

Summary of John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by Jeff D. Warrick (April 2009)

This document is a summary of John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion Books I & II, III, & IV.*¹

Numbering system example: 1.i.3 = Book 1, chapter 1, section 3

Book I – Overall Context “The Knowledge of God the Creator”

1.i.1- 1.i.3 – Our knowledge of God and of ourselves interrelate. Sound wisdom consists of two parts: 1) knowledge of God and 2) knowledge of ourselves. Knowing God is what allows us to know ourselves truly (making a sober assessment of where we stand in relation to a pure standard in God).

1.ii.1 – 1.ii.2 – Piety (reverence towards God with love of God) is needed for us to draw closer and to know God. Knowledge of God consists of two parts: 1) knowledge of God revealed as the Creator and 2) knowledge of God revealed as the Redeemer. This book (I) focuses on the first aspect.

1.iii.1 – 1.iii.3 – Humans are imbued with a natural sense of divinity. Even those who claim atheism feel an inkling of the divinity from time to time.

1.iv.1-1.iv.3 – Though the sense of God is engraved on our minds, we humans fail to apprehend true piety (which would allow us to know God properly), we rather fashion God as we like (idolatry), ignore the light of nature which shows us God, and even presume to make up false ways to worship God in order to satisfy our ravings (because of our puffed up pride).

1.iv.4 – A second sin, in failing to apprehend God as engraved upon our minds, is that humans throw off the bridle of the Holy Spirit which could restrain our sin but rather practice hollow observances of God in a vain attempt to earn God's favor. Humans fall into making God small until trouble arises and we need God.

1.v.1 – 1.v.6 – General revelation is shown in the creation wherever we cast our eyes. This general revelation in the creation is manifested two ways. The first way consists of two parts: 1. God is seen in everything created (in and of those things created) but also 2. by the natural order of things created (stars, nature, and in the complexity of the human body and mind). It is ridiculous to think that the universe created itself and the wonders of the soul and body testify to God (the soul has its own faculties and reaches beyond the needs of knowledge that the body would have). Our soul drives us to contemplate deep things. However, even though God (the Author of the creation) is superior to the creation, tracing its outlines sketches a living likeness of God.

1.v.7- 1.v.8 General revelation is also shown a second way (outside the fact of the creation and the marvelous course of nature) in the administration of human society by the providence of God. God saves those beyond hope and the unstoppable and mighty are suddenly cut down. How can we not see God's hand in this (the hand of fatherly kindness)?

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).

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1.v.9 – 1.v.10 – Humans should restrain idle speculations and bold curiosity into discerning the essence of God. At some point we must simply adore what we have been shown. God chooses when to reward and when to punish. God's power and wisdom appear clearly in God's works. God's wisdom abounds far beyond ours.

1.v.11- 1.v.15 –Though God's works manifest God most plainly, we have grown so dull as that they do us no ultimate good. Humans rather fall into superstition and fashion idols. Nature ultimately speaks to us in vain. Nature, therefore, fully manifesting the wisdom and radiance of God, but failing to convince us, serves to render humans inexcusable. We are incapable of knowing God through general revelation and must rather rely on the illumination of the Holy Spirit working in us through faith and the gospel.

1.vi.1 – 1.vi.4 - Calvin now turns to special revelation. Actual knowledge of God we can use is only bestowed upon us by the Scriptures. The Scriptures (a special gift) allow bleary-eyed humans (as general revelation leaves us bleary-eyed at best) to see God in a clear way. The Scriptures reveal God as Creator and Redeemer. The Scriptures are for our profit (supplanting errors in our hearts with truth). God foresaw that general revelation, though grand, would be ineffective.

1.vii.1 – 1.vii.5 – Scriptures bear witness to themselves as truth through the Holy Spirit at work in us. The church is grounded upon Scripture, not the other way around, but the authority of the church is useful in instruction. The testimony of the Spirit is the power and excellence which exceeds any human reason and is what is required to seal the acceptance of the Scriptures on human's hearts. Only those to whom it is given can comprehend God's ways.

1.viii.1 – 1.viii.8 – As far as human reason goes, Scripture should impress humans. Scripture has a heavenly character, raises up good rather than debased things, and its parts are in stunning agreement. It exhibits doctrine and beauty which should entice any reasoned person. It exhibits unique antiquity, unexpected humility (as of Moses), incontestable miracles, and unnatural prophecies that show the divine stamp.

1.viii.9 – 1.viii.13 – The Scriptures have been preserved against all odds, such that only divine intervention could have assured their preservation. The writings exhibit language changes over time as would be expected, offer simple as well as eloquent styles, parts were written by stolid fisher folk who were untrained in schooling and must have had the instruction of the Spirit, it has resisted centuries of assault from all quarters, and has been sealed in the blood of the martyrs. Therefore, testimonies to its authenticity are far ranging.

1.ix.1-1.ix.3 – Our knowledge of the truth of the Scriptures lies in it being inwardly testified to by the Holy Spirit. We can know the true Spirit is at work in us if the testimony we sense matches the Scriptures, as after all, the Spirit is the Author of the Scriptures. So Word and Spirit belong inseparably together, they together (Word and Spirit) accomplish the work of God.

1.x.1 - 1.x.3 – Continuing to focus on God the creator, we learn of the attributes of God through the Scriptures (which includes mercy, judgment, and justice). The Scriptures testify to the true God and exclude all other false gods. Overall the Scriptures bade us to fear, and then trust God.

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1.xi.1- 1.xi.3 – Fashioning images of God corrupts God's glory and displeased God. Humans (and angels for that matter) cannot bear a visible presence of the divine in true form thus God has had to come in clouds/smoke, as the form of a dove, and appear as in human form at times as a prelude to future the revelation as Christ. In short, images are not suited to reveal the mystery of God's glory.

1.xi.4 – 1.xi.10 – Scripture repeatedly derides fashioning any images of God, yet humans give birth to false gods and superstition through their idols. Images are certainly not books for the unlearned and actually teach futile doctrine, simply turning over to dumb idols the duty of ministers (which is to preach sound doctrine). The simplest messages of Scripture regarding Christ are far greater than the value of a thousand images. The crux of the matter in regard to images of God is this: they snatch away from God what rightfully belongs only to God.

1.xi.11, 14, 15, 16 –Using the distinctions of *dulia* and *latria* to advance the cause of images in the church is absurd. To serve an idol is as bad as, or maybe worse, than worshipping an idol. If one says they are not really serving the idol through *dulia*, then they are not really worshipping God through *latria*! So certainly the Council of Nicaea (787) erred in their verdict. They mistreated Scripture and even claim that the greatest heretics are the *εικονομαχοι* (image fighters). In the end they have no real *latria* and *dulia* distinction upon which to stand.

1. 1.xi.12-1.xi.13 – Given that any representation of God in an image is a defacing of God's glory, there are nonetheless legitimate uses of art (though quite limited) which includes art that does not represent God and which depicts histories and events. Though, in the end we do better without art at all in the church as art can more easily corrupt a person than help them.

1.xii.1 – 1.xii.3 – God is owed perfect honor. Maintaining lesser gods/superstitions robs God of the glory which undividedly belongs to God. In practicality trying to slice out a distinction between *dulia* and *latria* is beyond our capacity and we end up rendering to a creature what belongs to God.

