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PREPARATION

1. Certainly many, if not most, theological textbooks and manuals would entitle this section 'Ecclesiology - the Doctrine of the Church'. Calvin's title arouses much more interest.
2. In order to remind yourselves of the phrases and concepts Calvin would have had in mind and, to a large extent, have expected his readers to be familiar with, familiarise yourself with statements in the creeds and, if you have time, the confessions relating to the nature of the church.

EXPLORATORY

1. 1012, 13f Calvin outlines the subjects to be dealt with in book 4. What are they?

- a. *...the Church, its government, orders and power;*
- b. *...the sacraments;*
- c. *...the civil order.*

Why are these three things necessary? (1011, 5f)

- a. *...we need outward helps to beget and increase faith within us and advance it to its goal.*

What treasure has been committed to the Church, in order that it might flourish? (1011, 7f)

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

What two functions are committed to, pastors and teachers? (1012, 2ff)

- a. Teaching
- b. The exercise of authority

How has God provided for unity in the Church? (1012, 4f)

- a. *...he omitted nothing that might make for holy agreement of faith*
- b. *...and for right order.*

How do Churches carry out the role of mother towards those who have God for their Father? (1012, 19ff)

- a. God is pleased to gather his sons into the church, *that they may be nourished by her help and ministry as long as they are infants and children.*
- b. *...also that they may be guided by her motherly care until they mature and at last reach the goal of faith.*

2. The first paragraph of this section is taken up with a discussion of whether we should say we believe *in* the church or we believe the church. Calvin is not happy with *in*, which, he feels, implies that the church itself is an object of faith on the same level as God himself. However, if you are struggling to follow Calvin's distinction, please note the last sentence in footnote 4: *It is impossible to bring out the meaning in English, a virtually inflectionless language, of a distinction that stretches even the Latin.*

What phrase does Calvin use for the Church as an earthly entity? (1013, 1)

- a. *...the visible Church*

In Calvin's view, of what does this visible church consist? (1013, 32ff)

- a. *...a small and contemptible number [of the elect]...hidden in a huge multitude and a few grains of wheat [ie, the elect]...covered by a pile of chaff.*

Given that the visible church consists of this mixture, what must we make our aim? (1013, 36ff)

- a. *To come to a position in which, for good reasons, we can, consider the unity of the church as that into which we are convinced we have been truly engrafted.*

Why is this necessary? (1014, 3ff)

- a. *...no hope of future inheritance remains to us unless we have been united with all other members under Christ, our head.*

3. The communion of saints. Where does this phrase come from? (1014, 22)

- a. The (apostles') creed

What does, the communion of saints, signify? (1014, 29ff; 1015, 24ff)

- a. *...the saints are gathered into the body of Christ on the principle that whatever benefits God confers upon them, they should in turn share with one another.*
- b. *In the very word, communion, there is a wealth of comfort because, while it is determined that whatever the Lord bestows upon his members and ours belongs to us, our hope is strengthened by all the benefits they receive.*

Through what lens do we need to view the church in order to recognise the communion of saints (1015, 30)

- a. *...it belongs to the realm of faith.*

If we recognise this communion, how will we behave? (1014, 23ff)

- a. *...each of us should keep in brotherly agreement with all God's children, should yield to the church the authority it deserves, in short, should act as one of the flock.*

Calvin recognises two qualifications on the communion of saints. What are they? (1014, 31ff)

- a. *This does not, however, rule out diversity of graces, inasmuch as we know that the gifts of the Spirit are variously distributed.*
- b. *Nor is civil order disturbed, which allows each individual to own his private possessions*

In the paragraph that begins on 1015, 8, with the words, *Now, it is very important for us to know...* Calvin returns to the phrase, *believe the church* (line 9). What phrases in this paragraph help us to understand what he means by this?

