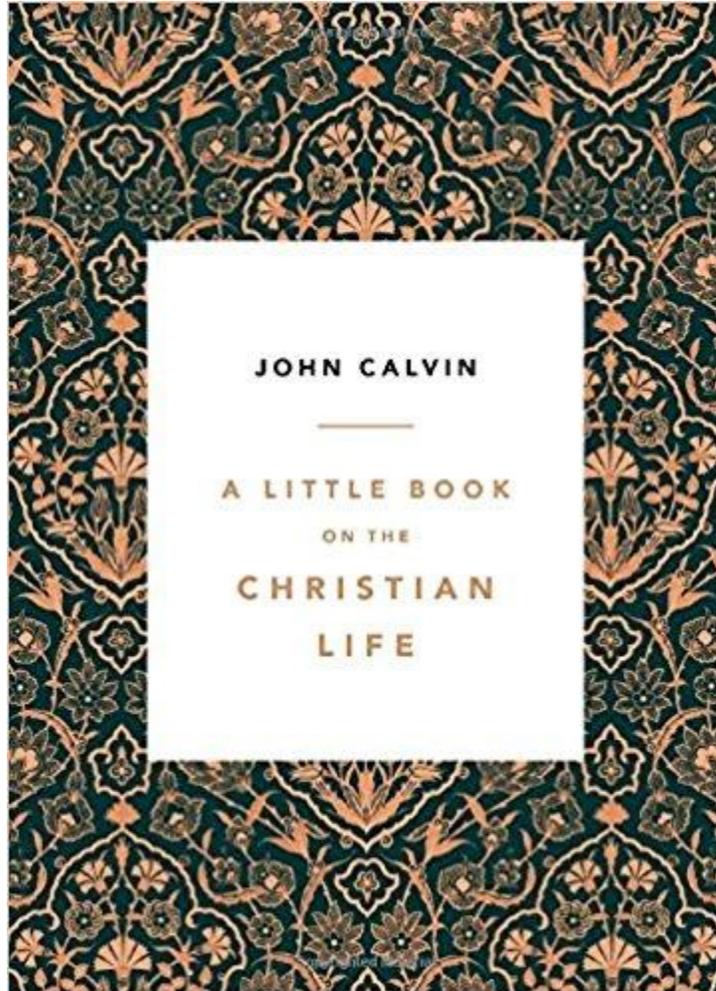


# A Little Book on the Christian Life



Coquina Presbyterian Church

Adult Sunday School

Spring, 2017

# Content Outline

## Preface and Introductory Materials

Author's Preface.....	XV-XXV
Calvin and His Impact.....	Handout
Prayer of Calvin.....	Handout

## Chapter 1 – Scripture's Call to Christian Living (As you read, check off key ideas below)

- God's Goal for us
- Philosophical vs God's approach to the development of virtue.
- Two Main parts to Biblical Instruction
- The best foundation for personal virtue.
- The best model for personal virtue.
- Right doctrine's relation to the whole of life.
- The principal part of worship.
- A higher daily goal than merely our puny performance.

## Chapter 2 – Self Denial in the Christian Life

- An even more precise rule than the precepts of the law?
- We are not our own, we are the Lord's
- The first step of the transformation that follows.
- Self-denial seeks God's glory, drives out evils.
- Two ensnaring obstacles along the path.
- Three "right action" categories.
- The vices of others and our own.
- Whose Kingdom do I carry around?
- The proper use of the good gifts we have been given.
- That which conceals and obliterates the failings of others.
- The chief part of our self-denial relates to \_\_\_\_\_.

## Chapter 3 – Bearing our Cross is Part of Self Denial

- Self Denial's highest calling.
- What is the best consolation for our sufferings?
- Cross bearing as affliction from God.
- Our "flesh" and the Father's loving discipline of cross bearing.
- "We might be slaughtered, but thereby a door unto the blessed life is opened to us."
- Persecution should bring spiritual joy and sensitivity to God's heart and others Hearts too.
- Considering in suffering God's fairness, justice and concern for our salvation.

## Chapter 4 – Meditation on Our Future Life

- Our plans, pursuits, actions: For happiness only on earth?
- No Middle Ground between a loving focus on earth or heaven.
- The test of our "progress in the School of Christ" vis a vis the view we take of our own death.

## Chapter 5 – How the Present Life and Its Comforts Should Be Used

- The slippery ground of a God-ordered pilgrimage
- God's design for our blessings.
- Moderation in ALL of God's benevolence.
- Entire focus on our personal calling to duty in life-Vocation.

