

Doing a John Calvin

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this evening, for a short while, and with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read.

Ephesians chapter 4, Ephesians chapter 4, and if we read again, at verse 15. Ephesians 4 and verse 15.

Where Paul writes, rather speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped.

When each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. And so on.

In 1541, the French reformer John Calvin, he returned to his pulpit in Geneva, in the Swiss city of Geneva, after three and a half years of exile.

[1 : 16] What's interesting is that five years earlier, Calvin had hoped to settle in the French city of Strasbourg, because Strasbourg was where many of the minds of the Reformation were living at the time.

But in the providence of God and in the purposes of God, Calvin ended up arriving in the Swiss city of Geneva in the summer of 1536. And at the time, Geneva, you could say it was on the cusp of Reformation.

As you know, the Reformation, it was spreading like wildfire in the 16th century. It had all started with the reformer, the German reformer Martin Luther and his 95 theses.

And so as time went on and when Calvin arrived in the city of Geneva in 1536, the city of Geneva was under reform. And it was under reform because the locals, they had driven out their last Roman Catholic bishop, they had ceased from serving the mass, and they had given all the priests in the city an ultimatum.

They had told them, you either convert or you leave the city. And most of the Roman Catholic priests, they all decided to depart from the city in Geneva and to leave its reformation behind them.

[2 : 27] Which was actually the point at which, I'm sure you remember that famous Latin motto of the Reformation, post-tenebras lux, after darkness, light.

That was the point at which this came into being. This is where it came from, the city of Geneva. Post-tenebras lux, after darkness, light. But when Calvin arrived in Geneva, the city was still in darkness.

It was in, you could say, a considerable amount of turmoil. They needed help to reform their city. But Calvin, he had no intention of staying to help the people there.

He didn't want to live in Geneva. He didn't want to stay in this city. He wanted to go to Strasbourg where the great minds of the Reformation lived. Nevertheless, Calvin stayed.

And his first two proposals for change were about a confession of faith and communion. Calvin drafted a new confession of faith for the city. And all who wished to remain in a reformed Geneva, they were ordered to accept it.

[3 : 33] They were to confess this as their confession of faith. The next, more and more controversially, was communion. Because Calvin wanted communion more frequently.

And he also wanted more of a fence put around the communion table. And for the new and reforming city of Geneva, frequent communion wasn't so much of a problem.

What was a problem was fencing the communion table. Rightly, Calvin wanted all these notorious offenders in the city of Geneva. He wanted all these people in the congregation and in the community of Geneva to be denied access to the Lord's table.

They weren't living the Christian life. So he wanted them to be denied access to the Lord's table. But the city, the city council of Geneva, they refused and rejected Calvin's proposals. They decreed that no one is to be denied access to the Lord's table in the city of Geneva. And with the city council wanting to control and even curtail the level of reformation in Geneva, the relationship, you could say, between church and state, it became strained. [4 : 41] So strained that it snapped. And in 1538, less than two years after arriving in Geneva, Calvin was given three days notice and ordered to leave the city.

Of course, that was no skin off Calvin's nose. He wanted to live in Strasbourg. So he went to live in Strasbourg, the location that he loved and looked forward to. And it was there that Calvin was at his happiest.

It's there that he was mulling over all the finer points of theology. And it's there that he met his wife, Ida Lett. But after three and a half years in exile in the city of Strasbourg, the Geneva City Council, they sent Calvin a warm greeting, welcoming him back as their preacher and pastor. Calvin considered he thought about the letter and he considered rejecting it or even refusing such a welcome. But he was constrained by God's word and compelled by God's will. And so Calvin, he reluctantly returned to Geneva on the 7th of September, 1541. One historian writes, The air was thick with anticipation.

[5 : 55] When Calvin first climbed back into his old pulpit, the congregation braced themselves for the torrent of anathemas that must surely come from an embittered deportee now given a public voice.

Instead, much to everyone's surprise, Calvin just opened his Bible and continued his exposition of the Psalms, picking up at the very place he had left off when he was exiled three and a half years earlier.

