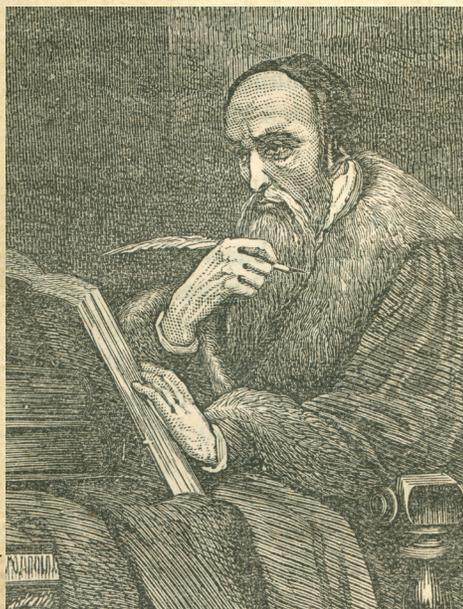


## FACES OF THE REFORMATION

### JOHN CALVIN

**Born:** July 10, 1509 | Noyon, northern France

**Died:** May 27, 1564 | Geneva, Switzerland



REFORMATION  
2017 It's *Still* All About  
**Jesus**

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## The French Reformer Who Limited Christ's Atonement to Only a Chosen Few

Born in 1509, John Calvin was a second-generation reformer. He was 8 years old when Martin Luther posted the 95 Theses in 1517. By the time Calvin studied theology, Luther's writings were available in his native language of French. Unlike the earlier reformers, Calvin spent little time differentiating his theology from Roman Catholicism. Instead, he focused his theology on finding common ground between Luther and Ulrich Zwingli.

Calvin encountered Luther's works in 1534 and identified himself on the side of the Reformation. He read and valued Luther's writings. His first edition of the "Institutes of Christian Religion" mimicked the format of the Large Catechism. Calvin also had a positive relationship with Melancthon. He translated Melancthon's "Loci Communes" into French and signed the Variata of the Augsburg Confession after Melancthon edited Article X on the Eucharist.

In addition to reading Luther, Calvin was also aware of Zwingli's theology. Calvin's theology mediated between the two. Agreeing with Luther and reacting against Zwingli, Calvin argued that we are so saved by grace alone that it is not possible for any individual to "choose" salvation. Rather, through grace God has chosen us. Luther used this theology to emphasize that it is by grace that we have been saved. Calvin, however, used this same idea to focus on the absolute providence of God. He created the doctrine of double predestination: God has chosen some for salvation and, therefore, God must have also chosen others for damnation.

Calvin also disagreed with Luther in the use of the Law. Calvin argued that the third use of the Law (the guide for our behavior) was the Law's primary use, thus agreeing with Zwingli's call for radical piety. He argued that the Law was presented as a measure of grace and, therefore, the third use of it should be primary. Luther, while acknowledging a third use of the Law, emphasized the second use of the Law (the mirror to show us our own sinfulness) and recognized a distinction between Law and Gospel, whereas Calvin attempted to blend the two.

Finally, Calvin created a middle ground between Luther and Zwingli on the Eucharist. While he respected Luther's view of the real presence, he also incorporated some of Zwingli's arguments that the risen Christ's body is in heaven and, thus, cannot be bodily present in the Sacrament. Calvin created a compromise — that Christ's human nature is on the right hand of God and, therefore, cannot be in the Sacrament. He argued, however, that Christ's spiritual nature was able to be present both in heaven and in the Sacrament at the same time. Thus, Christ's presence was present spiritually but not bodily in the Sacrament. Calvin's teaching on the Sacrament proved to be the most divisive of all and the one that Lutherans could not find ways to accept.

Calvin's attempt to mediate the theology of Luther and Zwingli created a third theology that emphasized the points of contention to which Lutherans would later have to respond in the Formula of Concord.

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