

The Christian Life

By John Calvin

About the cover:

Taken in the Canadian Rockies the cover represents the goal at which the Christian life aims. Along the way many obstacles will hinder our slow and sometimes painful progress. Sometimes we travel under cloud, sometimes fording streams, sometimes traversing marshy land, sometimes through woods, and sometimes climbing steep mountains, taking two steps forward and one step back. Progress is not always evident, but every hour takes us nearer the goal. Along the way, the terrain may be frowned upon for its difficulties or it may be admired for its beauty. However, focusing on the goal brings consolation in the trials we face along the way.

About this booklet:

The contents of this booklet are taken from chapters 6-10 of book 3 of Calvin's Institutes (Henry Beveridge translation, 1845 edition). Since Calvin's Institutes were first published, these chapters have been printed separately numerous times and in a variety of languages.

We have enhanced the readability of the Beveridge translation in a number of ways: Archaic words have been replaced. A number of sentences have been retranslated from the original Latin to better reflect the original content. New section headings have been added. And, paragraph's have been broken into smaller portions.

Thanks are due to Jan Zeldenrust for proofreading and suggesting many improvements.

Although Calvin lived in different circumstances than we do today, the lessons he teaches are Scriptural and therefore always timely. May the Lord be pleased to bless these words to the hearts of His people.

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INTRODUCTION

The following chapters deal with the life of the Christian, and can be classed under two main heads.

First, it must be held to be a universally acknowledged point, that no man is a Christian who does not feel some special love for righteousness (chapter 1). Secondly, in regard to the standard by which every man ought to regulate his life, although it seems to be considered only in chapter 2, yet the three chapters that follow also refer to it. Chapter 2 shows that the Christian has two duties to perform, namely abandoning our own will, and devoting ourselves entirely to the service of God. The observance being so strenuous, he needs the greatest patience. Consequently, chapter 3 deals with the usefulness of the cross, and chapter 4 invites to meditation on the future life. Lastly, chapter 5 clearly shows how we are to use this life and its comforts without abusing them, in no small degree conducive to the goal of living the Christian life.

CHAPTER 1

SCRIPTURAL ARGUMENTS EXHORTING US TO HOLINESS.

Connection between the Christian Life and the Doctrine of Regeneration and Repentance

1. The Christian life arising out of the new life of regeneration is a large and extensive subject.

We have said that the object of regeneration is to bring the life of believers into concord and harmony with the righteousness of God, and so confirm the adoption by which they have been received as sons.

But although the law includes within it that new life by which the image of God is restored in us, yet, as our sluggishness stands greatly in need both of helps and incentives it will be useful to collect out of Scripture a true account of this reformation lest any who have a heartfelt desire of repentance should go astray in their zeal.

Moreover, I am not unaware that, in undertaking to describe the life of the Christian, I am entering on a large and extensive subject, one which, when fully considered in all its parts, is sufficient to fill a large volume. We see this, for instance, in the length to which the Fathers extend their exhortations in treating of individual virtues. This they do, not from mere wordiness; for whatever be the virtue which you undertake to recommend, your pen is spontaneously led by the abundance of material so to amplify, that you seem not to have discussed it properly if you have not done it at length.

My intention, however, in the instruction concerning life which I now propose to give, is not to extend it so far as to treat of each virtue specially, and then enlarge with encouragements. This must be sought in the writings of others, and particularly in the sermons of the Fathers. For me it will be sufficient to point out the method by which a pious man may be taught how to frame his life aright, and briefly define some universal rule according to which he may properly examine his duties. I shall one day possibly find time for more ample discourse, or leave others to perform an office for which I am not so fit. I have a natural love of brevity, and, perhaps, if

I spoke at length, I would not succeed. Even if I could gain the highest applause by being more wordy, I would scarcely be disposed to attempt it. Moreover, the nature of my present work requires me to glance at simple doctrine with as much brevity as possible.

As philosophers have certain definitions of integrity and honesty, from which they derive particular duties and the whole train of virtues; so in this respect Scripture is not without order, but presents a most beautiful arrangement, and one which is every way much more certain than that of philosophers. The only difference is, that they, under the influence of desire for popularity, constantly put on an exquisite clarity of argument, which may serve to display their genius. Whereas the Spirit of God, teaching without such aspirations, is not so perpetually observant of exact method, and yet by observing it at times sufficiently implies that it is not to be neglected.

2. We must be holy because God is holy and He dwells among us.

The Scripture system of which we speak aims chiefly at two objects. The first is, that the love of righteousness, to which we are by no means naturally inclined, may be instilled and implanted into our minds. The second is (see chapter 2) to prescribe a rule which will prevent us from going astray while in the pursuit of righteousness. It has numerous admirable methods of recommending righteousness. Many have been already pointed out in different parts of this work; but we shall also briefly mention some of them here. With what better foundation can it begin than by reminding us that we must be holy, because “God is holy?” (Leviticus 19:1; 1 Peter 1:16). For when we were scattered abroad like lost sheep, wandering through the labyrinth of this world, He brought us back again to His own fold.

When mention is made of our union with God, let us remember that holiness must be the bond of our union. But, this does not mean that we come into communion with Him by the merit of holiness. We ought rather first to cleave to Him, in order that, pervaded with His holiness, we may follow whither He calls. Holiness must be the bond of our union because it greatly concerns His glory not to have any fellowship with wickedness and impurity. Wherefore He tells us that this is the goal of our calling, the goal to which we ought ever to have respect, if we would answer the call of God. For to what end were we rescued from the iniquity and pollution of the

world into which we were plunged, if we allow ourselves, during our whole lives, to wallow in them?

Besides, we are at the same time admonished, that if we would be regarded as the Lord's people, we must inhabit the holy city Jerusalem, which, as He hath consecrated it to Himself, it would be impious for its inhabitants to profane it by impurity. Hence the expressions, "Who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness" (Psalm 15:1, 2; 24:3, 4); for the sanctuary in which He dwells certainly ought not to be like an unclean stall.

3. The strongest inducement to a Christian life comes from our redemption in Christ.

To better arouse us, Scripture reveals God the Father, who, as He hath reconciled us to Himself in His Anointed, has impressed His image upon us, to which He would have us to be conformed (Romans 5:4). Come, then, and let them show me a more excellent system among philosophers, who think that they alone have a moral philosophy duly and orderly arranged. They, when they would give excellent exhortations to virtue, can only tell us to live agreeably to nature.

Scripture derives its exhortations from the true source when it not only teaches us to regulate our life with a view to God its author to whom it is subject; but after showing us that we have degenerated from the true origin and law of our creation, adds, that Christ, through whom we have returned to favor with God, is set before us as a model, whose image our life should represent. What might you need that is more effectual than this? Nay, what might you need besides this? If the Lord adopts us for His sons on the condition¹ that our life be a representation of Christ, who is the bond of our adoption, then unless we dedicate and devote ourselves to righteousness, we not only, with the utmost treachery, revolt from our Creator, but also reject the Savior Himself.

Then, from an enumeration of all the blessings of God, and each part of our salvation, Scripture finds materials to encourage us.

¹ "On this condition": This is not speaking of a condition as a prerequisite. Rather, the idea is that when God adopts us, we have an obligation to express Christ's image through our obedience.

Since God exhibited Himself to us as a Father, we must be convicted of extreme ingratitude if we do not in turn exhibit ourselves as His sons. Since Christ purified us by the washing of His blood, and communicated this purification by baptism, it would ill become us to be defiled with new pollution. Since He engrafted us into His body, we, who are His members, should anxiously avoid contracting any stain or blemish. Since He who is our head ascended to heaven, it is befitting in us to withdraw our affections from the earth, and with our whole soul aspire to heaven. Since the Holy Spirit dedicated us as temples to the Lord, we should make it our endeavor to show forth the glory of God, and guard against being profaned by the defilement of sin. Since our soul and body were destined to heavenly incorruptibility and an unfading crown, we should earnestly strive to keep them pure and uncorrupted against the day of the Lord. These, I say, are the surest foundations of a well-regulated life, and you will search in vain for anything resembling them among philosophers, who, in their commendation of virtue, never rise higher than the natural dignity of man.

Extremes to be Avoided: Boasting or Becoming Dejected

4. Many boast of Christ in words, but they have not truly learned Christ.

This is the place to address those who, having nothing of Christ but the name and sign, yet desire to be called Christians. How dare they boast of this sacred name? None have a relationship with Christ but those who have acquired the true knowledge of Him from the Gospel. The Apostle denies that any man truly has learned Christ who has not learned to put off “the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on Christ” (Ephesians 4:22). Therefore, no matter how eloquently they chatter about the Gospel, they are convicted of falsely and unjustly pretending to have a knowledge of Christ.

Doctrine is not an affair of the tongue, but of the life; is not grasped merely by intellect and memory, like other branches of learning; but is received only when it possesses the whole soul, and finds its seat and habitation in the inmost recesses of the heart. Let them, therefore, either cease to insult God, by boasting that they are what they are not, or let them show themselves not unworthy disciples

of their divine Master. We have given the first place to doctrine in which our religion is contained, since by it our salvation commences; but doctrine must also be transfused into the heart, and pass into the conduct, and so transform us into itself, as not to prove unfruitful.

Philosophers are justly burn with anger against, and disgracefully banish from their company, those who while professing an art which ought to instruct their conduct, convert it into mere wordy and clever argumentation. With how much better reason shall we detest those flimsy rhetoricians who are contented to let the Gospel play upon their lips, when, from its efficacy, it ought to penetrate the inmost affections of the heart, fix its seat in the soul, and pervade the whole man a hundred times more than the frigid discourses of philosophers?

