

This Was John Calvin by Thea B. Van Halsema, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI: 1959, reprinted 1990) (25 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

1. Studied Much

... he drove himself deep into study. For supper he usually ate little or nothing, so that his mind would be clear in the evening. He allowed himself only a few hours of sleep and then lay awake an hour in the morning, reviewing all he had studied the night before, developing his memory, filling it with knowledge, (page 28)

2. Enjoyed Being a Scholar

The life of a scholar enchanted him. To learn more Greek and Latin, to use these languages and to read the literature written in them, to search the old writings, to write about them, to retreat into a book-filled study--what more could one ask, except a little money with which to rent a quiet room, buy a scanty meal of food and wine, and lay up enough ink and paper with which to write one's ideas? (page 31)

3. From His Study Came Calvin's *Institutes*

So appeared the mighty writing which gathered together from God's Word a complete system of doctrine. The *Institutes* began with God and ended with God and found all things in God, the triune God. Calvin wrote clearly, with a lawyer's logic. He wrote eloquently, as an author who expertly wields his words. He wrote brilliantly, with a rare mind that grasped the whole of God's truth as man can know it. He wrote passionately, with a heart devoted entirely to his Lord. And he wrote humbly, because his soul had been delivered from the mire of sin only by the grace of God. No one had so written before. No one has written since in any way approaching the magnificence with which Calvin set forth the "truths of the Christian religion." (page 53)

4. Although Ill Much of Time, the Calvins Were Content

Two sick people--through nine years of marriage they carried the burden of frequent illness without complaining. It was enough of happiness to be content, content with each other, and content with whatever God would choose to send into their life together. The Lord's work could not wait for good health. (page 117)

5. Communion Elements Were Symbolic

But is the body of Christ *with* the bread, in-under-and-above it, as Luther insisted? No, said Calvin, using Scripture, the body and blood of Christ are not physically with the bread and wine. The body and blood of Christ are *spiritually* present. (page 120)

6. Honored Luther

"Remember what a great man Luther is," he wrote, and enumerated his accomplishments. "Even if he would call me a devil," ended Calvin, "I would yet honor him and call him an illustrious servant of God." (page 122)

7. Were Brothers in Christ, But Did Not Agree

Though they never reached the agreement and the unity of which Calvin dreamed, they spoke of each other in words of friendship and esteem. Despite their differences, they considered each other brothers in Christ. We today might learn that lesson from the great reformers. (page 123)

8. The Death of His Son

The Lord has certainly inflicted a severe and bitter wound in the death of our infant son. But He is Himself a father, and knows what is good for His children." Almost twenty years later, the pastor of Geneva replied to an enemy's accusation: "Balduin twits me ... that I have no children," answered Calvin. "God had given me a son. God has taken my little boy ... But I have myriads of sons throughout the Christian world." These would be Calvin's sons, his spiritual sons, following his teaching and example. (page 147)

9. Two Servants of Christ – Farel and Viret

Farel and Viret--these were Calvin's closest friends in the last twenty-eight years of his life. Farel, the older man, the thundering, impetuous, fearless dynamo. Viret, the steady, kindly, learned brother, two years younger than Calvin. "I do not think that there has ever been, in ordinary life, a circle of friends so sincerely bound to each other as we have been in our ministry." So Calvin wrote in his dedication of the commentary on Titus. Calvin dedicated this commentary to "two eminent servants of Christ, William Farel and Peter Viret, dearly beloved brethren and colleagues in the work of our Lord." (page 158)

10. Friends with Heinrich Bullinger

Heinrich Bullinger, the talented successor to Zwingli at Zurich, was a friend of Calvin. In many letters they talked of the church of Christ, of its doctrines and its problems. They spoke firmly and strongly to each other when they did not agree. But the bond of

friendship between them was strong. (page 162)

