

Neo-Calvinism vs. the Bible 010

Matthew 7:16-18

December 1, 2024

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Let's open our Bibles to Matthew 7:16.

Neo-Calvinism vs. The Bible

- I. Calvinism's Mixed Blessing
- II. Why Critique Calvinism?
- III. **The Source of Calvin's Theology**
- IV. Calvin's Manner of Life
- V. TULIP Through the Grid of Scripture
- VI. Conclusion

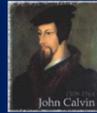


In Sunday School, we are continuing our topical study that we started, entitled "Neo-Calvinism vs. the Bible." We started off with Roman numeral I, talking about the mixed blessing of Calvinism.

Then we spent a lot of time on Roman numeral II: "Why Critique Calvinism?" And then lately (and I am thinking we are going to finish this today, Lord willing), we got to Roman numeral III: "The Source of Calvin's Theology."

III. The Source of Calvin's Theology

- A. Augustine (A.D. 343–430)
 - 1. Calvin's literary dependence upon Augustine
 - 2. Who was Augustine?
- B. The Institutes of the Christian Religion (A.D. 1536)



Well, Calvin himself, as you remember from this quote, made this comment. He said this:

"Augustine is so wholly with me, that if I wish to write a confession of my faith, I could do so with all fullness and satisfaction to myself out of his writings."¹

So we have talked about how a lot of people look at Calvin as if he is a wonderful exegete of Scripture. And in some ways he was. But what people overlook a lot of times is who Calvin was depending upon.

I showed you a lot of documentation for this. He was depending upon a man named Augustine. So that required a bit of a deep dive into Augustine. A lot of people today are following Augustinian theology without even knowing who Augustine or Augustine is.

Jesus told us that before we embrace something or believe something, we need to trace the roots. The roots determine the fruit. He made that statement in the Sermon on the Mount. He said this in Matthew 7:16-18:

"You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit" (Matthew 7:16-18).

So if you have an orange tree, then someone planted an orange seed, right? An orange seed does not create a lemon tree. So it is very important that we do this exercise in any theology that we embrace—or any idea for that matter. What is the root of it?

We see, in our critique of Neo-Calvinism in this series, that Calvin says that his source is Augustine. So who is Augustine? We wrapped up this slide last time. He was someone who lived in the fourth century.

¹ John Calvin, "A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God," in *John Calvin, Calvin's Calvinism*, trans. Henry Cole (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1987), 38.

2. Who Was Augustine?

- a) A.D. 343–430
- b) Father of Determinism
- c) Father of Amillennialism
- d) Father of the Inquisition
- e) Limited Facility with Scripture's Original Languages
- f) Embraced Roman Catholic Doctrines:
 - 1) Infant Baptism
 - 2) Mary's Sinlessness
 - 3) Purgatory
 - 4) The Roman Catholic Church as the Only True Church



Augustine is the father of determinism: the doctrine that some are elected to heaven and some are elected to hell, with no choice in the matter. He is the father of, "Kingdom Now," "Amillennial," teaching.

Augustine is the father of the Inquisition. He believed that he could use political power to come down on the non-elect, or coerce confessions into Christianity through governmental power.

Augustine was someone who really did not know a lot about Hebrew, which explains why he was more of a philosopher than he was an exegete, and why he really did not have a lot of interest in God's promises to the nation of Israel given in Hebrew Bible.

Augustine was also someone who was embraced as the quintessential Catholic. He is the Catholics' Catholic. And that is why so many people, even John Calvin, referred to him as "holy father," or "saint"—these kinds of names.

As such, Augustine embraced infant baptism (just like R.C. Sproul did), Mary's sinlessness, and purgatory (which, as I showed you last week, was a real money-making scheme for the Catholic Church during the Dark Ages that lasted over a thousand years).

Augustine also (I showed you the quote) did believe that the Catholic Church is the only true church. So if you have some kind of salvation experience outside of Roman Catholicism, then it is illegitimate, because Catholics believe that the Pope is the vicar of Christ on the earth.

Catholics believe that even now, which is why so many of them are kind of blushing at this current pope. "Oh my gosh, I cannot believe what just came out of his mouth. He can't be saying these things. He is the vicar of Christ."

A "vicar" is a substitute—"vicarious" indicates someone or serving in the place of someone else. The Pope is the one that stands in the place of Christ on Planet Earth.

Augustine believed these things. Augustine started the ball rolling in a lot of these ideas. John Calvin made a few corrections, but he largely said, "I am going to take a lot of Augustinianism with me into the Protestant movement."

So when a lot of people are following Calvin they are following Augustine who is lurking behind the scenes, who lived a thousand years before Calvin.

B. Calvin's "Institutes of the Christian Religion"

1. A.D. 1536 (1st edition)
2. Foundational
3. Written by Calvin:
 - a) at age 25
 - b) 2 years after declaring himself a Protestant
 - c) While still on the Roman Catholic Church payroll
4. Contain (along with Calvin's other writings) no clear salvation experience



Now let's switch gears for a minute and let's say a few words about "The Institutes of the Christian Religion," written in 1536. That is another source of Calvinism. So what are "The Institutes of the Christian Religion"?

Well, as I said before, the first edition was created in 1536 by John Calvin. That book is considered a foundational source of ideas for Calvinism. That is where a lot of Calvinism, absorbing Augustinianism, got the ball rolling into what later became known as modern day Calvinism—Neo-Calvinism.

