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PREPARATION

1. The preparation recommended for the previous chapter – familiarizing yourself with statements in the creeds and confessions that relate to the church – will also be helpful for this chapter.

EXPLORATORY

1. This section is a summary, not only of what Calvin has taught with respect to the church but of the pains he has taken in certain areas to be absolutely clear. Please pick out the main points that he wishes to emphasise. (1041, 13ff)
 - a. *...the ministry of the Word and sacraments...a perpetual token by which to distinguish the church.*
 - b. *...wherever the ministry remains whole and uncorrupted, no moral faults or diseases prevent it from bearing the name, church.*
 - c. *The church, is not so weakened by trivial errors as not to be esteemed lawful.*
 - d. *...the errors which ought to be pardoned are those which do not harm the chief doctrine of religion, which do not destroy the articles of religion on which all believers ought to agree; and with regard to the sacraments, those which do not abolish or throw down the lawful institution of the Author.'*

With what status does Calvin view the ministry of the Word and sacraments? (1041, 15f)

- a. *...a perpetual token by which to distinguish the church.*

What deviations from Biblical ideals, although undesirable, can exist without rendering false the claim of a professing Christian community to be a church? (1041, 18ff)

- a. *...trivial errors*
- b. *...the errors which ought to be pardoned are those which do not harm the chief doctrine of religion on which all believers ought to agree*
- c. *...with regard to the sacraments, those (errors) which do not abolish or throw down the lawful institution of the Author*

Apart from those that are implied in the statements above, what descriptions does Calvin give us of the errors that render false a community's claim to be a church? (1041, 25ff)

- a. *...the sum of necessary doctrine is overturned*
- b. *...the use of the sacraments is destroyed*
- c. *...the church must tumble down when that sum of religion dies which alone can sustain it.*
- d. *...if the true church is the pillar and foundation of truth, it is certain that no church can exist where lying and falsehood have gained sway.*

What is, *the foundation of the church*, the removal of which renders the church's continued standing impossible? (1041, 32ff)

- a. *...the teaching of the prophets and apostles, which bids believers entrust their salvation to Christ alone*

What other factor disqualifies a community that calls itself a Church from being a church - and why? (1042, 4ff)

- a. *...no church can exist where lying and falsehood have gained sway.*
 - b. *...the true church is the pillar and foundation of truth*
2. Why is it not schism to separate from 'churches' that have substituted man-made rules for the ministry of the Word and replaced the sacraments with the, *foulest sacrilege*? (1042, 18ff)
- a. *The communion of the church was not established on the condition that it should serve to snare us in idolatry, ungodliness, ignorance of God, and other sorts of evils, but rather to hold us in the fear of God and obedience to truth.*
3. What has to be present for a claim to apostolic succession through the episcopate (or any other institution) to be valid? (1045, 4f)
- a. *...a true and uninterrupted emulation on the part of the successors.*
4. Calvin quotes three passages from John 10 and then sums up what he has been saying with a quotation from John 8. With what quotation does he sum up the thrust of them all? (1046, 24f)
- a. *He who is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.*
5. What distinction does Augustine make between heretics and schismatics? (1047, 2ff)
- a. *...heretics corrupt the sincerity of the faith with false dogmas*
 - b. *...schismatics, while sometimes even of the same faith, break the bond of fellowship.*
- Church unity involves two things. What are they? (1047, 10f)
- a. *...our minds agree in Christ*
 - b. *...our wills should also be joined with mutual benevolence in Christ.*
- What part should commitment to the same genuinely Christian doctrines play in true Christian unity? (1047, 6ff, 16f)
- a. *...this conjunction of love so depends on unity of faith that it ought to be its beginning, end, and, in fine, its sole rule.*
 - b. *...apart from the Lord's word there is not an agreement of believers but a faction of wicked men.*
6. What is the ultimate and most compelling reason for separation? (1048, 13ff)
- a. *For it is enough for me that it behooved us to withdraw from them that we might come to Christ.*
- 7 - 12. In these sections Calvin examines whether the Roman church ought to be thought of as a true church and, by implication, protestants as schismatics. The protestant position of separation from Rome needs to be justified in case protestants are guilty of rending the body of Christ by that separation.

His starting point is Israel, which was obviously a spiritually mixed society. It is important to remember that Calvin's concept of the church is of a mixed multitude, that an entity that claims the name, 'church' ought to be regarded as a true church as long as it is institutionally sound, *ie* true gospel preaching and the orderly administration of the sacraments are maintained. The

absence of Individual faith and, to some extent even morals, does not prevent a church that is institutionally sound from being regarded by all as truly a church.

