

INSTITUTES OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION

BOOK IV: OF THE EXTERNAL
MEANS OR HELPS BY WHICH GOD
ALLURES US INTO FELLOWSHIP
WITH CHRIST, AND KEEPS US IN
IT

JOHN CALVIN

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with an Introduction & Discussion Questions and Answers
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INTRODUCTION

John Calvin was one of the eminent servants of Christ in the history of the church, and we should cultivate a demeanor of gratitude whenever we are given the opportunity to reflect on his contributions.

Many have done this in particularly focused way, even going so far as to identify themselves as “Calvinists.” This is fine as a form of theological shorthand, but there are also other errors to avoid. Such additional errors go beyond simply the error of the kind of partisanship that likes to rally behind uninspired teachers. That error of partisanship inflates the importance of Calvin beyond anything that he would want, but there is another kind of error that actually *diminishes* the range of his contributions.

In modern parlance, Calvinism refers to one’s soteriology, which has to do with salvation. What is your view of the five points, otherwise called the doctrines of grace? But this limited focus has not always been the case. For example, in other eras, a “Calvinist” would have been someone who adhered to Calvin’s view of the sacraments—that being a time when virtually all Protestants were what we would call Calvinists in soteriology.

This is simply another way of saying that Calvin made enormous contributions in a number of areas besides the doctrine of salvation. These doctrines would include worship, the sacraments, political

theory, the gospel, and more. And some of his largest downstream contributions come from Book IV of his *Institutes*.

Overview

The fourth book of the *Institutes* contains three basic sections, spread over twenty chapters. The first section on the Church contains thirteen chapters. The second on the Sacraments is six chapters in length. The third has to do with Civil Government, and is the conclusion of the *Institutes*. For our introductory purposes here, I intend to deal with these sections a little bit out of order. The reason for this is that when it comes to Book IV of the *Institutes*, Calvin's influence has been largely lost when it comes to the *sacraments*, and yet is still widely pervasive when it comes to the subject of *governments*.

Sacraments

Keith Mathison has written a very good introduction to Calvin's views on the Lord's Supper, and the subtitle illustrates the problem I am referring to.¹ That subtitle is *Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper*. What Calvin believed on this subject may be believed in the twenty first century, of course, as I do, but it needs to be excavated by theological archaeologists first.

There are actually a wide range of possible opinions on the Supper, but for most theologically-aware Christians today, the options are limited to the Roman Catholic view (transubstantiation) or the Zwinglian view (mere memorialism). Off to the side is the Lutheran view, which most evangelicals think of as quasi-Catholic. The views therefore reduce to two—those who believe that the Supper is where “something happens,” and those who believe that “nothing happens except a remembrance.”

1. Keith A. Mathison, *Given for You* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002). Anyone wishing to pursue this subject beyond the very brief handling here would be well-advised to start with this book.

SUMMARY

In the former Books an exposition has been given of the three parts of the Apostles' Creed concerning God the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier. It now remains to treat, in this last Book, of the Church and the Communion of Saints, or of the external means or helps by which God invites us to fellowship with Christ, and keeps us in it.

The twenty Chapters of which it consists may be conveniently reduced to three particular heads—viz.

- I. Of the Church.
- II. Of the Sacraments.
- III. Of Civil Government.

The first head occupies the first thirteen chapters; but these may all be reduced to four—viz.

I. Of the marks of the Church, or the means by which the Church may be discerned, since it is necessary to cultivate unity with the Church. This is considered in Chapters 1 and 2—

II. Of the rule or government of the Church. The order of government, Chap. 3. The form in use in the primitive Church, Chap. 4. The form at present existing in the Papacy, Chap. 5. The primacy of the Pope, Chap. 6. The gradual rise of his usurpation, Chap. 7—

III. Of the power of the Church. The power in relation to doctrine as possessed either by individuals, Chap. 8; or universally as in Councils, Chap. 9. The power of enacting laws, Chap. 10. The extent of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, Chap. 11—

IV. Of the discipline of the Church. The chief use of discipline, Chap. 12. The abuse of it, Chap. 13. The second general head,

Of the Sacraments, comprehends three particulars—

I. Of the Sacraments in general, Chap. 14—

II. Of the two Sacraments in particular. Of Baptism, Chap. 15. Of Paedobaptism, Chap. 16. Of the Lord's Supper, Chap. 17. Of profaning the Lord's Supper, Chap. 18. Of the five Sacraments falsely so called, Chap. 19.