It is a 1536 work. It is a foundational work. It was written by John Calvin at the ripe old age of twenty-five. I am not denying the fact that Calvin was a brilliant man. He was an attorney. I believe he studied for the law, if I have the story right.

But I will just be honest with you folks. If a bunch of people, after I am long gone and dead, make a religion out of things I said when I was twenty-five years of age, I would be a little standoffish about that because a person needs some time to mature and to grow.

But Calvin was able to put a lot of these things together at the age of twenty-five. Now, what is interesting is that we criticize Joseph Smith of Mormonism, who had a lot of his visions and doctrinal insights at a very early age, like this—I think even earlier.

I am not trying to say Calvinism is just like Mormonism. Mormonism is a completely different animal. They deny the Trinity, etc. But it is interesting how I listen to people that are apologists against Mormonism point to the young age of Joseph Smith.

And almost none of those same apologists point to the very young age of John Calvin when he formulated "The Institutes of the Christian Religion," a foundational Calvinist work.

Now, what is interesting is that Calvin wrote this only after two years of declaring himself to be a Protestant. So if Calvin was saved—and I will go ahead and put my neck out on the line here: I am not clear that John Calvin was ever saved. And I will explain why I think that in just a moment.

But let's say that Calvin was saved. Let's say that he got saved at age twenty-three, and that he wrote this at age twenty-five. The truth of the matter is that the human mind has to go through a process of progressive sanctification, because we carry a bunch of baggage with us into our newfound walk with Christ.

And just because you are saved and you are a new creature in Christ Jesus does not mean that your mind does not think the way it used to on a lot of topics. So there is an unlearning process that has to happen.

And sometimes it is frustrating because nobody likes their file drawers rearranged, yours truly included. But when we walk with God in progressive sanctification, in the middle tense of our salvation, God is not interested in taking a coat of paint and throwing it over the sinful mind.

God is interested in taking a wrecking ball to the way we used to think. It is a process that we go through. You can only go through it through perpetual exposure to the Word of God.

I question whether that process really ever happened with John Calvin, since he wrote such a foundational work so close to his alleged conversion to Christianity.

Bob Kirkland, in a really good book entitled "Calvinism: None Dare Call It Heresy; Spotlight on the Life and Teachings of John Calvin" says this:

"Within only two years after Calvin declared himself a Protestant, he published his famous 'Institutes of the Christian Religion.'"²

Let me leave out part of that quote, because there is a big "Oh my goodness" moment coming, which I need to prepare you for. Picking it up at the last sentence or so, Kirkland says,

"If we assume his vague intellectual testimony of salvation was a genuine salvation experience, he had been a Christian for just about two years when he wrote his 'Institutes,' which is a foundational resource for today's Calvinism."³

² Bob Kirkland, *Calvinism: None Dare Call It Heresy; Spotlight on the Life and Teachings of John Calvin* (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails, 2018), 16.

³ Ibid.

The truth of the matter is that we are now all in the process of Romans 12:2. Paul tells us,

"And do not be conformed to this world,..." (Romans 12:2).

Now, who is Paul speaking to there? He is not speaking to the unsaved. He is speaking to the Christian.

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,..." (Romans 12:2).

The concept of renewal is a process. The concept of transformation is a process. As a Christian, you have to learn to think the way God has declared you to be at the point of justification by faith alone.

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

If Kirkland and others are correct in their analysis, I do question whether Calvin really had gone very far in that process. I know that two years after my conversion to Christianity, I was still a theistic evolutionist.

I still did not know anything or understand anything about spiritual gifts. I did not even know that I had the gift of teaching. I did not know anything about prophecies, about the end times eschatology.

And if you were to turn me loose on a platform or a pulpit at the age of eighteen, to me that would have been a frightening experience. It is frightening enough the way I am now. Can you imagine me at the age of eighteen?

And here is Calvin writing this foundational work in Calvinism two years into his conversion. I remember when Kanye West—you know who he is; and if you do not know, as my professor Dwight Pentecost used to say, 'Blessed be your ignorance'—got Jesus, and all of a sudden became this Christian celebrity.

We destroy people in Christianity when we do this. We are so excited to have a celebrity as one of ours that we jam a microphone right in his face and act as if he is the be-all and end-all of truth.

Yet the poor guy has had zero (if he is truly saved) opportunity for growth and progressive sanctification. We end up destroying people like that, because the Bible is very clear concerning an elder, at least: do not lay hands too quickly (1 Timothy 3:6, 5:22).

Do not put a novice into a position of elder, lest he fall into the condemnation of the devil (1 Timothy 3:6, 5:22). So someone who is a celeb Christian, with no time for growth, is automatically given this huge platform by evangelical Christianity, because we are so excited that one of them is now one of us that we have to tell everybody about it. Basically we are setting up that person to fall into the snare of Satan (1 Timothy 3:6, 7).

What is the snare of Satan (1 Timothy 3:6, 7)? First comes pride, then comes a fall. A haughty spirit precedes destruction (Proverbs 16:18). So if you have somebody who is used to having their flesh fed because they are popular, a rock star, they have not learned to die to that.

They probably still think their value is determined by how many people they can attract into an auditorium. So the mind has not been renewed and they have not learned to crucify the flesh.

