

Sola Gratia
Grace Alone
Ephesians 2:4-8

Picture of Calvin

First: Calvin and Geneva

John Calvin was born 10 July, 1509 in Noyon, France, only 8 years before Luther's 95 Thesis. At the age of 14, 6 years after Luther's 95 Thesis, he left home to study the Catholic priesthood in Paris. By 1528, Lutheran ideals were sweeping Paris, especially the Universities and Calvin, now a law student at the University of Orleans, joined the Reformation cause. In 1533, at the age of 24, he slipped out a window of his apartment and fled Paris under threat of arrest for his Protestant associations. This began Calvin's pilgrim years and for the remainder of his life he would remain an exile and a wanted man by French authorities and the Catholic Church.

For three years he lived in various places around France until, at the age of 27, he entered the city-state of Geneva in August of 1536 to serve the Protestant church there. The city had only embraced the Reformation four years earlier (1532) and was in spiritual disarray. In 1538, he refused Communion to nonconforming members of the Genevan Church and was excommunicated by the Genevan civil leaders. He lived in Strasbourg, Germany for three years until, at the city father's request, he returned to Geneva in 1541 and remained there until he died 27 May, 1564.

However, Calvin was a foreigner in Geneva and not a citizen until 8 years before his death. As a refugee, Calvin became the father to refugees from all over Europe and England and Geneva became the mother of refugee churches. This created problems for Calvin. When he entered, the city had a population of 10,000 people. But hearing of Calvin and the Reformation movement there, religious refugees fled to Geneva for safety. In one two-year period, 10,567 refugees passed through Geneva and were given assistance. In June of 1547, 500 poor French refugees entered the city. The refugee situation taxed Geneva's benevolence, hotels, restaurants, hospitals, job opportunities and schools. (Imagine if a wave of Syrian refugees poured into Johnson City) It quickly became a political issue and Calvin was blamed as an anti-French sentiment settled in on the city. But people from everywhere fled to Geneva, many of them, like John Knox, fleeing Mary Tudor's burning of Protestants in England.

The anti-Calvin sentiment never ceased so long as he lived in Geneva. Dogs were named after him and often set loose on him. Placards criticizing him regularly appeared throughout the city. Songs in the pubs were sung to ridicule him. He was the constant target of petty mischief and more serious crimes. People argued against him while he preached. Guns were fired outside his home during the night as he and his family tried to sleep. An unsigned death warrant was attached to his pulpit in 1547. Geneva was constantly under threat of attack from France. Untold amounts of money was spent fortifying its walls and securing its borders. Assassination attempts inside of Geneva were made against Calvin. He was mobbed on more than one occasion and once attacked with a sword for not giving communion to nonattending members of the church. An army once marched on Geneva but its forces were diminished by crossing the Swiss Alps.

In 1556, 18 years after he entered the city for the 2nd time and only 8 years before his death, Calvin's supporters won enough elections for Calvin to begin an Academy to train pastors.

Second: Calvin and Evangelism

After his expulsion from Geneva in 1536, Calvin, now 27, produced the first edition of his Institutes. Dedicated to Frances I, he wrote:

“When I did first set my hand to this work [i.e. his Institutes] I thought nothing less, most illustrious King, than to write anything to be presented to your Majesty. My mind was to teach certain rudiments whereby they that are touched with some zeal of religion might be instructed to true godliness. And this travail I undertook principally for my countrymen, the French, of whom I understood very many to hunger and thirst for Christ, but few had received so much as any little knowledge of him. That this was my purpose the book itself declareth, being framed to a simple and plain manner of teaching.

But when I perceived that the furious rage of certain wicked men hath so far prevailed in your realm that in it there is no room for sound doctrine, I thought I should do a thing worth my travail if in a single work I should give both instruction for them whom I proposed to instruct, and send forth an apology [evangelistic tract] to you, whereby you may learn what manner of doctrine that is against which these furious men burn in so great rage, who at this day trouble your realm with sword and fire. For I shall not fear to confess that I have in this work comprehended in a manner the substance of that selfsame doctrine against which they cry out that it ought to be punished with imprisonment, banishment, proscription and fire. . . .”