The message to the people of Geneva was simple and it was clear. The reformer was back, but not with a personal agenda. He was back to preach God's word and to proclaim the whole counsel of God.

And you know, that's what I always love about John Calvin. That although he was a reformer, although he was a great theologian, one of the great minds of the Reformation, even though he was these things, he was first and foremost a preacher.

And he was a pastor, a preacher of God's word and a pastor to God's people. Because the thing is, Calvin knew and believed that the word of God is the only rule to direct us.

[7 : 12] And that the only means by which Reformation could or would ever come was through the preaching of God's word. Now, after that long introduction, I want to qualify what I'm about to say next.

Not because I want to put myself on the same par as the great reformer John Calvin, because that's impossible. But I want to do a John Calvin. I've been thinking about this and I was thinking, well, where do you go back?

What do you study? And so I want to do a John Calvin. Because as I come back to the pulpit at the prayer meeting, after a long period of absence, and I'm very grateful to the elders for covering all the prayer meetings in my absence.

But now I want us to pick up where we just left off. Not three and a half years ago like Calvin, but five months ago. The last time I preached at the prayer meeting was the 31st of January this year. So I want to do a John Calvin. And if you remember that far back to the 31st of January, then you'll remember that we were studying Paul's letter to the Ephesians. And alongside our study, we had an online Bible study.

[8 : 21] We had a Bible study on Monday night where we were following a Bible study booklet. Unfortunately, we're not going to resume our online Bible study. But I want us to do a John Calvin. I want us to pick up where we left off five months ago.

I want us to resume our study of this brilliant and, I think, beautiful letter. And for the short time that we are together, before I hand over to our treasurer, I want us to just recap and remember and remind ourselves of our study so far.

I want us to give ourselves or remind ourselves of the picture that is in the letter of Ephesians. Because the beautiful thing about Paul's letter to the Ephesians is that it's a tale of two parts. You could say it's a game of two halves. And as you know and as you can see, and I'm sure you've read Ephesians many times before, you'll know that there are six chapters in Paul's letter to the

Ephesians.

And Paul has, he has intentionally split and separated his letter into two parts. He has two sets of three chapters. Two sets of three chapters.

[9 : 28] Because in the first three chapters, you could say, chapters one to three, Paul is teaching. Then in the second set, chapters four to six, Paul is telling. In the first three chapters, Paul is giving information.

In the last three chapters, it's application. In the first three chapters, he uses indicatives all the way through. In the last three chapters, it's all imperatives. So the first three chapters, he seeks to encourage.

The last three chapters, he wants to exhort. And so you can see the letter is, it's a tale of two parts. It's a game of two halves. And we saw that as we studied the first three chapters of this letter together.

We saw Paul in chapters one, two and three. We saw him teaching and informing and encouraging. Because if you remember way back in chapter one, Paul opened his letter with a long sentence.

And in that long sentence, he gave us a long list. A long list describing all the blessings and all the benefits that we experience and enjoy as believers. Paul wrote there in chapter one, verse three.

[10 : 34] He says there, And so you remember that verses three to 14 of chapter one, It's one long sentence.

Where Paul, he reminds us and he reassures us that as God's people, we are blessed. We're blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ.

We have received from the gracious hand of King Jesus, something that we don't deserve. We have every spiritual blessing. And Paul goes through all these blessings. He talks about our predestination, our adoption, our justification, our sanctification, our redemption, our forgiveness, our pardon, our perseverance as the saints, our glorification, and also even our eternal inheritance. And Paul tells us that all of this, all of it has been graciously and gloriously given and gifted to us from the hand of King Jesus. We have received every spiritual blessing.

More than that, we're told, Paul tells us that all these gracious and glorious gifts and graces, they've been given to us with a guarantee. A guarantee that they are all ours.

[11 : 53] And they're all ours now for all time and for all eternity. They're ours now.

