

Discussion Guide for Session 4

A. **Announcements** and **prayer**

B. **Scripture meditation:** Ps 33:6 (Calvin's Commentary below provides an example of his Trinitarian and Christocentric interpretation of the Old Testament.)

v6. *By the word of Jehovah. That he may stir us up to think more closely of God's works, he brings before us the creation of the world itself; for until God be acknowledged as the Creator and Framer of the world, who will believe that he attends to the affairs of men, and that the state of the world is controlled by his wisdom and power? But the creation of the world leads us by direct consequence to the providence of God. Not that all men reason so justly, or are endued with so sound a judgment, as to conclude that the world is at this day maintained by the same divine power which was once put forth in creating it: on the contrary, the great majority imagine that he is an idle spectator in heaven of whatever is transacted on earth. But no man truly believes that the world was created by God unless he is also firmly persuaded that it is maintained and preserved by him. Wisely and properly, therefore, does the prophet carry us back to the very origin of the world, in order to fix in our minds the certainty of God's providence in the continual order of nature. By the figure synecdoche, he uses the term heavens for the whole fabric of the world, because, as I have elsewhere remarked, the sight of the heavens more than all the other parts of creation transports us with admiration. He therefore immediately adds, And all the host of them, by which phraseology, according to the usual method of Scripture, he means the stars and planets; for if the heavens were destitute of this ornament, they would in a manner be empty. In saying that the heavens were created by the word of God, he greatly magnifies his power, because by his nod alone, without any other aid or means, and without much time or labor, he created so noble and magnificent a work. But although the Psalmist sets the word of God and the breath of his mouth in opposition both to all external means, and to every idea of painful labor on God's part, yet we may truly and certainly infer from this passage, that the world was framed by God's Eternal Word, his only begotten Son. Ancient interpreters have, with considerable ingenuity, employed this passage as a proof of the eternal Deity of the Holy Spirit against the Sabellians. But it appears from other places, particularly from Isaiah 11:4, that by the breath of the mouth is meant nothing else but speech. For it is there said concerning Christ, "He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked." As powerful and effective speech is there allegorically denominated the rod of his mouth; so in like manner, for another purpose it is denominated in the immediately succeeding clause the breath of his mouth, to mark the difference that exists between God's speech and the empty sounds which proceed from the mouths of men. In proving the Divinity of the Holy Spirit, therefore, I durst not press this text against Sabellius. Let us account it sufficient that God has formed the heavens by his Word in such a manner as to prove the eternal Deity of Christ. Should any object that these divine persons would not appear distinct if the terms Word and Breath are synonymous; I answer, that the term breath is not employed here simply as in other places, in which there is evidently a distinction made between the Word and the Spirit; but the breath of his mouth is used figuratively for the very utterance of speech; as if it had been said, As soon as God uttered the breath of his mouth, or proclaimed in word what he wished to be done, the heavens were instantly brought into existence, and were furnished, too, with an inconceivable number and variety of stars. It is indeed true that this similitude is borrowed from men; but the*

Scriptures often teach in other places, that the world was created by that Eternal Word, who, being the only begotten Son of God, appeared afterwards in flesh.

C. Review questions for Session 3

1. Calvin published ___ Latin version of the *Institutes*.
 - a. 2
 - b. 3
 - c. 4
 - d. 5

2. The English version of the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* recommended for this course is the translation by F.L. Battles, which was published in:
 - a. 1561
 - b. 1813
 - c. 1845
 - d. 1960

3. Calvin's compositional style in the *Institutes* may best be characterized as:
 - a. Scholastic, i.e., Aristotelian logical analysis of Scripture
 - b. Allegorical Palladianism moderated by Luther's doctrines of *Sola Scriptura* and *Sola Fide*.
 - c. Rhetorical/antithetical/polemical
 - d. Non-speculative—devotional and practical
 - e. C and D both apply
 - f. All of the above apply

4. Recalling the handout photocopied from Partee (see Discussion Guide for **Session 3**), I favor adopting his rubric, _____, as a structural guide for our topical study of the *Institutes*.
 - a. 'habitus infusus' (a Thomistic-Aristotelian concept)
 - b. Union with/in Christ
 - c. 'ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda'
 - d. the archetype of the Apostle's Creed
 - e. T.U.L.I.P. (the acrostic as expounded in the Canons of Dort)

5. Based on your reading and study thus far, have you formed a clearer understanding of the concept, *pietas*, as used by Calvin?

6. Reflecting on Romans 12:1-2, do you think Paul's enjoinder 'to present ourselves as living sacrifices' is symbolic of *pietas*? (Also, please read the photocopy from Joel Beeke's, *Living for God's Glory*, Chapter 13, for additional perspectives.)

- D. **Introduction to Book I** (God's work for us in creation)
- a. The "Triunity of God"
 - i. Functional relationships within the Triune Godhead (refer to Venn diagram on blackboard)
 - ii. The Deity of Christ Jesus
 - b. Calvin's exegetical principles (refer to attached photocopy, Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin*, pp. 52-55)
 - i. Clarity and brevity
 - ii. Author's intention
 - iii. His situation
 - iv. The passage's original meaning
 - v. It's context
 - vi. The cautious possibility of meaning beyond the literal
 - vii. The precise meaning of biblical metaphors
 - viii. The *scope of Christ*, i.e., the Scriptures must be read for the purpose of finding Christ in it.
- E. **Discussion** of reading assignment for today
- a. Book I:1.1—thematic implications?
 - b. What do you think Calvin meant by the phrase, "Nearly all...."?
 - c. Class discussion of Book I, Chapters 1-14
 Book I: 1.2; 2.2; 3.1; 4.1 5.1; 7.1; 7.2; 7.4; 9.1; 9.2; 9.3; 10.2; 13.1; 13.2; 13.17; 13.20; 13.23; 14.1; 14.16; 14.20.
- F. For **Session 5**:
- a. Complete reading assignment in Book I: 16.1; 16.3; 16.4; 16.8; 16.3; 17.1; 17.2; 17.6; 18.1; 18.2; 18.3; 18.4; 15.4. (*fini*)
 - b. Be thinking of the doctrinal implications or practical applications of what we have surveyed in our overview of Book I.