

## Calvin: the Unchanged

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*The Unchanged.* I am going to summarize what a pastor I know said about how true Christians are changed when/if they have accepted Christ and then examine lives of a couple of “*the Reformers.*” Did John Calvin, John Knox and Martin Luther demonstrate that they were ever biblically *changed* as a result of being a Christian, that is, a follower of Christ Jesus? It is important to the discussion as they are major influences that so many base their doctrinal beliefs on.

The *Unchanged* person is one who says he's *saved* but people who know them may have some serious concerns about that person's salvation because this person has never been *changed*.

The Unchanged call Jesus "Lord" but in the pattern of their life they don't do the will of the one they call Lord.

*"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"* **Matthew 7:21-23**

My pastor said Jesus never saved anyone that wasn't also changed. The Bible tells us:

*If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.* **1 John 1:6**

If you say you're saved and yet you live like a lost person, not just having a bad day or a bad week *but as the pattern of your life*, then guess what? You're lost. Paul put it this way:

*The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

**Galatians 5:19-21**

If you have these things as the pattern of your life you have not been *justified*. The evidence of our salvation is that more and more you're becoming like Jesus. This is called *sanctification*. My pastor used the tried and true illustration, “*If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, what is it? It's a duck!*” He said, “*If a person walks like a lost person, lives like a lost person, behaves like a lost person... what is he? 'A back slidden Baptist?' No friend, that's a lie that's been told for far too long. 'So brother did they lose their salvation?' No, they never had it to begin with.*”

Next my pastor spoke about the evidence that we're saved. When we were *saved* it is called *justification*. When we get to heaven is *glorification*. But on earth a Christian is to become more

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and more like Jesus which is *sanctification*. Sanctification is the *evidence* that you have been *justified* (saved). Sanctification shows that you have been changed.

From my own notes elsewhere:

**Justification-** is the judicial act of God, by which He wipes away all the sins of those who believe in Christ. Justification removes the guilt and penalty of sin as if they never happened. Justification took place the moment you trusted Christ. Justification means that the guilt or the penalty of sin is removed, not the power of sin in this life.

H.A. Ironside asked, "*What is it to be justified? It is to be cleared of all blame, to be freed from every charge... What is the basis of justification? Jesus' blood! It is because of what He did. It is because of the blood He shed. It is the giving up of His life. It is His life for ours; His holy, spotless life for our sinful, wicked lives.*"

**Sanctification-** is a lifelong process which removes the growth and the power of sin. It is the process of becoming more Christ-like. John Wesley noted that "*sanctification does not lead to spiritual perfection, because we all remain sinners. But at least, the one sanctified consciously, consistently rejects sin.*" His father called it "*the internal witness of the Holy Spirit.*"

My pastor went on to use the example of a man walking into a room and announcing he'd just been hit and run over by an 18-wheeler but did not look too bad with no visible injuries or other evidence of being hit by a semi. We'd look at him and say there was no way that person had been run over by a semi. Why? Because there hadn't been any change; he'd be dead or in a cast, there would be some way to tell. In the same way if a Christian lives like everyone else, if he lives like nothing ever happened and there is no change then... "*no change, no Jesus.*"

*Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.*

John Adams, 'Argument in Defense of the Soldiers in the Boston Massacre Trials,'  
December 1770

Let's examine John Calvin and those Reformers in the *Magisterial Reformation* in general to see if they were changed as a result of being genuine followers of Christ. What kind of change did John Calvin exhibit? That fact is John Calvin never demonstrated any change, he never demonstrated a repentant heart, and as a result he never demonstrated sanctification. (See my notes on *The Golden Rule and Radical Reformation vs. Magisterial Reformation* for specific examples.)

As I have shown elsewhere John Calvin and other reformers had people tortured and killed over both civil and doctrinal issues. In Geneva, John Calvin *irresistibly* forced the residents of Geneva to attend church services and forced them to take the Eucharist/Lord's Supper or suffer severe consequences (isn't it amazing that the entire population of Geneva had been "*regenerated*"?). John Calvin was following Augustine's example of forcing people to participate in the Sacraments. However, the Apostle Paul tells us we should only participate in the Lord's Supper when our heart is right with God. It should be obvious that if you force/compel people to participate in the Church you can't know who is really a believer and who is going through the motions to save their hide. Apparently that was not obvious to John Calvin.

