

Chapter 3: Calvin's Sanctification

As I have written in chapter one, the task of this thesis is to find out whether or not solitude is compatible with Calvin's spirituality in sanctification. Taking the scope of sanctification as the standard and entry point of this compatibility, it is therefore important that this thesis lays out also the breadth of Calvin's sanctification. Therefore, it is only straightforward that in this chapter that I lay out Calvin's concept of sanctification in the *Institutes*. However, before I dig deeper into Calvin's concept of sanctification, I would first begin with a general discussion of what sanctification with regards to its active role, discipline, and imitation of Christ. To do this, I will do a brief survey in the matter of sanctification from numerous theologians. After this, this research will dive briefly into the matter of a personal sanctification. Is there a case in Calvin that Christians can progress in their sanctification alone? As it is generally known, Reformed tradition tends to side with a communal sanctification rather than a personal one. It is only after this brief survey that I will, then, go into Calvin's part of sanctification. In the *Institutes*, we see that he begins his concept of sanctification in book III chapter three which he titles "Our Regeneration by Faith: Repentance". Just to make things clear from the beginning, Calvin's usage of "repentance" can be understood as or even synonymous to "sanctification".¹²⁷ Calvin himself interprets repentance as regeneration "whose sole end is to restore in us the image of God."¹²⁸ Thus, it is very clear that Calvin does not define repentance as a one-time turning point. In theological terms, it is helpful for us to turn to Frame who differentiates a "definitive sanctification" and a "progressive sanctification."

¹²⁷ J Mark Beach, *Piety's Wisdom: A Summary of Calvin's Institutes with Study Questions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 165

¹²⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.8

The former being a one-time sanctification wholly completed in Christ and the latter, a chasing after the image of Christ. This chapter will not discuss the distinction of sanctification and justification but just to make clear from the beginning that what Calvin means as “repentance” in the *Institutes* tends to side more to the “progressive sanctification” mentioned in Frame’s discussion.¹²⁹ Moving on, we see that Calvin would continue his discussion of sanctification until Book III chapter ten where he would then start on to the subject of justification. Thus, from the basis of his structure this thesis would argue that in Calvin’s *Institutes*, the concept of sanctification would range from chapter three all the way to chapter ten. Beach has categorized chapter six to ten together as one chapter which he aptly named “The Christian life”.¹³⁰ While this approach is also considerable, this research would argue that the basis of what is written in chapter six to ten has its foundations in the previous chapters of the book. Thus the range of discussion for this thesis still remains within one to ten. For what this thesis is trying to achieve, though, I have decided to not include both chapter IV and V where Calvin is mostly doing polemic arguments against the Roman Catholic. When we have all of these into consideration, we are left with six chapters in which I have broadly divided into five categories: (1) repentance: mortification; (2) repentance: vivification; (3) denial of self; (4) carrying the cross; (5) meditations on future life. For the sake of this thesis, it is in these five categories in which I will lay out Calvin’s idea of sanctification.

3.1. Sanctification as Active. The Westminster Larger Catechism defines sanctification as such:

¹²⁹ John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2013), 986

¹³⁰ J Mark Beach, *Piety's Wisdom: A Summary of Calvin's Institutes with Study Questions*, 174

Sanctification is a work of God's grace, whereby they whom God hat, before the foundation of the world, chosen to be holy, are in time, through the powerful operation of His Spirit applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God; having the seeds of repentance unto life, and all other saving graces, put into their hearts, and those graces so stirred up, increased, and strengthened, as that they more and more die unto sin and rise unto newness of life¹³¹.

This definition, as we can see, is very thorough and more than adequately explains the idea of sanctification. The problem that we face- along with how later Reformed Christians apprehend sanctification- is that there is a lack of emphasis on the active effort on the human side. I am not claiming that this definition in the WCL denies the role of human in sanctification, but that it is not emphasized *enough*. A quick look and we can tell that, in this definition, God is the major and active player while human is put in a secondary and more passive order. Thankfully, other confessions make up for this deficiency. With regards to sanctification, the Canons of Dort says that it is

“the sense and certainty of this election afford to the children of God additional matter for daily humiliation before Him, for adoring the depth of His mercies, for cleansing themselves, and rendering grateful returns of ardent love to Him, who first manifested so great love towards them.¹³²

In this definition, the active role of man is evidently more pronounced. The role of man, I would argue, is most evident in the Heidelberg Catechism:

Because *I* am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing, that so *I* may confess His name, and present *myself* a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him; and also that with a free and good conscience *I* may fight against sin and Satan in this life, and afterwards reign with Him eternally over all creatures.¹³³

In his survey of these Reformed Confessions, Rohls defines sanctification as the “process by which Christ, through the Spirit, renews the justified sinner into Christ's image.” To

¹³¹ Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Reformed Confessions Harmonized* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1999), 104

¹³² Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, 104

¹³³ Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, 104

this, he adds that “sanctification consists in human being’s repentance: that is, their conversion.”¹³⁴ Take note of the change of object from God to human. Rohls’ connection of sanctification to repentance is important in that it brings about an active and responsible aspect of sanctification. If Rohls stops at the first part of his definition, we can easily misunderstand sanctification as solely by grace alone without our active striving; yet, Rohls prevent this misunderstanding by adding the role of person in the process. The matter of cooperation of man and God with regards to sanctification is one which I want to highlight especially when this thesis is arguing on the need of an outward and active discipline in the progress of sanctification.

3.1.1. *An active Sanctification.* Grudem notes that certain theologians (such as John Murray) “object to saying that God and man “cooperate” in sanctification.”¹³⁵ Grudem, however, thinks that is appropriate to say that “God and man cooperate in sanctification,” as long as we explain the distinctive roles clearly.¹³⁶ Sanctification as the work of God is amply witnessed in the Bible (1 Thess. 5:23; Phil.2:13; Heb.13:20-21) and Grudem has also wholly expressed that it is “specifically God the Holy Spirit who works within us to change us and sanctify us, giving us greater holiness in life.”¹³⁷ Yet, this does not stop him from pointing out the specific role of Jesus in sanctification. First, he points out that it is Jesus who earned our sanctification; God has made Christ to be “our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Cor.1:30)”. Secondly, Christ is also

¹³⁴ Jan Rohls, *Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 140

¹³⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 753

¹³⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 753

¹³⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 754

our example (Heb.12:2; 1 Pet.2:21; 1 Jn.2:6).¹³⁸ In other words, Grudem narrows Christ's role in our sanctification as our objective justifier and example to follow. Set within this role, Grudem would then be enabled to say that

