

Two weeks ago I spoke to you about the greatest leader in the first generation of the Reformers. Martin Luther did a work such as few men in all history have done. He was certainly as devoted to Christ as any man in the whole history of the Christian church. There were many others who did fine work in the same generation as Martin Luther, but there was another generation which followed. And there was another word that was needed, a word of a different nature from that given by Martin Luther.

It was similar to the case of Elijah and Elisha. Elijah did a great work which Elisha never could have done. Elisha did a word Elijah could not have done. If the order of the two men had been reversed, neither of them would have accomplished half of what he did. Elijah laid the foundation. Without it, the work of Elisha would have accomplished far less than it did. Elisha's work needed Elijah as a foundation.

We have a somewhat similar situation in the difference between the first and second generation of the Reformers. The outstanding leader among many fine men of the first generation of Reformers was Martin Luther. In the second generation of Reformers there were also many very great men, but by far the most outstanding of them was John Calvin. John Calvin and M. Luther agreed almost exactly in their theology. There is hardly anything you can find in Calvin's writings that you don't already find in Luther's writings. Calvin often expressed things in a particularly fine way. He gave excellent illustrations, opened up new light from various aspects, but his teaching and that of Luther, except in one point which Luther magnified tremendously, except in that one point, their teaching was almost identical.

Luther though dealt with situations as he found them. He would see a need, and he would write about it. He would see another need and he would make a big attack about this matter. He would be attacked on a certain point, and he would explain it and go into it. Thus it is not systematic in that sense. It was a dealing with the issues as they arose, and this was necessary in the first generation. Luther wrote in a way to reach the common man. He wrote articles that were distributed all over Europe and that had tremendous wide influence among all types of people. It wasn't necessary to systematize, to organize, to establish on a lasting foundation. And this was the great work that Calvin did. The points about Calvin that are usually spoken of as Calvinism, his great emphasis on the sovereignty of God, we already find in Luther. In fact we find them more clearly and strongly in Luther's writings than in anything that Calvin himself wrote. Many of Luther's followers lateron receded from Luther's rather extreme position on these points, but between Calvin and Luther the only real difference was over the matter of the communion service. On that there was a rather sharp distinction between Luther and Zwingli, the founder of the Reformation in Switzerland. Luther thought that difference in the understanding of the communion was so great that he refused to cooperate with Zwingli in any way. Calvin actually stood about half way between Luther and Zwingli and a little more on the side of Luther perhaps than on that of Zwingli.