

Heroes of the Faith #04: John Calvin

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Well, now why should I talk about John Calvin to a bunch of Calvinists? Surely you already know everything about John Calvin.

But it is important for us to refresh our memory a little bit from time to time about John Calvin because not everybody knows a lot about John Calvin and there are even some people in this world that don't fully appreciate John Calvin and his contributions.

Now I was converted when I was in high school through the work of the Christian Reformed Church. I was the one convert for the decade in northern California. And I was often accused of having become a Calvinist before I became a Christian. There may even be some truth to that.

I was always from those high school days very much drawn to Calvin and to his theology and to the power of his thought. But that is not a universal experience I find. And I remember very vividly when I was a freshman in college going to one of those accused barbeques they have for the freshman class to get to know one another. This was a secular school and I met a nice Jewish girl named Leah Potts and we got to talking a little bit about religion and she says, "Well, I am Jewish, what are you?"

And I said, "I am Calvinist."

And she sort of recoiled and she said, "I didn't know there were any alive. I thought they were just in books."

So that there are some folks who don't even know that Calvin still has any living followers.

As one friend of mine used to say, "God's frozen people."

But, you know, not only are those who are sort of unacquainted with Calvin, there are those who are positive enemies to what John Calvin has said. Calvin experienced that in his own days. There were those who were bitter enemies of John Calvin. You know, John Calvin was married for about eight years. His wife died rather young and in those

eight years they had only one child, the child died after a few months and many of Calvin's enemies said of him, "You see, God has cursed him by not giving him children."

And the enemies could be cruel and bitter to John Calvin. And Calvin's answer was that God had given him thousands of spiritual children.

Other enemies said that the cause of John Calvin's wife's death was that she had died of boredom. And there is something of that tendency, you know, to think of Calvin almost as if he were a disembodied mind.

We... I don't know if any of you remember the old radio program *Donovan's Mind* that story about a brain that was taken out and kept living outside the body. Sometimes they think of Calvin only sort of as a brain that functioned, that was brilliant, but somehow wasn't really alive and in this world.

A few years ago a scholar actually had to write a book entitled *The Humanity of John Calvin* as if it was sort of in doubt, you know, that maybe Calvin was sort of docetic, only seemed to be human and...

But Calvin opened himself up to some of this because he was a very private person. In that regards he was very different from Martin Luther. Luther was the kind of person that you sort of felt everything that ever went through his mind came out his mouth. He was a talker. He was an extrovert. He just talked and talked and talked. Calvin is much more restrained about himself. Calvin doesn't share even in his correspondence a lot about his feelings. And that is a frustration to his biographers. It is hard to develop an exciting biography about a person who hasn't opened himself up a lot. And the danger is to assume that because he doesn't talk about his feelings that he didn't have any feelings.

But, of course, that doesn't really follow. He simply was a rather private person. And those who got to know him, his close friends, his wife, loved him deeply and admired him deeply and realized that he was a man of deep, spiritual sensitivity and commitment. But not a man that talked a lot about himself.

He did write some when his wife died and expressed his very sincere love and grief at her passing. Although the only words that seem ever to be quoted from his letters about his wife's death are those words where he said, "She never interfered with my work." And it is often alleged that that was a very unfeeling sort of epitaph.

But if you were John Calvin and doing the kind of work he was doing, that is really rather high complement that she never interfered with that crucial work he was doing.

He admitted that he had a rather bad temper, that he struggled constantly to control his temper, that he lost his temper at times with people.

And he died relatively young, just about 55 years of age, literally working himself to death, like Luther producing volumes and volumes of writing.

Amazingly, Calvin of all the reformers is still the one whose commentaries cannot be ignored by any modern scholars. Calvin's commentaries of the Scripture have been of such quality that still 400 years later scholars must consult them in writing any respectable commentary on the Scriptures. He was a man of tremendous learning and tremendous ability.

In his old age he did occasionally talk about himself in his letters complaining about this health, you know, how sometimes older folk do what my mother-in-law calls the organ recital.

