



# THE CHARACTERS

**THEO**

**JOHN CALVIN**

**GENEVA**

LUTHER

**JOHN CALVIN** (1509–1564) was a French scholar who became one of the most influential figures in the Protestant Reformation. In 1533, soon after his conversion, Calvin embraced the Reformation, setting him on a path that would change Christian history forever. In 1536, he published the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*—a clear and concise guide to Protestant beliefs—which he wrote to strengthen believers and help them stand firm against persecution. Calvin’s *Institutes*, his ministry in the city of Geneva, and his teachings on God’s sovereignty and grace made the city a Reformation hub. Today, his writings continue to shape Christian theology and inspire believers worldwide.

**THEO** loves to ask big questions. He sees theology as a thrilling puzzle, and every answer he finds in Scripture brings him closer to understanding the heart of God.

**GENEVA** has a gift for seeing the beauty in Scripture. To her, theology is not just a subject to study but a thrilling, personal journey with God that fills life with meaning.

## TO THE READER

When I first wrote this book, I never expected it to become so popular. At first I kept it short and simple, but when I saw how many people appreciated it, I felt I had to make it **bigger and better** each time I updated it. Even though it took a lot of work, I loved doing it for the church's good.

Last winter, while I was very sick, I worked hard to finish this book, hoping it would be a helpful gift to everyone who believes in God. My only hope and prayer is that it will help and benefit God's church.

My main goal has always been to help the church by **teaching true doctrine**. Even though people have made false accusations against me, I trust that God will help me keep going. My sole aim has always been to benefit the church by upholding the true doctrine of godliness. The devil and his followers will not deter me, for **I trust in God's strength** to persevere.

I wrote this book to guide and teach those who study theology, so that they can read the Bible more easily and understand it better. I believe this book sums up the Christian faith in a way that helps readers know what to look for in Scripture and how to understand it.

If I write any commentaries on the Bible in the future, they'll be brief, because this book covers the big ideas of Scripture. It does this so that readers won't have to go through long explanations and can approach the Bible with the key knowledge they need.

Farewell, kind reader. If my work helps you, please pray for me to God our Father.



Geneva, August 1, 1559

*John Calvin*  
John Calvin



## TO KING FRANCIS OF FRANCE

To the Most Mighty and Illustrious Monarch, Francis, Most Christian King of the French, His Sovereign, John Calvin Wishes Peace and Salvation in Christ.

When I started writing this book, I did not plan to present it to Your Majesty. My goal was to provide **basic religious instruction** to help those who are interested in the Christian faith grow in **true godliness**. I especially wanted to help my fellow Frenchmen, many of whom are eager to know Christ but lack proper knowledge of him. This book is written simply and straightforwardly so anyone eager to learn about Christ can understand it.

However, I have seen that certain wicked individuals have caused such chaos in your realm that there is no room for sound doctrine. So I thought it would be useful both to instruct my countrymen and to present Your Majesty with a **clear statement of our beliefs**. This way, you can understand the doctrine that has so enraged these troublemakers who disturb your kingdom with fire and sword. I am not afraid to declare that this book contains the essence of the very doctrine they seek to punish with imprisonment, exile, and even death.

I know these opponents have been spreading false accusations about us, causing you to turn against us. But, as a fair leader, remember that accusations alone are not enough to judge anyone. **Our beliefs have often been condemned** because of our enemies' violent opposition and deceitful slander—not because of any real fault of ours. It is their aggression that leads to unjust punishments without a fair trial and their lies that falsely accuse us of treason and wrongdoing. You, noble King, can see how many lies are told about us daily. They claim our beliefs aim to overthrow governments and cause chaos, but that is far from the truth.

That is why I am asking you to look into this matter closely. I am not worried about my own safety; I am more concerned about the **well-being of all believers and the truth of Christ**, which is being crushed in your kingdom. The real church is being harshly persecuted, and the truth of Christ is being hidden and oppressed. No one is standing up to defend the church against this injustice.



Our beliefs are **grounded in the Bible** and in the **true teachings of Christ**. We are not trying to disrupt society; we are trying to honor God and follow his Word. We respect the early church fathers, and much of what we teach aligns with their writings. But we must remember that **everything belongs to Christ**, and **we must obey him above all else**.

