

Reading Calvin Profitably, Part 2: Mark Thompson's questions and a reading plan

Mark's questions:

Mark Thompson, Principal of Moore College at this writing, wrote these study questions in the mid-90's. Use them along with Reading Calvin Profitably, for pre-reading and for revision. They'll sharpen your reading and retention.

You'll find a suggested reading plan for the Institutes in 25 weeks here

Two websites to visit quickly:

From Derek Thomas, who knows something of Calvin. I especially like points 4-6:

<https://www.crossway.org/articles/6-tips-for-reading-calvins-institutes-of-the-christian-religion/>

And if you want a bit more, here's a brief blog by the ever-thoughtful Justin Taylor:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/why-and-how-to-read-calvins-institutes/>

So go enjoy, and may you profit greatly as you exercise your mind and soul!

Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion
Questions to aid your reading of Book I, Chapters i-v.

1. With what basic idea does Calvin begin? What does he achieve by making this his starting point? (It might help you to compare the opening paragraph with the beginning of works such as Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith*, Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*, and Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology*.)
2. How does a knowledge of ourselves leads us to a knowledge of God?
3. In what way does a knowledge of God ensure a right knowledge of ourselves?
4. To what extent does this insight of Calvin explain aspects of
 - our culture?
 - modern church life?
 - modern theology?
5. What hints does Calvin give for a proper understanding of how these two types of knowledge are related?
6. How does Calvin define true knowledge of God?
7. What is important for us to know about God? How critical is the notion of Fatherhood in the knowledge of God?
8. What ought such a knowledge produce in us?
9. How strong is Calvin's argument that every human mind has an innate sense of the divine? On what is it based?
10. Does Calvin give any clue as to the extent of this 'sense of deity'? Does it differ from the 'knowledge of God'?
11. In what ways is genuine knowledge of God suppressed in our world?
12. How does Calvin relate the knowledge of God and the worship of God? How does the latter differ from superstition?
13. Is Calvin's appeal to the world around us an exercise in natural theology?
14. What prevents Calvin's encouragement to 'descend within' ourselves from degenerating into mysticism?
15. What is Calvin's attitude to 'science'?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'it [the pious mind] embraces him no less as punisher of the wicked than as benefactor of the pious'

'there is nothing less in accord with God's nature than for him to cast off the government of the universe and abandon it to fortune'

'no religion is genuine unless it be joined with truth'

Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
Questions to aid your reading of Book I, Chapters vi-x.

1. What is it that makes necessary God's witness to himself in Scripture?
2. How does Calvin relate the knowledge of God in the creation and the knowledge of God in Scripture? Where does he find support for his understanding of this relation?
3. What evidence is there in these chapters that Calvin held that Scripture was the inspired Word of God?
4. What word does Calvin repeatedly use to describe the Christian's appropriate response to Scripture?
5. How does Calvin tackle the problem of the canon of Scripture (i.e. the tension between the claim that Scripture is supremely authoritative and the claim that it was only by the authority of the church that certain books became Scripture)?
6. How does Calvin explain the 'inward testimony of the Spirit'? How is this related to the inspiration of Scripture?
7. What are the implications of the conviction that Scripture is self-authenticating? Is such a conviction necessary? How can it be sustained in the face of continuing unbelief in the world?
8. What characteristics of Scripture confirm the authority which ultimately rests on this self-authentication?
9. According to Calvin the intimate relation of God and Scripture does not come to an end at the point of inspiration. In what other way does he say God is involved?
10. What is Calvin's answer to those who appeal to the teaching office of the Spirit, separate from and over against the Scripture? How does he support his contention?
11. What is the nature of the connection between Word and Spirit? What implications might this have for Christian living in general and Christian gathering in particular?
12. What does Calvin describe as the goal of the knowledge of God set forth for us in Scripture?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'For by his Word, God rendered faith unambiguous forever, a faith that should be superior to all opinion.'

'all right knowledge of God is born of obedience'

'For truth is cleared of all doubt when, not sustained by external props, it serves as its own support.'

'those for whom prophetic doctrine is tasteless ought to be thought of as lacking taste buds'

'the Word is the instrument by which the Lord dispenses the illumination of his Spirit to believers'

Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
Questions to aid your reading of Book I, Chapters xi-xiv.

1. Does Calvin's argument against images make the incarnation problematic?
2. Which parts of Scripture inform Calvin's critique of idolatry?
3. What is the impact of the use of images on the one who makes or uses them?
4. Calvin's recourse to the principle underlying the prohibition of idolatry raises the question of the essential nature of our relationship to God. How might the same principle critique modern church practice?
5. In what connection does Calvin make his famous statement about God 'lisp[ing]' or 'stammer[ing]' (*balbutire*) in speaking to us? What does he mean?
6. How does Calvin defend the use of the word 'Trinity', a word which itself does not appear in Scripture?
7. How does Calvin define 'person' with respect to the members of the Godhead? What are the dangers he is seeking to avoid?
8. How would you describe Calvin's use of Scripture to establish the deity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit? What critique does he make of some of the church fathers' arguments from Scripture?
9. How is Calvin able to defend the equality of Father, Son, and Spirit in the face of both the distinction between them and their activity?
10. Who does Calvin quote approvingly as having said 'I cannot think on the one without quickly being encircled by the splendour of the three; nor can I discern the three without being straightway carried back to the one'? What implications does such a sentiment have for thinking about God today?
11. What does Calvin see as the fundamental ministry of angels?
12. What place does the devil occupy in God's universe? How does Calvin deal with the difficulties suggested by this affirmation?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'God himself is the sole and proper witness of himself'

'the words "Father", "Son", and "Spirit" imply a real distinction ... but a distinction, not a division'

'And let us not take it into our heads either to seek out God anywhere else than in his Sacred Word, or to think anything about him that is not prompted by his Word, or to speak anything that is not taken from that Word.'

Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

Questions to aid your reading of Book I, Chapters xv-xviii.

1. What fundamental distinction does Calvin make within our knowledge of ourselves? To what extent is this a helpful distinction?
2. What does Calvin understand as the image of God in humanity? What is distinctive about the way he argues his case?
3. According to Calvin, how should we think about our souls?
4. To what extent would Calvin endorse the old adage 'to err is human'?
5. What is the connection between creation and providence according to Calvin?
6. How extensive is God's continuing involvement in his world?
7. How precisely does Calvin's doctrine of providence differ from the Stoic belief in fate? What other biblical teaching does it reinforce and safeguard?
8. How can we meaningfully speak of personal responsibility in the face of Calvin's teaching on God's providential involvement in the world?
9. According to Calvin, in what sense can we say that God 'repents'?
10. How can God be protected from the charge of evil when he uses even the action of wicked people to further his purposes for his world?
11. Can and/or should a distinction be made between providence and election?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'faith has its own peculiar way of assigning the whole credit for Creation to God.'

'it is certain that not one drop of rain falls without God's sure command'

'we are not at all hindered by God's eternal decrees either from looking ahead for ourselves or from putting all our affairs in order, but always in submission to his will.'

'it is more than evident that they babble and talk absurdly who, in place of God's providence, substitute bare permission — as if God sat in a watchtower awaiting chance events, and his judgments thus depended upon human will.'

Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion
Questions to aid your reading of Book II, Chapters i-iii.

1. What happened at the Fall? What was the root cause of those events according to Calvin?
2. How were the effects of the Fall transmitted to us? How does Calvin support his answer to this question?
3. What is the nature and extent of the impact of original sin upon human life?
4. How helpful do you consider Calvin's method as he begins to explore the nature and limitations of the fallen human will? Does it have any limitations?
5. To what twin motives does Calvin ascribe the tendency of some early fathers to affirm the freedom of the human will? To what extent can you sympathise with these concerns? Is there another way of addressing them?
6. Calvin quotes Augustine with approval: 'What we need is true confession, not false defence' (*On Nature and Grace*, liii.62). What does Calvin understand by this statement? How might it be profitably employed in modern theology?
7. Even on this side of the Fall there is evidence of genuine perception and true knowledge as well as a broad concern for order and equity. How does Calvin account for this?
8. How does Calvin use the distinction between necessity and compulsion to explain our sinfulness? How convincing is his argument?
9. What happens to the human will upon regeneration/conversion?
10. What is the problem, according to Calvin, if the grace of God is not efficacious of itself?
11. What biblical support is there for Calvin's insistence that even perseverance is the work of God?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'Adam would never have dared oppose God's authority unless he had disbelieved in God's Word'

'Nothing, however slight, can be credited to man without depriving God of his honour, and without man himself falling into ruin through brazen confidence.'

'For there is no danger of man's depriving himself of too much so long as he learns that in God must be recouped what he himself lacks.'

'man's keenness of mind is mere blindness as far as the knowledge of God is concerned.'

* This section is packed full of great quotes from Augustine and other early Fathers. I hope you didn't miss them!

Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
Questions to aid your reading of Book II, Chapters iv-vi.

1. How helpful is Calvin's exploration of the action of God, the Satan, and human agents in the disaster which descended upon Job?
2. What contribution might Calvin's treatment of the place of the Satan in God's world make to modern discussions of 'spiritual warfare'?
3. How does Calvin ultimately reconcile God's dominion and human freedom?
4. How does Calvin justify his rejection of the argument that sin is evacuated of all meaning by the suggestion that our human wills are corrupted?
5. Just what is the purpose of God's encouragements and exhortations if our wills are not completely free? How can they possibly be heeded?
6. In what way does the Law point to our need for grace in order to respond rightly to God?
7. In what sense are our actions really ours according to Calvin?
8. What vital element of the knowledge of God cannot be acquired by means of a contemplation of the universe? Where is this knowledge to be found?
9. Is it possible to know God at all apart from Christ? How does Calvin justify his answer to this question?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'In discussing free will we are not asking whether a man is permitted to carry out and complete, despite external hindrances, whatever he has decided to do; but whether he has, in any respect whatever, both choice of judgement and inclination of will that are free.'

'What difference does it make whether we sin out of free or servile judgment, provided it is by voluntary desire — especially since man is proved a sinner because he is under the bondage of sin?'

'God works in his elect in two ways: within, through his Spirit; without, through his Word. By his Spirit, illuminating their minds and forming their hearts to the love and cultivation of righteousness, he makes them a new creation. By his Word, he arouses them to desire, to seek after, and to attain that same renewal.'

'no worship has ever pleased God except that which looked to Christ.'

Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
Questions to aid your reading of Book II, Chapters vii-viii.

1. What does Calvin understand by the word 'law'? How close is he to what the New Testament means by *no/moß*?
2. What does Calvin mean by 'it is ill-advised to pit God's might against his truth' (II.vii.5)? How helpful is this principle?
3. Calvin speaks of the three functions and uses of the moral law. Can you identify them and summarise them? What is the biblical support for each? In Calvin's thinking, does any one of these have priority over the others?
4. How effective were the provisions of the Old Testament ceremonial law? By what mechanism was this so?
5. In what ways does Calvin's preamble to his discussion of the Ten Commandments provide a critique of modern ideas of 'worship'?
6. What is Calvin's rule for the right interpretation of the commandments?
7. As Calvin explains the Ten Commandments, do any of his applications strike you as surprising? To what extent is the surprise a result of a modern trivialising of their scope?
8. How effective is 'Love your neighbour as yourself' as a summary of the Law? How is it to be understood?
9. How does Calvin explain what it means for the Christian to be 'under the law of grace' at the end of his exposition of the commandments? How clearly does his explanation reflect the teaching of the New Testament?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'I do not tarry over what Jerome thinks; let us rather inquire what is true.'

