

Heroes the Faith - Calvin

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 June 2015

Preacher: Rhys Bezzant

[0 : 00] So welcome back to this the second of three sessions on Reformation Heroes of the Faith. Last week we met, perhaps not for the first time, Martin Luther and spoke about his own strengths and weaknesses in Christian ministry.

Tonight we're going to meet John Calvin, the second of our heroes, and next week our third and final night together. We're looking at Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, the man who oversaw the Reformation in England.

In a moment we're going to read from Titus chapter 1, and in these presentations I try and explain a text from the Scriptures as we begin introducing the theme for the night.

And then we're going to look at Calvin and some lessons for our own personal service. But first of all, let me pray. How wonderful it is, Heavenly Father, that we can draw together tonight, though cold outside, to have our hearts warmed by these heroes of the faith from ages past, learning from their example, their teaching, their manner, perhaps even from their weaknesses.

Please bless us with your spirit that these lessons might be taken to our hearts. Please bless us that we might serve others for Christ's sake.

[1 : 31] Amen. Well, I'm reading from Titus chapter 1, verses 5 to 9. Paul writes,

Paul is writing to Titus, one of the young men that he's encouraging in leadership.

And he gives these instructions for what the church should look for, actually, in a leader. He begins by saying in verse 5, the reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished.

That you might put in order what was left unfinished. Titus has the responsibility of finishing the job that others started, tidying up, getting order out of something that was established, but messy.

He's to find leaders himself, find elders. And he's to make sure these elders know what their job is in their personal character.

[3 : 44] They're to be growing in godliness, in Christlikeness. And they're to teach the message, the trustworthy message, as Titus himself had heard it.

So, Titus has to put in order what remains to be done. And part of what it meant to be done was to find new leaders for the church who themselves might display godly character and be able teachers.

Now, this little snapshot of ministry, Paul's relationship that Paul's relationship with Titus represents, is extraordinarily important for us today.

But it reflects beautifully the situation that Calvin found himself in as well. Now, we need to find new leaders for the church, right?

It's a job that falls to every generation of Christians to pray for, to encourage, to raise up leaders for the church.

[4 : 51] The church is only ever one generation away from extinction. So, friends, I ask you, are you praying that God would raise up leaders for his church?

This always unfinished business. Praying, of course, that those leaders would have godly character and the ability to teach.

It's interesting, isn't it, that here Paul is encouraging in Titus and those who'd come after Titus, not just godly character and not just an ability to lead, but both together.

For Paul recognises that Christian ministry is about relationships and ideas. It's not just relationships and it's not just ideas.

It's the intersection of relationships and ideas. People and ideas go together in Christian ministry. Character and catechism, character and explanation of the faith, go together in Christian ministry.

[5 : 59] And it's why I love teaching church history so much at Ridley or in occasions like this. Because church history is not just about people.

And it's not just about ideas. It's about where people and ideas connect. Either good ideas that are ignored or bad ideas that should be refuted or godly character that's gone awry.

Whatever the combination, as we study church history, we see exactly reflected, refracted actually from this text, the importance of both ideas and individuals connecting.

But for Calvin's perspective, this is a particularly important idea because Calvin was a second generation reformer.

So just by looking at dates, you can see this. Luther was born in 1483. Calvin was born in 1509.

[7 : 13] Now they lived on planet Earth overlapping. But what's the difference in age then between Luther and Calvin? If Luther was born in 1483, Calvin was born in 1509.

How much older does that make Luther? Sorry? 26 years difference, right? There's a whole generation between them. Calvin was a second generation reformer.

Luther comes blustering onto the scene. A big personality, increasingly grumpy in his old age. And Luther, as it were, bombasts his way through lots of different crises and pastoral situations.

Effectively, Luther's ministry busts things up. Shakes the cage. And Calvin, as a second generation reformer, is just the right man at the right moment, to use the language of Paul, who has to put in order the things that are yet unfinished.

Calvin's job under God is to bring some kind of settled order from the extraordinary revolution that Luther had led.

