

PREPARATORY

Please note, I.vi introduces a new subject – scripture.

1. What is the overall title for Book I?
 - a. *The Knowledge of God the Creator*
2. What has been the subject of I.i-v?
 - a. The knowledge of God that men and women would have if sin had not entered the world.
 - b. What creation would reveal if we were still able to perceive it.
 - c. The ineffectiveness of creation as an instrument of revelation now that sin has blinded us to what creation is telling us.

In I.i-v Calvin has taken us as far as God's witness to himself in our consciences and in creation will get us, now he turns to scripture, the further revelation that God has added for our benefit.

Words you might find helpful to look up when you come to them are: patriarch, scripture, oracle,

EXPLORATORY

1. Calvin has taught us that God has created us with an inner sense of the divine and that creation itself - the physical universe and our own makeup – also teach us that God exists. He uses one word to tell us how intently all of that speaks of God's existence and his nature. What is that one word? (69, 25)

- a. *...brightness*

How 'bright' is that brightness? (69, 26f)

- a. *...more than enough to withdraw all support from men's ingratitude*

Do we need anything to teach us about God in addition to our own sense of the divine and creation? (69,29ff)

- a. *...it is needful that another and better help be added to direct us aright to the very Creator of the universe.*

What is God's objective in multiplying the helps that he gives us to recognise his existence and what he is like? (69, 31f)

- a. *...he added the light of his Word by which to become known unto salvation*

It may be helpful to pause at this point and remind ourselves that the Bible really began with Moses. (The book of Job may have been written earlier and, in the book of Genesis, he may have incorporated material that existed previously in written form.) The significance of all this becomes more obvious when we recall the Old Testament timeline. If we accept Usher's chronology the world began around 4000bc. Moses lived around 1500bc, so the world existed without canonical scripture for some 2,500 years. The arrival of scripture on the scene was a major leap forward but it didn't happen for a long time after God created the world. It coincided with the constitution of the Jews as a nation (indeed, in written form, it *was* the Jews' Constitution) and was a major influence on the development of their national life and culture, going forward from that point.

Why did God introduce scripture ('scripture' = written words, *ie* scripts)? What was it designed to do as far as the Jews were concerned? (70, 4ff)

- a. *...after he chose the Jews as his very own flock, he **fenced them about** that they might not sink into oblivion as others had.*

What is scripture designed to do for us? (70, 7)

- a. *...he holds us by the same means in the pure knowledge of himself*

What would happen to us if we did not have scripture to, 'hold' us? (70, 8f)

- a. *... even those who seem to stand firm before all others would soon melt away.*

Without scripture what would we be like when it comes to reading the evidence of his own existence that God has given to us in creation? (70, 9f)

- a. *...old or bleary-eyed men or those with weak vision*

What do such people need, in order to be able to, *begin to read distinctly*? (70, 12)

- a. *...spectacles*

How does scripture act like spectacles? (70, 13ff)

- a. *Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, **clearly shows us the true God.***

Moving into the second paragraph (starts 70, 23) what does Calvin tell us he is **not** writing about in this section of the Institutes? (70,26, 33ff; 71, 6ff)

- a. *...the proper doctrine of faith whereby they (ie, Adam, Noah, Abraham and the rest of the patriarchs, line 23f) had been illumined unto the hope of eternal life.*
- b. *...that other inner knowledge...which alone quickens dead souls*
- c. *...I am not yet going to discuss that covenant by which God adopted to himself the sons of Abraham, or that part of doctrine which has always separated believers from unbelieving folk*

What **is** he writing about in this section of the Institutes? (71, 9ff)

- a. *...here I shall discuss only how we should learn from Scripture that God, the Creator of the universe, can by sure marks be distinguished from all the throng of feigned gods.*

Leaving, *the proper doctrine of (saving) faith*, completely to one side for now, what did Adam, Noah, Abraham and the rest of the patriarchs attain as a result of careful study of God's Word? (70, 23ff)

- a. *Adam, Noah etc, penetrated to the intimate knowledge of him that in a way distinguished them from unbelievers.*

How does Calvin distinguish between this knowledge and saving faith? (70, 26f, 27ff, 30ff; 71, 7ff)

- a. *...the proper doctrine of faith, illumines, unto the hope of eternal life*
- b. *...the hope of eternal life, requires that they, recognise God not only as Creator but also as Redeemer*
- c. *First in order came that kind of knowledge by which one is permitted to grasp who that God is who founded and governs the universe. **Then that other inner knowledge was added, which alone quickens dead souls, whereby God is know not only as the Founder of***

the universe and the sole Author and Ruler of all that is made, but also in the person of the Mediator as the Redeemer.

