in special religious acts—such as prayer, fasting, and pilgrimages—then he will, and he must, find an outlet in his daily work. So the Puritan preacher urged the members of his congregation to express themselves with all diligence in their vocations.” Robert S. Michaelsen, “Changes in the Puritan Concept of Calling or Vocation,” *The New England Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (September 1953): 322–23.

⁵⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:48.

⁵⁸ The fourth commandment, the Sabbath, is placed in the midst of the two tables because the keeping of it is the best help for the keeping of all the rest, according to Lewes Baily, *The Practice of Piety: Directing a Christian How to Walk That He May Please God* (London: Printed for Philip Chetwind, 1672), 178. For more on Sabbath, see Perkins, *Works*, 5:67–68; 6:98–103; 8:344–58; 9:144.

for marketplace callings which enable commerce and community. With the right use of personal callings, according to Perkins, the marketplace thrives, and society prospers by attaining essentials that meet physical and material needs.

Perkins uses the marketplace to redefine prosperity. This is evident in his sermon on Zephaniah 2:1–2, preached at a massive market in Cambridge.⁵⁹ With reform in mind, Perkins juxtaposes abundant commerce with “all that God can give a man in this world is His gospel.”⁶⁰ “The only way to establish a kingdom or commonwealth,” therefore, “is to plant the gospel there. For this makes a happy people. And this is the main cause of our happiness and success in this church and land. And the obedience of the gospel it is that makes every man in his trade, office, and calling whatsoever it be, to prosper (read Ps. 1:3).”⁶¹ For Perkins, the gospel is prosperity. Thus, in obeying it, we prosper in our callings. From this, Christopher Hill maintains that it “was almost irresistible to argue backwards from prosperity to godliness.”⁶² On this basis, some have asserted that Perkins believed that godliness necessarily leads to material prosperity.

Perkins does emphasize that God rewards us for new obedience—that is,

⁵⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 9:79–122. Paul Schaefer comments that this was one of Perkins’s “most revivalistic-style sermons,” which he delivered in the largest, longest-running markets that England had ever seen—the Stourbridge Fair, Cambridge. Paul R. Schaefer, “Protestant Scholasticism at Elizabethan Cambridge: William Perkins and a Reformed Theology of the Heart,” in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1999), 154. The fair originated in the early thirteenth century, running for two days. But in Perkins’s day it ran from August 24 to September 29. Merchants benefited greatly by selling their wares and merchandises to purchasers coming from all parts of the realm. “The 1589 charter states that it ‘far surpassed the greatest of and most celebrated fairs of all England.’ Of note, Stourbridge Fair was the inspiration for John Bunyan’s ‘Vanity Fair’ in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.” Perkins, *Works*, 9:xvi,n25. This sermon was preached between 1592–93. Shaw, “The Marrow of Practical Divinity,” 177.

⁶⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 9:109. To Perkins, “The true treasure then is in a word, the true God, that one only eternal essence in three persons, who made all things and governs all things.” *Works*, 1:529. In addition, “The gospel of Christ brings peace and perfect joy (John 15:11; Rom 15:4). And the reason is plain, for it ministers a perfect remedy for every sin, and comfort sufficient for every distress. And this is a note whereby the gospel is discerned from all other doctrines whatsoever.” Perkins, *Works*, 2:32.

⁶¹ Perkins, *Works*, 2:285. Quoted in Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution*, 230. See also Perkins, *Works*, 1:449–50.

⁶² Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution*, 230.

diligence in the works of our callings.⁶³ As a result, some scholars (such as Hill) have focused on material rewards to the neglect of their origin and ends and have connected Perkins to the rise of modern capitalism.⁶⁴ Breward counters, “If justice is done to the theological bases of Perkins’ doctrines of vocation and the chilling qualification he placed on the acquisition and use of wealth it is difficult to see anything but a vague relationship between diligence and success.”⁶⁵

For Perkins, prosperity is governed by God’s providence. God’s goodness is evident in health, wealth, and liberty, but it is also present in contrary estates such as sickness, bondage, and poverty.⁶⁶ In the latter, Perkins complains, “The blind world sees no providence nor goodness of God.” But when we labor to see the goodness of God in everything, “our experience of divine providence” will lead to contentment.⁶⁷ This aspect

⁶³ See Marshall, *A Kind of Life*, 44.

⁶⁴ Marshall explains that the Puritan era was sandwiched between two eras that separated spirituality from public or secular life—medieval capitalism and modern capitalism. Marshall defends a theology of vocation against Max Weber’s thesis. Weber stressed that the focus on the Protestant work ethic, or the Puritan ideal of vocation, combined with doubts about the order of salvation led to ascetic, restless work habits driven by an attempt for reassurance. Marshall, *Marshall, A Kind of Life*. See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. T. Parsons (New York: Scribners, 1958). Hill suggests that Weber and his disciples have been accused of ‘grave anachronism,’ since they generalized about Calvinism on the basis of late seventeenth-century examples of the permeation of the mediaeval doctrine of the calling by a capitalist spirit. They could, however, have found evidence of the process already at work in Perkins.” *Puritanism and Revolution*, 230n6. Contrary to Hill’s opinion, Perkins was not part of the later Puritan “Proto-capitalist view.” Robert Shenk explains, “There was a difference between the early Puritan idea of work or vocation and the later, proto-capitalist view. Later Puritans like Cotton Mather and Englishman Richard Steele insisted virtues of industry and diligence could, and did, lead to a sanctification of what might be called business motivations and wealth-getting. On the other hand, early Puritans like Perkins remained fully conscious of the dangers of such motivation. In particular, these earlier men stressed very strongly the dangers of covetousness. Robert Shenk, “Robert Frost and the Early Puritan Idea of Vocation,” *Christian Scholars Review* 10, no. 3 (1981): 230. Shaw notes that “a cycle was beginning which by Cotton Mather’s day had run its course. Mather explained the cycle in simple terms: ‘religion begat prosperity and the daughter devoured her mother.’” “The Marrow of Practical Divinity,” 273. “Perhaps Perkins’s essay on vocations might be called the cornerstone of that American faith in the virtues of industry and thrift which found supreme expression in Benjamin Franklin,” claims Wright, *Middle-Class Culture*, 171. For more, see Breward, “The Life and Theology,” 290ff.; Shaw, “The Marrow of Practical Divinity,” 269–74; Charles H. George and Katherine George, “Protestantism and Capitalism”; Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were*, Epub ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), chap. 2; Alvin J. Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed The World: Formerly Titled Under the Influence*, ePub ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 199–201; Michaelsen, “Calling,” 322; Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 126.

⁶⁵ Breward, “William Perkins,” 126.

⁶⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:83.

⁶⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:82–83. See also 1:573–74.

of Perkins's view tends to be overlooked. All things flow from God's goodness, lead to His glory, and sanctify believers. This is true of prosperity and adversity.⁶⁸ Prosperity (and every other socioeconomic state) is a tool that God uses to shape the believer while contributing to the common good. For the sincere saint, then, contentment (not prosperity) is the chief aim.

In preaching at the Stourbridge Fair, Shaw explains, Perkins "intended to unlock the stored up energy of the English people and unleash the forces that would bring transformation to the English nation."⁶⁹ By this "transformation" he chiefly intends prosperity. It had been previously hindered due to oppression. Now, according to Perkins, after "the gospel has been preached these thirty-five years," prosperity was hindered due to sin.⁷⁰ Paul Seaver underscores the severity of the situation. The "rural commonwealth and the urban world of small tradesmen was threatened by unrestrained economic appetite and entrepreneurial energy."⁷¹ For this reason, Perkins calls on the nation to repent. He charges his hearers with five national sins, one of which was the abuse of marketplace callings.⁷² But, repentance, he says, is "the first step toward God's grace."⁷³ In emphasizing repentance, Shaw believes that "Perkins tied the strands of salvation and societal renewal together."⁷⁴ For God's mercy results in peace, and its companions are "prosperity, plenty, health, wealth, corn, wool, gold, silver, and an abundance of all things

⁶⁸ Perkins explains that God may exercise and try a saint by "lack and poverty." *Works*, 10:86.

⁶⁹ Shaw, "The Marrow of Practical Divinity," 212. See also Patterson, *William Perkins*, 115–17.

⁷⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 9:114.

⁷¹ Seaver, *Wallington's World*, 135.

⁷² The other four sins were (1) ignorance of God's will and worship, (2) mocking Christianity, (3) blasphemy, and (4) profaning the Sabbath. Perkins, *Works*, 9:108–11. See also Schaefer, "William Perkins," 154–55.

⁷³ Perkins, *Works*, 9:94.

⁷⁴ Shaw, "The Marrow of Practical Divinity," 212.

that may please the heart of man.”⁷⁵ In repentance, “we might assure ourselves of the glorious prosperity of England to continue from generation to generation.”⁷⁶

Perkins welcomed prosperity for it is one of God’s many blessings for those who obey the gospel (the visible integration of the gospel with life). For Perkins, a busy marketplace is the result of the right use of our callings as the gospel takes root in the commonwealth, the church, and the family.

Wealth

Perkins’s assessment of socioeconomic status rests on the principles within personal callings—degree and order. He states, “God has appointed that in every society one person should be above or under another, not making all equal, as though the body should be all head and nothing else. But even in degree and order He has set a distinction of men, hence proceed diversity of personal callings.”⁷⁷ Social hierarchy does not diminish equality before God. We should, therefore, strive for contentment—the “esteeming of that particular estate that God has placed us to be the best of all estates for us that can be.”⁷⁸

For this reason, Perkins does not “object to wealth—only to the improper use of it.”⁷⁹ Having said that, he warns that there are simply “too many spiritual hazards that attend” the pursuit of wealth.⁸⁰ Covetousness is particularly dangerous, for “when the

⁷⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 9:107.

⁷⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 9:121.

⁷⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:54.

⁷⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:82. See also 3:203–05; 4:89; Yuille, *Living Blessedly*, chap. 7.

⁷⁹ Charles Robert Munson, “William Perkins: Theologian of Transition” (PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1971), 103. See Perkins, *Works*, 1:523–24. For more on the proper use of riches, see 6:133–41; 8:386–94; 10:82–88. See also Wright, “William Perkins,” 177–81; Shaw, “The Marrow of Practical Divinity,” 257ff; Marshall, *A Kind of Life*, 44; David M. Barbee, “A Reformed Catholike: William Perkins’ Use of the Church Fathers” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2013): 288ff.

⁸⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 8:387. See also Shaw, “The Marrow of Practical Divinity,” 260. Perkins observes that “the poorer sort among us do more heartily receive it [the gospel] than they of the richer

heart swells with [a] desire of riches, all the graces of God consume and fade away.”⁸¹

Perkins takes a reasonable approach to riches. Believers must attend to their personal needs which preserve their “state, condition, and dignity.”⁸² These personal needs are based on one’s calling: “books unto the student, and tools unto the tradesman.” The preservation of their “state, condition, and dignity” includes “comfort, ease, profit, and delight.”⁸³ He states that there is not “one rule for all men,” what is good for one may or may not be sufficient for another, for every man is accountable to his calling.⁸⁴ Once a sufficient standard has been met (a moderate living), a man should observe a “pause.”⁸⁵ By this, Perkins means he should take an inventory of all that he has and soberly consider if anything more is necessary. Perkins advises against comparing oneself to “a covetous man,” however, a man should reflect on “the example and judgment of the godly, men and women in the same estate and order.”⁸⁶ By taking this “pause,” a person can avoid a rash pursuit for more. By way of example, Perkins speaks of attire. He acknowledges that if a pause is not made, vanity will lead many to seek “abundance.”

In Scripture, the term “riches” often refers to “necessities,” rather than “abundance.”⁸⁷ On this basis, Perkins argues that surplus is never the goal. Instead,

sort.” Perkins, *Works*, 2:95. He also warns, riches are “commonly (though not always) unjustly gotten, for it is a hard thing to become rich without injustice.” 8:389.

⁸¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:81.

⁸² Perkins, *Works*, 8:386.

⁸³ Perkins, *Works*, 1:364. See also 1:524–25; Andrew Scott Ballitch, “‘Scripture Is Both the Glosse and the Text’: Biblical Interpretation and Its Implementation in the Works of William Perkins” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017): 107.

⁸⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 10:85. Perkins explains, “And so are riches good in themselves, but not for every man, and, therefore, [they are] no further to be sought than we know they are good and profitable for us” (85). See also 1:524; 7:75.

⁸⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:84.

⁸⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:84.

⁸⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:86. Through work, wealth is acquired in three levels: (1) what is necessary in accordance with one’s basic needs and position in society, (2) abundance serves not only for necessity, but for holy comeliness and delight, and (3) superfluous wealth, the final level, exceeds what a person can use during their lifetime. Perkins, *Works*, 1:525. See also 1:364–65, 564; 3:202–05; 8:389, 415.

moderation should characterize those believers who do not succumb to “distrustful care,” but trust in God’s provision.⁸⁸ While abundance should not be pursued (or even prayed for), it can be received when God bestows it as a singular blessing, for He gives abundance to whomever He will.⁸⁹ When God blesses us with abundance, we must be mindful of its “temperate” use.⁹⁰ By this, Perkins means that we must recognize that it is (1) for the maintenance of our own good estate and conditions, (2) for the good of others, especially those within our immediate and extended family (1 Tim 5:8), (3) for the relief of the poor, according to the state and condition of every man, (4) for the support of the church and true religion (Prov 3:9), and (5) for the maintenance of the commonwealth (Rom 13:7).

Concerning the relief of the poor, Perkins affirms that it is the responsibility of the commonwealth. Breward notes, “Like all his reformed predecessors he [Perkins] had a vision of a Christian commonwealth in which poverty was not merely ameliorated, but abolished.”⁹¹ Perkins’s stance stems from his view of vocation—God designed the elect

Shaw remarks that Perkins’s teaching on abundance morphed into something different with later Puritan divine John Downname (1571–1652), who believed one should seek wealth in order to give it away. “The Marrow of Practical Divinity,” 260. Perkins addressed this idea in relation to giving: “We must indeed do good, but yet within the compass of our estates and callings, and according to our ability. For God accepts every man according to what he has, and not according to what he has not.” Perkins, *Works*, 10:86.

⁸⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:83–86. See also 1:424. Perkins says, “Success depends upon God’s providence. The distrustful care is that whereby men trouble themselves about the issue of their labors; and when they have done the work, do not rest therewith, but vex themselves about the success, not relying on God’s providence for the blessing, but only on the means.” 1:554. See also Yuille, *Living Blessedly*, chap. 7, “Worrying over Worldly Things,” “The Commandment,” para. 1. Elsewhere, Perkins commends meekness and denounces its opposite, that is to have an “immoderate care for the world,” and for the greedy to “seek to enrich themselves by cruelty, lying, fraud, and oppression.” Perkins, *Works*, 1:192. For more on moderation, see *A Treatise of Christian Equity and Moderation*. 10:357–98.

⁸⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 1:525.

⁹⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 8:393–94. Perkins says riches can be used for many means, but first they must be shared with the church. “This is the principal of all,” and is one of four “essential Christian duties.” *Works*, 10:51.

⁹¹ Breward, “The Life and Theology,” 296. For discussions on Perkins’s view of poverty, see Breward, “The Life and Theology,” 295–98; Marshall, *A Kind of Life*, 39–40; Patterson, *William Perkins*, 135–67; Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution*, 215–38; V. Kiernan and Christopher Hill, “Puritanism and the Poor,” *Past & Present*, no. 3 (February 1953): 45–54; Shaw, “The Marrow of Practical Divinity,” 263–69; Wright, *Middle-Class Culture*, 170–200; Charles H. George and Katherine George, “Protestantism and Capitalism.”

to have some meaningful employment. Therefore, long-term poverty represents the misuse of vocations, i.e., the prevalence of injustice and idleness.

There are two degrees of poverty, according to Perkins. The first is common, whereby a person can live without alms. The second is extreme, whereby a person cannot “possibly maintain his life without relief.”⁹² In both cases, believers are called to help.⁹³ If someone exploits the poor, he is “quite void of every spark of that gracious disposition which was in Christ.”⁹⁴ Perkins discusses a third case, “lusty beggars.”⁹⁵ They are able to care for themselves, but choose to live as “vagabonds, rouges, and straggling persons” refusing to walk in a calling, and therefore, they cause “great disorder in commonwealths” and “plague our times.”⁹⁶

Shaw notes a shift in Perkins’s thinking about poverty in the decade between his two works: *A Fruitful Dialogue Concerning the End of the World* and *A Treatise on Vocations*.⁹⁷ In his earlier work, he rebukes the selfish corn-monger. In the latter, he

⁹² Perkins, *Works*, 1:365.

