

**"CALVIN ON SIN AND SALVATION"**

Romans 3:21-28

Dick Russell had a Bible study group. An unsaved man, at the urging of his wife, joined the group and discovered he really liked the acceptance he found there and especially the prayer time. He realized even Christian men had serious issues to deal with in their lives, and week after week there were praises to God for answered prayer. No stranger to family problems, the man told Dick as he called one night, "You know, my son was shot in the eye with a pellet gun. And the damage on the retina seems to be threatening his eyesight. I'd like for you to pray, Dick, that God would restore the sight." And so he agreed with him and they began to pray. The next day, the doctor went in and discovered two cataracts, one on each eye, along with the damage in the retina. The fella was on his face before God as the doctor was doing his work. Then, lo and behold, when the gentleman came home from the surgery, their house had been burglarized. And things were in a turmoil. He called Dick. Again they prayed.

The operation was a miraculous success. His son was fitted with contacts, and he had his eyesight back. Before long the phone rang again. Dick was asked to pray about another need. The fella's daughter, hooked on heroin, was becoming destructive and breaking the windows and destroying pieces of furniture in the home. He said to Dick, 'You have no idea what it's like to literally wrestle with your child and to pull her arms behind her back while the police snap handcuffs on and take her out of the house.' That, by the way, led to harassment from the drug crowd that she was running with—motorcycle gangs and obscene phone calls and again attempted damage to the home. Just one breaking experience after another. And the fella stayed in the Bible study. Dick prayed with him about this impossible situation, growing in urgency, but unknown to the people he worked with. Just sort of a quiet burden he held on to. Finally, this led to the ultimate. There was one person in the family with whom he really felt close, his wife's mother. And would you believe it, she had a heart attack.

Just sort of an ultimate climax—a final blow. That evening, [the fella] came home from work, went upstairs to his room without a word, and closed the door. His wife, downstairs fixing supper, heard a noise, heard words. She went up and listened. She heard this man, broken, weeping, just dumping out to the Lord every ugly sin of his life saying, 'I'm spiritually bankrupt. I ask you now, Father, through Jesus Christ. To come into my life.' And the wife, on the other side of the door, also wept, rejoicing at what God had done in this strange set of circumstances that broke that man to the place of submission and salvation. An answer to her own prayers for his salvation."

Sin and Salvation- today we conclude a series on that great Protestant Reformer of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, John Calvin, who helped to shape our Reformed, Presbyterian Theology and we focus in on what he thought about these two important issues.

**Calvin's theology** focuses on the saving grace of God, and that is good news.

I think that Calvin has taken a bad rap and has been seen as judgmental because he spoke of our sinful state, he talked about human depravity. But the problem is people don't want to be reminded of their sinfulness; people don't want to be reminded of their failings and weaknesses. Not that we have to hang them out there for everyone to see, but come on, let's be honest, we all have issues, we all have and will make mistakes, sin, mess up. We all are broken people- for heaven's sakes, that's why Jesus came. The fact is that Calvin, in his writings the *Institutes*; he didn't dwell on the topic of sin. He never dwelt on sin for its own sake but rather he stressed sin in the context of the knowledge of God and the knowledge of self, which he emphasized were intimately connected. And Calvin was not shy in pointing out that a true knowledge of ourselves has to include a knowledge of ourselves as sinful people. And if we can "get this" idea, then we can move on to the fact that we cannot do anything out of our own abilities but rather we have to place our confidence solely in God.

Calvin wrote, "It is necessary, on the other hand, to consider the remedy of Divine grace, by which the depravity of nature is corrected and healed... God begins the good work in us by exciting in our hearts a love, desire, and ardent pursuit of righteousness..." (*Institutes*, II. iii.6) So let's look at Sin and Salvation.

First, let's talk about **Sin's Power**. Genesis tells us that, in the beginning, humans were created good. Calvin even states that Adam and Eve were living in a state of "original righteousness" before they sinned. As a result of sin, humans were left to wonder in a state of corruption to the point that the Apostle Paul says in Romans 3:23 that, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." And so what happened is that "original righteousness" was replaced by "original sin." And if you want to get a clearer understanding of where Calvin was coming from on this notion of "original sin" read Augustine because he helped shape Calvin's views on this issue.

