

The Mind of Christ and Reason

The Role of Disciplined Reason Searching the Laws
Embedded in God Created Order and God's Will

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Are God's Laws that are Embedded in Creation, Accessible to Non-Christians?

The following is a crucial question for Christians who believe in *Scripture alone* and who want to know and do the will of God 24/7 with the Mind of Christ:

Can a person who is not a believer in Christ Jesus acquire any knowledge through observation and disciplined research of God's created order that can help a Christian to better understand and participate in the common good of all human kind as planned and willed by our God of pure goodness?

1. A First Response from a Renown *Scripture Alone* Theologian

As a first response, I have examined John Calvin on this subject as he is a reference point for many Protestant denominations that hold to *Scripture Alone*. I wanted to know if he believed that those of other religious, philosophical or secular faiths could obtain knowledge outside of Scripture that might be in anyway useful to Christians in the pursuit of the terrestrial common good as willed by God, our Father, for his children?

First off, Calvin is clear that in the Fall, God withdrew the supernatural gifts¹ such as faith, hope, and zeal in charity toward neighbor and a hopeful assurance of eternal joy with God.

What then remained for Calvin? Basing himself on Scripture, Calvin argues that “enough of reason” was preserved by God’s grace and love. This preservation of “enough of reason” is what clearly distinguishes humans from brute beasts.²

Yet, Calvin maintains, “A mind cannot be considered whole that is both weak and plunged into deep darkness”³ about its origin and its own true nature; that is, to be a creature created to be in a loving relationship with a trustworthy, loving God. “Likewise the will,” which is “inseparable from reason,” for Calvin, “is so attached to desires of the flesh that it cannot strive after the right without a special intervention of God’s grace.”⁴

However, Calvin continues, that “to so condemn human understanding for its perpetual blindness as to leave it no perception of any good is contrary to God’s word.”⁵ In other words, for Calvin, after the Fall, human understanding possesses some power of perception, “since its was created to be captivated for truth. Yet, this longing for truth, such as it is, languishes due to the effects of the Fall.”⁶

¹ Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1960; II, ii, 12. [Whereas Calvin depicts God withdrawing the supernatural gifts from humankind, this author prefers to see that event as: (1) God respected the ability God created in human creatures to reject God’s companionship and friendship and (2) God, being Love, could not force his love and offer of friendship upon humankind. (3) Therefore, it was humankind that rejected friendship with God and had chosen death instead. (4) God, respecting humankind’s freedom withdraws the super natural gifts and confirms humankind in their choice of death. (5) However, being Love, God works out a plan to restore the lost friendship that will respect human freedom and provide a rationale for human reason so that we might come to fully trust God as the God of pure goodness and love. Over a long arc of time God gives humankind every reasonable sign so that they might come to believe that he is a God of love and pure goodness. The ultimate witness to this love is manifest in Christ Jesus.

² Calvin references Augustine, on *Nature and Grace*, iii, 3;

³ Calvin, II, ii, 12.

⁴ Ibid., II, ii, 12.

⁵ Ibid., II, ii, 12

⁶ Ibid., II, ii, 12.

Nevertheless, Calvin notes that the efforts of reason “do not always become so worthless as to have no effect,” especially when attention is given to earthly matters. “Earthly things” have “their significance and relationship with regard to the present life” and are, in a sense, “confined within its bounds.”⁷ Among earthly things Calvin includes “government (the fostering and preservation of society), household management, all mechanical skills and the liberal arts.”⁸ It would therefore seem that God’s truth about harmony among relationships in society, marriage and family that are imbedded in God’s created order would fit somewhere within the categories of both societal relationships, government and household management.