“The role we play in sanctification is both a passive one in which we depend on God to sanctify us, and an active one in which we strive to obey God and take steps that will increase our sanctification.”¹³⁹

Simply put, our passive role is our recognition of God's sovereignty and work in us, and also our dependency towards him in sanctification. This is true for we know that apart from God, we can do nothing (Jn.15:5). What Grudem rightly bemoans is the fact that this passive role “is sometimes so strongly emphasized that it is the only thing people are told about the path of sanctification.” The idea of “let go and let God” in its most serious consequence will “lead Christians to become lazy and to neglect the active role that Scripture commands them to play in their own sanctification.”¹⁴⁰ Frame even goes further to say that the slogan is “unbiblical.” Like Grudem, Frame “opposes the notion that sanctification is passive, or even that it is simply an outworking of justification.” Sadly though, Frame points out that such a stance is not foreign within the Reformed circle. In the Formula of Concord, the Lutheran confessional standard,

“good works are never motivated by any command, threat, or reward but are produced spontaneously by the Spirit within. This is perhaps the root of Lutheran theologian Gerhard Forde's view that “sanctification is thus simply the *art of getting used to justification.*””¹⁴¹

Frame insists that the Scripture testifies the need for an active sanctification:

¹³⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 753-754

¹³⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 754

¹⁴⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 754

¹⁴¹ John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 993

“Scripture commands us to yield our lives to God (Rom.6:19; phil.3:13-14), to strive for holiness (Rom.8:13; 2 Cor.7:1), to don the whole armor of God (Eph.6:10-20) in order to fight against Satan and his Angels, to put to death our sinful disposition (Rom.8:13).”¹⁴²

The importance of an active role in sanctification cannot be stressed enough. A highly spiritual, inner, and passive sanctification is not a biblical image but rather a more Platonic one. If Christians do not engage in an active role in sanctification, we must accept the fact that we will not be able to grow unto Christ even if we believe in the sovereignty of God. In his argument towards an active sanctification, Grudem brings us to Romans 8:13 to highlight the personal responsibility, in which Paul says “if by the Spirit *you* put to death the deeds of the body you will live.” Grudem points to the fact that in the verse, it is not the Spirit but it is the Christian who must put to death the deeds of the flesh. Building his argument, Grudem continues to Philipians 2:12-13 where Paul exhorts the church to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” By “work out” Grudem interprets this as working out “the further realization of the benefits of salvation” of our Christian life.¹⁴³ In this regard, Guthrie echoes Grudem when he says that “Christians are not people who just passively trust God to accept them as they are, solve their problems...they are people who respond to God’s love, forgiveness, and acceptance with thankful obedience in every area of their lives.”¹⁴⁴

Grudem’s argument comes from the serious problem that many Christians neglect this active seeking of Christ in their path of sanctification, which, in turn, leads to a spiritual stunt in their lives. Historically, we can see how Christians have deteriorated when an active sanctification was not pursued. Puritanism along with some other movements that

¹⁴² John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 988

¹⁴³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 754-755

¹⁴⁴ Shirley C. Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, rev. ed. (Louisville, Ken.: Westminster/J. Knox Press, 1994), 331

puts an emphasis on the way we live, according to Lovelace, “appears to be an ascetic movement within Protestantism reacting against cheap grace.” This “cheap grace”, Lovelace argues, was the result of Luther’s overemphasis on justification, even though he does not deny sanctification.¹⁴⁵ Against the background of Roman Catholic’s approach of treating good works as a virtue, Luther “cut through the Roman Catholic spirituality of achievement by stressing the thing that was most important to Jesus: Christ-centered faith. Evangelical piety is first of all a spirituality of faith as opposed to one of achievement.”¹⁴⁶ Luther was being very careful that no good works shall be treated or included in our justification; we are justified merely by God’s grace through faith alone. However, this emphasis carries with it a major side effect: “it too often seems to lead Christians to that life of casual disinterest in spiritual growth.”¹⁴⁷ Guthrie concurs with this analysis when he says that “mainline Protestants have so strongly emphasized salvation by grace alone that we are often suspicious of any talk about good works.”¹⁴⁸ Once again, this goes back to Grudem’s critique of an overemphasis of passive sanctification that leads a spiritual listlessness. While Culver may be right by saying that it is incorrect to say the “sixteenth-century Protestants discovered justification by faith but had no interest in sanctifications,”¹⁴⁹ but the main point here is not that the Protestants were not interested per se, rather, it was a matter of emphasis that led to this tragic downfall. The fact that Puritanism rose as an *ascetic* movement ought to convince us that there was a lack of spiritual discipline or good works in the lives of the common layman at that time. Even when Culver tries to justify Luther’s position on sanctification through

¹⁴⁵ Lovelace, *Evangelical Spirituality*, 218

¹⁴⁶ Lovelace, *Evangelical Spirituality*, 217

¹⁴⁷ Lovelace, *Evangelical Spirituality*, 218

¹⁴⁸ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 332

¹⁴⁹ Robert D Culver, *Systematic Theology* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Pub, 2005), 756

a quotation from *Large Catechism III*, it still tells too much of a passive sanctification, rather than an active one:

Sanctification embraces all acts of divine grace by which the Holy Spirit turns a person from sin to holiness which...in its wider sense includes every good work of God by which he separates a sinner from the lost and condemned world...bestowal of faith, justification, sanctification in its narrow sense, or the inward change in man by which he becomes holy, his preservation in faith to the end, and his final glorification on the day of judgment.^{150*}

It is clear from this quote above that it is not wrong to say that there is indeed an overemphasis of the role of God in our sanctification which soft-pedals our responsibility in an active sanctification.

3.1.2. *Sanctification as Imitation.* This idea of an active sanctification is also one that is shared by Genderen and Velema. While they do fully accept that sanctification comes from God, they did not shy away from saying that “sanctification means the call to resist sin and to live in obedience to God’s commandments and in love toward him through the power of the Spirit.”¹⁵¹ They made their point even clearer when they say that “we are indeed sanctified in Christ and must at the same time pursue sanctification.”¹⁵²

Sanctification, according to them, has both concrete pattern and content. The main pattern according to them is the pattern of imitation. Basing their argument on 1 Peter 2:21-24, Genderen and Velema brings up the writings of Peter who tells the church to follow Christ’s footsteps. This means that in its pattern, sanctification is an imitation of Jesus Christ in what he has demonstrated for us. Culver supports this idea but adds that this pattern includes also an imitation of not just Christ but of God in both the Old and

¹⁵⁰ Culver, *Systematic Theology*, 756

¹⁵¹ J van Genderen and W H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics*, english-language ed. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Pub., 2008), 646

¹⁵² Genderen and Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics*, 648

New Testament.¹⁵³ “The imitation can never mean superficial imitation of him and seeking to resemble him, just to look good. It is not a matter of moralism or external piety to be practiced to gain people’s respect. Instead, “imitation is itself part of salvation, just as sanctification is part of the doctrine of salvation.” Imitation is therefore a moving in the direction of Christ, “in whose immediate presence we remain by following him.”¹⁵⁴ In its content, Genderen and Velema points out that imitation means “that Christ is manifested in us” especially in the sense of being crucified and raised with him. In other words, imitation in its content brings us to mortification and vivification; exactly what Calvin said when he speaks of sanctification.¹⁵⁵ At this point it should be clear that sanctification is not merely a passively experienced process. There is a need for imitation, an active following of Christ’s example that comes from the individual person.

