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PREPARATION

1. In this chapter, Calvin sets out a position in the first section (that reprobation is the concomitant of election) and then deals with various objections arising from his presentation of election and reprobation.

What are the objections that Calvin deals with, together with the sections in which he deals with them?

2-5. Election makes God a tyrant.

6-9. The doctrine of election takes guilt and responsibility away from man.

10-11 The doctrine of election leads to the view that God shows partiality towards persons.

12 The doctrine of election destroys all zeal for an upright life.

13-14 The doctrine of election makes all admonitions meaningless.

EXPLORATORY

1. What graphic image does Calvin use to illustrate the natural human reaction to the doctrines of election and reprobation? (947, 16f)

- a. *...it breaks forth into random and immoderate tumult as if at the blast of a battle trumpet.*

What words and phrases in this section indicate to us what Calvin means by, 'reprobation'? (947, 25; 948, 2, 39f; 949, 2f)

- a. The reprobate are, *those whom God passes over*
- b. *...hardening*
- c. *...preparation for destruction, as a result of, God's secret plan*
- d. Withholding that, *more powerful grace, by which God, makes sheep out of wolves.*

What attempt is made by some to moderate the doctrine of election? (947, 18f)

- a. *...many...accept election in such terms as to deny that anyone is condemned.*

On this view, what does God do with respect to the reprobate? (948, 25ff)

- a. *God does not utterly reject those whom he tolerates in leniency but suspends judgment on them, should they perchance repent.*

What additional information are we given in this section about the views Calvin is opposing? (948, 3f, 31ff)

- a. *...those I have spoken of labour anxiously to make false excuses in God's defence.*
- b. They distinguish between, *made, and, prepared. ...vessels of wrath are for good reason said to be, **made** for destruction, but that, God has **prepared** vessels of mercy.*

What do Calvin's opponents feel that they gain from this distinction? (948, 34ff)

- a. *...in this way Paul ascribes to, and claims for, God the credit for salvation, while he casts the blame for their perdition upon those who of their own will bring it on themselves.*

What is Calvin prepared to concede to his opponents? (948, 37f)

- a. *Paul, using a different expression, softens the harshness of the former clause...*

Wherein does Calvin differ from his opponents? (948, 38ff)

- a. *...it is utterly inconsistent to transfer the preparation for destruction to anything other than God's secret plan.*

Why is Calvin so certain of this? What Biblical data does he draw on for support? (948, 40ff)

- a. *This was also declared in a little earlier context: God aroused Pharaoh [Rom 9:17]; then, he hardens whom he pleases [Rom 9:18]. From this it follows that God's secret plan is the cause of hardening.*

What phrase of Augustine does Calvin quote as the correct interpretation of Paul's words in Romans 9:22-23? (948, 30f)

- a. *...where might is joined to longsuffering, God does not permit but governs by his power.*

Why is Calvin so certain that reprobation, as he defines it, has to be a truth? (947, 20f; 948, 30f, 38ff & 949, 4ff)

- a. *...election itself could not stand except as set over against reprobation. God is said to set apart those whom he adopts into salvation; it will be highly absurd to say that others acquire by chance or obtain by their own effort what election confers on a few.*
 b. *Therefore those whom God passes over he condemns; and this he does for no other reason than that he wills to exclude them from the inheritance which he predestines for his own children.*
 c. *Where might is joined to long-suffering, God does not permit but governs by his power.*
 d. *...it is utterly inconsistent to transfer the preparation for destruction to anything but God's secret plan...God aroused Pharaoh (Rom 9:17); then, he hardens whom he pleases (Rom 9:18). From this **it follows** that God's secret plan is the cause of hardening.*
 e. *God does not convert the obstinate because he does not manifest that more powerful grace, which is not lacking if he should please to offer it.*

2. We turn now to the objections.

What is the first objection? (949, 13ff)

- a. *They first ask...by what right the Lord becomes angry at his creatures **who have not provoked him by any previous offence**; for to devote to destruction whomever he pleases is more like the caprice of a tyrant than the lawful sentence of a judge.*

NB Calvin does not answer this question in the terms in which it is put. He challenges the legitimacy of the question and the attitude that lies behind it. He also draws attention to certain truths that serve as a bridle, limiting the questions we are prepared even to ask.

