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PREPARATORY

1. Please summarise I.vii

EXPLORATORY

1. What is the, *certainty, higher and stronger than any human judgment*, referred to in 81, 29? (80, 6ff)

- a. *...those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture...Scripture indeed is self-authenticated...it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning...the certainty it deserves with us it attains by the testimony of the Holy Spirit...illuminated by his power, we believe neither by our own nor 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 upon the majesty of God himself) that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men.*

In the absence of this certainty, Calvin tells us that it is a waste of time to attempt to do three things. What three things? (81, 30ff)

- a. *...to fortify the authority of Scripture by arguments*
- b. *...to establish it by common agreement of the Church*
- c. *...to confirm it with other helps*

What will be the consequence of not laying the foundation, *ie* the certainty already referred to? (81, 32f)

- a. *...unless this foundation is laid, its authority will always remain in doubt.*

Once the necessary certainty has been given to us by the Holy Spirit, what is the Bible's most captivating characteristic? (82, 12ff)

- a. *...we are captivated with admiration for Scripture more by grandeur of subjects than by grace of language.*

In what way does Calvin feel that Scripture's use of, *mean and lowly words*, to express, *the sublime mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven*, points us to, *God's extraordinary providence*? (82, 17ff)

- a. *...if they had been adorned with more shining eloquence, the impious would scoffingly have claimed that is power is in the realm of eloquence alone.*

What lessons should the form of Scripture (its, *mean and lowly words*) teach us? (82, 22f & 28f)

- a. *...the force of the truth of Sacred Scripture is manifestly too powerful to need the art of words.*
- b. *...truth is cleared of all doubt when, not sustained by external props, it serves as its own support.*

(The second paragraph in this section reminds me of an ongoing debate I once had with a friend of mine about the concepts behind, *The Purpose Driven Life*. I felt, as someone who has received coaching in sales and marketing, that that was all PDL promoted. He felt that it offered a real way forward for individual Christians and for his Church. This was the constant topic of our conversations until one day I noticed that he had completely changed his position – so much so that I had to check with him that I was interpreting what he was saying to me correctly! He confirmed that I was so I asked him what had brought this change about. He replied that he had become much more disciplined about Bible reading and that he had started reading his Bible through consecutively. That was all it took to for him to see that, as he put it, *The Bible is in a different league!*)

2. Although Calvin has pointed out to us that the Holy Spirit employs, *mean and lowly words*, and by this means emphasises the content rather than the form of Scripture, the Bible employs eloquent language in places. Why is this? (83, 4)

- a. *The Holy Spirit wished to show that he did not lack eloquence*

While acknowledging the eloquence of, *David, Isaiah and the like*, Calvin returns to his central point, which is – what? (83, 5ff)

- a. *...whether you read David, Isaiah, and the like, whose speech flows sweet and pleasing, or Amos the herdsman, Jeremiah, and Zechariah, whose harsher style savours of rusticity, that majesty of the Spirit **of which I have spoken** will be evident everywhere.*

What does Calvin note about the Bible, by which it is distinguished it from all Satanically inspired imitations that claim to reveal the mind of God? (83, 17ff)

- a. *As far as Sacred Scripture is concerned...it clearly is crammed with thoughts that could not be humanly conceived.*

What does this tell us about, *those for whom prophetic doctrine is tasteless*? (83, 23)

- a. They lack taste buds!

3. Which argument for the authority of scripture forms the subject of this section? (83, 27)
 - a. *...the very antiquity of scripture*

How significant is Scripture's antiquity, in Calvin's view? (83, 27f)

- a. *...the very antiquity of scripture has no slight weight*

What, *few main details*, does Calvin present in support of Scripture's antiquity? (83, 29f, 84, 1ff & 12ff)

- a. *...no monument of any religion is extant that is not far later than the age of Moses*
 - b. *Moses devised no new god, but rather set forth what the Israelites had accepted concerning the eternal God handed down by the patriarchs age after age. For what else does he do but call them back to the covenant begun with Abraham [Gen 17:7]?*
 - c. *...if Moses...traced the transmission of his doctrine back to such a remote source, we must ponder how much Sacred Scripture outstrips all other writings in antiquity.*

