



SBAOC Weekly Update

NEWS & PRAYER REQUESTS

- *Saved By Faith Youth Camp* will be June 15-19. Registration information is available at www.sbfyckansas.com.

If you have any news, prayer requests, or events that you would like to have included in this update, please email the information to spurgeonassociation@gmail.com or call us at 785-456-8513.

WHAT BAPTISTS CAN LEARN FROM CALVIN

Why the Genevan Reformer's Words Are Still Worth Hearing Today

Timothy George

The year 2009 marks two important anniversaries in the history of the Christian church: the birth of John Calvin at Noyon in France in 1509, and the birth of the modern Baptist movement at Amsterdam one hundred years later in 1609. Both events are being celebrated with numerous symposia, publications, and conferences, but few are asking what these two events, separated by the century of the Reformation, have in common. Baptists are fiercely independent and refuse to recognize any human figure as a standard of faith. Today's Baptists would agree with what the nonconformist Samuel Hieron said in the seventeenth century:

We do not hang on Calvin's sleeve
Nor yet on Zwingli's we believe:
And Puritans we do defy,
If right the name you do apply.

Are Baptists Calvinists? If a Calvinist is a person who follows strictly the teachings of John Calvin, then in three important respects Baptists are not, and have never been, Calvinists. Calvin was a pedobaptist; Baptists are credobaptists; Calvin believed in a presbyterial form of church government; Baptists are congregationalists. Calvin believed that the civil magistrate should enforce both tables of the law, suppressing heresy and blasphemy by force if necessary. Baptists believe in religious liberty for all persons.

For all that, Calvin remains the most formative theological influence in the development of the Baptist tradition. Unfortunately, many Baptists today know only the ungenerous stereotype of Calvin that depicts him as "the dictator of

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PURPOSE STATEMENT:

We unite as an association of Southern Baptist churches in order to manifest the glory of God above all. We purpose to do this by seeking spiritual awakening and revival by intense prayer and earnest obedience to Scripture. We covenant to strengthen and support one another, motivated and guided by the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, by facilitating faithful preaching of the Word of God, proclaiming the gospel of the risen Lord Jesus Christ to all, making and gathering disciples, planting churches and coordinating unified missions efforts.

"If there is no church... should you not commence one?" C. H. Spurgeon

COMMENTS ON OUR PURPOSE STATEMENT

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Whitefield Encourages a New Open Air Preacher...

"Let the love of Jesus constrain you to go out into the highways and the hedges to compel poor sinners to come in. Some may say, 'This is not proceeding with a zeal according to knowledge;' but I am persuaded, when the power of religion revives, the gospel must be propagated in the same manner as it was first established, by itinerant preaching. Go on, dear sir, go on and follow your glorious Master without the camp, bearing His reproach. Never fear the scourge of the tongue, or the threatenings that are daily breathed out against the Lord, and against His Christ. Suffer we must. Ere long perhaps, we may sing in a prison, and have our feet in the stocks; but faith in Jesus turns a prison into a palace, and makes a bed of flames become a bed of down (roses). Let us be faithful today, and our Lord will support us tomorrow."

*George Whitefield
Whitefield's letter to Rev. George Stonehouse*

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Geneva wielding the whip of logic and driving a chariot named the sovereignty of God harnessed to mean-spirited steeds called predestination and total depravity" (Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin*, 14). It is said that on occasion so-called liberal Christians stand before the famous statue of Calvin in Geneva and hurl eggs at the dour likeness looking down at them!

Two thousand nine is a good time to look again at Calvin's theology and its relationship to the Baptist movement. Here are five theological principles Baptists can learn from Calvin.

