

QUOTABLE QUOTES RE: JOHN CALVIN
From Dr. David Calhoun, "Reformation and Modern Church History"
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I. Calvin the Man

Calvin's prayer "for the morning"—

"My God, my Father and Preserver, who of thy goodness hast watched over me during the past night, and brought me to this day, grant also that I may spend it wholly in the worship and service of thy most holy deity. Let me not think, or say, or do a single thing which tends not to thy service and submission to thy will, that thus all my actions may aim at thy glory and the salvation of my brethren, while they are taught by my example to serve thee. And as thou art giving light to this world for the purposes of external life by the rays of the sun, so enlighten my mind by the effulgence of thy Spirit, that he may guide me in the way of thy righteousness. To whatever purpose I apply my mind, may the end which ever propose to myself be thy honor and service. May I expect all happiness from thy grace and goodness only. Let me not attempt anything whatever that is not pleasing to thee....Do thou add more and more to the gifts of thy grace until I wholly adhere to thy Son Jesus Christ, whom we justly regard as the true Sun, shining constantly in our minds. In order to my obtaining of thee these great and manifold blessings, forget, and out of thy infinite mercy, forgive my offenses, as thou has promised that thou wilt do to those who call upon thee in sincerity. Amen."

Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559—

"We are not our own: let not our reason nor our will, therefore, sway our plans and deeds. We are not our own; let us, therefore, not set it as our goal to seek what is expedient for us according to the flesh. We are not our own: in so far as we can, let us, therefore, forget ourselves and all that is ours"

"Conversely, we are God's: let us, therefore, live for Him and die for Him. We are God's: let His wisdom and will, therefore, rule all our actions. We are God's: let all the parts of our life, accordingly, strive toward Him as our only lawful goal."

Calvin's Motto—

"My heart, I give you, O Lord, promptly and sincerely."

Calvin upon solicitation to return to Geneva—

"[I would rather] submit to death a hundred times than to that cross [Geneva], on which one had to perish daily a thousand times over" (1540 A.D.)

Calvin not a Dictator—

"Calvin was only granted bourgeois status at Geneva in his old age; he never became a citizen of the city. He could not stand for office and, until Dec. 1559, could not even vote in city elections; nor did he have privileged access to, or

direct influence over, the city council at any point during his career....Calvin could and did urge, cajole and plead; he could not, however, command.” --Alister McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, pp. 109, 125.

II. Calvin's Work

“It is not enough to have our eyes open and to note well and mark what God does during our whole lives, but we must profit from ancient histories. In fact this is why our Lord has wanted us to have some notable judgments left in writing, so that the memory of them would remain forever. And we should not only profit from what is contained in Holy Scripture, but when we hear what is spoken by the histories written by the pagans, we should also have the prudence to apply to ourselves what God has done.” --John Calvin

“The histories of all past times” are “a true school on how to regulate our life,” but sacred history is superior because it lays down “general principles by which we may examine every other history” and because it displays more clearly “what should be imitated and what avoided.” --John Calvin

“God has given me grace to write what I have written as faithfully as it was in my power. I have not falsified a single passage of the Scripture, nor given it a wrong interpretation to the best of my knowledge ... and always aimed at simplicity.” --John Calvin.

B.B. Warfield—

“Calvin found Protestantism a mob and transformed it into an army.”

“As systematiser ... he [Calvin] makes his greatest demand on our admiration and gratitude” --“John Calvin the Theologian,” 22

Karl Barth—

“How energetically Calvin, having first established what stands in the text, sets himself to rethink the whole material and to wrestle with it, till the walls which separate the sixteenth century from the first become transparent.” --*Church Dogmatics* 1/1, 16-17

J.T. McNeill, Introduction to Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536-1559), xxix [McNeill-Battles ed.]—

Calvin's *Institutes* “holds a place in the short list of books that have notably affected the course of history”

“His readiness in bringing scripture passages to bear upon each point of argument is astonishing, and has perhaps never been surpassed.”

Ford Lewis Battles, *Analysis of the Institutes*, 19

Calvin is “a scriptural theologian first, and a user of philosophy, logic, rhetoric—all human tools of organization—only second.”

Alister McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, 139-140.

“The intellectual domination of Protestantism by theologians of the Reformed tradition is due to both the substance and structure of Calvin’s final edition of the *Institutes*.”

“The origins of Calvin’s methods as perhaps the greatest biblical commentator of his age lie in his study of law in the advanced atmosphere of Orleans and Bourges. There is every indication that he learned from Bude the need to be a competent philologist, to approach a foundational text directly, to interpret it within the linguistic and historical parameters of its context, and to apply it to the needs of the present day.” –*Life*, p. 59

R.C. Reed, *The Gospel as Taught by Calvin*, 14

Calvin “was a wholesale plagiarist, from Moses and David, Isaiah and Ezekiel, Jesus and John, Peter and Paul”

Alexander Smellie, *The Reformation in its Literature*, 159

Calvin’s *Institutes* “is a great book. It is great in its constructive power. It welds into a unity things which before had stood apart in isolation, unrelated and alone. Athanasius had preached the mystery of the Incarnation, God manifest in flesh. Augustine had dwelt on the dark fact of original sin and the bright fact of redeeming grace. Anselm had gloried in the atonement of the Cross as a satisfaction to divine justice and holy law. But Calvin saw their mutual relations and their organic connection with each other. He felt, also, that all of them were required in Christian faith and experience. He brought them together, so that they were separate no longer; and that is an incalculable gain to the Church of Christ.”

Jean Cadier, *The Man God Mastered*, 178

“I am thinking of the man who said to me a short time ago as he came out of a lecture, ‘I have just been converted through reading the *Institutes*.’ And when I asked him to tell me what exactly had been the message which had effected this transformation in his life, he replied: ‘I learned from reading Calvin that all the worries about health and about the uncertain future which had hitherto dominated my life were without much importance and that the only things that counted were obedience to the will of God and a care for His glory.’”

Brief Bibliography:

Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, tr. Ford Lewis Battles

McGrath, Alister, *A Life of John Calvin* [excellent short summary of the *Institutes*]

Parker, T.H.L., *Calvin’s Old Testament Commentaries* (1986) and *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries* (1993).

Reed, R.C., *The Gospel as Taught by Calvin* [19th c. So. Presbyterian, fine small study]

Reid, J.K.S., ed. *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, (Westminster, 1954)

Warfield, B.B., *Calvin and Augustine* [excellent]

Wendel, Francois, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*
[best full study of Calvin's theology]