



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

A PPA Seminar: Fall 2017

John Calvin: Pastor and Pilgrim

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**Prayer with Calvin before studying lessons in school:** *“O Lord, You who are the fountain of all wisdom and learning, because You have pleased to give me the means of instruction as a child, so I my know how to rule myself in holiness and honorable behavior throughout the course of my life: Please also illumine my understanding, which of itself is blind, so that it may grasp the teaching that will be given to me; please strengthen my memory to be able to remember well, dispose my heart to receive what is taught willingly and with due eagerness, so that the opportunity You present to me may not be lost because of my ingratitude. To do this, please pour Your Holy Spirit on me, the Spirit of all intelligence, truth, judgment, prudence, and teaching, Who will make me able to profit well so that my teachers’ efforts to teach me may not be lost. Whatever the studies to which I apply myself, grant that I may direct them to the true purpose, which is to know You in our Lord Jesus Christ, to have full confidence of salvation and life in Your grace alone, and to serve You rightly and purely, according to Your pleasure, so that everything I learn may be an instrument to aid me in that [serving Your pleasure].*

*And because You promise to give me wisdom also to the small and humble, and to confound the proud in the vanity of their minds—and likewise to manifest Yourself to those of right heart, and on the contrary to blind the wicked and perverse—grant that I may be brought under the rule of true humility, by which I may be made teachable and obedient: first to You, secondly to those in authority over me, whom You have appointed to rule and teach me. Moreover, please dispose my heart to seek You without pretense, renouncing every carnal and evil affection. And in such a way I now am preparing myself to serve You one day in the estate and calling to which You may be pleased to appoint me when I have come of age. Hear me, merciful Father, by our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.*

## **Calvin the Man: “To Make Godly Christians, not Calvinists”**

### **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, 1564)**

**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. The ungodly will greedily seize upon this word, but I say it again that all I have done has been worth nothing, and that I am a miserable creature. But certainly, I can say this, that 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.*

*As to my doctrine, I have taught faithfully, and God has given me grace to write what I have written as faithfully as it was in my power...I have always faithfully propounded what I esteemed to be for the glory of God...I pray you make no change, no innovation. People often ask for novelties. Not that I desire for my own sake out of ambition that what I have established should remain, and that people should retain it without wishing for something better, but because all changes are dangerous and sometimes hurtful” (May 1, 1564).*

Buried in a wooden box in an unmarked grave. His goal was to honor and glorify God and not Himself (Psa. 115:1). He wanted to make Christians, not Calvinists.

**Birth (July 10, 1509)**

**Youth and Early Education**

1512: Death of mother- Grief/loss/heartache very early in life; Church as “mother”

1521: Goes to Paris to study- Best theological education

1528: Goes to Orleans and then Bourges to study law- Obedience/honor to father

1531: Death of father- Grief/loss/heartache

1533: Calvin leaves Paris- Exile/pilgrim

1534: Calvin leaves France- Exile/pilgrim

### **Conversion (ca. 1533-34)**

#### **Quotation:**

*“When I was as yet a very little boy, my father had destined me for the study of theology. But afterwards, when he considered that the legal profession commonly raised those who followed it to wealth, this prospect induced him suddenly to change his purpose. Thus it came to pass, that I was withdrawn from the study of philosophy, and was put to the study of the law. To this pursuit I endeavored faithfully to apply myself, in obedience to the will of my father; but God, by the sweet guidance of his providence, at length gave a different direction to my course.*

*And first, since I was so obstinately devoted to the superstitions of Popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame, which was more hardened in such matters than might have been expected from one at my early period of life. Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that although I did not altogether leave off my [humanist] studies, I yet pursued them with less ardour.*

*I was quite surprised to find that before a year had elapsed, all who had any desire after purer doctrine were continually coming to me to learn, although I myself was as yet but a mere novice and tyro [beginner]. Being of a disposition somewhat unpolished and bashful, which led me always to love the shade and retirement, I then began to seek some secluded corner where I might be withdrawn from the public view; but so far from being able to accomplish the object of my desire, all my retreats were like public schools. In short, whilst my one great object was to live in seclusion without being known, God so led me about through different turnings and changes, that he never permitted me to rest in any place, until, in spite of my natural disposition, he brought me forth to public notice” (Calvin, Commentary on the Psalms, Vol. 1, preface, xl-xli).*