3.1.3. *Sanctification as a Discipline.* So then, if we agree on the importance and need of being active and imitating, how should we realistically approach this? McGrath argues that, in line with the spirituality of the Reformers, an active sanctification must be realized in discipline. While discipline has “often been misunderstood as a degeneration into some kind of legalism,” he stresses that “no one is suggesting for one moment you can get into the kingdom of God by observing a set of rules or regulations!”¹⁵⁶ For him, contradictory to being a “mindless observance of rules,” discipline is firstly a self-recognition in how far we have fallen from the will of God and thus must be responded by “bringing your life into line with his will.” Discipline is about commitment; about

¹⁵³ Robert Duncan Culver, *Systematic Theology*, 759

¹⁵⁴ Genderen and Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics*, 658-659

¹⁵⁵ Genderen and Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics*, 660

¹⁵⁶ Alister E. McGrath, *Spirituality in an Age of Change: Rediscovering the Spirit of the Reformers* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 185

taking seriously all aspects of our lives as truly belonging to God and therefore strategizing it for this cause; it is more importantly, “our *contribution* to the God-given and grace-driven process of fitting us and enabling us to be the people of God in the world.” Our life as children of God is pushed not by commands but by love and it is love that keeps pushing us into the lifelong process of sanctification. Once again, McGrath says that “discipline is our contribution, aided by God, to that process.” This brings me to my point that sanctification -in its progressive sense- is and requires discipline. In its relation to sanctification, we can even agree with McGrath who says that discipline “is thus the means by which the process of conforming to Christ may be facilitated...a form of spiritual obedience, a fruit of faith that leads to new qualities of faith and commitment to God.”¹⁵⁷ On this note, Nouwen says that “a spiritual life without discipline is impossible.”¹⁵⁸ Nouwen says that “the word *discipleship* and the word *discipline* are the same word...if we want to be disciples of Jesus, we have to live a disciplined life.”¹⁵⁹ It is important to make clear at this point that discipline does not merely mean the ability for self-control but as Nouwen explains

In the spiritual life, the word discipline means “the effort to create some space in which God can act.” Discipline means to prevent everything in our life from being filled up. Discipline means that somewhere we’re not occupied, and certainly not preoccupied... Discipline helps us to follow the voice of the Spirit, who wants to lead us to new places.”¹⁶⁰

Nouwen’s idea of discipline not only helps to prevent us from treating discipline as a legalistic-merit but it enhances the point that in discipline we are not merely trying to

¹⁵⁷ McGrath, *Spirituality in an Age of Change*, 186

¹⁵⁸ Nouwen, *Making all Things New*, <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/188381-making-all-things-new>

¹⁵⁹ Nouwen, *A Spirituality of Living*, 15

¹⁶⁰ Nouwen, *A Spirituality of Living*, 16

stop ourselves from deteriorating, rather, there is an active seeking and changing involves within it.

3.1.4. *Sanctification as discipline of imitation.* The integral role of discipline in sanctification is also brought up by Willard who says that “we are to take this task with the utmost seriousness and in the most literal senses, since no one, not even God himself, will do it for us.” To be clear, Willard is not denying the sovereign role and work of God in our sanctification, rather, he does not want to lighten our responsibility in taking up the task of discipline. Willard argues that if we want to truly benefit from spiritual disciplines, it can only come if we are willing to do it willingly and responsibly.¹⁶¹ There is no room for a passive sanctification given here. To point out that spiritual discipline involves imitation (as I have pointed out above), Willard turns to Paul whose “life we can examine that would give us insight into the disciplined life.” Borrowing Paul’s language, Willard says that “spiritual disciplines are in a real sense an “exercise unto godliness (1 Tim.4:7).”¹⁶² However, Paul seems to be an enigma to many modern Christians. Willard argues that to many modern readers, Paul has become this dogmatic system builder and that such a hermeneutic has robbed all talk of following Jesus or Paul of its practical meaning; “it does not express an actual strategy of living our day-to-day existence but at most concerns only certain special moments or articles of faith.” Rather than following their examples, we merely talk about them as an example. The only way to overcome this, according to Willard, is “by entering into the actual practices of Jesus and Paul as something essential to our life in Christ.”¹⁶³ This approach of imitation as a discipline is also echoed by Warfield who writes “the holiest of personal life can scarcely afford to

¹⁶¹ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 93-94

¹⁶² Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 95

¹⁶³ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 96-97

dispense with stated forms of devotion, and that the regular public worships of the church, for all its local imperfection and dullness, is a divine provision for sustaining the individual soul.”¹⁶⁴ While Warfield was not directly speaking directly of solitude as one of the means of grace, the point here is that he stresses the importance of actively imitating Christ in his outwards discipline as a means of spiritual growth. Going back to Paul’s usage of “exercise unto godliness,” Willard points out that the words Paul used was an “intensely practical one.” The original word “exercise” in Greek is *gumnaze*, “from which we get our term “gymnasium”. The reason why Willard finds it necessary to point all these out is simple: he wants to strengthen the fact that spiritual discipline involves a bodily training; a real following and imitation (in the true sense of the word) of Christ and Paul himself as our example.¹⁶⁵ The early church understood that without imitating Christ in the disciplines that he did, they would not experience spiritual growth as well.