[8 : 42] For Luther, a man of existential angst, who was often felt either guilty or sensitive to his environment, he kept asking the question, where can I find a gracious God?

How do I know that God is on my side? How do I know the Lord loves me? And he discovered that by studying Romans 1. In the gospel, God gives us a gift.

The gift of righteousness. The gift of right status. But for Calvin, that wasn't the animating question. That wasn't the big driving question that Calvin confronted.

His big question was not, where can I find a gracious God? His big question was, what is the true church? What should church look like?

Now, of course, Calvin believed in the doctrine of justification. And Calvin believed his sins were forgiven. And Calvin enjoyed the experience of God's mercy to him.

[9 : 51] Of course, he benefited in all those ways as Luther had. It's just that his big question was slightly different. His big question is, what should the true church look like?

Luther had rattled the cage. Stuff had come loose. Calvin now has to sort out the mess. Try and recreate positively the church of Christ as the scriptures would require it.

Calvin, I label the great organizing genius. Last week's heading was Luther, the violent physician.

The words used at Luther's funeral by his best buddy, Melancthon. Calvin, the great organizing genius.

He just had the touch to build a system or to organize or to put things in their place or to settle things down. Can you see the difference?

[11 : 02] Calvin, the great organizing genius. Now, why was Calvin like this? Or why is it that God chose this man, Calvin, for that task?

He chose others as well, right? I could give 25, 50, 100 of these little lectures. We're focusing on just these three men for these few weeks. Calvin was a great organizer of theology and ministry, at least in part because of the training he had from early adulthood, but into his first years as a reformed believer as well.

So let me tell that part of the story. In Calvin's day, there was a push to reorganize university courses.

Before Calvin and before the Renaissance, when you went to university, you studied a great author, a great thinker, and you tried to work out what that thinker thought about that thinker, thought about that thinker, thought about that thinker, eventually getting back through that chain to a great text like the Bible.

So what you studied was the latest thinker in the chain, the one who was most recent.

[12 : 37] Because you thought, well, what's the point of going back to the beginning when there's a thousand years of thinkers? Why don't I just study the latest thinker who will have reflected on the reflector on the reflector?

Do you see the point? That was the traditional university course. But in Calvin's day, universities were reorganizing their syllabi, and they decided that perhaps the best way to educate people was not just to reflect on the most recent thinker, but to go back to the original document that 2,000 years of people had been thinking about.

And this new educational strategy was called humanism. Now, it has nothing to do, when you and I think of humanism in our day, we think it means someone who's anti-God, who's humanistic, but that's not what it meant.

You've got to wipe that from your mind when it comes to thinking about Calvin. Humanism in his day meant studying ancient documents. And Calvin just so happened to train as a lawyer at universities in France that were trialing this new kind of syllabus.

So Calvin's education was not about, it was not interacting with the most recent thinkers about law.

[14 : 15] Calvin was trained to go back to the Roman lawyers themselves and read what the Roman lawyers wrote 2,000 years, no, it wouldn't have been 2,000 years in their day, 1,500 years earlier.

The printing press had been discovered in the century before Calvin and consequently ancient texts were easier to print and to find as well.

Now, I don't think Calvin probably realised at the time, but this educational model that he studied under for his law degree made him a humanist and he developed lots of skills, which in time he would apply to the Old Testament and the New Testament as well.

For whatever reason, God used Calvin and his particular education to give him skills to read the ancient texts like the Bible with fresh eyes.

Because it's not just in law that you studied the most recent thinkers who thought about others, who thought about others, who thought about others, but that's the way it worked when you studied theology as well.

[15 : 39] You didn't go to church to read the Bible, heaven's above. You went to church to hear what your pastor thought about that theologian, thought about that theologian, thought about that theologian, who thought about the Bible.

Why would you bother reading the Bible? No, you and I were regarded as not people who had the skills to read the Bible. What you did was you engaged with other people who had read the Bible.