4. This section continues the arguments for the authority of scripture by selecting, *only a few instances out of the many* (85, 17) that show that Moses wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. What few instances does Calvin select? (84, 27ff; 85,)

- a. *While Moses recalls what Jacob almost three hundred years before had declared under heavenly inspiration concerning his posterity, does he in any way ennoble his tribe? No – he brands it with eternal infamy in the person of Levi!*
- b. *Also, when he recalls the wicked murmuring of his brother Aaron and his sister Miriam [Num 12:1] shall we say that he speaks from the feeling of his flesh...?*
- c. *...since his was the highest authority, why did he not at least leave the right of the high priest to his sons, but instead relegate them to the lowest place?*

(NB. The heading above sections 5-10: *Refutation of objections regarding miracles and prophecy*)

5. Depending on how you count the list that Calvin gives on pp85f, he lists some 11 miracles that were associated with Moses. What is his point? (86, 4f)

- a. *...- by these was not God, from heaven, commending Moses as his undoubted prophet?*

What is Calvin's response to those who regard as controversial the view that the record of these miracles is reliable? (86, 7ff)

- a. *Inasmuch as Moses published all these things before the congregation, among eyewitnesses of the events what opportunity was there for fraud?*

How would you characterise this section's final sentence?

- a. Sarcasm

6. Continuing to deal with objections to the conclusions drawn from Moses's miracles, what objection does Calvin confront in this section? (86, 21f)

- a. *...the father of lies slanderously attributed them to magic arts*

What does Calvin point out in response to this suggestion? (86, 22ff, 26ff, 31ff & 35ff)

- a. *Moses shrank so much from this superstition as to order that anyone who merely consulted magicians and soothsayers should be stoned to death [Lev 20:6].*
- b. *Surely any imposter plies his legerdemain (ie, sleight of hand, conjuring tricks) in an effort to overwhelm the minds of the multitude to snatch renown. But what about Moses? Proclaiming that he and his brother Aaron are nothing...he sufficiently wipes away every mark of reproach.*
- c. *...what sort of incantation could cause manna daily raining from heaven to provide sufficient food for the people; if anyone had more than his due measure stored up, to teach him from its very putrefaction that his unbelief was divinely punished [Ex 16:19-20]?*
- d. *God allows his servant so to be tested by many severe proofs that the wicked may now have no success in clamouring against him...the outcome plainly bears out that in this way his doctrine was sanctioned for all time.*

7. Moving on from Moses's miracles to prophecies, *that are fulfilled contrary to all human expectation*, what prophecy does Calvin start with and by whom was it uttered? (87, 1ff)

- a. The ascription of the primacy in Israel to Judah [Gen 49:10]
- b. Jacob

What events seemed to indicate that this was a prophecy that would not be fulfilled? (87, 5ff)

- a. *...from the time that this writing was recorded, four hundred years passed during which there was no mention of a sceptre in the tribe of Judah*
- b. *After the consecration of Saul, the royal power seems to have resided in the tribe of Benjamin.*
- c. *Who would have anticipated that a king was to come forth from the lowly house of a herdsman? And since there were seven brothers in the family, who would have marked the youngest for the honour?*

What prophecy of Moses that was unlikely to be fulfilled, does Calvin refer to? (87, 19f)

- a. *...the election of the gentiles into God's covenant [Gen 49:10], **which actually took place almost two thousand years later.***

8. Calvin continues to trace the same phenomenon (*ie*, the fulfilment of prophecies that, at the time they were made and for some time afterwards, seemed unlikely to be fulfilled) using examples from the writings of Isaiah and Jeremiah, the high degree of agreement between Jeremiah and Ezekiel and the prophecies of Daniel.