7. In this section, Calvin gives a summary of the religious history of the Jews.

What justification does Calvin offer for starting to examine how we should think of and relate to Roman Catholicism by looking at the history of Israel? (1048, 16ff)

- a. *But it will appear more clearly how we ought to esteem all the churches which are in subjection to that Roman idol's tyranny if they be compared with the ancient church of Israel, as described by the prophets.*

How do we know that the Jews were the true church? (1048, 19ff)

- a. *The true church existed among the Jews and Israelites when they kept the laws of the covenant.*
- b. *...by God's beneficence they obtained those things by which the church is held together.*

What were, in the case of Israel, those things by which the church (was) held together? (1048, 22ff)

- a. *...the doctrine of truth in the law*
- b. *...ministry in the hands of the priests and the prophets*
- c. *Common initiation, into religion by the sign of circumcision*
- d. *For the strengthening of their faith they were exercised in the other sacraments.*
- e. *...the titles with which the Lord honoured his church applied to their society.*

Did this state of affairs continue? (1048, 27ff)

- a. *Afterward, having forsaken the law of the Lord, they sank into idolatry and superstition and partly lost that privilege.*

Calvin concludes that, although the Israelites under God's blessing made a good beginning, in the end they became something other than a church: *...who has...dared to call that assembly, church, where the Lord's word is openly and with impunity trodden under foot? where his ministry, the church's chief sinew, indeed its very soul, is destroyed.*

8. Was this decline of the true church in Israel total? Calvin says that the answer to this question is, easy. How does he answer it? (1049, 3ff)

- a. *...in falling away there were certain degrees*

Calvin illustrates the various degrees of decline by noting the religious differences between Israel and Judah. To what facts does he draw our attention? (1049, 4ff)

- a. *...we shall not say that there was the same decline in Israel as in Judah at the time when both first turned aside from the pure worship of God.*
- b. *Jeroboam, when he first fashioned calves...utterly corrupted religion. The people of Judah contaminated themselves with wicked and superstitious customs before they falsified the outward form of their religion.*
- c. *In Judah, because the teaching of the law, the priestly order and such rites as God had ordained continued, the Godly there had a church in passable condition.*
- d. *Among the Israelites, to Ahab's reign things got not a whit better, and then got even worse. The kings who came after, until the destruction of the kingdom, were partly like Ahab, partly (when they wanted to be a little better) followed the example of Jeroboam. **But all without exception were ungodly and idolaters.** (Emphasis IJ)*

- e. *In Judah, there were from time to time various changes: while some kings perverted the worship of God with false and contrived superstitions, others restored the decadent religion.*

What was the final outcome, even in Judah? (1049, 23f)

- a. *Finally, even the priests themselves befouled God's Temple with profane and loathsome ceremonies.*

9. What is Calvin's view of the Catholicism of his day? (1049, 26ff)

- a. *...the condition of religion among them is as corrupt and debased as it was in the Kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam. But they have a grosser idolatry. And in doctrine they are not one droplet purer...*

What two demands does the Roman church make on those who would be included among its members? (1049, 34ff)

- a. *First, that we should participate in all their prayers, sacraments, and ceremonies.*
- b. *Second, that we should grant to their church every honour, power and jurisdiction that Christ gives to his church.*

In the remainder of this section Calvin responds to the first point, above.

Should it be pointed out that in the Old Testament era, even when corruption was powerfully present, that the prophets did not separate themselves from the nation for sacrifice or prayer, what is Calvin's response? (1049, 41ff)

- a. *I admit that all the prophets that were at Jerusalem...neither sacrificed privately nor had separate assemblies from the others for prayer.*
- b. *...they had God's command by which they were bidden to assemble in Solomon's Temple.*
- c. *...the chief point...they were not compelled to any superstitious worship; indeed, they were obligated to do nothing that had not been instituted by God.*

How does this differ from fellowship with Roman Catholics, on their terms? (1050, 9ff)

- a. *...we can scarcely have any meeting with them in which we do not pollute ourselves with manifest idolatry.*
- b. *Surely, their chief bond of communion is in the Mass, which we abominate as the greatest sacrilege.*

What conclusion does Calvin draw from these two facts? (1050, 13ff)

- a. *...in this respect our case is different from that of the prophets, who, although present at the ceremonies of the wicked, were compelled neither to look at nor to take part in any rites save those established by God.*

What example does Calvin produce from the Northern kingdom of Israel to support his conclusion? (1050, 24f)

- a. *Let anyone show me one prophet or any godly man who once worshipped at Bethel.*

What was the problem with worshipping at Bethel? (1050, 20ff)