1.xiii.1-1.xiii.29 – Anthropomorphisms are merely God accommodating us in our limited understanding. But God has revealed Himself in three persons. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the same in essence, but exist in three persons of hypostases. The word Trinity renders more plainly the truth found in the Scripture, though the word itself is not found. The three are same in essence, but have three subsistence's. Christ and the Holy Spirit are both deity. The terms Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinction not division. Calvin quotes Nazianzus, "I cannot think on the one without quickly being encircled by the splendor of the three; nor can I discern the three without being straightway carried back to the one." (1.xiii.17). To the Father is attributed the beginning of activity and the fountain of all things, to the Son, wisdom, counsel, and order, and to the Spirit power and efficacy. They have unity of essence, yet order is maintained, which takes nothing away from the deity of the Son or Holy Spirit.

1.xiv.1- 1.xiv.2 - The Scriptures show us the God of history, the Founder of the universe, who made good things for us humans before creating us, that we might rest our faith in this God. Scripture guides us as a light in seeking God as otherwise we grope in confusion in our weak human state.

1.xiv.3 – 1.xiv.4 – (Before beginning the discussion of man's nature, angels will be discussed).

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A chief characteristic of God is self-existence (an attribute of true divinity). This is important, as only God is self-existent; there is not a divine creator of evil. Rather, evil springs from the corruption of what God created good. In examining what God has created and shown us we should stick to what is sure and profitable and shy away from idle speculations about things not given for our edification.

1.xiv.5 – 1.xiv.12 – Angels (real and not mere ideas), through their ministry, exhibit respects of the divinity as in a mirror. They serve not only as messengers, but also as protectors of humans under God's care. Calvin merely speculates that individuals may have guardian angels, but haggling over this is of no profit, the key is that angels as a whole serve and protect us as God bids.

1.xiv.13 – 1.xiv.19- Devils, like angels, have real existence in great numbers and are not mere ideas. Satan, of the devils, is the chief architect of malice and iniquity. His malice comes from his perversion of the nature with which he was crafted by God. Scriptures speak sparingly on the empty history of the devils, which is taught only as far as that which advances our edification. We should rest assured that the devil can do nothing without the permission of God. We can also rest assured that the devil can never triumph over a believer and in fact Christ has already triumphed over Satan's power of death through Christ's death and victory (resurrection) over death.

1.xiv.20 – 1.xiv.22 – Though the creation is not the chief evidence of faith, the creation everywhere manifests the work of God and is worthy of our meditation upon it. God created this marvel of a universe out of nothing (ex nihilo). We as people of faith must 1) not thoughtlessly pass over what God has created and 2) know that God has destined all things for our good and salvation. As such, we should petition our gracious God for what we desire.

1.xv.1 – 1.xv.5. Calvin presents a 2-fold knowledge of ourselves: 1) what we were like as originally created and 2) our condition after the fall. Humans consist of body and soul. The soul (which is created and not a portion of divinity) is an essence and the nobler part of a human. The fact that humans search out the universe's secrets and conceive of the invisible God shows we have a soul. We ought to reckon that though the body manifests God's glory the soul is the proper seat of God's image. But even the elect are a poor mutilated image of God which will only be restored in heaven. Calvin refutes Augustine (that the soul reflects the Trinity in understanding, will, and memory).

1.xv.6- 1.xv.8 –The human soul consists of two faculties: 1) understanding and 2) will. The will is subject to understanding and submits its desires to our understanding for judgment. Now choice is under the control of the will. In the original state humans had the capacity to, by free will, attain eternal life. Adam's choice of good and evil was free. Since Adam destroyed himself, all posterity is born with hereditary taint. God was not constrained to make humans incapable of sinning (though such a nature would have been more excellent). But we ought not question God, as the fall of humans was voluntary but God can and does use this as an occasion for his own glory.

1.xvi.1- 1.xvi.9 – God preserves (nourishes and sustains) all things through providence. There is no such thing as chance, per se, as all events are governed by God's secret plan. He so regulates all things so that nothing takes place apart from his knowing and decreed secret plans. God's

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providence is not as of an idle spectator, but God governs all events as an active and present God. God's providence is not only general (general operations of nature we operate under), but special (regulating all events per God's plan). Nothing happened apart from God's plan or permission.

1.xvii.1 – 1.xvii.2 - Scriptures teaches that “all things are divinely ordained.” Three things are key: 1) God's providence covers past and future, 2) God is free to work with or without an intermediary, and 3) God watches the whole human race, but also his church especially closely. God's will is the “just cause of all things” and we are not left to the perils of blind chance or fortune/misfortune. Everything happens according to God's secret plans, and it should be far from us to examine God's plans with bold curiosity. To deny this truth is to insist that God cannot go beyond mere human reason. But God's judgments are a “deep abyss” which we cannot begin to fathom. Let us not forget that God's justice and providence are never separated.

1.xvii.3 – 1.xvii.5 This doctrine does not give us license to blame God for our debased actions, nor does it mean we can live carelessly. We must look ahead and keep our affairs in order but always “in submission to his will.” This is because our gracious God has provided means and helps to preserve us. By being inspired to take precautions, we are complying with God's providence. Providence is not always naked, but clothed with the means God gives us. So we are not off the hook for evil actions, as the evil we do (which Calvin agrees is in accordance with God's will) in the end serves God. God knows how to use evil for good. The evil still originates in the individual, but is put to use and only lawful because God wills it to be so.

1.xvii.6 – 1.xvii.11 – This doctrine should comfort the believer as all things that happened turn out for the good and salvation of the believer. There is not a chance that things happen by chance! Our plans, wills, efforts, and abilities are bent and constrained as necessary by God's secret plans. In fact whatever evil comes our way should not be a cause for revenge, but rather we can be certain it was sent by God's just dispensation. Our prosperity and adversities come from God. This doctrine can free us from the anxiety of over our next breath as though a sword were hanging over us perpetually (as in a world of blind chance). Nothing can befall us unless God determine it, and those who hatch evil plans will be thwarted except as God has “permitted or indeed commanded.” So the ultimate peace and blessedness lies in this doctrine.

1.xvii.12 – 1.xvii.15 – Yes, there are some Scriptures which seem to counter the providence doctrine as presented. However, these Scriptures which seem to show God changing his mind ought to be understood as simply language which is used as an accommodation to us. We ought to hold to the impassibility of God. God is not shaken and suddenly really changes his mind. God's actions which can be seemingly reactionary are really simply paving the way for his eternal ordinances to be carried out as God has foreseen from all eternity.

1. xviii.1 – 1.xviii.2 – The providence of God is active, not passive. The things which take place in the world do not take place by bare permission. All things take place per God's secret plan. God does not sit idly by while chance events take place. God works his providence in us by means of secret inspiration. But while humans are acted upon by God they too act upon themselves. But God's will is the cause of all things. Providence is the acting principle upon which human plans and works are commanded.

1.xviii.3 – 1.xviii.4 – God does not possess two contrary wills (as in one which decrees all things

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by his secret plan and one which forbids things in his precepts), such that the two wills contradict each other. Nothing is done apart from God's willing it to happen, not even those things which are against his will. But God being the almighty makes good even out of evil. When people act against God's will, his will ends up being done on them. We need to understand the difference between God's will and precepts. Our wicked acts (which are against God's precepts) are carried out under the will of God, such that we are culpable, but God will use them to a good end.

Book II "The Knowledge of God the Redeemer in Christ"

11.i.1 – 11.i.3 – Calvin reiterates that knowledge of ourselves involves two components: 1) what we were at creation and 2) what we are after the fall. The first component causes us to consider the gifts we had originally and long for immortality, the second causes us to lie prostrate at God's feet in our weakness. So we thus realize the nature of our duty (worship God) but our inability to carry it out. The reason we need this knowledge is that it strips us of our pretensions and allows us to seek true wisdom and action.

