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PREPARATORY

This chapter contains 16 sections, divided into three groups. Please note the headings given to the groups:

1-4: *Scriptural argument for rejecting images in worship;*

5-7: *Pope Gregory's error in this refuted from Scripture and the fathers;*

8-16: *Origin of the use of images, and consequent corruption of worship, although sculpture and painting are gifts of God.*

EXPLORATORY

1. *Scripture...where is would distinguish the true God from the false, it particularly contrasts him with idols.* Does this mean that God is less disapproving of us if we avoid making idols? (100, 2ff)
 - a. No ...it particularly contrasts him with idols...not to approve what is more subtly and elegantly taught by the philosophers.
 - b. ...that exclusive definition, encountered everywhere, annihilates all the divinity that men fashion for themselves out of their own opinion

From whom do we learn about the true God? (100, 8f)

- a. ...God himself is the sole and proper witness of himself.

What principle must we cling to in order to avoid the, *brute stupidity*, that has gripped the whole world? (100, 13f)

- a. *God's glory is corrupted by an impious falsehood whenever any form is attached to him.*

2. Calvin quotes Moses, Isaiah and Paul to show, *how openly God speaks against all images, that we may know that all who seek visible forms of God depart from him.* What conclusion does Calvin feel is clear from these scriptures? (101, 15ff)

- a. *From this it is clear that every statue man erects, or every image he paints to represent God, simply displeases God as something dishonourable to his majesty.*

Whom does Calvin quote, showing that even among thinking pagans the Holy Spirit produced an awareness of the folly of idolatry? (101, 20)

- a. *Seneca*

Calvin obviously has in his sights those who professed to be Christians but who made extensive use of idols, statues and artistic representations of God, Mary, the saints etc. What argument of theirs in support of this practice does he bring forward in 101, 27ff, branding it a, *worthless dodge*?

- a. *...they allege that images were forbidden to the Jews because they were inclined toward superstition.*

How does Calvin counter this, *worthless dodge*? (101, 29ff)

- a. By pointing out that the reason for this prohibition arises from God's, *eternal essence*, and, *from the continuing order of nature*;
- b. The recognition of these things (God's eternal essence and the continuing order of nature) could not have, *belonged to but one people*.
- c. *Paul was addressing, not the Jews, but the Athenians, when he refuted their error of making a representation of God.*

3. In this section Calvin responds to two arguments that might appear to support the view that images of God can be legitimate. What are the two arguments? (102, 1ff & 19)

- a. *God...from time to time showed the presence of his divine majesty by definite signs, so that he might be said to be looked upon face to face;*
- b. *...those cherubim*

Which, *definite signs*, are listed? (102, 5f, 12f & 18f)

- a. *...clouds and smoke and flame [Deut 4:11]*
- b. *The Holy Spirit appeared under the likeness of a dove*
- c. *God from time to time appeared in the form of a man*

What was the function of, *clouds and smoke and flame*? (102, 5ff)

- a. *...clouds and smoke and flame...restrained the minds of all, like a bridle placed on them, from attempting to penetrate too deeply.*

How does the experience of Moses show Calvin's understanding to be correct? (102, 9ff)

- a. *Moses, to whom...God revealed himself more intimately than to the others [Ex 33:11], did not succeed by prayers in beholding that face; but he received the answer that man is not able to bear such great brightness [Ex 33:20].*

What was it about the appearance of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove that admonished the faithful, *to believe the Spirit to be invisible*, and to content themselves with, *his power and grace*, seeking, *no outward representation for themselves*? (102, 19)

- a. *...he vanished at once*

Why did God's pre-incarnation appearances in human form not give worshippers authority to make images of him, resembling the form(s) in which he had appeared to them? (102, 18ff)

- a. *...the fact that God from time to time appeared in the form of a man was the prelude to his future revelation in Christ.*
- b. *...the Jews were absolutely forbidden...to set up for themselves a symbol of deity in human form.*

In what way does the construction (and location) of the mercy seat, *suggest that the best way to contemplate the divine is where minds are lifted up above themselves with admiration*? (102, 25ff)

- a. *...the cherubim with wings outspread covered it;*
- b. *...the veil shrouded it;*
- c. *...the place itself deeply enough hidden concealed it [Ex 25:17-21].*

What was the purpose of the positioning of the angel's wings on the mercy seat? (102, 32ff)

