

# (Biographies) John Calvin

by John Piper

---

*John Piper explores the centrality and supremacy of God in ministry, using John Calvin as a model, and argues that this is the key to understanding God's nature and character.*

**Duration:** 1:33:15

**Scripture:** Exodus 3:14-15, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Divine Scripture", "Preaching Ministry"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of putting on a tongue, which refers to preaching the word of God. He emphasizes that a settled conviction about the divinity of Scripture should not rest on personal judgment, but on the witness of the Spirit and the Father. The speaker then explores the life of John Calvin, highlighting his dedication to preaching and teaching the Bible. He argues that Calvin's ministry was unleashed by his deep belief in the divine majesty of God's Word, leading him to prioritize preaching as the fullest display of God's glory.

---

## Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from *Desiring God* is available at [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org) I want to begin by directing your attention to the self-identification of God in Exodus chapter 3, verses 14 to 15. You can look at it if you want.

By the way, with regard to the manuscript, as in the last several years, just to spare you the trouble of trying to listen and write at the same time, if you want it, we will put this manuscript in your hands right after this gathering, free of charge, so that you can focus all your energies on listening. And if there's any juicy quote or anecdote that I tell, it'll be on paper, in your hands, five minutes after we're done, and you don't have to worry. You can be thinking about questions you want to ask me at the end, instead of trying to keep track on paper of where I'm going.

Exodus chapter 3, verses 14 and 15. Now, you remember Moses has been called and commissioned by God to go down to Egypt to set the people free and lead them out of bondage. And Moses is frightened, and he says to God that he doubts that he's the man for the job.

And God says to him in verse 12, I will be with you. And then Moses says, when I say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you, they may say to me, what is his name? What shall I say to them? And God's response at this point is, I believe, perhaps the most, at least one of the most important

self-revelations of God in all the Bible. God said to Moses, I am who I am.

And he said, thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, I am has sent me to you. And God furthermore said to Moses, thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, Yahweh, which is simply another form of Ehe. Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob has sent me to you.

This is my name, Yahweh. This is my name forever. This is my memorial name to all generations.

And so it's very clear that the thousand-fold used name of God, Yahweh, in the Old Testament is rooted by God explicitly in the phrase, I am who I am. Yahweh has sent you. Tell them that the most significant thing you can say and the most wonderful thing you can say is that I simply and absolutely am.

Now I begin with this self-designation of God because my unhidden and unashamed aim in this message on John Calvin and in ten years of hosting the Bethlehem Conference for Pastors is to fan a flame in you that you might have a passion for the centrality and the supremacy of God in your ministry. This is not distanced, merely objectified historiography. I have an agenda, a very clear theological sermonic agenda and Calvin is my guinea pig this year.

And it's the same message every year and it hangs on the wall up there and it's written on everything I write and it's what I live for. And so there's no hidden agenda here. My aim is to fan a flame in you that your heart would burn for the centrality and the supremacy of God in ministry.

My heart burns when I hear God say, Moses, tell them I am. Doesn't yours? Tell them I am sent you. My heart just burns when I read that.

I want to get that. I want to see that. I want to taste that.

I want to live that. It burns in me when I think about the absoluteness of the being of God. Never beginning, never ending, never becoming, never changing, never improving to be dealt with on His terms or not at all.

I just tremble inside when I hear God talk like that. So let it hit you brothers. God, this God in whose name this conference exists, this God never had a beginning.

Let it hit you. Everything changes if you see that. This God never had a beginning.

Every kid I've ever had, all five of them, only one's not there yet, at age three asks, where did God come from? That's the biggest question. God came from God. God is.

What a statement. Oh, Calvin. One who never had a beginning, but always was and is and will be, defines all things.

Whether we want Him to be there or not, He's there. We don't negotiate with Him for what we want reality to be. The arrogance of man, all the way God is talked about today.

The arrogance of human beings, as if we can negotiate the kind of God we get. When we come into existence, we stand before God who made us, He owns us. We had absolutely no choice in this.

You have absolutely no choice in whether you come into being and stand before God and reckon with God or not. And no ranting, no raving, no sophisticated doubt or skepticism has any effect whatsoever on the

existence of God. He simply and absolutely is.

Tell them, I am has sent you. If we don't like it, we can change for our joy or we can resist to our destruction. But one thing remains absolutely unassailed.

God is. He just is. You got to reckon with Him or die.

There is no choice. He is there. He's God.

Therefore, brothers, let it hit you. What matters in ministry is God. Above all things, I cannot escape the simple.

I used to think it was something you moved beyond. I cannot escape the simple, obvious truth that God must be the main thing in ministry because God is the main thing in life. And he's the main thing in life because he's the main thing in the universe.

And he's the main thing in the universe because every atom and every emotion and every soul and every angelic and demonic and human being belongs to God, who absolutely is. He created them all. He sustains them all.

He directs them all because, as the apostle says, from Him and through Him and back to Him is everything. To Him be the glory. He absolutely is.

Tell them, I am has sent you. And so, on this tenth anniversary of the Bethlehem Conference for the Supremacy of God in pastors, my desire is as strong as ever that God might inflame in you a passion for His centrality and supremacy in your ministry so that people will say of you, when you are dead and gone, He knew God. He loved God.

He showed us God week in and week out. He was, as the apostle says, filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3.19, make that your prayer like it was the apostles' prayer for the Ephesians.

Now, this is my aim and this is my burden for the Bethlehem Conference and for my life and for this church and for you and for your churches and for the nations because it's implicit in the sheer being of God. It's explicit in the teachings of the Bible from Him, through Him and to Him are all things. In Him we live and move and have our being.

He's the end point. As John MacArthur ended on this morning, the glory of God is where Paul ends it all. He ends it all there every time.

The glory of God. But also, not just those two reasons, but because next year's speaker, David Wells, thank God he said yes finally. I've asked him for year after year after year because I love this man.

