Calvinism

**John Calvin** (1509-1564) was a prominent French theologian during the [Protestant Reformation](http://www.theopedia.com/Protestant_Reformation) and the father of the theological system known as [Calvinism](http://www.theopedia.com/Calvinism). [Martin Luther](http://www.theopedia.com/Martin_Luther) and Calvin are arguably the most significant architects of the Reformation. "If Luther sounded the trumpet for reform, Calvin orchestrated the score by which the Reformation became a part of Western civilization.

* Originally trained as a [humanist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance_Humanism) lawyer, he broke from the Roman Catholic Church around 1530.
* After religious tensions provoked a violent uprising against Protestants in France, Calvin fled to [Basel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basel), Switzerland, where he published the first edition of his seminal work [*Institutes of the Christian Religion*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institutes_of_the_Christian_Religion) in 1536.
* was recruited by [William Farel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Farel) to help reform the church in [Geneva](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geneva).
* The city council resisted the implementation of Calvin's and Farel's ideas, and both men were expelled.
* At the invitation of [Martin Bucer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Bucer), Calvin proceeded to [Strasbourg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strasbourg), where he became the minister of a church of French refugees.
* He continued to support the reform movement in Geneva, and was eventually invited back to lead its church.
* Following his return, Calvin introduced new forms of church government and [liturgy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_liturgy), despite the opposition of several powerful families in the city who tried to curb his authority.
* Calvin spent his final years promoting the Reformation both in Geneva and throughout Europe.
* Calvin was a tireless [polemic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polemic) and [apologetic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_apologetics) writer who generated much controversy
* He regularly preached sermons throughout the week in Geneva.
* Calvin was influenced by the [Augustinian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine_of_Hippo) tradition, which led him to expound the doctrine of [predestination](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predestination) and the [absolute sovereignty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monergism) of God in [salvation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salvation) of the human soul from death and [eternal damnation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Damnation).

**Calvin's theology**

**God**

* There could be no knowledge of self without knowledge of God.
* All men have a natural awareness of divinity, however, man has suppressed or corrupted this knowledge, and confused the creation with the Creator.
* When men contemplate the greatness of God they can come to realize their own inadequacy.
* God is [providentially](http://www.theopedia.com/Providence) in control of all things that come to pass, including evil things, but this does not make him the author of [evil](http://www.theopedia.com/Sin).

**Man**

* Man is created in the image of [God](http://www.theopedia.com/God).
* This image has been marred by the Fall, though not destroyed.
* Before the Fall, man's will was truly [free](http://www.theopedia.com/Free_will); however, now it is [corrupt](http://www.theopedia.com/Total_depravity) and enslaved to [sin](http://www.theopedia.com/Sin).
* Man is totally unable to seek or choose God unless God chooses him first.

**Jesus Christ**

* Christ is the only possible bridge between God and men..
* The work of Christ in is of the three offices of [prophet](http://www.theopedia.com/Prophet), [priest](http://www.theopedia.com/Priest), and [king](http://www.theopedia.com/index.php?title=King&action=edit&redlink=1). As prophet, Christ's teachings are proclaimed by the [apostles](http://www.theopedia.com/Apostle) for the purpose of our salvation. As priest, Christ's sacrifice of himself and his mediation before the Father secures the salvation of men. As king, Christ rules the Church spiritually in the hearts of its members.

**The Holy Spirit**

* The [Holy Spirit](http://www.theopedia.com/Holy_Spirit) unites men to Christ when Christ is apprehended through faith in the promises of Scripture. The Spirit leads men to Christ; without him, saving faith is impossible.

**Justification by faith**

* Justification by faith is the material principle of the Reformation. It is based upon the [mercy of God](http://www.theopedia.com/Mercy_of_God), not the merits of humanity.
* Calvin believed in unconditional election and predestination. That God has previously chosen people to be saved. You can take comfort in knowing you are one in the fact that you have sought out God and the church.

**Sacraments**

* Two main sacraments: baptism and Eucharist (Lord’s Supper). They are testiments to God’s grace rather than receiving grace.
* Baptism is symbolic as entrance into a covenant with God.
* Calvin believed that Eucharist is spiritual food of Christ, not literally blood and body.

**Church government**

* Calvin is the founder of the Presbyterian system of [church government](http://www.theopedia.com/Church_government).
* Pastors represent the local assembly and responsible for churches.
* Consistory was a council of elected members, responsible for church discipline and the moral lives of church members
* Regionally, is the presbytery, then Provincial and National Synods.
* Church government is responsible for church discipline: order and obedience to Christ in response to scripture. Aimed to glorify God, keep the Church Pure, and correct offenders.
* Power was limited to excommunication: denying the Eucharist, baptism, or marriage.

**Calvin's influence**

**Separation of church and state**

* Calvin believed that the church should not be subject to the state, or vice versa.
* While both church and state are subject to God's law, they both have their own God-ordained spheres of influence.
* The church does not have the authority to impose penalties for civil offenses, although it can call on the civil authorities to punish them.
* Conversely, the state is not to intrude on the operations of the church. However, it has a duty to protect the church and its ability to function *as* the church.

**Missions**

* Geneva became a safe haven for Protestant refugees, not only from France, but all over Europe.
* Calvin founded a school to instruct men in Reformed theology and then train them to return home, preach the Gospel, and plant churches.
* The city therefore became the nucleus of missionary activity; for example, in 1561, 140 missionaries are recorded as having left Geneva. [[4]](http://www.theopedia.com/John_Calvin#note-3)
* The missionary influence of Calvin extended not only to his native France, but also to Scotland (home of the Presbyterian Church), England, northern Italy, the Netherlands, and even Poland. Calvin also sent out the first two overseas missionaries in the history of Protestantism: an expedition to Brazil in 1556.

**The Protestant work ethic**

* Calvin, he taught, work is a calling from God. Therefore, one glorifies God in his work by working diligently and joyfully.
* Calvin did not invent capitalism, but he did teach that one of the rewards of hard work is wealth. His philosophy of work allowed capitalism to flourish where it was practiced.