Tonight you have received and you are still receiving every spiritual blessing in heavenly places. In Christ. But then as we moved on from chapter 1 where Paul encountered or recounted all these blessings and benefits of our salvation.

In chapter 2, Paul encouraged us by reminding us that although we were once dead in our trespasses and sins. And although we were once walking according to the course of this world. And although we once followed the prince of the power of the air. And although we once lived for the passions and pleasures of our body and our mind. Paul reminds us that our God who is rich in mercy and who loves the unlovely.

He made us alive in Christ. He saved us. And he saved us, Paul teaches us. He saved us by grace alone. Through faith alone. In Christ alone.

[13 : 00] And it's all of course to the glory of God alone. It's not of works. Lest anyone should boast. It's the gift of God. We are his workmanship. Created in Christ Jesus.

And we're created in Christ Jesus for good works. We're saved to serve. We're saved to serve. And as Paul goes through Ephesians chapter 2. He explains that we're saved to serve not as strangers and sinners.

But as citizens and saints in the church of Jesus Christ. We were once afar off he says to us. But we have now been brought near. By the blood of Jesus Christ.

And so by building. You can see Paul building all the time. He builds upon the blessings and benefits found in chapter 1. And then building on the gifts and the graces of chapter 2.

Paul moves into chapter 3 of his letter. And he explains the mystery of salvation. Because the truth is salvation. As we all know it's a great mystery.

[13 : 59] There's no rhyme or reason as to why we of all people have received the blessings and benefits of salvation. And others have not.

There's no rhyme or reason why we are here tonight. And other people in our community are not. Because we're certainly not better or brighter or braver than them. And yet the mystery is that we are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.

And others are not. It's a mystery why we are predestined for glory. And others are not. It's a mystery why we are justified and adopted and being sanctified by the grace of God. And others are not. It should be a mystery to us that we are redeemed and forgiven and pardoned. And others are not. It's a mystery why we are given and guaranteed this eternal inheritance. And all these blessings from and through the Holy Spirit. And others are not. My friend it should always be a mystery to us that we are saved by grace alone. Through faith alone in Christ alone. [15:02] To the glory of God alone. And others are not. And as Paul says in chapter 3. It's a complete mystery why God would reveal himself to us. And that he would reveal to us the breadth and length and height and depth of his love to us in Christ.

It's a complete mystery as to why we have been given any position or any privilege of all these blessings above anyone else. Because there's no evidence.

No evidence in our lives that would ever suggest that we have determined it or desired it or even deserve it. To receive this gracious gift of salvation from the hand of King Jesus.

Which is why as Paul explains in chapter 3. We should respond to God's salvation. By praising our Saviour. And providing our service.

We should respond to the mystery and majesty of our salvation. By serving the Saviour. We should respond to all that has been graciously given and gifted to us. By declaring our doxology.

[16:10] Which is what Paul gives to us at the end of chapter 3. He says there in Ephesians chapter 3. Right at the end he says. Now unto him who is able to do far more abundantly.

Than all we ask or think according to the power at work within us. To him be glory in the church. And in Christ Jesus. Throughout all generations.

Forever and ever. Amen. And with that declaration and doxology. Paul moves. From the first half of his letter.

Into the second half of his letter. So he said it's split in two sections. There's two parts. He has separated his letter into two halves. And so in chapter 4.

Paul moves from teaching to telling. He moves from information to application. He moves from indicatives to imperatives. From encouragement to exhortation.

[17:09] And you can see that as Paul moves from one part into the other. From one half into the other. He begins chapter 4 with the word. Therefore. So he says.

After all that I've just said. Here's now the application. I therefore. A prisoner for the Lord. Urge you to walk in a manner worthy. Of the calling to which you have been called.

With all humility and gentleness. With patience. Bearing with one another. In love. Eager to maintain the unity of the spirit. In the bond.

Of peace. Now the reason Paul gave such an exhortation. At the beginning of chapter 4. Was. As we saw in January. It was to emphasize and explain.