Everything he writes I just say, yes David, yes David. And one of the things he said that is so right is, it is this God, majestic and holy in His being, who has disappeared from the modern evangelical world. And then just in the most recent, no it's December, Christianity Today.

Did you read that article by Leslie Newbigin, about Leslie Newbigin? Raise your hand if you read that article. Okay, not many, but it's good. It's a good article.

Do you remember what he said there? He said, I suddenly saw, now this is just David Wells from a British perspective. I suddenly saw, he writes, that someone could use all the language of evangelical Christianity and yet the center was fundamentally the self. My need of salvation.

God is auxiliary to that. I also saw, he writes, that quite a lot of evangelical Christianity can easily slip. Can become centered in me and my need of salvation and not in the glory of God.

And oh have we slipped. How many are the churches today, I ask you, how many churches do you know where the dominant aroma, sound, feel, expression is the preciousness of the weight of the glory of God? How many are there? Now John Calvin saw in his own day the same thing that Leslie Newbigin saw in India and in Britain the last 50 years. And in 1538, the Italian Cardinal Sadole, trying to win back the city of Geneva, which had turned over to the Reformation just before Calvin came, trying to win them back, writing to the city council, had written a long introductory section extolling the preciousness of eternal life before he gets to his vicious criticisms of the Reformation and John Calvin in particular.

Well Calvin was asked to write the response to this in the fall of 1539. He did it in six days. Luther read it and said, here is a writing with hands and feet.

Luther was 25 years older than John Calvin and admired him. Melancthon stood in awe of John Calvin. John Calvin called him the theologian with trembling.

Calvin's response to Sadole is important because you can read it in this book. I recommend that you all have this book in your library. This is a collection.

This is for Luther. Dillenberger did for Calvin what he did for his Luther collection. Get the Luther collection and the Calvin collection.

Then you got everything you need right here. You don't need to buy anything else of John Calvin. You don't need it, but you can if you want to.

I have a few others under here like these. You can read this there that the response to Sadole, one of the first things John Calvin wrote, established him as the reformer of Europe when he wrote it, didn't deal first with justification, didn't deal first with priestly abuses, didn't deal first with transubstantiation, didn't deal first with praying to the saints, didn't deal first with papal authority. All those come in for powerful treatment.

But what he deals with first proves to be, I believe, the integrating issue of his life, the whole explanation of how he got to be who he was and why his theology was what it was, why the world is today what it is under the influence of Calvinism. It is the fundamental issue for John Calvin. It comes out over and over and over again, namely the centrality and the supremacy of the majesty and the glory of God.

For example, he sees in Sadole's puff of piety at the beginning something that Newbigin saw. Here's the way Calvin puts it. Your zeal for heavenly life is a zeal which keeps a man devoted to himself and does not even by one expression arouse him to sanctify the name of God.

Sanctify the name of God. Your whole treatment of eternal life never even got to the main issue of whether going there should be for the glory of God. Calvin's chief contention with Rome comes out in his writings over and over again is that you can take true language and skew it so badly that it loses its whole center and foundation.

What Calvin aims to do is something very different. So he goes on and he says, this is what you should do, Sadole, set before man as the prime motive of his existence, zeal to illustrate the glory of God. Now there's the banner over John Calvin's life, preaching, and theology.

Zeal, there's passion, to illustrate the glory of God. The essential meaning of John Calvin's life and preaching is that he recovered and he embodied a passion for the absolute reality God is and majesty of God. Benjamin Warfield wrote a big book that David Livingston loaned me on Augustine and Calvin.

And it's pretty profound stuff. And he says, no man ever had a profounder sense of God than John Calvin. And that's the key to his life.

No particular doctrine, not predestination, not election, not justification by faith, is the key that unlocks the life of John Calvin. Gerhardus Voss wrote a very powerful essay. You should get Voss's collected shorter writings.

They were called Presbyterian Reform. It was called when it was published in 1980. Maybe it's still there, but you can get it.

And in this essay, he writes about Reformed theology versus Lutheran theology. And he asks, why? What is it about Reformed theology, that is the heirs of John Calvin, that enables that tradition to grasp the fullness of Scripture, unlike any other branch of Christendom? Let me put it in parenthesis here. I argue a lot with Armenians.

And I used to buy the criticism that Calvinists were driven by an ironclad logic and ride rush out over the Scriptures. Never have I seen such a hocus-pocus in my life now that I've spent 20 years on this. It's exactly the opposite in all of my discussions.

This is a system. I give a hoot about systems. I don't care about naming systems.

But this is a theology that has embraced Scriptures. And when you press Scriptures on the Armenians in my denomination, they just go everywhere into philosophies. How can this be? How could God do that? How can this fit with that? How can this... I said, I'm the logic chopper.

Don't talk like that. Text after text. And so, this is true historically.

Whether you met some Calvinist along the way who just argued because, well, if this is true, this has to be true, blah, blah, blah, and never quotes texts. Forget that guy. Go to the Bible.

But historically, this system has been able to comprehend 1 Timothy 2.4, 2 Peter 3.9, Ezekiel 18.33, and many other texts along with all the great Calvinist pillar texts into one authentic, integrated, whole council of God. And Gerhardus Voss is very eager to find out why that is. Why? And here's his answer.

Because, quote, Because Reformed theology took hold of the Scriptures in their deepest root idea. That's why. This root idea, which served as the key to unlock the rich treasures of the Scriptures, was, and then he puts it in italics, the preeminence of God's glory in the consideration of all that has been created.

It's the relentless orientation on the glory of God that gives coherence to John Calvin's life and the Reformed tradition. Voss said, The all-embracing slogan of the Reformed faith is this, quote, The work of grace in the sinner as a mirror for the glory of God. Mirroring the glory of God is the meaning of John Calvin's life.

Mirroring the glory of God. Now, when he gets to justification, which he did very quickly to Sadulei, when he gets to justification, this is what he says, You touch upon justification by faith, the first and keenest subject of the controversy between us. Wherever the knowledge of it is taken away, the glory of Christ is extinguished.

