

John Calvin (and We) Celebrate 500 Years

Princeton Theological Seminary has provided a yearly course of study of John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* – through Internet at <http://www2.ptsem.edu/coned/calvin>. This website provides a reading schedule, the readings in both visual and audio form, a weekly reflection, and the opportunity for discussion. A link to Princeton Theological Seminary's course will be included in the our church website, www.fpcduncan.com, and a companion course is planned within our church that parallels those topics covered in the Princeton Theological Seminary website. A short summary and commentary on the Princeton Theological Seminary readings and reflections will also be provided monthly in our church newsletter.

I hope these actions will encourage church members to visit Princeton Theological Seminary's website, discover and explore far-reaching concepts from a knowledgeable resource, and thereby celebrate John Calvin's systematic theology from the past to the present with an eye toward the future. We are what we believe, and John Calvin's work provides information about those beliefs.

Elsie McKee, in the introductory reflection on the Princeton Theological Seminary website, conveys that John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* underwent considerable expansion from the 1536 first book to the 1560 final publication; the work was to build faith of Christians. John Calvin's axioms were: "... that there is one God, who is just and good by definition; that Jesus Christ is God's Son and the Bible is God's revelation (renewing and expanding what was made known in creation but lost to sight by the fall); that because the Bible is God's Word, it cannot materially contradict itself and must all fit together in such a way as to be practicable." [1]

“Book One. The Knowledge of God the Creator” Chapters 1-10

There is neither knowledge of God without knowledge of ourselves, nor knowledge of ourselves without knowledge of God. Yet, it is God who calls us and it is God who provides the thirst for knowledge. According to Rev. Dr. Gordon S. Mikoski, “Abstract and ethereal claims about God must finally give way to discerning the meaning and implications of what God has revealed to us and for us as we live amidst the concrete realities of this world.” [2]

Trust and piety – that is “reverence joined with love”[3] – are required for knowledge of God with emphasis upon God, not us, as the center of all being. The divine wisdom reveals itself in the wonder of creation; we are to contemplate God recognizing God's divine omnipotence and God's hand in all of creation. Reverend Barbara A. Chaapel notes that “ ... science and theology have become talking partners in our time.” [4]

However, it is not in creation, but in the Holy Scriptures where God bestows the actual knowledge of divine works and God's essence. We are convicted by the Holy Spirit to seek and accept truth through Scripture. According to Tom Gillespie, "Put simply, the God of whom the Bible speaks is the God who speaks through the Bible." [5] Scriptural authority comes from God, not the church, and the church is grounded by Scripture. [6]

John Calvin's theology is both thinking and practical. He neither accepts blindly nor reasons beyond the "reasonable." He is pragmatic; his words speak from the past to the present.

References:

- [1] McKee, Elsie, "Reflections for the week of January 1-4". *Calvin 09 - Read the Institutes*. Princeton Theological Seminary. January 1-4, 2009. Web. 22 Jan. 2009. <<http://www2.ptsem.edu/ConEd/Calvin/archive/>>.
- [2] Mikoski, Gordon S., "Reflections for the week of January 5-11". *Calvin 09 - Read the Institutes*. Princeton Theological Seminary. January 5-11, 2009. Web. 20 Jan. 2009. <<http://www2.ptsem.edu/ConEd/Calvin/archive/>>.
- [3] Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Ed. John T. McNeill. Trans. Ford Lewis Battles. 2 vols. Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 2006. 41. Print.
- [4] Chaapel, Barbara A., "Reflections for the week of January 12-18". *Calvin 09 - Read the Institutes*. Princeton Theological Seminary. January 12-18, 2009. Web. 20 Jan. 2009. <http://www2.ptsem.edu/ConEd/Calvin/archive/>>.
- [5] Gillespie, Thomas W., "Reflections for the week of January 19-25". *Calvin 09 - Read the Institutes*. Princeton Theological Seminary. January 19-25, 2009. Web. 20 Jan. 2009. <<http://www2.ptsem.edu/ConEd/Calvin/archive/>>.
- [6] Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Ed. John T. McNeill. Trans. Ford Lewis Battles. 2 vols. Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 2006. 74-75. Print.

Additional notes:

1. All citations from the *Institutes of Christian Religion* are from the published form of the book.
2. "John Calvin to the Reader", "Subject Matter of the Present Work", and "Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France", although part of the reading, are excluded from the summary.
3. I will attempt to use inclusive language, and neither male nor female. However, should text and clarity suffer, a singular pronoun may suffice with the understanding that it precludes neither male nor female.

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