Actually, we do not crucify the flesh. The flesh is already crucified (Galatians 2:20, 5:24, 6:14; Romans 6:6). But you have to reckon that so, moment by moment (Romans 5-6). And that is how you grow as a Christian.

So Kanye West, when he got saved, and had no opportunity for growth was being promoted really quickly. I remember the Calvinists criticizing, rightfully so, people promoting Kanye West too fast, too quickly.

I remember one particular Calvinist, Justin Peters, saying, "Well, if Paul needed his three years in Arabia, then why would we think that Kanye West does not need his three years in Arabia?"

And I thought to myself, when this Calvinist said that, "Well, doesn't that same rule apply to John Calvin, the guy that your whole system comes from?" If Kanye West needs his Arabia, just like Paul the Apostle needed his Arabia, then didn't John Calvin need his Arabia?

So this is the problem of wanting to get published too fast. My professor Elliott Johnson warned me about that. Be careful about wanting to get published too fast, because when you are young, you really have not had an opportunity to think through all the weaknesses of your view.

And you have a tendency to be overly dogmatic on something where it is inappropriate. And then once it is in print, the temptation is to spend the rest of your life defending what you wrote. So it can actually have a negative effect on your ministry.

So all of these kinds of lessons, I am wondering, did John Calvin, at such a young age, have this opportunity for growth? And what is interesting is that John Calvin wrote this while he was still on the Roman Catholic Church payroll.

John Calvin did not want to start a Protestant movement. Neither did Martin Luther. In fact, if you had told them, "Hey, you guys are going to start Protestantism," they would have been like, "What is that?"

There was no concept of Protestantism. These guys were Catholics. The Roman Catholic Church is the one true church, right? Augustine said that over a thousand years earlier.

The Reformers' whole agenda was to reform the church from the inside. So when Luther published his Ninety-Five Theses on the cathedral door in Wittenberg, Germany, he was basically trying to start a Facebook discussion.

But the Roman Catholic Church kicked Luther out and started calling him a heretic and gave him the right foot of fellowship. And he started Protestantism because he had nowhere else to go.

That shocked Luther and Calvin—particularly Luther—more than anybody else. So, Calvin was in that same position. He was going to work from the inside and reform the church from within.

So when Calvin developed the first edition of "The Institutes of the Christian Religion," a foundational work in Calvinism, in 1536, after having been allegedly saved—if he was saved—for two years, he was still on the Roman Catholic Church payroll.

That is something that hardly ever gets pointed out in this discussion. Dave Hunt, in his book "What Love Is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God," says,

"Most of those today, including evangelical leaders who hold Calvin in great esteem, are not aware that they have been captivated by the writings of a devout Roman Catholic, newly converted to Luther's Protestantism, who had broken with Rome only a year before. Oddly, Calvin kept himself on the payroll of the Roman Catholic Church for nearly a year after to have been miraculously delivered from the 'deep slough' of 'obstinate addiction to the superstitions of the papacy.'"⁴

So if you are studying to be a Catholic priest and you want to break away from that at a young age, and you are still being paid by Roman Catholicism, has the mental renewal process that Paul spoke of in Romans 12:2 run its course?

And that process never really completely runs its course in our lives. But had it made significant progress into young John Calvin's mind?

I think these are legitimate questions to ask as Neo-Calvinism comes roaring back into the church and everybody acts as if we have to get back to Calvin and Luther because that is where truth is found.

Now, here is the direction I want to go—or at least say a couple words about this. In Calvin's writings—and he wrote a lot—we have no clear testimony of an actual salvation experience.

Here is what Bob Kirkland writes (this is the whole quote I was going to read a little earlier). He says,

"Within only two years after Calvin declared himself a Protestant, he published his famous 'Institutes of the Christian Religion.' In all of Calvin's

⁴ Dave Hunt, *What Love Is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God*, 4th ed. (Bend, OR: Berean Call, 2013), 42.

writing, one will not find a clear testimony of his salvation experience. A statement of his 'conversion' can only be found in his book 'Commentary on the Psalms'...If we assume his vague intellectual testimony of salvation was a genuine salvation experience, he had been a Christian for just about two years when he wrote his 'Institutes,' which is a foundational resource for today's Calvinism."⁵

So here are Calvin's writings on the Psalms. This is the closest we can find, Kirkland says, to anything that would tell us that John Calvin was actually regenerated or born again.

This is what Calvin wrote. He said,

"God by a sudden conversion [referring to his sudden move away from the Catholic Church at age of 23]..."⁶

Okay, moving out of the Catholic Church at age twenty-three does not mean that you are a Christian at age twenty-three, right? Your Christianity is not determined by what church you go to any more than sitting in McDonald's makes you a hamburger, right?

But this is what is accepted by most as Calvin's conversion: his switch away from the Pope. Christianity, by the way, is not defined by what you turn away from. It is defined by what you turn toward.

You can go through all kinds of moral reformation and not be a Christian. Alcoholics Anonymous will put you through a moral reformation. I am not knocking Alcoholics Anonymous. A lot of people get help through Alcoholics Anonymous.

However, going through the Alcoholics Anonymous program does not mean that you are saved. Basically, it means that you went through some lifestyle changes, and things of that nature, which can be very, very helpful to people.

