

## **Discussion Guide for Combined Sessions 12 and 13**

A. **Announcement:**

Dr. Fred de Beer will teach a combined adult Sunday school class on December 20<sup>th</sup>; therefore, the topics scheduled for Session 13 are combined with today's session.

B. **Calvin's Prayer:**

*"Almighty God, Thou didst frame heaven and earth for our sake. Thou didst witness to us through Thy servant Moses that both sun and moon are under us, and their resources we are so to use as if they were our servants. Grant then, by Thy many blessings, we may be lifted up and come to Thy true glory, that we may worship Thee in pure simplicity, and wholly surrender ourselves to Thee. May more and more be kindled to seek after righteousness and strive to glorify Thy name on earth at last coming to that blessed glory prepared for us in heaven by Christ our Lord. Amen."*

C. **Scripture meditation: 1John 1:3** *That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (ESV)*

Calvin's Commentary:

3. *That which we have seen.* He now repeats the third time the words, *seen and heard*, that nothing might be wanting as to the real certainty of his doctrine. And it ought to be carefully noticed, that the heralds of the Gospel chosen by Christ were those who were fit and faithful witnesses of all those things which they were to declare. He also testifies of the feeling of their heart, for he says that he was moved by no other reason to write except to invite those to whom he was writing to the participation of an inestimable good. It hence appears how much care he had for their salvation; which served not a little to induce them to believe; for extremely ungrateful we must be, if we refuse to hear him who wishes to communicate to us a part of that happiness which he has obtained.

He also sets forth the fruit received from the Gospel, even that we are united thereby to God, and to his Son Christ in whom is found the chief good. It was necessary for him to add this second clause, not only that he might represent the doctrine of the Gospel as precious and lovely, but that he might also show that he wished them to be his associates for no other end but to lead them to God, so that they might be all one in him. For the ungodly have also a mutual union between themselves, but it is without God, nay, in order to alienate themselves more and more from God, which is the extreme of all evils. It is, indeed, as it has been stated, our only true happiness, to be received into God's favor, so that we may be really united to him in Christ; of which John speaks in the seventeenth chapter of his gospel.

In short, John declares, that as the apostles were adopted by Christ as brethren, that being gathered into one body, they might together be united to God, so he does the same with other colleagues; though many, they are yet made partakers of this holy and blessed union.

D. ***Charles Spurgeon' opinion of Calvin's commentaries:***

Excerpted from: **Commenting and Commentaries:** Two Lectures, Addressed to the students of The Pastors' College, Metropolitan Tabernacle, by C. H. Spurgeon, President London: Passmore & Alabaster, Paternoster Buildings, 1890. (All rights reserved)

*John Calvin:*

It would not be possible for me too earnestly to press upon you the importance of reading the expositions of that prince among men, John Calvin!<sup>2</sup> I am afraid that scant purses may debar you from their purchase, but if it be possible procure them, and meanwhile, since they are in the College library, use them diligently. I have often felt inclined to cry out with Father Simon, a Roman Catholic, "Calvin possessed a sublime genius", and with Scaliger, "Oh! how well has Calvin reached the meaning of the prophets—no one better." You will find forty-two or more goodly volumes worth their weight in gold. Of all commentators I believe John Calvin to be the most candid. In his expositions he is not always what moderns would call Calvinistic; that is to say, where Scripture maintains the doctrine of predestination and grace he flinches in no degree, but inasmuch as some Scriptures bear the impress of human free action and responsibility, he does not shun to expound their meaning in all fairness and integrity. He was no trimmer and pruner of texts. He gave their meaning as far as he knew it. His honest intention was to translate the Hebrew and the Greek originals as accurately as he possibly could, and then to give the meaning which would naturally be conveyed by such Greek and Hebrew words: he laboured, in fact, to declare, not his own mind upon the Spirit's words, but the mind of the Spirit as couched in those words. Dr. King very truly says of him, "No writer ever dealt more fairly and honestly by the Word of God. He is scrupulously careful to let it speak for itself, and to guard against every tendency of his own mind to put upon it a questionable meaning for the sake of establishing some doctrine which he feels to be important, or some theory, which he is anxious to uphold. This is one of his prime excellences. He will not maintain any doctrine, however orthodox and essential, by a text of Scripture, which to him appears of doubtful application, or of inadequate force. For instance, firmly as he believed the doctrine of the Trinity, he refuses to derive an argument in its favour from the plural form of the name of God in the first chapter of Genesis. It were easy to multiply examples of this kind, which, whether we agree in his conclusion or not, cannot fail to produce the conviction that he is at least an honest commentator, and will not make any passage of Scripture speak more or less than, according to his view, its divine Author intended it to speak."