'the only lawful worship of him is the observance of righteousness, holiness, and purity'

'See whether you can be angry against your brother without burning with desire to hurt him'

Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
Questions to aid your reading of Book II, Chapters ix-xi.

1. How does Calvin define the word 'gospel'? On what biblical basis does he do so?
2. What is the relationship between the Law and the Gospel?
3. In what way(s) does the Old Testament stand in agreement with the New?
4. What, according to Calvin, is the status of the Old Testament believer before God?
5. Can you summarise the Old Testament evidence for belief in life beyond death in the Old Testament?
6. Calvin sees a profound unity between the Old Testament and the New. How does Calvin expound this unity? How useful is the basic concept in understanding the unity of Scripture?
7. What five points of difference does Calvin identify between the Old Testament and the New?
8. How does Calvin expound Paul's distinction between the letter and the Spirit? [You might like to look at Calvin's commentary on 2 Corinthians 3:6 for additional material here.]
9. How do Calvin's ideas about the relationship of the testaments challenge the directions of much Old Testament scholarship? How distinctive and how necessary is a Christian perspective on the Old Testament?
10. How do you think such a perspective might show itself in our preaching from the Old Testament?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'We enjoy Christ only as we embrace Christ clad in his own promises'

'For this reason not even David disguises the fact that if believers keep their eyes fastened upon the present state of things, they will be smitten by very grievous temptation, as if there were for innocence neither favour nor reward with God.'

'The Lord held to this orderly plan in administering the covenant of his mercy: as the day of full revelation approached with the passing of time, the more he increased each day the brightness of its manifestation.'

'the Old Testament or Covenant that the Lord had made with the Israelites had not been limited to earthly things, but contained a promise of spiritual and eternal life.'

'We must also note this about the holy patriarchs: they so lived under the Old Covenant as not to remain there but ever to aspire to the New, and thus embraced a real share in it.'

Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
Questions to aid your reading of Book II, Chapters xii-xiv.

1. What kind of necessity does Calvin attach to the incarnation?
2. What is significant about Christ's humanity?
3. How does Calvin develop the 'Second Adam' imagery with respect to Christ?
4. Is Calvin right to say 'the only reason given in Scripture that the Son of God willed to take our flesh ... is that he would be a sacrifice to appease the Father on our behalf'?
5. What is the point Osiander was trying to make? How does Calvin refute him?
6. How does Calvin counter the teaching of Menno Simons and others that Christ's flesh was of a unique kind distinct from our own?
7. Which biblical texts were used to support the suggestions that Christ's body was merely apparent (Marcion) or 'a body of air' (Mani)? What problems does Calvin reveal in their use of the Bible?
8. Does the incarnation mean that all men and women share a 'fellowship of nature' with Christ?
9. How does Calvin explain a real humanity that does not participate in the common human entanglement with sin?
10. The last four sentences of chapter thirteen outline an idea which has become known as the 'extra Calvinisticum'. What is it? How does it square with the teaching of Scripture?
11. What does Calvin mean by 'the communicating of properties'? What biblical examples does he use?
12. What was Michael Servetus' heresy, as expounded by Calvin? What did Calvin see as its most serious consequence?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'since neither as God alone could he feel death, nor as man alone could he overcome it, he coupled human nature with divine that to atone for sin he might submit the weakness of the one to death; and that, wrestling with death by the power of the other nature, he might win victory for us.'

'Often when Scripture sets out a list of human beings, it names only the males. Must we then say that women are nothing? Why, even children know that women are included under the term "men".'

'we affirm his divinity so joined and united with his humanity that each retains its distinctive nature unimpaired, and yet these two natures constitute one Christ'

'It is also clear that God would not have been called "Father" from the beginning unless there had already at that time been a reciprocal relationship to the Son.'

Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
Questions to aid your reading of Book II, Chapters xv-xvii.

1. How does Calvin derive the three-fold office of Christ from the title 'Christ'?
2. Calvin's treatment of Jesus as prophet is brief and appears to omit one of the key Old Testament texts in this connection. What is it? What difference do you think its inclusion would have made to Calvin's treatment?
3. How does Calvin sum up the value of Christ's prophetic office for us?
4. In what two directions does Calvin explain the eternal kingship of Christ?
5. How does Calvin's exposition of the kingship of Christ differ from modern triumphalistic hymns and choruses? To what extent is Calvin accurately portraying the teaching of Scripture on this issue?
6. What is the last act of Christ's reign and why is it so?
7. How does Calvin develop the uniqueness of Christ's priesthood together with the priesthood of all believers?
8. What purpose does Calvin attach to the biblical statements about God's wrath and eternal death?
9. In what way does Calvin see salvation relating to the life of Christ as well as his death? What can we learn from this? How fair is it to suggest that Calvin would want to see more emphasis on the life of Christ and less on his death?
10. How essential is the concept of 'penal substitution' in Calvin's exposition of the atonement? How accurate is it to see that concept as one among many 'theories' of the atonement?
11. How important does Calvin consider the confession that Jesus 'descended into hell'? Would he have been satisfied with the modern alternative in the creed 'descended to the dead'?
12. What, according to Calvin are the three benefits we receive from Christ's resurrection?
13. What is the significance of the ascension in Calvin's exposition?
14. How does Calvin correlate Christ's merit and God's freely given mercy?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'it is not lawful to go beyond the simplicity of the gospel'

'whenever we hear of Christ as armed with eternal power, let us remember that the perpetuity of the church is secure in this protection' 'Yet this is our wisdom: duly to feel how much our salvation cost the Son of God'

'our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ'

Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion

Questions to aid your reading of Book III, Chapters i-ii.