So it means that when Calvin finally arrives in Geneva, he was a Frenchman but had been exiled from France because his Protestant views were too dangerous.

When Calvin finally arrives in Geneva and starts running a church there, he does something quite dramatic. He actually preaches sermons straight from the biblical text.

He'd had a humanist training and he'd learned that the best way of dealing with the big ideas is to go to the original text and learn how to unpack it.

[16 : 50] And I mean, we still do this today, don't we, in many university courses? At least I do when I teach history at Ridley. We could read history books, and you do, but I make sure that in our courses we're reading the original writers as well.

We now these days call it primary documents, right? In Calvin's day we've just been called the humanist syllabus. Calvin preaches from the text, the text of scripture.

He writes commentaries on the text of scripture. He writes a theological handbook called the Institutes, which helps people to read the big themes of the scriptures.

Calvin wants to help people engage with the very text of the Bible, either through sermons or through books or through theology handbooks.

Calvin preached three or four times a week, perhaps sometimes more. He preached on weekdays from the Old Testament.

[18 : 09] He preached on Sundays from the New Testament. In a small town like Geneva, as it was in those days, you could probably turn up to church several times a week on the way to work or on the way home.

Geneva probably wouldn't have been much bigger than this block of land. So Geneva was a very small walled town. There were some people who lived outside the city walls, of course.

The poor lived outside the city walls. But otherwise, the town itself wasn't very large at all. It would have been easy to get to church on Wednesday morning or Thursday night, as well as Sunday morning as well.

Calvin organizes texts. He uses the primary text, the scriptures, and thereby empowers his listeners to engage not with commentary alone, but with the text itself.

For in the text, in the word, we meet the Lord. Now, I have a question for you.

[19 : 20] When you read the Bible in your quiet times, your daily devotions or your weekly devotions, do you come to the Bible to be touched emotionally or to be taught theologically?

Do you come to the Bible to be touched emotionally or taught theologically?

I think Calvin is a great example of a Christian pastor who wants to go beyond just what you feel to help you restructure your thinking, perhaps restructure your heart through your engagement with the word.

Now, my hunch is that most people I meet in churches read the Bible in the morning in order to feel something. That's why you don't read Leviticus for your quiet times, right?

But you probably read Psalms more often. That's why you read Mark in your quiet times, but perhaps not Romans or Revelation.

[20 : 34] My hunch is that most of us approach the scriptures to be touched. Well, I wonder whether Calvin has a challenge for us that this text of the New Testament or the Old Testament for that matter can actually reshape the whole way we live, not just kind of flame and emotion that we need that day.

Calvin structures our thinking as well as our feeling. Now, the second point I want to make on Calvin's great contribution over the page.

Calvin also restructures the shape of the church. He restructures our thinking about the Bible. He also restructures our thinking about ministry in the local church.

Remember, Calvin lived at the end of the Middle Ages in which the Roman Catholic hierarchy controlled society and the church.

The Roman Catholic church was so embedded in society that the church effectively ran society as well as the church.

[22 : 21] And it didn't just run, oversee it, but the Roman church had a very distinct hierarchical structure. He had bishops, priests, and deacons in hierarchical order.

And of course, the Pope himself was a bishop, the Bishop of Rome, and he was the chief bishop. And there were some other kinds of categories between those three.

But basically, the Roman hierarchy consisted of bishops, priests, and deacons. And the goal was to keep society stable, not changing, static.

That's what happens when you get hierarchies. Hierarchies assume order that someone is above someone else. If you know some philosophy, this is the classic Platonic way of viewing the world.

Hierarchy breeds stability or order. But in Calvin's day, there were reformers, of course, like himself, but there were also some Protestant Christians called Anabaptists who were highly disorderly in the way they approached church life.

[23 : 50] Well, they wouldn't have thought it was disorderly, but Calvin did at least. The Anabaptists said, we must break away from any connection with society.

The church must be entirely independent, entirely free, entirely disconnected from the society in which it finds itself.

We need to be pure and therefore we must not send our kids to the local school. We must not fight in armies.

