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PREPARATION

1. Calvin gave us his high level outline for the treatment of the church in IV.I - *our plan of instruction now requires us to discuss the church, its government, orders and power...*
2. Having dealt with church government and orders in chapters i-vii, he turns in chapter viii to the power of the church.
3. In what three areas does, *the spiritual power, which is proper to the church*, consist? (1149, 27f)
 - a. Doctrine;
 - b. Jurisdiction;
 - c. Making laws.
4. In his treatment of these three areas, Calvin follows a different order. Chs viii & ix deal with the church's authority in the area of doctrine, which is further sub-divided into, i) authority to lay down articles of faith, and, ii) authority to explain them. IV.x deals with the church's authority to make laws. In IV.xi we come to, *the third part of ecclesiastical power*, which is jurisdiction.
5. The meaning of Polity: A form or process of civil government or constitution.

EXPLORATORY

1. How significant, in Calvin's thinking, is the jurisdiction that God has granted to the church? (1211, 1f)

a. It is, *the most important in a well ordered state*.

To what does the jurisdiction of the church pertain? (1211, 3f, 10f)

a. *...the whole jurisdiction of the church pertains to the discipline of morals*

How does the church's jurisdiction come to expression (what concrete form does it take)? (1211, 10f)

a. In *...an order framed for the preservation of the spiritual polity*.

What institutions were established among churches, *from the beginning*? (1211, 12)

a. *...courts of judgment*

With what did these courts concern themselves?

a. *...the censure of morals;*

b. Investigation of vices;

c. *...the exercise of the office of the keys*.

What indications are there in scripture that these courts existed? (1211, 16ff)

a. The mention of, *offices of ruling*, in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and 1 Timothy 5:17.

How are elders distinguished from one another in 1 Timothy 5:17? (1211, 22ff)

a. *...those who labour in the Word*

b. *...those who do not carry on the preaching of the Word yet rule well*.

What, in Calvin's view, does ruling well consist of? (1212, 1f)

a. The supervision of morals

b. Using, *the whole power of the keys*.

Now, to investigate why the exercise of, *the whole power of the keys*, requires the existence of such courts. What is the first reason given? (1212, 5ff)

- a. *...he commands that those who are contemptuous of private warnings be severely warned in the name of the people; but if they persist in their stubbornness, he teaches that they should be cut off from the believers' fellowship [Matt 18:15-18]*
- b. *...these admonitions and corrections cannot be made without investigation of the cause; accordingly some court of judgment and order of procedure are needed.*

What are the implications for churches in which the concept of ecclesiastical jurisdiction is not generally recognised by the membership? (1212, 11ff)

- a. *Such churches, make void the promise of the keys and banish excommunication, solemn warnings and such things...*

1212, 20 What, in Calvin's view is, *reasonable*?

- a. *That churches have the authority to impose the, grave sanction, of excommunication.*

What does Calvin feel that the possession of this grave sanction prevents? (1212, 20ff)

- a. *...the judgment of a contemptible and despised church could otherwise be spurned by rash and foolish men.*

What two passages does Calvin regard as complementary, even though they appear to, express two things somewhat diverse from each other? (1212, 26ff)

- a. *...two passages that speak of binding and loosing:*
 - i. *Matt 16:19, where Christ, after promising to give the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven to Peter, immediately adds that whatever he binds or looses on earth shall be confirmed in heaven.*
 - ii. *Jn 20:22f, about to send the disciples out to preach, after he breathes on them, he says, If you forgive the sins of any, they will be forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they will be retained in heaven.*

To what, solely, do, *This command concerning forgiving and retaining sins and that promise made to Peter concerning binding and loosing*, refer? (1212, 39)

- a. *...solely to the ministry of the Word*

What ministry in particular is Calvin referring to? (1212, 41f)

- a. *The ministry of the gospel.*

What is it about the gospel itself and men and women's acceptance or rejection of it that makes it appropriate to picture the ministry of the gospel as binding and loosing/forgiving and retaining sins? (1213, 1ff)

- a. *...we all, being slaves of sin and death, are released and freed through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus [cf Rom 3:24].*
- b. *...they who do not receive or acknowledge Christ as their liberator and redeemer are condemned and sentenced to eternal chains [cf Jude 6]*

For whose benefit did Christ make this link between the ministry of the Word on earth and heavenly reality? (1213, 6f)

- a. *The apostles;*
- b. *...all those to whom it was going to come.*

What did the apostles and those to whom they ministered receive from, *this noble testimony*? (1213, 9)

