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

Lesson 33: The Roman Catholic Abuse of Church Government, Part 1 (Book 4, Chapters 4-6)

**Chapter 4: The Condition of the Ancient Church, and the Kind of Government in Use Before the Papacy**

1. Main idea: Calvin surveys church history regarding the government of the church, and how it developed through the centuries. He shows how the respective offices (minister, elder, deacon) underwent both refinement (clearer theological thinking) and enlargement, depending on circumstances, and what the government of the church looked like before the papacy started to rise and dominate the life of the church.
2. All who were called to the office of minister were called “presbyters” and in each city they chose one “presbyter” (minister) to be a “bishop.” This was done so that dissensions might not arise from equality of rank. “Still, the bishop was not so much higher in honor and dignity as to have lordship over his colleagues.”
3. Jerome writes, “Just as the presbyters, therefore, know that they are, according to the custom of the church, subject to him who presides [bishop], so the bishops recognize that they are superior to the presbyters more according to the custom of the church than by the Lord’s actual arrangement, and that they ought to govern the church in co-operation with them.”
4. Nevertheless, the duty of both bishop and presbyter was the ministry of the Word and Sacraments.
5. In order to deal with incidents in the church that could not be settled by the few presbyters and bishop in a city, the matter was referred to a province where the bishops gathered together and elected one of their own to be archbishop of the province. Finally, if the province could not settle the matter it was referred to the church at large (Synod) and the archbishops selected one of their own to be patriarch.
   1. This corresponds amazingly to our Presbyterian system of the church session, the Presbytery (w/moderator), and Synod (w/moderator).
6. In the early church, the diaconate was the same as we saw laid out last week in Scripture.
7. Ministers were to be provided for, yet not to the point to where they could indulge in luxury and indulgence, as ministers were to be examples of frugality to others. One could be removed from his office if he began to live in excess.
8. As greedy people infiltrated the church, the revenues of the church were divided into 1)provision for clergy, 2) provision for the poor within the church, 3)repair for churches and other building and 4)provisions for the poor outside the church
9. The bishops would receive into their keeping young children (with parents permission) to train and instruct them in the faith so that they made be prepared to take office at an older age. These were called “clerics.” If they proved themselves over time, they rose in rank to deacon, then presbyter. Ordination to bishop was done with approval by the other ministers as well as the people in that area.

**Chapter 5: The Ancient Form of Government Was Completely Overthrown by the Tyranny of the Papacy**

1. Main idea: Calvin argues that the papacy brought tyranny into the life of the church, since it overthrew the biblical stipulations regarding who may hold church office and how such persons should be appointed to the same. Additionally, the relationship between church and state were compromised and various abuses were introduced. The morals of the clergy devolved completely, being thoroughly corrupted.
2. Lack of Theological Training: Calvin argues that in his day, those who are elected as bishops do not have any theological learning and if they have any learning, it’s more about being able to argue in court rather than have skill and understanding in preaching. And don’t even get him started on their morals! “If their morals are appraised, we shall find few or almost none whom the ancient canons would not have judged unworthy.”
3. Voice of the People Lost: Not only that, but the people’s right in electing a bishop has been taken away. The Church has slowly added laws (canons) to herself that now contradict the very Word of God.
4. Calvin argues against the widespread Medieval practice of assigning "benefices," or revenue-producing parishes, to absentee pastors. In some cases, men received multiple benefices without ever having the intention to discharge any pastoral duties for people who lived in the parish. He argues that such practices were "utterly contrary to God, nature, and church government." His attacks on these "monstrous abuses," as he called them, were motivated by strong, simple convictions about the proper government of the church: churches should call their own pastors; pastors should take seriously their God-given duty to lead holy lives and take good spiritual care of the churches they are called to serve. None of that has been present since the rise of the Roman bishop as “Pope.”
5. Concerning Monks: Calvin had little time for monks who claimed to fulfill a priestly function. Whatever virtues monastic life may hold, it is not a pastoral ministry in the biblical sense; nor was it ever treated that way in the early church. Because monks generally did not preach, exercise church discipline, or administer the sacraments, Calvin did not regard their work as priestly ministry.
6. Corrupt Bishops: Calvin was equally impatient with most of the bishops of his day. Although he recognized the validity of their office, he rarely saw them fulfill it. Many failed to reside in the parishes they served. They did not preach or exercise pastoral care. In short, they "acted just as if the pastor's function were to do nothing." The only thing Calvin said they did well was to collect money from their parishioners.

Calvin also criticized the priests and bishops for their low standard of morality. His long list of clerical vices included excess, effeminacy, fraud, lust, greed, cruelty, treason, and the like. As far as Calvin could see, scarcely one bishop in a hundred, "if his conduct were to be judged according to the ancient canons, would not be subject either to excommunication or at least to deposition from office.”

1. Concerning Deacons: Then there were the deacons, who were called to give alms to the poor, but usually viewed the diaconate as a good career move, a stepping-stone to the priesthood.
2. None of these men [monks, corrupt bishops/deacons] had any business serving in ministry. Whatever authority they were granted by the Roman Catholic Church, they failed to have the support of the apostles, the endorsement of the early church fathers, or the approval of Jesus Christ.

**Chapter 6: The Primacy of the Roman See [Area of Church Jurisdiction]**

1. Main idea: Calvin describes at length “the capstone” of the whole corrupt nature of the Roman hierarchical system and its abuses, namely the papacy. He argues against the RCC claim of apostolic succession from Peter, argues that in effect the RCC has transferred headship of the church from Christ to a human head, and Calvin argues that Christ’s headship cannot be transferred to another. The unity of the Church does not depend upon or require a universal bishop over the whole institution.
2. Catholic Arguments for the Pope: 1) OT Israel had a high priest 2)Jesus’ Words to Peter in Matt 16:18 (rock) and John 21:15 (feed my sheep) 3) The Keys of the Kingdom (Matt 16:19) give absolute authority to the Pope and salvation is found only through holding fast to the RCC 4) The Pope is the head of the church on earth as Christ’s representative
3. Calvin’s Response: 1) Christ is our high priest and the Church is constituted differently than Israel 2) “the rock” is the foundation of apostles who confess Jesus is the Christ, & Peter commands other ministers to feed the sheep [1 Peter 5:2] 3) the "key" to heaven is simply the gospel of Jesus Christ, to which people are bound by faith or else loosed by unbelief 4) Christ is the only head of the Church
4. Scriptural support for Christ as the only head of the Church: Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:15-16, 5:23; Colossians 1:18, 2:9-10; Christ holds the church together, not the Pope
5. Calvin also appeals to the early church fathers Jerome and Cyprian who wrote that bishops were equal and all under the authority of Jesus Christ.
6. "Where is the primacy of the Roman See, if the entire bishopric resides in Christ alone?" Calvin concludes that the papal authority assumed in later days was unknown to the ancient church and therefore constituted a usurpation of the true authority of the exalted Christ.