

John Calvin

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[0 : 0 0] Well today as you know it's the 1st of November and according to Roman Catholicism the 1st of November is All Saints Day and it's a day that the Roman Catholic Church has appointed to celebrate the saints who have attained heaven and of course All Saints Day it comes after All Hallows Eve or what we now call Halloween and Halloween was a day to remember the dead but something I didn't realize is that tomorrow the 2nd of November is All Souls Day a day that's dedicated to those who have died but have not yet come out of purgatory and gone into heaven and so yesterday today and tomorrow Halloween All Saints Day and All Souls Day may have been appointed by the Roman Catholic Church to celebrate the dead but you know I find it ironic that when a dead Roman Catholic Church was celebrating the dead on the 31st of October 1517 Martin Luther was nailing his 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg and by hammering his nail into the church door you could say that Luther he was putting the first nail into the coffin of a dead Roman Catholic

Church and since that day the 31st of October has been regarded as not Halloween well that's we shouldn't call it Halloween it's Reformation Day and yesterday it marked the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation and because of this great milestone in the history of the Protestant Church we've been over the past few weeks we've been tracing the storyline of the Reformation and as I said before to trace the storyline of the Reformation is to trace the lives of four particular men because if we know the story of these men we will know that for the most part we will know the story of the Reformation and we'll be able to see how God in his providence how he used these men to reform the church of Jesus Christ and the story of the Reformation we've seen before it goes from Martin Luther to William Tyndale to John Calvin to John Knox and as we trace the steps of these men we're following the flow of the Reformation we're following the flow from the German Reformation to the English

Reformation to the Swiss Reformation and then to the Scottish Reformation and this movement of reform it took about 55 years the Reformation that didn't happen overnight it took time and it wasn't the result of one man it was the work of a body of men and already in our study of the Reformation we've seen the story of the Reformation begin in Germany with Martin Luther then we went to England with William Tyndale but now this evening I'd like us to go to the Swiss city of Geneva to consider the life and ministry of and influence of the well-known reformer John Calvin and as I said before the way in which I'd like us to meet the reformer is under five simple headings childhood conversion call congregation and contribution childhood conversion call congregation and contribution so look first of all at childhood childhood John Calvin he was born in Neuenburg in northern France on the 10th of July 1509 and he was the son of a man called Gerard Gerard was a church lawyer who was attached to the cathedral in Neuenburg and contrary to Luther's experience if you remember Luther his father hated the idea of

Luther becoming a priest but Calvin's father he encouraged his son to join the priesthood and so at the age of 14 the youthful and obedient Calvin he prepared himself for the priesthood by moving 60 miles away from home to Paris and he studied at the university there and it was there in Paris that Calvin learned Latin from one of the greatest Latin scholars of his time this man called Matherin Cordier and this man Matherin Cordier he must have had this great impression upon Calvin because years later when Calvin was writing one of his commentaries the commentary on 1st Thessalonians he dedicated his entire commentary to this man Cordier and Calvin writes in his commentary he says it's only right that you should come in for a share in my labor since under your patronage having entered on a course of study I gained a proficiency which prepared me to be useful in some degree to the church of God my father sent me while yet a boy to Paris as I had simply tasted the first elements of Latin of the Latin tongue providence arranged that I had for a short

time the privilege of having you as my instructor

I derived much assistance from your training that it is with good reason that I acknowledge myself indebted to you for such progress as has since been made so he made this dedication to his Latin teacher and also while as a student in Paris Calvin formed this close friend friendship with a zealous Christian called Nicholas Copp and Calvin's friendship with this man called Nicholas Copp it was to have an important consequences in the future and this brings us from considering Calvin's childhood to Calvin's conversion childhood conversion and so in 1527 at the age of 18 Calvin's father fell out with the canons of Neuron Cathedral and as a result Gerard decided that his son should no longer waste his time becoming a priest but he should become a lawyer and so as an obedient son Calvin he terminated his theological studies and he became this law student at Borgo in central France and his law education it led Calvin from studying Latin to then studying Greek but you know when his father died in 1531 Calvin soon returned to his first love of theology

