

## TWELVE POINTS OF LIGHT

### POINT 10: JOHN CALVIN - REFORMED THEOLOGY

#### INTRODUCTION

##### A. Quotes on Calvin

1. Pope Pius IV, *The strength of that heretic consisted in this, that money never had the slightest charm for him. If I had such servants my dominion would extend from sea to sea.*
2. Voltaire, French philosopher, *The famous Calvin, whom we regard as the Apostle of Geneva, raised himself up to the rank of Pope of the Protestants.*
3. H. Daniel-Rops, Roman Catholic theologian, *One of the terribly pure men who pitilessly enforce principles.*
4. Will Durant, *We shall always find it hard to love the man who darkened the human soul with the most absurd and blasphemous conception of God in all the long and honored history of nonsense.*
5. C.H. Spurgeon, *The longer I live the clearer does it appear that John Calvin's system is the nearest to perfection.*
6. Lewis W. Spitz, Lutheran historian, *Calvin was one of those strong and consistent men of history who people either liked or disliked, adored or abhorred.*

##### B. Background

1. Born in France; intended to be a priest but his father encouraged him to study law.
2. Conversion
  - a. In 1533, he had a *sudden conversion*.
  - b. His account in the preface to his commentary on the Psalms: *God drew me from obscure and lowly beginnings and conferred on me that most honorable office of herald and minister of the Gospel...What happened first was that by an unexpected conversion he tamed to teachableness a mind too stubborn for its years.*
3. In Basel
  - a. Branded a Lutheran and left Paris when persecution arose and settled in Basel.
  - b. Published first edition of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536) or *Principles of the Christian Faith*.
  - c. Purpose - *to hand on some elementary teaching by which anyone who had been touched by an interest in religion might be formed to true godliness.*
4. In Geneva
  - a. Stopped in Geneva on the way to Strasbourg.
  - b. Guillaume Farel, leader of the reformation in Geneva, urged Calvin to stay and help the church there.
  - c. Calvin refused so he could devote his time to study and writing.
  - d. Farel swore a curse on Calvin's studies unless he stayed in Geneva.
  - e. Calvin relented, *I felt as if God from heaven had laid his mighty hand upon me to stop me in my course...and I was so terror stricken that I did not continue my journey.*
  - f. Pastored St. Pierre church and led the reform movement in Geneva.
    - 1) His home (except for one brief exile) until his death in 1564.
    - 2) Geneva went from a city of notoriously lax morals to what John Knox described as *the most perfect school of Christ since the days of the apostles.*
  - g. Influence
    - 1) Everyone in Geneva had to subscribe to his confession of faith.
    - 2) Excommunication for those who did not conform to standards.

##### C. Contemporaries

1. Pierre Viret
  - a. Reformer of Lausanne.
  - b. Farel, Calvin and Viret were the founders of the Reformed Church in French Switzerland.

2. Martin Bucer
  - a. Calvin's mentor in Strasbourg.
  - b. Influenced Calvin in the area of predestination.
3. Sebastian Castellio
  - a. Became one of Calvin's severest critics.
  - b. Wrote, *To burn a heretic is not to defend doctrine, but to kill a man.*
4. Theodore Beza
  - a. Calvin's successor in Geneva.
  - b. Strongly defended Calvinistic ideas like double predestination, biblical literalism, and church discipline.
5. Heinrich Bullinger
  - a. Successor to Zwingli in Zurich.
  - b. Helped bring resolution to differences on communion between Zwinglians and Calvinists.

<b><i>DEVELOPMENT OF REFORMED THEOLOGY</i></b>
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#### A. Calvin's writings

1. *Institutes*
  - a. Written as a Protestant confession to the King of France.
  - b. It is systematic theology designed for practical application to church life.
  - c. Divided into 4 major sections based on the Apostles' Creed.
    - 1) God
    - 2) Jesus Christ
    - 3) The Holy Spirit
    - 4) The Church
  - d. Expanded on several occasions by Calvin.
    - 1) Addressed current issues and pastoral concerns.
    - 2) Went from 21 chapters to 80 chapters in 1559.
2. *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* (1541) - function of pastors
  - a. Primarily - the preaching of the Word
  - b. Administer the sacraments - baptism and communion
  - c. Conduct weddings
  - d. Direction of public charity
  - e. Participation in the Consistory which met every Thursday to censure and excommunicate believers who were guilty of immorality or deviation from Reformed doctrine.
3. *Catechism of the Church of Geneva* (1542)
  - a. Questions and answers designed to teach Reformed theology in 55 Sundays.
  - b. Memorized by children at school, repeated and explained on Sunday in church.
4. *Form of Church Prayers and Hymns* (1542)
  - a. Basis for the order of the Reformed service to this day.
  - b. Introduced the public singing of Psalms.

#### B. Calvin's Theological Views

1. Theology Proper
  - a. Knowledge of God
    - 1) Comes through worship
    - 2) He is revealed in Scripture.
    - 3) Our view of God is limited by our finiteness.
    - 4) Dependent on a relationship to Jesus Christ.