⁹³ “He [Perkins] did not see poverty as an essential part of true religion [as the Catholics did], or teach that alms conferred spiritual merit.” Breward, “The Life and Theology,” 296. However, Perkins did believe that poverty was a matter of outward order and therefore a part of every society. It contributes to the concept of Christian charity by enabling the more fortunate to model God’s mercy and compassion by assisting those in need, which fosters community. As an act of faith, for common poverty we must give from our abundance, or items we have that are beyond our own necessities. For extreme poverty, we must go farther and share from what is necessary for our own maintenance. Perkins, *Works*, 1:365–66. Under the virtue of liberality, related to the begging of alms, Perkins advises that giving should be ordered as such: (1) to our own household and kin, (2) to those in the household of faith, (3) to the poor closest to us, in our own towns and lands. *Works*, 8:426. He also applies this principle of giving in cases of hardship due to disability, age, imprisonment, or any other impediment. The disabled should be looked after by others in their community. *Works*, 10:98–99. For more on Perkins’s view of poor relief see 1:203, 392–96, 526; 2:95–98; 4:511–12; 7:503ff.; 8:415; Yuille, *Living Blessedly*, chap. 6.

⁹⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 1:365. For more on injustice, see 10:88–91. Todd comments, “The puritan guidelines for proper business behavior includes traditional denunciations of all forms of economic exploitation, by unqualified physicians, greedy magistrates, merchants using gloss or inadequate lighting to disguise faulty merchandise, enclosers (driven by ‘want of sobriety and temperance in diet and apparel,’ according to Perkins), grain-hoarding husbandmen (‘shedding the blood of the poor’), or printers of unprofitable books.” *Christian Humanism*, 156. See Perkins, *Works*, 10:89.

⁹⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 1:366. See also 10:54–56.

⁹⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 8:426. Perkins classified popish votaries, as monks and friars in this category. Perkins, *Works*, 10:40.

⁹⁷ Shaw, “The Marrow of Practical Divinity,” 263–65. See Perkins, *Works*, 6:452; 10:55.

directs “his venom” to the “agricultural capitalist’s” victim—the beggar. This does not indicate, according to Shaw, “an increasing harshness toward the treatment of the poor.” Rather, the “reverse seems to be true.” Although attitudes, in general, change over time, Perkins’s “social passion is noticeably cooled when one examines both his rules for giving and his growing distinction between worthy and unworthy poor.”⁹⁸

Perkins’s main issue is with the misuse of one’s particular calling.⁹⁹ He is, therefore, intolerant of two extremes. First, he takes aim at the greedy corn-monger who performs his works unjustly. For Perkins, “covetousness was not an abstract sin merely to be rebuked, but a social evil, causing great hardship to the poor of Cambridgeshire by reason of the hoarding of corn in time of scarcity.”¹⁰⁰ Second, Perkins takes aim at the beggar who refuses to apply himself to a calling. Such a man is guilty of an equally vile sin: idleness. Moreover, both extremes dishonor God and are detrimental to the commonwealth.

Since God has ordained the personal call, Perkins believed that long-term unemployment was a sin.¹⁰¹ An able-bodied believer must occupy a calling for the purpose of supporting himself, his family, church, and commonwealth. These cannot stand “without distinction of particular callings and labor in the same, for which cause the apostle ‘would not have him to eat, that will not labor’ (2 Thess 3:10).”¹⁰² Perkins condemns beggary because “it is against the Word of God, and the light of nature, that any should live having nothing to do.”¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Shaw, “The Marrow of Practical Divinity,” 265. Shaw provides a helpful synopsis of the Poor Law of 1597, of which Perkins approved.

⁹⁹ Shaw, “The Marrow of Practical Divinity,” 270–71.

¹⁰⁰ Wright, “William Perkins,” 174.

¹⁰¹ For a contrasting viewpoint, see Marshall, *A Kind of Life*, 40.

¹⁰² Perkins, *Works*, 4:89.

¹⁰³ Perkins, *Works*, 1:366. Hill gives a bleak account and states that Perkins believes that poverty is “presumptive evidence of wickedness,” all beggars are unregenerate, and consequently they live

In light of this, Perkins saw beggary as a national problem “that proclaimed to the world the shame either of the magistrate who restrains it not, having authority, or of the wealthy and able, that they have no mercy or compassion.”¹⁰⁴ Beggary, or the long-term unemployment of able-bodied people, is not to be confused with poverty. As a matter of justice and charity, the poor must be relieved. As V. Kiernan claims, “Charity, like labour in one’s vocation, must be ‘socially necessary’: it must not be the haphazard, superstitious tossing of a purseful of coins to a throng round a coach-door, but rational, systematic, animated by civic responsibility as well as private piety.”¹⁰⁵ The only remedy for beggary is a well-informed theology of vocation. William Crenshaw summarizes Perkins’s view as follows:

Poverty may be a cross, but it is no curse. But beggary is a fearful curse, threatened on the enemies of God. The daily cries in our streets cry for yet further reformation hereof, that the impotent poor may be sufficiently provided for, that he need not, and the sturdy beggar compelled to work, that he may not be suffered to beg. Happy you, or whosoever can have a hand in effecting this blessed work. We, who can do little else, shall pray for it and for them who labor in it.¹⁰⁶

in impoverished circumstances. Thus, their only hope is to find “work and be restored to a disciplined (let us hope) community, for salvation is all that matters.” *Puritanism and Revolution*, 218, 231. Concerning the idea that God rewards those who are saved, Hill concludes that “this conception of justification by success was to become a commonplace of Puritan thought; but Perkins was one of its earliest English exponents.” *Puritanism and Revolution*, 229. In like manner, Wright suggests, the Puritans believed that unfaithfulness in vocation risked “hell-fire in the world to come.” *Middle-Class Culture*, 182. On the other hand, Kiernan argues that Hill “thinks of the destitute swarms roaming about England as evicted peasants, victims of harsh landlords, and enjoying the sympathy of the ordinary people. There were others, however; pilfering Nymms and Bardolphs, cast-off retainers who had vapoured and bullied in their day, and in and round London a large criminal class,” i.e., they were a dangerous threat to society. “Puritanism and the Poor,” 48. Perkins is clearly aware of this danger, he asserts, “the inhabitants of this commonwealth are generally by many degrees poorer than the Jews were. Therefore, to steal a thing, but of some small value, from one in this country does more endamage [damage] him than a thing of great value would have done the Jews.” Perkins, *Works*, 6:137.

¹⁰⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 8:426. See also Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution*, 219.

¹⁰⁵ Kiernan and Hill, “Puritanism and the Poor,” 49. Todd, in her writing on the humanist movement (which she believes strongly influenced Puritan beliefs), discusses poverty, idleness, and vocation. “Idleness was an offense against the commonwealth, a drain on the economy, and poor stewardship of the divine trust of time. It was a denial of the new profile of virtue in which work, discipline, and productivity for the common weal were prominent features. The sanctification of work, the exaltation of discipline and the drive to repress idleness and frivolity have been properly labeled hallmarks of puritanism. The ideal of *mediocritas* in getting and spending, the doctrine of stewardship, and the demand for discriminate, rationalized, secular poor relief certainly characterize puritanism.” *Christian Humanism*, 126–27, 147.

¹⁰⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:231–32. In the Epistle Directory of *The Calling of the Ministry*.

The Church

The church is “the most excellent society” in existence, according to Perkins.¹⁰⁷ He believed that the Church of England was “God’s true church.”¹⁰⁸ Despite its “corruptions,” he was strongly opposed to all who would separate from her.¹⁰⁹ Rather, people must esteem the church that honors Christ. “Perkins felt that he could be a member of the Church of England, and try to influence it in a Reformed direction, while studiously avoiding the sort of confrontation about issues of governance, worship and clerical dress”; so, Sedgwick believes that “Perkins can be perceived as more irenic than he actually was.”¹¹⁰ Many of Perkins’s contemporaries favored a Presbyterian form of church government because they perceived it to be a more influential path toward reform.

¹⁰⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 4:383. He also has a similar view of marriage. He states, “marriage is the nearest conjunction and the most excellent and perfect society which is in this world.” *Works*, 10:365–66.

¹⁰⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 1:310; 4:26, 421, 461–62. Known as the “one true church” during medieval times, the Roman Church, according to Perkins, was “no longer constituted a ‘true church’ because they had overthrown ‘the truth of doctrine.’” Yuille, “The Wholesome Doctrine,” 123. See Perkins, *Works*, 4:93. Perkins believes that all Reformed churches, such as the “churches of the Lutherans,” are also “the true churches of God.” *Works*, 5:382. See also 1:311.

¹⁰⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 1:123. See also 1:310–11; 4:218; Breward, “The Ideal of the Ministry,” 76. Perkins identifies a few valid reasons for separation. Perkins, *Works*, 5:384–86. Due to the previous years of Roman Catholic oppression, some in the Protestant church dreaded another tyranny in the form of the Elizabethan establishment. Beale suggests three groups: (1) like Perkins, there were those reasonably happy with the Elizabethan settlement, but anxious for further reform, (2) those like Cartwright who viewed the church as the supreme authority, and (3) those on the theological left wing. “Sanctifying the Outer Life,” 74. Lake provides three additional categories: “[1] The work of Protestant opponents of a Catholic regime and then of [2] Catholic opponents of a Protestant one, or of [3] Puritan critics of the national church.” Peter Lake, “Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England,” *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 2 (April 2006): 274. Perkins was committed to building a strong Protestant church, while he opposed the former “Roman Church,” who “is no mother church, no spouse of Christ, but the ‘whore of Babel,’ the ‘mother of abominations,’ from which we are commanded to depart (Rev 18:4).” His main concern is that the papists claim Scripture is not the authority or self-evident, so “they judge by the rule of faith; the consent of councils and fathers; and if these fail, then by the pope.” Perkins, *Works*, 1:124, 134. Acknowledging that there is no perfect church on earth, Perkins maintains, “He then that will go out of a church because there be hypocrites in it must go out of the world, for such a church is not found but triumphant in heaven.” *Works*, 3:35. See also 1:123; 4:71.

¹¹⁰ Sedgwick, “William Perkins,” 179. R. T. Kendall discredits Perkins for his lack of involvement in church polity. He claims, “The reasons for this seems to be that, as Elisabeth was effectively crushing the ‘classical’ movement and other ecclesiological radicals by 1589, Perkins saw the handwriting on the wall. The ecclesiological enterprise went underground for the next several years. When it was to emerge later, the radical ecclesiologists were not merely Presbyterians and Separatists but also Independents. In any case, Perkins stayed clear of things ecclesiological in his treatises and sermons.” R. T. Kendall, “The Puritan Modification of Calvin’s Theology,” in *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World*, ed. W. Stanford Reid (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 203; R. T. Kendall, “Living the Christian Life in the Teaching of William Perkins and His Followers,” in *Living the Christian Life: 1974 Westminster Conference Papers (Reprint)* (Huntingdon, Cambs.: The Westminster Conference, 1974), 46. See also Breward, “William Perkins,” 118; Wright, “William Perkins,” 190; Sedgwick, “William Perkins,” 207.

While Perkins might have shared some of the concerns, he did not share their fervor for systems of church polity. As Raymond Blacketer explains, “Perkins saw the conversion and spiritual renovation of the people in the pews as the primary means of reform.”¹¹¹

Individual responsibility is why Leif Dixon claims, “Perkins was always politic in blaming the people themselves, rather than the Church of England,” for the current need for reform.¹¹²

Reform proceeds through the preaching of the Word of God, which according to Perkins is the “infallible mark” of the “true church.”¹¹³ Breward reaches a different conclusion regarding Perkins’s strategy for reform, affirming that, given the failed attempt to secure reform through ecclesiastical channels, his only way to influence the church was to convict the consciences of men.¹¹⁴ Such an assessment fails to account for Perkins’s high view of preaching.

The preacher who obeys in his calling achieves results consistent with God’s good pleasure.¹¹⁵ Perkins is convinced that “the end of all preaching is to make sinful

¹¹¹ Raymond A. Blacketer, “William Perkins (1558–1602),” in *The Pietist Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005), 45. Individual responsibility is why Dixon claims, “Perkins was always politic in blaming the people themselves, rather than the Church of England,” for the current need for reform.

¹¹² Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians*, 80.

¹¹³ Perkins, *Works*, 5:378. See also 1:310. Parallel with Perkins, the Puritans had “an intense vision of the reality and mutuality of the community of the godly and of the way in which that community could and should be called together through the word, particularly the word preached,” according to Lake, *Moderate Puritans*, 3. See also Schaefer, “William Perkins,” 155.

¹¹⁴ Breward, “William Perkins,” 120; Breward, “The Ideal of the Ministry,” 81. Breward states the minister’s authority was limited, in that they could only rely on the application of Word to conscience. For this reason, Breward says Perkins’s “hopes for renewal were placed in the Universities, not in political action which impinged on the lawful authority of the Prince.” “The Ideal of the Ministry,” 78. Hence, Perkins published his cases of conscience, where Sedgwick reports that Perkins “moves from spiritual self-examination into the moral questions which arise from a person being a member of the family, the church or the commonwealth.” “William Perkins,” 194. For more on Perkins’s cases of conscience, see Breward, “Reformed Casuistry”; Donald K. McKim, *Ramism in William Perkins’s Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 96ff.; Beeke, “Greatest Case”; James F. Keenan, “Was William Perkins’ Whole Treatise of Cases of Consciences Casuistry?: Hermeneutics and British Practical Divinity,” in *Contexts of Conscience in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1700*, ed. Edward Vallance and Harald Braun (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Patterson, *William Perkins*, chap. 4; Wright, “William Perkins,” 171–96; Shaw, “The Marrow of Practical Divinity,” chap. 3.

¹¹⁵ Perkins affirms that the preacher is effective because “the authority of the prophet’s calling

men to become new creatures like unto Christ. This is the drift of the ministry. And the doctrine that tends to this purpose is sound and wholesome.”¹¹⁶ He adds, “This catholic church” invisible though it may be, for flesh cannot discern the elect from the non-elect, “will prevail because faithful and true is He that has spoken and who will preserve in this church a succession of wholesome and sound doctrine.”¹¹⁷ Regarding this “wholesome” doctrine, Perkins declares that “it is an infallible note of the true church of God to keep, maintain, and defend” it.¹¹⁸

The church is “a company of men” who confess and believe Scripture “unto the state of salvation.”¹¹⁹ Perkins concludes, “Hence it follows necessarily that the preaching of the doctrine of the prophets and apostles, joined with any measure of faith and obedience, is an infallible mark of a true church.”¹²⁰ In short, there are three primary requirements for “the good estate of the church”: (1) the preaching of the gospel; (2) the administration of the sacraments; and (3) the execution of discipline according to Scripture.¹²¹ If the last two are missing, but the preaching of the gospel is maintained,

is derived from God Himself. Thus, in sum (1) the preacher’s authority is from God; (2) credit nor blessings proceed from the words or works unless God gives it; and (3) protection and safety from God is provided only upon the preachers who have been called.” Perkins, *Works*, 10:278–80. See also 2:15–16.

¹¹⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 2:293.

¹¹⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 4:25. See also Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians*, 79; Sedgwick, “William Perkins,” 181.

¹¹⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 4:92.

¹¹⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 1:310. From the Lord’s Prayer, Perkins explains that “the title, ‘of whom the whole family which is in heaven and earth is named,’ set down a description of the church.” *Works*, 5:473. In another place, he lists several categories to account for the fact that members of Christ are a “mixed company,” or “diversely distinguished” before men or God. *Works*, 4:25, 445; 6:174, 371. See also 5:377; 9:175; 10:335–43.

¹²⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 5:378.

¹²¹ Perkins identified four degrees of church authority: “admonition, suspension from the sacraments, excommunication, and anathema.” Perkins, *Works*, 2:34. Breward notes that Perkins recognized the limits of church discipline. For instance, the magistrate had access to prisons, punishment terms, and conditions, whereas the church did not. So, Perkins relied on the magistrate to perform its duties. Breward, “The Ideal Ministry,” 81. Moreover, Perkins argues that it is the responsibility of the magistrate to penalize hypocritical Christians and ministers who fail in their duties. *Works*, 4:141–42; 10:163, 169, 173. See also Breward, “William Perkins,” 117; Wright, “William Perkins,” 178.

“there is for substance a true church of God.”¹²²

God provides four chief benefits to the church: (1) communion (first with Him and then with each other); (2) the forgiveness of sins; (3) the resurrection of the body; and (4) everlasting life (which begins on earth).¹²³ Furthermore, there are four main duties that every Christian must practice: (1) praying to God with thanksgiving; (2) seeking to “further the good of the church, as much as possible”;¹²⁴ (3) serving others, which is “the special ornament of Christ’s holy gospel”;¹²⁵ and (4) walking worthy of their (general) calling.¹²⁶

Perkins proclaims, “In a word, this calling of Christianity is the most excellent calling in the world, and he walks worthy [of] the same who keeps a good conscience before God and is unblameable before all men.”¹²⁷ Therefore, he encourages every member to strive, within the compass of their particular calling, to bring all people into the church.¹²⁸

The Family

Perkins’s *Oeconomie* is dedicated to the first “sort” of vocations, the family, the foundation of society.¹²⁹ The “right ordering” of the family is the subject that he treats

¹²² Perkins, *Works*, 5:378. See also Blacketer, “William Perkins,” 42.

