

Difficulties in Scripture

[John Calvin](#)

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“as also in all [his] epistles, speaking in them of these things; wherein are some things hard to be understood, which the ignorant and unstedfast wrest, as [they do] also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.”

— 2 Peter 3:16

In truth I should be attempting something like emptying the sea if I wished to examine and enumerate one by one all the scandals which wretched men devise for their own destruction out of the teaching of Scripture. For it is not simply a matter of their making a blind assault if they run up against some difficulty, but, having freely given their minds to the matter, they become agitated by all the rough features, as if their one satisfaction in life lay in tormenting their minds with thorny questions. For they carefully note anything that shows the slightest sign of being irrational, and criticize it sharply, so as not to give the impression that they can be made to believe all that easily. If there is also any appearance of disagreement and contradiction in several Scripture passages, they seize on it eagerly, and by collecting all the examples of that kind, they make a great fuss about their own shrewdness. Besides, men like that are afflicted by an almost incurable disease. For although it makes them feel ashamed not to know something, yet they cannot bear to learn anything. But because by their boasting they upset people who are very often simple but otherwise quite capable of being taught, it was necessary to touch on that part of scandals, not that they can be disposed of in a few words, when even a lengthy book would not be enough to deal with them. But, in the first place, all of us need to take heed, so that in reading Scripture we keep to the way the Spirit of God points out to us; and for those who are aspiring to come close to Christ, it will certainly be a plain, consistent way. In the second place, we should not have a desire to be or to appear clever by complicating difficult questions. Finally, if we find something that is strange and beyond our understanding, do not let us be quick to reject it. That many people let their ignorance develop immediately into aversion is a fault deserving severe censure. But, in fact, the man who says that any divine pronouncements which he himself does not understand are not God's oracles at all has little reverence for God. For what is that but assessing the infinite wisdom

of God by the small measure of our mind? It is like using a finger to measure the whole world! But if we acknowledge that Scripture has come forth from God, then we should not be surprised if it contains many things that are beyond our understanding. To sum up, in religion this is the way and order of wisdom, to strive earnestly for a right understanding with the obedience of faith.

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