



THE REFORMATION: After Darkness Light

Lesson 7: John Calvin & Geneva

The Reformation spread

John Calvin's early years

- Calvin was born in the small city of Noyon, France, on 10 July 1509
- Calvin's mother died when he was only 4 years old. Calvin's father wanted him to become a priest but later changed his mind, directing Calvin to become a lawyer
- In May 1535 Calvin was converted, later saying, "God had turned my heart around and brought me to Himself". This set Luther toward becoming a minister of the gospel.
- Calvin wrote his first book, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, within the first year of his conversion
- This book was added to and revised right up to the 1550s, and would become one of his most famous writings

Calvin in Geneva (1536-1538)

- After persecution started to break out throughout France, Calvin decided to travel to Strasbourg, France, to study with Martin Bucer and lead a quiet life of study and writing
- Due to a war between France and Germany Calvin detoured through Geneva
- By the persuasion of William Farel, a Protestant Reformer in Geneva, Calvin remained for about 2 years in Geneva
- As the pastor in Geneva, Calvin instituted church discipline to those believers who failed to live according to the expectations of Scripture. This resulted in him barring people from communion and resulted in him being removed from his pastorate and banished from Geneva.

Calvin in Strasbourg (1538-1541)

- He was 30 yrs old when he arrived in Strasbourg, spending 3 years there
- He was appointed pastor of a refugee congregation
- Calvin married Idelette de Bure, a widow of an Anabaptist, who bore one son and several girls, all dying in infancy
- Idelette died 9 years after marrying
- To his satisfaction Calvin received a request from the city council of Geneva for his return. Reluctantly Calvin returned to Geneva to take up his old post as pastor.

Calvin back in Geneva (1541 - 1564)

- Despite continual criticism and opposition Calvin had much success in purifying the church

The Michael Servetus controversy

- Michael Servetus, a Spanish physician, authored of several theological treatises in which he argued that the union of church and state after Constantine's conversion was in truth a great apostasy
- As a result, he was condemned to burning as a heretic, which was the customary form of execution for heretics
- Calvin tried to persuade Servetus to change his views and urged the council for a less cruel death
- In reply to criticism of Calvin's endorsement of death a number of things can be said:
 1. The belief that denial of the Trinity and/or Incarnation should be viewed as a capital crime in a Christian state was part of Calvin's and Geneva's medieval inheritance; Calvin did not invent it
 2. There were less executions in Geneva for heresy than in most parts
 3. Anti-Trinitarian heretics were burned in other places beside Geneva in Calvin's time, and indeed later, two in England, as late as 1612
 4. The Roman Inquisition had already set a price on Servetus' head
 5. The decision to burn Servetus as a heretic was taken not only by Calvin personally but by Geneva's Council of twenty-five

6. Heresy was treated in the 16th century as we would treat a health problem: (1) Outbreak, (2) Quarantine, (3) Eliminate heretics as they polluted the environment and affected other people
7. Calvin wanted Servetus to be beheaded rather than burnt
8. The chief Reformers outside Geneva, including Bucer and the gentle Melancthon, fully approved the execution

- John Piper, in response, states:

So the times were harsh and immoral and barbaric, and had a contaminating effect on everyone, just as we are all contaminated today by the evils of our time. Their blind spots and evils may be different from ours. And it may be that the very things they saw clearly are the things we are blind to. It would be foolhardy to say that we would have never done what they did under their circumstances, and thus draw the conclusion that they have nothing to teach us. In fact, what we probably need to say is that some of our evils are such that we are blind to them, just as they were blind to many of theirs, and the virtues they manifested in those times are the very ones that we probably need in ours.

Calvin's pastoral work in Geneva

- In 1559 Calvin opened the Geneva Academy for future ministers
- Due to war Geneva was flooded with around 20,000 refugees, which was significant given that Geneva's population was about 10,000 people when Calvin arrived
- To respond and care for the many overwhelming needs of the city Calvin set up an elaborate diaconal system

Calvin's death

- Calvin drove himself to exhaustion with study, writing and preaching
- He was also raked with health problems
- Even on his death bed Calvin was working, dying on 27 May 1564

Calvin's preaching

- On average Calvin preached about 4-5 times a week, including twice every Sunday
- His style was to enter the pulpit without notes and preach directly from the Greek NT or Hebrew OT
- From the NT he preached from 2-3 verses and 12-12 verses from the OT

Calvin's works

- The Institutes as well as treatises on theology
- Some 50 volumes of commentaries
- 35 volumes of letters
- There are 2500 manuscripts of his sermons, which are very pastoral in nature
- He was a great counselor of individuals as well as a strong preacher and teacher

Calvin's theology

- Many believe Calvin wrote what we know as the five points of Calvinism
- However, these were constructed 54 years after his death
- In 1610, the Arminians, headed by the Dutch Reformed theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560 - 1609), developed what was known as the Five Articles of Remonstrance
- The five points of Calvinism were articulated in response to Jacobus Arminius who wrote Five Articles of Remonstrance
- In November 13, 1618, 39 pastors, 18 ruling elders, 5 professors and 19 delegates were invited to settle this issue at Synod of Dort, which lasted for seven months
- The result was that Arminianism was unanimously rejected and condemned
- The five theological points of Calvinism are summed up in the word TULIP:
 1. Total depravity
 2. Unconditional election
 3. Limited atonement
 4. Irresistible grace of the Holy Spirit
 5. Perseverance of the Saints
- Calvin was also a firm believer in the authority and sufficiency of Scripture
- Calvin stated, "We hold that the Word of God alone lies beyond the sphere of our judgement"

Calvin's worship

- Calvin understood 'worship' as meeting with God
- He felt that worship must be structured according to God's word
- He held to a principal of worship called the Regulative Principal, though the phrase never appears in Calvin's writings
- The idea of the Regulative Principal is that we only do that which God has sanctioned in His Word. Otherwise, we don't do it
- The reason Calvin desired worship to be sanctioned only by the Word of God was that he knew that the heart was an idol factory and could turn worship of God to the worship of idols, just as Israel did in worshipping the Golden Calf
- Five Principles that informed Calvin's approach to worship:
 1. Centrality of the Word
 - It is to be done according to the Word
 - Songs are to be purely from the Word
 - Preaching of the Word is central
 2. Simplicity
 - This means the absence of distractions
 - Calvin was opposed to showiness in worship
 - It should be to focus on God in simplicity without distraction
 3. Ascend spiritually when we meet with our God
 - The Reformers wanted simple places of worship to prevent them thinking of the churches as temples
 - They knew that the real place to worship is Heaven
 - We see this Heavenly Jerusalem not with our eyes but with our faith as we lift our hearts heavenward
 - We don't recreate a temple here on earth

4. It must be reverent

- This doesn't mean joyless, but it does mean reverent
- There is a proper understanding that we are coming to meet with God
- While we come boldly with joy we also come very reverentially

5. Music

- Calvin believed that our emotions ought to be engaged in worship and that we were created to be emotional beings.
- But he also believed that we must be very careful with our emotions due to our fallenness
- Calvin understood the part emotions play in worship therefore he was very concerned about music
- Calvin believed that the church should no longer retain musical instruments as it should retain incense and sacrifice
- Melody must match the appropriate weight of the subject

Conclusion

- Calvin was a pastor who wanted people to be certain that they can rely on the Word of God, certain they were loved in Jesus Christ and that they could rely on the Bible as they met God in worship