**Calvin’s *Institutes of Christian Religion***

Lesson 28: Predestination, Part 2 (Book 3, Chapters 23-24)

**Chapter 23: Refutation of the False Accusations with which this doctrine has always been unjustly burdened**

1. What was your first reaction when you encountered the doctrine of election/predestination? My first reaction was rejection and shock that somebody could believe something like that. I remember after I finally accepted it as Biblical, whenever I’d share it with my friends, they too would be shocked or angry. Calvin begins this chapter by writing, “Now when human understanding hears these things, its insolence [rudeness/disrespect] is so irrepressible that it breaks forth into random and immoderate tumult [confusion/uproar] as if at the blast of a battle trumpet.”
2. He begins by talking about some groups [mostly Lutheran] who accept election but reject reprobation. What is reprobation? Calvin defines it as, “Those whom God passes over, he condemns; and this he does for no other reason than that he wills to exclude them from the inheritance which he predestines for his own children.” In other words, when God positively elects some people unto Himself, He naturally has passed over others in not electing them. We don’t believe that all are elected, so reprobation is a natural consequence of election.
3. Romans 9:14-18 [God has mercy on whom He will and He hardens whom He will]
4. Romans 9:19-25 [Paul anticipates a strong reaction to what he just said so he answers – who are we to fight back against God?]
5. Having showed that reprobation is a logical and Scriptural consequence of election, Calvin now begins to answer 5 objections that people have raised against election/predestination.

*First Objection: Election makes God a tyrant*

1. Objectors say, “to devote to destruction whomever He pleases is more like the caprice of a tyrant than the lawful sentence of a judge.”
2. Calvin responds by saying that election is rooted in God’s will [I WILL have mercy/compassion on whom I WILL] and whatever God wills is righteous. If we ask why God has willed it as such, we “inquire into the impossible for we may not peer into the secrets of God.” Calvin writes, “We also deny that we are competent judges to pronounce judgment in this cause according to our own understanding. Accordingly, if we attempt more than is permitted, let that threat of the psalm strike us with fear: God will be the victor whenever he is judged by mortal man [Ps. 51:4].” Or as Paul puts it, “Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?” (Rom 9:20)
3. So God can do whatever He pleases and whatever He pleases is in accord with His nature which is righteous, just, pure, holy, loving, merciful, and gracious. But there’s more to it than God’s will. Calvin writes, “As all of us are vitiated [spoiled/impaired] by sin, we can only be odious to God, and that not from tyrannical cruelty but by the fairest reckoning of justice. But if all whom the Lord predestines to death are by condition of nature subject to the judgment of death, of what injustice toward themselves may they complain?” We can’t complain because we are by nature sinners and therefore only deserving of His condemnation in accordance with His standard of justice and perfect holiness.

*Second Objection: Election excuses sinners*

1. Objectors say, “all guilt and responsibility of sinners is yanked from them” since election belongs to the will of God.
2. Proverbs 16:4 – “The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble [judgment].” Calvin comments on this verse, “”Behold! Since the disposition of all things is in God’s hand, since the decision of salvation or of death rests in his power, He so ordains by His plan and will that among men some are born destined for certain death from the womb, who glorify His name by their own destruction.”
3. The reprobate are fully guilty in their sin and justly condemned, yet behind all of this lies God’s will and His determination to pass them over [reprobation].
4. Positively, God elected some not according to their works, but according to His will, but they will enter into heaven based upon the perfect works of Christ through God’s grace and mercy.
Negatively, God passed over some not according to their works, but according to His will, but they will enter into hell based upon their sinful works through God’s just and holy judgment.

*Third Objection: Election means God shows partiality*

1. “The fact that God therefore chooses one man but rejects another arises not out of regard to the man but solely from His mercy, which ought to be free to manifest and express itself where and when He pleases. We also see in another passage that “not many originally called were of noble birth, or wise, or distinguished” [I Cor. 1:26], in order that God might humble pride of flesh, so far is God’s favor from being bound to persons!
2. Election is based in God’s free decision and not based on any quality about us. God is under no obligation to sinners, and He is free to show Himself merciful to whom He wants and to show Himself just to whom He wants and it’s not based on anything within us.
3. “God shows His mercy in giving to some what is undeserved; this is grace. In not giving His grace to all, He manifests His justice, which all deserve.” --J. Mark Beach