¹²³ Perkins, *Works*, 5:386–414.

¹²⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 10:50.

¹²⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:52.

¹²⁶ To walk worthy by faith one must (1) depend on God’s providence and mercy at all times, (2) daily turn unto Him by a continual renewing of repentance, and (3) endeavor to perform new obedience in respect of all His commandments. Perkins, *Works*, 10:53.

¹²⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:52.

¹²⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 4:380–82.

¹²⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:111–94. For more on *Oeconomie*, see Yuille, “Spiritual Household”; Shaw, “The Marrow of Practical Divinity,” 231–42; Patterson, *William Perkins*, 150–53, 156; Chilton Latham Powell, “English Domestic Relations, 1487–1653: A Study of Matrimony and Family Life in Theory and Practice as Revealed by the Literature, Law, and History of the Period” (PhD diss., Columbia University Press, 1917): 101–46; Wright, *Middle-Class Culture*, 201–27; Wright, “William Perkins,” 184–

so family members may be prepared to contribute to “the common good.”¹³⁰ Thomas Pickering reports that the family “is the first and most ancient of societies, wherein the principles of authority and subjection are first taught and learned.”¹³¹ According to Yuille, Perkins views the spiritual household as “the most effective means for altering the course of society.”¹³² Consequently, the deterioration of the family will have a negative impact on both the church and the commonwealth.¹³³

According to Perkins, “Scripture is the only rule of ordering the family.”¹³⁴ The family has two primary duties. First, it must be devoted to God (e.g., the general duties of Christianity). A family that strives for godliness has the “‘promises of this life’ (its happy and prosperous estate), ‘and the life to come’ (1 Tim 4:8).”¹³⁵ Second, all the members of the family “must employ themselves in some honest and profitable business, to maintain the temporal estate and life of the whole,” (e.g., the duties of the particular calling).¹³⁶

86; Beale, “Sanctifying the Outer Life,” 63–69.

¹³⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:112. Treatises on marriage and family were a popular genre. Wright proposes several reasons for this topic’s popularity: The break with medieval ways, commercial expansion more widely distributed wealth which rapidly multiplied the middle class, and the divorce of Henry VIII and Queen Katherine fixed attention upon a pertinent domestic problem. He says that most of the marriage treatises were “written from the middle-class point of view and express ideals of the rising mercantile classes.” Wright, *Middle-Class Culture*, 202–3. Perkins’s *Oeconomie*, first in Latin (1590) and then in English (1609), was “one of the best planned, best balanced, most practical, and most informing of the whole series,” according to Powell, “English Domestic Relations,” 131. Unlike other commentators of his day, Yuille remarks, Perkins, with “great biblical wisdom,” addresses the “messier aspects of family life” between “broken people in broken relationships.” “Spiritual Household,” 164. For instance, see Perkins’s explanations concerning desertion in marriage. Perkins, *Works*, 10:162–65. See also Wright, *Middle-Class Culture*, 214.

¹³¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:111–12. Thomas Pickering is the translator and post-humous publisher of this work, along with several others including the *Treatise of Vocations*.

¹³² Yuille, “Spiritual Household,” 179.

¹³³ Perkins, *Works*, 10:112.

¹³⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 10:119. This factor distinguished his treatise from others. Wright claims that “the habit of giving domestic directions was so great that many purely moralistic works are full of advice to husbands and wives.” *Middle-Class Culture*, 214–15.

¹³⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:120.

¹³⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:122.

Perkins discusses the order of the family in terms of three “couples.”¹³⁷ (1) husband and wife; (2) parents and children; and (3) masters and servants.

According to Perkins, marriage “is the most excellent and perfect society in this world.”¹³⁸ Of that most “excellent condition,” Perkins notes five truths. (1) God ordained marriage in the garden of Eden; (2) It was established upon the consultation of the Trinity (Gen 1:26); (3) The manner of this union was excellent; (4) God blessed the union with a command to populate the earth; and (5) “Marriage was made and appointed by God Himself to be the fountain and seminary of all other sorts and kinds of life in the commonwealth and in the church.”¹³⁹

It is important to note that Perkins recognizes single life as a part of God’s particular call upon believers. However, it was not part of God’s original creation, thus it is a product of the fall. “Now if mankind had continued in that uprightness and integrity which he had by creation, the state of single life had been of no price and estimation among men, neither should it have had any place in the world without great contempt of God’s ordinance and blessing. Nevertheless, since the fall, to some men, who have the gift of continency, it is in many respects far better than marriage.”¹⁴⁰ Notably, singleness has three advantages: (1) it frees man from many familial concerns; (2) it enables an undivided attention toward heavenly things; and (3) in imminent or present danger, the single is less worried for he has only himself to worry about.¹⁴¹

Of marriage, there are four main ends: (1) “The procreation of children for the propagation and continuance of the seed and posterity of man upon the earth.” (2) “The

¹³⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:123.

¹³⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:365–66.

¹³⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:124.

¹⁴⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:124.

¹⁴¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:124.

procreation of a holy seed whereby the church of God may be kept holy and chaste, and there may always be a holy company of men who may worship and serve God in the church from age to age.” (3) “That after the fall of mankind, it might be a sovereign means to avoid fornication, and consequently to subdue and slake [quench] the burning lusts of the flesh.” (4) “That the married parties may thereby perform the duties of their callings in [a] better and more comfortable manner.”¹⁴²

In choosing a marriage partner, one should search for someone who shares a similar condition in life. It is a true, just, and honorable practice “that the prince, nobleman, freeman, gentleman, yeoman, etc. should be joined in society with them who are of the same or like condition with themselves, and not otherwise.”¹⁴³ This practice prevents many misunderstandings and troubles “in families and other orders of men.”¹⁴⁴

As for the mutual duties of the callings of husband and wife, there are two: cohabitation and communion. First, they should reside in one place. This is especially important during the first year of marriage so that they can grow in knowledge of and affection for one another. After that, only in two exceptions can they live apart, by mutual consent—for a time to support the needs of the family, and if an urgent event in the church or commonwealth requires their participation.¹⁴⁵

Communion, Perkins notes, is the mutual and willing communication “both of their persons and goods to each other, for their mutual help, necessity, and comfort.”¹⁴⁶ Yuille states, “this joining was emotional, spiritual, and physical.”¹⁴⁷ The marriage act,

¹⁴² Perkins, *Works*, 10:124–25. See also Yuille, “Spiritual Household,” 169–70.

¹⁴³ Philippians 4:8. Perkins, *Works*, 10:145.

¹⁴⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 10:146. For more on preparing for marriage, entering into the contract, and the duties of “married folks,” see 10:123–75.

¹⁴⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:161–62.

¹⁴⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:166.

¹⁴⁷ Yuille, “Spiritual Household,” 168.

Perkins says, should be “sanctified by the Word and prayer.”¹⁴⁸ He also sees it as a kindness that is due to each other, and that in three ways: (1) by enjoying each other, (2) cherishing one another, and (3) rejoicing in one another.¹⁴⁹ Yuille suggests that, in Perkins’s view, marriage is liberated from the “self-serving convenience or inconvenience that it has become” and instead is “one of the most sacred callings the world has ever known.”¹⁵⁰

Perkins teaches that the husband’s individual duty is first to love his wife as himself, and this in two ways. He is to protect her from danger and, in regarding her estate as his own, he is to provide for her in his lifetime and thereafter.¹⁵¹ The husband’s second duty is to honor his wife, which necessitates three things: (1) he is to acknowledge her as his companion, (2) he is to bear patiently with her weaknesses, and (3) he should respectfully consider and heed her advice.¹⁵² As for the wife, she has two duties. First, she is to submit to her husband, as unto the Lord (Eph 5:22), and second, she is to obey her husband and include him in decisions and actions.¹⁵³

Parents are to “preserve the life” of their children by “observing both the inclination and natural gifts of body and mind that are in the child, and accordingly to bestow it in some honest calling and course of life.”¹⁵⁴ Living well is not the only objective in bringing up children, parents must prepare them to pursue godly lives, serving the Lord in a “fit calling.”¹⁵⁵ It is the duty of the children to obey their parent’s

¹⁴⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:167.

¹⁴⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:166–70. See also Yuille, “Spiritual Household,” 166–67.

¹⁵⁰ Yuille, “Spiritual Household,” 168.

¹⁵¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:171.

¹⁵² Perkins, *Works*, 10:172.

¹⁵³ Perkins, *Works*, 174–75.

¹⁵⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 10:177. See also 3:32–33.

¹⁵⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:63, 178.

advice in (1) choosing a particular calling and (2) choosing a marriage partner. Perkins notes that the parental “authority is not so great that the child be forced or compelled,” yet reverence and respect should be a “strong inducement, not to dissent or renounce his [parent’s] advice without great and weighty cause.”¹⁵⁶

The final couple aids the increase of the family—the master and servant.¹⁵⁷ In the fear of God, it is the duty of the master and the servant to demonstrate faithfulness, respect, and diligence in their work and attitude toward one another.

Each of these three couples “relate to one another,” and perform their individual duties ‘under the private government of one,’” the husband, who is “the head of the household.”¹⁵⁸ Such a view has its critics. However, Yuille states that for Perkins, authority is “never an end in itself, but a means to an end. It exists so that life can flourish. It is self-giving, not self-serving,” it conforms to Scripture; “thus, it is never arbitrary,” rather it is mutual: “acting together, deciding together, working together, living together, etc.”¹⁵⁹

Perkins ends with the duties of the “Good-Man” and “Good-Wife.”¹⁶⁰ It is by God’s providence that each has been appointed to their positions (callings). The “Good-Man,” for instance, should be faithful to his most principal duty, which is caring for the souls under his roof. Perkins complains that many “betake themselves to lesser duties,” such as a father who prioritizes his children’s material needs above their spiritual needs.

¹⁵⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:181.

¹⁵⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:184–88. Perkins remarks that Christians have a “spiritual liberty in this life, and a corporal only in the life to come. For though a servant in regard of faith and the inner man is equal to his master, because in Christ Jesus there is neither master nor servant, bond nor free, yet in regard of the outward man and civil order among men, the master is above the servant, and the servant is and must be subject to the master.” He distinguishes between free or bondservants. Regarding the latter, Perkins argues that “servitude proceeds not of nature, but has its original from the laws of nations, and is a consequence of the fall.” Perkins, *Works*, 10:188.

¹⁵⁸ Yuille, “Spiritual Household,” 176.

¹⁵⁹ Yuille, “Spiritual Household,” 176–77.

¹⁶⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:189–94.

All are important, but spiritual nourishment cannot be neglected.¹⁶¹ Collectively, the husband and wife provide spiritual and physical nourishment for their households and hospitality to outsiders, while managing and maintaining order to prepare the members of their households to pursue godly lives. In so doing, they demonstrate their commitment to “a stable home,” which according to Wright, “is the *sine qua non* of the collective and individual welfare.”¹⁶²

The Individual

In addition to benefiting the commonwealth, church, and family, personal callings profit the individual. For this reason, Perkins challenges believers to observe the rule set down by the apostle Paul: “Let every man abide in that calling wherein he was called.”¹⁶³ Perkins insists that the act of abiding within the compass of our callings perpetuates “assurance of God’s protection and assistance in our callings.”¹⁶⁴ As a result, people can be confident and content in the work God has called them to do.

In order to abide, the worker must know and do the works of his calling and not the works of another man’s calling. Christ provides an example in His refusal to mediate an agreement between the two brothers who fought over their inheritance (Luke 12:14).¹⁶⁵ Perkins states that “it is as if He should say, ‘It is not within the compass of My calling, for I came to accomplish redemption, not to divide inheritances.’”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:75.

¹⁶² Wright, *Middle-Class Culture*, 201.

¹⁶³ Perkins, *Works*, 10:46. 1 Corinthians 7:20 is the theme verse for his vocation treatise. Perkins, *Works*, 10:43.

¹⁶⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 2:53. See also 10:46. Calvin relayed a similar directive to safeguard against fickle human tendencies or restlessly moving about to different jobs. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, John Baillie, and Henry P. Van Dusen (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 724–25.

¹⁶⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:46.

¹⁶⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:46.

It is within the compass of our calling that we do the good works that God has ordained for us to do.¹⁶⁷ Perkins explains what this means by way of several examples. First, a man may be zealous for Christ, but he must first find his calling and then demonstrate his zeal within its compass.¹⁶⁸ Second, in discussing the connection between Christian liberty and maintaining a clear conscience, we must do things “indifferent” to edify ourselves (to grow in godliness). But these things must be “used within the compass of our calling.”¹⁶⁹ For instance, it is an abuse for the “mean [average] man to be in meat, drink, apparel, building, as the gentleman; the gentleman as the knight; and the knight as the lord or earl.”¹⁷⁰ Third, based on Matthew 5:9, Perkins states, “Whereas peacemakers are blessed, we are to be admonished, if it be possible to have peace with all men, as much as in us lies; and within the compass of our callings, to avoid all occasions of contention and strife.”¹⁷¹

To take a case in point, Perkins remained within the compass of his calling by refusing to engage in the contemporary Presbyterian debate. This opportunity, and others for that matter, may have been appealing however, he remained faithful to the works of his calling. Shaw remarks that Perkins’s *A Golden Chain* “is the first substantial theological work written after the crushing of Presbyterianism,”¹⁷² which happens to be his most popular work to this day. According to Richard Baxter (1615–1691), Perkins

¹⁶⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 8:151. For more on remaining within the compass of one’s calling, see 1:92, 353; 4:382–83, 511, 540; 5:391, 465; 8:369; 9:13, 143; 10:86; Shaw, “The Marrow of Practical Divinity,” 244; Breward, “The Life and Theology,” 279.

¹⁶⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 5:154. George concludes then that “the calling thus becomes a kind, and an absolutely essential kind, of Christian worship.” “Callings,” 129.

¹⁶⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 8:60. See also 2:347.

¹⁷⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 8:60.

¹⁷¹ Perkins, *Works*, 1:211. See also 5:318.

¹⁷² Shaw, “William Perkins and the New Pelagians,” 289.

conformed [to the Elizabethan establishment] for the sole purpose to keep preaching.¹⁷³ Dixon describes the favorable environment in which Perkins preached: “On the one hand, the Elizabethan government would not judicially execute or mandate Protestantism thus resulting in dictatorship because of religion, but they had also not gone far enough (towards reform) by protecting and placating the lukewarm.”¹⁷⁴ Between these two extremes, Perkins implemented his strategy to provide consistent, sound, biblical teaching for salvation and life.¹⁷⁵ As a result, “A pastoral revolution was initiated that had profound effects on the ethos of the Church of England.”¹⁷⁶

These examples demonstrate God’s protection and assistance in Perkins’s calling—he knew the works of his calling and remained within its compass.¹⁷⁷ This was not a delimiting decision, for he engaged in a multitude of diverse opportunities. He preached and taught in the community jail, at Great St. Andrew’s Church in Cambridge, at Christ’s College, and in written publications. After eleven years, he exited his position as a fellow at his alma mater to pick up his new duties as husband and father. In all this, he was productive.

The opposite approach is less effective. Perkins recalls that Samson, Saul, Jonah, and Peter reached beyond their callings and “bereaved themselves of God’s

¹⁷³ Richard Baxter, *A Second True Defence* (London: For Nevil Simons, 1681), 39.

¹⁷⁴ Dixon, “Atheisme,” 790.

¹⁷⁵ Ballitch states that Perkins “offered an alternative to the disputes about polity that both worked within existing frameworks of the established church and resonated with the spiritual aspirations of his contemporaries. This did much to shift Puritan interests into personal and local piety.” “Scripture,” 156–57. Of Perkins, Dixon observes that based on the freedom available to consistently preach the gospel, “wider quirks of institutional religion can be viewed with some detachment.” *Practical Predestinarians*, 79. Perkins himself states, “We must give place to the sway of the times wherein we live, so far forth as may stand with keeping faith and a good conscience.” He explains that Paul stayed in Ephesus for three years without speaking ill of their goddess Diana, for the sake of his calling (to preach), which resembles his own story. Perkins, *Works*, 8:368.

¹⁷⁶ Breward, “William Perkins,” 124.