5. Christians ought not to despond when they see only a small beginning.

I do not insist that the life of the Christian shall breathe nothing but the perfect Gospel, though this is to be desired, and ought to be attempted. Therefore, neither do I insist so strictly on evangelical perfection, that I would refuse to acknowledge as a Christian any man who has not attained it. In this way all would be excluded from the Church, since there is no man who is not far removed from this perfection, while many, who have made but little progress, would be undeservedly rejected.

What then? Let us set this before our eye as that for which we ought constantly to aim. Let it be regarded as the goal towards which we are to run. For you cannot divide the matter with God, undertaking part of what His word commands, and omitting part at pleasure. For, in the first place, God uniformly recommends integrity as the principal part of His worship, meaning by integrity real singleness of mind, devoid of disguise and fiction, which is the opposite of a double heart(cf. Psalm 12:2). It's as if it were said, that the beginning of living rightly is when the internal affections are sincerely devoted to God, in the cultivation of holiness and justice.

But seeing that, in this earthly prison of the body, no man is supplied with sufficient strength to run his course with due readiness, and the greater number are so oppressed with weakness, that hesitating, and halting, and even crawling on the ground, they make little progress, let every one of us go as far as his humble ability

enables him, and pursue the path on which we have set out. No one will travel so unsuccessfully that he does not daily cover at least some ground. Let us, therefore, never cease to do this, that we may daily advance in the way of the Lord; and let us not despair because of our meager success.

However little our success may correspond with our wish, our labor is not lost when today is better than yesterday, provided with true singleness of mind we keep our aim, and aspire to the goal, not speaking flattering things to ourselves, nor indulging our vices, but making it our constant endeavor to improve ourselves, until we attain to goodness itself. If during the whole course of our life we seek and follow, we shall at length attain it, when relieved from the infirmity of flesh we are admitted to full fellowship with God.

CHAPTER 2

NOT OUR OWN

Sections 1-3

Pursuing Righteousness by Abandoning our own Will and Devoting Ourselves Entirely to God

1. We are not our own, but belong to God and therefore must devote all our energy in His service.

Although the law of the Lord contains the best and most suitably arranged rule of life, it has seemed proper to our heavenly Teacher to train His people by a yet more accurate method than the rule which is prescribed in the law. Now, the leading principle in the method is, that it is the duty of believers to present their “bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is” their “reasonable service” (Romans 12:1). Hence he draws the exhortation: “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.” The great point, then, is, that we are consecrated and dedicated to God, and, therefore, should not henceforth think, speak, meditate, or act, without a view to His glory. That which He has made sacred cannot be applied to profane use without great insult to Him.

But if we are not our own, but the Lord’s, it is plain both what error is to be shunned, and to what end the actions of our lives ought to be directed.

We are not our own; therefore, neither is our own reason or will to rule our acts and counsels. We are not our own; therefore, let us not make it our end to seek what may be agreeable to our carnal nature. We are not our own; therefore, as far as possible, let us forget ourselves and the things that are ours.

On the other hand, we are God’s; let us, therefore, live and die to Him (Romans 14:8). We are God’s; therefore, let His wisdom and will preside over all our actions. We are God’s; to Him, then, as the only legitimate end, let every part of our life be directed. O how great the accomplishment of him who, having been taught that he is not his own, has withdrawn the dominion and government of himself from

his own reason that he may give them to God! For as the surest source of destruction to men is to obey themselves, so the only haven of safety is to have no other will, no other wisdom, than to follow the Lord wherever He leads.

Let this, then be the first step, to abandon ourselves, and devote the whole energy of our minds to the service of God. By service, I mean not only that which consists in verbal obedience, but that by which the mind, divested of its own carnal feelings, implicitly obeys the call of the Spirit of God.

This transformation, which Paul calls the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23), though it is the first entrance to life, was unknown to all the philosophers. They give the government of man to reason alone, thinking that reason alone is to be listened to; in short, they assign to reason the sole direction of the conduct. But Christian philosophy bids reason to concede her place, and yield complete submission to the Holy Spirit, so that the man himself no longer lives, but Christ lives and reigns in him (Galatians 2:20).

2. Since we are not our own, let us renounce ourselves and seek the glory of God by obeying His will.

From this follows the other principle, that we are not to seek our own, but the Lord's will, and act with a view to promote His glory. Great is our proficiency, when, almost forgetting ourselves, certainly postponing our own reason, we faithfully make it our endeavor to obey God and His commandments. For when Scripture commands us to lay aside private regard to ourselves, it not only divests our minds of an excessive longing for wealth, or power, or human favor, but eradicates all ambition and thirst for worldly glory, and other more secret plagues. The Christian ought, indeed, to be so trained and disposed as to consider, that during his whole life he has to do with God. For this reason, as he will bring all things to the reckoning and will of God, so he will religiously direct his whole mind to Him. For he who has learned to look to God in everything he does, is at the same time diverted from all vain thoughts. This is that self-denial which Christ so strongly enforces on His disciples from the very outset (Matthew 16:24), which, as soon as it takes hold of the mind, leaves no place either, first, for pride, arrogance, and display; or, secondly, for greed, lust, extravagance, softness, or other vices which are engendered by self-love.

On the contrary, wherever self-denial does not reign, the foulest vices are indulged in without shame; or, if there is some appearance of virtue, it is corrupted by a depraved longing for applause. Show me, if you can, an individual who, unless he has renounced himself in obedience to the Lord's command, is disposed to do good for its own sake. Those who have not so renounced themselves have followed virtue, at least for the sake of praise. The philosophers who have contended most strongly that virtue is to be desired on her own account, were so inflated with arrogance as to make it apparent that they sought virtue for no other reason than as a ground for indulging in pride. So far, therefore, is God from being delighted with those who strive for popular applause with their inflated minds, that He declares they have received their reward in this world (Matthew 6:2), and that harlots and publicans are nearer the kingdom of heaven than they (Matthew 21:31).

We have not yet sufficiently explained how great and numerous are the obstacles by which a man is impeded in the pursuit of virtue, so long as he has not renounced himself. The old saying is true, There is a world of iniquity treasured up in the human soul. Nor can you find any other remedy for this than to deny yourself, renounce your own reason, and direct your whole mind to the pursuit of those things which the Lord requires of you, and which you are to seek only because they are pleasing to Him.

3. We should shun ungodliness and worldly lusts and follow sobriety, justice, and piety.

In another passage, Paul gives a brief, indeed, but more distinct account of each of the parts of a well-ordered life: "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:11-14). After holding forth the grace of God to revive us, and pave the way for His true worship, he removes the two greatest obstacles which stand in the way, namely, ungodliness, to which we are by nature overly prone, and worldly lusts, which are far worse. Under ungodliness, he includes not merely superstition, but

everything at variance with the true fear of God. Worldly lusts are equivalent to the lusts of the flesh. Thus He commands us, in both tables of the Law, to lay aside our own mind, and renounce whatever our own reason and will dictate.

Then he reduces all the actions of our lives to three branches, sobriety, justice, and godliness. Sobriety undoubtedly denotes as well chastity and temperance as the pure and frugal use of temporal goods, and patient endurance of poverty. Justice includes all the duties of fairness, in order that everyone receives his due. Next follows godliness, which separates us from the pollutions of the world, and connects us with God in true holiness. When these are connected together by an indissoluble chain, they produce a solid perfection.

Nothing is more difficult than to say goodbye to the will of the flesh, subdue, nay, reject our lusts, and devote ourselves to God and our brethren, and lead an angelic life amid the pollutions of the world. Paul, therefore, calls us back to the hope of a blessed immortality in order to set our minds free from all entanglements. He justly urges us to contend because, as Christ has once appeared as our Redeemer, thus on His final coming He will give full enjoyment of the salvation He acquired. In this way He dispels all the enticements, which obscure our path and prevent us from aspiring as we ought to heavenly glory. Nay, He tells us that we must be pilgrims in the world, that our heavenly inheritance may not pass away or perish.

Sections 4-7

Self-denial as it Relates to our Fellowman

4. Self-denial promotes a humble opinion of ourselves and respect for our neighbor.

For when Scripture commands us, in regard to our fellow men, to prefer them in honor to ourselves, and sincerely labor to promote their advantages (Romans 12:10; Philippians 2:3), He gives us commands which our mind is utterly incapable of obeying until its natural feelings are suppressed. For so blindly do we all rush in the direction of self-love, that everyone thinks he has a good reason for exalting himself and despising all others in comparison. If God bestows on us something pleasing, we trust in it and immediately our spirits are lifted, and not only swell up, but almost burst with pride.

The vices we abound in we both carefully conceal from others, and flatteringly represent to ourselves as minute and trivial, nay, sometimes embrace them as virtues. When the same qualities which we admire in ourselves are seen in others, even though they should be superior, we maliciously detract from them and tear them down in order that we may not be forced to yield to them. In like manner we repugantly exaggerate their vices, not content when we severely and sharply censure them. From this arises the haughtiness with which each, as if exempted from the common lot, seeks to exalt himself above his neighbor, confidently and proudly despising others, or at least looking down upon them as his inferiors. The poor man yields to the rich, the working-class man to the nobleman, the servant to the master, the unlearned to the learned, and yet everyone inwardly cherishes some idea of his own superiority.

Thus each flattering himself, sets up a kind of kingdom in his breast; the arrogant, to satisfy themselves, pass censure on the minds and manners of other men, and when contention arises, the full venom is displayed. Many carry themselves with mildness so long as they experience smooth and pleasant circumstances, but how few are there who, when stung and irritated, preserve the same tenor of moderation? For this there is no other remedy than to pluck up by the roots those most noxious pests, self-love and contentiousness. This the doctrine of Scripture does. For it teaches us to remember, that the endowments which God has bestowed upon us are not our own, but His free gifts, and that those who pride themselves on account of them betray their ingratitude. “Who maketh thee to differ,” saith Paul, “and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?” (1 Corinthians 4:7).