The third general head, Of Civil Government. This considered first generally, and then under the separate heads of Magistrates, Laws, and People.

CHAPTER 1

Of the true church. Duty of cultivating unity with her, as the mother of all the godly.

The three divisions of this chapter are—

I. The article of the Creed concerning the Holy Catholic Church and the Communion of Saints briefly expounded. The grounds on which the Church claims our reverence, sec. 1-6.

II. Of the marks of the Church, sec. 7-9.

III. The necessity of cleaving to the Holy Catholic Church and the Communion of Saints. Refutation of the errors of the Novatians, Anabaptists, and other schismatics, in regard to this matter, sec. 10-29.

Outline:

1. The church now to be considered. With her God has deposited whatever is necessary to faith and good order. A summary of what is contained in this Book. Why it begins with the Church.

2. In what sense the article of the Creed concerning the Church is to be understood. Why we should say, "I believe the Church," not "I believe in the Church." The purport of this article. Why the Church is called Catholic or Universal.

3. What meant by the Communion of Saints. Whether it is inconsistent with various gifts in the saints, or with civil order. Uses of this article concerning the Church and the Communion of Saints. Must the Church be visible in order to our maintaining unity with her?

4. The name of Mother given to the Church shows how necessary it is to know her. No salvation out of the Church.

5. The Church is our mother, inasmuch as God has committed to her the kind office of bringing us up in the faith until we attain full age. This method of education not to be despised. Useful to us in two ways. This utility destroyed by those who despise the pastors and teachers of the Church. The petulance of such despisers repressed by reason and Scripture. For this education of the Church her children enjoined to meet in the sanctuary. The abuse of churches both before and since the advent of Christ. Their proper use.

6. Her ministry effectual, but not without the Spirit of God. Passages in proof of this.

7. Second part of the Chapter. Concerning the marks of the Church. In what respect the Church is invisible. In what respect she is visible.

8. God alone knoweth them that are his. Still he has given marks to discern his children.

9. These marks are the ministry of the word, and administration of the sacraments instituted by Christ. The same rule not to be followed in judging of individuals and of churches.

10. We must on no account forsake the Church distinguished by such marks. Those who act otherwise are apostates, deserters of the truth and of the household of God, deniers of God and Christ, violators of the mystical marriage.

11. These marks to be the more carefully observed, because Satan strives to efface them, or to make us revolt from the Church. The twofold error of despising the true, and submitting to a false Church.

12. Though the common profession should contain some corruption, this is not a sufficient reason for forsaking the visible Church. Some of these corruptions specified. Caution necessary. The duty of the members.

13. The immoral lives of certain professors no ground for abandoning the Church. Error on this head of the ancient and modern Cathari. Their first objection. Answer to it from three of our Savior's parables.

14. Second objection. Answer from a consideration of the state of the Corinthian Church, and the Churches of Galatia.

15. Third objection and answer.

16. The origin of these objections. A description of Schismatics. Their portraiture by Augustine. A pious counsel respecting these scandals, and a safe remedy against them.

17. Fourth objection and answer. Answer confirmed by the divine promises.

18. Another confirmation from the example of Christ and of the faithful servants of God. The appearance of the Church in the days of the prophets.

19. Appearance of the Church in the days of Christ and the apostles, and their immediate followers.

20. Fifth objection. Answer to the ancient and modern Cathari, and to the Novatians, concerning the forgiveness of sins.

21. Answer to the fifth objection continued. By the forgiveness of sins believers are enabled to remain perpetually in the Church.

22. The keys of the Church given for the express purpose of securing this benefit. A summary of the answer to the fifth objection.

23. Sixth objection, formerly advanced by the Novatians, and renewed by the Anabaptists. This error confuted by the Lord's Prayer.

