

Week 12: Monday April 26, 2021

THE REFORMATION CHURCH (1500–1648) (Cont'd)

Lecture 1

Topic: John Calvin

Due: Gonzalez, 2.77–86

Lecture 2

Topic: John Calvin and his theology

Due: Gonzalez, 2.115–123; 125–134

4. Johann Heinrich Bullinger (1504–75).- Zwingli's successor.

Bullinger was a pupil and friend of Zwingli. He was more moderate, patient, worked better with others, and carried on the work of the Reformation in German Switzerland.

a) His life

Father a parish priest at Canton Argau

Educated: School of the Brethren of the Common Life, in Emerich, duchy of Cleves

University of Cologne: became familiar with the humanists, especially Erasms. Also read Luther and Melanchton.

1529 – succeeded his father in Bremerton.

1523 – returned to Switzerland. Supporter of Zwingli.

1528 – participated in the Berne Disputation

1531 – Lost his fortune in the Second Kappel War, fled to Bremgarten, and then took refuge in Zurich.

1531 – became Zwingli's successor.

b) His contributions.

- (1) He strengthened ties with other Reformed Churches. Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva called Bullinger "the common shepherd of all Christian churches."

—He maintained *correspondence* with Protestant church leaders and Protestant rulers all over Europe.

—He showed *hospitality* to Protestant fugitives who fled persecution (especially from England).

—He was a theological diplomat.

1549 - The “Consensus Tigurinus” - an agreement between Bullinger and Calvin (of Geneva) concerning the meaning of the Lord’s Supper that helped prepare the way for a later union of German-Swiss (Zwinglian) Protestants and French-Swiss (Calvinist) Protestants.

1566 - 2nd Helvetic Confession - an agreement between Bullinger and Theodore Beza united Zwinglianism and Calvinism into one Reformed religious movement. (The agreement was based upon a confession that Bullinger had earlier drawn up as a personal statement of his faith.)

(2) He was a powerful preacher and writer.

—the *Decades* - a collection of 50 sermons in five groups of ten sermons. The collection covered the major points of Christian doctrine and were used in England for many years as a textbook of theology.

(3) He shaped Reformed Theology.

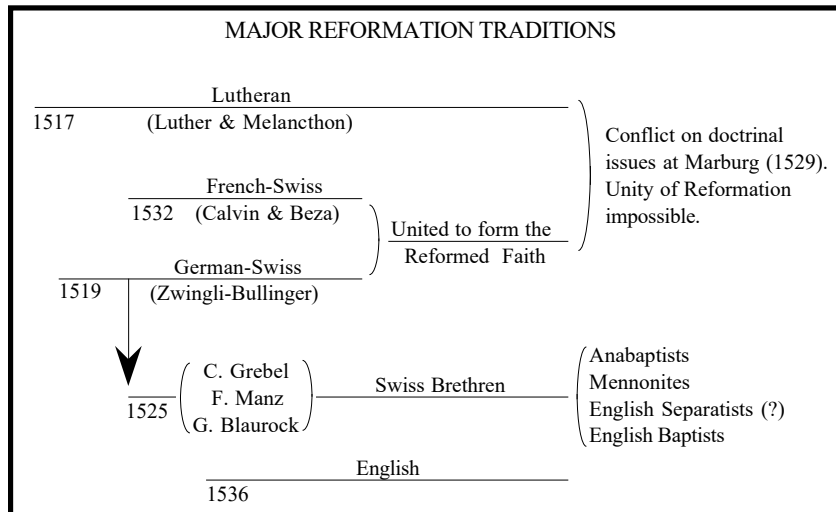
—the idea of a covenant.

—the importance of the sabbath.

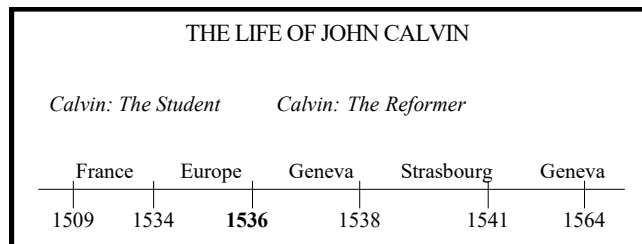
—the centrality of the sovereignty of God.