The edition of John Calvin's works which was issued by the Calvin Translation Society, is greatly enriched by the remarks of the editors, consisting not merely of notes on the Latin of Calvin, and the French translation, or on the text of the original Scriptures, but also of weighty opinions of eminent critics, illustrative manners and customs, and observations of travellers. By the way, gentlemen, what a pity it is that people do not, as a rule, read the notes in the old Puritan books! If you purchase old copies of such writers as Brooks, you will find that the notes in the margin are almost as rich as the books themselves. They are dust of gold, of the same metal as the ingots in the centre of the page. But to return to Calvin. If you needed any confirmatory evidence as to the value of his writings, I might summon a cloud of witnesses, but it will suffice to quote one or two. Here is the opinion of one who is looked upon as his great enemy, namely, Arminius: "Next to the perusal of the Scriptures, which I earnestly inculcate, I exhort my pupils to peruse Calvin's

commentaries, which I extol in loftier terms than Helmich<sup>3</sup> himself; for I affirm that he excels beyond comparison in the interpretation of Scripture, and that his commentaries ought to be more highly valued than all that is handed down to us by the Library of the Fathers; so that I acknowledge him to have possessed above most others, or rather above all other men, what may be called an eminent gift of prophecy.”

Quaint Robert Robinson said of him, “There is no abridging this sententious commentator, and the more I read him, the more does he become a favourite expositor with me.” Holy Baxter wrote, “I know no man since the apostles’ days, whom I value and honour more than Calvin, and whose judgment in all things, one with another, I more esteem and come nearer to.”

[Note: Did you catch the surprising (to me) comment about Arminius’s opinion?]

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<sup>2</sup> The Works of John Calvin, in 51 volumes. Messrs. Clark, of Edinburgh, announce that they possess the copyright of the works of Calvin originally published by the Calvin Translation Society, and issue them on the following terms:—Complete sets in 51 volumes, 9 pounds, 9 shillings. The “Letters”, edited by Dr. Bonnet, 2 vols., 10 shillings. 6d., additional, Complete sets of Commentaries, 45 vols., 7 pounds 17s. 6d. The “Institutes”, 3 vols., 24 shillings.

<sup>3</sup> Werner Helmich, a Dutch Protestant divine, A.D. 1551-1608.

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E. ***From our discussion in Session 11:***

1. What theological premises undergirded Calvin’s optimistic view of civil government in human society?
2. Any comments about Calvin’s role in the execution of Michael Servetus?

F. ***A Brief Survey of Calvin’s Legacy:*** Notes from DW Hall’s monograph, *Calvin’s Legacy: His Influence on the Modern World*, “Ten Ways Modern Culture is Different Because of John Calvin”, pp. 11-41.

1. In a less prejudiced era (1855), Harvard professor George Bancroft identified Calvin’s accomplishments as follows:
  - a. Calvin is among “the foremost of modern republican legislators.”
  - b. He was responsible for elevating the culture of Geneva into “the impregnable fortress of popular liberty, the fertile seed-plot of democracy.”
  - c. Calvinism through the agency of Puritanism helped produce the “free institutions of America.”
  - d. Tracing Calvin’s legacy through the Plymouth pilgrims, the Huguenot settlers of South Carolina, and the Dutch colonists of Manhattan, Bancroft concluded: “He that will not honor the memory and respect the influence of Calvin knows but little of the origin of American liberty.” (Ref. cited p. 12)

2. Hall, in comparing Calvinism with various ideological movements in history, opines: "...the Genevan Reformer's positive cumulative impact is greater than that of Rousseau, Nietzsche, Marx, and many other philosophers." (p. 12)

