

CALVINISM

“This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.” (1 John 3:11-12)

John Calvin was born in France July 10, 1509. In the autumn of 1533 he experienced a religious conversion. Later in life he would give two differing accounts of his conversion.

The first account can be found in his *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*.

“God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame, which was more hardened in such matters than might have been expected from one at my early period of life. Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that although I did not altogether leave off other studies, yet I pursued them with less ardour.”

In the second account he describes a long process.

“Being exceedingly alarmed at the misery into which I had fallen, and much more at that which threatened me in view of eternal death, I, duty bound, made it my first business to betake myself to your way, condemning my past life, not without groans and tears. And now, O Lord, what remains to a wretch like me, but instead of defense, earnestly to supplicate you not to judge that fearful abandonment of your Word according to its deserts, from which in your wondrous goodness you have at last delivered me.”

Perhaps both accounts are true and Calvin was merely expressing the same experience from two different perspectives.

Calvin was a brilliant theologian and published his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in 1536. It was written to "aid those who desire to be instructed in the doctrine of salvation." The Institutes were in four parts. The first examines God the Father; the second, the Son; the third, the Holy Spirit; and the fourth, the Church.

A brief overview of “Calvinism” is represented by the acrostic T.U.L.I.P.

T = Total depravity.

U = Unconditional election.

L = Limited Atonement.

I = Irresistible Grace.

P = Perseverance of the Saints (Once saved always saved).

Jesus provides insight into a simple way of judging religious teachers. He said: **“By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”** (Matt 7:16-20)

Following the instructions of Christ, therefore, we should not judge Calvin by what he said, or wrote, but by what his teaching produced.

CALVIN’S THEOCRACY

In 1541 Calvin established a Theocracy in Geneva. Albert Henry Newman in his Manual of Church History (Vol. 2 p. 217) describes Calvin’s thinking with these words:

“Never did a man come to his life-work with a fuller realization of the difficulties and the responsibilities involved or with a more resolute determination to carry out, regardless of consequences, what he believed the will of God required, than did Calvin. He had not the slightest misgivings as to the absolute correctness and the sole validity of his own particular schemes of Christian doctrine and of church government. All who set themselves in radical opposition to the one or the other were under the guidance of Satan, were out of the pale of salvation, and deserved no consideration at the hands of the faithful”.

Calvin’s dogmatism resulted in what historians call a “Theocratic Reign of Terror”. Here is some of the “fruit” produced by Calvin’s teaching.

- No mercy was shown to enemies of the theocracy.
- A system of espionage was introduced where informers shared the fines imposed and children were encouraged to testify against parents.
- On Oct. 27, 1553 Michael Servetus was burned at the stake for daring to disagree with Calvin. After writing in the flames for half an hour he cried out” Jesus, thou Son of the eternal God, have compassion upon me” and then died.
- From 1542 - 1546, 58 were executed and 76 were banished./
- During the pestilence of 1545, 34 women were burned or quartered on suspicion of spreading the plague by magic.
- Calvin encouraged the public execution of rebellious children based on Deut. 21:18 - 21.

- In 1568 Phillippe Deville was beheaded for striking his father.
- Since one cannot gather grapes from thorns nor figs from thistles, the honest student of history finds the fruit of Calvinism weighed in the balance and found wanting.

THE NATIONAL SYNOD OF DORT

Jacobus Arminius was born Oct. 10, 1560. His theology was the opposite of Calvinism and is summarized in the following five points.

- 1 - Election is condition on foreseen faith.
- 2 - Universal atonement (Christ died for all men, but no one enjoys forgiveness but believers).
- 3 - Man must be regenerated if he is to be saved,.
- 4 - Grace is not irresistible.
- 5 - The perseverance of believers is uncertain.

On Nov. 13;, 1618 the National Synod of Dort was convened to determine which doctrine was correct, Calvinism, or Armenianism. There were 84 members present.

Though Calvin and Arminius were both dead, the influence of their teaching lived on. Deciding which doctrine was correct must not have been easy for the debate raged on for six months. The Synod began Nov. 13, 1618 and was not over until May 9, 1619.

Since the Calvinists won the debate they followed in the dogmatic foot steps of their departed leader. Consequently, 200 ministers were deposed from office, 80 were banished, 70 agreed to be silent and refrain from ministry, 40 “repented” and were restored to their office, and Van Oldenbarnevelt was declared guilty of treason and beheaded on May 14, 1619.

DON'T BE LIKE CAIN

“This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.” (1 John 3:11-12)

- Like Calvin and Armenius, both Cain, and Abel were religious.

- Like Calvin and Armenius their views on religion were different.
- The King James version states that Cain “talked” with Abel before killing him (Gen. 4:8). Some have supposed this was a religious debate like the one between Calvinism and Armenianism.
- On the surface, it seems that the worship of Cain was more “Scriptural” than that of his younger brother. The Scriptures explain the curse to Adam with these words: **“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”** (Gen 3:17-19)
- Cain was tilling the soil by the sweat of his brow, just like Adam. Abel, however, was a shepherd. We have no record of the Scriptures saying anything about “keeping sheep”. Based on this “silence of Scripture”, perhaps Cain won the debate.
- Cain was apparently so upset with his brother’s religion that he killed him, much like Calvin killed those who disagreed with him.
- From the very beginning, God taught us to love one another and not be like Cain.
- Remember! Jesus was also killed by religious people who thought they were going by the Scriptures. The Jews told Pilate: **“We have a law, and according to that law he must die”** (John 19:7).
- Jesus warned His Disciples that the time would come when whoever put them to death would think he was doing service to God (Jn. 16:3).

LOVE DOES NO HARM TO ITS NEIGHBOR

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”
(Rom 13:8-10)

Unfortunately, Calvinists are not the only ones who have been guilty of persecuting others. Anytime it happens, however, it is in open contradiction to the teachings of Christ. Anyone can love their friends, but Jesus commands us to love our enemies.

Jesus said: **“You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on**

the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matt 5:43-48)

Note that the distinguishing mark of those who follow Christ is neither Calvinism, nor Armenianism, but love. Jesus said: **“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35)**

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE

Many months before Calvary Jesus gave miraculous power to His disciples. Please consider these commands of Christ to His disciples: **“Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.” (Matt 10:8)**

While the disciples could rejoice that even the demons were subject to them (Lk. 10:17), they still lacked the power to love their enemies. In fact, it seems that they didn’t even love one another. Perhaps this is why Jesus forbade His disciples to leave Jerusalem until they received new power from the Holy Spirit: Note: **“On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 1:4-5)**

Further focus on the Holy Spirit is found a few verses later in Acts 1:8: **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”**

Man cannot make “fruit”. Man can make something that looks like fruit, and perhaps even tastes like fruit, but only God can make fruit.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.” (Gal 5:22-26)

Whatever you do, please love one another and do not be like Cain!