

**Men's Reading Club**  
**“Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion”**  
In Two Volumes  
**By John Calvin (1509-1564)**  
Edited by John T. McNeill  
(Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960)  
**Study Guide**  
(by Terry L. Johnson)

## Introduction

As we embark on a 1-2 year study of Calvin's *Institutes*, we are treating ourselves to the wisdom and piety of one of the great works of the Christian tradition.<sup>1</sup> The older as well as the more recent observers of Calvin wax euphoric on his greatness. His contemporary, Philip Melancthon (1497–1560), referred to him as “The Theologian.” His mentor and co-laborer, Martin Bucer (1491–1551), described Calvin to the Geneva town council as “that elect and incomparable instrument of God, to whom no other in our age may be compared, if at all there can be the question of another alongside of him.”<sup>2</sup>

Among the older commentators the nineteenth century German-American theologian, Philip Schaff (1819–1893), calls the first edition of the *Institutes* “the masterpiece of a precocious genius of commanding intellectual and spiritual depth and power.” It is, he continues, “one of the few truly classical productions in the history of theology,” earning Calvin the double title of “The Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas of the Reformed Church.”<sup>3</sup> The greatest of the theologians of Old Princeton, B. B. Warfield (1851–1921), claims that “what Thucydides is among Greeks, or Gibbon among eighteenth century English historians, what Plato is among philosophers, or the Iliad among epics, or Shakespeare among dramatists, that Calvin's *Institutes* is among theological treatises.”<sup>4</sup> He cites the brilliant nineteenth century Scottish theologian William Cunningham, who considered the *Institutes* “the most important work in the history of theological science.”<sup>5</sup> The French biographer of Calvin, Francois Wendel (1905–1972), calls the *Institutes* a monumental work,” even “truly a theological *summa* of Reformed Protestantism.”<sup>6</sup>

Among more recent observers, John Murray (1898–1975), the great Scottish theologian of Westminster Theological Seminary's founding generation, refers to the *Institutes* as “the *opus magnum* of Christian theology.”<sup>7</sup> John T. McNeil, editor of the most recent edition, calls the *Institutes* a “masterpiece,” and claims it “holds a place in the short list of books that have notably affected the course of history, molding the beliefs and behaviors of generations of mankind.”<sup>8</sup> Even the neo-Orthodox theologians such as Karl Barth (1886–1968), Emil Brunner (1889–1966), and T. F. Torrance (1913–2007) hold Calvin in highest regard, seeing themselves as the distance successors of the first generation of Reformers.<sup>9</sup> Alister E. McGrath, in his biography of Calvin,

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<sup>1</sup> The edition we shall be using is the most recent English translation of the 1559 and final edition from the Library of Christian Classics (Vol. XX), John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 1 & 2, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960).

<sup>2</sup> Philip Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church* (1910; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), VIII, 434.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *History*, VIII, 329.

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, “On the Literary History of Calvin's Institutes,” in John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Allen (trans.) (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), vi.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Warfield, vi.

<sup>6</sup> Francois Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins & Development of His Religious Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1950), 122.

<sup>7</sup> John Murray, “Introduction,” *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Allen (trans.) (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), lvii.

<sup>8</sup> McNeill, “Introduction,” *Institutes*, xxix.

<sup>9</sup> They have done so at the expense of the Reformers' immediate successors, the so-called Protestant Scholastics, whom the neo-orthodox despised. The wedge that they drove between Calvin and his successors (e.g. Beza, Perkins, Olevianus, Turretin) has been shown by Richard A. Muller to be completely untenable, in his two works, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (University Press: Oxford, 2003). See also his four volumes entitled *Post-Reformation Reformed*

calls the *Institutes* “the most influential theological work of the Protestant Reformation, eclipsing in importance the rival works of Luther, Melancthon, and Zwingli.”<sup>10</sup> Finally, “It is taken for granted,” says Elsie Anne McKee, “that John Calvin was one of the great theologians of the Christian tradition, and his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is . . . probably the single most influential book of the Protestant Reformation.”<sup>11</sup>