- a. *...even if the whole fabric of the world were overthrown, the church could neither totter nor fall.* Calvin states two reasons why this is so:
 - i. *...it stands by God's election and cannot waver or fall any more than his eternal providence can.*
 - ii. *...it has in a way been joined to the steadfastness of Christ, who will no more allow his believers to be estranged from him than that his members be rent and torn asunder.*
- b. *...while we remain in the bosom of the church, the truth will always abide with us.*
- c. *So powerful is participation in the church that it keeps us in the society of God.*

To what extent does Calvin feel that the church should attempt to limit formal membership to true believers only? (1015, 28ff)

- a. *Not at all. For here we are not bidden to distinguish between reprobate and elect - that is for God alone, not for us, to do*

What, then, is it appropriate for individuals to be certain of and to do? (1015, 35ff)

- a. *...to establish with certainty in our hearts that all those who, by the kindness of God the Father, through the working of the Holy Spirit, have entered into fellowship with Christ, are set apart as God's property and personal possession; and that when we are of that number we share that great grace.*

4. How useful, indeed how necessary is it that we know the church as our mother? (1016, 7ff)

- a. *...there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels.*

How many Biblical references does Calvin produce to support this view and his conclusion that, *it is always disastrous to leave the church?*

- a. Seven

5. An unusually long section that establishes the divine institution of the ministry.

What three things do we see, from Ephesians 4:10-13? (1017, 4ff)

- a. *...how God, who could in a moment perfect his own, nevertheless desires them to grow up into holy manhood solely under the education of the church.*
- b. *We see the way set for it: the preaching of the heavenly doctrine has been enjoined upon the pastors.*
- c. *We see that all are brought under the same regulation, that with a gentle and teachable spirit they may allow themselves to be governed by teachers appointed to this function.*

What was necessary for this plan to be effective? (1017, 23)

- a. *...holy assemblies...that the doctrine taught...might foster agreement in faith.*

Why was the location for such assemblies given exalted titles? (1017, 28ff)

- a. *...they are used solely to bring esteem, love, reverence and dignity to the ministry of the heavenly doctrine*

What similarity exists between the ministry God provided for Israel and the ministry he provides for us? (1017, 41f)

- a. *...it is his will to teach us through human means.*
- b. *As he was of old not content with the law alone, but added priests as interpreters from whose lips the people might ask its true meaning [cf Mal 2:7], so today he not only desires us to be attentive to its reading, but also appoints instructors to help us by their effort.*

In what way does this arrangement, prove our obedience? (1018, 3f)

- a. *...by a very good test when we hear his ministers speaking just as if he himself spoke.*

What is God doing when he addresses us, in human fashion through interpreters? (1018, 5ff)

- a. *...he also provides for our weakness...in order to draw us to himself, rather than to thunder at us and drive us away.*

In the next two paragraphs Calvin asserts that public assembly is an essential activity for Christians and the ministry of the word is the means whereby God's, *living image* (1019, 3) is seen.

What temptation arises from the human means God has chosen to use to unite and edify his people? (1018, 11f)

- a. We are tempted to, *think the authority of the Word is dragged down by the baseness of the men called to teach it*

What does such an attitude reveal about those who hold it? (1018, 12, 20, 34ff & 1019, 6)

They are:

- a. Ungrateful;
- b. Fanatical;
- c. Ungodly;
- d. Possibly, apostate.

How do these characteristics show themselves? (1018, 22ff, 34ff; 1019, 7)

- a. *Many are led either by pride, dislike or rivalry to the conviction that they can profit enough from private reading and meditation: hence they despise public assemblies and deem preaching superfluous.*
- b. *...in their stubbornness [the ungodly] can never submit to the yoke of being taught by human word and ministry.*
- c. *...a passion for splitting churches*

How does God deal with such people? (1018, 26ff)

- a. *...no one escapes the just penalty of this unholy separation without bewitching himself with pestilent errors and foulest delusions.*

What things do we need to keep in mind if we are to be preserved from falling into these same attitudes and errors? (1018, 13ff, 19f; 1019, 8ff, 13ff & 27ff)

- a. *...among the many excellent gifts with which God has adorned the human race, it is a singular privilege that he deigns to consecrate to himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that his voice may resound in them.*
- b. *...although God's power is not bound to outward means, he has nonetheless bound us to this ordinary manner of teaching.*
- c. *We must hold to...the church is built up solely by outward preaching, and that the saints are held together by one bond only: that with common accord, through learning and advancement, they keep the Church order established by God [cf Eph 4:12].*
- d. *...to this end...in ancient times all believers were commanded to assemble at the sanctuary.*
- e. *...believers have no greater help than public worship, for by it God raises his own folk upward step by step.*

To what two facts does Calvin allude to show not only the error of separating ourselves from the church and its ministry but also the effect on a believer of being prevented from joining the corporate gatherings of the church? (1018, 31ff; 1019, 20ff)