¹⁷⁷ Perkins applies this principle to himself while discussing the subject of equity in the courts. “Lawyers must not think that I have gone beyond the compass of my calling and encroached upon their liberties. For they are to know that the laws of men are policy, but equity is Christianity.” *Works*, 10:375–76.

protection and instead opened their lives up to God's punishment and judgment."¹⁷⁸

Perkins reasons that because of "vain curiosity" a man highly esteems yet hardly performs the duties of his own calling, while being "very ready to talk of and inquire into the state and lives of other men."¹⁷⁹ In short, when a believer walks outside of the compass of his calling, "he cannot but do amiss."¹⁸⁰ Perkins's concern is twofold: first, this action leads to disobedience; and, second, it inadvertently leads to the filling of another man's calling.¹⁸¹

The personal calling is not merely an obligatory activity to answer "a summons from God."¹⁸² Perkins perceives it to be much more. It is the means by which order is established in a person's life (and in the commonwealth). It is where God-given gifts and affections are put to work to benefit others. These works are also "expedient" in the doer.¹⁸³ Meaningful employment can even be "delighted in."¹⁸⁴ Work in a calling results

¹⁷⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:47. See also 1:132–33. Perkins states, "They sin that go into places of great danger without a calling; so Peter sinned in thrusting himself into Caiaphas's hall, a place of temptation, as by lamentable experience he found too true." *Works*, 1:137. Perkins also gives a contemporary example: carpenters and masons, according to their call, take physical risks to work on high places. Conversely, to their detriment, others without being called take the same risks to be admired by men for their personal gain and advantage (137).

¹⁷⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:73.

¹⁸⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 5:154.

¹⁸¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:74. This is additional evidence against the common thought that choosing a vocation is a secondary issue as long as the work is done for God's glory. Rather, designed by God, each saint has his or her particular calling where they will most effectively honor God and serve others.

¹⁸² Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity*, 77.

¹⁸³ Perkins, *Works*, 10:75.

¹⁸⁴ Akin to Perkins's view, George summarizes that "English Protestantism found satisfaction and delight in the particularized ideal of work in the world; the penal and disciplinary functions of work are only incidental to the primary fact that work is at once an expression of salvation and also of the spontaneous relationship of man to the world around him." "Callings," 142. Perkins's teaching countered monasticism's institutionalized idea that vocation required ultimate sacrifice (i.e., total renunciation), which still gripped the church. This Catholic tradition remains evident in 20th century Trappist monk Thomas Merton. He experienced personal conflict as to whether his bi-vocational role as an author was pleasing to God. He wonders "would God have me do something in which I am skilled and enjoy? If I enjoy the work, without sacrifice, will it please God?" Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain: An Autobiography of Faith* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1998), 445–51.

in personal blessings, such as “peace, health, wealth, liberty, and [a] good name.”¹⁸⁵ It also facilitates contentment and spiritual growth. In short, the personal calling is personally gratifying. “The common good of men stands in this, not only that they live, but that they live well in righteousness and holiness and consequently in true happiness. And for the attainment hereunto God has ordained and disposed all callings, and in His providence designed the persons to bear them.”¹⁸⁶

Perkins perceives comfort in the doctrine of vocation. In hardship, the individual witnesses God’s protection as he remains faithful to his calling. Perkins asserts, “There is no calling upon earth, since the fall of Adam, but has crosses and calamities attending on it. But they are delayed, by sufficient comfort, when our consciences can tell us we were placed in our callings by God Himself.”¹⁸⁷ Comfort and confidence in God’s design support endurance among trials and temptations, which leads to our next section: the soteriological implication.

¹⁸⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:105.

¹⁸⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:45.

¹⁸⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:64.

CHAPTER 6

THE SOTERIOLOGICAL IMPLICATION

Perkins's favorite axiom is as follows: "Theology is the science of living blessedly forever."¹ By "forever," he means eternally. He affirms that some are deceived when they "imagine that there is no eternal life till after death; for it begins in this world."² Therefore, the Christian's main endeavor must be to establish the foundation for eternal life (spiritual life) while on earth. We do so by fulfilling the works of our callings with "love, mercy, and justice, all which be fruits of faith."³ True to his axiom, Perkins emphasizes that the integration of salvation with all of life is essential, for God's soteriological purpose is accomplished as we unite His general and particular callings in practice. In so doing, our spiritual lives are made manifest, and we are sanctified as our love for God and others is cultivated and expressed in the practice of good works.⁴

¹ William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 6:11.

² Perkins, *Works*, 5:411. Perkins explains, "Natural life is that whereby men in this world live by meat and drink and all such means as are ministered by God's providence. Spiritual [eternal] life is that most happy and blessed estate in which all the elect shall reign with Christ, their Head, in the heavens after this life and after the day of judgment forever and ever. And this alone is the life which in the Creed we confess and believe, and it consists in an immediate conjunction and communion or fellowship with God Himself." *Works*, 5:407. Moreover, Christ's benefit to our life on earth is "spiritual life, whereby we live not, but Christ lives in us, making us partakers of His anointing, and thereby enabling us to live as prophets, priests, [and] kings. Prophets, to teach and make confession of our faith in Christ; priests, to dedicate and present our bodies and souls to God for the service of His majesty; [and] kings, to bear rule and dominion over the corruptions and lusts of our hearts." *Works*, 9:44.

³ Perkins, *Works*, 1:532.

⁴ The Great Commandment becomes evident in our lives. "One of the scribes asked Jesus "'Which commandment is the most important of all?' Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12: 28–31).

God's Purpose

Perkins gives attention to God's soteriological purpose in his commentary on Galatians.⁵ In addressing Paul's defense of his calling and teaching against false prophets, Perkins concludes, (1) "Justification by works is a yoke that none could ever bear"; and (2) "Faith in the heart is a light, and works are the shining of the light."⁶ Perkins's exposition is significant because it confirms his theology of vocation.⁷ Based on Galatians 1:15–17,⁸ he explains the seamless nature of God's plan, that is, the way in which the general and particular callings work together.⁹

Perkins believes that the order of Paul's calling is applicable "in the conversion and salvation of every sinner."¹⁰

The beginning of our salvation is in the good pleasure of God; then follows separation or election to eternal life; then vocation by the word and Spirit; then obedience to the calling of God, and, after obedience, everlasting life.¹¹ This order Paul here sets down, and the consideration of it is of great use. Hence, it appears to be a doctrine erroneous which begins our salvation in the prevision of man's faith and good works.¹² For in Paul's order, works have the last place. And it must be

⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 2:1–575. For more on Perkins's exposition, see Andrew Scott Ballitch, "Scripture Is Both the Glosse and the Text': Biblical Interpretation and Its Implementation in the Works of William Perkins" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017): 92–98; Ballitch, "Not to Behold Faith, But the Object of Faith': The Effect of William Perkins's Doctrine of the Atonement on His Preaching of Assurance," *Themelios* 40, no. 3 (2015): 455–56.

⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 2:13, 32, 48.

⁷ Perkins's Galatians commentary is significant because it was his last work, which demonstrates the consistency of his thought on vocation. See Ballitch, "Scripture," 92.

⁸ "But when it pleased God (which had separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace), To reveal his Son in me (or to me) that I should preach him among the Gentiles, immediately I communicated not with flesh and blood. Neither came I to Jerusalem, to them which were apostles before me, but I went into Arabia, and turned again to Damascus" (Gal 1:15–17). See Perkins, *Works*, 2:51.

⁹ One additional point, evident in Perkins's terminology, is his shrewd contrast between the Protestant and Catholic views of faith and works. Perkins associates Paul's accusers with his present-day popish persecutors.

¹⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 2:52. Perkins considers the causes of Paul's conversion, the manner and end of his calling, and his obedience.

¹¹ In sum, the order of salvation is: (1) election (which includes God's good pleasure and counsel—i.e., predestination); (2) vocation or effectual call (keeping in mind that Perkins uses the term "vocation" to describe the general call to salvation and the particular call); (3) justification; (4) obedience; and (5) everlasting life. Perkins, *Works*, 2:51–53. For a similar order of salvation, see 5:335, 351; 8:628.

¹² By "erroneous," Perkins is referring to the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification, a works-based faith that accords with God's "prevision," which is His foreknowledge of events before they

God's pleasure that man shall do a good work before he can do it. And if separation to eternal life should be according to faith or works, then we should make separation of ourselves, as well as God.¹³ And vocation [salvation] is not for works, but that we might do good works [particular calling] (Eph. 1:4).¹⁴

In sum, Perkins affirms that (1) we are saved not by our works, but to do good works, (2) we cannot lose salvation because it rests upon the perfect counsel and good pleasure of God, and (3) we can have assurance based on our obedience to God's call, for "this order is (as it were) a golden chain in which all the links are inseparably united."¹⁵

Mindful of these causes (and assurances) of the general calling, Perkins proceeds to explain the personal calling:

We gather that God has determined what He will do with every man, and that He has in His eternal counsel assigned every man his office and condition of life. For there is in God a pleasure whereby He may do with every man what He will. And by His eternal counsel He separates every man from the very womb to one calling or other. And accordingly He calls them in time by giving gifts and will to do that for which they were appointed.¹⁶

Perkins draws six conclusions from the above. First, we are to obey God with diligence and a good conscious in our callings because He assigned us to them. Second, we are to

happen. In another place, he asserts, "They make the prescience (foreknowledge) of man's faith and unbelief to be the impulsive cause of God's decree. This is erroneous by the doctrine of all churches unless they be popish." Perkins, *Works*, 5:357, 359. Moreover, "vocation" to Catholics was a term normally reserved for monastics and clerics who made the ultimate sacrifice for religion's sake. In another place, Perkins references a work from Zanchius, which helps explain his terminology. "The doctrine of the Pelagians is confuted as touching predestination to life by our faith and works, which God foresaw we should do. Whereas on the contrary, therefore God did predestine us to faith and good works because He did choose us to eternal life." Perkins, *Works*, 8:635. H. Zanchius (1516–1590) was an Italian Reformer who served as professor of Old Testament at Strasbourg. In his *A Case of Conscience*, Perkins included an excerpt from Zanchius regarding the doctrine of justification. See Perkins, *Works*, 8:595–637.

¹³ Perkins, *Works*, 2:52. Again, the words of Zanchius are helpful: "If any is elect to eternal life, they are also predestined to the means by which they come unto it. And because we can neither attain to the end, nor the means that bring us thereunto of ourselves, therefore, it is our part to crave them at God's hands by prayer, that He would give us faith, and a care to do good works, and increase them in us." Perkins, *Works*, 8:635. For more on the "supernatural capability" by grace enabling us "to make separation of ourselves," see 7:18.

¹⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 2:52. Perkins's reference to Ephesians 1:4 is peculiar, compared to the more commonly referenced Ephesians 2:10. He uses Ephesians 1:4 because it emphasizes that the decree of predestination is inherent to the particular calling. Perkins employs Ephesians 2:10 in other places. See Perkins, *Works*, 1:241; 2:22; 4:597; 5:335, 351; 6:235, 265; 7:17–18, 140, 477; 8:629, 633, 635.

¹⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 52. Ballitch proposes that "the foremost pastoral problem Perkins dealt with was the issue of assurance." He believes that assurance is Perkins's main point. "Scripture," 157. See also "Not to Behold Faith, But the Object of Faith," 455–56.

¹⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 2:52–53.

respect our rulers and teachers because God has called them to their posts. Third, we are to be assured of “God’s protection and assistance in our callings, for in that He has appointed us our callings, He will also defend us in them (2 Cor 3:6; Isa 49.2).”¹⁷ Fourth, we are to increase in patience and contentment, even in trials and temptations in our calling, because we are “ordained to it.” Fifth, we are to thank God because “our callings, gifts, and the execution of our callings is wholly of God.”¹⁸ Sixth, we are to depend upon God’s providence.¹⁹ Perkins concludes, “For if He provided our callings when we were not, He will much more aid and bless us in them now while we have a being.”²⁰ As we abide in our particular callings, God’s purpose is fulfilled in our lives; we are sanctified and our love for Him increases.

Love for God

Perkins insists that we should perform the works of our callings with diligence and a good conscience; however, he maintains that all who “endeavor to get or keep a good conscience are most of all subject to temptations.”²¹ This is the case because “spiritual life is most of all manifest in afflictions and temptations, in the bearing whereof faith reigns.”²² Where better to turn than to Christ, who provided the perfect example while He was in the desert.²³ “The most principal and glorious man ever,” says Perkins,

¹⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 2:53.

¹⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 2:53.

¹⁹ On this point, Perkins advises “poor parents,” who cannot leave their children an inheritance, to “comfort themselves in this: that their children are from their mothers’ womb separated to some good office and condition of life by the wisdom of God, and a good office or calling is better than land and living.” Perkins, *Works*, 2:53.

²⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 2:53.

²¹ Perkins, *Works*, 1:87.

²² Perkins, *Works*, 10:14.

²³ William Perkins, *The Combat between Christ and the Devil Displayed: or A Commentary upon the Temptations of Christ*. *Works*, 1:71–165. For more on Perkins’s exposition, see Ballitch, “Scripture,” 109–11.

was tempted like every man yet remained faithful.²⁴ Perkins highlights five circumstances of Christ's temptation that demonstrate the relationship between Satan's points of attack and Christ's particular calling. Perkins, then, explicitly applies these circumstances to the context of our vocations.

The first circumstance concerns the "time" of Christ's temptation.²⁵ His mediatorial office is confirmed when He is baptized with the Holy Spirit, and immediately His temptations begin. On the basis of Christ's example, Perkins concludes, "It is the will of God he [the believer] should be tempted, that in the school of temptation he might learn to practice his baptism."²⁶ In doing the works of their callings, believers, "even at their very entrance," will be tempted by the devil.²⁷

Perkins adds, after Christ called His disciples "to their office of preaching," they met a "great tempest" upon the sea.²⁸ Christ allows such temptations for two reasons. The first is to teach them that no man can accomplish the works of his calling without the "special assistance and grace" of God. The second is to stimulate the "gifts and graces" that He gives them. According to Perkins, Christ would have these gifts and graces "tried in the entrance of their callings, and exercised in the continuance and unto the end."²⁹

²⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 5:104.

²⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 1:87–90.

²⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 1:88. See also 8:375.

²⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 1:89. According to Perkins, this point refutes "the common opinion of ignorant people, who think those that are tempted by the devil to be most vile and wicked men, such as have forsaken God, and therefore God has forsaken them" *Works*, 1:98. By extension, an inappropriate inference is that believers will not encounter temptations within the God-ordained confines of their callings. For instance, Breward remarks of Perkins, "So long as men kept within the compass of their calling there could be no conflict, because God used individuals in their callings to order life in society." Ian Breward, "The Life and Theology of William Perkins, 1558–1602" (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 1963): 279. Breward is partly correct. Perkins promoted remaining within the compass of our callings to honor God's order, although he never promised the absence of conflict.

²⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 1:89.

²⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 1:89.

The second circumstance concerns the “author” of Christ’s going into the desert, namely, the Holy Spirit.³⁰ Like Christ, we are to yield to the Holy Spirit’s leadership “in everything,” and we are to learn from Him as “He teaches and guides us by the Word.”³¹ Knowing that temptations are ordained by God’s “special providence and appointment,” Christ did not evade the battle. “So likewise if a man follows his calling according to God’s will, and thereupon falls into troubles and temptations, he may not seek to escape them by neglecting his duty, but with courage and patience must inure himself to bear them, waiting on the Lord by well-doing for his deliverance.”³²

For Perkins, we are to cooperate with the Spirit by being “thoroughly acquainted with our natural dispositions and inclinations,” and by setting “a strong guard about our own hearts.”³³ He adds, “Every man has all sins in him, but yet through the work of God, restraining corruption in some, and renewing grace in others, it comes to pass, that each man is more inclined naturally to some sins than to others, which thing Satan does observe most diligently.”³⁴ In other words, the “seeds” of all sin are in human nature, but the practice of every sin is restrained by the “general and limiting grace of God” by means of vocations, education, civil laws, etc.³⁵ God’s grace keeps everyone in a “certain compass limited by the wisdom of His power.”³⁶

Ultimately, abiding in our callings is doubly beneficial. First, it guards against

³⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 1:90–93. Perkins explains that formerly Christ had a comfortable and private life, working as a carpenter with His family. *Works*, 1:93; 4:89. But, His baptism installed Him into His new office of Mediator, likewise, “all who are appointed and set apart by God for any special calling, are in some sort changed by His Spirit.” *Works*, 1:93. By this change, Perkins is referencing the general call to salvation, where believers are made “new” and receive the indwelling Holy Spirit.

³¹ Perkins, *Works*, 1:91.

³² Perkins, *Works*, 1:91–92.

³³ Perkins, *Works*, 1:108. For Perkins, this is a “prudent” act. See 8:366.

³⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 1:107. See also 9:96–104. For Perkins’s doctrine of sin, see 6:32–46.

³⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 9:97–98.

³⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 9:98.

our personal inclinations toward certain sins. Second, it is the means by which God “chastens” us “for some past sin, or to prevent some sin, or greater evil to come, or to make trial of [our] faith and patience.”³⁷ While remaining within the compass of our callings we can be sure of God’s help and protection; but, if we forsake the works of our callings and persist in some other work, “we expose ourselves to all God’s judgements.”³⁸

The third circumstance is that Christ’s anointing with the Holy Spirit equipped Him to fulfill His calling.³⁹ In the same way, Perkins insists that God equips and qualifies His followers for the works of their callings. By contrast, those “who lack gifts for their callings” have chosen for themselves and have not been placed there by God.⁴⁰

The fourth circumstance concerns the place of Christ’s temptation, namely, the desert. For several reasons, it was perfectly suited for Christ to accomplish His work as “Mediator, namely, in temptation overcome him [Satan].”⁴¹ First, it was Christ’s objective to work in “great humility,” therefore the place was “void of all pomp and glory.”⁴²

³⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 1:132.

³⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 1:133. Perkins explains that when adversity hits, it effects the godly and ungodly alike. The child of God, however, is not without God’s comfort through trials. If God chooses to chasten the child, he does greatly differ from the wicked, “for through the fruition of God’s love in Christ the evil of the punishment is taken away, and the outward smart [effects] thereof sanctified to the greater good of his soul [Job 23:10; Ps. 119:71]; but out of this case their protection is certain (Ex. 12:23; Ps. 105:16–17; Ezek. 9:4–6). The consideration of this gracious protection of God’s angels over such as keep themselves in their ways, must move everyone to labor to know and practice the duties of his calling both generally of Christianity, and particularly for the state of his life, in all good conscience. But if we forsake our ways [disobey in our callings] we lose the comfort of their protection, and expose ourselves to all God’s judgements.” Perkins, *Works*, 1:132–33. See also 1:456.

³⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 1:94. Perkins states that Christ “received a greater measure of the Spirit” at His baptism. See also 2:249–50; 5:104, 368; 6:55; The Westminster Confession, 8.3. Perkins does not presume the Spirit’s absence prior to this time, but “though Christ were always full of grace, yet He increased therein as His estate and calling did require.” Perkins, *Works*, 1:94. Andrew Ballitch reasons, “Perkins here suggests Christ had to rely on the Spirit for the bestowal of gifts and graces throughout His life and points to the real progression of Christ as a man.” “Andrew S. Ballitch, “God the Son in the Theology of William Perkins,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 9, no. 2 (July 1, 2017): 158–59. J. V. Fesko adds, “Christ did not cheat by relying upon the Spirit. He offered Spirit-empowered obedience to His heavenly Father in accord with the terms of the covenant of redemption.” J. V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2016), 322.

⁴⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 1:94.

⁴¹ Perkins, *Works*, 1:91.

⁴² Perkins, *Works*, 1:95.

Second, the “deserted abode” ensured an encounter with the adversary. Third, the wilderness was advantageous for Satan, and therefore drew attention to the fact that Christ’s victory was based on God’s provision and could not be attributed to comforts found in society. Fourth, the victory was peculiar to Christ and, therefore, “wholly” belonging to Him. Fifth, the wilderness experience granted Him “more credit, reverence, and authority” in His future work.⁴³

Perkins believes this circumstance is particularly relevant to the church as she sojourns in the world. It is a wild and barren place where Christians must “arm themselves with patience against manifold assaults and vexations, comforting their hearts” with the rumination of Christ’s victorious experience, which can also be theirs in the God-appointed places of their callings.⁴⁴

The fifth circumstance concerns the end of Christ’s experience, namely, “*how* He was tempted, *wherefore*, and *by whom*.”⁴⁵ Knowing “how” Satan tempts us is important for overcoming blasphemous thoughts. First, he tempts by conveying into the mind “either by inward suggestion, or by outward object, the motion or cogitation of a sin.” In Christ’s case, Satan conveyed to His mind “the unrighteous cogitations of unbelief, idolatry, and covetousness.” Second, Satan “conveys evil suggestions” into the mind of man, and as a result, the godly are “full of trouble, sorrow, and vexation.” Third, Satan uses temptations to lead to corrupt actions. Perkins states, “this is the place where Christ differs from all men,” for He was without sin.⁴⁶

As to “why” Christ was tempted, Perkins says it was, first, to overcome temptation, or “the devil’s own weapon.” Second, He was tempted so that we might learn

⁴³ Perkins, *Works*, 1:95.

⁴⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 1:102.

⁴⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 1:96.

⁴⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 1:97. See also 6:149–50.

how Satan “assaults the church” and how we can resist him. Third, He was tempted so that He might be “a merciful high priest unto them that are tempted (Heb. 2:17–18).” Because of His experience, He shows compassion and is “ready to help and comfort” His people when they are tempted.⁴⁷

Finally, the author of Christ’s temptations is the devil—a “slanderer and an accuser” who finds fault unnecessarily.⁴⁸ Based on his name alone, Perkins cautions, we should “beware of false accusing, tale-bearing and slandering; for in these practices we put on the devil’s name.”⁴⁹ Satan accuses God to man, man to God, and man to man.⁵⁰ For the last, Perkins says it was Satan who worked in Peter when he tried to “dissuade” Christ “from that work for which His Father had sanctified Him and sent Him into this world” (Matt. 16:23).⁵¹ Following Christ’s example, we must stand against those who try to draw us away from the duties of our callings.⁵²

Satan’s assaults upon Christ (and His followers) are multifaceted and meant to incite “such thoughts and cares that show distrust in God.”⁵³ In brief, Christ was tempted to infidelity, covetousness, idolatry, presumption, greed, and notoriety. He was also tempted to doubt His ability and identity. But Christ overcomes.

[Christ] betakes Himself to the written Word for His defense. And this He did especially for our instruction; namely, that we might know, that the written Word of God, rightly wielded by the hand of faith, is the most sufficient weapon for the repelling of Satan and the vanquishing him in all his temptations; hence Paul calls it “the sword of the spirit” [Eph. 6:17], because it serves not only for our defense, but

⁴⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 1:98.

⁴⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 1:99.

⁴⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 1:99.

⁵⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 1:99. For examples of “God to man,” see Gen 3:4; “man to God,” see Rev 12:9 and 1 Peter 5:8; and “man to man,” see Eph 2:2 and James 3:14–15.

⁵¹ Perkins, *Works*, 1:105, 99.

⁵² Perkins, *Works*, 1:105.

⁵³ Perkins, *Works*, 1:119.

also to wound Satan, and to put him to flight.⁵⁴

It is the “sincere and sound” believer who endeavors to keep God’s Word and “in him the love of God (i.e., not that love wherewith God loves him, but that whereby he loves God) is perfect indeed (i.e., sincere and sound, perfection being opposed not to imperfection but hypocrisy).”⁵⁵ Perkins astutely judges the power of God’s Word next to the reality of temptations in a believer’s life; we are imperfect, but we can sincerely love God, which is to honor Him, and God’s honor “stands in reverence, obedience, and thankfulness.”⁵⁶

Perkins concludes by acknowledging that Christ demonstrated a perfect unity between His two callings. He joined “the worship of God and the service of God.”⁵⁷ The completion of “religious duties” cannot content us, but “absolute service and obedience” is due to God. Some live in their particular callings “as they list, either idly or unjustly, by fraud and dissembling.” But Christ did not separate His worship from His service to God,⁵⁸ nor should we.

Love for Man

Loving God and seeking our neighbor’s good are inseparable in Perkins’s mind. He argues, “The end of a man’s life, and all of his actions, is to serve God, in serving of man, and by serving of man, to serve God.”⁵⁹ Both the glory of God and the common good result from the right use of our callings. This should chiefly be evident in the church. It is a mark of the “child of God” to love his brother (1 John 3:10).⁶⁰ For Perkins, we are to carry “a tender affection to men not because they are of the same flesh,

⁵⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 1:114.

⁵⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 8:601.

⁵⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 1:236.

⁵⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 1:155.

⁵⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 1:155–56.

⁵⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 1:236.

⁶⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 8:606.

but because they are joined in the bond of one Spirit with us (2 Peter 1:7).”⁶¹

For those outside the church, Perkins hopes they receive that “special ornament of Christ’s holy gospel,” which is Christian service.⁶² He claims that “many of us do amiss, disjoining faith and good life [good works]. And this fault is the greater because it is an occasion to our adversaries to dislike and reject our religion.”⁶³ Church growth slows when we separate faith from the works of our callings. “God would have all men to be saved,” so believers must determine “to do good to all by thought, word, and deed.”⁶⁴ Perkins’s concern, therefore, is twofold: firstly, believers must love one another because Christ purchased their unity with His blood; and, secondly, believers must love outsiders in the name of Christ.⁶⁵

For this, Perkins turns to the virtue of “equity” which, he believes, is the substance that holds the commonwealth together.⁶⁶ He pens, “Let your equity or moderation of mind be known to all men.”⁶⁷ Unfortunately, moderation is scarce, “dwelling in corners,” while “extremity” governs the world.⁶⁸ For the church, extremity

⁶¹ Perkins, *Works*, 5:389. Christians should do good to all, but especially to other Christians “(1) by example; (2) by admonition; (3) by exhortation; (4) by consolation; (5) by prayer.”

⁶² Perkins, *Works*, 10:52.

⁶³ Perkins, *Works*, 2:48.

⁶⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 2:238, 239.

⁶⁵ Perkins’s context was primarily Christian, therefore doing good to those in the church was essential. Schaefer remarks, “Perkins spoke to a society in which every member, unless excommunicated, was deemed a member of the covenant people of God. He preached to a nation in which everyone was, at least outwardly, considered a Christian, one within the compass of God’s merciful calling to Christ through the preaching of the word.” “William Perkins,” 155. However, Perkins’s emphases on the carnal Christian and on the Christian’s involvement in the commonwealth demonstrate his priority for a consistent witness.

⁶⁶ For *Epieikeia* or *A Treatise of Christian Equity and Moderation*, see Perkins, *Works*, 10:357–98. This was a posthumous publication, edited by William Crashawe, who remarks that civil justice and man’s life (human society, neighborhood, friendship, kindred, marriage itself) depend on equity. Perkins, *Works*, 10:363. For more on other virtues that make a man “fit to live well,” see 8:359–440.

⁶⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:365. Perkins notes, “Our English translations commonly read: ‘Let your patient mind be known to all men’ (Phil. 4:5).”

⁶⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:398.

should be replaced with the practice of moderation, which conveys a good witness to everyone.

Equity has two parts: public and private. Without public equity, “there can be no buying or selling, borrowing or lending, between man and man,” explains Perkins.⁶⁹ In economics, “the laws of men may ordain and appoint extremities, but the law of God must tell us when to urge them and when to moderate them.”⁷⁰ There may be times where it is legally acceptable to deal harshly or dishonestly to gain an advantage. However, moderation and compassion best reflect Christian character.

Private equity concerns actions between private people. First, we must be moderate within ourselves, “neither bearing all things nor revenging everything.” Second, we must exercise moderation in our dealings with others.

Husbands, wives, magistrates, subjects, teachers, hearers, masters, servants, parents, children, men, women, neighbors in towns, fellows in societies, in service, in labor, etc. In a word, none are excepted, who [in] any way live or converse together. But it is true of all of them that if there is not a moderation and a forbearance one of another, there can be no peace among them, but their lives shall be all (as it were) a hell upon the earth.⁷¹

The practice of equity necessitates four things.⁷² First, we are to recognize that it is a sign of wisdom to bear with one another and overlook offenses (Prov 19:11). Second, we are to assume the best of people’s words and actions, even if they are suspect. The lack of this duty, and the practice of its opposite, “is the cause of more troubles in societies, and families, between man and man, than any other thing in the world.”⁷³ Third,

⁶⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:372.

⁷⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:372–73. As in the execution of “forfeitures of bonds, lands, or leases, in suretyships, rents, or fines.”

⁷¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:377.

⁷² Perkins, *Works*, 10:377–88. Perkins includes exceptions to each duty.

⁷³ Perkins, *Works*, 10:380. Based on the ninth commandment, Perkins says we should preserve our neighbor’s good name by “rejoicing for their credit and good estimation,” and “having a care both to judge and speak well of others.” Perkins, *Works*, 6:145, 147.

we are to renounce our rights. “Often times men stand so strictly upon their right that they go further than their right reaches.”⁷⁴ Fourth, we are to forgive others. This is, according to Perkins, of greatest importance because (1) we require the forgiveness of others, and (2) primarily, “how else can he [a believer] in reason demand or pray for forgiveness at God’s hand for many thousands [of] offences of his own and those exceedingly great, when another man cannot obtain forgiveness at his hands for a few small offences?”⁷⁵

Our particular callings are “instruments of mercy,” intended to exhibit care and compassion for others.⁷⁶ When others can “see, feel, and speak of” our equity toward them, their “life in this world” is adorned with “comfort.”⁷⁷ Serving others is the “special ornament” of the gospel, which is why Perkins emphasizes that it is God’s pleasure “that men shall be His instruments for the good of one another.”⁷⁸ It is for the performance of these good works that God has ordained our particular callings.

Good Works

For Perkins, the main end of good works is God’s glory, but “this is not the whole end,” we also help ourselves and bless others.⁷⁹ The performance of good works is essential for perseverance. As such, Perkins analyzes the virtues, vices, hindrances, and helps that influence our faithfulness to the works of our callings. His thoughts substantiate the unity of our general and particular callings, where the greatest commandment becomes evident—we love God, and we love our neighbors as ourselves

⁷⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 10:383.

⁷⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:385.

⁷⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 1:201.

⁷⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:389, 377.

⁷⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:52, 58.

⁷⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 1:240.

as we practice the works belonging to each. The fact that “we are bound” to be faithful in the works of our particular callings, “must teach us much more to be constant in the general duties of Christianity.”⁸⁰ For this reason, it is within the context of our particular callings rather than by any other “accidental or collateral courses” that we are sanctified, that is, “little and little renewed in holiness and righteousness.”⁸¹ With so much at stake, Perkins is careful to explain the nature of good works and the manner in which they should be done.

Perkins writes, “*A good work, is a work commanded of God, and done by a man regenerate in faith, for the glory of God in man's good.*”⁸² The works of our general callings are directly commanded by God as “parts of worship.” These works include “prayer, thanksgiving, receiving the sacraments, hearing the Word, contributing to the good estate of the church, relieving the poor, and walking worthy of our calling.”⁸³

When it comes to “contributing to the good estate of the church,” Perkins issues a grievance. “Here I may justly complain of the neglect of this duty: men are so far from duties of edification that they use all means to pull down rather than to build

⁸⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:100.

⁸¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:243; 6:186. See also 2:293. In this statement, Perkins reveals that a theology of vocation is more comprehensive than the theology of work. Zanchius states, “While we have a care to glorify God and to do good works, we will not be conformable to the world in the wickedness of it, neither submit ourselves to our flesh and Satan.” Perkins, *Works*, 8:633.

⁸² Perkins, *Works*, 1:233. For more on each component of his definition, see 1:233–37. Regarding the papists “who hold them [good works] necessary, as causes of our salvation and justification,” and some Protestants, “who hold them necessary, though not as principal causes (for they say, we are only justified and saved by Christ), yet as conservant causes of our salvation,” Perkins clarifies, “that good works are necessary, not as causes of salvation, or justification, but as inseparable consequents of saving faith in Christ, whereby we are justified and saved.” Perkins, *Works*, 1:239. For more on good works, see 1:233–42, 392–405; 7:19. Scholarship pertaining to his view of good works primarily considers their role in the doctrines of justification (i.e., voluntarism) and assurance, see Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 79–81, 92–95; R. T. Kendall, “Living the Christian Life in the Teaching of William Perkins and His Followers,” in *Living the Christian Life: 1974 Westminster Conference Papers (Reprint)* (Huntingdon, Cambs.: The Westminster Conference, 1974); Richard A. Muller, *Grace and Freedom: William Perkins and the Early Modern Reformed Understanding of Free Choice and Divine Grace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 51, 118, 123–24, 132–35, 152; David M. Barbee, “A Reformed Catholicism: William Perkins’ Use of the Church Fathers” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2013): 232ff.

⁸³ Perkins, *Works*, 1:236–37; 10:49–53.

[up].”⁸⁴ To correct this deficit, he commends the practice of encouragement and connects it to vocation. There should be frequent “admonitions, exhortations, consolations, and all other like duties that serve to this end,” so that any man, by virtue of his particular calling, can “edify” the church.⁸⁵ Based on the fifth commandment, rather than envying or resenting each other, we should notice when others “excel us in gifts,” and then “praise” them when they use their gifts.⁸⁶

Another duty associated with the general calling is the “renewing of our repentance.”⁸⁷ Grace leads to repentance, while the continual act of confessing our daily sins maintains God’s grace.⁸⁸ Perkins urges us to “hearken to this counsel of the Spirit”; let us search our hearts “for secret and hidden corruptions,” refusing to “mingle our sins with God’s grace.”⁸⁹ The good work of self-examination lays a “sure foundation” for God’s good work of grace to continue in us and to “stay God’s judgements” against us.⁹⁰

According to Perkins, the essence of good works extends beyond those of the general calling. He insists, “all kinds of callings and their works” are the matter of good works.⁹¹ These works pertain to “indifferent” duties which are performed by faith, for God’s glory, and are sanctified by the Word and prayer.⁹² By “indifferent,” Perkins is

⁸⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 10:51.

