

***A LITTLE BOOK ON
THE CHRISTIAN LIFE***

BY JOHN CALVIN


Westminster Presbyterian Church
Book of the Month – March 1, 2023

R. Carlton Wynne

“By nature I love brevity.”

— John Calvin (1509–1564)





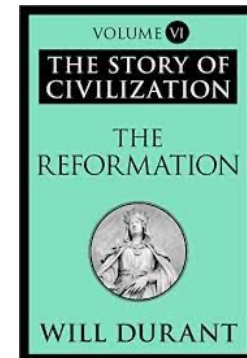
THE LEGACY OF JOHN CALVIN

- EDUCATION
- CARE FOR THE POOR
- ETHICS AND GOD'S LAW IN SOCIETY
- FREEDOM OF THE CHURCH
- DECENTRALIZED POLITICS
- DOCTRINE OF VOCATION
- MUSIC IN THE VERNACULAR
- GENEVA BIBLE
- WORLD MISSIONS
- PREACHING

CALVIN THE MAN

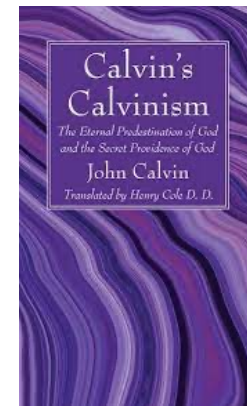
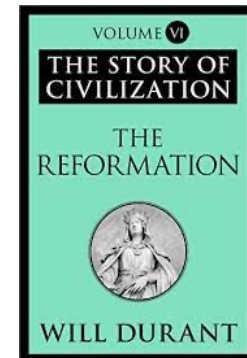
CALVIN THE MAN

- *“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.”* – Historian Will Durant



CALVIN THE MAN

- *“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.”* – Historian Will Durant
- *“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.”*
– Calvin biographer Henry Cole



CALVIN THE MAN

- Born on July 10, 1509, in the town of Noyon, located sixty miles north of Paris.
- Born “Jean Cauvin” (later ‘Calvinus’)
- Calvin’s Family
 - Gérard Calvin (father)
 - Jeanne le Franc (mother)
- Calvin’s Education
 - Renaissance Humanism



The background of the slide is a Renaissance-style painting. It depicts a group of people, possibly scholars or artists, in a landscape with a series of arches in the background. The scene is filled with figures in various poses, some standing and some sitting, engaged in what appears to be a study or discussion. The architecture features a row of dark, arched openings that look like windows or doorways, set into a light-colored wall. The overall tone is somewhat somber due to the dark overlay, but the details of the figures and the architectural elements are visible.

CALVIN THE MAN

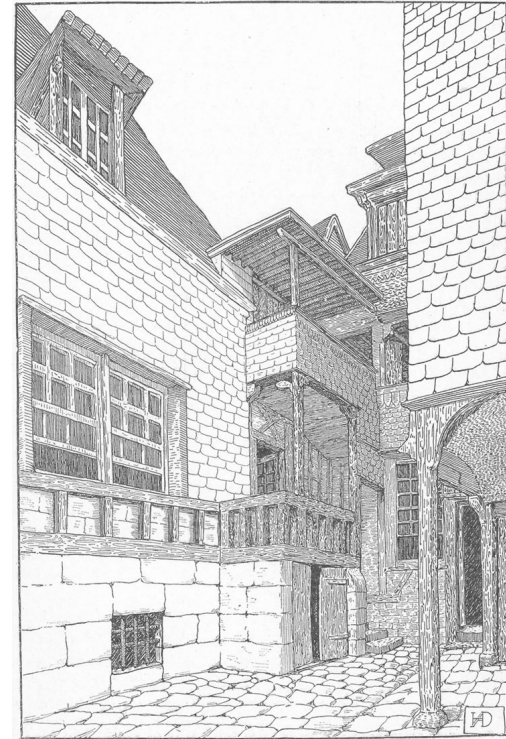
- RENNAISSANCE HUMANISM (14th–16th Centuries)
- “Specifically, humanists advocated a new approach to education which was modelled on the form and content of the languages, history, rhetoric, philosophy, poetry and ethics of Graeco-Roman civilization. The rallying cry of these visionaries was *ad fontes*, i.e. a return to the sources. By recovering these foundations, the humanists envisaged a cultural, intellectual and sociopolitical revitalization of Europe.”

– N. P. Feldmeth, *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 1988), 322.