- a. *No one - not even a fanatical beast - ever existed who would tell us to close our ears to God.*
- b. *David complains with great bitterness of spirit that he has been barred from the tabernacle through the tyranny and cruelty of his enemies...he laments that he burns, is tormented and well-nigh consumed with this single trouble, vexation, and sorrow.*

Why did God choose teaching as the means of revealing himself? (1019, 31f)

- a. *...in order to be known spiritually*

What titles did God give to the temple that arose from this function? (1019, 32ff)

- a. *...the face of God, Ps 42:2*
- b. *...his footstool, Ps 132:7; 1 Chron 28:2*

What can we say about buildings that are associated in our minds with worship but in which God is not revealed through the teaching? (1019, 36ff)

- a. *...temples...built for God on any other principle were a mere profanation of his worship.*

6. Calvin mentions two possible errors that we can fall into in our view of the teaching ministry. What are they? (1020, 11ff)

- a. *Some exaggerate its dignity beyond measure.*
- b. *Others contend that what belongs to the Holy Spirit is wrongly transferred to mortal men.*

Calvin steers a balanced and Biblical course between these two extremes by drawing attention to two kinds of scriptural passage. What kinds of passage does he list?

- a. *...the passages in which God as the author of preaching, joining his Spirit with it, promises benefits from it.*
- b. *...the passages in which God, separating himself from outward helps, claims for himself alone both the beginnings of faith and its entire course.*

How many passages of the first sort does he list? (1020, 23ff)

- a. 10

How many of the second sort? (1021, 4ff)

- a. 5

How do we get the best result from preaching? (1021, 19f)

- a. *By presenting ourselves, in a teachable spirit to the ministers ordained by God*

7. Calvin asserts that, *Holy Scripture speaks of the church in two ways*. What two ways? (1021, 27ff)

- a. *...that which is actually in God's presence, into which no persons are received but those who are children of God by grace of adoption and true members of Christ by sanctification of the Holy Spirit...not only the saints presently living on the earth, but all the elect from the beginning of the world.*
- b. *...the whole multitude of men spread over the earth who profess to worship one God and Christ...In this church are mingled many hypocrites who have nothing of Christ but the name and outward appearance.*

Why are the latter, tolerated for a time? (1022, 2ff)

- a. *...either because they cannot be convicted by a competent tribunal or because a vigorous discipline does not always flourish as it ought.*

8. What is Calvin concerned to guard against in this section? (1022, 13)

- a. *...men's undue rashness*

What considerations does Calvin present to restrain such rashness? (1022, 13ff)

- a. *...to know who are his is a prerogative belonging solely to God [2 Timothy 2:19].*
- b. *...daily events themselves remind us how far his secret judgments surpass our comprehension...those who seemed utterly lost and quite beyond hope are by his*

goodness called back to the way; while those who more than others seemed to stand firm often fall.

- c. *...many sheep are without and many wolves are within.*
- d. *...he knows and has marked those who know neither him nor themselves.*
- e. *Of those who wear his badge, his eyes alone see the ones who are unfeignedly holy and will persevere to the very end [Matt 24:13] - the ultimate point of salvation.*

How does God expect us to distinguish between those who are his children and those who are not? (1022, 27ff)

- a. *By exercising, a certain charitable judgment whereby we recognise as members of the church those who, by confession of faith, by example of life, and by partaking of the sacraments, profess the same God and Christ with us.*

9. By what features do we recognise, the face of the Church? (1023, 7ff)

- a. *...the word of God purely preached and heard;*
- b. *...the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution.*

How much authority is vested in each individual church? (1023, 19f)

- a. *...each rightly has the name and authority of the church*

By whose decision is someone's place in the church taken away from them? (1023, 23,

- a. *...public judgment*
- b. *...the common agreement of the church by which they are borne and tolerated in the body of Christ.*

If a community, has the ministry of the Word and honours it, if it has the administration of the sacraments, how are we to regard it? (1024, 1)

- a. *...it deserves without doubt to be held and considered a church.*

By respecting the opinion of the body with regard to individuals and being content with the marks of a true church as set forth by Calvin, what do we safeguard? (1024, 3ff)

- a. *...we preserve for the universal church its unity*
- b. *...we do not defraud of their authority those lawful assemblies which have been set up in accordance with local needs.*

10. What is the effect on a church (as defined by the two characteristics of faithful, properly heard preaching and the proper administration of the sacraments) of somebody separating themselves from it? (1024, 18f)