Then by a diligent examination of our faults let us keep ourselves humble. Thus while nothing will remain to swell our pride, there will be much to subdue it. Again, we are commanded, whenever we behold the gifts of God in others, so to reverence and respect the gifts, as also to honor those in whom they reside. If God has been pleased to bestow honor upon them, it would ill become us to deprive them of it. Then we are told to overlook their faults. Certainly not to encourage their faults by our compliments; rather, not to insult on account of those faults those whom we ought to regard with honor and good will. In this way, with regard to all with whom we have

relations, our behavior will be not only moderate and modest, but courteous and friendly. The only way by which you can ever attain to true meekness, is to have your heart imbued with a humble opinion of yourself and respect for others.

5. Self-denial promotes the advantage of our neighbor.

How difficult it is to perform the duty of seeking the good of our neighbor! Unless you leave off all thought of yourself and in a manner cease to be yourself, you will never accomplish it. How can you exhibit those works of love which Paul describes unless you renounce yourself, and become wholly devoted to others? “Charity (says he, 1 Corinthians 13:4) suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked” etc. Were it the only thing required of us to seek not our own, nature would not have the least power to comply: she so inclines us to love ourselves only, that she will not easily allow us carelessly to pass by ourselves and our own interests that we may watch over the interests of others, nay, spontaneously to yield our own rights and resign it to another.

But, to conduct us to this, Scripture cautions us with this rule, that whatever gifts we obtain from the Lord have been entrusted to us, that they might be directed for the common good of the Church. Therefore, the legitimate use of all our gifts is a kind and liberal sharing of them with others. There cannot be a more certain rule, nor a stronger exhortation to observe it, than when we are taught that all the gifts which we possess are divine deposits entrusted to us for the very purpose of being distributed for the good of our neighbor.

In fact, Scripture goes so far as to compare them to the abilities given to the members of the human body (1 Corinthians 12:12). No member has its function for itself, or applies it for its own private use, but transfers it to its fellow-members; nor does it derive any other advantage from it than that which it receives in common with the whole body. Thus, whatever the pious man can do, he is bound to do for his brethren, not consulting his own interest in any other way than by striving earnestly for the common edification of the Church. Let this, then, be our method of showing goodwill and kindness, considering that, in regard to everything which God has bestowed upon us, and by which we can aid our neighbor, we are His

stewards, and are bound to give account of our stewardship; moreover, that the only right mode of administration is that which is regulated by love. In this way, we shall not only always unite the pursuit of a stranger's benefit with a concern for our own advantage, but also make the latter subordinate to the former.

And so that it not escape our notice that this is the principle for duly administering every gift which we receive from God, He of old applied that law to the minutest expressions of His own kindness. He commanded the first-fruits to be offered to Him as an attestation by the people that it was impious to reap any advantage from goods not previously consecrated to Him (Exodus 22:29; 23:19). But if the gifts of God are not sanctified to us until we have with our own hand dedicated them to the Author Himself, it must be a foul abuse that does not emit a scent of such dedication. It is in vain to contend that you cannot enrich the Lord by your offerings. Although your liberality cannot reach God (as the Psalmist says), yet it is to be exercised toward to the saints which are upon the earth (Psalm 16:2, 3). For that reason acts of mercy are compared to holy offerings, as today they correspond to the offerings under the Law.

6. Love to our neighbor is promoted by considering the image of God.

Moreover, that we may not grow weary in well-doing - as would otherwise immediately and unavoidably be the case - we must add another quality which the Apostle specifies: "Charity suffereth long, and is kind, is not easily provoked" (1 Corinthians 13:4). The Lord commands us to do good to all without exception, though the greater part, if estimated according to their own merit, are most unworthy of it. But Scripture comes to our aid with a most excellent reason, when it says we are not to look to what men in themselves deserve, but to attend to the image of God, which exists in all,² and to

² "The image of God, which exists in all": Calvin held that "the likeness of God extends to the whole excellence by which man's nature towers over all the kinds of living creatures" (Institutes 1.15.3). At the same time, he contends that the image consists in the knowledge of God, true righteousness, and holiness (Institutes 1.15.4). Importantly, however, Calvin understands that by nature, the way we are born in Adam, this image of God is wholly corrupted: "Therefore, even though we grant that God's image was not totally annihilated and destroyed in him, yet it was so corrupted that whatever remains is frightful deformity" (Institutes 1.15.4). The Canons of Dordt (Heads 3/4, article 4) reflect the same idea: "There remain,

which we owe all honor and love. But in those who are of the household of faith, the same rule is to be more carefully observed, inasmuch as that image is renewed and restored in them by the Spirit of Christ.

Therefore, whoever be the man that is presented to you as needing your assistance, you have no ground for declining to give it to him. Say he is a stranger. The Lord has given him a mark which ought to be familiar to you: for which reason he forbids you to despise your own flesh (Galatians 6:10). Say he is contemptible and without value. The Lord points him out as one whom He has distinguished by the splendor of His own image (Isaiah 58:7). Say that you are bound to him by no ties of duty. The Lord has substituted him as it were into His own place, that in him you may recognize the many great obligations under which the Lord has laid you to Himself. Say that he is unworthy of your least exertion on his account; but the image of God, by which he is recommended to you, is worthy of yourself and all your exertions. If he not only merits no good, but has provoked you by injuries and offenses, still this is no good reason why you should cease to embrace him in love, and pursue the obligations of love. He has deserved very differently from me, you will say. But what has the Lord deserved? Whatever injury he has done you, when He commands you to forgive him, He certainly means that it should be imputed to Himself. In this way only we attain to, what is not to say difficult but altogether against nature, to love those that hate us, render good for evil, and blessing for cursing, remembering that we are not to reflect on the wickedness of men, but look to the image of

however, in man since the fall the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for the maintaining an orderly external deportment. But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God and to true conversion, that he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil. Nay further, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and holds it in unrighteousness, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God.” Properly, although mankind lost completely the content of the image of God in the fall, humans retain glimmerings that correspond to God’s image (i.e. the *capacity* to bear this image), which glimmerings man renders wholly polluted apart from faith. Thus, Calvin’s argument becomes this: We ought to love our neighbor because he yet retains glimmerings that correspond to God’s image. A good treatment of the image of God in man explaining the various views can be found at the following link: <http://www.cprf.co.uk/articles/imageofgod.htm>.

God in them, an image which, covering and obliterating their faults, should by its beauty and dignity allure us to love and embrace them.³

7. Acts of kindness must arise from love in the heart.

We shall thus succeed in mortifying ourselves if we fulfill all the duties of love. Those duties, however, are not fulfilled by the mere discharge of them, even though none were omitted, unless they are done from a pure disposition of love. For it may happen that one may perform every one of these duties, in so far as the external act is concerned, and be far from performing them rightly. For you see some who would like to be thought very generous, and yet they give nothing to others unless they [also] reproach them with arrogant looks, or even immoderate words. And have we come to such a calamitous condition in this unhappy age, that the greater part of men almost never give alms without some insult.

Such conduct ought not to have been tolerated even among the heathen; but from Christians something more is required than to carry cheerfulness in their looks, and give attractiveness to the discharge of their duties by courteous language. First, they should put themselves in the place of him whom they see in need of their assistance, and pity his misfortune as if they themselves felt and bore it, so that a feeling of pity and common courtesy should incline them to assist him just as they would themselves.

He who is thus minded will approach and give assistance to his brethren, and will not contaminate his acts with arrogance or reproach; neither will he despise the brother to whom he does a kindness; neither will he treat him as one who needed his help, or subject him as being under obligation to him. Just as we do not insult a diseased member when the rest of the body labors for its recovery, nor think it under special obligation to the other members, because it has required more exertion than it has returned.

A sharing of obligations between members is not at all to be regarded as a free gift, but rather as the payment of that which is due

³ Ultimately, we ought to love our neighbor because God commands us to do so. When we love our neighbor, we ourselves manifest God's image in us. At the same time, when we love for our neighbor, we seek his highest good, even the restoration of God's image in him. Loving our neighbor, therefore, still has much to do with the image of God.

by the law of nature; therefore it would be monstrous to refuse to do them. For this reason, he who has performed one kind of duty will not think himself thereby discharged, as is usually the case when a rich man, after contributing somewhat of his substance, delegates the remaining burdens to others as if he had nothing to do with them. Everyone should rather consider, that whatever degree of prosperity he enjoys, to that degree he owes himself to his neighbors. The only limit to his kindness is the running short of his means; the extent of these should regulate the extent of his love.

Sections 8-10

Self-denial as it More Especially Relates to God

8. Self-denial involves resigning ourselves, and all we have, to the disposal of the Lord.

Let us again consider more fully the principal part of self-denial, which as we have said has reference to God. Many things have already been said with regard to it, which are not necessary to repeat; it will be sufficient to view it as shaping us to calmness of mind and patience.

First, then, in seeking the convenience or tranquility of the present life, Scripture calls us to resign ourselves, and all we have, to the disposal of the Lord, to give up to Him the affections of our heart, that He may tame and subdue them.

We have a frenzied desire, a never-ending eagerness, to pursue wealth and honor, intrigue for power, accumulate riches, and collect all those frivolities which seem conducive to luxury and splendor. On the other hand, we have a remarkable dread and hatred of poverty, lowly birth, and humble condition, and feel the strongest desire to guard against them. Hence, in regard to those who frame their life after their own counsel, we see how restless they are in mind, how many plans they try, and to what fatigues they submit, in order that they may obtain whatever things greed or lust for success moves their affections to desire. Or, on the other hand, how much they go through to escape poverty and degradation.

