



John Calvin's *Institutes in the Christian Religion (1541)*

A PPA Seminar: Fall 2017

John Calvin: Pastor and Pilgrim

Rev. Charles R. Biggs

Three Quotations to summarize the man (please memorize):

"I offer my heart, promptly and sincerely."

"All the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves."

"True piety consists in a sincere feeling which loves God as Father as much as it fears and reverences Him as Lord, embraces His righteousness, and dreads offending Him worse than death."

Christian- "Simil Justus et Peccator"

Pastor

Pilgrim

Apostolic

Reformed

Catholic

Humanist Scholar- Theological Architect

Death (May 27, 1546)

Quotation:

"I have had many infirmities which you have been obliged to bear with, and what is more, all I have done has been worth nothing...I have willed what is good, that my vices have always displeased me, and that the root of the fear of God has been in my heart; and you may say that the disposition was good; and I pray you, that the evil be forgiven me, and if there was any good, that you conform yourselves to it and make it an example."

➤ **Birth (July 10, 1509)**

➤ **Youth and Early Education**

1516: Death of mother

1521: Goes to Paris to study

1528: Goes to Orleans and then Bourges to study law

1531: Death of father

1533: Calvin leaves Paris

1534: Calvin leaves France

➤ **Conversion (ca. 1533)**

➤ **Reformer**

Martin Luther (1483-1545)- Like a “hero” of Calvin’s

Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560)- Like a good “schoolfriend” of Calvin’s

Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531)

Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575)- Like a “close cousin” to Calvin

Theodore Beza (1519-1605)- Like a “son” to Calvin

➤ **Institutes of the Christian Religion- First Edition (1536)**

➤ **Geneva I (1536-38: First pastorate in Geneva)**

William Farel (1489-1565)- “Fiery and bold” (“Calvin’s loveable, but frustrating uncle”).

Friends/Co-laborers in Geneva: William Farel and Pierre Viret (1511-71)

Beginning reformation of the Church- (May 1536, Geneva becomes reformed city)

Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church (1536-37):

- Regular celebration of Lord's Supper
- Excommunication
- Catechism instruction for the youth (*Confession of Faith*, 1536)
- Singing in worship

➤ **Exiled from Geneva (1538-41)**

➤ **Exile in Strasbourg (1538-41)**

Martin Bucer (1491-1551)- "Patience and fortitude"

Pastor- Historian Bruce Gordon: "*Calvin, eighteen years [Bucer's] junior, was a volatile firebrand who oscillated between overweening self-confidence and crippling self-doubt. Yet Bucer saw in him greatness.*" Calvin's father-figure.

Idelette de Bure (1500-49) (1540: Married; Died: 1549)

Importance of Discipline

Jacopo Sadoleto (1477-1547)

➤ **Geneva II (1541: Calvin returns and remains until death)**

➤ **Michael Servetus (1509-1553)**

Character of Servetus

Character of Calvin

➤ **Geneva Academy (1559)**

➤ **Institutes of the Christian Religion- Final Edition (1559)**

"Embracing almost the whole sum of piety & whatever is necessary to know of the doctrine of salvation: A work most worthy to be read by all persons zealous for piety" [my emphasis].

Casper Olevianus' summary of Calvin's 'Institutes':

"Man being at first created upright, but afterwards being not partially but totally ruined, finds his entire salvation out of himself in Christ, to whom being united by the Holy Spirit

freely given, without any foresight of future works, he thereby obtains a double blessing—namely, full imputation of righteousness, which goes along with us even to the grave, and the commencement of sanctification, which daily advances till at length it is perfected in the day of regeneration or resurrection of the body, and this, in order that the great mercy of God may be celebrated in the heavenly mansions throughout eternity.”

Book I:

Book II:

Book III:

Book IV:

Let us pray with Calvin:

“Grant, Almighty God, that since it is the principal part of our happiness that in our pilgrimage through this world there is open to us a familiar access to you by faith, O grant that we may be able to come with a pure heart into your presence. And when our lips are polluted, O purify us by your Spirit, so that we may not only pray to you with the mouth but also prove that we do this sincerely, without any dissimulations, and that we earnestly seek to spend our whole life in glorifying your name; until being at length gathered into your celestial kingdom, we may be truly and really united to you, and be made partakers of that glory, which has been brought forth for us by the blood of your only begotten Son. Amen.”

Bibliography/For Further Reading

- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1541, Calvin’s Own Essentials Edition).
_____. Edited by John T. McNeill. *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (2 Volumes)
- Calhoun, David B. *Knowing God and Ourselves: Reading Calvin’s Institutes Devotionally*.
- Godfrey, W. Robert. *John Calvin: Pilgrim and Pastor*.
- Gordon, Bruce. *John Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion: A Biography*.
_____. *Calvin*.
- Hall, David W. and Lillback, Peter A. *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes: Essays and Analysis* (*Calvin 500 Series*).
- Lane, Anthony N. S. *A Reader’s Guide to Calvin’s Institutes*.
- Lawson, Steven J. *The Expository Genius of John Calvin*
- McKee, Elsie Anne, ed. *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety* (*Classics of Western Spirituality*).
- Parker, T. H. L. *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought*
- Schaff, Philip. *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VIII: The Swiss Reformation
- Selderhuis, Herman J. *John Calvin: A Pilgrim’s Life*.
_____. *The Calvin Handbook*.
_____. *Calvin’s Theology of the Psalms*.
- Wendel, Francois. *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*