## History

The first edition was published in 1536, with a preface written in August 1535, when Calvin was barely 26 years old. It means that he wrote the bulk of it when he was 25. Given that he was not converted until sometime in 1532-33, it means that Calvin was a very quick learner. “How this beautifully crafted expression and interpretation of God’s loving power appeared from the hand of a twenty-five year old exile who had never studied theology cannot be adequately explained by historical circumstances,” admits his recent biographer, Bruce Gordon.<sup>12</sup> The first edition of the *Institutes* (1536) sold out, giving us some indication of its popularity. The second edition (1539) was three times the size, having grown from 6 to 17 chapters. The third edition (1543) expanded to 20 chapters. The final versions (1559 Latin, 1560 French) were nearly 25% larger than the previous, reorganized into 4 books made up of 80 chapters. It had become “almost a new book,” as the sub-title claimed.<sup>13</sup> In 1536 it was about the size of the New Testament. By 1559 it was about the size of the Old Testament and the Synoptic Gospels, as McNeill points out.<sup>14</sup> The *Institutes* was first translated into English by Thomas Norton in 1561, then by John Allen in 1813 (1<sup>st</sup> American edition 1816), by Henry Beveridge in 1845-6, and finally by Ford Lewis Battles in 1960. The completed *Institutes* were soon translated into Italian (1557), Dutch (1560), German (1572), Spanish (1597), Bohemian (1617), Hungarian (1624), and perhaps even Greek (1618). Its popularity has continued across the centuries to the present day. As McNeill says, “Perhaps no other theological work has so consistently retained for four centuries a place on the reading list of studious Christians.” Moreover it “continues to challenge intensive study, and contributes a reviving impulse to thinking in the areas of Christian doctrine and social duty.”<sup>15</sup> Again, “It is a living, challenging book that makes personal claims upon the reader.”<sup>16</sup>

## Purpose

What was Calvin’s aim in writing his *Institutes*? Some background is in order. The title *institutio* was employed by church fathers such as Lactantius, Ambrose, and Isidore, by medieval theologian Bernard, and by contemporaries Erasmus (1466–1536) and Budé (1468–1540). Its basic meaning is “instruction” or “education.” Calvin intended his first edition of the *Institutes* (1536) as a relatively brief catechetical manual, or “instruction” for the church. It contained, he claimed then, “a summary of the principal truths of the Christian religion” that all might know the faith of those who were called Protestants.<sup>17</sup> As we’ve noted, many editions followed (e.g. 1539, 1543, 1545, 1550, 1559), expanding the original text to 4.5 times its original size, appearing both in Latin (for scholars) and French (for the people e.g. 1541, 1551, 1557, 1562).

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### Dogmatics.

<sup>10</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 139.

<sup>11</sup> Elsie Anne McKee, “Exegesis, Theology and Development in Calvin’s *Institutio*: A Methodological Suggestion,” in Elsie Anne McKee and Brian H. Armstrong, *Probing the Reformed Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 154.

<sup>12</sup> Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 62.

<sup>13</sup> See McNeill, “Introduction,” *Institutes*, xxxviii.

<sup>14</sup> McNeill, “Introduction,” *Institutes*, xxxiv.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, xxix.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, li.

<sup>17</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, citing Calvin’s preface to his *Commentary upon the Psalms*.

However, between 1536 and 1539 Calvin’s understanding of his greater theological project, and the various genres by which to pursue it, began to clarify. Simultaneously he was writing catechisms and commentaries, revising the *Institutes*, and preaching sermons. Calvin’s first catechism was published in French in 1537 and in Latin in 1538. He published his first commentary, that on Romans, in 1540, with a dedication written from Strasbourg on October 18, 1539. Here he commends “lucid brevity” and is critical of “long and wordy commentaries.”<sup>18</sup> He criticizes the commentaries of both Melancthon and Bucer, the former for failing to comment on the whole text (“he . . . passes over many matters which can cause great trouble to those of average understanding”), and the latter for being “too verbose to be read quickly by those who have other matters to deal with, and too profound to be easily understood.” Melancthon “has not gone into every detail,” while Bucer “has done so at greater length than can be read in a short time.”<sup>19</sup> The solution: Calvin’s commentaries will “treat every point with such brevity that my readers would not lose much time in reading in the present work what is contained in other writings.”<sup>20</sup>

What are these “other writings” in which Calvin’s readers may pursue theological discussion at length? His theological treatises and especially the *Institutes*. In Calvin’s scheme the various genres function as follows:

