

History of the Reformation

John Calvin

“The Theologian”

- "I am eager for people to know Calvin not because he was without flaws, or because he was the most influential theologian of the last 500 years (which he was), or because he shaped Western culture (which he did), but because he took the Bible so seriously, and because what he saw on every page was the majesty of God and the glory of Christ“ . . . John Piper
- John Calvin – Giant of the Reformation
 - One of the most respected
 - Theologian of the Reformation, Mission minded, Bible Exegete
 - One of the most hated
 - Restriction of Religious Freedom & Doctrine of Predestination
- The Theologian
 - Melancthon referred to Calvin as “The Theologian” of the Reformation
 - Augustine and Luther were perhaps his superiors in creative thinking; Aquinas in philosophy; but in systematic theology Calvin stands supreme. . . T. H. L .Parker
 - Martin Luther –
 - The “Spark” of the Reformation
 - The one who caused the religious norm to explode
 - Calvin
 - Next generation from Luther
 - Gathers theological strands
 - Institutes of Christian Religion
 - Through 5 editions in his lifetime
 - Coherent, systematic gathering together of the biblical understanding of all of life and its relationship to God
 - Piper – it reads not like a systematic theology, but as a bible commentary which is arranged systematically
- Lasting contributions
 - Preaching
 - Calvin preached over 2,000 sermons
 - Almost all expository exposition of biblical passages
 - Deut – 200 sermons
 - Job – 159 sermons
 - Isaiah – 153 Sermons
 - I Cor – 89 sermons
 - Biblical in substance
 - Apart from the Scripture, the preacher has nothing to say”
 - Sequential and Expository
 - Verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book
 - Simple and pastoral, yet evangelistic and polemic
 - Direct, not wasting words, passionate
 - Always doxological in its conclusion

- **Institutes of the Christian Religion**

- First written to the king of France (1536) to demonstrate that the reformation movement was both orthodox and in accordance with the Church Fathers
- His aim was to give reformed churches everywhere a clear understanding of the doctrines revealed in scripture that should be the foundation of their common faith.
- They were written in Latin so people in every country could read them.
 - Almost immediately, he translated them into French to be used in Geneva
- Final edition in 1559 (pages from the McNeil's English translation)
 - Book I - God the Creator (204 pp)
 - Book II – God the Redeemer in Christ (293 pp)
 - Book III – God the Sanctifier (471 pp)
 - (How we receive the Grace of Christ)
 - Book IV – The Society of Christ (510 pp)
 - (external aids wherein He invites us and holds us)

- **The Majesty of God's Word**

- Beza: “He knew the power of the divine word, that is able to bring down all high thoughts in subjection to the dominion of Christ, and to overcome all principalities and powers.”
- Scriptures were the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, infallible and authoritative
 - Roman Catholic – scripture authoritative because the RC said so
 - Calvin – scripture authoritative because of the internal testimony of the HS, not because of logical and rational arguments
 - John 14:26 – the HS will “teach you all things and will remind you of everything which I said to you”
 - The only way to come to know God is through His Word

- **Doctrine of God**

- Calvin's life and theology could be summed up in the phrase, . . . *Sola Deo Gloria*

- **Glory to Christ**

- The thing [O God] at which I chiefly aimed, and for which I most diligently labored, was, that the glory of thy goodness and justice . . . might shine forth conspicuous, that the virtue and blessings of thy Christ . . . might be fully displayed

- **Justification by grace alone**

- “You see that our righteousness is not in ourselves, but in Christ; that the only way in which we become possessed of it is by being made partakers with Christ, since with him we possess all riches. . . . To declare that we are deemed righteous, solely because the obedience of Christ is imputed to us as if it were our own, is just to place our righteousness in the obedience of Christ.” Institutes, 3.11.23

- **Doctrine of the Holy Spirit**

- Avoided speculation about mysterious features of the Trinity. Considered the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit as settled doctrine. God revealed himself as a Trinitarian God and any other concept was a false God.