Turning to Isaiah, what is the first improbable prediction to which Calvin refers? (87, 30f)

- a. *Isaiah spoke publicly of the fall of the city (*ie*, Jerusalem) and the exile of the people.*

87, 32ff: Although he doesn't really believe it, Calvin is prepared to grant, for the sake of this stage of the argument, that the predictions of Jerusalem's downfall and the exile of its inhabitants were, *not yet a clear enough token of divine inspiration*. He then goes on to show that Isaiah's prophecies became even more remarkable and could only be explained by reference to divine inspiration. What remarkable feature of Isaiah 45 does Calvin cite? (87, 35ff)

- a. *...those prophecies which Isaiah at the same time utters concerning release*
- b. *He names Cyrus [Isa 45:1] through whom the Chaldeans had to be conquered and the people set free.*

What is so remarkable about Isaiah's naming of Cyrus? (87, 38f)

- a. *...more than a hundred years elapsed from the time the prophet so prophesied and the time Cyrus was born.*

What is Calvin's conclusion? (88, 4ff)

- a. *Does not this bare narrative, without any verbal embellishment, plainly show the things Isaiah recounts to be undoubted oracles of God, not the conjectures of a man?*

(We should pause to notice footnote 7, in which McNeill asserts that, *The modern view of the late date of Isaiah ch 45 does not of course enter Calvin's mind in this argument.*

Mc Neill is referring to the opinion of some relatively recent scholars that parts or all of the book of Isaiah do not date from the date claimed at the outset of the book [the time of the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, approx 739 – 686 BC]. Due to the prophecies' specificity and accuracy, some modern scholars insist they must have been written after the event. Daniel's prophecies receive the same treatment. The footnote is ambiguous. Does McNeill mean to imply that if Calvin was aware of this opinion that he would have treated it with respect and not have advanced the argument about Cyrus that he does use, or is he simply stating what he believes to be a fact?

In fact, in the following section (88, 25ff) we learn that this 'modern' opinion is not so modern at all. Calvin himself was aware of it: *...certain rascals...ask, Who assures us that the books that we read under the names of Moses and the prophets were written by them?*

In the case of the book of Isaiah, the modern view alluded to by McNeill is that it had more than one author. Isaiah may have written chs 1-39 but someone else (or even more than one person) must have written chs 40 onwards. Why do they say this? Because the prophecy is so specific and accurate.

How do we respond to this view? By referring to Jesus's statements, which show that he ascribed all sections of the book to Isaiah.

Matthew 3:3, Luke 3:4-6, Isaiah 40:3-5, 52:10

Matthew 4:13-15, Isaiah 9:1f

Matthew 8:17, John 12:38, Isaiah 53:1,4

Matthew 12:18, Isaiah 42:1-4, 49:3

Matthew 13:15, John 12:40f, Isaiah 6:9f

Matthew 15:8&9, Mark 7:7, Isaiah 29:13)

What prophecy of Jeremiah does Calvin cite as evidence that Jeremiah spoke by inspiration? (88, 7ff)

- a. *Jeremiah, some time before the people were led away into exile, set the duration of the captivity at seventy years and indicated the return and liberation [Jer 25:11&12; 29:10]*

What feature of Daniel's prophecies supports the same view, ie that he also spoke by inspiration? (88, 19ff)

- a. *Did he not so clothe his prophecies of future events almost to the six hundredth year as if he were writing a history of past events generally known?*

9. How does Calvin show that sceptics adopt double standards when it comes to the authenticity of Scripture? (88, 25ff)

- a. *...certain rascals bawl out in corners in order to display the keenness of their wit in assailing God's truth. For they ask, Who assures us that the books that we read under the names of Moses and the prophets were written by them? They even dare question whether there ever was a Moses. Yet if anyone were to call in doubt whether there ever was a Plato, an Aristotle, or a Cicero, who would not say that such folly ought to be chastised...?*

(Note from IJ: Having dealt with the *inspiration* of scripture, Calvin is now turning to the reliability of its *transmission*. It is often assumed that because the Bible is an ancient book that could only have come to us through a process of repeated copying that its reliability must be suspect. We do not have the autographs (ie the original manuscripts, written by Moses, David, Isaiah, Paul etc) but are dependant on copies, many of which are, of course, copies of earlier copies. Should we therefore start by assuming that we cannot treat the manuscripts on which the Bible is based as if they are faithful to the original? Calvin's point here is that we accept that other ancient books were written by those to whom authorship is attributed and that the words we read are their words. Why do sceptics assume this is not true of the books that make up the Bible?

