Reformation History Session 3: John Calvin

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Preacher: Edward Kang

[0:00] We've come to our third and final reformer in this church history class. And again, as I said, I'd argue that Calvin, more than Luther, more than Zwingli, is the most important reformer out of all of them.

His legacy looms so large that really a lot of people have very polarized opinions of him. It seems like you either love him or you hate him.
You either commit Calvin phobia or Calvin olatry, as one historian puts it. Here's some examples. One from the prince of preachers himself, Charles Spurgeon.
The longer I live, the clearer does it appear that John Calvin's system of theology is nearest to perfection. Or he said this quote, among those who have been born of women, which is all of us, there has not risen a greater than John Calvin.
Very, very high praise. On the flip side here, this pastor, Pastor Jimmy Swaggart, who has claimed Calvin has, I believe, caused untold millions of souls to be damned.
[1:12] Or historian Will Durant, who said, we will always find it hard to love Calvin, who darkens the human soul with the most absurd and blasphemous conception of God.

Very, very stark words. Even this supposedly unbiased neutral source, the Oxford Dictionary of Christian Churches, writes, Calvin was the cruel and unopposed dictator of Geneva.
Quite the difference. No. So who was this man that we can't seem to agree upon? Was he Satan incarnate or was he savior of the world?
As one historian says, we do no service to the truth by depicting Calvin as angelically good, nor diabolically evil. And so to be able to get to the real truth of who he is, let's take a deep dive into his story.
John Calvin was born in 1509, nearly 25 years after Luther and Zwingli. And he's born in northern France, in Noyon, to a Roman Catholic family.
[2:21] At this point in history, the Reformation, it's still in its early stages. So it hasn't spread all over, hasn't spread all over France just yet. Calvin's mother, sadly, tragically, suddenly dies when little John is just three or four.

And his father, Gerard, he was a secretary or an accountant to the local bishop. He was a prominent man, which helps not only with the bills, but helps him gain some connections.
So hoping that little John would have a successful, sprawling career as a pastor in the church, Gerard sends John to the University of Paris at the tender age of 13.
That sounds very impressive. And no doubt, Calvin did possess exceptionally gifted skills and an exceptionally gifted mind. But remember back then, the education system was very, very different. You didn't have to know math, science, history, all these things that we need to know now. All you really needed to know was just to know the language of Latin, which was in what all the lectures were in.
[3:26] And then if you knew Latin, you were accepted. So 13-year-old Calvin, he's at university. It's immediately clear to his professors, his fellow students, that he possesses an exceptional mind, that he's really, really gifted at writing and reading and rhetorical skills in particular.

But during that time, while he's at university to study, to be part of the clergy, something happens to his father. We're not exactly sure what happens, but it appears that he's implicated in a financial scandal, accused of misappropriating funds from the church.
And we're not exactly sure whether he did this or not. It could be, he could just be, you know, the scapegoat. But either way, he is excommunicated from the church. And so seeing that the funds run out and seeing that money is tight, Calvin's dad, he suggests that he should stop studying to be a pastor.

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Instead, that he should study law, thinking that that would give him some more money. And then John, humble John, he accepts that. If you were here week one, we talked about Luther.
And it's an interesting contrast with him, because if you remember from that, his father pleaded for him to go to law, but he refused. He refuses. So they take very drastic paths to the ministry.
[4:48] But really, God uses it all to accomplish his will. And maybe as an encouragement for you, if you feel like, man, I'm not doing exactly what I want to do. I want to go into ministry now. God can do all things and he can lead you down different paths to do that.

It's during that time that he's studying law that Calvin is trained to become a humanist. Was anyone there last week remember what it means to be a humanist, a medieval humanist?
Do you guys remember what the phrase was? I think I even have it there. Anyone remember humanism? Master. Master?
I'm sorry. No, you're good. You're good. It's defined by the motto ad fontes, which again means back to the sources.
It's really where Calvin there is encouraged to study the original sources in the original languages so that he doesn't have to depend on translators. He doesn't have to depend on really other interpreters, but that he could read them for themselves.
[5:53] And so he sufficiently, proficiently learns the ancient languages like Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. And he really becomes very skilled at this.

He reads the ancients, gains wisdom from what they said, all reading the original context. And this is just a really quick appeal to you guys to try studying the original languages of Greek and Hebrew. It doesn't just have to be for pastors, for seminarians, right? There are really lots of good resources online for you to study Greek and Hebrew, right? Lots of you guys speak more than two languages, more than one languages.
You speak two or more. And you understand how that when things are translated from one language to another, things are lost in nuance.
The original force is not completely captured as you get into this other language. I think it's kind of like that. When you know Greek and Hebrew and you're able to study in its original context, then you kind of get the fuller picture of what the text is actually saying.
[6:59] And that's not to say that if you don't know Greek and Hebrew that you don't actually understand the Bible, right? I do think that our English translations are very, very, very good. But if you have the time and energy, which maybe honestly, frankly, you might not, a lot of you guys might not have because you're very busy people.