24. A second answer, founded on some examples under the Old Testament.

25. A third answer, confirmed by passages from Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Solomon. A fourth answer, derived from sacrifices.

26. A fifth answer, from the New Testament. Some special examples.

27. General examples. A celebrated passage. The arrangement of the Creed.

28. Objection, that voluntary transgression excludes from the Church.

29. Last objection of the Novatians, founded on the solemn renewal of repentance required by the Church for more heinous offenses. Answer.

In the last Book, it has been shown, that by the faith of the gospel Christ becomes ours, and we are made partakers of the salvation and eternal blessedness procured by him. But as our ignorance and sloth (I may add, the vanity of our mind) stand in need of external helps, by which faith may be begotten in us, and may increase and make progress until its consummation, God, in accommodation to our infirmity, has added such helps, and secured the effectual preaching of the gospel, by depositing this treasure with the Church. He has appointed pastors and teachers, by whose lips he might edify his people (Eph. 4:11); he has invested them with authority, and, in short, omitted nothing that might conduce to holy consent in the faith, and to right order. In particular, he has instituted sacraments, which we feel by experience to be most useful helps in fostering and confirming our faith. For seeing we are shut up in the prison of the body, and have not yet attained to the rank of angels, God, in accommodation to our capacity, has in his admirable providence provided a method by which, though widely separated, we might still draw near to him. Wherefore, due order requires that we first treat of the Church, of its Government, Orders, and Power; next, of the Sacraments; and, lastly, of Civil Government; at the same time guarding pious readers against

the corruptions of the Papacy, by which Satan has adulterated all that God had appointed for our salvation. I will begin with the Church, into whose bosom God is pleased to collect his children, not only that by her aid and ministry they may be nourished so long as they are babes and children, but may also be guided by her maternal care until they grow up to manhood, and, finally, attain to the perfection of faith. What God has thus joined, let not man put asunder (Mark 10:9): to those to whom he is a Father, the Church must also be a mother. This was true not merely under the Law, but even now after the advent of Christ; since Paul declares that we are the children of a new, even a heavenly Jerusalem (Gal. 4:26).

2. When in the Creed we profess to believe the Church, reference is made not only to the visible Church of which we are now treating, but also to all the elect of God, including in the number even those who have departed this life. And, accordingly, the word used is “believe,” because oftentimes no difference can be observed between the children of God and the profane, between his proper flock and the untamed herd. The particle *in* is often interpolated, but without any probable ground. I confess, indeed, that it is the more usual form, and is not unsupported by antiquity, since the Nicene Creed, as quoted in Ecclesiastical History, adds the preposition. At the same time, we may perceive from early writers, that the expression received without controversy in ancient times was to believe “the Church,” and not “in the Church.” This is not only the expression used by Augustine, and that ancient writer, whoever he may have been, whose treatise, *De Symboli Expositione*, is extant under the name of Cyprian, but they distinctly remark that the addition of the preposition would make the expression improper, and they give good grounds for so thinking. We declare that we believe in God, both because our mind reclines upon him as true, and our confidence is fully satisfied in him. This cannot be said of the Church, just as it cannot be said of the forgiveness of sins, or the resurrection of the body. Wherefore, although I

am unwilling to dispute about words, yet I would rather keep to the proper form, as better fitted to express the thing that is meant, than affect terms by which the meaning is causelessly obscured. The object of the expression is to teach us, that though the devil leaves no stone unturned in order to destroy the grace of Christ, and the enemies of God rush with insane violence in the same direction, it cannot be extinguished—the blood of Christ cannot be rendered barren, and prevented from producing fruit. Hence, regard must be had both to the secret election and to the internal calling of God, because he alone “knoweth them that are his” (2 Tim. 2:19); and as Paul expresses it, holds them as it were enclosed under his seal, although, at the same time, they wear his insignia, and are thus distinguished from the reprobate. But as they are a small and despised number, concealed in an immense crowd, like a few grains of wheat buried among a heap of chaff, to God alone must be left the knowledge of his Church, of which his secret election forms the foundation. Nor is it enough to embrace the number of the elect in thought and intention merely. By the unity of the Church we must understand a unity into which we feel persuaded that we are truly ingrafted. For unless we are united with all the other members under Christ our head, no hope of the future inheritance awaits us. Hence the Church is called Catholic or Universal (August. Ep. 48), for two or three cannot be invented without dividing Christ; and this is impossible. All the elect of God are so joined together in Christ, that as they depend on one head, so they are as it were compacted into one body, being knit together like its different members; made truly one by living together under the same Spirit of God in one faith, hope, and charity, called not only to the same inheritance of eternal life, but to participation in one God and Christ. For although the sad devastation which everywhere meets our view may proclaim that no Church remains, let us know that the death of Christ produces fruit, and that God wondrously preserves his Church, while placing it as it were in concealment. Thus