And he did in his last years have a lot of troubles. He had a malaria like fever that recurred and troubled him greatly. He had kidney stones. That was the scholar's disease in the 16th century. I had that... kept that in mind when I had a kidney stone attack a few... about ago year and a half ago and it was a small comfort actually. But all of the great scholars had kidney stones. They had a rather poor diet and they didn't get enough exercise and they regularly had kidney stones, very painful. And Calvin in one of his most touching letters towards the end of his life wrote that he had seen the doctors about his kidney stones and the doctors had suggested that he go horseback riding.

If the disease didn't kill you in the 16th century, the doctors surely would. And Calvin, in a rather sad moment said that he would take the doctor's advice except that his hemorrhoids were so bad he couldn't sit on a horse.

So Calvin was human. And as we come to study him, as we come to try to think about him, we are left with the problem of what angle do we take to get inside Calvin's thoughts?

Calvin's work is so massive and so profound and so balanced that it is often difficult to find a point of entry. You know, if you want a really quotable quote, you look at Luther. Luther has some nice sharp often exaggerated statement that goes right to the heart of things. But if you really want a comprehensive balanced statement, a real exposition of a point with clarity, we usually turn to Calvin. And Calvin has been so balanced that he has frustrated the historians who want to find out what is really at the heart of Calvin's thought. What is the basis of Calvin's thought? What does he build everything on?

And he is so balanced that the historians and theologians really haven't been able in any convincing way to decide what was that real foundation of his thought, unless it simply is to say that it was the Bible, that he took the whole Bible and built on the whole Bible.

You know, some used to say, "Well, it is election. It is predestination that is really the foundation stone of Calvin's thoughts." But that is really not true. Election was important to Calvin. It was a doctrine that was attacked in his own day and so he wrote defending it. But it is only part of that balanced presentation of biblical truth that we find in John Calvin.

And so I would like to say that one of the perspectives we really need always to keep in mind is that Calvin saw himself primarily as a pastor and a preacher. He was a scholar. He was a brilliant scholar. Left to himself he might well have liked to spend his days just as a scholar.

You remember when he left France he set off for the city of Strasbourg where he knew that Martin Bucer had begun a great reform of the Church. And he said, "What I really want to do is spend my life there in rather retired scholarship, writing, doing commentaries, biblical work. But there is a war between France and Germany. There always seems to be a war between France and Germany and Calvin got diverted to get around the battle lines and he passed through the city of Geneva. And he was only going to spend one night in Geneva, he was just traveling through. And William Farel who had begun the reformation in Geneva, one of these fiery red headed types of fellows heard that John Calvin was in Geneva and he had recently read John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* which Calvin had produced when he was about 25 years of age, I think. His first edition of the *Institutes* was only about one-fifth the size of what we have today, but nonetheless, a most remarkable accomplishment for a young man.

And as you read that first edition of *The Institutes* what impresses you is Calvin's theology is already all there. His theology didn't seem to evolve very much the way Luther's did. Luther's theology evolved quite a bit, but Calvin's... oh, there were some little things that developed, but basically Calvin's theology seems to be right there clear almost from the very beginning, most remarkable.

And Farel who had begun as a great preacher of reform in Geneva realized that he needed somebody with Calvin's kind of organizational skills.

Calvin, unlike Luther had finished his law studies. Calvin really was a rather modern fellow. He was more influenced by the Renaissance than by the Middle Ages in his education and he had real organizational abilities. And Farel said, "Calvin, won't you stay and help us here at Geneva?"

And Calvin said, "No, you don't understand. I want to be a scholar. I am going on to Strasbourg to work there."

And Farel said, "Unless you stay and help us here, God will condemn all your future works and give you no peace."

Calvin regarded that as an irresistible call. He said it was as if he had heard the very voice of God. Calvin always had a very high view of preaching. In that he was agreed entirely with Luther. Preaching is the Word of God. Preaching is not the Sunday morning opinion floated out for the congregation to bat around later over dinner to determine whether the preacher was right or wrong. But in some profound sense, God is speaking through his servant if the servant is doing what he ought to be doing, to apply the Word of God to the hearts of his people. And he felt in that moment that Farel spoke to him that he was

speaking the Word of God and Calvin stayed. [?] was very happy about it, often troubled and facing a great deal of opposition in Geneva.