11.i.4- 11.i.11. Unfaithfulness is the root of the fall, as it led to disobedience, pride, and misguided ambition. So Adam, who was united to God, became estranged, subject to corruption of the nature in which God had originally gifted humans. Therefore, all of Adam's posterity are born with inherited corruption (original sin). We do not simply imitate Adam in our corruption but are born defective (cursed in the womb itself). Adam lost the gifts of God not just for himself but all humans. So we are begot through a corrupted nature. This original sin affects all parts of us, so that we are nothing but concupiscence and justly deserve punishment. So God is now hostile to the corruption of his work (not the work itself).

11.ii.1-11.ii.9- The topic of free will is a tricky one fraught with dangers in its study. It may lead us to reckless laziness and abandon or lead us to credit ourselves with good which deprives God of the due honor. The Church fathers generally write without clarity on this subject (save Augustine). Free will may be defined as the "power of selection" (Aquinas), or "a faculty of the reason and the will to choose good with the assistance of grace; evil, when grace is absent" (Bernard). There is a distinction between "will" (choice) and "freedom" (from certain things). Calvin cites Augustine's doctrine of "free will" which is really an "unfree" will. In the end our will is enslaved to sin by our nature. If the Son sets us free, we are free indeed, but we should not boast of free will, as it is only by God's grace that we have it (that is an ability to do any good). It is better to abolish the term all together, so fraught with perils as it is.

11.ii.10 – 11.ii.17 – In no good accomplishment or thought, even in the smallest way, should we count ourselves as the source. In fact the more we recognize our weakness and poverty of gifts the closer we come to true knowledge of ourselves (as humility is the root of knowledge of ourselves). Our natural gifts were corrupted through sin and our supernatural gifts were stripped by God on account of our fall. The supernatural gifts lost were faith, love of God, charity towards neighbor, and zeal for righteousness. The natural gifts corrupted were soundness of mind and uprightness of heart. Depravity of the will is the result, so our will is bound to wicked desires and cannot strive after right. We must distinguish between reasoning about earthly and heavenly things. We are left with a small ability with regard to reason of earthly things and the seed of political order is implanted in us. We have varying abilities with regards to arts and

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sciences and so even despoiled, God left us with many gifts of the Spirit. We see in these a trace of the image of God, which distinguished humans from the other creatures.

11.ii.18 – 11.ii.21 – Reasoning with regard to heavenly things consists of three things; 1) knowing God, 2) knowing his fatherly favor, and 3) knowing how to live by his Law. In regard to the first two, without the illumination of the Spirit of God, we are like travelers in a rainstorm at night, in which brief flashes of lightening show the way, but glimpses are too quickly lost to be of any real good. In reality we are as good as blind to spiritual matters when left on our own. The Spirit as our teacher must show our minds the way. Any thought that our insight can penetrate to the true things of God and heaven (on our own) is madness.

11.ii.22 – 11.ii.23 – In regard to the third item (knowing how to frame our lives according to God's Law) humans are endowed in our hearts with a natural law. Natural law is that apprehension of the conscience which distinguishes between right and wrong. But this natural law does not lead to us to right knowledge of God or salvation, but rather serves to render humans inexcusable. We tend to understand broadly right & wrong, but tend to rationalize our own violations of what is right. We should also distinguish between incontinence (temporary delusion followed by repentance) and intemperance (sin which stubbornly continues).

11.ii.24 – 11.ii.27 – Therefore, our knowledge totally fails in regards to the first table of the Law and our knowledge (though possessed in limited fashion) remains insufficient of the second table. Evil desires incessantly tickle our minds, and so we are led to the disease of lusts against the precepts of the second table. We need the Spirit to illuminate our reason so badly that it is as necessary to our reason as light is for our eyes. So God alone restores what was damaged (corrupted gifts) or taken away (those lost gifts). Though this natural instinct (natural law in humans) is by no means free will, rather our will is so damaged that we will and only desire what is evil and need the Holy Spirit to long after good. To our will belongs only sin and lest we flatter ourselves, even our desire to pray comes from God.

11.iii.1 – 11.iii.5 – Our soul is so corrupted, so utterly devoid of all good, that only a rebirth or renewal of our souls will fix our dreadful predicament. A mere reforming will not suffice. When we see humans apart from God seemingly do good things, we ought to attribute that to God's reigning in of their base desires (like a bridle). In the elect God cures these base desires but for others he merely restrains them inwardly. If God were to let humans loose to do as their desires please them, they would run amuck in wild lusts. In fact, man is subject to the necessity of sinning, that is to say, by the corruption of our nature and will, we are in bondage to sin. A corrupt nature will to do ill (this is of necessity). Just as God, in boundless goodness, of necessity does only good. This, in no way, hinders God's free will. Therefore, humans sin willingly, not under compulsion. Augustine notes that our corruption has turned freedom into necessity. Calvin turns here to some wonderful insights of St. Bernard which further the points.

11.iii.6 – 11.iii.14 – God corrects and cures our corruption, changing our evil will to a good will. It is God's grace which precedes every one of our good works. In this grace, we should take no credit ourselves, as if we cooperated with God's grace of our own merit. It is only in the elect that one finds a will inclined to good, and God's grace is prior to all merit. This grace of God is irresistible, it is not held out and we decide to accept or reject. The Lord by his Spirit directs us in this acceptance. We ought to know that God's loving-kindness is set forth for all, but only the elect are moved to seek after it. This election is not handed out indiscriminately as though

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humans were free to choose; rather it is efficacious on the elect alone. Both operating and co-operating grace ought to be understood as God's work in us. God's grace does not violate our free will, for it is God's grace that heals our will such that it now most freely assents to follow God and perform good works. In fact it is this grace that now grants our will true freedom.

11.iv.1-11.iv.8- Calvin now turns to how God works in human's hearts. Calvin starts with the affirmation that humans of their corrupt nature will only to sin of necessity, yet voluntarily (not under compulsion). In an evil act, God, Satan, and man all act. But God's purpose and manner are fundamentally good, while Satan and humans purposes and manner of acting are evil. God may use the manner of acting of an evil person to achieve his just and good ends. Calvin now cautions us not to forget God's active providence in all things. Per Augustine, that human's sin is their doing, that by sinning they accomplish this or that, comes from God. In routine decisions neither good nor bad, decision itself is due to the special impulse of God. Our minds are guided by God's prompting rather than our own freedom to choose (this is the special grace).

11.v.1-11.v.19 – There are numerous objections put forth in defense of free will (weak and clever). Calvin refutes these. I will cover what I find to be the stronger objections addressed. 1) Reward and punishment lose their meaning without free will. He reiterates support for his view of free will in Augustine and Paul. Everything we receive is a gift of God and so merits to ourselves are meaningless (our desires are of necessity evil), so punishment is just (what does it matter if we sin freely or in servile judgment). 2) Exhortation is meaningless without free will. Calvin answers that exhortation is still valuable in changing the mind. In renewing our souls God makes exhortation effective. I was surprised he does not discuss this as one of God's helps and means as he discussed earlier. 3) Reproofs in Scripture are meaningless without free will. Calvin responds that those who try to wiggle out of their guilt (caused by their own perverse will) based upon external causes are grasping at straws. 4) Why does God test us or wait upon our answers if there is no free will? Calvin responds that he does this for no other reason than that we see our own nothingness. 5) What about Scriptures which call us co-workers? Calvin responds that this applies to ministers alone. This is not to be taken as co-workers using their own merit, but God's anyway. As this chapter moves toward a close, Calvin goes on to refute allegorical interpretations (beyond the rule of Scripture) and notes our helplessness is such that in the end we need a physician not an advocate. We are helpless and do all things only through God.