CALVIN THE MAN

- “When I was as yet a very little boy, my father had destined me for the study of theology. But afterwards, when he considered that the legal profession commonly raised those who followed it to wealth, this prospect induced him suddenly to change his purpose.”

– Calvin, “Preface” to *Commentary on the Psalms*, xl.

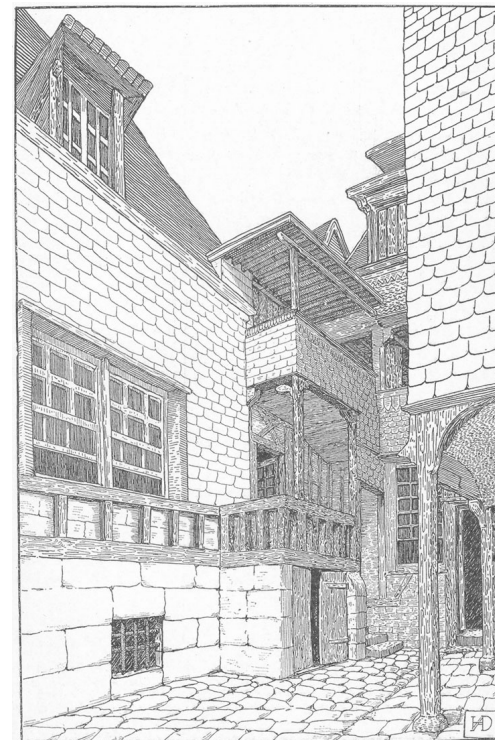


Calvin's house, Noyon

CALVIN THE MAN

- “God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame, which was more hardened in such matters than might have been expected from one at my early period of life. Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that although I did not altogether leave off other studies, I yet pursued them with less ardour.”

— Calvin, “Preface” to *Commentary on the Psalms*, xl.



Calvin's house, Noyon

A black and white portrait of John Calvin, a bearded man wearing a cap and a fur-trimmed robe, holding a book. The text "CALVIN'S SEAL" is overlaid in white capital letters.