## Introduction

It has been said that the Puritans who disembarked from the Mayflower in 1620 came to the North American wilderness with three books under their arm: *The Geneva Bible*, the *Geneva Psalter*, and Calvin's *The Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life*. It is indisputable that the Christianity which shaped the new American democracy through 1781 was the Christianity of those same three books. We commend this study to you as one that will, in a very personal and practical way, lead us to right thinking, feeling and action in all we do as Christians who live in a culture that was in its history once very familiar with John Calvin and his pastoral counsels.

## Texts

1. Your own personal *Bible* and a Study Journal.
2. *A Little Book on the Christian Life*, John Calvin, Copyright 2017, by Aaron Clay Denlinger and Burk Parsons, Reformation Trust Publishing, a division of Ligonier Ministries, Sanford, FL. It was first published in English in 1549 under the title *Of the Life or Conversation of A Christian Man*, and covers themes such as obedience, self-denial, and the significance of the Cross of Christ in daily living for Jesus. Its content is a distillation of Chapters 6-10 ("Of the Christian Life") of the third book of Calvin's signature work *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which was first published in 1536.
3. *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. (Suggested for your home or Web-based library)

In 1536, the great protestant theologian John Calvin wrote a *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, in which he determined to describe

“...the Whole Sum of Piety and Whatever it is Necessary to Know in the Doctrine of Salvation, A Work Very Well Worth Reading by All Persons Zealous for Piety....”

The book was addressed to the King of France (Calvin's native country), and was designed to convince the King and his nation that the Protestant Reformation's faith and practice was that of the true Christian Faith.

We will work our way through the content of this little book at a leisurely pace. It is strongly suggested that you read the entire book as soon as you can. Our class outline will highlight the content to be covered each Sunday.

## **Reading Challenges**

Calvin's writing is demanding, with long sentences through which you sometimes must patiently work your way. It is entirely unlike modern newspaper and popular literature (not to mention Social Media) which majors on a brevity of style and grammar that was unknown in the days of the Reformation. So don't be discouraged by your first 15 minutes of reading. Keep at it and, the more you read, your reading skill will be thereby increased. Once you are used to the author's style, the reading itself will immediately become much less a chore.

Also, modern evangelical Christians are frequently overwhelmed by their first encounter with the way Reformed Christians generally approach both the Biblical texts and the Christian life. This is especially true of the Protestant writings of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (1500-1799), particularly of the "Puritan" writings of that period.

In a world devoid of modern communication conveniences, the printed word was a novel possession of many households in the 1600's. Husbands and wives were for the first time equipped for family discipleship with not only the Bible in their own language, but also a growing library of instructive pamphlets containing sermons and Biblical commentary.

The effectiveness of Pastoral preaching and teaching in the local churches was therefore advanced by a growing Biblical literacy in the pews. Society benefited as the men and women thereby educated came to their adult lives with a deeper understanding, and love, of both the Scriptures and the Savior God revealed in those Scriptures.

Reformation-related writings like our little book therefore present us with an opportunity to deepen our understanding of what God requires of us as his dearly loved and redeemed people. It answers a question posed by one of the intellectual and spiritual giants of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Presbyterian pastor Dr. Francis A. Schaeffer, who asked in the title of his book:

**“How Shall We Then Live?”**

**JOHN CALVIN:  
FROM SECOND REFORM IN GENEVA  
TO DEATH (1541-1564)  
Reformation Men and Theology, Lesson 8 of 11  
by Dr. Jack L. Arnold<sup>1</sup>**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

- A. From 1536 to 1538 Calvin had great authority in Geneva. This was his first attempt at reform, but he pushed the reform too quickly, for the city was not ready for any kind of stern discipline. The city council removed Calvin and Farel from Geneva and Calvin went to Strassburg for three years. This was undoubtedly a great time of discouragement for Calvin.
  
- B. In Calvin's absence, matters deteriorated sadly in Geneva. Some of its citizens came to realize that he had been right in seeking a church in which Christian law would rule. They saw, as he did, that infidelity was the root cause of their troubles. After various political conflicts, and when their freedom seemed in danger, the people of Geneva implored Calvin to return. On September 13, 1531, amid great rejoicing and enthusiastic ovation, Calvin entered Geneva a second time. In this ordeal, God worked a tragedy into a blessing, creating a situation in which the people of Geneva welcomed Calvin and his reform.

