

Insight Into



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Insight Into

General Information

Insight Into is the official youth periodical of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations in the United States and Canada.

As a Reformed magazine, **Insight Into** seeks to promote the knowledge of the truth and to give biblical guidance to young people in their daily lives.

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MEDITATION

A Joyous Reunion “*And they began to be merry*” (Luke 15:24b).

Rev. G. M. de Leeuw

Dear youth of the congregations,

In Chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke, you have read, “*And they began to be merry.*” Two times there was no interruption, but remarkably the third time there was. In the third parable, of the prodigal son, we read while they were merry of the anger of the oldest brother. What caused him to be angry? Why did he ask his father to give him an account of the fact that his younger brother, in his opinion a prodigal, received such a welcome back? Was there not a lot of money wasted? Was there not much sin committed?

What do you think? Yes, there was. When this son left, in spite of many warnings as we suppose, demanding the portion of his goods with the intention to waste it, you can imagine the grief of the father. It was soon spent. We could better say wasted. And then? How now to proceed? Finally, he ended up among the swine, so things went downhill very quickly. But look, a strong resolution arises; yes, the Bible says that he came to himself. He will go home and tell his father that he has sinned against God and against him, too. So there is a confession of guilt and an admittance of his unworthiness. What a difference from the way he left. What a great contradiction. He is burdened with his unworthiness, but will they accept him? How will that go?

Was the father still there? Dear youth, there are cases of people who have left the church, the doctrine, their upbringing, yes, everything. They think and imagine that now they can begin to live, but it came out that they were wrong in their choice. They came to realize this, no, not all at once, but step by step. And remarkably, they had to return, confessing their wrongdoings. But in certain cases, in the meantime, a dear father or a dear mother’s place was empty. They were gone, taken

away by death. That was not the case here in the parable. His father even saw him a great way off, which shows that he was looking for him. Young people, do you realize that parents are concerned, very concerned, when you move away from your upbringing? This is because of your baptized forehead, and because of what they promised in the hour of your baptism. Still, they ask the Lord for your return.

When he comes home, there is a remarkable reception. You can read that in verses 20 to 24, *“And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.”* Was now that oldest brother happy, too, as we assume? No, dear boys and girls, it was just the opposite. He is angry, blaming his dear father for such a joyous reunion and blaming his brother for such a going astray. Youth, do not forget that Christ Jesus is teaching here, and a great part of His audience are Pharisees, Jewish Pharisees. Once the Gentiles will be called, but during Christ’s time upon earth, it was mainly the Jews who were called to repentance.

Notice that in this parable, a great part is bestowed by Christ to the oldest son. Why? It is mainly to make Himself free of the Pharisees, and even of His own people, the Jews. Dear youth of the congregations, ask the Lord’s help in staying away from mainly two things. That whole electronic world of devices is a continual temptation. Also this idle world with its thousands of avenues to sin became the snare for the youngest son, but the Lord graciously drew him out of it. The other thing is that the oldest son, although obedient and possibly an example outwardly, which is good in itself, yet missed the exclamation, *“Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee”* (verse 18). This was the true confession of guilt by the youngest son. Oh, ask the Lord for that true understanding of the Scriptures, as Christ Jesus says, *“Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me”* (John 5:39).



TIME (2)

*“Redeeming the time,
because the days
are evil” (Ephesians 5:16).*

Rev. E. Hakvoort

In the first article, we have seen that the Bible uses the word “time” in such different ways than we often do. We use the word “time” in a superficial way, as if we must use our earthly stay to our utmost to enjoy the time before we are old. But the Bible uses the word “time” in a spiritual way and binds upon our heart that we must use the time to our utmost to “*seek the Lord while He may be found and to call upon Him while He is near*” (see Isaiah 55:6), before it is forever too late! We have seen that Christ has come in this “evil time” to suffer and die for His people. Therefore, the Lord gives us His precious Word to instruct us in how to see and use the time.

In this article I want to answer the question how the Bible then speaks about the time and how to redeem the time. We cannot be thorough, because the Bible (as we have seen) speaks more than 420 times about the word “time.” I only want to give a few examples in the hope that young and old may take it to heart and learn to redeem the time of grace.