- a. *Extraordinary strength.*

Why did the apostles in particular need this extraordinary strength? (1213, 10ff)

- a. *It was important for the apostles to have constant and perfect assurance in their preaching, which they were not only to carry out in infinite labours, cares, troubles, and dangers, but at last to seal with their own blood.*
- b. *...it was important for them to be convinced that in such anxiety, difficulty, and danger they were doing God's work; also, for them to recognise that God stood beside them while the whole world opposed and attacked them; for them, not having Christ, the author of their doctrine before their eyes on earth, to know that he, in heaven, confirms the truth of the doctrine which he had delivered to them.*

Why did the apostles' hearers need, *an unmistakable witness...that the doctrine was not the word of the apostles but of God himself?* (1213, 25ff)

- a. *...these things - forgiveness of sins, the promise of eternal life, the good news of salvation - cannot be in man's power.*

What, then, does Christ's use of the imagery of keys, binding and loosing and of forgiving and retaining sins, amount to? (1213, 27ff)

- a. *A testimony, on the part of Christ, that in the preaching of the gospel the apostles have no part save that of ministry*
- b. *...that it was he himself who would speak and promise all things through their lips as his instruments*
- c. *...the forgiveness of sins which they preached was the true promise of God; the damnation which they pronounced the sure judgment of God.*

Was this testimony applied solely to the apostles' ministry? (1213, 33f)

- a. *This testimony, moreover, was given to all ages*

...the power of the keys is simply - what? (1213, 39)

- a. *...the preaching of the gospel*

...with regard to men it is not so much power as - what? (1213, 40)

- a. *...ministry*

Why is it, *not so much power as ministry?* (1213, 40ff)

- a. *...Christ has not given this power actually to men, but to his Word, of which he has made all men ministers.*

2. Turning now to Matthew 18:17-18, in what ways is the promise given in these verses (that of binding and loosing) similar to the power of the keys? (1214, 10ff)

- a. *...each is a general statement*
- b. *...in both is always the same power of binding and loosing (that is, through God's Word), the same command, the same promise.*

Wherein does Matthew 18 differ from Matthew 16 and John 20? (1214, 13ff)

- a. *...the first passage is particularly concerned with...preaching; the latter applies to the discipline of excommunication which is entrusted to the church.*

How does the church, 'bind'? (1214, 16f)

- a. *...the church binds him whom it excommunicates*

What does a church not do when it excommunicates a member? (1214, 17f)

- a. *It does not cast the member, into everlasting ruin and despair.*

What does it do? (1214, 18ff)

- a. *...it condemns his life and morals, and already warns him of his condemnation unless he should repent.*

How does the church, 'loose'? (1214, 20)

- a. *It looses him whom it receives into communion*

How has Christ dignified the judgments of the church? (1214, 24ff)

- a. *...the Lord testifies that such judgment by believers is nothing but the proclamation of his own sentence...whatever they have done on earth is ratified in heaven.*

What assurance is there that churches judge rightly?(1214, 27ff)

- a. *...they have the Word of God...They cannot err or disagree with God's judgment, for they judge solely according to God's law*

In what ways have Matthew 16 & 18 been misused by Catholicism in particular? (1214, 32ff)

- a. *Upon these two passages...these madmen...indiscriminately try to establish:*
 - i. *(auricular) confession*
 - ii. *...excommunication*
 - iii. *...jurisdiction*
 - iv. *...the right to frame laws*
 - v. *...indulgences*
 - vi. *...they cite the first passage to establish the primacy of the Roman see.*

To what craft does Calvin liken the tendency of Catholicism to twist scripture to make it seem as though their practices have a Biblical basis when, in reality, they do not? (1214, 39)

- a. *...the locksmith's art*

How accomplished are they at this practice?