11.vi.1 – 11.vi.4 – Even though the magnificent theater of creation should allow us to know God, it actually profits our weak minds very little. Thus, we should be convicted of our ineptitude to save ourselves, and through despair reach out to God who can save us. Our salvation comes through knowing “the Father to be the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.” (John 17:3p). This is not a new thing, as Christ the Mediator was prefigured in the Old Testament and came at the appointed time. There is no saving knowledge of God apart from the Mediator. Christ was the seed in whom all the nations were to be blessed, and Christ is the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). In the end we need a perfect Mediator because without a Mediator God's majesty is too high for us to attain as mortals who are like grubs by comparison and only Mediator who can allow us to hold the proper and perfect faith in God.

11.vii.1-11.vii.2 – The law (the Decalogue plus the whole form of religion handed down by God through Moses) was required as a tutor for humans until Christ appeared. We should understand

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the law as spiritual in nature (sprinkling of blood for example as a foreshadow). Only spiritual worship delights God (not earthly ceremonies which do not lift the mind higher).

11.vii.3-11.vii.9 – The first use of the Law (pedagogical use). The Law being so demanding, showing us how far we are from holiness, and being impossible for us to meet shakes us out of our puffed up arrogance and renders us inexcusable and drives us into despair. By accusing us, the law causes us to seek grace. And indeed, because we are nourished by grace apart from the law which we cannot meet on our own (which if we did would give a blessed life) the grace we received on account of the mercy of God is all the sweeter.

11.vii.10- 11.vii.11 – The second use of the Law (civil use). The law acts as a bridle on human evil inclinations as humans dread the law and just punishment under it. So it serves to restrain certain humans who would otherwise run amuck in lusts unbridled. It serves as a tutor leading the unregenerate to Christ.

11.vii.12- 11.vii.17- The third (and principle) use of the Law (didactic). The law is also like a whip to the idle, to arouse them to work. It urges believers on in doing good works. Therefore, whoever wants to do away with the law for believers speaks foolishly. The law is only abrogated to the extent that we are released from its curse, yet we receive it with the same veneration and obedience as through it were in full affect for us. Although we ought to understand that the ceremonial laws have been abrogated. They are ceased now as they previously pointed to the death and resurrection of Christ, and so Christ's coming has terminated them (indeed fulfilling them). Christ, carried out eternal atonement, and so daily observances which attest to sin, but do not blot them out are no longer necessary.

11.viii.1- 11.viii.12 - The Moral Law (Decalogue) is needed because the natural law, though engraved on our hearts, is veiled by our darkness, such that a written code was needed. First of all God is quite concerned not only about our outward manifestations, but our inward purity of heart. So the law is spiritual and requires not just refraining from outward violation, but inward refraining as well. Second, let us be aware that in interpreting the law the opposite of what is commanded is prohibited, and the opposite of what is prohibited is commanded. The Decalogue is properly broken into two tables (first 4 deal with proper duties of worship of God and the last 6 deal with duties we have toward other humans).

11.viii.10-11.viii.50 – The commandments are prefaced with a statement of God's fatherly kindness and it lets us know that He is our God. The commandments meanings go well beyond the plain literal sense. We learn that God is pre-eminent, and we owe God innumerable things. We must banish idols which woefully try to represent the incomprehensible. Oaths only in rare situations which vindicate God's glory or edify a brother or sister are advisable. As Christians there is still need for us to do the things of the Sabbath in which we obtain spiritual rest, we worship, and give our servants rest. We appoint Sunday for that reason. We are called to honor father and mother, work for our neighbors' safety in any way we can, remain faithful to our spouse, work to protect the goods of our neighbors, tell the truth, and at times reproofs or accusations to remedy evil are needed. Lastly, we even avoid covetousness which is that tickling of the mind with evil thoughts without intent to carry them out. Even these we strive to control.

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11.viii.51-II.viii.59 – The overall purpose of the law is to mold humans to the archetype of divine purity. For proof we see that at times only the second table of the law is mentioned in Scripture, which show that the prophets demanded real evidence of the fear of the Lord which shows forth when people adhere to the requirements of the second Table. In following the 2nd table, zeal for righteousness, piety, and integrity show forth. Let us abide by the call to love our enemies, let us also not make distinctions among sins like venial and mortal. For in even in “little” sins, we set aside God’s authority and follow our own.²

11.ix.1 - 11.ix.5 – The gospel includes those testimonies of God’s mercy and fatherly favor given to the patriarchs of old. The gospel did not supplant the entire law such that a new way of salvation is brought forth, rather it confirmed and fulfilled what the law promised. John the Baptist stood between the law and gospel, and the apostles carried the gospel forward. What John did in linking the two (law and gospel), did nothing else in his ministry but prepare disciples for Christ. Let us remember that the gospel points out what the law foreshadowed under types.

11.x.1-11.x. – The old and new covenants are really one and the same and they only really differ in mode of dispensation.³ This is shown in that the Jews looked not to carnal and earthly prosperity in the promises of God, but to the future life. Also, the covenant of old required the Jews to rely on the mercy of God not their own merits, and lastly, they knew Christ as Mediator in whom they were joined to God. The Old Testament was clearly concerned with the future life which had its end in Christ. They ate spiritual food (manna) and drink (water in the desert) which referred to Christ. The testimonies of the prophets are replete with examples of hope in immortality and everlasting life with God. So it is clear that the Old Testament covenant had not been limited to earthly things, but contained a promise of spiritual and eternal life.

11.xi.1 – 11.xi.12 – The true differences between the Old and New Testaments pertain to the manner of dispensation rather than to substance. 1) In the OT earthly promises, benefits, and punishments were used to train up God’s people to set their minds on heavenly things. 2) In the OT figures were used to convey truth while in the NT the very truth is present and sealed in the blood of Christ, 3) The OT is literal while the NT is spiritual. Note that in the OT the law of God is written on stone tablets, while in the NT it is written on the hearts of humans. The former preaches death and the new preaches life. The Old brings death and a curse, where the new brings life and release from the curse. 4) Building on item #3 the OT results in slavery while the new in freedom and release. The law produces anxiety while the gospel produces joy. “The law and the prophets were until the time of John; since then the kingdom of God is proclaimed” [Luke 16:16 cf. Vg] and 5) Lastly, the OT was defined the covenant within one nation, Israel, while the a mark of excellence of the New over the Old is the calling of the Gentiles as well.

11.xi.13- 11.xi.14 – Calvin now goes on to talk about the differences in dispensations in terms of differing administrations. These differences do not mean that God is changeable, but simply accommodates different forms to different ages. This is similar to how parents raise children, in that techniques differ as our children mature. Besides, God is free to work as God wills.

²Augustine notes that we should not make little of “little” sins as well, as the drops of many “light” sins soon fill a river of sin. St. Augustine, *Homily 1 on the First Epistle of John (1:1-2:11)*.

³See the Westminster Confession of Faith 6.042 for a summary statement on this matter.

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11.xii.1-11.xii.7- It was of great importance that we have a Mediator who is both true God and true man. Our despoiled condition means we cannot even come the littlest way toward grasping the glory of God without a Mediator. The cavernous pit separating us from God is simply too great so such a Mediator is needed. Additionally, the tasks required of the Mediator necessitated being God. His tasks were to swallow up death, conquer sin, rout the powers of the air and world. Also, only God could fulfill obedience in our stead. As a God-man, Jesus could be subject to death and yet it is impossible for death to hold the God-man.