But if you have the time and energy, why not study the original languages so that you can expand your tool set to understand the scriptures? So quick appeal. It's not just for pastors.
You guys can study Greek and Hebrew too. At the end of his university days, he writes a dissertation in 1532 in which he takes on one of the most popular thinkers of the day, and his name is Erasmus.
And he tries in particular to challenge Erasmus, to show the errors of his interpretation of particularly a philosopher named Seneca. And it seems like he really pours himself into this dissertation, right, as all PhD students can probably understand.
He has big hopes, big dreams from what this dissertation can accomplish, right? He thinks that it could prove his genius and that once it gets out there, people are going to flock to him so that, you know, they're going to flock to him, giving him job offers, asking him to teach.
[8:12] But much to Calvin's disappointment, none of that happens. It completely flops. Nobody reads it. Nobody cares.

We even have a letter from Calvin to one of his former professors, basically pleading for him to add it, add this dissertation to his syllabus, asking him to require his students to read this dissertation, probably to, you know, gain some royalties, maybe gain some clout.
But that never pans out. Nothing works. And really, Calvin's at a complete dead end. It's possible, some church historians hypothesize, that God uses this particular experience of disappointment, of struggles with obscurity to bring out full faith in his heart.
We don't know very much about his conversion. One of the tough things about teaching on Calvin is particularly he hardly writes about himself. Unlike Luther, who is very, very willing to wear his heart on his sleeve and expound all about the things that are going internally within himself, Calvin is much more hush.

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He doesn't really talk a lot about himself. But in one of his commentaries in the Psalms, he describes his conversion like this. God, by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame, which was more hardened in such manners than might have been expected from one of my earlier periods of life.
[9:45] And so it's clear that when we are converted, God brings us down first. He humbles us so that we can truly see God as he really is, lofty and high and mighty.

And so it's really at this point, this pivotal point of his life, that Calvin becomes convinced of reformational ideas. Again, he has been Roman Catholic his entire life. But it's at this point he becomes of reformational ideas that were previously heralded by Zwingli and Luther.
About a year after his published dissertation, the now pro-reformer Calvin, he particularly finds himself in hot water. So the story goes, a good friend of his, he's back in Paris.
Remember, Calvin used to go to the University of Paris. So this friend's name is Nicholas Kopp. He was the rector at the University of Paris. And he actually delivers a pro-Lutheran, pro-reformational speech, a message.
And it lands both Kopp and Calvin in huge, huge trouble. Because it's very likely that Calvin either wrote the message himself, or at the very least had a very significant role in its development, in its writing.
[10:57] So in response, both Kopp and Calvin are forced to flee the nation or the country of France altogether because their very lives are on the line.

Because the Roman Catholic authorities, they were determined to suppress, to squelch, to remove at all costs the spread of the Reformation.
One significant event that happens during Calvin's flight from France was called the Affair of the Placards. It happens in 1534. So reformers, reformed-minded believers, they post these public notices, criticizing the mass, criticizing the church in cities all across France.
And the reaction from the Roman Catholic authorities was swift and severe. A wave of persecution followed, and many suspected Protestants were then either imprisoned or executed.
And it includes many of Calvin's close associates, close friends. While Calvin is on the run for his very life, he lands in Basel, Switzerland.
[12:08] And it's there, he works on two things of note. Number one, he works on the French translation of the Bible. Just like Luther, if you remember, in the first week, Luther translates the Bible, the Latin Bible, into the common language of German, so that everybody can read it.

So Luther does the same thing in French. Not, sorry, Luther. Calvin does the same thing in French. And more notably, he works on his first edition of the Institutes.
Has anybody heard of the Calvin's Institutes? It's a really famous book. I'm going to talk a lot about, more about it much later. So this first edition that he works on, it's notably shorter than the final edition.
It's only a fifth of the final length. But that aside, the Institutes of Christian Religion, it's really Calvin's magnum opus. It's arguably the most important work of all of the 16th century.
And keep in mind that if you follow Luther's timeline, he writes this magisterial tome, this important piece of work, one or two years after his conversion.
[13:17] And he's at the tender age of 26. That's how young he is. That's how exceptionally minded he is. Can you imagine writing the most important work, theological work, in churches, one of the most important theological works in all church history at that young age just after you became converted?

It's an extraordinary achievement. And it basically becomes a bestseller overnight. And it completely sells out all of its printed copies in just nine months.
In Basel, he sets his goal to go to Strasbourg, which was in Germany back then. But by God's providence, some fighting, some military battles, it prevents Calvin from taking the direct route to get directly to Strasbourg.
So then it forces him to take a detour to the southeast, to the city of Geneva, Switzerland. His eventual plan was to eventually turn north to get to Strasbourg.
But while he is in Geneva, he has this conversation with a fiery man with fire red hair, fire red beard, that completely changes his life and his life's trajectory.
[14:33] That guy's name is William Farrell. I think I'm pronouncing his name right. William Farrell. Maybe this conversation, conversation might not be the right word to describe it because it's not so

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much of a dialogue, but it's really more of a confrontation.