⁸⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:51.

⁸⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 6:108.

⁸⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:53. See also 8:147–49, 634.

⁸⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 9:92.

⁸⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 9:95.

⁹⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 9:95.

⁹¹ Perkins, *Works*, 8:151. Perkins argues against the “popish church, which teaches that only alms-deeds and building or maintaining of churches and religious houses are the matter of good works.” *Works*, 8:151. He reiterates, “For not only alms-deeds, and large gifts to churches, and highways, are good works, but also the special duties of every man’s lawful calling, done in faith, to the glory of God, and the good of men, be the calling ever so base, by the doing whereof, in faith and obedience, he may get sure testimony of his election.” 1:242.

⁹² Perkins, *Works*, 1:237–38; 10:60.

comparing the personal works in the believer's particular calling to those corporate works of the general calling that are "directly" commanded by God.⁹³ He does not mean that "indifferent" works are irrelevant, but that they may apply to one believer and not to another.⁹⁴

Moreover, the nature of these indifferent works exists within the compass of our particular callings, which "the Holy Spirit teaches us that we must search what are the proper works of our own callings, and then afterwards do them."⁹⁵ Therefore, "we must learn, that every action of a man's lawful calling, done in obedience to God, for the good of men, is a good work before God."⁹⁶ It is the right use of every calling that makes its works "good."⁹⁷

To the contrary, Perkins speaks of those works that are performed by someone who has entered a calling without divine sanction.⁹⁸ He asks, "Are these works null?" Two things are to be considered. First, a fault in the actual work makes it null. Second, a fault in the worker does not make the work null. For example, the work of baptism is not rendered null because the minister did not rightly enter the calling. However, the worker is null because of his disobedience. This distinction is significant. The individual who indiscriminately chooses his calling without regard for his God-given gifts and affections,

⁹³ Speaking directly about the particular calling, he says that "Every instinct of God's Spirit in the conscience of the doer, has the force of a particular commandment." He adds, "The Spirit moves men to good works, and this motion of the Spirit, is in and by the Word of God." Perkins, *Works*, 1:234–35.

⁹⁴ This relates to the first part of Perkins's definition of a particular calling, "*A certain kind of life*" (italics added), our works are particular to us as individuals.

⁹⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:73. He references 1 Thessalonians 4:11 and 1 Peter 4:15. This is the first property of good works, that they be "proper" or associated with our calling and not another man's calling, thus we must search to identify them correctly. Perkins illustrates this point with John 21:19–22, where Jesus told Peter to follow him, but Peter asked, "What about John?" Perkins accuses Peter of "little regarding his own duty," due to "a kind of curiosity." Perkins, *Works*, 10:73.

⁹⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 1:238.

⁹⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:60.

⁹⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:75–77.

makes a bad entrance for which he will be held accountable, unless he repents.⁹⁹

However, God remains sovereign over those works that are done in disobedience. By God's grace, the recipient of the work is not penalized for the worker's sin.

Next, Perkins discusses the end of "good works," which "is threefold."¹⁰⁰ First, concerning God—good works serve to sanctify us, and they evince our reverence, obedience, and thankfulness to Him. "True thankfulness stands in obedience, and our obedience is shown by doing good works."¹⁰¹ Second, concerning ourselves—good works testify to "our faith," confirm our position in Christ and "title to all His benefits," and make us "answerable to our holy calling" whereby we become recipients of the "sweet promises" that Scripture makes to those who obey.¹⁰² Third, concerning others—good works "win some to Christ, encourage believers in the obedience of the truth, and prevent offences, whereby many are drawn back."¹⁰³

Good works follow "saving faith in Christ," and they are "the way of Christ." This means that those who are in Christ necessarily follow His ways.¹⁰⁴ Perkins says, "For where the fire of grace is, there it cannot but burn; and where the water of life is, it cannot but flow and send out the streams thereof, in good works."¹⁰⁵ And so, every

⁹⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:76.

¹⁰⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 1:240. See also J. Stephen Yuille, *Living Blessedly Forever: The Sermon on the Mount and the Puritan Piety of William Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), chap. 4, "The Light of the World," para. 2, Kindle.

¹⁰¹ Perkins, *Works*, 1:240.

¹⁰² Perkins, *Works*, 1:241. Perkins states, "For faith and good works are the fruits and effects of God's election." *Works*, 5:332. He adds, "The care and endeavor to do good works," is a proof of election, but this proof is not for "God (for it was sure unto Him before the foundation of the world), but for ourselves and for our neighbors." *Works*, 8:633.

¹⁰³ Perkins, *Works*, 1:241. Perkins contends, "For a papist doing a good work, according to the rules of their religion, does it to satisfy God's justice, for the temporal punishment of his sins, and to merit heaven by it, and so errs quite from the right end of a good work, respecting therein, his own good, and nothing at all the good of others." *Works*, 1:237.

¹⁰⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 1:239. Perkins repeatedly cites 2 Peter 1:10, "Give all diligence to make our election sure." And he insists that the believer's effort begins with God's grace.

¹⁰⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 1:240.

believer must emulate the “virtues of Him that has called him (1 Peter 2:9).”¹⁰⁶ To that end, Perkins teaches that good works must be done in holiness and constancy.¹⁰⁷

Holiness

To sanctify the works of our callings, Perkins recommends Scripture and prayer.¹⁰⁸ Based on Colossians 3:17,¹⁰⁹ praying for the Father’s blessing should precede all our works; that is, “when we enterprise any business” of our callings, “either in speech or action,” we must pray “for ability and good success.”¹¹⁰ We should also offer prayers of thanksgiving for God’s blessings upon the labors of our callings.¹¹¹

Regarding God’s Word, Perkins relays that one morning Christ told Peter to cast his net on the other side of the boat for a catch. After a night of failed attempts, Peter replied, “Lord, at thy word I will do it.” “And every man,” says Perkins, “should daily say thus much in his place, that he will do the works of his calling at God’s commandment and according to His Word.”¹¹² Thus, to be skillful in the works of our callings, God’s Word “must be our rule and square.”¹¹³ By “skillful,” Perkins means both

¹⁰⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 1:241.

¹⁰⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:77–100.

¹⁰⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:80–93.

¹⁰⁹ “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God.” Perkins, *Works*, 10:93.

¹¹⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:93; 1:501. For more on prayer, see 1:405–504; 2:257–64; 5:417–79. See also Yuille, *Living Blessedly*, chap. 6. Perkins commends a common practice of the then English family. “Children were taught to pray, ‘Father, I pray you, bless me. Mother, I pray you, bless me.’” He argues, “Well, God’s church is His family, and men who live therein are the children of God.” Perkins, *Works*, 10:93. His point is that, therefore, we should pray for the Father’s blessings over the works of our callings.

¹¹¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:93.

¹¹² Perkins, *Works*, 10:80. See Luke 5:5.

¹¹³ Perkins, *Works*, 4:322; 10:80. See also 7:66. For more on Scripture, see 1:237–38; 6:96–97; 8:236–49. Perkins personally modeled this reliance on Scripture. According to Ballitch, Perkins was known to “faithfully labor in his duties,” because Scripture was his guide. “Scripture,” 156, 212. Admittedly, Perkins used Scripture to synthesize all of life. According to Theodore Bozeman, this resulted in an “exacting inward analysis.” Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisionist Strain: Disciplinary Religion & Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 84. Perkins endeavored to be an expert in God’s Word via the constant practice of study, meditation, and

technical proficiency and biblical wisdom whereby we know which works to do and the virtuous way to do them.¹¹⁴ For holiness, Scripture declares that faith and love should animate our works, while covetousness and injustice should be absent from all that we do.¹¹⁵

Faith. When it comes to explaining how works are done in faith, Perkins appeals to Noah's example. When he was called, "we must not only understand justifying faith, but withal another particular faith flowing from it, whereby he was persuaded that the building of the ark was a work acceptable unto God, and that he should find a blessing therein [Heb. 11:7]."¹¹⁶ This "particular faith" flows from "justifying faith."¹¹⁷ By it, those who obey in the works of their calling behold "the blessing and goodness of God," even amid troubles and hardships.¹¹⁸

memorization. He expressed that his "inward experience is a commentary unto him," for in his heart, the Holy Spirit "seals up the certainty of God's Word." Perkins, *Works*, 8:529, 241. Eloquently, he adds, "It is a blessed thing to have the kingdom of God [Scripture] erected in our hearts." *Works*, 10:25.

¹¹⁴ In Perkins's estimation, the skill necessary to use our gifts and abilities virtuously is a work of God's grace. Perkins, *Works*, 2:21–22. Shaw affirms that the grace of sanctification is divine initiative combined with human response, thereby, "Virtue must adorn the actions" of our callings. Mark R. Shaw, "The Marrow of Practical Divinity: A Study in the Theology of William Perkins" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1981), 217. Shaw, "Drama in the Meeting House: The Concept of Conversion in the Theology of William Perkins," *Westminster Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 70.

¹¹⁵ Perkins states that "the virtues which the Word of God requires of us in the practice of our callings are many, but especially two: faith and love." Perkins, *Works*, 10:91. See also W. B. Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 145–46. When it comes to our attitudes toward serving others, Perkins emphasizes virtue. He explains that "all good works done by us proceed from the virtue and merit of Christ crucified. He is the cause of them in us, and we are the causes of them in and by Him." Perkins, *Works*, 9:16. For more on virtues, see *The Third Book of The Cases of Conscience*, where he discusses prudence, clemency, temperance, liberality, justice, and fortitude. 8:359–440. See also 1:400–3.

¹¹⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:91.

¹¹⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:91. See also 1:400–1; 8:528–29. Like Perkins, Chad Burchett affirms, "For the Puritans, the most honorable of pursuits was vanity without the invigorating, purpose-imbuing power of faith motivating the endeavor." Chad Burchett, "Serious Joy: The Puritan Heritage of Leisure," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 10, no. 2 (July 2018): 222. Charles George agrees, "to be truly God's work the calling must be pursued in faith, by faith, and for faith." Charles H. George and Katherine George, "English Protestant Economic Theory: The World and Its Callings," in *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation, 1570–1640* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 135.

¹¹⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:92.

Faith is “preserved” by knowing and applying Scripture to our lives.¹¹⁹ The acts of our callings must be commanded, or at least approved, by Scripture.¹²⁰ Also, there must be a “a particular word,” either directly stated or generally gathered from Scripture, in which God promises to bless the works of our callings. “And everyone must labor in his place for knowledge of both [of] these.”¹²¹ The Holy Spirit helps us, for “every instinct of God’s Spirit in the conscience of the doer, has the force of a particular commandment.”¹²²

Perkins points out that towns and corporations establish ordinances and guidelines which people follow. If they obey in these circumstances, “shall they not much more yield themselves to the commandments of God, and walk in their callings according to them?”¹²³ Therefore, works done within the compass of our callings are done in faith, whereas works outside the compass of our calling are not necessary (for us) and must be “left undone.”¹²⁴

Love. Works done in love bear two marks. First, they are motivated by a desire for the “honor, praise, and glory of God.”¹²⁵ Those who choose themselves over God and perform “good works for false ends, as to be seen of men, and to be praised of men” are guilty of “gross hypocrisy,” for hereby “the honor due to God is taken from Him and given to men.”¹²⁶ In marked contrast, sound doctrine leads to love “out of a pure

¹¹⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 8:149.

¹²⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:91. Here, he elaborates on his explanation (previously mentioned) about works that are “indifferent.”

¹²¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:91.

¹²² Perkins, *Works*, 1:234.

¹²³ Perkins, *Works*, 10:92. See also 1:454.

¹²⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 8:367.

¹²⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:92. Perkins references 2 Corinthians 5:14: “The love of Christ constrains me.” See also 1:401.

¹²⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 1:398. Perkins elaborates on this point in his teachings on “humility” and “simplicity.” See 1:401–03.

heart.”¹²⁷

Second, works done in love are for the benefit of the church, commonwealth, and family.¹²⁸ Perkins rejects an adage that was popular in his day: “Every man for himself and God for us all.” Such a person does the works of his calling for his “private benefit,” which is the practice of those who love themselves and neglect the good of others.¹²⁹ In sum, it is “the hand of faith” that keeps believers within the compass of their callings and “stays the mind upon the Word of God,” while “the hand of love reaches out itself to others in duties of love toward God and man.”¹³⁰

Covetousness. Perkins warns against the sin of covetousness more than any other vice.¹³¹ Based on the tenth commandment, he states that it “is a more permanent thought that tickles the mind with some inward joy.”¹³² Because covetousness dominates the mind, it impedes the entrance of God’s Word. Perkins believes that it draws the believer to “neglect or condemn Scripture,” which, in addition to being the means to sanctify our works, is “the most sufficient weapon” we have to overcome the devil and his temptations.¹³³ Because of covetousness, the believer is in a vulnerable position. This leads Perkins to a lengthy discussion of the nature of this sin and the remedies for combatting it.

Covetousness is often portrayed as a somewhat personal and trivial sin. It is

¹²⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 2:349.

¹²⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:93. See Galatians 5:13.

¹²⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:93.

¹³⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:92. See also Robert S. Michaelsen, “Changes in the Puritan Concept of Calling or Vocation,” *The New England Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (September 1953): 324.

¹³¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:81–88. His work, *A Fruitful Dialogue Concerning the End of the World* (1587), was written against “covetous hording up of corn.” Perkins, *Works*, 6:445–74. For more on covetousness, see 1:523ff.; 6:133, 149–50; 9:93; Yuille, *Living Blessedly*, chap. 7; Michaelsen, “Calling,” 321–22.

¹³² Perkins, *Works*, 6:149.

¹³³ Perkins, *Works*, 1:114.

often camouflaged as “thriftiness and carefulness.” Perkins attributes this to our “common practice” of making “great sins little sins, and little sins no sin.”¹³⁴ He contends that covetousness “is one of the head and master sins of the world, and from it a sea of evils flows both into [the] church and commonwealth. So vile a sin, let such as are placed in any calling take heed of it, and be careful lest it take place in our hearts and draw them to many other evils.”¹³⁵ Perkins explains that Judas, at first “one of Christ’s own family,” let covetousness “prevail within his own heart” and, as a result, he experienced a terrible death.¹³⁶ A similar end will come to those who “nourish this sin,” warns Perkins, even though they appear knowledgeable, zealous, and commendable.¹³⁷

Ultimately, covetousness is Satan’s device for inciting “such thoughts and cares that show distrust in God.”¹³⁸ It occurs when we lack contentment and are overcome by desire. “When the heart swells with [a] desire of riches, all the graces of God consume and fade away, and we load ourselves with burdens.”¹³⁹ These burdens cloud a proper perception of God and others. We must seek to be content based on God’s particular call, and we must learn to honor His providence in our lives and in the lives of our neighbors; that is, we must strive to “see God’s goodness” and “labor to make Him

¹³⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 9:226. Perkins warns, we should “account no sin light or small. ‘A little leaven does leaven the whole lump’ (Gal. 5:9). ‘For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord’ (Rom. 6:23),” and “Sins are so enfolded one in another that he which commits one is not free from any other.” *Works*, 6:200; 1:399.

¹³⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:81. He identifies “unbelief” as a “mother sin,” “whence all other sins arise, yet covetousness also is a root in another respect, because as the root gives sap and nourishment to all the branches, so does covetousness to every other sin whatsoever” (81). In line with Perkins’s view, Francis Schaeffer offers a contemporary reflection on covetousness. “Do I love my neighbor as myself, or do I covet against my neighbor: Do I desire what he has and envy him for his gifts, possessions, or leadership? Would I secretly rejoice if he lost his position of leadership, or be wretched inwardly if he gained recognition that I do not receive? When there is ‘coveting’ there is no purity.” Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality: How to Live for Jesus Moment by Moment* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011), “Introduction,” para. 20, Kindle.

¹³⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:81.

¹³⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:81.

¹³⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 1:118–19.

¹³⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:81–82.

our portion.”¹⁴⁰

To do this, Perkins suggests “restraining our affections from the world.”¹⁴¹ The act of restraint includes the decision to seek only what is necessary for our lives which in essence is moderating our desires. In addition, we must “turn our affections from the world, which requires two things.” First, we must ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten the “eyes of our minds,” which will “turn our hearts from the love of this present world (Eph. 1:18).” Second, we must maintain a humble view of our position in Christ, which will rightly order our affections.¹⁴² Perkins says,

We must endeavor to have in our hearts a sense and feeling of the want of Christ, and to see our damnable estate in ourselves, and how greatly we stand in need of the blood of Christ. For the consideration of our own misery in ourselves, and a lively sense of the need we have of Christ, will make us hunger after Him and His righteousness above all things in the world. We find by experience, that many are endued with good gifts of knowledge, of joy in the Word of God, of zeal, etc., who nevertheless in their callings be overcome with this soul sin of covetousness: and the reason is, because they were never thoroughly touched with any sense or feeling of the need they had of Christ. Their hearts are dead in sin and corruption, they never knew the vileness of their natures.¹⁴³

Perkins’s directive to meditate on our effectual call (the general calling) sits within a larger context—namely, the performance of the works of our callings in holiness while mortifying covetousness. Such meditation is primarily for believers because it (1) encourages us not take our salvation for granted, (2) cultivates our repentance, and (3) facilitates our cooperation with the Holy Spirit’s work of sanctification, whereby He turns our affections toward better things. In this way, it stirs us up to do good works, not for selfish reasons but for God’s glory and others’ good.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 10:82–83.