Now this story that gets around that Calvin was sort of the dictator of Geneva, ok, nothing could be farther from the truth. For about the last nine years of his life in Geneva he had relative peace and was relatively well respected. But Calvin, most of his life in Geneva, faced serious opposition and even the last few years he never was a dictator. He never had any official civic office and he never had anything more than the moral authority of the preacher even in the best years there.

Just as one little example of that Calvin believed that the Lord's Supper ought to be administered at least once a week. The city council in Geneva said, "No, we are only going to have it four times a year."

Calvin could never get them to change that. And, of course, we as good Calvinists through the years have ignored the advice of John Calvin and followed the wisdom of the city council of Geneva. But we don't want to get into that.

So I would like to suggest that one way of looking at the work and accomplishment of John Calvin is Calvin as a preacher and as a pastor. And as a preacher and pastor I think one of the greatest themes that he always proclaimed was the theme of faith.

Now you may think, well, now you are just going to shift into that lecture you gave last night about faith.

But I think that if possible there is a depth of understanding about faith in Calvin and a way in which the idea of faith organizes the thought of Calvin which is even more profound at points than that of Martin Luther.

Now, you know, you all write that down. I did say that.

There is a remarkable character to what Calvin understands in faith. And I would like to look at some five aspects of faith with you from John Calvin. Some of them we will do pretty quickly, but... and some others we will linger over because I think they bring out some of the distinctive message of Calvin.

The first point is... and this Calvin shared with all the real reformers is that our faith is in Christ. One of the great problems we face in the modern Church is that we hear a lot of talk about faith, that faith is talked about in the modern evangelical Church far too much as if it is a virtue that we accomplish, that faith becomes an end in itself, that faith really is turned into a good work.

It is as if a lot of evangelicals are saying, "Well, I know we can't be obedient to God. I know we can't fulfill the law. I know we can't achieve a works righteousness and so God in mercy has reduced the demands of the law, he has reduced the things that we must do

down to just one thing. There is only one thing that we have to do now and that is believe.”

And so faith in some creature’s work is turned into a work. Faith becomes something that we have to work up, something that we have to accomplish as if it is something that we planted and we nurtured and we grew and that we return God’s favor by having. And Calvin with all reformers saw clearly that faith is, by its very nature, not self centered, but Christ centered. Faith always must be talked about in terms of its objects, the one to whom it looks.

The first point for Calvin was faith is in Christ. Faith looks away from the self and looks to Christ.

We are not saved by faith. We are saved by Christ. And faith is that which looks to Christ, which trusts Christ, which relies on Christ. And in that sense faith must in a very profound way sort of recede in the background. It is Christ that must be central. Faith is that [?] which puts us in touch with Christ who saves us. And I think Calvin would want to stress that for us today as so crucial.

How are you saved? Yes, in one sense, certainly, we are saved by faith. But we are not saved by faith as something good in us. But we are saved by faith because faith is what leads us out of us and to Christ. And so Christ is our justification. Christ is our sanctification. Christ will be our glorification and we are in touch with him by trusting him, by relying on him, by putting all of our confidence in him.

And so faith must be faith in Christ. And Calvin was one of the great expositors of the work of Christ. It was Calvin who first in the history of doctrine talked about Christ as our prophet, priest and king. It was Calvin that developed that three fold understanding of Christ’s work and saw how beautifully and fully Christ fulfilled the Old Testament in that sense.

What was typified, what was prophesied in the Old Testament in the office of the king and of the prophet and the priest now all comes together in Jesus Christ in his great work so that he is priest for us as he offers himself as our high priest upon the cross, both priest and sacrifice. He is prophet for us as he teaches us God’s will. And he is king over us as he continues to reign even now as King of kings and Lord of lords.

So faith, first of all, is faith in Christ.

Then, secondly, Calvin wants to stress that faith is through the Spirit.

It was B B Warfield, you remember, who said that John Calvin is the greatest theologian of the Holy Spirit in the history of the Church. And I think B B Warfield was exactly right. Calvin was a theologian of the Holy Spirit *par excellence*. He gave real attention to the important work of the Spirit.