To avoid similar entanglements, the course which Christian men must follow is this: first, they must not long for, or hope for, or think of any kind of prosperity apart from the blessing of God. They must cast themselves on His blessing, and there safely and confidently

recline. For, however much the flesh may seem beautifully capable to itself while it contends for honor or wealth, or brings forth zeal, or is encouraged by the favor of men, it is certain that all this is nothing, and that neither natural capacity nor exertion will be of the least avail, except in so far as the Lord prospers both. On the contrary, His blessing alone makes a way through all obstacles, and brings everything to a joyful and favorable solution.

Secondly, without this blessing we may be able to acquire some degree of fame and riches (as we daily see wicked men loaded with honors and wealth). Yet since those on whom the curse of God lies do not taste the least particle of true happiness, whatever we obtain without His blessing must turn out badly. But surely men ought not to desire what makes them more miserable.

9. We should not eagerly contend for riches and honors, or use wicked schemes to obtain them; rather, we should seek the blessing of God.

We believe that all prosperous and desirable success depends entirely on the blessing of God, and that when such blessing is absent all kinds of misery and loss await us. Therefore, it follows that we should not eagerly contend for riches and honors, trusting to our own skill and painstaking attention, or leaning on the goodwill of men, or relying on any vain notion of chance; but should always have respect to the Lord, that with His help and support we may be brought to whatever lot He has provided for us.

Thus, in the first place, the result will be, that we will not rush to grasp at wealth and seize honors either by unlawful acts, or by tricks and wicked schemes, or by violent pillaging, all which lead to our neighbor's injury. Instead, we will only follow such wealth as we may enjoy with innocence. Who can hope for the assistance of God's blessing in the course of fraud, violent robberies, and other wicked practices? As this blessing attends only him who thinks purely and acts uprightly, so too it calls back those who desire this blessing from twisted plans and evil actions.

Secondly, a bridle will be put on us, restraining an excessive desire to grow rich, or a presumptuous coveting after honor. How can anyone have the nerve to expect that God will help him pursue those things that are against His word? Be done with the thought! What

God with His own lips pronounces cursed, can never be pursued with His blessing.

Lastly, if our success is not equal to our wish and hope, we shall, nevertheless, be kept from impatience and detestation of our condition, whatever it be, knowing that to feel this way would be murmuring against God, at whose pleasure riches and poverty, contempt and honors, are dispensed. In short he who leans on God's blessing in the way which has been described, will not employ wicked schemes in the pursuit of those things which men habitually desire, knowing they would avail him nothing. Nor when anything prosperous befalls him will he ascribe it to himself and his own diligence, or industry, or luck. Instead, he will ascribe it to God as its author. If, while the affairs of others flourish, his affairs make little progress, or even lose ground, he will bear his humble lot with greater composure and moderation than an unbeliever would bear a moderate success, which only falls somewhat short of what he wished.

The reason being, he has a comfort in which he can rest more quietly than in the greatest wealth or power, because he considers that his affairs are ordered by the Lord in the manner most advantageous to his salvation. This, we see, was David's persuasion, who, while he follows God and surrenders himself to His guidance, declares, "Neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother" (Psalm 131:1, 2).

10. When we commit ourselves entirely to God, we will manifest tranquility and endurance in every circumstance of life.

Nor is it in this respect only that pious minds ought to manifest this tranquility and endurance; it must be extended to all the circumstances to which this present life is liable. He alone, therefore, has properly denied himself, who has resigned himself entirely to the Lord, placing the whole course of his life entirely at God's disposal. He whose mind is thus composed will neither think himself wretched nor murmur against God because of his lot, whatever may befall him.

But, how necessary this disposition is will be clear, if you consider the many accidental happenings to which we are liable. Distresses of one kind or another repeatedly harass us: at one time the pestilence rages; at another we are relentlessly vexed with the calamities of war; frost and hail, destroying the promise of the year,

lead to barrenness, which reduces us to poverty; wife, parents, children, and relatives, are carried off by death; house is consumed by fire. These are the events which make men curse their life, detest the day of their birth, declare daylight and heaven to be loathsome, even censure God, and (as they are eloquent in blasphemy) charge Him with cruelty and injustice.

However, in these things the believer ought to contemplate the mercy of God, even His fatherly kindness. Accordingly, if he should see his house reduced to loneliness by the removal of loved ones, even then he will not cease to speak well of the Lord. Rather, his thought will be, Still the grace of the Lord, which dwells within my house, will not leave it desolate. If his crops are damaged by frost, consumed by ice, struck down by hail, and he sees famine threatening, he will not however despond or murmur against God, but maintain his confidence in Him: “We thy people, and sheep of thy pasture, will give thee thanks for ever” (Psalm 79:13). So then, He will supply me with food, even in extreme barrenness. If he is afflicted with disease, the sharpness of the pain will not so overcome him, as to make him break out with impatience, and complain against God; but, recognizing justice and tenderness in the rod, will patiently endure. In short, whatever happens, knowing that it is ordered by the Lord, he will receive it with a calm and grateful mind, and will not stubbornly resist the rule of Him, to whose power he has once entrusted himself and his possessions.

Especially let the Christian soul avoid that foolish and most miserable consolation of the heathen, who, to strengthen their mind against adversities, ascribed them to chance. They judged it absurd to feel indignant against chance, since it was aimless and reckless, and, with its blind eyes, simultaneously wounded the well-deserving and the undeserving. On the contrary, the rule of piety is, that the hand of God alone is the ruler and judge of the fortunes of all, and, rather than rushing on with thoughtless fury, dispenses good and evil simultaneously with a perfectly regulated justice.

CHAPTER 3

SELF-DENIAL AND BEARING THE CROSS

Sections 1-2

The Nature of the Cross, its Necessity and Dignity

1. To follow Christ is to bear the cross as He did.

The pious mind must ascend still higher, namely, where Christ calls His disciples when He says, that everyone of them must “take up his cross” (Matthew 16:24). Those whom the Lord has chosen and honored with a relationship to Him must prepare for a hard, laborious, troubled life, a life full of many and various kinds of evils. Thus it is the will of the heavenly Father, to exercise His own in such a way as to give them a reliable trial. Having begun this course with Christ the firstborn, He continues it towards all His children. For though that Son was dear to Him above others, the Son in whom He was “well pleased,” yet we see, that far from being treated gently and indulgently, we may say, that while He dwelt on earth not only was He subjected to a perpetual cross, but His whole life was nothing else than a kind of perpetual cross. The Apostle assigns the reason, “Though he was a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8).

Why then should we exempt ourselves from that condition to which Christ our Head properly submitted; especially since He did so on our account, that He might in His own person exhibit a model of patience? Wherefore, the Apostle declares, that all the children of God are destined to be conformed to Him. And so, the remarkable consolation that we are sharing in the sufferings of Christ, comes to us in harsh and bitter circumstances, which things men deem unfavorable and evil. Just as He passed through a labyrinth of many woes to celestial glory, so we too are conducted there through various tribulations. For, in another passage, Paul himself says, “we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22); and again, “that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Romans 8:29). How powerfully should it soften the bitterness of the cross, to think that the more we are afflicted with adversity, the

surer we are made of our fellowship with Christ; by communion with whom our sufferings are not only blessed to us, but tend greatly to the furtherance of our salvation.

2. The cross is necessary to humble our pride, to teach us dependence upon God, and to give us experience of His presence.

We may add, that the only thing which made it necessary for our Lord to undertake to bear the cross, was to testify and prove His obedience to the Father. But, there are many reasons which make it necessary for us to live constantly under the cross. Feeble as we are by nature, and prone to ascribe all perfection to our flesh, unless we receive as it were a visual demonstration of our weakness, we readily estimate our virtue above its proper worth. Nor do we doubt that, whatever happens, our virtue will stand unbroken and invincible against all difficulties. Hence we indulge a stupid and empty confidence in the flesh, and then trusting to it grow proud against the Lord Himself; as if our own faculties were sufficient without His grace.

This arrogance cannot be better repressed than when He proves to us by experience, not only how great is our weakness, but also our frailty. Therefore, He visits us with disgrace, or poverty, or bereavement, or disease, or other afflictions. Feeling altogether unable to support them, we forthwith, in so far as regards ourselves, give way, and thus humbled we learn to invoke His strength, which alone can enable us to bear up under a weight of affliction. Nay, even the holiest of men, however well aware that they stand not in their own power, but by the grace of God, would feel too secure in their own strength and steadfastness, were they not brought to a more thorough knowledge of themselves by the trial of the cross. This sluggishness even crept up on David, “In my prosperity I Said, I shall never be moved. Lord, by thy favor thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled” (Psalm 30:6, 7). He confesses that in prosperity his senses were dazed with numbness, so that, neglecting the grace of God, on which alone he ought to have depended, he trusted in himself, and promised himself perpetuity. If it so happened to this great prophet, who of us should not fear and pursue caution?

Though when they are in tranquility they flatter themselves with the idea of greater constancy and patience, yet, when they are

humbled by adversity, they become acquainted with their hypocrisy. Believers, I say, warned by such proofs of their diseases, make progress in humility, and, divesting themselves of a depraved confidence in the flesh, direct themselves to the grace of God, and, when they have so directed themselves, experience the presence of God's power, in which is ample protection.

Sections 3-6

The Manifold Advantages of the Cross Described: Teaching us Patience and Obedience

3. The cross produces patience, hope, and firm confidence in God.

This Paul teaches when he says that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience. God having promised that He will be with believers in tribulation, they feel the truth of the promise; while supported by His hand, they endure patiently. This they could never do by their own strength. Patience, therefore, produces in the saints an experiential proof that God truly supplies the help which He has promised whenever there is need. Hence also their faith is strengthened, for it would be too great an ingratitude not to expect that the truthfulness of God would be as firm and constant in the future, as they have already found it. We see already how many good things arise from the cross in one context. Overturning the false opinion we form of our own strength, and detecting the hypocrisy in which we delight, the cross removes our destructive fleshly confidence. Thus it teaches us, when thus humbled, to recline on God alone, so that we do not become overwhelmed or surrender. Then victory is followed by hope, inasmuch as the Lord, by performing what He has promised, establishes His truth in regard to the future. Were these the only reasons, it is surely plain how necessary it is for us to bear the cross.