Calvin believed strongly in the Bible truths of election and predestination but also in the Bible truth of a universal, gospel invitation to sinners.

John 3:16 – *“For although there is nothing in the world deserving of God's favor, he nevertheless shows he is favorable to the whole world when he calls all without exception to faith in Christ...”* – John Calvin in The Gospel According to John, 74.

1 Timothy 2:4 – *“...there is no people and no rank in the world that is excluded from salvation; because God wishes that the gospel should be proclaimed to all without exception...hence he justly concludes that God invites all equally to partake of salvation.”* – John Calvin in Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, 54.

2 Peter 3:9 – *“He does not hasten the end of the world, in order to give all time to repent...So wonderful is his love toward mankind, that he would have them all to be saved...God is ready to receive all to repentance, so that none may perish.”* – John Calvin in Commenters on the Catholic epistles, 419.

“[Isaiah] shows that it is our duty to proclaim the goodness of God to every nation.” – John Calvin in Commentary on the Book of the Prophet of Isaiah

He also prayed for and led his congregation to pray for the salvation of all people everywhere.

“We pray you now, O most gracious God and merciful Father, for all people everywhere. As it is your will to be acknowledged as the Savior of the whole world, through the redemption wrought by your Son Jesus Christ, grant that those who are still estranged from the knowledge of him, being in the darkness and captivity of error and ignorance, may be brought by the illumination of your Holy Spirit, and the preaching of your gospel to the right way of salvation, which is to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” – John Calvin in McKee, “Calvin and Praying for ‘All People,’” 139.

In fact, Calvin believed it was the duty and joy of every believer to share Christ with whomever they could and whenever they could. We exist when and as we do, to share Christ in whatever society, vocation, opportunity God affords.

Third: Geneva as a Missionary Center

Calvin intended Geneva to be a model city and missionary center, effecting the Reformation around the world and especially in France.

“Send us wood, and we shall send you arrows”

- John Calvin

In *“Calvin’s Geneva...Human vessels were equipped and refitted...that they might launch out into the surrounding ocean of the world’s need, bravely facing every storm and peril that awaited them in order to bring the light of Christ’s gospel to those who were in the ignorance and darkness from which they themselves had originally come...Geneva became a dynamic center or nucleus from which the vital missionary energy it generated radiated out into the world.”* - Philip E. Hughes in “John Calvin, Director of Missions,” 44-45.

“...Calvin sought to harness the energies and gifts of many of these refugees so as to make Geneva central the expansion of Reformation thought and piety throughout Europe. This means training and preparing many of these refugees to go back to their native lands as evangelists and Reformers. And first and foremost, on Calvin’s heart as a place needing the gospel was his home and native land, France.” – Michael A.G. Haykin and C. Jeffrey Robinson, Sr., in *To The Ends of the Earth*, 66.

(1549) - *“When I consider how very important this corner [Geneva] is for the propagation of the kingdom of Christ, I have good reason to be anxious that it should be carefully watched over.”* – Letter to Heinrich Bullinger.

In 1545, Francis I approved the destruction of 24 villages and the murder of 800 people who had strayed from the Catholic faith.

In 1559, Calvin established an Academy for training pastors. About 1000 people daily attended Calvin's lectures. (Robert Kingdon in *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France, 1555-1562*, 14-15).

Four years earlier he had begun sending missionaries into France in 1555. Between 1555 and 1562, innumerable men and women left Geneva and entered France under the guise of various professions. As churches began, the need for pastors multiplied such that the church in Geneva often sent its own pastors to start and encourage French congregations. (Kingdon, *Geneva*, 70)

In 1555, there were five Protestant churches in France. (Gordon, *Calvin*, 306). By 1562 (7 years later), 2,000 Protestant churches had been established with a membership of over 2 million people. It is estimated that 10-20% of the entire French population embraced Protestantism (Mark Greengrass in *The French Reformation*, 43).

(1558) - *"The number of the faithful is everywhere increasing, and already in very many places secret meetings are being held."* – John Calvin in *Tracts and Letters*, 6:463).