- *Catechisms* would fulfill the catechetical function of the *Institutes*, 1536, of providing a brief “summary of the principal truths of the Christian religion” for the people of God;
- *Commentaries* would provide brief, succinct exegetical comments on the texts of Scripture without much theological elaboration; they were to be models of *brevitas* and *facilitas* (ease of expression, clarity);
- *Sermons* would be expansions of the commentaries: more detailed explanation, cross-referencing, theological elaboration and practical application; Muller cites as an example of sermonic expansion Calvin’s work on Galatians, in which his sermons, preached between November 14, 1557 and May 15, 1558 are nearly five times the length of the commentary, published in 1548. His comments on Galatians 3:3-5 require only a few paragraphs, whereas he devotes an entire sermon to it in his preaching.<sup>21</sup>
- *Institutes* would be the place where the various theological topics discovered in the course of the exegetical work would be explained at length, making their detailed development in the commentaries unnecessary.

This division of labor, or distinction in genres, meant that the second edition of the *Institutes* was an entirely different kind of work. Warfield describes the transition from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> editions as a transformation “from a short handbook on religion for the people into a scientific treatise in dogmatic theology for the students of theology.”<sup>22</sup> It was intended, he says, “as a text-book in theology.”<sup>23</sup>

If we turn to Calvin’s preface (found in *Institutes*, 3-5, for the 1539 Latin and 1541 French editions) we can better understand Calvin’s meaning. He expresses there his intent:

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<sup>18</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, Ross Mackenzie (trans.), Calvin’s Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 144.

<sup>22</sup> Warfield, “Literary History,” xv.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxiii.

“Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*”

It has been my purpose in this labor to prepare and instruct candidates in sacred theology for the reading of the divine word . . . for I believe I have so embraced the sum of religion in all its parts, and have arranged it in such an order, that if anyone rightly grasps it, it will not be difficult to determine what he ought especially to seek in Scripture . . .<sup>24</sup>

He then mentions his then future commentaries (having not yet published one as of 1539):

I shall always condense them, because I shall have no need to undertake long doctrinal discussions, and to digress into commonplaces (Latin *communes*).<sup>25</sup>

We will want to return to Calvin’s mentioning “order” and “commonplaces” in the above citations.

For now we will move ahead to his preface to the French edition of 1560 (McNeill, 6-8, first published in the first French edition of 1541). Here he mentions a second purpose:

It can be a key to open a way for all children of God into a good and right understanding of Holy Scripture.<sup>26</sup>

Latin versions were for scholars. Vernacular versions were for ordinary Christians. Consequently Calvin exhorts,

All those who have reverence for the Lord’s word, to read it, and to impress it diligently upon their memory, if they wish to have, first, a sum of Christian doctrine, and second, a way to benefit greatly from reading the Old as well as the New Testament.<sup>27</sup>

Note that he repeats the relationship between his projected commentaries and the *Institutes* as now redesigned: “I shall use the greatest possible brevity,” he writes of the commentaries, “because there will be no need for long digressions, seeing that I have treated at length almost all the articles (Latin *loci*) pertaining to Christianity.”<sup>28</sup>

A third reason can be found in Calvin’s long “Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France” first written August 23, 1535, and retained in each successive edition of the *Institutes*. Schaff claims that Calvin’s preface “is reckoned among the three immortal prefaces in literature.”<sup>29</sup> Essentially it is an apology, a defense of Reformed Protestantism against charges of heresy and radicalism (i.e. Anabaptism). He intends not a “full-scale apology,” nor a “defense” *per se*, “but merely to dispose your mind to give a hearing to the actual presentation of our case.”<sup>30</sup>

Calvin’s three purposes, then, are 1) train Christian ministers; 2) educate Christian laypeople; 3) defend Reformed Protestantism from its enemies. B. B. Warfield, the greatest of the Princeton theologians, summarizes the *Institutes* as “the first serious attempt to cast into systematic form that body of truth to which the Reformed

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<sup>24</sup> Calvin, “Subject Matter of the Present Work,” from the French Edition of 1541 and 1560, in *Institutes*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Calvin, “Subject Matter,” 7.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Schaff, *History*, VIII, 332.

