

Year at a Glance	
Nov 9-Dec 14	Early Church Age
Jan 4-Feb 8	Post-Nicene Age
Feb 15-Mar 22	Medieval Age
Mar 29-May 10	Reformation Age
May 17-May 31	Great Awakening to Today

Reformation Age	
Mar 29	“Martin Luther and Protestantism” (chapter 24)
Apr 5	Easter (no class)
Apr 12	“John Calvin” (chapter 26)
Apr 19	“The Anabaptists” (chapter 25)
Apr 26	“The Church of England” (chapter 27)
May 3	“The Catholic Reformation/America and Asia” (chapters 28-29)
May 10	“Puritanism/Denominations” (chapter 30-31)

Two weeks ago, we began our study of the Reformation with a focus on **Martin Luther** and the rediscovery of the gospel from Romans 1:17, “The righteous will live by faith.” We considered the background of the Reformation, noting how the groundwork had been laid by men like **Wycliffe** and **Hus**, along with the influence of humanists such as **Erasmus** and the spread of the **Greek New Testament**. The **printing press** and shifting political realities allowed Luther’s teaching to spread in a way previously impossible. At the heart of the Reformation were four key questions: **How is a person saved? Where does authority lie? What is the church? And what is the essence of the Christian life?** Luther’s answers centered on justification by faith alone, the authority of Scripture, the priesthood of all believers, and serving God in every calling.

We then walked through Luther’s life, tracing his deep spiritual struggle—from his fear at his **first mass**, through his extreme **asceticism** and troubled conscience, to his breakthrough understanding that **God’s righteousness** is a gift received by faith. Key moments included the sale of **indulgences**, the posting of the **95 Theses**, his bold stand at **Worms**, and his protection at **Wartburg Castle** where he **translated the New Testament into German**. We also noted both the **strengths and weaknesses** of Luther’s life, including his courage, his emphasis on the Word of God, and some of the **serious errors** and sins of his later years.

Finally, we looked at Luther’s theology—especially **justification by faith alone**, the theology of the **cross**, and his method of spiritual growth summarized as **prayer, meditation, and trial** (Anfechtung). The Reformation reshaped the church by restoring the **authority of Scripture**, elevating **preaching**, placing worship in the **language of the people**, and recovering the significance of **everyday callings**. Please take time to read Luther’s **introduction to Galatians** in the notes, as it beautifully captures the heart of his rediscovery of the gospel. For today, we encouraged you to read Shelley Chapter 26 on Calvin in preparation.

## The Reformation Age

### “Calvin”<sup>1</sup>

“You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”—1 Cor. 6:19- 20

“**We are not our own:** let not our reason nor our will, therefore, sway our plans and deeds. We are not our own: let us, therefore, not set it as our goal to seek what is expedient for us according to the flesh. We are not our own: in so far as we can, let us, therefore, forget ourselves and all that is ours. Conversely, **we are God’s:** let us, therefore, live for Him and die for Him. We are God’s: let His wisdom and will, therefore, rule all our actions. We are God’s: let all the parts of our life, accordingly, strive toward Him as our only lawful goal” (Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1539).

#### Class Prayer

“My God, my Father and Preserver, who of thy goodness hast watched over me during the past night, and brought me to this day, grant also that I may spend it wholly in the worship and service of thy most holy deity. Let me not think, or say, or do a single thing which tends not to thy service and submission to thy will, that thus all my actions may aim at thy glory and the salvation of my brethren, while they are taught by my example to serve thee. And as thou art giving light to this world for the purposes of external life by the rays of the sun, so enlighten my mind by the effulgence of thy Spirit, that he may guide me in the way of thy righteousness. To whatever purpose I apply my mind, may the end which I ever propose to myself be thy honor and service. May I expect all happiness from thy grace and goodness only. Let me not attempt anything whatever that is not pleasing to thee....Do thou add more and more to the gifts of thy grace until I wholly adhere to thy Son Jesus Christ, whom we justly regard as the true Sun, shining constantly in our minds. In order to my obtaining of thee these great and manifold blessings, forget, and out of thy infinite mercy, forgive my offenses, as thou hast promised that thou wilt do to those who call upon thee in sincerity. Amen.”

#### CALVIN CHRONOLOGY

1509	Born in Noyon in Picardy, France
1521-1526	University of Paris
1527-1529	Orleans University
1529-1531	Bourges University
1535	Fled Paris
1536	First edition of <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> Settled in Geneva
1538	Banished from Geneva with Farel
1540	Marriage to Idelette de Bure
1541	Returns to Geneva
1548	Idelette dies
1559	Established Genevan Academy Final edition of <i>Institutes</i>
1564	Death

<sup>1</sup> The outline for these notes is largely drawn from David Calhoun.