However, Calvin is quick to point out that “the discovery and systematic transmission of the inner and more excellent knowledge of the arts” (of which relationship dynamics would be a part) is possible only due to God’s graciously preserving this human ability. Moreover, Calvin limits this ability of disciplined study and reasoning to the few. He states that God “does not bestow this profound ability upon all, but only upon a few.” Likewise, because it is “bestowed indiscriminately upon believers and non-believers alike, it is rightly counted as a natural gift”; that is, it is a gift (grace) of God given for the common good of the present life. In fact, those whom Scripture [1 Cor. 2:14] call “natural humans” were indeed “sharp and penetrating in their investigation of subjects about things useful in this life.”⁹

Therefore, Calvin concludes that “whenever we come upon the systematic transmission of the arts,” (which include the empirically grounded sciences), “let that admirable light of truth shining in them teach us that the mind of humans, though fallen and perverted from its wholeness, is nevertheless clothed and ornamented with God’s excellent gifts.”¹⁰

In other words, it is clear, according to Calvin, that whomever God has given the ability can research and can come to know a useful degree of truth regarding earthly things; that is, they can “discover the hidden and excellent things of earthly matters.” Given that God’s plan for harmonious and healthy relationships is also an essential part in the *terrestrial pilgrimage* of all humankind, how much more should the truths and laws of the excellent ways of social harmony, healthy marriages and families be accessible to the minds of those intellectually gifted persons even if they are not aware of or believe in the existence¹¹ of a God of pure goodness, who created out of

⁷ Ibid., II, ii, 13. [Calvin does clearly affirm that the estate of the Fallen mind is “intelligent enough even to taste something of things above,” but he says, humans are “more careless about investigating” the things above and when humans do ponder these things, it (the human mind) “is especially aware of its own frailty.” (Ibid., II, ii, 14)]

⁸ Ibid., II, ii, 14.

⁹ Ibid., II, ii, 14

¹⁰ Ibid., II, ii, 15

¹¹ This holds true even if a person might reject “God.” A person could remain in God’s good graces in that they are only rejecting a twisted notion of God created by the sickness of a fallen mind. God himself rejects this perverted notion of God. So it is not God they are rejecting but falsehood. They

love, loves us constantly and even became one of us to show us God's pure goodness, and save us from our sins and open us to eternal fellowship with God.

Whether one has a belief in our God as outlined above or has another belief, it seems that those whom God has gifted with acute minds, whatever their religious or philosophical faith maybe, can discover portions of the otherwise hidden and excellent truths that lie within God's laws that are embedded in God's creation. Such knowledge can be useful also toward making more stable, satisfying, harmonious and meaningful societal and personal relationships. This is so, as noted previously, in that the creational laws regarding many aspects of the substance of what it takes to have good and healthy societal and personal relationships remain embedded in the human person even after the Fall. Although generally estranged from these laws due to the darkness of our minds, we are still created in the image and likeness of God and are his handiwork.

In other words, while the Fall has indeed obscured a generalized awareness of the laws of healthy relationships, the creational imprint in humankind and God's creational blueprint for societal, marriage, family and personal relationships remain vigorously intact. Therefore, God's laws of relational harmony and its derived blessings are as effective and true today and tomorrow as there were from the beginning. Hence, many of the useful laws rooted within humankind are discoverable by those so gifted by God with these natural gifts and the laws they glean are clearly useful to Christians and to all persons of good will.

Conclusion: “Can” or “ought to” Christians?

Hence, it seems that Calvin, both from a theological and Scriptural point of view, would maintain that Christians **“can”** and hence **“ought to”** *learn from and work together with those – of whatever implicit¹² or explicit faiths- who have empirically sought and acquired knowledge about the dynamics of relationships that would better enable people to have stable, satisfying, harmonious and meaningful societal, marital and personal relationships. This same truth could be extended to those who have developed emotional self-regulation and relationships programs that have had good, positive outcomes in assisting relationships to move in the direction of becoming more like what God designed human relationships, marriages and society to be from the beginning of creation.*

are not rejecting the gentle, loving forgiving God revealed by Christ Jesus. They are rejecting a false notion of God and, hence, remain in the good graces of our God of pure goodness.

