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PREPARATION

1. Book 3, Chs 21-24 contain Calvin's formulation of the doctrine of election plus his response to some objections to it. As usual, Calvin takes a measured approach to the subject, proceeding from one aspect of the doctrine to the next. Start by going through all four chapters, setting out the outline contained in the headings given to groups of sections.
 - a. Ch 21:
 - i. 1-4, The importance of the doctrine of predestination excludes presumption and reticence in speaking of it.
 - ii. 5-7, Predestination explained in relation to the Israelitish nation, and to individuals.
 - iii. P931, Summary survey of the doctrine of election.
 - b. Ch 22:
 - i. 1-6, Election is not from foreknowledge of merit but is of God's sovereign purpose.
 - ii. 7-11, Answers to opponents of this basis of election, which also is reprobation.
 - c. Ch 23:
 - i. 1-3, Reprobation the concomitant of election and an act of God's will.
 - ii. 4-7, God's justice is not subject to our questioning.
 - iii. 8-11, God willed, not only permitted, Adam's fall and the rejection of the reprobate, but with justice.
 - iv. 12-14, Preaching of predestination not injurious but useful.
 - d. Ch 24:
 - i. 1-5, The elect are effectually called, and incorporated into the communion of Christ.
 - ii. 6-11, Under Christ's protection the perseverance of the elect is secure: Scripture passages cited in objection interpreted.
 - iii. 12-17, How God deals with the reprobate.

EXPLORATORY

1. Calvin opens this section with two observations. What observation does he make about gospel preaching? (920, 10f)
 - a. *...the covenant of life is not preached equally among all men.*What observation does he make about the reception the gospel receives? (920, 11f)
 - a. *...among those to whom it is preached, it does not gain the same acceptance either constantly or in equal degree.*What does this lack of uniformity in the way the gospel is preached and responded to reveal? (921, 2)
 - a. *...the wonderful depth of God's judgment.*Thinking about these phenomena gives rise to what kind of questions? (921, 6f)
 - a. *...great and difficult questions*What quality of mind and heart is called for if we are to resolve these, *great and difficult questions*? (921, 7)

a. Reverence

What data do reverent minds need to acquire and be applied to? (921, 8f)

- a. *...what they may suitably hold concerning election and predestination.*

What attribute of God is reinforced in our understanding by an understanding of election (indeed without an understanding of election we must remain ignorant of it)? (921, 16f)

- a. *...God's free mercy.*

What is the relationship between our salvation and God's free mercy? (921, 16f)

- a. *...our salvation flows from the wellspring of God's free mercy.*

How does ignorance of this principle detract from God's glory? (921, 35ff)

- a. *...when the salvation of a remnant of the people is ascribed to the election of grace, then only is it acknowledged that God of his mere good pleasure preserves whom he will, and moreover that he pays no reward, since he can owe none.*

How does ignorance of this principle take away from true humility? (921, 30ff)

- a. *...our salvation comes about solely from God's mere generosity...those who wish to get rid of all this are obscuring as maliciously as they can what ought to have been gloriously and vociferously proclaimed, and they tear humility up by the very roots.*

What is the point that Paul makes about salvation in Romans 11:5-6? (921, 30f)

- a. *...our salvation comes about solely from God's mere generosity*

What phrase of Paul's makes this point most effectively? (921, 26)

- a. *...a remnant has been saved according to the election of grace.*

Why does Calvin, infer that all those who do not know that they are God's own will be miserable through constant fear? (922, 7ff)

- a. *...here is our only ground for firmness and confidence: in order to free us of all fear and render us victorious amid so many dangers, snares and mortal struggles, he (Christ) promises that whatever the Father has entrusted into his keeping will be safe (Jn 10:28-29).*

What three benefits has Calvin noted? (921, 166ff)

- a. *...God's free mercy;*
- b. *...eternal election;*
- c. *...true humility.*

What does blindness to these three blessings take away from us? (922, 14)