There's the bottom line for Calvin. You don't begin with justification. This is what sets him apart from Luther.

And this is a fundamental, that's too strong a word, a very significant difference in the two traditions as they come down. I mean, these men were eye to eye on the glory of God and the sovereignty of God and the predestination of God and the election of God. Luther and Calvin stood on the same footing, but there was a slight nuanced starting point difference that has, I believe, made a difference in those traditions.

And the glory of God is the starting point for John Calvin and those who have followed in his footsteps. That's the deeper root than justification. For Calvin, the need of the Reformation is this.

This is a quote now from Parker, T.H.L. Parker. Rome, this is his interpretation of Calvin, I think it's right, Rome had destroyed the glory of Christ in many ways. One, by calling upon the saints to intercede when Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man.

Two, by adoring the Blessed Virgin when Christ alone is to be adored. Three, by offering continual sacrifices in the mass when the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross is complete and sufficient. Four, by elevating tradition to the level of Scripture and even making the word of God dependent for its authority on the word of man.

Calvin asks in his commentary on Colossians, How comes it that we are carried about with so many strange heresies? He asks that. And here's his answer. Because the excellence of Christ is not perceived by us.

That's what I was praying about, brothers, at the beginning. Something happened to this man. The excellence of Christ is not perceived by us.

Which means, I believe, that where a passion for the glory of Christ weakens and the center shifts, everything shifts. Which bodes very poorly for us today. In doctrinal faithfulness.

And you can see it. Just think of them. Think of the shiftings that are happening today.

There's a root. It is a marvelous thing. How conserving, as Spurgeon said, how conserving are the doctrines of grace to a hundred other doctrines.

How preservative is an orientation on the absolute supremacy of the glory of God in all things. And when it is forsaken and not talked of much, and in fact seminary teachers will say, I think the love of God should be stressed more. So many things follow right in the train.

It doesn't even take a generation before heresies begin to follow in the train of the loss of the centrality of the majesty and the glory of God. For Calvin, the reformation was needed because the glory of Christ had been extinguished. So the unifying root now, I'm arguing, of Calvin's life and labors is his passion to display God in Christ in his majesty and glory.

When he was 30 years old, he looked to the end of his life and he described an imaginary scene, one of his writings, of himself at the last judgment giving account to God. And this is what he anticipated saying, Oh God, the thing at which I chiefly aimed and for which I most diligently labored was that the glory of thy goodness and justice might shine forth conspicuous, that the virtue and blessings of thy Christ might be fully displayed. Then, 24 years later, one month before he gave an account to the judge in death, he wrote in his last will and testament, I have written nothing out of hatred to anyone, but I have always faithfully propounded what I esteem to be for the glory of God.

That was his estimation, at least, of his writing and his life. Now, here's my question. This is my key question that I want to try to answer and unfold with you.

What happened to him? Because I want it to happen to all of my people. I want it to happen for the joy of all the nations. That's our mission statement up there on the wall.

I want it to happen in your churches or in you if it hasn't happened yet. What happened to John Calvin to make him a man so mastered by the majesty of God? And second part to the question, what kind of ministry did it unleash in Geneva when it happened? So that's my agenda for the remainder of our time together. Let's bring the story from his birth up to where it happened.

He was born on July 10, 1509. Luther has now turned 25. He's lecturing just this year in Wittenberg for the first time in Noyon, France.

He was a Frenchman all his life. Broke his heart that the Reformation was so horribly, brutally persecuted and squelched in France. We know almost nothing of his childhood.

At age 14, his father sent him to study theology at the University of Paris where the Reformation had not touched anybody at that time or was just beginning to. Five years later, he's 19 years old now. He's been studying medieval theology for all of that time as well as some of the basic things that you study as a 14-year-old at the university.

His father ran afoul of the church in Noyon and changed his mind about what his son should study and told him if he wants any support, he should go study law, which he then obediently did. Calvin was all his life long incredibly submissive to authority. We'll hear it with Pharaoh.

We'll hear it with Busser. We know it with his dad and above all with God. He loved the word submit.

He moved to Orleans and Bourget and he finished a law degree and was very good at it. During this time, he mastered Greek because he fell in love with the classics on the side. He was reading Duns Scotus and William of Ockham and Gabriel, Briel, and then Biel and then his father died.

1531, which is a great and transforming thing for him because it freed him to leave law because he didn't like it after he had finished it and returned to his first love, which had become the classics. And so what did he do? Right off the bat, he writes a book called A Commentary on Seneca, 1532. First book he ever wrote at age 23.

But sometime between age 21 and age 23 or 24, the scholars go around on just when and how it happened. Something powerful happened. November 1533, so he's 22 years old now.

What's that? 24 years old, born 1509. Nicholas Copp, a very good friend of his, gave the opening sermon at the ceremonies at the University of Paris and it sounded so Luther-like that the authorities of the university immediately called him in for interrogation and he escaped Paris and France barely with his life. And what we find is that Calvin escapes with him.

And suddenly, on the pages of history, Calvin's a reformer. And the question is how he got to be that way. And many scholars believe he wrote the sermon that Nicholas Copp delivered.

Francis I, the king of France, called a persecution on the cursed Lutheran sect in Paris and Calvin and many of the others had to leave. So what happened? Calvin recounts, he's writing seven years later now on his conversion. He writes that he struggled to live out his traditional Catholic faith, just like Martin Luther, sounds a lot like Luther, when you read this passage in the preface to the Psalms.

And then he says, When low, a very different form of doctrine started up. Not one which led us away from the Christian profession, but one which brought it back to its fountain, to its original purity. Offended by the novelty, I lent an unwilling ear and at first I confessed strenuously and passionately resisted to confess that I had all my life long been in ignorance and error.

I at length perceived as if light had broken in upon me. That's a very important phrase in the Institutes, keep it in your mind. As if light had broken in upon me.

