JOHN CALVIN AND THE REFORMATION #6
FOURTEEN YEARS OF STRUGGLE IN GENEVA (1541-1555)

Prayer
Scripture: Hebrews 3:12-15
Hymn: 302 "When the Storms of Life Are Raging"

CALVIN'S RETURN TO GENEVA

Conditions in Geneva deteriorated rapidly after the departure of Calvin and Farel. The four ministers appointed by the Councils proved inadequate to their task (Henri de la Mare and Jacques Bernard were weak men; Antoine Marcourt and Jean Morand had more ability but lacked wisdom). The reaction against the discipline of Farel and Calvin expressed itself in great license of conduct. The government treated the preachers as its creatures; the church was controlled by the government. The supporters of Farel and Calvin (nicknamed "Guillermins" from Farel's name) openly opposed the new preachers and proposed to absent themselves from communion. Farel did not discourage them; Calvin in letters urged them to avoid schism. The center of the Guillermin faction was the college led by Antoine Saunier and Mathurin Cordier, friends of Calvin. On September 26, 1538, two younger teachers, who had been most open in criticizing the new preachers, were exiled. On December 26, 1538, Saunier and Cordier were exiled, almost destroying the school. Unrest in the city was so great that the preachers offered to resign but the Councils refused to accept their resignations. Farel, as the new pastor in Neuchatel, was still a recognized leader among French-speaking Protestants. He joined Peter Kuntz, the leader in Bern, in holding a meeting of French-speaking pastors and the Geneva preachers at Morges, March 12, 1539, to try to work out reconciliation between the Guillermins and the supporters of the Bern Articles (the Articles contained the Bern form of church organization and worship; its supporters in Geneva were nicknamed "Articulants" which was transformed into "Artichauds"). After the meeting Farel and Viret preached in Geneva as a gesture of good will and Calvin sent a letter from Strasbourg supporting the reconciliation.

Even though the revolution of 1538 that drove Farel and Calvin from Geneva was in no sense Romanist but rather thoroughly Protestant, Cardinal Sadolet thought he saw in it an opportunity to restore Geneva to the Roman fold. His letter to Geneva was answered by Calvin at the request of Bern. The letter greatly increased Calvin's prestige in Geneva.

In the election of February, 1539, the Articulants were again victorious. In March the Councils sent three members (Jean Lullin, Ami de Chapeaurough and Jean Monathon) to Bern to arrange a treaty with Bern. Bern had been victorious in its war with Catholic Savoy and had aroused much resentment in Geneva by asserting its right to oversee affairs in Geneva. The treaty was completed and signed in three days because the Geneva representatives made concessions to Bern that had not been authorized. Both parties in Geneva felt their representatives had betrayed their home town. The Little Council rejected the treaty. The Guillermins bitterly attacked the party in power, the Articulants, for endangering the freedom of the city. Both sides bitterly attacked the treaty. In the election of February, 1540, two syndics were chosen from each party in an effort to restore peace. A stormy wave of popular feeling demanded that the three traitors be punished. The government was powerless to control the city. The three representatives fled from the city. On June 5 they were
condemned to death. Three Guillermins were elected to take their place in the Little Council, giving the Guillermins a majority on the Council. A street fight followed in which the Artichauds were the aggressors. Their leader, Jean Philippe, was charged with killing a man in the riot. On June 10 he was beheaded. The power of the Artichauds was broken.

Bern and Geneva were on the brink of war. The pastors, Jean Morand and Antoine Marcourt, left the city without being dismissed. On September 21, 1540, the Little Council instructed Ami Perrin to find means, if possible, to bring Calvin back. After many appeals from Geneva, from the other Swiss cities, and a strong appeal from Farel, and with permission from Bucer, Calvin agreed to return to Geneva.