- a. *...the foundation of our salvation.*

Calvin has further words of caution before entering into the matter itself. What two kinds of people does he want to restrain? (922, 24ff & 924, 4f)

- a. The audaciously and impudently curious;
- b. Others who, by way of reaction to the first sort, *all but require that every mention of predestination be buried.*

Why is it important that we restrain unhelpful natural tendencies when thinking about this question in particular? (922, 24f)

- a. *It is, already somewhat difficult of itself.*

If we study the Bible carefully enough, will all our questions that arise from predestination be answered? (923, 5f)

- a. *...he would have us revere but not understand*

What is the benefit of this? (923, 6)

- a. *...through this also he should fill us with wonder.*

Why does God reveal some things and not others? (923, 6ff)

- a. *He has set forth by his Word the secrets of his will that he has decided to reveal to us. These he decided to reveal in so far as he foresaw that they would concern us and benefit us.*

2. What is the root of excessive curiosity? (924, 2)

- a. *...insolence*

3. What problem arises from the requirement that, every mention of predestination be buried? (924, 9f)

- a. *...they descend to too low a level, they make little progress with the human understanding.*

924, 14 Calvin describes scripture as, *the school of the Holy Spirit*. What do we conclude from this about its content? (924, 14ff)

- a. *...nothing is omitted that is both necessary and useful to know*
- b. *...nothing is taught but what is expedient to know.*

What duty in relation to predestination arises from these two facts (924, 16ff)

- a. *...we must guard against depriving believers of anything disclosed about predestination in scripture.*

In what way may excessive caution be unhelpful to our fellow Christians? (924, 18f)

- a. *We may seem, to defraud them of the blessing of our God*

What does it imply about the data the Holy Spirit has chosen to reveal? (924, 19f)

- a. *He has, published what it is in any way profitable to suppress.*

4. What gives us confidence in the face of the world's mockery of distinctively Christian doctrines? (925, 17ff)

- a. *God's truth is so powerful...that it has nothing to fear from the evilspeaking of wicked men.*

In what way does the Holy Spirit in scripture accommodate himself to our weaknesses? (925, 36f)

- a. *Scripture...proceeds at the pace of a mother stooping to her child, so to speak, so as not to leave us behind in our weakness.*

What does a reluctance to speak Biblically about predestination imply about God? (926, 4ff)

- a. *...they accuse God indirectly of stupid thoughtlessness, as if he had not foreseen the peril that they feel they have wisely met...he had unadvisedly let slip something hurtful to the church.*

5. What is the main petty objection used by professing Christians who oppose predestination? (926, 12)

- a. *They, make foreknowledge its cause.*

What positive point does Calvin make by way of initial response to this tendency? (926, 13)

- a. *We...place both doctrines in God;*

Calvin's description of the divine foreknowledge:

What are the four elements of foreknowledge? (926, 15ff)

- a. *...all things always were, and perpetually remain, under his eyes;*
- b. *...to his knowledge there is nothing future or past, but all things are present;*
- c. *...they are present in such a way that he not only conceives them through ideas...but he truly looks upon them and discerns them as things placed before him;*
- d. *...this foreknowledge is extended throughout the universe to every creature.*

How is predestination defined? (926, 23f)

- a. *God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man.*

Whom did God consult in formulating this decree? (926, 23f)

- a. *...he compacted with himself.*

How does this decree work itself out? (926, 25f)

- a. *...eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others.*

What negative assertion does Calvin make about the relationship between foreknowledge and predestination? (926, 14)

- a. *...subjecting one to the other is absurd.*

What Biblical example does Calvin give in support of his assertions about predestination? (927, 2)

- a. *...the whole offspring of Abraham.*

What was the condition of the nation of Israel before God chose them and, indeed, throughout the time of their national relationship with him? (927, 41f)