—moderate Augustinian on predestination, opposed Calvin’s theory of the two polities within the Christian commonwealth

C. John Calvin and the French Swiss Reformation.



1. John Calvin (Jean Cauvin): His life (1509–64).
 - a) John Calvin: His early years (1509–34).



John Calvin, a name that inspires tremendous affection by some, and not so much by others.

- (1) His family.
 - born–10 July, 1509 in Noyon in N. France, in Picardy.
 - father–Gerard, a bishop’s business manager, a lawyer.
 - mother–died in his youth (4 brothers, 2 sisters).
- (2) His education.
 - 1523 - College de la Marche.
 - College de la Montague.

1528 - Paris, transferred to Orlean/Bourge at his father's direction.

1532 – Commentary on Cicero, and Commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia (On Mercy)* when he was only twenty-one.

Parenthesis: Two key support players in the Reformation

N.B. Jaques Lefevre (ca 1455–1536)

- also known as **Lefèvre d'Étaples** or **Stapulensis**¹
- a French Roman Catholic philosopher, biblical and patristic scholar, and humanist.
- taught classics at University of Paris. He held many reformation beliefs, but never thought it necessary to separate from Rome.
- 1492 travelled to Italy and began studying the ancient philosophers (primarily Aristotle) in Rome, Florence, and Venice,
- 1511 from reading the Bible he came to understand justification by faith alone. This he described in his commentary on the epistles of St. Paul
- 1521 condemned for heresy by the Sorbonne, as did the government. He had published two scholarly papers showing that Mary Magdalene, Mary, the sister of Lazarus, and the woman who washed Jesus's feet (Luke 7:37) were different women. Today this is accepted by both RC and Protestants, but it was a new realization in the early 1500s.
- fled to Strasbourg during Francis's imprisonment in Madrid; and was later protected by Queen Marguerite of Navarre, sister of King Francis I, from whom she learned of the biblical truth of justification by faith.
- he had some connection to several of the Reformers: William Farel, John Calvin, Martin Bucer.

N.B. Marguerite of Navarre (1492-1549)

The older sister of King Francis I (reigned 1515–1547) with whom she was very close all of her life. Though he was Roman Catholic, and she was of strong Reformation beliefs.

“My sister Marguerite is the only woman I ever knew who had every virtue and every grace without any admixture of vice.” Francis I

In one of France's many wars, Francis I was defeated, and he was taken captive at the Battle of Pavia (1525) and spent a year in prison in Madrid. The Spanish allowed Marguerite to visit him. He was extremely ill, depressed. Marguerite called the household together to prayer for the king and he recovered to reign another ten years.

¹ F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 596.

She wrote, “I entreat you, Monseigneur, to believe unfalteringly that it is only to test your love for Him and to give you leisure to think about how much He loves you. . . . He has permitted this trial, after having united you to Him by tribulations to deliver you for His own glory – so that, through you, His name may be known and sanctified, not in your kingdom alone, but all Christendom.”²

Marguerite’s spiritual advisor was Jaques LeFevre.

Her husband, King Henry of Navarre, a Roman Catholic who did not share her Protestant faith. She would invite various reformation pastors to preach and hold communion in her chambers. Once Henry interrupted the service, reprimanded her before her guests, and slapped her on the cheek. When she informed her brother, the King of France, Francis ordered out his army to invade Navarre. Henry begged her to forgive him, and he promised to study the teaching of the reformers. He then joined her in her bible studies and protection of the reformers. Though she herself never left the Roman church, she was a frequent correspondent with Calvin, and often interceded with Francis on behalf of the Reformation.

She wrote a collection of religious poems based on the King David’s words, ‘create in me a clean heart, O Lord,’ which was later translated into English by the eleven-year-old Princess Elizabeth in England. Her translation was then bound with an beautiful embroidered cover as a present for her step-mother, the devout Catherine Parr, Henry VIII’s last wife.

(3) His conversion.