You know, that I had been in a sty of error. I had wallowed and how much pollution and impurity I had thereby contracted. Being exceedingly alarmed at the misery into which I had fallen as duty bound, I made it my first business to betake myself to thy way, O God, condemning my past life, not without groans and tears.

But by a sudden conversion, subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame. Having thus received some taste, another crucial phrase, and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with an intense desire to make progress. Now, that's the end of his quote.

What was the foundation of Calvin's faith that yielded a life of devotion to displaying the glory of the majesty of God? And I believe the answer is that Calvin suddenly, as he said, saw and tasted in scripture the majesty of God. He suddenly, as it were, by a miracle, saw and tasted the majesty of God in his word. Two things.

He saw God and he saw it in his word. These things were powerfully conjoined. And thus the scriptures and God were simultaneously self-authenticated for Calvin.

Which becomes very crucial in the way he unfolds this matter. Now, how did this happen? This is extremely, extremely important. And I'm going to use the institutes, books, book 1 and chapters 7 and 8. They are the key books on how you come to a saving knowledge of God in the scriptures.

And you all read these chapters, probably, because they are the key chapters that every student is assigned to read on the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. And here I wrestle with, because I have not appreciated, I don't think to the degree that I should, Calvin's teaching on this until recent years and even recent weeks, I would say. As I've really wrestled more than anything else with this issue right now that we're addressing.

How did John Calvin come to a saving knowledge of God such that he was devoted for the rest of his life to the majesty of God and the glory of God and wrote the way he did and preached the way he did? His answer in this part of the institutes is the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. For example, he says in book 1, chapter 8, paragraph 13, and I see at least one person has the volume back there looking up the text. Scripture will ultimately suffice for a saving knowledge of God only when its certainty is founded upon the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit.

So two things came together for John Calvin sometime between 21 and 24 in his life. Scripture and the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit. Neither alone suffices.

Scriptures do not save and the Holy Spirit does not save. Alone. But how does it work? This is what I've got to get.

I feel like I've got to get this. What does the Spirit do? The answer is that he does not add revelation. Like, he doesn't sow the thought, this Bible is the word of God.

I'm telling you it is, so believe it. And then you look at the Bible and it says, he said you're the word of God, and so I've got to believe you. That's not the dynamic.

It's not that the Holy Spirit adds a sentence that you then bank on and go to the Bible with that sentence. Rather, this is my effort now, and we can talk about this in the question and answer time. The Holy Spirit awakens us, awakens us, gives life to us, opens the eyes of us, from death and blindness and dead taste buds, to see and taste the divine reality of God in the Scripture, which authenticates it as God's own word.

He says, quote, our heavenly Father, revealing his majesty, key phrase, revealing his majesty in Scripture, lifts reverence for Scripture beyond the realm of controversy. Close quote. Now here's a key for Calvin.

The witness of God to Scripture is immediate, unassailable, life-giving revelation to the mind of the majesty of God in the Scriptures themselves. Over and over again in his description of what happens in coming to faith, you see his references to the majesty of God revealed in Scripture, vindicating Scripture. The majesty of God revealed in Scripture, vindicating Scripture.

So already the dynamics of his conversion was or were the central passion of the rest of his life, namely the majesty of God. Now we've got to go deeper here. We still don't have it yet, I don't think.

We haven't gotten to the bottom of how this works. If we go a little bit deeper, I think we will see clearly why this conversion resulted in an invincible constancy in this man's life, in a lifelong allegiance to the majesty of God through incredible suffering and persecution and difficulty. The words that take us deeper are these.

First, this is 1, book 7, paragraph 5. Therefore, illumined by the Spirit's power, we believe neither by our own... Now that just blew me away for years. I used to scoff at that in seminary. You don't even know what I'm saying because I didn't finish the sentence.

Therefore, illumined by the Spirit's power, we believe neither by our own or anyone else's judgment. And I used to laugh and say, well, if I don't believe by my own, pray tell, whose do I believe by? I mean, what else is there for me to believe with but my judgment and anybody else's judgment? A teacher or the church. I mean, what's left? I mean, this is a baffling sentence.

Note this. The Institutes were written, 1st edition, 1536. They went through five rewritings and enlargements to 1559.

These are not throwaway sentences. Okay, read it again. Therefore, illumined by the Spirit's power, we believe neither by our own nor anyone else's judgment that Scripture is from God.

But, here comes the alternative, above human judgment. We affirm with utter certainty, just as if we were gazing upon the majesty of God Himself, that it, the Scriptures, has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men. That was an unintelligible sentence to me for years.

And only recently has, I believe, God granted me some light to know my own experience. And Calvin's. And you know where it's come from? The Bible.

And I direct your attention, if you want to open your Bible, to see what I have been wrestling with, to 1st John, chapter 5. It is amazing to me, and I would scold him, that in books, book 1, chapter 7 and chapter 8 of the Institutes, Calvin never, except in my mind two places, and they're weak, based what he says on Scripture. Explicitly. But all the implicit Scripture that's there, I believe now, having seen links with 1st John 5, 7 to 11.

So I want to read these verses with you, and see if lights don't go on for you the way they've been going on for me, just in coming to terms with what this man meant by the internal testimony of the Spirit, whereby we come to a settled conviction that God is speaking in the Bible, and therefore in His majesty is to be trusted and lived for. Verse 7, 1st John 5. It is the Spirit who bears witness. Now, okay, that's all over the place in the Institutes, book 1, chapter 7. The Spirit who bears witness.

Because, and here's an unintelligible phrase, almost, the Spirit is the truth. John MacArthur, preach on that for me. I don't know what that means.

The Spirit is the truth. The least it means is, they're inseparable. The Spirit is the truth.

Now I'll drop down to verse 9. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God, now that's the same as the witness of the Spirit in verse 7, I believe, the witness of God is greater. Now see, I think Calvin, if he were reading and expositing this right now, would say, when it says witness of men, it means me and you. My judgment and your judgment.