Calvin's missionary endeavors in France were so successful that on 27 January, 1561, Charles IX sent a letter to the city council of Geneva demanding that Calvin stop sending missionaries into France. (It was this King of France who, 11 years later, arranged a marriage between his Catholic sister Margaret to a Protestant in an effort to calm the nation's religious schism. But, during the wedding festivities, the leading French Protestants, known as Huguenots, were massacred, on what has become known as the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre – 24 August, 1572 - and which eventually killed tens of thousands of Protestants throughout France.)

On 10 March, 1557, Calvin sent two pastors and a dozen other members to Brazil.

SBC appointed 35 missionaries in its first 7 years of existence, all in peacetime and with potentially unlimited funds. From 1555-1562, Calvin sent at least 142 missionaries, all under war-time conditions. It took the SBC 110 years to reach 1,000 missionaries. Calvin averaged a minimum of 20 missionaries a year meaning he would have sent out 2,200 missionaries in 110 years.

All of this was accomplished at great human cost. Before leaving Geneva, men would write their wills, place their families in the care of the church or other families and arrange future husbands for their wives.

Letter to 5 men from Geneva facing martyrdom (May 15, 1553)

"Since it pleases him to employ you to the death in maintaining his quarrel, he will strengthen your hands in the fight, and will not suffer a single drop of your blood to be spent in vain. And though the fruit may not all at once appear, yet it time it shall spring up more abundantly than we can express. But as he hath vouchsafed you this privilege, that your bonds may be renowned, and that the noise of them has been everywhere spread abroad, it must needs be, in despite of Satan, that your death should resound far more powerfully, so that the name of our Lord be magnified thereby." – John Calvin in *Letters of John Calvin*

“On 16 August 1557, to take another incident mentioned in the Register, Nicolas des Gallars, himself a Frenchman of noble birth and one of Calvin’s right-hand men, set out from Geneva in order to serve the cause in Paris, where peril lurked for professors of the Reformed faith around every street corner. On the way his companion was seized and put to death, but des Gallars managed to escape and reach his destination. Not long after his arrival enemy forces suddenly descended on his congregation and threw some two hundred of them, including many of high birth, into custody, as he tells in a letter of 7 September 1557. Again, in 1559 there is the somewhat terse entry: “Mâitre Lancelot d’Albeau was appointed to Valence, where, after faithfully preaching the Gospel, he was seized by his enemies and sealed the doctrine of the truth with his blood and his death” – Hughes in “The Geneva of Calvin”

Jean Crespin was a French Catholic attorney for the Parisian Parliament. When he embraced Protestantism he fled France and eventually moved to Geneva where he became a printer. His most famous book is Lives of the Martyrs. He records 67 names of men who left Geneva and died as Protestant martyrs.

Alexandre Canus was a former monk. Claude le Peintre was an assistant goldsmith. Michael Miquelot was an assistant tailor. Augustin Dumarchiet was a barber. Claude Thierry was an assistant pharmacist. Claude Monier was a school teacher. Jean Joery was a traveling salesman. Pierre Bergier was a pastry baker. Rene Pyet was a cobbler. Etienne Gravot was a carpenter. Simon Laloe was an optometrist. Pierre Denocheau was a notary clerk. Thomas Calbergue was a carpet weaver. Pierre de Rousseau was a lawyer. Benoin Romyen was a cabinet maker. Jean Barbeville was a stone mason. Jean de Leon was a tailor.

Fourth: The French Wars of Religion

On 1 March, 1562, French soldiers fired on 500 Protestant worshippers in Wassy, Northeastern France, killing thirty. Within a month, Protestants in France were declared outlaws who could be killed legally and without repercussion. – Bruce Gordon in Calvin 320-321.

Ten years later the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre (August 24, 1572) would occur. As many as 30,000 Protestants were killed. Two years later, Calvin died and, at his request, was buried in an unmarked grave.

Fifth: Calvin and Grace

The word that killed the Reformers was the word ‘alone.’ For them, the Catholic church taught that we are saved by grace but not by grace ‘alone.’ As you might imagine, Calvin emphasized grace alone to the exclusion of salvation by grace and works or merit.