“First, when I was too firmly addicted to the papal superstitions to be drawn easily out of such a deep mire, by a sudden conversion He brought my mind (already more rigid than suited my age) to submission [to Him]. I was so inspired by a taste of true religion and I burned with such a desire to carry my study further, that although I did not drop other subjects, I had no zeal for them. (Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*)

I . . . wished to find myself a quiet hiding place—a wish which has never yet been granted for me; for every retreat I found became a public lecture room. When the one thing I craved was obscurity and leisure, God fastened upon me so many cords of various kinds that He never allowed me to remain quiet, and in spite of my reluctance dragged me into the limelight.

I left my own country and departed for Germany to enjoy there, unknown, in some corner, the quiet long denied me.”
—Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*

² Severance, Diana Lynn. *Her-Story: 366 Devotions from 21 Centuries of the Christian Church*. Christian Focus Publications. Kindle Edition.

- b) **John Calvin: His life as a wandering student (1534–36).** The catalyst was Cop's inflammatory speech on All-Saints Day (1533) in Paris.

(In Basel Calvin completed the first edition of the *Institutes*.)

–March, 1536 Calvin published the first edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

The *Institutes* had six chapters:

1. The Law: how it condemns us of our sin, leads to a recognition of our sinfulness, and our need before God.
 2. Faith: discusses the Apostles' Creed, what Christians believe and what Christ did for us.
 3. Prayer: Discusses the Lord's Prayer.
 4. The two true sacraments: The Lord's Supper and baptism.
 5. Why the other five sacraments are false sacraments.
 6. Christian liberty and responsibility to serve God.
- c) John Calvin: His life in Geneva (1536–64).
- (1) His first stay in Geneva (1536–38).

He intended to stay one night, Farel, a fiery red-headed and bearded evangelist, insisted that God wanted Calvin in Geneva, and Calvin relented.

“A short time before, by the work of the same good man [Farel], and of Peter Viret, the papacy had been banished from the city; but things were still unsettled and the place was divided into evil and harmful factions. One man, who has since shamefully gone back to the papists, took immediate action to make me known. Then Farel, who was working with incredible zeal to promote the gospel, bent all his efforts to keep me in this city.

–1538 Tried to get the City council to accept a more disciplined life. This involved three things:

1. Openly immoral were to be excluded from the Lord's Table.

2. Church discipline needed to include the rule of excommunication.
3. Prohibit commerce on Sunday
4. Establish compulsory education,
5. Create a system of charity for the poor,
6. Promotes fair business practices
7. Reform the city's governmental practice.

–The Council refused to accept this. So Calvin and Farel refused to serve the Lord's Supper to anyone. So Calvin was exiled. He was delighted.

–Calvin was criticized for being harsh, unsympathetic, and inflexible.

–Bucer invited Calvin to Strasbourg

(2) His exile in Strasbourg (1538–41).

In Strasbourg Calvin not only preached two sermons on Sundays but lectured every day, while also working on the second edition of his Institutes and a Commentary on Romans. After hearing Calvin preach, the Stordeurs left the Anabaptist congregation and joined with Calvin. Calvin visited with them in their home and nurtured them in the Scriptures.

“Then loosed from my vocation and free [to follow my own desire], I decided to live quietly as a private individual. But that most distinguished minister of Christ, Martin Bucer, dragged me back again to a new post with the same curse which Farel had used against me. Terrified by the example of Jonah which he had set before me, I continued the work of teaching.”

(5) His marriage to Idellette de Bure (1540-1548)

(4) His later years in Geneva (1541–64).

“Afterwards the Lord had pity on the City of Geneva and quieted the deadly conflicts there. I was compelled against my own will, to take again my former position. The safety of that church was far too important in my mind for me to refuse to meet even death for its sake. But my timidity kept suggesting to me excuses of every color for refusing to put my shoulder again under so heavy a burden. However, the demand of duty and faith at length conquered and I went back to the flock from which I had been driven away. With how much grief, with how many tears, and in how great anxiety I went, God is my best witness.”

—the organization of the church - *The Ecclesiastical Ordinances*.

Purpose:

Church offices:

—pastor.

—doctor.

—elder.

—deacon.

—the discipline of the church.