- a. *...a few, ignoble - indeed, even wicked and stubborn - men.*

What, therefore, must have been excluded from God's choice of them? (927, 38f)

- a. *...the worthiness of men or the merit of works.*

What did influence him in choosing the nation of Israel? (927, 42f)

- a. *...he chose to give such evidence of his mercy.*

What is the significance of, *and not we ourselves*, in Ps 100:3? (928, 8ff)

- a. *It, is not superfluous, since by it they may know that God is not only the author of all good things in which they abound but has derived the cause from himself, because nothing in them was worthy of so great honour.*

What should we bear in mind when the Bible mentions the land of Israel? (928, 21f)

- a. *...it is a visible symbol of the secret separation that includes adoption.*

How is election known? (929, 5)

- a. *Through and by, its signs.*

What examples of *its signs* (ie its effects) are given by Calvin? (928, 31ff)

- a. *The exodus (the first liberation)*
- b. *The return from exile (the second)*
- c. *...other intermediate benefits*
- d. *...the gathering together of the remnant of the people*

What wrong impressions could have been gained from the exile? (929, 3ff)

- a. It is as though he...had rejected her;
- b. ...or as though the exile had been an interruption of election.

What remains true about election, however things appear? (929, 5)

- a. *...election remains inviolable*

6. How is the second degree of election distinguished from the first?

- a. ...more special grace was evident (929, 8ff)
- b. ...from the same race of Abraham God rejected some but...kept others among his sons by cherishing them in the Church.

How does the rejection of Ishmael demonstrate the doctrine of election? (929, 11ff)

- a. *Ishmael had at first obtained equal rank with his brother Isaac, for in him the spiritual covenant had been equally sealed by the sign of circumcision.*
- b. *Ishmael is cut off.*
- c. *In Isaac the seed was called: the same calling continued in Jacob.*

Did their own actions play a part in the rejection of Ismael, Esau and Saul? (929, 21ff)

- a. *By their own defect and guilt, I admit, Ismael, Esau and the like were cut off from adoption. For the condition had been laid down that they should faithfully keep God's covenant, which they faithlessly violated.*

What served to intensify their guilt? (929, 25f)

- a. *...God...deigned to prefer them to the other nations.*

What does the first degree of election demonstrate? (929, 31f)

- a. *...in his mere generosity (God) has not been bound by any laws but is free.*

What conclusion does Calvin draw from this fact? (929, 32f)

- a. *...equal apportionment of grace is not to be required of him.*

What does the unequal distribution of God's saving grace prove? (929, 33f)

- a. *...it is free.*

What did the personal election of Jacob to genuine spiritual blessing, on top of his being part of the elect nation and combined with God's hatred of Esau, create? (930, 5f)

- a. *A, double bond.*

What did this make Malachi's contemporaries? (930, 4f)

- a. *...doubly thankless*

7. What is Calvin's own estimate of the explanation of election that he has been able to give thus far? (930, 8ff)

- a. *God's, free election has only been half explained until we come to individual persons.*

What distinguishes the election of individual persons from that of groups of people? (930, 10f)

- a. *...to whom God not only offers salvation but so assigns it that the certainty of its effect is not in suspense or doubt.*

In order to understand the election that is, *effectual and truly enduring*, whom must we recognise as its source? (930, 21)

- a. *Christ*

What title is given to Christ, that shows his relation to his people and their election? (930, 16 & 22)

- a. *Head.*

930, 18ff: Consider how Calvin compares and contrasts the power of grace that is experienced by those whose election is in Christ with the favour that was shown to Abraham's descendants? God's adoption of Abraham and his descendants displayed what on God's part? (930, 18f)

- a. *God's generous favour*

What is seen in the election of the members of Christ? (930, 21)

- a. *...a far more excellent power of grace*

What makes the grace shown in election in Christ, *far more excellent*, than the grace shown to the natural descendants of Abraham? (930, 21f)

