

PREPARATION

Please note the high-level, twofold division of this chapter. Please record it:

Sections 1-5: Corruption of man's nature is such as to require total renewal of his mind and will.

Sections 6-14: Conversion of the will is the effect of divine grace, inwardly bestowed.

So, in the first division, we are going to be concentrating on – what?

- a. Man's need.

And in the second on – what?

- a. God's provision.

EXPLORATORY

1. What does Calvin intend us to understand by, *both faculties of his soul?* (271, 6f)

- a. Understanding and will.

How do Christ's words in John 3 teach that the description, *flesh*, with all that that implies (cf Calvin's rhetorical question, 289, 10ff) applies to every aspect of our nature and character? (289, 18ff)

- a. *...man must be reborn...Now the soul is not reborn if merely a part of it is reformed, but only when it is wholly renewed.*

How do Paul's words in Romans 8 support the same conclusion? (289, 21ff)

- a. *...the antithesis...confirms this. The Spirit is so contrasted with flesh that no intermediate thing is left.*

What must have taken place, according to Calvin, for us to, *have*, anything of the Spirit? (289, 26)

- a. regeneration

What does this imply about what we receive from nature? (289, 26)

- a. It is flesh.

Moving on to the second paragraph in section 1, what parts of man does Paul specifically identify as being corrupted and perverted as a result of the fall? (290, 3 & 8ff)

- a. Mind
- b. Understanding
- c. Heart

Quoting Ephesians 4:20, Calvin identifies the grace of Christ as the remedy for the corruption and perversion of the above faculties but he emphasizes a particular aspect of the remedy. What does he add for emphasis? (290, 17)

- a. *...the grace of Christ is the sole remedy.*

Does Ps 61:10 say what Calvin says it does?

- a. Ps 61:10 is the Vulgate numbering. 62:9 in our versions. 62:9 does say what Calvin says it does.

2. What, specifically, is, *the reasoning of the apostle*, referred to by Calvin, 291, 18? (291, 19f)

- a. That not a single shred of hope for man should be drawn from anything that he is capable of. He is completely and utterly dependant on God's *gift* of eternal life.

What conclusion does Calvin draw from this? (291, 16ff)

- a. *...that men are as they are here described not merely by the defect of depraved custom, but also by depravity of nature.*

Is Calvin's inference – *ie*, the origin of corrupt behaviour is corruption residing in our nature and not that the corruption in our nature only comes about as the result of corrupt behavior – borne out by his reasoning?

- a. Yes.

What are the components of human corruption as listed by Paul in Romans 3? (291, 24ff & 30ff)

- a. Absence of righteousness;
- b. Absence of understanding;
- c. The presence of, *...shameful acts with which [we]...defile our several members;*
- d. Being devoid of the fear of God.

Why is a 'hydra' a suitable illustration for this condition?

- a. A Hydra is a many-headed beast.

What point does Calvin make by using a diseased body as an illustration? (291, 36f)

- a. An unhealthy condition is correctly diagnosed in the heart even when the symptoms are not fully manifested in someone's behavior.

Where does this particular illustration break down? (291, 42ff)

- a. In a diseased body there are usually some unaffected organs/members. As far as sin is concerned, no part of our nature is unaffected.

3. How do we know that the grace of God is at work in unbelievers? (292, 18ff)

- a. *...if the Lord gave loose rein to the mind of each man to run riot in his lusts, there would doubtless be no one who would not show that, in fact, every evil thing for which Paul condemns all the nature is most truly to be met in himself.*

What does the grace of God do, and not do? (292, 18)

- a. It restrains inwardly but does not cleanse.

4. What problem remains to be resolved? (293, 8)

- a. Identifying the source of good and noble acts by unregenerate people.

What is the implication of excluding God's grace from such acts? (293, 10f)

- a. *...nature, if carefully cultivated, is not utterly devoid of goodness.*

Because it has been established that fallen human nature is utterly devoid of goodness, to what does Calvin ascribe 'good' deeds? (293, 11f)

- a. *...I admit that the endowments resplendent in Camillus were gifts of God...*

What does the fact that someone enjoys gifts from God indicate about that person? (293, 20ff)

- a. Nothing.