**II. CALVIN'S SECOND REFORM (1541-1564)**

- A. It is easy to see the wonderful providence of God in bringing John Calvin back to Geneva. This free and independent city with its democratic institutions was at that time, of all the places in the world, the most admirably fitted to be the scene of the great reformatory labors of Calvin.
  
- B. Upon his return to Geneva, Calvin drew up a Church Order, a set of rules for governing of the church. It was based upon the teaching of Scripture that Christ has ordained four offices in the church: pastors, teachers or professors, elders, and deacons. The cornerstone of Calvin's form of church government was the office of elder. Pastors were to preach and to exhort the people. Elders were men of unusual stamina and spiritual insight who supervised the people, and visited and assisted the pastors. Deacons were general servers. Through this type of government, based on the Bible, Calvin was able to instruct and discipline the people spiritually.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.thirdmill.org/files/english/html/ch/CH.Arnold.RMT.8.HTML> Jack Arnold (1935-2005) mentored me and my wife through the ordination process back when I was a 50 yr. old ruling elder following Jesus' call to the gospel ministry. One of the best, and honest men I have ever had the privilege of knowing. He died one Sunday Morning, in the pulpit, preaching from Philippians 1:21, as he uttered the words "And when I go to heaven..." (A wonderful memorial 5-minute video produced by his wife and family may be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kh5laMLOTwk>

Calvin labored to set forth a theocracy that would be an example of Christian life and government, and also be a citadel of evangelical truth that would conquer the power of Rome in all other lands.

- C. Calvin put great emphasis upon Christian education. He knew that the Reformation would only be effective as people knew and obeyed God's Word. He devised a catechetical system for the young which was carried all over Europe. Primary and elementary schools were set up to educate the people, so they could be better Christians. Calvin established the Academy at Geneva, the first Protestant University, where thousands of young men were trained for the ministry of the Word. From these efforts, the gospel and Presbyterianism spread all over Europe. John Knox, like thousands of others who came to sit as admiring students at Calvin's feet, found there what he termed "the most perfect school of Christ that ever was on the earth since the days of the apostles."
- D. For the next twenty-four years, Calvin labored in Geneva to bring about an effective reform in that city of Switzerland and in all of Europe. Apart from *The Institutes*, Calvin also wrote many other works, including commentaries on most of the Old and New Testament books. Calvin was the greatest exegete and the prince of commentators of the Reformation. He had a thorough knowledge of Greek, Hebrew and Latin, and through the printed page he supplied the Protestants with ammunition to fight the Roman Church. One feels amazed at the extent of his work. Arminius, the originator of a theology opposed to that of Calvin's system, gave an unbiased opinion of Calvin's works, saying:
- "Next to the study of the Scriptures, I exhort my pupils to pursue Calvin's commentaries, which I extol in loftier terms than Helmick himself; for I affirm that he excels beyond comparison in the interpretation of Scripture, and that his commentaries ought to be more highly valued than all that is handed down to us by the library of the fathers; so that I acknowledge him to have possessed above most others, as rather above all other men, what may be called an eminent gift of prophecy."
- E. Calvin was also responsible for putting much of the Bible into the French language so the people could read God's Word. Calvin's works had a further effect in giving form and permanence to the then unstable French language in much the same way that Luther's translation of the Bible molded the German language.
- F. It was Calvin's theology and form of church government that triumphed in the Protestant Church of France, the Reformed Church of Germany, the Church of Scotland, the Reformed Church in Hungary, the Reformed Church in Holland and in Puritanism in Old and New England.
- G. Calvin died in the year 1564 at the early age of 55. Beza, his close friend and successor, described his death as having come quietly in his sleep, and then added:
- "Thus withdrew into heaven, at the same time with the setting sun, that noble brilliant luminary, which was the lamp of the Church. On the following day and night there was intense grief and lamentation in the whole city; for the Republic had lost its wisest citizen, the Church its faithful shepherd, and the Academy and incomparable teacher."

# **ANOTHER SIDE OF JOHN CALVIN**

## **Reformation Men and Theology, Lesson 9 of 11**

**by Dr. Jack L. Arnold<sup>2</sup>**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

- A. Calvin is often pictured by his opponents as hard, cold, stern and calculating. He was actually a man of meekness and peace who avoided all dissension so long as it pertained to private affairs. He was a very meek and shy person, and always felt that he was not equal to the task set before him.
- B. However, when God and his kingdom were attacked, Calvin rose to exert the authority of his calling to the ministry that God had given him. Then he felt himself the instrument of the Most High and became relentless. All gentleness disappeared.