- a. *...engrafted to their head, they are never cut off from salvation.*

In the history of the Jews, which Calvin takes as a general pattern for God's mode of operation, Calvin sees election working on two levels, or in two stages, with two different but not unrelated outcomes. What is the first level or stage? (930, 23f)

- a. *God makes a covenant of eternal life and calls a(ny) people to himself*

What example does Calvin give of such a call? (930, 27ff)

- a. *The statement, I have loved Jacob, applies to the whole offspring of the patriarch, whom the prophet there contrasts to the posterity of Esau.*

What is the second level or stage? (930, 25)

- a. *...a special mode of election*

This second level or stage was, *set before us in the person of one man (ie, Jacob)*. By what characteristic was it distinguished from the first? (930, 31f)

- a. *It, cannot fail to accomplish its purpose.*

Why are those who are elected effectually to eternal life called, the remnant, by Paul and Isaiah? (930, 34f)

- a. *...of the great multitude many fall away and disappear, so that often only a slight portion remains.*

Why does Calvin find this falling away easy to explain? (930, 36ff)

- a. *...the general election of a people is not always firm and effectual;*
- b. *...to those with whom God makes a covenant, he does not at once give the spirit of regeneration.*

Of what significance was the outward change in the Israelites, when God entered into his national covenant with them? (930, 41ff & 931, 12ff)

- a. *It was not saving. It was, intermediate between the rejection of mankind and the election of a meagre number of the godly.*
- b. *...that adoption of Abraham's seed in common was a visible image of the greater benefit that God bestowed on some out of the many.*

Why, even though God knew that many of the nation of Israel were foreigners and rebels against his grace, did he describe them as, the inheritance of God? (931, 3ff)

- a. *God has not pointlessly covenanted that he would become their Father and Redeemer.*

What does his covenant lead him to focus on? (931, 5f)

- a. *...his freely given favour rather than to the many who treacherously desert him.*

Why did the existence within Israel of these traitors and even the fact that they were in the majority not nullify his covenant? (931, 7ff)

- a. *...where he preserved some remnant for himself it appeared that his calling was, without repentance.*
- b. *God was continually gathering his Church from Abraham's children rather than from profane nations had its reason in his covenant*
- c. *...his covenant, which, when violated by that multitude, he confined to a few that it might not utterly cease.*

What does this lead Paul to do when discussing the covenant in the letter to the Galatians? (931, 15ff)

- a. *Carefully distinguish, the children of Abraham according to the flesh from the spiritual children who have been called after the example of Isaac.*

The summary, 931, 26ff:

What principle was active when, *God once established by his eternal and unchangeable plan those whom he long before determined once for all to receive into salvation?* (931, 31)

- a. *...his freely given mercy.*

What did God not take into account in this decree? (931, 31)

- a. *...human worth.*

Turning to, *those whom...he would devote to destruction*, what is expressed in this determination? (931, 31f)

- a. *...his just and irreprehensible but incomprehensible judgment*

How does God - in this life - identify the reprobate? (931, 38f)

- a. *By shutting them off, from knowledge of his name or from the sanctification of his spirit.*

Do you agree that Calvin's description of the two outcomes (glory for the elect and judgment for the reprobate) and the processes that carry them into effect, indicates that election results in God intervening in people's lives to save them, whereas in reprobation God leaves people to their own choices?

What are the three realities, brought about by election? (931, 34ff)

- a. The call;
- b. Justification;
- c. Glory.

In what does election find its fulfilment? (931, 36)

- a. Glory.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Cf 929, 29ff To what extent do we tend to *require* God to apportion grace equally?
2. To what extent would it be true to say that Calvin believes in elections, rather than in election?
3. Calvin is undoubtedly correct in his assessment of the covenant that God entered into with the Israelites as a nation but he describes this way of working as though it could be the normal

pattern that he always follows (to *those* with whom God makes a covenant...930, 37ff). Is it? If it is, to what extent should it be institutionalised?