Appealing to long-standing customs instead of the truth is unfair. Sometimes just because a lot of people do something or believe something, it becomes the norm, even if it is wrong. This can make bad actions and mistakes seem acceptable. **True believers should follow God's eternal truth**, not just go along with what everyone else is doing or saying. Isaiah taught us not to fear what others fear but to fear the Lord and honor him as holy. Even if everyone around us is doing or believing the wrong thing, God will still judge them, as he did in the story of Noah. Bad customs are like a disease, and they give us no excuse for ignoring God's truth.

The true church is not always visible, but it endures through Christ's protection. Throughout history, it has often been hidden or oppressed, but **God has always preserved a faithful group**. It is a mistake to focus too much on buildings and leaders, because the church's essence is not in structures or authorities. Only God knows the true form of the church, and believers must trust his will. Even in tough times of persecution, God preserves his church, even if it is hidden.

In conclusion, I urge you, noble King, to **consider the true teachings of the Protestant faith** and protect those who follow it. We believe that if you read this confession with an open mind, you will see the truth and support the cause of the gospel. May the Lord, the King of Kings, establish your throne in righteousness and your rule in fairness.

John Calvin

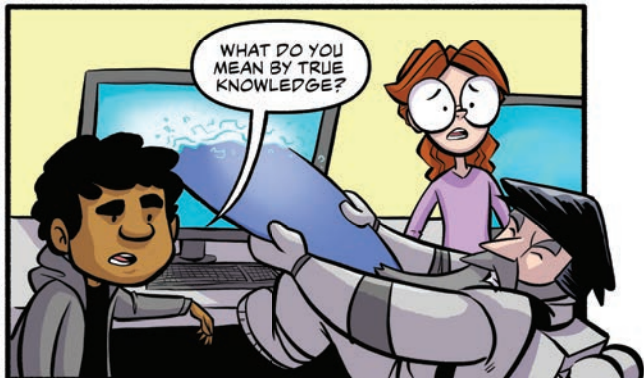
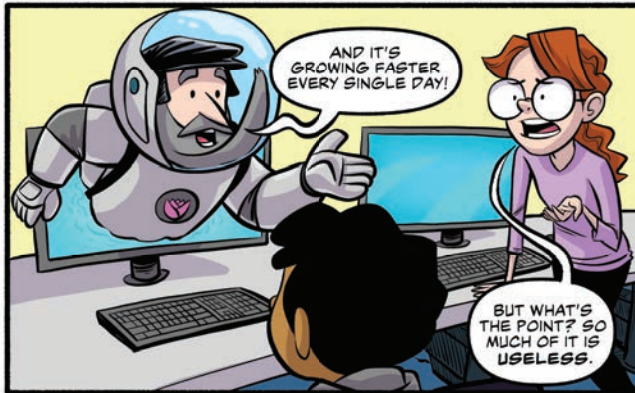
*John Calvin*  
Basel, August 1535