11.xiii.1-11.xiii.4 – Christ assumed the true substance of human flesh. Jesus called himself “Son of man” indicating he was begotten of human seed. Also the gospel’s testify that Jesus experienced hunger, thirst, cold, and other infirmities associated with a human nature. Christ was true man but yet sinless. He was sinless not simply because he was begotten without the ordinary means of generation for humans but because his generation was sanctified by the Spirit that Jesus might be pure and undefiled as were humans before Adam’s fall.

11.xiv.1-11.xiv.8 – Calvin sticks to a Chalcedonian orthodoxy in defining the two natures of Christ in one person. Calvin likens this to our human situation of having a body and soul. Calvin discusses some examples of the *communicatio idiomatum*. For example, God cannot die, but because Jesus was a God-man, and dies for us, the Apostle John can testify that God laid down his life for us. People make many errors in regards to the study of the two natures: The natures are not fused, commingled, nor pulled apart or separated, we must not seize upon attributes of his divinity to take away his humanity and vice versa. This joining of the two natures is a “hypostatic union.” This manifestation of the nature of Christ illumines our understanding of Sonship. Calvin notes that to neither angels nor humans was God ever Father, except with regard to his only begotten Son.

11.xv.1-11.xv.6 – The threefold saving activity of Christ (the *Triplex Munos*) consists of the prophetic office, kingship, and priesthood. The office of prophet was a regular benefit for the people of the OT. Jesus was anointed to be a herald and witness of the Father’s grace. He is special in that the perfect doctrine he has brought an end to prophecies. Christ’s kingship is spiritual. This king will care for us (even through troubles) until we are called to triumph. As priest Christ is of a new order in that he is both the priest and sacrifice.

11.xvi.1 – 11.xvi.4 – Christ is our Redeemer. As we turn away from him we turn away from our own salvation. We should recognize that God’s justice demands satisfaction and Christ interceded and made the satisfaction for us (out of love). In a marvelous and divine way God loved us even when he hated us. That is he hated the evil we became which he did not make, yet loved what remained in us of his original good work.

11.xvi.5 – 11.xvi.19 – Calvin now provides an explanation of the Apostles’ Creed. This in general covers the entire course of Christ’s obedience in life, death, and resurrection. It is a common theme of Calvin that the disobedience of humans had to be corrected by the perfect obedience of the Son. Further Christ’s obedience was voluntary as well as perfect. Calvin makes much out of the article of the creed which affirms that Christ descended into hell. Christ suffered not a simply bodily death, but grappled with the very dread of everlasting death. He

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suffered a Godforsaken death. What is more terrible than entering the abyss estranged from God? But fortunately for us, he could not be held by the cords of death. And although the divine spirit and dower remained hidden for a bit this was not contrary to faith. Overall, we should be moved by the creed to recognize that the Judge is our Redeemer.

11.xvii.1 – 11.xvii.6 – The Scriptures couple God's grace and Christ's merit. When we speak of the fact that grace was imparted to us on account of the merit of Christ, we should understand that by His blood we are clean and expiation is made for our sins. Christ did not heap up merit for himself, which would be absurd, as though God lacked merit enough for himself, rather, God delivered his Son over, God took no regard for himself but us made regard for us His priority instead.

Book III Overall Context is The Way is Which we Receive the Grace of God.

111.i.1 – 111.i.4 – The Holy Spirit is the bond which unites us to Christ effectually. We are endowed with the Holy Spirit for the sake of the Son. But we must understand that the fullness of the Spirit rests in Christ. The Spirit is sometimes called the Spirit of the Father and at other times the Spirit of the Son. In fact the Spirit has many names in Scripture which include Spirit of Adoption (because he is the witness to us of God's fatherly benevolence), fire, water, and spring. The principal work of the Spirit is faith. In fact faith itself has no other source than the Spirit.

111.ii.1 – 111.ii.13 – Faith is not simply a common assent to the gospel history. Faith is also more than a simple implicit faith. Faith rests on knowledge, knowledge not only of God, but also of his divine will. We need to have faith in the knowledge of our merciful father who reconciled us through Christ. It is not enough implicitly to believe though without taking the care to investigate and understand this. The Scriptures regularly teach that understanding is joined with faith. We should know that even with study our understanding always remains weak, but Christ has come to us clothed in his Gospel, and faith rests on God's word.

III.ii.14 – III.ii.16 – Faith is knowledge, but not strict rational knowledge. The knowledge of faith consists in assurance rather than comprehension. Faith is frequently called for that matter recognition (which is to recognize we are God's children). Faith is sure and firm, such that boldness arises from our faith and a confidence in our Heavenly Father's benevolence. Faith turns on the hinge of embracing the truth of God's mercy and this gives us peace.

III.ii.17-III.ii.20 – On the other hand, even though we are assured in our faith, the world is so full of temptations and anxiety, that our faith is nonetheless tinged with doubt. In fact in this life we are never fully cured of the disease of unbelief. This unbelief remains in our flesh all our lives. However, faith ultimately triumphs over the difficulties which imperil it.

III.ii.21-III.ii.25 – The Lord has given us strength in faith against the attacks of the world in giving us the word of the Lord. In faith we know that when the Lord chastises us, it is out of love. We know that the Lord stands ready to pardon our iniquities when we come under his mercy. Note that the saints, when afflicted, even when hope seems dim, yet called upon the Lord. In fact, the root of faith can never be torn out from the godly. The right kind of fear in regards to our faith remains in small vestiges of unbelief which creep into our minds, due to our

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weak flesh, but in no way are the saints so disheartened as to lose sleep over not having full assurance of God's mercy. One may then ask how can faith and fear coexist in the mind? But this fear simply causes us to all the more be humble and submit to God's power in the sweetness of his grace. Certainly our ingrafting into Christ makes our faith secure. Our condemnation has been swallowed up in Christ. But even if in this life our faith is interrupted and buffeted about in our weakness, so that even its light is snuffed out, it never ceases in its earnest quest for God.

III.ii.26-III.ii.32 – Fear of God is service rendered to God as our Lord and honor of God is that obedience which is rendered to God as our father. Therefore, let fear of the Lord be to us reverence compounded of fear and honor. As children of God we fear offending God more than punishment. We should understand that our Heavenly Father does not on account of faith automatically grant us long years and earthly prosperity. However God supports our faith. It begins in His promise, rests in it and ends in it. In God faith seeks life, not in penalties but in promise of mercy, freely given. But faith only reconciles us to God when we attain to the promise as it joins us to Christ (as no one is loved by God apart from Christ in whom all God's promises are confirmed and fulfilled). Faith also needs and is bound to God's word and only becomes faith when illumined by the testimony of God's grace. Even in the OT we find that knowledge of Christ was not totally lacking as the sacrifices had Christ as their very end.

III.ii.33-III.ii.43 – We should also understand that faith only becomes efficacious with the illumination of the Holy Spirit, as apart from the Spirit the Word can do nothing. In fact, we cannot come to Christ unless drawn by the Holy Spirit. It is to do injury to the Spirit if we separate faith which is the Spirit's peculiar work from the Spirit. Other benefits of faith are that it engenders love in us and provides us the hope of eternal salvation (its inseparable companion.)