Discipline is “like a bridle to restrain and tame those who rage against the doctrine of Christ; or like a spur to arouse those of little inclination; and also sometimes like a father’s rod to chastise mildly and with the gentleness of Christ’s spirit those who have seriously lapsed.”

—the Michael Servetus episode.

One of the most controversial periods of his life was the condemnation of Servetus and the execution of him by burning him at the stake. But Calvin, like most 16th century Christian leaders, Roman Catholic or Protestant, believed a heretic, one who denied the Trinity, denied the Trinity, denied the deity of Christ, should be punished with death. This belief was almost universally based on the wrong idea, based on the application of the Law to the modern State, as a theonomy. Wrong ideas about both the kingdom and the Law were responsible for the horrible deaths of hundreds of thousands of people during the Middle Ages and up through the end of the seventeenth century.

Calvin:

Whoever shall maintain that wrong is done to heretics and blasphemers in punishing them [with death] makes himself an accomplice in their crime... It is God who speaks, and it is clear what law He would have kept in the Church even to the end of the world... so that we spare not kin nor blood of any and forget all humanity when the matter is combat for His glory. [quoted in J. W. Allen, *History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1951). 81, as cited by Hunt, *What Love is This?* Fn 71, 87)

Calvin wrote in a letter to the Marquis de Poet, high chamberlain to the King of Navarre,

Do not fail to rid the country of those zealous scoundrels who stir up the people to revolt against us. Such monsters should be exterminated, as I have exterminated Michael Servetus the Spaniard.

Two years later Calvin wrote:

“And what crime was it of mine if our Council at my exhortation... took vengeance upon his execrable blasphemies? (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8:690-691)

Calvin gave this account of his last interview with Servetus.

“When [Servetus] was asked what he had to say to me he replied that he desired to beg my pardon. Then I protested simply, and it is the truth, that I had never entertained any personal rancor against him. I reminded him gently how I had risked my life more than sixteen years ago to gain him for our Savior. If he would return to reason I would faithfully do my best to reconcile him to all good servants of God. And although he had avoided the contest I had never ceased to remonstrate with him kindly in letters. In a word I had used all humanity to the very end, until he being embittered by my good advice all manner of rage and anger against me. But I told him that I would pass over everything which concerned me personally. He should rather ask the pardon of God whom he had so basely blasphemed in his attempt to efface the three persons in the one essence, saying that those who recognize God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with a real distinction, created a three-headed hound of hell. I told him to beg the pardon of the Son of God,

whom He had disfigured with his dreams, denying that he came in our flesh and was like us in His human nature, and so denying that He is a sole Redeemer. But when I saw that all this did no good I did not wish to be wiser than my Master allows. So following the rule of St. Paul, I withdrew from the heretic who was self-condemned from (*Hunted Heretic: The Life and Death of Michael Servetus* by Roland H. Bainton, 209–10).

N.B. In my thinking three things ought to be considered when evaluating Calvin's behavior with Servetus.

1. Evaluating him on the basis of Scripture.

In this he is clearly lacking and should stand condemned.

His viewpoint is completely determined by the false understanding of Scripture based on the Origen-Augustine allegorical model which confused Israel and the Church. In this model, the Mosaic Law, and the idea of a theocracy, should be imposed on Church Age governments. The result of this, which had been accepted as valid, legal, and Christian, was that heretics should be executed by fire as that was their future destiny in the Lake of Fire. No one at that time disputed the justness of burning at the stake.

2. Recognizing a fundamental principle of history: it is wrong to judge the values and actions of a person in one century or generation on the basis of the values and mores of a subsequent generation.

Later generations reached a conclusion, based largely on the impact of a more literal interpretation of Scripture, that freedom of conscience applied to all citizens and that it was wrong to execute heretics by capital punishment.

When judged by the standards of the day, as seen in the fact that the four cities that were consulted by the Council of Geneva with the facts, all concurred with their decision that Servetus should be burned at the stake. Even Bucer, Bullinger, and Melancton, the most moderate and least harsh of the Reformers, concurred completely with the decision of the Council to execute Servetus by fire.