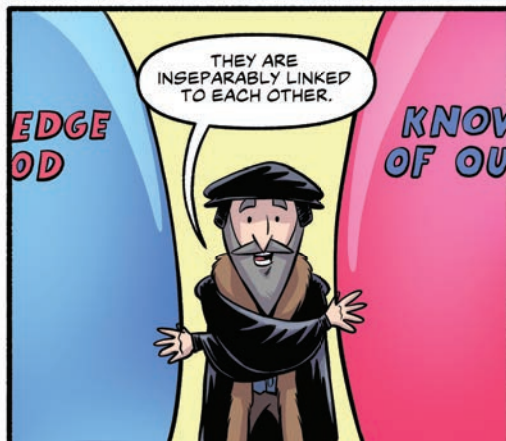
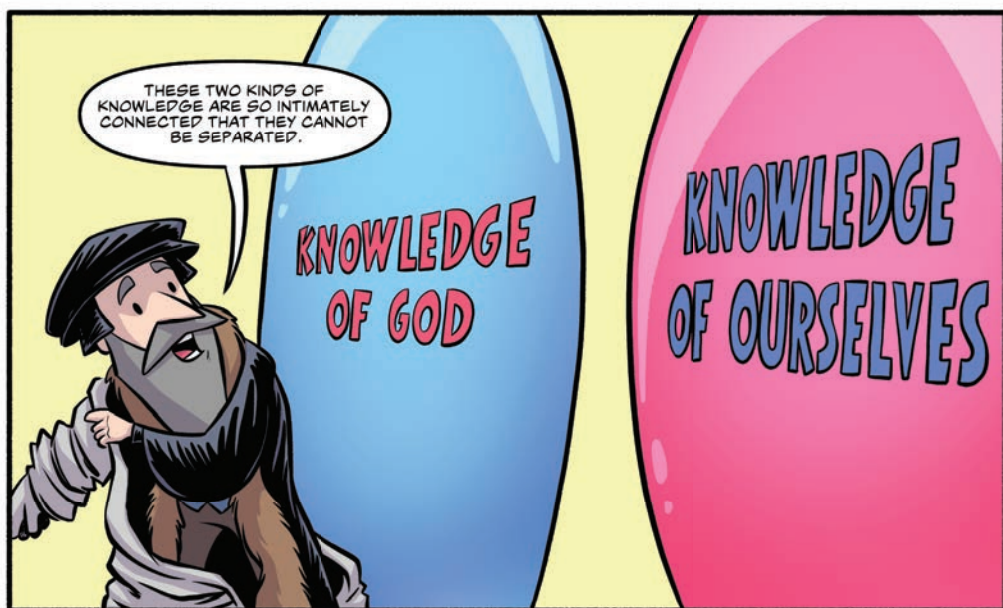
# CHAPTER 1

## Knowing God and Knowing Ourselves





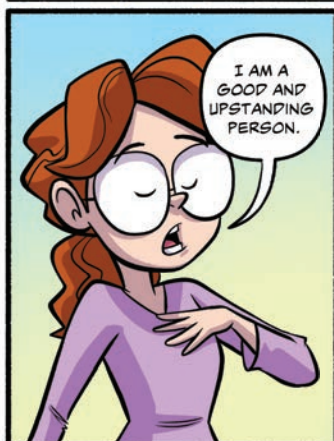
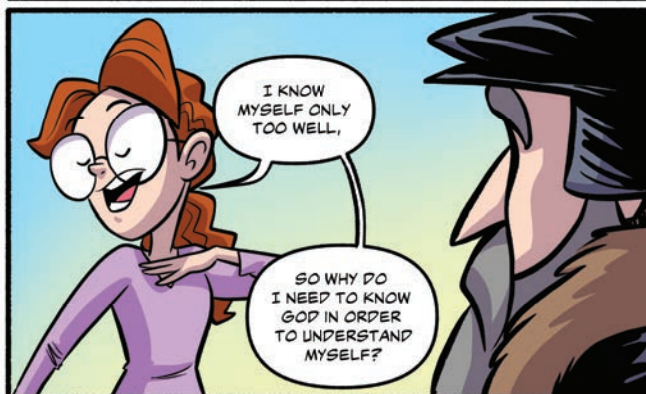