[6 : 38] Calvin resumed his theological studies mastering the languages of both Greek Hebrew and Latin but it wasn't until sometime between 1532 and 1534 that John Calvin was converted to the Protestant faith and it seems that this was there was this great influence upon Calvin's life at the time which could have led him to embrace the gospel because Calvin had this cousin now bear with me with all these names these French names I'm trying to cope with them as well this man called Pierre Olivetan now I'm trying to pronounce them right too and this man called Olivetan he was influential for Calvin because he was responsible for publishing the French Bible in 1535 but the reason we can't pinpoint Calvin's conversion is because as a man Calvin was very private and he was very very reserved he would fit in well here and in his writings Calvin he very rarely refers to himself and he very rarely refers to his experience except that he was this lover of Jesus Christ but in his preface to his commentary on the book of Psalms

Calvin gives to us this small insight into his conversion and he writes there he says at first since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame which was more hardened in such matters that might have been expected from what had my early period of life having thus received some taste and knowledge for true godliness I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein that although I did not altogether leave of other studies I yet pursued them with less ardour I was quite surprised to find that before a year had elapsed all who had any desire after purer doctrine were continually coming to me to learn although I myself was yet as but a mere novice and you know although we can't be sure when Calvin was converted in November 1533 we can be sure that he was at least involved in this reformation movement that got him into serious trouble because on the 1st of November 1533 Calvin's friend Nicholas Kopp he was giving this speech as the newly appointed rector in the Paris University and Nicholas Kopp he used his occasion for this speech he used the occasion to give a call for reformation in the church and he was quoting the words of Luther and the works of Luther and as you would expect this speech that Kopp gave it it caused an uproar among the Roman Catholics and then it provoked King Francis

King Francis I it provoked him to take more of this an oppressive stance towards the reformers and all their sympathisers and now with his arrest imminent Nicholas Kopp he ditched the job he had just been given he fled the country and he made his way to Basel in Switzerland and of course Calvin's name was also blacklisted among those who were opposing the Roman Catholic Church and it's said that he had to escape Paris disguised as a gardener but Calvin he only fled as far as western France but then the following year 19th of October 1534 France became too dangerous for any reformers to live in because when the city of Paris woke up on the morning of the 19th of October 1534 they found the city covered in posters covered in posters condemning the Roman Catholic Mass as blasphemy and on these posters it claimed that all the Roman clergy they were servants of the Antichrist and so the backlash from the government came immediately because they imprisoned and they tortured and they burned many many Protestants and now with no choice Calvin had to follow in the footsteps of his friend Nicholas Kopp by fleeing the country and he arrived in Basel in January 1535 but in order to justify the burning of Protestants King Francis issued this public letter the same year and he accused all the French Protestants as political rebels and he sought to political rebels who were seeking to overthrow the government and because of this persecution from the king Calvin felt that he had to defend all his brothers and sisters in the faith and so in 1536 which was the year William Tyndale was executed in England he was burned

at the stake for translating the Bible into English in that same year John Calvin first published the Institutes of the Christian Religion and Calvin's Institutes in the preface of it it was a letter written to King Francis and the letter to King Francis it was a masterpiece because it was written with dignity and it was written with passion it set forth the Protestant position and it sought to vindicate all these French Protestants from the king's accusations but this book which Calvin wrote the Institutes of the Christian Religion not only had the preface but it was also an orderly summary of Christian doctrine and it was all about the Christian life and well that's exactly what it was and that's what it still is today it's Christian doctrine about and it's about the Christian life and even though Calvin revised and expanded his Institutes again in 1539 and then once again in 1559 the Institutes of the Christian Religion they are still the clearest and the most elegant and best organized presentation of Reformed theology and in the final edition of the Institutes which was published in 1559 it was made up of four books there were four books book one focused upon the knowledge of God our creator book two focused upon the knowledge of God the Redeemer in Christ then book three the way we receive the grace of Christ and then book four of the Institutes it focused upon the external means or aids by which God invites us into the society of Christ meaning the church and by setting out the Institutes like this