### **Reformer**

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

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

**Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531)**- An exemplary and faithful minister and martyr

**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”).

#### **Quotation from Farel:**

*“Wherever else I had gone, I had taken care to conceal that I was the author of [the Institutes]; and I had resolved to continue in the same privacy and obscurity, until at length Guillaume (William) Farel detained me at Geneva, no so much by counsel and exhortation, as by a dreadful curse, which I felt to be as if God had from heaven laid his mighty hand upon me to arrest me. As the most direct road to Strasbourg, to which I then intended to retire, was shut up by wars, I had resolved to pass quickly by Geneva, without staying longer than a single night in that city. A little before this, Popery had driven from it by the exertions of the excellent man whom I have named and Pierre Viret; but matters were not yet brought to a settled state, and the city was divided into ungodly and dangerous factions. Then a person, who has now basely apostatized and returned to the Papists, discovered me and made me known to others.*

*Upon this, Farel, who burned with an extraordinary zeal to advance the gospel, immediately strained every nerve to detain me. And after learning that my heart was set upon devoting myself to private studies, for which I wished to keep myself free from other pursuits, and finding that he gained nothing by entreaties, he proceeded to utter the imprecation that God would curse my retirement and the tranquility of my studies which I sought, if I should withdraw and refuse to help, when the necessity was so urgent. By this imprecation I was so terror-struck, that I gave up the journey I had undertaken; but sensible of my natural shyness and timidity, I would not to myself to any particular office.”*

### **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/pilgrim**

### **Exile in Strasbourg (1538-41)- Characterized by peace and mature spiritual growth**

#### **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)**

Concerning her death: *“Although the death of my wife has been exceedingly painful to me, yet I subdue my grief as well as I can...I have been bereaved of the best companion of my life, of one who, if anything more difficult had befallen me, would not only have been the willing sharer of my exile and indigence, but even of my death. During her life she was the faithful helper of my ministry. From her I never experienced the slightest hindrance. She was never troublesome to me throughout the entire course of her illness; she was more anxious about her children than about herself. Taking up the matter immediately, she said, ‘I have already committed them to God.’ When I said that that was not to prevent me from caring for them, she replied, ‘I know you will not neglect what you know has been committed to God.’ Lately, also, when...she should talk with me regarding these matters, I heard her give the following brief answer: ‘Assuredly the principal thing is that they live a pious and holy life. My husband is not to be urged to instruct them in religious knowledge and in the fear of God. If they be pious, I am sure he will gladly be a father to them; but if not, they do not deserve that I should ask for aught in their behalf.’”*

#### **Importance of Discipline**

#### **Jacopo Sadoletto (1477-1547)- “Reply to Sadoletto”**

### **Geneva II (1541: Calvin returns and remains until death)- constant tension and persecutions**

#### **Quote (about going back to Geneva):**

*“Rather would I submit to death a hundred times than to that cross on which I had to perish daily a thousand times over.”*

**Letter to Farel:** *“Whenever I call to mind the wretchedness of my life there, how can it not be but that my very soul must shudder at any proposal for my return? I will not mention the anxiety by which we were continually tossed up and down and driven to and fro from the time I was appointed you colleague... When I remember by what torture my conscience was racked at that time, and with how much anxiety it was continually boiling over, forgive me if I dread the place as having about it something of a fatality in my case. You yourself, with God, are my best witness that no lesser tie could have held me there so long, save that I dared not throw off the yoke of my calling, which I was convinced had been laid on me by the Lord.”*

*...Therefore, so long as I was bound hand and foot, I preferred to suffer to that extreme rather than for a moment to listen to the thoughts that were apt to come into my mind of moving elsewhere, thoughts which often stole in upon me unawares. But now that by the favor of God I am delivered, who will not excuse me if I am unwilling to plunge again into the gulf and whirlpool which I know to be so dangerous and destructive?"*

## **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].*

### **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."*