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The Life and Legacy of John Calvin



Church History - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg delves into the life and legacy of John Calvin, a highly influential theologian of the Reformation era. Calvin was a humanist scholar who became acquainted with the gospel while studying New Testament Greek. He later became convinced of the Reformed faith and formulated his beliefs in his successful book, which served as a key text for the Calvinist theology that followed. Calvin's legacy includes the influential city of Geneva, which he helped to shape through his autocratic ruling style and strongly held beliefs.

Transcript

Tonight, we're going to be talking about the most influential theologian of the Reformation. Martin Luther, of course, is not the man we're talking about, but he is the name that usually comes to mind when we think of the Reformation, and for good reason. Martin Luther was the spark plug and the spearhead of the Reformation.

Before Martin Luther, there were others who tried to reform the Catholic Church, or at least tried to break off and meet separately from it. Most of them were hunted down and burned at the stake. The Waldensians were among those who were of that category, and several other groups before.

Luther is remembered only because he had a measure of success that the others did not. He did not die a martyr. He was hunted, but he was never caught.

And because he was not caught, he lived to have tremendous influence. His influence brought about such an undermining of the otherwise unchallenged authority of the Pope that many countries in Europe ceased to have allegiance to the Pope and saw that there was an alternative. So that in Martin Luther's time, in his lifetime, he saw a transition in Europe from an entirely and seamlessly Roman Catholic Europe to a Europe where certain princes of certain nations were still Roman Catholic and certain princes of other nations were now Lutheran.

And of course, Luther was working in Germany, contemporary with him. Over in Zurich, Switzerland, there was Ulrich Zwingli, who was doing similar things in Switzerland. He

never did have quite the impact on Switzerland that Luther had on Germany and much of the rest of Europe.

But Zwingli began the reforming work in a significant way in Switzerland. John Calvin, however, became the most influential theologian of the Reformation. He also worked in Switzerland, though he was not Swiss himself.

Zwingli, by the way, was his Reformation took place in German-speaking Switzerland. As you must know, part of Switzerland is German-speaking and part of it is French-speaking. Even as Canada is part English-speaking and part French-speaking, the country of Switzerland has always had the French-speaking and German-speaking sectors.

And Zwingli's impact was in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, whereas Calvin's initial impact was in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. And that's partly because he was a Frenchman, although he knew many languages. He was a humanist scholar before he was a Christian.

And he knew Greek and Latin and Hebrew and probably a lot of other more current European languages as well as many, almost all educated Europeans know several living languages, unlike us Americans. But Calvin's impact was also in Switzerland because he had to flee from France because of his Protestant leanings eventually and the persecution he received in France. And he found a haven, as it turns out, in Geneva where he had a tremendous impact and from which he operated like a hub of the Reformation and spreading out his doctrine to all of Europe and having a tremendous and lasting impact on much of Europe and eventually on America as well.

Now, Calvin and Luther are very much the biggest names in the 16th century Reformation. Luther because he's essentially the founder of the Reformation and Calvin because he was the most influential theologian of the Reformation. He was the first one to really write out a systematic theology of the Reformed religion, which became the standard even to this day for many Reformed people.

Calvin is the founder of what is today called Reformed theology, even though technically Luther was a Reformer. The theology that is today called Reformed theology goes back to John Calvin and really before Calvin, it goes back to Augustine. And some, especially Calvinists, would say it goes back to the Apostle Paul.

Those who are not Calvinist don't believe this goes back to the Apostle Paul, and they think it started with Augustine in the year 400. But we can maybe talk about that later. The point here is that Calvin's theology is what is known as Reformed theology today.

If you hear people talk about being Reformed in theology, what they mean is that they are Calvinist in their theology. So we can speak of Calvin's influence in terms of the theology that was named after him, Calvinism, or the more generic term, Reformed

theology. And, of course, also Presbyterianism.

The Presbyterian denomination traces its roots back to Calvin's Geneva. Presbyterianism really is a term that speaks more of the form of church government that Calvin instituted, which is the Presbyterian form of government. From the Greek word *presbyteros*, which means elder, an elder.

And as opposed to the Episcopalian form of government, *episkopos* is the Greek word for bishop. And the Roman Catholic Church and some of the other Reformed churches had a bishop overseeing churches. But Presbyterian form of government has elders, a body of elders.

Eventually there were 12 elders in Geneva who oversaw the Reformation under Calvin's guidance. Well, let's go back a little further. Let's go back to the birth of this man.

He was born in Noyon, France, a Frenchman, of course. He was born in 1509. Unlike Luther, who was a peasant in Germany, and therefore poor, and became a monk, Calvin didn't have anything in common with Luther in that respect.

Calvin was born in an aristocratic family. He never became a monk. He became a humanist scholar at the university first.

The reason he was an aristocrat is because his father was the secretary and the attorney to the bishop of the town of Noyon where he was born. And therefore he had a high church office, good pay, and comfortable circumstances that Calvin was raised in. He received a good education, studied at several universities in France.

At age 14, he went to the University of Paris to study theology and graduated from there. And at age 19, he entered another university at Orleans to study law. This was at his father's desire.

Calvin really loved theology. His father wanted him to be a lawyer. Calvin really wanted to be just a scholar.

He didn't want to be a pastor. He didn't want to be so much a theologian, really. Eventually, his passion was for theology, but initially he was just a carnal, unconverted Roman Catholic student of theology at the University of Paris.

But eventually, of course, he was converted. But before he was converted, he had planned to go into the Roman Catholic priesthood, but that never materialized. He never was ordained a priest.

And he changed his goal to become just a scholar. He wanted to spend his life basically in a quiet library somewhere, just reading the classics in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. It takes a certain kind of personality to want to do that kind of thing.

I can kind of relate with that. I'd like to spend my whole time reading, but it gets a little lonely. He himself described himself as an antisocial type of person.

He just wanted to retire with his books and learn things, and I guess write. In fact, he did write one very scholarly work when he was 23 years old, before he was a Christian. And that was called A Commentary on Seneca's Treatise on Clemency.

Seneca, of course, a philosopher, and Calvin following in the scholarly tradition of a classical scholar, writing a commentary on Seneca's work. That commentary, I presume, is still available. And it's the only work that we know of any significance that Calvin wrote before he was converted.

Sometime between the years 1532 and 1533, Calvin was converted, though it's not known exactly when or exactly how. It apparently happened as he was studying the New Testament in Greek that he became acquainted with the gospel. Now, it's not clear exactly what form he understood the gospel initially in, because he did not intend at first to leave the Roman Catholic Church, although he was certainly aware of the Reformation going on.

Zwingli had already thoroughly reformed Zurich, and of course Luther had been influential for about 10 years in Germany and elsewhere. So Calvin was not unaware of the Reformation going on in other parts of Europe. But though he gave his life to God and surrendered to the gospel, as he understood it, he did not initially plan to leave the Roman Catholic Church.

It's rather interesting how he came to be associated with the Reform movement. It was kind of accidental. He didn't intend to.

He had a very good friend named Nicholas Kopp, and Nicholas Kopp became the rector of the University of Paris, where Calvin happened to be with him and was very close to him. And in his inaugural address as the new rector of the university, Nicholas Kopp gave a very strong argument for reforming the church, that is, reforming the Catholic Church in France. Now, the university was not quite ready to go along with this.

As a matter of fact, there was a strong negative reaction. And so both Nicholas Kopp and his friend John Calvin were expelled from Paris. They actually had to flee because they would have been arrested.

In fact, they were caught up with and arrested briefly and imprisoned for a while. The reason Calvin got in trouble because it was widely reported that he had written a speech for his friend and is still suspected by historians that Calvin wrote that speech. And so if that is true, of course, then Calvin already had come to the view that the church needed to be reformed, but he was not quite ready to leave it.