Calvin was actually making the important point that Protestants had not invented new doctrines they were simply returning to the teaching of the Apostles in the early church and of course the theology of the Apostles and the Reformers it was that salvation was by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and Calvin he also stressed the absolute sovereignty of God in our salvation and that's why many people today they wrongly accuse John Calvin as the man who invented the doctrine of predestination that of course isn't true because God's sovereign predestination is clearly set out in the Bible but Calvin's greatest contribution to the Reformation you could say was well part of it was the teaching upon the church because Protestants and Roman Catholics they had very differing views about the church

[14:48] Roman Catholicism teaches that there is no salvation outside the church and that the church is governed by the Pope and grace flows to the sinner through all the sacraments but Calvin's biblical view of the church was that the church is actually invisible an invisible and spiritual body of all true believers but it's not only invisible it's also visible and the visible part of the church he says is to be run by a distinctive system of church government it's not to be controlled by the Pope but carried out by four permanent offices expressed clearly in the New Testament and these four offices are pastor teacher elder and deacon and for Calvin the role of the pastor he was to lead the services of worship and expound the scriptures and administer the sacraments the teacher was to was to train the pastors and he was also to instruct the people in Christian doctrine the elders they were to help the pastors provide pastoral care and also provide moral discipline within the congregation and together pastors and elders of different congregations they were to be brought together as a recognized district or what we would call a presbytery and this form of church government which Calvin set out in his institutes based upon scripture it's all what we refer to today as

Presbyterianism now the fourth office of deacon that didn't share in the ruling of the church by teaching or discipline because the role of a deacon is to manage congregations funds and to look after the poor and the sick but you know what's remarkable is that Calvin taught that all those nominated for any of the four offices pastor, teacher, elder or deacon they would require approval of a congregation before they could assume their responsibilities that's what we're doing tonight Calvin believed that the most scriptural method by which a congregation expressed its approval of candidates for an office in the church was by electing them democratically and as I said that's what we're doing this evening we're electing new office bearers by voting and you know remarkably it's all everything we're doing tonight it's based upon what John Calvin wisely taught and explained in his institutes nearly 500 years ago but this brings us thirdly to consider Calvin's call childhood conversion call

John Calvin's call to the pastoral ministry it was very very interesting because having lived in the Swiss city of Basel for just over a year Calvin made a brief visit to his home in Neuchâtel in France but on his return Calvin hoped to make his way to Strasbourg in Germany and Calvin he just wanted to settle in Strasbourg and live the quiet life but war had broken out between the Roman Emperor Charles V and King Francis and had forced Calvin to make this detour towards the Swiss city of Geneva and by the strangest of providences John Calvin found himself in a city to which he never

intended to travel and it's said that as John Calvin was checking into his accommodation for the night he was recognised by a man called William Farrell and William Farrell he was this French Protestant reformer and he was known to many people as this fiery red-headed evangelist they often likened him to this

Old Testament prophet because he repeatedly pronounced the condemnation of the Roman Catholic Church and he made all these challenging demands for repentance and reform in fact Farrell had been responsible for bringing reformation to Geneva but as Calvin was checking in to his accommodation he was recognised by William Farrell as the young author of the Institutes he was only 26 at the time and it said that Farrell went straight up to Calvin and he said to him you must become our pastor but Calvin had no reason to be in Geneva let alone be their pastor because Calvin he was the kind of man who well he even called himself he was the kind of man who wanted to be in the shade he didn't want to be in the public eye he wanted to be out of the spotlight he didn't want to be in the pulpit he wanted to be in the back corner of a library left alone to write his theology and his commentaries and so with that well Calvin refused Farrell's request but then William Farrell he put his finger into Calvin's face and he said to him then the curse of God be upon you and with that

Calvin melted he melted and Calvin then humbled himself and Calvin said to Farrell well if that is the case by the grace of God I will be your pastor and that's how John Calvin was called to Geneva and his career as the reformer of Geneva it would last for almost the rest of his life and I say I stress the almost because only after two years of being the pastor in Geneva Calvin was run out of town by the city council and the reason Calvin was run out of Geneva was because both he and this fiery red-headed Farrell they taught that church discipline belonged to the church's officers and not to the city council the church discipline everything to do with the church belonged to the church not to the council and when Calvin when he fenced off the Lord's table and said that in order to come to the Lord's table you must be living a life that is consistent with your testimony of faith in Jesus Christ and worthy of your calling when he said that that was the straw that broke the camel's back and in April 1538 the city council of Geneva they banished