## I. The Life of John Calvin (1509-1564) (cp. Luther – 1483-1546)

### A. Youth and Education

1. “A man from the common people” - Calvin was not from nobility or power but an ordinary man whose influence came through faithful preaching and teaching of God’s Word rather than social status.
2. His father had procured for him two ecclesiastical posts (benefice), which supported his studies (pluralism & absenteeism).
3. Master of Arts at Paris (1528) and law at Orleans and Bourges (1531). Calvin became familiar with the humanists, Erasmus, Luther, Wyclif, and Hus.
4. Commentary on Seneca’s *On Mercy* (1532)

### B. Conversion (“an unexpected [or sudden] conversion”)

1. When? 1532-34 (**gave up his posts** in 1534)
2. Who? “God...turned my course”
3. What? “He turned to teachableness a mind too stubborn for its years (Calvin’s **motto**: “My heart, I give you, O Lord, promptly and sincerely.”)
4. 1535 went into exile in Basel, Switzerland.
5. *Institutes* first published in Latin (1536); later translated into French.

### C. Geneva (1536-38)

1. **Geneva** was supposed to be a one-night stop on the way to **Strasbourg**.
2. William Farel (1489-1565) was told that the author of the institutes was in town. And “implored” Calvin to join the ministry in Geneva.
3. When Farel persuaded John Calvin to remain in Geneva, the city bordered on anarchy. Under Calvin’s influence the city government was [eventually] transformed.



When John Knox was in Geneva, years later, he thought it “the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the Apostles.”

4. However, during this first stint:
  - a) People named their dogs “Calvin”
  - b) Sang nasty songs in the tavern about Calvin.
  - c) Shot off their guns next to his window at night.
  - d) Threw rocks at his window when he was studying.

- e) You could say there was not a good pastor/church relationship.
5. Expelled! - Conflict came to head over the issue of excommunication.

#### D. Strasbourg (1538-41)

1. A mentor—Martin Bucer (1491-1551)
2. A ministry – Bucer convinced Calvin to become the pastor over a church of approximately 500 French refugees. During his ministry he wrote a liturgy in French.
3. A wife—Idelette de Bure (1540)<sup>2</sup>

Calvin wrote to his friend William Farel, “She is not only good and honorable, but also handsome.” John Calvin and Idelette enjoyed a deeply loving marriage, though it lasted only nine short years. Their relationship has often been compared to that of Martin Luther and his wife Katie. Calvin described her as “a precious help and an excellent companion.” Their only child died within days of birth—a loss Calvin called “a severe wound.”<sup>3</sup> Yet he found comfort in knowing that “God is Himself a Father, and He knows what is best.” Idelette’s two children from her first marriage lived with them as part of their household.

#### E. Geneva Again (1541-64)

1. Reluctant but willing—“[I would rather] submit to death a hundred times than to that cross [Geneva], on which one had to perish daily a thousand times over” (1540); “But when I remember that I am not my own, I offer up my heart, presented as a sacrifice to the Lord” (1541).
2. The shape of Calvin’s ministry
  - a) Preacher and teacher (“minister of the Word of God in the church of Geneva”)

Calvin was very concerned with what we now call “expository preaching,” as Zwingli had been. He preached through books of the Bible, verse by verse. **On the first Sunday he was back in Geneva, in 1541, after being expelled almost three years before, the room was full of people waiting to hear what he was going to say.** People may have been somewhat ashamed, and they might have expected Calvin to reprimand them for the way they had treated him before. The moment

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<sup>2</sup> There is a book called *Idelette*, a historical novel written by Mrs. John Gerstner which tells the story of this remarkable woman with an historical novel approach. She dedicated the book to her husband: “To my husband, John Gerstner, a professor of church history, without whose help this book would have been far less accurate but far more interesting” (Calhoun).

<sup>3</sup> They had one child together, who died in infancy, and also raised Idelette’s two children from her previous marriage.

was very tense when Calvin stood up to deliver his first sermon back in Geneva. **When he stood up, he said, “You remember three years ago I was on this verse, and today we take it up here.”** He went right on to the next verse without any preceding comments. Nothing could have been less dramatic but more effective at illustrating what Calvin saw as very important in ministry (Calhoun).

b) Reformer (“Calvin found Protestantism a mob transformed it into an army” [B.B. Warfield])

(1) Church

- (a) Basic structure of **Presbyterianism** (*Ecclesiastical Ordinances of the Church of Geneva*)
- (b) **Independence** of church in spiritual matters
- (c) **Worship** (Form of Church Prayers and Hymns)
- (d) The “**secularization of holiness,**” which means that holiness is no longer confined to church or monastery life but extends to everyday work and ordinary callings.
- (e) **Training Center** - In 1559 Calvin established the Genevan Academy, and 900 students enrolled at its opening—French, English, German, Scotch, Swiss, and others came to learn the Scriptures. Many, including John Knox, later returned to their homelands and brought back with them Calvin’s distinctive teaching.