In sum to these discussions, I have first pointed out that sanctification involves the role and responsibility of man. Attached to the concept of soteriology, we can easily deny the role of man in sanctification. However, when we understand it as a progressive sanctification- our continual becoming unto Jesus Christ- we must include the integral role man has to play for himself. This is what both Grudem and Frame considers as an “active sanctification”. In an active sanctification, its pattern and content can generally be considered as an imitation of Christ in his disciplines. This imitation is not done because we are forced but because of our own willingness to know Christ and to be like Christ. It

¹⁶⁴ Fred G. Zaspel, *The Theology of B.B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010), 502

¹⁶⁵ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 98-99

is never moved by compulsion but, rather, by love. Finally, this imitation is truly and visibly realized in our discipline, to be exact, spiritual disciplines. While an imitation of Christ does not mean that we have to be Christ like-for like, it does not mean we can just neglect all the means of discipline that both Jesus and Paul had done throughout their lifetime on earth. If our Lord Jesus himself went into solitude, prayed and fasted, does this not mean that we have to do the same as well? This fact is strengthened by Paul who calls on the church to “exercise unto godliness” in a very intense and practical sense. When Paul calls on the church to follow his example (1 Cor.11:1), he was not merely being a moral compass, rather, it includes all the spiritual disciplines that he had been doing.

When we look at Calvin, his concept of sanctification goes very much hand in hand with what has been written above. While Calvin clearly purports the idea of justification by faith alone, he adds that “nevertheless actual holiness of life, as to speak, is not separated from free imputation of righteousness.”¹⁶⁶ Here, Calvin stresses that an actual and visible holiness must be present if a person has been truly justified. This actual holiness is definitely “born of faith” but it must not stop us from “betaking himself from the errors of his past life into the right way, and *applying himself his whole effort to the practice of holiness.*”¹⁶⁷ Thus, it is clear that in Calvin, sanctification does not stop in a passive role. Even though sanctification wholly comes from God, it still requires our active role in it to progress ourselves. Calvin continues by saying that an active sanctification is not a commandment; we do not actively pursue sanctification out of fear or commandments. Instead, “a man cannot apply himself seriously into repentance without knowing himself

¹⁶⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.1

¹⁶⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.1

to belong to God. but no one is truly persuaded that he belongs to God unless he has first recognized the grace of God.” what Calvin is essentially saying is that true sanctification only, and most definitely, happens in the lives of believers. True Christians do not pursue sanctification out of fear towards a Judge but of love towards a gracious Father.¹⁶⁸

3.1.5. Private Sanctification. The fact that Christians grow together as a unit (or as a church) is very evident in Calvin. Calvin says that it is within the church that the children of God are nourished by the Church’s “help and ministry as long as they are infants and children but also that they may be guided by her motherly care until they mature and at last reach the goal of faith.”¹⁶⁹ Calvin even goes to say that the visible church is the “mother” whom “gives us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keeps us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels.”¹⁷⁰ The important point here is that when it comes to sanctification, it looks like Calvin promotes a communal sanctification, rather than an individual one. Reformed tradition, in general, is also very wary of a personal, subjective experience with God. The question, then, begs, “Is there space for a personal sanctification in Calvin?” This question will answer whether or not in his Spirituality, Calvin has room to accommodate private disciplines such as solitude. While Calvin does not directly address this problem, there are hints spread across his writings for such a case. When it comes to God’s providence, Calvin points out that the Bible “testify that God’s singular providence watches over the welfare of believers.” Calvin rejects those who “imagine a universal providence of God,

¹⁶⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.1

¹⁶⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.i.1

¹⁷⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.i.4

which does not stoop to the special care of any particular creature.”¹⁷¹ What this brings out is the underlying principle that God does bless each Christian privately. This blessings, I would argue, includes the blessings and promise of sanctification. While we are all called into the mother church to grow together, it does not deny the option of a personal growth in Christ alone.

The second place we can turn to when it comes to a personal sanctification is in Calvin’s concept of prayer. In the background of the dangers of public prayer, Calvin notes that the “essentials of prayer are set in the mind and heart;” it is a private discipline. Directing us to the teaching of Jesus, Calvin says that when it comes to prayer, Christ “bade us into our bedroom and there, with door closed, pray to our Father in secret.” From the teaching in Matthew 6:6, Calvin understands Jesus to teach us to

“Seek a retreat that would help us to descend into our heart with our while thought and enter deeply within. He promises that God, whose temples our bodies ought to be, will be near to us in the affections of our hearts.”¹⁷²

Thus, as a discipline, Calvin understands prayer to be something secret, which is “both principally lodged in the heart and requires a tranquility far from all our teeming cares.”

Even Jesus himself, when he wants to pray, “habitually withdrew to a quiet spot far away from the tumult of men.” Again, while Calvin is not speaking directly regarding a private sanctification, at the very least, he applies this principle when it comes to the discipline of prayer. If we can apply this principle to prayer, why cannot we apply this also to other disciplines of sanctification? In this case, Calvin’s discussions on private prayer establish the ground that there can be room for a private sanctification in his spirituality.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.xvii.6

¹⁷² Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xx.29

¹⁷³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xx.29

To sum, the reason why the above discussions were necessary is to show that private spiritual disciplines can be included in the discussions of sanctification. The fact that spiritual disciplines serve as means to progress sanctification ought to be clear at this point. These discussions are particularly helpful in this thesis which tries to compare the value of solitude as a discipline and an imitation of Christ with Calvin's concept of sanctification. Furthermore, when we see how Calvin lays out his paradigms of sanctification in the *Institutes*, it is obvious that an active sanctification, discipline and imitation play important roles in his spirituality. It is only now, when these are all settled that I will move onto the details of Calvin's sanctification as I have divided above.

3.2. *Mortification.* The bodily expression of sanctification has been divided into two parts by Calvin: mortification and vivification. This part of the thesis would first focus solely on the former. Calvin defines mortification as such:

“A sorrow of soul and dread conceived from the recognition of sin and the awareness of divine judgment. For when anyone has been brought into a true knowledge of sin, he then begins to hate and abhor sin; then he is heartily displeased with himself, he confesses himself miserable and lost and wishes to be another man.”¹⁷⁴

To break it down, mortification in Calvin involves recognition of sin, a hatred of sin and a desire to change. It is important to take note here that Calvin does not just treat mortification as an innate thing. It starts, clearly, with the inclination of the heart. The heart must hate sin and it must feel sorrow from this recognition. However, mortification is not just passion. In other places, we see that Calvin would add to mortification, “of the flesh and of the old man.”¹⁷⁵ This shows that mortification involves the *whole* man. Using the expression “producing fruits worthy of repentance (Lk.3:8; Acts 26:20)” Calvin says that this verse