<sup>30</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 31.

churches adhered as taught in Holy Scriptures.”<sup>31</sup> Schaff labels it “a systematic exposition of the Christian religion,” a “vindication” of the evangelical faith,” and an “apologetic” defending Protestants from their persecutors.<sup>32</sup> Its range, according to McNeill, is “the whole field of Christian theology.” Its comprehensiveness surpasses all the other theological works of the sixteenth century. “It’s superiority is still greater with respect to the order and symmetry with which it is composed,” continues McNeill.<sup>33</sup>

## Design

Calvin was concerned with the “right order of teaching” (*ordo recte dicendi*) according to which the topics (*loci*) would be organized, as well as important disputed dogmatic themes (*disputationes*). The twin organizational concerns of the *Institutes* then are 1) the identity of the basic topics for discussion, and, 2) the proper order for presenting these topics. Melancthon published a work of systematic theology in 1521 and again in 1535 entitled *Commonplaces (Loci Communes* or “Universal Topics”). In its 1539 form, says Muller, “the *Institutes* was restructured and augmented in order that it might serve as the repository of the *loci communes* (universal topics, or ‘commonplaces’) and *disputationes* that might otherwise have appeared in the commentaries.”<sup>34</sup> Calvin continued to tinker with its order until the final edition. “I was never satisfied,” he said, “until the work had been arranged in the order now set forth.”<sup>35</sup>

## Structure

The *Institutes* is structured in four books roughly according to the Creed. Book I deals with God the Father, Book II God the Son, Book III God the Holy Spirit, and Book IV the Church. We say “roughly” structured by the creed because catechetical influences as well as the Apostle Paul’s structure in the book of Romans may also be discerned.<sup>36</sup> For example, Muller points out that Book II follows the Pauline *ordo* in its reflections on sin. Even Book I can be seen as Pauline, following the arrangement of Romans which begins with God and the human predicament (1:18–3:21). Chapters in Book II, on the Decalogue, the sacraments and prayer take the *Institutes* beyond the Creed. Still, Yale Divinity School professor Bruce Gordon, in his biography of Calvin, labels the *Institutes* “a masterpiece of organization and clarity.”<sup>37</sup>

## Sources

As for the various sources from which Calvin draws, the most important is Scripture. McNeill finds Calvin’s use of Scripture to support each point of his argument “astounding,” even “perhaps never been surpassed.”<sup>38</sup> He holds to “literal,” that is, historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture eschewing allegorical interpretations. He also reads Scripture redemptively. “The Scriptures,” says Calvin, “are to be read with the purpose of finding Christ there.”<sup>39</sup>

After Scripture we find heavy use of the church fathers, especially John Chrysostom and Augustine. By merely counting two editors’ notations, one finds 750 citations of Augustine in the 1521 pages of the McNeill edition, 163 of Gregory or Cyprian, 130 of Tertullian, Jerome, or Chrysostom, 123 of Leo I, Ambrose, or Lactantius,

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<sup>31</sup> Warfield, “Literary History,” v.

<sup>32</sup> Schaff, viii, 330.

<sup>33</sup> McNeill, “Introduction,” *Institutes*, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 119. See also *Institutes*, 5.

<sup>35</sup> “John Calvin to the Reader,” 1559, in *Institutes*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 138-39.

<sup>37</sup> Gordon, *Calvin*, 302.

<sup>38</sup> McNeill, “Introduction,” liv.

<sup>39</sup> Cited by McNeill in “Introduction,” lvi, from Calvin’s commentary on John 5:39.

Irenaus or Athanasius, and 200 other citations from the church fathers. In all, the editors have found 1406 patristic citations or allusions in the *Institutes*.

Calvin knows and is guided by the ancient councils of Nicea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon. While he often attacks the medieval scholastic theologians, he “readily employs the terminology in use in the (philosophical) schools,” as Wendel points out.<sup>40</sup> Among the Medieval theologians the editors of the *Institutes* find Bonaventure cited or alluded to 16 times, Bernard 40 times, and 143 references to Aquinas!