My capacities to see things and draw conclusions from them, and your capacities to see things and draw conclusions from them. If we receive that kind of witness from ourselves and from others, the witness of God is greater. 4. The witness of God is this.

Then you get some of this Johannine talk that's so provocative and baffling. That He has borne witness concerning His Son. The witness is this.

He has borne witness concerning His Son. Okay, I thought you were going to tell me how He witnessed. Tell me how He witnesses.

Tell me the experience you're talking about here. What's the experience of the witness of the Spirit? The witness of God. And now I believe verse 11 does that.

It's the way I see it now. The witness is this. That God has given us eternal life.

The witness is the giving of life. That caused lights to go on everywhere for me in recent weeks. Let me tell you how I connect it with Calvin now.

I believe Calvin did what I'm doing right now. I believe he poured over these verses as well as many others in coming to an understanding of the internal testimony of the Spirit and how it brings you to a settled conviction of the majesty of God in Scripture and thus the divinity of Scripture. I think what he would say is if you base your convictions about Scripture on a series of logical inferences drawn from observations even he would say the indicia, the majesty of Scripture itself.

Finally your faith rests on man. That's what he says. Baffles me.

He says that even the list in the Westminster Catechism I know it was written later, but he lists them all. They got them from him. That list in the 41st question or wherever it is where it says how shall we know that the Scriptures are of God and it says the Scriptures bear witness that they are of God by and then it lists six things that you behold in Scriptures their unity and their the uniformity of parts, you know what they are.

Calvin says even if they inspire reverence in you that's your judgment. I said, what are you leaving me with? You know what he's leaving me with? The miracle of verse 11. Lazarus heard a witness in the tomb and he did not infer that he was alive from any prior observation.

I think that's exactly what Calvin means. I can't make sense out of not by your own judgment any other way than to say Calvin means that a miracle happens when God stands forth in His Holy Word and awakens the soul as from death immediately. No chain of reasoning, but immediately like Edward says and Calvin does too only he doesn't use the word honey, he says black and white he says, how do you prove black is not white? Just look at it! And Edward said, how do you prove to anybody honey is sweet? There's no inferences involved.

Put on a tongue, if you don't get it, I can't do anything for you. This is awesome to me because the implications of this for me in the way I do evangelism and the way I preach and where my faith settles and what I think of apologetics which I do not jettison, I don't believe in fact, read chapter 8 after he shoots all the legs out from under arguments he spends chapter 8 giving arguments nevertheless, to perceive that a settled conviction about the divinity of the majesty of God in scripture rests on not your judgment nor another person's judgment but on something above judgment what?

The closest I can get biblically is verse 11 where this is the witness this is the witness of the Spirit this is the witness of the Father this is the witness of God God gives life and when you have life you breathe you see, you taste and it's there and you can't ever turn from it again and I've walked to this church a thousand times across the bridge from where I live in the last 16 years and year in and year out the seasons come and the seasons go and I watch the leaves come out on the tree and I watch this magnificent tree over there just down 12th street that's about as tall as this room here and I imagine sap getting up there somehow and a little leaf springing out up there in the same perfect magnificent shape to do whatever green stuff is supposed to do to make life in that tree and I make no inferences I feel God you could put a bullet to my head and say, deny that that's God and all I could say is, shoot me dead and at the judgment you know what I expect to hear?

I expect to hear Jesus call Professor Hawking over and call me up and he say, John, tell him about the tree tell him about the tree and I'll tell him about the tree and God will cause him to see at that moment

what a folly to deny God but what I, you see what I meant earlier was this is helping me understand me and what God's done with me I grew up in a Christian home I know why I believe why do I believe? I always believed and now my experience of general revelation and my experience of God in the scriptures that I simply absolutely cannot deny cannot escape as much as I often was tempted to try my oh my I'm going to totally get out of hand here that was one page out of thirty what am I going to do? here's the way J.I.

Packer here's the way J.I.

Packer put it Packer is very helpful on this issue see if this isn't almost the same as what I'm saying I hope it is because I want somebody to agree with me because this is so fresh for me if I'm right on the way I understand Calvin here Packer, quote the internal witness of the spirit in John Calvin is a work of enlightenment whereby through the medium of verbal testimony the blind eyes of the spirit my spirit are opened and divine realities come to be recognized and embraced for what they are this recognition Calvin says is as immediate and unanalyzable as the perceiving of color or taste by the physical sense an event about which no more can be said than that when appropriate stimuli were present it happened and when it happened we know it happened period, close quote I think that's

what I'm saying and that's Packer's interpretation of John Calvin and that's my explanation in answer to my first question so I'm at the end of question number one what happened to John Calvin between the ages of 21 and 24 that bound this man heart and soul to the majesty of God not aloof out there somewhere but in the Bible such that he lived Bible for the supremacy and majesty of God and my answer has been his own exposition of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit in chapter seven and eight of book one is autobiographical though he doesn't say so now here's the second part of my question and I'm somehow going to have to figure out how to shorten this down what kind of ministry does that unleash what does it look like what do you do with your life if you have had that happen to you

and you now believe that the majesty of God is what the Bible is about the majesty of God is where you what you find in the Bible and where you meet the majesty of God is in the Bible what happens to you Calvin thought he was cut out for a literary life he was cut out for a literary life and many of you are cut out for literary lives and he he was forbidden to lead a literary life let's let's take his life a little farther he escapes from Paris he leaves France entirely he spends two years of exile in Basel Switzerland to redeem the time what would you do if you were running from your life from King Francis I in Basel and you had just had this happen to you and you were hiding in an underground what would you do you know what he did he learned Hebrew it's never too late brothers get

yourself exiled for a couple of years and March 1536 he published here's another thing he did on the side he wrote the Institutes first edition little teeny book 26 years old went through five enlargements why did he write the Institutes I want to change your perception of this thing here why did he write this what drove these two volumes here's what it was he tells us we don't have to leave any question about it but lo while I lay hidden at Basel and known only to a few people many faithful and holy persons were burned alive in France it appeared to me that unless I opposed the perpetrators to the utmost of my ability my silence could not be vindicated from the charge of cowardice and treachery this was the consideration which induced me to publish my Institutes of the Christian Religion