How churches grow. How churches grow. Of course Paul. As an apostle. As a Christian. He knows that churches grow. By God's grace.

[18:04] Because without God's grace. There will be no growth. And as Jesus said. He taught the apostles. I will build my church. And the gates of hell. Will not prevail against it.

Paul himself. Wrote about church planting. And church revitalization. Saying that Paul may plant. Apollos may water. But it is God alone. Who gives the increase.

So Paul knows. That churches only grow. When God's grace. Is at work in them. Without grace. There's no growth. Without grace. There's no growth. Paul knows that.

But Paul still exhorts. The Ephesians. And us. By saying that churches grow. When we're walking. Worthily together. And churches grow. When we're working.

Well together. Churches grow. When we're walking. Worthily together. And working well together. Churches grow. Says Paul. When we have a Christ-like walk.

[19:01] That's his focus. First and foremost. He doesn't talk about evangelism. Strategies. Or anything like that. He doesn't point out. Graphs or anything. Paul says. Churches will grow.

When we have a Christ-like walk. When we. He says there. Verse 2. When we're humble. Gentle. And patient. When we're bearing with one another in love.

That's when churches grow. When we're eagerly endeavoring to keep the unity. And preserve the unity. And guard the unity of the spirit. In the congregation. Churches grow.

Says Paul. When we walk as one united body. Of Christ. Because that's what we are. And Paul explains that. He emphasizes that. Using the word.

One. He says there is one body. Verse 4. And one spirit. And we've been called. To one hope. There's one Lord. There's one faith.

[19 : 58] There's one baptism. There's one God and Father. Who is over all. And through all. And in all. Therefore churches grow. When we walk worthily together.

And churches grow. When we work well together. Because as Paul goes on in chapter 4. He says we're to work well as a team. We're to be a team.

As the old cliché goes. There's no I in team. Team stands for everyone. Together everyone achieves more. Together everyone achieves more.

Therefore no man is an island. We're not isolated. Or individualistic. Neither are we to just stand on the sidelines. Spectating everybody else. Getting on with the work. Because being part of the church of Jesus Christ.

It's not a spectator sport. We're a team. And as a team. We're to work well together. And we're to work well together. As Paul explains.

[20 : 56] We're to work well together. Until. Until we attain to the unity. The oneness. The togetherness. Of the faith. So we're to keep seeking.

We're to keep striving. We're to keep serving together. For the glory of God. For as Paul says there in verse 15. Of chapter 4.

We're to speak the truth in love. We're to grow up in every way. Into him. Who is the head. Into Christ. From whom the whole body.

Joined and held together. By every joint with which it is equipped. When each part is working properly. Makes the body grow. So that it builds itself up.

In love. So churches grow when we walk worthily together. And churches grow when we work well. Together. And that's our study so far.

[21 : 57] That's all we've reached. And God willing. We'll resume our study. Next week. We'll continue to learn more. From Paul's letter. To the Ephesians. But you know.

It's good to do a Calvin. Isn't it? It's good to do a Calvin. Because. Regardless of whatever century we're in. It's good to go back to the word of God. Because.

Whatever part of. God's word we come to. We are reminded that. It is the only rule. The only rule to direct us. On how we may glorify God.

And enjoy him. Forever. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let's pray together. Our Father in heaven.

We give thanks for thy word. And thy word is. Remains for us. That only rule. The only rule. To direct us. Both in life.

[22 : 51] And in our faith. And we pray Lord. That we would follow it. That would remain for us. A lamp unto our feet. And a light to our path. And Lord.

As we resume our study of Ephesians. We pray that. All that we learn. And all that we continue to learn. That it would encourage us. And even enable us. To be built up as a spiritual house.

Holy and acceptable unto thee. Bless us Lord. In all that we seek to do. That we would seek to work together as a team. Ultimately for the furtherance of thy kingdom.

And the glory of thy name. Bless us then Lord. Together we pray. Lead us and direct us.

Continually we ask. For we ask it in Jesus name. And for his sake. Amen.