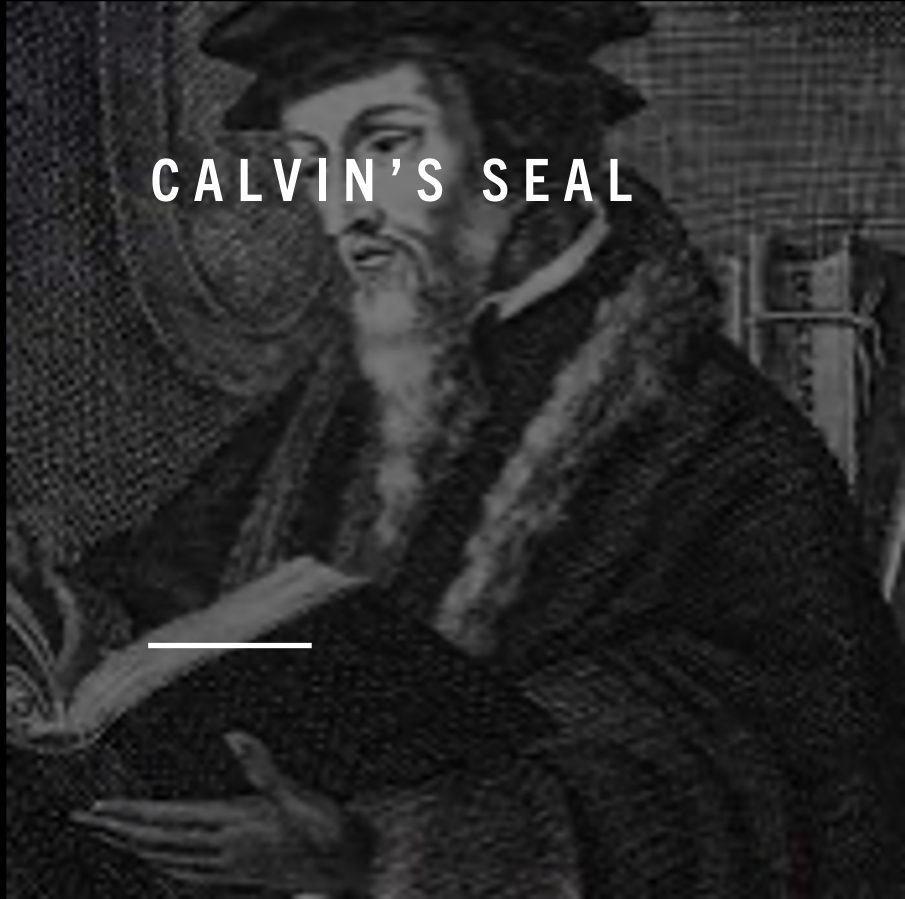
CALVIN'S SEAL



Cor meum tibi offero, Domine, prompte et sincere

*(“My heart I give you, O Lord,
promptly and sincerely.”)*

CALVIN'S SEAL



Cor meum tibi offero, Domine, prompte et sincere

*("My heart I give you, O Lord,
promptly and sincerely.")*



CALVIN'S "INSTITUTIO"!

THE INSTITUTES OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION

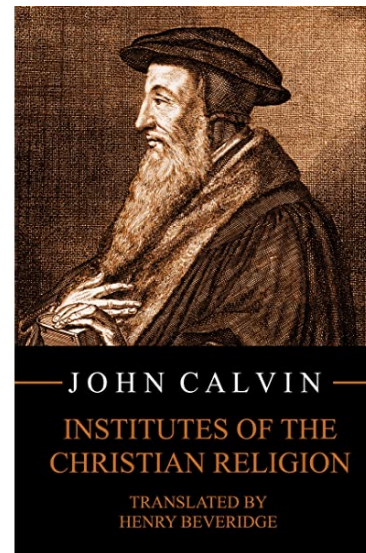
"An institutio is a manual that introduces the basic principles of a subject to beginners who are learning for the first time the terminology and structure of a new discipline.

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 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."

– David Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, p. 10

CALVIN'S INSTITUTES

- *Basic instruction (institutio) in the Christian religion, embracing just about the whole sum of godliness, and all that needs to be known in the doctrine of salvation; a work very well worth reading by everyone zealous for godliness.*

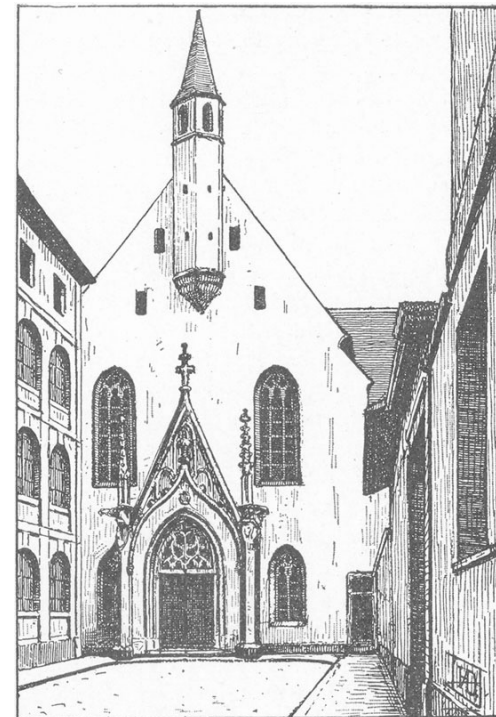


CALVIN'S DETOUR TO GENEVA (1536)



William Farel's Call to Calvin

CALVIN'S DETOUR TO STRASBOURG (1538–41)



The Madeline, Calvin's Church at Strasbourg

CALVIN'S DETOUR TO STRASBOURG (1538–41)

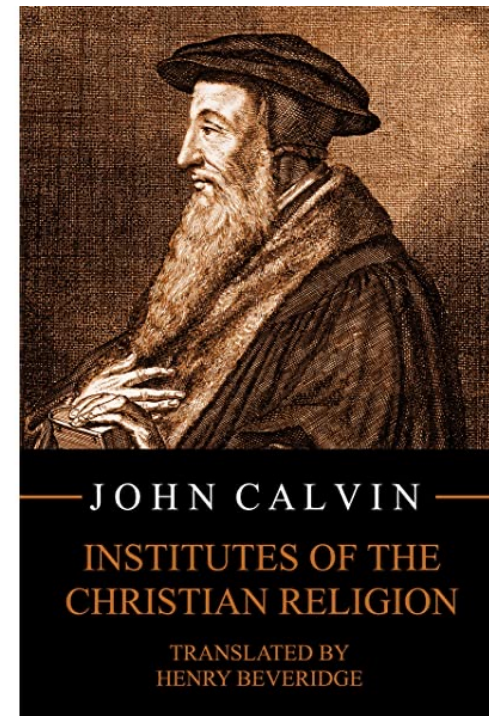


“As to my intended course of proceeding, this is my present feeling. Had I the choice at my own disposal, nothing would be less agreeable to me than to follow your advice . . . But when I remember that I am not my own, I offer up my heart, presented as a sacrifice to the Lord . . . Therefore there is no ground for your apprehension that you will only get fine words . . . Although I am not very ingenious, I would not lack pretext by which I might adroitly slip away so that I should easily excuse myself in the sight of men and show that it was no fault of mine.”