Yet there are all kinds of people who go through these moral, self-imposed revolutions, or reformations, who are not saved at all, because Christianity is not determined by what you turn away from. It is determined by what you turn to, and whom you place your faith in.

As I am looking at John Calvin's alleged record of his salvation, I am seeing a lot of "turn from," not a lot of "turn to." He says,

"God by a sudden conversion [referring to his sudden move away from the Catholic Church at the age of 23] 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

⁵ Bob Kirkland, *Calvinism: None Dare Call It Heresy; Spotlight on the Life and Teachings of John Calvin* (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails, 2018), 16.

⁶ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. I, p. xl (Amazon Digital Services LLC, 2011 edition, Kindle Edition), Kindle locations 939-943.

inflamed with so intense a desire to progress therein, that although I did not altogether leave off other studies, I yet pursued them with less ardor."⁷

In other words, Cavin was not going to study law anymore. He was going to study theology. Do you see a conversion here? I am not seeing it. And I know that what I am saying is blasphemous to strong acolytes of John Calvin, but I am just not seeing—if this is the best you got—a conversion at all.

Calvin does talk about becoming inflamed with an intense desire. But the Mormons have that, too. Did you know that? You talk to a Mormon, not if, but when they come to your door, and, you know what? They will talk to you about a burning in the bosom.

That is their language, not mine. "Our Mormonism must be true because God showed it to me." "Well, how did He show it to you?" "Well, I had a subjective experience." "Well, what is your subjective experience?" "I had a burning in the bosom."

Okay, well, then it is my job as a Christian to figure out: is that burning in the bosom from God or not? It could have been some bad beans, or it could have been some indigestion.

It could have been any number of things, particularly if you are following Jesus Christ who you think is the brother of Satan, and if you think that salvation is by works, not by faith alone, and you do not accept the Bible alone.

You have to add three other books to the Bible, at least—"The Book of Mormon," "The Pearl of Great Price," and "The Doctrine and Covenants"—by alleged manifestations of Jesus in North America.

And BYU, Brigham Young University, has the greatest archeology department academically, and they cannot find a shred of Jesus' presence in North America. Isn't that interesting?

Whereas you go to Israel and all you have to do is stick the shovel into the ground and somebody comes up with one of these great discoveries that corroborate with the Bible.

So if your burning in the bosom led you that direction, I am sorry. I am not trying to be insensitive to your experience. I am not even denying that you had an experience. I am just denying whether it is from God, because I do not think the Holy Spirit would lead you this way.

So if we can do that with Mormons and Mormonism, why can't I do that with John Calvin when he talks about this being "inflamed with so intense a desire,"⁸ etc.?

Now, here at Sugar Land Bible Church, people want to join our church, which is wonderful. We do church membership here. When you submit a form for church

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

membership, we want a description of a salvation experience. We want to know, are you really a Christian or not?

And so sometimes it will come up in the interview how a person got saved; sometimes they will write it out. And I do not think any of our elders who take people through this interview process would accept this here as a salvation experience.

To me, it would raise questions about whether such a person is really saved at all. And so that is what you have happening here with John Calvin. You have someone who, number one, was very, very influenced by Augustine. I have given you his very shady and shaky background.

Number two, he wrote the foundational book for Calvinism when he was twenty-five years old. Number three, he was only two years removed from Roman Catholicism. And in his mind, anyway, if he was saved, he was only saved for two years.

Let's see, how many numbers did I have going there? Well, here is another number. Calvin was still on the Roman Catholic payroll when he wrote this, and He had no clear salvation testimony.

Okay, given all of that, are you guys sure you want to attach your wagon to John Calvin? Why can't we do it this way? I am going to attach my wagon to the Scripture, and when Calvin says stuff that corroborates with the Scripture, I am with John Calvin.

When John Calvin goes against the Scripture, I depart from John Calvin. Why can't we do that? Why do we have to take people and turn them into these saints of the past that you can't even question?

This is the problem I am having when you actually get into the minutia of some of the foundations of John Calvin.

So what have we looked at so far? Calvinism is a mixed blessing. We have gotten into the subject of why critique Calvinism; and we have gotten into the subject of the sources of Calvin's theology, whether it be Augustine or "The Institutes of the Christian Religion."

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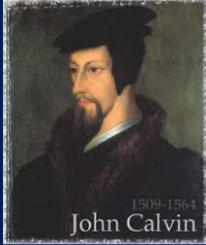


Let's move into number IV: "Calvin's Manner of Life." What kind of person was this guy, exactly? Is this a guy you'd want to have over and into your living room and fellowship with?

Is this the kind of guy that you would want babysitting your children? Is this the kind of guy that you would want teaching a Sunday School class?

IV. Calvin's Manner of Life

- A. Bernard Cottret
- B. Three infamous examples
- C. General examples
- D. The contrary example of Christ
- E. The contrary example of Christ's followers
- F. Lack of love implications
- G. Lack of love in Calvin's writings
- H. Conclusion



A portrait of John Calvin, a French theologian, reformer, and pastor. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a dark cap and a dark robe. The portrait is framed by a thin white border. Below the portrait, the text "1509-1564" and "John Calvin" is visible.

So as we get into this subject of John Calvin's life, I just want to start with a quote from Bernard Cottret. Who was this Bernard Cottret? He was a French university professor, and, very interestingly, a Calvin admirer.

