

John Calvin (1509-1564)

- Leader of the Swiss protestant reformation
- Greatest and most influential mind of the Reformation – his writings set the intellectual base for much of the later Protestant theology
- Born in France and received a classical education at the University of Paris
- By 1534 he had come under the influence of the Protestant movement and made his break with the Roman church
- Attracted by humanism – set out to establish Biblical grounds for humanistic concerns
  - Mastered Greek and Hebrew in order to read the scriptures in their original language
- *Scriptura sola* (Scripture only)
  - Rejected anything not found in the Bible
  - What is found there must be followed without question
  - Believed that the scriptures needed to be applied to practical issues and present circumstances
- By the age of 26 wrote *The Institutes of Christian Religion*
  - Originally written in Latin and later translated into French
  - Revised 4 times in Calvin's lifetime
  - Set forth his understanding of the nature of the true Christian faith before it was corrupted by Rome
  - A crystal-clear definition of the Protestant position

Book 1 – The Knowledge of God the Creator – the sovereignty of God

- Knowledge of God naturally implanted in humans, but this knowledge is stifled or corrupted by ignorance, pride and stubbornness
- God wills whatever happens in the physical world and in human history – assures his own glory
- His will is inscrutable - all of his decisions are Just
- Need of Scripture as a Guide and Teacher

Book 2 – The Knowledge of God as a Redeemer in Christ

- The subject of original sin is considered – a man has no means within himself, by which he can escape from guilt
- Necessary that the eternal Son of god should become man and assume a true human nature. Also shows in what way the divine and human nature constitute one person

Book 3 – The mode of obtaining the grace of Christ

- Benefit of Christ when united to us by the Holy spirit

- Justification by faith saves some, and these go on to sanctification
- Justification comes through the work of Christ in the believer's behalf
- God justifies only those believers in Christ whom he elects to receive into favor
- Predestination – Most important of his teaching was that God determined those who were destined for heaven and those doomed to hell prior to the time of creation

Book 4 – Treats the means the Holy Spirit employs in calling us effectually from spiritual death and preserving the Church – Baptism and the Lord's Supper

- Teaching and Theology
  - Stressed the power and love of God – not an angry God, but a gentle and kind God
  - Only the Bible gives access to the truth about God
  - All men and women are created in order that they may know the majesty of God
  - Five points, making up the word **TULIP**, are used to summarize Calvin's Doctrine
    - Total Depravity of Man**
    - Unconditional Election** – God chooses or “elects” his children
    - Limited Atonement** – the death and resurrection of Christ is substitutionary payment for the sins of God's “elected”
    - Irresistible Grace** – God's call cannot be ignored
    - Perseverance of the Saints** – not possible for the “elected” to lose his salvation
- Eventually, Calvin served as a minister in the Reformed Church of Geneva, Switzerland, and then in Strasbourg
- Invited back to Geneva and became its virtual ruler
  - He himself was given to hard work and simple living and he impressed this upon the city
  - He discouraged frivolity of any kind
    - Frivolous people lower themselves to the level of brutes
    - However, he was not a teetotaler, ascetic or Sabbatarian: he wrote that only an “inhuman philosophy” would be to make no use of the creator's gifts except for necessity
  - Recognized social responsibility
    - Relief for the poor
    - Construction of hospitals, schools (which were free) and new prisons
    - Consumer protection laws
    - Provision for refugees - Geneva became the home of the oppressed Protestants
    - Sanitation system
  - Encouraged commerce and industry as well as lending money at reasonable rates of interest
  - Encouraged education and founded the University of Geneva