G. ***Hall's Ten Short Summaries of Calvin's Imprint on Western History and Culture:***

1. *Education: The Academy* (founded in Geneva, 1558; building dedicated June 5, 1559):
  - a. Two levels of curricula: one for public education of Genevan youth and the other a seminary to train ministers of the gospel.
  - b. At the time of Calvin's death in 1564, the public school had rapidly expanded to 1200 students; the seminary had 300 students.
  - c. Both schools were tuition free and were forerunners of modern public education.
  - d. Later a school of law was added and eventually a medical school was established.
  - e. Hall notes that Calvin's focus on education fostered cultural and political advancement and concludes: "One of Calvin's most enduring contributions to society—a contribution that also secured the longevity of many of the Calvinistic reforms—was the establishment of the Academy in Geneva." (p. 15)
2. *Care for the Poor: The Bourse:*
  - a. Church ministry was conducted through the diaconate.
  - b. The Bourse became a pillar of societal welfare.
  - c. The initial purpose of the Bourse was to minister to French refugees who had fled persecution in France.
  - d. The deacons ministered to orphans, the elderly, the sick and incapacitated and provided interim subsidies and job training as necessary to immigrants.
  - e. Calvin left part of his family inheritance in his will for the Boys School and for poor immigrants.
  - f. Martin Bucer said of the diaconate, "without it there can be no true communion of the saints."
  - g. Calvin argues that care for the poor is a measure of our Christianity: "If we want to be considered Christians and want it to be believed that there is some church among us, this organization must be demonstrated and maintained." (p. 18)
3. *Ethics and Interpretation of the Moral Law: The Decalogue:*
  - a. Calvin interprets the Ten Commandments as ethical pillars of society.

- b. The Law is a “perfect rule of righteousness” that points to our dependence on God and assists man, created in God’s image, in pointing toward right directions.
- c. Notwithstanding our “utter powerlessness” and “utter inability” to keep the Law, Calvin believed that the Law had many practical functions—it convinced like a mirror; it restrained like a bridle; and it illumined or aroused us to obedience, reminding believers of God’s norms.
- d. Calvin taught that each prohibition in the Law required obedience to its opposite, viz., if one was not to steal, then he also should protect his and others’ property; if one was not to lie, the he was to tell the truth.
- e. Calvin’s teachings on the need and the proper use of the Law had great influence on later codifications in various Puritan contexts and eventual development of constitutional democratic institutions.
- f. Hall proclaims, “...charity was the aim of law, and purity of conscience was the intended result.” (p. 20)

4. *Freedom of the Church: The Company of Pastors:*

- a. On April 18, 1538 the City Council exiled Calvin and Farel, who were pastors of St. Pierre and St. Gervais churches respectively, from Geneva for insubordination when they denied communion to feuding citizenry (lest they heap judgment on themselves).
- b. After Calvin and Farel were invited to return to Geneva in September 1541, Calvin lobbied for governmental reform and for decentralized authority in order to free the church from political interference.
- c. The City Council agreed to the 1541 *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, which provided protocols prescribing church responsibilities for moral issues within the church.
- d. In 1542 Calvin established the Consistory, a ministerial council to govern church affairs. ... “[T]his arrangement marked a radical departure from the yoking of political and ecclesiastical influence under Roman Catholic auspices.” (p.21)
- e. Hall observes: “A church free from external, hierarchical, or civil control was a radical and lasting contribution that Calvin made to the modern world. When the church is effective at promoting her God-given virtues, that free church is a powerful influence for society’s good.” (p. 22)

5. *Collegial Governing: The Senate:*

- a. Hall points to Calvin’s sermon on 1 Samuel 8 in 1561: Calvin’s “exposition discusses the dangers of monarchy, the need for proper limitation of government, and the place of divine

sovereignty over human governments. It is an example of Calvinism at its best, carefully balancing individual liberty and proper government.” (p. 22)

- b. Calvin preached that “there are limits prescribed by God to their [kings’] power, within which they ought to be satisfied: namely, to work for the common good and to govern and direct the people in truest fairness and justice; not to be puffed up with their own importance, but to remember that they also are subjects of God.” (pp. 22-23)
- c. Calvin endorsed the republican-type plan of government as an innovation inspired by God in Exodus 18 and applied in the development of the small council (the Senate) and large council in Geneva.
- d. Calvin’s sermons advocated for limited government, decrying legitimate princes from tyrants who rule only by their “own will and lust” and from oppressive magistrates who plunder “to enrich themselves off the poor.” (p. 24)
- e. With the idea that individual responsibility was a good and necessary speed bump to check a government that was taking over more than it should, Calvin “altered the trajectory of governance.” (p. 24)