– J. Calvin to W. Farel (August, 1541)

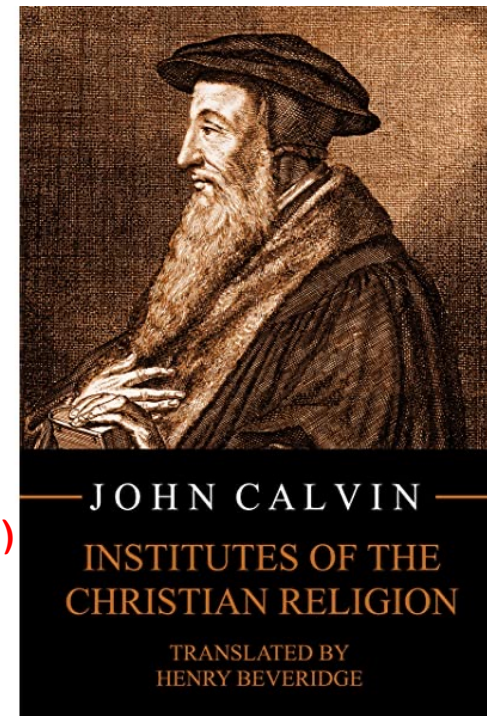
CALVIN'S INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

- Book I – The Knowledge of God the Creator
- Book II – The Knowledge of God the Redeemer
- Book III – How We Receive the Grace of Christ
- Book IV – The Church and the Means of Grace



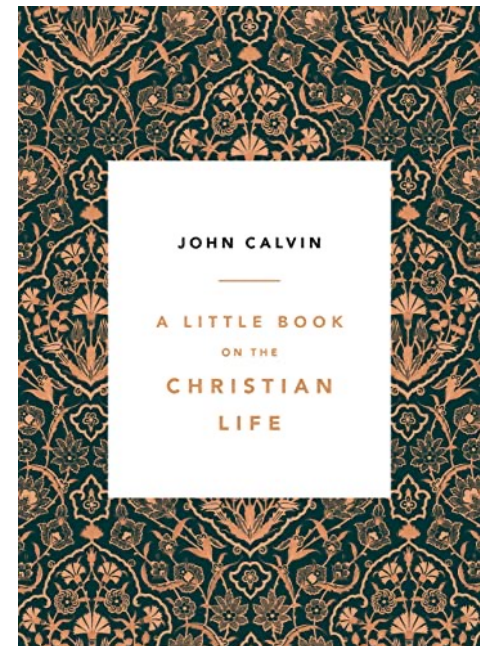
CALVIN'S INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

- Book I – The Knowledge of God the Creator
- Book II – The Knowledge of God the Redeemer
- Book III – How We Receive the Grace of Christ
- “A Little Book on the Christian Life” (Book III, ch. 6–10)
- Book IV – The Church and the Means of Grace



CALVIN'S *"A LITTLE BOOK ON THE CHRISTIAN LIFE"*

- Ch. 1 – Scripture's Call to Christian Living
- Ch. 2 – Self-Denial in the Christian Life
- Ch. 3 – Bearing our Cross is a Part of Self-Denial
- Ch. 4 – Meditation on Our Future Life
- Ch. 5 – How the Present Life and Its Comforts Should Be Used



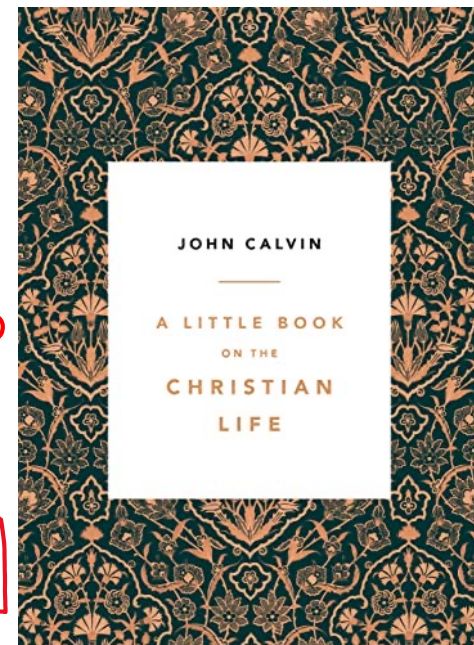
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← INWARD