¹⁷⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.3

¹⁷⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.5

tends the idea of “leading a life that demonstrates and testifies in all its actions repentance of this sort;”¹⁷⁶ The outward and tangible changes in the life of a man is emphasized here. Along with this hatred of sin, it is natural that mortification is not, for Calvin, merely a relaxing walk after a change of direction; it requires tremendous effort and intensity. Calvin, commenting on the prophets, says that “when they (the prophets) recall man from evil, they demand the destruction of the whole flesh, which is full of evil and of perversity.”¹⁷⁷

3.2.1. Order of Mortification. For Calvin, mortification is a first step of a cycle; it is something that we have to return over and over again. The access to the knowledge of Christ must, for him, starts from the “hatred of sin (mortification), which is the beginning of repentance.” Christ reveals not to those who are full and righteous but towards the “poor and afflicted sinners, who groan, toil, are heavy-laden, hunger, thirst, and pine away with sorrow and misery (Is.61:1-3).”¹⁷⁸ Calvin argues that since “all emotions of the flesh are hostility against God (Rom.8:7),” there shall be no renewal unless our perverse and evil self is killed. Thus, our first step before we can turn to Christ is to “deny own nature.”¹⁷⁹ From an orderly perspective, what Calvin is essentially saying is that we cannot have vivification if we do not firstly go through mortification. This means that all notions of becoming like Christ are invalid if one does not first and foremost abandon oneself. In other words, to be filled with Christ requires firstly an emptying of self; “unless self-denial precedes, we shall never approach what is right.” If Calvin does not make a clear distinction of order between sanctification and justification, between

¹⁷⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.5

¹⁷⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.8

¹⁷⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.20

¹⁷⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.8

mortification and sanctification, he does. Yet, once again, it is crucial to note that Calvin is not teaching the idea of sinless perfection in the sense that God could only fill us up only after we are spotless. For Calvin, man cannot be sinless in this life; this is why we have to always return to mortification again. Rather, Calvin wants to stress that if we do not deny ourselves, there will never be vivification.

3.2.2. Mortification as lifelong. Calvin argues that the work of sanctification is a lifelong process; “the life of a Christian man is a continual effort and exercise in the mortification of the flesh.”¹⁸⁰ This is so because sin was something unavoidable in the life of a Christian; “until they are divested of mortal bodies, there is always sin.”¹⁸¹ In other places, he would say that “so long as we dwell in the prison of our body we must continually contend with the defects of our corrupt nature.”¹⁸² The question, then, begs “has not Christ abolished our sins on the cross? Was not the work of Christ complete?” The work of Christ in abolishing sin, according to Calvin, refers to the “guilt of sin, rather than to the very substance of sin.”¹⁸³ In other words, for Calvin, justification deals with our status before God while sanctification, our real changing and becoming like Christ. The reason why Calvin firmly believes that the law of sin still remains in the lives of believers is because we are fallen by nature. In flesh, we will never be free from the substance of sin itself and this sinful substance affects all of our faculties, actions and desires.¹⁸⁴ By nature, the “flesh inordinately desires against the Spirit.”¹⁸⁵ For Calvin, there is no escaping this fact. This is why he says we have to strive in order that sin “be

¹⁸⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.20

¹⁸¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.9

¹⁸² Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.20

¹⁸³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.9

¹⁸⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.12

¹⁸⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.13

deprived of mastery. Let not what it bids be done.”¹⁸⁶ In this sense, mortification is an admission of man being flesh in the temporal world; because there will always be sin in us, there must always be mortification. The hope and goal of mortification is not that we can become unblemished and spotless; rather, that sin does not take major control of our lives. The fight is not merely a one-off but rather lifelong.

Calvin then speaks of an inner and outer repentance. Even though Calvin does not specifically distinguish parts of inner and outer repentance to either mortification or vivification, the overall tone of his discussion in this part seems like it is for the former rather than the latter. It is for the sake of easing this thesis that I have categorized Calvin’s discussion of an inner and outer repentance into the part of mortification. For an inner repentance, Calvin says that there must be a willingness to live by God’s law. Here, Calvin says that the Spirit “often recalls us now to the individual precepts of the law, now to the duties of the Second Table.” The fruit of this is, namely, piety towards God, love towards men and holy life.¹⁸⁷ Of course, the matter of the law is, as Calvin himself points out, firstly a matter of the heart. The inner obedience towards the law begins first with the rendering of the hearts (Jl.2:13) and the Bible has clearly witnessed that the Spirit firsts condemns “uncleanness in the very wellspring of the heart, and then proceeded to the external evidence.” Calvin concludes in this part that “men must cleanse away secret filth in order that an altar may be erected to God in the heart itself.”¹⁸⁸ In other words, an inner mortification must happen before our outer repentance can happen. For Calvin, an outer cleansing must have its origin from the heart. However, this does not mean outward

¹⁸⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, III,iii,13

¹⁸⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii,16

¹⁸⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III,iii, 16

exercises are rendered deceiving and superfluous. Calvin claims that “there are certain outward exercises that we use privately as remedies, either to humble ourselves or to tame our flesh, but publicly as testimony of repentance.” Having said this, Calvin feels that the benefits of these bodily disciplines have been overshadowed with the vices that come with it. Calvin thinks that Christians have been “depending too much upon such exercises” and that it has gone beyond measure in two aspects. First, he argues that bodily disciplines has been commended too much in its face value that it “somewhat obscured what ought to have been of far greater importance.” Second, the harshness of these practices was deemed too overbearing by Calvin, saying that they were “more rigid than the gentleness of the church would call for.”¹⁸⁹ After downplaying the importance of bodily exercises, Calvin continues to warn his readers that the outward practice of penance is never the chief end. It is utterly important that a bodily expression of repentance do build up from a true mourning and rending of heart. In point seventeen of chapter three, not only does Calvin start off his discussions with this emphasis, but he also ends it the same way.¹⁹⁰ At this point, I would like to comment that while it is clear Calvin does not negate the need of bodily discipline or expressions in repentance, it seems like the outward practice of penance has fallen largely behind in pecking order in comparison to the inner repentance. It almost feels like the outward repentance is scrutinized with suspicious eyes. It is almost not incorrect to say, just by these passages alone that mortification in Calvin is a mortification of the heart. If we can agree to this, it is no wonder that in Reformed traditions, outward disciplines have been so much pushed towards the backstage.