6. *Decentralized Politics: The Republic:*

- a. By 1543 with procedural safeguards in place, various branches of government could no longer act unilaterally.
- b. Hall comments: “The structure of Genevan presbyterianism began to influence Genevan civil politics; in turn, that also furthered the separation of powers and provided protection from oligarchy.” Additionally he notes: “This Calvin-shaped polity...and other elements of the federal structure would later be copied as one of Geneva’s finest exports.” “Not only was Calvin’s Geneva religious, but she also sought the assent of the governed to a degree not previously seen, leading the world to new and stable forms of republicanism.” (p. 25)
- c. Hall states in conclusion: “Many ideas that began with Calvin’s reformation in Geneva and later became part of the fabric of America were cultivated and crossbred in the seventeenth-century. Customs now taken for granted, like freedom of speech, assembly, and dissent, were extended as Calvin’s Dutch, British, and Scottish disciples refined these ideas.” (p. 26)

7. *Parity among All Professions: The Doctrine of Vocation:*

- a. Calvin developed the idea of the sacredness of ordinary vocations—a change from the traditional concept of a holy calling being exclusively applied to the clergy.

- b. He viewed work as having divine dignity; thus, business, commerce, and industry were elevated under Calvin's principles by which every area of work could be a valid calling from God, every bit as sacred as a call to the ministry.
- c. Hall comments: "This was a radical change in worldview, which would ultimately alter many economies, cultures, and human lives." (p. 27)
- d. Calvin and other Reformers retired the distinction between the sacred and secular providing a new way to view "human labor, namely, that a person could serve God and glorify him in any area of labor." (p. 27)
- e. Bach signed each of his original scores with the initials "SDG" (for the Latin phrase *Soli Deo Gloria*, or "to God alone be the glory").
- f. Hall concludes: "Some of the finest Christians in history have also applied the Lordship of Christ to their won vocations and served as leaders in various fields for the glory of God. It is no accident that Rembrandt (art), Milton (poetry), Althusius (political theory), Grotius (international law), Adam Smith (economics), and many others refined their callings while operating from a Calvinistic worldview." (p. 28)

8. *Economics and Profit: The Invisible Hand:*

- a. Geneva, with its growing intellectual ferment, evidenced by the founding of Calvin's Academy and the presence of the Medici bank, "became an ideal center for perfecting and exporting reform." (p. 29)
- b. Calvinism and free markets and capitalism spread hand in hand, but this material success was not equated "with a sign of being the elect." (p. 29)
- c. Calvin's interpretation of the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment held that holding and protecting of personal property was normal, but it also forbade coveting of what others have, and required every person to "exert himself honestly in preserving his own [property]"; to be content with "our own lot," arguing that "we study to acquire nothing but honest and lawful gain; if we long not to grow rich by injustice, nor to plunder our neighbor of his goods...." (p. 30)
- d. Hall concludes: "The prosperity ethic that followed his time in Geneva is one of the wide-ranging but misconstrued effects of his thought and practice." (p. 31) "The common but mistaken caricature of Calvin as a crass capitalist should be contrasted with the prayer he suggested using before beginning work and which is included in the 1562 Genevan Catechism." (p. 30)

9. *Music in the Vernacular: The Psalter:*

- a. Hall notes: “One of Calvin’s early initiatives was to translate music designed for use in public worship into the language of the day.... Calvin wanted worship—in all its aspects—to be intelligible.... Calvin wanted everyone who participated in worship, not only the clergy, to be able to understand and reiterate the truths of Scripture—this time in poetic structure.” (p. 31)
- b. After Calvin’s death, Beza sponsored a hymn-writing contest to promote singing of the Psalter. This Psalter became the international songbook of Calvinists.
- c. In addition to the Psalter, the Geneva Bible and Beza’s New Testament Annotations were extended with the spread of Calvinism.
- d. Shakespeare quoted the Geneva Bible in his plays.
- e. Hall concludes: “Calvin’s disciples knew that the faith that sings powerful truths will also pass those truths on to future generations, and worship music set in the vernacular was a strong step in that direction.” (p. 33)