Time is unsure

The first aspect I want to mention is that the time is unsure. In Mark 13:33, we read, “*Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.*” The Lord Jesus says this in the context of heaven and earth passing away. He had just given the parable of the fig tree. When her branch is tender and puts forth leaves, we know that the summer is near. Thus it is with the signs of the times. They tell us that Christ’s return to judge us all is near.

How do we then act in these unsure times? Is our life like that of Felix? When he heard Paul speak and had some impressions about the seriousness of the times, he said, “*Go thy way for this time; when I have a*

convenient season, I will call for thee” (Acts 24:25). In other words, when I have a more convenient time, then I will call you again to hear you. So, he postponed “redeeming the time.” But how often postponing turns into cancellation. How soon it will be too late.

Do you see how the devil does that? To the children he says: Too young! To the youth he says: Too busy with study, marriage, etc.! To the older ones he says: Too old. But when we die, it will be: Too late! And that is exactly his purpose with our life. The Lord, however, says, *“To day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart”* (Psalm 95:7-8). He still has His hands stretched out to wicked sinners.

Today is the time of grace. We must not spend that in the world, but in the Word. Indeed, we do not know the times. It can be eternity soon. Isn’t it a wonder that the Lord points us to the acceptable time in which grace can be received? Therefore, we must buy out the time; use the time not in foolish things but in seeking the Lord and searching the Scriptures. I hope that this may be bound upon your heart, because then we learn to hasten ourselves for our life’s sake. That we may be made ready when the Lord comes again or when death comes. When that is bound upon your heart, then your life will be lived in the light of eternity. And your prayer will be like Jonathan Edwards prayed, “Lord, stamp eternity on my eyeballs.” In other words, let me be fixed on the things not of time, but of eternity. That I may seek *“those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God”* (Colossians 3:1).

Time is set

A second aspect with regards to the necessity of *“redeeming the time”* is that our time is set. Solomon speaks in Ecclesiastes 3:1, *“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.”* And then he explains that there is a time to be born but also a time to die. Why does he do that? Is that to scare our young people to whom he speaks? No, it is to stop us. It is to impress upon us that everything has its set time. It also says that everything on earth is changeable. No one can hasten or delay things. Solomon gives many examples of this in Ecclesiastes. There is *“a time to be born and a time to die”* (Ecclesiastes 3:2). Oh, we can take “time off” or a “time of holiday.” I am not saying that this is wrong, but the devil and death have no holidays. Do we consider that? When it is God’s time, He will say thus far and not further. Do we take that into account? See, everything changes. But young friends, what a wonder that we read that the Lord changes not. He is unchangeable. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is faithful towards unfaithful sinners. What a blessing it would be if you may use the time to seek the things which are above where Christ is! To not only seek the rest for the body,

but to seek the rest for the soul, and a rest in God. Then it becomes so true what Augustine experienced and said, “Our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee, O Lord.” Such are the people who may experience that the false rest in their life is cancelled. As fruit of God’s grace, a holy restlessness is born. What a blessing if in that restlessness your eye may be opened for Christ who is called “the Shiloh,” the Rest. In Him only there is rest for a restless sinner. In Him there is peace and joy for such ones.

Time is an acceptable time

Why does Paul bind upon the heart that we should redeem the time, because the days are evil? Because he had learned in his own life that the time is an acceptable time. We read in Isaiah 49:8, “*In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee.*” He speaks here literally of the time of God’s good pleasure. Does this not clearly point to what Christ has done for His people and what He does in His people? As the Saviour of sinners, He has obtained salvation in the way of His sufferings and death. Thereto He came in “*the fulness of the time*” (Galatians 4:4), sent by the Father. He is the centre of the time and of God’s Word. He obtained that salvation for those who by nature don’t ask for Him either. But He will ask for them.

By His Word and Spirit He works in the heart that spiritual rebirth. This makes them from spiritually dead to alive. We call that the time of God’s pleasure. He pours His love in the heart and makes us guilty sinners to bow before Him. Sin will be experienced, and tears will be shed, because of sins against a good-doing God. Are there (young) readers who are not strangers of this?