Now there were two important points that Augustine held to regarding original sin. First, **due to the fall of Adam and Eve everyone who followed has inherited the "taint" of sin.** And what this means is that we both sin and we inherit the condition of sinfulness. So even before you and I actually commit the sin we are guilty of sin, because it is our preferred nature- we are prone to sin. Second, not only have we inherited the condition of sin but **we have inherited the guilt for our first parents' sin.** This appears to be very unfair at first glance. I mean, why should I be held responsible because of someone else's sin. And yet throughout Scripture there is a collective responsibility when it comes to sin. Sin is both individual and corporate.

Calvin preached that it is because of our sinful state and being prone to sin that we need God, we need God big time. This is what Calvin's followers have labeled as **the total depravity of man.**

And yet he believed that we are not so full of sin that we are incapable of good works, for Calvin believed that Christians and non-Christians both can do good works. But Calvin believed that all of us, given the right situation are capable of the worst sins you or I can think up. And because sin infiltrates even our best actions and thoughts, we desperately need the redemption of God.

Second, **Freedom of the Will**. Calvin gets a bad rap when it comes to his doctrine of sin for he has been accused of de-emphasizing freedom of will. But this is not the case and it seems to be more his followers who have done so. Calvin seems to point to the fact that the will can resist God. We need to understand that Calvin believed that we always have the **freedom of choice**. Christian and non-Christian have the power to choose simple things- like to drink this water or not; to walk over to the Communion Table or not. We have free will when it comes to "earthly things." We also have **the freedom to do what is right**.

Listen to what Paul writes in Romans 7:15, "I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." So there is the point when we can chose to do what is right or chose what is wrong; but we have the freedom to do good.

And yet listen to what Paul says right after this when he writes in Romans 7:18, "nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it." Folks we want to do right, and at times we do, but at times we get pulled back to do what we don't want to do. Try this one-

"the question is not whether we can do the good we will; the question is whether we can will to do the good." (*John Calvin, Reformer for the 21<sup>st</sup>*

*Century*, Johnson, p.54) Calvin also taught **the conversion of the will**.

And the will being converted is a result of the amazing grace of God. God wants to bend our wills to His, but not by manipulation or intimidation. For God honors our independence and our free will.

Remember earlier on in this sermon series I mentioned that Calvin used the example of the rider (who represents God) attempting to tame the wild horse (that is you or me) as God tries to bring us in line with His will and brings love, support and discipline to reign us in.

Third, **Created in the Image of God: Fall and Redemption.** We read in Genesis how we are created in God's image which makes us special and separated from the rest of creation. And yet with sin, this image has been tarnished and corrupted. But thanks be to God this image has not been destroyed because we are specially created in God's image. And so God, in His infinite wisdom and by His divine mercy had a way, a plan, if you will, to bring us back into that right relationship with God, to restore the image. And the way, the plan was by sending His only Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem us. For Jesus Christ is the true and undefiled image of God. And so, for us, God is always renewing us in His image through the life, death and

resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. And as God is renewing us in His image, we are being restored to true freedom, the freedom for obedience.

So let me conclude by saying that the theology that Calvin set forth in word and paper was always about the Good News of God's saving grace.

And this Good News focused on how the God of creation sent His Son to enter our sinful world to embrace the weakness, the pain, the brokenness of our sinful condition and redeem it, redeems us, to the glory of God. To God be the glory. Amen.

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Romans 3:21-28

Introduction: Dick Russell had a Bible study group...

**Calvin's Theology** focuses on...

First, let's talk about **Sin's** \_\_\_\_\_  
Genesis and Romans 3:23

First, **due to the fall of Adam and Eve everyone who followed has inherited the \_\_\_\_\_ of sin**  
We inherited the \_\_\_\_\_ of sinfulness

Second, **we have inherited the \_\_\_\_\_ for our first parents' sin**

The \_\_\_\_\_ depravity of man

Second, **Freedom of the** \_\_\_\_\_

**Freedom of** \_\_\_\_\_

**Freedom to do what is** \_\_\_\_\_ Romans 7:15, 18

Calvin taught the \_\_\_\_\_ of the will

Third, **Created in the \_\_\_\_\_ of God: Fall and Redemption**

Conclusion: Calvin's theology was always about the Good News of God's saving grace.