- a. *Its unity is broken.*

What titles of the church underscore the illegitimacy of separation? (1024, 24ff)

- a. *...the pillar and ground of the truth;*
- b. *...the house of God;*
- c. *...his body and...fulness.*

What two divine objectives are achieved by the existence of the church and its custodianship of the things God has committed to it? (1024, 27ff)

- a. *...the preaching of his Word [is] kept pure*
- b. *God...show[s] himself the Father of a family*

How does he, show himself the Father of a family? (1024, 31)

- a. *...he feeds...and provides.*

What follows from this if we separate ourselves from the church? (1024, 34ff)

- a. *...separation from the church is the denial of God and Christ*
- b. *Nor can any more atrocious crime be conceived than for us by sacrilegious disloyalty to violate the marriage that the only-begotten Son of God deigned to contract with us. [Cf Eph 5:23-32]*

11. What are Satan's objectives with regard to the church? (1025, 9f)

- a. *...there is nothing that Satan plots more than to remove and do away with one or both of these [marks].*

The two marks are - what? (1025, 24ff)

- a. Both Word and sacraments are administered within, *the order approved by the Lord.*

What sorts of stratagems has Satan employed in the pursuit of his objectives? (1025,

- a. *Sometimes he tries by effacing and destroying these marks to remove the true and genuine distinction of the church.*
- b. *Sometimes he tries by heaping contempt upon them to drag us away from the church in open rebellion.*

What success has Satan known? (1025, 14f)

- a. *By his craft the pure preaching of the word has in some ages disappeared...a ministry Christ so ordained in the church that, if destroyed, the upbuilding of the church would fail [Eph 4:12].*

How committed is Satan to the achievement of his objectives? (1025, 15f)

- a. *...and now with the same malice he is striving to overthrow the ministry.*

What is so very special about the two marks of a true church? (1025, 20f)

- a. *They are...the signs and tokens with which the Lord thought his church sufficiently marked.*

How should we then estimate the temptation to withdraw from a congregation that displays the marks of authenticity? (1025, 18)

- a. *...how dangerous - nay how deadly*

12. *We may safely embrace as church any society in which both these marks exist.*

Calvin affirms this principle and applies it so thoroughly as to state that we ought not to allow the presence of, *some fault*, in, *the administration of either doctrine or sacraments*, to, *estrangle us from communion with the church*. Why is this? (1025, 38f)

- a. *...not all the articles of true religion are of the same sort.*

What practical conclusion does the distinction between essential and nonessential doctrines drive Calvin to? (1026, 17ff)

- a. *...we must condone delusion in those matters which can go unknown without harm to the sum of religion and without loss of salvation.*

What examples does Calvin give of doctrines that must be believed and taught for a church to be truly a church? (1026, 3ff)

- a. *God is one; Christ is God and the Son of God; our salvation rests on God's mercy...*

What New Testament passage does Calvin quote to support the view that not every difference between Christians should be the occasion for separation? (1026, 11ff)

- a. *Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, be of the same mind; and if you be differently minded in anything, God shall reveal this also to you. [Phil 3:15]*

What is the ideal that is taught by this verse? (1026, 16f)

- a. *...we should agree on all points*

What prevents us doing this? (1026, 17)

- a. *...all men are somewhat beclouded with ignorance*

What two responses to error does Calvin seek to guard against? (1026, 22ff)

- a. *...fostering them through flattery and connivance.*
- b. *...thoughtlessly forsaking the church because of any petty dissensions.*

Why is it wrong to thoughtlessly forsake the Church? (1026, 24ff)

- a. *...in it alone is kept safe and uncorrupted that doctrine in which piety stands sound*
- b. *...and the use of the sacraments is guarded.*

If we feel it is necessary to draw attention to and attempt to remedy error in the Church what two things do we need to bear in mind? (1026, 33ff)

- a. *...we are neither to renounce the communion of the Church*
- b. *...nor, remaining in it, to disturb its peace and duly ordered discipline.*

13. What reactions to the sins of other professing Christians does Calvin call for in this section?(1026, 36; 1027, 20)

- a. Considerateness;
- b. *...kindness*

Calvin produces three parables that show, allegedly, that, *the church is at the same time mingled of good men and bad*. Which parables are they? (1027, 28ff)