1. Calvin has been described as 'the theologian of the Holy Spirit'. How does he relate the Spirit and Christ?
2. What does Calvin consider the principal work of the Holy Spirit? Why?
3. Calvin begins his second chapter with a brief summary of the gospel message. What elements does he include?
4. What is the relation of faith and knowledge?
5. How would you put Calvin's definition of faith in your own words? What are its essential components?
6. How does Calvin distinguish false faith from the genuine article?
7. What is the place of assurance in genuine faith?
8. What does Calvin say about doubt in the life of the believer?
9. Does faith remove the fear of death? In what way?
10. How does Calvin forestall the objection that the faith he describes leads to presumption and familiarity with God?
11. In what way is it right to think of all faith as weak and without merit before God?
12. Where does faith begin and end according to Calvin? What follows for the practice of our individual and corporate life?
13. According to Calvin, how are we to understand the link between faith and love?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'The Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself'

'it would be the height of absurdity to label ignorance tempered by humility "faith"'

'The same Word is the basis whereby faith is supported and sustained; if it turns away from the Word, it falls. Therefore, take away the Word and no faith will then remain.'

'The human heart has so many crannies where vanity hides, so many holes where falsehood lurks, is so decked out with deceiving hypocrisy, that it often dupes itself.'

'the knowledge of faith consists in assurance rather than in comprehension'

'When first even the least drop of faith is instilled in our minds, we begin to contemplate God's face, peaceful and calm and gracious toward us. We see him afar off, but so clearly as to know we are not at all deceived.'

Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
Questions to aid your reading of Book III, Chapters iii-v.

1. What reason does Calvin give for dealing repentance before he deals with justification? In what other ways might you answer this concern?
2. What is the proper relationship of faith and repentance according to Calvin?
3. Calvin points to a distinction made by others between 'legal repentance' and 'evangelical repentance'. What is meant by each? Are there better ways of making the distinction?
4. How does Calvin define 'repentance'? What elements are included?
5. How helpful is the distinction between sin 'reigning' and sin 'dwelling' in the believer? What is Calvin trying to avoid? What is his Scriptural basis for such statements?
6. How does Calvin understand the 'unforgivable sin' of Matthew 12:31-32?
7. What were the three elements of repentance, as delineated and expounded by the medieval scholastic theologians?
8. How does Calvin answer the biblical evidence (e.g. the case of David's adultery) put forward by scholastic theologians to support the continued need for satisfaction after the remission of guilt?
9. Calvin seems to endorse the modern distinction between God's attitude towards the sinner and that towards the sin itself. What is the significant difference in Calvin's presentation?
10. Which biblical passages does Calvin identify as the proof texts for the doctrine of purgatory? How does he refute such an understanding of them?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'A man cannot apply himself seriously to repentance without knowing himself to belong to God'

'through continual and sometimes even slow advances God wipes out in his elect the corruptions of the flesh, cleanses them of guilt, consecrates them to himself as temples renewing all their minds to true purity that they may practice repentance throughout their lives and know that this warfare will end only at death'

'That fear cannot, indeed, be too great which ends in humility and does not depart from the hope of pardon.'

'it is not our task to bind with new bonds consciences that Christ most sternly forbids to enslave.'

'Here I must adjure my readers not to heed my glosses, but only to yield some place to the Word of God'

Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
Questions to aid your reading of Book III, Chapters vi-x.

1. What, according to Calvin are the two main aspects of the biblical instruction on the Christian life?
2. What Scriptural reasons does Calvin adduce for the pursuit of holy living?
3. How does Calvin define and distinguish the 'three parts' of the Christian life: soberness, righteousness, and godliness?
4. Calvin's description of the Christian life contrasts with modern more individualistic approaches to 'spirituality'. How would you explain his accent on the corporate of our lives?
5. What difference does Calvin see between 'bearing one's cross' and Stoicism? How might that challenge some presentations of the gospel in our own day?
6. In what sense does Calvin enjoin a contempt of this world?
7. How does Calvin avoid the excesses of asceticism and indulgence in our attitude to 'earthly benefits'?
8. What does Calvin mean by 'vocation' (calling)? What biblical basis does he provide for this concept?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'For it [the gospel] is a doctrine not of the tongue but of life. It is not apprehended by the understanding and memory alone, as other disciplines are, but it is received only when it possesses the whole soul, and finds a seat and resting place in the inmost affection of the heart.'

'For thus we are instructed to remember that those talents which God has bestowed upon us are not our own goods but the free gifts of God; and any persons who become proud of them show their ungratefulness.'

'You will never attain true gentleness except by one path: a heart imbued with lowliness and with reverence for others.'

'Therefore, in patiently suffering these tribulations, we do not yield to necessity but we consent for our own good.'

'Indeed, there is no middle ground between these two: either the world must become worthless to us or hold us bound by intemperate love of it.'

Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
Questions to aid your reading of Book III, Chapters xi-xiv.