- a. *...circumcision remained, sacrifices were offered, the holy law was observed, the God whom their fathers had worshipped was invoked; but because of counterfeit and forbidden forms of worship, God disapproved and condemned whatever was done there.*

Calvin's conclusion is - what? (1050, 17ff)

- a. *We therefore conclude that among the godly the communion of the church ought not to extend so far that, if it degenerates into profane and corrupted rites, they have to follow it headlong.*

10. In this section Calvin turns to the second of the two conditions imposed by Catholicism, *that we should grant to their church every honour, power and jurisdiction that Christ gives to his church.* (cf 1049, 35ff) asserting that over this point he contends, *even more.*

For Calvin, how does God's word require the Christian to think of and relate to the church? (1050, 22ff)

- a. *...we should reverence its judgment, defer to its authority, obey its warnings, be moved by its chastisements, and keep its communion scrupulously in all respects*

What follows from this, for Calvin, if we recognise Roman Catholicism as a true church? (1050, 35f)

- a. *...we cannot admit that they have a church without the necessity of subjection and obedience to it awaiting us.*

If we ignore the aberrations with which Catholicism (and similar 'churches') is riddled and acknowledge it as a true church, albeit one that we would not join or join in with, what would be the implications of that for our relationship to God's Church? (1051, 6ff, 12ff)

- a. *We will be making ourselves, strangers to the true church.*

Again, if we acknowledge Catholicism as a true church, what are the implications of that for the marks that we are taught in scripture to recognise the true church by?

- a. *If those were churches, then the church is not the pillar of truth, but the prop of falsehood.*
- b. *...if anyone recognises the present congregations...as churches...he will gravely err. For if they are churches, the power of the keys is in their hands; but the keys have an indissoluble bond with the Word, which has been destroyed from among them.*
- c. *...if they are churches Christ's promise prevails among them; Whatever you bind, etc. But on the contrary, they disown from their communion all that genuinely profess themselves servants of Christ. Accordingly, either Christ's promise is vain or they are not...churches.*
- d. *...instead of the ministry of the Word, they have schools of ungodliness and a sink of all kinds of errors. Consequently, by this reckoning either they are not churches or no mark will remain to distinguish the lawful congregations of believers from, mosques.*

11. How did God's covenant with the Jews retain its influence on their behaviour? (1051, 33ff)

- a. *...it was not they who preserved the covenant; rather, leaning upon its own strength, it kept itself alive by struggling against their impiety.*

12. What do we learn about Antichrist in this section? (1052, 20ff)

- a. *Daniel and Paul foretold that Antichrist would sit in the Temple of God.*
- b. *...his reign was not to be such as to wipe out either the name of Christ or of the church.*

Who, in Calvin's view, is the Antichrist? (1052, 22)

- a. *...the Roman pontiff.*

Are there no true churches or Christians among Catholicism? (1052, 15ff)

- a. *...we deny to the papists the title of the church, we do not for this reason impugn the existence of churches among them.*

What is the state of these churches? (1052, 28ff)

- a. *They are, under his tyranny*
- b. *...profaned by his sacrilegious impiety*
- c. *...afflicted by his inhuman domination*
- d. *...corrupted and well-nigh killed by his evil and deadly doctrines*
- e. *Christ lies hidden, half buried*
- f. *...the gospel is overthrown*
- g. *...piety scattered*
- h. *...the worship of God nearly wiped out*

Given all that has been noted and the fact that in Calvin's estimation, *in them...everything is so confused that there we see the face of Babylon rather than that of the Holy City of God*, what concession is he prepared to make to the claim of Catholic churches to be churches? (1053, 6ff)

- a. *I call them churches to the extent that the Lord wonderfully preserves in them a remnant of his people...and to the extent that some marks of the church remain*
- b. *...on the other hand, because in them those marks have been erased to which we should pay regard in this discourse, I say that every one of their congregations and their whole body lack the lawful form of the church.*

FOR REFLECTION

1. Do we share Calvin's, 'high' view of the Church? If we have a, 'Western' outlook on life, we probably approach such areas of involvement with others in a more individualistic and consumerist manner, picking and choosing what we adhere to rather than feeling we have to buy into a whole package. Does this make it easier for us to accept things that Calvin found unacceptable? If so, is that right?
2. In our evangelism, is this an area of difference between ourselves and our contemporaries? We see Christianity as a package, to be accepted or rejected as a whole, whereas those we address probably feel they have the freedom to select elements of Christianity if they wish and reject others - and they do not see this as making them either Christian or non-Christian.
3. What are the implications of the above questions and observations for the teaching that needs to go on in churches? How do we train people to think in the way that Christians ought to think?