

John Calvin and Calvinism – No. 1

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The name of John Calvin is still nearly a household term although he has been dead over four centuries. As a religious reformer, he rode the crest of the sixteenth century reformation, a little younger, but contemporary with Luther, Zwingli, and others less notable. Born in 1509, he was reputedly the most learned man in Europe at the age of 22 years. Calvin was reared in Roman Catholicism but became convinced of its errors in his late teens. Placing himself under Reformer scholastics, he was confirmed in Reformation doctrines and began preaching them by the age of twenty. He was a man of considerable political power, as well as ecclesiastical, practically ruling the city of Geneva for the last twenty years of his life. While Calvin exercised great influence through his preaching, his greater influence was wrought through his pen. It is through his literary efforts that he not only influenced his own generation, but millions of people in succeeding generations down to the present.

Calvin's most influential work is his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, completed in 1536 when he was but 27 years old. In this monumental work, Calvin grapples with such weighty issues as predestination, election, grace and free will of man. The Synod of Dort, convened in 1618, crystallized the major doctrinal interpretations of Calvin into five statements as follows:

1. Of Predestination
2. Of the Death of Christ
3. Of Man's corruption
4. Of Grace and Freewill
5. On Perseverance.

This creed has come to be recognized as the definitive statement of Calvin's theology. "Five-point Calvinism," as it has been commonly called, has had a pronounced effect upon Protestant faith and practice. All Presbyterian churches are governed by the Westminster Confession of Faith, drawn up in 1648 which is built on Calvin's five points. Baptist theology is Calvinistic in part. Other religious groups have been similarly affected by it. We shall study these five points in succeeding articles on *The Scripture Cache*.

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