We must not be members of the public service. We must withdraw from any kind of threat to our purity.

Now, these Anabaptists did something else that was highly irregular. For the first time in a thousand years, they baptised an adult.

[24 : 52] Now, of course, today we don't see that as terribly problematic. But in Calvin's day, this was seen as very, very threatening. You baptised infants and they took their place in the church and in society and it was a package deal.

But these Anabaptists, which literally means again Baptists, these re-baptisers, these Anabaptists baptised adults to show their rejection of the world that they'd grown up in.

The world that saw the church and state working together, the world in which every infant was baptised. So you've got Calvin, just imagine I'm Calvin for a moment, okay?

I quite like this analogy. On the one side, Calvin's reacting against the very, very static, hierarchical worldview of the Roman church.

And on the other side, he's reacting against the very disorderly Anabaptist threat, which seemed to be pulling down everything that was familiar and orderly in society.

[26 : 11] Calvin, and Luther for that matter as well, to tell you the truth, find themselves fighting against two fronts. Fighting the Roman Catholics on one hand, and fighting against the very dangerous, in their estimation, we probably wouldn't see Baptists as quite so dangerous, but in his day, the Anabaptists on the other.

They're fighting on two fronts. This is what Calvin does. He said, we don't want their old style hierarchical view of church. Church and society wedded together.

Calvin says, we don't want the disorderly, pure church, which is trying to distance itself from society. Calvin has a new vision for the way the church should relate to its society.

When Calvin sets up a new way of doing church, he's really setting up a new way of thinking about society.

And this is what Calvin says. He says, let's have four kinds of ministers, not just bishops, priests, and deacons in hierarchical fashion.

[27 : 30] Let's have pastors, doctors, elders, and deacons, each with a distinct ministry. The pastor is the person who runs the church.

The doctor is the specialist staff member who gives lectures and does perhaps extra preaching or extra exposition of the scriptures.

Let's have elders help out on the parish council or the vestry, but the elders were the people who helped bring discipline to the wider community, not just the church community.

So the elders had a job in making sure that if you were drunk on the street, that you were punished. If you were cheating on your taxes, elders, the elders would have some responsibility to make sure that you paid your way.

These were elders in the church, but elders in the community as well, who had some disciplinary function. Remember, Geneva is not much bigger than this block of land, so there is some kind of easier oversight.

[28 : 51] And the fourth category Calvin argued for was that there should be deacons whose job it is to help the sick, help the elderly and the frail, provide food or finances for those who are destitute, to take some minestrone around to someone's home if they're kind of not able to get out, nurse the sick perhaps, some deacons might do that in our churches as well, but this was a broader social responsibility.

Calvin's redefined church and thereby he's starting to redefine society. He wants a church where there are pastors, doctors, elders and deacons, not just a church where there are bishops, priests and deacons.

And in doing this, Calvin's done two important things. he's created the first example of team ministry where you've got a variety of people who are working together in their church with different skills and focuses and outreach responsibilities.

It's a team ministry and it's a team ministry that involves both the clergy and the laity together. Because you can have a hierarchy of bishops, priests and deacons who look down on the lay people.

You can have a hierarchy of bishops, priests and deacons but they're actually never in the same place at the same time because the bishop's in that city and the priest is in this city, the deacons kind of somewhere else altogether.

[30 : 35] No, Calvin has a vision for team ministry that involves clergy and laity together. After a thousand years of one kind of ministry structure, Calvin's recreating the way the church and society could yet together be.

It's really breathtaking. It's extraordinarily breathtaking. Now we as Anglicans, I suspect most of us in the room are Anglicans, we still have an honour, at least I'm a clergy so I still honour bishops, priests and deacons and those who've been set over me in the Lord.

I make vows to honour and respect my bishop and I think the Anglican church with its bishops, priests and deacons is a really fine model. I don't think it's the only model that you could invent for running a church.

