

***A Little Book on the Christian Life, by John Calvin***  
**Westminster Book of the Month**  
**March 1, 2023**

## I. Introduction

### A. Calvin's Legacy

1. Education – “The Academy of Geneva”
2. Care for the Poor
3. Ethics and God's Moral Law in Society
4. Freedom of the Church
5. Decentralized Politics
  - a) *“He that will not honor the memory and respect the influence of Calvin knows but little of the origin of American liberty.”* – George Bancroft, *Literary and Historical Miscellancies*, 450.
6. Doctrine of Vocation
7. Music in the Vernacular
8. Geneva Bible
9. World Missions
  - a) On Isaiah 12:4 (“... *make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted*”), Calvin argued God *“means that the work of this deliverance will be so excellent that it ought to be proclaimed, not in one corner only, but throughout the whole world . . . spread abroad to all men.”*
10. Preaching

## II. Calvin the Man

### A. Introduction

1. “We shall always find it hard to love the man [John Calvin] who darkened the human soul with the most absurd and blasphemous conception of God in all the long and honored history of nonsense.”<sup>1</sup>
2. *“No servant of Christ, probably, since the days of the apostles and of the Gospel witnesses of their century, has been more grossly misrepresented or more maliciously maligned than the faithful, fearless and beloved Calvin.”*<sup>2</sup>

### B. Who was Calvin?

1. Born on July 10, 1509, in the town of Noyon, located sixty miles north of Paris.
2. Educated in Renaissance Humanism
3. Calvin's “sudden” (*subito*) conversion

### C. Calvin's Seal – *“My heart I give you, O Lord, promptly and sincerely.” (Cor meum tibi offero, Domine, prompte et sincere)*

### D. Calvin's *Institutes*

1. What is an *Institutio*? *“An institutio is a manual that introduces the basic principles of a subject to beginners who are learning for the first time the terminology and structure of a new discipline. Calvin's Institutes, however, had a dual purpose. It was designed not only to ‘transmit certain rudiments by which those who are touched with any zeal for religion might*

<sup>1</sup> Will Durant, “The Reformation,” Pt. VI of *The Story of Civilization* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 90.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Calvinism*, trans. Henry Cole (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1950), 6.

*be shaped true godliness' but also to explain the theological views of Protestants to the French king and to defend the essentially peaceful character of their political intentions.”<sup>3</sup>*

### III. Calvin’s “Little Book on the Christian Life”

#### A. Ch. 1 – Scripture’s Call to Christian Living

1. *“The goal of God’s work in us is to bring our lives into harmony and agreement with His own righteousness, and so manifest to ourselves and others our identity as His adopted children ... My goal here is simply to present to godly people a model for ordering their lives. I intend, that is, to identify a certain universal principle to guide Christians in their duties.”* (p. 4)

#### B. Ch. 2 – Self-Denial in the Christian Life

1. *“If we are not our own, but the Lord’s, it’s clear what errors we must flee, and what we must direct our whole lives toward. We are not our own; therefore, neither our reason nor our will should dominate our plans and actions. We are not our own; therefore, let us not make the gratification of our flesh our end. We are not our own; therefore, as much as possible, let us forget ourselves and our own interests. Rather, we are God’s. Therefore, let us live and die to Him. We are God’s. Therefore, let His wisdom and His will govern all our actions. We are God’s. Therefore, let us--in every way in all our lives--run to Him as our only proper end.”* (pp. 22–23).

#### C. Ch. 3 – Bearing our Cross is a Part of Self-Denial

1. *“Having begun this way with Christ, His only-begotten Son, [God] continues similarly with all His children ... [and] His life was nothing other than a kind of perpetual cross.”* (p. 58)

#### D. Ch. 4 – Meditation on Our Future Life and Ch. 5 – How the Present Life and Its Comforts Should Be Used

1. *“In whatever trouble comes to us, we should always set our eyes on God’s purpose to train us to think little of this present life and inspire us to think more about the future life.”* (p. 89)
2. *“There is no middle ground between these two things: either earth must become worthless to us, or we must remain bound by the chains of extravagant love for it.”* (p. 92)
3. *“By way of contrast to that future and eternal life, this present life cannot only be safely disregarded but, in view of that life to come, thoroughly despised and scorned. If heaven is our home, what is earth but our place of exile? If departure from this world is entrance into life, what is this world but a grave?”* (p. 99)
4. *“We begin in this life, by various blessings, to taste the sweetness of God’s kindness. Thus, our hope and desire are provoked to pursue the full expression of his kindness.”* (p. 97).
  - a) **1 Tim 4:4–5** – *“For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,<sup>3</sup> for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.”*
5. *“We won’t go wrong in the use of God’s gifts as long as we let their use be governed by their author’s purpose in creating and designing them for us—for truly He created them for our good, not our ruin”* (p. 114)

<sup>3</sup> Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, 10; quoting CO 1.26–36.