- d. *...the proper doctrine of faith, pertains to, that covenant by which God adopted to himself the sons of Abraham, or that part of doctrine which has always separated believers from unbelieving folk...founded in Christ.*

Confining ourselves to the knowledge of which Calvin is speaking, what does it assure us of? (70, 31f; 71,10ff, 16f)

- a. *...who that God is who founded and governs the universe*
- b. *God, the Creator of the universe, can by sure marks be distinguished from all the throng of foreign gods.*
- c. *God, the artificer of the universe, is made manifest to us in scripture.*

Both kinds of knowledge have the same source, which is – what? (70, 30; 71, 10)

- a. *...the Word.*
- b. *...we learn...from Scripture*

What particular human responsibility does Calvin assert in this section? (71, 16ff)

- a. *God, the artificer of the universe, is made manifest to us in scripture, and that what we ought to think of him is set forth there, lest we seek some uncertain deity by devious paths.*

2. Who were the first receivers and transmitters of God's Word? (71,20)

- b. *...the patriarchs*

In what three forms did God's Word come to the patriarchs? (71, 21)

- a. *...oracles*
- b. *...visions*
- c. *...the work and ministry of men*

Having received God's word, what was the patriarchs' responsibility? (71, 21ff)

- a. *...he put into their minds what they should then hand down to their posterity.*

We have noted from sec 1 that the transmission of God's Word occurred in two stages: initially, transmission was oral, later it was written. How does Calvin describe this two-stage process in this section? (71, 23ff)

- a. *...firm certainty of doctrine was engraved in their hearts, so that they were convinced and understood that what they had learned proceeded from God.*
- b. *Finally, in order that truth might abide forever in the world with a continuing succession of teaching and survive through all ages, the same oracles he had given to the patriarchs it was his pleasure to have recorded, as it were, on public tablets*

As he revealed his word in these two ways, what was God achieving? (71, 26ff)

- a. *...by his Word, God rendered faith unambiguous forever*
- b. *...in order that truth might abide forever in the world with a continuing succession of teaching and survive through all ages...With this intent the law was published, and the prophets afterward added as its interpreters.*

71, 26 What does Calvin mean by 'faith'? (71, 23f)

- a. *...firm certainty of doctrine (ie The form of Christian doctrine, not saving faith.)*

71, 33 introduces a brief digression: *...the use of the law was manifold...* What does, 'manifold', mean in this context?

- a. Many and various.

What 'especial' use of the law does Calvin mention? (72, 1ff)

- a. *...it was especially committed to Moses and all the prophets to teach the way of reconciliation between God and men.*

So that we do not become fixated on this particular use of the law, what does Calvin find it necessary to repeat? (72, 4ff)

- a. *...besides the specific doctrine of faith and repentance that sets forth Christ as Mediator, Scripture adorns with unmistakable marks and tokens the one true God, in that he has created and governs the universe, in order that he may not be mixed up with the throng of false gods.*

How does this use of scripture emphasise its importance? (72, 9ff)

- a. *...however fitting it may be for man seriously to turn his eyes to contemplate God's works, since he has been placed in this most glorious theatre to be a spectator of them, it is fitting that he prick up his ears to the Word, the better to profit.*

What is the explanation for the fact that as life goes by unbelievers tend to become hardened in their resistance to truth? (72, 14ff)

- a. *...there are very few who... apply themselves teachably to God's word*

What foundation is necessary in order for us to be sure we possess and practice *true* religion? (72, 17ff)

- a. *...true religion...must take its beginning from heavenly doctrine*

What is the only way to, *get even the slightest taste of right and sound doctrine*? (72, 20)

- a. *...be a pupil of scripture*

(Explanatory note from IJ: in <http://www.ccel.us/godsinnerrantword.ch4.html> Jim Packer helpfully inserts '(this)' into Calvin's penultimate sentence, making it read: *But not only faith, perfect and in every way complete, but all right knowledge of God is born of (this) obedience.*)

How does Calvin conclude this section in a way that shows that his Word is a special gift of his grace? (72, 24ff)

- a. *...surely in this respect God has, by a singular providence, taken thought for mortals through all ages.*

3. In the first sentence Calvin gives us three common human tendencies. In the second sentence he shows that scripture opposes them. What are they? (72, 27ff)

- a. *...forgetfulness of God;*
- b. *...the tendency to every kind of error;*
- c. *...the lust to fashion constantly new and artificial religions.*

What was necessary, seeing that, the heavenly doctrine was in danger of being forgotten, vanishing and being corrupted? (72, 30f)

- a. *...written proof of the heavenly doctrine*

For whose benefit has God provided, *the assistance of the Word*? (72, 34f)

- a. *...all those to whom he has been pleased to give useful instruction.*

What did he foresee that made the provision of his Word in written form absolutely necessary? (72, 35ff)

- a. *...he foresaw that his likeness imprinted upon the most beautiful form of the universe would be insufficiently effective.*

What is the practical implication of this for us? (72, 37ff)

- a. *...we must strive onward by this straight path If we seriously aspire to the pure contemplation of God.*

What prevents even believers drawing the correct conclusions about God simply from considering his works? (73, 4)

- a. *...our depraved judgment*

To what does Calvin liken diligent Bible study that is undertaken because of a sincere desire to know God? (73, 7)

- a. *...the track*

To what does he liken the true knowledge of God that we gain from such study? (73, 7)