1. How does Calvin define justification by faith? What place does he give it in Christian doctrine?
2. What were the problems with Osiander's doctrine of justification?
3. How would Calvin clear himself of the charge that justification by faith elevates faith to the status of a work?
4. Is justification by faith a 'legal fiction'? Why or why not?
5. Why did Calvin feel himself unable to agree with Augustine's presentation of the subject of justification?
6. What practical difference will it make to the exercise of Christian ministry if one holds that it is not works but faith which justifies us?
7. How does Calvin answer the criticism of the word 'alone' in the formula 'justification by faith alone'?
8. How does 'justification by faith alone' safeguard the honour of God?
9. In what way does 'justification by faith alone' establish Christian confidence?
10. How does Calvin assess the virtuous behaviour in unbelievers?
11. What good purpose does Calvin see in the continued presence of imperfection in the unbeliever?
12. On what basis is Calvin able to say that 'to the very end of life, believers have no other righteousness than that which is there described'?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'Therefore, since God justifies us by the intercession of Christ, he absolves us not by the confirmation of our own innocence but by the imputation of righteousness, so that we who are not righteous in ourselves may be reckoned as such in Christ.'

'For faith totters if it pays attention to works, since no one, even of the most holy, will find there anything on which to rely.'

'faith is said to justify because it receives and embraces the righteousness offered in the gospel.'

'if those whom the Lord has reconciled to himself be judged by works, they will indeed still be found sinners, though they ought, nevertheless to be freed and cleansed from sins.'

'the heart cannot be opened to receive his mercy unless it be utterly empty of all opinion of its own worth.'

Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion

Questions to aid your reading of Book III, Chapters xv-xviii.

1. How does the foundation laid by Christ's death call into question all forms of merit?
2. Would Calvin have been happy with Luther's description of the Christian as 'at the same time righteous and a sinner'?
3. How does Calvin answer the charge that good works are devalued by the doctrine of justification by faith?
4. What does Calvin present as the ultimate bond between righteousness and sanctification?
5. What are the proper Christian motives for godly living and good works according to Calvin?
6. Why isn't the fear of God meritorious?
7. What prevents the doctrine of free grace from being an invitation to sin?
8. How does Calvin answer the appeal to those divine promises which are attached to the observance of the Law?
9. What is the double acceptance of man before God?
10. How does Calvin reconcile the free unilateral nature of God's covenant with our obligation to uprightness and sanctity of life?
11. How helpful is Calvin's distinction between the 'first cause' of salvation and its 'manner' (III.xvii.6)?
12. How does Calvin explain the apparently contrary teaching of Psalm 106:30-31?
13. How does Calvin reconcile James with Paul?
14. What is the Christian's reward according to Calvin?
15. What is relation of love and justification?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'Therefore, as soon as you become engrafted into Christ through faith, you are made a son of God, an heir of heaven, a partaker in righteousness, a possessor of life; and (by this their falsehood may be better refuted) you obtain not the opportunity to gain merit but all the merits of Christ, for they are communicated to you.'

'For justification is withdrawn from works, not that no good works may be done, or that what is done may be denied to be good, but that we may not rely upon them, glory in them, or ascribe salvation to them.'

'God's sole reason to receive man unto himself is that he sees him utterly lost if left to himself, but because he does not will him to be lost, he exercises his mercy in freeing him.'

'... in those who are directed to the good by his Spirit he recognises the only genuine insignia of his children.'

Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
Questions to aid your reading of Book III, Chapters xix-xx.

1. What are the dangers into which a discussion of Christian freedom might easily fall? Are they such as to bring into question the wisdom of discussing this subject at all?
2. What are the three parts of Christian freedom according to Calvin?
3. What is the exegetical basis for Calvin's discussion of Christian freedom? Does his treatment here give us insight into his interpretive method?
4. How does Calvin view those ceremonies for which there is no direct mandate from Scripture?
5. In what sense is Christian freedom a spiritual thing?
6. To what extent are the enjoyment of material wealth, academic prestige, privileged birth, ecclesiastical rank, etc. matters of Christian freedom?
7. In what practical ways may we have fallen into one of traps Calvin mentions here, namely the belief that Christian freedom does not exist unless we take possession of it?
8. How helpful is Calvin's distinction between 'offence given' and 'offence received'? What is its biblical basis?
9. Would Calvin agree that we must so act as never to cause offence to our neighbours?
10. What is the point of Calvin's distinction of a twofold government in man?
11. How does Calvin define 'conscience'?
12. In what sense does Calvin suggest God has ordained prayer not so much for his own sake as for ours?
13. How do Calvin's 'rules for right prayer' challenge some modern trends in the practice of prayer?
14. In what way is prayer grounded in the character of God and the nature of faith?
15. What does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus?
16. What guidelines does Calvin give for public prayer? How does he anchor these biblically?
17. What does Calvin have to say about singing?
18. What is the function of the Lord's Prayer according to Calvin?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'we should use God's gifts for the purpose for which he gave them to us, with no scruple of conscience, no trouble of mind.'

'Thus let every man live in his station, whether slenderly, or moderately, or plentifully, so that all may remember God nourishes them to live, not to luxuriate.'

'we should use our freedom if it results in the edification of our neighbour, but if it does not help our neighbour, then we should forgo it.'

'For as our freedom must be subordinated to love, so in turn ought love itself to abide under purity of faith.'

'Therefore we see that to us nothing is promised to be expected from the Lord, which we are not also bidden to ask of him in prayers. So true is it that we dig up by prayer the treasures that were pointed out by the Lord's gospel, and which our faith has gazed upon.'

Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion
Questions to aid your reading of Book III, Chapters xi-xiv.