1. *Holy Scripture and the Living Christ.* Unlike the Augsburg Confession which began with an article on the doctrine of God, Reformed statements of faith usually begin by affirming the authority and sufficiency of Holy Scripture. Baptist confessions of faith do the same. Calvin was a biblical theologian. He believed that God had revealed His will to human beings through His mighty acts of salvation recorded in the words of the Bible. Calvin's official title in the Church at Geneva was "Minster of the Divine Word." Calvin's famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is a masterful summary of Protestant theology, but it must be supplemented by his Old and New Testament commentaries. Yet he did not understand the Bible as a mere depository of information about sacred things. Rather, Scripture conveyed, through the witness of the Holy Spirit, the reality of the living Christ. In their recent "battles" over the Bible, Baptists have much to learn from Calvin's engagement with Scripture. He would agree without hesitation that the Bible is totally truthful in all that it affirms, but he also recognized that this insight, as well as the Christological meaning of Scripture, was not achieved by systematic logic or empirical investigation. Inspiration and illumination are both the work of God's Spirit, the Spirit of truth who invariably draws us to Christ who is the Truth, as well as the Way and the Life (John 14:6).
2. *God-centered worship.* Baptists, like many other evangelicals, have been caught up in the worship wars of the past decade. Baptists can learn a great deal from the way Calvin negotiated the worship wars of the sixteenth century. Calvin was an innovator in worship both in terms of what he took out of the service (organs and images) and what he added (psalm singing). Today one can hear a beautiful organ concert at Calvin's church in Geneva, and it's a good thing too! One need not be a slavish follower of Calvin to recognize what motivated the changes he made: the desire to glorify God through the praises of His people. This could best be done, Calvin believed, in a service where Pulpit and Table were both given proper place. Preaching has long been recognized as a key moment in Baptist worship, but many Baptists often neglect the Lord's Supper and its transforming power in the life of faith. For many Baptists, the influence of Zwingli rather than Calvin leads to a minimalist theology that results in infrequent communion often poorly administered. On both the theology and practice of the Lord's Supper, Baptists need a "back to Calvin" movement.

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3. *The sovereignty of God in salvation.* Like Augustine and Aquinas before him, Calvin held to a high doctrine of predestination. He did so not because he was a mean man with a harsh view of God, but because he believed he found this teaching clearly taught in Holy Scripture. Many great Baptists through the centuries have agreed with him including John Bunyan, Benjamin Keach, Andrew Fuller, William Carey, Roger Williams, and Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Throughout their history Baptists have argued about God's election and extreme positions have sometimes been taken: a kind of hyper-Calvinism bordering on fatalism at one extreme, and a radical Arminianism morphing into Pelagianism on the other. Evangelical Calvinists have affirmed both God's sovereignty in salvation and human responsibility in keeping with the accents of the Bible itself. Throughout the history of the church some of the most effective evangelists and missionaries, including the great Baptist William Carey, have been staunch defenders of a Reformed doctrine of predestination. Baptists today can find in this teaching a stronghold in times of temptation and trials and a confession of praise to God's grace and glory. The doctrine of election requires one to be still before the majesty and mystery of God, and to confess with Calvin: "We should not investigate what the Lord has left hidden in secret ... nor neglect what he has brought out into the open so that we may not be convicted of excessive curiosity on the one hand, or of excessive ingratitude on the other" (Institutes 3.21.4).
4. *The world as theater of God's glory.* One of the greatest differences between the Baptists of the seventeenth century and the earlier Anabaptists during the time of Luther and Calvin was their attitude toward the world. It is not much of an exaggeration to say that while Lutherans accepted the world as a necessary evil, and Anabaptists withdrew from the world as the domain of sin and corruption, Calvinists engaged the world as "the theater of God's glory," seeking to re-form and transform it in keeping with the purposes and will of God. In their history, Baptists have sometimes wavered among these three models of engagement. But at their best, Baptists have been in the vanguard of those seeking religious freedom, human rights, and democratic forms of government. John Wesley once claimed that he came within "a hair's breadth of Calvinism," and nowhere was this more true than in

his statement, "The world is my parish!" Baptists, too, have gone into every corner of the world proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ to persons of every race, nation, and language group. They have worked for the abolition of the slave trade, the political emancipation of women, the protection of unborn human life, prison reform, and many other movements for social justice.

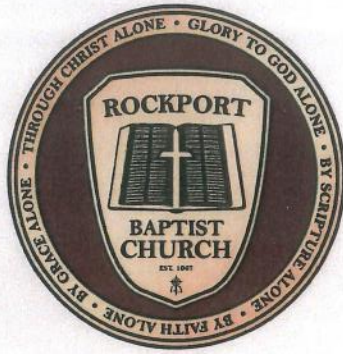
5. *Christian unity.* Calvin is well known for his attacks against the Roman Catholic Church of his day which he believed was filled with abuses that needed to be reformed on the basis of the Word of God. But Calvin was not a separatist. He did not seek to start a brand new church, but to call the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church back to its biblical foundations and evangelical faith. He regarded schism as one of the greatest sins one could commit against the church, and he had a burning passion for Christian unity. Calvin met with Catholic theologians and discussed the doctrine of justification in an effort to find a greater unity on this important teaching. He was also in touch with Protestant church leaders all over Europe exhorting them to work together and stand united for the sake of the Gospel. Baptists have much to learn from John Calvin about the quest for Christian unity today. Disunity damages the witness of the church. Jesus prayed to the heavenly Father that His disciples would be one, as He and the Father were one, "so that the world might believe" (John 17:21). Calvin did not seek unity at the expense of truth, but rather unity-in-truth. Today Baptists constitute one of the largest fellowships of believers in the world. The integrity of their witness and their effectiveness in evangelism and mission are directly related to the prayer Jesus prayed and to the way of reform John Calvin pioneered. "

