

John Calvin for Everyone
The Institutes of the Christian Religion
Book 1 – Chapter 14 – Part 4
EVEN IN THE CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE AND OF ALL THINGS, SCRIPTURE BY
UNMISTAKABLE MARKS DISTINGUISHES THE TRUE GOD FROM FALSE GODS

In this chapter Calvin continues his arguments for understanding God as a particular kind of God. He does so by addressing four topics: creation itself, angels, the devil/demonic and the spiritual lessons of creation. This article will summarize what Calvin believes we ought to learn from creation.

Summary: Calvin wraps up” this chapter with a summation of the spiritual lessons we ought to learn from creation. *“Meanwhile let us not be ashamed to take pious delight in the works of God open and manifest in this most beautiful theatre.”* (pg. 179) He goes on to remind his readers that while creation is not the prime reason to believe, it is a truism that all we see is God’s and ought to cause us consider the reasons why God made it. In addition Calvin sees God’s hands at work not only in the original six-day creation as recorded in Genesis, but God’s continuing care for it. *“We shall likewise learn that he nourishes some (parts of creation) in secret ways, and as it were, from time to time instills new vigor into others...”* (pg. 180)

The first lesson we are to learn from creation is that God is a God of order. Calvin refers to God as the one who *“stationed, arranged, and fitted together the starry host of heaven in such wonderful order that nothing more beautiful in appearance can be imagined; who so set and fixed some in their stations that they cannot move”* (pg. 181) The second lesson is that God is a God of power. *“It is so too when we observe his power in sustaining so great a mass, in governing the swiftly revolving heavenly system, and the like For these few examples make sufficiently clear what is to recognize God’s powers in the creation of the universe.”* (pg. 181)

The purpose of all of this contemplation of God’s creation (while noting that God is a God of order and power) is to bring us to thankfulness and trust. *“It is to recognize that God has destined all things for our good and salvation, but at the same time to feel his power and grace in ourselves and in the great benefits he has conferred upon us, and so bestir ourselves to trust, invoke praise, and love him.”* (pg. 181) Calvin continues, *“God himself has shown by the order of creation that he created all things for man’s sake.”* (pg. 181-182) We know this is so because God, in creating all that there is, created humanity on the last of the six days: using each of the previous five days to *“prepare everything that he foresaw would be useful”* for humanity. (pg. 182) Because God did all of this for us, Calvin believes that there should be *“no doubt whether this most gracious Father has us in his care, who we see was concerned for us even before we were born! How impious would it be to tremble for fear that his kindness might at any time fail us in our need...”* (pg. 182)

Calvin ends this section by reminding us that we are God’s children *“whom he has received into his faithful protection to nourish and educate...we are to trust that he will never leave us destitute of what we need for salvation...”* (pg. 182)

Reflection: Calvin has often been portrayed as a hard-nosed, unloving, legalistic sort of person. What we witness in this part of this work is something very different. We see someone whose heart is filled with an appreciation for the beauty of nature. He almost waxes poetic about the love that God has for us as God’s children. Calvin is thus someone who has rejected the medieval image of a God who hangs us over the edge of hell and replaced it with a loving God who has insured that we have all that we need for life and salvation. I wonder how many of us have, when looking on the beauty of this world, have thought the same thing about God; that here is a God who loves and cares for us because this God has given us such an amazing place in which to live?

Questions:

1. How does creation shape your image of God?
2. What is the most beautiful place you have ever been?
3. How have you experienced the love of God?