A NEW BEGINNING IN GENEVA

On September 13, 1541, Calvin re-entered the city with fear and trembling. He knew he was coming on the invitation of the government and not because all the people wanted him. His enemies had acquiesced because things were so bad in the city they had to invite him back. He had written Farel, "When I consider that I am not in my own power, I offer my heart a slain victim for a sacrifice to the Lord...I yield my soul chained and bound unto obedience to God. He had left his wife and possessions in Strasburg.

Calvin presented himself to the Little Council, declaring he had come to serve the city. His service would be to establish the church in accordance with the Word of God. He requested the Council to appoint a committee to aid him in preparing a written constitution for the Genevan church. Calvin was determined to make Geneva a model Christian community. It would take him fourteen stormy years to win Geneva.

Calvin had returned to Geneva a wiser but determined man. He was thirty-two. He had promised Bucer he would show moderation and brotherly kindness. He did not mention the past. He wanted to take up where he had been forced to stop. He wanted to bring to Geneva what he had been able to perfect in Strasbourg in church organization, worship, and discipline. He made no effort to have the remaining ministers removed although they were unsatisfactory. He was determined to be conciliatory toward former opponents.

The Little Council appointed the committee of six to work with Calvin. Four of them were members of the Little Council: Claude P tertemps, Ami Perrin, Claude Roset, and Jean Lambert. Two were from the Two Hundred: Ami Porral and Jean Balard. Only Balard was not a Guillermin. The Council gave Calvin a spacious house with a garden that had formerly belonged to one of the canons of the Cathedral. From his upper room he could look out over the beautiful landscape around the lake. His wife and household goods were moved from Strasbourg at the expense of the city. He was voted a salary of five hundred florins along with twelve measures of wheat and about two hundred-fifty gallons of wine. Calvin was touched by the generosity.

When Calvin mounted the pulpit of St. Peter's for the first sermon the church was packed by people expecting a sensation. Calvin took his text from the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the meek." The meek are promised possession of the earth. They do not act like the infidels, hurling insults, grasping for power, and eager to take revenge. Surrounded and besieged by the wicked they are trusting pilgrims under God's protecting hand, willing to wait until the Last Day to gain possession of their inheritance.

Calvin plunged into his work. The first month was exhausting. The other ministers were of little help and he did not fully trust them. He was thankful to have Viret with him until the next July. He worked feverishly on his plan for the church. On September 26 he laid before the Little Council his Ecclesiastical Ordinances of the
Church of Geneva. The Little Council examined it article by article with much discussion that called forth strenuous labor on Calvin's part. Finally on November 3, as modified by the Little Council, it was placed before the Two Hundred and underwent further changes. On November 20, after the sounding of the bell and triumph, the General Council met and approved the ecclesiastical constitution without dissent. As finally passed it was not all that Calvin desired. The church was given a measure of independence unknown in other Protestant lands. The church was given no control over the state or over the infliction of civil punishments. The modifications made by the Councils were intended to strengthen the government's control of the church. Calvin would be an adviser, not a ruler. The church would stand in a helpful relation to the state. An effective discipline would be maintained that would enable the church to carry out its most urgent duty which was to direct its members in right doctrine and right living. This constitution prepared for Geneva would become a kind of blue print for the Reformed Churches of the International Reformation. It was one of Calvin's most important works.

**THE ECCLESIASTICAL ORDINANCES OF THE CHURCH OF GENEVA**

The constitution provided for four offices in the church: pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons—each with well defined functions. The pastors were to preach the word, instruct, exhort, administer the sacraments, train young preachers, and with the elders make "Fraternal Corrections." Candidates for pastor had to give testimony of an inward call, pass a test in doctrine, be approved in conduct, receive the approval of the ministers and Little Council and have the consent of the people. The laying on of hands was omitted, partly because of fear of superstition provoked by Roman practice and partly because of the unresolved issue of authority between ministers and magistrates. New ministers had to swear obedience to the magistrates and the laws of Geneva, but were to have liberty to obey God in work and teaching. There were to be weekly meetings of the pastors of Geneva and dependent villages to discuss problems. If differences arose that could not be settled the elders were to be called in to settle the disputes. If this failed then the magistrates would judge. There would be quarterly meetings, called the "Venerable Company," to handle administration and discipline. "Fraternal Admonition" would be given brothers who had offended.