It has some advantages, but I think Calvin points out some other advantages of a different model where clergy and laity can work well together, where you have a team with specialist responsibilities working together.

you think about not only your church, but how your church relates to the community around it. So my second challenge for the night is, the first was, do you read the scriptures to be touched or to be taught?

[32 : 11] My second challenge for the night is, are we praying that our church and its ministries would transform the community outside?

Because that's a pretty different vision, isn't it? I think it's a wonderful vision to have, to think about the way Doncaster can be different because God has put you here, because you care for your neighbours, because there are resources within this fellowship that help you deal with crises or difficulties in your life.

That together we should seek the common good of our society, not just what's good for me or for us at this moment.

And the way, the resources we have in church are magnificent and we forget how different and how marvellously blessed we are for having each other.

A few years ago, a friend of mine, his wife gave birth to a beautiful daughter, but she died, that is the wife, just a couple of hours after their baby was born.

[33 : 30] This was at the Royal Women's. And it just so happened the same week, and it doesn't happen very often in Victoria, there are only 30, I think 30 maternal deaths each year in Victoria. That very same week, another woman in the Royal Women's, also died in child birth, and her baby, I don't know whether it was a boy or a girl, but her baby survived.

It just so happened that the friend of mine, of course, is a Christian, and instantly there were resources that could serve him, people were working on how he could live in someone else's home for a time.

We had a round the clock care team in the hospital. We slept over in the Royal Women's. I slept over in the Royal Women's one night.

I'm very proud to say that. He was the first man ever to be admitted to the Royal Women's. After his wife died, he couldn't manage to leave the hospital.

But the other fellow, as sound as it was, had no one. He didn't know many people. His wife was the one who engaged socially in their community.

[34 : 43] His family didn't know really what to do. His sister came in and visited, but there wasn't much ongoing care. And the nursing staff of the hospital pointed out how different these two cases were.

Now, we don't even think of it much the time. You know, someone's sick and you take them a casserole or one of the pastors might visit someone who's housebound and kind of encourage them to take communion or something like that.

We have immense resources in our fellowship here, your fellowship, in our churches, that can bless the communities around us.

And we ought not to take that for granted. We've learned from Calvin, haven't we? We recognise that lay and clergy should work together. we recognise that team ministry is healthy ministry.

We recognise that our own ministry in the church can spill over and bless the community around us. people. And my third and final point, and then I'll open up for questions, is the way Calvin's theology worked.

[35 : 59] So far I've spoken about his education and approach to texts and his model of ministry. theology. The third point I want to make is how Calvin understood theology.

Now for many of us that's all we know about Calvin, some of his ideas or that he believed in the doctrine of election or something like that which in some minds makes him a bad guy. Actually I try and frame Calvin as the organising genius because he organised thinking about the scriptures, he organised thinking about ministry in the church and he also organised ideas but sometimes some of us only know about his organisation of ideas so I've left it to last.

Some people you meet will say oh Calvin he was that stupid guy who believed in election. I remember once I was ten pin bowling in Vienna in Austria with a Christian group that I was part of.

I remember a woman who was bowling in my lane discussing discovered that I described myself as Calvinist or reformed in theology and she just stood there and looked at me and said how on earth could you agree with the ideas of that murderer?

Because it is true that a heretic named Servetus came to Geneva preaching against the doctrine of the Trinity and for his heresy he was burnt alive.

[37 : 37] Calvin agreed that he should be punished but Calvin also had argued that he ought not to be burnt but hanged. It is true that Calvin was involved in this heresy trial that he tried to change the mind of the authorities in terms of the actual punishment.

moment. Some people only know Calvin because of that moment. My local bishop in Melbourne sends out a newsletter each week or each couple of weeks and one of them not too long ago spoke about how he'd been reading about Calvin and how he'd pushed to have someone burned and how despicable that was.

And that was the end of his reflection on Calvin. Well I get that this particular incident can put you off the guy.

Just like that woman who I was bawling with said how can you believe in the teaching of a monster. Geneva. I want to say that that was standard for Calvin's world.