it was published with no other design than that men might know what was the faith held by those I saw basically and wickedly defamed close quote so when you hold the Institutes in your hand sure it's

controversial sure it's got all kinds of polemical language in it but know that the seed of it was the blood of French young pastors who had fallen in love with the gospel the furnace of burning flesh is the forge of the Institutes of the Christian Religion would I'm tempted to say and will say would more were at stake for us today in doing theology we'd do it differently wouldn't play 1536 France gives a temporary amnesty to all these guys who ran away Calvin goes back for a few months to settle his accounts get his brother Anton and Marie and he leaves forever never to return but something

awesome happens you all know this story but oh is it important historically is so important he says I'm off to Strasbourg I know what I'm wired to do I'm gonna go there and be safe, secure, comfortable and easy and write books to defend the gospel till I die someday in ease in Strasbourg well there happens to be a war going on between Charles V and Francis I and the troops are moving on the road between Paris and Strasbourg and so he takes a detour a detour through Geneva detour ha he says it's exactly the same as and behold Caesar Augustus declared a tax why? well just to get a virgin from Nazareth to Bethlehem that's why that's why these that's why these troops were in the way to get Calvin to Geneva don't doubt that one minute of course there are 10,000 other things God was doing just

like you know why you came to this conference? or why we held this conference? so that a maid over at the Holiday Inn would be saved that's why so that a van driver would hear the gospel that's why and 10,000 other reasons nobody ever thought of we're here that God's doing okay he goes to Geneva one night William Farrell firebrand of the Reformation in Geneva finds out that he's there and he comes to him and this is what happened let's let Calvin give us the words this time Farrell who burned with an extraordinary zeal to advance the gospel immediately learned that my heart was set on devoting myself to private studies for which I wished to keep myself free from all other pursuits and finding that he he gained nothing by entreaties he proceeded to utter an imprecation that God would curse

my retirement and the tranquility of my studies which I sought if I should withdraw and refuse to give assistance in Geneva when the necessity was so urgent by this imprecation I was so stricken with terror that I desisted from my journey which I had taken so I told you he believed in submission this happened again later on so the course of his life is forever turned by this providence of going through Geneva and 48 volumes later of books and tracts and sermons and commentaries and letters we thank God for this providence he took up his responsibilities as professor of sacred scriptures first in Geneva in 1536 and then in four months he became the pastor one of the pastors of Saint Peter's or Saint Pierre's however you want to say it in Geneva it was one of three parishes there were

10,000 people in the city so you can see how roughly it was divided up 3,000 people or so he'd be responsible for with the other pastors there and then lo and behold because he and Farrell are such hotheads and firebrands and believe in the gospel and the church and the city council isn't that far along he and Farrell get banished out of the city April 1538 and he is relieved done with that city because it was nothing but trouble anyway wanted to die a thousand deaths he said remember I told you last night at the banquet how he wanted to die every day and so he's glad now he's off to Strasbourg and lo and behold Martin Busser who's ministering to the poor French refugees in where is he Strasbourg yeah he Calvin went to Basel now Busser comes to get him and here's what Calvin wrote that

most excellent servant of Christ Martin Busser employing a similar kind of remonstrance to Farrell and protestation as that which Farrell had recourse to before drew me back drew me to the new station alarmed by the example of Jonah which he set before me I still continued in the work of teaching meaning I went with him and became professor of New Testament there and became the pastor of 500 French

refugees for the next three years of his life now probably the most important thing about those three years in Strasbourg before he goes back to Geneva is maybe the Romans commentary maybe the second edition of the Institutes but it's probably Idelette his wife she was an Anabaptist believe it or not he had no truck for the Anabaptists at all and she married one and her husband Jean died and he

married her in August 6th of 1540 and she had two children and the daughter came along with them back to Geneva and eventually broke Calvin's heart because she got involved in an affair and they were married then for nine years more about that in just a minute May 1st 1541 the city council changes its mind we've really blown it because we sent away John Calvin William Ferrell let's get them back and so he agonizes through this decision again and he goes back and stays there for the rest of his life which is not very long 23 more years and he dies when he's 54 years old you keep your bow strong like he did and you won't live beyond 54 probably Tuesday September 13 1541 he entered Geneva for the second time to serve that church until he died his first son is born July 28 42 he dies in two

weeks and two other children die in childbirth and then she never recovers and nine years later Adelette Calvin dies and he never remarries so there's this season of great heartache in his life all of his children die his wife dies he never remarries he writes to Viret you know well how tender or rather soft my mind is had not a powerful self-control been given to me that's an understatement had not a powerful self-control been given to me I could not have borne up so long truly mine is no common source of grief I have been bereaved of the best companion of my life of one who had it been so ordained would have willingly shared not only my poverty but even my death during her life she was the faithful helper of my ministry from her I never experienced the slightest hindrance she was never

troublesome to me throughout the whole course of her illness but was more anxious about her children than herself as I feared these private worries might upset her to no purpose I took occasion three days before she died to mention that I would not fail in discharging my duty towards her children he never remarried and oh it is good that he did not because the life he then led would have been a disappointment to any woman listen to this summary of it from Caledon who was a contemporary Calvin for did not spare himself at all he wrote working far beyond what his power and regard for his health could stand he preached commonly every day for one week in two and twice every Sunday or a total of ten times every fortnight every week he lectured three times in theology he was at the consistory

on the appointed day and made all the remonstrances every Friday at the Bible study what he added after the leader had made his declaration was almost a lecture he never failed in visiting the sick in private warning and counsel and the rest of the numberless matters arising out of the ordinary exercise of his ministry but besides these ordinary tasks he had great care for believers in France both in teaching them and exhorting and counseling them and consoling them by letters when they were being persecuted and also in interceding for them yet all that did not prevent him from going on working at his special study and composing many splendid and useful books Wolfgang Musculus called him a bow always strung to his great destruction Caledon said for many years with a single meal a day he