III.iii.1 – III.iii.16 – The sum of the gospel consists of repentance and forgiveness (consequences of faith). The first part, repentance consists of vivification of the spirit and mortification of the flesh. In vivification humans recover courage and return from death to life. Repentance itself is the true turning of our life to God. In mortification, we put off the old self, it is crucified, so that the corruption of our original nature no longer thrives. So the sole end of repentance is regeneration, to restore us to the image of God. But this process occurs slowly and ends only at death. Indeed we continue to sin in that we are tickled by evil desires and even act on them. We find in 11 Cor 7:11 an enumeration and description of repentance. The fruit of repentance is piety, but not perfection in this life.

III.iii.17-III.iii.21 - Calvin notes that there is required us special repentance (for those extraordinary failures) and ordinary repentance for the routine failings due to our corrupt nature. We live in a prison house of the body in this life in which we continually contend with our defects. We now also need to turn our attention to the fact that repentance and forgiveness are related. Both of these are graces and gifts of God received by faith.

III.iii.22-III.iii.25 – The unpardonable sin is to sin against the Holy Spirit by resisting the truth of God, even though a person is manifestly convicted of its truth. This is a stubborn and foolish resistance. This is to have a spirit of blasphemy, in that the person deliberately (not through ignorance) impugns the divine name.

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III.vi.1 – III.vi.5 - A key foundation in righteousness is the Scriptural warning that we must be made holy because God is holy. Christ has been set before us as an example, whose pattern we ought to express in our life. For we have been adopted as sons by the Lord with the single condition that our lives manifest Christ. Those who live as they please in sin should either cease to boast of what they are not (Christians) or live as disciples worthy of Christ. On the other hand let us realize we do not attain perfection in this life. But the whole of Scriptures are our target ever before us.

III.vii.1- III.vii.10 - The sum of the Christian life is self-denial which affects our relationships with God and neighbor. The first step is to depart from yourself so that you belong fully to the Lord and the second step we stop seeking after things for ourselves, but rather seek to serve to advance the Lord's glory. All actions in life should be limited to three parts: soberness (chastity and purity), righteousness, and godliness. Given that we imagine our own pre-eminence, we must persistently examine our faults and seek humility. This all leads to proper attitudes towards neighbors guided by the rule of love. We help our neighbor not out of base servitude, but with a right attitude of charity and joy on helping as God has gifted us. But the chief part of self-denial is in our relationship to God. We look only to the Lord's blessings for prosperity. We do not murmur against God whatever or lot in life. But have a solace in God's blessing which also helps us bear adversity. We trust that the Lord will always provide. In our self-denial in relationship to God we surrender to God and have a peaceful and grateful mind. The rule of piety is that God's hand alone governs our life, not blind fortune.

III.viii.1-III.iii.11 – In this life we take up our cross and in so doing are conformed throughout this life to Christ. The afflictions humble us until we rely on God alone as our strength. Carrying our cross trains us in patience and obedience. Each has a unique cross to bear some tried by one kind of cross, some by another. Those who suffer for righteousness sake suffer in comfort, for this is a special honor. Also, Christians may yet groan in their tribulations, but nonetheless undertake the cause at hand with an underlying and triumphant cheer in the heart.

III.ix.1-III.ix. 6 – This life is miserable for good reason as the Lord wishes to impart upon us the incomparable glory of the heavenly life. It is an abomination that those who claim to be Christians are gripped by a fear of death, but they should rather desire it. After all, as we make progress in following Christ, we joyfully await the day of death and final resurrection.

III.x.1-III.x.6 – Even in consideration of the above, Scripture informs us to enjoy the earthly benefits which come our way. We are not all called to an ascetic life. On the other hand goods ought to be used lawfully. For if we gorge ourselves, or become drunk, we fritter away our piety and ignore the proper duties that come with gifts. We become enmeshed in things earthly rather than things spiritual.

III.xi.1- III.xi.4 – Justification is simply the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as righteous people. This consists of the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Justified is the one who is excluded from works righteousness and instead grasp the righteousness of Christ through faith. To justify means only that one is acquitted who was accused, as if innocence were confirmed. It is not our own innocence, but the imputed righteousness of Christ which saves us.

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III.xi.13 – III.xi.15 - Faith righteousness overthrows works righteousness when carefully examined. A problem with works righteousness is that if even one particle of our salvation was based upon our works, an occasion for boasting is in us. Paul says even Abraham had not cause to boast, as he was not righteous by works. When a reward is made for works, this is paying a debt, but God's forgiveness of us is of free grace. In fact, we are so destitute of any of any good works won of our own merit, that though obedience to the Law justifies, no human is or has ever been found who comes even a small fraction of the way toward true obedience to the law.

III.xi.16 – III.xi.18 – Faith righteousness causes us to turn away from the futility of our own works and rely on God's mercy and Christ's righteousness. In the order of justification God embraces the sinner out of pity for our miserable state, touches the sinner with a sense of goodness. This results in saving faith in Christ's righteousness and reconciles us to God. Faith receives and embraces the righteousness offered in the Gospel and so justifies. What is grace, but to be in good standing with God, to be looked upon favorably through Christ. And our faith is a free gift.

III.xi.19-III.xi.20 – Humans are justified by faith alone. And faith does not justify from the workings of even love, but justifies us in no other way than leading us into fellowship with the righteousness of Christ. For even if faith was based upon our love, it again is a righteousness owed, and not reckon out of grace and freely.

III.xi.21-III.xi.23 – The righteousness of faith brings reconciliation with God. This means our sins are forgiven since sin is division between humans and God. In fact, humans are enemies of God until restored to God's good graces through Christ. So our righteousness is actually in Christ not in us, for sin has been condemned as sin in Christ's flesh and in this way the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us who are in Christ. For to appear before God, our vices must be buried in Christ's perfection.

III.xii.1-III.xii.8 – In order to convince ourselves of the necessity of God's free justification we should contemplate God's judgment seat. Many do not in the slightest contemplate God's judgment. If they did they would realize even the slightest imperfection demands justice. And so no one can stand the judgment based upon works. Even if they did the impossible and lived up to law, they would still fall immeasurably short of God's holiness and fall in dread judgment anyway. For what human's exalt is abominable before God. So, true righteousness comes only through our Mediator, Christ. Let us not flatter ourselves, for if God uncovers the darkest recess of our consciences, our depravity will be laid bare. We in humility need the perfection of Christ.

III.xii.1-III.xii.5 – But in God's free kindness our consciences can have peace as God bestows the righteousness of Christ upon us. In recognizing our iniquity and inability to save ourselves and rely upon God we glorify God. When we grasp the righteousness of Christ we have a faith which does not waver, vacillate and despair. This kindness of God is sweet grace.

III.xiv.1-III.xiv.11 - There is a 4-fold classification of human standing with regard to justification. Those with 1) no knowledge of God, 2) those whose mouths say yes I know God, but whose actions say they do not, 3) hypocrites, and 4) the regenerate who make holiness their concern. We should note that even unbelievers are given gifts of God. But since they no not

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God they apply their gifts to poor ends. In the case of the nominal and hypocritical Christians, their lack of humility and impurity of conscience (no fruits of regeneration) betrays their lack of Faith. But even true believers do not good works of themselves, but the Holy Spirit sanctifies them and mortifies the flesh.

III.xiv.12 – III.xiv.21 There are many opponents to justification by faith alone. They speak of supererogatory works (works which are righteous to the extent they follow the law). But God only accepts perfect obedience, so a small victory against a mountain of debt would be hollow anyway. But all our good works are God's anyways and we have no claim even in a small way. So we put no confidence in works and ascribe to them no glory for ourselves. Since good works are a gift, in them, we see the Spirit of adoption.