In equipping some people in ways that especially suit their callings and situations in life, what is God doing? (294, 5)

- a. *...providing for the human race...*

Calvin gives two further reasons why men's good deeds are not acts of righteousness in God's sight. One is integral to the deed itself and present in different people in varying degrees; the other is more of an absolute and ultimately disqualifying factor. What are they? (294, 9f & 13)

- a. *...ambition;*
- b. *...no zeal to glorify God.*

How can Calvin, who is by no means privy to everyone's heart, on all occasions, be confident that the zeal to glorify God never forms any part of any action of the unregenerate?

- a. ...the spirit of the fear of God rests, *upon Christ (Is 11:2). By this we are taught that all estranged from Christ lack, the fear of God, which, is the beginning of wisdom.*

5. How would you distinguish between necessity and compulsion, in this context? (295, 6f)

- a. Compulsion is a form of necessity that arises from *outside* the person compelled. Necessity can, and in this case does, arise *from within*.

Why might someone ask: *Is not God of necessity good?* What inference is such a questioner aiming to draw from the necessity of goodness in God? (295, 13f)

- a. They mean to imply that actions arising out of necessity do not reflect on the person performing them. God's goodness should not be an object of praise because he has no choice; he cannot be anything other than good, 295, 13f. Man's sin does not merit condemnation because it arises from necessity, 295, 19f.

While accepting that God is unable to do evil, Calvin does trace not this inability to a lack of choice on God's part. To what does he ascribe it? (295, 16)

- a. God's, *boundless goodness*

God is acting in complete consistency with his nature. What does this imply about God's will in the matter of goodness? (295, 18)

- a. It is, *free*. There is no inconsistency between necessity and freedom.

If we apply the same reasoning process to man's sin, what conclusion do we draw about whether or not people sin willingly? (295, 19f)

- a. The necessity of sinning does not imply any external compulsion or lack of freedom on man's part when he sins. *...who shall say that man therefore sins less willingly because he is subject to the necessity of sinning?*

Man became subject to this necessity as a result of exercising his - what? (295, 23)

- b. *...freedom...*

What was introduced into man, as a result of the way he chose to exercise his freedom, that turned freedom into necessity? (295, 24)

- a. *...corruption*

What did the introduction of corruption involve, and what did it not involve? (294, 36f)

- a. It did not involve the loss of will – *...to will is of man.*
- b. It involved the loss of the, *soundness* of will.

The text above this line needs reworking.

6. For Calvin, it is important to be completely clear about the current state of the human will. This is so that it will be clearly seen that salvation is all of God and that we make no contribution to it at all.

How does a full understanding of, *the sort of remedy by which divine grace corrects and cures the corruption of nature*, help us to understand ourselves and our needs? (297, 1ff)

- a. *...the Lord in coming to our aid bestows upon us what we lack*
- b. Therefore *...when the nature of his work in us appears, our destitution well...at once be manifest.*

List the texts that Calvin refers to, together with the points that he makes from them. (start at 297, 3)