### **II. CALVIN'S TEMPERAMENT**

- A. Calvin, at times, could be quite irritable, but much of this can be attributed to his ill health. He was plagued with constant headaches which hardly ever left him. The pain was so intense that many nights he could not sleep. He also had some kind of disease of the trachea which, when he spoke too much, caused him to spit blood. Several attacks of pleurisy prepared the way for consumption, of which he finally died. He had acute hemorrhoids, the pain of which was unbearably increased by an internal abscess that would not heal. Several times intermittent fever laid him low, sapping his strength and constantly reducing it. He had gallstones and kidney stones in addition to stomach cramps and wicked intestinal influenzas. To top it all off, he had acute arthritis. In one of his letters to a friend he said, "If only my condition were not a constant death struggle."
- B. This man was able to accomplish great things even though he was sickly much of his life.

### **III. CALVIN'S LABOR**

- A. Calvin was an incessant worker who was always doing something for his master Jesus Christ. He wrote The Institutes and commentaries on almost every book of the Bible. He wrote other works and carried out prolific correspondence with most of the prominent Reformers in Europe and England. Calvin was the chief administrator for the church at Geneva, and he carried out his pastoral responsibilities with great care and concern. He rarely refused anyone counsel if it was a serious need. Calvin also preached or taught twice a day, and three times on Sunday.

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.thirdmill.org/files/english/html/ch/CH.Arnold.RMT.9.HTML>

- B. Even on his death bed, he continued to work on unfinished material and, whether orally or by correspondence, he took part in the affairs of the church. He would often whisper, “O Lord, how long?” Men begged him to rest, but he refused, saying, “Bear with me that God find me watching and waiting and busy at his work until my last sigh.”

#### IV. CALVIN’S COURAGE

- A. We have often heard of the bravery of Luther as he faced the enemies of the gospel, but we forget that Calvin was just as brave as he stood for his biblical convictions.
- B. Calvin came very near to losing his life several times because of an unbending attitude towards the free thinkers and libertines in Geneva.

“The heroism of Luther is well known. Let us look at the equally courageous actions of John Calvin for our examples. On December 16, 1547, the Libertines, sworn enemies of Calvin, gathered in the Senate House in Geneva determined to destroy the Reformer. Unusual circumstances made it appear that they would succeed. At the risk of his life, Calvin appeared in the midst of the armed crowd. Amidst loud cries for his death, he stood with folded arms and looked the agitators in the face, No one struck him down. Then, advancing through their ranks with his breast bared, he challenged them, ‘If you want blood, there are still a few drops here; strike then!’ No arm was raised. Calvin slowly ascended the stairway and addressed a meeting of the Council of Two Hundred which was in session. Descending the stairs, he faced the crowd again accompanied by one of the city councilors. He called for silence and addressed the people with such energy and daring that tears flowed from many eyes and the crowd retired in silence.

“The opposition soon made other plans to destroy or discredit the Reformer. One of these resulted in a direct confrontation between Calvin and the Council of Two Hundred. The issue was the excommunication of Philibert Berthelier, the Council’s secretary, by the consistory of the Church of Geneva in 1551 and his absolution by the State Council in 1553. The following Sunday was communion. Calvin preached in St. Peter’s, and at the close of the sermon declared that he would never profane the sacrament by giving it to an excommunicated person. Over his head on the pulpit his emblem was set: a heart aflame in an outstretched hand offered to God. His famous motto was embossed on the dark-red velvet pulpit cover: Soli Deo Gloria. Raising his voice and lifting up his hands, he exclaimed, in the words of St. Chrysostom: “I will lay down my life before these hands give the sacred things of God to those who have been branded as his despisers.

“A crowd of Libertines surged forward to the table. Calvin, descending from the pulpit, stood before the table. With drawn sword a Libertine cried, ‘Administer communion to us or you will die.’ His head thrown back and his arms extended over the sacred elements, Calvin responded that although they might cut off his arms, shed his blood, and take his life, they would never force him to give holy things to the profane and dishonour the table of his God. The crowd was stunned,

and a long silence followed the dramatic moment. Perrin, one of the city syndics opposed to Calvin, quietly ordered Berthelier not to approach the table. After the crowd withdrew, Beza reports, communion was celebrated ‘in profound silence and under a solemn awe, as if the Deity Himself had been visibly present among them’” (*The Banner Of Truth*; “The Reformers: The Secret Of Their Greatness”; Eugene Osterhaven).

