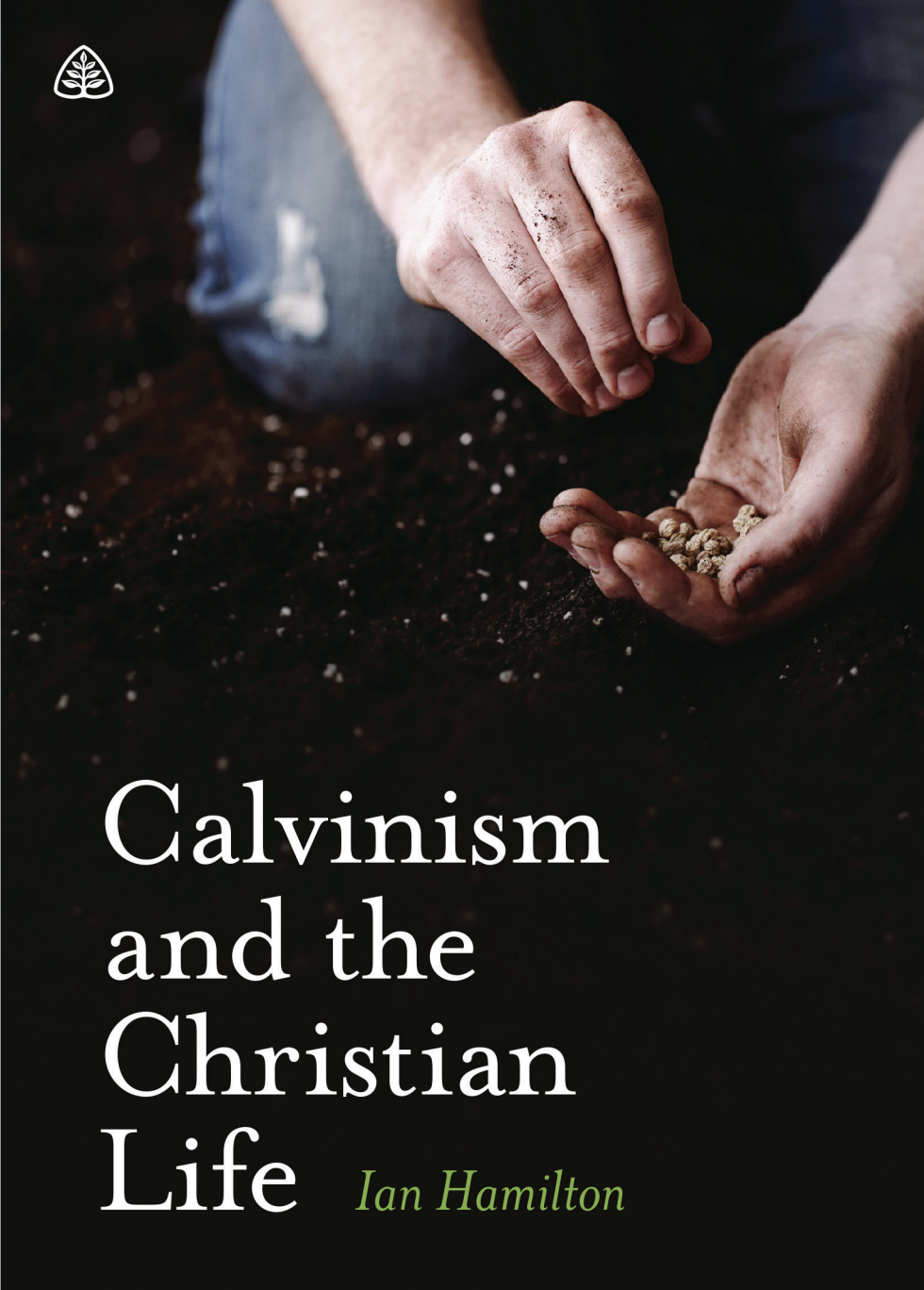


S T U D Y   G U I D E



# Calvinism and the Christian Life

*Ian Hamilton*

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## Lesson 1

# What Is Calvinism?

### INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, Pastor Ian Hamilton introduces us to John Calvin and helps us understand Calvinism. In the process, we find that Calvin was not a theological innovator, but he was indeed a magnificent systematician. We also learn that Calvinism is not simply a theological system, but rather a whole religious consciousness.

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. To highlight the life of John Calvin
2. To answer the question, “What is Calvinism?”
3. To see Calvinism primarily as a religious attitude

### SCRIPTURE READING

*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*

—Romans 11:33

### LECTURE OUTLINE

#### A. Who was John Calvin (1509–1564)?

1. He was no theological innovator.
2. He saw himself primarily as a pastor not a theologian.
3. Between 1530–1533, he likely experienced conversion.
  - a. He says little about its circumstances.
  - b. Of it, he notes, “God subdued my heart to docility,” a summary that characterized his entire life and teaching.
4. From 1536–1538, he served the newly reformed city of Geneva.
5. From 1538–1541, he ministered in Strasbourg.
  - a. In 1538, the city council dismissed Calvin from Geneva due to his reformation convictions.
  - b. In 1541, emissaries from Geneva urged Calvin to return.