- a. *[Phil 1:6] "...he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."*
 - a. *...there is no doubt that through "the beginning of a good work" he denotes the very origin of conversion itself, which is in the will*
- b. *[Ezek 35:26-27] "A new heart shall I give you, and will put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh. And I shall put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes."*
 - a. *Who shall say that the infirmity of the human will is (merely – IJ)*
 - b. *strengthened by his help in order that it may aspire effectively to the choice of good, when it must rather be wholly transformed and renewed?*
- c. *[2 Cor 3:5] "we are not even capable of thinking"*
 - a. *...when God converts us to zeal for the right, whatever is of our own will is effaced. What takes its place is wholly from God. I say that the will is effaced; not in so far as it is will, for in man's conversion what belongs to his primal nature remains entire. I also say that it is created anew; not meaning that the will now begins to exist, but that it is changed from an evil to a good will. I affirm that this is wholly God's doing, for according to the testimony of the same apostle, "we are not even capable of thinking"*
- d. *[Phil 2:13]*
 - a. *God not only assists the weak will or corrects the depraved will, but also works in us to will...everything good in the will is the work of grace alone*
- e. *[1 Cor 12:6] "It is God who works all things in all"*
 - a. *There he is not discussing universal governance, but is uttering praise to the one God for all good things in which believers excel. Now by saying "all" he surely makes God the author of spiritual life from beginning to end.*
 - b. *Previously he had taught the same thing in other words: that believers are from God in Christ [Eph 1:1; 1 Cor 8:6]. Here he clearly commends the new creation, which sweeps away everything of our common nature.*
 - c. *...an antithesis between Adam and Christ*
- f. *[Eph 2:10] "we are his workmanship, created in Christ for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them"*
 - a. *...he would prove our salvation a free gift [cf Eph 2:5], because the beginning of every good is from the second creation, which we attain in Christ.*
- g. *[Eph 2:10] "we have been created in Christ...for good works which God prepared beforehand"*
 - a. *...if even the least ability came from ourselves, we would also have some share of the merit*
 - b. *He means by these words that all parts of good works from their first impulse belong to God.*
- h. *[Psalm 100:3] "And we ourselves have not done it" (Said by the Psalmist after he had said that, we are God's handiwork)*

- a. *It is clear from the context that he is speaking of regeneration, which is the beginning of the spiritual life; for he goes on to say that "we are his people and the sheep of his pasture" [Ps 100:3]*
- b. *...we see how, not simply content to have given God due praise for our salvation, he expressly excludes us from all participation in it.*

How does Calvin sum up the Psalmist's thought? (298, 32ff)

- a. *It is as if he were saying that not a whit remains to man to glory in, for the whole of salvation comes from God.*

7. Calvin knows that some, *concede that the will is turned away from the good by its own nature and is converted by the Lord's power alone* – yet they qualify this statement in an unsatisfactory way. They go wrong by limiting God's part in conversion to – what? (298, 37f)

- a. *They, , concede that the will is...converted by the Lord's power alone, yet in such a way that, having been prepared, it then has its own part in the action.*

In what way is this contrary to Augustine's understanding of the relationship between God's grace and the inclination of our own wills? (298, 38ff)

- a. *As Augustine teaches, grace precedes every good work; while will does not go before as its leader but follows after as its attendant.*

What, *two things are clearly signified*, in the words of Ps 100:3 as well as in other passages? (299, 4ff)

- a. *...the Lord corrects our evil will or rather extinguishes it*
- b. *...he substitutes for it a good one from himself*

Why is it wrong to attribute to ourselves the working of the will that we are given in conversion? (299, 8)

- a. *...the will reformed is the Lord's work*

8.

9.

10. What does Calvin say that God does in our heart that demonstrates his complete authority? (303, 28)

a. *The Lord...reigns in it as in his own possession.*

In the three previous sections, Calvin has been at pains to show from scripture that any inclination in our wills to seek God according to the gospel must come from God himself. In this section, he takes that one step further. God's grace not only creates a possibility that we might seek him but also – what? (303, 34)

a. Acts effectively in causing us to respond.

11. As Calvin turns in this section to the subject of perseverance, please bear in mind that it is not sufficient to define perseverance simply as, 'once saved, always saved'. Perseverance includes far more than our security.

What does Calvin identify at the beginning of this section as, *a most wicked error*, concerning the distribution of perseverance? (304, 31ff)

a. Perseverance *...is distributed according to men's merit*, as a reward to those who co-operate, independently of God, with grace previously given.

