

PREPARATORY

1. Summarise I.vi
2. The name frequently given to the study of the components of scripture and their transmission down through the centuries is *Text and Canon*. If you have time, google that 'phrase and familiarise yourselves with some of the issues.

EXPLORATORY

1. What is the subject of this chapter? (74, 14)
 - a. *...the authority of Scripture*

(Note from IJ: Footnote 2, p74, is a significant pointer for us. It tells us that chs 7-9 are going to deal with the authority of scripture. Calvin is very methodical, building logical arguments one step at a time. He is particularly concerned in this chapter with the relationship between the Bible and the Church. The Roman Catholic Church claims that, because, historically, the Church gave us the Bible, the pronouncements of the Church (by which it means itself of course) are at least of equal authority to the teaching of the Bible. In this chapter Calvin is combating the RC position and asserting the authority of Scripture over us all.)

Is Calvin going to deal exhaustively with this subject? (74, 13f & 24ff)

- a. No. His intention is to *...say something about the authority of scripture...This matter is very well worth treating more fully and weighing more carefully. But my readers will pardon me if I regard more what the plan of the present work demands than what the greatness of this matter (ie, the authority of Scripture) requires.*

What is Calvin's two-fold purpose in this chapter?

- a. *...to prepare our hearts to reverence [Scripture]*
- b. *...to banish all doubt.*

Why is it essential if we are to make any progress in understanding God and his requirements that we, *regard them (ie the Scriptures) as having sprung from heaven?* (74, 21ff)

- a. *...the scriptures obtain full authority among believers only when men regard them as having sprung from heaven.*

To what, *more pernicious error*, does Calvin refer in 75,3?

- a. *Scripture has only so much weight as is conceded to it by the consent of the Church*

Calvin sees this claim by the Church as an insult to whom? (75,6)

- a. *...the Holy Spirit*

The Holy Spirit is mocked when men, acting under the guise of the Church or in any other capacity, take to themselves his prerogatives. In relation to the authority of Scripture, what prerogatives have been stolen from the Holy Spirit and transferred to themselves? (75, 7ff)

- a. *Convincing, us that these writings came from God*
- b. *Assuring us that scripture, has come down whole and intact even to our very day*
- c. *Persuading, us to accept one book instead of another*
- d. *Determining, what reverence is due Scripture and what books ought to be reckoned within its canon*

What type of people fear widespread knowledge of the Scriptures and do all they can to suppress it? (75, 14f)

- a. *...sacrilegious men, wishing to impose an unbridled tyranny...*

In Calvin's day, what was an efficient vehicle for men to use for this purpose? (75, 15)

- a. *...the church*

Who are let down by this tyranny? (75, 18f)

- a. *...miserable consciences seeking firm assurance of eternal life*

What two things does the Christian message attract if it is seen to be founded on the opinions of men? (75, 12f)

- a. *...mockeries*
- b. *...suspicion*

2. In Calvin's view Paul's statement: *...the church is, "built upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles"*, neatly refutes the position that Scripture derives its authority from being identified and recognised by the Church. How does Calvin state the conclusion to which this text drives him? (75, 28ff)

- a. *If the teaching of the prophets and apostles is the foundation, this must have had authority before the church began to exist*

Calvin's opponents have a, *subtle objection*, to his position, which is – what? (75, 31ff)

- a. *...although the church took its beginning here, the writings to be attributed to the prophets and apostles nevertheless remain in doubt until decided by the church.*

How does Calvin respond to this, *subtle objection*? (75, 33ff)

- a. *...if the Christian Church was from the beginning founded upon the writings of the prophets and the preaching of the apostles, wherever this doctrine is found, the acceptance of it – without which the church itself would never have existed – must certainly have preceded the church.*

What, in Calvin's view, is, *utterly vain*? (76, 3ff)

- a. The pretence that, *the power of judging Scripture so lies with the church that its certainty depends upon churchly assent.*

What does the Church do? It, *receives and gives its seal of approval to the Scriptures*. Calvin makes one negative point and one positive point about the right understanding of this churchly responsibility. What are they?