In organization and worship Calvin was putting into action what he had developed in his refugee church in Strasbourg. The six former parishes of Geneva were combined into three: St. Peter's, St. Gervais, and the Madeleine. There were six pastors. On Sundays there would be a daybreak service at St. Peter's, then a service in each of the churches at nine, and one in St. Peter's and St. Gervais at three o'clock. In each parish the children would be brought at noon for instruction. Preaching services would be held in each church at successive hours on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. This was a heavy schedule for a city of 12,000 people but popular interest warranted such a schedule.

The teachers were to prepare men for the ministry and for the civil government. They were to give lectures in theology and guard the purity of doctrine. There must be instruction in languages and science. Calvin insisted on instruction in Latin, Hebrew, and Greek. There were to be separate schools for boys and girls.

Twelve elders were to be chosen by and from the magistry. They were to be nominated by the Little Council. This was a concession wrung from Calvin by the politicians. Two of the elders were to come from the Little Council, four from the Council of Sixty, and six from the Two Hundred, which finally ratified all the choices. The work of the elders would be annually reviewed by the Little Council which had the power to dismiss them. They were to be chosen from the various
districts of the city. The elders were to be honorable men of good manners, without blemish, and beyond any suspicion; above all they should be God-fearing and wise. The elders were to watch over the life of each individual, to admonish affectionately those seen to err or to lead a disorderly life and to make a report to the Consistory, a body composed of the elders and pastors, that this body might make fraternal corrections. The elders promised to report every wrong that should come to their knowledge without hate or partiality, that the church might be kept in good order and in the fear of God. Each elder had a territory where he would visit every member regularly.

The Consistory met every Thursday.

The deacons were chosen by the Little Council and divided into two groups. One group managed the funds of the church. The other ministered to the sick and needy. The constitution called for a charity hospital, a hostel for travellers, a pest-house for those with plague, and for a physician and a surgeon to attend patients in the hospital and in the homes of the poor.

The constitution had sections on baptism, the Lord's Supper, marriage, the burial of the dead, and the visitation of the sick and prisoners. Baptism was to be performed at preaching services near the pulpit. Calvin wanted the Lord's Supper celebrated in one of the three parishes each month and in all of them three times a year. The Councils modified this to communion in all churches four times a year: Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and the first Sunday in September. The communion table was to be located near the pulpit. Marriages could be held on any day except communion Sunday (to honor the sacrament). Marital disputes should be taken to the magistrates who might ask advice from the ministers. At funerals superstitions contrary to the word of God were to be avoided. Relatives and attendants should report the sick to the minister within three days. The magistrates were to permit the ministers to visit prisoners for exhortation and consolation.

In Calvin's Geneva discipline was rigorously and diligently enforced without partiality. The magistrates frequently arrested offenders without any action by the elders. Weekly offenders noted by the elders were brought by a police officer before the Consistory. Often Calvin privately counselled and admonished them before they faced the Consistory. Among the offenses were such things as failure to attend church services, contemptuous deportment during services, handkericking after medieval religious practices, drunkenness, gambling, profanity, family quarrels, wife beating, adultery, extravagance, gaudy clothes, and flippant remarks. The Consistory levied humiliating acts of penance. In most cases there seems to have been real correction of conduct and attitude. In some cases the penance was hotly resented. The censors were conscientious and overlooked nothing and exempted no one. Calvin increasingly gained the respect of the magistrates. He made no distinction between membership in the church and citizenry. Every citizen must be a Christian. Calvin watched for every source of moral delinquency and courageously attacked every corrupting force in the community. Card games and games of chance were severely restricted. Dancing was prohibited as a diabolical incitement to lust. Dancing accompanied by kisses and embraces was forbidden by Geneva before Calvin came but the ordinance had not been enforced. Taverns and houses of prostitution were closed. In 1546 an attempt was made to provide centers of innocent entertainment, called abbayes. The keepers were to watch for drinking, games of cards, obscene or irreverent songs. A French Bible was displayed and religious discourse was encouraged. No food was to be served to those who did not say grace. The abbayes were to close at 9 o'clock. The abbayes were boycotted by so many that the taverns were allowed to reopen in three months but censorship of drunkenness, vice and rowdy behavior was rigidly enforced along with closing hours. Night behavior in Geneva
greatly improved. Dramas were also suppressed by Calvin. The only plays were those given by children in the schools.