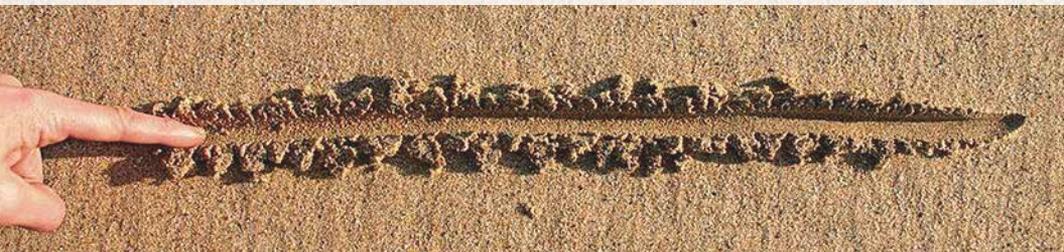
How do I know that I am one of those made alive? They have no rest until the Lord will hear them and show them His salvation in Christ. They call upon His Name, pleading with the Lord for mercy, as the poet did in Psalter 273:2, “*The time for Zion’s help is near, the time appointed in Thy love; O let Thy gracious aid appear, look Thou in mercy from above.*” That is the acceptable time, in which a grieved sinner may hear that there is hope, not in myself, but in Christ. Do you understand it? Outside of Christ there is no life, but only death. Therefore, we must learn to redeem the time. In the next article, we hope to see some practical aspects of that.

(To be continued, the Lord willing)

“If we Christians would join the wise men, we must close our eyes to all that glitters before the world and look rather on the despised and foolish things, help the poor, comfort the despised, and aid the neighbour in his need.”

~ Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Drawing the Line!



Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Immersed minds

Nebuchadnezzar was like a chess player. He wasn't reactive but proactive. He thought ahead and made plans. To be like God was his greatest ambition. He wanted everyone to worship him in his oversized empire. Besides being vast, his empire was very multicultural. His successful war machine was able to cross borders of neighbouring nations and subdue their resistance--but that didn't make them worship him and his Babylonian empire. Therefore, he thought out a brilliant but devious plan.

"I must make them all think alike. I must take their minds and immerse them in Babylonian values, ideals, and manners. I must concentrate on young minds and saturate them so long that they will be totally in my camp."

The one who used Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon is the same one who uses university professors, reporters, political leaders, and social media today. Though his methods have changed, Satan's strategy hasn't. All he wants is to submerge and marinate young minds in secular thinking. His poisons are sweet yet subtle. His ideas often sound good and reasonable. They feel good to our natural hearts, because they are new and exciting. Yet they fuel the flesh and captivate the mind.

How can we resist him and his warfare? There is only one answer, and that is God's grace in a heart that is united to fear His Name. To fear God is the beginning of wisdom. Let it therefore be your prayer daily, "*Teach me Thy way, O LORD; I will walk in Thy truth; unite my heart to fear Thy Name*" (Psalm 86:11).

This tender esteem of God was the secret in the life of the young man, who was perhaps only 12 years old. His name was Daniel.

Hidden warfare

Imagine this! A totally free top-level university degree with free dorms and free food. As Ashpenaz, the king's chief servant, went about to collect the best and most promising of the young people of all kinds of ethnic and culture groups that lived in Babylon, he also came to the Jewish settlement. After some inquiry, four Jewish boys were selected to be involved in Nebuchadnezzar's scheme. They must have been the most promising students. It is very possible that there were more young Jewish scholars, yet only four of these young Jews survived the spiritual battle!

Upon arrival at the campus, each scholar was escorted to their new living quarters. Along the way, they were issued a Babylonian identity, a new name! Most likely they were given a new outfit conforming to the latest fashion, for these students were the next generation of leaders, so they better lead the fashion and set new trends.

Though the whole plan was promoted as a generous and free gift of the king, there was nothing free about it. It was a most treacherous battle for the soul. The assault was more cunning and more destructive than all the war machines the Babylonian military had invented. The barbed and poisoned arrows came packaged in exciting new ideas and innocent-sounding theories in the classroom, in the social life and entertainment, in the free time, and even in the delicious Babylonian food.