Now, again, there is something very timely about that. There is a lot of interest in the Spirit in our day. And some would want to say, “Well, we have done a lot more thinking about the Spirit in our day than Calvin did in his.”

If Calvin were here today he would say, “You know, we... you modern folks don’t make a clear enough distinction between two aspects of the work of the Spirit. The Spirit does, in the Scripture, extraordinary work and the Spirit also does ordinary work.”

Now the Spirit does extraordinary things like giving prophecies and healings and raising the dead and speaking in tongues. Calvin would say it is not surprising that people get fascinated by that kind of work of the Spirit which Calvin thought was limited to the New Testament period. But Calvin said, “You know, we have to be sure we recognize that what is really important is the ordinary work of the Spirit, common, every day things like regenerating human hearts, opening our eyes to understand the Scripture, helping us to grow in grace and holiness.”

Now to be sure, those sorts of things are sort of boring, every day, common place.

We were turning on the television one day and seeing a Pentecostal preacher up there and he said... I don’t want to imply that he is a typical Pentecostal preacher. This was a particularly unfortunate example it seemed to me, but he got up there and he said, “Now, the Holy Spirit is going to be here today and some will be saved and some will be healed and some will speak in tongues and thousands will be slain in the Spirit.”

Now it seemed to me by his own testimony he was saying, “I know we may do a few ordinary things like saving people, but, boy, there is going to be real excitement here because some are going to be slain in the Spirit.”

And there is a [?] where you see kind of perversion and imbalance in that look at the Christian life. And there is a kind of self centeredness in that. What am I going to experience? What new kind of excitement am I going to have? You see, it is a very kind of self centered religion and Calvin wanted to say to us our faith is in Christ as we look outside of ourselves. Our faith is through the Spirit as that mighty Spirit of God comes into us to lead us to Christ. We can’t accomplish faith on our own. We can’t look to Christ to be justified or sanctified or glorified on our own. We need that sovereign work of the Spirit.

And we, as reformed people, I think, have to hold up a banner in our day of the centrality of the ordinary work of the Spirit.

If I dare quote Martin Luther again, Luther used to say, “So many people want to say, ‘Oh, the death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ, that is old hat. Give us something new.’”

And Luther used to say, “We can’t have any new. We must have the gospel. We must have the heart and center of things.”

The Holy Ghost comes with power into our lives to lead us to Jesus Christ, to help us to grow in grace. Calvin understood that so beautifully, so fully. And we need to avoid, then, anything that is going to lead us away from Jesus Christ even when we talk about the Spirit.

Sometimes the Spirit is talked about in a way that leads us away from Christ. Luther worried about that and in his typically powerful way said, “Some people think they have swallowed the Holy Ghost, feathers and all.”

And instead, you see, the work of the Spirit is powerful and gently to bring us to our Savior Jesus.

So faith in Christ, is from the Spirit and is through the Word.

The Word is tremendously important for John Calvin. The Word as eternal Word, the Word as incarnate Word, the word as written Word, the Word as preached Word, the Word as read Word. The Word of God is the channel by which we know God.

One of Calvin’s favorite verses was Deuteronomy 29:29. You all remember Deuteronomy 29:29?

That’s right.

“The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

And Calvin said, “There is a lot about God we would like to know, but that he hasn’t told us. And what we need to cling to, what we need to understand, what we need to know is what is revealed us, what he has told us.”

And, of course, preeminently, God has revealed himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ. But in mercy to us he goes on making a written revelation to us in the Scriptures. God has spoken.

There has been some discussion recently about what Calvin really thought about the Word of God, about the Bible and especially in our modern time when we hear a lot about the inerrancy of the Bible. Some want to say, “Well, Calvin really didn’t believe in the inerrancy of the Bible.”

Well, I want to say to you, “Don’t you believe it.”

Calvin devoted himself in his commentaries to showing that the Bible was true and reliable. And when you read *The Institutes* Calvin is rather remarkable in the things that he says about the Bible. He says, in effect, in *The Institutes* almost as if he had read Dr. Van Til—maybe it just means that Dr. Van Til had read Calvin or that they both read the

Bible—what Calvin says about the Bible is, he says the Bible is true and he says you know that in the same way that you know that the sun is shining.