But he was sort of forced to leave by his association with this man, making these strong

statements in public and causing this big scene. So they were both apprehended when they fled from Paris briefly at Nyon, where they were for a short time imprisoned and then released. After that, they fled from France altogether and sought refuge in Basel, Switzerland.

And it is in this way that Calvin sort of inadvertently became associated with the Reformed movement. He never went back and was associated with the Catholic Church again. So, I mean, there are some vague areas there as far as how he came to really, in his own heart, be convinced of the Reformed views.

It is not so hard to know how Luther did. Luther had a dramatic conversion. Of course, Luther was a tormented soul.

He was sinful, tormented in his conscience. A man continually losing sleep over the sins that he felt in his conscience. And then he had a breakthrough when he discovered in Romans, Paul's statement, that the just shall live by faith.

And Luther was converted by that revelation. And Luther was always a passionate man, a different temperament than Calvin. Luther was a strong man, a big man and a strong man, an aggressive man.

Calvin was a thin and weak and sickly man most of his life. And he was stubborn. But he was not the aggressive type that Luther was.

And very different temperaments. But Luther's conversion was with a bang. He just passed from being tormented by the sense of guilt to being totally, having a relief and a sense of liberty from discovering the gospel in the book of Romans.

Calvin may have kind of drifted into becoming a Christian. He was a churchman already and apparently lived a disciplined life and so forth and perhaps didn't have such strong nagging of his conscience all the time. And it's possible that he may never, it might be that he couldn't even pinpoint the day of his conversion.

Now I was raised in a church tradition that always said, if you don't know the day you were converted, you weren't. Anyone ever heard that one before? If you don't know when you're born again, then you aren't born again yet. And that always struck me as orthodox because I was raised believing that.

Though I'd have to say I'm not so sure that's true. I'm not sure that those when Jesus walked the earth who followed Him always knew the exact moment that they passed from being curious to fully committed. I think some people, their confidence in Jesus and their loyalty to Him just kind of developed and eventually they realized that they were totally in His back pocket and that they didn't quite know when they stepped over that line.

I think there's people like that today. And Calvin, assuming he was really saved, may have really been that kind of person too. He may not have really known what day he was converted.

He was a religious kind of a guy studying the New Testament and eventually just came to find himself agreeing, I guess, with the Reformed faith and eventually being pretty strongly convinced of it. And if he did write Nicholas Copp's speech, it's clear that he became very adamantly convinced of the Reformed faith. But this is how he came to be associated with the Protestants as opposed to the Catholics with which he had formerly been associated.

Now, Basel, or Basel in Switzerland, was a place where he was all right. He didn't really get into any trouble there. There was a strong tolerance for the Reformed faith there.

And so he stayed there for several years. In 1536, Calvin wrote the first edition. In Basel, Switzerland, he wrote the first edition of the Institutes of the Christian Religion, which is his classic work.

He revised it several times in his lifetime, the last revision being just five years before his death in 1559. And it got bigger every time he revised it, sort of like my tape series on things. The first series is two tapes long.

Next time I give it, it's 12 tapes long. Eventually, Calvin's Institutes was four volumes. And that's the form it's in now, if you buy it.

I have a copy of it. It's all in one book, but it's in four books and really thick. But Institutes, the original version of it, was not quite so large, but it was a very concise and clear and convincing statement of the Reformed faith as Calvin understood it.

And he was a brilliant man. He wrote it when he was 26 years old. And it became the most influential book of the Reformation.

In fact, he addressed it to the king of France, Francis I, who was persecuting Protestants in France. And though it did not accomplish its object, it did not... He basically appealed to the king of France to tolerate and to be convinced of the Protestant views. He did not convince the king.

But the Protestants in France and elsewhere in the world immediately looked to Calvin as the great spokesman and enunciator of their views and great defender of his. So he was an overnight hero throughout Europe for having published this book, Institutes of the Christian Religion. And of course, many people would say it's still the most perfect presentation of Christian theology or Protestant theology ever written.

Now, Calvin, even though he revised it for many times in his lifetime, and he was a much, you know, a very old man by the time he... Well, not extremely old, but he was in

his late 50s. That's not really very old. But he was considerably older in his last revision than when he first wrote it.

He, at the end of his life, said he had not really altered his views in any particular over the whole period of time, from the first time he wrote Institutes to the time that he came up with his last edition. The later editions were just expansions. They were not changes.

To tell you the truth, that's always made me a little suspicious. I cannot imagine being able to say that I have not altered my theological views at any point since I was 23 years old. Actually, 26.

Calvin was 26 when he wrote Institutes. Now, it is, you know, if a man in his 50s can say he hasn't changed his doctrine in any particular since he was 26 years old, that tells you one of two things. Either his theology was perfect at age 26, or else he's a stubborn guy who wouldn't change his mind about anything and wouldn't grow beyond his early understanding.

If I held all the views that I taught when I was 26 years old, I would think myself to be stunted spiritually, because it's just, for one thing, I mean, if Calvinism, let us say, was indeed a thoroughly thought out theology that had been enunciated and explained and had beat out all rival views throughout centuries of Christian thought, and he became convinced of this by the age of 26, he might well be able to say, well, you know, I can't help it. The perfect theology came on, and I was taught it well, and I just happened to be fortunate to have perfect theology by age 26. I never had to change my mind.

The thing is, he formulated this, and he was only three years old in the faith when he published it. He'd been a Christian for three years. So he's like a baby Christian, but an immense scholar, a great scholar of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, and so forth, and of course, an immense intellect.

There's no question about it, Calvin was a brilliant man. But I've always been a bit suspicious of the fact that a guy who's been saved for three years and is only 26 years old could write a major theological work in his 50s and say, I've never changed my mind about anything. And to me, when I meet someone like that, I think this person either had perfect theology when they were in their 20s or just thinks they did, or simply wouldn't change.

I've often thought about people who write enormously successful books about some controversial theological issue when they're relatively young. I've thought of Hal Lindsay many times. His book, Late Great Planet Earth, sold 20 million copies.

That's a big mega bestseller, 20 million copies. Any book that sells that is pretty major. Well, put him on the map right away.

And what if he now, 30 years later, decided that he didn't quite think that that outlook on

the end times was correct? Well, I mean, if he is a tremendously humble man, he might put out a retraction. I write a book saying I was all wrong in that book. You know, I'll pay you back the dollars you spent for my 20 million copies.

You know, I misled you. Now, I'm not saying Hal Lindsay's wrong, although everyone here knows I think he was. But whether I think he was or not isn't what matters.

The fact is that the question I'm wondering is, could he conceivably ever think he was? I mean, there was a time when I thought he was right, too. But I never went on record and had 20 million people read my book. And I had the liberty, therefore, in obscurity, to change my views as I read the Bible and had the freedom to do so without having to eat great masses of humble pie.

But, you know, when a man becomes enormously successful in his early age for writing an incredibly successful book, there's strong psychological pressure to hold on to those views, even in the face of strong opposition. And Calvin did experience strong opposition, but he never, according to his own statement, never did budge from his view. Come on in.

You're welcome to come on in. There's probably more room to sit down in there if you'd like. Oh, yeah.

Yeah, we have a handout here for you. Here's two of them. So, anyway, at age 26, he wrote Institutes and became an overnight hero of the persecuted Protestant viewpoint.

And, by the way, I mean, obviously, even though I am not a Calvinist, there'd be very much of what Calvin taught that no Christian would disagree with, no Protestant would disagree with. And I have to say that probably the majority, although I can't claim to have read that whole thing, I've read digests of it, but I would say probably the majority of what's in Calvin's Institutes, even non-Calvinist Protestants would probably say, that's well put and I agree with that, you know. There are distinctives of Calvin's theology that not all Christians agree with, and we'll talk about those a little later.