Nor indeed, is it of little importance to be cleansed of your blind self-love, that you might be made more conscious of your moral weakness. Thus impressed with a sense of your weakness you learn to distrust yourself — to distrust yourself so that you transfer your confidence to God; to recline upon God with such heartfelt confidence so that you may continue invincible to the end, relying upon His assistance; to stand by His grace so that you may understand

that He is true to His promises; and, having discovered the certainty of His promises you may be strengthened in your hope.

4. The cross trains us to obedience.

Another goal which the Lord has in afflicting His people is to try their patience, and train them to obedience. Not that they can yield obedience to Him except in so far as He enables them; but He is pleased thus to attest and display clear proofs of the graces which He has conferred upon His saints, so that they should not lie hidden within and unemployed. Therefore, He is said to test their patience in order to bring into the open the strength and constancy to endure, which things He has provided to His servants. Therefore such expressions indicating that God tempted Abraham (Genesis 21:1, 12) and verified his piety from the fact that he did not refuse to sacrifice his only son. And therefore, Peter, no differently, tells us that our faith is proved by tribulation, just as gold is tried in a furnace of fire.

But who will say it is not expedient that the most excellent gift of patience, which the believer receives from his God, should be promoted in its use that it may become sure and evident? Otherwise men would never value patience according to its worth. But if God Himself acts rightly in supplying occasion for stirring up the virtues conferred upon believers, in order to prevent them from lurking in obscurity - nay, lying useless and perishing - there is the best reason for the afflictions of the saints, since without them their patience could not exist.

I say, that by the cross they are also trained to obedience because they are thus taught to live, not according to their own wish, but at the disposal of God. Indeed, if all things proceeded according to their way of thinking, they would not know what it is to follow God. Seneca mentions that there was an ancient proverb when any one was exhorted to endure adversity, "Follow God."⁴ Thereby they indicated that a man truly submitted to the yoke of God only when he presented his hand and back to His rod. But if it is most right that we should in all things prove our obedience to our heavenly Father, certainly we ought not to reject any method by which He trains us to obedience.

⁴ Seneca, On the Blessed Life, chapter 15.

5. The cross subdues the depravity of the flesh.

Still, however, we do not see how necessary that obedience is, unless we at the same time consider how prone our carnal nature is to shake off the yoke of God whenever it has been treated with some degree of gentleness and indulgence. It happens to obedience as with unruly horses, which, if kept idle for a few days while being lavishly fed, become ungovernable, and no longer recognize the rider, whose every command they previously obeyed. And we invariably become what God complains of in the people of Israel — waxing gross and fat, we kick against Him who reared and nursed us (Deuteronomy 32:15).

The kindness of God should allure us to reflect upon and dearly love His goodness; but such is our ill will, that we are invariably tempted by His indulgence. It is therefore more than necessary for us to be restrained by discipline from breaking forth into such bad temper. Thus, lest we go on a rampage when we have an over-abundance of wealth; lest we grow proud when we are raised up to honors; lest we grow haughty when we are inflated with other advantages of body, mind, or condition, the Lord Himself opposes, overpowers and restrains the fierceness of our flesh by the remedy of the cross, just as He foresees to be expedient. Naturally, He does this by various methods, depending on the benefit to each person. For just as we do not all equally labor under the same severity of disease, likewise we do not all need the same difficult treatment. Thereupon it appears that all are not trained with the same kind of cross. While the heavenly Physician treats some more gently, in the case of others He employs harsher remedies, His purpose being to provide a cure for all. Still none is left exempt and intact, because He knows that all, without a single exception, are diseased.

6. God permits our infirmities, and corrects past faults, that He may keep us in obedience.

Additionally, it is necessary for our most merciful Father, not only to anticipate our future weakness, but also frequently to correct our past faults, in order that He may preserve us in proper obedience towards Him. Therefore, whenever we are afflicted we ought immediately to call to mind our past way of living. In this way we

will find that the faults which we have committed are deserving of such chastisement.

And yet the exhortation to patience is not to be based chiefly on the acknowledgment of sin. For Scripture supplies a far better consideration when it says, that in adversity “we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world” (1 Corinthians 11:32). Therefore, in the very bitterness of tribulation we ought to recognize the kindness and mercy of our Father, since even then He ceases not to further our salvation. For He afflicts, not that He may ruin or destroy us, but rather that He may deliver us from the condemnation of the world.

Let this thought lead us to what Scripture elsewhere teaches: “My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Proverbs 3:11, 12). When we perceive our Father’s rod, is it not our part to behave as obedient teachable sons rather than rebelliously imitate desperate men, who are hardened in wickedness? God dooms us to destruction, if He does not, by correction, call us back when we have fallen off from Him, so that it is truly said, “If ye be without chastisement,” “then are ye bastards, and not sons” (Hebrews 12:8). We are most perverse then if we cannot tolerate Him while He declares His goodwill to us, and the care which He takes of our salvation. Scripture states the difference between believers and unbelievers to be, that the latter, as the slaves of ancient and deep-seated wickedness, only become worse and more obstinate under the scourge; whereas the former, like free-born sons, turn to repentance. Now, therefore, choose which category you prefer. But as I have already spoken of this subject, it is sufficient having briefly mentioned it, to bring it to an end.

Sections 7-8

Bearing the Cross in Persecution and other Difficulties a Most Excellent Thing, and yet by no Means Removes all Sense of Pain

7. We have singular consolation under the cross, when we suffer for righteousness' sake.

There is remarkable consolation, moreover, when we are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Indeed, in time of persecution, this knowledge ought to help: How much God considers us worthy of honor since in this way He marks us as His personal soldiers. By suffering persecution for righteousness' sake, I mean not only striving for the defense of the Gospel, but striving for the defense of righteousness in any way whatsoever. Whether, therefore, in maintaining the truth of God against the lies of Satan, or defending the good and innocent against the injuries of the wicked, it is unavoidable but that we will incur the displeasure and hatred of the world. The result will be that danger threatens our life, fortune, or honor. It must not be troublesome for us to devote ourselves to God to this degree; nor must we think ourselves miserable in those things in which He with His own lips has pronounced us blessed (Matthew 5:10). Poverty, indeed considered in itself, is misery; so are exile, contempt, imprisonment, disgrace; finally, the worst of all calamities is death itself. But when the favor of God breathes upon us, there is nothing which concerns us which will not lead to our happiness. Let us then be contented with the testimony of Christ rather than with the false estimate of the flesh, and then, after the example of the Apostles, we will rejoice in being "counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Acts 5:41).

For example, if, while conscious of our innocence, we are deprived of our earthly resources by the wickedness of man, we are, no doubt, reduced to poverty in the eyes of men; but in truth, before God in heaven, our riches increase. If driven from our families, we have a more welcome reception into the family of God. If violently tossed about and despised, we are more firmly rooted in Christ. If branded by disgrace and dishonor, we have a more honorable place in the kingdom of God. And, if we are massacred, our entry into the blessed life is thereby opened. We ought to be ashamed that those things upon which the Lord sets so great value, we consider less

valuable than the shadowy and vanishing enticements of the present life.

8. Persecution and difficulties, while leading us to groan under their burdens, should nevertheless be borne willingly and cheerfully.

By these, and similar considerations, Scripture abundantly comforts us in the humiliation or losses which we suffer in defense of righteousness. Therefore, we are very ungrateful if we do not willingly and cheerfully receive these things at the hand of the Lord, especially since this form of the cross is most appropriate to believers, given that Christ desires to be glorified in us by these means, as Peter also declares (1 Peter 4:11, 14). However, since for dignified natures, it is more bitter to suffer disgrace than a hundred deaths, Paul expressly reminds us that not only persecution, but also disgrace awaits us, “because we trust in the living God” (1 Timothy 4:10). So in another passage he tells us to walk according to his example through “evil report and good report” (2 Corinthians 6:8).

The cheerfulness required, however, does not imply a total insensibility to pain. The saints could show no patience under the cross if they were not both tortured with pain and vexed with trouble. If there were no hardship in poverty, no suffering in sickness, no sting in humiliation, no terror in death, what strength or moderation would there be in considering these things to be of no concern? But while every one of these things naturally vexes the mind by its inherent bitterness, the believer’s strength is displayed in this: though he has been tested with such a feeling of bitterness, no matter how severely he might be distressed by it, nevertheless he courageously resists and overcomes the difficulty. In this he displays his patience, that though sharply stabbed, he is nevertheless restrained by the fear of God from erupting into any outrageous behavior. In this he displays his cheerful readiness, that though pressed with sorrow and sadness, he rests in God’s spiritual consolation.

Sections 9-11

A Description of Warfare under the Cross, and of True Patience (not that of Philosophers), after the Example of Christ

9. In contrast to the teaching of the Stoics, bearing the cross patiently does not mean we are numb to the pain,.

This conflict, which believers carry on against the natural feeling of anguish, while they strive for self-control and patience, is elegantly described by Paul in these words: “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:8, 9). You see that bearing the cross patiently does not mean having your feelings altogether numbed, and being absolutely insensible to pain. Such was the absurd description which the Stoics of old gave of the courageous man as one who, divested of human feeling, was affected in the same way by adversity and prosperity, grief and joy; or rather, like a stone, was not affected by anything. And what did they gain by that sublime wisdom? They portrayed an image of patience, which never did, and never can, exist among men. Rather, as long as they desire such an exact and rigid patience, they have in fact stolen the strength of patience from human life.

