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PREPARATION

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1. What do all, if left to themselves, have in common? (47, 15) (Remember, Calvin's starting point, established in ch 3, is that all have a consciousness of the existence of God)

- a. *...all degenerate from the true knowledge of him.*

With what result? (47, 16)

- a. *...no real piety remains in the world.*

What two tendencies are at work, bringing this declension in the true knowledge of God about? (47, 13ff)

- a. *...some...evaporate in their own superstitions*
 - b. *...others deliberately and wickedly desert God*

Why are those who cannot rise above superstitions not guilt-free? (47, 19f)

- a. *...the blindness under which they labour is almost always mixed with proud vanity and obstinacy.*

What is the symptom that vanity and pride are at work as people try to frame some conception of God? (47, 20ff)

- a. *...vanity joined with pride can be detected in the fact that, in seeking God, miserable men do not rise above themselves as they should, but measure him by the yardstick of their own carnal stupidity, and neglect sound investigation.*

What do such people fail to apprehend? (47, 25)

- a. *God as he offers himself*

What effect does this failure have, even on such people's worship? (48, 1ff)

- a. *...whatever they afterward attempt by way of worship or service of God, they cannot bring as a tribute to him*

Why is this? (48, 3f)

- a. *...they are worshipping not God but a figment and a dream of their own heart.*

According to Calvin's understanding of Romans 1, what three attitudes make the condemnation of unbelievers just? (48, 13ff)

- a. *...vain curiosity*
 - b. *...an inordinate desire to know more than is fitting*
 - c. *...a false confidence*

2. What do those who, *furiously repel all remembrance of God*, resist? (48, 22f)

- a. *...the feeling of nature*

Why is it appropriate for David to represent those who, *shut (God) up idle in heaven*, as, *flatly denying God's existence*? (48, 27ff)

- a. *...there is nothing less in accord with God's nature than for him to cast off the government of the universe and abandon it to fortune, and to be blind to the wicked deeds of men, so that they may lust unpunished.*

How do we know that fashioning a god of our own devising is the same as denying God altogether?

- a. Paul affirms that, *God cannot deny himself, because he remains for ever like himself, implying that a god who is unlike the true God amounts to a denial of the true God.*

3. What is the main point made by Calvin in this section? (50, 1f)

- a. *....no religion is genuine unless it be joined with truth.*

What natural tendency contradicts this? (49, 15ff)

- a. *...that vain defence with which many are won't to gloss over their superstition...they think that any zeal for religion, however prosperous, is sufficient.*

What universal rule applies to all worship? (49, 18ff)

- a. *...true religion ought to be conformed to God's will*

Why is this the universal rule? (49, 19ff)

- a. *God ever remains like himself, and is not a spectre or phantasm to be transformed according to anyone's whim.*

From what two characteristics do we see that superstition, *mocks God with pretences while it tries to please him?* (49, 22ff)

- a. *It siezes, almost solely upon what God has testified to be of no concern to himself*
- b. *And, holds in contempt or else openly rejects that which he prescribes and enjoins as pleasing to himself*

What, therefore, are people doing who worship according to their own superstitions and prejudices? (49, 26f)

- a. *...all who set up their own false rites to God worship and adore their own ravings.*

What must they have done before reaching this stage? (49, 27f)

- a. *...first fashioned a God to match the absurdity of their trifling*

What New Testament evidence does Calvin produce to show that his thinking on this matter conforms to scriptural teaching? (49, 29ff)

- a. *Gal 4:8, When you did not know God, you were in bondage to things that by nature are no Gods.*
- b. *Eph 2:12, the Ephesians were, without God, at the time they were straying away from the right knowledge of the one God.*

4. What are the characteristics of hypocrisy? (50, 3f, 4ff, 8f, 13f, 18ff, 20ff; 51, 3ff)

- a. *...they never consider God at all unless compelled to.*
- b. *...they do not come nigh unless they are dragged there despite their resistance. And not even then are they impressed with the voluntary fear that arises out of reverence for the divine majesty, but merely with a slavish, forced fear, which God's judgment extorts from them.*
- c. *They dread God's judgment to the point of loathing.*
- d. *They greatly desire the overthrow of God's judgment seat.*

- e. *...lest they should everywhere seem to despise him whose majesty weighs upon them, they perform some semblance of religion.*
- f. *...they do not desist from polluting themselves...Or at least they are not so restrained by that pretended fear of God from wallowing blithely in their own sins and flattering themselves, and preferring to indulge their fleshly intemperance rather than restrain it by the bridle of the Holy Spirit.*
- g. *...they boldly rebel against him in almost all their deeds, and are zealous to placate him merely with a few paltry sacrifices. Where they ought to serve him in sanctity of life and integrity of heart, they trump up frivolous trifles and worthless little observances with which to win his favour.*

Being unwilling to trust God, where do hypocrites place their trust? (51, 11f)

- a. *...they neglect him and rely upon themselves*

What is the end result, in hypocrites' lives, of this process? (51, 14f)

- a. *...blind wickedness stifles and finally extinguishes those sparks which once flashed forth to show them God's glory.*

What has been Calvin's contention throughout chapters 3, 4 & 5? (51, 20f)

- a. *...a sense of divinity is by nature engraven on human hearts.*

What does he bring forth as the principal evidence for this contention? (51, 21f)

- a. *...necessity forces from the reprobate themselves a confession of it.*

What works in unbelievers' hearts to hold this confession back? (51, 27)

- a. *...stubbornness*

FOR REFLECTION

1. In what way does the Biblical episode of Cain and Abel bring out the truth of Calvin's assertion that only those who allow God to teach them about himself can worship him? Does the story of Cornelius, whose alms and prayers came up before God, contradict this?