**Calvin’s *Institutes of Christian Religion***

Lesson 20: The Christian Life, Part 1 (Book 3, Chapters 6-7)

**Chapter 6: The Life of the Christian Man; and First, by What Arguments Scripture Urges Us To It**

1. “The goal of regeneration is to manifest in the life of believers a harmony and agreement between God’s righteousness and their obedience, and thus to confirm the adoption that they have received as sons.”
2. There are 2 motives for the Christian Life
   1. Our hearts are filled with a love of righteousness
   2. We are guided by the rule for righteousness which is Scripture that calls us to pursue holiness
3. Leviticus 19:2 – “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” (Also in Leviticus 11:44-45 and 1 Peter 1:15-16)
4. We ought to cling to God and now that we are infused with His holiness by the Spirit, we are to follow where He calls us. Part of God’s calling to us in the pursuit of holiness is to have no fellowship with the wicked.
5. “It is highly unfitting that the sanctuary in which God dwells should like a stable be crammed with filth.”
6. God is going to populate His holy city with holy inhabitants, not the wicked. So God, even now, is preparing us and making us fit for heaven.
7. Next, Calvin moves into discussing that Christ is the supreme example for us to follow in the pursuit of holiness.
8. “Scripture shows that God the Father, as He has reconciled us to Himself in His Christ, has in Him stamped for us the likeness to which He would have us conform.”
9. “We have been adopted as sons by the Lord with this one condition: that our life express Christ, the bond of our adoption. Accordingly, unless we give and devote ourselves to righteousness, we not only revolt from our Creator with wicked disloyalty but we also shun our Savior himself.”
10. Ephesians 5:1 – “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.”
11. 1 Peter 1:14-15 – “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, **15**but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct”
12. “Ever since Christ engrafted us into His body, we must take special care not to disfigure ourselves, who are His members, with any spot or blemish.”
13. We must lay aside love of earthly things and “wholeheartedly aspire heavenward” and “strive to keep our bodies and souls pure and uncorrupted until the Day of the Lord”
14. Calvin then begins to discuss the difference between “nominal Christian living” [outward only with no inward reality] and “imperfect Christian living.”
15. A pretended knowledge of Christ insults God because the Christian life “is not comprehended by the understanding and memory alone, but it is received only when it possess the whole soul, and find a seat and resting place in the inmost affection of the heart.”
16. Calvin says it may begin with knowledge of doctrine [who God is, man’s sin and need of a Savior, etc.] “but is must enter our heart and pass into our daily living.” Each day of the Christian life is a day of repentance and seeking after God.
17. But this is different than acknowledging that we are imperfect but are aiming for perfection. “Perfection is the goal, though progress is slow.”
18. “Let us not cease so to act that we may make some unceasing progress in the way of the Lord. And let us not despair at the slightness of our success; for even though attainment may not correspond to desire, when today outstrips yesterday the effort is not lost. Only let us look toward our mark with sincere simplicity and aspire to our goal; not fondly flattering ourselves, nor excusing our own evil deeds, but with continuous effort striving toward this end: that we may surpass ourselves in goodness until we attain to goodness itself.”

**Chapter 7:The Sum of the Christian Life Is: The Denial of Ourselves (Remember Jan. 14 sermon on Matthew 16)**

1. Calvin begins this chapter by discussing the meaning and necessity of self-denial. We are called to offer ourselves to God as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1-2)
2. “We are not our own: let not our reason nor our will, therefore, sway our plans and deeds. We are not our own: let us therefore not set it as our goal to seek what is expedient for us according to the flesh. We are not our own: in so far as we can, let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours.  
   Conversely, we are God’s: let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God’s: let his wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions. We are God’s: let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal.”
3. Step 1: We must deny ourselves to expend ourselves in the Lord’s service
4. Step 2: We must not pursue the things limited to the temporal life but the things “which are of the Lord’s will and will serve to advance His glory.” See Titus 2:11-14
5. Calvin now turns to self-denial directed toward our neighbor.
6. Romans 12:10 – “Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.
7. Philippians 2:3-4 – “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. **4**Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”
8. “The very vices that infest us we take pains to hide from others, while we flatter ourselves with the pretense that they are slight and insignificant, and even sometimes embrace them as virtues. If others manifest the same endowments we admire in ourselves, we spitefully belittle and revile these gifts in order to avoid yielding place to such persons.”
9. We are called to examine ourselves and our faults of pride over against others reminds us of our need for humility. We can only attain true gentleness towards others by 1 path: “a heart imbued with lowliness and with reverence for others.”
10. We are called to seek our neighbor’s welfare and remember the image of God in others. This includes those who our sin would make us view as “unloveable.” See Matthew 5:44
11. One practical example – giving: In giving we must imagine ourselves in the place of the one whom we see in need and give as though we were giving to our own relief. Then, in answer to question, "How much?" Calvin responds, not with 10%, but with no less than love demands, "to set no other limit than the end of his resources."
12. Finally, Calvin discusses self-denial directed toward God which is the chief part of self-denial.
13. “In seeking either the convenience or the tranquility of the present life, Scripture calls us to resign ourselves and all our possession to the Lord’s will, and to yield to Him the desires of our hearts to be tamed and subjugated.”
14. Not the least particle of happiness is ours unless the Lord gives His blessing and turns away misfortune. So we are called to deny our mad lusts after wealth, honor, authority, riches, etc., and desire for the Lord to prosper and care for us. “Even legitimate blessings are as nothing without the Lord’s blessing upon them.”
15. Self-denial toward God also helps us bear adversity. “When we are resigned to and governed by God’s will we accept life’s trials without complaint or ill will.”
16. “Various diseases repeatedly trouble us: now plague rages; now we are cruelly beset by the calamities of war; now ice and hail, consuming the year’s expectation, lead to barrenness, which reduces us to poverty; wife, parents, children, neighbors, are snatched away by death; our house is burned by fire. It is on account of these occurrences that men curse their life, loathe the day of their birth, abominate heaven and the light of day, rail against God, and as they are eloquent in blasphemy, accuse him of injustice and cruelty. But in these matters the believer must also look to God’s kindness and truly fatherly indulgence. In short, whatever happens, because he will know it ordained of God, he will undergo it with a peaceful and grateful mind so as not obstinately to resist the command of him into whose power he once for all surrendered himself and his every possession.”
17. God’s hand alone bestows or withholds gifts and trials, all according to His justice.