

Who was John Calvin? 3: The man.

Contrary to the popular image, Calvin was not a dour legalist without joy, out to place various restrictions on his followers. He was a compassionate and humane person, as his letters demonstrate. Neither was his chief focus in theology the doctrine of predestination, resulting in fatalism. Calvin was dominated by the desire to honour and glorify God in all that he did. In pursuing this course, he was sometimes severe when confronting error, but (in the spirit of the age) it was occasionally necessary to be so forthright. Calvin may not have been as docile as Bucer or as conciliatory as Bullinger, but was in a more severe political position than these, subject to more onslaughts and faced with more theological problems to solve. He longed for unity in the truth.

Contrary to belief, his Institutes are not centred on predestination, but it begins with and sets forth the doctrine of the holy and glorious God, drawing out subsidiary doctrines from this point. Wm. Cunningham called it, 'the most important work in the history of theological science' [*Reformers & Theol of Ref.* 295]. Nor was Calvin's theology contrary to evangelism; indeed he sent out one of the first ever Protestant missionaries to Brazil, and true Calvinism (a term he did not approve of) has always been accompanied by fervent Gospel preaching. Nether were his sermons academic; contrary to contemporary custom he did not read out written sermons, and did not even use notes. His method was to read the text from the original Hebrew or Greek and then comment on it from his vast knowledge to suit the needs of his congregation. Many of his sermons are published and read today, because (unlike other contemporary works) they are interesting and useful; indeed they were the first of the Reformers to be translated and widely distributed. Despite being a brilliant theologian he rather considered himself to be a pastor, called to teach his people the truth as it is found in God's word but with the aid of everyday images, clarity, empathy and spirituality.

That some supposed Christian leaders can call this humble and gracious man 'a despotic tyrant' who repressed Christian freedom and caused social injustice is a wicked travesty; they should be ashamed of themselves since even secular historians would not affirm this; indeed many historians have praised Calvin, despite not being Christians [e.g. JA Froude].

The citizens of Geneva wept when Calvin died and claimed that they had lost their father; hardly the remarks of repressed subjects of a despot. Claims of his enemies that he had amassed a huge fortune were also found to be lies; he lived modestly, even frugally, and gave money away. There have been few Christian leaders as hard working, caring, godly and humble as John Calvin.

Who was John Calvin? 3: The man.

Contrary to the popular image, Calvin was not a dour legalist without joy, out to place various restrictions on his followers. He was a compassionate and humane person, as his letters demonstrate. Neither was his chief focus in theology the doctrine of predestination, resulting in fatalism. Calvin was dominated by the desire to honour and glorify God in all that he did. In pursuing this course, he was sometimes severe when confronting error, but (in the spirit of the age) it was occasionally necessary to be so forthright. Calvin may not have been as docile as Bucer or as conciliatory as Bullinger, but was in a more severe political position than these, subject to more onslaughts and faced with more theological problems to solve. He longed for unity in the truth.

Contrary to belief, his Institutes are not centred on predestination, but it begins with and sets forth the doctrine of the holy and glorious God, drawing out subsidiary doctrines from this point. Wm. Cunningham called it, 'the most important work in the history of theological science' [*Reformers & Theol of Ref.* 295]. Nor was Calvin's theology contrary to evangelism; indeed he sent out one of the first ever Protestant missionaries to Brazil, and true Calvinism (a term he did not approve of) has always been accompanied by fervent Gospel preaching. Nether were his sermons academic; contrary to contemporary custom he did not read out written sermons, and did not even use notes. His method was to read the text from the original Hebrew or Greek and then comment on it from his vast knowledge to suit the needs of his congregation. Many of his sermons are published and read today, because (unlike other contemporary works) they are interesting and useful; indeed they were the first of the Reformers to be translated and widely distributed. Despite being a brilliant theologian he rather considered himself to be a pastor, called to teach his people the truth as it is found in God's word but with the aid of everyday images, clarity, empathy and spirituality.

That some supposed Christian leaders can call this humble and gracious man 'a despotic tyrant' who repressed Christian freedom and caused social injustice is a wicked travesty; they should be ashamed of themselves since even secular historians would not affirm this; indeed many historians have praised Calvin, despite not being Christians [e.g. JA Froude].

The citizens of Geneva wept when Calvin died and claimed that they had lost their father; hardly the remarks of repressed subjects of a despot. Claims of his enemies that he had amassed a huge fortune were also found to be lies; he lived modestly, even frugally, and gave money away. There have been few Christian leaders as hard working, caring, godly and humble as John Calvin.