But suffice it to say that it was while he was in Basel at age 26 in 1536 that he wrote the first edition of Institutes. Originally it was written in Latin, though he immediately translated it into French so that the French Protestants could have it readily accessible to them. And I mentioned that it was addressed originally to the King Francis I of France, hoping to alleviate the persecution of Protestants in that country, which it did not necessarily do.

But it certainly made Calvin an overnight success. I shouldn't say success, because he wasn't trying to become a leader of the Protestant movement as a matter of fact. He just wanted to be a scholar.

He just wanted to write scholarly works. It's just that the Protestants were in the market

for a scholarly leader at that time, and immediately his work pointed him out as the guy who could fill that niche. So soon after he published Institutes, Calvin was on his way to Strasburg.

Now, Strasburg was in Germany, but Protestantism was well-received in Strasburg, and he really intended to settle down for the rest of his life, to just spending his life in a library and studying and writing scholarly works. That's what he wanted to do with his life. However, something changed that.

Calvinists would say that God's sovereignty changed that. What actually happened was, as he was on his way to Germany, between where he was and where he was going, there was some war going on between the French and the Spanish. He didn't want to walk through the war zone, so he made a detour through Geneva, Switzerland.

There, in Geneva, there was a preacher who had been there for four years, a Protestant preacher trying to preach reform to the Catholic Church there, named William Farrell. While in Geneva, of course, Calvin attended church, and Farrell was preaching, and Farrell recognized Calvin there and realized he had an illustrious scholar and author in the congregation. So after the church service, Farrell approached him and urged him to stay and help with the reform in the city of Geneva, because though Farrell was fiery and energetic, he had only had limited success, and he felt quite sure the caliber of Calvin could help bring this thing to completion.

By the way, he was right. It did happen under Calvin. Calvin initially didn't want to do it.

He didn't want to be a reformer. He wanted to be a scholar and a writer. But William Farrell said to him, you are seeking only your own will in wanting to be a scholar, but God wants you to settle here in Geneva and help with the reform, and if you don't do this, God will judge you for doing your own will instead of his.

Well, Calvin took that to heart. He was actually terrified when he heard that, and so he agreed to stay in Geneva, and he took that as a call from God to Geneva. Well, his first attempts to reform Geneva were not as successful as his later successes would have caused us to expect.

He spent the rest of his life in Geneva with the exception of three years where he was exiled. We'll talk more about that in a little bit. But he had to flee from Geneva for a few years because of a political situation there, which turned around three years later, and he came back with more power than before.

But he had to leave, and during a three-year absence, he went to Strasbourg, where he had intended to go originally when he was on his way there, and he had gone to Geneva on his way to Strasbourg. He did flee from Geneva at one point. He went to Strasbourg.

He spent three years there, and there he became the pastor of 500 French refugees,

Protestants, in the city, and enjoyed tremendous success. As a matter of fact, the biographers of Calvin all seem to agree this was the happiest three years of his life. He had carte blanche to preach whatever he wanted to preach, to set up the church the way he wanted to set it up.

He had his fellow French nationals he was ministering to, and so they received him well better than the Swiss did because he was an outsider there. And he also married there. He married a woman who was the widow of an Anabaptist martyr.

I've often wondered about that, about their marriage. Actually, she didn't live long. He was a sickly man.

She must have been sickly too. In 1540, he married her. Her name was Adelette de Beur.

They only had one child, and the child died a few days after it was born. My notes say the child did, but that's a typographical error. It should say died a few days after it was born in 1542.

She had a couple children from her first marriage when he met her, but the only child they ever had together died at infancy. She herself died a few years later in 1549, and he outlived her by 15 years. He always spoke very highly of her.

In later writing about his wife, he always indicated that they were very happily married, that she was a godly woman and a good help in the ministry. What I find interesting is that her first husband had been an Anabaptist martyr, and that Calvin himself strongly opposed Anabaptists, wrote treatises against them, and even favored and was instrumental in the burning of at least one Anabaptist martyr. Not her first husband, I don't think.

I always wondered how it is that she and he got along, unless her husband had become an Anabaptist and she had not. That's a possibility. It's possible that her husband was a convinced Anabaptist, and she never was, and so she could marry someone who persecuted Anabaptists and be happily married to him.

I don't know very much about her. All the historians say the same thing. Her husband was an Anabaptist martyr, but I've never been able to get any information as to whether she ever was an Anabaptist herself.

A change in the political power in Geneva led the reformers who were there to beg Calvin to come back. He didn't want to. He was having a good time in Strasbourg doing what he liked to do, but they prevailed on him.

With the change in the politics there, the city was drifting back to Roman Catholicism, and it was thought by the reformers there that no one less than Calvin himself could hold the city firm to its Protestant moorings. Apparently, they convinced him of that, and with

great reluctance, he accepted the call to go back to Geneva, where he spent the rest of his life. While there, he came back to Geneva actually on his own terms.

I'll tell you more about that in a moment. He set up a university, became the University of Geneva. This became a place, Geneva actually under Calvin's leadership, became a place where refugee Protestants from all over Europe would come, even from England and Scotland.

Men like John Knox from Scotland came there and studied under Calvin. Calvin set up a university and trained these Protestant refugees from all these different countries in Calvinism, and then they would go back to their own countries and preach it, and that is how Calvinism spread to the whole of Europe and especially took hold in certain countries, Netherlands and Scotland particularly. Scotland became the most strongly Calvinist country, and consistently so in the time of John Knox, still is a very strongly Calvinist country, and the Netherlands also, Holland, became very Calvinistic, stronghold of that theology.

Anyway, eventually, like his wife before him, and like all other people before him, Calvin died. He died on May 27th, 1564, and he died in the arms of his successor, Theodor Beza. So we've read about the successors of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin.

Now, at least we got their names. We haven't studied them much. When Luther died, the Reform Movement in Germany was left to Philipp Melancthon to take over, and he headed up the Lutheran Movement, although he made some changes from Luther's theology, and Lutheranism did take a turn.

It's no longer exactly like what Luther believed. In Zurich, when Zwingli died, he left Bollinger in charge, and Bollinger succeeded him there, and then when Calvin died, Theodor Beza took over as leader of the Reforms in Geneva. So these are the three great influential reformers, Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, and now you know who succeeded them in the next generation.

Calvin himself, by the way, was a second-generation reformer. He benefited from the earlier works of Luther and Zwingli and so forth. He's never considered to be a first-generation reformer, although his life did overlap that of Luther and of Zwingli, but he came in later and kind of picked up where these men left off in a way.

I want to talk a little bit about the reforms that Calvin succeeded in bringing about in Geneva, because Geneva became sort of the prototype of what many people today would like to see America become, and what the Puritans wanted America to become when they came over. There are still many Calvinists who believe that what happened in Geneva could happen here, and not only that, it could happen the world over, especially post-millennialists, the Reconstructionists believe that Calvin's Geneva is simply a model of what can happen to everywhere in the world. He actually set up his idea of a

theocratic society.

Now, theocratic comes from the word theos, which is God, the Greek word for God, and kratik has to do with ruling, like an autocratic system is self-governing. Auto means self in Greek, and kratik is democratic, is governed by the populace. A theocratic system is like that of Israel in the Old Testament.

God ruled it. God was the ruler. And Calvin had this idea for setting up the kingdom of God, first of all, in Geneva, and he did a pretty good job of getting done what he hoped to do.

Some of us, if we could go back in a time machine from the liberty that we experience here as Christians in America, could go back and live in Geneva in the days of Calvin, would feel terribly oppressed, even if we were Calvinists, even if you agreed with his theology. There's simply, it was like a totalitarian system in one sense. In some respects, he set up a system that was like we think of communist countries, where the authorities could go in and enter your home without a warrant and see if you've got any contraband in there, see if you've got anything in there that's contrary to the church and so forth, and you could be burned at the stake if you were a blasphemer or a heretic.

It was not exactly what we would find tolerable. But it certainly made everyone into a Calvinist in Geneva fairly successfully. Before Calvin arrived in Geneva, the city was governed by two men who were themselves under one man.