If the thought raised by Calvin's detractors occurs to us what is the, *one consideration*, that comes to our aid? (949, 22f)

- b. *...it is very wicked merely to investigate the causes of God's will.*

Why is this? (949, 23f)

- c. *...his will is, and rightly ought to be the cause of all things that are.*

Calvin proves the above statement by stating the alternative - which is? (949, 24ff)

- a. *For if it (ie God's will) has any cause, something must precede it, **to which it is, as it were, bound**; this is unlawful to imagine.*

To what danger does excessive speculation and an attitude that requires God to justify - to us - all that he does, expose us? (949, 31ff)

- a. *Let men's rashness, then, restrain itself, and not seek what does not exist, lest perhaps it fail to find what does exist.*

In the above sentence, what is it that, *does not exist*?

- a. A factor that determines and governs God's will. A reason, other than his will, why he does what he does and causes what he causes.

Does this mean that God's will and actions are arbitrary? (950, 3f)

- a. *And we do not advocate. The fiction of, absolute might; because this is profane, it ought rightly to be hateful to us.*

In what way does God differ from us? (950, 6ff)

- a. *...men who are troubled with lusts are in need of law; but the will of God is not only free from all fault but is the highest rule of perfection, and even the law of all laws.*

Does this mean that even God himself is **obliged** to act in a perfectly righteous way? (950, 9f)

- a. *...but we deny that he is liable to render an account...*

Calvin makes another significant denial - what is it? (950, 9ff)

- a. *...we also deny that we are competent judges to pronounce judgment in this cause according to our own understanding.*

Calvin's concluding observation is that we are warned in the Psalms not to call God to account, which is what we do when we refuse to accept what the Bible plainly affirms because it seems abhorrent to us.

3. In sections 3, 4 & 5 Calvin sets out further considerations designed to put us in our rightful place - and God in his!

What phrase sums up the phenomenon that Calvin points to in this section? (950, 25f)

- a. *...all whom the Lord predestines to death are **by condition of nature** subject to the judgment of death...*

Calvin's challenge to his detractors, arising from this observation is - what? (950, 26f)

- a. *...of what injustice toward themselves may they complain?*

4. In this section Calvin points out that God's actions are not unjust merely because they appear so to us. God cannot be unjust because we learn what is truly righteous by observing him and by observing what he does. If he does something it is right and just for him to do it. He is under no external obligation to do or be anything.

What objection to Calvin's position is expressed in this section? (951, 12ff)

- a. *...were (the reprobate) not previously predestined by God's ordinance to that corruption which is now claimed as the cause of condemnation...Is (God) not, then, unjust who so cruelly deludes his creatures?*

What does Calvin concede to this objection? (951, 18ff)

- a. *Of course, I admit that in this miserable condition wherein men are now bound, all of Adam's children have fallen by God's will.*

Wherein does he differ with the conclusion that his objectors draw from the fact that all that happens is attributable ultimately to God's decree? (951, 22f)

- a. *But it does not directly follow that God is subject to this reproach. (ie the reproach that he, cruelly deludes his creatures, by addressing us as though we have choice and are solely responsible for our own condemnation.)*

Why does it not directly follow? (951, 24ff)

- a. *In Romans 9 we have the Bible's response to this very objection - Who are you, O man, to argue with God? Does the moulded object say to its moulder, Why have you fashioned me thus? Or does the potter have no capacity to make from the same lump one vessel for honour, another for dishonour?*

How does Calvin defend this line of reasoning from the charge that it brings us back to an arbitrary God (for what else seems to be said here than that God has a power that cannot be prevented from doing whatever it pleases him to do? Line 30ff)? (951, 32ff)

- a. *...it is far otherwise. For what stonger reason can be adduced than when we are bidden to ponder who God is? For how could he who is the judge of the earth allow any iniquity?*

If I can offer my own explanation of what Calvin is saying: When Paul reflects this objection in Romans 9 and responds to it, he doesn't try to explain to the objectors why they are wrong - he has no explanation but they must be wrong because it cannot be possible for God to act in the way they are saying. However, Paul is not able to explain to them why they are wrong. The answer, as Calvin says, is to remember who God is and what, as God, he must be incapable of.

