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

Lesson 36: Ecclesiastical Power & Its Abuse by the Roman Catholic Church, Part 2 - Legislative (Book 4, Chapter 10)

Calvin distinguishes 3 types of ecclesiastical power:

1. Doctrinal authority – the church may rightly define doctrine and declare its faith against error (Chs. 8-9)
2. Legislative authority – the church may establish polity for its well-ordered governance
3. Jurisdictional authority – the church’s authority in matters of church discipline (Ch. 11)

**Chapter 10: The Power of Making Laws, in Which the Pope, With His Supporters, Has Exercised Upon Souls the Most Savage Tyranny and Butchery**

1. The question at hand is, “Does the church have the power to make laws that bind consciences?”
2. To put the question another way, “How is God to be duly worshipped according to the rule laid down by Him and how can the spiritual freedom which looks to God remain unimpaired for us?”
3. Calvin says that from this practice by the RCC has “arisen innumerable human traditions” that function as “so many nets to ensnare miserable souls.”
4. Luke 11:46 – “Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.”

*Ecclesiastical Laws*

1. “Calvin is opposed to the establishment of human traditions that make rules apart from God’s Word and are enforced with penalties if not followed.” –J. Mark Beach
2. “Since God is the only Lawgiver, to function in his place is to usurp his authority and to hurt his people. In order to have peace with God, we must be free, and in order to be free we cannot be under the burden of laws that are not prescribed by God. The Church must not make necessary that which Christ has left free. If we ignore this rule, the result will be anxiety, pain, terror, and grief.” --Reformation 21 Blog
3. The RCC says that the laws she makes are “spiritual” (pertaining to the soul) and are necessary for eternal life.
4. Calvin says, “Necessity ought not to be imposed upon consciences in those matters from which they have been freed by Christ; and unless freed, they cannot rest with God.”
5. So the Word should govern any laws or principles of worship that the Church lays down for people, not traditions of man or dependence upon Councils (which as we saw last week may make errors).
6. 1 Cor. 7:35 – “I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.” Paul leaves necessity out when talking about an area where Jesus left freedom.

*Abuse of Conscience*

1. What is conscience? “When men have an awareness of divine judgment adjoined to them as a witness which does not let them hide their sins but arraigns them as guilty before the judgment seat.” That awareness is “conscience.” This comes from the Latin “*scientia*” which means understanding or knowledge.
2. Romans 2:14-15 – “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. **15**They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them”
3. “This feeling, which draws men to God’s judgment, is like a keeper assigned to man, that watches and observes all his secrets so that nothing may remain buried in darkness.”
4. 1 Timothy 1:5 – “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience [moral uprightness and integrity in heart] and a sincere faith.”
5. But there are some things that are in and of themselves indifferent.
6. 1 Cor. 10:28-29 – “But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience— **29**I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else’s conscience?”
7. Since our consciences have to do with God alone, any human law laid upon us and described as “necessary” is unlawful.
8. A civil magistrate may impose laws regarding outward conduct to which we must submit, but he has no authority or power to impose laws which govern our inward man (soul) pertaining to worship and Christian living.
9. “The church has no right to command the obligatory observance of laws or rules which have been conceived apart from God’s Word.” –J. Mark Beach
10. “The whole case rests upon this: if God is the sole lawgiver, men are not permitted to usurp this honor. Consequently, we ought at the same time to keep in mind these two reasons already mentioned why the Lord claims this for Himself alone. The first is that we should have in His will the perfect rule of all righteousness and holiness, and thus in knowing Him possess the perfect knowledge of the good life. The second is that He alone (when we seek the way to worship Him aright and fitly) has authority over our souls, Him we ought to obey, and upon His will we ought to wait.”
11. James 4:12 – “There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy”
12. Colossians 2:8 – “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.”
13. Some RCC examples:
    1. “It is far more wicked to have skipped auricular confession [confessional to priest] at the turn of the year than to have led an utterly wicked life the whole year through.”
    2. “It is far more wicked to taste meat on Friday [during Lent] than to have fouled the whole body with fornication every day.”
    3. “It is far more wicked for a priest to be bound in 1 lawful marriage than to be entangled in a thousand adulteries.”
14. “While commending the observance of God’s commandments only coldly and perfunctorily, they nonetheless zealously and busily urge an exact obedience to their own.”
15. At the heart, the elements of worship should show forth Christ rather than hide Him. The RCC has 7 sacraments rather than the 2 simple sacraments instituted in the NT. “It is certain that all ceremonies are corrupt and harmful unless through them men are led to Christ. But those ceremonies in use under the papacy are separated from teaching so as to hold men to utterly meaningless signs.”
16. Matthew 15:8-9 – “‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’”

*The Necessity of Ecclesiastical Polity*

1. “We see that some form of organization is necessary in all human society to foster the common peace and maintain concord. We further see that in human transactions some procedure is always in effect, which is to be respected in the interests of public decency, and even of humanity itself. This ought especially to be observed in churches, which are best sustained when all things are under a well-ordered constitution…”
2. 1 Cor. 14:40 – “But all things should be done decently and in order.” [The context is corporate worship]
3. So there are church laws and church order in a constitution that are good for promoting decency and orderliness in church and this is called “church polity” (government). “But in these observances one thing must be guarded against. They are not to be considered necessary for salvation and thus bind consciences by scruples; nor are they to be associated with the worship of God, and piety thus be lodged in them.”
4. Examples: the time fixed for corporate worship, the place fixed for corporate worship, how the order of worship looks, when/frequency of Lord’s Supper observance, etc.
5. “Especially are there those things which maintain discipline, such as catechizing, church censures, excommunication, fasting, and whatever can be referred to the same list.” ARP Example: Our Book of Discipline. It lays out all sorts of rules and procedures to follow that are not explicitly laid down in Scripture, but are either based upon Scripture or inferred from Scripture. But we don’t make following this a matter of salvation. I submit to it as a minister and you’ve submitted to it as a church member in believing that it is in accord with Scripture, sound doctrine, and wisdom.
6. “I approve only those human constitutions which are founded upon God’s authority, drawn from Scripture, and, therefore, wholly divine.”
7. Calvin discusses kneeling while praying. God’s Word does sanction kneeling while praying [Acts 21:5], but Scripture also allows other postures for praying. So kneeling is not so necessary that it becomes a matter of salvation.
8. The law of love should be our guide so we may judge what would hurt or what would edify and any observances imposed should be few and edifying.
9. So there are 2 extremes we want to avoid when it comes to worship and church government:
   1. Making human laws and setting upon them a “necessity” which if disobeyed bars one from salvation. (Roman Catholic Church).
   2. Having no church laws whatsoever to govern and order worship, piety, and discipline.