Turning to the Reformers, Calvin’s debt to Luther is great. The first edition of the *Institutes* follows the order of Luther’s *Little Catechism*. Calvin’s doctrine of justification by faith is Luther’s, as well as the surrounding doctrines of original sin, Christ’s atonement, and the application of redemption by the Holy Spirit through the word and sacraments. Philip Melanchthon, Luther’s colleague on the reform at Wittenburg, was in regular correspondence with Calvin. Melanchthon was the primary author of the Augsburg Confession, the standard Lutheran confession of faith, about which Calvin said, “There is nothing in (it) which is not in accord with our teaching.”<sup>41</sup> In addition, it was Melanchthon’s work on dogmatics, *Loci Communes* (1521, 1535), noted above, that had a decisive influence on the direction the *Institutes* would take as Calvin transitioned from its design as a catechism to a summary of doctrine. Finally, Martin Bucer (1491–1551) had an important influence on Calvin, especially during Calvin’s Strasbourg years (1539–41). Wendel shows Bucer’s influence on Calvin’s understanding of predestination, the unity of the covenants, repentance, the doctrines of the church, church discipline, and we might add, worship.<sup>42</sup>

### ***Calvini Opera***

Muller insists out that like most of the theologians of his era, Calvin “understood himself as a preacher and exegete, and understood the primary work of his life as the exposition of Scripture.”<sup>43</sup> He points out that the *Institutes* are equaled in length by Calvin’s sermons on Job, as well as by each of his commentaries on Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the Pentateuch. He argues decisively that Calvin must be interpreted in light of the whole body of his work. Given what we’ve noted above about the complementary relationship between the catechisms, sermons, and especially the commentaries and *Institutes*, we will err if we read the *Institutes* in isolation from Calvin’s other work. According to Calvin scholar Elsie McKee, the *Institutes* are “to be read in tandem with the commentaries,” and the biblical citations as “cross references to the exegetical writings.”<sup>44</sup> Muller continues: “The *Institutes* must not be read instead of commentaries, but with them . . . Indeed if one wishes to ascertain the biblical basis of Calvin’s topical discussions and disputations one *must* read the commentaries.”<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the opposite is true. One must read the *Institutes* to find theological elaboration, biblical cross-referencing, historical examples, or rebuttals of variant theological views lacking in the commentaries. Muller insists that the *Institutes* not be viewed as the “centerpiece of Calvin’s theological enterprise” but rather, “as he continued to describe it, the set of *loci communes* and *disputationes* that stood in a complementary relationship with *his central effort of commenting on the text of Scripture*.”<sup>46</sup> Half of the biblical citations found in the McNeill text of the *Institutes* are the work of the editors, not of Calvin. However, Calvin’s own citations serve the purpose of what Muller calls “intertextuality,” of directing readers to the commentaries

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<sup>40</sup> Wendel, *Calvin*, 126.

<sup>41</sup> Wendel, *Calvin*, 136.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-144.

<sup>43</sup> Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Elsie Anne McKee, “Exegesis, Theology, and Development in Calvin’s *Institutio*,” 154. See also Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 107.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 108, cf. 149.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

for exegetical detail. His citations frequently refer “to the initial verse of an identifiable pericope on which Calvin has commented at length.”<sup>47</sup> When they are not cross-references to Calvin’s commentaries “they probably should be viewed as references to the exegetical tradition and not as ‘proof-texts’” in any pejorative sense.<sup>48</sup> Many issues never addressed in the *Institutes* that typically are addressed in theological works are addressed in the commentaries and sermons. They may be omitted in the *Institutes* because they weren’t controversial or hadn’t become the subject for a universal topic. For example, he says little about the divine essence and attributes in the *Institutes*, while he elaborates these things as they are examined exegetically in the commentaries. Muller cites the example of Exodus 3:14, where Calvin demonstrates his continuity with the assumptions of the medieval scholastic tradition.<sup>49</sup> Similarly Calvin’s doctrines of creation, of the covenant, and of the third use of the law are found mainly in the sermons and commentaries.

In summary:

The *Institutes* cannot be rightly understood apart from Calvin’s exegetical and expository efforts, nor can his exegetical and expository efforts be divorced from his work of compiling the *Institutes*.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 186.