Now he said, “I can offer you evidence and proof that the Bible is true just as I am sure that a scientist could offer us evidence and proof that the sun is shining.”

And evidence and proof in certain circumstances might even have some usefulness to show that the sun is shining. But none of us needs evidence and proof to know that the sun is shining.

And so it is with the Word of God. It shines with a clarity that is self authenticating, that is self proving, that to every heart softened by the Holy Spirit, recognizes immediately yes this is God’s Word.

And I think that is really is an experience for most Christian people, that we do have that immediate sense of recognition that here in this Word God is speaking. This is God’s Word.

And so Calvin was clear that the Word of God is true.

And he is clear that the Word of God is sufficient. The Word of God tells us everything that we need to know about our salvation. We don’t need any Church traditions to supplement the Word of God for our salvation. We don’t need any continuing revelations of the Holy Spirit to supplement the Word of God for our salvation. We don’t need a prophet or an authoritative teacher, a pope. We don’t need any ecumenical counsels to supplement the Word of God. It is sufficient to tell us all that we need to know about our salvation. And that was a great testimony in Calvin’s day and it needs to be in ours, too.

And finally, he said, the Word of God is perspicuous. I love the word perspicuous because it is probably the least perspicuous word in the language. Perspicuous simply means clear. The Word of God is understandable.

We can read it and understand it. Now he didn’t mean that every one of us can pick up the book of Ecclesiastes and write a commentary explaining every way in which that book’s varying statements relate to one another. It doesn’t mean that every one of us is a preacher able to explain every single verse in the Scripture. It certainly doesn’t mean that we don’t need to have seminaries or theological professors. I want to try to be as clear about that as possible.

But what it means is that... what did you say?

No, Calvin felt that we could gain deeper and fuller insight into the Word of God, that scholarship, indeed, was crucial to help us make progress in deeper and richer understanding of the Word of God. But what he meant was that the message of salvation is crystal clear in the Word of God to be found by those who read it. It is there. It is

clear. You don't need a caste of priests to tell you what is in there to find out salvation. You don't need a caste of professors to stand between you and the Bible to find the message of salvation.

And so Calvin wanted to say the Scripture was clear.

And that is why he devoted so much of his energy to preaching and writing commentaries on the Word of God. That is why he thought preaching was so important. You know, it is interesting. It would be interesting to take a poll here today and ask: Which is more important, do you think, hearing the Word of God preached or having private devotions and reading the Word of God on your own?

Now, of course, we don't ever want to be in a position where we have to set those things off against one another. But Calvin was crystal clear in his answer to that and it was the same answer Luther gave. Hearing sermons is much more important than reading the Bible on your own, much more important than reading the Bible on your own because God has given the gift of preachers to his Church to apply the Word of God to the hearts of the people.

It is as if Calvin were saying when we read the Bible on our own we may slip by those difficult passages that really need to be applied to our lives and move on to those passages where we feel nice and comfortable. And the role of the preacher is to make those who are too comfortable, uncomfortable and to make those who are too disquieted, comfortable. That is why being a preacher is so hard.

But the role of the preacher, you see, is to apply that Word of God to the hearts and lives of the people in a way that will make a difference and bring it home to them. And that is why the reformers saw preaching as so crucial and why they felt it must be the Word of God that is preached.

There was recently published a book of sermons by John Calvin on the 10 Commandments. If you haven't seen that book, I really commend it to you. And when you read that book what is intriguing about Calvin's style as a preacher is that he starts talking about how God was speaking to the Jews and all of the sudden he is talking about how God is speaking to us and it is so immediate you are not really aware how he has made the shift from the historical past to the present. But you know suddenly you have been addressed. You have been brought in. The Word of God in no sense stands back there. The Word of God is for us right now speaking to our hearts.

Calvin is very intriguing as a preacher that way. It is well worth looking at some of those sermons of his to see how he brings the Word of God immediately to the people and to their needs, not always the needs that they think they have, but the needs that God thinks they have. And that is why it is so important to preach the Word.