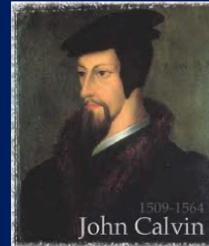
So when Cottret writes things about the history and the biography of John Calvin, you cannot accuse him of an anti-Calvinistic slant. He is just a historian. And he wrote a book called "Calvin: A Biography."

Cottret says in the book that Calvin is responsible for thirty-six to fifty-eight executions that Calvin was either directly or indirectly involved in.⁹

⁹ Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub. Company, English translation, 2000)

A. Bernard Cottret

1. France University professor
2. Calvin admirer
3. "Calvin: A Biography"
4. 36 to 58 executions that Calvin involved in
5. Dates, executions, methods, torture
6. Heretic: for questioning or criticizing Calvin
7. Atmosphere in Geneva



Calvin, as I will show you, got the political reins of Geneva in Switzerland and turned that place into, I would just call it a hellhole. It was not somewhere that you'd want to live. It was almost like a Christian form of Sharia law that Calvin established.

And if you disagreed with what he said or what he did or how he did things, and you were public about it or wrote about it, there was a very good likelihood that you could end up dead—and not just dead: tortured to death.

So Bernard Cottret, in his book "Calvin: A Biography," himself being an admirer of John Calvin, says that Calvin was responsible for thirty-six to fifty-eight executions, either directly or indirectly.

The book documents the dates, the methods, the executions, and the form of torture. In John Calvin's Geneva, you could be called a heretic simply for questioning John Calvin.

Even though concerning the beliefs of some of the people who were put to death, I agree with Calvin theologically. There are issues related to the Trinity. But for goodness sake, we do not kill people, right?

Even if we have the ability to kill people, we do not do that. That is not the way of Jesus. That is not the way of Christ. We do not kill people because they disagree. The Bible says to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

This idea that you grab the reins of power and you use government as some sort of coercive force—where is that command ever given to the New Testament church? Well, it is not given to the New Testament church.

But where did Calvin pick up this idea from? He got it from Augustine, the Father of the Inquisition, which I tried to show you last time.

Cottret talks in this particular book about the atmosphere that was unleashed in Geneva under Calvin. Cottret writes this:

"Fear of sorcery and of heretics entailed their retinue of hasty, indeed barbarous remedies: imprisonment, torture, the stake."¹⁰

Now, here is a quote from Dave Hunt that I have given you before. Dave Hunt has investigated very carefully the happenings in Geneva under Calvin. Hunt writes,

"In February of 1555, Calvin's supporters gained the absolute majority on the council [in Geneva]. On May 16, there was an attempted uprising because Calvin had excluded certain libertarian civic officials from the Lord's Supper."¹¹

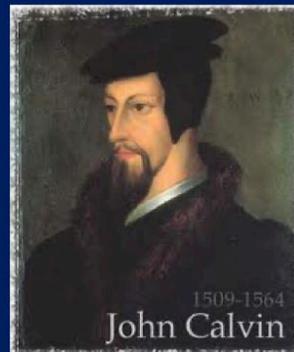
And maybe Calvin was right to do that as a pastor, I do not know.

"Leaders of the rebellion who fled to Bern were sentenced to death in absentia. Four who failed to escape were beheaded, quartered, and their body parts hung in strategic locations as a warning. Evoking the phrase 'henchmen of Satan,' which he had used years earlier against the Anabaptists [another group that Calvin disagreed with], Calvin justified this barbarity by saying, 'Those who do not correct evil when they can do so and their office requires it are guilty of it.' [That is a direct quote of Calvin.] From 1554 until his death in 1564, 'no one any longer dared oppose the Reformer openly.'¹²

Well, of course, they did not oppose him openly, any more than you would oppose Castro in Cuba openly, right? Because you know you are going to be in a lot of trouble.

B. Three Specific Infamous Examples

1. Jacques Gruet
2. Michael Servetus
3. Belot



¹⁰ Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub. Company, English translation, 2000), p. 181.

¹¹ Dave Hunt, "Calvinism Denied," in *Debating Calvinism: Five Points, Two Views*, ed. Dave Hunt and James White (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), pp. 23-24.

¹² *Ibid.*

And when we talk about Calvin's manner of life, usually three historical examples come up—three infamous examples. Number one: Jacques Gruet. Number two (most people know this middle one): Michael Servetus. And number three, Belot.

Let's look at these one by one. Who is Jacques Gruet? Bob Kirkland, quoting a source, says this:

"Jacques Gruet, a known opponent of Calvin, was arrested and tortured twice a day for a month in an effort to get him to confess to the accusations against him. Then, on July 26, 1547, he was tied to a stake, his feet were nailed to it, and he was beheaded."¹³

Now, do you want to call yourself a Calvinist with this background? Well, the Calvinist camp does not want you to know this background. They want this covered up, because this makes them look really bad, following a guy with this kind of résumé and history.

Here is a quote from J.M. Robertson, in "A Short History of Freethought, Ancient and Modern." He says this of Calvin:

"Gruet was put to the torture many times (444) during many days...In reality such unmeasured use of torture was in Geneva a Calvinistic innovation."¹⁴

So this was a method that the Calvinists came up with all on their own.