- a. *...the parable from Christ's lips that compares the church to a net in which all kinds of fish are gathered and are not sorted until laid out on the shore [Matt 13:47-58].*
- b. *Let them hear that it is like a field sown with good seed which is through the enemy's deceit scattered with tares and is not purged of them until the harvest is brought into the threshing floor [Matt 13:24-30].*
- c. *Let them hear finally that it is like a threshing floor on which grain is so collected that it lies hidden under the chaff until, winnowed by fan and seive, it is at last stored in the granary [Matt 3:12].*

14. Despite the errors that existed and were tolerated within the Church at Corinth, Paul still recognised it as a Church. Why is this? (1029, 1f)

- a. *...because the ministry of Word and sacraments remains unrepudiated there.*

15. In this section Calvin quarrels with the conclusion drawn by some that Paul's instructions to the Church at Corinth to practice separation give an individual the right to practice it. What passage in particular does he feel expresses the view he is articulating in this section? (1029, 38)

- a. 1 Cor 11:28

How does Calvin feel this passage supports the view he is articulating? (1029, 35ff)

- a. *For when Paul urges us to a holy and pure partaking of [the Lord's supper] he does not require that one examine another, or every one the whole church, but that each individual prove himself.*

16. What does Calvin feel is at stake in the proper recognition of, and participation in, the church? (1031, 4ff)

- a. *...because God willed that the communion of his church be maintained in this outward society, he who out of hatred for the wicked breaks the token of that society **treads a path that slopes to a fall from the communion of saints.***

What five things should those who feel compelled unwarrantably to separate from the church bear in mind? (1031, 9ff)

- a. *...in a great multitude there are many men, truly holy and innocent in the Lord's sight, who escape their notice.*
- b. *...even among those who seem diseased there are many who in no wise are pleased with, or flatter themselves in, their faults, but aroused again and again by a profound fear of the Lord, aspire to a more upright life.*
- c. *...a man is not to be judged by one deed, inasmuch as the holiest sometimes undergo a most grievous fall.*
- d. *...how much more important both the ministry of the Word and participation in the sacred mysteries are for the gathering of the church than the possibility that this whole power may be dissipated through the guilt of certain ungodly men.*
- e. *...in estimating the true church divine judgment is of more weight than human.*

17. What, chiefly, is Calvin seeking to clarify in this and the following sections? (1031, 24)

- a. *...in what holiness it (ie the church) excels*

Why is it necessary for us to think clearly about this? (1031, 24ff)

- a. *...lest, if we are not willing to admit a church unless it be perfect in every respect, we leave no church at all.*

What follows from these two thoughts: Christ...gave himself up for the church that he might sanctify her; he cleansed her by the washing of water in the word of life, that he might present her to himself as his glorious bride, without spot or wrinkle, etc, and, *it also is no less true that the Lord is daily at work in smoothing our wrinkles and cleansing spots?* (1031, 33)

- a. *...the church's holiness is not yet complete.*

In what sense, therefore, is the church holy? (1031, 34ff)

- a. *...it is daily advancing and is not yet perfect: it makes progress from day to day but has not yet reached its goal of holiness*

Calvin concludes this section by quoting three Old Testament passages. In support of - what? (1032, 9ff)

- a. *...from the creation of the world there was no time when the Lord did not have his church.*

Why is this observation significant? (1032, 8f)

- a. *...there are oftentimes few evidences of this sort of sanctification among men*

What conclusion does Calvin draw from the continual existence of the true church that he applies to the interpretation of Joel 3:17 and Isaiah 35:8? (1032, 4ff)

- a. *Let us not understand this prophecy as if all the members of the church were without blemish; but because they zealously aspire to holiness and perfect purity, the cleanness that they have not yet fully attained is granted them by God's kindness.*

18. In this section appeal is made to the examples of, *Christ, the apostles and almost all the prophets*, in support of the view that separation is wrong where the word and, *rites wherewith* (God is) *worshipped*, are to be found.

a. A

What sorts of things did the prophets have to put up with, *in people, in magistracy and in priesthood?* (1032, 30ff)

a. *Isaiah does not hesitate to liken Jerusalem to Sodom and Gomorrah [Is 1:10]. Religion was in part despised, in part besmirched. In morals one frequently notes theft, robbery, treachery, slaughter and like evil deeds.*

