

What is the Value of John Calvin for Today?

We may know the story of Jesus, what he did, what he said, how he died. But how does *his* story relate to *my* story? The giant of European Christianity, John Calvin, had a simple but profound way of putting the two together, which can help us in our own relationship with God and in helping others to follow him. It can be applied in powerful ways to our preaching, counselling, and in countering false teaching, whether Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Orthodox. Delve into the past and learn the biblical ‘secret’!

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I. *THE MINISTRY OF JOHN CALVIN*

- A. A brief sketch of his life and work
- B. He was not just about predestination!
- C. His pious motto was “*My heart I offer you, O Lord, promptly and sincerely.*”

II. *UNION WITH CHRIST*

- A. Christ is the inexhaustible fountain of all good things.
- B. What God did for Christ (Ephesians 1)
- C. God does for us (Ephesians 2)
- D. We are united to him by faith

“we should be satisfied with the benefits of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that when we are grafted into his body and made one with him by belief of the gospel, then we may assure ourselves that he is the fountain which never dries up, nor can ever become exhausted, and that in him we have all variety of good things, and all perfection.” (Calvin’s Sermon on Ephesians 4:10)

III. THE NECESSITY OF UNION

“we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. Therefore to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us. For this reason he is called ‘our Head’, and ‘the first-born among many brethren’. We also, in turn, are said to be ‘engrafted into him’, and to ‘put on Christ’; for, as I have said, all that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him.” (Opening of Book 3 of *The Institutes*)

“For we know that there are (so to speak) two fountain-heads of mankind, that is to say, Adam and our Lord Jesus Christ. Now with regard to our first birth we all come out of the fountain of Adam and are corrupted with sinfulness, so that there is nothing but perverseness and cursedness in our souls.” (Sermon on Ephesians 4:22)

IV. THE BENEFITS OF UNION

A. We partake of Christ and his benefits

“once we are possessed of our Lord Jesus Christ, we may well give up all other things as superfluous and profitless.” (Sermon on Ephesians 3:7-9)

B. Unity in the body vs. tearing Christ in pieces

C. Ruled by our head

D. Future union

E. Benefits together

“Although we may distinguish them [justification and sanctification], Christ contains both of them inseparably in himself. Do you wish, then, to attain righteousness in Christ? You must first possess Christ; but you cannot possess him without being made partaker in his sanctification, because he cannot be divided into pieces. Since, therefore, it is solely by expending himself that the Lord gives us these benefits to enjoy, he bestows both of them at the same time, the one never without the other. Thus it is clear how true it is that we are justified not without works yet not through works, since in our sharing in Christ, which justifies us, sanctification is just as much included as righteousness.” (Institutes 3.16.1)

V. **CLOSING THE GAP IN UNION**

VI. **ROMAN CATHOLIC ERRORS**

A. Are the saints separated from God?

B. What mediators do we need?

C. Union with the saints

VII. **PROTESTANT ERRORS**

A. Union and the sacraments

“the supper ought to serve as a ladder in the search for our Lord Jesus Christ. It is meant to confirm us in the assurance that he dwells in us and that we are made one with him.” (Sermons on Ephesians 5:25-27)

B. Where is Christ now?

C. Union with Christ at the incarnation

“‘we are bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh,’ (Gen. ii.23) not because, like ourselves, he has a human nature, but because, by the power of his Spirit, he makes us a part of his body, so that from him we derive our life.” (Commentary on Ephesians 5:30-31)

VIII. UNION WITH CHRIST AND PREACHING RELATIONALLY



To find out more...

C. Catherwood, *Five Leading Reformers: Lives at a Watershed of History*

Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian religion* (best English translation is McNeill-Battles)

John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians (Banner of Truth)

Robert. L. Reymond, *John Calvin: His Life and Influence*

Lee Gatiss, “The Inexhaustible Fountain of All Good Things: Union with Christ in Calvin on Ephesians”

(<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/publications> Themelios, July 2009).

Calvin's sermon on Ephesians 5: 28-30 (audio) at
<http://www.theologian.org.uk/audio/calvinephesians5.html>