

Lecture 14-The Life of the Christian**Prayer**

Grant, Almighty God, that as You constantly remind us in Your Word, and that You have taught us by so many examples that there is nothing permanent in this world, but that the things which seem the firmest tend to ruin and instantly fall and, of themselves, vanish away when by Your breath, You shake that strength in which men trust; O grant that we, being really subdued and humble, may not rely on earthly things but raise up our hearts and our thoughts to heaven, and there fix the anchor of our hope, and may all our thoughts abide there until, at length, when You have led us through our course on earth, we shall be gathered into that heavenly kingdom which has been obtained for us by the blood of Your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Life of the Christian**I. Development**

A. 1539 addition; 1559 divided into five chapters (3, 6-10); “The Golden Booklet of the Christian Life”

B. Calvin's first Genevan experience (1536-38)

II. Classic of Devotional Literature

A. Balanced, penetrating, practical— McNeill

B. Significant influence on people of the Reformed faith

III. The Life of the Christian (3, 6)

A. Scripture provides a “pattern for the conduct of life” (3, 6, 1)

B. “Journey” image (3, 6, 5; 3, 7, 3; 3, 10, 1); pilgrimage

IV. Sum of the Christian Life: Denial of Ourselves (3, 7)

A. In relation to other people (3, 7, 5)

1. We are stewards

2. Our neighbors are made in the image of God

B. In relation to God (3, 7, 10; cf. also 3, 7, 1; 3, 7, 2; *negotium cum Deo* [“business with God”])

V. Bearing the Cross, A Part of Self-Denial (3, 8)

A. The fact of cross-bearing (3, 8, 2)

B. The importance of cross-bearing

1. The cross can be borne only by faith

2. God uses the cross to bring us into closer fellowship with Christ

a. Trust in God (3, 8, 2)

b. Patience and obedience (3, 8, 5; 3, 8, 9; 3, 8, 11)

3. Not stoicism

VI. Meditation on the Future Life (3, 9)

A. Life of hope (3, 9, 1); heaven is our homeland

B. The earth is “our place of exile” (3, 9, 4)

1. We must not despise this life nor be ungrateful to God for it (3, 9, 3)

2. We must properly “use” this present life (3, 10)

VII. How We Must Use the Present Life and Its Helps (3, 10)

A. The earth is our “sentry post” (3, 9, 4)

B. Life of responsibility

C. Double danger (3, 10, 1)

1. Too strict - necessity only (3, 10, 3)

2. Too loose - no limitations (3, 10, 3)

D. Principles (3, 10, 2-6)

1. Use God's gifts according to the end for which he created them for us - necessity + delight (Sermon on 1 Corinthians [698]; *Commentary* on Psalm 104:31; *Commentary* on John 2:8; *Commentary* on Deuteronomy 24:5; *Commentary* on Genesis 29:18)
Cf. Emile Doumergue, "Calvin: Epigone or Creator?" in *Calvin and the Reformation* (1909; 1980)
2. Recognize that God is the source of all good things and give Him thanks
3. Learn how "to go without things patiently"
4. Remember that we must one day "render account" of all those things which "were so given to us by the kindness of God" (3, 10, 5)
5. Each one is "to look to his own calling"
 - a. We must "stick by our trade" (*Commentary* on 1 Corinthians 7:20)
 - b. The dignity of work (3, 10, 6)
 - c. Diligence in work (Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*; *Commentary* on Mathew 6:62-30; Sermon no. 2 on 1 Corinthians [606])

For Further Study

Battles, Ford Lewis. *The Piety of John Calvin: An Anthology Illustrative of the Spirituality of the Reformer*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978.

Battles' introduction ("True Piety According to Calvin"), plus the selections from Calvin's writings on his spiritual pilgrimage, his faith, the Christian life, and prayer.

Leith, John H. *John Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989.

The Union (Virginia) Seminary's 1949 Yale dissertation published forty years later.