1 – The Basis of Salvation – The richness of God’s mercy and great love 4

2 – The Problem in Salvation – We were dead in our trespasses 5a

The Papists, who are eager to seize every opportunity of undervaluing the grace of God, say, that while we are out of Christ, we are half dead. But we are not at liberty to set aside the

declarations of our Lord and of the Apostle Paul, that, while we remain in Adam, we are entirely devoid of life; and that regeneration is a new life of the soul, by which it rises from the dead. Some kind of life, I acknowledge, does remain in us, while we are still at a distance from Christ; for unbelief does not altogether destroy the outward senses, or the will, or the other faculties of the soul. But what has this to do with the kingdom of God? - Calvin

3 – The Results of Salvation –

- Made us alive together with Christ 5b

The meaning is, that, there is no other life than that which is breathed into us by Christ: so that we begin to live only when we are ingrafted into him, and enjoy the same life with himself. This enables us to see what the apostle formerly meant by death, for that death and this resurrection are brought into contrast. To be made partakers of the life of the Son of God, -- to be quickened by one Spirit, is an inestimable privilege. - Calvin

- Raised us up with him 6a
- Seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus 6b

4 – The Purpose of Salvation –

- So that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus 7
- So that no one can boast 9b
- For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.10

5 – The Means to Salvation –

- By grace you have been saved 5c
- For by grace you have been saved through faith 8a

First, he asserts, that the salvation of the Ephesians was entirely the work, the gracious work of God. But then they had obtained this grace by faith. On one side, we must look at God; and, on the other, at man. God declares, that he owes us nothing; so that salvation is not a reward or recompense, but unmixed grace. The next question is, in what way do men receive that salvation which is offered to them by the hand of God? The answer is, by faith; and hence he concludes that nothing connected with it is our own. If, on the part of God, it is grace alone, and if we bring nothing but faith, which strips us of all commendation, it follows that salvation does not come from us. - Calvin

- It is not your (our) own doing 8b

Ought we not then to be silent about free-will, and good intentions, and fancied preparations, and merits, and satisfactions? There is none of these which does not claim a share of praise in the salvation of men; so that the praise of grace would not, as Paul shews, remain undiminished.

– Calvin

- It is the gift of God 8c

Hence we see, that the apostle leaves nothing to men in procuring salvation. In these three phrases, -- not of yourselves, -- it is the gift of God, -- not of works, -- he embraces the substance of his long argument in the Epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians, that righteousness comes to us from the mercy of God alone, -- is offered to us in Christ by the gospel, -- and is received by faith alone, without the merit of works... - Calvin

- It is not a result of works 9a

He means to prove that man does not in any way procure salvation for himself, but obtains it as a free gift from God. The proof is, that man is nothing but by divine grace. Whoever, then, makes the very smallest claim for man, apart from the grace of God, allows him, to that extent, ability to procure salvation. - Calvin

Conclusion:

The Reformers were right. We are saved by grace alone. It is God's mercy and love alone that moves him to extend grace to us so that we might believe.

This is antithetical and anathema to a western Democratic world in which we get a vote in everything and can even elect or demote a President by the will of the people.

God is not a President and we don't get a vote on how he saves us.

We must cry out to him for kindness and then rejoice in the grace, love and mercy that gives us salvation. This humbles us. It exalts God.

Small Groups:

- 1 – According to the text, what is God's motive in saving us? Love and mercy
- 2 – According to the text, what problem exists in saving us? We are dead in trespasses.
- 3 - How does this make us dependent on God's grace? God must quicken us – make us alive - for us to respond to the gospel invitation.
- 4 – How does this exalt God's grace? It gives him all glory in saving people.
- 5 – According to the text, what is the purpose of our salvation?

- 6 – How does this humble humanity?
- 7 – Why did the Catholic Church detest this doctrine?
- 8 – Why might people today disapprove of this doctrine?
- 9 – How do you wrestle with this doctrine?
- 10 – How would you explain it to friends, family or co-workers?