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

Lesson 21: The Christian Life, Part 2 (Book 3, Chapters 8-10)

**Chapter 8: Of Bearing the Cross – One Branch of Self-Denial**

1. Matthew 16:24 – “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”
2. “For whomever the Lord has adopted and deemed worthy of His fellowship ought to prepare themselves for a hard, toilsome, and unquiet life, crammed with very many and various kinds of evil. It is the Heavenly Father’s will thus to exercise them so as to put His own children to a definite test.”
3. Christ Himself suffered and we must not think that we are exempt. We are called to partake in His sufferings by which we are blessed.
4. 2 Corinthians 1:5 – “For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.”
5. Philippians 3:10 – “that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death”
6. Calvin then begins to discuss several of God’s purposes in cross-bearing:
   1. Unmasks our sin
   2. Teaches us humility, patience, and obedience
   3. Medicine for our spiritual health
   4. Fatherly discipline/chastisement
   5. For righteousness’ sake in persecution/calamity
7. Unmasks our sin: We attribute everything to our own abilities and esteem our virtues above “its due measure.” This leads into “stupid and empty confidence in the flesh and relying on it, we are then insolently proud against God Himself as if our own powers were sufficient without His grace.” So God purposes cross-bearing to prove to us by experience our incapabilities and our frailty of flesh.
8. Humility: “And it is of no slight importance for you to be cleansed of your blind love of self that you may be made more nearly aware of your incapacity; to feel your own incapacity that you may learn to distrust yourself; to distrust yourself that you may transfer your trust to God; to rest with a trustful heart in God that, relying upon his help, you may persevere unconquered to the end; to take your stand in his grace that you may comprehend the truth of his promises; to have unquestioned certainty of his promises that your hope may thereby be strengthened.”
9. Patience/Obedience: God uses cross-bearing to bring to light “the graces He has conferred upon the saints.” We learn to obey God, for we are taught to seek His will rather than chase our own. It proves to ourselves and to others what God has worked in us. God doesn’t give us these spiritual virtues for them to lie hidden and dormant. So God uses cross-bearing to make them manifest.
10. 1 Peter 1:6-7 – “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, **7**so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ”
11. Romans 5:3-5 – “we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, **4**and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, **5**and hope does not put us to shame”
12. Medicine for our spiritual health: When we experience an abundance of God’s goodness we grow “fat and flabby” and like wild horses begin to kick against God (See Deut. 32:15). So God puts us under the “remedy of the cross.” For some it is milder while for others it is more harsh, but God aims at our health and “he leaves no one free and untouched, because He know that all are diseased.”
13. Fatherly discipline/chastisement: “it is needful that our most merciful Father should not only anticipate our weakness but also often correct past transgressions so that he may keep us in lawful obedience to himself. Accordingly, whenever we are afflicted, remembrance of our past life ought immediately to come to mind; so we shall doubtless find that we have committed something deserving this sort of chastisement.”
14. 1 Corinthians 11:32 – “But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.”
15. For righteousness’ sake in persecution/calamity: Even though such things as poverty, exile, contempt, prison, disgrace, and even death can happen to us, yet if they do that does not mean we have lost God’s love and favor toward us.
16. “We must learn what it is to suffer for Christ’s sake and to be counted worthy to suffer for Him.” –J. Mark Beach
17. 1 Peter 4:12-17
18. But we’re not Stoics (passionless, cold rocks). We suffer and we express the emotions attendant to our sufferings, but we do not despair. “Thus is will come to pass that, by whatever kind of cross we may be troubled, we shall firmly keep our patience…The conclusion will always be: the Lord so willed, therefore let us follow His will.”

**Chapter 9: Of Meditating on the Future Life**

1. “Whatever kind of tribulation presses upon us, we must ever look to this end: to accustom ourselves to contempt for the present life and to be aroused thereby to meditate upon the future life. For since God knows best how much we are inclined by nature to a brutish love of this world, he uses the fittest means to draw us back and to shake off our sluggishness, lest we cleave too tenaciously to that love.
2. By the miseries of this life that afflict us, God shows us the vanity of this present age. So these afflictions are meant to keep us from a false sense of security in this world or trying to find peace in it.
3. “When we think of our crown, we are to raise our eyes to heaven. For this we must believe: that the mind is never seriously aroused to desire and ponder the life to come unless it be previously imbued with contempt for the present life.”
4. “Either the world must become worthless to us or hold us bound by intemperate love of it.”
5. But we must be balanced. We do get to enjoy some pleasures and happiness in this life which are a foretaste of the blessings of heavenly glory. “We are not to hate this earthly life except in so far as it holds us subject to sin.”
6. However, this current world is a place of exile for us and we are merely pilgrims passing through on our way to the Promised Land. Thus, we are called to long for the Lord’s coming and we groan and sigh for it “as the happiest thing of all.” We meditate upon the future blessing of eternal life to come. The fulfillment of our salvation which is glorification.
7. When we suffer will will “without difficulty bear up under such evils” because we “have lifted our heads above everything earthly.” Conversely, when we see the wicked prospering and getting away with their sin, we await the day of reckoning that God has promised when the evildoer will meet divine justice and “be cast into utter disgrace.”
8. “To conclude: if believers’ eyes are turned to the power of the resurrection, in their hearts the cross of Christ will at last triumph over the devil, flesh, sin, and wicked men.”
9. Romans 8:18-25

**Chapter 10: How to Use the Present Life, and the Comforts of it**

1. So while we are to be future minded, how can we appropriately enjoy, appreciate, and use the things of this life?
2. We are to avoid the 2 extremes of acesticism (no pleasures in this life) and intemperance (unchecked indulgence in all pleasures of life)
3. The right use of things in this life is to use the Lord’s gifts by directing them to the purpose and use for which He created them.
4. First Principle: “to indulge oneself as little as possible; but, on the contrary, with unflagging effort of mind to insist upon cutting off all show of superfluous wealth, not to mention licentiousness, and diligently to guard against turning helps into hindrances”
5. Second Principle: “he who is ashamed of mean clothing will boast of costly clothing; he who, not content with a slender meal, is troubled by the desire for a more elegant one, will also intemperately abuse those elegances if they fall to his lot”
6. Philippians 4:12 – “I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.”
7. Third Principle: “all those things were so given to us by the kindness of God, and so destined for our benefit, that they are, as it were, entrusted to us, and we must one day render account of them. Thus, therefore, we must so arrange it that this saying may continually resound in our ears: ‘Render account of your stewardship’ [Luke 16: 2].”
8. Ultimately, it comes down to this: “Each individual has his own kind of living assigned to him by the Lord as a sort of sentry post so that he may not heedlessly wander about throughout life.” So we all have different stations and tasks in life and we should not grumble because God has given it to us. So be faithful where you are, content with what you have, and moderate in how you use what you have.
9. “No task will be so sordid and base, provided you obey your calling in it, that it will not shine and be reckoned very precious in God’s sight.” God brightens even the lowliest daily task that is done in His service.