What follows from the fact that, *the execution of judgment*, is a divine prerogative? (951, 37)

- a. *...by nature (God) loves righteousness and abhors unrighteousness.*

Why can we go no further than this in our understanding? (952, 3ff)

- a. *...such depth underlies God's judgments [Rom 11:33] that all men's minds would be swallowed up if they tried to penetrate it.*

What does Calvin label as, *unworthy*? (952, 5ff)

- a. *...to reduce God's works to such a law that the moment we fail to understand their reason, we dare to condemn them.*

What does he label as, *Monstrous*? (952, 13ff)

- a. *...the madness of men, who desire thus to subject the immeasurable to the puny measure of their own reason!*

Calvin has one final argument, added to reinforce the point that all creatures who have a right relationship with God - even angels who rely for that relationship on their own righteousness - only do so because they are elect. In Calvin's view what does this imply about others, who do not have a right relationship with God? (952, 18f)

- a. *No other cause of this fact can be adduced but reprobation...*

What places a limit on our ability to fully explain this? (952, 19)

- a. *...reprobation, which is hidden in God's secret plan.*

5. I think this section does not require any input from me. If we have followed what Calvin has been saying, it's meaning will be clear. Ponder Augustine's words in 953, 12ff and Calvin's conclusion in line 22ff.

And worship.

6. So far, Calvin has been at pains to establish the freeness of God when it comes to predestination. He acts solely according to his own will and pleasure, without being influenced by human behaviour, either foreseen or actual.

He has dealt with the first of five objections - that such a view turns God into a tyrant by reminding us that it is God that we are describing, who cannot be a tyrant nor act purely arbitrarily.

Now he turns to the second objection, which is that predestination, as Calvin has been expounding it, takes away from individuals responsibility for their behaviour. This is an objection that can be raised from various motives. Christians sometimes raise it because they feel that human responsibility is important and that emphasising God's sovereignty in the way that Calvin does undermines it. On the other hand, non-Christians might raise it not so much as an objection but as a welcome conclusion because it excuses them from the consequence of their actions. It will help us to understand the points Calvin makes in response to this viewpoint if we note at outset the character, motives and objectives of those to whom he is responding. What phrases indicate Calvin's estimation of them and of their motives? (953, 27, 30; 957, 26, 29ff)

- a. ...*impiety*
- b. ...*profane tongues*
- c. ...*this wicked excuse*
- d. *The reprobate (who) wish to be considered excusable in sinning, on the ground that they cannot avoid the necessity of sinning*

We see therefore that in this section Calvin's primary focus is on unbelievers who use election as an excuse not to change. He does not appear primarily to be responding to believers who struggle with election because they do not want confess a doctrine that makes man anything less than 100% responsible.

This 'objection' is not being raised as an attempt to uphold God's honour, as it is sometimes raised by believers, but to take away from God any basis on which to pronounce judgment and condemnation. Those who reach this conclusion defiantly, *dishonour the judge*, who clearly pronounces their condemnation as a judgment on them for their sin.

Calvin does not begin his response to this objection until 954, 7. Up to that point, he states the objectors' position and distances himself from, *that defence to which church writers commonly have recourse*.

How does Calvin frame the objection that he deals with in sections 6-9? (section 6 heading and 953, 31ff; 954, 4ff)

- a. *Why should God impute those things to men as sin, the necessity of which he has imposed by his predestination? What should they do? Should they fight against his decrees? But they would do this in vain since they could not do it at all. Therefore they*

are not rightfully punished on account of those things of which the chief cause is in God's predestination.

- b. *...if man was created by God's providence to this condition, that he should afterward do all that he does, then he should not be blamed for what he cannot avoid and undertakes by God's will.*

In what way is this objection different to the previous one? (953, 27f)

- a. *It, tends not so directly to accuse God as to excuse the sinner.*

How do some orthodox theologians attempt, in a way that does not impress Calvin, to deal with this objection? (953, 38ff)

- a. *God's foreknowledge does not hinder man from being accounted a sinner; inasmuch as the evils God foresees are man's, not his own.*

Calvin begins his own response by drawing 'a line in the sand'. What biblical statement must be upheld, in his view? (954, 9f)

- a. *God has made everything for himself, even the wicked for the evil day.*

Older writers, cautiously interpreted such assertions as the above in what way? (54, 15ff)

- a. *God's providence...imposes no necessity on, the reprobate.*
- b. *...He has created them in this condition, since he has foreseen their wickedness to come*