"Gruet, refusing under the worst stress of torture to incriminate anyone else, at length, in order to end it, pleaded guilty to the charges against him, praying in his last extremity for a speedy death. On July 26, 1547, his half-dead body was beheaded on the scaffold, the torso being tied and the feet nailed thereto. Such were the judicial methods and mercies of a reformed Christianity, guided by a chief reformer...[Gruet was] subjected to the torture morning and evening during a whole month."¹⁵

You know, when you get into a conversation of any kind with a modern-day Calvinist who is steeped in this, and who does not think like you do, it is interesting to me how angry they can get. It's like, hey, where did the love of Christ go?

¹³ Bob Kirkland, *Calvinism: None Dare Call It Heresy; Spotlight on the Life and Teachings of John Calvin* (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails, 2018), 18. To read more about Gruet's execution and other Calvin-era executions, read Preserved Smith's (1880-1941) *The Age of the Reformation* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1920); see page 120 for information about Gruet.

¹⁴ J. M. Robertson, *A Short History of Freethought, Ancient and Modern*, Vol. I (London: Owlfoot Press, 1914), p. 352; citing partly from: "Stähelin, i, 400. Henry avows that Gruet was 'subjected to the torture morning and evening during a whole month' (Eng. tr. ii. 66). Other biographers dishonestly exclude the fact from their narratives."

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

And I am not saying that our side is perfect in that either, but I have noticed this in the very strong disciples of John Calvinism: there is an immediate anger. There is an immediate irritation. There is an immediate ambition to shut you down.

And I am sort of wondering, in whose spirit are they acting? It kind of reminds me of the Sons of Thunder. Remember them? In Luke 9, they came into a Samaritan village with Jesus, and the Samaritans, a half-breed race, would not respond to the ministry of Christ.

And then James and John, one of whom was going to become the Love Apostle, which shows you that God can change anybody's heart—you can read it all there in Luke 9:51-56—say, "Shall we not call fire down from heaven to destroy these people [the Samaritans]?" (Luke 9:54, paraphrase).

And Jesus rebuked them and said, "You do not know in whose spirit you are speaking" (Luke 9:55, paraphrase). "What you have in mind is a spirit, a mentality, but it is not the Spirit of Christ" (Luke 9:55-56, paraphrase).

Jesus did not come into the world to destroy the lives of people. His whole purpose of coming into the world was to liberate people (Luke 9:56).

So when I see these things in John Calvin, and I see this very angry, almost vindictive mentality in many in the Calvinist camp—in which things are said, and accusations are made that just rather shock the conscience—I think, "Well, no wonder they are acting that way. Look who they are following." Do you see that?

The most well-known execution that Calvin presided over was that of Michael Servetus. This one is more well-known. The other ones are less known.

Brenda Nichol, in a video series called "Wide Is the Gate," says this concerning Michael Servetus:

"Calvin had a long-standing vendetta against Servetus. Servetus foolishly taunted Calvin through letters; thus, Calvin insisted on having him arrested and charged when he entered Geneva."¹⁶

I mean, the worst mistake Servetus ever made was going back to Geneva, where Calvin and his supporters had jurisdiction.

"Calvin wanted the death penalty for him. Servetus pleaded with Calvin to be beheaded instead of being burned at the stake, and Calvin was willing to go along with the idea. If Servetus was beheaded instead of burned,

¹⁶ Brenda Nickel, featured in the documentary film, *Wide is the Gate*, Vol. 2 (Produced by Caryl Productions; available through Lighthouse Trails or The Berean Call; trailer for the film: <http://www.lighthouse Trails.com/home/29-wide-is-the-gate-dvd-volume-2-the-emerging-new-christianity.html>). Her online book on Calvinism, which includes biography on her years as a Calvinist, can be accessed at www.CalvinismNoMore.com.

then Calvin couldn't be blamed. Beheading, in this case, was attractive to both Servetus and Calvin."¹⁷

I mean, if you give me a choice between beheading and being burned, I think I will take the beheading. You'd go faster. No torture.

Do you remember what Jesus said in the Upper Room to the disciples? He said, "The time is going to come when people are going to kill you. They are going to want to kill you. And in the process, they are going to think they are doing God a service" (John 16:2, paraphrase).

And certainly the disciples faced that all the way through the Book of Acts. People wanted them dead. And these people that wanted them dead, in this case, unbelieving Israel, thought that they were serving God.

I mean, John Calvin, in his very twisted, deluded mind, probably had some kind of religious justification for what he did. The quote goes on:

"French reformer William Farel rebuked Calvin for the thought. Since the charge was religious and not civil in nature, Servetus was burned at the stake. Melanchthon (Luther's friend and successor) praised Calvin for Servetus' death. This execution basically skyrocketed Calvin to fame throughout Europe."¹⁸

Boy, he got a lot of thumbs up on his social media after he did this.

"The execution basically skyrocketed Calvin to fame throughout Europe. It put him on the map, so to speak, as a noteworthy and respected reformer."¹⁹

What else do we know about the whole Michael Servetus affair? Here is a quote from George Zeller of Middletown Bible Church (a great website that I recommend to you [<https://www.middletownbiblechurch.org/>]).

This is his quote, and on the next slide that I will show you, he is quoting a famous Book by C.H. Mackintosh, "Notes on the Book of Deuteronomy."