Nothing new

Recently, many of you young adults walked onto campuses. After unpacking your suitcases in your dorm rooms, you were introduced to the new faces of other students. The university organized a few days of orientation activities which were free but mandatory to attend. Pleasure and instruction were craftily woven together to put you as new recruits at ease. The atmosphere was fun and active, though there were some strange or even objectionable elements. Perhaps some of you thought, "This is not quite where my parents or my home church drew their line. But what is wrong with it after all? It is just innocent fun. There is no harm in it!"

This experience is not new. It was experienced by Daniel and his three Jewish friends as it is today by many of our youth leaving high school and beginning university study. Some literally move away from home and church, while others are going between the world of home and church and university. In both cases, however, the pressure is felt. If there wasn't a God in heaven preserving a seed to serve Him, even in those ungodly contexts, there would be none left. We are no match to the powers of darkness.

Are you convinced of that? Do you realize that we have no might to fight the cunning power of God’s adversary? Do you sense that biggest danger to fall in this battle is not outside but inside of you? Do you realize that your heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked?

Daniel speaks up

“I am not eating this food or drinking this wine. I’ve made up my mind. I know it isn’t right. Nothing of this Babylonian stuff is neutral. It is not innocent. It is seeking to snarl us and wean us away from what the Lord has laid out in His Word as being true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and good.”

The Scriptures tell us that “*Daniel purposed in his heart*” (Daniel 1:8). In other words, within his heart ripened a strong resolve. Though not stated, let’s not omit to recognize God’s Spirit bringing him to this strong resolve. Daniel drew a line and then told everyone, “I am not crossing this line.” Undoubtedly, some of his fellow students shook their heads at Daniel and might have said, “Come on, Daniel, don’t be so weird. What is wrong with this Babylonian food? Nobody is poisoning you. It is good and balanced and delicious. Why eat only vegetables and drink only water? You are going way too far with your ideas. Don’t be ridiculous.”

But Daniel stood his ground. His resolve wasn’t made overnight and wasn’t based on his feelings. It was made in the tender fear of God and in obedience to God’s revealed will. As Rev. John Brown (1722-1787) of Haddington, Scotland wrote in his *Self-Interpreting Bible*:

When men profane God’s temple by their sins, it is just that he should profane it by his judgments. How exactly Hezekiah’s pride is punished in the captivity of his seed! They who wish to serve their generation must not spend their youth in idleness but in study. And it is shameful for Christians to take less care of educating their children than heathens do of their slaves; and to show less regard to their God than heathens do to their idols. If we receive favours from men, let us always view them as the gift of God, and be the more careful to avoid every appearance of evil; and let us always be humble under humbling providence. Let us never be backward to that self-denial which tends to prevent sin: and for that end, let us improve whatever interest we have with the great. Whatever in diet, or anything else, we willingly lose for God’s honour, will prove clear gain in the issue. Proper abstemiousness [sobriety] and temperance contribute to the improvement of our mind as well as the health of our body. God honours them that honour Him, while they who despise Him are lightly esteemed. And they who mourn much with Zion

in her distress are, if for their good, spared to share with her in the joys of her deliverance.

Daniel's secret

Later in the Book of Daniel, the secret of his strength is explained, *"But the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits"* (Daniel 11:32). God had blessed the early training his parents and leaders gave him while still at home. He learned to recognize God's authority and love God's will. Now as he stood before his first wave of temptation, he knew where to draw his line. Knowing God and who He is gave him the courage to stand alone at first. For anyone that honours God before men isn't standing alone. With God you are always in the majority.

Though not mentioned in the list of the heroes of faith by name in Hebrews 11, yet Daniel is included in the phrase, *"Who through faith ... wrought [worked] righteousness"* (verse 33). Without faith in God, it is impossible to face sin within your heart and in the world around you. Let this caution us to cease from all self-dependence.

Resolution

Daniel made a resolution. A resolution is a formal and conscious expression of determination on a certain course of action. Paul exhorted the young Christians in Acts 11:23b to such resolutions, *"And exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord."* Often such a resolution may turn into a vow. Rev. William Perkins (1558-1602), a Puritan preacher, wrote, "A vow is a promise made unto God of things lawful and possible." We must never make a vow rashly or lightly. *"When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay"* (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5).