Evidence that Demands a Verdict, by Josh McDowell, vol 1, contains a table (on p48 in my 1972 edition) that lists the writings of 16 ancient authors. The most ancient, from our perspective, is Sophocles (born 496 BC) and the most recent is Suetonius (died 160 AD). The earliest copy that we have of anything by Sophocles dates from 1,000 AD, meaning that 1400 years had elapsed before our earliest evidence of Sophocles writings was created! How many manuscript copies of Sophocles works exist? 100 – and that's an unusually large number. For the writings of Plato (427 – 347 BC) we are dependant on **7 manuscripts only**, the earliest of which dates from 900 AD, 1,200 years after Plato lived. Another famous Greek philosopher is Aristotle (384 -322 BC). We have only 5 manuscripts of any one of his works, the earliest of which dates from 1,100 AD – some 1,400 years after Aristotle lived.

What about the New Testament? It is the most well attested ancient book that there is. The oldest 'scrap' of the New Testament dates from 136 AD. The oldest surviving manuscripts of the whole date from the 4th Century AD, only 250 to 300 years after the originals were written.

In addition to the manuscript evidence, there is a separate line of transmission in the quotations from the New Testament in the writings of early Christians and liturgies.

What about the number of ancient New Testament manuscripts? It literally runs into thousands! In 1968 Bruce Metzger put the number at, 'close to 5,000'. Writing as long ago as 1940 Sir Frederick Kenyon, former **Director and Principal Librarian of the British Museum** stated, *...the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.*

What about the Old Testament? Obviously the transmission process is longer and, until comparatively recently, the earliest Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament dated from approximately 1,000 AD. This text is called the Masoretic Text (MT) after the scholars who created it.

What we do know is that Jewish scholars were meticulous in their copying methods. Their faithfulness to the manuscripts from which copies were made has been attested by many observations of their methods. A major break-through was the discovery, in the mid-20th Century, of the Dead Sea Scrolls. These contain much of the Old Testament and date from approx 200 BC. The gap between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the MT is 1200 years, plenty of time for the text to have become corrupted as a result of being repeatedly copied. The significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls is that they reveal the text not to have become corrupted. So we believe that our Old Testament text is the same as that available to Jesus and we share his belief in its reliability and authority.

That turned into a larger-than-originally-intended digression. Let's get back to Calvin's point, which is that people treat far less well attested ancient writings as the genuine production of their authors. Why are they not prepared to treat the Scriptures in exactly the same way?)

10. This section opens with a reference to 1 Macc 1:56f, which reads (in The Jerusalem Bible): *Any books of the Law that came to light were torn up and burned. Whenever anyone was discovered possessing a copy of the covenant or practising the Law, the king's decree sentenced him to death.*

As Calvin points out, Antiochus Epiphanes' decree could not have led to the destruction of all copies of the Scriptures, because of their rapid reappearance. *The Greek translation*, mentioned in 90, 6f is the Septuagint – a Greek translation of the Old Testament, made in Alexandria. Alexander the Great had made Greek the *lingua franca* of his entire empire.

Calvin also mentions, in 90, 17f, the Jews' departure, *from the mother tongue*. He is referring to their adoption of Aramaic in place of Hebrew. (Jesus spoke Aramaic.) How did this change of the everyday language serve to preserve the Scriptures among them? (90, 13ff)

- a. *...the writings remained safe and intact. The Hebrew language lay not only unesteemed, but almost unknown; ...through whom did God preserve for us the doctrine of salvation embraced in the Law and the Prophets, that Christ in his own time might be made manifest [Matt 22:37-40]? Through the Jews...*

11. Calvin now turns to the New Testament.

He reiterates what he has formerly asserted with regard to the Old Testament, that its divine origin is attested to by – what? (90, 32ff)