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**Two-Year Schedule for  
Reading Calvin’s Institutes**

<b>Year 1 – Vol. I (based on about 2-3 pp/day)</b>			
<i>Date</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Pages</i>	<i>Number of Pages</i>
January	I.i.1–I.v.15	1-69	68
February	I.vi.1–I.xii.3	69-120	51
March	I.xiii.1–I.xiv.22	120-183	63
April	I.xv.1–I.xviii.4	183-237	54
May	II.i.1–II.iv.8	241-316	75
June	II.v.1–II.viii.34	316-401	85
July	II.viii.35 – II.xi.14	401-464	63
August	II.xii.1–II.xvii.6	464-534	70
September	III.i.1–III.iii.25	537-621	84
October	III.iv.1–III.vii.10	622-701	79
November	III.viii.1–III.xiii.5	702-768	66
December	III.xiv.1–III.xix.16	768-849	81

<b>Year 2 – Vol. II (based on about 2-3 pp/day)</b>			
<i>Date</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Pages</i>	<i>Number of Pages</i>
January	III.xx.1-52	850-920	70
February	III.xxi.1- III.xxiii.14	920-964	44
March	III.xxiv.1–III.xxv.12	964-1008	44
April	IV.i.1–IV.iii.16	1011-1068	57
May	IV.iv.1–IV.vi.17	1068-1118	50
June	IV.vii.1–IV.viii.16	1118-1166	48
July	IV.ix.1–IV.xi.16	1166-1229	63
August	IV.xii.1–IV.xiii.21	1229-1276	47
September	IV.xiv.1–IV.xvi.32	1276-1359	83
October	IV.xvii.1–IV.xviii.20	1359-1448	89
November	IV.xix.1–IV.xix.37	1448-1484	36
December	IV.xx.1–IV.xx.32	1485-1521	36

**Questions for Discussion**

(pp 1-69)

**Prefaces**

1. What is Calvin’s purpose in writing the *Institutes*? (p 4, 6, 7, 8, 31)
2. In what relation does the *Institutes* stand to his commentaries? (p 3, 5, 7)

**Book I – The Knowledge of God the Creator (Chapters i-v)**

1. How are the knowledge of God and the knowledge of self interrelated? (p 35ff)
2. What does Calvin mean by the knowledge of God? (p 40, 70)
3. What role does *pietas* play in Calvin’s theology? (pp 39-43)
4. Where does the knowledge of God begin for Calvin? (p 43ff)
5. What argument does Calvin employ to demonstrate God’s existence? (pp 51-63)
6. Is God’s self-revelation in nature clear or unclear? (pp 51-63) If clear, why do we not profit by it? (pp 63-69)

**Questions for Discussion**

(pp 69-120)

**Book I – The Knowledge of God the Creator (Chapters vi–xii)**

1. Why did God add Scriptural revelation to natural revelation? (pp 69ff)
  
2. How does Calvin answer the question raised by the Roman Catholics, that if the church determines what is and isn't Scripture, that its authority is greater than Scripture's? (pp 74ff)
  
3. Upon what does Calvin base confidence that Scripture is the word of God if not the testimony of the church? (pp 76- 80)
  
4. Of what use are the various evidences for the truthfulness of Scripture as God's word? (p 83ff)
  
5. In addition to Scripture's self-authenticating properties, what other arguments does Calvin use to demonstrate that Scripture is the word of God? (pp 81-92)
  
6. Yet, in the end, upon what would Calvin have us base our confidence that Scripture is the word of God? (p 92)







**Questions for Discussion**  
(pp 183-237)

**Book I – The Knowledge of God the Creator (Chapters xv.1– xviii.4)**

1. To what theme does Calvin return which was introduced at the beginning of the *Institutes*? Why?  
(183)
  
2. What must we know about ourselves before we can come to a “clear and complete” knowledge of God? (183)
  
3. What are the constituent parts of man? How does Calvin define the invisible part of man? (184-85)
  
4. Where does the image of God properly reside in man? (186-188)







**Questions for Discussion**  
(pp 241-316)

**Book 2 – The Knowledge of God the Redeemer (Chapters i.1– iv.8)**

1. Once again, to what theme does Calvin return at the outset of Book Two? What would he have us know and against what does he warn us? (241-244)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What does Augustine, with Calvin agreeing, say was the original sin of Adam? (245-246)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What is the difference between Pelagius (ca 354–420) and Calvin/Augustine on original sin? (246-250)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. How does Calvin define original sin? (250-255)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What two errors does Calvin wish to avoid as he discusses free will? (255-264)



11. How does Calvin explain the virtuous pagan? (292-294) That is, if human nature is as bad as he says the Bible teaches it is, how is it that history provides examples of admirable pagans?
  