Is this view entirely devoid of truth? (954, 18f)

- a. *No...such a one says something but not everything.*

How had 'the Church' made use of this argument up to this point? (954, 19ff)

- a. *The older writers have a habit of using this solution at times but with some hesitation...*
- b. *But the schoolmen rest upon it as if no objection could be made against it.*

Why is Calvin not impressed with this approach? (954, 31ff)

- a. *God, foresees future events only by reason of the fact that he decreed that they take place...*

7. Whom do Calvin's detractors bring forth as an example of someone whose actions were foreseen only but not foreordained? (955, 4)

- a. Adam

From what observation do they draw this conclusion? (955, 3f)

- a. *...it is not stated in so many words that God decreed that Adam should perish for his rebellion.*

Exactly what is meant by this, given that God did threaten man with death if he should choose to disobey? (955, 8f)

- a. What is meant is that although God made it plain that disobedience would lead to death, there is no recorded decree of God that rendered man's disobedience certain. The point at issue here is: was Adam's disobedience a result of God's decree or simply the outworking of Adam's free will? According to those with whom Calvin is contending, *God ordained nothing except to treat man according to his own deserts.*

This absence of a specifically articulated decree in relation to the fall leads Calvin's detractors to make what assertion with regard to Adam and what assertion with regard to God? (955, 7ff)

- a. *Adam, had free choice that he might shape his own fortune...*
- b. *God ordained nothing except to treat man according to his own deserts.*

What grounds does Calvin find for objecting to this view? (955, 4ff, 9ff)

- a. It implies that, *that very God, who, scripture proclaims*, does whatever he pleases, *would have created the noblest of his creatures to an uncertain end.*
- b. *If such a barren invention is accepted, where will that omnipotence of God be whereby he regulates all things according to his secret plan, which depends solely on itself?*

Calvin then turns to the *consequence* of Adam's sin for all his posterity, which was - what? (955, 14f)

- a. *...all were cut off from salvation.*

Was this cutting off of *all* from salvation, on the sole basis of Adam's disobedience, a natural consequence? (955, 13f)

- a. *...it did not take place by reason of nature*

What, then, is the cause that all Adam's offspring were cut off from salvation? (955, 12)

- a. *...predestination*

So, Calvin's detractors make the point that there is nowhere recorded a decree of God that rendered man's disobedience and subsequent condemnation certain. Building on this observation they assert that there is no basis for believing that such a decree existed. Calvin responded by pointing out that there are other circumstances that cannot be naturally explained but for which there is also no recorded decree, These phenomena must occur because God has decreed them for they can have no other cause. The particular phenomenon that he refers to is the imputation of Adam's guilt to all his posterity. What is natural about this - that someone's relationship to God and to salvation should be determined by somebody else's behaviour? That someone should be accounted guilty on the basis of actions that were performed by someone else before they were even born? This can only come about because God has decreed that it will be so...*whence does it happen that Adam's fall irremediably involved so many peoples, together with their infant offspring, in eternal death unless because it so pleased God?* (955, 24ff)

This line of argument leads Calvin to pose what question? (955, 15ff)

- a. *What prevents them from admitting concerning one man what they unwillingly concede concerning the whole human race?*

What two things cannot be denied, in Calvin's view? (955, 29f & 30f)

- a. *God foreknew what end man was to have before he created him...*
- b. *...and consequently foreknew because he so ordained by his decree.*

Why does Calvin feel that the conclusion is inescapable that God's decision lies behind the reprobation of specific individuals and their condemnation as a result of Adam's sin? (956, 1ff)

- a. *...as it pertains to his wisdom to foreknow everything that is to happen, so it pertains to his might to rule and control everything by his hand.*

How does Augustine describe the steps that God determined to follow in creation and the fall? (956, 5ff)

- a. *...the God and Lord of all things:*
 - 1. *...created all things exceedingly good;*
 - 2. *...foreknew that evil things would rise out of good;*
 - 3. *...also knew that it pertained to his most omnipotent goodness to bring good out of evil things rather than not to permit evil things to be;*

4. *...so ordained the life of angels and men that in it he might first of all show what free will could do, and then what the blessing of his grace and the verdict of his justice could do.*