[21 : 26] John Calvin they sent him out and so Calvin went he left probably quite happily and he went to the place where he originally intended to go two years earlier he went to Strasbourg in Germany and there Calvin he wished to live as he had hoped to live he wanted to look for a nice place to study scriptures out of sight and out of mind and just write his books but when he reached Strasbourg there was another man like William Farrell just waiting for him and this other man went by the name of Martin Buser and Martin Buser he came right up to Calvin and he called him to be the pastor of Strasbourg and Calvin well he once again agreed but as it turned out Calvin spent the happiest years of his life in Strasbourg because in Strasbourg Calvin learnt what a reformed church could look like and he experienced teaching in a reformed college and he wrote his first commentary on Paul's letter to the Romans but it was also in Strasbourg that Calvin finally got married and Calvin he once spoke about his romantic side not many men do this but he said as for marriage

I'm not one of these infatuated lovers who captivated by a pretty face kiss even her vices the only beauty which interests me is that she should not she should be modest obliging not haughty not extravagant patient and solicitous for my help so as you can see Calvin was a picky man when it came to women but in August 1540 Calvin married a widow called Ida Lett and Ida Lett she had two children from her first marriage at which Calvin cared for deeply especially because Calvin's wife she became ill shortly after their marriage and she died only nine years later in 1549 and after Ida Lett's death Calvin wrote about his wife he said I struggle as best as I can to overcome my grief I have lost the best companion in life telling words of a man but that brings us to consider next of all Calvin's congregation childhood conversion call congregation so while Calvin was happy in Strasbourg Geneva was in a mess there was doctrinal confusion about the mass there was and there was political mayhem and things got so bad that the city council they pleaded with Calvin to return at first Calvin said he would rather die a thousand deaths than return to Geneva but after being exiled for three years in 1541 with much persuasion and a lot of pleading Calvin decided to return to Geneva and you know there was great suspense and there was great wonder as to what this great reformer would say when he climbed back into the pulpit he had been exiled from but you know when he climbed when Calvin climbed back up into his pulpit he just continued preaching from where he had left off three years earlier but Calvin's actions in that in that moment they were a

statement to the citizens of Geneva and a statement was that this pulpit will preach the word of God and this city will be under the preaching of the word of God and when you look at Calvin's life and the rest of his ministry nothing was ever plain sailing for him in Geneva throughout his ministry in Geneva he was repeatedly accused of being a heretic he was provoked by people they put up posters around the city about him they even put posters around his pulpit and even had people heckling him while he was preaching during his sermons people would try to drown him out with coughing other people would try and make rude noises in the church trying to put him off but even though

Calvin's ministry in Geneva was constantly hanging by a thread he continued to be a faithful pastor for the next 23 years until his death in 1564 but you know what marked Calvin as a great reformer it wasn't just his amazing intellect and his ability for reasoning and explaining the Bible what marked Calvin was his preaching Martin Lloyd-Jones said that Calvin was preeminently a preacher of God's word and although it may have been his preferred choice Calvin wasn't an armchair theologian he wasn't the one who sat in the ivory tower he might have wanted to do that before he went to Geneva but he didn't want to do it then he didn't live a life that was disconnected from the people he was preaching to no Calvin he roared like a lion when he stepped into the pulpit to preach the word of God and Calvin preached

God's word every other day of the week he preached twice on Sunday he preached Monday morning Tuesday morning Wednesday morning Thursday morning Friday morning all at 6am Calvin preached nine sermons a week that puts me to shame but he said that if he had to give up all of his ministries and just have one ministry he would have taken the pulpit and let go of everything else and that's because Calvin understood the primacy and purpose of preaching he saw himself as a pastor whose chief duty was to preach the word of God and you know if we're going to have another reformation in our day it will only come if there is a new generation of preachers who preach the word of God in truth and sincerity but you know one of the features of Calvin's preaching was that he preached sequentially through books of the Bible expositing them verse by verse