*Fourth Objection: Election destroys all zeal for upright living*

1. Objectors say, “Election means you can go live however you please and do whatever you want and it will not matter because you are elect.” In other words, personal conduct is irrelevant if election is true.
2. Calvin responds: Election does not make us careless, but humble and cast down. We are taught “to tremble at God’s judgment and esteem His mercy.”
3. Ephesians 1:4 – “He [the Father] chose us [the elect] in Him [Christ the Son] before the foundation of the world, that we [the elect] should be holy and blameless before Him [the Father].” In other words, God’s election has its goal and aim in holiness and Christlikeness.
4. Even our endeavor to live upright and holy lives finds its root in election by the will of God.

*Fifth Objection: Election renders admonitions/exhortations to Godly living as meaningless*

1. Objectors say, “Well you might as well not preach the Gospel or call people to live holy lives if election is true.”
2. Calvin responds by pointing to the Apostle Paul who clearly believed and upheld God’s sovereignty in election, and yet Paul went around proclaiming the Gospel to unbelievers and writing letters to churches admonishing them to put away sin and put on holiness.
3. “Let preaching, then, take its course that it may lead men to faith, and hold them fast in perseverance with continuing profit. And yet let not the knowledge of predestination by hindered, in order that those who obey may not be proud as of something of their own but may glory in the Lord.”

**Chapter 24: election is confirmed by God’s call; Moreover, the wicked bring upon themselves the just destruction to which they are destined**

1. This chapter deals with issues such as: how is election confirmed in God’s call, how is God’s justice not impugned by condemning the reprobate, how can people know they are among God’s chosen, etc.
2. Romans 8:29-30 [the golden chain of salvation]
3. So election finds fruition in calling and in justification and all of this magnifies God’s free grace and mercy.
4. “Humans as sinners are without ears to hear and eyes to see. The call of the gospel must be accompanied with the ‘inner call’ of the Spirit, a gift given only to the elect.” –J. Mark Beach
5. So where does assurance come from if election lies in the hidden things of God and we’re not to place our faith *in faith*? How may we know that we are indeed saved and a part of God’s chosen ones?
6. “Those who rightly and duly examine it [the doctrine of election] as it is contained in his Word reap the inestimable fruit of comfort.” Our assurance begins with the Word of God itself. When we look at God’s word, we see that those who respond to the gospel in faith will be saved. “Whoever believes in Christ will be saved” (John 3:16). Have you believed in Jesus? Are you being sanctified? Is the fruit of the Gospel blossoming in your life? We look to God’s Word and from it we examine our lives and can take comfort that we are God’s children.
7. This leads to a discussion of perseverance. Those whom God has elected will never fall away and are kept eternally safe and secure (John 6:44, 10:27-29; 1 John 2:19). Some will appear to have faith for a time and then they will walk away. Their walking away reveals the fact that their faith was not true, saving faith to begin with. They may have heard the Gospel and responded to it in some way (the 2nd and 3rd soils in the parable of the soil), but it’s only temporary. They did not have the inward, saving call of the Holy Spirit which is given to the elect, who will persevere to the end.
8. What about the reprobate? How do they come to their end? “God sometimes deprives them of the capacity to hear His word; at other times He, rather, blinds and stuns them by the preaching of it.” The same sun that melts frozen water [saves sinners], hardens clay [condemns the unjust].
9. “If the same sermon is preached, say, to a hundred people, twenty receive it with the ready obedience of faith, while the rest hold it valueless, or laugh, or hiss, or loathe it. If anyone should reply that this diversity arises out of their malice and perverseness, I still will not be satisfied, because the nature of the former would be occupied with the same malice if God did not correct it by his goodness. Therefore, we shall always be confused unless Paul’s question comes to mind: Who distinguishes you? [I Cor. 4:7]. By this he means that some excel others not by their own virtue but by God’s grace alone.”
10. So as we close our discussion of Calvin on election/predestination, I want us to think about how this doctrine is more than just some theological abstract. Election plays into assurance of faith and perseverance of the faith and these are supremely practical doctrines to help encourage us and spur us on in the faith. It plays into the mercy, grace, and justice of God so election leads us into a greater understanding of who our God is. Election increases our humility as we have no merit or anything about which to boast. Election increases our thanksgiving to God. Election moves us to praise and worship, rather than the opposite.