¹⁴¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:82.

¹⁴² Perkins, *Works*, 10:86–87.

¹⁴³ Perkins, *Works*, 10:87.

¹⁴⁴ Ian Breward interprets this passage in terms of justification. He says, “When men performed their callings in this way [per Perkins’s directions], they would soon be driven to realise their inability to please God. Only through faith in him could men gain the additional assurance that their calling

Injustice. The second vice is injustice.¹⁴⁵ As in the case of covetousness, no one is immune from the temptation to act unjustly thereby abusing “their callings to the hurt and hindrance of others, either publicly or privately [Luke 19:8; Micah 7:2].”¹⁴⁶ In fact, the two vices are connected. According to Perkins, if a man tends toward coveting, the devil “will provoke him to fraud and oppression.”¹⁴⁷ Perkins issues warnings to officials, pastors, lawyers, physicians, merchants, tradesmen, landlords, husbandmen, printers, and booksellers. His appraisal of unjust acts is equally comprehensive: fraud, violence, bribery, exorbitant fees and prices, false weights and false measures, lying, hoarding, and exploiting the poor.¹⁴⁸

The church is obliged to “walk unblameably in the midst of a crooked generation [Phil. 2:15].”¹⁴⁹ Thus, we must examine the works of our callings, forsake unjust acts for which “we shall be judged,” and strive to please God in every work.¹⁵⁰ Perkins remarks, “So long as we practice injustice in our particular calling, all our worship and service of God is an abomination unto the Lord.”¹⁵¹

In sum, holiness in the works of our callings proceeds from God’s Word and

was acceptable to God, ‘and that he will give a blessing unto them for Christs sake.’” “The Life and Theology,” 286.

¹⁴⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:88–91.

¹⁴⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:88–89. Perkins laments that his nation is guilty of “evil dealing in bargaining between man and man. How hard a thing it is to find an honest, simple, plain dealing man.” *Works*, 9:110.

¹⁴⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 1:107.

¹⁴⁸ The virtue of justice informs Perkins’s idea of caring for the poor. Perkins, *Works*, 1:393. For a contrary opinion of Perkins’s view of poverty see Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the 17th Century* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1965), 224ff.

¹⁴⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:89.

¹⁵⁰ Perkins, 10:90–91. “Now then, we must enter into examination of all the works of our callings, and finding what stands not with equity and injustice [justice in the original], we are to forsake it. See William Perkins, *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the University of Cambridge, M. W. Perkins*, vol. 1 (London: John Legatt, 1626), 771.

¹⁵¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:90.

prayer, resulting in sanctified works that are increasingly performed in faith and love and progressively free of covetousness and injustice.

Constancy

Next, Perkins teaches that the works of our calling should be characterized by constancy, which is “nothing else but a perseverance in good duties.”¹⁵² It is not uncommon for people to “like the callings of other men better than their own,” and thus alter their course. However, the “Holy Spirit commands us to continue in our duties.”¹⁵³ Perkins recognizes three challenges to our pursuit of such constancy.

The first is ambition. This vice is stirred up in a man’s heart by the “special practice of the devil.”¹⁵⁴ Ambition results from a lack of contentment and “a natural self-love,” whereby man thinks too highly of himself and, therefore, “seeks a higher place and a better estate.”¹⁵⁵ If a man is disposed toward ambition, Perkins warns, the devil “will puff him up with pride and vainglory.”¹⁵⁶ Vanity and worldly desires will dominate a man to the degree that he “cannot think or desire to please God,” but rather he is driven to “rash enterprises” that are beyond his own ability and the “measure of faith” God has given him.¹⁵⁷

Ambition and its contrary, diligence, desire different objects. Ambition focuses

¹⁵² Perkins, *Works*, 10:94–100.

¹⁵³ Perkins, *Works*, 10:94.

¹⁵⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 1:144.

¹⁵⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:94. Perkins cites the biblical examples of Adam, Eve, and Absalom. See also *Works*, 9:222.

¹⁵⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 1:107. Vainglory, says Perkins, “is a branch of pride, which makes men to refer all they have or can do to their own private glory and advancement.” *Works*, 2:392.

¹⁵⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 2:38; 8:366. See also 8:93, 603; Joel R. Beeke, “William Perkins and His Greatest Case of Conscience: ‘How a Man May Know Whether He Be the Child of God, or No,’” *Calvin Theological Journal* 41, no. 2 (2006): 275; Louis B. Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Published for the Folger Shakespeare Library by Cornell University Press, 1958), 184. Chaderton, Perkins’s mentor, believed that “pompous pride and cursed ambition” were the enemies “to all sincerity, good order, and true religion.” Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 35.

on worldly pursuits, whereas diligence pursues what is best in God's sight. In his third rule for choosing a vocation, Perkins says that those who are suited for more than one calling must choose the best calling.¹⁵⁸ Louis Wright inaccurately concludes that "ambition is not discouraged, for it is a duty to better one's condition if God provides the means."¹⁵⁹ For Perkins, however, the "best" calling is the one that most glorifies God and best contributes to the common good.

It is a godly desire to do the works of our callings with excellence, thereby honoring God and serving others well.¹⁶⁰ Perkins calls this virtue "diligence." He is not opposed to the pursuit of upward mobility as long as it is based on God's providence and the believer's diligent labor in his calling. After all, God rewards those "who employ their gifts" with diligence by giving them more.¹⁶¹

The second challenge to constancy is envy. It is a "pining away of the heart when men see others placed in better callings and conditions than themselves."¹⁶² Perkins charges the high priests with envy because they hated Christ for who He was and what He did.¹⁶³ "Envy is a compound of carnal grief and hatred. For it makes men grieve and repine at the good things of others, and to hate the good things themselves." As a result, it provokes "unjust anger."¹⁶⁴ Perkins laments over the fact that anyone who does good in the name of their religion is deemed a hypocrite and their religion is dismissed as

¹⁵⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:63.

¹⁵⁹ Wright, *Middle-Class Culture*, 177.

¹⁶⁰ Perkins warns against extreme efforts which lend toward perfectionism. He says, "If we cannot do the good things that we desire in that exquisite manner that we would, we must content ourselves with the mean." Perkins, *Works*, 8:368. This means that we must be content with doing less if we know that doing more is unrealistic and extreme and likely to result in failure or offense.

¹⁶¹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:48.

¹⁶² Perkins, *Works*, 10:95. See also 6:114.

¹⁶³ Matthew 27:18.

¹⁶⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 2:378; 8:384.

hypocrisy, but he concludes that this is “the censure of envy.”¹⁶⁵

To those who envy others for their callings, Perkins offers four words of counsel. First, they should admire those who fear God. Second, they should admire the gifts and graces that God has bestowed on people, even “enemies.”¹⁶⁶ Third, they should recognize that the best callings (as perceived by man) are ordained by God not for private gain but for the common good. Fourth, they should remember that the “greatest callings have the greatest charges,” and that those who hold them will give the greatest account to God.¹⁶⁷

The third challenge to constancy is impatience.¹⁶⁸ “It is a disquietness of mind,” that arises from the daily troubles experienced in our calling, “especially when men are not able to bear them, nor to brook [endure] the injuries that are commonly done unto them in word or deed.”¹⁶⁹ In times of distress, we are often provoked “to impatience, distrust, and murmuring against God” and, therefore, “use unlawful means to help” ourselves.¹⁷⁰ For instance, “if a man is impatient with poverty,” the devil will implant the notion of stealing.¹⁷¹

For this reason, like Christ in the wilderness, we must be prepared for the next temptation. This will “prevent much impatience” and provide peace for our souls.¹⁷² Appealing to Matthew 5:5, Perkins commends meekness, which is “a gift of God’s Spirit,

¹⁶⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 2:378.

¹⁶⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 2:378.

¹⁶⁷ Perkins, *Works*, 10:95.

¹⁶⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:95–96.

¹⁶⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 10:95.

¹⁷⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 1:480.

¹⁷¹ Perkins, *Works*, 1:107.

¹⁷² Perkins, *Works*, 1:121.

whereby a man doth moderate his affection of anger, and bridle in himself impatience.”¹⁷³

Perkins prescribes a series of remedies to overcome these three challenges to constancy (ambition, envy, and impatience). The first is monetary assistance (such as free loans, debt forgiveness, etc.) for those diligent laborers who suffer hardship at the hands of the unjust.¹⁷⁴ The second remedy is rest, including the weekly observance of the Sabbath. It is “the means to begin, continue, and increase both knowledge and grace.”¹⁷⁵ The third remedy is to change one’s calling when persistent problems pose a threat to long-term endurance.¹⁷⁶ Such a change must proceed from a desire to benefit the individual and contribute to the common good.¹⁷⁷ Regarding 1 Corinthians 7:20, Perkins

¹⁷³ Perkins, *Works*, 1:188; Yuille, *Living Blessedly*, chap. 3, “Blessed are the Meek,” para. 1.

¹⁷⁴ Perkins, *Works*, 10:96.

¹⁷⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:97. For more on Sabbath, see 5:67–68; 6:98–103; 8:344–58; 9:144. Regarding rest, Perkins commends the moderate use of leisure. Recreations and vacations help a person refresh in mind and body in order to return to the works of a particular calling with renewed vigor. Perkins, *Works*, 10:97. See also 4:89; 6:122–23; 8:421. Consistent with Perkins’s view, Burchett says that the Puritans did not denounce leisure. Leisure activities were not ends in themselves, but to serve a greater “end, which is devotion to a sovereign God through work.” “Serious Joy,” 221. See also Peter J. Beale, “Sanctifying the Outer Life,” in *Aspects of Sanctification: Being Papers Read at the 1981 Conference* (London: Westminster Conference, 1981): 74. For more on the Puritan view of recreation, see Paul Heintzman, *Leisure and Spirituality: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015); Leland Ryken, *Redeeming the Time: A Christian Approach to Work and Leisure* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995).

¹⁷⁶ Perkins, *Works*, 10:99–100.

¹⁷⁷ Perkins’s view closely resembles Calvin’s. See John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 248–49. “Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called” (1 Cor 7:20, ESV). The issue, for Perkins and the Reformers alike, is the motive for change. Luther is misinterpreted as rigid because of his ideas on the importance of remaining within one’s station. See Miroslav Volf, “Work, Spirit, and New Creation,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 41, no. 1 (2017): 73–74; R. Paul Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity: Vocation, Work and Ministry in a Biblical Perspective* (Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 1999), 79; Paul Marshall, *A Kind of Life Imposed on Man: Vocation and Social Order from Tyndale to Locke* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 25. Perkins refers to 1 Cor 7:20 in the opening of his treatise. Marshall says that Perkins’s static concept of change contradicts his idea of choosing a vocation based on gifts and affections. He concludes that Perkins’s teaching is ambiguous (43). As for 1 Cor. 7:17, 20, according to Stevens, “This is the text the Reformers, and particularly the Puritans made much of, too much in fact. Luther translated *klesis* as *Beruf* (meaning ‘station’) and from this, along with Calvin, developed the idea of a ‘worldly calling’.” *The Abolition of the Laity*, 73. G. D. Fee sheds light on these verses, which is typical of what the Reformers and Perkins believed. “The concept of call is first of all a way of describing Christian conversion. God calls people to be “in Christ” (1:9). That call came to a person in a given social setting. This is the clear emphasis in all the verbs in this passage, especially as it is associated with various social options (vv. 18 [twice], 21, 22 [twice]). These two realities are pressed theologically in various ways: a) God’s call to Christ that comes in these various settings renders the settings themselves irrelevant (vv. 18–19, 22). b) Because of this, change is not necessary; indeed, one may live out the Christian life in whatever setting that call took place. c) On the other hand, precisely because the settings are irrelevant, if

explains that it is not “the apostle’s meaning to bar men to divert from this or that calling, but he gives them an item to keep them from changing upon every light conceit and every sudden occasion.”¹⁷⁸ In the end, the duties of our callings and associated sufferings have been approved by God; therefore, we can proceed with “courage and constancy.”¹⁷⁹

Conclusion

As Perkins states, “Faith in the heart is a light, and works are the shining of the light (Matt. 5:16).”¹⁸⁰ To that end, we “must practice the duties of the general calling in the particular, so as though they are two distinct in nature, yet they may be both one in use and practice.”¹⁸¹ God’s purpose in saving us is realized through the unity of these two callings. Perkins is so convinced of this that he affirms that our degrees of glory will depend upon the “diverse measures of gifts and graces” God has given us and our “employance of them” for His glory and the building up of the church.¹⁸² By abiding within the compass of our particular calling and performing their good works, our sanctification is sure. Finally, in heaven, we will no longer be troubled by “unbelief, ambition, envy, lusts, or corrupt affections,” instead, we will be “perfect in every way.”¹⁸³

change does take place, that too is irrelevant. What one is not to do is to seek change as though it had religious significance, which it does not. d). Although he comes very close to seeing the setting in which one is called as “calling” itself, he never quite makes that jump. At most “calling” refers to the circumstances in which the calling took place. That does not mean that one is forever locked into that setting. Rather, Paul means that by calling a person within a given situation, that situation itself is taken up in the call and thus sanctified to him or her.” G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 309–10.

¹⁷⁸ Perkins, *Works*, 10:99.

¹⁷⁹ Perkins, *Works*, 5:354–55; 10:96.

¹⁸⁰ Perkins, *Works*, 2:48. “One of the chiefest uses of good works, that by them, not as by causes, but as by effects of predestination and faith, both we, and also our neighbors, are certified of our election, and of our salvation too.” Perkins, *Works*, 8:633.

¹⁸¹ Perkins, *Works*, 8:149.

¹⁸² Perkins, *Works*, 5:412.

¹⁸³ Perkins, *Works*, 5:408.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

William Perkins believed that in eternity God chose certain people for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Since salvation is from God, it cannot be earned, and it cannot be lost. We are not saved on account of our good works, but to do good works. It stands to reason, then, that in eternity God also designated the context in which we should perform these good works, namely, our particular calling, which Perkins describes as “a certain kind of life, ordained and imposed on man by God for the common good.” God’s imposition does not constrain human will, but points to His wisdom and good pleasure, which, Perkins believes, are the manifestation of “His fatherly care over us” whereby He employs us in His service according to our diverse vocations “for our good.”¹ For this reason, as in the case of predestination, Perkins viewed vocation as a comforting and encouraging doctrine. In short, God’s grace is most evident in our good works in the context of our vocations.

Perkins was determined to correct the false notion that people could be saved while living as they pleased. Due to the tendency for some to disconnect practice from belief, Perkins resolved to teach that the general and particular callings always work together. Justification and sanctification cannot be separated, as both are works of God’s grace in us and essential to His plan of redemption. Salvation is the beginning of life eternal. With the Holy Spirit’s assistance, that salvation is expressed at present in holy living as we obey God in our particular calling. Perkins consistently teaches this

¹ William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020), 10:58.

throughout his works. A proper response to God, then, is to join our general and particular callings by faithfully performing good works for His glory. This is God's primary means of sanctifying us. In the context of our callings, we endeavor by faith to learn and apply the promises and benefits of Christ.

Our choice of vocation should accord with our inward gifts and outward conditions. Our strengths in the performance of our vocation contribute to the good of family, church, and commonwealth, whereas our weaknesses are compensated for by others who do the works of their callings. Perkins emphasizes that even menial callings are by God's design. Therefore, we should view the callings of others without prejudice. To judge things that are indifferent as "high" or "low" undermines God's design. All callings performed in faith and obedience, honor God. A calling is not an end in itself, but a means to sustain the whole of society.

We must discern the works of our callings and strive to do them in holiness and constancy. Scripture and prayer sanctify our works by empowering us to pursue virtues and avoid vices. Conversely, our inclination to separate our works from our faith compounds when desires for recognition, wealth, power, and prestige lure us to commit acts of covetousness, injustice, ambition, envy, and impatience. Related to this, Perkins warns that it is our "practice" to make "great sins little sins, and little sins no sin."² For this reason, he suggests that we consider the end in advance by routinely taking inventory of our obedience in the works our callings. To be sure, each of us will give an account of how we managed our gifts, affections, and estates in the execution of our works.