Today also we have among Christians a new kind of Stoics, who not only count it a vice to groan and weep, but even to be sad and anxious. These paradoxes are usually started by idle men who, employing themselves more in speculation than in action, can do nothing else for us than beget such paradoxes.

But we have nothing to do with that iron philosophy which our Lord and Master condemned — not only in word, but also by His own example. For He both grieved and shed tears for His own woes and those of others. Nor did He teach His disciples differently: “Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice” (John 16:20). And lest anyone should regard this as faulty, He expressly declares, “Blessed are they that mourn” (Matthew 5:4).

And no wonder! If all tears are condemned, what shall we think of our Lord Himself, whose “sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground?” (Luke 22:44; Matthew 26:38). If every kind of fear is a mark of unbelief, what place shall we assign to the dread which, we read, in no slight degree astonished Him. If all

sadness displeases us, how does it suit us that He confesses, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death?”

10. The conflict between grief and patience is proved by the uniform experience of the elect.

I wished to make these observations to call back pious souls from despair, lest, from feeling it impossible to cast aside the natural emotion of grief, they might all at once reject the pursuit of patience. This must necessarily happen with those who suppose patience to be numbness, and a strong and steadfast man to be a senseless fencepost. Scripture praises the saints for their patience when, being afflicted by hardship arising from misfortunes, they do not weaken or lose heart; being vexed with bitterness, they are at the same time filled with spiritual joy; being pressed with anxiety, they are refreshed having been cheered by God’s consolation.

Still there is a certain degree of opposition in their hearts, because while natural sense shuns and dreads what is adverse to it, pious affection strives to obey God’s will even through these difficulties. The Lord expressed this opposition when He thus addressed Peter: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself and walkedst whither thou wouldst; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee; and carry thee whither thou wouldest not” (John 21:18). When it became necessary to glorify God by death, it does not have the appearance of reasonable truth that Peter was dragged to it reluctant and resisting. If that had been the case, little praise would have been due for his martyrdom. But even though he obeyed God’s appointment with the greatest heartfelt zeal, nevertheless he was pulled in different directions by a double will because he had not laid aside his human nature. When he thought of the bloody death which he was going to meet, having been struck with horror, he would gladly have avoided it. On the other hand, when he considered that it was God who called him to it, his fear was trampled and defeated, and he submitted to death cheerfully.

Therefore, if we would be disciples of Christ, we must make it our business to fill our minds with such reverence and obedience to God that we might tame and subjugate all affections that are contrary to His appointment. In this way, whatever kind of cross we experience, we shall firmly maintain our patience in the greatest

difficulties. Adversities will have their own harshness and cut into us. And so, when afflicted with disease, we shall groan and be disturbed, and long for health; when by poverty being oppressed, we shall be stung by the thorn of anxiety and sadness; thus we shall feel the pain of humiliation, contempt, and abuse; and, at the death of our loved ones we shall shed the tears appropriate to nature. But our conclusion will always be, The Lord willed it to be so, therefore let us follow His will. Nay, amid the piercing grief, between groans and tears, this thought will inevitably intervene and incline our heart cheerfully to endure the things which have so afflicted it.

11. Philosophers pretend a necessity which cannot be resisted, while Christians hold forth the justice of God and His care of our safety.

But since the chief reason for enduring the cross has been derived from a consideration of God's will, we must explain in few words the difference between philosophical and Christian patience. Indeed, very few of the philosophers advanced so far as to perceive that the hand of God tries us by means of affliction, and that we ought to obey God in this matter. The only reason which they allege is, that it must be so. But is this not the same as saying, we must yield to God, because it is vain to contend against Him? For if we submit to God only because it is unavoidable, we will stop submitting when we can avoid it.

But what Scripture calls us to consider in the will of God is very different, namely, first justice and equity, and then a regard to our own salvation. Consequently, Christian exhortations to patience are of this nature: Whether poverty, or exile, or imprisonment, or insult, or disease, or bereavement, or any such evil affects us, we must consider that none of these things befalls us except by the will and providence of God; further, that He Himself does nothing except it in most equitable order. What! Do not our countless daily offenses deserve to be chastised, more severely, and with a heavier rod than what His mercy actually imposes upon us? Is it not most right that our flesh should be subdued, and, as it were, become accustomed to the yoke, so as not to rage lustfully according to its natural disposition? Is it not appropriate that we are oppressed for the sake of God's truth and justice? But if the equity of God is undoubtedly apparent in afflictions, we cannot murmur or struggle against them without iniquity. We no longer hear the frigid refrain, "Yield, because it is

necessary;” but a vigorous and fully powerful precept, “Obey, because it is unlawful to resist; bear patiently, because impatience is rebellion against the justice of God.”

Then, as only that seems attractive to us which we recognize to be for our own prosperity and advantage, here also our heavenly Father consoles us, by the assurance, that He provides for our salvation by the very cross with which He afflicts us. But if it is clear that tribulations are beneficial to us, why should we not receive them with calm and grateful minds?

In bearing them patiently we are not submitting to inevitability but resting satisfied with our own good. Such thoughts, I say, cause that, to whatever extent our hearts are provoked by the bitterness which we naturally feel under the cross, to the same extent will they be expanded with spiritual joy. From this follows thanksgiving, which cannot exist without joy. But if the praise of the Lord and thanksgiving can spring only from a cheerful and gladdened heart - and there is nothing which ought to interrupt these feelings in us - it is clear how necessary it is to temper the bitterness of the cross with spiritual joy.

CHAPTER 4

ASPIRING TO THE FUTURE LIFE

Sections 1-2

The Cross in Various Ways Accustoms to Despise the Present Life, and Excites to Aspire to the Future Life

1. God afflicts His people so that we may see the vanity of this present life and thus contemplate the future life.

Whatever kind of tribulation afflicts us, we should always consider this to be the goal: that we should become accustomed to despise the present life, and thereby stirred up to contemplate the future life. For since God knows perfectly well how strongly we are inclined by nature to an instinctive love of this world, He employs the most suitable reason for calling us back, and shaking off our laziness, in order to prevent us from clinging too strongly to it. There is not even one of us, who is not eager to be seen as aspiring and striving towards heavenly immortality during the whole course of his life. Indeed, it shames us when we do not in any respect excel the dim-witted sheep, whose condition would not be at all inferior to ours, except there remained in us a hope of immortality after death. But when you examine anyone's plans, wishes, and actions, you see nothing in them but the earth. Our senselessness comes from this: our minds having being dulled by the hollow radiance of wealth, power, and honors, become so deadened that they cannot see afar off. The heart also, having been overtaken by greed, desire for popularity, and lust, is dragged down so that it cannot lift itself higher. In short, the whole soul, ensnared by the enticements of the flesh, seeks its happiness on the earth.

To oppose this plague, the Lord thoroughly educates His people concerning the vanity of the present life by a constant proof of its miseries. Therefore, that they may not promise themselves a deep-rooted and secure peace in life, He often permits them to be harassed either by wars, or tumults, or robberies, or frequently to be disturbed by other injuries. That they may not desire transient and doomed riches with excessive passion, or rest in those which they already possess, He reduces them to scarcity, or, at least, limits them to a

moderate allowance. He does this at one time by exile, at another by barrenness of land, at another by fire, or by other means. That they may not complacently be overly charmed by the advantages of married life, He plagues them by the depravity of their wives, or humbles them by the wickedness of their children, or afflicts them by loss of loved ones. But if in all these things He is indulgent to them, nevertheless He places before their eyes how unstable and passing away are those good things which are subject to mortality, by sending diseases and dangers in order that they should neither swell up with vainglory, nor revel in confidence.

Only then do we suitably profit by the discipline of the cross, when we learn that this life, estimated in itself, is restless, troubled, in numberless ways miserable, and in no respect completely happy; and that what are considered its good things are uncertain, fleeting, vain, and spoiled by many associated evils. As a result of this we at once conclude, that there is nothing else to strive for or look forward to here than struggle; that whenever we consider a crown we must raise our eyes to heaven. For we must hold, that our mind never rises seriously to desire and contemplate the future life, until it has first been instructed to look down upon the present life.

2. Excessive love of the present life prevents us from properly aspiring to the other.

For there is no medium between the two things: the earth must either be worthless in our estimation, or keep us enslaved by an excessive love of it. Therefore, if we have any regard to eternity, we must carefully strive to disentangle ourselves from these fetters. Moreover, since the present life has many enticements to allure us, and great semblance of delight, grace, and sweetness to charm us, it is of greatest consequence to us to be repeatedly called away, so that we not be mesmerized by such great allurements. For what, I pray, would happen, if we here enjoyed a perpetual combination of good things and happiness, when even the constant stings of affliction cannot adequately awaken us to a sense of our misery?

That human life is like smoke or even the form of a shadow, is not only familiar to the educated; also among the common people, there is not a more familiar proverb. Considering it especially profitable to learn, they have included it in many notable expressions. Truly there is almost no fact which we ponder more negligently, or

remember less often. For we plan all things as if we had located our immortality on the earth. If we see a funeral, or walk among graves, when the image of death is then present to the eye, I admit we philosophize admirably on the vanity of life. We do not indeed always do so, for those things often have no effect upon us at all. But, at the best, our philosophy is momentary. It vanishes as soon as we turn our back, and leaves no trace of remembrance; in short, it passes away, just like the applause in a theatre at some delightful show.

Forgetful not only of death, but even of our transient existence, as if no rumor of it had ever reached us, we are rolled back over to a dreamlike carelessness as those expecting an earthly immortality. Meanwhile, if anyone interrupts with the proverb, "Man is the creature of a day," we indeed acknowledge its truth, but, so far from giving heed to it, the thought of permanence still grips our minds.