19. In this section the same appeal is continued, specifically to the example of Christ.

a. A

Calvin concludes with two points, which are - what? (1033, 30ff)

a. *...he who voluntarily deserts the outward communion of the church (where the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered) is without excuse.*

b. *...neither the vices of the few nor the vices of the many in any way prevent us from duly professing our faith there in ceremonies ordained by God...a Godly conscience is not wounded by the unworthiness of another...nor are the sacraments less pure and salutary for a holy and upright man because they are handled by unclean persons.*

20. Still pursuing the same point (ie, that error and imperfection within the church is no reason to separate from it provided the Word and properly administered sacraments remain) against whom does Calvin take aim in this section? (1033, 39f)

a. *Those who, do not recognise the church unless it be free of even the slightest blemish. Upright teachers...by urging believers to improvement, teach them to groan throughout life under a burden of vices and to take refuge in pardon.* Why do Calvin's adversaries in this section object to such ministry? (1034, 5f)

a. *...by this means people are led away from perfection.*

What concession does Calvin make to his opponents? (1034, 7f)

a. *I admit that in urging men to perfection we must not toil slowly or listlessly, much less give up.*

What does Calvin draw attention to in the Apostles' Creed and what conclusion does he draw from it? (1034, 10ff)

a. *The order in which the church and forgiveness of sins are mentioned: Thus in the Creed forgiveness of sins appropriately follows mention of the church.*

b. *...as one reads in the prophet, only the citizenry and household of the church obtain this [Is 33:14-24]. Therefore, the building of the heavenly Jerusalem ought to come first, and in it the kindness of God should then have a place in order that the iniquity of all who come to it may then be blotted out.*

What appears to be the most important thing for Calvin, the establishment of the church or the forgiveness of sins? (1034, 16ff)

- a. The forgiveness of sins: *Now I say that it ought first to be built up, not that there can be any church without forgiveness of sins, but because the Lord has promised his mercy solely in the communion of saints.*

If there cannot be any church without the forgiveness of sins and if, as Calvin says in line 34ff, *baptism...teaches us that entrance into God's family is not open to us unless we first are cleansed of our filth by his goodness*, why is it necessary for the church to be built up (which includes people being joined to it) first? (1034, 18f)

- a. *...because the Lord has promised his mercy solely in the communion of saints.*

21. What is necessary for our profession of Christianity to be maintained in a vigorous condition? (1035, 11ff)

- a. *...unless we are sustained by the Lord's constant grace in forgiving our sins, we shall scarcely abide one moment in the church.*

How assured can we be of this, *constant grace*? (1035, 3f, 5ff, 14ff & 16ff)

- a. *...what would be the point of providing a pardon for us that was destined to be of no use?*
- b. *...the Lord's mercy, if it were granted only once, would be void and illusory, since each is quite aware throughout his life of the many infirmities that need God's mercy.*
- c. *...the Lord has called his children to eternal salvation. Therefore they ought to ponder that there is pardon ever ready for their sins.*
- d. *Consequently, we must firmly believe that by God's generosity, mediated by Christ's merit, through the sanctification of the Spirit, sins have been and are daily pardoned to us who have been received and engrafted into the body of the church.*

22. For whose benefit have the keys of the kingdom been entrusted to the church? (1035, 26)

- a. *...believers*

What benefit do believers gain from the exercise of the ministry spoken of as, *the keys*? (1035, 35f)

- a. *...personal consolation*

In what activities does the use of the keys consist? (1035, 28f, 31ff; 1036, 3ff)

- a. *...repeatedly exhort the people to be reconciled to God in Christ's name*
- b. *...the presbyters or bishops to whom this office has been committed strengthen godly consciences by the gospel promises in the hope of pardon and forgiveness...both publicly and privately as need requires*
- c. *...forgiveness of sins...is dispensed to us through the ministers and pastors of the church, either by the preaching of the gospel or the administration of the sacraments*

In what activity is the exercise of the power of the keys chiefly seen? (1036, 6ff)

- a. *...by the preaching of the gospel or by the administration of the sacraments; and **herein chiefly stands out the power of the keys*** (emphasis mine)

Calvin sums up his understanding of the keys in three statements - what are they? (1035, 40ff)

- a. *...however great the holiness in which God's children excel, they still - so long as they dwell in mortal bodies - remain unable to stand before God without forgiveness of sins.*
- b. *...this benefit so belongs to the church that we cannot enjoy it unless we abide in communion with the church.*

- c. *...it is dispensed to us through the ministers and pastors of the church, either by the preaching of the gospel or the administration of the sacraments; and herein chiefly stands out the power of the keys*

