

## A SPRINT THROUGH CALVIN'S INSTITUTES

### The Knowledge of God the Creator

#### I. Review from Book I, Chapters 1-5

- A. Two-fold source of true wisdom: Knowledge of God and Knowledge of Man
- B. Our knowledge of God should lead us to glorify Him
- C. God has placed a witness of Himself both inside (“seed of religion”) and outside (“dazzling theater”) of each person. But because of sin, we are “struck blind in such a dazzling theater” (1.5.8)
- D. Conclusion: *“There is no pure and approved religion founded upon common understanding alone...All excuse is cut off because the fault of dullness is within us.”* (1.5.13, 1.5.15)

#### II. The Objective Cure - Scripture as Spectacles

*THOUGH the light which presents itself to all eyes, both in heaven and in earth, is more than sufficient to deprive the ingratitude of men of every excuse, since God, in order to involve all mankind in the same guilt, sets before them all, without exception, an exhibition of his majesty, delineated in the creatures, — yet we need another and better help, properly to direct us to the Creator of the world. Therefore he hath not unnecessarily added the light of his word, to make himself known unto salvation...For, as persons who are old, or whose eyes are by any means become dim, if you show them the most beautiful book, though they perceive something written, but can scarcely read two words together, yet, by the assistance of spectacles, will begin to read distinctly, --so the Scripture, collecting in our minds the otherwise confused notions of Deity, dispels the darkness, and gives us a clear view of the true God. This, then, is a singular favor, that, in the instruction of the Church, God not only uses mute teachers, but even opens his own sacred mouth...Now, in order that true religion may shine upon us, we ought to hold that it must take its beginning from heavenly doctrine and that no one can get even the slightest taste of right and sound doctrine unless he be a pupil of Scripture.* (1.6.1-2)

1. According to Calvin, what are some things that God teaches us about Himself simply through “nature”? What are some things God teaches us about Himself through Scripture? Which do you think should be primary?

2. What did Calvin assert about Scripture when he says God “opens his own sacred mouth”? How are we to understand this truth in light of the fact that different fallible people, with different personalities, wrote the Bible?

*“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...”* (2 Tim 3:16)

*“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”* (2 Pet 1:21)

#### Basic Idea of Inspiration = “God’s words in men’s mouths”

The Bible is the work of God such that the end-product is God-given, having supervised the whole process so that what was written was as God willed it to be.

#### God’s Accommodation To Us - “This, then, is a singular favor...”

*For who is so devoid of intellect as not to understand that God, in so speaking, lisps with us as nurses are wont to do with little children? Such modes of expression, therefore, do not so much express what kind of a being God is, as accommodate the knowledge of him to our feebleness. In doing so, he must, of course, stoop far below the height of his majesty.* (1.13.1)

3. As we speak to others, what can we learn from God’s “accommodating” his language to our feeble minds?

### III. The Subjective Cure - The Testimony of the Holy Spirit

#### A. Why *These* Spectacles?

*The Scriptures obtain full authority among believers only when men regard them as having sprung from heaven, as if there the living words of God were heard... Hence, the highest proof of Scripture is uniformly taken from the character of him whose Word it is. The prophets and apostles boast not their own cleverness or any gifts of public speaking, nor do they dwell on rational proofs; but they appeal to the sacred name of God... For as God alone can properly bear witness to his own words, so these words will not obtain full credit in the hearts of men, until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who spoke by the mouth of the prophets, must penetrate our hearts, in order to convince us that they faithfully delivered the message with which they were divinely entrusted. (1.7.1, 4)*

1. What is the ultimate reason anyone accepts the Bible as authoritative?
  
2. What use do you think “proofs” of Scripture (see below) have according to Calvin? Was this true in your life? Were you convinced by proofs?

“Proofs”: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="display: inline-block; width: 30%;">• antiquity of the Bible</li> <li style="display: inline-block; width: 30%;">• miracles</li> <li style="display: inline-block; width: 30%;">• harmony of all its parts</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="display: inline-block; width: 30%;">• testimony of the church</li> <li style="display: inline-block; width: 30%;">• fulfilled prophecies</li> <li style="display: inline-block; width: 30%;">• heavenly character of message</li> </ul>

3. Aided by the Holy Spirit’s testimony in our hearts, what is the ultimate reason we should accept the Bible as authoritative? Do you agree that “The Bible is the Word of God because the Bible says it is the Word of God”? What happens to Biblical authority if we appeal to anything else?

*“It is easy to see that the Sacred Scriptures, which so far surpass all gifts and graces of human endeavor, breathe something divine.” (1.8.1)*

*“Indeed, Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence of its own truth as white and black things do of their color, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste” (1.7.2).*

Who is in a position to tell us what the proper indications of divinity would be when it comes to a purported revelation from God? In an opinion poll discloses that sixty-three percent of Americans believe the Bible to be God’s word in some special sense, does that count as relevant evidence for the conclusion that it is God’s word? Should the percentage rather be at least eighty-five? Should those surveyed rather be Asians or Europeans? One person opines that the Bible’s ‘beautiful and comforting words’ indicate that it came from God, while another takes such features as a kind of contrived and self-serving artificiality that lacks the rough realism or (alternatively) the ecstatic frenzy that one would ‘expect’ of inspiration. Who is in a position to say? The answer is that only God could tell us reliably and authoritatively what qualities mark out His word as really His. But where would God say this? If some document purported to be God’s word answering this crucial question, what adequate evidence could man have that this second message is a divine message to us? At some point, the message claiming to be from God would have to be its own authority, and there is no reason, then, why that should not be at the first point. Thus, *only God is adequate to bear witness to Himself or to authorize His own words.*

- Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 199.