- a. *...they know so well how to fit their keys to any locks and doors they please that one would say they had practiced the locksmith's art all their lives!*

3. To understand the position Calvin is opposing in this and the following section, please read footnote 6 on p1215.

What change of circumstances would, according to some, bring to an end the church's role in binding and loosing? (1215, 1ff)

- a. *Magistrates (those who keep order in society) would become professors of Christianity.*

In what way, according to Calvin, is this view mistaken? (1215, 3ff)

- a. *...they do not notice how great a difference and likeness there is between ecclesiastical and civil power...The two conceptions are very different...The church does not assume what is proper to the magistrate; nor can the magistrate execute what is carried out by the church.*

In what does this difference consist? (1215, 5ff)

- a. *...the church does not have the right of the sword to punish or compel*
- b. *...not to force*
- c. *...not imprisonment*
- d. *...nor the other punishments which the magistrate commonly inflicts.*
- e. *Church discipline, is not a question of punishing the sinner against his will, but of the sinner professing his repentance in a voluntary chastisement.*

Turning to the illustration that is designed to bring out the differences (1215, 13ff) what is the magistrate limited to? (1215, 16f)

- a. *So will...outward justice be satisfied.*
- b. *The offender, may show no sign of repentance.*

What must the church seek as the basis of restoration to full communicant status? (1215, 22)

- a. *...a solemn declaration of repentance.*

If the, *too barren*, argument of those who advocate the view that Calvin is opposing in this section be true, what would be the implications for pastors? (1215, 20ff)

- a. *Today, then, according to our opponents, let pastors stop rebuking manifest misdeeds; let them cease to chide, to accuse, to rebuke. For there are Christian magistrates who ought to correct these things by laws and sword.*

What does the view that Church discipline is rightly the sphere of Christian magistrates overlook? (1215, 26ff, cf 1216, 22ff)

- a. *...it very often happens that a magistrate is rather negligent, indeed, sometimes perhaps deserves chastisement himself*
- b. *...the magistrate, if he is godly, will not want to exempt himself from the common subjection of God's children. It is by no means the least significant part of this for him to subject himself to the church, which judges according to God's Word - **so far ought he to be from setting that judgment aside!** (emphasis mine) ...a good emperor is within the church, not over the church. (Ambrose)*

In what way ought the functions of minister and magistrate, *be so joined that each serves to help, not hinder, the other?* (1216,1ff)

- a. *...as the magistrate ought by punishment and physical restraint to cleanse the church of offenses, so the minister of the Word in turn ought to help the magistrate in order that not so many may sin.*

4. What two considerations indicate to us that the disciplinary jurisdiction given to the church is permanent, not temporary? (1216, 8ff)

- a. *...it is not fitting for us to accuse to the magistrate those who do not obey our admonitions, Yet this would be necessary if the magistrate should take over the office of the church.*
- b. *What of that promise? ...Christ here instituted nothing new but followed the custom always observed in the ancient church of his people...this was confirmed by the agreement of all times. For, when emperors and magistrates began to accept Christ, this spiritual jurisdiction was not at once annulled but was only so ordered that it should not detract from the civil jurisdiction or become confused with it.*

In conclusion Calvin levels two charges at his opponents. What are they? (1216, 29ff)

- a. *They, corrupt Christ's utterance with a false interpretation.*
- b. *They condemn in no light fashion all the holy bishops (ie, pastors) who have been from the time of the apostles for having taken upon themselves the honour and office of magistrate on a false pretext.*

5. In Calvin's view, a recovery of, the true use of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, will play a part in - what? (1216, 38ff)

a. *Overturning, the kingdom of Antichrist and, setting, up again the true Kingdom of Christ.*
 What is the aim of ecclesiastical jurisdiction? (1217, 3f)

- a. *...that offences be resisted*
- b. *...that...any scandal that has arisen be wiped out.*

What two factors ought to govern the application of church discipline to individuals?

- a. *...that this spiritual power be completely separated from the right of the sword (ie the civil power)*
- b. *...that it be administered not by the decision of one man but by a lawful assembly*

Why is it fitting to content ourselves solely with the use of the Word of God if engaged in a disciplinary procedure? (1217, 12ff)

- a. *For the severest punishment of the church, the final thunderbolt, so to speak, is excommunication...this requires no physical force but is content with the power of God's word.*

What does the Christian faith become, in the absence of properly applied and administered church discipline? (1217, 24)

- a. *...a laughingstock*

What is necessary in order to prevent this happening? (1217, 24f)

- a. *...those who profess themselves of the household of faith ought to be judged in accordance with what is taught.*

What powers need to be in place to enable such judgments to be made and effectually applied to individuals? (1217, 26ff)

- a. *That cannot be done unless there be joined with the ministry the right to call those who are to be admonished privately or be more sharply corrected; also the right to bar from the communion of the Lord's Supper those who cannot be received without profaning this great mystery.*

6. What change had taken place in the exercise of discipline between the New Testament and Calvin's own day? (1218, 25f)

- a. *...against law and right, the bishop has claimed for himself alone what had been given to the church.*