never took anything between two meals his reason was that the weakness of his stomach and his migraine headaches could only be controlled he found out by experiment through continual abstinence but on the other hand he was apparently very careless of his health working night and day scarcely without a break scarcely without sleep and to show how driven the man was he wrote to Fellay in 1546 apart from the sermons and the lectures now let me read it all apart from the sermons and the lectures there is a month gone by in which I have scarce done anything in such wise I am almost ashamed to live this

useless life now he's talking 20 sermons and 12 lectures in that month to get a clear picture of his ironed constancy through it all on behalf of the majesty of God we need to hear about his

sicknesses just a little bit just briefly here he wrote to his physicians when he was 53 years old I'm 51 so I can resonate what that age would be like and described his colic his spitting of blood his ague his gout in the feet his excruciating suffering from hemorrhoids and worst of all he says the kidney stones quote they gave me such exquisite pain at length not without the most painful strainings I ejected a calculus which in some degree mitigated my sufferings but such was the size of it that it lacerated the urinary canal and a copious discharge of blood followed the hemorrhage could only be arrested by an injection of milk through the syringe I have a separate paper here that I wrote along the way called the barbarity of the age of John Calvin because I thought I was going to talk

about Michael Servetus and you're all waiting for me to get there and I'm not going to say a word about it until you ask me about it in the question and answer time but the barbarity of this age you gotta feel from quotes like that we can come back to that later not only the physical sufferings but the threats to his life were just unbelievable just imagine Francis I and King Charles and they're in Winona, Minnesota say 50 miles away or so and within a half an hour they can be here and this is what he wrote to Melanchthon whence you may conclude he said that we have not only exile to fear but all the most cruel varieties of death are impending over us for in the cause of religion they will set no bounds to their barbarity that's why Saul wanted his armor bearer to kill him Calvin knew

what would come if the army did what it could do and he ministered under that kind of pressure not only that he was surrounded by enemies they shot muskets over his house at night the mobs would shout out you come out of there we're throwing you in the river tomorrow morning on your way to the Lord's house the libertines were his biggest ache probably they were the contemporary Corinthians who boasted in their immorality in every city in Europe in those days men had mistresses it was regulated in Geneva you could only have one mistress and that's the town that he came to and years after he had been preaching there these libertines had now gotten into the church and discovered some neat Pauline ways to justify the communion of saints which meant wife sharing for the libertines in his

church and so they caused endless grief for him and not just in the way you might think but in very severe life threatening ways let me tell you one little story here to show you the commitment to the majesty of Christ and the crisis that he faced week after week in this city the city council in Calvin's view had no jurisdiction over excommunication Calvin was the great deliverer of the church from state control believe it or not the consistory of elders and pastors excommunicated well the crisis came when this Berthollet fellow who was a libertine was excommunicated for his sexual immorality by the consistory of the church of St.

Peter's and he appeals his case to the city council and they overturn it and say he can go to communion Calvin says he writes a letter to Viret I took an oath that I had resolved rather to meet death than profane so shamefully the holy supper of the Lord my ministry is abandoned if I suffer the authority of the consistory to be trampled upon and extend the supper of Christ to open scoffers I should rather die a hundred times than subject Christ to such foul mockery so here comes the Sunday morning and Berthollet not only has himself but many libertines with him in the congregation and Calvin knows they're there and he knows the city council is watching and the whole Genevan reformation probably is at stake in 1553 so here's the report taken from Biza who wrote the first biography quoted

in I forget what book I got it from the sermon had been preached the prayers had been offered and Calvin descended from the pulpit to take his place beside the elements at the communion table the bread and wine were duly consecrated by him and he was not ready to distribute he was now ready to distribute them to the communicants then on a sudden a rush was begun by the troublers in Israel in the direction of the communion table Calvin flung his arms around the sacramental vessels as if to protect them from sacrilege while his voice rang out through the building these hands you may crush these arms you may lop off my life you may take my blood is yours you may shed it but you shall never force me to give holy things to the profaned and dishonor the table of my God and after this says Biza

the sacred ordinance was celebrated with a profound silence and under solemn awe all present felt as if the deity himself had been visible among them now the point of that in all of this talk about his sufferings physically his threats politically is simply to illustrate his unwavering allegiance to the majesty of Christ in the word, in the table against all odds and I believe that the experience that he had with God's majesty in the scriptures yielded this constancy there had been a supernatural inward testimony to the majesty of God in scripture he could not escape it and this word was therefore God's word and now he would live for this God and this word all his life no matter what now let me see how much time I should take here and decide what to do here I'll try to wrap it up in a few

more minutes his view of scripture which defined the remainder of his ministry was very high he said we owe to the scripture the same reverence which we owe to God because it proceeded from him alone and has nothing of man mixed with it his own experience had taught him quote, the highest proof of the scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it those were the incontrovertible truths for John Calvin the scriptures were the voice of God God vindicates God by bringing us to life by his majestic witness we see him in his scriptures and he and they then become authoritative immediately for our lives and what kind of life is born for Calvin it was a life of invincible constancy in the exposition of scripture tracks, institutes, commentaries commentaries on every