To give a little bit more backstory on Farrell, a couple years earlier, the city council of Geneva, they decide to turn Protestant. And if you guys have been here in the past, you guys know that city councils, they've done that in the past because they see that Rome is taking away power from them.
Particularly a lot of money flows to the Roman Catholic Church through indulgences, through taxes, through fees, whatever is like that. So if they become Protestant, it's in their best interest because that money stays internal and they can basically call the shots instead of the church in their particular town.
So they decide to turn Protestant and they hire Farrell as a pastor to essentially lead the people to follow suit. The problem is that even after a couple years of ministry, really not much progress is being made on that front.
the people are stubborn, that they don't want to become reformers or reformed, that they want to stay Catholic. And essentially the laity is threatening to convert back to Catholicism.
[15:53] So Farrell, he's fiery, but one particular note about him, he's humble and self-aware enough to know that he's not the guy. He's not the guy who these people need to lead them in reformational truths.

He knows that Geneva needs a particular kind of man, a theologian, an organizer, better, better than him. So Farrell, he hears that this precocious author of the newly published institutes has come to Geneva.
And so he knocks on his door. And so he knocks on his door. Convinced that God has brought Calvin to Geneva for a purpose, for a divine purpose, he urges Calvin to stay and to serve as a pastor in public ministry and shepherding the flock of God by feeding them the word of God.
It's a free job offer, right? It's a free job offer served on a silver platter. But Calvin, this embodied everything that he actually didn't want to do.
In his preface of the commentary in the Psalms, we get insights into Calvin's natural personality a little bit. He thought of himself as unpolished and bashful.
[17:09] What he desired most was not the limelight of the pulpit, but he naturally preferred solitude. He was introverted. He liked his alone time. The whole point of going to Strasbourg, why I wanted to get there, was because he knew that there was a great reformed pastor there already and that he thought his plan was, he thought he could find a patron who would essentially just pay him so that he could just stay inside, sit in his room and read and write.

That was his big dream. But now here is Pharrell who is desperately urging him to abandon that dream and to lead the Reformation in Geneva. So Pharrell essentially tells Calvin, God has told me that you are supposed to stay here.
And Calvin pushes back, no, no, no, brother. You see, I'm on my way to Strasbourg and I'm going to read and write and study there. That's the way that I'll contribute to the Reformation.
But here Calvin himself describing Pharrell's response to that. And when he realized that I was determined to study in privacy in some obscure place and saw that he gained nothing by entreaty, he descended to cursing and said that God would surely curse my peace if I held back from giving help at such a great time of need.
And so Calvin is shaken by this. He's terrified. He's terrified by this pronounced curse. And so he ends up reluctantly, but submissively, he decides to stay in Geneva.
[18:48] And he writes, in his own words, terrified by Pharrell's words and conscience of my own timidity and cowardice, I gave up my journey and attempted to apply whatever gift I had in defense of my faith.

He's a humble man, a faithful man. So that starts his pastorate in Geneva. And frankly, these were probably the worst three years of his entire life.
while Calvin tried to follow scripture, implementing biblical practices, people disliked him from the get-go. For one, Calvin is French, and so opposing him becomes a point of nationalistic pride, right, because they're Switzerland.
Who is this French guy coming here thinking he could be our pastor? And again, two, he's trying to lead Catholic-minded congregants down the path of the Reformation.
And so, hear this response. Mobs, they riot outside his house. They threaten him frequently that they're going to just toss him into the river. And so, reflecting on this period of life, he writes, this, I

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can truly testify that not a day passed in which I did not long for death ten times over.
[20:06] He writes this about Geneva. There is no place under heaven that I am more afraid of. I would submit to death a hundred times than to that cross which I had to die daily a thousand deaths.

That's how Calvin feels about his ministry in Geneva. It all comes to a head in 1538 on Easter Sunday. And this is kind of a theme that you're going to see throughout his relationship with the city councilors in Geneva.
The city councilors on Easter Sunday, they demand that the two administer the Lord's Supper. Calvin and Pharrell. But they believed that the church was in such disorder that they couldn't administer the table in good conscience.
So they insisted that as the shepherds of the flock, they have the right to fence the table. and it's that the power doesn't belong to the city councilors.
So the council is furious and they kick Calvin and Pharrell out to which I'm sure Calvin was more than happy about because now he finally gets what he wants.
[21:19] He finally gets to go to Strasbourg. So he gets to Strasbourg and he just loves it there. It's like his Disney, Disneyland. Right? Without a doubt, these are the happiest years of his life.

First, he gets to do what he wants and that's writing. He finishes the second edition of the Institutes. And honestly, the first edition of the Institutes, not only is it shorter, but it lacks originality because Calvin seems to be very heavily influenced by Luther and his writings.
He kind of seems like it pawns off a little bit too much there. It's really the second edition where his genius starts to shine. And he also starts to write commentaries as he writes his first one on the Book of Romans, more to say on that later.
It's also at Strasbourg where Calvin, he gets married. According to historian Timothy George, Calvin was doubtless the most eligible bachelor in the entire city.
The pastor there, Martin Buzer, the great pastor, he tries to matchmake him. And in fact, there's one story where he tries to matchmake him with, I think, a German or someone Swiss.
[22:35] And she doesn't speak French and he doesn't speak German. So that first date goes terribly. And Calvin is like Luther in that he's not really all that interested in getting married.