12. Explain the distinction Calvin makes between man sinning of *necessity* but without *compulsion*. (294-296)
  
13. What does Calvin say to those who argue that man’s will is weak and merely needs a little help, or that the will cooperates with grace in man’s salvation? (296-309)
  
14. How does Calvin explain that Scripture will attribute one event (e.g. Job’s afflictions) to God, Satan, and men? (309-11)
  
15. What does Calvin say about God hardening a sinners heart? (311-313)
  
16. What is Calvin’s concluding emphasis? (314-316)

**Questions for Discussion**

(pp 316-401)

**Book 2 – The Knowledge of God the Redeemer (Chapters v.1–viii.34)**

1. How does Calvin respond to the various arguments for free will? (316-322)
2. How does Calvin answer those who say that God only commands us or exhorts us to do that which we have the (free will) capacity to do? (323-340)
3. How does Calvin finally summarize the biblical and Augustinian view? (340)

**Chapter VI.**

4. Calvin now turns his attention directly to the knowledge of God the Redeemer, the subject matter of Book II. What does he think of the knowledge and service of God apart from Christ? (340-342)

5. If salvation is to be found only in the mediation of Christ, how are Old Testament believers to be saved? (342-348)

## **Chapter VII. The Purpose of the “Law”**

6. According to Calvin, what is the purpose of the Old Testament religion? (348-351)

7. More specifically, what is the purpose of moral law? (351-362)

8. In what sense has the law been abrogated for believers? (362-366)



14. What are the duties of worship outlined in the first four commandments? (381-401)



**Chapter IX: Christ Known Under the Law, Yet Clearly Revealed only in the Gospel**

5. How should we compare the knowledge of Christ experienced by the Old Testament believer with that experienced by the New Testament believer? (423-428)

**Chapter X: The Similarity of the Old and New Testaments**

6. How are the Old and New Testaments similar? (428-434)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. What is Calvin able to demonstrate by use of Bible biography? (434-449)

**Chapter XI: The Difference Between the Two Testaments**

8. How do the Testaments differ? (449-464)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. Why did God not reveal the whole truth to all peoples from the beginning? Why did He for so long limit His self-revelation to Israel through types and shadows? (463-464)

**Questions for Discussion**  
(pp 464-534)

**Book 2 – The Knowledge of God the Redeemer (Chapters xii.1– xvii.6)**

**Chapter II: Why Christ Had to Become Man**

1. Why was it necessary that our Mediator be both God and man? (464-474)

**Chapter XIII: Christ Assured the True Substance of Human Flesh**

2. Having already established the true divinity of Christ in I.xiii.7-13 (129-138), what is Calvin establishing in II.xiii.1-4? (474-481)
3. Calvin’s fresh contribution to Christology can be seen at the end of page 481. Known as *the extra Calvinisticum*, what is it?

**Chapter XIV: How the Two Natures of the Mediator Make One Person**

4. What careful distinctions does Calvin make in his discussion of the dual nature of Christ? (482–493)

**Chapter XV: What Christ Was Sent by the Father to do as Seen Through the Three-fold Office**

5. What are the three “offices” or functions that Christ fulfills as our Redeemer? (494-503)

**Chapter XVI: How Christ Has Fulfilled the Function of Redeemer**

6. What motivates Calvin to elaborate upon the theme of humanity’s peril: the depth of men’s depravity and men’s impending doom? (503-507)
7. According to Calvin, what has Christ accomplished? (507-512)
8. How does Calvin interpret the clause of the Creed, “He descended into hell”? (512-520)
9. What importance does Calvin place upon Christ’s exhalation: His resurrection, ascension, session, and future judgment? (520-527)

**Chapter XVII: Christ Has Merited God’s Grace and Salvation for Us**

10. How does Calvin answer the alleged inconsistency between the notions of God’s free grace and Christ’s merit? (528-534)

**Questions for Discussion**  
(pp 537-621)

**Book 3 – “The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ:” “Benefits” & “Effects” –**

**(Chapters i.1– iii.25)**

**Chapter I – The Secret Working of the Spirit**

1. Calvin is concerned now with the question of how the benefits of what Christ did outside of us (on the cross) come to benefit us. What is his answer? (537-542)

**Chapter II – Faith Defined & Explained**

2. What distinction does Calvin make between the Roman Catholic notion of “implicit” faith and true faith? (542-551)
3. What criticism does Calvin offer of the medieval distinction between “formed” and “unformed” faith? (551-559)
4. How does Calvin define faith? (559-562)