- a. *The church...does not thereby render authentic what is otherwise doubtful or controversial.*
- b. *...because the church recognises Scripture to be the truth of its own God, as a pious duty it unhesitatingly venerates Scripture.*

3. (Note from IJ: Depending on exactly who we are and what tradition we live out our Christian lives in, the pronouncements of Augustine, on this or any other subject, may appear neither interesting nor relevant. It would be a mistake to think like this. We will find that Calvin leans heavily on him. Augustine, although flawed in some ways, was a great thinker and a great Christian. If we can understand his arguments it will help us think more clearly ourselves.

The Manichees took their name from Mani, their founding 'prophet'. Their beliefs were an expression of what now tends to be known as Gnosticism. They were dualists – believers in a

battle between good and evil in which neither was supreme. There is a Wikipedia article on Manichaeism and many other sites deal with it and with Augustine's response to it.)

However, Calvin's concern is not with Manichaeism but with Augustine's teaching on the role of the church in encouraging unbelievers to come to faith, which is – what? (77, 22ff)

- a. *...those who have not yet been illumined by the Spirit of God are rendered teachable by reverence for the church, so that they may persevere in learning faith in Christ from the gospel.*
- b. *...the authority of the church is an introduction through which we are prepared for faith in the gospel*

4. What is necessary before we treat any doctrine in the way we should, *ie* as credible? (78, 7ff)

- a. *...credibility of doctrine is not established until we are persuaded beyond doubt that God is its Author*

Wherein, according to Calvin, does the 'highest proof' of scripture's divine authorship lie? (78, 9f)

- a. *...from the fact that God speaks in it.*

(Footnote 12 says that the Westminster Confession of Faith 1.5, 'states the reformed doctrine.' Here is 1.4 and 1.5:

1.4 The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

*1.5 We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the holy Scripture; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it abundantly evidences itself to be the Word of God; **yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.** [emphasis IJ]*

The 1689 Baptist Confession reproduces the above two paragraphs almost exactly as they are in the Westminster Confession.)

Calvin asserts that the *highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it*. What does his use of the word, *highest*, imply?

- a. That the various, 'proofs', of Scripture can be graded into higher and lower categories.

The assurance that God speaks in Scripture comes to us from two sources. What are they? (78, 11ff & 21f)

- a. *The prophets and apostles...bring forward God's holy name, that by it the whole world may be brought into obedience to him*
- b. *...a higher place than human reasons, judgments, or conjectures, that is, the secret testimony of the Spirit*

Is it not possible to establish the divine authorship of the Bible on any other grounds? (78, 22ff)

- a. *...if we wished to proceed by arguments, we might advance many things that would easily prove – if there is any god in heaven – that the law, the prophets, and the gospel come from him.*

(Note from IJ: You might find the reasoning of John Wesley interesting at this point: *The Bible must be the invention either (1.) of good men or angels, (2.) of bad men or devils, or (3.) of God.*

- *It could not be the invention of good men or angels; they neither would nor could make a book, and tell lies all the time they were writing it, saying, "Thus says the Lord," when it was their own invention.*
- *It could not be the invention of bad men or devils; for they would not make a book which commands all duty, forbids all sin, and condemns their souls to hell to all eternity.*
- *Therefore, I draw this conclusion: that the Bible must be given by divine inspiration.)*

What is Calvin's estimation of proceeding by arguments? (79, 3f)

- a. *...they who strive to build up firm faith in Scripture through disputation are doing things backwards.*

Why is this? (79, 11ff)

- a. *...even if anyone clears God's Sacred Word from man's evil speaking, he will not at once imprint upon their hearts that certainty which piety requires.*

What does Calvin regard as the correct way round to, build up firm faith in scripture? (79, 17ff)

- a. *...the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his word, so also the word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit...until he illumines their minds they ever waiver among many doubts!*

5. What evidence does Calvin point to, that enables us to discern who has received the Spirit's inward witness? (80, 6ff)

- a. *...those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon scripture...illumined by his power, we believe neither by our own or by anyone else's judgment that scripture is from God; but above human judgment we affirm with utter certainty (just as if we were gazing on the majesty of God himself) that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men...a thing far beyond any guesswork.*

FOR REFLECTION

1. In this chapter Calvin questions the authority of 'the Church' to assume the role of being the foundation on which true faith is built. In general in our day 'the Church' is not listened to in the way that it was in Calvin's day. What has taken the place of 'the Church' in modern UK society?
2. What would be Calvin's view of the role and limitations of apologetics? *But even if anyone clears God's sacred word from man's evil speaking, he will not at once imprint upon their hearts that certainty which piety requires...the word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. 79*