- According to Calvin, all positive knowledge of God derives from Scripture, and all truth claims about God must be judged by Scripture. But the authority of Scripture rests on the Holy Spirit, who inspired it, and a valid understanding of Scripture rests on the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.
- Theologian of the Holy Spirit
 - 1st to clearly systematize the biblical teaching of the HS
 - Integrated the doctrine of the HS with other areas of theology
 - Justification
 - Sanctification
 - Methods of grace
 - Knowledge of God
 - He rescued the doctrine of the HS which had been buried in Medieval Scholastic theology
 - Work of the HS in Scripture
- **Salvation of Sinners**
 - Salvation is God’s work in us, not our selecting how we will enjoy eternity
 - The sovereignty of the election of God of sinners
 - The substitutive definiteness of the atonement of Christ
 - The inability of the sinful will to good
 - The creative energy of the saving grace of the Spirit
 - The safety of the redeemed soul in the keeping of its Redeemer
 - B.B.Warfield (1909)
- **Continuity and Discontinuity of the OT/NT**
 - Calvin followed the “Covenant of Grace” argument of Zwingli and Bullinger of Zurich
 - “One Covenant – Different administrations”
 - Institutes 2.10
 - One covenant rather than one eternal purpose of God
- **The Church**
 - Acknowledged the Universal Church
 - The entirety of Book IV of the Institutes
 - “He has instituted pastors and teachers through whose mouths he teaches us; in short, he has omitted nothing whatsoever that might promote a holy agreement in faith and good order among us.” Institutes 4.1.1
 - Concept of the church
 - The Church Militant (visible)
 - Mixed group, elect and non-elect
 - God’s vehicle to promote sanctification
 - Offices – Pastors, Teachers, Elders, Deacons
- **The Sacraments**
 - Sacraments are a means of Grace
 - “Above all, he has instituted the sacraments, which as we know by experience are means more than useful to the nourishment and confirmation of our faith.” Institutes 4.1.1

- “the sacraments have the same office as the Word of God: to offer and set forth Christ to us, and in him the treasures of heavenly grace. But they avail and profit nothing unless received in faith.” Institutes 4.14.17
 - Baptism –
 - The initiatory sacrament bringing one into the Church
 - Infant baptism - Rejected the arguments of the Anabaptists
 - Means of Grace – not *ex opere operato* (works out of Christ’s work)
 - Not a “bare sign”, but neither baptismal regeneration
 - Lord’s Supper
 - “the truth of the thing signified is also present”
 - Spiritually, not literally
- **Church Discipline**
 - Within the church
 - Exclusion from the Eucharist
 - Exclusion from the Church
 - In life outside the church
 - The Elders have a responsibility for assisting people in their day-to-day lives
- **Relationship of the Church to the Secular Authorities**
 - “No one ought to doubt that civil authority is a calling not only holy and lawful before God, but also the most sacred and by far the most honorable of all callings in the whole life of mortal men.” Inst 4.20
 - Calvin submitted to the rule of the City Council
 - Yet felt that the church leaders should guide/ inform the council
 - Reminder that kings and rulers are to be the servants of God
- **The Christian Man in all of life**
 - Honest Labor glorifies God (Protestant Work Ethic)
 - No need for so-called religious disciplines (penance, fasting, asceticism, joining religious communities, etc)
 - God has called every man to his task on earth
 - Business
 - Labor not because of the need for daily bread
 - Not even to support family or ministries
 - Not to gain wealth
 - But to fully perform that which God has called you
 - Credit
 - Medieval context – Christians cannot do usury – only Jews
 - Calvin – biblical opposition to usury was to take advantage of the poor
 - Loans go grow a business was different from loans to a starving man
 - Charity
 - Not just giving spare food, clothes, coins
 - But respecting them and teaching them self-sufficiency
- **Social Responsibilities of the Christian Man**
 - Strong advocate of assistance to the many refugees which flooded into Geneva
 - Calvin advocated almsgiving as a necessary spiritual discipline of believers

- “[H]e has enjoined upon us frugality and temperance, and has forbidden, that anyone should go to excess, taking advantage of his abundance. Let those, then, that have riches, whether they have been left by inheritance, or procured by industry and efforts, consider that their abundance was not intended to be laid out in intemperance or excess, but in relieving the necessities of the brethren.” (commentary on 2 Cor 8:15)
 - The role of deacons was to administer the alms given (Acts 6)
 - Identified by district supervisors
 - Deacons visited, determined need, gave on a short term basis
 - Neither poverty nor riches
 - Help the poor, become a servant if wealthy
 - Live humbly
 - Generosity, tempered with responsibility
- **Summary**
 - Man’s highest pleasure is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever
 - Our salvation is really just the revelation of Jesus Christ
 - Rev 21:23 - “The city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb”
 - The purpose of our salvation (loved by God and rescued by God) is to make much of Him
 - To be sure – we will be glorified, but our glory reflects Christ’s glory, not our own
 - 2 Thess 2:14 – To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - 2 Cor 3:18 – We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.