11. A Faithful Friend for Christ's Sake

Over and over the pastor of Geneva stood beside the persecuted common folk of France in the words of his letters, which were delivered to them in prison. Many a Christian went to the stake strengthened by the words of a man he had never seen a man who had never seen him, either. The refugees who flooded Geneva at the rate of a thousand each year found that Calvin was their best friend. He found homes for them. He persuaded the councils to set up a cloth- manufacturing business to give the refugees work. He established church services in different languages for different refugee groups--English, Italian, Spanish, and Flemish. He was never too busy or too sick to find someone a house, a wife, a servant, a job. Such a friend was the man on Canon Street in Geneva--a famous warrior for Christ, but just as much, a faithful friend for Christ's sake. (page 163)

12. Money Was Nothing to Calvin

"Neither the table at which we eat, nor the bed on which we sleep, is our own... Where, then, do these rumors come from? My acquaintances well know ... that I do not possess a foot of land. I never had money sufficient to purchase an acre." Yet an enemy had spread the rumor that Calvin had paid thousands of dollars for an estate. Even the pope in Rome knew that Calvin was poor and that he wanted to be poor. Pius IV, who followed Paul III, said when Calvin died, "The strength of that heretic came from the fact that money was nothing to him." In the Church of Rome such an attitude was unheard of. (page 164)

13. Neither Rich nor Moneyed

Enemies, searching for something to criticize, made up false evidence to prove that Calvin was rich. In his preface to the commentary on Psalms, Calvin answered them. "If there are any whom, in my lifetime, I cannot persuade that I am neither rich nor moneyed, my death will show it at last." It did. Everything Calvin owned did not amount to more than about two hundred twenty-five dollars. Had he lived longer, he would have been still poorer, since he had refused to accept his last quarter's salary. I have not earned it, he said, so why should I receive it? "Satisfied with my humble condition, I have ever delighted in a life of poverty." In this, too, John Calvin followed the example of his Master. Yet Calvin could be delighted with riches of the kind that money cannot buy. He delighted in the beauty God had put into His world. "The little

singing birds are singing of God, the beasts cry unto Him; the elements are in awe of Him; the mountains echo His name; the waves and fountains cast their glances at Him; grass and flowers laugh out to Him." These are the riches of which Calvin speaks in the preface written for Olivetan's New Testament in 1535. (page 166)

14. Knowledgeable of World Events

But usually Calvin found no time for recreation. Like a captain on a ship in rough seas, he was too busy sailing the ship safely toward port. That ship was the whole Protestant church, not just the church of Geneva. Geneva had problems enough to overload a pastor, but Calvin kept watch over the rest of the world, too. Governments and battles and treaties and political intrigues--he knew the details of them all. They were important to him not in themselves, but because they affected the whole church of Christ, which was always Calvin's chief concern. (page 167)

15. French Christian Persecution

To the kings of France Calvin could not speak that way. Under Francis I and his son Henry II, persecutions continued. In the forty-four years that these two kings ruled, fifty thousand Protestants were killed. Thousands more went into exile. At Meaux, where the beginnings of a French reformation had been strong thirty years earlier, fourteen men were hanged on a circle of gallows in the market square and burned to death. A Paris professor was left six weeks in a narrow pit in which he could neither stand nor lie, and then he was burned. The hardworking, devout Waldensian people, who lived in the mountain valleys of southeast France, were horrible massacred. A cardinal had told the king lies about them. In 1545 three thousand of them--men, women, and children--were killed. Forty women fled into a barn. Soldiers set fire to the straw-filled barn and as the women rushed out, they were speared by the pikes, the bayonet-like weapons of the soldiers. Waldensian villages and peaceful farms were destroyed. Some of the people wandered, starving, in the forests. Others escaped to Switzerland to tell the terrible news. (page 169)

16. Calvin Was Ready to Fight for the Lord's Work

Calvin, the faithful friend and comforter, the humble man to whom money was nothing, the farseeing pastor who watched over Christ's churches everywhere and worked for unity among them ... this man was also an unflinching warrior in establishing the kingdom of his Master and in making his Master's church pure and holy. He was no born fighter, as were Luther and Farel- he hated every minute of battle. But when the work of the Lord demanded fighting, Calvin was ready. (page 171-172)