(By the way, on your computer program or in your library, if you can get Macintosh's coverage of the whole Bible, it is a classic. It is worth the investment.)

Here is what Zeller says:

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

"The prime example of intolerance was the execution of the heretic Servetus. Schaff..."²⁰

Now, Philip Schaff is a very reputable source on church history.

"Schaff devotes 86 pages to this man [Servetus]—his doctrines, trial and his execution (Volume VIII). Servetus fled to Geneva where Calvin had him arrested, tried and eventually burned to death. Other Reformers who strongly supported Calvin in this act included Beza and even the usually mild and gracious Melancthon...Obviously, during the millennial age, the King will not allow any false religions or doctrinal deviations, and all the earth will be united in the true worship of the true God. But contrary to the teaching of many Reformed theologians, we are not in the kingdom yet!"²¹

So if the kingdom is a time period of perfect justice, and if you believe that we are in the kingdom now, then it is not really too big a step to say, "Let's impose justice now."

And the church, when it does that, gets confused as to what its mission is. That is one of the reasons I wrote the book "The Coming Kingdom." We are not in the kingdom.

You cannot trust people with this level of political power unless it is Jesus. He is the only one who can administer justice perfectly. If you put this in the hands of a human being who has a sin nature, power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

So there are some real ramifications to believing that we are now in the kingdom. Augustine believed that we are in the kingdom. John Calvin, borrowing from Augustine, was a believer in the kingdom's current existence.

Well, if we are within the kingdom, then let's take over the government, and let's use the force of government to persecute God's enemies, because Servetus is a theological heretic—which, of course, he was.

But just because someone is a theological heretic, where in the world would the church get the idea that it is okay to take over the government and put people to death?

Is that what Jesus told us to do in the Great Commission? There is no hint of anything like this. Our whole focus is to reach and teach, to evangelize and disciple.

And if a person does not want to become a Christian, you know what? They have freedom to choose that. As the late Walter Martin used to say, "You can go to heaven God's way, or to hell your own. It is your choice."

²⁰ C.H. Mackintosh, *Notes on the Book of Deuteronomy*, Volume II, page 162 footnote. Initial quote by George Zeller, "Should We Go Back to the Reformation?" online: www.middletonbiblechurch.org/reformed/backto.htm, accessed 22 November 2019.

²¹ Ibid.

But it is our job to give people the choice. And if they reject—and we are told in the parable of the sower and in other places that there is going to be a lot of rejecters—what did Jesus say?

You shake the dust off your feet and you move on to more fertile grounds. You do not use government to retaliate against people who reject the name Jesus Christ.

So here is the Macintosh quote:

"The burning of Servetus, in 1533, for his theological opinions, is a frightful blot upon the Reformation, and upon the man who sanctioned such an unchristian proceeding. True, the opinions of Servetus were fatally and fundamentally false, —he held the Arian heresy,..."²²

Now, the Arian heresy is what the modern-day Jehovah's Witnesses teach, not if they come to your door, but when they come to your door.

The Arian heresy is the idea that Jesus is a created being: there was a time in which He was not. So when you talk to a Jehovah's Witness, and you have an opportunity to evangelize, that is something you could bring up, because they do not believe in the eternal existence of Jesus.

Jesus had no beginning. He is the uncaused Cause. He has always been. And at the point of the virgin conception—not even the virgin birth (which we are going to celebrate a few weeks down the road)—humanity was added to eternally existent deity.

At that point Jesus became the God-Man. He has not always been the God-Man. He has always been the Son of God, but has not always been the God-Man.

Jesus' existence as the God-Man started at the virgin conception. However, the timing issue notwithstanding, Jesus has always been. So when the Jehovah's Witnesses preach this doctrine that Jesus had a beginning point, they are recycling Arianism.

And apparently Michael Servetus was a believer in Arianism, and that is why Calvin put him to death.

"—he [Michael Servetus] held the Arian heresy, which is simply blasphemy against the Son of God; but to burn him, or any one else, for false doctrine, was a flagrant sin against the spirit, genius, and principle of the gospel, the deplorable fruit of ignorance as to the essential difference between Judaism and Christianity."²³

So you are distorting the Bible when you are arguing for a theocracy. You are trying to pretend that the church is Israel. Israel had the theocracy. But if we are the new Israel, we can have a theocracy as well.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Here is a quote from Paul Penley, who cites Calvin's letter to one of his contemporaries, Farel, concerning Michael Servetus. Penley writes,

"Michael Servetus, a Spaniard, physician, scientist and Bible scholar, suffered a worse fate. He was Calvin's longtime acquaintance who resisted the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. However, he angered Calvin by returning a copy of Calvin's Institutes with critical comments in the margins."²⁴

"Oh, here is your book, Calvin, that you wrote when you were twenty-five. Here is some criticism in the margins." Now, if you did that to me, I would probably get my feelings hurt, but I would not summon the Sugar Land City Council and have you burned to death.