6. From 1541–1555, he faced significant hostility in Geneva.
  - a. The city council did not want “that Frenchman” calling the shots.
  - b. They resisted a comprehensive reformation of the church and society according to the Scripture.
7. From 1555–1564, he enjoyed relative tranquility.
  - a. His allies became the majority party on the city council in 1555.
  - b. During these years, he preached seven to eight times a week convinced of the need to Scripturally equip the people.
8. He preached through most of the Bible.
9. He wrote extensively.
  - a. This included commentaries on almost all the books of the Bible.
  - b. This included many theological tracts and treatises.
  - c. This included hundreds upon hundreds of pastoral letters to many types of people at various levels of society.
  - d. The letters manifest a tender pastoral heart.
10. He at times manifested a volcanic temper, though people knew his pastoral care both in and beyond Geneva.
11. He expressed devotion to Protestant church unity.
  - a. His extensive travels, participation in colloquies, writing, preaching, and teaching evidence this.
  - b. He believed that the church needed to take unity seriously (see John 17:20–26).
12. He lived to glorify God and serve the church, wearing himself out for the cause of Christ in Geneva.
13. He manifested a commitment to missions.
  - a. Many men were sent into the heart of Europe to preach the gospel of free grace knowing the persecution they would face.
  - b. He himself desired to go to France but was overruled, because the need for his ministry in Geneva was greater.
  - c. He supported missions to Brazil, even though that work did not flourish.
14. His life was summed up by the motto, “My heart I give to you, oh God, promptly and sincerely.”
15. Others held him in high honor.
  - a. Knox called the Genevan academy, perhaps a little over-generously, “the most perfect school of Christ on earth since the days of the apostles.”
  - b. Melancthon referred to him as “the theologian.”

#### B. What is Calvinism?

1. Calvinism pulses with breathless wonder.
  - a. Romans 11:33–36 exemplifies such doxology as it marvels in the amazing grace of God.
  - b. The Danish philosopher-theologian Soren Kierkegaard stood in awe of a gospel that is 10,000 fathoms deep.

- c. Such worship and praise fills even the most controversial of Calvin's writings.
- 2. Calvinism pulses with grace-restrained humility (Rom. 11:33–34).
  - a. Calvin remained bound to the Word and did not want to go beyond it.
  - b. He did not believe that he had all the answers for matters that only God could explain.
- 3. Calvinism pulses with exultant adoration (Rom. 11:36).
  - a. Calvin's writings get caught up in the wonder of who God is.
  - b. Calvinism is not sterile and clinical or cold and academic.
- 4. Calvinism pulses with wholehearted consecration (Rom. 12:1).
  - a. It does not leave us where we are.
  - b. It does not rest in minds simply infatuated with the doctrines of grace.
  - c. It comes to capture and captivate the citadel of our beings that we might be consecrated to the Lord.
  - d. B.B. Warfield noted that the fountainhead of Calvinism did not lie in its theological system, but in its religious consciousness.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Calvin was both a theological innovator and a magnificent systematician.
  - a. True
  - b. False
2. Calvinism is a theological system out of which arises a religious consciousness.
  - a. True
  - b. False
3. Calvin saw himself primarily as a \_\_\_\_\_, not a \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. theologian, pastor
  - b. pastor, theologian
  - c. reformer, theologian
  - d. reformer, pastor
4. The hostility that Calvin faced in Geneva was not \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Connected to him being a Frenchman
  - b. Helped by his temper
  - c. Related to his burden for biblical reform
  - d. All of the above
5. Calvin \_\_\_\_\_ in his extensive preaching and writing ministry.
  - a. Preached through all the books of the Bible
  - b. Wrote commentaries on all the books of the Bible
  - c. Wrote hundreds of pastoral letters
  - d. All of the above

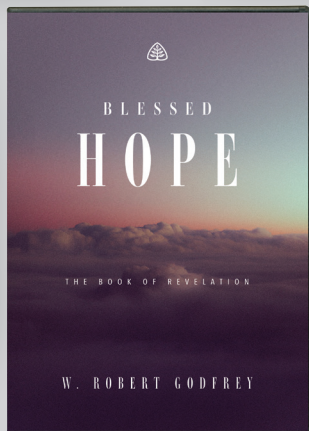
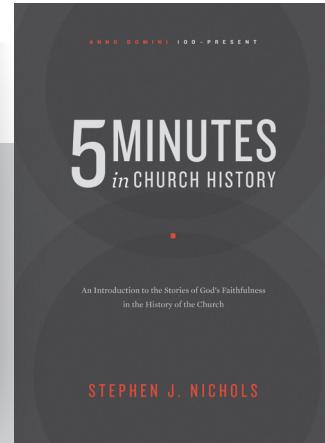
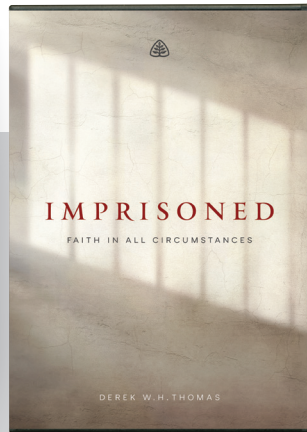
6. Pastor Hamilton claims that Calvinism pulses with \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. Breathless wonder  
b. Grace-restrained humility  
c. Wholehearted consecration  
d. All of the above

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does mentioning Calvinism raise the ire of many Christians?
2. What do you think Calvin meant by describing his conversion as God “subduing” his hardened heart?
3. Pastor Hamilton claims that Calvin’s “volcanic temper” humbled him. How is it that such a sin could bring humility?
4. “The foundation of Calvinism lies not in its theological system, but in its religious consciousness.” How is this different from the way some people see Calvinism?



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