

John Calvin for Everyone
The Institutes of the Christian Religion
Book 1 – Chapter 10

SCRIPTURE TO CORRECT ALL SUPERSTITION, HAS SET THE TRUE GOD ALONE OVER AGAINST
ALL THE GODS OF THE HEATHEN

Calvin continues with his discussion of the importance of scripture. He is still not yet ready to move toward the issue/importance of the Covenant with Abraham. Instead he wants to continue to make a fuller case for the critical nature of scripture.

Summary: Calvin has previously made two arguments about God. The first is that God can be and is known through God's creation. This is critical because it means that all persons ought to be able to know something about and thus believe in God because of what they see in the world around them. The second argument that Calvin makes is that God has made God's own self more fully known in the scriptures. In so doing God "*more intimately and also more vividly revealed*" (pg. 96) God's own self. The question which must now be answered is this, "*...whether the Lord presents himself to us in scripture as we previously saw him delineate himself in his works.*" (pg. 96)

Calvin begins by reminding his readers that the manner in which God governs the universe is the same manner in which God deals with humanity. Calvin then offers a couple of examples. The first comes in the form of God's appearance to Moses on Mt. Sinai. There God passes by Moses and makes a statement of self-revelation. God states that God is "*merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...forgiving iniquity...yet by no means clearing the guilty.*" (Exodus 34:6-7) Calvin then writes that the attributes listed there, "*kindness, goodness, mercy, justice, judgment and truth*" (pg.98) can be found throughout the world in God's creation. This is demonstrated more fully in Psalm 145 (which quotes the Exodus passage) where Calvin notes that "*... nothing is set down there that cannot be beheld in his creatures.*" (pg. 98) This is followed by the conclusion that "*Indeed with experience (meaning our observation of creation) as our teacher we find God just as he declares himself in his Word.*" (pg.98) Calvin then concludes this section by reminding his readers of the goal of God being set forth in scripture. "*Indeed the knowledge of God set forth in scripture is destined for the very same goal as the knowledge whose imprint shines in his creatures, in that it invites us first to fear God, then to trust in him.*" (pg. 98)

Calvin finishes the chapter by reflecting on the inexcusability of worshipping multiple gods. This belief is based on the belief that people throughout the ages had worshipped just one name of God. He writes, "*Indeed it is true that the name of one God was everywhere known and renowned. For men who worshipped a swarm of gods, whenever speaking from a real feeling of nature, as if content with a single God, simply used the name "God."*" Human beings only worshipped multiple gods then because they "*were dragged back or slipped back into false inventions*" and "*the trust of God has been corrupted by them all.*"

Reflection: Calvin's theology is based on the consistency of God. In other words, the God we see in the world needs to be the God we meet in the scriptures. Even if the world cannot teach us all that we need to know about God, the two must share the same "DNA." If either deviates, then his system of belief falls apart and opens the door for other religions and philosophies to gain a foothold in the minds of humanity and renders them free from judgment.

Questions:

1. What do you think of Calvin's contention that there is a consistency between the God we meet in scripture and the God we meet in creation?
2. Do you believe that this view is necessary? Why or why not?
3. Where do/don't you see God's kindness, goodness, mercy, justice, judgment and truth in creation?