it was said to Elijah, "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel" (1 Kings 19:18).

3. Moreover, this article of the Creed relates in some measure to the external Church, that every one of us must maintain brotherly concord with all the children of God, give due authority to the Church, and, in short, conduct ourselves as sheep of the flock. And hence the additional expression, the "communion of saints;" for this clause, though usually omitted by ancient writers, must not be overlooked, as it admirably expresses the quality of the Church; just as if it had been said, that saints are united in the fellowship of Christ on this condition, that all the blessings which God bestows upon them are mutually communicated to each other. This, however, is not incompatible with a diversity of graces, for we know that the gifts of the Spirit are variously distributed; nor is it incompatible with civil order, by which each is permitted privately to possess his own means, it being necessary for the preservation of peace among men that distinct rights of property should exist among them. Still a community is asserted, such as Luke describes when he says, "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul" (Acts 4:32); and Paul, when he reminds the Ephesians, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling" (Eph. 4:4). For if they are truly persuaded that God is the common Father of them all, and Christ their common head, they cannot but be united together in brotherly love, and mutually impart their blessings to each other. Then it is of the highest importance for us to know what benefit thence redounds to us. For when we believe the Church, it is in order that we may be firmly persuaded that we are its members. In this way our salvation rests on a foundation so firm and sure, that though the whole fabric of the world were to give way, it could not be destroyed. First, it stands with the election of God, and cannot change or fail, any more than his eternal providence. Next, it is in a manner united with the stability of Christ, who will no more allow

his faithful followers to be severed from him, than he would allow his own members to be torn to pieces. We may add, that so long as we continue in the bosom of the Church, we are sure that the truth will remain with us. Lastly, we feel that we have an interest in such promises as these, "In Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance" (Joel 2:32; Obad. 17); "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved" (Ps. 46:5). So available is communion with the Church to keep us in the fellowship of God. In the very term communion there is great consolation; because, while we are assured that everything which God bestows on his members belongs to us, all the blessings conferred upon them confirm our hope. But in order to embrace the unity of the Church in this manner, it is not necessary, as I have observed, to see it with our eyes, or feel it with our hands. Nay, rather from its being placed in faith, we are reminded that our thoughts are to dwell upon it, as much when it escapes our perception as when it openly appears. Nor is our faith the worse for apprehending what is unknown, since we are not enjoined here to distinguish between the elect and the reprobate (this belongs not to us, but to God only), but to feel firmly assured in our minds, that all those who, by the mercy of God the Father, through the efficacy of the Holy Spirit, have become partakers with Christ, are set apart as the proper and peculiar possession of God, and that as we are of the number, we are also partakers of this great grace.

4. But as it is now our purpose to discourse of the visible Church, let us learn, from her single title of Mother, how useful, nay, how necessary the knowledge of her is, since there is no other means of entering into life unless she conceive us in the womb and give us birth, unless she nourish us at her breasts, and, in short, keep us under her charge and government, until, divested of mortal flesh, we become like the angels (Matt. 22:30). For our weakness does not permit us to leave the school until we have spent our whole lives as scholars. Moreover, beyond the pale of the Church no forgiveness of sins,

no salvation, can be hoped for, as Isaiah and Joel testify (Isa. 37:32; Joel 2:32). To their testimony Ezekiel subscribes, when he declares, "They shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel" (Ezek. 13:9); as, on the other hand, those who turn to the cultivation of true piety are said to inscribe their names among the citizens of Jerusalem. For which reason it is said in the psalm, "Remember me, O Lord, with the favor that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance" (Ps. 106:4-5). By these words the paternal favor of God and the special evidence of spiritual life are confined to his peculiar people, and hence the abandonment of the Church is always fatal.