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Defenders of Reformed Theology will tell you, “*Well, a lot of the punishments and executions were pertaining to matters of civil law and didn't involve John Calvin as he was more concerned with theological issues.*” Today many of John Calvin's apologists continue to argue that certain types of executions, such as beheadings were for civil crimes, and burning at the stake, were reserved for theological heresy; and, so, one cannot lay the blame for all the executions in Geneva at John Calvin's feet. John Calvin did attempt on occasion to intercede to have some punishments switched from burning at the stake to the more humane beheading. As I'll explain below John Calvin's efforts to have the type of punishment changed didn't have anything to do with *civil vs. religious* law, or even being more humane. One can make the case that John Calvin had some punishments changed so that he could claim the executions were civil and not religious affairs and thereby exonerate himself from blame. But the fact is, in Geneva, it is impossible to separate John Calvin from religious law and civil law.

Loraine Boettner claims, “*Calvin was the first of the Reformers to demand complete separation between Church and State*”<sup>1</sup>. If separation between church and state existed in John Calvin's Geneva it would have been in theory and exercised for John Calvin's advantage. As John Adams said, facts are stubborn things.

John Calvin was called “*the Protestant Pope*” and the “*Dictator of Geneva*” and with good reason. In his *sovereignty* John Calvin *irresistibly* imposed and *compelled* his brand of “*righteousness*” on *all* the citizens of Geneva. John Calvin was a harsh man who was the first Protestant in Europe “*to impose...a uniform subordination upon an entire populace... With systematic thoroughness, John Calvin set to work for realization of his plan to convert Geneva into the first Kingdom of God on earth... The whole of his life was devoted to the service of this one idea*”<sup>2</sup>.

Philip Schaff tells of a Lutheran minister who visited Geneva, “*When I was in Geneva I observed something great which I shall remember and desire as long as I live... [which was] the weekly investigations into the conduct, and even the smallest transgression, of the citizens.*”<sup>10</sup>

Laurence Vance writes, “*Calvin was involved in every conceivable aspect of city life... He was consulted not only on all important state affairs, but on the supervision of the markets.*”<sup>3</sup>

If someone dared to criticize John Calvin theologically, as Sebastian Castellio did in 1544, Calvin would lodge a complaint with the Geneva civil authorities,<sup>4</sup> again, demonstrating the intimate connection between civil and religious life in Geneva.

One demonstration of John Calvin's micro-management of day-to-day life in Geneva is in 1546 John Calvin drew up a list of names for children inappropriate for baptism mandating that unless a name appeared in the Bible it was unsuitable.<sup>4</sup>

Historian Will Durant wrote:

*"To regulate lay conduct a system of domiciliary visits was established...and questioned the occupants on all phases of their lives... The allowable color and quantity of clothing, and the number of dishes permissible at a meal, were specified by law. Jewelry and lace were frowned upon. A woman was jailed for arranging her hair to an immoral height...*

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*Censorship of the press was taken over from Catholic and secular precedents... To speak disrespectfully of Calvin or the clergy was a crime... Fornication was to be punished with exile or drowning; adultery, blasphemy, or idolatry, with death... a child was beheaded for striking his parents..."<sup>5</sup>*

From the official records of the City Council Stephan Zweig noted:

*"There is hardly a day, in the records of the settings of the Town Council, in which we do not find the remark: 'Better consult Master Calvin about this.'"<sup>6</sup>*

John Calvin was given a "consultant's chair" in every meeting of the city authorities and "when he was sick the authorities would come to his house for sessions."<sup>7</sup>

*"...the sinister power of this zealot extended far beyond the walls of Geneva. The Swiss federated cities regarded him as their chief political member; throughout the western world the Protestants had appointed this "violentissimus Christianus" their commander-in-chief; kings and princes vied with one another in wooing the favour of a militant ecclesiastic who had established in Europe a Church organization second in power only to that ruled by the Roman pontiff. Nothing could happen in the political world without his knowledge; very little could happen there in defiance of his will. It had become as dangerous to offend the preacher of St.-Pierre as to offend emperor or pope..."<sup>8</sup>*

The Geneva Council declared in November of 1552 that Calvin's Institutes were a "holy doctrine which no man might speak against."<sup>9</sup> Clearly there was no separation between civil and religious affairs in Geneva. In addition, criticism of John Calvin's Institutes was considered heresy for which the sentence was death by burning at the stake. A civil crime with a religious punishment.