The two men were the bishop of the church and the administrator of civil affairs, and both of them answered to the Duke of Savoy. But just before Calvin came to the city, the people there sort of rejected the Duke of Savoy's authority, and there was a new system of government set up in the city. There was a general assembly and an elected committee known as the little council, and these were just elected by the citizenry.

Now, the general council was in charge of things. When Calvin came to Geneva the first time, remember, he was there for a while, then he had to flee to Strasbourg for three years, then he came back and spent the rest of his life there. The first time he came to Geneva, he came and in 1537 presented to the little council a series of articles.

There's a typo in your notes there where it says in 1537, Calvin, a series of articles. It should be presented a series of articles calling for reform in Geneva, that is, wanting to reform the Catholic church and so forth and the society in ways that had not yet been done. What he envisaged was a Puritan society of trained and conscientious Christians who would not need to be restrained by civil government because they would be controlled by the church, essentially.

If they were disobedient, they'd be excommunicated from the church, and those that were excommunicated from the church, of course, would be subject to governmental

sanctions and punishments, but he believed that if people were properly trained and if the church was correctly exercising discipline, essentially everyone in the city would come under church authority and would behave. And he got the city to, in many respects, approach that ideal. Now what he suggested to the little council was that he wanted to replace the weekly Catholic Mass with a monthly observance of the Lord's Supper.

And Calvin believed that the Lord's Supper, that only the spiritual presence of Christ was in the elements, whereas the Catholics believed that the elements became the actual physical body and blood of Christ in the Mass. Calvin believed that only the spiritual presence of Christ was in it, so it had different meaning than the Catholic Mass, but it also had a different frequency. The Mass was celebrated every Sunday.

Calvin wanted to make it only every once a month. And he wanted to excommunicate, that is, withhold from the Lord's Supper, persons who were unworthy to take it. He wanted everyone in the city to live upright, moral, Christian lives, and he wanted the sanctions upon those who did not do so to be that they would be excluded from the Lord's Supper.

This is what he presented to the little council as part of his reform ideas. In order to identify those who were unworthy to take the Lord's Supper, he wanted the council to appoint representatives who would circulate throughout the town with their eyes and ears open, spying on people basically, and finding out who was living in various forms of sin, and reporting back, and these people then would be excluded from the Lord's Supper, and that would suggest to them they're excluded from heaven, because they believed that if you don't take the Lord's Supper, you're not part of the church and there's no salvation outside the church. That's the belief back then.

So the first part of his reform was to institute a monthly observance of the Lord's Supper and exclude unworthy parties from it, and to discover who those unworthy parties were by sending eyes and ears of the government throughout the city to keep tabs on people's behavior. The second step of his reformation, he wanted to urge the council to make an open profession of the Reformed faith and to appoint representatives who would work with the pastors to receive a profession of faith from every citizen of Geneva. Each person was required publicly either to profess to be a Protestant or a Roman Catholic.

He was not going to enforce Protestantism. He would allow people to still profess to be Roman Catholic if they wished, but they would have to publicly profess either to be a Catholic or a Protestant. And I'm not sure what the sanctions would be if they did not.

It was simply the case that the government was to make this an official requirement. And so they'd make an open profession of faith. And the third step was to institute a systematic program of teaching and training.

And Calvin digested the theology of his institutes into two other works. One was a confession of faith for adults, and the other was a catechism to train children in the Calvinist faith. And the council was asked by Calvin to require the parents to see that their children learn the catechism, and the parents would report to the ministers of the church periodically to make sure that they were keeping up on this.

So what Calvin was doing is basically enforcing religious education on children so that it would ensure that at least the next generation would be Calvinist. He'd allow some people to profess Catholicism if they insisted, the adults, but they would have to teach their children the catechism, and so their children would come up as Protestants. So this is how he guaranteed that Geneva would become a Protestant city.

Now, these are the things he suggested, but the council didn't accept everything he suggested. First of all, they did adopt the articles, but with some modifications. They did replace the mass with the Lord's Supper, but they didn't want to do it every month.

They wanted to do it every three months. They wanted to do it four times a year. As it turns out, that's become the official practice of Presbyterianism ever since.

The Presbyterian church observes the Lord's Supper four times a year, once every three months. That was the council's modification of Calvin's idea. They also supported the confession of faith that he wrote, but they did not agree to withhold the Lord's Supper from people who wouldn't make the confession of faith.

They preferred a system of discipline that was being practiced at Bern in Switzerland, where the government, the civil government, had authority over the church. That's not what Calvin wanted to see happening. So they didn't really go along with Calvin's things too much.

They did agree with some, but he was an all-or-nothing kind of guy. He was not going to be settled for compromise. So he and William Ferrell continued to preach strongly his views and insist upon his views in their preaching.

The council forbade them to continue preaching like that and told them they can't do it, but they defiantly continued to preach against the decision of the council. Finally, persecution against them caused both William Ferrell and Calvin to have to flee from Geneva, and that's when Calvin went to Strasbourg, as we mentioned, pastored the group of French refugees there for three years, got married, and so forth. But there was a political change shortly after this.

In 1540, the political element that had resisted Calvin was overthrown in elections in Geneva, and a faction more favorable toward Calvin came to power, and so the friends of Calvin began to prevail on him to come back to Geneva. As I said, he wasn't eager to do that, but with great reluctance he accepted, but only on his own terms. He returned

on the condition that the council would have to adopt a constitution for the city based upon all of his earlier articles, so the things they didn't agree to before, they'd have to agree to now.

And he would, by his ideas, completely dictate the civil and religious affairs of the city. He had them set up a consistory, as he called it, of twelve elders, which was to judge accusations of people's moral infractions. You know, to excommunicate people from the Lord's Supper, they had to decide whether people were really unworthy or not, and so when people were reported to do things that would exclude them from the Lord's Table, these reports were made to the twelve elders, and these guys would serve as sort of a court to judge whether these people should be excluded from the Lord's Supper or not.

And by this time, Calvin began to rule Geneva in a fairly unchallenged way, though there were people who tried to challenge him, as we'll see in a moment, they just didn't succeed in ousting him. A system was set up where adulterers and witches and blasphemers and traitors were executed. We'll read of a notable case of that in a moment.

And other sins of a lesser nature were punished by fines, imprisonment, excommunication, and banishment from the city. And as I said earlier, houses could be entered by the authorities of the state just at will, and checked at any time to make sure that the rules were being observed. And while maybe compared to the rest of Europe, this wasn't radically unthinkable, certainly by the terms that we would like to live today, and we're accustomed to having much more freedom than that, I don't know that we would enjoy living in an America that was ruled like Geneva under Calvin.

There are some people who think that would be the best thing for America. And by the way, obviously Calvin, his ideas were to be preferred over those of the people ruling our country right now. And we would not doubt that the country would be a better place if adulterers and witches and so forth were, you know, if those activities were punishable at law.

I mean, why not? Murder is. And these things are all things that the Bible says are worthy of death. I'm not necessarily advocating that the death penalty be instituted on people who commit adultery and things like that.

But on the other hand, if it was, it wouldn't be any different than the law of Moses, which the Bible says is the most just law given to any nation. And no one could really argue that it's not just. It would just go against our grade because we're much more used to freedom.

But I personally would, and I'm sure you would too, have difficulty living in a country where religion was dictated so strongly and your house could be searched. But see, it was that way in many parts of Europe. The Roman Catholic Church could do the same

thing.

The Inquisition, you know, they could come into your home and do things too. So Calvin just set up sort of a Protestant version of what the Roman Catholics had in many other times in history and in some countries even in his own time. He continued to shape Geneva according to his pattern for 23 years until he died.

