

“Essential Truth”

From John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, Book III, 21.3, 23.13, English updated and emphasis added.

Scripture is all-sufficient; all of Scripture is essential truth.

. . . Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which as nothing useful and necessary to be known has been omitted, so nothing is taught but what it is of importance to know.

We cannot ignore “difficult” teachings, such as predestination.

Everything, therefore, delivered in Scripture on the subject of predestination, we must beware of keeping from the faithful, lest we seem either maliciously to deprive them of the blessing of God, or to accuse and scoff at the Spirit, as having divulged what ought on any account to be suppressed. . . .

Augustine wrote in his treatise *De dono perseverantiae*,

Are we not to tell the truth, that he who can comprehend may comprehend, rather than not tell it, and thereby not only prevent both from comprehending, but also make the more intelligent of the two to become worse, whereas if he heard and comprehended others might learn through him?

And we are unwilling to say what, on the testimony of Scripture, it is lawful to say. For we fear lest, when we speak, he who cannot comprehend may be offended; but we have no fear lest while we are silent, he who can comprehend the truth be involved in falsehood.”

In chapter twenty, glancing again at the same view, Augustine more clearly confirms it.

Wherefore, if the apostles and teachers of the Church who came after them did both; if they discoursed piously of the eternal election of God, and at the same time kept believers under the discipline of a pious life, how can those men of our day, when shut up by the invincible force of truth, think they are right in saying, that what is said of predestination, though it is true, must not be preached to the people? No, it ought indeed to be preached, that whoever has ears to hear may hear. And who has ears if he has not received them from Him who has promised to give them? Certainly, let him who receives not, reject. Let him who receives, take and drink, drink and live. For as piety is to be preached, that God may be rightly worshipped; so predestination also is to be preached, that he who has ears to hear may, in regard to divine grace, glory not in himself, but in God.

God calls His people to live by every word of God (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4), neither adding to nor taking away from His written revelation.

Let us, I say, allow the Christian to unlock his mind and ears to all the words of God which are addressed to him, provided he do it with this moderation, namely, that whenever the Lord shuts His sacred mouth, he also desists from inquiry. **The best rule of sobriety** is, not only in learning to follow wherever God leads, but also when He makes an end of teaching, to cease also from wishing to be wise.

The danger which they dread is not so great that we ought on account of it to turn away our minds from the oracles of God. There is a celebrated saying of Solomon, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing" (Proverbs 25:2). But since both piety and common sense dictate that this is not to be understood of everything, we must look for a distinction, lest under the pretense of modesty and sobriety we be satisfied with a brutish ignorance.

This is clearly expressed by Moses in a few words, "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children forever" (Deuteronomy 29:29). We see how he exhorts the people to study the doctrine of the law in accordance with a heavenly decree, because God has been pleased to promulgate it, while He at the same time confines them within these boundaries, for the simple reason that it is not lawful for men to pry into the secret things of God.

"The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men"
Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.6a.