5. But let us proceed to a full exposition of this view. Paul says that our Savior "ascended far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:10-13). We see that God, who might perfect his people in a moment, chooses not to bring them to manhood in any other way than by the education of the Church. We see the mode of doing it expressed; the preaching of celestial doctrine is committed to pastors. We see that all without exception are brought into the same order, that they may with meek and docile spirit allow themselves to be governed by teachers appointed for this purpose. Isaiah had long before given this as the characteristic of the kingdom of Christ, "My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever" (Isa. 59:21). Hence it follows,

that all who reject the spiritual food of the soul divinely offered to them by the hands of the Church, deserve to perish of hunger and famine. God inspires us with faith, but it is by the instrumentality of his gospel, as Paul reminds us, "Faith cometh by hearing" (Rom. 10:17). God reserves to himself the power of maintaining it, but it is by the preaching of the gospel, as Paul also declares, that he brings it forth and unfolds it. With this view, it pleased him in ancient times that sacred meetings should be held in the sanctuary, that consent in faith might be nourished by doctrine proceeding from the lips of the priest. Those magnificent titles, as when the temple is called God's rest, his sanctuary, his habitation, and when he is said to dwell between the cherubims (Ps 32:13-14; 80:1), are used for no other purpose than to procure respect, love, reverence, and dignity to the ministry of heavenly doctrine, to which otherwise the appearance of an insignificant human being might be in no slight degree derogatory. Therefore, to teach us that the treasure offered to us in earthen vessels is of inestimable value (2 Cor. 4:7), God himself appears and, as the author of this ordinance, requires his presence to be recognized in his own institution. Accordingly, after forbidding his people to give heed to familiar spirits, wizards, and other superstitions (Lev. 19:30-31), he adds, that he will give what ought to be sufficient for all—namely, that he will never leave them without prophets. For, as he did not commit his ancient people to angels, but raised up teachers on the earth to perform a truly angelical office, so he is pleased to instruct us in the present day by human means. But as anciently he did not confine himself to the law merely, but added priests as interpreters, from whose lips the people might inquire after his true meaning, so in the present day he would not only have us to be attentive to reading, but has appointed masters to give us their assistance. In this there is a twofold advantage. For, on the one hand, he by an admirable test proves our obedience when we listen to his ministers just as we would to himself; while, on the other hand, he consults our weakness

in being pleased to address us after the manner of men by means of interpreters, that he may thus allure us to himself, instead of driving us away by his thunder. How well this familiar mode of teaching is suited to us all the godly are aware, from the dread with which the divine majesty justly inspires them.

Those who think that the authority of the doctrine is impaired by the insignificance of the men who are called to teach, betray their ingratitude; for among the many noble endowments with which God has adorned the human race, one of the most remarkable is, that he deigns to consecrate the mouths and tongues of men to his service, making his own voice to be heard in them. Wherefore, let us not on our part decline obediently to embrace the doctrine of salvation, delivered by his command and mouth; because, although the power of God is not confined to external means, he has, however, confined us to his ordinary method of teaching, which method, when fanatics refuse to observe, they entangle themselves in many fatal snares. Pride, or fastidiousness, or emulation, induces many to persuade themselves that they can profit sufficiently by reading and meditating in private, and thus to despise public meetings, and deem preaching superfluous. But since as much as in them lies they loose or burst the sacred bond of unity, none of them escapes the just punishment of this impious divorce, but become fascinated with pestiferous errors, and the foulest delusions. Wherefore, in order that the pure simplicity of the faith may flourish among us, let us not decline to use this exercise of piety, which God by his institution of it has shown to be necessary, and which he so highly recommends. None, even among the most petulant of men, would venture to say, that we are to shut our ears against God, but in all ages prophets and pious teachers have had a difficult contest to maintain with the ungodly, whose perverseness cannot submit to the yoke of being taught by the lips and ministry of men. This is just the same as if they were to destroy the impress of God as exhibited to us in doctrine. For no other reason were believers anciently enjoined