Who then can deny that it is of the highest importance for us all, not only, I say, to be persuaded by words, but convinced by all possible experience of the miserable condition of our earthly life? Even when convinced, we barely cease to be dazed with a perverse and foolish admiration of it, as if our earthly life contained within itself the highest goal of good things. But if God finds it necessary so to train us, it must be our duty to listen to Him when He calls and shakes us from our numbness, that when we look down upon the world, we may strain with our whole heart toward the future life.

Sections 3-4

In Withdrawing from the Present Life we must neither Shun it nor Feel Hatred for it; but Desiring the Future Life, Gladly Quit the Present at the Command of our Sovereign Master

3. The present life is an evidence of God's favor upon His people and therefore should not be detested, but rather should call forth thanksgiving.

Still the contempt which believers should train themselves to feel for the present life, must not be of a kind to generate hatred of it or ingratitude to God. This life, though abounding in all kinds of wretchedness, is rightly classed among divine blessings which are not

to be despised.⁵ Wherefore, if we do not recognize the kindness of God in it, we are guilty with no little ingratitude towards Him. To believers, especially, it ought to be a proof of divine favor, since it is all together intended to promote their salvation.

Before openly exhibiting the inheritance of eternal glory, God is pleased to manifest Himself to us as a Father by minor proofs, namely, the good things which He daily bestows upon us. Therefore, while this life serves to acquaint us with the goodness of God, shall we disdain it as if it did not contain one particle of good? We ought, therefore, to feel and be influenced towards life in such a manner as to place it among those gifts of God's liberality which are by no means to be despised. Even if there were no proofs in Scripture (they are most numerous and clear), nature itself urges us to render thanks to God for having brought us forth into His light, granted us the use of it, and generously given us all the means necessary for its preservation.

And there is a much higher reason to be thankful when we reflect that we are in a way being prepared for the glory of the heavenly kingdom. For the Lord hath ordained, that those who in the future will be crowned in heaven must attend to a previous warfare on the earth, that they may not triumph before they have overcome the difficulties of war, and obtained the victory. Another reason is, that we here begin to experience in various ways a foretaste of God's favor, in order to arouse our hope and desire for its full manifestation.

As soon as we have concluded that our earthly life is a gift of God's mercy, we ought thankfully to remember it, since we are indebted to Him. Then we shall properly stoop to consider life's most miserable condition, and thus escape from that excessive fondness for it, to which, as I have said, we are naturally prone.

4. The weariness of the present life ought to be tempered by contemplating eternal life.

In proportion as this improper love of life diminishes, our desire of a better life should increase. I confess, indeed, that a most accurate opinion was formed by those who thought, that the best thing was not to be born, the next best to die early. For, being destitute of

⁵ Calvin sees the present life as a divine blessing to believers, but not to unbelievers. Blessings are not in the things themselves; rather, they are determined by the motive God has in giving those things.

the light of God and of true religion, what else could they see in life but that which was dreadful and repulsive? Nor was it unreasonable for those who felt sorrow and shed tears at the birth of their kindred, solemnly to celebrate at their deaths. But this they did without profit; because, devoid of the true doctrine of faith, they did not see how that which in itself is neither happy nor desirable turns to the advantage of the righteous: accordingly their opinion led to despair.

Let believers, then, in assessing this mortal life, and perceiving that in itself it is nothing but misery, make it their goal to direct themselves completely with greater eagerness and promptness to their future and eternal life. When we contrast the two [i.e. mortal and eternal life], the former may not only be safely neglected, but, in comparison of the latter, be despised and scorned. If heaven is our country, what can the earth be but a place of exile? If departure from the world is entrance into life, what is the world but a tomb, and what is living in it but immersion in death? If to be freed from the body is to gain full possession of freedom, what is the body but a prison? If it is the highest happiness to enjoy the presence of God, is it not miserable to be without it? But “whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:6). Thus when the earthly is compared with the heavenly life, it may undoubtedly be despised and trampled underfoot.

We ought never, indeed, to regard it [i.e. this mortal life] with hatred, except in so far as it keeps us subject to sin; and even this hatred ought not to be directed against life itself. In any event, we must stand affected towards it in regard to weariness or hatred so that, while longing for its end, we are ready to continue in it according to the Lord’s will, keeping far from everything like murmuring and impatience. For it is as if the Lord had assigned us a post, which we must maintain till He recalls us. Paul, indeed, laments his condition, in being still bound with the fetters of the body, and sighs earnestly for redemption (Romans 7:24). Nevertheless, he declared that, in obedience to God’s command he was prepared for both courses, because he acknowledges it as his duty to God to glorify His name whether by life or by death, while it belongs to God to determine what is most conducive to His glory (Philippians 1:20-24).

Wherefore, if it is proper to live and die to the Lord, let us leave the time of our life and death at His disposal. Still let us ardently long for death, and constantly meditate upon it, and in comparison

with future immortality, let us despise life, and, on account of the bondage of sin, long to renounce it whenever it shall so please the Lord.

5. *Christians should not tremble at the fear of death.*

But, most strange to say, many who boast of being Christians, instead of thus longing for death, are so afraid of it that they tremble at the very mention of it as something ominous and dreadful. It is not surprising, indeed, that our natural feelings should somewhat tremble at the mention of our dissolution.⁶ But it is altogether intolerable that the light of piety should not be so powerful in a Christian soul as with greater consolation to overcome and suppress that fear. For if we consider that this our unstable, vicious, corruptible, fading, decaying, and stinking tabernacle is dissolved, in order that it may next be renewed to a solid, perfect, incorruptible, in short to a heavenly glory, will not faith compel us eagerly to desire what nature dreads? If we reflect that by death we are recalled from exile to inhabit our native country, a heavenly country, shall this give us no comfort?

But everything longs for permanent existence. I admit this, and therefore contend that we ought to look to future immortality, where we may obtain that appointed condition which nowhere appears on the earth. For Paul admirably teaches believers to proceed cheerfully to their death, not because they “would be unclothed, but clothed upon” (2 Corinthians 5:4). Shall the lower animals, and inanimate creatures themselves even wood and stone, as conscious of their present vanity, long for the final resurrection, that they may with the sons of God be delivered from vanity (Romans 8:19); and shall we, endued with the light of intellect, and more than intellect, enlightened by the Spirit of God, when our own essence is in question, rise no higher than this earthly rot?

But it is not my purpose, nor is this the place, to argue against this great perversity. At the outset, I declared that I had no wish to engage in a broad treatment of fundamental themes.⁷ My advice to timid souls is to read Cyprian’s short treatise, *Mortality*, unless they were more worthy of being sent off to the philosophers, that they may

⁶ Dissolution: The disintegration that comes with death.

⁷ Fundamental themes: Literally, “common places” (Latin, *locorum communium*) often used to refer to the commonly-treated subjects in theology or philosophy.

begin to be ashamed when they have inspected what these say on the contempt of death.

This, however let us hold as established [truth], that no man has made much progress in the school of Christ who does not look forward with joy to the day of death and final resurrection (2 Timothy 4:18; Titus 2:13). For Paul distinguishes all believers by this mark; and the usual course of Scripture is to direct us thither whenever it would furnish us with an argument for substantial joy. “Look up,” says our Lord, “and lift up your heads: for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28). Is it reasonable, I ask, that what He intended to have a powerful effect in stirring us up to joy and enthusiasm should produce nothing but sadness and dismay? If it is so, why do we still glory in Him as our Master? Therefore, let us come to a sounder judgment. And, however repugnant the blind and stupid desire of the flesh may be, let us not hesitate to desire the arrival of the Lord as the most favorable of all events, not by prayers only, but with earnest sighs. For He will come as a Redeemer to deliver us from this raging abyss of all kinds of evil and misery (cf. Psalm 144:7), and lead us to the blessed inheritance of His life and glory.

Section 6

Our Infirmary in Dreading Death and the Correct Remedy

6. We should not fear death because at that time the Lord will receive us to glory.

Truly, this is the way it is: the whole body of the faithful, so long as they live on the earth, must be like sheep for the slaughter, in order that they may be conformed to Christ their head (Romans 8:36). Therefore, their situation would be most deplorable if they did not, with their frame of mind raised to heaven, rise above all that is in the world, and pierce through the present appearance of things (1 Corinthians 15:19).

On the other hand, when once they have raised their head above all earthly objects, though they see the wicked flourishing in wealth and honor, and enjoying profound peace, indulging in luxury and splendor, and reveling in all kinds of delights, though they should moreover be wickedly assailed by them, suffer insult from their pride, be robbed by their greed, or assailed by any other lust, they will nevertheless have no difficulty in bearing up under these evils. They

will turn their eye to that day (Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 7:17), on which the Lord will receive His faithful servants, wipe away all tears from their eyes, clothe them in a robe of glory and joy, feed them with the inexpressible sweetness of His pleasures, exalt them to share with Him in His greatness; in short, He will condescend to make them share in His happiness.

But the wicked who may have flourished on the earth, He will cast forth in extreme dishonor, will change their delights into torments, their laughter and joy into wailing and gnashing of teeth, their peace into the gnawing of conscience, and punish their luxury with unquenchable fire. He will also place their necks under the feet of the godly, whose patience they abused. For, as Paul declares, “it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven” (2 Thessalonians 1:6, 7).

This, indeed, is our only consolation. Deprived of it, we must either give way to despondency, or, to our own destruction, resort to the empty relief of the world. The Psalmist confesses, “My feet were almost gone: my steps had well nigh slipped: for I was envious at the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (Psalm 73:3, 4); and he found no resting place until he entered the sanctuary, and considered the latter end of the righteous and the wicked. To conclude in one word, the cross of Christ then only triumphs in the hearts of believers over the devil and the flesh, over sin and sinners, when their eyes are directed to the power of His resurrection.