*In our day, the "cancel culture" crowd among others seek to judge previous generations by modern standards, which is totally irrational and unfair to expect a sixteenth century or nineteenth century person to subscribe to values hardly imagined by anyone in their day, yet are normative two hundred years later.

3. In my rather short study of the issues I make the following observations.

- a. Most of those who are harshly critical of Calvin at this time are influenced by their rejection of his theology. To a man, the unitarians believe Servetus was unjustly punished because of course, they agree with his heresy.

b. Most of those who are sympathetic to Calvin are those who adhere to his theology and wish to exonerate him of blame.

But even Calvin took responsibility for what took place, even if his was not the final word, and it is clear that even in 1553 the Council did not go along with many of Calvin's recommendations. However, he did have great influence. What is necessary is for the student to read the personal correspondence of Calvin and make their own decision from the primary sources, and not take the word of secondary sources which may have various agendas which may not be obvious to the reader today.

Those sympathetic to Calvin point to the fact that

- Servetus was clearly a heretic and under the laws of both RC and Protestant States heretics were to be burned at the stake.
- Servetus really aggravated the situation and pushed all of Calvin's buttons which is true. He even attempted to bring heresy charges against Calvin.
- Servetus, had already been condemned by a Roman Catholic council in Vienna which condemned him as a heretic to be burned at the stake.
- Calvin tried to intercede to have Servetus executed in a more human way, by beheading.
- Calvin was not in charge in Geneva until 1555 and the Council was still free to ignore his advice and did.

—T. H. L. Parker represents those who are sympathetic to Calvin and how Calvin could justify the state in executing of a heretic.

“Should the State punish heresy as a crime? . . . ‘Is it lawful for Christian princes and judges to punish heretics?’ The purpose of civil government is not only that ‘men may breathe, eat, drink, and be warmed, although I certainly include all these when it provides for human society. But it also exists so that idolatry, sacrilege of the name of God, blasphemies against His truth and other public offences against religion may not emerge and may not be disseminated . . . Finally, that among Christians the public face of religion may exist and among men humanity.’ Thus, it is the duty of the State to establish true religion and to maintain that religion once it is established. The State and its administration are in no way secular or unclean, a neutral or antagonistic realm to the Church. On the contrary, the laws and those who administer them are ordained by God for the economy of his world. The rulers are ministers and servants of God and as such bear the authority not only of an earthly office but of the Lord by whom and for whom they execute their office. Granted that it is the duty of the State to establish and maintain true

religion, what is a government to do if it sees true religion fundamentally attacked? On the toleration or the punishment there will be a difference of opinion between the consensus of opinion in the twentieth century and the consensus of opinion in the sixteenth century. Our imaginations shudder at the terror and agony of the wretched victim. Their sense of order was horrified by the thought of souls destroyed by false doctrine, of Churches torn asunder into parties, of the vengeance of God displayed upon them in war, pestilence, famine.”

d) John Calvin: His last years.

John T. McNeill in *The History Character of Calvinism* (226–27) gives this account of Calvin’s last years and days:

“Amid the excitements of Europe, and of Geneva, he could never experience a life of undisturbed routine. But whatever the day brought, it brought labor. Even while others slept or took their pleasure, he read and wrote and prayed. . . . In his thirties, he became a chronic sufferer from catarrh, asthma, indigestion, and headache. He begins one of his lectures on Amos with the explanation that a point was missed in the previous lecture because headache prevented his seeing the text After 1558, when he had a long illness of quartan fever, he never recovered his strength, and his diseases multiplied. To those mentioned were added not only arthritism ulcerous hemorrhoids, and calculus but also pleurisy leading to malignant tuberculosis. His body was ceaselessly wracked with pain. Well-disposed physicians of Montpellier volunteered to advise him. His letter to them of 8 February 1564 contains a long recital of his symptoms. It is the letter of a dying man objectively reporting his diseases, with no element of emotion except gratitude to his correspondents for their concern to prolong his life.