Yet to make a vow can be good. It is written of David and Job that they made vows to God. It may help you to define your line and remind you to keep it. Vows must always be based on God's revealed will and never be made without prayer and deep thought. Daniel came to his resolution as a fruit of the gracious blessing of God through his parental teaching, but undoubtedly also through much personal prayer before God.

Dependence

Nineteen-year-old Jonathan Edwards drew up a list of resolutions. Above his first list of 10 resolutions, he wrote, "Being sensible that I am

unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat Him, by His grace, to enable me to keep these resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to His will, for Christ's sake." He didn't draw his lines without looking to God for help. Yet he did as Daniel and defined his lines, based on God's Word.

Your lines?

Have you drawn your lines based on God's Word like Daniel and his three friends? Many temptations through professors, advisors, and peers will knock on your door. Lucrative offers in scholarships for study opportunities and attractive invitations to join certain student groups will tantalize you. Subtle ideas and reasoning will challenge your values and roots. Outright mockery or disdain for your views may daunt you. Attractive young men or women will catch your eye and inflame your imagination. How will you handle all this without being flooded away by our current cultural thinking or being burned in the fires of soul-destroying ideas or directions?

Be warned, young friends. You can't handle any of it in your own strength. Confidence in yourself is the first step to falling. Be convinced that you are not up to the task of resisting Satan and standing strong with Daniel on your own. The old song "Dare to be a Daniel" is somewhat misleading. We need to *be* a Daniel before we can dare to be one.

If you miss this tender fear of God that united the purpose of Daniel, then seek the Lord Jesus who is exalted to give such gifts of grace to sinners. Seek Him daily in prayer. Daily read the Scriptures for knowing Him and His will. Seek such friends to stand with you as Daniel had. Avoid the company and the places where all is slippery slopes.

Direction

Hear God's final words of direction, "*Keep thy heart with all diligence: for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil*" (Proverbs 4:23-27).

May God bless you all with the grace He privileged Daniel with and use you like He used him for His kingdom, even though he lived and worked in a very secular environment.



A Stranger?

Rev. P. Van Ruitenburg

Someone is standing at the door and you do not know whether to open it; you are hesitant and do not completely trust the situation. But then Father or Mother tells you to quickly open it. You open the door as told, and you let the unknown man in. Well done. But he can see from your expression that you did not open it heartily, with joy, or with wonder; not with any of this. It had to be done, and that's why you opened the door. I'm afraid that for many people believing is nothing more than opening by command, because the pastor says it. However, that is not believing, and that is not how the Lord wants it at all. The Lord works differently through His Spirit, and makes room for Christ and reveals the Son. Believing is not a work of flesh and blood, nor a work of man, but God reveals Himself. Think of what the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "*Whom say ye that I am?*" (Matthew 16:15). One disciple thought this and the other thought something else. And what did the disciples themselves say? "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God ... Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven*" (Matthew 16:16-17).

The Lord is concerned with His honour and makes Christ known in true faith, dear and loved. The heart does not open to an unknown Jesus but to a revealed Jesus! It is good to insist on believing in Jesus as unbelief is a sin. However, you cannot force yourself to believe in an unknown Saviour. Therefore, do not rest until you have found the Saviour Himself in His Word. Letting Jesus in because you have to and therefore obeying is of no use. Let's not be content with a dream about Jesus or reading a text about Him accompanied by a flash of light or thunder. It is about whether and how Christ loves us. Christ is the meaning of our lives. "*I am Way, the Truth, and the Life*" (John 14:6).

"And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17).

"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood" (Galatians 1:15-16).

"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

RESOLUTIONS of Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) was one of the greatest American theologians who had a significant role in the religious revival “The First Great Awakening” during the mid-18th century.

When he was preparing for the ministry, he wrote seventy resolutions that guided him throughout his life.

During his 19th year, Jonathan Edwards began to form a series of resolutions, intended obviously for himself alone, to regulate his own heart and life. However, because of their Christian simplicity and spiritual-mindedness, they are eminently useful to others.

Jonathan Edwards was wholly averse to all outward show. Therefore, we can only conclude that he meant these resolutions for no other eyes than God’s besides his own. His biographer added, “He was too well acquainted with human weakness and frailty, even where the intentions are most sincere, to enter to any resolutions rashly, or from a reliance on his own strength. He therefore in the outset looked to God for aid, who alone can afford success in the use of the best means. The introduction statement indicates that his whole dependence was on the grace of God.”

Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God’s help, I do humbly entreat Him, by His grace, to enable me to keep these resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to His will, for Christ’s sake. Remember to read over these resolutions once a week!

1. Resolved, *that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to the glory of God, and my own good, profit, and pleasure, in the whole of my duration [life]; without any consideration of time, whether now, or never so many myriad [thousands] of ages hence.*
2. Resolved, *to do whatever I think to be my duty, and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general.*
3. Resolved, *if ever I shall fall and grow dull, so as to neglect to keep any part of these resolutions, to repent of all I can remember, when I come to myself again.*

4. Resolved, *never to lose one moment of time but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can.*
5. Resolved, *never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.*
6. Resolved, *to act in all respects, both in speaking and doing, as if nobody had been so vile as I, and as if I had committed the same sins, or had the same infirmities or failings, as others; and that I will let the knowledge of their failings promote nothing by shame in myself, and prove only an occasion of my confessing my own sins and misery to God.*
7. Resolved, *when I feel pain, to think of the pains of martyrdom and of hell.*
8. Resolved, *to be endeavouring to find fit objects of charity and liberality.*
9. Resolved, *to maintain the strictest temperance [self-control] in eating and drinking.*
10. Resolved, *whenever I do any conspicuously evil action, to trace it back, till I come to the original cause; and then both carefully endeavour to do so no more, and to fight and pray with all my might against the original of it.*

“The Son of God did not want to be seen and found in heaven. Therefore, He descended from heaven into this humility and came to us in our flesh, laid Himself into the womb of His mother and into the manger and went on to the cross. This was the ladder that He placed on earth so that we might ascend to God on it. This is the way you must take.”

~ Martin Luther (1483-1546)

“What shall I say! And how shall I describe this birth to you? For this wonder fills me with astonishment. The Ancient of Days has become an infant. He who sits upon the sublime and heavenly throne now lies in a manger. And He who cannot be touched, who is simple, without complexity, and incorporeal, now lies subject to the hands of men. He who has broken the bonds of sinners is now bound by an infant’s bands. But He has decreed that ignominy shall become honour, infamy be clothed with glory, and total humiliation the measure of His goodness.”

~ John Chrysostom (349-407)

The Worship of Self Examined and its only Remedy!

With editing by the *Insight Into* editors

Modern deceptions as old as the world

Do you love yourself? Do you glorify your own ego? In today's society, that seems normal. The deception that a higher level of contentment and happiness is achieved in violating God's law is a very old one. In fact, it goes back all the way to the Garden of Eden. Here Satan plainly told Eve that if she ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she would be like God, "*For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil*" (Genesis 3:5).

With man's fall also came the total blindness to the reality of God. We now make a god of ourselves and things. The idea that there is no God to be submissive to is very appealing to man, for then he can be his own god. Unregenerate man wants to be self-sufficient and independent and determine what is good and evil for himself. Tragically, the result of man's fall is that instead of being lifted up to a higher place, he has become totally corrupt and depraved. Every motive of our hearts has become selfish. We are filled with an inordinate love of self and a desire to live, breathe, and act only for ourselves, for our own glory, and to achieve our own selfish purposes and selfish desires.

Self-love condemned

Jonathan Edwards wrote: "Man naturally has no other principle to direct and govern himself in his actions, but only self-love, and is therefore prompted to pursue his own private and separate interest. Because of this, he has no sincere regard at all to the glory of God or the good of others. He seeks his own profit, his own advancement, and the gratifying of his own appetites, regardless of what the effect will be upon others."

God commands all men to love Him supremely and one another as themselves. When any man loves himself more than God, and his own good more than the good of any of his fellow-creatures, he is totally selfish; and his selfishness is a transgression of the divine law. All sinfulness can be traced to selfishness as its source. Men never act from any worse than selfish motives. Thomas Boston in his work *Human Nature in Its Fourfold*

State echoes the same thing: “Man was created, directly looking to God, and turned into himself; and, like a traitor usurping the throne ... They seek themselves, they act for themselves; their natural, civil, and religious actions, from whatever springs they come, all ran into, and meet in the dead sea of self.”