It wasn't just Calvin who believed in capital punishment. It was pretty general right? That was the way you dealt with crimes. Heresy was a crime. Calvin asked for the crime, the punishment to be mitigated and certainly if Servetus had remained home in Spain he would have been treated much more badly by the Spanish Inquisition than by the authorities in Geneva.

[39 : 14] either way Calvin taught the doctrine of election which some people see as as it were commensurate with the crime against Servetus.

But interestingly and it's important to say Calvin doesn't talk about election that much. He didn't invent it. Luther spends more time talking about election than Calvin ever does but people never complain about Luther preaching the doctrine of election.

Luther wrote a book called The Bondage of the Will the fact that only when God elects you can you escape your sin. Throughout church history it was a standard.

Most Christians believed in the doctrine of election. This wasn't something Calvin invented because he was a monster. Luther. It's not even the first thing Calvin talks about in the Institutes.

You have to sift through 1800 pages before you get to Calvin talking about election. Calvin's big thing wasn't justification.

[40 : 20] He believed in justification. He agreed with Luther, disagreed with Luther on some points. But justification wasn't the first thing you wrote about in the Institutes. though he does describe justification as the hinge on which all doctrine swings.

Now if you had to summarize what Calvin what's central to Calvin's ideas it wouldn't be election and it wouldn't be justification.

The big idea I think that Calvin tries to highlight is the doctrine of union with God. Union with God.

This is how it worked in the medieval world. If you were a medieval Christian you believed that when you began the Christian life your goal in the Christian life was finally one day after death being united with God connected to Christ.

Christ. So union with God for most medievals happened at the end of life perhaps at the beginning of the next life.

[41 : 40] But Calvin does something unbelievable. Calvin says no you're joined to Christ. You can celebrate union with Christ. You are in Christ from the very first day that you become a Christian.

Union with Christ isn't something you get at the end of the walk. Union with Christ is something you get at the beginning of the Christian walk. And this was unbelievable.

This was really quite an innovation. Perhaps not an innovation but at least this was something very distinctive about Calvin's line of arguing.

That union with God or union with Christ marks the beginning of the Christian life. You get it now. It's not something you have to wait for until the end.

As I've got a quote there Bruce Gordon says home for the exile that means you and me right because we're not in heaven yet.

[42 : 47] Home for the exile is not a location but it's union with God. You and I have already in a sense arrived. We are home because we are connected to God through Christ and if we're believers we can never be disconnected.

If you have the spirit you are connected to God in Christ. You can be confident. You can be secure. You can know what the end of the race will be because you're already as it were home.

If you had to speak about how Calvin organized his ideas I'd say this was one of the leading ideas in Calvin's work.

Union with God in Christ. God in Christ. He believed in election of course. He believed in justification of course. But those weren't unique to him.

Calvin does something more unique with this other doctrine of union with God which I think forms a structure for all his thinking. thing.

[44 : 10] There's only one plan of God. There's only one mediator between God and humankind. There is only one experience of being a Christian and that's an enjoying union with Christ.

Union as a theme is powerful in Calvin's thought. So my third challenge for the night and we finish with this.

How might you think differently about your Christian life if you would agree with Calvin that us being in Christ, us being united with God in Christ, us being secure was the most important category in your spiritual walk.

I think it's wonderful that I can enjoy deep deep connection with God and with you brothers and sisters because we are in Christ together.

There's a unifying thread to all my experience. Though I feel fragmented in this world or distracted or broken, something more true of me is that I'm deeply one, connected, and that should form a foundation for all my experience.

[45 : 42] What I've tried to do tonight then is give you a little window into some of the distinctive achievements of John Calvin. He lived in the 16th century in a small town called Geneva, but there he began a revolution, a revolution of sorts, in the way we approach the scriptures, in the way we approach Christian ministry, and the way we approach theological reflection.

And each of these three things Calvin organised afresh for which we can be very thankful people. Now we've got five or seven minutes or so until our time's up, so if you have some questions or some reflection on what I've said or some other things that you have asked yourself about the ministry of Calvin, then please feel free.