10. *The Power of Publishing Ideas: The Genevan Presses:*

- a. The advent of the Gutenberg press and advances in the art of printing provided the technical medium by which Calvin published his ideas and provided the lasting impact of his thought.
- b. Hall notes: “The number of books published in Geneva rose from 3 volumes in 1536 to 28 in 1554 to 48 by 1561.... By 1563, there were at least 34 presses in the city, many manned by immigrants.” (p. 34)
- c. An extensive literary distribution system evolved in Geneva providing a network for distributing Calvin’s and other Reformers’ writings (as contraband) to France and other parts of Europe.
- d. Hall observes: “Geneva was identified as a subversive center because of its publishing; and the 1551 Edict of Chateaubriand forbade, among other things, importing and circulating Genevan books.... This new medium and its energized distribution pipeline allowed Calvin’s message to transcend Geneva’s geographical limitations.” (p. 35)
- e. Thus, Calvin’s thought eventually spread to America and frequently appeared in sermons and pamphlets in various colonies. In regard to the impact of the *Institutes* as source for opposing governmental abuse, Hall quotes the historian Herbert Foster, “Probably no other work was so widely read and so influential from the Reformation to the American Revolution....” (p. 35)

- f. Hall concludes: “Long after his death in 1564, Calvin would live on through his writings, which are still widely available today, and continue to mentor many generations of disciples.” (p. 36)

#### H. ***The End of Calvin’s Mortal Life:***

1. From 1555 to 1564 his health declined markedly, so much so that he was made conscious of the need to use the time left to him well.
2. On Christmas Day 1559 the Council offered him the freedom of the city and he became an honorary citizen of Geneva. He was visibly moved. That same day as he returned home from the City Hall he had a serious bout of coughing followed by the vomiting of blood. It was TB and meant a slow lingering death.
3. On February 6, 1564 he preached for the last time. In March prayers were requested for him. On April 27 the Council members went in procession to visit him and receive his farewells, and on the next day he met with the local pastors to bid them farewell.
4. His long time friend and colleague, Farel, 84 years of age, travelled from Neuchatel to see him.
5. On May 27, 1564 John Calvin died. In his will, drafted a month earlier, he said:  
*“ I embrace the grace which God has offered me in our Lord Jesus Christ and accept the merits of His suffering and dying that through them all my sins are buried; and I humbly beg Him to wash me and cleanse me with the blood of our great Redeemer, as it was shed for all poor sinners so that I, when I shall appear before His face, may bear His likeness”.*
6. His body was sown into a white shroud and laid in a simple pine coffin. At the grave there were neither words nor song. He had given instructions that there should be no tombstone, and when some students visited the cemetery a few months later they could not distinguish his funeral mound from the others. In death, as in life, he shunned recognition for himself so that in all things his Savior might have the pre-eminence.

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#### I. ***Course Summary and Personal Reflections:***

In the introduction of the syllabus for this course, I posed these questions: Who was the real John Calvin and why do we need to know about him? Why is Calvin still relevant today? What is his legacy? Having completed this course, surveying briefly Calvin’s life, theology, and influence, hopefully

participants are now enabled to provide an accurate summative response to the over arching question, who was John Calvin, *really*?

My own educational venture actually began over a year ago when the Session asked me to present a series of instruction aimed at developing a deeper understanding of Holy Communion as a means of grace, particularly the theological significance of the elements in celebrating the Sacrament. Since this question fundamentally begs a Scriptural understanding of the nature of Christ's presence in the Supper, I was drawn to examine the historical debates among some of the fathers of the Reformation. This led me to read (I must admit for the first time!) portions of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by John Calvin. Through this study of the *Institutes* along with other biographical and historical writings, I discovered a John Calvin I had not *really* known.

The Calvin I began to know better was certainly not the person I had expected. Instead of an esoteric tyrant I discovered a totally surrendered Christian who was not only a brilliant theologian and devout preacher who possessed incredible knowledge and understanding of the Bible, but a humble soul who was a caring pastor and devoted teacher as well. My newfound understanding of the real Calvin humbled me and raised questions about why I had been so misinformed about many aspects of Calvin's personhood—his faith, piety and humility—and furthermore, how it was possible that at this stage in my Christian life I possessed so little appreciation or understanding regarding Calvin's legacy as a theologian, reformer, and as a pastor/preacher. This survey course thus evolved suspecting that I may not be alone in my ignorance and misperceptions.