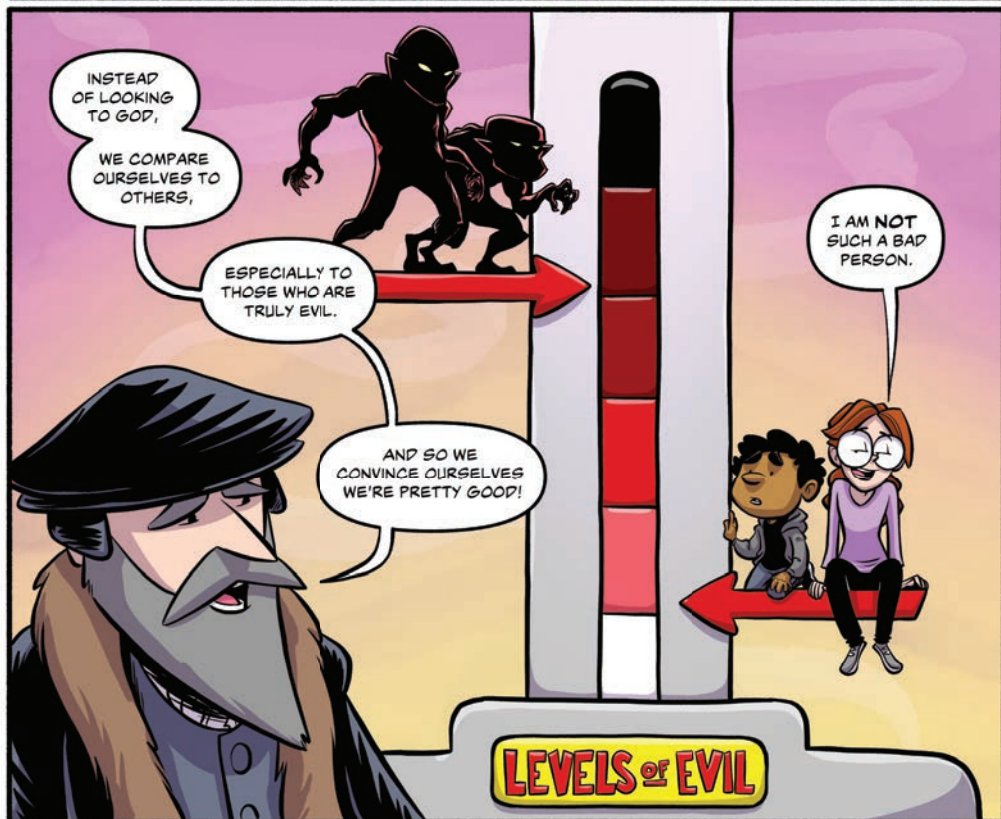






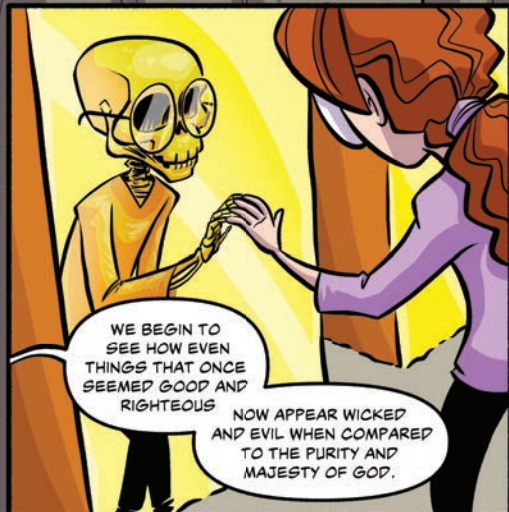
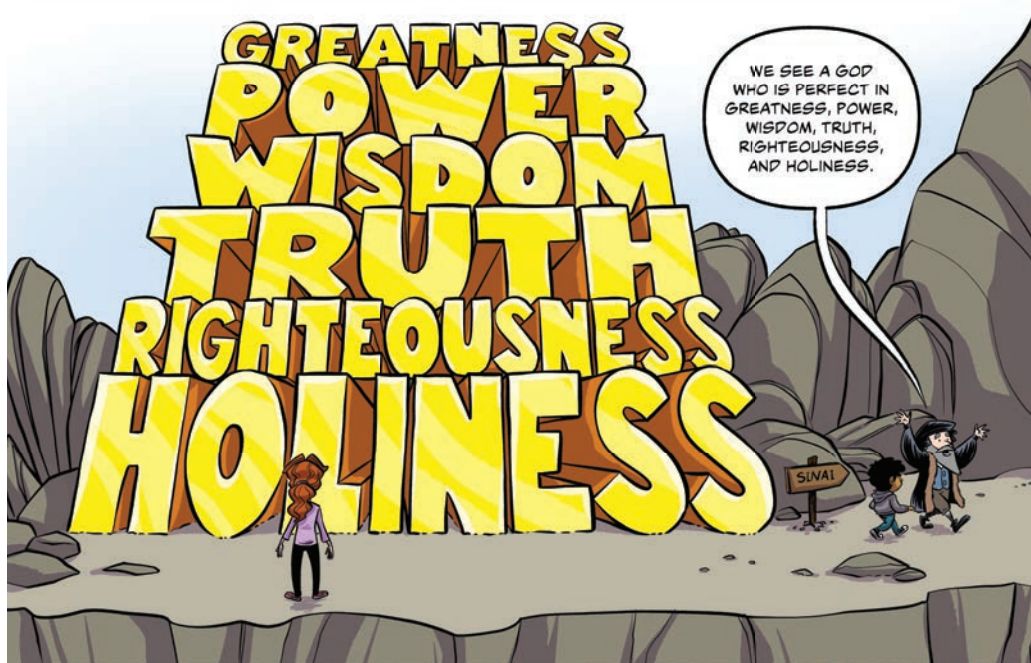