**Questions for Discussion**  
(pp 622-701)

**Book 3 – “The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ:” “Benefits” & “Effects” – (Chapters iv.1–vii.10)**

**Chapter IV – Defective Views of Repentance**

1. What is Calvin’s fundamental problem with the medieval/scholastic definition of repentance/penance? (622-626). Auricular confession (private confession to a priest, “in the ear”)? (626-638)
2. What is Calvin’s critique of the Roman Catholic practice of confession to a priest? (638-647)
3. What is the right view of absolution? (647-651)
4. What central biblical doctrine undermines the Roman Catholic notion that satisfaction is rendered to God through the merit of works? (651-654)

5. What does Calvin make of the Roman Catholic distinctions between “mortal” and “venial” sins, between the guilt of sin and the penalty of sin? (654–669)

#### **Chapter V – Indulgences & Purgatory**

6. What is the heart of Calvin’s objection to indulgences? (670-675)
7. How does Calvin go about refuting the doctrine of purgatory? (675-684)

#### **Chapter VI – The Life of the Christian Man**

8. With what subjects does Calvin begin his brief treatment of the Christian life? (684-689)
9. What is the sum, the heart, the essence of the Christian life? (689-698)
10. How does the principle of self-denial affect our outlook on prosperity and adversity? (698-701)

**Questions for Discussion**  
(pp 702-768)

**Book 3 – “The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ:” “Benefits” & “Effects” (Chapters  
viii-xiii)**

**Chapter VIII – Bearing the Cross & Self-Denial**

1. Calvin continues his discussion of self-denial into chapter VIII. Why is cross-bearing necessary?  
(702-708)
2. Christian suffering, however, is not stoicism. How does it differ from what he calls that “iron philosophy”? (708-712)

**Chapter IX – Meditation on the Future Life**

3. How does the hope of heaven affect our outlook on present suffering? (712-719)

**Chapter X – Using the Present Life & Its Helps**

4. Since believers are pilgrims on the way to heaven, of what use ought they to make of the things of this world? (719-725)

**Chapter XI: Justification by Faith: Definitions**

5. For Calvin, how important is the doctrine of justification? (725,726)
  
6. What are the two parts of justification by which Calvin defines it? (727-728)
  
7. What is the basic error of Osiander which Calvin is determined to refute? (729-743)
  
8. What does Calvin say in refuting the medieval schoolmen (the “scholastics” such as Lombard) and their sixteenth century defenders? (743-754)

**Chapter XII: Judgment & Free Justification**

9. What is it about God’s judgment that eliminates works from any consideration in justification?  
What, then, is the outlook of those who are ready to receive Christ? (754-763)

**Chapter XIII: Two Notes Regarding Free Justification**

10. What two additional notes does Calvin wish to make in Chapter XIII?

**Questions for Discussion**  
(pp 768-849)

**Book 3 – “The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ:” “Benefits” & “Effects” (Chapters xiv.1-xix.16)**

**Chapter XIV. – The Beginning & Progress of Justification**

1. In order to demonstrate that no one may be justified by works, Calvin divides humanity into four classes of persons. What does he have to say about the first class, pagans, even “good” pagans?  
(768-774)
2. What does Calvin have to say about the second and third classes of persons, the nominal believers and the hypocrites, in relation to justification by works? (774-776)
3. What does Calvin have to say about the fourth class of persons, those regenerated by God’s Spirit, in relation to justification by works? (776-779)

4. How does Calvin respond to the Medieval and Roman Catholic idea that any defects in our good works are compensated by works of supererogation (those beyond what is required from the Latin *erogare*, to spend)? (779-788)

**Chapter XV. – Boasting About the Merits of Works Diminishes God’s Praise and Undermines Assurance**

5. How does Calvin refute the notion that good works are meritorious? (788-797)

**Chapter XVI. – Refutation of False Accusations of the Papists Regarding Justification by Faith Alone**

6. How does Calvin answer the charge that the doctrine of justification, because it is severed from good works, encourages impiety? (797-802)

**Chapter XVII. – Agreement of the Promises of the Law and of the Gospel**

7. What does Calvin make of the argument that the law promises blessing in connection with obedience and good works? (802-808)