Now, although Calvin did succeed in turning Geneva into essentially the kind of expression of the kingdom of God that he wanted to a large measure, he was not altogether unopposed. There were a lot of the older families of Geneva who didn't appreciate a Frenchman, an outsider, coming in and taking over things so thoroughly. And his rule over the moral life of people was so strong that a lot of the younger people, who probably weren't really converted, really chafed under the strict moral standards that were so strictly enforced.

So there was dissatisfaction among some, and he had his critics. One of his critics, who disagreed with him on some theological points, was Sebastian Castillo. But a more famous dissenter from Calvin was Michael Servaitis.

Now, Michael Servaitis wasn't a citizen of Geneva. He was actually a Spaniard and a scholar, a physician. He was a scientist and he was a radical reformer.

It's sad that he is called a radical reformer, and he was technically an Anabaptist because he rejected infant baptism. But he was also anti-Trinitarian, and he had other views that most Anabaptists would have found heretical. But he was under sentence of death from the Roman Catholic Church, and he had to live under an assumed name for 22 years in France so that he wouldn't be caught.

In 1531, Michael Servaitis wrote a book called *On Errors of the Trinity*, where he argued that the Trinity was an extra-biblical doctrine. It was not in the scripture, he said, and it came from other sources. Later on, in 1533, he wrote a book called *The Restitution of Christianity*, which was meant as a refutation of Calvin's *Institutes*.

I have not seen this book. I would like to see it. Not so much that I would ever become a follower of Michael Servaitis, but I'd be interested in knowing what a scholar like Servaitis said in refuting Calvin's points in *Institutes*.

I don't know whether he made valid points or whether he just was off the wall. But it is said by historians that this was the great masterpiece that Michael Servaitis wrote, *The Restitution of Christianity*, where he basically refuted Calvin's *Institutes*. He was arrested in France at Calvin's instigation, though Calvin didn't live in France.

He was so influential over the Protestants there, that when Servaitis fled from the Roman Catholic persecution to France, he was arrested there as well through Calvin's influence. And he escaped somehow and fled for Naples. But just as Calvin had stopped at Geneva

on his way to Strasbourg, and really never got away from Geneva, so Michael Servaitis stopped by Geneva on his way to Naples and never quite got away from Geneva either.

I must confess that I haven't a clue why Servaitis went to Geneva. He knew that Calvin was ruling there. Calvin didn't really hold a political office.

Geneva was his brainchild. He was the unofficial leader of the community. Everyone followed his teaching, who was in power.

And Servaitis knew this, and he had written a book against Calvin's Institutes. And Calvin had burned other men before. Servaitis was not the first to be burned by Calvin, or the last.

Just the most famous, the most controversial. But for some reason Servaitis went to Geneva. And all the history books I've read about it, they all mention that he went there, but they never say why.

It seemed like it was a very dangerous place to go. I don't know whether Michael Servaitis hoped that Calvin might be more merciful than the inquisitors that were after him. If he hoped that, he certainly misjudged Calvin.

He found out that Calvin wasn't really much more merciful than the inquisitors. It may be that he went there to overthrow Calvin's authority, but that seems very strange. Calvinists say that this is so.

You see, the death of Servaitis at the hands of Calvin, or at the hand of Calvin's flunkies who followed Calvin, is the great blot that mars Calvin's reputation. Many people after Servaitis' time just remember Calvin as the man who burned Michael Servaitis. But Calvinists today say that Michael Servaitis went there to try to undermine Calvin and try to take over the church and the city.

If he did, I don't see how he could have thought he could do that. Calvin had the place sewn up, and Michael Servaitis was viewed as a heretic both by Catholics and Protestants. So I can't tell you why he went to Geneva.

It seemed like a very unfortunate and not very wise thing for him to do. He wasn't there for long before he was recognized and he was arrested. Calvin didn't personally arrest him or condemn him.

He stood trial before the authorities in the city, but the authorities were very largely influenced by Calvin, very strongly so. And they condemned him of heresy, to be burned at the stake. Now, quite a few historians have said that Calvin himself objected not to his death, but to that form of death.

Calvin apparently wished to have Servaitis killed in a more merciful way than being

burned at the stake. At least the Calvinists say this. Frankly, that doesn't vindicate Calvin too much.

He wanted to kill him, but not so unmercifully as burn him at the stake. But I guess this story is told in order to tell us that Calvin wasn't quite as bad as the Spanish Inquisition, because they took delight in torturing and dismembering people and so forth who were heretics. But Calvin apparently had more sympathy than that.

And yet Calvin's desire to have a more merciful form of punishment was overruled. He did support the killing of Servaitis as a heretic. And Servaitis was burned at the stake in Geneva, October 27, 1553, and became the most famous of the martyrs that Calvin killed.

Now, it may not seem nice to say Calvin killed him, and Calvin did not directly kill him. I mean, all historians know that Calvin controlled Geneva, and Geneva killed Servaitis. It's hard to know how much Calvin could have done to prevent it.

But he didn't want to do anything to prevent it. He approved of the man's death. Now, Calvin's opponents criticized him for burning Servaitis.

And one of his opponents I mentioned earlier, Sebastian Castellillo, wrote an actual attack against Calvin entitled Concerning Heretics. In that, Castellillo wrote that burning heretics is contrary to the spirit of Christ, and that it doesn't really serve the interest of truth. It only ends up killing a man, not advancing the cause of truth.

But Calvin had his defenders as well. Melancthon, who was Luther's successor in Germany, and Bollinger, who was Vingly's successor in Zurich, supported Calvin's burning of Servaitis. And so did the governments of Wittenberg, Basel, and Bern in Zurich.

So Calvin had those who encouraged him in this, though he also had a fair number of critics, and still does to this day, for the burning of Michael Servaitis. Though the burning of Servaitis was a controversial act, and not everyone supported Calvin in doing so, it became a test case to demonstrate whether Calvin's authority could be challenged or not in Geneva. And it became clear that it could not be successfully challenged.

He would rule the city with his ideas of Christianity until he died. Now, in closing tonight, I want to spend just a little time accounting you with Calvin's theology, because really, Calvin's theology is much more influential than Calvin's life. The reforms he instituted in Geneva aren't there anymore.

I mean, Geneva is no longer run as a Calvinist kingdom of God theocracy. So even though the memory of his reforms lives on, his actual reforms of the city don't, in the same form that they were then. But his theology not only lives on, but is spread widely throughout Europe, and eventually America.

The leading form of Christianity that the founders of this country brought with them was Calvinism. The Puritans were Calvinists. And so this country was very largely, to a certain extent, at least insofar as the Christians who came, was founded upon Calvinist principles.

And to this day, a great number of evangelical Christians are Calvinistic. Certainly Presbyterians are. And to a certain extent, Episcopalians are.

And the Orthodox Church has strongly Calvinist leanings in many respects, I think. A lot of Baptists and Congregationalists are Calvinist. And probably there's a lot of other people who are Calvinist who don't belong to any of those denominations.

By the way, Calvinism right now, just as we speak, is experiencing a tremendous resurgence in popularity. Not to say that there ever was a time in America where there weren't a lot of Calvinists, but it seems like there's a major thrust by Calvinist leaders and spokesmen today to really push a revival of Calvinism today. And men like R.C. Sproul, for example, are some of the spearheaders of that movement.

So you'll find a lot more Calvinists outspokenly Calvinistic today than you would have, I think, 20 years ago. But what is Calvinism? What did Calvin teach? Well, we usually think of Calvin's teaching in terms of the tulip acrostic, but that doesn't really say everything he taught. Those are some of the distinctives of what we call his soteriology.

Soteriology comes from the Greek word *soterio*, which means salvation. And so soteriology is the study of salvation. And Calvin's view on that was distinctive and has been reduced to a handy English acrostic.

He didn't do this. This was done later by his followers. But everyone knows, anyone who knows anything about the Reformation knows that Luther's central doctrine in Germany in his Reformation was justification by faith.