III.xvii.1-III.xvii.7 – Through faith in Christ we lay hold of manumission from subjection to the law. But the promises of the Gospel are substituted for the promises of the law, which proclaim free forgiveness of sin and which make our works acceptable to God (accepted as of a loving parent might accept imperfect works from a child working to please the parent).

III.xvii.8 – III.xvii.15 – Works do not complete righteousness. But, justification by faith alone is the foundation and substance of works righteousness. But works, once we are justified, do not take over the function of justifying. Our works are still imperfect but acceptable because we have been pardoned and are counted above their actual worth. Calvin refutes James as a proof of works righteousness. James was speaking clearly about people who boast of being Christ but are really not. James is not defining the manner of justification but deriding those who pretend faith as an excuse to produce no works, in which case James lays bare the deadness of their "faith."

III.xviii.11 – III.xviii.10 – That God uses the term "reward" should in no way point us to works righteousness. But we should consider that as Children who have received the Spirit of adoption our reward is really an inheritance. Works also reward us by training us to mediate on God's graces. Also, the promise of a reward encourages us who are weak in the flesh to press on to do good. We ought also to consider that, as we will be in heaven far longer than on earth, that is where we need to build up treasures.

III.xix.1 – III.xix.16 – Christian freedom subsists of three parts. The first is that our consciences rise above the law even though it exhorts us and teaches us. However, before God's judgment seat it has no place in accusing us. The second is that as freed from the law, we now obey it to the extent we can freely and willingly. We work to please God cheerfully as a loving and indulgent Father, who will overlook the imperfection of our work done in good conscience for God. The third part is in our treatment of the adiaphora (outward indifferent things). But we still are to use or refrain from using the gifts God has given us as in ways which will either benefit or prevent harm to our neighbors. Calvin will discuss our obligations to civil governments and church laws in Book IV.

III.xx.1- III.xx.16 – Through faith we are trained to pray to God. Prayer is necessary and by disclosing to God our pressing concerns we gain a peace of conscience. Prayer exercises our faith. Calvin gives 6 reasons for prayer. 1) It causes our hearts to seek God, 2) it purifies our hearts to only allow in things we would take to God in prayer, 3) in prayer we are reminded of

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the grace of God, 4) when answered, we can mediate on the kindness of God, 5) we learn to embrace the gifts of God with greater delight, and 6) through prayer we confirm God's providence in our lives. Right prayer is done reverently, with a focused mind. Also the Holy Spirit aids our prayer and teaches us to pray. Right prayer demands repentance as well. Right prayer is done in a state of total humility. Lastly, right prayer is done with confident assurance that God will answer the prayer. Prayer is so important, that in fact, to deny God prayer is to defraud God of glory due. God is also so generous, that even imperfect prayers are accepted

III.xxv.1 – III.xxv.5 - Faith is rare in this world, being besieged as it is on all sides. But one can profit by meditating on the resurrection at which fools scoff. The importance is especially apparent when we know that in Christ's resurrection we see the prototype of our resurrection. What was begun in the head (Christ) will be completed in the members (us) who are adopted into Christ. Even pagan burial rites point to the fact that something remains of the dead when they are gone. In fact, burial rites were and still are a constant prompting and reminder of the resurrection.

III.xxv.6 – III.xxv.9 – Calvin asserts that we will be resurrected in our existing bodies. It is a curious question to search after what happens to our souls in the intermediate state. But the Scriptures do teach they are present with Christ and accepted into paradise. At the same time the souls of the reprobate suffer their just punishment. It is preposterous that our souls will receive new bodies, but they shall receive the same body made imperishable. How else do those who hear the voice of the Son of God (John 5:28-29) come out of their tombs to resurrection of life or judgment? At Christ's resurrection, the souls of the saints came out of the tombs (Mat 27:52), as a prelude to the general resurrection. So we are raised in the same flesh, but with a new quality.

III.xxv.10 – III.xxv.12 – We should understand that what the Scriptures say in regard to our resurrection is spelled out in language which accommodates our limitations. Words cannot adequately express the actual spiritual blessedness in store. Also, we should understand that just as gifts are not equally distributed in this life to the saints, so in heaven, glory will not be equally distributed. But whatever glory is attained is still at its root a gift of and actually glorifies God. In the end we should limit our inquisitiveness in regards to the nature of heaven, as pondering it is a deep labyrinth. Likewise, the torments of the reprobate are explained in Scripture figuratively so as to help us understand the gravity of the situation and to jostle our consciences to action. So we should not underestimate the wretched condition of those cut off from fellowship with God.

Book IV Context: The External Means or Aids by Which God Invites us into the Society of Christ and Holds us Therein

IV.i.1 – IV.i.6 - We need outward helps to build up our faith owing to the slothful nature of our flesh. In order to aid us God provided preaching of the gospel and instituted the sacraments. Both the preaching of the word and the sacraments prop up our faith and aid in fostering and strengthening our faith. Our nourishment in these aids occurs in the bosom of the church, our nurturing mother. This church is both visible (all known Christians living on earth) and invisible (all the elect throughout time). The church is catholic (universal) as Christ could not be split! In the church we have the communion of saints such that whatever benefits God bestows upon the saints they in turn share with one another. Since faith comes from hearing, leaving the church is

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always disastrous. Private reading of Scripture alone (apart from the church) is inadequate. But, yet, one must keep a sober opinion of the efficacy of ministry (some exaggerate it ridiculously and some deny any benefit).⁴

IV.i.7 – IV.i.29 – The marks of the true church are 1) preaching and hearing of the pure the Word of God, and 2) the administration of the sacraments according to Christ's institution. This church is universal (gathering from all nations). A church with these marks may be defective in many minor ways (faults in doctrine and administration), but remains true if key principals are upheld (God is one, Christ is God and Son of God, etc.). Every church contains petty dissensions, ignorant people, and even grievous sins, but nonetheless remains the church so long as it maintains the marks and must not be abandoned. No church is perfect in this world, but the Lord is working daily on the churches to smooth out the wrinkles. When we worship in a church the vices of others do not hinder our worship and he who leaves a true church is without excuse. Christ gave the power of the keys to the church, dispensed through ministers and so it is our duty to seek forgiveness of sins only where the Lord has placed it (the true church).

IV.ii.1 – IV.ii.12 – Even though the faults listed above do not invalidate a church as a true church, the church can fall when its doctrine is overturned and the use of the sacraments is destroyed. Calvin notes that this is the case of the Roman Catholic Church at the time as sacrilege for instance has replaced the Lord's Supper and doctrine had been buried. The argument that the RC church has an unbroken line of succession is no support (as the Greek Church refutes this). So, in leaving the RCC, they are neither heretics (purveyors of false dogma) nor schismatics (breaking the bond of fellowship) in that the RCC had lost its status.

IV.iii.1 – IV.iii.16 – It is an honor (a very high one) for humans to serve in the theater of creation as God's ambassadors. For God could have done his work on his own, by angels, or with humans. But he hid his wisdom in fragile earthen vessels which shows us all the more how much we should esteem it. Those who preside over the church are apostles (1st builders of the church), prophets (rare now), evangelists (the helpers of the Apostles), pastors (proclaim the gospel and administer the sacraments), and teachers (public and private discourse). Another key office is that of deacon (care for the poor – two kinds of deacons - administrative and direct doing). A call to an office is required to serve and it must be “done decently and in order” [1 Cor 14:40]. There are outer and inner calls, but the will of the people is critical. An one must be ordained through laying on of hands into their office.