The Founders Journal, Fall 2009, founders.org

UPCOMING CONFERENCES & EVENTS

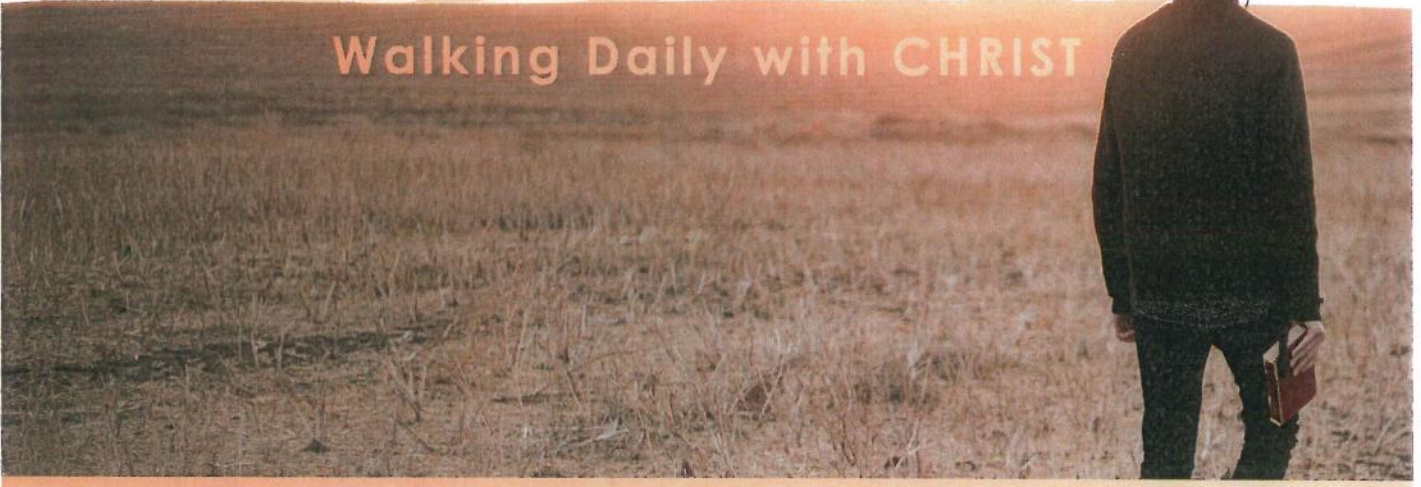
Grace Bible Conference—April 24-26. Rockport Baptist Church, Arnold, MO. "Walking with Christ." The SBAOC spring meeting will be held in conjunction with this conference.

2020 Saved By Faith Youth Camp—June 15-19. Webster Conference Center, Salina, Kansas. <https://www.sbfyckansas.com/>



GBC 2020

Walking Daily with CHRIST



Grace Bible Conference ROCKPORT BAPTIST CHURCH

Exploring both the heart motive and the practical discipline of *WALKING DAILY WITH CHRIST*.

April 24-26

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PRAYER MEETINGS FOR SPIRITUAL AWAKENING AND REVIVAL

- Fellowship Baptist Church in Onaga, Kansas—5:00 pm on Sundays
- Trinity Baptist Church in Wamego, Kansas—8:00 pm on Saturdays

The Spurgeon Baptist Association of Churches is an association of Southern Baptist Churches that are united to manifest the glory of God above all. We set out to do this by seeking spiritual awakening and revival by intense prayer and earnest obedience to Scripture. As an association of churches we are bound in mutual covenant to strengthen and support one another - motivated and guided by the authority and sufficiency of Scripture - by facilitating faithful preaching of the Word of God, proclaiming the gospel of the risen Lord Jesus Christ to all, making and gathering disciples, planting churches and coordinating unified missions efforts.

We are a non-geographic association seeking to include any like-minded body of believers so that together we might better fulfill the great commission of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Our intent is to lean on His instruction and not our imaginations so that He is honored in all that we do. We welcome churches who adhere to the confessions of faith accepted by Southern Baptists throughout their history, including, but not limited to, the Second London Confession (1689) and the Baptist Faith and Message.



Baptist Association of Churches