

Emergency Calvin Quotes

This first quotation is vintage Calvin—reflecting his characteristic emphasis on the sovereignty of God—that you can creatively work into an answer for almost any ordination exam question (the words printed in bold letters pretty much say it all, just make sure that “God’s” is possessive, not plural):

“We are not our own: let not our reason nor our will, therefore, sway our plans and deeds. We are not our own: let us therefore not set it as our goal to seek what is expedient for us according to the flesh. We are not our own: in so far as we can, let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours. Conversely, **we are God’s:** let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God’s: let his wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions. We are God’s: let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal. ... For, as consulting our self-interest is the pestilence that most effectively leads to our destruction, so the sole haven of salvation is to be wise in nothing and to will nothing through ourselves but to follow the leading of the Lord alone.” (Institutes, 3.7.1, p. 690)

~~as seen in Scripture?~~ Romans 14 — “We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves... whether we

A famous image associated with Calvin is that of Scripture likened to spectacles by which we are properly shown God (as well, that is, as humans can perceive God). “Just as old or bleary-eyed men ... with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God.” (1.6.1, p. 70)

live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.”

Concerning worship: “God hates nothing more than counterfeit worship.” (4.13.7, p. 1260) “... all men have a vague general veneration for God, but very few really reverence him; and wherever there is great ostentation in ceremonies, sincerity of heart is rare indeed.” (1.2.2, p. 43)

Concerning church discipline and the Lord’s Supper, Calvin writes that “here also we must preserve the order of the Lord’s Supper, that it may not be profaned by being administered indiscriminately.” (4.12.5, p. 1232)

Concerning baptism: “Baptism is the sign of the initiation by which we are received into the society of the church, in order that, engrafted in Christ, we may be reckoned among God’s children.” (4.15.1, p. 1303) “Now it is clear how false is the teaching ... that through baptism we are released and made exempt from original sin ... As we are vitiated and corrupted in all parts of our nature, we are held rightly condemned on account of such corruption alone and convicted before God. ... Through baptism, believers are assured that this condemnation has been removed and withdrawn from them. ... this perversity [i.e., sin] never ceases in us, but continually bears new fruit.” (4.15.9, p. 1311) “But baptism serves as our confession before men. Indeed, it is the mark by which we publicly profess that we wish to be reckoned God’s people; by which we testify that we agree in worshiping the same God, in one religion with all Christians; by which finally we openly affirm our faith.” (4.15.13, p. 1313f.) “God through baptism promises us forgiveness of sins, and he will doubtless fulfill his promise for all believers. This promise was offered to us in baptism; therefore, let us embrace it by faith.” (4.15.17, p. 1317).

Concerning the person administering baptism, “nothing is added to it or taken from it [i.e., baptism] by the worth of him by whose hand it is administered.” (4.15.13, p. 1314)

Regarding the necessity of baptism for salvation, e.g., in the case of emergency baptisms for dying children; “God declares that he adopts our babies as his own before they are born, when he promises that he will be our God and the God of our descendants after us [Gen. 17:7]. Their salvation is embraced in this word. No one will dare be so insolent toward God as to deny that his promise of itself suffices for its effect. Few realize how much injury the dogma that baptism is necessary for salvation, badly expounded, has entailed.” (4.15.20, p. 1321)

Concerning faith: "Faith consists in the knowledge of God and Christ [John 17:3], not in reverence for the church." (3.2.3, p. 545) Faith is "a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit." (3.2.7, p. 551)

Concerning original sin: "Original sin, therefore, seems to be a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul, which first makes us liable to God's wrath, then also brings forth in us those works which Scripture calls 'works of the flesh' (Gal. 5:19). And that is what Paul often calls sin. The works that come forth from it—such as adulteries, fornications, thefts, hatreds, murders, carousings—he accordingly calls 'fruits of sin' (Gal 5:19-21), although they are also commonly called 'sins' in Scripture..." (2.1.8, p. 251)

Concerning humanity's natural endowments: "And indeed, that common opinion which they have taken from Augustine pleases me: that the natural gifts were corrupted in man through sin, but that his supernatural gifts were stripped from him. For by the latter clause they understand the light of faith as well as righteousness, which would be sufficient to attain heavenly life and eternal bliss. ... Since, reason, therefore, by which man distinguishes between good and evil, and by which he understands and judges, is a natural gift, it could not be completely wiped out; but it was partly weakened and partly corrupted, so that its misshapen ruins appear." (2.2.12, p. 270)

Concerning science: "... the mind of man, although fallen and perverted from its wholeness, is nevertheless clothed and ornamented with God's excellent gifts. If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God." (2.2.15, p. 273-4)

* Opening lines of the Institutes: "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves." (1.1.1, p. 35)

Concerning nature: "I confess, of course, that it can be said reverently, provided that it proceeds from a reverent mind, that nature is God; but because it is a harsh and improper saying, since nature is rather the order prescribed by God, it is harmful in such weighty matters, in which special devotion is due, to involve God confusedly in the inferior course of his works." (1.5.5, p. 58)

Calvin's Three Uses of the Law: "... the 'moral law' ... consists of three parts. The first is this: while it shows God's righteousness, it warns, informs, convicts, and lastly condemns, every man of his own unrighteousness." (2.7.6, p. 354) "The law is like a mirror. In it we contemplate our weakness, then the iniquity arising from this, and finally the curse coming from both—just as a mirror show us the spots on our face." (2.7.7, p. 355) "The second function of the law is this: at least by fear of punishment to restrain certain men who are untouched by any care for what is just and right unless compelled by hearing the dire threats in the law." (2.7.10, p. 358) "The third and principle use, which pertains more closely to the proper purpose of the law, finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns.... Here is the best instrument for them to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord's will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the understanding of it.... The law is to the flesh like a whip to an idle and balky ass, to arouse it to work." (2.7.12, pp. 360-61)

Concerning God as both Judge and Redeemer: "The Judge is the—Redeemer! Hence arises a wonderful consolation: that we perceive judgment to be in the hands of him who has already destined us to share with him the honor of judging [cf. Matt. 19:28] ... No mean assurance, this—that we shall be brought before no other judgment seat than that of our Redeemer, to whom we must look for our salvation." (2.16.18, p. 526)