J.I. Packer commented that Calvin became "*the most influential man in the world in the sense that his ideas made more history than did those of anyone else alive in his day and for at least a hundred years after.*" If this statement is factual, then why does Calvin suffer so much bad press? Partly, Calvin is the victim of inaccurate historical depictions. Here are several examples of false claims:

Calvin has been characterized as a cold, austere, and cruel dictator who turned Geneva into a grim and cheerless police state. In fact, laws suppressing gambling, blasphemy, drunkenness, licentious dancing, playing games during the hours of public worship and so on, had existed in Geneva long before the Reformation began, and Calvin was all too aware that the moral life of the city during his time there left a lot to be desired. Contrary to the myths that surround his name, I have endeavored to show that he was trained as a biblical humanist, that he never subjected the state to the church, was Christ-centered in his theology, and that he was a warm-hearted, long-suffering pastor to his people.

Here is a brief factual summary of what I have learned in this course regarding Calvin's positive impact on Genevan civic and religious life and his definitive role in fostering the Reformation movement in Europe: For 23 years up until his final moments on earth he poured all his energy into the preaching, teaching, and application of the Word of God. He wanted Genevan Christians to be thoroughly grounded in the Scriptures and the Genevan church to be organized after the biblical pattern. To this end he drew up a series of doctrinal articles and a Confession of Faith. He regulated the public worship of three congregations, composed a liturgy, and wrote a catechism for children. He established and implemented biblical principles for the calling and appointment of pastors, elders, and deacons. Above all he gave himself to the preaching of the Word under which and through which he believed God would fashion a people who would honor Him and obey Him in the relationships and callings of daily life. In this way, as the Word molded the lives of its citizens, Geneva would become a pattern for others and a center of missionary endeavor. With this in mind Calvin organized the growing number of Reformed churches in France, established an educational academy for the training of pastors, and supervised the sending out of men to serve these churches. He also encouraged his fellow reformers in Europe, writing hundreds of letters and receiving large numbers of visitors and Protestant refugees.

I learned that Calvin was tireless (he rarely slept for more than four hours a night) in his resolve to foster practical applications of biblical principles to all of life. He fought strenuously against idolatry and unbiblical abuses of corporate worship. It was Calvin, more than any other, who strengthened the Reformation faith when it seemed to be falling back, and it was Calvin who enabled it once more to advance. Calvin was instrumental in establishing the sole authority of the Scriptures in the Protestant movement; accordingly, he fervently strove to build unity within the church around its teachings.

Central to his theology (as proposed by C. Partee) is our union with Christ: the understanding that our eternal salvation hinges upon sovereign grace and our justification by faith alone. The church is the organic expression of this union with Christ. The visible church, the communion of saints, is his body in the earth to effect our regeneration (sanctification) by preaching and teaching the Word and by proper administration of the Sacraments and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Here are some of the more common misperceptions and misunderstandings about Calvin's theology:

- 1) *The doctrine of predestination*: Calvin has been accused of manipulating Scriptural texts to support his own pre-conceived notions of the doctrine of predestination. In fact he was extremely careful to say no more and no

less than the Bible says about predestination and all else. We learned from our study of the *Institutes* that Calvin derived and systematized this doctrine from the authority of the Scriptures supported by the writings of patristic fathers such as Augustine and of contemporary Reformers such as Luther, Bucer, Melancthon and Zwingli, who were also teaching and preaching this truth based on the teachings of Scripture. Calvin did not invent this doctrine!

- 2) *The doctrine of total depravity*: This doctrine has been misunderstood to mean that Calvin claimed that human beings are as bad as they can be. In fact he taught that human beings are incapable of achieving salvation without divine grace; but under common grace people are capable of great acts of kindness and cultural achievement. He taught that in spite of having the image of God marred by the corruption of sin, people could nevertheless be restrained by conscience, law, environment and government.
- 3) *Predestination and evangelism*: Some detractors think that Calvin's teaching on predestination implies a pre-determined damnation of most of the human race, negating the need for evangelism. In fact, Calvin's main emphasis is on the saving grace of God and on Christ as Savior of all who believe. The offer of salvation is universal and all are responsible before God for receiving or rejecting the offer. He taught that the doctrine of predestination provides believers assurance of salvation and thus is a balm to the conscience. Calvin saw that this doctrine provides the foundation for presenting the good news of the Gospel of grace and therefore actually motivates believers to engage in joyful evangelism. Calvin's insistence that the Gospel must be offered to all was put into practice, as he did all he could to spread the gospel throughout Europe and even into Brazil by praying, writing, advising, and training leaders.
- 4) Calvin did not invent TULIP. Although the acrostic summarizes the doctrines of grace as formulated in the Canons of Dort 50 years after Calvin's death, it is not a comprehensive expression of all that Calvin taught in the *Institutes* and his commentaries on the Scriptures.