- a. *...they had been formed to this end, that veiling the mercy seat with their wings they might bar not only human eyes but all the senses from beholding God, and thus correct men's rashness.*

What is it about Isaiah's depiction of the seraphim that reinforces the view that God is not to be looked on directly by people? (102, 35ff)

- a. *...the prophets depict the seraphim as appearing in their visions with face veiled toward us [Is 6:2].*

What does this veiling signify? (102, 37ff)

- a. *By this they signify that the splendour of divine glory is so great that the very angels also are restrained from direct gaze, and the tiny sparks of it that glow in the angels are withdrawn from our eyes.*

What further consideration does Calvin introduce, to show that we are not to take the pattern for our devotion from the Old Testament? (102, 41ff)

- a. *...the cherubim with which we are now concerned belonged to the antiquated tutelage of the law. Thus it is absurd to drag them in as an example to serve our own age...that childish age, so to speak, for which rudiments of this sort were intended [Gal 4:3], is gone by.*

How do the writings of Juvenal (a Roman poet active in the late 1st and early 2nd century AD) contradict those who allege that under the Old Testament the Jews did have a likeness of God? (103, 6f)

- a. *Juvenal upbraided the Jews for worshipping mere clouds and the deity of the sky...he denies that any effigy of God existed among them*

4. In this section Calvin turns to the folly whereby the works of men's hands are invested – by those who are less than God's themselves – with deity!

Psalm 135:15 (*cf.* Ps 115:4) makes two points with regard to idols – what are those two points? (103, 18ff & 26ff)

- a. They derive no value from the preciousness of the materials used to make them.
- b. *...the other point: that mortals are carried away by too much folly and rashness who, precariously drawing a fleeting breath from moment to moment, dare to confer God's honour upon idols. Man...is a transient being, and yet he will want to be counted as God a piece of metal to whose deity **he himself gave origin.***

The second paragraph in this section states what has become an important principle for many Christians. It is usually known as *The Regulative Principle*. Can you spot Calvin's formulation of it here? (104, 21ff)

- a. *Scripture reatedly describes superstitions in this language: they are the "works of men's hands," which lack God's authority [Isa 2:8, 31:7, 37:19; Hos 14:3; Micah 5:13].*

How does Calvin give this principle a general application? (104, 24f)

- a. *...all the cults that men devise of themselves are detestable.*

5. What justification for the use of images in worship does Calvin deal with in this section? (105, 3f)
- a. *...images are the books of the uneducated*

This declaration was made by the Pope known as Gregory the Great. What is Calvin's riposte? (105, 4f)

- a. *...the Spirit of God declares far otherwise*

What does Gregory's view tell us about Gregory himself?

- a. He had not been, *taught in His* (ie, the Holy Spirit's) *school with regard to this*

Jer 10:8 and Hab 2:18 teach us a general principle, which is – what? (105, 11)

- a. *...whatever men learn of God from images is futile, indeed false.*

What do the prophets do that shows that images stand in place of books? (105, 16ff)

- a. *...the prophets set images over against the true God as contraries that can never agree.*

How do we know that, *whatever knowledge of God is sought from images is fallacious and counterfeit*? (105, 22ff)

- a. *...if it were not true...the prophets would not so generally have condemned it.*

6. In this section Calvin adds the views of early Christians and a non-Christian (possibly a stoic philosopher) called Varro .

What was the position of the early Church, as expressed by the Council of Elvira? (106, 3ff)

- a. *It is decreed that there shall be no pictures in churches, that what is revered or adored be not depicted on the walls.*

What was the observation of Varro? (106, 7f)

- a. *...the first met to introduce statues of the gods "removed fear and added error."*

What is especially significant about this statement? (106, 10ff)

- a. *...it deservedly ought to strike shame in us that a pagan man, groping so to speak in the dark, arrived at this light, that bodily images are unworthy of God's majesty because they diminish the fear of him in men and increase error.*

Historically, what came first – images or error? (106, 16ff)

- a. *Augustine, points out that the first errors concerning God in which men were entangled did not begin from images*

What was the impact of images, once they were added to the error(s)? (106, 18f)

- a. *...errors multiplied*

Why does the use of images lead inevitably to a lessening of the fear of God? (106, 20f)

- a. *...in the folly of images and in stupid and absurd invention his divinity could easily be despised.*

What general conclusion does Calvin feel is warranted by these observations? (106, 23ff)