To claim a difference between *civil* and *theological* governance in Geneva is just a device of John Calvin's defenders to hide his dirty laundry.

John Calvin never showed any evidence of sanctification, he showed no love and mercy to those he didn't like, he never repented of having other Christians tortured and killed. John Calvin does not remotely emulate Jesus, the Apostles or the first century Christians. Changed or unchanged?

Permit me one more illustration.

In the movie *The Godfather: Part III*, Michael Corleone, the Godfather, had been trying for years to get (and stay) out of organized crime and only go into "legitimate" ventures. However, the don had a difficult time doing it. Michael Corleone lamented, "Just when I thought I was out... they pulled me back in." Hearing that Cardinal Lamberto in the Vatican is a good and honest man Corleone visits the Cardinal for advice, and to tell him a legitimate business deal involving the Vatican Bank had gone bad because of unscrupulous people with connections to the Vatican. Cardinal Lamberto listens to Michael. During their discussions Lamberto picks up a stone from a fountain and says, "Look at this stone. It has been lying in the water for a very long time. The water has not penetrated it." Then Lamberto breaks the stone in two on the edge of the fountain. "Look, perfectly dry. The same thing has happened to people in Europe. For centuries, they have been surrounded by Christianity, but Christ has not penetrated. Christ doesn't live within them."

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This particular scene reminded me of John Calvin, not because of Michael Corleone, but because of the stone. John Calvin was surrounded by Christianity, but Christ did not live within him, he was *unchanged*.

*They made their hearts as hard as stone, so they could not hear the law or the messages that the LORD Almighty had sent them by his Spirit through the earlier prophets.*

**Zechariah 7:12**

By the way, John Calvin was not alone in his persecution of those who challenged or questioned him.

**Martin Luther** signed a paper in 1536 that agreed that preachers who questioned basic Christian doctrines and continued to do so under penalty of death, ought to be executed by the state.<sup>11</sup> Regarding the Jews, Martin Luther advised that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings were to be taken from them and safe-conduct on the highways was to be abolished. Jewish rabbis were forbidden to teach on pain of loss of life and limb.<sup>12</sup> And don't think this is not that big a deal today as it transpired nearly 500 years ago. Messianic Christians, Jews who believe that Jesus is the Messiah, will tell you that even today this is one reason why Jews are distrustful of the Gospel and still think today that this is what Christianity represents.

### **John Knox:**

- Went to Geneva three times to study with John Calvin claiming John Calvin's Geneva was "*The most perfect school of Christ that ever was on earth since the days of the Apostles.*"
- In Scotland, John Knox was involved in a successful plot to murder Cardinal Beaton in 1546. The assassination was approved and applauded by Knox, who describes the deed with a gleeful and mocking levity.
- Twenty years later when Queen Mary's counselor was brutally stabbed to death in 1566 Knox stated, "*...the act was most just and worthy of all praise.*"

**Huldrych Zwingli**, the founder of the Swiss Reformed Churches, mercilessly persecuted Anabaptists and other followers of Christ who maintained a nonresistant stance with imprisonment, torture, banishment and death. Under Zwingli's influence, penalties of drowning, burning or beheading were decreed by the (civil) Council.

The guidance of the Holy Spirit and *the living water* of Christianity appears not to have penetrated the hearts of these men. Yet, in justification the following is from a pro-Calvin site:

**JOHN CALVIN: FROM SECOND REFORM IN GENEVA TO DEATH (1541-1564)  
Reformation Men and Theology, Lesson 8 of 11 by Dr. Jack L. Arnold**

*Calvin considered Servetus the greatest enemy of the Reformation and honestly believed it to be the right and duty of the state to punish those who offended the church. This act was based on the Old Testament principle of death for heretics (Lev. 24:16).*

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*Calvin also felt himself providentially called to purify the church of all corruptions, and to his dying day he neither changed his views nor regretted his conduct toward Servetus.*