- a. *...the chief divisions of doctrine from which it would be easy to infer that the Evangelists are discussing heavenly mysteries above human capacity.*

What, *one fact raises their doctrine more than enough above the world?* (91, 16ff)

- a. *Matthew, previously tied to the gain of his table, Peter and John going about in their boats – all of them rude, uneducated men – had learned nothing in the school of men that they could pass on to others. Paul, not only a sworn but fierce and murderous enemy, was converted into a new man: this sudden and un hoped-for change shows that he was compelled by heavenly authority to affirm a doctrine that he had assailed...the truth cries out openly that these men who, previously contemptible among common folk, suddenly began to discourse so gloriously of the heavenly mysteries must have been instructed by the Spirit*

12. Calvin now moves on to argue for the authenticity of Scripture from the changes that it makes in those who believe it.

What does he note about the attitudes of unbelievers towards God's Word? (91, 35f)

- a. *...there has scarcely ever been either a sophist or rhetorician of superior ability who did not try his power against it.*

What has been the outcome? (91,36f)

- a. *...all were unsuccessful*

What does this demonstrate, as far as the Bible is concerned? (91, 39ff)

- a. *How could it, assailed so strongly from every side, have resisted if it had relied upon human protection alone? Rather, by this very fact it is proved to be from God, because, with all human efforts striving against it, still it has of its own power thus far prevailed.*

In 92, 3ff Calvin produces a second argument from experience, which is – what?

- a. *...it is not one state, not one people, that has agreed to receive and embrace it; but, as far and as wide as the earth extends, it has obtained its authority by the holy concord of divers peoples, who otherwise had nothing in common among themselves.*

What further fact adds weight to this agreement? (92, 11)

- a. *...the godliness of those who agree.*

13. What, in Calvin's view, is the significance of Christian martyrdoms? (92, 20f)

- a. *It is no moderate approbation of Scripture that it has been sealed by the blood of so many witnesses,*

What ought we to reflect on in particular about the attitude with which martyrs went to their deaths? (92, 22ff)

- a. *...they died to render testimony to the faith; not with fanatic excess (as erring spirits are sometimes accustomed to do), but with a firm and constant, yet sober, zeal toward God.*

Having amassed evidence from the content of scripture, the reliability of its transmission and the characteristics it produces in believers, what is Calvin's estimate of all this? (92, 28f)

- a. *...of themselves these are not strong enough to provide a firm faith*

What produces a firm faith? (92, 29ff)

- a. *...our Heavenly Father, revealing his majesty there, lifts reverence for Scripture beyond the realm of controversy*
- b. *...Scripture will ultimately suffice for a saving knowledge of God only when its certainty is founded upon the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit.*

Does that mean that all the arguments we have been considering for the inspiration, authenticity and authority of scripture are irrelevant? (92, 33ff)

- a. *...these human testimonies which exist to confirm it will not be vain if, as secondary aids to our feebleness, they follow that chief and highest testimony*

The inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit is the highest testimony. Other arguments are secondary aids only. What practical conclusion should we draw from this? (92, 36ff)

- a. *...those who wish to prove to unbelievers that Scripture is the Word of God are acting foolishly, for only by faith can this be known.*
- b. *...godliness and peace of mind ought to come first if a man is to understand anything of such great matters.*

FOR REFLECTION

1. In this chapter Calvin is bringing forth evidences of scripture's divine origin. Why is he doing this? Does he expect people to be convinced by the phenomena to which he refers? *He is doing it to show that people should be convinced from scripture's character that its origin is divine but he observes that we only see these things after we have adopted that view of scripture, not before.*
2. Do miracles subsequent to Moses's miracles serve the same purpose as those that God performed through Moses? *Yes, they served the purpose of authentication.*
3. Were miracles generally spread evenly throughout the eras covered by scripture or associated with particular periods? *Associated with particular people & periods.*
4. If we accept what Calvin says about what needs to happen before people can and will receive scripture in the way in which it should be received, what are the implications for us? *We should do all that we can to focus people's attention on their own salvation.*