"So what did Calvin do? You can read his resolution from a personal letter he wrote to a friend [Farel]: 'Servetus offers to come hither, if it be agreeable to me. But I am unwilling to pledge my word for his safety, for if he shall come, I shall never permit him to depart alive, provided my authority be of any avail.'"²⁵

That is a very interesting statement. A lot of people say, "Well, Servetus was put to death by Calvin's henchmen and he, Calvin, is not responsible. But I am not seeing that in this quote. Calvin says to Farel,

"'Servetus offers to come hither, if it be agreeable to me. But I am unwilling to pledge my word for his safety, for if he shall come, I shall never permit him to depart alive,...'"²⁶

Was Calvin the judge, or was he on the jury, or however they did it, to put Servetus to death? No, but Calvin knew exactly what was going on and commended the direction of this particular legal process against heretic Servetus.

Robertson writes that Calvin stated regarding Servetus,

"If he come, and my influence can avail, I shall not suffer him to depart alive."²⁷

Here is something concerning Michael Servetus: five days into the trial, Calvin wrote,

²⁴ John Calvin, Letter to Farel, 13 February 1546. Cited in Paul Penley, "John Calvin Killed Rival Theologians: Bad Bible Interpretation Justified It," online: <http://www.reenactingtheway.com/blog/john-calvin-had-people-killed-and-bad-bible-interpretation-justified-it>, 05 March 2015, accessed 13 November 2019.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ J. M. Robertson, *A Short History of Freethought, Ancient and Modern*, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 354.

"I hope the death sentence will at least be passed upon him."²⁸

And you want to create a historical scenario where Calvin is like Pontius Pilate, who just washes his hands of the whole thing? No. No, no, no.

Calvin was involved in this, at least indirectly. Could Calvin have stopped it? I do not know. But he could have tried. Would you have tried to stop this, if you were in his position? I hope you would have.

Bob Kirkland writes,

"Servetus had written a theology book, a copy of which was strapped to the chest of Servetus. The flames from the burning book rose against his face as he screamed in agony."²⁹

Here is a quote from John Calvin, cited in an article written by Paul Penley, talking about the problems of bad hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics is interpretation. Penley is giving historical examples of when one's hermeneutics are going astray—using the Bible to support things that it is not supporting, because of bad interpretation.

Penley uses Calvin as an example.

"Servetus...suffered the penalty due to his heresies, but was it by my will? [This is a quote from John Calvin.] Certainly, his arrogance destroyed him not less than his impiety. And what crime was it of mine if our Council, at my exhortation, indeed, but in conformity with the opinion of several Churches,..."³⁰

"Oh, it is the rest of the church's fault." Even though you are supporting what the rest of the churches are doing.

"...but in conformity with the opinion of several Churches, took vengeance on his execrable blasphemies?"³¹

The third example is Belot. Back to Bernard Cottret. Cottret says,

"While he shared the prejudices of his contemporaries against sorcerers, Calvin the churchman remained devoted to one of the church's principal

²⁸ "The Murder of Michael Servetus" ([http:// www.bcbsr.com/ topics/ servetus.html](http://www.bcbsr.com/topics/servetus.html)). Also see The Ridpath Library of Universal Literature, Vol. 5, p. 89 by John Clark Ridpath documenting actual letters from Calvin discussing the fate of Servetus.

²⁹ Bob Kirkland, *Calvinism: None Dare Call It Heresy; Spotlight on the Life and Teachings of John Calvin* (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails, 2018), 19; Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization: The Reformation*, Vol. VI (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1957), pp. 482-484.

³⁰ John Calvin. Cited in Paul Penley, "John Calvin Killed Rival Theologians: Bad Bible Interpretation Justified It," online: <http://www.reenactingtheway.com/blog/john-calvin-had-people-killed-and-bad-bible-interpretation-justified-it>, 05 March 2015, accessed 13 November 2019.

³¹ Ibid.

missions, the denunciation of heresy and the condemnation of heretics. For Calvin the greatest heretics were the Anabaptists. They were the internal enemy, as against the papists, who threatened the development of the 'true faith' from outside. Papists, moreover, were not heretics in the strict sense; their errors were predictable, almost programmed, and less dangerous on the whole than those original thoughts that risked affecting the Reformed world itself. In 1545 the Anabaptist Belot held that the Old Testament was abolished by the New. This point of view might be debatable theologically, but did it justify the torture inflicted on poor Belot after he was chained and his invectives against Calvin were laughed at?"³²

So in all of between thirty-six to fifty-eight executions, what I have given you are the three most famous ones, or infamous, ones.

And it is absolutely fascinating to watch devotees of John Calvin try to defend this. I taught in the College of Biblical Studies. I would share these things. And I had a lot of strong Calvinists in my classes, and they would try to justify what he did.

"Oh, he was just a man of the times." "Yeah, well, Calvin had thirty-six to fifty-eight executions. But, you know, the guy down the street had one hundred."

Since when is a Christian exonerated from anything because he is a man of the times? Isn't our whole calling to follow Christ? Doesn't Paul say, "Follow me as I follow Christ" (1 Corinthians 4:16, 11:1)?

We have all the abilities to walk in Christ-likeness and not be conformed to the world. And John Calvin, if he was saved at all, completely and totally failed to do so. The root determines the fruit, right?

This is the part of the Neo-Calvinist perspective that is not being brought to the forefront. We will continue to march down this road next Sunday morning in Sunday School class.

I was going to ask you: are you guys enjoying this study? I do not know if "enjoying" is the right word, but it's kind of eye-opening to learn these things, isn't it? Those that do not learn from history are are condemned to repeat it.

³² Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub. Company, English translation, 2000), p. 208.