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PREPARATION

Comparing the headings used by McNeill for this chapter with those used by Beveridge, it seems to me that Beveridge's headings give a better indication of the content. They are:

1. The holy fathers under the Law saw the day of Christ, though obscurely. He is more fully revealed to us under the Gospel. A reason for this, confirmed by the testimony of Christ and his Apostles.
2. The term Gospel, used in its most extensive sense, comprehends the attestations of mercy which God gave to the fathers. Properly, however, it means the promulgation of grace exhibited in the God-man Jesus Christ.
3. The notion of Servetus, that the promises are entirely abolished, refuted. Why we must still trust to the promises of God. Another reason. Solution of a difficulty.
4. Refutation of those who do not properly compare the Law and the Gospel. Answer to certain questions here occurring. The Law and the Gospel briefly compared.
5. Third part of the chapter. Of the ministry of John the Baptist.

EXPLORATORY

1. What was achieved by the Old Testament expiations and sacrifices? (423, 8f)
 - a. *God of old willed, through expiations and sacrifices, to attest that he was Father, and to set apart for himself a chosen people.*

In what way does Calvin distinguish between the Old and New Testament eras? (423, 11f)

- a. *...he with full splendour now appears to us*

What picture does Malachi use that shows the fullness of revelation under the gospel, compared to their light enjoyed by the Old Testament saints? (423, 15)

- a. *The sun*

In what way is this picture so very appropriate? (423, 17f)

- a. *...at (Christ's) advent they should hope for far more light.*

Peter says that, *The prophets...searched and diligently inquired about this salvation*. Does this mean they did not personally experience it? (423, 28f)

- a. *...they had but a slight taste of it; we can more richly enjoy it.*

How does Calvin sum up the difference between the Old and New Testament eras? (424, 4ff, 17f & 25ff)

- a. *...God has preferred us to the holy patriarchs, who were men of rare piety, is no slight commendation of the gospel revelation.*

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- b. *...those mysteries which they but glimpsed in shadowed outline are manifest to us.*
- c. *It is, moreover, true, as Paul elsewhere teaches, that God, who "ordered light to shine out of darkness, now has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" [2 Cor 4:6]. For when he appeared in this, his image, he, as it were, made himself visible; whereas his appearance had before been indistinct and shadowed.*

(IJ: Calvin's use of the word, *preferred*, here is not meant to imply that he likes us any better than he liked the Old Testament Patriarchs but simply that we are in receipt of greater privileges – more complete gospel revelation. No doubt God's expectation of us is correspondingly greater.)

Who made God known before Christ's incarnation? (424, 12ff)

- a. *John the Baptist's statement – "No one has ever seen God: the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has made him known" [John 1:18] – does not exclude the pious who died before Christ from the fellowship of the understanding and light that shine in the person of Christ.*

2. The heading given by Beveridge to this section expresses Calvin's thrust better than the heading used by McNeill: *The term Gospel, used in its most extensive sense, comprehends the attestations of mercy which God gave to the fathers. Properly, however, it means the promulgation of grace exhibited in the God-man Jesus Christ*

In Calvin's view, the word, *gospel*, can be taken in two senses. What are they? (425, 3f & 5)

- a. *...the broad sense*
- b. *...a higher sense*

What does the broad sense include? (424, 39ff; 425, 4f)

- a. *...all those promises of free remission of sins which commonly occur in the law, whereby God reconciles men to himself, are counted as parts of it.*
- b. *...those testimonies of his mercy and fatherly favour which God gave to the patriarchs of old.*

To what does the word, *gospel*, refer when it is used in its higher sense? (424, 37f; 425, 6f)

- a. *...the clear manifestation of the mystery of Christ*
- b. *...the proclamation of the grace manifested in Christ*

What two things authorise us to think of the word, *gospel*, as a word that can be used in either of these two senses? (425, 7ff)

- a. *...common usage*
- b. *This...rests on the authority of Christ and the apostles [Matt 4:17, 23; 9:35]*

(IJ: The verses referred to by Calvin are:

Matt 4:17, *From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

Matt 4:23, *And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.*

Matt9:35, Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

In support of Calvin's contention that the word, 'gospel' used in its highest sense refers to, *the clear manifestation of the mystery of Christ*, it is helpful to ask: Would we ever say of, say, Abraham, Moses, David or Isaiah what these verses say of Christ - *Then Jesus went about...preaching the gospel of the kingdom*. Although the gospel is very evident in Abraham's life would we ever say, 'Abraham went about preaching the gospel of the kingdom'? Would we say that of any of the Old Testament saints or even of Isaiah, whose book is sometimes referred to as, 'the gospel of Isaiah'?)

We are not to understand that the patriarchs (*ie* the Old Testament saints) knew nothing of the gospel (*Paul does not mean...that the patriarchs were shrouded in the shadows of death until the Son of God took flesh.*) What are we to understand? (425, 17ff)

- a. *...the gospel is a new and unusual sort of embassy [cf 2 Cor 5:20] by which God has fulfilled what he has promised.*
- b. *...because he has in his flesh accomplished the whole of our salvation, this living manifestation of realities has justly won a new and singular commendation.*

Although the gospel existed in the form of promises ever since the fall, how did the coming of Christ change that? (425, 21ff)

- a. *All the promises of God find their yea and amen in Christ [2 Cor 1:20]*
- b. Christ, by coming in the flesh, fulfilling all the conditions of our salvation and sending his Holy Spirit into our hearts brought us to experience, *this living manifestation of realities.*
- c. *...how excellent his advent (coming) is he has marked through opening by it the gate of heaven, that each one of us may enter there.*

3. (IJ: Quick refresher on Michael Servetus. Servetus was a Spaniard and a contemporary of Calvin who took it on himself to oppose evangelical theology, and Calvin in particular. Servetus was a leading thinker of his day who by no means confined his labours to theology. According to Wikipedia, he was the first European to correctly describe the function of pulmonary circulation.

He denied that Christ was God and took it on himself to write a response to Calvin's *Institutio*, called, *Christianismi Restitutio* (*ie* the Restitution/Restoration of Christianity). While Calvin was still in Paris he was challenged to a debate with Servetus but the latter did not appear, due to fears for his own safety. After the *Institutes* was published, he sent Calvin a copy that he had annotated, pointing out where Calvin was in error, subsequently publishing his *Restitutio*, and they corresponded from time to time. In 1553 Servetus turned up in Geneva, possibly encouraged by members of the City Councils who opposed Calvin and his thoroughgoing reforms. Servetus's reasons for doing this, despite Calvin's earlier statement that if he ever turned up in Geneva Calvin would do all he could to ensure that he did not leave alive, are not explicitly recorded anywhere but it appears to me that he had the specific intention of unseating Calvin and stepping into his shoes. His high-risk strategy of coming to Geneva failed and, on the orders of the City Council, he was burned to death in 1553. The charges against him were that he

denied the Trinity and the validity of infant baptism. The method of execution was contrary to Calvin's wishes. Calvin tried unsuccessfully to get it changed to beheading.

Bear in mind that the edition of the *institutes* that we are reading dates from 1559, by which time Servetus had been dead for 6 years. So Calvin is no longer opposing the man but his ideas and those who followed them.

There are still those who identify themselves as standing in a tradition of 'free-thinking' that Servetus championed. There is a Servetus Society. Servetus's former home in Spain is the headquarters of the Servetus Institute and a research centre for his life and works. [Source: Wikipedia])

What view is Calvin countering in this section? (425, 37f)

- a. *...by faith in the gospel we share in the fulfillment of all the promises.*

Does the fact that Christ, *left unfinished nothing of the sum total of our salvation*, mean that there is now, *no difference between us and Christ*? (426, 1ff)

- a. *Christ left unfinished nothing of the sum total of our salvation...it is wrong to assume from this that we already possess the benefits imparted by him...*
- b. *...we must remember that saying of John's: although we know that "we are the children of God, it does not yet appear...until we shall become like him, when we shall see him as he is" [1Jn 3:2].*