- a. *...the goal*

What is the consequence of turning aside from the Word? (73, 6f)

- a. *...though we may strive with strenuous haste, yet, since we have got off the track, we shall never reach the goal.*

(Note from IJ: As well as the picture of the track and the goal Calvin uses another illustration in 73, 10 – the labyrinth and the thread. The first use of this picture is in I.v.12. Footnote 36 draws attention to Calvin's repeated use of this illustration. It's worth thinking about. The labyrinth was a mythological maze-like structure built on Crete and occupied by the Minotaur, a creature that was half-man, half-bull. Every seven (or nine, depending on your version of the story) years seven young men and seven young women from Athens were consigned to the labyrinth as sacrifices to the Minotaur. Theseus, an Athenian prince, vowed to slay the Minotaur and, in order to do that, became one of the seven young men.

When he arrived on Crete, Ariadne, the princess, fell in love with him. She gave him a sword to slay the Minotaur and a quantity of thread. She instructed him to keep them by the entrance to the labyrinth. When the young men and women were locked in the labyrinth the following day, he was to tie one end of the thread to the entrance and unroll it as he made his way to the centre to find the Minotaur. When he had slain the Minotaur, the thread would guide him back to the entrance so that he and the others could escape. When he left Crete he was to take Ariadne with him.

So the picture is one of many routes but only one that leads to freedom. We need to escape the maze and many options present themselves to us but without a thread to guide us we will not know which way to take. Calvin uses this picture in a number of contexts, whenever we are confronted with issues so complex that we cannot see our way through them unaided. It is a good picture because it forces us to recognise our need of help and the source of the help that we need.

In this particular context, we need help to know God. The labyrinth is the myriad of self-generated thoughts and ideas that human beings have about God and what he 'must' be like. These thoughts arise from the combination of his splendour, displayed clearly in creation and providence, and our inability to interpret correctly what it is that we see all around us. A true understanding and knowledge of God is hidden from us by our own confusion, like something awaiting discovery in the centre of a maze. Unlike Theseus, we do not need to find our way out of this maze but into it [73, 10f) – right into the centre. God's Word is our thread that keeps us from pursuing blind alleys and conducts us right up to the truth about God himself.)

How is the two illustrations of the way and the goal and the labyrinth and the thread applied? (73, 11f)

- a. *...it is better to limp along this path than to dash with all speed outside of it.*

At the end of this section Calvin picks up on the phrase, *The LORD reigns*. Because of the context in which that phrase is used in the Psalms listed, Calvin maintains that David's purpose is not to refer to, *the power with which [God] is endowed, and which he exercises in governing the whole of nature*. What is the context that drives Calvin to the conclusion, which, it seems to me, is not the obvious one? (73, 12ff)

- a. *David [is] teaching that we ought to banish superstitions from the earth so that pure religion may flourish...*

How does the assertion that, *The LORD reigns*, relate to this objective? (73, 19f)

- a. *...errors can never be uprooted from human hearts until the true knowledge of God is planted therein.*

4. How is Christ's statement to the Samaritan woman, *that her people and all other peoples worshipped they knew not what; that the Jews alone offered worship to the true God*, illustrated by the Psalms that Calvin refers to? (75, 21ff, 33ff; 74, 1ff)

- a. Psalm 19. *...after he states, The heavens declare the glory of God, the firmament shows forth the works of his hands, the ordered succession of days and nights proclaims his majesty, then proceeds to mention his Word: The law of the Lord is spotless...enlightening eyes.*
- b. Psalm 29. *...the prophet - speaking forth concerning God's awesome voice, which strikes the earth in thunder...etc - finally adds at the end that his praises are sung in the sanctuary because the unbelievers are deaf to all the voices of God that resound in the air.*
- c. Psalm 93. *Similarly, he thus ends another psalm, where he has described the awesome waves of the sea: Thy testimonies have been verified, the beauty and holiness of thy temple shall endure for evermore.*

What statement about the necessity of scripture does Calvin repeat in 74, 8ff?

- a. *...the human mind because of its feebleness can in no way attain to God unless it be aided and assisted by his Sacred Word*

What were the consequences of this? (74, 10ff)

- a. *...all mortals at that time - except for the Jews - because they were seeking God without the Word, had of necessity to stagger about in vanity and error.*

FOR REFLECTION

1. What statements in this chapter indicate to us Calvin's view of the inspiration of the Bible?
 - a. p70: *This, therefore, is a special gift, where God, to instruct the church, not merely uses mute teachers but also opens his most hallowed lips.*
 - b. p71: *...he put into their minds what they should then hand down to their posterity...what they had learned proceeded from God.*
 - c. p73: *We must come, I say, to the word, where God is truly and vividly described to us from his works, while these very works are appraised not by our depraved judgment but by the rule of eternal truth.*
 - d. p74: *...His sacred word...*
2. *...all mortals at that time - except for the Jews - because they were seeking God without the Word, had of necessity to stagger about in vanity and error.*

What has changed?