Brother, you asked 17 questions last week, didn't you? I remember, I remember you. Sure. So there were about 17 questions in that as well, I think, just quietly.

Anglican, if you wanted to look at the articles of religion, of the 39 articles, article 17 is on election, and article 17 is basically picking up an idea not very different from Calvin, though what the articles do for Anglicans is they try and say that we're elected to salvation, but that doesn't mean non-Christians are elected to damnation.

So Anglicans make a difference between what God decides for Christians and what God decides for non-Christians. So Calvin kind of says that God elects some to salvation, some to damnation, but the Anglican articles hold back a little bit from that and say, no, God elects his own, and he overlooks those who aren't believers.

[47 : 48] They're not equal opposites, if you will. So I think, brother, it would be good to read article 17. It's the longest of all the 39 articles because most, it's only three paragraphs at that, but it expounds it quite pastorally.

The reason I'm an Anglican, by the way, was at this very point, I remember sitting at Ridley whenever it was too many years ago to recall. I got converted into a Brethren Assembly, and I'd been going to a Brethren Assembly for a lot of years until I started at St.

Jude's in Carlton. And I remember distinctly thinking, I want to be an Anglican because the article on election, article 17, beautifully presents the scriptural truth of God's choosing us, but it's described there in a very pastorally gentle way.

It's not thumping the tub and rejoicing that there are people who are damned. It's very gently and carefully and pastorally describing the joys that come to Christians, knowing that they've been elect in Christ.

Yeah. So for the recording, Olive's made a point about Thomas Chalmers and his care for his community, I think it was Glasgow, was it Glaswegian?

[49 : 12] Edinburgh. Was it Edinburgh, was it? Yes, it could well be. He was a Scot and they literally did this, they divided up the area into districts and elders were assigned responsibility for the poor in that district for social relief, for care.

It was quite extraordinary. I haven't done much reading on Chalmers but I have recently read the story. Is that right? To care for it?

And I think, you know, I actually think that churches now are doing better at this than perhaps 20 years ago in Melbourne, thinking about caring for their communities outside of the church walls, whether it might be some mercy ministries, whether it might be small groups helping out with the local primary school, painting a building or doing some gardening or whatever it might be.

I hear more and more of these stories which is just wonderful. What about the homeless? I think we need greater minds than mine to try and work out how you serve those who are so disadvantaged.

It is really chronic, isn't it? And in a country as wealthy as Australia, we should have the homelessness that we do. I just find it breathtaking. Yep, so again that has a number of parts and I'm going to answer gently.

[50 : 39] The language of covenant is a Bible word, of course. In the New Testament, the language of covenant appears and Calvin uses the language of covenant and builds quite a system upon it.

It's not just Calvin actually, it's other reformed thinkers and they probably do it more than Calvin does in the 17th century after the 16th century. But the idea of covenant is again a category that defends unity.

A covenant is an expression of unity between God and people or we covenant together to enjoy unity one with another. So it's not distant from the kind of third point I made that the oneness themes in Calvin are really quite strong as the covenant themes are.

But you have to turn up the volume on covenant if you're turning up the volume on human sin and therefore distance from God or dirt before God because there needs to be a mechanism for us who are sinners to be reunited with a holy creator.

I don't think Calvin uses the language of covenant to describe society though the Scottish Presbyterians might have done that more.

[52 : 01] And there was another point I was going to make which now escapes me. But I might take that on notice until next week. That's what I was going to say. In the baptism service, the Anglican baptism service, the language of covenant is never used.

Anglicans are a bit more cautious about the covenant language using it outside of the more classic description for the way God relates to humankind. Friends, it's nine o'clock so I'm going to bid my leave.

If you want to buy my book, I brought some spare copies this week, \$23. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, I do thank you for this opportunity to think about the ministry of John Calvin.

Please help us to learn lessons. Please help us to reflect on our own lives before you in the light of these lessons.

For Christ's sake. Amen.