

**John Calvin for Everyone**  
The Institutes of the Christian Religion  
Book 1 – Chapter 9

FANATICS, ABANDONING SCRIPTURE AND FLYING OVER TO REVELATION, CAST DOWN ALL THE  
PRINCIPLES OF GODLINESS

Calvin has spent several chapters discussing the importance of the scriptures, including how we come to believe that the scriptures are the Word of God only through the work of the Spirit and that any “proofs” of scripture’s validity are only proof under the work of the Spirit. Calvin now embarks on a defense of the scriptures as the only reliable way of knowing God.

**Summary:** Evidently, Calvin and his audience were aware of Christian groups who had begun to proclaim that the Holy Spirit had given them new insights which were contrary to what was revealed in the scriptures. In today’s world these groups could be compared to Mormons and Moonies who, while claiming the Bible as their own, claim to have been given new revelations which are contrary to scripture. Calvin does not pull any punches as he writes about these people. *“Furthermore, those who, having forsaken scripture, imagine some other way of reaching God, ought to be thought of as not so much gripped by error as carried away by frenzy. For of late certain giddy men have arisen, who, with great haughtiness exalting the teaching office of the Spirit, despise all reading and laugh at the simplicity of those, who as they express it, follow the dead and killing letter.”* (pg.93) Calvin accuses these people of having *“drunk of another spirit than that which the Lord promised his disciples”* (pg. 94) He references Paul in Galatians 1:6-9 when the Apostle makes it clear that any spirit which foists a doctrine upon the church which is contrary to the revealed doctrine deserves to be suspected of *“vanity and lying.”* (pg. 94)

At this point Calvin once again reminds his readers of the Spirit’s purpose. *“Therefore the Spirit, promised to us, has not the task of inventing new and unheard of revelations, or of forging a new kind of doctrine, to lead us away from the received doctrine of the gospel, but of sealing our minds with that very doctrine which is commended by the gospel.”* (pg.94) The Spirit’s task instead is, as Calvin previously pointed out, to convince our inner selves of the truth of the scriptures which it authored.

Calvin then gets to the heart of his argument by reminding his readers that the Spirit *“is the author of the scriptures; he cannot vary and differ from himself. Hence he must ever remain just as he once revealed himself there.”* (pg. 94-95) In other words what Calvin is claiming is that since the Spirit inspired the writers of the scriptures (perhaps even using the writers as human dictation machines) the Spirit would not, at some later time, teach something different than it taught before. For this reason Calvin argues, people ought to spend as much time as possible reading and hearkening to scripture. Calvin brings this all together by claiming that *“For by a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of His Word and of His Spirit so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our hearts...”* (pg. 95)

**Reflection:** In this chapter Calvin expands the theological underpinning for the Reformed Tradition’s emphasis on scripture. If, as he claims, we only find the living Word of God in the written word, then it ought to be the focus of our reading and study. In recent times some people have struggled with this view of scripture because it does not acknowledge the human component of the scripture’s creation; that the scriptures might reflect particular dated social norms, rather than eternal truths. This newer view has allowed the church to take a second look at everything from slavery to the place of women in the church.

**Questions:**

1. What do you think of Calvin’s claim that there can be no new revelation that might contradict scripture?
2. If Calvin is correct, does it limit what the Spirit might do?
3. Where have encountered those who claim to have had a new revelation?