While emphasizing the believer's practice, Perkins makes it clear that God's grace is the fountain of all things. It is the cause of "election," "vocation (the general call)," "faith," "justification," "love," "every good inclination," "every good work (the particular call)," and "life everlasting." In addition, it is "the foundation of humility, for it

² Perkins, *Works*, 9:226.

teaches us to ascribe all to grace and nothing to ourselves.”³

Perkins’s Legacy

A case study will be helpful in assessing the lasting influence of Perkins’s theology of vocation. Historian Paul Seaver recounts the life of Nehemiah Wallington (1598–1658) in *Wallington’s World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London*.⁴ Wallington was an ordinary tradesman who was born a few years before Perkins’s death. His “personal papers” reflect Perkins’s teaching regarding the believer’s “particular calling.”⁵

Known as “an indulgent father and a loving husband,” Wallington was like his God, whom he esteemed as “a loving and kind Father.”⁶ He produced “31 articles” for his family and himself for “the reforming of our lives.”⁷ These were signed by his wife, his apprentice, his three servants, and himself. Following in his father’s footsteps, Wallington became a wood-turner and opened a shop in 1620, which he operated for 38 years until his death. During these years, he struggled through plagues, civil war, and deep sorrow

³ Perkins, *Works*, 2:21–22.

⁴ Paul S. Seaver, *Wallington’s World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985). Insight into Perkins’s influence on Wallington is also illustrated by Robert M. Oswald III in “Death, Piety, and Social Engagement in the Life of the Seventeenth Century London Artisan, Nehemiah Wallington” (PhD diss., The University of Edinburgh, 2011).

⁵ Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 112–42. Seaver says that “more than 2,600 pages of personal papers—memoirs, religious reflections, political reportage, letters, and a spiritual diary—have survived, and these make his life, and even more this thought and attitudes, more accessible than those of any other artisan of his time.” *Wallington’s World*, 2. In total, Wallington wrote 50 volumes—some 20,000 pages at least, which, Seaver claims, “was a match for William Perkins.” *Wallington’s World*, 2, 210n9. Robert Oswald attributes Wallington’s method for “commonplace” writing to Perkins’s instruction. “Nehemiah Wallington,” 76–77. Oswald adds that Wallington references Perkins’s principles directly or indirectly via the teachings of his successors—William Ames, Paul Baynes, and Samuel Ward, to name a few “Nehemiah Wallington,” 41. Wallington also routinely referred to Arthur Dent’s *Plaine Mans Path-Way* (1605) and Robert Hill’s *The Pathway to Prayer and Pietie* (1613).

⁶ Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 75.

⁷ Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 79. Wallington compiled this list after he read William Gouge’s *Of Domestical Duties* (1622). Randall Pederson connects Gouge with the works of Perkins. Randall J. Pederson, *Unity in Diversity: English Puritans and the Puritan Reformation, 1603–1689* (Boston: Brill, 2014), 72. See also Peter J. Beale, “Sanctifying the Outer Life,” in *Aspects of Sanctification: Being Papers Read at the 1981 Conference* (London: Westminster Conference, 1981): 62–77.

due to the early deaths of four of his five children and other family members. In his work he endured extreme inflation and market fluctuations, an apprentice who stole hundreds of pounds from him, deceitful competitors, increasingly restrictive market conditions, and creditors who threatened to call in his debts.

In his personal papers he records his struggle with temptations associated with his work. “I did not take God with me in my selling . . . , but multiplied more words than I need with some lying words. And therefore,” it is a matter of justice “with God that I should lose my customer.”⁸ He identifies the cause of “his periodic bouts of poverty” to his own “idleness and negligence” in his calling. In all these struggles, however, he recognizes that God is seeking to purify him of his “love of the world.”⁹

Wallington views his particular calling as a means to better himself, his family, the church, and the commonwealth, and he believes that someday we will all “give an account of our stewardship.”¹⁰ Those who serve God with diligence and persistence will be rewarded, whereas those who set their hearts on riches will be condemned.¹¹ He was convinced that he was to seek to “glorify God in the place and calling wherein God had set him,” for at the same time “work at one’s calling was in so many instances the chief antidote to sin.”¹² He acknowledges the temptation that is inherent to prosperity, writing,

⁸ Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 131. Seaver says, “The urban world of small tradesmen was threatened by unrestrained economic appetite and entrepreneurial energy” *Wallington’s World*, 135.

⁹ Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 130. Like Perkins’s suggestion to “take account,” Wallington kept a “growing list of articles” that were meant to “help him in his fight against sins such as lust, pride, lying, quarrelsomeness and anger, as well as dullness at worship.” Oswald, “Nehemiah Wallington,” 182–83. Attached to each article was a monetary penalty for failure, that he paid to the poor. For instance, article 49 states: “That I stand not Idle at anytime, nor negligent in my calling, and if I do then to pay to the poor a farthing.” See Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 125. He also catalogued a list of “eighteen remedies for discontent.” *Wallington’s World*, 85.

¹⁰ Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 128. The particular calling was so important that the Wallingtons took in their orphaned nephew to ensure that he entered “a good trade that he is most capable of.” *Wallington’s World*, 84.

¹¹ Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 127. Like Perkins, Wallington saw riches as dangerous because they were “commonly (though not always) unjustly gotten, for it is a hard thing to become rich without injustice.” Perkins, *Works*, 8:389; Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 128, 132–33.

¹² Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 125–26.

“I think that if I had a little more of the world, I could serve God [a] far deal better [But] surely I am deceived, for those natural sins will still remain [and] besides I should grow more proud and earthly minded.”¹³

Seaver observes an “incessant warfare” in Wallington, typical of the “Christian pilgrim on earth.”¹⁴ This battle does not subside this side of heaven, despite one’s age, wisdom, skill, or prosperity. Because of this “considerable tension,” Seaver mistakenly concludes that Wallington’s “life as a tradesman” was unsuccessful and “always something of a burden.”¹⁵ But this is to miss the main point. As Wallington notes, the Lord provided for him and preserved him from every calamity. For his part, he gave praise for the “exceeding great mercy of God.”¹⁶

In sum, Seaver believes that Wallington prioritized his general calling over his particular calling. He says that, for Wallington, “work, though a good, was a subordinate one.”¹⁷ Wallington was devoted to spiritual disciplines because he loved God and because he knew their part in shaping a good attitude and ability in the works of his calling. When he neglected them due to oversleep or overwork (like the “worldly wise-man”),¹⁸ he became “vexed” with himself. However, this does not mean that he disparaged the work of his calling or viewed it as inferior.

In all this, we see Wallington’s affinity with the teaching of William Perkins. Perkins’s theology of vocation provided his fellow countrymen with a much-needed paradigm through which to appreciate the dignity of their work and, therefore, the larger contribution it makes to the good of self, the family, the church, and the commonwealth.

¹³ Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 129. See also 99–100.

¹⁴ Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 137.

¹⁵ Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 138.

¹⁶ Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 124.

¹⁷ Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 126.

¹⁸ Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, 126.

This was a conviction that shaped English society on both sides of the Atlantic and continues to exert an influence on Western society today.

For Further Research

Since the publication of Perkins's pioneering work on vocation, several notable theologians have taken up the subject.¹⁹ An analysis of the issue of continuity and discontinuity between these authors and Perkins would be a valuable area of research. By way of example, Perkins taught that all believers have a particular calling partly due to God's bestowal of gifts. J. I. Packer maintains that a shift occurred in the century after Perkins that limited the discussion of "gifts" to ministry, while "questions about other gifts to other persons were rarely raised."²⁰ A study of this shift (i.e., its reasons and implications) would be important for understanding modern concepts of vocation.

A study of how Perkins's theology of vocation engages our contemporary marketplace would also be profitable. Greg Cochran notes that, due to "many different forces at work in the world," Christians are increasingly required to "suppress their identities on every day but Sunday."²¹ How does Perkins's theology of vocation speak to

¹⁹ John Downname, *A Guide to Godliness; Or a Treatise of a Christian Life* (London: Philemo Stephens and Christopher Meredith, 1629); Thomas Shepard, *Certain Select Cases Resolved: Specially, Tending to the Right Ordering of the Heart, That We May Comfortably Walk with God in Our General and Particular Callings* (London, 1655); George Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling, or, A Treatise of Making Religion Ones Business* (London: R.W. for Dorman Newman, 1668); Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* (London: by Robert White for Nevill Simmons, 1673); Richard Steele, *The Trademan's Calling* (London: Samuel Sprint, 1684); John Cotton, "Christian Calling," in *The Puritans*, ed. Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, Rev. ed., 2 vols (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963); Cotton Mather, "A Christian at His Calling," in *Puritanism and the American Experience*, ed. Michael McGiffert (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1969). See also J. Stephen Yuille, *Puritan Spirituality: The Fear of God in the Affective Theology of George Swinnock* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007); Leland Ryken, "'Some Kind of Life to Which We Are Called of God': The Puritan Doctrine of Vocation," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 22, no. 1 (2018); Beale, "Sanctifying the Outer Life"; Robert S. Michaelsen, "Changes in the Puritan Concept of Calling or Vocation," *The New England Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (September 1953); Louis B. Wright, "William Perkins: Elizabethan Apostle of 'Practical Divinity,'" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1940): 181–83.

²⁰ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 219.

²¹ Gregory C. Cochran, "Spirituality and Our Work," in *Biblical Spirituality*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 268.

this new reality?

Finally, how does an increasingly isolated marketplace (i.e., working from home during a pandemic) alter the purpose of vocation? To what extent is it compatible with Perkins's concept of the common good? There has been an apparent shift in people's attitude toward work. Albert Mohler asks, "Have people across the rich world lost their taste for work?" If so, he adds, "According to Scripture, then, we have lost our taste for being human, being made in the image of God."²² What contribution could Perkins make to this discussion thereby aiding in the re-discovery of a vision for work rooted in God's good purposes for His creation?

These are fascinating questions that merit some careful attention that would undoubtedly prove useful both to church and society.

Contemporary Implications

This naturally leads to a brief consideration of the lasting implications of Perkins's theology of vocation. For starters, the importance of his emphasis on the goodness of all God's works cannot be overstated. Perkins's insistence on unity among the things of God positively impacts his application of theology. In the immediate context, it means that our vocations were in the mind of God before the world began. This infuses work with dignity and instills in us a confidence in how we perceive and perform our daily duties and responsibilities. Moreover, Perkins's theology of vocation bridges the gaps that we often construct between our general calling and our particular calling and between our particular calling and our sanctification.

By implication, we must be careful with the language we employ when speaking of our vocations, so as not to increase these gaps. Bethany Jenkins writes, "This idea of vocational assignment should not be over-spiritualized. As we have seen, our

²² Albert Mohler, "The Economist: Will the Rich World's Worker Deficit Last?" The Briefing (Blog), August 19, 2021, <https://albertmohler.com/2021/08/19/briefing-8-19-21>.

primary calling is to know Christ. Our vocational assignments are merely outgrowths of that calling, which means that knowing Christ is the everyday pursuit that fuels how we exercise our gifts and talents.”²³

Regrettably, many believers devalue their particular calling because they fail to appreciate that personal gifts, abilities, affections, and outward social order are expressions of God’s goodness. Moreover, they do not see these things as means by which they can glorify God. Perkins believed that our vocations are spiritual, for the spiritual life begins at conversion and includes those “good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10).²⁴ Indeed, our particular callings flow from our salvation (inclusive of our continual pursuit of Christian disciplines), and they are the means by which we fulfill the great commandment by serving God and others. Putting a premium on the works of our general calling inevitably devalues the works of our particular calling. If we view them as merely secondary, our purpose wavers, our diligence wanes, and our Christian witness suffers.

By devaluing their particular calling many have become blind to the primary means God uses to transform us. Perkins affirms that it is in the faithful performance of our particular calling, more than in any other “accidental or collateral course,” that we are “renewed in holiness and righteousness.”²⁵ The works of our calling generate all the necessary circumstances (e.g., success, temptation, anxiety, disappointment, criticism,

²³ Bethany L. Jenkins, “What Are We For?” in *The Gospel and Work* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), chap. 1, “Our Vocational Assignments,” para. 5, Kindle. Another author says, “The call to a vocation is a secondary call for the Christian. The primary call of the Christian is to be a Christian.” Cochran, “Spirituality and Work,” 274.

²⁴ Unfortunately, “Christians have become accustomed to think of themselves as having a ‘spiritual life’ which is sharply distinct from the every-day life in the family, and from work and leisure.” Paul Helm, *The Callings: The Gospel in the World* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), x.

²⁵ Perkins, *Works*, 10:243; 6:186. See also 2:293. Zanchius states, “While we have a care to glorify God and to do good works, we will not be conformable to the world in the wickedness of it, neither submit ourselves to our flesh and Satan.” Perkins, *Works*, 8:633.

disagreement, failure, etc.)²⁶ to produce Christlike character in us. We glorify God as we bless others and as we learn to apprehend and apply all the promises and benefits of Christ in the context of our particular calling.

Another implication of Perkins's theology of vocation is the repudiation of the sacred vs. secular dichotomy. A hierarchical view of vocation emerged during the monastic period. The term "vocation" became synonymous with the *vita contemplativa*. Most of the church lived the *vita activa*, laboring in trades or fields. As a result, their work was not included under the banner of vocation. This resulted in a false view of higher (sacred) and lower (secular) roles and responsibilities. Moreover, it tended to empty *the vita activa* of eternal significance. The same tendency exists today. Timothy Keller observes that "many believe there is God's work, and then there is making a living."²⁷ Perkins challenged this false paradigm by insisting that every believer has a calling designed by God, and that every work of our calling (done in faith and obedience for God's glory and the common good) is pleasing to God. Making a living is possible due to our gifts and abilities, which are both God-given. As a result, making a living is God's work and contributes to the individual's well-being and to the common good. Perkins insisted that the particular calling and its associated works encompassed the entirety of life. Thus, everyone (husband, mother, daughter, son, preacher, banker,

²⁶ We know God is always working, then, why would He not work in us and through us during our time at work? On the contrary, the sheer amount time and energy we expend at work cannot be extracted from our spirituality. Gregory C. Cochran provides a contemporary snapshot. "The average worker in the United States is actively on her job for 38.6 hours each week. This number is slightly higher than the OECD average worldwide (36.8 hours per week). Given that there are 168 hours in a week—about forty-nine of which are spent sleeping—most Americans spend roughly one-third of their waking hours at work." "Spirituality and Work," 267. See also Paul Heintzman, *Leisure and Spirituality: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 47.

²⁷ Timothy Keller, "Redefining Work" (The Gospel Coalition's 2013 Faith at Work Post-Conference, Rosen Shingle Creek, Orlando, April 10, 2013), https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/conference_media/redefining-work/. See also Timothy Keller and Katherine Leary Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012). Paul Stevens notes, "With a poor sense of God's purpose and a low sense of the civil vocation Christians today tend to focus on personal ministry and evangelism as the only true expressions of the called life." R. Paul Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity: Vocation, Work and Ministry in a Biblical Perspective* (Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 1999), 82.

scholar, teacher, farmer, judge, etc.) has a part to play. God's creation requires diverse callings for its proper management. As we continue in the good works of our callings, we make a meaningful contribution to the common good.

Finally, the implication of Perkins's view of the doctrine of vocation as comforting is noteworthy. When we perform the good works of our calling, according to our unique gifts and abilities, our service of others becomes a delight. It enables us to persevere in our day-to-day work. A mental shift occurs when we realize that fulfilling God's good design for us is our very best witness to the world. It fuels zeal, enthusiasm, and a sense of fulfillment. In times of adversity, it imparts constancy; in times of prosperity, humility; in times of temptation, fortitude; and in times of leanness, confidence. In this way we are sanctified, and God is glorified. For Perkins, these two are the essence of the spiritual life.

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ABSTRACT

GOD'S IMPOSITION: THE CENTRALITY OF VOCATION IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF WILLIAM PERKINS

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William Perkins (1558–1602) was a significant figure in the post-Reformation Church of England. Contemporary scholars call him the “father of Puritanism” for his pursuit of spiritual reform through preaching and teaching. As a theologian, he is known for his important contribution to the doctrine of predestination, *A Golden Chain*. He also authored numerous practical works meant to guide Christian life. Scholarship concerning his practical works is less available, thus this dissertation contributes to that lacuna specifically concerning his *A Treatise of the Vocations, or Callings of Men, with the Sorts and Kinds of Them, and the Right Use Thereof*.

In terms of spirituality, Perkins was concerned with how Christians respond to God's grace in their daily practice. Vocation, or the personal calling, according to Perkins, is “a certain kind of life, ordained and imposed on man by God for the common good.” In other words, a vocation is designed by God, unique to each Christian, and for the good of the family, church, and commonwealth. A result of God's decree of predestination, the personal calling follows the general calling (salvation). Vocation then is the context in which sanctification occurs, or where spirituality is made evident. This is the essence of Perkins's spirituality: God's grace is most evident through a Christian's obedience in good works in the context of his or her particular calling. This conviction shapes his vision of the Christian life.

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