to seek the face of God in the sanctuary (Ps. 105:4) (an injunction so often repeated in the Law), than because the doctrine of the Law, and the exhortations of the prophets, were to them a living image of God. Thus Paul declares, that in his preaching the glory of God shone in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). The more detestable are the apostates who delight in producing schisms in churches, just as if they wished to drive the sheep from the fold, and throw them into the jaws of wolves. Let us hold, agreeably to the passage we quoted from Paul, that the Church can only be edified by external preaching, and that there is no other bond by which the saints can be kept together than by uniting with one consent to observe the order which God has appointed in his Church for learning and making progress. For this end, especially, as I have observed, believers were anciently enjoined under the Law to flock together to the sanctuary; for when Moses speaks of the habitation of God, he at the same time calls it the place of the name of God, the place where he will record his name (Exod. 20:24); thus plainly teaching that no use could be made of it without the doctrine of godliness. And there can be no doubt that, for the same reason, David complains with great bitterness of soul, that by the tyrannical cruelty of his enemies he was prevented from entering the tabernacle (Ps. 84). To many the complaint seems childish, as if no great loss were sustained, not much pleasure lost, by exclusion from the temple, provided other amusements were enjoyed. David, however, laments this one deprivation, as filling him with anxiety and sadness, tormenting, and almost destroying him. This he does because there is nothing on which believers set a higher value than on this aid, by which God gradually raises his people to heaven. For it is to be observed, that he always exhibited himself to the holy patriarchs in the mirror of his doctrine in such a way as to make their knowledge spiritual. Whence the temple is not only styled his face, but also, for the purpose of removing all superstition, is termed his footstool (Ps. 132:7; 99:5). Herein is the unity of the faith happily realized,

when all, from the highest to the lowest, aspire to the head. All the temples which the Gentiles built to God with a different intention were a mere profanation of his worship—a profanation into which the Jews also fell, though not with equal grossness. With this Stephen upbraids them in the words of Isaiah when he says, “Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the Prophet, Heaven is my throne,” &c. (Acts 7:48). For God only consecrates temples to their legitimate use by his word. And when we rashly attempt anything without his order, immediately setting out from a bad principle, we introduce adventitious fictions, by which evil is propagated without measure. It was inconsiderate in Xerxes when, by the advice of the magians, he burnt or pulled down all the temples of Greece, because he thought it absurd that God, to whom all things ought to be free and open, should be enclosed by walls and roofs, as if it were not in the power of God in a manner to descend to us, that he may be near to us, and yet neither change his place nor affect us by earthly means, but rather, by a kind of vehicles, raise us aloft to his own heavenly glory, which, with its immensity, fills all things, and in height is above the heavens.

6. Moreover, as at this time there is a great dispute as to the efficacy of the ministry, some extravagantly overrating its dignity, and others erroneously maintaining, that what is peculiar to the Spirit of God is transferred to mortal man, when we suppose that ministers and teachers penetrate to the mind and heart, so as to correct the blindness of the one, and the hardness of the other; it is necessary to place this controversy on its proper footing. The arguments on both sides will be disposed of without trouble, by distinctly attending to the passages in which God, the author of preaching, connects his Spirit with it, and then promises a beneficial result; or, on the other hand, to the passages in which God, separating himself from external means, claims for himself alone both the commencement and the whole course of faith. The office of the second Elias was, as Malachi

them from public crimes, which came under the cognizance of the Church, and produced much scandal. The great difficulty they had in pardoning those who had done something that called for ecclesiastical animadversion, was not because they thought it difficult to obtain pardon from the Lord, but by this severity they wished to deter others from rushing precipitately into crimes, which, by their demerit, would alienate them from the communion of the Church. Still the word of the Lord, which here ought to be our only rule, certainly prescribes greater moderation, since it teaches that the rigor of discipline must not be stretched so far as to overwhelm with grief the individual for whose benefit it should specially be designed (2 Cor. 2:7), as we have above discoursed at greater length.