CHAPTER 5

RIGHTLY USING THE PRESENT LIFE AND ITS COMFORTS

Sections 1-2

Extremes to be Avoided if we would Rightly use the Present Life and its Comforts

1. We ought to avoid the extremes of asceticism and intemperance.

By such elementary principles we are at the same time well instructed by Scripture in the proper use of earthly goods, a subject by no means to be neglected in forming a rule of life. For if we are to live, we must use the necessary supports of life. Nor can we even shun those things which seem to serve the interests of delight more than necessity. We must therefore observe a rule, that we may use them with a pure conscience, whether for necessity or for pleasure.

This the Lord prescribes in His word, when He teaches that to His people the present life is a kind of pilgrimage in which they press on toward the heavenly kingdom. If we are only to pass through the earth, there can be no doubt that we are to use its goods only in so far as they assist our progress, rather than retard it. Accordingly, Paul, not without cause, persuades us to use this world without abusing it, and to buy possessions as if we were selling them (1 Corinthians 7:30, 31).

However, because this is a slippery place, and there is great danger of falling on either side, let us strive to secure our feet where we can stand firm without danger. Some good and holy men, seeing intemperance and luxury perpetually carried to excess, if not strictly restrained, and desiring to correct such a destructive evil, imagined that there was no other method than to allow man to use material goods only in so far as they were necessities. Although this advice is indeed pious, they were unnecessarily severe. For, very dangerously, they put on their consciences a closer noose than that by which the word of God binds them. Going from that principle, it is necessary for them to abstain from all things you are able to be without, so that they held it barely allowable to have anything more than plain bread and water. Others were still more rigorous, as is related of Crates the

Theban, who threw his riches into the sea because he thought that unless he destroyed them they would destroy him.

Many also in the present day, seek an excuse for overindulging the flesh in the use of external things, and at the same time desire to pave the way for licentiousness. Doing this, they take for granted, what I by no means concede: that this liberty is not to be restrained to any degree, but that it is to be left to every man's conscience to use these things as far as he thinks lawful. I indeed confess that here consciences neither can nor ought to be bound by fixed and definite laws. But, since Scripture has laid down general rules for the legitimate uses, we should keep within the limits which they prescribe.

2. God created things not only to meet our needs, but also for our comfort and pleasure.

Let this be our principle, that we err not in the use of the gifts of Providence when we refer them to the goal for which their author made and designed them. For He created them for our good, and not for our destruction. No man will keep the true path better than he who shall have this goal carefully in view.

Now then, if we consider for what end He created food, we shall find that He planned not only for our necessity, but also for our delight and cheerfulness. Thus, in clothing, the purpose was, in addition to necessity, beauty and honor; and in herbs, fruits, and trees, besides their various uses, gracefulness of appearance and sweetness of smell. Were it not so, the Prophet would not enumerate among the mercies of God "wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine" (Psalm 104:15). The Scriptures would not everywhere mention, in commendation of His liberality, that He had given such things to men. The natural qualities of things themselves demonstrate in what direction, and to what extent, they may be lawfully enjoyed. Has the Lord adorned flowers with all the beauty which spontaneously presents itself to the eye, and the sweet odor which delights the sense of smell, and shall it be unlawful for us to enjoy that beauty and this odor? What? Has He not so distinguished colors as to make some more agreeable than others? Has He not given qualities to gold and silver, ivory and marble, thereby rendering them precious above other metals or stones? In short, has He not given many things a value without having any necessary use?

Sections 3-6

Avoiding the Extreme of Fleshly Intemperance

3. God created all things in order that we might know the Creator, and show thankfulness for His bountiful favor.

Have done, then, with that ruthless philosophy which allows no use of creaturely things except for necessity. Not only does it maliciously deprive us of the lawful fruit of God's kindness, but cannot be realized without depriving man of all his senses, and reducing him to a senseless fencepost. But, on the other hand, let us with no less care guard against the lusts of the flesh, which, if not kept in order, break through all bounds. These lusts are, as I have said, advocated by those who, under pretense of liberty, allow themselves every sort of license.

In the first place, one restraint is put on when we hold that all things were created for us in order that we might know their author, and show thankfulness for His bountiful favor. Where is the activity of gratitude if you so gorge or daze yourself with feasting and wine as to be unfit for offices of piety, or the duties of your calling? Where is the recognition of God, if the flesh, boiling forth in lust through excessive indulgences infects the mind with its impurity, so as to lose the discernment of honor and integrity? Where is thankfulness to God for clothing, if on account of expensive dress we both admire ourselves and disdain others? Or if, from a love of elegance and style, we pave the way for sexual impurity? Where is our recognition of God, if the splendor of these things captivates our minds?

For many are so devoted to pleasure in all their senses that their reason lies overwhelmed in ruins. Many are so delighted with marble, gold, and pictures, that they become marble-hearted — are changed as it were into metal, and made like painted figures. The savory smells of the kitchen with their fragrant charm, so engage their attention that they have no spiritual sense of smell. The same thing may be seen in other matters. Wherefore, it is evident that there is now great need somewhat to restrain the abuse of liberty, and to encourage the rule of Paul, “make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:14). Where too much liberty is given to them, they break forth without measure or restraint.

4. Aspiration after heavenly life is destroyed by an excessive love of created objects.

There is no more reliable or quicker way of accomplishing this than by despising the present life and meditating on heavenly immortality. For from this, two rules arise: First, “it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none;” “and they that use this world, as not abusing it” (1 Corinthians 7:29, 31). Secondly, we must learn to be no less calm and patient in enduring scarcity, than restrained in the experience of abundance.

He who makes it His rule to use this world as if he used it not, not only demolishes all intemperate appetite in regard to food and drink, as well as all excessive pampering, craving of recognition, arrogance, pride, and pessimism, in regard to his meals, his house, and his clothes, but he also removes every care and affection which might seduce or hinder him from aspiring to the heavenly life, and cultivating the devotion of his soul. It was well said by Cato, “Great care regarding cultural refinement, is great carelessness regarding virtue.” It is an old proverb, “Those who are much occupied with the care of the body, usually give little care to the soul.”

Therefore while the liberty of the Christian in external matters is not to be tied down to a strict rule, it is, however, subject to this law: he must indulge as little as possible; on the other hand, it must be his constant aim not only to limit extravagance, but to avoid all show of pointless abundance, and diligently beware of converting a help into a hindrance.

5. Those who have made progress in the school of Christ will regard all their goods as trusts for which they must one day give an account.

Another rule is, that those in poor and reduced circumstances should learn patiently to be without, that they may not become immoderate in their desire of things. The moderate use of things implies no small progress in the school of Christ. Similarly, he who has not at least made some degree of progress in this direction is barely able to consider himself a disciple of Christ.

For in addition to the many other vices which accompany a longing for earthly things, he who is impatient under poverty almost always brings forth the contrary disease in abundance. By this I mean, that he who is ashamed of plain clothing will boast of a precious one.

He who is not contented with a small meal, will be disturbed at the shortage of a more luxurious supper, and will excessively squander his luxury if he obtains it. He who has a difficulty, and is dissatisfied in submitting to an ordinary and humble condition, will be unable to refrain from pride if he attains to honor. Let it be the aim of all who have any unfeigned desire for piety to learn, “both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need” (Philippians 4:12), after the example of the Apostle.

Scripture, moreover, has a third rule for controlling the use of earthly things. We have already discussed it when considering the precepts of love. For it declares that all things have been given us according to God’s favor and appointed for our use, that they may be regarded as trusts, of which we must one day give account. We must, therefore, administer them as if we constantly heard the words sounding in our ears, “Give an account of your stewardship.”

At the same time, let us remember by whom the account is to be taken, namely, by Him who, while He so highly commends abstinence, sobriety, economy, and moderation, at the same time abominates luxury, pride, flamboyance, and vanity; who approves of no other management of goods but that which is combined with love; who with His own lips has already condemned all those pleasures which withdraw the heart from chastity and purity, or darken the mind.

6. God requires us to look to His calling in all our actions.

The last thing to be observed is, that the Lord commands everyone of us, in all the actions of life, to have respect to our own calling. He knows the feverish restlessness of our natural disposition, the fickleness with which it is borne hither and thither, its eagerness to hold two opposites in its grasp at one time, and its desire for popularity. Therefore, lest all things should be thrown into confusion by our folly and rashness, He has assigned distinct duties to each in the different spheres of life. And that no one may presume to overstep his proper limits, He has distinguished the different spheres of life by the name of callings. Every man’s sphere in life, therefore, is a kind of station assigned him by the Lord, that he may not be always driven about at random. So necessary is this distinction, that all our actions are judged by it in His sight, and often in a very different way from that in which human reason or philosophy would judge them.

There is no deed more distinguished even among philosophers than to free one's country from tyranny, and yet the private individual who stabs the tyrant is openly condemned by the voice of the heavenly Judge. But I am unwilling to dwell on particular examples; it is enough to know that in everything the Lord's calling is the foundation and beginning of right action. He who does not act with reference to it will never keep the right path in the discharge of duty. He will sometimes be able, perhaps, to give the semblance of something praiseworthy. But whatever it may be in the sight of man, it will be rejected before the throne of God. And besides, there will be no harmony in the different parts of his life.

So then, his life will be most rightly ordered when it is directed to this goal. For no man, though tempted by his own impulsive rashness, will attempt more than his calling justifies, because he will understand that it is by no means lawful to overleap its prescribed boundaries. The little known person will cheerfully cultivate a private life, in order not to desert the station where God has placed him. Again, in all our cares, toils, annoyances, and other burdens, it will be no small relief to know in all these things, that God Himself is our commander. The magistrate will more willingly perform his office, and the father of a family will keep himself to his proper sphere. Everyone in his particular sphere of life will endure and swallow its inconveniences, cares, uneasiness, and anxiety without complaining, when he has been persuaded that God has laid the burden on him. This, too, will afford remarkable consolation, that in following your proper calling, no work will be so low and worthless as not to shine brightly and be considered of great value in God's sight.