1. How does Calvin define justification by faith? What place does he give it in Christian doctrine?
2. What were the problems with Osiander's doctrine of justification?
3. How would Calvin clear himself of the charge that justification by faith elevates faith to the status of a work?
4. Is justification by faith a 'legal fiction'? Why or why not?
5. Why did Calvin feel himself unable to agree with Augustine's presentation of the subject of justification?
6. What practical difference will it make to the exercise of Christian ministry if one holds that it is not works but faith which justifies us?
7. How does Calvin answer the criticism of the word 'alone' in the formula 'justification by faith alone'?
8. How does 'justification by faith alone' safeguard the honour of God?
9. In what way does 'justification by faith alone' establish Christian confidence?
10. How does Calvin assess the virtuous behaviour in unbelievers?
11. What good purpose does Calvin see in the continued presence of imperfection in the unbeliever?
12. On what basis is Calvin able to say that 'to the very end of life, believers have no other righteousness than that which is there described'?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'Therefore, since God justifies us by the intercession of Christ, he absolves us not by the confirmation of our own innocence but by the imputation of righteousness, so that we who are not righteous in ourselves may be reckoned as such in Christ.'

'For faith totters if it pays attention to works, since no one, even of the most holy, will find there anything on which to rely.'

'faith is said to justify because it receives and embraces the righteousness offered in the gospel.'

'if those whom the Lord has reconciled to himself be judged by works, they will indeed still be found sinners, though they ought, nevertheless to be freed and cleansed from sins.'

'the heart cannot be opened to receive his mercy unless it be utterly empty of all opinion of its own worth.'

Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
Questions to aid your reading of Book III, Chapter xxv

1. In what sense can we talk about the final coming of Christ as 'our redemption'? Does such language undermine our enjoyment of a full salvation now?
2. What are the two helps which Scripture provides to overcome our natural difficulties with the concept of bodily resurrection?
3. How does Calvin explain the involvement of the Triune God in the resurrection of Jesus Christ?
4. How does Calvin answer the suggestion that Jesus did not rise bodily from the dead, but rather his body was stolen by his disciples?
5. What Old Testament anticipations of the bodily resurrection are adduced by Calvin? Can you supplement this list?
6. What is wrong with the suggestion that our souls will be resurrected with our bodies?
7. What fundamental principle of Christian theology does Calvin put into practice in his brief discussion of the intermediate state?
8. What does the resurrection of the ungodly tell us about the scope and effect of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?
9. What does Calvin see as the intention of the various 'physical metaphors' used to describe the lot of the wicked?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'Accordingly, he alone has fully profited in the gospel who has accustomed himself to continual meditation upon the blessed resurrection.'

'And to separate him from ourselves is not permissible and not even possible, without tearing him apart.'

'Even a blind man can see what stupid nonsense these people talk who are afraid of attributing excessive cruelty to God if the wicked be consigned to eternal punishment.'

'He does not call forth new matter from the four elements to fashion men, but dead men from their graves.'

'It would not profit us much if the body which had been offered as an atoning sacrifice had been destroyed and replaced by a new one.'

Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion
Questions to aid your reading of Book IV, Chapters i-ii

1. Calvin begins his discussion of the church by using language reminiscent of Cyprian, who said 'You cannot have God for your Father unless you have the church for your mother'. In what ways is Calvin's use of this language different from that of Cyprian?
2. What are the foundations of the church according to Calvin?
3. According to Calvin, what are the means by which the church enables us to grow to maturity?
4. Why is individual and private reading of God's word not enough?
5. What two dangers does Calvin see in the discussion about Christian ministry? Are they still dangers today? If so, in what way?
6. What are the two ways in which Calvin claims Holy Scripture uses the term 'church'? What evidence does he provide? Is he right?
7. In Calvin's time there were calls for a pure and separate church made up exclusively of those who could be demonstrated to be Christians. How does Calvin answer this call in his explanation of the nature of the church? How might such an answer help us in parish ministry?
8. What are the 'marks' (*notae*) of the church according to Calvin? What other familiar 'marks' does he omit?
9. Does Calvin expect complete uniformity among Christian churches? How does he think differences ought to be handled?
10. What does Calvin understand by the 'power of the keys', a phrase used to denote the authority conferred by Christ in Matthew 16:19?
11. How does Calvin respond to the Roman claim regarding the apostolic succession of bishops?
12. What are the two bonds of the communion of the church, according to Calvin? How are they related?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'God breathes faith into us only by the instrument of his gospel.'

'For among the many excellent gifts with which God has adorned the human race, it is a singular privilege that he deigns to consecrate to himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that his voice may resound in them.'

'For the Lord esteems the communion of his church so highly that he counts as traitor and apostate from Christianity anyone who arrogantly leaves any Christian society, provided it cherishes the true ministry of Word and sacraments.'

'Again, if the true church is the pillar and foundation of truth, it is certain that no church can exist where lying and falsehood have gained sway.'

'Apart from the Lord's Word there is not an agreement of believers but a faction of wicked men.'

Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion
Questions to aid your reading of Book IV, Chapters iii-v

1. According to Calvin, what is the instrument by means of which the Lord rules his church?
2. Why then does God use the ministry of men in the church?
3. How does Calvin define each of the gifts of the risen Christ mentioned in Ephesians 4:11?
4. How helpful is Calvin's distinction between pastors and teachers? Does it reflect what is being said in Ephesians 4?
5. What is the task of the pastor according to Calvin?
6. What is the point of Calvin's insistence that a pastor ought to consider himself bound by the law of divine call (IV.iii.7)?
7. What does Calvin mean by a 'call to the ministry'?
8. On what does Calvin base his insistence that ministers should be appointed by election by the people? Is he right?
9. How does Calvin explain the emergence of the 'bishop' in the early church?
10. What was the nature of preparation for ministerial office in the early church according to Calvin?
11. What are Calvin's objections to ordination as practiced under the papacy?
12. What specific problems does Calvin have with the diaconate under the papacy? In what way could the principle be applied to the other 'orders of ministry'?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'For neither the light and heat of the sun, nor food and drink, are so necessary to nourish and sustain the present life as the apostolic and pastoral office is necessary to preserve the church on earth.'