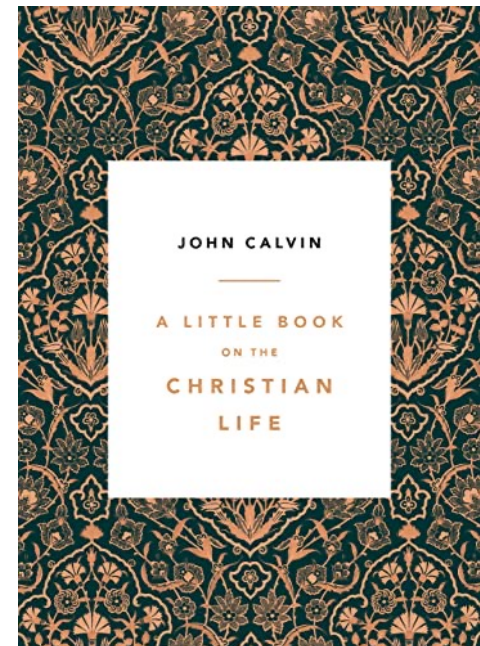
← OUTWARD

← UPWARD



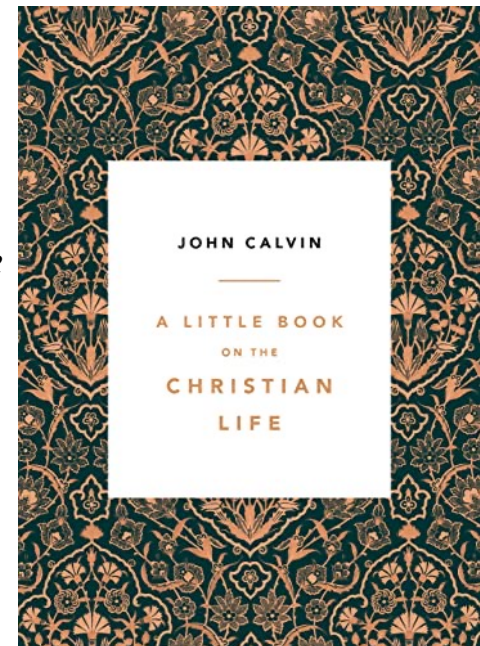
CH. 1 – SCRIPTURE’S CALL TO CHRISTIAN LIVING

- *“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)*



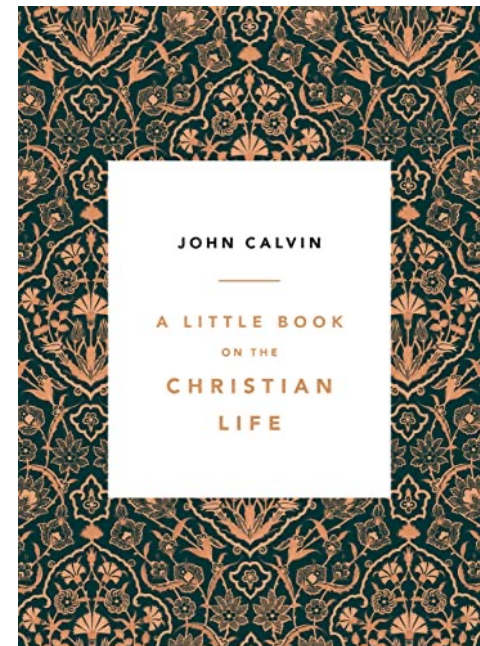
CH. 1 – SCRIPTURE’S CALL TO CHRISTIAN LIVING

- *“To begin with, what better foundation can Scripture give for the pursuit of righteousness than to tell us we should be holy because God Himself is holy? ... Holiness is the goal of our calling.” (p. 6–7)*
- *“Christ, through whom we have been restored to favor with God, is set before us as a model whose form and beauty should be reflected in our own lives.” (p. 9)*



