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PREPARATION

CONTENTS

1. The knowledge of God, as understood by Calvin, involves more than merely conceiving that there is a God. What additional elements does Calvin have in mind? (39, 33ff; 40, 19ff)
 - a. *...we not only conceive that there is a God but also grasp what befits us and is proper to his glory, in fine, what is to our advantage to know of him.*
 - b. *...we shall not say that, properly speaking, God is known where there is no religion or piety.*
 - c. *...it will not suffice simply to hold that there is One whom all ought to honour and adore, unless we are also persuaded that he is the fountain of every good, and that we must seek nothing elsewhere than in him.*

What term does Calvin use for the knowledge of God of which he is speaking in this section? (40, 3f)

- a. *...the primal and simple knowledge to which the very order of nature would have led us...*

What condition would have to have been fulfilled in order for the created order to have brought us to the position in which we recognised who God is and the appropriate way to relate to him? (40, 4f)

- a. *...if Adam had remained upright.*

Why is Calvin spending time describing something that no longer exists? First of all because we learn from it, as we do from creation in general, so much about ourselves. We learn to see ourselves as we truly are by comparing ourselves with what mankind was originally - our good is only a pale reflection of the goodness we had originally. The evil in us was not there originally at all.

Remember that true knowledge about ourselves, such as comes from knowing what we once were and what we were created to be, is a source, for Calvin, for knowledge of God. In turn the knowledge of God, as Calvin sees it, is a major source for true knowledge about ourselves. By looking at what would have been had mankind not fallen, Calvin is setting the standard for a correct assessment of ourselves. The fact that, as a result of rebellion, this knowledge is no longer available to us is something of which we should be ashamed. But it should also stimulate us to seek what we have lost - an appropriate relationship with our creator, who is also the only source of any good.

The other aspect of this is that the standards of our original creation are the standards to which we should aspire as Christians. So this is a very relevant area of knowledge for us.

What does God reveal about himself through creation? (40, 12ff)

- a. *...as much in the fashioning of the universe as in the general teaching of Scripture the Lord shows himself to be simply the creator.*

What must we do if we are certain that there is a God? (40, 18f)

- a. *...our mind cannot apprehend God without rendering some honour to him*

What form should this honour take? (40, 19ff)

- a. *...it will not suffice simply to hold that there is One whom all ought to honour and adore, unless we are also persuaded that he is the fountain of every good, and that we must seek nothing elsewhere than in him.*

If we hold that God not only sustains this universe (as he once founded it) by his boundless might, regulates it by his wisdom, preserves it by his goodness, and especially rules mankind by his righteousness and judgment, bears with it in his mercy and watches over it by his protection - what more is it necessary for us also to believe? (41, 3ff)

- a. *...no drop will be found either of wisdom and light, or of righteousness or power or rectitude, or of genuine truth, which does not flow from him and of which he is not the cause.*

How should we apply this understanding to our own lives and expectations? (41, 6ff)

- a. *...we may learn to await and seek all these things from him, and thankfully to ascribe them, once received, to him.*

In what way will this recognition have a practical outworking? (41, 8ff)

- a. *...this sense of the powers of God is for us a fit teacher of piety, from which religion is born.*
- b. *...until men recognise that they owe everything to God, that they are nourished by his fatherly care, that he is the author of their every good, that they should seek nothing beyond him - they will never yield him willing service.*

What is required for us to give ourselves truly and sincerely to God? (41, 14ff)

- a. *We must, establish (our) complete happiness in him*

2. Section 1 has affirmed that a right attitude towards God is essential for our lives to be a sincere and vibrant response to what and who he is.

Section 2 looks at some of the elements that should be present in this response.

What is the first thing that will arise from true knowledge of God? (41, 23f)

- a. *...fear and reverence*

What is the second thing that will arise from true knowledge of God? (41, 24ff)

- a. *...with (our knowledge) as our guide and teacher, we should learn to seek every good from him, and, having received it, to credit it to his account.*

(Note from IJ: Try to bear in mind that in I.ii-v Calvin is writing about the knowledge of God that would arise in the hearts of unfallen human beings from their consideration of creation alone.)

If we were still in an unfallen state, we would gladly and willingly recognise that we are, *his handiwork...made over and bound to his command by right of creation*. In this condition, how would we evaluate a life that is not, *disposed to his service*? (42, 6)

- a. *...wickedly corrupt*

Along with this acknowledgment of God's rights over us arising from creation, what do we also need to recognise in order to, *desire to cleave to him and trust in him*? (42, 9f)

- a. *We must, acknowledge him to be the fountainhead and source of every true good*

The paragraph that begins in 42, 13 gives a detailed description of, *pure and real religion* (43, 11) In what human organ or faculty does it reside? (42,13 *et al*)

a. The mind.

This is a reminder to us that Calvin is not primarily concerned with behaviour but with motivation and attitude.

What characterises, *the pious mind*? (42, 13ff)

- a. Submission to revelation:
 - i. ...*the pious mind does not dream up for itself any god it pleases, but contemplates the one and only true God.*
 - ii. ...*it does not attach to him whatever it pleases, but is content to hold him to be as he manifests himself.*
 - iii. ...*the mind always exercises the utmost diligence and care not to wander astray, or rashly and boldly go beyond his will.*
- b. Submission to God's sovereignty:
 - i. *It thus recognises God because it knows that he governs all things*
 - ii. *It...trusts that he is its guide and protector*
 - iii. *Because it acknowledges him as Lord and Father, the pious mind also deems it right to observe his authority in all things, reverence his majesty, take care to advance his glory, and obey his commandments.*
 - iv. ...*it is not so terrified by the awareness of his judgment as to wish to withdraw, even if some way of escape were open...it embraces him no less as punisher of the wicked than as benefactor of the pious...the pious mind realises that the punishment of the impious and wicked and the reward of life eternal for the righteous equally pertain to God's glory.*
- c. Submission to God's will
 - i. ...*therefore giving itself over completely to trust in him*
- d. Seeking good things from him only:
 - i. *Because it understands him to be the Author of every good, if anything oppresses, if anything is lacking, immediately it betakes itself to his protection, waiting for help from him.*
 - ii. *Because it is persuaded that he is good and merciful, it reposes in him with perfect trust, and doubts not that in his loving-kindness a remedy will be provided for for all its ills.*
- e. As well as trusting God and seeking all its good from him, the pious mind recognises that there always remains an 'otherness' to God and does not become over-familiar or presumptuous.
 - i. *Because it sees him to be a righteous judge, armed with severity to punish wickedness, it ever holds his judgment seat before its gaze, and through fear of him restrains itself from provoking his anger.*
- f. The pious mind is motivated by love to God, not out of a craven and insecure fear
 - i. ...*this mind restrains itself from sinning, not out of dread of punishment alone; but because it loves and reveres God as Father, it worships and adores him as Lord. Even if there were no hell, it would still shudder at offending him alone.*

What is Calvin's summary definition of, *pure and real religion*? (43, 11ff)

- a. ...*faith so joined with an earnest fear of God that thus fear also embraces willing reverence, and carries with it such legitimate worship as is prescribed in the law.*

What distinguishes the truly pious mind from the generality of mankind? (43, 15f)

- a. *...all men have a vague general veneration for God, but very few really reverence him.*

What is a particular sign of the absence of true reverence? (43, 16f)

- a. *...great ostentation in ceremonies*

FOR REFLECTION

1. Do you agree with the order in the heading of section 1. Is piety necessary for the fear of God or should that be the other way round?
2. Do I have what Calvin would recognise as a truly pious mind?