'Finally, what the apostles performed for the whole world, each pastor ought to perform for his own flock, to which he is assigned.'

'But in indiscriminately calling those who rule the church "bishops", "presbyters", "pastors", and "ministers", I did so according to the Scriptural usage, which interchanges these terms.'

'Therefore, it was a principle of long standing in the church that the primary duties of the bishop were to feed his people with the Word of God, or to build up the church publicly and privately with sound doctrine.'

'But let any one of them who has not utterly lost shame answer me what sort of bishops are commonly elected today!'

Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
Questions to aid your reading of Book IV, Chapters vi-viii

1. What alleged biblical foundations of Roman primacy does Calvin identify? How does he refute them?
2. How does Calvin use the Bible as he begins to mount his argument against the Roman papacy?
3. What evidence does Calvin gather against the suggestion that Peter was the founder and bishop of the church at Rome?
4. How does Calvin explain the emergence of Roman primacy in the early church?
5. What, according to Calvin, is the real contribution of Gregory I to a proper understanding of the place and function of the bishop of Rome?
6. How does Calvin assess the papacies of the Reformation era: Leo X (1514-21), Clement VII (1523-1534), and Paul III (1534-1549)?
7. Would Calvin agree with Luther's identification of the papacy as the Antichrist? Why or why not?
8. What historical example does Calvin elicit to demonstrate that it is not just the person of the pope but the whole institution and its supports which stands condemned?
9. In what way does Calvin appeal to apostolic succession to support his claim that there are strict limits to the authority of the church with respect to the articles of faith?
10. How does Calvin confront the argument that it is the presence of Christ amidst his church which guarantees the truth of its doctrine?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'Since heaven is opened to us by the doctrine of the gospel, the word "keys" affords an appropriate metaphor. Now men are bound and loosed in no other way than when faith reconciles some to God, while their own unbelief constrains the others more.'

'They do signal injury to Christ when they would have one man set over the church universal, on the pretext that the church cannot be without a head. For Christ is the Head ...'

'even if Rome had once been the head of churches, today it is not worthy of being regarded among the smallest toes of the church's feet.'

'This, then, is the difference. Our opponents locate the authority of the church outside God's Word; but we insist that it be attached to the Word, and do not allow it to be separated from it.'

Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion
Questions to aid your reading of Book IV, Chapters ix-xiii

1. What is the value of Church Councils according to Calvin? How should a Christian treat their decisions?
2. What can we learn from Calvin's method in discussing these subjects? What are the dangers/tensions?
3. What does Calvin understand by the word 'conscience'? How does this lead him to understand what it means to live with a good conscience?
2. What are the two reasons Calvin gives for understanding God Himself as the sole lawgiver?
3. Calvin recognises that there are legitimate human laws and constitutions. How then are we to discern which are those that are contrary to the Lord's Word?
4. Calvin paraphrases Paul in Colossians 2:23 as 'Human traditions deceive under the appearance of wisdom'. How might his discussion of this idea help us to critique much modern teaching on 'spirituality'?
5. What considerations govern what Calvin would consider to be 'legitimate church observances'?
6. What does Calvin understand by the exercise of 'the office of the keys'?
7. What are the aims of church discipline? From which New Testament passages does Calvin develop this understanding?
8. Who is to exercise church discipline according to Calvin? On what biblical basis does he make this assertion?
9. Does Calvin consider the practice of fasting to be appropriate for Christians? If so, in what circumstances and on what biblical basis? If not, why not?
10. What are Calvin's reasons for opposing the practice of clerical celibacy?
11. How helpful is Calvin's definition and classification of religious vows?
12. What is Calvin's chief objection to monasticism? Is it a fair reflection of the teaching of Scripture?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'For God abominates nothing more than when men try to disguise themselves by displaying signs and outward appearances in place of innocence of heart.'

'So today not only the untutored crowd but any man who is greatly puffed up with worldly wisdom is marvellously captivated by ceremonial pomp.'

'There is nothing involved, nothing obscure, nothing ambiguous in these words which forbid the church universal to add to or take away anything from God's Word, when the worship of the Lord and precepts of salvation are concerned.'

'For even though those who obey such laws in the worship of God have some semblance of humility in this obedience of theirs, they are nevertheless not at all humble in God's sight, since they prescribe for him these same laws which they observe.'

'And although excommunication also punishes the man, it does so in such a way that, by forewarning him of his future condemnation, it may call him back to salvation. But if that be obtained, reconciliation and restoration to communion await him.'

'But this is to tempt God: to strive against the nature imparted by him, and to despise his present gifts as if they did not belong to us at all.'

'we are warned by examples from almost every age that the truth is not always nurtured in the bosom of the pastors, and the wholeness of the church does not depend upon their condition.'

Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion
Questions to aid your reading of Book IV, Chapters xiv-xvi

1. What are the four elements of Calvin's definition of a sacrament?
2. How does Calvin explain the relationship between the Word and the sign in a sacrament?
3. What, according to Calvin, is the work of the Holy Spirit with regard to the sacraments?
4. How exactly do the sacraments strengthen faith?
5. What is the point of Calvin's critique of Zwingli on the sacraments in IV.xiv.13?
6. Calvin affirms Augustine's view that there are two vices which are often associated with the sacraments. What are they?
7. What sacraments does Calvin identify in the Old Testament? How does he justify describing these things as sacraments? How convincing is he?
8. How does Calvin define baptism?
9. What are the three benefits we receive from baptism according to Calvin?
10. What place does the notion of 'public testimony' play in Calvin's understanding of baptism?
11. How does Calvin respond to the suggestion that a new and proper 'baptism' is necessary in the case of those who only genuinely come to faith long after their original 'baptism'?
12. How does Calvin develop the relationship between circumcision and baptism? How convincing is he at this point?
13. What is the benefit of infant baptism — to the parents? — to the infant?
14. How does Calvin deal with the objection that the baptism of infants is inappropriate due to their inability to exercise faith?
15. Can you outline Calvin's defence of infant baptism?
16. According to Calvin, and on analogy with baptism, should children be admitted to the Lord's Supper? Why or why not?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'the sacrament requires preaching to beget faith.'

'Hence, any man is deceived who thinks anything more is conferred upon him through the sacraments than what is offered by God's Word and received by him in true faith.'

'infants are not barred from the Kingdom of Heaven just because they happen to depart the present life before they have been immersed in water.'

'Those who embrace faith in Christ as grown men, since they were previously strangers to the covenant, are not to be given the badge of baptism unless they first have faith and repentance, which alone can give access to the society of the covenant. But those infants who derive their origin from Christians, as they have been born directly into the inheritance of the covenant, and are expected by God, are thus to be received into baptism.'

'For how sweet is it to godly minds to be assured, not only by word, but by sight, that they obtain so much favour with the Heavenly Father that their offspring are within his care?'

Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
Questions to aid your reading of Book IV, Chapters xvii-xviii

1. What is the chief function of the Lord's Supper according to Calvin?
2. Why does Calvin think it is inadequate to identify 'eating and drinking Christ' as believing in Him?
3. What is Calvin's starting point for his own exposition of this sacrament and its meaning?
4. Calvin here identifies three formal parts to the nature of a sacrament. What are they and to what does each refer in the case of the Lord's Supper?
5. How does Calvin respond to the Roman Catholic teaching of 'transubstantiation' (that the substance of the bread and wine are converted into the body and blood of Christ)?
6. How does Calvin respond to the suggestions by Luther and others that Christ's real presence in the bread and wine is made possible by the ubiquity of his physical body?
7. What is the significance of the ascension of Christ for an understanding of the Lord's Supper?
8. It has been suggested that Calvin's approach to the Protestant debates about the nature of the Supper was to shift the focus from the question of a 'real presence'. Is this true? If so, to what is our attention drawn?
9. Which superstitious and idolatrous practices does Calvin identify in connection with this sacrament? How many of them have reappeared in modern Protestantism?
10. What does Calvin understand as 'unworthy' reception of the sacrament?
11. How often should we receive the Lord's Supper?
12. What harm to Christian faith and life does Calvin see in the Mass?
13. How does Calvin explain the origin of the Roman Mass?
14. Is it the Mass that is the problem according to Calvin, or simply the abuse of the Mass? Why?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'Christ is the only food of our soul'

'Scripture, in speaking of our participation with Christ, relates its whole power to the Spirit.'

'The only reason that some recoil from our interpretation is that they are blinded by a spell from the devil, so that they conjure for themselves dark enigmas, while the interpretation of this striking figure is obvious.'

'For what is idolatry if not this: to worship the gifts in place of the Giver himself?'

'This is indeed very certain: that the cross of Christ is overthrown as soon as the altar is set up; for if he offered himself as a sacrifice on the cross in order to sanctify us forever, and to acquire eternal redemption for us, no doubt the force and effectiveness of this sacrifice continue without end.'

Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion
Questions to aid your reading of Book IV, Chapters xix-xx

1. What is the foundation of Calvin's refutation of the five 'false sacraments'?
2. What early and desirable practice in the churches does Calvin consider was later perverted into the sacrament of confirmation?
3. Calvin sees the creation of this sacraments as an assault upon baptism. In what way(s)?
4. What exactly is the holy and wholesome 'predecessor' of the sacrament of penance which Calvin would like to see restored in the church?
5. In what way was penance spoken of as 'the second plank after the shipwreck'? How does Calvin refute this suggestion?
6. What distorted reasoning is common to the emergence of the sacraments of confirmation and penance(IV.xix.4 & IV.xix.14)? In what ways is it a danger for us today?
7. How convincing is Calvin's argument against the 'sacrament of extreme unction'?
8. What are Calvin's objections to the Roman priesthood? How does it differ from the genuine presbyterate?
9. On what grounds does the Roman church teach that marriage is a sacrament? Where are the problems with this view?
10. How would Calvin prefer marriage to be understood?
11. According to Calvin, to what extent should civil government concern itself with matters of religion?
12. Would Calvin support the notion of a 'just war'? If so, under what guidelines would such a war be fought?
13. In what kind of case, if any, is it appropriate for a Christian to seek redress through the legal system?
14. How would Calvin expect a Christian to act under bad government? Given our changed circumstances (where we appoint the government), how can these principles be applied?

Can you locate these classic Calvin quotes?

'What can you say here but that they are plainly mad who are so fond of their own inventions that by comparison they carelessly despise God's most holy institutions?'

'These things cannot be heard without such laughter that I marvel at their being written without laughter, if, after all, those who wrote them were men.'

'I contend that it is dishonourable to seek from the example of those whom the apostolic church ordained as deacons a testimony for these very ones whom the Romanists present to us in their doctrine.'

'Marriage is a good and holy ordinance of God; and farming, building, cobbling, and barbering are lawful ordinances of God, and yet are not sacraments.'

'And how absurd it would be that in satisfying men you should incur the displeasure of him for whose sake you obey men themselves!'