*We should not be too hard on Calvin in the matter of Servetus, for the spirit of the day among all, except the Anabaptists, whether Catholic or Protestant, was to put heretics to death. The treatment of heretics was an error of the age, and we dare not judge Calvin by our twentieth century standards.*

Sorry Dr. Arnold, John Calvin is not being judged by "our twentieth century standards" as you opine nor should he be judged by "the spirit of the day" as you suggest. John Calvin, as we all are, is judged by the words of Christ Jesus. Jesus and his Disciples are clear on how we should deal not only with our enemies but also how to handle doctrinal issues. Nowhere in the *New Testament* have I found that the use of torture, disemboweling, drowning or burning at the stake were even remotely hinted at much less permitted by Jesus or the early church that, ironically, spread like wildfire without those means.

Dr. Arnold claims "The treatment of heretics was an error of the age." That might be a fair statement if John Calvin had not read the words of Christ Jesus. No, John Calvin is regarded by those in the Reformed Theology camp as a great exegete and as such Dr. Arnold cannot use the lame excuse he suggests, that "everyone else was doing it."

As Dr. Arnold points out, John Calvin "to his dying day he neither changed his views nor regretted his conduct." I have yet to see any evidence that John Calvin ever repented of his acts, but I have read many times where he boasted of them. Again, show me where John Calvin ever "changed" as a result of being a true follower of Christ. If it walks like a duck and it quacks like a duck...

In the Introduction to Chapter I of the *Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (1932), Loraine Boettner wrote that John Calvin, Martin Luther, and Zwingli were, "among the past and present advocates of this doctrine are to be found some of the world's greatest and wisest men." Clearly they neither understood nor practiced the very basics of Christianity. I have to question Boettner if he thinks these were among the world's greatest and wisest men!

Why should I or anyone trust men who don't grasp or implement the clear teaching by Jesus or his Disciples on how we should deal with others? If supposed great exegetes of the Gospel of Christ like Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox or even Augustine before them, can't be trusted to understand and follow the basics of Christianity why should we accept them on basic, but important, doctrine that they have gotten wrong in numerous instances and then used extreme and violent measures to enforce?

*But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable. The priests did not ask, 'Where is the Lord?' Those who deal with the law did not know me; the leaders rebelled against me. **Jeremiah 2:7-8***

Great leaders lead by example. In the case of men like John Calvin should we follow their examples and torture, disembowel, drown or burn at the stake those who we disagree with on doctrinal issues? If not, let's quit ignoring or glossing over their horrible deeds and examples, quit looking to them to tell us what the Bible says.

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*'You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:43-38*

*So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Ephesians 4:17-18.*

### **Invite vs. compel/coerce**

In Geneva John Calvin controlled every facet of civil life and religious life, obviously he believed that if he did not have command of every individual's action that he would lose control and he carried this line of thinking to how he thought God was limited. John Calvin had neither love nor loyalty in Geneva, just fear.

- Jesus invites, the Holy Spirit invites and convicts.
- John Calvin, Martin Luther, John Knox and others coerced with threats of banishment, torture and execution in order to convert.

Why was it, if everything was predestined that Calvin, Luther, and Knox felt the need to coerce people into believing? Surely that had been determined one way or the other by God before the beginning of time.

The problem is not, as Calvin decrees, man's "inability" to believe and accept God's gift of salvation, rather it is man's "unwillingness." This unwillingness is a consequence of free will and not a result of a predestined and preprogrammed action that cannot be deviated from.

The possibility that predestination does not allow for, but free will does, is genuine love. John Calvin decreed that those who love God have no choice, they were predestined to love or reject God, whether they wanted to or not. That is not love, that is a result of being preprogrammed. With free will those who love God, though drawn by the Holy Spirit who approached everyone, do so by their own volition. They have yielded their pride and accepted God's gift of salvation. Without free will to accept or reject there is no genuine love by either party.

Paul tells us in Romans 12:9 that love must be sincere. Which is sincere and genuine love on both the part of God and man? The programmed robot-like love or the true love of someone who has made a conscious decision and forsaken the world and loves God instead?

Which type of love would God prefer? People who loved Him because He programmed them to love Him, or people who love Him because they are sincere and want to love Him?

From Genesis to Revelation God has given us the answer.

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Was John Calvin changed as a result of being a follower of Christ or did he use religion for his own unbiblical purposes?

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