8. Sticking with the objection that predestination, if accepted, would take responsibility away from man, what distinction must Calvin's opponents employ in support of their position? (956, 14f)
 - a. *...the distinction between will and permission.*

How do Calvin's opponents apply this distinction? (956, 16f)

- a. *By this they would maintain that the wicked perish because God permits it, not because he so wills.*

In Calvin's view, God's permission implies - what? (956, 17)

- a. *God so wills.*

What is it that Calvin cannot conceive of, which is necessary for the proponents of the position he is attacking to believe? (956, 17ff)

- a. *...it is not in itself likely that man brought destruction on himself through himself, by God's mere permission and without any ordaining. As if God did not establish the condition in which he wills the chief of his creatures to be!*

Given this certainty on Calvin's part, what is the only position open to him? (956, 22f)

- a. *...the will of God is the necessity of things.*

If this is the case, why does predestination not take away responsibility from man? (957, 1ff, 8ff)

- a. *Individual, perdition depends on the will of God in such a way that the cause and occasion of it are found in themselves.*
- b. *...man falls according as God's providence ordains, but he falls by his own fault.*

On this basis, how does Calvin define predestination? (956, 30)

- a. *...nothing but the meting out of divine justice...*

What makes the predestination of the lost to corruption and unbelief an act of justice on God's part? (956, 31ff)

- a. *...it is certain that they were not unworthy to be predestined to this condition.*

The reasons for God's plan are, *secret* (956, 31) and , *hidden* (957, 5). But what can be safely said about it? (957, 5f)

- a. *...it is certain that he so judged because he saw that thereby the glory of his name is duly revealed.*

To what extent did the imperfections of the created environment contribute to Adam's fall? (957, 10ff)

- a. *...the Lord had declared that, everything that he had made...was exceedingly good. Whence, then, comes that wickedness to man, that he should fall away from his God? Lest we should think that it comes from creation, God had put his stamp of approval on what had come forth from himself.*

What, then, is the source of corruption? (957, 15f & 18f)

- a. *...his own evil intention*
- b. *...the corrupt nature of humanity*

What advice does Calvin have for us if we struggle to accept this explanation because it leaves important questions unanswered? (957, 21ff)

- a. *...let us not be ashamed to submit our understanding to God's boundless wisdom so far as to yield before its many secrets. For, of those things that it is neither given nor lawful to know, ignorance is learned, the craving to know a kind of madness.*
9. Admitting that he has not produced a case sufficiently strong to silence impiety's continual growling and muttering, Calvin rests on - what? (957, 36f)
- a. *God's most righteous judgment*
- In this context, why does God point out in Genesis that creation was very good? (957, 40ff)
- a. *...to prevent them from charging (their corruption) against himself*
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.
- 13.
14. Augustine's approach to predestination and its proclamation reminds us that - what? (963, 20f)
- a. *...those things which are truly said can at the same time be fittingly said.*
- What two evils arise when people are taught that their unbelief is solely attributable to God's predestination? (963, 24f)
- a. *...sloth;*
- b. Encouragement is given to evil intentions.
- What attitude should arise from our awareness of our ignorance of who is elect and who isn't? (964, 13f)
- a. *...we ought to be so minded as to wish that all men be saved.*
- What will this attitude lead to as far as our behaviour towards the lost is concerned? (964, 14f, 17ff)
- a. *So shall it come about that we try to make everyone we meet a sharer in our peace.*
- b. *...a healthful and severe rebuke should be applied as a medicine to all that they may not either perish themselves or destroy others.*
- Assuming we are faithful in our attitudes and behaviour towards the lost, what will the outcome be? (964, 15ff)
- a. *...our peace will rest upon the sons of peace.*
- b. *It belongs to God, however, to make that rebuke useful to those whom he...has foreknown and predestined.*

FOR REFLECTION

1. Have the objections to election changed much from Calvin's day to ours?
2. Reviewing the terms used in section 1 by which Calvin's understanding of reprobation is defined, are you more comfortable with some than with others? Why is that?
3. 948, 38ff, in the whole context of section 1: Is Calvin right to use God's dealings with Pharaoh as an example of his dealings with all the reprobate? Or was Pharaoh somebody whom God dealt with in a particular way?
4. How do we perceive of the relationship between righteousness and God's will. Is God's will in our thinking constrained by righteousness or the determinant of it?