So the Word comes, faith comes through the Word, through our acquaintance with the Word. Now Calvin commended the private devotional reading of the Scripture and that

is important. We need to do that. But we need to be sure that we are hearing that Word preached, too.

Then we come to the fourth point about faith in Calvin. This is very important and I think if I was trying to point to one really distinctive thing about Calvinism, this would be it. This is very important and I think if I was trying to point to one really distinctive thing about Calvinism, this would be it.

You know, sometimes... I am going to keep the suspense going here a minute. Sometimes we think, well, what is really distinctive about Calvinism is that Calvinists believe in election, not distinctive. Luther believed in election. Thomas Aquinas believed in election. Absolutely he did. You read his *Summa Theologica*. He believed in election just the way we Calvinists do. Augustine believed in election. That is not distinctively Calvinistic.

Oh, maybe limited atonement, how about that? Nah. You can find medieval theologians who believed in limited atonement. [?] there are a whole bunch.

What might you suggest is really distinctive about Calvinism? I think what is really distinctive about Calvinism is that Calvin really taught and consistently upheld that faith is with confidence. Calvinists are the only people who really believe in the perseverance of the saints. Calvinists are the only ones who believe that not only can we have confidence that God is our heavenly Father in the present, but he will remain our heavenly Father for the future.

You see, both Luther and Thomas Aquinas said, “Yes, God has his elect and he will certainly save his elect. But in this life you can’t really know whether you are elect or not.”

And so there are some people who are saved for a time and then fall away and are lost because they were never really elect. That is what Luther and Thomas would say. But what is revolutionary about Calvinism, it seems to me, is that Calvinism says we, as God’s people, can know now that we are elect. And what that means is we will never fall away from grace. God, by his grace will preserve us and therefore for the faith that Calvin taught and what I believe to be the faith of the Scriptures, it is a faith with confidence, not only in the present, but for the future. We can be assured that he who began a good work in us will bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. We can be assured that no one can pluck us out of the Savior’s hand. We can be assured that no one will bring a charge against God’s elect, not at some unknown and unspecified number, but we are God’s elect if we have trusted in Christ. We can be assured that we are God’s elect in that sense and Calvin, when we read his works with that notion in mind we can see him hammering away at that point again and again and again. God’s people must have confidence in the saving work of Jesus Christ for them.

Faith, Calvin says, is trusting Jesus to do what he promised. Faith is not saying Jesus is a Savior. Faith is saying Jesus is my Savior, my Savior now and my Savior forever. Faith is confidence in Jesus Christ as my Savior.

And therefore faith has no doubt in it.

Now Calvin when he says that does not say Christians never have any doubts. Christians have doubts. But he said, "The warfare that goes on in the heart of the Christian is the warfare between faith which is trusting without doubt and doubt which wants to lead us away from faith." Calvin said, "Too often Christians have sort of defined faith itself as doubt." And he says that is wrong. Faith is reliance and trust and assurance in Jesus Christ. That is why I encourage Denis to have us read some from Romans four and five today.

Listen, again, to the way Paul describes Abraham.

"He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body," reading at Romans 4:19, "which was as good as dead because he was about 100 years old or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God. But he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised."

Or that wonderful verse, Romans 4:16, "That is why righteousness depends on faith in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all of his descendants."

You see there is grace which produces faith which is an assured guarantee of God's redemption for us. That is crucial. That is crucial for the well being of the Christian life. That gives us confidence now and for the future. That helps us really to affirm that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ. And that gave a whole different quality to Calvinist living.

I remember hearing a pastor who was a Calvinist who had been counseling with a fellow who had been raised in a very Arminian home. This fellow was deeply troubled because he said growing up he could remember that every night his mother prayed at the family dinner table, "Oh Lord, if only we could die tonight so that we might not fall away and be lost tomorrow."

Now what does that do to your Christian living? Well, aside from the sort of morbid, neurotic quality of it, it makes you radically self centered, doesn't it? You are left constantly worrying about yourself, whereas Calvinism with its assured sense of God's mercy is able to think about others, at least ideally.

We, you see, are liberated from self centered. That is why I think Calvin at this point really completes a thought that Luther hadn't quite fully seen, that Luther's theology directs him towards, but he never quite came to.