Does Calvin's objection to this error imply that our response to the work God does in us bears no relationship to our ongoing experience of his activity? (305, 21ff)

a. *I grant that believers are to expect this blessing of God: that the better use they have made of the prior graces, the more may the following graces be thereafter increased.*

How does Calvin, 305, 31f, sum up the position he is opposing?

a. *...from the individual movement of each a mutual convergence occurred...*

What description of perseverance does he prefer? (305, 33)

a. *...the multiplying of grace.*

What assertion of his, *adversaries*, does Calvin, *not gainsay*? (306, 3ff)

a. *...after we have by the Lord's power once for all been brought to obey righteousness, we go forward by our own power and are inclined to follow the action of grace...*

What idea does he regard as a wretched delusion? (306, 10f)

a. *...man has in himself the power to work in partnership with God's grace...*

12. Note from IJ: In this section Calvin deals with a misinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:10 that taught that, in effect, God's grace starts things off in a right direction but after that, it can only become increasingly fruitful if we, of ourselves, co-operate with it. He ascribes this misinterpretation at least in part, to an, *absurd latin translation*, presumably the Vulgate. The Douay Rheims translation (an English translation based on the Vulgate) renders this verse, *But by the grace of God, I am what I am; and his grace in me hath not been void, but I have laboured more abundantly than all they: yet not I, but the grace of God with me*. The final phrase is obviously capable of being understood *...the grace of God and me*.

Interestingly, this is most effectively corrected in another Catholic translation, the Jerusalem Bible, which reads: *On the contrary, I, or rather the grace of God that is with me, have worked harder than any of the others;*

In 1 Cor 15:10 Paul identifies the parts played by himself and by God's grace in his industriousness as a Christian. How much of the credit goes to God? (306, 23f)

- a. *...he transfers all credit for labour to grace alone.*

13. Obviously, there was a sense in Calvin's day of trust in the Church as an institution and in the words of those especially revered as faithful teachers of truth. He felt it necessary to demonstrate, in a way that we might not, that what he was teaching was nothing new, that it was faithful not only to scripture but also to the doctrines and teachers that the Church recognised as the best that had been given. Augustine in particular is someone to whom Calvin demonstrates his faithfulness as often as he feels it appropriate.

Click [here](#) for the Wikipedia article on Augustine. Augustine was a thorough theologian, a great preacher and champion of Christianity. On the other hand, he had great reverence for the Church as an institution and an authority. He advocated the persecution of non-conformists, basing it on the text, *compel them to come in*. Some have described the Reformation as the triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over Augustine's doctrine of the Church.

The first quotation from Augustine runs from line 23 to line 34. To what faculty does Augustine attribute the ability of Christians to live Godly lives? (307, 24)

- a. *...they are able because they so will.*

What has to be true of our wills before they commit to Godly actions and outcomes? (307, 23f)

- a. *...the will of the saints is so much aroused by the Holy Spirit.*

What conclusion does Augustine draw from 2 Corinthians 12:9 about the help we can derive from our own wills if God does not take them over? (307, 30f)

- a. *...the will itself would succumb through weakness, and for that reason [we] could not persevere.*

How are we delivered from this undesirable outcome? (307, 31ff)

- a. *Therefore assistance is given...and hence, however great its weakness, not to let it fall.*

What would it be incorrect to assert as the teaching of Augustine? (308, 3f)

- a. That grace is given, *which by anyone's free choice may be accepted and rejected.*

What is Augustine's true teaching on the extent of the operations of grace? (308, 4ff)

- a. *...this very grace forms both choice and will in the heart, so that whatever good works then follow are the fruit and effect of grace; and it has no other will obeying it except the will that it has made.*

14. According to Augustine, are our wills free? (309, 1)

- a. *...there is left to man...free will.*

How does God work to produce the situation wherein man *...is so affected within that he obeys from the heart*? (308, 28ff)

- a. By grace, God makes someone free to obey him;
- b. The same grace imparts a feeling of delight following on obedience, this is part of the formative process that leads to the development of perseverance;
- c. Grace strengthens this foundation and inclination;
- d. Grace controls what continues to develop.

What plays no part in this process? (308, 17f)

a. ...*the merits of works, nor...the merits of the will.*

How, then, should our understanding of *free will* be qualified? (309, 2ff)

a. ...*except through grace the will can neither be converted to God nor abide in God; and whatever it can do it is able to do only through grace.*

FOR REFLECTION

1. How far do we recognise ourselves and the things we experience from Calvin's and Augustine's descriptions of the way that grace operates? In practice, do we really feel that our own efforts play no part in our ongoing experience of God?