

## A SPRINT THROUGH CALVIN'S INSTITUTES

### The Knowledge of God the Redeemer in Christ

#### I. Review of Book I as a Whole

A. God has undeniably revealed to man His power, purity, and majesty in what He has made: "...*there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory.*" (1.5.1)

B. Creation has a purpose! "...[God] *would have us look unto him, direct our faith to him, and worship and call upon him...*" (1.5.6). Yet, "*such is our stupidity that we grow increasingly dull toward to manifest testimonies, and they flow away without profiting us.*" (1.5.11)

C. Yet out of God's great love, He provides His Word and Spirit so that we could enjoy Him again.

D. Finally, all things in heaven and earth, even evil, are directed by God's almighty hand "*that from man's Fall he might gather occasion for his own glory*" (1.15.8).

#### II. True Knowledge of Ourselves

*It was not without reason that the ancient proverb so strongly recommended to man the knowledge of himself...But the more useful the precept is, the more careful we must be not to use it perversely. This, we observe has happened to certain philosophers, who, while urging man to know himself, propose the goal of recognizing his own worth and excellence...But self-knowledge lies first in considering what we were given at creation and how generously God continues his favor toward us, in order to know how great our natural excellence would be if only it had remained unblemished and, at the same time, remember that we have nothing of our own, but depend entirely on God...Secondly, to call to mind our miserable condition after Adam's fall; hence all confidence and boasting are overthrown, we blush for shame, and feel truly humble... Here, then, is what God's truth requires us to seek in examining ourselves; it requires the kind of knowledge that will strip us of all occasion for boasting, and lead us to submission... Nothing pleases man more than the sort of alluring talk that tickles the pride that itches in his very marrow...But however great such commendation of human excellence is that teaches man to be satisfied with himself; it does nothing but delight in its own sweetness; indeed it so deceives as to drive those who assent to it into utter ruin. (2.1.1-2)*

1. According to Calvin, how do worldly self-knowledge and godly self-knowledge differ? What are the two parts to right self-knowledge? What should each produce?

2. Why do you think this type of self-knowledge is or is not crucial for the Gospel? How should this shape how we hear sermons at PPC? What do you honestly think "soft" vs. "hard" preaching produce in us?

Calvin's Crossfire Questions and Answers: -*These will help set us up to understand our sinful condition...*

- What was the reason for Adam's sin?  
*"Our destruction, therefore, comes from the guilt of our flesh, not from God..." (2.1.10)*
- Why did the Fall happen?  
 That it was "gluttonous intemperance" is "childish". Rather "unfaithfulness" (2.1.4); also pride (Augustine) or disobedience.
- Why didn't God prevent Adam from sinning?  
*"Pious minds ought to loathe this objection, because it manifests inordinate curiosity" (2.1.10)*

### III. Transmission of Adam's Sin to Us

...Adam, when he lost the gifts received, lost them not only for himself but for us all...For the contagion does not take its origin from the substance of the flesh or soul, but because it had been so ordained by God that the first man should at one and the same time have and lose, both for himself and for his descendents, the gifts that God had bestowed upon him...Original sin, then, may be defined a hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature, extending to all the parts of the soul, which first makes us liable to the wrath of God, and then produces in us those works which Scripture calls "works of the flesh"...[W]e are to understand it not as if we, guiltless and undeserving, bore the guilt of his offense...[For] not only has punishment fallen upon us from Adam, but a contagion imparted by him resides in us, which justly deserves punishment... Thus those who have defined original sin as "the lack of the original righteousness, which ought to reside in us," though they substantially comprehend the whole case, do not significantly enough express its power and energy. For our nature is not only utterly devoid of goodness, but so prolific in all kinds of evil, that it can never be idle. (2.1.7-9)

1. Do we become sinners because we sin or do we sin because we are sinners? What is worse?
2. Do we inherit corruption from Adam through our physical lineage? Do we inherit it merely by imitating Adam's bad example (i.e., Pelagianism)? How?

*"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned..."* (Rom 5:12)

3. What is the extent of our corruption, according to Calvin (and Scripture)? What is misleading about the term "total depravity"? What keeps it from being "total"? What might be a better description? What about the "good" things people do?

*"...For why is one person more excellent than another? Is it not to display in common nature God's special grace, which, in passing many by, declares itself bound to none?"* (2.2.17)

### IV. Are We Free?: The Corruption of Our Will

...there remains a will which both inclines and hastens on with the strongest affection towards sin. For man, when he gave himself over to this bondage, was not deprived not of will, but of soundness of will... Man, since he was corrupted by the fall, sins not forced or unwilling, but voluntarily, by a most forward bias of the mind; not by violent compulsion, or external force, but by the movement of his own passion; and yet such is the depravity of his nature, that he cannot move and act except in the direction of evil...At length [Bernard] concludes, "Thus the soul, in some strange and evil way, is held under this kind of voluntary, yet sadly free necessity, both bond and free; bond in respect of necessity, free in respect of will: and what is still more strange, and still more miserable, it is guilty because free, and enslaved because guilty, and therefore enslaved because free." ...[W]e see how, not simply content to have given God due praise for our salvation, [the Psalmist in Psalm 100:3] expressly excludes us from all participation in it. It is as if he were saying that not a whit remains in man to glory in, for the whole of salvation comes from God. (2.3.5-6)

1. Calvin says about calling our wills "free", "What purpose is served by labeling with a proud name such a slight thing?" (2.2.7). What makes our wills "such a slight thing?" Are we free? In what sense?

*"By nature [man] possesses natural ability but lacks moral and spiritual ability. The fact that he does not possess the latter does not destroy his responsibility, because his responsibility rests upon the fact that he does possess the former."*

-A.W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, p. 154

*"For Edwards, the greatness of the gospel is visible only when viewed against the backdrop of the greatness of the ruin into which we have been plunged by the fall. The greatness of the disease requires the greatness of the remedy."*

- R.C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy Over Free Will*, p. 148