¹⁸⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III,iii,16

¹⁹⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.17

Things does not seem to get better for an outward repentance as Calvin continues to criticized the way “repentance” was understood at that time when applied to external profession. Calvin argues that what most understood as repentance was not a turning to God, but “a confession of guilt, together with a beseeching of God to avert punishment and accusation. Thus, to “repent in sackcloth and ashes (Mat.11:21; Lk.10:13) is only to evidence our self-displeasure when God is angry with us.” In this sense, bodily mortification is merely a public anticipation of God’s judgment and that by itself, it is meaningless unless coupled with a true internal repentance. However, in all these, there is a silver lining. Calvin stresses that when it comes to biblical repentance, it “means by it a kind of passage and resurrection from death to life.” What Calvin is trying to point out here is that a biblical repentance is a true conversion; the flesh must be killed, and the new person by the Spirit must live. Calvin says that we have to be careful with the idea of repentance without change, “as if mortification of the flesh no longer concerned us.” Going back once more to the fact of natural corruption, Calvin says that this do not “allow us to slacken our concern for mortification.” Being justified, as Calvin points out, “does not do away with the ordinary repentance to which corruption of nature compels us to give attention throughout our lives.”¹⁹¹

3.3. Vivification. After we have partaken in Christ’s death (mortification), then we can have a share in his resurrection (sanctification). This resurrection, according to Calvin, means that “we are raised up into newness of life to correspond with the righteousness of God.”¹⁹² Vivification, thus, is simply understood to do good (Ps.36:8; 3; 27). In Isaiah’s words, it is learning to “do good; seek judgment; help the oppressed (Is.1:16-17).” In

¹⁹¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.18

¹⁹² Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.9

other words, vivification is a renewal of the Spirit that leads us to “righteousness, judgment, and mercy.” In book three, chapter three, point nine, Calvin crucially writes that “repentance as regeneration, whose sole end is to restore in us the image of God that had been disfigured and all but obliterated through Adam’s transgression.”¹⁹³ This “regeneration”, I would argue, is synonymous with what Calvin say is vivification. In biblical words, vivification of the Spirit is “being changed into his likeness from glory to glory (2 Cor.3:18);” “renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man which is after God created in righteousness and holiness of truth (Eph.4:23);” and “putting on the new man...who is being renewed into the knowledge and the image of him who created him (Col.3:10).”¹⁹⁴ In other places, Calvin would say that sanctification “is to manifest in the life of believers a harmony and agreement between God’s righteousness and their obedience, and thus to confirm the adoption that they have received as sons (Gal.4:5; 2 Pet.1:10).”¹⁹⁵ Within this understanding, we can then say that vivification is a restoration towards becoming a son in the image of Christ.

Once again, while we may misunderstand Calvin of purporting the idea of passive sanctification when he says that we are “restored by this regeneration through the benefit of Christ into the righteousness of God,” Calvin certainly does not stop there. There is no wrong- in fact, rightly so- in attributing sanctification wholly as a work of God but it is important once again to remind ourselves here that an active sanctification does not deny a passive one and vice versa. Now, this is why Calvin carefully warns his readers in the next line that “this is not to deny a place for growth.” The emphasis on the active role of

¹⁹³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.9

¹⁹⁴ Calvin. *Institutes*, III.iii.9

¹⁹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.vi. 1

man is still highly emphasized when Calvin, in the same paragraph, says that “the closer any man comes to the likeness of God, the more the image of God shines in him, in order that believers may reach this goal, God assigns to them a race of repentance, which they are to run throughout their lives.”¹⁹⁶ I would argue that Calvin’s image of race tends strongly to the idea of an active sanctification.

3.3.1. Strength of Vivification. I have spoken above how there is no vivification without mortification. However, the strength to mortify sins does not come merely just by abhorring sin. Calvin says that “no one ever hates sin unless he has previously been seized with a love of righteousness.”¹⁹⁷ From this we can infer that to leave sin behind, we cannot just avoid it but that we need to chase a higher object. It is imperative that in our sanctification, we are not merely going beyond reproach. In this regard, Calvin says that

“I think he has profited greatly who has learned to be very much displeased with himself, not so as to stick fast in this mire and progress no farther, but rather to hasten to God and yearn for him in order that, having been engrafted into the life and death of Christ, he may give attention to continual repentance.”¹⁹⁸

Thus, in Calvin, vivification ought to actually bring us “into obedience to God’s righteousness”.¹⁹⁹ While vivification proceeds from mortification, it also lends strength and directions to it. Without vivification, mortification would just be a running from one sin to another since we have no Holy One to look forward to. Calvin makes this point clearer when he says that even in our zeal for righteousness we are still prone to “wander

¹⁹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.8

¹⁹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.20

¹⁹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii. 20

¹⁹⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.14

about.”²⁰⁰ Having the passion does not mean we have the right object. Calvin says that philosophers that “particularly to exhort us to virtue, announce merely that we should live in nature. But Scripture draws its exhortation from the true fountain.”²⁰¹ Vivification, then, has its direction in Christ who “has been set before us as an example, whose pattern we ought to express in our life.”²⁰²

3.4. Denial of Self. Of sanctification, the Westminster Confession of Faith says in its second point that “there abiding still some remnants of corruption in every part; whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.” We have also seen above how Calvin himself agrees to this when he speaks of our natural corruption in the flesh. Yet, there arises a tension when Calvin starts to write about the sum of the Christian life. For Calvin, our duty as Christians is “to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to Him- this is your true and proper worship (Rom.12:1).” In Christ, “we are consecrated and dedicated to God in order that we may think, speak, meditate, and do, nothing except to his glory.” We are no longer our own but the Lord’s (1 Cor.6:19)! However, how can we do give glory to God when there is still sin as long as we are in flesh? How do we love for him when there is always an irreconcilable war between our flesh and Spirit? The answer for Calvin is to deny ourselves and turn wholly to the bidding of God’s Spirit.²⁰³

Calvin says that we must “seek not the things that are ours but those which are Lord’s and will serve to advance his glory.” By “ours” he means pride, arrogance ostentation,

²⁰⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.vi.2

²⁰¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III. vi.3

²⁰² Calvin, *Institutes*, III.vi. 3

²⁰³ Calvin. III.vii.1

lasciviousness, self-love, glory seeking and etc.²⁰⁴ To this, he adds ungodliness (of which he understands not only as superstitions “but also include whatever contend against the earnest fear of God”) and worldly lust (which is the passion of the flesh).²⁰⁵ Without self-denial, not only are we unable to do any good, the “good” works that we actually do are merely done “for the sake of praise.”²⁰⁶ So great is the power and wickedness of our “self” that for Calvin, it is not enough just to casually deny ourselves. He is convinced that “Christian must surely be so disposed and minded that he feels within himself it is with God he has to deal throughout his life.” This is why point two in this chapter is aptly named “self-denial through *devotion* to God”. For Calvin, there is no other remedy, if we truly want to “seek after those things which the Lord requires of you” “apart from denying yourself and giving up concern for yourself.”²⁰⁷ The will to devote ourselves to God by the killing of our flesh is of utmost importance to Calvin because he knows that “nothing is more difficult than, having bidden farewell to the reason of the flesh and having bridled our desires...to devote ourselves to God and our brethren, and to meditate amid earth’s filth, upon the life of the angels.” A half-hearted self-denial will not do in this task of mortifying the flesh. There must be real effort in killing off our flesh and clinging unto Christ.²⁰⁸