You really see how much of a romantic Calvin is in a letter that he writes to Pharrell. It says, I'm not of the wild race of lovers who at the first sight of a fine figure embrace all the faults of their beloved. This is the only beauty that appeals to me. If she is chaste, if she is not finicky, if she is economical, if she is patient, if she is interested about my health.
So that's his standard, right? He ends up marrying one of his congregants, Idolette de Burr. She is a widow of a French-speaking Anabaptist.
And she converts to the Reformed faith and they get married. Again, we don't know a ton about their family life because Calvin, again, he's reluctant to speak much about himself. But we do know that they loved one another.
[23:36] They had one child who was born prematurely and then dies in infancy. In another letter to a friend, you see how Calvin, he wrestles with grief, with suffering.

He writes, Certainly the Lord has afflicted us with a deep, painful wound in the death of our beloved son. But he is our father. He knows what's best for his children.
Later, his precious Idolette would also pass away. Calvin comments on this, I am deprived of my excellent life companion. Although his child would pass away, doesn't mean that his house was empty.
Idolette, she brought in two children from her previous marriage about whom Calvin assured to her, promised to her on her deathbed that he would faithfully raise them.
In addition, he lived with his brother's family and his brother had eight children. For most of his life, Calvin's house was full of little children.
[24:44] And I make the excuse that Theo is so distracting, always knocking on my door, wanting to be picked up. But now I know to shut my mouth because you look later on the sheer output of Calvin and how hard he works and he does it all in the context of living with little children.

Most importantly, in the years in Strasbourg, he develops a close relationship with the remarkable pastor there, Martin Bootzer. they develop like a father and son-like relationship.
And Bootzer, the older pastor, takes Calvin, the younger pastor, under his wing. And Bootzer, it's noted that he has particularly theological influences on Calvin.

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The first is regarding church governance, church policy, or polity, rather. Bootzer shows that there are only four governing offices in the church. And he says that number one is the teacher, is basically like the seminary professor, the professor responsible for studying and teaching theology. Then two, the teaching pastor, the one who's responsible for the ministry of the word, for the sacraments. Number three, the ruling elders who have the job of governing the church. And then four, the office of deacon.
[25:59] What's notably absent is what Sean talked about today in his sermon was the offices of cardinal, of bishops, of the pope, right? Does anybody know what a bishop technically is?

Do you guys know? Yeah? Yeah, overseer. Yeah. In particular, how the church polity works is that essentially it's the local church pastor's boss.
And so the bishop is in control or overseers multiple congregants or multiple churches, parishes, and he's kind of like the head honcho.
So all these people need to report to him. So pastors no longer are solely responsible that the church governance doesn't belong to local eldership, but it ultimately lands on bishops.
And then, of course, you see that continue to climb up with, you end up leading to the pope. So what he says is, no, the church governance ultimately lies in the local pastors, in the local eldership.
[27:03] And so it's not a hierarchical system of the Roman Catholic Church where authority flows top down from a single supreme head of the pope, but it's instead shared by a plurality of elders.

That's Calvin's big thing or Bootser's big thing. And in terms of the four offices, we would essentially agree with them, but we just don't bifurcate the elder's role like that into teaching and preaching and ruling.
I think a pastor should essentially be able to do all of those things. And so many churches like ours, we do distinguish the role of senior pastor and associate pastor, right?
But we don't necessarily see that as an explicitly different class of elders. We also talked about the regulative principle of worship last week.
Does anybody remember that? Anyone remember the regulative principle of worship? Anyone? Yeah? Okay. Yes, exactly.
[28:07] Exactly, exactly. And that's opposed to the normative principle of worship. The normative says that anything that scripture doesn't explicitly prohibit, you are allowed to do. So I use the example, right, maybe you could have a magic show.

Scripture doesn't talk about that. Maybe you could have a magic show or maybe you could have a stand-up comedy set. This doesn't say anything about that, so that could be allowed.
So he becomes very convinced of the regulative principle of worship, which is the hallmark of really the reformed tradition. So influenced by Bootser, later on in Calvin's ministry, he particularly adopts, and we talked about this too with Zwingli, he adopts the instrument list, the acapella singing of the psalms only.
So no guitars, no amps, no nothing, just voices, and just the psalms. And if I'm honest, I do confess to you that when I think about that kind of worship, some words that come to mind are boring, sleepy, I don't know, those things, right?
But nothing is further from the truth about the worship that happens in Calvin's church. Some visitors joined the service one time, and they note how shocked they are, how energetic, how lively, how passionate these people are in singing worship.
[29:37] Much of the medieval Catholic worship, it was basically being sung to, right? They have the choirs, they're the ones who would sing the worship, and you just sat there, and you were sung to.

But in Calvin's church, the roof is practically popping off because of how loud, how deafeningly loud people are at singing the worship of their God.
I've been to some churches where it's deafeningly loud because they turn up the amps like crazy, I'm sure maybe you know that, and again, maybe different styles, but I don't know about you, I'd rather be in a church where it's only deafeningly loud because the people of God are singing worship to him, right?
And that's what marks and characterizes Calvin's church. Finally, Bootser teaches Calvin on the necessity of practicing church discipline, church discipline being the practice of correcting, restoring erring members in repentance to protect the holiness, the witness of the church, and follows biblical patterns like Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5.

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In particular, Bootser impresses on Calvin the need to properly fence the Lord's table to prevent those who are living in egregious, blatant sin, unrepentant sin, from partaking of the elements.
[30:56] And we're going to see just how that impacts Luther a little bit later. So we talked about Bootser. Everything's going just great for Calvin until he gets this letter, and guess who it is.

