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PREPARATION

<i>The necessity and usefulness of this doctrine. Extremes to be avoided, if we would rightly use the present life and its comforts, sec. 1, 2</i>		<i>The good things of this life are to be enjoyed as gifts of God, 1-2</i>
1.	Necessity of this doctrine. Use of the goods of the present life. Extremes to be avoided. 1. Excessive austerity. 2. Carnal intemperance and lasciviousness.	Double danger: Mistaken strictness and mistaken laxity
2.	God, by creating so many mercies, consulted not only for our necessities, but also for our comfort and delight. Confirmation from a passage in the Psalms, and from experience.	The main principle
<i>One of these extremes—viz. the intemperance of the flesh—to be carefully avoided. Four methods of doing so described in order, sec. 3-6</i>		<i>We are not to use these blessings indulgently, or to seek wealth greedily, but to serve dutifully in our calling, 3-6</i>
3.	Excessive austerity, therefore, to be avoided. So also must the wantonness of the flesh. 1. The creatures invite us to know, love, and honour the Creator. 2. This not done by the wicked, who only abuse these temporal mercies.	A look at the Giver of the gift prevents narrow-mindedness and immoderation
4.	All earthly blessings to be despised in comparison of the heavenly life. Aspiration after this life destroyed by an excessive love of created objects. First, Intemperance.	Aspiration to eternal life also determines aright our outward conduct of life
5.	Second, Impatience and immoderate desire. Remedy of these evils. The creatures assigned to our use. Man still accountable for the use he makes of them.	Frugality, earthly possessions held in trust
6.	God requires us in all our actions to look to his calling. Use of this doctrine. It is full of comfort.	The Lord's calling a basis of our way of life

EXPLORATORY

- Calvin places everything that we encounter in this life (*earthly benefits*, line 22) into two categories - which are? (719, 27)

- ...for necessity;*
- ...for delight.*

Calvin's objective in dealing with the subject of earthly benefits is the maintenance of - what? (719, 27)

- ...a clear conscience.*

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What do we need to do in order to maintain a clear conscience? (719, 26)

- a. *...hold to a measure*

What picture does Calvin use to show us the dangers to which we are exposed? (720, 4f)

- a. *...this topic is slippery*
- b. *...and slopes on both sides into error.*

We find the measure to which we should hold in God's *word*. What is its fundamental principle? (719, 29)

- a. *...the Lord...teaches that the present life is for his people a pilgrimage on which they are hastening toward the heavenly kingdom.*

Turning again to the dangers to which we are exposed, if we slide down either of the two slippery slopes where will we end up? (720, 11 & 22)

- a. *...far too severe;*
- b. *...licentious indulgence*

How does excessive severity manifest itself? (720, 12 & 15f)

- a. In fettering consciences, *more tightly than does the word of the Lord.*
- b. Scarcely permitting people to, *add any food at all to bread and water.*

What is Calvin's estimate of binding consciences, *more tightly than does the Word of the Lord*? (720, 13)

- a. *...a very dangerous thing.*

What is his estimate of the motives of the people who did this? (720, 10)

- a. *...godly.*

Turning now to the opposite slope (the one that leads to licentious indulgence) by what policy do its advocates seek to promote it? (720, 23ff)

- a. *...freedom is not to be restrained by any limitation but to be left to every man's conscience...*

What does scripture give us and what does it not give us in order to help us in this area? (720, 28 & 27)

- a. *...general rules for lawful use.*
- b. *...definite and precise legal formulas.*

2. Our principle is: *the use of God's gifts is not wrongly directed when it is referred to that end to which the author himself created and destined them for us...* What enables Calvin to draw this conclusion? (720, 32f)

- a. *...he created them for our good, not for our ruin.*

What principle does this enable Calvin to derive? (721, 7ff)

- b. *...the natural qualities themselves of things demonstrate sufficiently to what end and extent we may enjoy them.*

3. What would have to happen for us to derive no benefits from what is created other than their necessary usefulness? (721, 21f)

- a. *We would have to be degraded to blocks.*

Why is it not appropriate for us to give free rein to our appetites and desires, even if their objects are legitimate? (721, 24f & 722, 17f)

- a. They, *overflow, and, boil up without measure or control.*

How do we bridle this tendency for legitimate appetites to assume lustful proportions? (721, 27ff)

- a. We need to bear in mind the relationship between the creature and the creator. The thing created must not distract us from the creator, rather we should, *recognise the author and give thanks for his kindness towards us.*

What two words does Calvin use in 722, 8 & 9 to show the potential that our appetites have to dominate our lives?

- a. *...enslave, and, overwhelmed.*

4. Calvin gives two rules that should govern our relationship with this world and its benefits. What are they? (722, 21f & 25)

- a. *...those who use this world should be so affected as if they did not use it;*
- b. *...they should know how to bear poverty peaceably and patiently, as well as to bear abundance moderately.*

These two rules arise from something more fundamental, which is...? (722, 20f)

- a. Maintaining an attitude of, *contempt for the present life*, and meditating on, *heavenly immortality.*

What are the three parts of the law that Calvin prescribes on 723, 2ff?

- a. *...to indulge oneself as little as possible;*
- b. *...to insist upon cutting off all show of superfluous wealth, not to say licentiousness;*
- c. *...diligently to guard against turning helps into hindrances.*

5. This section gives us rules 2 and 3. What was rule 1? (722, 20f)

- a. Maintain contempt of the present life and meditate on heavenly immortality.

What is rule 2? (723, 8)

- b. *...know how to go without things patiently.*

What is rule 3? (723, 28ff)

- c. *...all those things were so given to us by the kindness of God, and so destined for our benefit, that they are, as it were, entrusted to us, and we must one day render account of them.*

6. Note the size of footnote 8. The subject of this section is obviously something that people have found fascinating, stimulating and, it would appear, controversial.

What tendencies are restrained by a proper commitment to our callings? 724, 3ff)

- a. Restlessness;
- b. Fickleness
- c. Ambition that longs to embrace various things at once;
- d. Stupidity and rashness.

What picture does Calvin use to underscore the importance of our commitment to our callings? 724, 10f)

- a. *...a sort of sentry post.*

Who does Calvin set before us as an example of someone who, without complaint, recognised and was constrained by his status and rank in society? (724, 16ff)

a. David

What principle does Calvin feel that David's behaviour illustrates? (724, 12ff)

- a. A factor in God's evaluation of our actions is the extent to which they conform to or deviate from our calling and the rank that goes with it.

How does an understanding that our role and place in life is our calling benefit us? (725, 3ff)

- a. It will be a source of, harmony among the several parts of our life;
b. It will provide order and guidance as to what areas of life are not part of our responsibility;
c. It will remove resentment, enabling us to live ungrudgingly;
d. ...it will be no slight relief from cares etc...for a man to know that God is his guide in all these things.

Taken together, what view of our tasks in life do these benefits add up to? (725, 17ff)

- a. ...no task will be so sordid and base, provided you obey your calling in it, that it will not shine and be reckoned very precious in God's sight.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Do you think that Calvin is describing a crisis or a process when he writes of our becoming dominated by our appetites. How should we apply our answer to our own life?
2. What, helps, in your life in particular, have the potential to become hindrances?
3. What does it mean to be married as though unmarried, to buy as if not buying?