What is the practical application of all that Calvin has been saying about the keys? (1036, 9ff)

- a. *Accordingly, let each one of us count it his duty to seek forgiveness of sins only where the Lord has placed it.*

23. In this section Calvin opposes what he calls a, *pestilential opinion*, (1036, 16). He gives us four elements of it, which are – what? (1036, 19ff)

- a. *...in baptism God's people are reborn into a pure and angelic life, unsullied by any carnal filth.*
- b. *...if, after baptism, anyone falls away, they leave him nothing but God's inexorable judgment.*
- c. *...to the sinner who has lapsed after he has received grace they hold out no hope of pardon.*
- d. *...they recognise no other forgiveness of sins than that by which they are first reborn.*

In Calvin's estimation this view is an attempt to, snatch away from the church the sole anchor of salvation, which is – what? (1037, 5ff)

- a. *He...forgives not once or twice, but as often as men, stricken with the awareness of their transgressions, cry out to him.*

What scriptural evidence does Calvin offer in support of this view? (1036, 30ff; 1037, 2ff)

- a. *...since at the Lord's command the saints daily repeat this prayer, Forgive us our debts [Matt 6:12], they doubtless confess themselves debtors...The Lord requires the saints to confess their sins – and that indeed continually throughout life; and he promises pardon.*
- b. *Whom, now, would he have us forgive seventy times seven? Is it not our brethren [Matt 18:21-22]?*

24. Calvin buttresses his assertions that we need God to continually and repeatedly forgive us, and that God does do this by many Old Testament (*the very swaddling clothes of the church*) examples. What examples are drawn from the book of Genesis? (1037, 8ff)

- a. *...the patriarchs – when they conspired to murder their brother...softened at last by Judah's advice, the sold him; but this too was an unbearable cruelty.*
- b. *Simeon and Levi illicitly avenging their sister's defilement*
- c. *Reuben fouled his father's bed with vilest lust*
- d. *Judah, wanting to indulge in fornication, beyond the law of nature goes in to his son's wife.*

How does the record of these incidents show, in Calvin's view, the continual and repeated forgiveness of God? (1037, 19ff)

- a. *...far from being banished from the chosen people, these men were raised up as heads!*

What was David's status, both nationally and spiritually, when he, *opened the way for his blind lust by the shedding of innocent blood*? (1037, 22ff)

- a. *... he was chief administrator of justice...He had already been reborn, and among the reborn was adorned with the Lord's excellent praises*

How is David an example of God's willingness to forgive even his own people when they are overtaken by temptation – even to the extent of committing a crime, *horrible even among the gentiles?* (1037, 26f)

- a. *Still, he committed that crime...and yet received pardon.*

What do the promises of restoration to fellowship with God that are frequently given through the mouths of the prophets imply about God's willingness to forgive his own people's sins? (1037, 28ff)

- a. ...as often as promises of divine mercy are manifested in the Law and the Prophets toward the Israelites, so often does the Lord prove that he shows himself willing to forgive the offences of his people!

25. How does God use the example of adultery to bring out the extent of his willingness to forgive those who repent? (1038, 5ff)

- a. By contrasting the extent of his willingness to forgive with ours: What man is there (*he says through Jeremiah*) who if his wife prostitute her body to adulterers, can bear to return to her embrace? By your fornications all your ways are polluted, O Judah; the earth has been filled with your filthy loves. Return yet to me and I will receive you [Jer 3:1]...Return you who turn away, I shall not avert my face from you, for I am holy, and I will not be angry forever [Jer 3:12].

What did Solomon believe about God's willingness to forgive his people? (1038, 14ff)

- a. *...when Solomon dedicated the Temple, he intended it also to be used so that thereby the prayers offered to obtain pardon of sins might be answered.*

Why did God ordain, in the law daily sacrifices for sins? (1038, 27ff)

- a. *...if the Lord had not foreseen that his people would be continually burdened with diseases of sins, he would never have established this remedy.*

Case proven?