It's his favorite people on earth. It's the city councilors of Geneva. They're back again. And they're desperate for help because in 1539, this cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church, Cardinal Sattoletto, he tries to woo back Geneva to the Roman Catholic Church.
He writes that they have abandoned the one true church, but we'll cut you the slack. You're going to be completely forgiven if you just return. If you join the Catholic Church again.
And he says, look, particularly at Pharrell, look at Calvin. They're false teachers. They're wolves dressed in sheep's clothing. They have misled you, and look, now, they have abandoned you.
So the city council and desire to stay reformed, they search for help to respond to this letter. They know that they're not the theologians. They need help writing a response.
[32:07] They send help to multiple cities, but no one comes to their help until they finally send it to Strasburg. Now, Calvin, I think understandably so, he's pretty reluctant to help these people out.

After all, again, they drove him out of the city, and it's a bit of a sour spot for Calvin. But by the encouragement of Bootster, he does write the response to Sattoletto.
And this reply is widely understood as the most succinct, persuasive treatise of the Reformation. It's a great piece of work. He not only faithfully exposits God's word to highlight key reformational ideas like justification by faith alone, or sola scriptura, or the priesthood of all believers, all these things that we've talked about in the past.
Most particularly he highlights our union with Christ. But he expands the argument to say that Rome, you call us the theological innovators, but it is actually you who have strayed away.
We stand in line with the apostolic teacher. We stand on the shoulders of the church fathers. You're not following the Bible. So this tour de force of a letter, it gets Calvin back on the radar for the city councilors, and they realize they made a mistake.
[33:38] They write to beg Calvin to come back. Again, Calvin wants no part of Geneva whatsoever, but Bootser, Pharrell, the classic people who keep telling him to do things he doesn't want to do, they eventually convince Calvin to return, to serve the needy people there.

And Geneva is where the rest of his ministry will play out. when he returns to Geneva after three years in 1541, he famously, he steps up to preach at St.
Pierre, and what does he do? He simply picks up right where he left off. No, I told you so.
No, you were wrong to drive me out. Nothing like that. Just the next passage. If that's not a perfect metaphor of faithful, patient, enduring pastoral ministry, I'm not sure what it is.
Kevin Dillon, he talks about this. You threaten my life, what do you get? You're going to get the next passage. You threaten to disown me to raid my house, what are you going to get?
[34:48] You're going to get the next passage. That's the kind of man that he is. And that's the kind of faithful ministry that pastors should strive for.

You attack me, what are you going to get? You're going to get the next message, my best message the very next Sunday. Following the pattern started from Zwingli, he preached Lectio Continua, which we talked about is just preaching expositionly, preaching through the books of the Bible, chapter by chapter, verse by verse.
He preached often. He preached twice on Sundays and every single day of the week, every other week. never with the manuscripts, Calvin would steep himself in the text in his preparation and then he'd just get up and he'd preach.
His practice was typically to preach on Sundays in the New Testament and then through the rest of the week, preach in the Old Testament so that his congregation would receive a balanced diet.
We have over 2,500 sermon manuscripts that listeners, they heard the sermon that they would transcribe and some of which are still being translated to this day. His preaching was earnest, forceful.
[36:03] One example, he preaches through the book of Ephesians and during one sermon he literally pops a blood vessel because of how forcefully he's trying to preach. And the frequency and the volume of his preaching is just the tip of the iceberg of the sheer output of this man.

This man is incredible. In his short life, he does the work that honestly it would require us probably two or three lifetimes to accomplish. Frankly, he writes more than probably most of us will ever read

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in our entire lives.
About 35 volumes of correspondences of letters in which people wrote to him asking for pastoral advice for certain situations like that. People asked him for pastoral advice and he was never too busy to answer them.
In our modern day context, I think his email inbox was perfectly pristine. He read everything, replied to everything. He writes catechisms, tracts, confessions of faith, ecclesiastical documents, liturgies, treatises.
He writes more than 50 commentaries covering more than 70% of all the Bible. He writes about three fourths, covers about three fourths of the Bible.
[37:19] And he, again, goes through them verse by verse. These commentaries, even though they're more than 500 years old, they're honestly still gold for modern preachers and pastors.

There are some things that Calvin can argue and elucidate more clearly than any modern commentator can do. And that was his goal, right? Unlike other contemporaries who use commentaries for these lengthy, heady, doctrinal digressions, his simple goal was, in his commentaries, clarity and lucid, clarity and brevity.
And it's really those two aspects that allow these commentators or comment, commentaries to penetrate our minds, the minds of the readers. Later, Jacob Arminius, if you know the term Arminianism, famously it's put against Calvinism, Arminianism, the clash, right?
The founder, essentially, of Arminianism, hear what he has to say about Calvin. He recommends the commentaries, saying, after the reading of scripture, I recommend that the commentaries of Calvin be read.
For I affirm that in the interpretation of scripture, Calvin is incomparable, and that his commentaries are more to be valued than anything that is handed down to us in the writings of the fathers.
[38:40] Very, very high praise from someone who disagreed with him, very starkly. Here's another historian. Calvin was an exegetical genius of the first order.