New Testament book except Revelation numerous Old Testament books but all of it all of it including these two books here is exposition of scripture Dillenberger says Calvin assumed that his whole theological labor was the exposition of scripture he wrote at the end of his life I have endeavored both in my sermons and also in my writings and commentaries to preach the word purely and chastely and faithfully to interpret his sacred scriptures everything was exposition of scripture that was the kind of ministry that was unleashed by his experience and preaching then became the main vehicle Emile I'm not sure how to pronounce his French name Dumergue or whatever Americans say if he read it he's the main biographer six volumes on the 400th anniversary of John Calvin standing in his own pulpit

in Geneva wrote that is the Calvin who seems to me to be the real and authentic Calvin the one who explains all others Calvin the preacher of Geneva molding by his words the spirit of the reformed of the 16th century Calvin's preaching was of one kind and it never ever changed it was sequential expository preaching through book after book after book on Sunday morning he always took New Testament afternoon New Testament sometimes a psalm on Sunday during the week three times always Old Testament there are only fewer than half a dozen instances where he broke pattern for any church year event so Don Whitney if you wonder what to do on Christmas preach on Deuteronomy 29-23 or whatever happens to be next that's what Calvin did every Easter every Christmas he plowed right on through with fewer

than half a dozen exceptions now to give you an idea picture this it's August 25th 1549 and he begins a series of messages on the book of Acts we know this because that was the first time when he had a stenographer who was taking down his sermons he preached totally without notes and without anything straight from the Greek and straight from the Hebrew right there in front of him he begins Acts on August 25th 1549 he ends Acts on Sunday morning in March 1554 so from 49 to 54 he's preaching on Acts straight through and then after that he picks up Thessalonians 46 sermons Corinthians 186 sermons Pastorals 86 sermons Galatians 43 sermons Ephesians 48 sermons until May of 1558 when he has to quit for half a year because he's sick as you can well imagine he might be with the relentless

schedule that he's kept he begins then in 1559 the harmony of the Gospels and he dies while he's doing it in 1564 now during that time during the week he's preaching 159 sermons on Job 200 on Deuteronomy 353 on Isaiah 123 on Genesis and so on the numbers are phenomenal the point is this is no accident he chose to do this here's the story that I love that shows how completely self-conscious he is in this on Easter day 1538 he's banished out of Geneva that first time remember he's been preaching for about a year he's banished for three years to minister in Strasbourg they call him back he comes back in September 1541 and walks into the pulpit and picks up at the next verse and he he comments on the fact that he wanted them to know that it was just an interlude in his exposition of the word

of God why I'm closing now with these last three answers very short answers to the question why that kind of preaching Luther didn't do that Luther preached the gospel and the epistle Spurgeon didn't do that shame on Spurgeon maybe or maybe not why did he do it this way three possible reasons number one Calvin believed the lamp of the word had gone out in Europe the word had been taken away here's what he said he's confessing his own sin to the Lord he says thy word which ought to have shown on all thy people like a lamp was taken away or at least suppressed as to us and now oh Lord what remains to a wretch like me but earnestly to supplicate thee not to judge according to my deserts that fearful abandonment of thy word from which in thy wondrous goodness thou hast delivered me so you

feel in his conversion the horror he felt he saw by the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit the majesty of God revealed in the word and he looked across the church and he said what a fearful abandonment of the holy precious word and his whole life then became I am going to lay this word out every day for the rest of my life it is so precious that's reason number one so number two T.H.L.

Parker says Calvin had a horror of those who preached their own ideas in the pulpit oh we need that horror today he says Calvin says when we enter the pulpit it is not so that we may bring our own dreams and fancies with us so evidently he believed that the best safeguard against bringing my fancies into the pulpit is to systematically work my way through God's ordered inspired majesty revealing word finally the third reason brings us full circle back to the majesty of God in the word he really believed that when the word was faithfully expounded God in his majesty stood forth in the congregation listen to this great exhortation to you from Calvin let the pastors boldly dare all things by the word of God let them constrain all the power glory, excellence of the word to give place to and

to obey the divine majesty of this word let them enjoin every one by it from the highest to the lowest let them edify the body of Christ let them devastate Satan's reign let them pasture the sheep kill the wolves instruct, exhort the rebellious let them bind and loose thunder and lightning if necessary but let them do all according to the word of God in other words the key phrase there is the divine majesty of his word Calvin believed that if his goal in life was to illustrate the glory of God and if the glory of God is uniquely and self-authenticatingly revealed in the word of God then the full display of the word would be the fullest

display of the glory I think that's the way he reasoned in my own personal conviction when I ask myself the question can it be done any other way besides

preaching? how about just teaching with an overhead? how about small group discussions? how about lectures? how about books? how about computer CDs sent to China? what's to become of preaching? and this is my conviction I don't know what Calvin would say but I'm a preacher and I have to believe in what I'm doing and so I want to know why I am so drawn to do it and I believe the answer is nothing will ever replace preaching and the reason I believe that preaching uniquely not teaching per se not reading the bible per se but preaching to the congregation over a text will always be there is because God means for himself in the fullness of his glory to be extolled and glorified and honored and cherished and something about that event of worship beckons for more than analysis it beckons for

more than explanation it beckons for expository exaltation that's what I like to call it preaching is the worshipful moment over the word it is expository exaltation and wherever God-centeredness is alive wherever the supremacy of God reigns in the hearts of a people something inside will say oh pastor do more for us than explain it to us love it over us cherish it over us taste it over us revel in it over us exalt in it over us because we need to see it come alive and burn in you and that is what is called preaching father I thank you so much for the help that John Calvin has been to me and for many you make no claim of his perfection and I surely make no claims of infallibility in this message and ask that you would balance it now with all that you need to be for these brothers here in

their preaching balance it out with all that I haven't said that needs to be said and make us faithful to this glorious word and to your majesty in Jesus name Amen Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper Pastor for Preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota Feel free to make copies of this message to give to others but please do not charge for those copies or alter the content in any way without permission We invite you to visit Desiring God online at [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org) There you'll find hundreds of sermons articles, radio broadcasts and much more All available to you at no charge Our online store carries all of Pastor John's books audio and video resources You can also stay up to date on what's new at Desiring God Again, our website is

[www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org) Or call us toll free at 1-888-346-4700 Our mailing address is Desiring God 2601 East Franklin Avenue Minneapolis, Minnesota 55406 Desiring God exists to help you make God your treasure because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/15/SID15064.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-piper/biographies-john-calvin/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**