We devoted the majority of this course examining portions of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. I thought that the following excerpt from David Calhoun's [Introduction](#) to his course on the *Institutes* would provide a fitting summary of our survey:

....Why did Calvin write the *Institutes*? He wrote the book probably in the year 1534 or 1535, just after he had been converted to Protestantism. He wrote the first edition of the *Institutes* to provide instruction to French Protestants. In the book he tells us that he himself is just beginning along this route of Bible and theological study. He says, "Even though I was just beginning, others were

coming to me and asking me for help.” So he wanted to set forth, in an organized way, the teaching of the Bible in order to help his fellow French citizens who had converted to Protestantism to have a clear statement of their faith. He published the book in 1536 for that purpose—to provide instruction for French Protestants—but also to present a Protestant confession of faith to King Francis I of France. We have that preparatory address in the McNeill/Battles edition of the *Institutes*, and that stays in all the editions all the way down to the last one in 1559. It is Calvin’s statement to the King of France: “This is what we are. This is what we believe.” We do not know that Francis ever read that material. If he did, it did not seem to help him much. Nonetheless, Calvin wanted to say that Protestants are not strange extremists nor are they going to endanger the country of France. They are Bible-believing, law-abiding people. Then, from 1536 to the last edition in 1559, he expanded the *Institutes*—they get bigger and bigger—to serve as an introduction to Scripture. During this time, Calvin was also writing commentaries. His purpose was to have the *Institutes* as a kind of theological introduction to Scripture so that he did not have to deal with theological issues out of context. He wanted to do his Bible commentaries in a very simple, straightforward way and not have long excursus at various points in order to develop a theological topic, which was the typical way that theology was written in the sixteenth century and before.

According to Warfield, Calvin added, developed, and defined. We compare the first edition of 1536 to the last edition of 1559. We, of course, are reading the 1559 edition. The 1536 edition is translated and in print. Dr. Ford Lewis Battles did a translation in the 1536 edition as well. You can read that and compare Calvin’s first statement with his last statement.

Warfield is right in saying that Calvin added, developed, and defined. He did not really change his ideas or theology. Calvin did not have to write a book entitled “How My Mind has Changed.” Augustine did do that. He wrote his retractions at the end of his life as he looked back over all of his writing and tried to judge which ideas were good and which were not so good. He thought about how his ideas changed from time to time in his life. Calvin did not have to write a retraction because he did not change. It was not because Calvin was stubborn or proud and just did not want to change. His theology, amazingly enough, was intact in that first statement of 1536. He developed, defined, and illustrated it, but he did not change it. As he added, developed, and defined, he was growing in knowledge.

Calvin’s advancement in knowledge certainly shows in the later editions of the *Institutes*. He was writing Bible commentaries, so his Bible knowledge deepened, and that is seen in his use of Scripture in the *Institutes*. He continued to study the church fathers. More and more we see quotations from the church fathers in the *Institutes*. He loved Augustine, of course. Augustine was the church father for Calvin. At one point, he exalted Augustine as “totally ours”—that is, belonging to the Reformed side as over against the Catholic side. That

may have been an overstatement, but Calvin was enthusiastic about Augustine. He also often used Chrysostom, the Greek church father, although he recognized that Chrysostom was not nearly as astute in theology as Augustine. However, Chrysostom was a great exegete, a great expositor of Scripture. He used Cyprian, Ambrose, Gregory, and Bernard of Clairvaux. These were his favorites. Then, Calvin interacted with contemporary Protestants such as Luther (somewhat indirectly), Melancthon, Zwingli, Bullinger, and Bucer. All of this study did bear fruit. We see the results of it in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes*.

The other large area that enabled Calvin to expand, define, and perfect the *Institutes* was his own experience. He was first in Geneva for a short time with William Farel. Later, he served as a pastor in Strasburg for three years with Martin Bucer. Then, he was back in Geneva for the rest of his life. So, his pastoral ministry helped him to expand his theological treatise. Around the time that he published the *Institutes*, he traveled back into France some and down into Italy. He moved around quite a bit during that period.