He did not cease to work to the limit of his strength. When his legs would not carry him to the cathedral, he was carried by others, and continued to preach until 6 February, 1564. His last attendance at church was the following Easter Sunday, 20 April. He received the communion from Beza, who reports that Calvin afterward joined in the singing . . . with faltering voice but joyous countenance. On 27 April he bade farewell from his bed to the members of the Little Council and on the 28th to the ministers of Geneva, recounting to both his aims, his struggles, and his faults. ‘My sins have always displeased me,’ he said, ‘and the fear of God has been in my heart.’ He continued, with great composure, to dictate whenever possible

to his secretary until his speech failed a few hours before his death. His will (25 April) contains a testimony of his personal faith. 'Farewell my best and most faithful brother,' he wrote to Farel (2 May), 'live in memory of our union, which as it was useful to the Church of God, the fruits of it will abide in heaven for us.' Thereafter his voice was heard only in prayer.

2. John Calvin: His writings.
 - a) Biblical commentaries.
Romans–Joshua.
57 vols. of letters.
 - b) *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*.
Dedicated to Francis I.

“One of the few books that have profoundly affected the course of history.” - John T. McNeill.

—First edition (1536) - 6 chapters.

—Fourth edition (1559) - 80 chapters.

Book 1 God the Father,

book 2 God the Son,

book 3 Holy Spirit in terms of His work of creating faith in the hearts of men, and

book 4 on the church.

3. John Calvin: His thought.

- a) The knowledge of God.
 - (1) Scripture and the knowledge of God.

“Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God” (*Institutes* 1, 6, 1).

(2) The authority of Scripture.

“Unless this certainty, higher and stronger than any human judgment, be present, it will be vain to fortify the authority of Scripture by arguments, to establish it by common agreement of the church, or to confirm it with other helps. For unless this foundation is laid, its authority will always remain in doubt. Conversely, once we have embraced it devoutly as its dignity deserves, and have recognized it to be above the common sort of things, those arguments—not strong enough before to engraft and fix the certainty of Scripture in our minds—become very useful aids. What wonderful confirmation ensues when, with keener study, we ponder the economy of the divine wisdom, so well ordered and disposed; the completely heavenly character of its doctrine, savoring of nothing earthly; the beautiful agreement of all the parts with one another—as well as such other qualities as can gain majesty for the writings” (*Institutes* 1, 8, 1).

Scripture is “the eternal and inviolable truth of God”³

“Between the apostles and their successors, however, there is, as I have stated, this difference that the apostles were the certain and authentic amanuenses of the Holy Spirit and therefore their writings are to be received as the oracles of God, but others have no other office than to teach what is revealed and deposited in the holy Scriptures” (IV, viii, 9).

On 2 Tim. 3:16-17 Calvin writes, First, he (Paul) commends the Scripture on account of its authority; and, secondly, on account of the utility that springs from it. In order to uphold the authority of the Scripture, he declares that it is divinely inspired (*Divinitus inspiratam*); for, if it be so, it is beyond all controversy that men ought to receive it with reverence. This is a principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion (*non ex suo sensu loquutos esse*) but that they were organs of the Holy Spirit to utter only those things which had been commanded from heaven. Whoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him, first of all, lay down this as a settled point, that the law and the prophecies are not a doctrine delivered by the will

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997).

of men, but dictated (*dictatam*) by the Holy Spirit... Moses and the Prophets did not utter at random what we have from their hand, but, since they spoke by divine impulse, they confidently and fearlessly testified, as was actually the case, that it was the mouth of the Lord that spoke (*os Domini loquutum esse*)... This is the first clause, that we owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God, because it has proceeded from him alone, and has nothing of man mixed with it” (*nec quicquam humani habe*⁴

On 2 Peter 1:20: ““the beginning of right knowledge is to give that credit to the holy prophets which is due to God... He says that they were moved, not that they were bereaved of mind ... but because they dared not to announce anything of themselves (*a se ipsis*) and only obediently followed the Spirit as their leader, who ruled in their mouth as in his own sanctuary.”⁵

Respecting the four Evangelists he says that God “therefore dictated to the four Evangelists what they should write, so that, while each had his own part assigned to him, the whole might be collected into one body.”⁶

⁴ John Murray, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 17–18.

⁵ John Murray, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 18.

⁶ John Murray, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 19.