26. How does the New Testament show that, on God's part, the same willingness to forgive has been carried over from the former era? (1039, 3ff)

- a. *Peter, who had heard that anyone not confessing Christ's name among men would be denied in the presence of the angels of God, denied him thrice one night and not without cursing; yet he was not deprived of pardon.*
- b. *Those who lived disorderly among the Thessalonians are chastised in such a way as to be invited to repentance.*
- c. *Not even Simon the Magician is cast into despair, but is rather bidden to have good hope, when Peter urges him to take refuge in prayer.*

27. In this section Calvin brings to our attention two churches that had defected from the faith, both doctrinally and, in the latter case, morally. Which two churches (or groups of churches) are they? (1039, 16f)

- a. The Galatians
- b. The Corinthians

He closes this section by returning to the creed, making the same observation as previously, which is – what? (1039, 30ff)

- a. *...once the church has, so to speak, been established, forgiveness of sins is added to it.*

28. Calvin has been rebutting the position of those who teach that the Christian life must be lived in perfection or not at all. In this section he counters a more moderate view, which is – what? (1039, 33ff)

- a. *Certain men, somewhat more prudent, when they see the teachings of Novatus refuted by the great clarity of Scripture, do not deem every sin unpardonable, but only voluntary transgression of the law, into which one knowingly and willingly falls.*

What sins do these men allow that God will pardon? (1039, 37f)

- a. *...one that is an error of ignorance*

How does God, in the Old Testament, show that his forgiveness is not confined to sins of ignorance? (1040, 1ff)

- a. *...in the law the Lord commanded one sort of sacrifice to be offered to atone for the voluntary sins of believers, another sort to redeem their acts of ignorance.*
- b. *...who can excuse David on grounds of ignorance...?*
- c. *Did the murder of a brother seem a lawful thing to the patriarchs?*
- d. *Had the Corinthians profited so ill as to think lust, impurity, fornication, hatreds, and contentions pleasing to God?*
- e. *Did Peter, so carefully warned, not know what an enormity it was to renounce his Master?*

If, in spite of all the examples cited of people whose sins, not committed in ignorance, were forgiven, we persist in limiting God's willingness to forgive the penitent, what characteristic are we displaying? (1040, 17f)

- a. *...unkindness*

29. How did the ancient writers to whom Calvin refers classify sins? (1040, 20ff)

- a. *...rather slight errors*
- b. *...more serious crimes*

What sort of sins were more serious? (1040, 33f)

- a. *...public crimes, which with great scandal came under the church's cognizance*

How were such crimes reacted to by the church, provided the perpetrator was penitent? (1040, 22; 1041, 1ff)

- a. *By exacting, solemn penitence.*
- b. *...they made pardon very difficult for those who had committed anything deserving churchly correction.*

Why did they take this stance, toward both, *slight errors*, and, *more serious crimes*? (1040, 24ff)

- a. *We must not interpret this opinion to mean that they wished either to cast into despair those who have fallen away from their first repentance, or to make light those other errors as if they were small in God's sight.*
- b. *...the church fathers well knew that the saints often totter in unbelief, sometimes give vent to superfluous oaths, now and then flare into anger, indeed, even break out into open railing, and besides are trouble with other ills that the Lord thoroughly abominates.*

But these writers called them, slight errors, in order to distinguish them from public crimes

- c. *...not because they considered pardon for their sins hard to obtain before the Lord*
- d. *...with this severity they intended to deter others from rashly plunging into iniquities that would merit their being cut off from the communion of the church.*

Calvin feels that, *the Lord's Word, which here ought to be our sole rule, surely prescribes a greater moderation.* What scriptural emphasis does he feel these ancient writers overlooked? (1041, 8ff)

- a. Scripture, surely teaches that disciplinary rigour is not to be pushed so far that the man for whom it ought to be chiefly concerned becomes overwhelmed with sorrow.

FOR REFLECTION

1. 1012, 5ff. How consistent is Calvin's view of the help and impressions we receive from sacraments with the Biblical principle that, 'we walk by faith, not by sight'.
2. What practical implications arise from thinking of the Church (or Churches, possibly, depending on the extent of our congregationalism) as the believers' mother.
3. From section 13 onwards, Calvin makes more explicit use of scripture to support his doctrine that a church exists wherever the Word and sacraments are present. What do you think of the passages he uses and the interpretation of them on which he builds his case?
4. In Jer 3:12, as quoted on 1038, 9ff, God links his holiness with his willingness to forgive. Do we find it easier to imagine God saying, 'I *shall* avert my face from you, for I am holy', than, 'I *shall not* avert my face from you, for I am holy'? Is it true to say that in our minds his holiness tends to be linked with his judgment? If so, what are the implications of this? Although we would never articulate the thought that grace is somehow less than holy, is that what we really believe?