17. Often Quite Ill and in Pain

Enemies in the streets and councils of Geneva. Trouble everywhere. The pastor of Canon Street fought them while his body called out for rest and peace. Sometimes his

asthma gave way to attacks of pleurisy. He who had always to speak, in pulpit and lecture and council and at home, was forced to get his words out deliberately because breathing was not easy. Often Calvin could not sit or move comfortably because of severe hemorrhoids. Or the knifing pains of kidney and gallstones would torment him. If his hemorrhoids were bearable, he would take to his horse and gallop as fast as he could, hoping to jolt loose the stones for which his day knew no surgery. Headache-- was he ever free from it? Sometimes he was blinded by the pain or kept awake all night. Many times Calvin ate only one meal a day. Cramps, indigestion, influenza were regular problems. (page 18a)

18. The Little Council of Geneva Condemned Servetus to Death

With his book tied to his arm, his body chained to the stake, Servetus died in the flames on the hill called Campel. He was forty-two years old. It was October 27, 1553. So died the man whose name would be forever linked with that of Calvin. It had been linked because of the burning; yet Calvin was the only person to plead against the use of the stake. The decision to kill Servetus was not Calvin's nor was it caused by his strong influence. It was the verdict of the Little Council of Geneva, upon advice from sister cities. These facts have often been forgotten. (page 198)

19. God Used Calvin to Build His Church

Looking back from this twentieth century, it is sad to see that Calvin in his treatment of Servetus acted like other men of his own day. It is sad because in his writing said in much that he did Calvin was far ahead of his time, pointing the way to tolerance and freedom, to separation of church and state, to every man's right to believe in God as his conscience dictates. The miracle is that God used a sinful servant like John Calvin as mightily as He did to build His church and influence His world. (page 199)

20. No Complaint Regarding Illnesses

"By companies, by squadrons, and in single attacks the horde of enemies has invaded me," wrote Calvin to some doctors of Montpellier who had been consulted on his illnesses. "It is twenty years since I have been without a headache." Arthritis and gout crippled the joints of his legs and arms. Kidney stones too large to be passed caused an agony of knifing pain. His chest felt as if a weight were lying on it, and each breath was an effort. But there was no complaint from the man attacked by this army of illnesses. (page 210)

21. Back to work.

When friends begged him to rest, to stop, he shook his head and answered, "what: would you want the Lord to find me idle when He comes?" (page 211)

22. Not Much to Will Away

A notary came to make Calvin's will. Not that there was much to will away. The greatest legacy Calvin had received could not be counted in money. He spoke of it first. "In the first place, I give thanks to God," he said while the notary wrote. "He drew me out of the abyss ... to the light of His gospel ... He has so far extended His mercy toward me as to use me and my work to . . . announce the truth of His gospel . . . He will show Himself the father of so miserable a sinner." (page 213)

23. Love Another, Support One Another

"My sins have always displeased me. ... I pray you, forgive me the evil, and if there was any good, ... make it an example." As to my doctrine, "I have taught faithfully, and God has given me grace to write ... as faithfully as it was in my power." In this doctrine I have lived and wish to die. Persevere, all of you, in it. "Love one another, support one another. Let there be no envy." (Page 215)

24. Prayed Continually

He prayed continually, aloud or silently, with his lips moving. In the throes of pain he often cried, "How long, O Lord?" Or, "Lord, Thou dost crush me, but it suffices that it is Thy hand." (page 216)

25. No Grave Marked for Calvin

Calvin had asked in his will that "my body ... be interred in the usual manner, to wait for the day of the blessed resurrection." So there were no words at the grave. No stone was place to mark the spot. Soon no one knew where Calvin's body lay. The grave remains unknown today. (page216)