CH. 2 – SELF-DENIAL IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

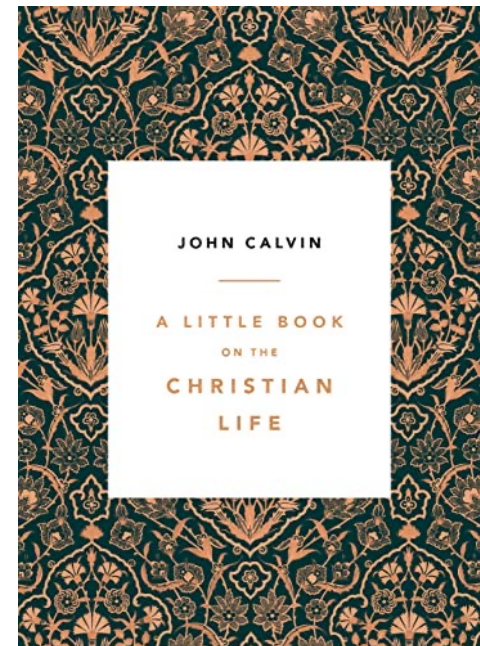
WHY SELF-DENIAL?



CH. 2 – SELF-DENIAL IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

WHY SELF-DENIAL?

- (1) We belong to God



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“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.” (p. 22)*

CH. 2 – SELF-DENIAL IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

WHY SELF-DENIAL?

- (1) We belong to God



*“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)

CH. 2 – SELF-DENIAL IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

WHY SELF-DENIAL?

- (1) We belong to God
- (2) We are prone to indulge sin



*“Each of us thinks we have just cause for elevating ourselves and despising all others in comparison to ourselves—**our self-love ruins us with such blindness.** If, in fact, God has gifted us with something that is good in itself, we immediately make it the basis for praising ourselves to such a degree that we not only swell up but almost burst with pride.” (p. 31)*

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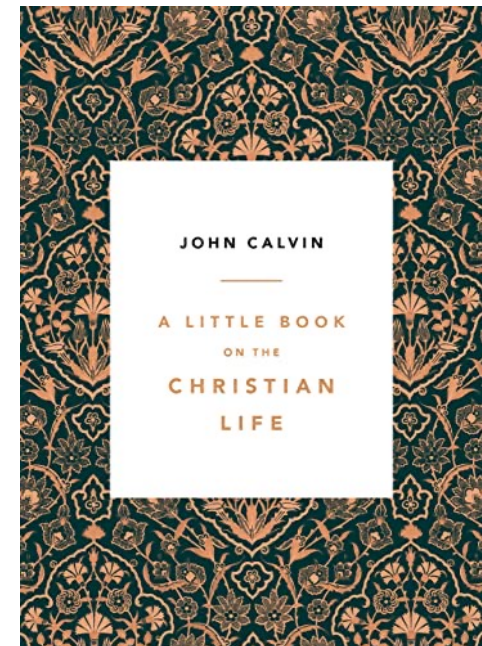
Self-denial is that inward, Spirit-wrought denial of our restless inclination toward selfishness and pride in our relationships with God and with other people.

CH. 2 – SELF-DENIAL IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

*“For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² **It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,** ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”* – Titus 2:11–14 (NIV)

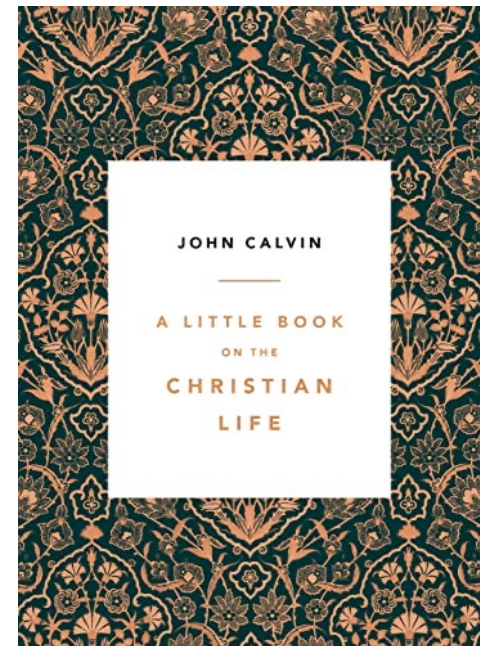
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CH. 3 – BEARING OUR CROSS IS A PART OF SELF-DENIAL



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HOW SHOULD WE BEAR OUR CROSS?



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HOW SHOULD WE BEAR OUR CROSS?

- (1) Remember Christ and His cross.



