

# hope FOR

# TODAY



A Publication of Sycamore Reformed Presbyterian Church **summer 2009**

## FROM THE pastor's desk

### **Hearts Aflame** by Barry York

He was born on July 10, 1509, meaning this month marks the 500th anniversary of his birth. His life's prayer, symbolized by a heart on fire being held out by an open hand, was "I offer my heart to you, O Lord, promptly and sincerely." The impact of his life centuries later bears a strange witness to this prayer. For people who hear his teachings rarely remain unaffected by them. Their hearts too become enflamed—either with these teachings or against them.

I speak of John Calvin, and the response to his name or teachings (known as Calvinism) invokes the same reaction five centuries later as it did in his age. Many loved Calvin in his day. One called his academy at Geneva, Switzerland, "the most perfect school of Christ since the days of the apostles." One of his successors, writing a biography of Calvin, compared him and other godly men to stars, "since they by their brightness show the way of happiness to others." Yet many in Geneva scorned Calvin, believing that their happiness was the last thing Calvin desired. So despised was he that the most popular name for dogs in Geneva became "Calvin" in order to ridicule him!

If nothing else can be agreed upon about Calvin, most anyone will acknowledge his

influence. He wrote thousands of tracts, letters, commentaries and books that are still widely translated and read today. One of his books, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, is still considered to be one of the clearest defenses of Protestant theology ever written. His teachings helped spread the Reformation throughout Europe like wildfire, and were brought to colonial America by its founders. He is credited for such things as bringing a healthy separation between civil and church authority that were influential on the democratic view of government; transforming care for the poor from almsgiving to vocational training; returning congregational singing, study of the Bible and access to the sacraments to the lay people (which had been forbidden to them in the medieval period).

Indeed, pastors and rulers from many European nations sought Calvin out; yet through it all he lived modestly to the point that, when he died, he even insisted his grave remain unmarked lest it be venerated wrongly. One of his chief denouncers, Pope Pius, said: "The strength of that heretic, consisted in this, that money never had the slightest charm for him. If I had had

"Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." -Romans 5:5

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such servants my dominion would extend from sea to sea.”

On Friday, July 17th, our congregation invites you to come and learn more about this incredible man. We will have three short presentations of John Calvin, done not only in honor of his birthday, but also in celebration of Bill VanDoodewaard's recent accomplishment. Bill is a pastoral intern at Sycamore Reformed Presbyterian Church who has just completed his PhD in Church History from the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. After being with us for three years, Bill and his precious family are moving away later this month as he takes up a teaching assignment at Patrick Henry College in Virginia.

As you hear of Calvin's life, ministry and teaching, we can promise one thing. Your heart, one way or another, will start burning!

**Hearts Aflame:** A Seminar on John Calvin In Honor of His 500th Birthday and in Celebration of Bill VanDoodewaard's PhD

**Friday, July 17th**

7:00 p.m.

Sycamore Reformed Presbyterian Church

7:00-7:30 p.m.

**Calvin and His Fascinating History**

Bill VanDoodewaard

7:45-8:00

**Calvin and His Tireless Ministry to the Poor**  
Jason Camery

8:15-8:30

**Calvin and the Awful Doctrine of Predestination**  
Barry York

*Refreshments & Nursery Provided!  
Questions Invited!*

## HISTORY speaks today

### psalm 48:12-13

**The Life of John Calvin** by Bill VanDoodewaard

When Gerard and Jeanne Cauvin welcomed their baby on July 10, 1509, they little suspected that the boy would create a reformation within the Protestant Reformation, changing Christianity forever.

At 11 or 12 years old, Jean Cauvin (or John Calvin) was sent to Paris to prepare for the priesthood, but switched to studying law in Orleans 5 years later. There, Calvin was converted, trusting in Christ alone for forgiveness of his sins, and developed a deep burden to know God more and understand his grace better. Shortly after, Calvin began

travelling and living in various places in France and Italy while beginning his Institutes of the Christian Religion. Calvin expanded, revised and refined the Institutes for the rest of his life, leaving the church a legacy of careful, biblical theology several volumes large. What began as an explanation of Protestantism for a Catholic monarch became a detailed theology of the Reformed faith.

On his way from Ferrara to Strasbourg in 1536, he spent one night in the city of Geneva, and was convinced by a local preacher to stay there, teaching the people biblical doctrine.



Calvin spent the majority of his life in Geneva, preaching, writing, lecturing, marrying, and dying in May of 1564. An intensely private man, we know little of Calvin's personal life. Even this, however, accords with the doctrine Calvin understood and taught: his goal was not to leave a personal legacy, but an enduring testimony to God's glory. God blessed his work and, half a millennia later, is reviving and blessing it still.

# sycamore EVENTS



## NEW SONG CONCERT! JULY 30 AT 7 PM

The concert will be held in our sanctuary for our congregation and the community.

Join us for a pre-concert cookout at 5:30 pm and then for a concert by New Song, a singing group from Geneva College, on July 30 at 7 pm.



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Visit our website at  
[www.sycamorerpc.org](http://www.sycamorerpc.org)  
and learn more about the church  
and it's people!

## jason camery shares his story



When one thinks about their personal testimony we often remember how God first convicted us of our sin. We feel the need to have our sins forgiven and we turn to Jesus Christ who promises to forgive our sins. This took place in my life in December of 1995. I remember praying for forgiveness and responding to Jesus' words in the Bible found in 1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins

and purify us from all unrighteousness." This was the beginning of a new life in Christ and one that has brought me peace and joy.

However, I would like to offer a different type of testimony for your consideration. This testimony is based on what I have already stated because if it was not for Christ's forgiveness I could not write this! As a new Christian I was eager to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ and the Scriptures which explained His teaching. This eagerness was primarily fed by Bible study and preaching heard every Sunday at church. Also, during the week, I would listen to the radio that broadcasted sermons by trusted pastors like John MacArthur, Ravi Zacharias, and Steve Brown. It was this combination of study empowered by the Holy Spirit that led me to discern something I had never considered before! I slowly began to see that Christianity is about God's sovereign grace and not about man's free will.

The revelation of God's sovereign grace in my salvation caused me to fight against it. I mean, I wanted a little credit for choosing Christ! But it was Christ who told His disciples in John 15:16 "You did not choose Me but I chose you..." This scripture and many others like it worked on my heart until I came to the conclusion that I would have never chosen Christ unless He chose me first. When this truth hit me I was serving as a youth pastor in a large church. As you might guess many in the church that I was serving in were not as excited about this as I was. I left that church by the sovereign will of God and embarked on a road that expanded my faith. Today, as I look back, I see God's direction in teaching me the doctrines of grace and allowing me to understand the reformed faith which is the gospel. Many credit John Calvin with this understanding of scripture. But John Calvin is only one among thousands of godly men who have taught the truth about God's sovereign grace or, shall I say, God's free will.