¹² A Christian could also be functioning under a scientific (non philosophical) methodology; that is, a methodology of the “empirical, observable and repeatable under the same conditions. Being Christian adds nothing or takes nothing away from that verifiable outcomes methodology that can and has been used by others of different secular, philosophical or religious faiths. Of course, anyone who might totally believe that all truth will be and can only be found through scientific methodology and research would be a person with an explicit faith in science as the ultimate test of truth and reality. It is a religion or a philosophy like any other worldview. Clearly it would be against one's faith as a Christian to believe in that methodology rather than Christ and the Scripture as having the last word as to what it means to be human.

“Must” Christians?

Yet, the question could still be asked and, hence, must be asked: **“Must” Christians, according to God’s will, receive and integrate into their lives knowledge from such sources? What is God’s will according to Calvin?**

If we take Calvin’s statement concerning “the ancient jurist” and apply it equally to those who research “the inner workings” of self-control, communication and other relationship skills and who strive to base their programs upon empirical research as well as on verifiable outcomes, we have our answer by way of analogy. In speaking about those ancient jurists, Calvin says: “Shall we deny that **the truth** shone upon the ancient jurists who established civil order and discipline with such great equity?”¹³

If God has willed that we be helped in physics, government, architecture, mathematics and other like disciplines “by the work of the ministry of those who have not received the gift of faith in Christ,”¹⁴ clearly God wills to help us by whomever the Holy Spirit has gifted with the ability to discern the laws embedded in creation regarding the building stable, satisfying, harmonious and meaningful societal, marital and personal relationships.

Indeed, “Scripture informs us through the example of Bezalel and Oholiab whose knowledge and talent were needed to construct the Tabernacle that their giftedness was “instilled in them by the Spirit of God”¹⁵ [Ex. 31:2-11, 35:30-35]. It is no wonder, Calvin concludes, “that the knowledge of all that is most excellent in human life is said to be communicated to us through the Spirit of God.”¹⁶

Moreover, is not “the Spirit of God the sole fountain of truth”? If we believe this, “we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear.” It is, therefore, clear that these gifted persons can gain knowledge that can be used to instruct people in useful relationship skills.

Simultaneously, it is clear that those relationship skills and the knowledge supporting them is communicated through the one and same Holy Spirit to whomever is willing to receive these gifts from the Holy Spirit. Of course, it is the same Holy Spirit who both illuminates us to recognize the origin of this knowledge as a gift of God and to see their usefulness in God’s plan for societal, marital and all personal relationships.

Conclusion: “Must” Christians?

¹³ Ibid., II, ii, 16.

¹⁴ Ibid., II, ii, 16.

¹⁵ Ibid., II, ii, 16.

¹⁶ Ibid., II, ii, 16

Hence, it seems that Calvin, both from a theological and Scriptural point of view, would maintain that Christians **must** accept “those most excellent benefits of the divine Spirit” that the Spirit “distributes to whomever the Spirit wills, for the common good of humankind.”¹⁷ Moreover, Calvin is blunt and seems to go even further. If we, Christians, do not employ the knowledge and skills of those the Spirit has gifted to do this type of research and study, we are dishonoring the Spirit of God. “For by holding the gifts of the Spirit in slight esteem, we condemn and reproach the Spirit himself.”¹⁸

We, Christians, “**must**” therefore recognize that the Holy Spirit, across the centuries and in these decades, has distributed his gifts of exceptional ability to penetrate the laws of the created order. Some of these Spirit-gifted persons are working diligently to understand the laws of stable, satisfying, harmonious and meaningful societal, marital and personal relationships. We, Christians, “**must**” therefore learn from these people and work with them when useful, whether they be Christians or not, in order to assist all people to better their societal, marital and personal relationships as God wills.

Humbly Accept Truth or Pay the Price of Sloth

Calvin, it seems, cannot insist enough that Christians must humbly accept this knowledge from whence ever it might come. He warns sternly: “If we neglect God’s gift freely offered in these arts [the art of relationships included], we ought to suffer just punishment for our sloth.”¹⁹ In other words, nothing could be clearer for Calvin than that we are under a divine mandate from Christ Jesus. We must learn from and work with those of whatever faiths who are striving diligently to discover and set forth the laws embedded in creation so as to be able to build more effective societies, marriages and personal relationships.

