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Calvin's "Temporary Faith" for the Reprobate

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I'm sorry, but I have a tender heart toward the theological creature in the Augustinian/Reformed tradition called the reprobate. It gets even worse! Did John teach that God gives a "temporary faith" to the reprobate—making them think they are saved—when they are not?

A great deal is said by John Calvin concerning the reprobate in his classic *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and in particular book III, chapter II, section 11 help, I will divide his long paragraph into four (4) sections and add commentary. The emboldened phrases will be my emphasis added.

Since many evangelicals do not normally make use of this term, it is important to define reprobation or the reprobate:

Reprobation: From the Latin verb *reprobare*, to reprove. This is the belief that God has eternally condemned all non-elect persons to eternal condemnation their sins. Calvin insisted "that this is not just a matter of God's 'passing over' the non-elect, but an actual hardening so that they are actually strengthened t the gospel," although he also taught that humans are unable to understand the full counsel of God on this issue and must humbly trust His goodness and ju this.²

I believe in election and that it "is consistent with the free agency of man."³ Thus, the idea of the reprobate is a problem in decretal theology. Since many Ce do not see any conditionality in the sovereign decree(s) of God, they must either adhere to a system where God decides to choose some (the elect) and rej predestines others to hell (the non-elect or the reprobate), or they go with the less harsh version, where God only predestines the elect to heaven but the nc go their own way in sin without a harsh decree but with a fate that is sealed because of God's non-choosing.

Section One:

Calvin says, "I am aware it seems unaccountable to some how faith is attributed to the reprobate, seeing that it is declared by Paul to be one of the fruits of election; and yet the difficulty is easily solved: for though none are enlightened into faith, and truly feel the efficacy of the Gospel, with the exception of those are fore-ordained to salvation, **yet experience shows that the reprobate are sometimes affected in a way so similar to the elect**, that even in their own judgment there is no difference between them."

What happens when one of the elect of God fall away from the church? And, what happens when some of the "reprobates" or non-elect persons live a Chris life that better reflects God's grace and glory than some of the Elect? This is why Calvin said, "yet experience shows that the reprobate are sometimes affec a way so similar to the elect, that even in their own judgment there is no difference between them." Most Southern Baptists view people as either "saved" or persons. Therefore, the plight of the reprobate (according to Calvin) can be a shocking storyline.

Section Two:

Calvin said, "Hence it is not strange, that by the Apostle a taste of heavenly gifts, and **by Christ himself a temporary faith is ascribed to them**. Not that tl truly perceive the power of spiritual grace and the sure light of faith; but the Lord, the better to convict them, and leave them without excuse, **instills into th minds** such a sense of his goodness as can be felt **without the Spirit of adoption**."

Notice the phrases "by Christ himself a temporary faith, is ascribed to them" and "instills into their minds such a sense of his goodness" and "without the Spi adoption." The Jesus that I personally know and have studied about in the New Testament would never be involved in such a "bait and switch" by crediting temporary faith to a person thereby making them feel mentally and morally assured of their faith—when they are not a child of God.

Section Three:

Calvin said, "Should it be objected, that believers have no stronger testimony to assure them of their adoption, I answer, that though there is a great resemnt and affinity between the elect of God and **those who are impressed for a time with a fading faith**, yet the elect alone have that full assurance which is ex by Paul, and by which they are enabled to cry, Abba, Father. Therefore, as God regenerates the elect only for ever by incorruptible seed, as the seed of life sown in their hearts never perishes, so he effectually seals in them the grace of his adoption, that it may be sure and steadfast. But in this there is nothing t prevent **an inferior operation of the Spirit from taking its course in the reprobate**. Meanwhile, believers are taught to examine themselves carefully and humbly, lest carnal security creep in and take the place of assurance of faith. We may add, that **the reprobate never have any other than a confused sei grace, laying hold of the shadow rather than the substance**, because the Spirit properly seals the forgiveness of sins in the elect only, applying it by spe faith to their use. **Still it is correctly said, that the reprobate believe God to be propitious to them**, inasmuch as they accept the gift of reconciliation, th confusedly and without due discernment; not that they are partakers of the same faith or regeneration with the children of God; but because, **under a cover hypocrisy, they seem to have a principle of faith in common with them**.

Calvin is implying that some kind of lower work of the Spirit is taking action in the reprobate leading to a confused sense of grace, yet the reprobate continu believe he or she is counted among the elect. Yet, while the reprobate sincerely believes, Calvin applies to the non-elect professed believer a cloak of hypo How can the reprobate be charged with hypocrisy, when he or she has been duped in the first place?

Section Four:

Calvin said, "**Nor do I even deny that God illumines their minds** to this extent that **they recognize his grace**; but that conviction he distinguishes from th peculiar testimony which he gives to his elect in this respect, that the reprobate never attain to the full result or to fruition. When he shows himself propitious them, it is not as if he had truly rescued them from death, and taken them under his protection. **He only gives them a manifestation of his present mercy elect alone he implants the living root of faith**, so that they **persevere even to the end**. Thus we dispose of the objection, that if God truly displays his g

must endure for ever. There is nothing inconsistent in this with **the fact of his enlightening some with a present sense of grace, which afterwards proves evanescent.**"

Yes, Mr. Calvin, it is inconsistent for God to enlighten some (the reprobate) with a present sense of grace, which turns out to be evanescent or short-lived! / "present sense of grace" appears to be a false sense of grace—given not "for keeps" but to deceive. Is this divine sadism?⁴

In closing, while John Calvin seeks to explain the assurance of salvation for the elect in this section of the Institutes, he digresses to the extreme in dealing the reprobate. In the theological world of Calvin, it seems that he would give this piece of advice to reprobates who feel the love of God in their hearts: "Get it!" Alas, the idea of God giving a temporary faith impugns His character—showing that He does not seek the highest good for those created in His own ima

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¹ <http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/calvin/bk3ch02.html#eleven.htm>

² Shawn D. Wright, "Glossary of Some Important Theological Terms," in the book, *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*, Nashville: B & H, 2008, 284. This book contains articles by both Calvinist and Non-Calvinist writers.

³ *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*.

⁴ In the book *Whosoever Will* by Allen and Lemke, Dr. Kenneth D. Keathley mention the writings of R. Olmstead, in his book *Staking All on Faith's Object* (140-141), and says, "In Olmsted's opinion, Beza's teaching on the fall of the reprobate "comes perilously close to ascribing the matter to divine sadism." Beza was a second generation major follower of John Calvin. Keathley also mentions the work of Kendall in his book *Calvin and English Calvinism* (36), that Beza said the reason that God gave temporary faith to the reprobate was that "their fall might be more grievous."

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