- C. Until 1555, Calvin never had free reign in Geneva. He had many enemies who hated him, and he was open to constant ridicule that most men would not have tolerated. A wife of a leading statesman in Geneva was disciplined for dancing at a wedding (secretly she was a Libertine). In response, she called Calvin a “pig” and a “lowdown liar.”

“He could not walk across the street without being mocked, ‘There he goes, neighbor. I prefer to hear three dogs barking than to listen to him preach.’ ‘Did you know, hell has only two devils, and there goes one of them!’ Children called after him, twisting his name, ‘Cain, Cain!’ More than one dog answered to the name ‘Calvin!’ (Stickelberger, *John Calvin*).

## V. CALVIN’S HUMILITY

- A. Calvin was basically a humble man. He rarely thought he was equal to any task, but found his strength in Christ. He was not even made a citizen of Geneva until seventeen years after his second entry into the city.
- B. On April 25, 1564, Calvin dictated his will. In it we see the marks of a humble Christian:

“In the name of God, I, John Calvin, servant of the Word of God in the Church of Geneva, weakened by many illnesses . . . thank God that he has shown not only mercy toward me, his poor creature, and . . . has suffered me a partaker of his grace to serve Him through my work . . . I confess to live and die in this faith which He has given me, inasmuch as I have no other hope or refuge than His predestination upon which my entire salvation is grounded. I embrace the grace which He has offered me in our Lord Jesus Christ and accept the merits of His suffering and dying that through them all my sins are buried; and I humbly beg Him to wash me and cleanse me with the blood of our great Redeemer, as it was shed for all poor sinners so that I, when I shall appear before His face, may bear His likeness.

“Moreover, I declare that I endeavored to teach His Word undefiled and to expound Holy Scripture faithfully according to the measure of grace which He has given me. In all the disputations which I led against the enemies of the truth, I employed no cunning or any sophistry, but have fought His cause honestly. But, oh, my will, my zeal were so cold and sluggish that I know myself guilty in every respect; without His infinite goodness, all my passionate striving would only be smoke, indeed the grace itself which He gave me would make me even more guilty; thus my only confidence is that He is the Father of mercy who as such desires to reveal Himself to such a miserable sinner.”

## VI. CALVIN'S INSIGHT

A. Calvin was a wise man even from the days of his youth, but age made him even wiser. He was a rare phenomenon in the history of the Church.

B. His last exhortation to the members of the City Council was:

“If our state is to continue, then the house of God which He has erected therein must not be dishonoured, for He says He will honor those who honor Him and despise those who despise Him. There is no higher power than that of the King of all kings and the Lord of all lords.

“I say this that we may serve Him truly according to His Word and become ever more established in it. Each of us has his weaknesses: let each examine himself carefully and fight against them. Some are cold, devoted to their business but show no concern for the church. Others are slaves of their passions. Again others whom God has endowed with gifts use them not.

“You older ones be not jealous of the gifts which the younger generation has received, but be glad and praise the Lord who has given them.

“And you younger ones, be humble and seek not to achieve greater things than you can do: for youth is seldom void of ambition and tends to despise opinions of others.”

## VII. CALVIN'S HERITAGE

A. Calvin was committed to the Bible, a proclaimer of the true gospel and a faithful teacher of the whole counsel of God. He, more than anyone else, would have detested the term “Calvinism,” for he only wanted to be known as a man of God’s infallible Book.

B. Calvin is to be judged by the fruit of his ministry, and the monument he has left us by God’s grace is “every republican government on earth, the public school system of all nations, and the Reformed Churches throughout the world holding the Presbyterian System.”

C. Whether a person agrees or disagrees with all of Calvin’s theology, every Protestant is indebted to this man. Lord, give us some more Calvins!

## A Prayer By John Calvin

**A**lmighty God and Father, grant unto us, because we have to go through much strife on this earth, the strength of thy Holy Spirit, in order that we may courageously go through the fire, and through the water, and that we may put ourselves so under thy rule that we may go to meet death in full confidence of thy assistance and without fear. Grant us also that we may bear all hatred and enmity of mankind, until we have gained the last victory, and that we may at last come to that blessed rest which the only begotten Son has acquired for us through his blood. Amen