3.4.1. Denial of Self to Men. Calvin then begins to list the benefits or relationship that self-denial has with regards to man and God. First, towards man, Calvin says that self-denial “gives us the right attitude to our fellow men.” By this he explains that all of us are

²⁰⁴ Calvin.III.vii.1

²⁰⁵ Calvin. III.vii.3

²⁰⁶ Calvin.III.vii.2

²⁰⁷ Calvin. III.vii.2

²⁰⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.vii.3

naturally inclined for self-love; “there is no one who does not cherish within himself some opinion of his own pre-eminence.” Our natural self-desire is to tower above our peers and “loftily and savagely abuses every mortal man, or at least looks down upon him as an inferior.” In other words, without self-denial, our communion with others can never be a friendship but a rivalry. Once again, the only remedy to this problem is “to tear out from our inward parts this mostly deadly pestilence of love of strife and love of self.” The mortification of this self-love is the foundation of a true brotherly communion. When we deny ourselves with regards to our relationship with others, this means humility on our behalf. Calvin calls for Christians to “unremittingly examining our faults, call ourselves back to humility.” In doing so, there is no time to puff up but much to be cast down. It is only when we deny ourselves, we can think others as stronger than us (Phi.2:3) and gain the ability to “esteem and regard whatever gifts of God we see in other men that we may honor those men in whom they reside.” Simply put, Calvin argues that self-denial will lead us to have “a heart imbued with lowliness and with reverence for others.”²⁰⁹

To prevent us from ceasing to love our neighbors, Calvin adds that in its motivation, self-denial means that we do not deem others in accordance to our own eyes. We do not love or hate someone merely on our own experience and judgment. While the Bible commands us to do good unceasingly, Calvin admits that “people are most unworthy if they be judged by their own merit.” People are biased, disappoint, ungrateful and some may even return good with evil. However, in our self-denial, we are to see that these people are the image of God. Even though a person may be contemptible and worthless, Calvin points out that “the Lord shows him to be one whom he has designed to give the

²⁰⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.vii.4

beauty of his image.” Self-denial, in this regard, is a denying our own judgment towards our neighbor and to look at them on the basis of our relationship in Christ.²¹⁰ For this to take place, we must “fulfill the duties of love.” For Calvin, the inner motivation for self-denial is none other than love. Those who truly want to love thy neighbor must begin with love. Calvin says that Christians must

“put themselves in the place of him whom they see in need of their assistance, and pity his ill fortune as if they themselves experienced and bore it, so that they may be impelled by a feeling of mercy and humanness to go to his aid just as to their own.”

Essentially, then, self-denial is humbling of oneself to those who are in need, opening our hearts to embrace their pain as though they are ours and then helping them just as you would help yourself. It is only by this kind of denial that we can prevent ourselves from developing a “hero-mentality” as if now we are a debtor to our neighbor.²¹¹

3.4.2. Denial of self to God. Calvin considers the relationship between self-denial to God as the chief part of his discussions. Once again, our self-denial to God is our devotion to his will. This means that our own personal will must be killed. Calvin points out that by nature, we covet wealth and honors so that we may be treated with magnificence. On the other hand, we are so uneasy and uncomfortable towards “poverty, lowly birth, and humble condition.” It is in this situation that self-denial comes in. Calvin exhorts Christians to “neither desire nor hope for, nor contemplate, any other way of prospering than by the Lord’s blessing.” Self-denial in this regard is to deny the worldly blessings that will bring us to destruction and seek the blessings of God which even though might seem lowly, brings true happiness from God.²¹² In addition, self-denial in this sense is to

²¹⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.vii.6

²¹¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.vii.7

²¹² Calvin, *Institutes*, III.vii.8

believe that “every means toward a prosperous and desirable outcome rests upon the blessing of God alone.” This means that God will only bring true blessings to the endeavors that glorify him. No help from God will come to those who wish to try to achieve the goal through perverse means. Self-denial here means a distrusting of superficial success and trusting only in God’s blessings; and when things do go well, we are able to “give God the credit as its Author.”²¹³

3.5. *Carrying the Cross.* If sanctification, as argued above, is understood as an imitation of Christ, this would also mean an imitation to carry the cross just like he does. For Calvin, a cross-bearing life is an unavoidable life for a Christian. Just as Christ himself was tried with a perpetual cross his whole life, God’s children “ought to prepare themselves for a hard, toilsome, and unquiet life, crammed with very many and various kinds of evil.” However, this cross-bearing is not all negative. Calvin reminds us that if we share in Christ’s suffering, “we at the same time grasp the power of his resurrection.” Calvin argues that “the more we are afflicted with adversities, the more surely our fellowship with Christ is confirmed;” thus, the sufferings of the cross help us “in promoting our salvation.”²¹⁴ With how the cross can help promote our salvation, Calvin first says that the cross leads us to trust in God’s power. Calvin argues that we are too easily deceived by our own virtues. In our arrogance, we are often made to trust in our own strength. However, when sufferings come and we are crushed, we learn humility and to call out to God. The testing of the cross here then acts like an alarm for us not to trust in our own strength but God.²¹⁵ After we have humbled ourselves, Calvin continues by

²¹³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.vii.10

²¹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.viii.1

²¹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.viii.2

saying that, now, the cross “permits us to experience God’s faithfulness and hope for the future.” With the former, God promises to be with believers in tribulation; the Scripture constantly attests how God was always with his people during times of difficulties. With the latter, God’s victory in the Scripture and in the cross itself ought to produce hope within us. Additionally, our hope lies in the fact the cross itself does not end in failure but in victory.²¹⁶

Unlike the world who thinks that suffering is a curse, Calvin says that suffering, especially for righteousness sake, is a “singular comfort.” In other words, it is an honor to suffer for Christ. Furthermore, the Scripture witnesses that all of our afflictions for the sake of righteousness turn into happiness for us.²¹⁷ Nonetheless, Calvin still concedes the honor and hope for a better outcome cannot hide the fact that these afflictions still do not “remove all feeling of bitterness and pain;” yet it does not have to. The response for Christians during afflictions is not to be Stoic,²¹⁸ rather, to accept the pain of these afflictions while resisting all of it in the power of God. Calvin concludes that a Christian’s “cheerful shines if, wounded by sorrow and grief, he rests in spiritual consolation of God.” Not deflecting the pain that the cross brings, Calvin wants Christians to still find comfort in Christ because Christ is with them.²¹⁹