His commentaries are unsurpassed for their originality, depth, clarity, and soundness. Calvin was king, king of the commentators.
There, if you read through them, he actually is surprisingly unashamed to admit as well when he simply just doesn't know the answer to a tough question. I think that's so encouraging for me to see his humility.
And he doesn't let perfection come in the way of progress. And he continues to track on chapter by chapter, verse by verse. And finally, you can't speak about Calvin and his work without mentioning the aforementioned 1,800-page magisterial tome of the Institutes.
And it's by far Calvin's greatest achievement. And he takes the classical insights of the Reformation and he gives them a clear systematic exposition, which neither Luther nor Zwingli was able to do.
[39:55] And so that's why people call him the architect of the Reformation. So Martin Lloyd-Jones, faithful pastor, he writes this, Luther was a volcano, spewing out ideas in all directions without form or systems.

But ideas cannot live and last without a body. And the great need for the Reformation was a theologian, a systematic thinker.
And he goes as far as to say that there was a very good chance that the Reformation would have died out by the end of the 16th century if it weren't for Calvin. And the reality is that there's a very good chance that all of us then, without Calvin, would be Catholic.
Catholic? Right? When Calvin comes on the scene, he particularly, he inherits a tradition and a theology that's marked by two decades of controversy, of infighting.
Another historian, Caspar Schweckfield, he says this, the Papists damn the Lutherans, the Lutherans damn the Zwinglians, the Zwinglians damn the Anabaptists, and the Anabaptists damn all the others.
[41:01] During Calvin's lifetime, at that precise moment, Zwingli had died, Luther was dormant, the Roman Catholic Church was resurgent, and the Anabaptists were fragmented.

With the Institutes, Calvin emerges as the new leader of the Reformation and the reformulator of a new theology. I talked at the beginning of the class in week one about how we should strive to incorporate in our reading diet old books by dead people.
And I think the Institutes is a great, great first option because it's a very pastoral work. It's not just dry, heady theological material. Right?

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In some particular sections, especially on ones like prayer, you really see Luther's pastoral, or Luther, Calvin's pastoral heart come out. Some have read through the Institutes even devotionally. And if you're interested in reading it, I kind of feel ashamed talking about it like this because I've never actually finished reading it, but I love if you guys want to read it with me. This is pretty much the gold standard of the Institutes.
[42:14] It's obviously translated in English. This copy by John Macnell, Sean bought it for me, or the church bought it for me. Yeah, it's long. This is actually just one of two, so there's another entire book to it as well.

But there are some reading plans that people have come up with where you just have to read 15 minutes a day. 15 minutes a day for a year, and that you can get through the entire thing. And I think it's a great way to sink your teeth into some old books by dead people.
And if you want to read one, this is probably one of the best. Talk about it a little bit. Calvin talks or covers such a wide breadth of material from faith and salvation to the local church, from prayer to the sacraments.
So I couldn't possibly cover all that Calvin says. But just some really, really brief highlights. It opens with one of the most famous openings of any theological work.
He writes this, Nearly all the wisdom we possess consists of two parts, knowledge of God and knowledge of self. And he says that those are intertwined, right?
[43:19] That's his genius immediately on display. You cannot have one without the other. You can't truly know yourself, who you are as a finite creature, without knowing the true and living God.

And on the flip side, you can't really know God unless you actually see yourself for who you are. A creature, a sinful creature at that, right? And living in total dependence on him, right?
Most of the theological works at that time, it tended to separate theology proper, the study of God, and anthropology, the study of man. It tended to separate those two.
But Luther's genius is, again, to see that they are totally intertwined. And I think that's helpful. Again, you read through these old books and you'll find that these things apply to us in our day, our day and age, right?
Because you hear commonly the language of self-discovery, of self-actualization, that people are saying, you need to search within yourself. You need to go travel and go backpacking, I don't know, go meditating.
[44:21] And if you search within yourself, then you can find out who you really are. Luther would strongly push back on that kind of talk, saying that it's not by searching internally do you find out who you are, but it's externally.

It's by seeing who God truly is and all this splendor, then you understand who you are, right? Next, he talks about how Scripture is the Word of God. He highlights key doctrine of Scripture, like it's clarity, veracity, sufficiency.
Don't have time to get into that. But one particular note about the Scriptures is he asks, how do we know that the Scriptures are the Word of God? And Calvin, he argues that it really is by the Holy Spirit alone, the author of the Scriptures.
He is the one who convinces us and it authenticates the Scriptures to us that this truly is the inerrant, infallible Word of God, right? So we don't know and believe the Bible is truth.
It's full of truth by subjecting it to actually outside external tests and measures. We ultimately know it is the Word of God by the ministry, the internal ministry of the Holy Spirit himself.
[45:34] And of course, I'd be remiss if we didn't mention the doctrines of grace, topics like predestination, election. It's what Calvin is often most known for, but it's, number one, hardly original.

