

## John Calvin for Everyone

The Institutes of the Christian Religion

Book 2 – Chapter 9

CHRIST ALTHOUGH HE WAS KNOWN TO THE JEWS UNDER THE LAW, WAS AT LENGTH  
CLEARLY REVEALED ONLY IN THE GOSPEL

This was a section added to one of the last editions of the Institutes where Calvin wants to point out that the purpose of the Law was always to point to Christ.

**Summary:** Calvin begins by reminding his readers that the Law with its sacrifices was not intended to be a set of rituals performed to appease an angry god, but was instead intended to show God's parent-like love in that the sacrifices offered a means of forgiveness and reconciliation. He writes, God *"was then (in the Old Testament) surely known in the same image in which he with full splendor now appears to us"* (p. 423). In other words there is only one God, a loving one, in both Old and New Testaments. Even so, the Law was only a "shadow" of the glory and wonder of Christ that was to come, and toward which the Jews looked with great expectation. *"They (meaning the Jews) had but a slight taste of it (the Good News of Jesus); we can more richly enjoy"* (p. 423).

The reality that we get to enjoy the fullness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ is something that Christians ought to treasure and appreciate. *"That God has preferred us to the holy patriarchs, who were men of rare piety, is no slight commendation..."* (pg. 424). He continues by explaining that even though the pious who lived and died before Christ saw some of the *"light that shines in the person of Christ"* (pg. 424), they only glimpsed the shadow of what is *"manifest to us"* (pg. 424) and so we ought to be grateful.

Calvin next turns to the Gospel which he describes as *"the clear manifestation of the mystery of Christ"* (pg. 424). Nonetheless he reminds us that the Gospel was also contained in the Law. *"...gospel, taken in the broad sense, includes those testimonies of the God's mercy and fatherly favor which God gave to the patriarchs of old"* (pg. 425). Even so the Gospel proclaimed by Christ is a *"new and unusual sort of embassy by which God fulfilled what he had promised; that the truth of His promises would be revealed in His Son"* (pg. 425).

In the next section Calvin refutes what he sees as errors concerning some understandings of the Gospel. The first is that some people argue that we receive all of the promises of Jesus' work (the Gospel) in this life. He disagrees. *"Although, therefore, Christ offers us in the gospel a present fullness of spiritual benefits, the enjoyment thereof ever lies hidden under the guardianship of hope, until having put off corruptible flesh we may be transfigured into the glory of him who goes before us"* (pg. 426). The second is that some people see in the Law only a relationship of works between humanity and God, rather than a relationship of love. *"...the Gospel did not supplant the entire Law as to bring forward a different way of salvation. Rather it confirmed and satisfied whatever the law had promised and gave substance to the shadows"* (pg. 427).

**Reflection:** Throughout the history of Christianity, many believers have taught that there was no connection between the Law of Moses and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is as if the Gospel replaced the Law. For Calvin this makes no sense. If God is a God of grace and compassion in the New Testament then God must have been a God of grace and compassion in the Old. The Law then was a good thing, which gave people hope until the coming of Christ.

### Questions:

1. What do you make of seeing the love of God in the Law of Moses?
2. What Law of the Old Testament might be an example of love?
3. How is the work of Jesus, Good News (Gospel) to you?