AND WE ACKNOWLEDGE WITH THE APOSTLE PAUL:





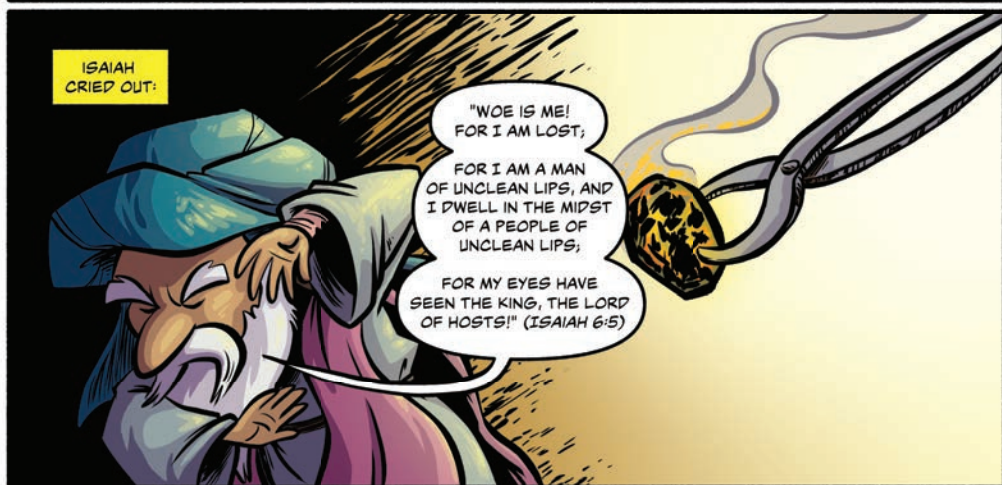




WHEN GOD APPEARED TO ABRAHAM, ABRAHAM SAID:

I HAVE SPOKEN TO THE LORD;

I WHO AM BUT DUST AND ASHES. (GENESIS 18:27)



ISAIAH CRIED OUT:

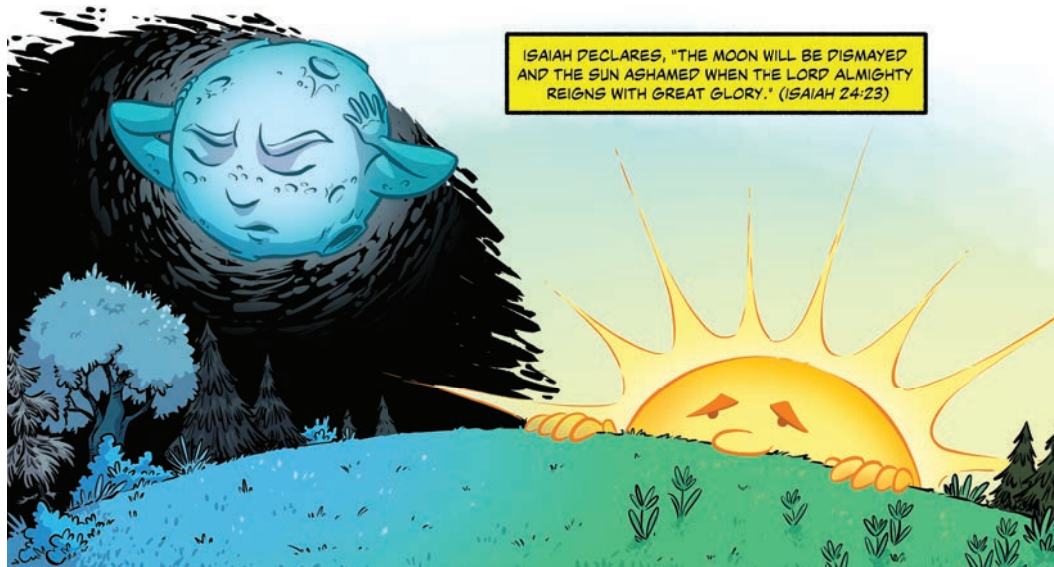
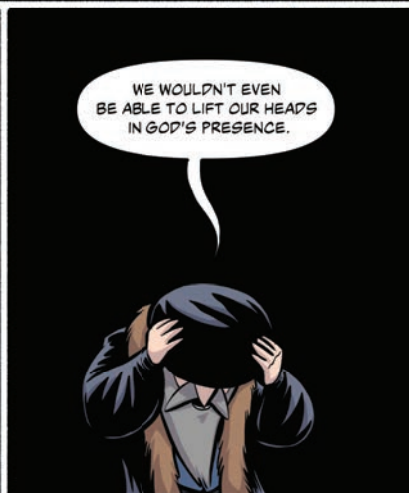
"WOE IS ME! FOR I AM LOST;