- b. Providence of God
    - 1) Universal operation of God in nature.
    - 2) General intervention in men's lives.
    - 3) Special working by the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians.
2. Sacraments
- a. Additional aids similar to the preaching of the Gospel for confirming and sustaining faith.
  - b. Baptism
    - 1) A sign of the remission of sin, mortification of the flesh and union with Christ.
    - 2) Infant baptism is a sign of the new covenant, a parallel to circumcision in the old covenant.
  - c. Communion
    - 1) It is more than a memorial.
    - 2) The spiritual substance of the body of Christ flows into our souls.
3. Eschatology
- a. Reformed theology is primarily amillennial.
    - 1) The millennial kingdom is spiritual.
    - 2) The Church fulfills the role of Israel.
  - b. Premillennialism
    - 1) Millennial kingdom is a literal 1,000 year period in which Christ establishes His Kingdom on earth.
    - 2) Time when the unconditional promises made to the nation of Israel will be fulfilled.
4. Christian Life
- a. The Life of Faith
    - 1) Principal work of the Spirit is faith.
    - 2) Principal exercise of faith is prayer which demonstrates an active dependence on God.
  - b. Grace-dependent relationship
    - 1) Natural joys demand prayers of thanksgiving.
    - 2) Adversities, weakness, and need require prayers of petition.
    - 3) Failure and rebellion call for prayers of confession and repentance.
  - c. Three-Fold System of Guidance
    - 1) Past - self-worth is not based on performance but a permanent relationship with God.
    - 2) Present - "cross-bearing" is bearable in the light of the resurrection and presence of Christ.
    - 3) Future - live in the hope of a future life renewed by the promises of God.
5. Five Points of Calvinism (TULIP)
- a. A mnemonic device for the five points of Calvinism.
  - b. A response of the Canons of Dort (1618) to views espoused by Jacob Arminius.
  - c. 5-Points
    - 1) Total depravity - fallen man is totally unable to save himself.
    - 2) Unconditional election - God's electing purpose was not conditioned by anything in man.
    - 3) Limited atonement - Christ's death atoned for the sins of the elect.
    - 4) Irresistible Grace - the gift of faith, sovereignly given by God's Holy Spirit, cannot be resisted by the elect.
    - 5) Perseverance of the Saints - those who are regenerated and justified will persevere in the faith.
- C. Five Points Examined
- 1. Total depravity
    - a. Not every man is as bad as he can be, Mark 10:21.
    - b. Every person lacks that love to God which is fundamental requirement of the law, Mat. 22:37 because he prefers himself to God, 2 Tim. 3:2-4, and has an aversion to God, Rom. 8:7.
    - c. Has no thought, feeling, or deed of which God can fully approve, Rom. 7:18.
    - d. Is incapable of escaping depraved condition on his own strength, Rom. 7:18.

## 2. Unconditional Election (Predestination)

### a. Notes

- 1) James Montgomery Boice, *If sinners are as helpless in their depravity as the Bible says they are, unable to know and unwilling to seek God, then the only way they could possibly be saved is for God to take the initiative to change and save them...It is God choosing to save those who, apart from His sovereign choice and subsequent action, certainly would perish.*
- 2) Double predestination refers to God's selecting some for salvation and others for damnation.

### b. Basis for election

#### 1) God's choice

- a) God actively looks with favor upon some and then elects them to salvation.
- b) Arguments in favor
  - 1] Biblical statements, Acts 13:48, John 6:44.
  - 2] Based on God's purpose from eternity, 2 Tim. 1:9.

#### c) Objections

- 1] Foreknowledge and election become the same thing. *God foresaw that sin would enter the world, but he did not necessitate it, he merely permitted it.* Thiessen
  - 2] If election is limited by God then the atonement must also be limited (verses promoting unlimited atonement, John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2).
  - 3] Makes God responsible for reprobation which goes against His heart of redemption, 2 Pt. 3:9.
- 2) Prescience - foreknowledge (knowledge of things before they happen)
    - a) God in His foreknowledge foresaw those who would respond to His offer of salvation and actively elected them to salvation.
    - b) Arguments in favor
      - 1] Unlimited atonement
      - 2] Exhortation to repent, Acts 17:30 and to believe, John 6:29.
      - 3] Biblical statement that election based on foreknowledge, Rom. 8:28-30.
    - c) Objections
      - 1] References that the Father gave certain ones to Christ, John 6:37; 17:9.
      - 2] Decree of God, Acts 13:48.
      - 3] Repentance, 2 Tim. 2:24-26, and faith, Rom. 12:3, are gifts of God.

## 3. Atonement

### a. Limited (Particular)

- 1) James Montgomery Boice, *Reformed theology stresses that Jesus actually propitiated the wrath of God toward His people by taking their judgment upon Himself, actually redeemed them, and actually reconciled those specific persons to God.*
- 2) Arguments in favor
  - a) Qualifying verses, Is. 53:5; Mt. 1:21; 20:28.
  - b) Christ's death in relation to the non-elect
  - c) Christ's work of intercession is for believers not unbelievers.

### b. Unlimited

- 1) Definition: the atonement is sufficient for all but efficient only for the elect.
- 2) Arguments in favor
  - a) It is tied to man's response of faith since Christ's death does not save apart from faith, John 20:31.
  - b) Convicting work of the Holy Spirit is unnecessary if salvation does not require faith.
  - c) God's love is not limited to the elect (universal offer), Jn. 1:29; 3:16, 17; 4:42; Acts 10:43; Rom. 10:13
  - d) Mankind fell in Adam and mankind has the opportunity for redemption in Christ, Rom. 5:17.
  - e) The non-elect are condemned on the basis of the cross, John 3:18.

4. Irresistible grace
  - a. Tied to God's choice
  - b. Basic questions
    - 1) Is God's grace extended only to the elect who are then regenerated?
    - 2) Does God extend His grace to all but reception demands a response of faith?
5. Perseverance (eternal security)
  - a. Based on relationship not performance.
  - b. God keeps those who are His
    - 1) John 6:37-40
    - 2) Philippians 1:6

### **CONCLUSION**

- A. Calvin was a deep thinker who applied theology to practical Christian living.
- B. He focused on God's sovereignty tied to man's accountability.
- C. It is possible that his followers took his principles further than he intended.
- D. Believe like a Calvinist and live like an Arminian -trust God alone but work like it depends on you.

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