Well, Calvin believed in justification by faith also, but his central doctrine, his main emphasis, was the sovereignty of God as he perceived it. Now, I say as he perceived it because today Calvinists are still usually characterized as those who have a high view of the sovereignty of God, and non-Calvinists, or sometimes labeled Arminians, are often accused of having a low view of the sovereignty of God. I think this is unfortunate because it is therefore assumed that what the Calvinists call the sovereignty of God is indeed what the Bible teaches about the sovereignty of God, and anyone who's not a Calvinist just has a low view of the sovereignty of God.

You see, the term sovereignty has a specific meaning in the English language. And we might as well talk about it in the English language since that's our language, and the word doesn't appear in the Bible, so we don't need to talk about the Greek or Hebrew word for sovereignty. It's not a biblical word.

The sovereignty of God is the doctrine of God's authority and omnipotence. Omnipotence means he has a power to do whatever he wants. And the word sovereignty is a word related to being a lord or a king.

If a person is answerable to none, like a king, he's answerable to none, he's the final authority, he's sovereign. A father, biblically speaking, is sovereign in his home. A king is sovereign in his domain.

A lord who had a household of servants was sovereign over his servants in his household. That's what sovereignty means. The man has authority, which means he has the right to rule, and he's answerable to none.

That's what the word sovereign means. Now, Calvin introduced... Well, he didn't really introduce this. He got it from Augustine, who introduced it pretty much out of Greek philosophy.

The idea that God's sovereignty has the element of absolute control over everything. In fact, the way Calvin put it, all things that ever happen were ordained by God and eternally decreed, and God's sovereignty today is his execution of his decrees. And he decreed what would happen to every person, whether they be saved or whether they be lost, and this is an unchangeable decree made in eternity.

And Calvin taught a doctrine which most Calvinists today are a little uncomfortable with. He taught what modern Calvinists call double predestination. I forget what R.C. Sproul calls this doctrine.

Something like equal ultimacy or something like that. But it's more commonly called double predestination. Now, most Calvinists today believe in predestination, meaning they believe that God predestined who would be saved, and that out of his good pleasure he chose to save some.

Now, what about the others he didn't choose to save? Well, the modern Calvinists generally say, well, it's not so much that he chose for them to go to hell, it's just that he didn't choose to save them. He chose to save some, and he just left the others the way he found them, without choosing them to go to hell particularly. Well, Calvin thought that was mealy-mouthed.

Calvin was much more consistent than modern Calvinists. Calvin knew that if God unilaterally, sovereignly chose to save some and not all, that he was by that act choosing that all the others would go to hell. And Calvin made it very plain.

He says God did out of his most excellent pleasure, and good pleasure, and sovereign choice, determine in eternity past who it would be his pleasure to save and who it would be his pleasure to damn. That's what Calvin said. He specifically used that term.

God determined who it would be his good pleasure to damn and who it would be his good pleasure to save. This is called double predestination. Modern Calvinists, that's a little strong for them.

And like I say, if you believe in double predestination today, a Calvinist will call you a hyper-Calvinist. Because Calvinists talk about hyper-Calvinism and Calvinism. And the vast majority of Calvinists are what you'd call, or what they would call, Calvinists.

And if anyone really believed what Calvin believed, they'd be called a hyper-Calvinist by a Calvinist today. So Calvin believed in this, that God ordained everything that would happen to every person. Of course, it was God ordained that Adam would fall.

God ordained that people who go to hell would go to hell. Now, it's not just that God ordained that a category of people who reject Christ would go to hell. But every individual who ends up in hell, God ordained that that person should, and out of his good pleasure, would be sent to hell for some mysterious purposes.

Calvin was always appealing to the mysteriousness of God's counsel because it was hard to understand why God would do that and still be said to love all people and wish all to be saved and so forth. He just said that was a deep mystery. But it was deep, okay, but it wasn't a, I don't know, we can call it a deep mystery.

Anyway, Calvin's idea of sovereignty certainly was an expansion on what the Bible actually teaches on sovereignty. The Bible teaches the sovereignty of God by appeal to well-known images of sovereignty. God is called a king.

God is called a lord. God is called a father. Those are images of sovereignty.

A king is sovereign in his domain. A lord is in his domain. And a father in it is in his.

But for some reason, Calvin thought that the sovereignty of God was different than the sovereignty of a king or of a father or of a lord, although the Bible indicates that God's sovereignty is like that of a king or a lord or a father. What's the difference? Well, a king has the right to rule. He's answerable to none.

But he doesn't control everything that everyone does in his domain. A father has the right to rule his family, but he doesn't control every move and every thought and every decision his children make or his wife makes. He's the sovereign, but he doesn't control everything.

Sovereignty has never, in the English language, meant the person who controls everything. Sovereignty means the person who has the right to rule unchallenged. And that is what the Bible teaches about the sovereignty of God.

Calvin added, following Augustine, who was the first to bring it in to theology, the idea

that God's sovereignty meant not only that he had the right to rule, but that he actually does author every decision that is ever made and everything that ever happens. It's just the outworking of eternal decrees he made about what would happen. And so God's sovereignty is his execution of these eternal decrees.

So that's the basic central teaching of Calvin's theology is this concept of the sovereignty of God. Now, as far as the relationship of that concept to the issue of personal salvation, this is where we get what most people consider to be the essence of Calvin's theology, and that is the tulip acrostic. Tulip being chosen because the first letter of each of the main points of the Calvin view spell out tulip, T-U-L-I-P.

Each letter is the first letter of one of the points of Calvin's theology. Now, Calvin didn't do this. He didn't frame his theology as an acrostic.

This was done later, after Arminius had arisen to challenge Calvinism. The Calvinists got together to challenge Arminianism, and they reduced Calvin's ideas into these five basic points, usually called the five points of Calvinism. Calvin never heard of the five points of Calvinism.

He taught them, but he never knew that Calvinism had five points. He just, you know, institutes it this big, you know, and it had hundreds of points. But his followers reduced the essence and the distinctives of his theology, as it differed from Arminianism, which arose after Calvin was gone, into these five basic thoughts.

The T in tulip stands for total depravity. The U stands for unconditional election. The L stands for limited atonement.

The I stands for irresistible grace. And the P stands for the perseverance, or some would prefer the preservation, of the saints or of the elect. Now, I'll just tell you briefly, if you're not acquainted, what those doctrines really say.

The T, which stands for total depravity, means that man in his unregenerate state, in his natural fallen state, is completely shot through with corruption, moral corruption. That man was born with this corruption from Adam, and everything man does is shot through and corrupted by this corruption. Now, total depravity is not to be confused with absolute depravity.

Calvinists make this distinction. Absolute depravity would mean that a man is just as bad as he could possibly be. He's absolutely depraved.

Absolute means without any possible exception. Now, Calvinists don't teach this, and nor should anyone teach this. Certainly, we could not argue that an unregenerate man is as bad as he could be, because anyone could be worse.

I mean, anyone who doesn't sleep with every woman in his office, if he could, but he

doesn't, he's not as bad as he could be, right? I mean, if a man's faithful to his wife, even though he's a pagan, he's not as bad as he could be. If he doesn't rip off his employer, if he doesn't blaspheme God, if he doesn't murder people that make him mad, if he doesn't do those things, then he's not as bad as he could be. He could do those things.

He doesn't do them. So the Calvinists, in speaking of total depravity, doesn't mean absolute depravity. It doesn't mean that man is as bad as he can be.

It just means that man cannot do anything acceptable in the sight of God, because even man's good deeds in his unregenerate state are tainted by indwelling sin, so that even man's good works, done as an unregenerate sinner, are sin in themselves. And so, this being so, if this is true, it would follow that man cannot do something as positive as repenting and surrendering to God and devoting himself to Jesus Christ. An unregenerate man couldn't do that, because that would be, he can't do anything acceptable to God.