FOR I AM A MAN OF UNCLEAN LIPS, AND I DWELL IN THE MIDST OF A PEOPLE OF UNCLEAN LIPS;

FOR MY EYES HAVE SEEN THE KING, THE LORD OF HOSTS!" (ISAIAH 6:5)



ELIJAH COULDN'T EVEN APPROACH GOD WITHOUT COVERING HIS FACE WITH HIS CLOAK. (1 KINGS 19:13)







## CHAPTER SUMMARY

True wisdom consists of two inseparable parts: knowing God and knowing ourselves. These two types of knowledge are inseparably linked, and we cannot truly understand one without the other.

To truly know ourselves, we must first look at God. His greatness, holiness, and perfection reveal our sinfulness and need. When we see ourselves in the mirror of his majesty, we are struck by the depth of our corruption and misery. This humbling realization leads us to seek God's mercy and grace.

Ultimately, we need to rightly understand both God and ourselves if we want to grow spiritually. Unless we contemplate God's majesty, we remain blind to our flaws and think we are righteous. If we compare ourselves only to others, we deceive ourselves and become proud. But knowledge of God and ourselves forms the foundation of true wisdom: It shapes our purpose, values, and perspective, and it guides us to measure our lives according to his perfect standard.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND MEDITATION

1. What did you learn from this chapter? Describe any ideas, discoveries, or verses that stood out to you.
2. What is the relationship between knowing God and knowing ourselves? Why must these two types of knowledge be linked together?
3. Why does Calvin argue that we cannot truly know ourselves apart from knowing God? What are some practical ways this truth can change how we live?





4. What are the dangers of focusing solely on one of these two types of knowledge without paying attention to the other?
5. What does it mean for us to see ourselves in the mirror of God's majesty? How does God's majesty shape your understanding of your sinfulness and who you truly are?
6. Why is comparing yourself to others unhelpful? What happens when you compare yourself to God instead?
7. When he describes humanity apart from God, Calvin uses strong words like *lowly, ignorant, vain, perverse, corrupt, unrighteous, deceitful, foolish, vile, and debased*. Why do people today rarely use this kind of language to describe humanity as a whole? How does downplaying sin impact our culture, the church, and our personal lives?
8. How does Scripture help us understand both who God is and who we are?
9. Look up the following Scripture passages: Genesis 18:27; Judges 6:22–23; Judges 13:22; Isaiah 6:5; Ezekiel 1:28–2:1. How does each person in those passages respond to an encounter with God? What does this tell us about him—and about us?
10. Think of all that happens during a church worship service. What do prayers, songs, confessions, sermons, and other elements of worship tell us about God's majesty and our need for his grace? In what ways could they emphasize his majesty and our need even more?

**READ CALVIN FOR YOURSELF!**  
BOOK 1, CHAPTER 1, SECTIONS 1-3