**Calvin’s *Institutes of Christian Religion***

Lesson 32: The Government of the Church (Book 4, Chapter 3)

**Chapter 3: The Doctors and Ministers of the Church, Their Election and Office**

1. Why does God use men to oversee His Church? “The Lord alone should rule and reign in the church as well as have authority or pre-eminence in it, and this authority should be exercised and administered by His Word alone. Nevertheless, because He does not dwell among us in visible presence [Matt. 26:11], we have said that He uses the ministry of men to declare openly His will to us by mouth, as a sort of delegated work, not by transferring to them His right and honor, but only that through their mouths He may do his own work— just as a workman uses a tool to do his work.”
2. What are some reasons for doing it this way?
   1. *It shows us His regard for men*. “…from among men He takes some to serve as His ambassadors in the world [cf. II Cor. 5:20], to be interpreters of His secret will and, in short, to represent His person. And by this evidence He proves it to be no idle speaking that He often calls us His temples [I Cor. 3:16– 17, 6:19; II Cor. 6:16], since from the lips of men, as from the sanctuary, He gives his answers to men.
   2. *It humbles us*. “If God spoke from heaven, it would not be surprising if His sacred oracles were to be reverently received without delay by the ears and minds of all. For who would not dread the presence of His power? Who would not be stricken down at the sight of such great majesty? Who would not be confounded at such boundless splendor? But when a puny man risen from the dust speaks in God’s name, at this point we best evidence our piety and obedience toward God if we show ourselves teachable toward His minister, although he excels us in nothing.”
   3. *It fosters mutual love for one another*. “Nothing fosters mutual love more fittingly than for men to be bound together with this bond: one is appointed pastor to teach the rest, and those bidden to be pupils receive the common teaching from one mouth. For if anyone were sufficient to himself and needed no one else’s help (such is the pride of human nature), each man would despise the rest and be despised by them. The Lord has therefore bound his church together with a knot that He foresaw would be the strongest means of keeping unity, while He entrusted to men the teaching of salvation and everlasting life in order that through their hands it might be communicated to the rest.
3. What is the significance of ministers for the church?   
   “Paul shows that the church can be kept intact only if it be upheld by the safeguards in which it pleased the Lord to place its salvation. “Christ ascended on high,” Paul says, “that he might fill all things.” [Eph. 4:10] This is the manner of fulfillment: through the ministers to whom He has entrusted this office and has conferred the grace to carry it out, He dispenses and distributes His gifts to the church; and He shows Himself as though present by manifesting the power of His Spirit in this His institution, that it be not vain or idle. Thus the renewal of the saints is accomplished; thus the body of Christ is built up [Eph. 4:12]; thus “we grow up in every way into him who is the Head” [Eph. 4:15] and grow together among ourselves; thus are we all brought into the unity of Christ, if prophecy flourishes among us, if we receive the apostles, if we do not refuse the doctrine administered to us.”
4. Some Scriptural examples that hold in high esteem pastoral ministry:
   1. Isaiah 52:7 – “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’”
   2. Luke 10:16 – “The one who hears you hears me [Jesus], and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects Him who sent me.”
   3. 2 Corinthians 3:9 – “For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation [OT/Mosaic Law], the ministry of righteousness [NT Apostolic ministry] must far exceed it in glory.”
   4. 2 Corinthians 4:6 – “For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts [apostles/ministers] to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”
5. “How great the necessity of the ministry is, God has declared not only in words but also by examples. When God willed that the light of His truth should shine more fully upon Cornelius, He sent an angel from heaven to direct him to Peter [Acts 10:3–6]. When he willed to call Paul to the knowledge of Himself and to engraft him into the church, He does not address Him with his own voice, but sends him to a man from whom he is to receive both the doctrine of salvation and the sanctification of baptism [Acts 9:6]. It is not by chance that the angel, who is God’s interpreter, abstains from declaring God’s will, but orders a man to be sent for to declare it. It is not without reason that Christ, the sole teacher of believers, entrusts Paul to the teaching of a man— that very Paul whom He had determined to catch up into the third heaven and make worthy to receive a wonderful revelation of things unspeakable [II Cor. 12:2–4]. Who, then, would dare despise that ministry or dispense with it as something superfluous, whose use God willed to attest with such proofs?”
6. Calvin then moves from discussion the high nature of pastoral ministry to talk about the several offices/officers of the ministry.
   1. Ephesians 4:11 – “And He [God] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers”
   2. “Apostles, then, were sent out to lead the world back from rebellion to true obedience to God, and to establish his Kingdom everywhere by the preaching of the gospel, or, if you prefer, as the first builders of the church, to lay its foundations in all the world [I Cor. 3:10].”