3.5.1. The Cross as Training. The way the cross can train us is through a multipronged approach. First, the affliction of the cross trains us to be patient. Second, the cross teaches us to obey because without it, we would all live according to our own liking and “would

²¹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.viii.3

²¹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.viii.7

²¹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.viii.9

²¹⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.viii.8

not know what it is to follow God.”²²⁰ Third, the cross teaches us to always be vigilant; Calvin calls the cross a “medicine” in this regard. For Calvin, afflictions in this life restrain us from jumping into our indulgence. More often than not, God’s gracious abundance towards us makes us “flattened and flabby,” rather than direct us to his love and grace. In such abundance, we tend to indulge in bodily sins rather than avoid them. Therefore, the cross and its afflictions restrains us from being wild and acts like a remedy towards our condition.²²¹ In these functions of the cross, rather than merely treating it as training, Calvin directs us to treat it as a fatherly chastisement. God’s affliction towards us, as Calvin argues, is to “free us from the condemnation of the world (1 Cor.11:32).” “In the very harshness of tribulations,” Calvin says, “we must recognize the kindness and generosity of our Father toward us, since he does not cease to promote our salvation.”²²²

3.6. *Meditation of future life.* The heart of discussions here is the contempt of this world. Christ says that his kingdom does not belong in this world (Jn.18:36) and if sanctification is to grow unto the likeness of Christ, it means that the movement of our growth should be upwards and not horizontally. By this it means that the direction of our sanctification ought to go towards Christ who is in his heavenly kingdom and not in the world. It is no wonder Calvin puts so closely the “meditation on the future life” to the matter of sanctification. In connection to the discipline of the cross, Calvin calls all Christians “to accustom ourselves to contempt for the present life and to be aroused thereby to meditate upon the future life. Calvin argues that we are by nature inclined to a “brutish love of this

²²⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.viii.4

²²¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.viii.5

²²² Calvin, *Institutes*, III.viii.6

world,” and to this cause, God often counter this evil by “continual proof of its miseries.” Here Calvin clearly states that the affliction that comes by bearing the cross can be viewed positively in the sense that we will, in turn, not put our trust and hope in this world.²²³ Such discipline is important as Calvin does not believe in a middle ground between our attitude towards this world; “either the world must become worthless to use or hold us bound by intemperate love of it.” while we may say that we belong in heaven, Calvin points out that more often than not, it is just talk. The true meditation of future life and its practical realizations are badly neglected. Therefore, for Calvin, it is our duty to listen to God and to shake “us out of our sluggishness, that holding the world in contempt, we may strive with all our heart to meditate upon the life to come.”²²⁴

3.6.1. Grateful for the present life. It is important to take note that within this part, Calvin does not write the practical application of “striving with all our heart to meditate.” Instead, Calvin immediately tries to balance the need to contempt this world without being ungrateful towards this earthly life. For Calvin, this life “is still rightly to be counted among those blessings of God which are not to be spurned” since in this life “God wills by lesser proofs to show himself to be our Father.” Thus, for believers, this “ought to be a testimony, wholly destined, as it is, to promote their salvation.” Another reason to be grateful for this life is that we are able, in this life, to “taste the sweetness of the divine generosity in order to whet our hope and desire to seek after the full revelation this. Simply put, Calvin considers this life as a foretaste of the eternal goodness which we will receive next time.²²⁵ Calvin then warns against excessive contempt towards this

²²³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ix.1

²²⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ix.2

²²⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ix.3

world that leads us to a dead end. There is no point to contempt this world if we have not been given a better one. Such an approach will only lead us to despair. While we need to contempt this world, “what is taken away from the perverse love of this life ought to be added to the desire for a better one;” let us understand this life as a misery and meditate “upon the eternal life to come.” We must not be an escapist but that “we may both be burn with the zeal for death and be constant in meditation.”²²⁶

3.6.2. Moderation in Meditations. In a more practical sense, Calvin warns that in our contempt of this world, there is a double danger: mistaken strictness and mistaken laxity. Calvin says that the Scripture teaches us to treat this present life as a pilgrimage and that we have to use “it’s good things in so far as they help rather than hinder our course” towards the Heavenly Kingdom. The first danger lies in the false idea of strictness that only “allowed man to use physical goods in so far as necessity required.” On the other side of scale, there are some who desire to indulge in material enjoyment that they argue that the freedom to use physical goods is restrained only by “every man’s conscience to use as far as seems lawful to him.” This, Calvin does not agree.²²⁷ For the first problem, Calvin has this principle as a solution: “that the use of God’s gift is not wrongly directed when it is referred to that end to which the Author himself created and destined them for us, since he created them for our good, not for our ruin.” For Calvin, God’s creation goes beyond “necessity.” There are things that God creates for beauty and enjoyment and that there is no need to deny their end for the sake of necessity. In naming numerous

²²⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ix.4

²²⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.x.1

examples, Calvin finally concludes “did he not, in short, render many things attractive to us, apart from their necessary use?”²²⁸

For the second danger, Calvin calls us to look at the giver of the gifts which would, in turn, prevent from narrow-mindedness and immoderation. When we look at the giver, we do not just treat the gifts as the blessing itself but it would point us to God and his gracious kindness. This would also prevent us from vainly chasing after greater amounts of worldly things because they are not, in themselves, the goal.²²⁹ Calvin then returns to our meditations of future life which will help us to be not entangled by earthly properties. From this comes two rules: (1) “those who use this world should be so affected as if they did not use it (1 Cor. 7:29-31)” and (2) “to bear poverty peaceably and patiently, as well as to bear abundance moderately. Thus, even though external matters cannot be restricted by a fixed formula, for Calvin, it is still bound by this law: “to indulge oneself as little as possible; but, on the contrary, with unflagging effort to mind insist upon cutting off all show of superfluous wealth.”²³⁰ Lastly, Calvin reminds us that the Scripture tells us that we have to “render account of your stewardship (Lk. 16:2).” We have to be accountable for every single gift that God has entrusted to us. In sum, we must not be affected by the perishing gifts of this world, to live moderately and to realize of our accountability before God.

²²⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.x.2

²²⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.x.3

²³⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.x.4