***“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)

CH. 3 – BEARING OUR CROSS IS A PART OF SELF-DENIAL

HOW SHOULD WE BEAR OUR CROSS?

- (1) Remember Christ and His cross.
- (2) Remember what God is doing in our trials.



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- (1) Remember Christ and His cross
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- Humbling our Pride
- Enabling us to Experience God's Faithfulness
- Training us for Patience and Obedience
- Chastening us as His Children
- Driving us Deeper into Christ

CH. 3 – BEARING OUR CROSS IS A PART OF SELF-DENIAL

HOW SHOULD WE BEAR OUR CROSS?

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*“We see that bearing the cross with endurance doesn’t mean that a person is absolutely stupefied or robbed of every feeling of sorrow ... **Indeed, adverse circumstances will keep their bitterness, and we will feel their bite.**”* (p. 81)

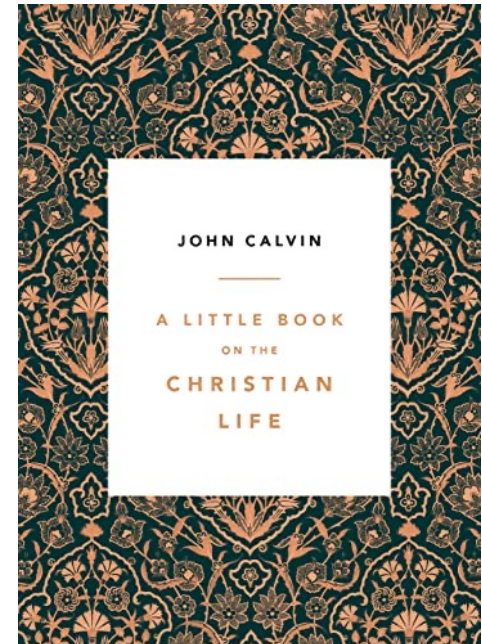
CH. 3 – BEARING OUR CROSS IS A PART OF SELF-DENIAL

Self-denial is that inward, Spirit-wrought denial of our restless inclination toward selfishness and pride in our relationships with God and with other people.

Cross-bearing is the outward, active, Spirit-wrought bearing of the “weakness” of this world and of our flesh, by faith, wherein we are inwardly renewed in joyful communion with Christ in the middle of real emotional and physical pain.