Calvin appeals to the history of the church for support for his position. Whom does he cite and what did they say? (1218, 3ff)

- a. *Cyprian: From the beginning of my episcopate I determined not to do anything without the advice of the clergy and the consent of the people.*
- b. *Ambrose: The old synagogue, and afterward the church, had elders, without whose counsel nothing was done. It has fallen out of use, by what negligence I do not know, unless perhaps through the sloth, or rather, pride, of the learned, wishing to appear to be important by themselves alone.*

In Calvin's view, with what ecclesiastical institution holds the greatest authority (provided, always, it is exercised in subjection to Christ)? (1218, 29)

- a. *...there is more authority in the assembly than in one man.*

7. This section records further deterioration and deviations from the scriptural teaching in the area of spiritual jurisdiction.

What mark of declension is noticed first by Calvin? (1219, 1ff)

- a. *...bishops, disdaining the business...have delegated it to others.*

What comes next? (1219, 5ff)

- a. *...although the litigation concerns only earthly matters, they still call it spiritual jurisdiction.*

What is his third observation? (1219, 19ff)

- a. *...fornication, wantonness, drunkenness, and misdeeds of this sort, they not only tolerate but, so to speak, foster and confirm with tacit approval.*

How do they do this? (1219, 23)

- a. *...they call but a few of many before them, either that they may not seem too negligent in conniving or that they may milk them of some money.*

8. What are the elements of the spiritual power wielded by the Pope and other high-ranking members of the Papal system? (1220, 2ff)

- a. *...boldness in formulating new doctrines by which they have turned the wretched people away from the original purity of God's Word.*
- b. *...the wicked traditions with which they have ensnared them*
- c. *...pretended ecclesiastical jurisdiction which they exercise through suffragans and officials.*

How do we know that for Christ's ministers, to be *decked out with opulence and proud titles*, is contrary to his will? (1220, 21f)

- a. Matt 20:25f & Luke 22:25f *The rulers of the gentiles lord it over them...but you do not do so.*

What does Christ mean to teach in this statement in addition to affirming that, *the office of pastor is distinct from that of prince*? (1220, 24f)

- a. *...the two are so different that they cannot come together in one man*

Why does the example of Moses who, for a time, combined both offices in himself not set forth a normal pattern for us? (1220, 26ff)

- a. *...that Moses carried both offices at once was...a rare miracle*
- b. *...it was a temporary arrangement...when a definite form is prescribed by the Lord, the civil government is left to Moses; he is ordered to resign the priesthood to his brother.*

9. How does Christ set ministers an example in terms of rank and offices they should not aspire to? (1221, 27ff)

- a. *...he does not impose a harder law upon his servants than he has first borne and received himself.* Who has made me a judge or a ruler over you? Luke 12:14.

What phrase encapsulates the example set by the apostles? (1221, 35f)

- a. *It did not seem good to the apostles to give up the preaching of the Word of God to serve tables.*

What are we taught by this statement of the apostles? (1221, 38f)

- a. *...the fact that to be both a good bishop and a good prince is not the same man's task.*

Why is the example set by the apostles particularly relevant to all who follow? (1221, 39ff)

- b. *...the apostles...who...were able to cope with far more and greater cares than any men born after them...they could not shoulder the ministry of the Word and tables together, without sinking under the burden*

What is the inevitable outcome when ministers involve themselves in secular affairs? (1222, 6ff)

- a. Ministers will, *forsake their duties and move into the other camp.*

10. What has been the effect of the ceding of secular powers to the church? (1222, 33ff)

- a. *The princes who conferred jurisdiction upon bishops...did not provide well for the welfare of this church...for they thus corrupted its true and ancient discipline...they completely abolished it!*

11. Please note the quotations from Bernard in this section, which encapsulate a proper attitude.

12. - 16 Nothing is required from me as far as these sections are concerned but I encourage you to read them, not for the record of others' faults that they contain but for their positive teaching, which should serve as a corrective against improper ambitions for the position of churches and ministers in the community.

FOR REFLECTION

1. How does Christ's promise of the keys underscore for us the importance of our ministry being faithful to the teaching of the apostles.
2. 1216, 31ff Is the 'condemnation' of, all the holy bishops significant? If so, why? What does the fact that Calvin raises this as an objection to his opponents imply about the connectedness of the Christian church down through the ages? What does this imply about the role of reflection in the formulation of our theology? Is Calvin right to take this into account in his thinking through of the relationship between the ministers of the church and civil authorities.