The other factor that enabled Calvin to develop and lengthen his *Institutes* was his theological controversy. Calvin had many, many theological battles. By 1559, we can see the results of these coming out in the *Institutes*. He had controversies on the doctrine of the Trinity, the Old Testament, and the Lord's Supper. All of these controversies impacted the *Institutes*. Through all of these years, Calvin was adding, developing, defining, and rearranging. If Calvin did not change his mind as to the content, he made a lot of changes as to the order. In fact, he tells us that he was not really happy with the order in which he placed things until the final edition of 1559. Calvin was very concerned about this. As you read through the *Institutes*, be alert of these methodological statements in which Calvin tells us what he is doing. He was very concerned not only to get the doctrine right but also to put it in the right place. That is something important that we can learn from Calvin. Calvin was concerned with epistemology—how people are taught and how they learn. He said that it is important to say the right thing, but it is also important to say it at the right time. Dr. Battles created a chart in which you can see the reordering or the shifting of material that took place during that time particularly between 1550 and 1559. Even though it can be overwhelming when you first look at it, the chart illustrates the point very well that Calvin was concerned with his arrangement: what comes first and what comes next. As we come into some of these doctrines, we will see that one thing that got moved around quite a bit is the doctrine of election. When do you tell people about election? Calvin does something rather surprising with that doctrine that we will get to later. Let me say just a few words about English translations. The first was Thomas Norton back in the sixteenth century. Calvin was very fortunate with his first English translator. Norton did an exceptionally good job. Very soon after the completion of the *Institutes* in 1559, which was written in Latin, it was translated by Calvin into French and then quite soon into English. John Allen was the second translator. John Allen and Henry Beveridge were both nineteenth-century

translators. The Beveridge translation is still in print. It was until fairly recently anyway. Those are not bad but not very good either. Ford Lewis Battles' 1960 translation is the one that we are using. Even though it has been criticized some, it is by far the most superior translation that we have at present.

The four titles of Calvin's books are his titles. The chapter titles are his as well. It is very important to know the titles of these four books. Learn and memorize them just the way Calvin wrote them because he was very concerned with the titles. Two of the titles are "Knowledge of God the Creator" and "Knowledge of God the Redeemer." These are shortened forms of the fuller titles that Calvin gave. You can see how the four books break down into treatments of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Church.

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(Excerpted from the Worldwide Classroom, "Structure and Organization of Calvin's Institutes, I", pp. 1-3, © Fall 2005, David Calhoun & Covenant Theological Seminary)

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**It now seems fitting to close this course with Calvin's ending phrase in the *Institutes, his Confession of Faith:***

**GOD BE PRAISED**

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### **Sources:**

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- Battles, FW: *An Analysis of the "Institutes of the Christian Religion" of John Calvin*, P&R Publishing Co., 2001 [paper back release]
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- Lawson, SJ: *The Expository Genius of John Calvin*, Reformation Trust Pub. (Ligonier Ministries, Orlando, Fla.) 2007
- Parker, THL, *Portrait of Calvin*, Published by Desiring God, P. O. Box 2901, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402, 1954

### **Web Resources:**

- John Piper to the Bethlehem Conference for Pastors entitled "The Divine Majesty of the Word: John Calvin: The Man and His Preaching": [www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Bibliographies/1471\\_The\\_Divine\\_Majesty\\_of\\_the\\_Word/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Bibliographies/1471_The_Divine_Majesty_of_the_Word/)
- David Calhoun, a professor at Covenant Seminary: <http://worldwide-classroom.com/courses/info/ch523/>
- WORLD Magazine | Liberty's champion | Marvin Olasky | Jul 04, 09.webarchive
- WORLD Magazine | Sticking by the Bible | Marvin Olasky | Jul 04, 09.webarchive

### **Attachment:**

Photocopy of the Epilogue from Hall's chapter, "John Calvin: A Life Worth Knowing" in *The Legacy of John Calvin: His Influence on the Modern World*, pp. 76-81.

I added this reading because it summarizes very well I think Calvin's character and humility. A particularly surprising insight I gained from this study of Calvin was his virtue of humility. It has become clear to me now that true humility is at the heart of

Calvin's understanding of doctrines of election and predestination. What is your opinion?