You know, it was said in the 16th century by a Catholic soldier that he would rather face a whole army than one Calvinist convinced he was doing the will of God.

You see, that kind of strength, that kind of solidity that undergirded the life of the Christian, of the Calvinist, not because he was going around saying, “Oh, I am better than everybody else because I am elect,” as if he were somehow self righteous or somehow had made himself better than others. But it was that confidence, you see, that Jesus Christ has redeemed me for time and for eternity. I am his own. I am assured of that relationship. That relationship is peace for me.

Romans 5:1. “Therefore since we are justified by faith we have peace with God.”

It is the Calvinist who has real peace with God because in Jesus Christ he has found a Savior who will hold on to him and who now can use him in his service.

And it is when we really grasp that that then we can really understand why the doctrine of election was so important to Calvin and such a comfort to him.

How can I be assured that God will never let me go? Because he who began a good work in me, according to his plan from eternity, will surely bring it to completion. And since now I know the Spirit of God is within me, I know that I was in his plans and I know that I will reign in glory with him. What a comfort. What an assurance. What a glory.

There is nothing threatening in election when seen from that point of view, but only a strengthening for Christian living, a guarantee.

Paul in Romans 5:5 says, “We have a hope that does not disappoint us.”

Christ won’t let us down. If we have really trusted in him by faith, he will keep us as his own.

Now just very briefly the fifth point, then, Calvin said this faith is within the Church. Calvin did not see the Christian life in static terms as if once we get this business of faith he had such confidence that we never have to go on growing, that we have arrived.

A lot of Christians who want to just arrive and settle down and settle back. Calvin would have none of that.

There are a lot of Christians, you know, who... I... I had a seminary student who described them as whiskey Calvinists.

I said, “I don’t know what a whiskey Calvinist is.”

He says, “Well, we have a lot of whiskey Calvinists who are Baptists in Texas.”

Whiskey Calvinists who are Baptist. I had better keep my voice down.

I said, "What in the world is a whiskey Calvinist?"

And he said, "Well, a whiskey Calvinist is one who believes only one fifth of Calvinism."

And I said, "What is the one fifth?"

And he said, "Perseverance of the saints."

You see, any doctrine can be misused. And the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints can be misused if by that we understand that sort of like a train on the top of a hill and all that Christian life amounts to is to give that train a little push and once it gets over the crest of that hill and goes down it will run certainly without any more attention to the end.

There are a lot of Christians today who really see their Christian work as just giving trains pushes over the edge of the hill. All that is important, then, is the beginning of Christian life and Christian experience. Get them saved and move on.

Calvin would have torn out his hair.

I don't know how much hair he had at the end of his life, but he would have torn out his hair at such a thought. Faith is within the Church and must be constantly nurtured and growing. This should really characterize our reformed Church life. Yes, we have faith. Yes, we are saved. Yes, we have confidence. Nonetheless, we must be ever growing in our faith. Christian life and experience is never static. It is never mechanical. But as a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and with the Father and with the Holy Spirit is ever growing and developing. Again, we look at Romans four verse 20.

"No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in faith."

And Paul in Romans five talks about that process of growing.

"We rejoice in our sufferings knowing that sufferings produces endurance, endurance produces character, character produces hope and hope is not disappointed."

There is a process of Christian life and development. Our faith grows within the fellowship of the Church. God has appointed ways and means for our faith to be nurtured. And for Calvin that meant the fellowship of the Church [?] into God and to Christ and of his full provision. And that is the faith that Calvin lived in. That is the faith that Calvin died for. That is the faith that he calls each one of us to...

One of his last letters written to his old friend Farel shortly before he died Calvin summarized his own faith in these words.

“It is enough that I live for Christ who is the prize of his own in life and also in death. It is enough that I live for Christ.”

Let's pray together.

Father, we pray that you would lead us in the path of faith, the faith that looks to Christ that is inspired by the Spirit, that is nurtured by the Word, that is full of trust and in the fellowship of your Church is ever growing. We are a weak and needy people and we rejoice in the strength and power of our Savior and pray that we might ever live for him. Hear us for we pray in his name. Amen.