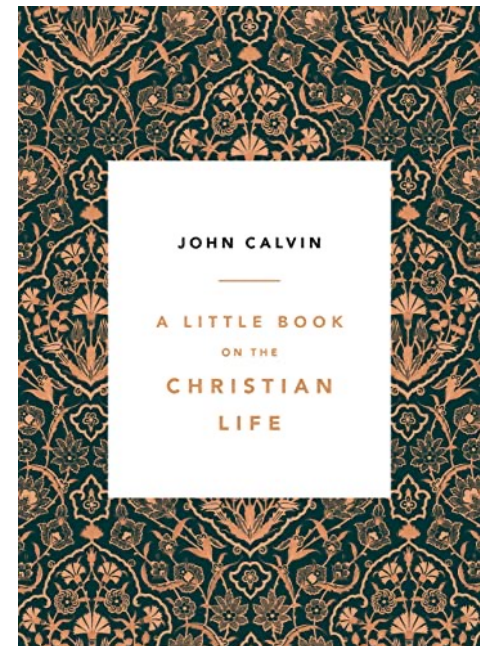
CH. 4 – MEDITATION ON
OUR FUTURE LIFE

CH. 5 – HOW THE PRESENT
LIFE AND ITS COMFORTS
SHOULD BE USED



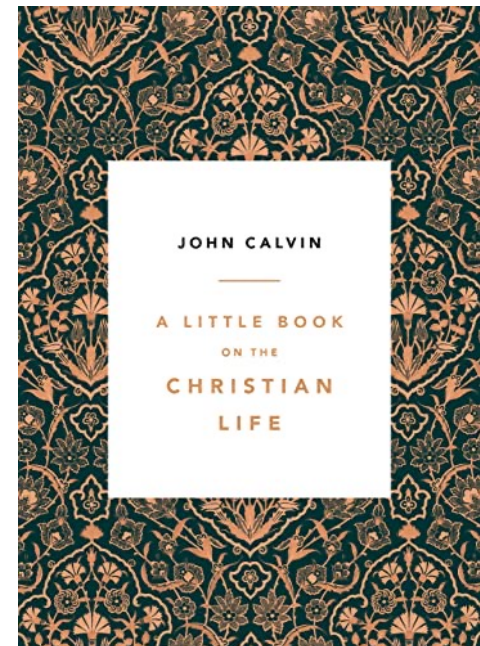
CH. 4 – MEDITATION ON OUR FUTURE LIFE

*“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)*



CH. 4 – MEDITATION ON OUR FUTURE LIFE

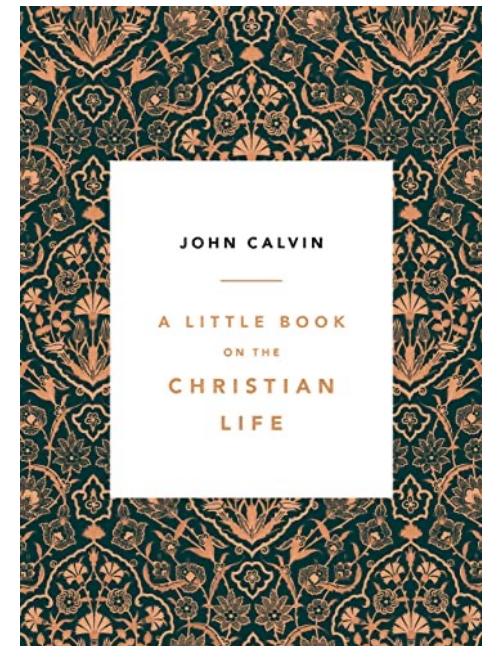
*“By way of contrast to that future and eternal life, this present life cannot only be safely disregarded but, in view of that life to come, thoroughly despised and scorned. **If heaven is our home, what is earth but our place of exile?** If departure from this world is entrance into life, what is this world but a grave?” (p. 99)*



CH. 4 – MEDITATION ON OUR FUTURE LIFE

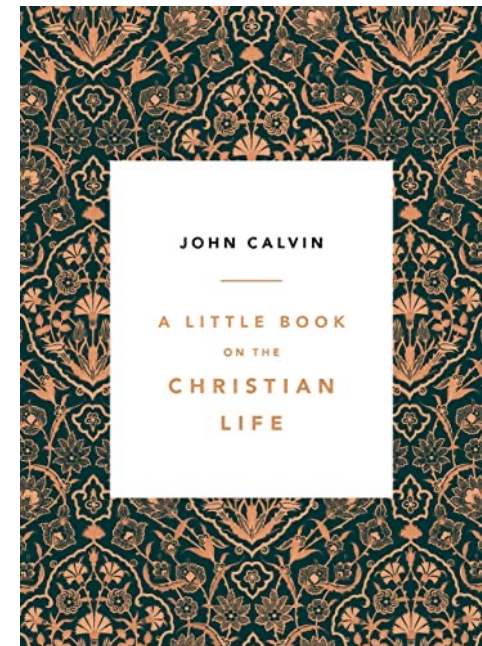
***“We begin in this life, by various blessings,
to taste the sweetness of God’s kindness.”***

*Thus, our hope and desire are provoked to
pursue the full expression of his kindness.”*
(p. 97)



CH. 5 – HOW THE PRESENT LIFE AND ITS COMFORTS SHOULD BE USED

*“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)*



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good, not our ruin” (p. 114)*

- God is the Giver of every good gift (James 1:17)
- Have a holy detachment our use of things (1 Cor 7:31) and exhibit moderation (Prov 30:8)
- Remember we are stewards of all we have (Rom 14:12)
- Rest in your unique calling (John 21:23)

CALVIN'S "A LITTLE BOOK ON THE CHRISTIAN LIFE"

Self-denial is that inward, Spirit-wrought denial of our restless inclination toward selfishness and pride in our relationships with God and with other people.

Cross-bearing is the outward, Spirit-wrought bearing of the "weakness" of this world and of our flesh, by faith, wherein we are inwardly renewed in joyful communion with Christ in the middle of real emotional and physical pain.

Meditation on the future life is the upward, Spirit-wrought, delight in our heavenly inheritance, which brings with it a longing for the resurrection and a moderate, thankful use of God's gifts in this life.

CALVIN'S "A LITTLE BOOK ON THE CHRISTIAN LIFE"

- SELF-DENIAL

INWARD

- CROSS-BEARING

OUTWARD

- MEDITATION ON THE FUTURE LIFE
and A PROPER USE OF THE
COMFORTS OF THIS LIFE

UPWARD