CALVIN'S PHENOMENAL LABORS

Calvin's workload was almost unbelievable. He constantly robbed himself of sleep to work. He wearied his secretaries with constant dictation. His literary production was tremendous. He gave careful attention to his writing of commentaries on the books of the Bible. He was always turning out theological treatises on the burning issues of the day. There was endless correspondence that included people of many countries and often with people of high station. He kept informed and active in all the affairs of church and state. He was busy advising the Councils. They looked to him for guidance in religious, business, and legal matters. He preached four times a week: Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Every other week he preached every day. There were daily lectures in the college. He was unceasing in visiting the sick and those he thought were careless in duty. An endless stream of people came to him with all kinds of problems. His home was always filled with foreign visitors and refugees. He was diligent and creative in working for improved sanitation and public health. He persuaded the Councils to bring in a cloth and velvet mill that brought fame to the city and greatly improved its economic condition. He looked for ways to improve unproductive lines of business and worked to end unemployment among the poor.

CALVIN'S HEALTH

All this work was carried on by a man who was never well. Throughout his whole ministry he was on the borderline of the tuberculosis that finally killed him. He had stomach and intestinal disorders. He suffered from gallstones and kidney stones. He had gout and rheumatism. He suffered from frequent and lasting migraine headaches. He was subject to frequent influenza and pleurisy. He had abscesses that would not heal. He had bronchial infections and spat blood when he spoke too much. He suffered from hemorrhoids. Frequently fever laid him low. The ills increased and grew worse as he aged, but he would not let them stop him. Even his worst enemies and critics had to marvel at the work he could turn out. He was an iron man in his determination and yet so timid and sensitive. He had a temper that sometimes got out of control.

CALVIN'S FAMILY

Calvin's wife lived only nine years after their marriage. He counted her a model wife and their life together one of the happiest, despite their constant poor health. She was a great help and support to him in his ministry. She bore him a son, Jacques, on July 28, 1542. The baby lived only a few days and the mother was left an invalid for the rest of her life. Calvin cared for her tenderly and with great devotion. She died on March 29, 1549. Calvin was deeply grieved and lonely but he refused to let it show or stop him in his work. The people of Geneva thought he must be made of iron. Occasionally he would pour out his grief to friends like Farel in a letter.

His wife's death was not his only bitter blow. The wife of his brother, Anton, was caught in adultery with Peter Daguet, whom he considered one of his most devoted helpers. He was his general handyman. In the trial it was also discovered that Daguet had also been stealing from Calvin for some time. This was a bitter blow to Calvin who had worked so hard for a model city and who so wanted his own family to be the example. His enemies gloated over his embarrassment and humiliation.

Shortly after the death of his wife, her daughter, Judith, whom Calvin loved as his own child, committed adultery. This was such a bitter blow that for a time Calvin and to retire to the
country away from Geneva and the heavy load. He poured out his grief in a letter to Bullinger.

These were only the beginnings of troubles. For fourteen years he expected at any time to be driven from the city. His enemies seemed to grow in numbers and in strength and bitterness. Often it appeared that all his work would collapse in utter failure and ruin. He refused to give up and he would not desert his post. He believed God had called him to it.