

CALVIN AND THE MAJESTY OF GOD

Exodus 3: 1 – 14

Every Christian is a theologian whose belief characterises their life. Biblical theology covering Majesty, Sovereignty, and Holiness of God are interconnected by our understanding of scripture and for our study we are directed by the most significant theologian of the church: **John Calvin [1509-1564]**. Born in Noyon, France; 80 ks NE of Paris, a generation behind Luther but not affected by Reformation in early life. Studied Latin, Philosophy, Law; & after his father's death: Greek & Hebrew. At about 24 years sudden conversion, "overtaken & caught-up short" like Paul. Protestant upsurge caused him to leave France for Basel, a free city for the Reformation & March 1536 first edition of *Institutes*. Left for Strasbourg via Geneva where he taught theology, then pastor plus visitation, a Confession of Faith, organisation, Godly living & church discipline. Opposition from Genevan councils, preachers insulted & abused, Lord's Supper parodied in taverns, etc. preachers banished from Geneva. Went to Basel then Strasbourg where he ministered to some 400 French exiles.

He gave himself totally to proclamation of gospel & was builder of a new church order and theology rather than Papal antagonist. One lesson from Calvin concerns the insurmountable barrier between God and man created on the one hand by the holiness and majesty of God and on the other by the sinfulness and feebleness of man [Inst.] Theology can never be understood or developed around human needs or societal trends, but on the magnificence of God; His greatness and splendour: *In the beginning God...* There can be no 'direct communication' between God and man. So great is God's majesty that for man to be faced with the task of comprehending God as He is in Himself would be to measure with the palm of his hands a hundred thousand heavens, earths & worlds, for God is infinite. So destructive of all that is evil is the holiness and majesty of God that sinful man in direct contact with Him would be brought to nothing by the incomprehensible brightness. The glory of God, contemplated alone by man, could only fill the beholder with despair. If the angels are majestic in their appearance to men, how will it be when God appears in His glory?

Calvin's theology is theology of the word of God, meaning that 'revelation' through scripture is the only reliable source of our knowledge of God. He did not form systematic theology [??]; ie. he did not subject scripture to the control of human thought or logic. He sought to allow his thoughts to be controlled by the word spoken by God in Christ. He lectured/preached each day & twice on Sundays. Monthly communion began with careful discipline to help weak & exclude careless. Congregational singing & metrical Psalter, etc.

Exodus 3: 1-14; the induction of Moses as leader and deliverer began with his encounter with God at *Horeb, the mountain of God*. **V1**; a normal day. **V2**; God's initiative. **V3**; human response. **V4**; God's call, *from within the bush*. **V5**; holy. **V6**; God's revelation. **V7**; God, *I have seen – my people – I have heard – I am concerned*. **V8**; I have come down to rescue them – to bring them up out of that land – into a land flowing with milk & honey. **V9**; the cry of the Israelites has reached me & I have seen the oppression. **V10**; go, I am sending you to Pharaoh – to bring my people out of Egypt. **V11**; Who am I? cf. v4; Here I am. **V12**; I will be with you – it is I who have sent you – when you have brought the people out – you will worship God on this mountain. **V13**; What is His name? What shall I tell them? **V14**; I am who I am ... I am has sent me to you.

Calvin returned to Geneva in 1541 and began preaching at the place he had left. Everything depended on preaching; twice on Sundays & alternate weekdays. Spoke lucidly from Hebrew or Greek without notes; careful about application. On the preacher: 'It would be better for him to break his neck going up into the pulpit, if he does not take pains to be the first to follow God'. Involved in weddings, baptisms, sick visitation, prisoners, met with Genevan ministers every Friday for Bible exposition & discussion; wide influence.

Married widow, baby son died, then Idelette died. Children from first marriage, his brother Antoine whose wife committed adultery with Calvin's servant who'd been stealing from him for years; step-daughter convicted of adultery. Calvin constantly ill but expanded *Institutes* & published many commentaries. Opened academy, lectures, reformed churches, sent missionaries, John Knox, correspondence, declining health, dictated letters & lectures from bed, carried on chair or horseback to duties: 'would you have the Lord find me idle when He comes'? Buried in unmarked grave.