IV.iv.1 – IV.iv.15 – Originally bishop and presbyters were the same in rank. Teaching was enjoined to presbyters and administrative functions to bishops, though practices varied by area. In connection with the maintenance of disciple, archbishops and patriarchs were chosen. Over time, a fourfold division of moneys arose: clergy pay, aid to the poor, church maintenance, and the poor again in the context of the bishop direction including help of foreign poor. Other schemes arose as well. But overall, the idea was minimal use for personal living standards and ornamentation, and the bulk was for the help of the needy. Also, in these offices, extensive preparation was required. This ensured capable people who knew the people well were ordained into the ranks of pastors and bishops in particular.

⁴ See Augustine Exposition of Psalm 99 LXX (Hebrew Bible 100). Augustine makes this point in the exposition.

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IV.viii.1 – IV.viii.16 – The spiritual power of the church, which is for up building not destruction, consists in doctrine, jurisdiction, and making laws. With regard to doctrine the church can lay down article of faith and explain them. In any event the church may not go beyond the word of God. Not even the Apostles were permitted such freedom let alone successors. Even though Christ is with the church and Spirit supports the church, when opinions stray from the word of God, humans ought to understand they are then following their own predilections.

IV.xii.1 Discipline is critical for even a small family and so is all the more critical for the church which (in good Presbyterian form) should be as ordered as possible. Slack discipline will contribute to the ultimate dissolution of the church. The discipline of the church for the most part relies on the power of the keys. To understand discipline it is best to divide the church into the clergy and the people. This is because there is common discipline for all and a special discipline for clergy.

IV.xii.2- IV.xii.6 – For private sins, discipline should begin with private admonition, followed by a second admonition with witnesses if the offender is stubborn. If even this fails, then the offender is called before the elders of the church. If even this fails, then removal from the fellowship of the church is required (Matthew 18:15-17). In this administration of discipline for private sins, the church ought to be as mild and fatherly in admonition as possible. The goal is to bring the persons back so that they may rejoice upon being corrected. Severe punishment is reserved for egregious cases. In discipline, the church must preserve the order of the Lord's Supper and exclude an unworthy person who has gravely injured the church. If the sin is truly public, then a rebuke from the church should come at once. In discipline, the church must keep three ends in view: 1) to make sure the dishonorable are not called Christians, 2) so that the good not be corrupted by the bad, and 3) and to cause the offender to repent of their shame.

IV.xii.7 – IV.xii.13 – Discipline should be applied without regard to human rank (princes and paupers ought to be treated alike). In discipline the rule of moderation should apply. The punishment must not bring overwhelming sorrow or become a destruction in and of itself. It is designed to lead a sinner to repentance. Remember the Lord can change the worst humans into the best. Let us not also slide into trying to administer use severe discipline as a means to puff ourselves up as better than others. If sin invades in large numbers, then teaching more than commanding is required.

IV. xii.14- IV.xii.21 – The other part of discipline, outside the power of the keys lies in penance (acts of humility, repentance, and faith). Fasting is an example and its purpose is threefold 1) subdue the flesh, 2) to better prepare and enter into prayers, and 3) when we wish to confess guilt. Fasting should only be used to these ends and must not become superstitious.

IV.xii.22 - IV.xii.28 - The second part of discipline involves clergy who should devote themselves to be examples. As such, clergy should practice harsher discipline upon themselves than the common people. Celibacy is not a requirement of clergy and has deprived the church of good pastors. Celibacy is a gift to a few and marriage is prescribed for others.

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IV.xiii.1-IV.xiii.21 – What is called a promise to humans is a vow with God. Therefore, when a vow is made we need to keep in mind: 1) Who we make a vow to, 2) who we are to make a vow (what is our strength) and 3) with what intention we make a vow (what is in our heart that God sees). Vows can be past (thanksgiving which attests to gratitude or to punish ourselves through repentance) and future (to make us cautious or stimulate us). Vows should be temporary as perpetual vows are foolish, weary us or we break them. Monastic vows are problematic as in the foolishness of celibacy and in inventing modes of life apart from God's calling. Monasticism in general has degraded from the ancient forms and one should know that monastic life is not superior to other calls in life.

IV.xiv.1 – IV.xiv.5 – Sacraments are an outward sign which confirms divine grace towards us and in which we too attest our piety toward God. The sacraments aid our faith, which must be propped up on all sides in life. A sacrament consists of a preached word which helps us understand the visible sign. A sacrament requires preaching to generate faith. Even the Holy patriarchs linked signs to doctrine. The sacraments are like seals that make the covenant official. They exercise our trust in God making us more certain of God's Word. They are also like pillars, which when added to the foundation of God's word, makes our faith more secure.

IV.xiv.6 – IV.xiv.19 – Faith is the proper work of the Holy Spirit, but we recognize three graces, 1) God's word, 2) sacraments, and 3) the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Though the sacraments serve to establish and increase our faith, they do so only when the Spirit is working in us. We need to understand though that word and sacrament equally confirm our faith. The sacraments have the same office as the Word of God: to offer Christ to us and heavenly grace. We must be careful not to neglect and weaken the use and meaning of the sacraments, but also not to attach secret powers. Augustine notes that there can be invisible sanctification without a visible sign and a visible sign without true sanctification. Christ is the substance of the sacraments. As to those wicked who partake, Augustine says, "If you receive carnally, it does not cease to be spiritual, but it is not so for you."

IV.xiv.20-IV.xiv.26 – The OT sacraments (which foreshadow Christ and the old spiritual food was Christ) included circumcision, purifications, sacrifices, and other rites. When Christ came these were supplanted with Baptism and the Lord's Supper (which attest to Christ as revealed). These are the ordinary (regular) sacraments of the church (as some could argue that laying on of hands in ordaining to a church office is a special sacrament). The sacraments do nothing in the way of their outward dispensing, but only when the heart is inwardly cleaning.

IV.xv.1-IV.xv. 22– Baptism is the initiatory sign that we are received into the fellowship of the church and grafted into Christ. It is a sign and evidence of our purification, or it is a kind of sealed instrument by which God assures us that all our sins are so deleted, that they will never come into his sight, and never be imputed. For it is his will that all who have believed be baptized for the remission of sins. He did not mean to intimate that our salvation is perfected by water, or that water possesses in itself the virtue of purifying, regenerating, and renewing; nor does he mean that it is the cause of salvation, but only that the knowledge and certainty of such gifts are perceived in this sacrament. We ought to consider that at whatever time we are baptized, we are washed and purified once for the whole of life. It is incontrovertible, that baptism has been substituted for circumcision, and performs the same office. The sinner receives

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forgiveness by the ministry of the Church; in other words, not without the preaching of the gospel (that we are cleansed by Christ's blood), for which baptism is the sign and testimony of the washing away of sins.

IV.xv.1 – IV.xv.23 – The opponents of infant baptism attack it on the grounds that it is not founded or instituted by God. However, upon study, we see that they are wrong and it is the Lord's Holy ordinance to baptize infants. For circumcision and baptism have an anagogic relationship. In both circumcision and baptism we have the same promise, which is fatherly favor, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. Circumcision was the first entry for the Jews into the church and their adoption on to the household of God. And today the promise of the covenant (sealed or certified through baptism) applies to Christian children just as it applied to Jewish children (by circumcision). Baptism replaces circumcision. Additionally, the Lord chastises those who hinder the children to come to him.