- a. *Whoever, therefore, desires to be rightly taught must learn what he should know of God from some other source than images.*

7. What is God's prescribed method for teaching truth to believers? (107, 9f)

- a. *In the preaching of his Word and sacred mysteries he has bidden that a common doctrine be there set forth for all.*

How, then, have people come to depend on images? (107, 21f)

- a. *...because they were defrauded of that doctrine which alone was fit to instruct them*

What have those in authority in Churches that employ idols turned over to them? (107, 22)

- a. *...the office of teaching*

What should Christian people be taught? (107, 28ff)

- a. *Christ died on the cross to bear our curse [Gal 3:13]*
- b. *Christ died on the cross...to expiate our sins by the sacrifice of his body [Heb 10:10]*
- c. *...to wash them (ie, our sins) by his blood [Rev 1:5]*
- d. *Christ died on the cross...in short, to reconcile us to God the Father [Rom 5:10]*

8. Calvin opens this section by disagreeing with the view, widely-accepted in his day, that idols originated as – what? (107, 36ff)

- a. *...the originators of idols were those who conferred this honour on the dead, and thus superstitiously worshipped their memory.*

(The passage referred to in the book of Wisdom reads in the Jerusalem Bible:

*A father afflicted by untimely mourning
makes an image of his child so swiftly taken,
and now he honours as a god what yesterday had only been a dead man,
bequeathing mysteries and initiations to his dependents.
Then in the course of time the godless custom hardens, and is observed as law
and, by command of princes, the carved images receive worship.)*

What is Calvin's view of this account of the origin of idolatry? (108, 5f)

- a. *I do not concede that this was the original source of the evil*

What is his evidence? (108, 6ff)

- a. *...it appears from Moses that idols were in use before this eagerness to consecrate images of the dead prevailed, which is frequently mentioned by secular writers.*

What statements of Moses does Calvin have in mind? (108, 9ff)

- a. *...Rachel stole her father's idols [Gen 31:19]*
- b. *After the flood there was a sort of rebirth of the world, but not many years passed by before men were fashioning gods according to their pleasure...it is believable that while the holy patriarch was still living his descendants were giving themselves over to idolatry...as Joshua testifies [Josh 24:2] Terah and Nahor were worshippers of false gods before the birth of Abraham.*

What do we learn about the human mind from the rapid progress of idolatry? (108, 23ff)

- a. *Man's mind, full as it is of pride and boldness, dares to imagine a god according to its own capacity; as it sluggishly plods, indeed is overwhelmed with the crassest ignorance, it conceives an unreality and an empty appearance as God.*

To what does Calvin ascribe the origin of idolatry? (108, 30ff)

- a. *The example of the Israelites shows the origin of idolatry to be that men do not believe God is with them unless he shows himself physically present.*

108, 41ff: *Daily experience teaches that flesh is always uneasy until – what?*

- a. *...it has obtained some figment like itself in which it may fondly find solace as in an image of God.*

9. Once our flesh obtains such a figment, what ensues? (109, 4)

- a. *Adoration promptly follows upon this sort of fancy*

Trace the steps whereby the creation of an idol leads to the adoration of idols, even where those who create them do not believe, at outset, that an idol is God. (109, 4ff)

- a. *...when men thought they gazed upon God in images, they also worshipped him in them.*
- b. *Finally, all men, having fixed their minds and eyes upon them, began to grow more brutish and to be overwhelmed with admiration for them, as if something of divinity inhered there.*
- c. *Men are so stupid that they fasten God wherever they fashion him; and hence they cannot but adore.*

If people distinguish in their minds between the idol and the God that the idol represents is that OK? (109, 24ff)

- a. *It is always idolatry when divine honours are bestowed upon an idol, under whatever pretext this is done. And because it does not please God to be worshipped superstitiously, whatever is conferred upon the idol is snatched away from him.*

In the incident of the Golden Calf, did the Israelites intend to turn away from the God who had brought them out of Egypt to another God? (109, 32ff)

- a. *The Jews, too, were not so thoughtless as to forget that it was God by whose hand they had been led out of Egypt [Lev 26:13] before they fashioned the calf [Ex 32:4].*

109, 38: *...they wished to retain that liberating God – under what circumstances?*

- a. *...provided they could see him going before them in the calf*

Why was this? (110, 14ff)

- a. *Not content with spiritual understanding, they thought that through the images a surer and closer understanding would be impressed upon them.*

Where does this thought lead? (110, 16ff)