At this point of church history, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Zwingli, they all believed and affirmed in election. And it's also hardly all that Calvin talks about, right?
We talked about the different editions of the Institutes. In the first edition, he doesn't even talk about it at all. And I mentioned that he writes catechisms in one 350-question catechism, 350 questions. Not a single one is about predestination. That being said, it's still such an important part of Calvin's theology, right? Because I think it ultimately flows from Calvin's majestic view of God, his big view of God, and his small view of man.
He sees that God is the first cause and the last end of all things. He holds to a monergistic soteriology, big words, but what it basically means that monergistic means essentially one working,

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because he held that God alone, he alone is the effective cause of our salvation, of our regeneration.
[47:00] And that's opposed to a synergism, where that belief is that salvation is a cooperative act between God and man. That man essentially needs to supply something from himself to be able to be saved.

Because of texts like Ephesians 2, John 6, Romans 9, Calvin also taught that sinners are spiritually dead, right? They have no motion, no function, unable to cooperate at all with their salvation.
But only by the mercy of God, through the definite and effectual atonement at the cross, Christ pays for the sins of those he saves. And by that atonement, then he effectively calls somebody.
And when he calls, when his words leave his mouth, they never return empty. So when he calls, nobody can resist him. And by that call, he breathes life into new souls, resurrects us to new life, and that promise of salvation then leads, this is the only basis on which we can have the total assurance of pardon, the total assurance of salvation, that God will be faithful to his promise because he can never renege on his promises and that we can trust that he will hold us fast.
Do you guys know that song, He Will Hold Us Fast? Really, you can't sing that song fully if you don't hold on to a Calvinistic theology. The common pushback against Calvin and the doctrines of grace is the problem of hell.
[48:30] It's a fair question. It's a tough question. If God is sovereign, how is it right, fair, that any is sent to hell? Calvin would follow the Apostle Paul in Romans 9 simply just saying, who are you as the pottery to speak back to the potter?

He has the right to decide what he will with his pottery. And I think it's, it could be helpful to also diagram, hopefully you guys can see this, in particular, how God treats, can you guys see that?
He treats the two parties. He has the elect, he has the non-elect. The elects, he, of course, saves, and the non-elect, he gives up to their sin.
Why it's helpful to diagram this, diagram this, is in particular, you can see the asymmetry in how he deals with them, right? So for the elect, what does God give them?
He gives them what they don't deserve. He gives them grace. He gives them grace. Whereas the non-elect, what does he give them? He gives them what they do deserve. So there's a difference in how he treats these two parties.
[49:52] Maybe another way to frame that is, in particular, the elect, God has to actively step into their lives and turn them to him. Because they're on their path, we're all once on the path away from them, right?

So he has to step in and turn them to him. Whereas for the non-elect, it's not that God has to do the same thing. He has to step in and turn, they're running towards him and that he actually turns them away.
It's not like that, right? They're already on their way to hell. They're already on their path. And in the language of Romans 1, he simply gives them up to their sins, the lusts of their heart.
So there's an asymmetry between the way that he speaks about these two groups. Sometimes you hear that also the accusation that Calvinists, they don't care about evangelism.
They don't care about missions because, you know, they just chalk it up to God's sovereignty. I think that's not only a misunderstanding of Calvinistic theology, but I think it's also a failure to account for historical examples in church history, right?
[51:00] Not only are the founders of the modern mission movement like William Carey, Adam Judson, or Hudson Taylor, all Calvinists, Calvinists. But we find examples in Calvin himself.

So when Calvin returns to Geneva, the city became something like the missionary capital of the Reformed world. So Calvin, he's so insightful.
He sees that this movement is only going to continue on if he trains pastors. And so he sees it as part of his ministry to raise up other elders, other leaders.
So he sets up Geneva College, Geneva College, where thousands of Protestant refugees flow to be trained in the gospel and then ultimately to be sent back.
And it has a famous moniker, a famous moniker of being called the School of Death. Because why? Because so many of its graduates would be then sent out, fully knowing that if they were to preach the Protestant message, that it could be their very life on their lines.
[52:01] Calvin in particular, he has a soft spot for it seems like the nation of France because he's French, right? So he sends at least 88 pastors back to France.

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And these pastors, they have an extraordinary impact for the Reformation, for the gospel. Around 1555, there were only a handful of organized, reformed churches in France.
Just a handful. By Calvin's death, nine years later, in 1564, there were roughly 2,000 churches and perhaps one to two million congregants in those churches.
And most notably, Calvin is also interested, very heavily interested in global missions outside of Europe. He sends out the first Protestant missionaries to the nation of Brazil in 1556. That mission ultimately fails because of persecution, internal conflict, but it still demonstrates nonetheless that Calvin's vision, he had a vision beyond Europe and he had a missionary's heart.
That was his goal. Coming up on the end, some challenges to the ministry. So hopefully, you've seen so far just how hard this man works. And honestly, he probably works harder than he should.
[53:18] It's known that Calvin regularly burns the midnight oil, working day and night, tirelessly, reading, writing, counseling, studying, thinking, with basically no breaks in between.

And why I say that is because it certainly didn't help with his continuous health problems. Even from a very young age, Calvin struggled mightily with stomach issues. And later on, he suffers from, like, you read the symptoms, he has like everything, almost.
He has colic, spits up blood, violent fevers, and the excruciating sufferings of hemorrhoids. One time, I mean, hopefully this is not too graphic.
You guys ate your lunch. He passes a kidney stone so large that it lacerates his urinary canal. And once it passes, in his words, a copious amount of blood follows.
You compare this to Luther, if you remember, from week one, who wrestles, struggles with physical issues at the end of his life. And quite often, church historians point to that as the reason why he ends up kind of writing really nasty, anti-Semitic things.
[54:30] But despite all of his physical hardship, Calvin remains faithful to the Lord, faithful to his ministry. He's a model example of steadfast perseverance in that.

