

“JOHN CALVIN: HIS TEACHINGS”

There are two emblems that are often used to represent the teachings of John Calvin. One is three Latin phrases: *sola Scriptura*, *sola gratia*, *sola fidei*. *Sola Scriptura* means “only Scripture.” John Calvin taught that what we can know about God, how we worship God, what God requires of man, how we can be saved can only be found in Holy Scripture. The traditions of men, the pronouncements of a Pope, the utterances of holy men cannot add one iota of true knowledge and in fact corrupt true knowledge when they depart from Scripture. The church may not add any duty to what God has already given in His Word. Neither can they exempt any man from God’s holy commands.

Sola gratia means only grace. Only by the grace of God do we continue to live from one moment to the next. Only by the grace of God are we saved from everlasting punishment for our sins.

Sola fidei means only faith. Salvation comes by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. There is nothing we can do to deserve or earn salvation. Even the faith which saves us is a gift from God.

The other emblem is the acronym T*U*L*I*P.

T – Total depravity. There is nothing good in us until we are saved.

U – Unconditional Election. God has chosen who will be saved.

L – Limited Atonement. The redemption purchased by Christ by His death on the cross was only for those whom God chose for salvation.

I – Irresistible Grace. When God calls a person, he/she cannot resist the offer of the Gospel.

P- Perseverance of the Saints – The elect will persevere to the end.

1. The Church

In the time of John Calvin and Martin Luther, the Roman Catholic Church claimed to be the only Christian Church, the Body of Christ. It taught that only through the Church could you pray to God, have your sins forgiven, and go to heaven. If a baby was baptized by a Roman Catholic priest it was a Christian. Marriage was a Church sacrament.

John Calvin put the theology of the Church in systematic form. He taught that there is a distinction between the invisible church and the visible church. The invisible church is all those, living and dead, who by true faith trust in Christ as Savior and Lord, they are the elect of God.

The visible church can and does include some people whose faith is not genuine and who only pretend to be Christians. There are true visible churches and false churches. The true visible church has the preaching of right doctrine and properly administers the sacraments. It is not a true church because it has officers and members whose morals are perfect. They aren't! Since only God knows whose faith is true, all who profess faith in Christ are included in the visible church unless their morals and conduct deny Christ and are an offense to His name.

Calvin believed that all men must worship God, even though they have not professed faith in Christ. For that reason he strived to require all citizens to attend worship services. He believed that prayer should be simple and not obscured by elaborate rituals. He taught that Christ is present whenever believers meet for prayer. He introduced the practice of congregational singing of the Psalms. The church has pastors, teachers, lay elders, and deacons as its officers. He taught that apostles, prophets, and healers were only in the early church.

2. Church and State

The idea of separation of Church and state does not come from the teachings of Calvin. He believed that the Bible should be the law of a Christian land. It is the responsibility of the Church to teach and interpret the Bible. It is the responsibility of the state to enforce the Bible's commands.

While Calvin was still in his teens, Luther was wrestling with the problem of the peasant wars. Luther had rebelled against the two most powerful institutions of his day, the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire. His success encouraged peasants to begin rioting in various places for changes in the social and economic structure. His teachings concerning "Godly law" led to the conclusion that social structures contrary to God's law did not deserve the allegiance of the people and justified rebellion. When the peasant wars started in 1525 Luther eventually sided with the princes for strategic reasons.

Calvin was faced with Protestants whose persecution in some places included being driven from their homes and burned at the stake. He also had to deal with the Scripture in Romans 13 which begins:

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. (Romans 13:1-2 NKJV)

He forbade Protestants in Catholic-dominated areas from participating in Catholic forms of worship. They couldn't partake of the Catholic Mass or show honor to images because both were an offense to God. Individuals in these areas could not resist persecution with force. Their only alternatives were escape or risk martyrdom. However,

Calvin allowed for resistance to evil rulers by other recognized political authorities. This teaching made the American Revolution different from the French Revolution and helps explain America's intervention in Iraq.

3. Predestination –

The teaching most identified with John Calvin is predestination. The idea did not, however, originate with him. It is found in the Bible and it is thoroughly discussed in the writings of St. Augustine.

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30 NKJV)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, (Ephesians 1:3-5 NKJV)

God is omnipotent, omniscient and holy. He has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. That includes the salvation of those whom He chose in Christ before the foundation of the world. To them He has given the gift of saving faith which they did not deserve or earn. All are sinners and are damned to everlasting punishment. The elect were predestined to be saved from Hell by faith in the sacrifice of Christ.

Calvin was aware of the Scriptures in which man's free will is proclaimed, of God's gracious offer of salvation to whosoever will. He simply would not flinch or ignore the Bible's teaching of predestination just because he couldn't understand how the two could be reconciled.

One point should be emphasized. Both the Bible and Calvin teach that the elect are predestined to be saved. Neither the Bible nor Calvin ever say that the wicked are predestined to be damned.