- a. *Once this perverse imitation of God pleased them, they never stopped until, deluded by new tricks, they presently supposed that God manifested his power in images.*

10. Deliberately passed over

11. Deliberately passed over

12. This section is here for the avoidance of misunderstanding. What misunderstanding? (112, 3f)

- a. *I am not gripped by the superstition of thinking absolutely no images permissible*

On what grounds does Calvin allow certain representations? (112, 4f)

- a. *...sculpture and painting are gifts of God*

What is absolutely forbidden, in all circumstances? (112, 8ff)

- a. *We believe it wrong that God should be represented by a visible appearance, because he himself has forbidden it [Ex 20:4] and it cannot be done without some defacing of his glory.*

What, in Calvin's view, is permitted? (112, 15ff)

- a. *Therefore it remains that only those things are to be sculptured or painted which the eyes are capable of seeing*

What, specifically, is permitted on this basis? (112, 19f)

- a. *...histories and events*

How are histories and events useful? (112, 21)

- a. *They...have some use in teaching or admonition*

13. In this section Calvin introduces another consideration relevant to the subject of images of all sorts. On what authority is this particular consideration based? (112, 35)

- a. *...the authority of the ancient church*

What period is intended by, *ancient*? (112, 36)

- a. *...about five hundred years*

What were those approx five hundred years characterised by? (112, 36ff)

- a. *...religion was still flourishing*
- b. *...a purer doctrine thriving*

What use was made of images in that period?

- a. *Christian churches were commonly empty of images*

Was this failure to make use of images an oversight or a deliberate policy? (113, 6ff)

- a. *Are we to think that those holy fathers would have allowed the church to go for so long without something they adjudged useful and salutary? Of course it was because they saw in it either no usefulness or very little, but very much danger, that they repudiated it out of deliberation and reason, rather than overlooked it out of ignorance or negligence.*

Calvin recognises two God-given images. What are they? (113, 35f)

- a. *Baptism and the Lord's Supper*

14. In this section Calvin takes issue with the decrees of the council known as Nicaea II. Here is some of their text:

...we define, with all care and exactitude, that the venerable and holy images are set up in just the same way as the figure of the precious and life-giving cross; painted images, and those in mosaic and those of other suitable material, in the holy churches of God, on holy vessels and vestments, on walls and in pictures, in house and by the roadsides; images of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ and of our undefiled Lady, the holy God-bearer, and of the honourable angels, and of all saintly and holy men. For the more continually these are observed by means of such representations, so much the more will the beholders be aroused to recollect the originals

and to long after them, and to pay to the images the tribute of an embrace and a reverence of honour, not to pay to them the actual worship which is according to our faith, and which is proper only to the divine nature; but as to the figure of the venerable and life-giving cross, and to the holy Gospels and the other sacred monuments, so to those images to accord the honour of incense and oblation of lights, as it has been the pious custom of antiquity. For the honour paid to the image passes to its original and he that adores an image adores in it the person depicted thereby... (Documents of the Christian Church, Henry Bettenson, p94)

Calvin reproduces some of the arguments used at the council to support the above thinking. What is his assessment of them? (115, 20f)

a. *...disgusting...absurdities*

15. Continuing with Nicaea II, how did the participants treat Scripture, bending its meaning so that it appeared to support their position? (115, 39f)

a. *...childishly...rending it so impiously and foully!*

16. In this section the blasphemy of the Nicaea II participants is exposed. One of the arguments for the veneration of images is the distinction between *latria* and *dulia*. *Dulia*, it is argued is a form of respect rather than worship, appropriate to be offered to images. *Latria* is reserved for God alone. In this section Calvin shows that this distinction, which he never accepted as a legitimate distinction, has, by the time of Nicaea II, entirely disappeared.

FOR REFLECTION

1. In the last sentence of paragraph 1, Calvin identifies the fundamental reason for idolatry when he speaks of *...likenesses, pictures and signs by which the superstitious have thought he will be near them.* What does this tell us about what people are aiming at when they create their own Gods? In the idol/idolater relationship even though worship is being offered by human beings, who is *really* in control?

How offensive must the true God find this?

2. What is the evil principle at the core of all idol worship?
3. What are the implications of God's prohibition of us manufacturing likenesses for the view that media are neutral?
4. What forms might idolatry take today?
5. Are Church buildings and activities appropriate places/pursuits from which to derive pleasure?