7. Calvin says the first three offices listed there were temporary, while the last two are “perpetual and indispensable. The foundation has been laid so those offices particularly related to laying the foundation have ceased. However, the house is continually being built until Christ comes so those offices related to the building up of the house continue while Christ tarries.
   1. Interestingly enough, Calvin called Luther an “apostle or at least an evangelist” who was called to lead the church back from the rebellion of the Antichrist. However, this was “extraordinary” because is regular churches it has no place.
8. Calvin held to a 4-fold office: Pastors, Doctors [Teachers], Elders, and Deacons. Doctors were not to discipline or administer sacraments, but rather interpret Scripture in order “to keep doctrine whole and pure among believers.”
9. But, even though apostle and prophet have ceased as offices, the office of minister roughly corresponds to apostle and the office of teacher roughly corresponds with prophet.
10. Concerning the task of the apostle-pastor, Calvin writes, “The Lord, when He sent out the apostles, gave them the command to preach the gospel and to baptize those who believe unto forgiveness of sins [Matt. 28:19]. But He had previously commanded that they distribute the sacred symbols of his body and blood after his example [Luke 22:19]. Here is the holy, inviolable, and perpetual law imposed upon those who took the place of the apostles, by which they receive the command to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. From this we infer that those who neglect both of these pretend falsely to be apostles.”
11. Additionally, pastors are bound to his particular church. Pastors can aid pastors in other churches and indeed this is what is going on at Presbytery and Synod meetings, but each pastor has been given the domain of his own church and respect the limits of their province and the provinces of other ministers. Lest you think this is a human idea, Calvin writes: “This is not of human devising but ordained by God himself. For we read that Paul and Barnabas created presbyters in the individual churches of Lystra, Antioch, and Iconium [Acts 14:22–23]; and Paul himself bade Titus appoint presbyters in every town [Titus 1:5]. So in one place Paul speaks of the bishops of the Philippians [Phil. 1:1]; in another, of Archippus the bishop of the Colossians [Col. 4:17]. And in Luke there is a notable sermon of Paul’s to the presbyters of the church at Ephesus [Acts 20:18–19].”
12. Calvin sees the various words used in Scripture – bishop, presbyter, pastor, minister – as being synonymous and interchangeable. See Titus 1:5,7; 1 Tim 3:1; Phil 1:1; Acts 20:17, 28.
13. Calvin then begins to discuss “governors” (1 Cor. 12:28 – ESV translates as “administers”) whom Calvin also calls elders. Elders are “charged with the censure of morals and the exercise of discipline along with the bishops.” See Rom. 12:8. This office is for all ages until Christ returns.
14. Deacons are entrusted with the care of the poor and Calvin see two kinds of deacons from Romans 12:8 – “He that gives” and “He that shows mercy.” In other words, there are those who serve the church in administering the affairs of the poor and then other deacons who actually care for the poor. The first distributes the alms and is administrative. The second are those devoted to the care of the poor and sick. The office of deacon finds its establishment in Acts 6 but it’s done under the authority of the apostles/ministers. So the office of deacon finds itself in submission to the office of elder, but the two are to work together for the good of the Church.
15. Interestingly enough, Calvin was apparently open to widows (a certain class of women) being deacons in the sense of the 2nd type of deacon (actually caring for the poor/sick) based on 1 Timothy 5:9-10.
    1. But notice that there are severe restrictions – widow, over 60, already had a history of doing the type of work of a deacon. Also note, that there was no authority in this office either. For Calvin, the authoritative aspects of being a deacon (i.e., taking care of the financial affairs of the church, determining how and to whom to distribute the church’s resources) are reserved for the men deacons alone. The women deacons function somewhat like nurses.
16. Calvin finishes this chapter discussing the calling, authorization, and ordination of ministers. Ministers must be called (inwardly and outwardly) [Heb 5:4], must respond to the calling, and carry out the tasks of the calling. The qualifications for calling are found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:7-9. Essentially, they must hold to sound doctrine and live a holy life, which ironically are the basic things that ministers exhort all of Christ’s church to pursue. They must be doing it themselves in order to exhort the Church to do it also. For those men who meet these qualifications and sense the inward call of God’s Spirit, the church then confirms that inner call with an outward call and this is done with the oversight of other ministers and done by the laying on of hands (Acts 13:2-3) and voted on by the people (Acts 14:23, Acts 6:2-7).
17. “We therefore hold that this call of a minister is lawful according to the Word of God, when those who seemed fit are created by the consent and approval of the people; moreover, that other pastors ought to preside over the election in order that the multitude may not go wrong either through fickleness, through evil intentions, or through disorder.” This is what happens when students at seminary come under the care of the Presbytery, are only received based on their testimony and sense of call, are examined in sound doctrine and pastoral ministry, and then approved to be called by a local church of God.”