[27 : 51] Calvin believed that when you preach the Bible sequentially verse by verse you will leave no stone unturned you'll leave no doctrine untaught you'll leave no sin left unexposed and no promise left undelivered by the method of expository preaching Calvin believed that you would address every area of life using sola scriptura just scripture alone and just to give you an idea of how many sermons Calvin would preach on certain books of the Bible and how long he would spend on a certain book of the Bible gives me hope when Calvin preached through the book of Acts he preached 189 sermons when he preached through 1 Corinthians he preached 110 sermons 2 Corinthians it was 63 sermons Galatians it was 43 sermons Ephesians 48 sermons 1 and 2 Thessalonians 46 sermons 1 Timothy 55 sermons when Calvin preached through Genesis he preached 183 sermons

Deuteronomy 201 sermons the book of Job 159 sermons Ezekiel 173 sermons and when Calvin preached through the book of Isaiah he preached 353 sermons my friend Calvin believed in the primacy and the purpose of preaching and he died in 1564 as he attempted to preach a harmony of the gospels Calvin was a pastor who patiently led his congregation through verse by verse exposition of the Bible book by book that's how much he wanted his congregation to know the Bible and so we've considered Calvin's childhood Calvin's conversion call and congregation but last of all Calvin's contribution Calvin's contribution and you know it's undeniable that John Calvin he's made a massive contribution to the Reformed Church and his contribution it's not only come in paper form with his institutes they were over a thousand pages long he has a 22 volume commentary series on most of the books in the Bible but the other contribution of Calvin is the term

Calvinism now we have to be clear Calvin never liked the term Calvinist or Calvinism and the term Calvinism as we know it today it didn't arrive until well into the next century which was about 70 years after Calvin's death and Calvinism appeared as this stand against what you call Arminianism and it was the teaching of a Dutch scholar called Jacob Arminius and when Arminius died in 1609 his followers they put together this petition so that five of his core views would be accepted by the Dutch Reformed Church but then in 1618 a synod of Reformed theologians the synod of Dort they met in Dort and they met in order to respond to these five core views of Arminianism and what they came up with was what we now know as the five points of Calvinism or what others call tulip total depravity unconditional election limited atonement irresistible grace and perseverance of the saints

tulip but these five points of Calvinism they were never intended to be a summary of Calvin's theology because as we have seen and as we know Calvin's theology was far wider and far deeper than just five points and Calvin never wanted recognition for anything he had ever done he didn't want people to be known as Calvinists or he didn't want anything to be said about him regarding Calvinism Calvin was a man who lived and died soli deo gloria to the glory of God alone in fact when Calvin died on the 27th of May 1564 his only request was that he would be buried in a common cemetery in an unmarked grave Calvin didn't want any glitter he didn't want any glamour and he didn't want even a gravestone you know it was typical Calvin he wanted his life's work to be for God's glory and the extension of Christ's kingdom and you know without us even realising it Calvin has influenced all of us he's influenced even what we're doing this evening in electing new office bearers but you know in order for Calvin's institute Calvin's influence to come from Geneva to Scotland it had to come through someone and that someone was John Knox because John Knox he spent a lot of time in Geneva and he learnt a lot from John Calvin and Calvin was greatly used to spark the Scottish Reformation and so God willing we'll consider the Scottish Reformation next week when we come to consider John Knox together so I hope you'll all come back for that one so that's John Calvin the Swiss Reformer 1509 to 1564 we'll just conclude in a word of prayer let us pray O Lord our gracious God we give thanks to thee for the great reminder that thou art the one who works in history and the God who has foreordained all things that come to pass and we bless thee Lord that we are able to consider these great men of the past men whom thou hast used for thy glory and that even their life's song then is to be our life's song now that it is not unto us [34 : 09] Lord not to us but do thou glory take O Lord bless these thoughts to us that they would encourage us that they would spur us on that they would make us realize the need for reformation in our own day and in our own generation that we too would go back to the Bible and realize the power that is alone found in thy word for thy word is the lamp unto our feet it is the light unto our path it is sharper than any two-edged sword and it pierces to the dividing sunder of soul and spirit O Lord bless us then we pray guide us and keep us and go before us in all that we say and do for we ask it in Jesus name and for his sake Amen