Everything he does is self-serving. Everything he does is tainted by sin. And therefore, even a thing like repenting and believing in Jesus is impossible, according to Calvin and Calvinism, to the unregenerate person.

And therefore, total depravity to the Calvinists means total inability. It is often said by Calvinists that since Paul said, in Ephesians 2, that man before conversion is dead in trespasses and sins, and since a dead person can't do anything, that an unregenerate person can't do anything, can't believe, can't repent, can't turn to God, can't do anything. Well, then how in the world would anyone get saved? If we're all born unregenerate, and an unregenerate person can't repent and can't believe, and those things are necessary for salvation, how would anyone get saved? Well, that brings us to the second point.

Unconditional election. Election, just a fancy word for choice. And it means God choosing, God electing.

God has chosen to save certain people. Now, that unconditional part is essential in Calvinism, because even Arminians believe that God has chosen to save some people. But Arminians usually believe one of two things.

They either believe that God chose to save individuals based on his foreknowledge of what they would later choose. You see, an Arminian believes that even the unregenerate person can repent in response to God's drawing, in response to God's conviction of his spirit. The Arminian believes an unregenerate person could, if he would, repent and believe, and that God has chosen before the foundation of the world who would be saved, but not based on nothing, but based on his foreknowing.

Who would believe and who would not. God knew who would exercise faith and who would not, and the Arminian believes that God has chosen individuals based on this

foreknowledge. Now, some Arminians believe something slightly different.

Some Arminians believe that God hasn't chosen individuals for salvation, but categories. That God has just made the choice that whoever believes in Christ will be saved, whoever rejects him will be lost, and every individual makes his own choice which category he'll be in. And if you've chosen to follow Jesus Christ, you are in the category that God has chosen.

So you're one of the chosen ones. He's chosen to save everyone who meets these criteria, and you meet the criteria by your own choice, according to Arminianism. Therefore, you come into this state of being chosen, one of the chosen ones.

Anyway, Calvinism doesn't accept either of those two positions. Calvinism teaches that God's choice is unconditional. Calvinism finds it abhorrent to say that God chose you to be saved because He knew that you would someday believe.

Because in Calvinism, that would mean that God is still choosing you on the basis of something you do. You may not have done it yet, but He knew you would, and it's still your action, your believing, your repenting that saves you. And the Calvinists can have none of this, because before you're saved, you're totally depraved.

You can't do anything like that. You can't do anything acceptable, even believe and repent. So God has to choose whom He will save unconditionally, since one who is dead and trespasses can't meet any conditions.

And therefore, the only way anyone would be saved is if God just unconditionally says, OK, you, you, you, and you, I'll take you. The rest of you, I'm not taking you. It's unconditional.

That's what the U in TULIP stands for, the Unconditional Election. The third letter, L, stands for the Limited Atonement. Now, a lot of Calvinists don't like the expression Limited Atonement.

They like the doctrine, but they don't like the expression, because limited sounds like it's lessening what Jesus did at the cross. The atonement is what Jesus accomplished at the cross. Well, to say it's limited, it almost sounds like it's putting it down, like kind of making Jesus' atonement, His work at the cross, not so potent or not so effective.

And they don't like that term, and I don't blame them. I don't like it either. But they give it another term.

Modern Calvinists often speak of limited atonement in terms of particular redemption, substituting the word atonement for redemption and the word limited for particular. The Calvinist believes that although he does believe in limited atonement, which means that Jesus only died for the elect, He didn't die for anyone else, that God elected

unconditionally to save some, and Jesus only died for them. He didn't die for the whole world, as we normally think of it, but He died only for the world of the elect.

For the unsaved, He never died. That is, for those who were going to remain unsaved, because He never wanted them in the first place. He would have chosen them if He wanted them.

He didn't want them, so why would He die for them? Now, the Calvinist says this does not demean the atonement. It does not lessen it. In one sense, it makes it more effective.

So, it's a particular redemption. The way they say it is this. Jesus did not die simply so that all people might potentially be saved, but guaranteeing the salvation of none.

But He died in order to actually redeem the ones that He chose. That His death did not simply make a general salvation available to all, but rather His death accomplished the salvation of those few that He had chosen, and they are redeemed by His death, unilaterally. He redeemed them.

And they say that if Jesus died for people who never get saved, that makes His death not so powerful, because His atonement could be thwarted by the rebellion of man. And so they would say that the limited atonement actually elevates the atoning work of Christ to something much more powerful than what the Arminian would believe. The Arminian believes that Jesus died.

Of course, we haven't even talked about Arminians yet, but the Arminians came along later. However, all the early church fathers were Arminian, in the sense that we use that term today. They all believed in Arminian ideas until Augustine in the year 400.

Everyone knows that. Even Calvin did that. Even Augustine admitted that.

But Arminians believe that Jesus died for all humanity, and that that simply made a general pardon available to all people, and it remains for the individual to decide whether he or she will avail himself of that pardon. So the limited atonement is part of the Calvinistic system. Then the fourth point is called irresistible grace.

Now, grace here refers to God's dynamic drawing of the sinner to himself. That because a sinner is totally depraved, dead in trespasses and sins, can't do anything for himself, God has to do everything in getting that person to become a Christian. And what God actually does is He sends His grace to regenerate.

And when He has regenerated them by His grace, they are then capable of repenting and believing. And that's what they do because they are elected to do that. God's irresistible grace means He has this grace that He gives only to the elect, and when this grace comes, it is effectual.

It's sometimes called the effectual calling. That God calls the elect, and that call gets the effect God wants. It irresistibly guarantees the salvation of those that God has chosen.

Now, this introduces one of the main bones of contention between Calvinism and non-Calvinism. Because Calvinism teaches that regeneration, which is what we call being born again, that regeneration precedes faith. In fact, Calvin taught, and so do Calvinists today, that you cannot believe until you've been regenerated.

God has to send the grace of regeneration first to regenerate you, then you come alive from the dead and you can then have faith and be saved as a result of that. So regeneration precedes faith. Non-Calvinists have always said, no, faith precedes regeneration.

Grace comes through faith. And if something comes through something else, that something else had to be there first. If faith is the conduit through which grace comes, and Paul said we are saved by grace through faith, that's of course Ephesians 2, 8 and 9, yet over in Romans 5, Paul said that through Christ we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand.

So Paul said we have access into grace through faith. That certainly sounds like you have the faith first, and that gives you access into grace. So non-Calvinists have always taught, and that was actually I believe the Bible teaches, that you have faith and that brings about regeneration because you believe.

But the Calvinist view is, no, you are regenerated first by the unilateral, unconditional election of God and his irresistible grace that draws you inevitably to him, so that everyone that God really wants to be saved will be. And if anybody is not saved, it's simply that God didn't want them to be. I mean that may sound a little harsh for those of you who are not Calvinists to think that anyone could really say that, but that's exactly what Calvinism teaches, that if a person is not saved, it is simply because God didn't want them to be saved, because he is the one who made all the choices.

And he chose who he wanted, and he drew them irresistibly. And if there's someone standing right next to him who didn't come, it's because God didn't choose him, didn't draw them, he could have but didn't, chose not to. Which, there's no other way to put that than God didn't want them saved.

If he could have saved them all and didn't, there's no one forcing him, no one's twisting his arm. So he did exactly what he wanted, and nothing more, nothing less, according to Calvinism. So those who go to hell go there because God's good pleasure desired for them to go there.

Now, to my mind I've always had difficulty with this in view of the fact that God says that he's not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Now,

clearly not all do come to repentance, and some do perish, but the Bible says he's not willing for that to be so. Or Jesus said to the Pharisees how many times, I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not, and they didn't.

But he wanted them to, he tried to gather them, he used every resource. Or when God said to Israel in Isaiah chapter 5, comparing them to a vineyard, he says, I gave you every advantage, I looked for good grapes, but I got only sour grapes from this nation. He says, what more could I have done? He said, to get good grapes than what I've already done.