If we do not do so, it seems that God’s plan for relationships in general and marriage and parenting in particular will be thwarted and we will receive—as Calvin says—just punishment for our sloth. If we do not learn from and work with these persons and, at the very least, utilize the empirical basis of their knowledge, we indeed should be punished for our sloth and our lack of understanding of the working of the Holy Spirit. Due to this sloth and/or misunderstanding of the working of the Holy Spirit, we will be greatly hampered in living God’s plan and will for harmonious societies, marriages and personal relationships. We will have to give an accounting for our grieving of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁷ Ibid., II, ii, 15.

¹⁸ Ibid., II, ii, 15.

¹⁹ Ibid., II, ii, 16.

Thanksgiving for Gifts Received

Of course, in addition to humbly and joyously utilizing the knowledge and skill sets from these “ministers” called to seek the laws of relationships embedded in God’s created order, Christians must also thank God for the gift of their work. Are we not obliged to give thanks to God for “anything praiseworthy?” *“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things.”* [Ph 4:8-9]

Does not all truth come from God? Calvin himself encourages Christians to be humbly thankful to God. Christians must not only learn from whatever right knowledge these God-gifted people have discovered, but Christians must also thank God for their efforts and God’s gift of learning to these people. If we are not thankful, Calvin says, “Let us be ashamed of such ingratitude, into which not even the pagan poets fell, for they confessed that the gods had invented philosophy, laws and all useful arts.”²⁰

Therefore, Christians must thank God, the Holy Spirit, for gifting these persons with able and disciplined minds capable of discerning some of God’s laws inscribed in God’s creation. Christian must thank God for God’s infinitely wise plan in aiding us also through these “ministers of the relationship laws embedded in creation.” These persons were gifted to us help us in our task of realizing God’s plan and will for harmonious societal relationships and for faithful and nurturing marriages on earth.

Christians are also duty bound to prayerfully ask God to further bless these persons in their work, in their lives and in their growth in wisdom. We must also pray that they not use God’s gift for personal aggrandizement.

We must pray that God adorn them with humility and graciousness, which make these people more acceptable to God who has given them their gifts for the common good. Finally, we must ask God, the Father, to bless them with the gift of faith in Christ Jesus as teacher, Lord, Redeemer and God incarnate. We must pray thus so that they too may come to know and rejoice in the greater truths of life and life’s meaning and purpose.²¹ Such conversions are witnessed to in the life of

²⁰ Ibid., II, ii, 15.

²¹ Calvin is aware that some Christians, basing themselves on Romans 8:9, object. It is impossible, they say, that unbelievers, who are estranged from God, can have anything to do with the gifts of the Holy Spirit? Calvin’s position is that Christians should understand the statement that “the Spirit of God dwells only in believers” [Romans 8:9] as referring to the Spirit of sanctification through whom we are consecrated as temples of God [1 Cor 3:16]. However, Calvin continues, the Holy Spirit is not limited only to the task of sanctification; “the Holy Spirit fills, moves and quickens all things by his power, and does so according to the character that the Spirit has bestowed upon each person” by the law of creation. Institutes, II, ii, 16.

Sinclair Lewis. He attests to the joy of the fullness of belief in Christ Jesus. May our prayers therefore be humble and yet confident that our father, who has revealed his heart to us will grant them the gift of faith in Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, God the Eternal Word become God incarnate, fully and truly human and fully and truly divine, the Son of God, the fullness of God's wisdom, the willing sacrifice for our sins, now risen and sitting at the right hand of the Father.

Chapters to Follow

2. A Second Response from *Scripture Along*

To be completed after conversations with the readers of the first response.

3. How Jesus Used his Human Reason in his Life and Ministry.

4. The Right Relationships Between Divine Revelation, Faith, Reason and Scientific Method

Tools will also be discussed on how to discern when scientific data from a field is being projected into a philosophy of the human person as to the meaning and purpose of human life.