(2) State

- (a) Contrary to what you may have heard, Calvin was **not** the dictator of Geneva.

John Calvin was granted bourgeois status in Geneva only late in life becoming a citizen of the city in 1559. He could not stand for office and, until December 1559, could not even vote in city elections; nor did he have privileged access to, or direct influence over, the city council at any point during most of his career.

“Calvin could and did urge, cajole and plead; he could not, however, command” (Alistair McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin* 109, 125)

(b) Geneva not a theocracy

- (i) Not only was Calvin was not a dictator, but neither was Geneva a theocracy. Although church

and state were closely connected, the city was not governed by Old Testament civil law. Calvin did not teach that Mosaic laws should be directly applied to the state, but rather that their principles—such as love and justice—should guide society.

(ii) Like the rest of sixteenth-century Europe, Geneva treated heresy not only as a religious offense but also as a civil crime, which is why executions for heresy occurred, including the well-known case of Michael Servetus.

- Burning of Michael Servetus in 1553
- McGrath has argued that Calvin's role was "somewhat peripheral" (*A Life of John Calvin*, 105).
- Servetus was a medical doctor who also wrote several theological treatises.
- Was condemned by the Catholics for heresy but escaped and came to Geneva to convert Calvin to his Unitarianism.
- Calvin drew up 38 accusations against him.
- Some in Geneva who opposed Calvin took up Servetus' side saying that since he was condemned by the Catholics, he couldn't be all that bad.
- The city government sought counsel from the other Protestant cantons of Switzerland. They all agreed that Servetus was a heretic and that he should be executed.
- Calvin argued against execution by burning (though not against execution itself) but was overruled by the city council.
- Sebastian Castello severely criticized the execution of Servetus—*Concerning Heretics: Whether They Ought to be Persecuted* [Waldo and Hus argued something similar in their day.]

### 3. The humanness of Calvin

#### a) His headaches and sickness

- b) John Knox was shocked to find Calvin lawn bowling on the Lord's Day (prehaps apocryphal).
  - c) One story that captures the humanness of John Calvin involves his friend Pierre Viret. Wanting to send a message to Viret in Lausanne, Calvin entrusted a letter to one student from the Geneva Academy. Noticing that another student looked disappointed to have nothing to carry, Calvin paused, wrote a second note, and gave it to him. When Viret received them, the first addressed Calvin's business. The second read, "Dear Pierre, I have nothing to add; but seeing this student disappointed, I thought I would write another letter. Please act very surprised when you read this." There is a book titled *The Humanness of John Calvin*. You won't find one called *The Humanness of Martin Luther*; everyone already knows that (Calhoun).
4. Reformation Monument—Reformation leaders often associated together: Farel, Calvin, Beza, Knox were later commemorated in the Reformation Monument (erected 1909).
  5. Calvin's death (1564)
    - a) Minutes of the Little Council—"God gave him a character of great majesty."
    - b) Theodore Beza—"Now that Calvin is dead, life will be less sweet and death less bitter."

## II. The Theology of John Calvin

"Let us beware lest our words and thoughts go beyond what the Word of God tells us. . . . We must leave to God His own knowledge . . . and conceive Him as He makes Himself known to us, without attempting to discover anything about His nature apart from His Word" (Calvin).

*Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1539).

John T. McNeill: Calvin's *Institutes* "holds a place in the short list of books that have notably affected the course of history" (Introduction to the McNeill-Battles edition of the *Institutes*, xxix.).

Alister McGrath: "The intellectual domination of Protestantism by theologians of the Reformed tradition is due to both the substance and structure of Calvin's final edition of the *Institutes*" (*A Life of John Calvin*, 139-40).

### A. Growth of a Book

1. From the "little booklet" of 1536 (255 pages in the English) to four books and 80 chapters of 1559 (1500 pages).
2. Not revised but expanded

- a) Study of the church fathers—Chrysostom, Bernard of Clairvaux, and especially Augustine
- b) Ministry at Strasbourg and Geneva
- c) Study of the Scripture
  - (1) Commentaries on most of the books of the Old and New Testaments
  - (2) Accuracy, clarity, brevity, humility
  - (3) Calvin concerning his writings on Scripture

Commentary on Romans: God limits our knowledge “first that we should be kept humble and also that we should continue to have dealings with our fellows.”