What two things agree rather well with each other? (426, 28)

- a. *...we possess in Christ all that pertains to the perfection of heavenly glory*
- b. *...faith is the vision of good things not seen [cf Heb 11:1]*

Wherein does the difference between Old Testament and New Testament promises consist? (426, 31f)

- a. *...the nature or quality...the gospel points out with the finger what the law foreshadows under types.*

4. When Calvin writes *...we refute those who always erroneously compare the law with the gospel by contrasting the merit of works with the free imputation of righteousness* does he mean to imply that there is no contrast between these two things? (426, 36f)

- a. *This is indeed a contrast not at all to be rejected.*

In that case, what is he refuting? (427, 6f)

- a. *...the gospel did not so supplant the whole law as to bring forward a different way of salvation*

In that case, how do the law and the gospel differ? (427, 7ff)

- a. *...the gospel...confirmed and satisfied whatever the law had promised, and gave substance to the shadows.*
- b. *When Christ says, "The Law and the Prophets were until John" {Luke 16:16; cf Matt 11:13}, he does not subject the patriarchs to the curse that the slaves of the law cannot*

escape. He means they had been trained in rudiments only, thus remaining far beneath the height of the gospel teaching.

What arguments, derived from Paul's words in the letter to the Romans, does Calvin present in support of his position? (427, 14ff)

- a. *Paul, calling the gospel "the power of God unto salvation for every believer" [Rom 16:25], presently adds: "The Law and the Prophets bear witness to it" [Rom 3:21].*
- b. *...at the end of the same letter, although he teaches "the preaching of Jesus Christ is the revelation of the mystery kept in silence through times eternal" [Rom 16:25], he qualifies this statement by adding an explanation, teaching that he was "made known through the prophetic writings" [Rom 16:26].*

What two-fold conclusion does Calvin draw about the relationship of the law and the gospel? (427, 22ff)

- a. *From this we infer that:*
 - a. *...where the whole law is concerned, the gospel differs from it only in clarity of manifestation.*
 - b. *...because of the inestimable abundance of grace laid open for us in Christ, it is said with good reason that through his advent God's Heavenly Kingdom was erected upon earth [Matt 12:28].*

5. In the unfolding history of redemption, what place did John the Baptist occupy? (427, 27f)

- a. *John stood between the law and the gospel, holding an intermediate office related to both.*

John understood that Jesus was to die as our substitute (*behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*) but another equally important New Testament fact is absent from John's preaching. What is absent? (427, 30ff)

- a. *...that incomparable power and glory that shone forth in the resurrection.*

How does Jesus position John in relation to the prophets who had gone before him and the apostles who would come after? (427, 33ff)

- a. *"John excels among the sons of men, yet he who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he" [Matt 11:11]*

What does Jesus mean by, *the Kingdom of Heaven*, in this context (427, 37ff)

- a. *...the preaching of the gospel...As we have seen elsewhere, he denotes this preaching by "Kingdom of Heaven."*

Given Christ's estimate of John's position, why does John appear to demean his role, referring to himself as, *only a "voice"*? (427, 40ff)

- a. *He does not do this out of feigned humility, but wishes to teach that the real ambassadorship was not entrusted to him, but that he performed the office of harbinger, as Malachi had foretold: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Jehovah comes" [Mal 4:5].*

Why did Christ describe John as, *a burning and shining lamp*? (428, 8f)

- a. *...because full daylight had not yet come.*

So much for John's relationship to the Old Testament, in what way did he anticipate the New? (428, 10f)

- a. *...he actually used the same baptism as was afterward entrusted to the apostles {John 1:33}.*

FOR REFLECTION

1. We often think of the law as that which convicts, which it is, but Calvin in this chapter reminds us that the law contains promises as well as laying down rigorous conditions. What it could not do was provide us with any assistance to meet those conditions. The gospel meets them entirely on our behalf. What subjective as well as objective benefits does this bring to us? (The opening verses of Romans 7 may help you to answer.)