Study Guide Questions

Section 1

1. How does Christ become ours?
2. But what do we need because of our ignorance and sloth?
3. Why sacraments?
4. What has the papacy done?
5. If God is your Father, who may you call your Mother?

Section 2

1. What does the phrase "I believe the church" refer to?
2. Which reading of that phrase does Calvin prefer?
3. Why is the Church called catholic or universal?

Section 3

1. What principle governs God's gifts to us?
2. Should we try to distinguish elect and reprobate?

Section 4

1. What title describes the visible church?

2. Is there another way of salvation outside this mother?
3. How long must we be under her authority?

Section 5

1. How has God determined to grow us up to maturity, compared to how He could have done it?
2. Why does God consecrate the mouths and tongues of men?
3. What do some stubborn men refuse to do?
4. How is the church built up?
5. What must all in the church do, from the highest to the lowest?

Section 6

1. Who is the author of preaching?
2. Is the preacher anything apart from the work and blessing of God?

Section 7

1. What church “really is before God”?
2. What church has many hypocrites mingled in with it?

Section 8

1. What does Augustine say about the perspective of God’s secret predestination?
2. So on what basis do we receive others as fellow Christians?

Section 9

1. Where does a church of God exist?
2. May we receive as brothers those that we believe to be living in a manner unworthy of it?

Section 10

1. Since God has so clearly marked His Church, how serious is it to separate from a true church?

ANSWERS TO STUDY GUIDE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapter One

Section 1

- 1. How does Christ become ours?**
Through faith in the gospel.
- 2. But what do we need because of our ignorance and sloth?**
We need outward helps.
- 3. Why sacraments?**
To foster and strengthen faith.
- 4. What has the papacy done?**
It has polluted everything God had appointed for our salvation.
- 5. If God is your Father, who may you call your Mother?**
The holy catholic Church.

Section 2

- 1. What does the phrase “I believe the church” refer to?**
To the visible and invisible church both.
- 2. Which reading of that phrase does Calvin prefer?**
He prefers “I believe the church,” not “I believe in the church.”
- 3. Why is the Church called catholic or universal?**
Because there could not be two or three churches.

Section 3

1. What principle governs God's gifts to us?

Whatever He gives to us, we should bestow on one another.

2. Should we try to distinguish elect and reprobate?

No, that is for God alone to do.

Section 4

1. What title describes the visible church?

Mother.

2. Is there another way of salvation outside this mother?

No.

3. How long must we be under her authority?

All our lives.

Section 5

1. How has God determined to grow us up to maturity, compared to how He could have done it?

He has done it through the education of the church, when He could have done it by divine fiat.

2. Why does God consecrate the mouths and tongues of men?

In order that His voice may resound in them.

3. What do some stubborn men refuse to do?

They refuse to submit to being taught by human word and ministry.

4. How is the church built up?

Solely by outward preaching.

5. What must all in the church do, from the highest to the lowest?

Aspire to the Head.

Section 6

1. Who is the author of preaching?

God.

2. Is the preacher anything apart from the work and blessing of God?

Nothing.

Section 7

1. What church “really is before God”?

The church in which no one is received unless they have been made true children of God by the Holy Spirit.

2. What church has many hypocrites mingled in with it?

The visible church.

Section 8

1. What does Augustine say about the perspective of God’s secret predestination?

He looks at the church and sees many sheep outside the church and many wolves within.

2. So on what basis do we receive others as fellow Christians?

On the basis of charitable judgment.

Section 9

1. Where does a church of God exist?

Where the word is purely preached and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution.

2. May we receive as brothers those that we believe to be living in a manner unworthy of it?

Yes, because of the common agreement of the church. Until that status is lawfully removed, we should honor it.

Section 10

1. Since God has so clearly marked His Church, how serious is it to separate from a true church?

It amounts to a denial of God and Christ.

Section 11

1. What two devices does Satan use to assault the marks of the Church?

He either corrupts them entirely, or he corrupts them to such an extent that people abandon the true church prematurely.

Section 12

1. Should we reject a church that still retains the marks?

No, not even if it otherwise swarms with faults.