Neither do the internal struggles from the church stop. His wrestlings with the Genevans still go on. Some of the greatest enemies was from within his own church.
There's a faction called the Libertines. They're a faction because they argue that the cross of Jesus Christ, it makes it so that it doesn't matter how we as Christians live our lives.
We can live righteously, sure, but it also doesn't matter if we live in sin. We can live in egregious sin and it doesn't matter because it's all forgiven. That's what they're arguing. It's really a clear antinomian, if you know that word, anti-law, namas.
It's a heresy. And basically, in every European city back then, men, husbands, they kept multiple mistresses. And so these Libertines, they essentially would go into church boasting of their sexual promiscuity in the name of Christian freedom.
[55:42] And I think, as a side note, it's a reminder that we often think that doctrine, what's in our head, then flows out to our lives, right?

It affects the way that we live our lives, which is absolutely true, right? But it's not just a one-way street, too. Our living and our choices, it actually will, it tends to impact and influence our theology, too, right?
If you live a sinful lifestyle, we often morph and adapt what we think to then justify our sin, right? I think that's a classic example with these Libertines. It's really impossible to hold on to right doctrine and wrong living at the same time.
One will have to go. So in 1530, or 1553, a rich, influential Libertine called Bert Tellier, he was banned by Calvin as he should have been, from the Lord's table.
He's blocked off, fenced off, because of his unrepentant, promiscuous lifestyle. Bert Tellier then, he goes to the city council, probably flaunting his wealth, his power, and the city councilors, knowing that, they then bypass, try to overrule Calvin's decision.
[56:59] And so they say, no, no, no, no, Calvin's crazy. You can come and take the Lord's Supper. Sunday comes, and in walks Bert Tellier, and once the sermon is preached, the prayers are prayed, it's finally time to partake of the Lord's Supper.

What will Calvin do? What he does is remarkable. He flings his arms around the sacramental vessels, as if to protect them from dishonor, sacrilege.
And he proclaims, these hands you may crush, these arms you may lop off, my life you may take, my blood is yours, you may shed it, but you shall never force me to take holy things to the profaned, and dishonor the table of my God.

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Do you respect the Lord's table in the same way? It's a challenge for us, right? Probably the most common attack against Calvin is then the Cervetis affair in 1553, the same year.
A little back story, Michael Cervetis was a Spanish physician. Originally part of the Catholic Church, Cervetis, he writes some anti-Trinitarian books.
[58:17] It's clearly heresy, and it makes him a wanted man by basically all of Europe, all the Roman Catholic Church. Despite that, when Cervetis, he actually reaches out to Calvin to meet up, and Calvin agrees, even though that this man is a heretic.

He hopes that he can win him back to the Lord. Of course, Cervetis then stands him up, but then a couple years later, he reaches back out again.
Calvin sends him the latest edition of the Institutes, and then Cervetis, he takes the book, he redlines all of it, basically, covers it in his edits, saying, these are all the things that you got wrong.
Eventually, Cervetis, he flees Geneva, or flees to Geneva, rather, and he walks into church while Calvin is actually preaching, and Calvin does have him arrested.
While he's in prison, Calvin visits him often, repeatedly, appealing to persuade him towards orthodoxy, and during that time, the Geneva Council, they consult other Protestant cities, asking, what should we do with this man?
[59:27] He's an infamous man. They unanimously recommend execution, and this is a smear on Calvin that he does support and defend his execution, but while he does that, he requests the more merciful execution of beheading, rather than to be burned at the stake, but the council rejects this, and he does have, they do have Cervetis burned at the stake.

And so Calvin is certainly a man of his time when he supports the execution, and he does bear moral responsibility. It's a smear on his legacy, but really, it's a more nuanced picture than some people really understand or portray Calvin, especially the Oxford Dictionary, right, calling him the dictator, the cruel master of Geneva.
Despite all these challenges, Calvin fights the good faith. He finishes the race well. He dies on May 26th, 27th rather, on 1564, at the young age of 54, in Geneva, the very city that tried to kill him, reject him.
It's the very city that through his resilience he made into his home. After a long period of declining health, marked by chronic illnesses like migraines, joint pain, tuberculosis, he preaches his last sermon in early 1564, and then he withdraws from public ministry.
And while he's still mentally active, while he's still there, he still tries to give pastoral counsel. People come visit him frequently. But as death approaches, he is visited by fellow pastors, and he expresses a consistent humility about his life, emphasizing that he simply is just a sinner saved by grace rather than a figure who deserves great honor.
[61:19] And so, in keeping with his wishes, he was buried in an unmarked grave in Geneva so that no one could find him, no one could venerate him. That's how humble he is.

And it reflects his decision not to point to himself, but ultimately to the majestic God that he longed to worship and be faithful to for his entire life. That's Calvin.
That concludes our three classes in church history. So, thanks guys for coming. Do you guys have any questions?

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