Certainly God sounds like he's complaining, I've exhausted my resources, I've done everything I could, and I didn't get what I wanted out of you people. In fact, every time in the Bible that God complains about sinners in the rebellion, he is tacitly saying, I'm not getting what I want out of you people. That's why I'm complaining.

You know, I mean, if God really wanted this group of people to go to hell, and this group of people go to heaven, and inevitably what God wants happens, then there wouldn't be any complaints from God in the Bible about the way things turn out. But if you read the prophets, there's almost one sustained complaint from God through the entire Old Testament. And one of the prophets, Ezekiel, God said through him, Turn you, turn you, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked would turn from his wicked ways and live.

Turn, you have my reproof, why will you die? It certainly sounds like God really doesn't want the wicked to die, lost. He wants them to turn, but all he can do is plead, he can't make them do it. Unlike Calvinism, which says God's the only one who makes any decisions about such things.

God gives repentance, he gives faith to those he wants to have it, the rest he never wanted them to have it in the first place. Very difficult, very difficult to find, in my opinion, support for some of these ideas in the Bible. Anyway, the fifth point of Calvinism is called perseverance of the saints.

And that is simply saying that just as God irresistibly drew the elect to himself, and it was guaranteed that they would come because he wanted them to, he also irresistibly holds them, they will not fall away. Now the upshot of this in actual practical experience is that those who are really elect do not backslide. Not only do they not backslide, but they live a holy life because that's what God says is his will for his people.

So you can basically know the elect by the fact that they don't backslide and that they persevere in godliness. And if a person does backslide or does not persevere in godliness, they weren't elect, they were never saved. Now, how this impacts individual cases is this.

I mean, suppose you see a person who responds to an altar call, seemingly gives his life to Christ, is zealous for God, begins to tell his friends about Christ, reads his Bible diligently, reforms his life, gives up his old sinful pattern, seems to experience a tremendous amount of deliverance from sin in his life, has a tremendous experience with God, and seems to continue to walk in it, let's say, for 10, 20 years. But, after that length of time, they fall away, and die falling away, without ever returning to Christ. Is this hypothetical merely, or has this ever really happened? Of course it has happened.

There are many, many cases, I know of cases like this, and the history must be replete with cases like this. Yet, what does Calvinism teach us about this? Well, I'll tell you what non-Calvinism teaches, because that was the first doctrine of the Church. The first doctrine of the Church is that these people were saved for a while, or as Jesus put it in his parable of the seeds, they believed for a while.

That's how Jesus put it in Luke chapter 8, where he said, the seeds that fell on the stony ground are those who believed for a while. What happens when you believe? You're saved. You're justified by faith.

They're believed for a while. But, after a while, persecution and tribulation come up because of the Word, and they fall away. And they don't live anymore.

They're dead. Now, the early Church taught, for about three centuries, that such people are saved while they are believers. But, if they cease to believe, they're no longer saved.

But Calvinism came along, and actually Augustinianism, and Calvin also believes, that if they fall away, it's because they never were saved in the first place. Now, the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is simply part of a whole sovereignty of God applied to individual salvation. If God makes all the decisions in the universe, and everything is ordered by Him, then it's obvious that people get saved who He wants to be saved.

They persevere if He wants them to persevere. Those that don't persevere, He didn't want them to, and He must not have wanted them saved, because they die in their sins. But, there are good reasons to question Calvin's doctrine of sovereignty.

Not that we wish to, in any way, diminish the sovereignty of God, but I'd like to bring it back within biblical perimeters. Calvin actually introduced an idea of sovereignty that came out of Greek philosophy. He didn't introduce it again, Augustine did.

Augustine got it from Aristotle, and it's Aristotelian, the idea that the, it's basically Greek fatalism, made theistic, bringing God, the Greeks didn't have God in the picture of fatalism, but bringing the Christian God, and He's the one who causes fatalism to work. Everything happens exactly as it's supposed to. That was Aristotle, mixed with Bible by Augustine, and then we get this concept of a God who everything happens just the way He wants it to.

Not the God of the Bible, and certainly not the God that the Christians believed in for the first 400 years before Augustine. But Calvin taught Augustinianism, so did Luther, by the way. Now, Calvinists sometimes say that this doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is the only true assurance a Christian can have that he's really saved and that he will be saved.

I've known many Calvinists who've told me that the only way they have real assurance of their salvation is by believing in this Calvinistic doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Because they say, if it isn't true, then I might fall away, but I have the assurance that God will not let the saints fall away. We will persevere.

But people who gain comfort from this, I think, have not thought very clearly yet. Because it seems obvious that, on Calvin's view, you never were saved if you fell away at the end. So you can never know if you're really saved until the end.

Because if you fall away in your deathbed, and some people have, some people under torture have cursed Christ after serving Him for 30 years, and died cursing Christ, denying Christ. Jesus said, you deny me before men, I'll deny you before my Father which is in heaven. It has happened.

What does Calvinism say? They never were saved. So for the whole 30 years that they served God, just as much as you serve Him, and they were sure they were saved, just as much as you're sure you're saved, they proved by falling away on their deathbed they never were saved in the first place. Maybe you're not either.

I mean, really, that's what you've got to figure. In Calvinism, the only real assurance of salvation comes by persevering to the end. Because anyone who doesn't persevere to the end never was saved, no matter how much they appeared to be for decades before.

So really, you can't know if you're saved under Calvinism, unless you've persevered to the end. Because all the things that you think prove to you you're saved, well, many people who fall away had those same evidences that they were saved too. But under Calvinism, they weren't, because they, in some cases, fell away.

Now, is this a dreary thing to think about? It shouldn't be. The non-Calvinist view has always held that you can have assurance of salvation. Because salvation is a very simple matter.

You simply trust Christ. Even a child can do that. That doesn't take any great strength.

That doesn't take any great virtue. It's not a virtue to trust Christ. It's just what a child does to a parent.

You just put your faith in Jesus, and you trust Him to the end. You can do that with God's help. And the Bible makes it very clear that God's help is available to you.

Now, I don't know what to say about people who fell away. I don't know what to say about them. But I know what I can say about me, and that is, by the grace of God, I'm determined to just trust Jesus until the day I die.

When we were talking about the Anabaptist martyrs in a previous lecture, I wondered, you know, how could I endure some of those tortures? And then I thought, how could I not? I mean, it's not like they had a choice. If you're going to be tortured, you're going to be tortured. You might, you know, the thought of it may be hideous, but if it happens to you, it happens.

You go through it, and you went through it. I mean, by saying I can't stand it doesn't change anything. You do stand it if it happens.

The question is, does it help anything for you to deny Christ in the midst of it, and to give up your faith? Of course not. You gain nothing that way. You might shorten the torture by a few minutes, but you add more at the other end after death.

I can't imagine how, even though I'm extremely weak when it comes to the contemplation of pain and torture, I can't imagine ever denying Christ, even under the most extreme and excruciating torture, just because I couldn't see that that would solve any problems, and I also know too well that Jesus is real. I have a feeling that some people find their assurance not in an actual relationship with Jesus, but in a doctrine of perseverance. They figure that I look like a Christian as much as the next guy, so I'm probably one of the elect, and therefore I will persevere.

I think it's safer to realize that your salvation and your security rests in a relationship with Jesus Christ, that you know him, and you are committed to him, and you're loyal to him, and by his grace, you're going to stay faithful to him to death. That is a different way of looking at assurance. Calvin didn't believe that one could be certain who the elect were, but he did feel you could be fairly certain if people met three conditions.

One, they participated in baptism in the Lord's Supper. Two, they lived an upright moral life. And three, they made a public profession of faith.

These things, he felt, would give a certain degree of certainty of being the elect. But even he knew that you can't prove you're elect unless you persevere to the end.