“The majesty [of the Word of God] is somehow diminished...if we do not interpret it with great discretion and moderation.”

Karl Barth: “How energetically Calvin, having first established what stands in the text, sets himself to rethink the whole material and to wrestle with it, till the walls which separate the sixteenth century from the first become transparent” (*Church Dogmatics* 1/1, 16-17).

Alister McGrath: “The origins of Calvin’s methods as perhaps the greatest biblical commentator of his age lie in his study of law in the advanced atmosphere of Orleans and Bourges. There is every indication that he learned . . . to approach a foundational text directly, to interpret it within the linguistic and historical parameters of its context, and to apply it to the needs of the present day” (*A Life of John Calvin*, 59).

### 3. And re-arranged

Illustration: Providence and predestination treated together until the 1559 edition. There providence appears in book 1 (God the Creator) and predestination in book 3 (The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ) (after prayer). Now it answers the question, “Where did my salvation come from?”

## B. Characteristics of the Institutes

### 1. Biblical

- a) Priority of Scripture

Ford Lewis Battles: Calvin is “a scriptural theologian first, and a user of philosophy, logic, rhetoric—all human tools of organization—only second” (*Analysis*, 19).

b) Use of Scripture

John T. McNeill: “His readiness in bringing scripture passages to bear upon each point of argument is astonishing, and has perhaps never been surpassed” (Introduction to the McNeill-Battles edition of the *Institutes*, lix).

R. C. Reed: Calvin “was a wholesale plagiarist, from Moses and David, Isaiah and Ezekiel, Jesus and John, Peter and Paul” (*The Gospel as Taught by Calvin*, 14).

2. Systematic

“As systematizer...he makes his greatest demand on our admiration and gratitude” (B.B. Warfield, “John Calvin the Theologian,” 22).

- a) Not “iron-clad logic” but a concern for orderly arrangement
- b) Respects the “limits” of Scripture (“learned ignorance”)

Alexander Smellie: Calvin’s *Institutes* “is a great book. It is great in its constructive power. It welds into a unity things which before had stood apart in isolation, unrelated and alone. Athanasius had preached the mystery of the Incarnation, God manifest in flesh. Augustine had dwelt on the dark fact of original sin and the bright fact of redeeming grace. Anselm had gloried in the atonement of the Cross as a satisfaction to divine justice and holy law. But Calvin saw their mutual relations and their organic connection with each other. He felt, also, that all of them were required in Christian faith and experience. He brought them together, so that they were separate no longer; and that is an incalculable gain to the Church of Christ” (*The Reformation in its Literature*, 159).

3. Devotional

- a) *Summa pietatis*—“the whole sum of piety and whatever it is necessary to know in the doctrine of salvation” (1536 sub-title)
- b) Words near the beginning of the final (1559) edition—“Unless [we] establish our complete happiness in [God], we will never give [ourselves] truly and sincerely to Him” (1,2,1)

- c) Goal is worship—doctrine of God (1,5,9), election (3,21,1), Lord's Supper (4,17,7)

Jean Cadier: "I am thinking of the man who said to me a short time ago as he came out of a lecture, 'I have just been converted through reading the *Institutes*.' And when I asked him to tell me what exactly had been the message which had effected this transformation, in his life, he replied: 'I learned from reading Calvin that all the worries about health and about the uncertain future which had hitherto dominated my life were without much importance and that the only things that counted were obedience to the will of God and a care for His glory'" (*The Man God Mastered*, 178).

#### 4. Practical

- a) Calvin's *Institutes* were written "not in an ivory tower, but against the background of teething troubles." (Parker, *Portrait of Calvin*, 72)
- b) "Street corner" theologian

#### c) **The principle of accommodation**

(1) Scripture "proceeds at the pace of a mother stooping to her child, so to speak, so as not to leave us behind in our weakness." (3,21,4)

(2) "We must, therefore, consider what questions each is able to bear, and accommodate our doctrine to the capacity of the individual." (*Commentary on Romans 14:1*)

#### C. Calvin on Communion (Gonzalez, p. 68)

1. Took a position between Luther and Zwingli
2. Affirmed the real spiritual presence of Christ
3. Not merely symbolic, nor merely devotional
4. There is in it a true divine action for the church that partakes of the sacrament.
5. "This does not mean that the body of Christ descends from heaven, nor that it can be present in several altars at the same time, as Luther claimed."
6. In "the act of communion, by the power of the Holy Spirit, believers are taken to heaven and share with Christ in a **foretaste of the heavenly banquet.**"

**Next Week: "The Anabaptists" (chapter 25)**