Self-worship examined

Self-worship has its roots in the father of evil, the devil. He loves himself above all other beings in the universe, and seeks for men to imitate and follow him by exalting themselves in the place of God, and living to please themselves. Even devotees of the modern Satanist movement understand this, although one would think they would be blind to it. Anton LaVey, author of *The Satanic Bible*, asserts that **Satanism is “essentially a religion of the self; it holds that the individual and his personal needs come first.”** Consistent with this, Satanists believe that the most important holiday of the year is one’s own birthday, because it is a celebration of self. The Satanist feels: “Why not really be honest and if you are going to create a god in your image, why not create that god as yourself? After all, aren’t you happier about the fact that you were born than you are about the birth of someone you have never even met? You should give yourself a pat on the back, buy yourself whatever you want, treat yourself like the king (or god) that you are, and generally celebrate your birthday with as much pomp and ceremony as possible.”

Self-knowledge necessary

Is natural man willing to acknowledge these truths about himself? No, for self-righteous proud men today would become just as angry as the Jews in Jesus’ day if they were told that they were children of the devil. “We are all children of God” would be the response of most men in the 21st century. Men view themselves through rose-coloured glasses, and they thrive in thinking well of themselves and their own goodness. Jonathan Edwards’ clear admonition is as needed today as it was then: “You are ready to look upon yourself as having many good things. You read and pray and have done many good works, and often find religious affections. It seems to you that they are things that God should take notice of and have respect [to]; but God does not think of you as you think of yourself. He sees and knows that for all these things, the devil is your father; you are one of his children. For all these fair shows, that gilded outside, you have the poison of asps within. You are one of the generation of vipers, though you don’t see it yourself. Yet your heart is indeed like the venomous nature of that old serpent.” Thus the hearts of wicked men and the devil are very much alike.

In applying this doctrine, Jonathan Edwards makes use of it to awaken men to “the great vileness and wickedness of their own hearts.” He warns his hearers “that as you are the children of the devil, that God looks upon you with abhorring and displeasure as He does upon the devil ... all his children are by God looked [upon] with a like loathing and anger. God is angry with the wicked every day; both in sleeping and waking, sitting down and rising, God’s anger still burns against you.” He urges them to “see and own therefore that it would be just with God to hate and loathe you, and curse you, and damn you for all that you are or have done: for God does no injustice in damning the devil and his children.”

Self-loathing a result of God’s humbling work

But do unconverted men today really see and own that it is just for God to hate them, loathe them, and damn them? **None can or will own such doctrines until they are humbled and broken before God for the vileness and wickedness of their hearts and natures.** Few today have experienced that humiliation, which the Bible and the Puritans taught, was necessary to true conversion. Wicked men are pleased and comforted when they hear the false teaching that God loves all men just the same. Such teaching does not alarm men or cause them to fear God, and we know that the Scripture says, “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom*” (Proverbs 9:10). The Scripture also clearly teaches that “*the foolish shall not stand in Thy sight: Thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the LORD will abhor the bloody and deceitful man*” (Psalm 5:5-6), and “*God is angry with the wicked every day*” (Psalm 7:11). Where is this taught today? While such doctrines may anger the unconverted and false professors of Christianity in our churches, if we fail to teach what the Bible teaches, are we not truly misleading souls?

Finally, since unconverted men are like the devil in their sins, natures, and hearts, then it logically follows that if they remain unconverted, they will be punished both like him and with him for all eternity. Jonathan Edwards said: “If you are the children of the devil, you will doubtless be involved with your father in his destruction. The devil and his children, God will put together. They will have the same habitation; they shall be one miserable company. They shall be treated alike at the Day of Judgment. They shall stand together; and they shall be turned away together into the same everlasting fire; and will be looked upon with the same abhorrence to all eternity by the saints and angels.”

No help in self but only from God!

Can man be delivered from the deep pit he has dug? Certainly he cannot

deliver himself. As the psalmist in Psalm 7 witnessed the total depravity of man, a cry arose from his heart for the almighty and irresistible salvation that comes only from God. God was expected to *come to Zion*, to *turn away ungodliness from Jacob*. Matthew Henry writes: **“The world is bad; O that the Messiah would come and change its character! There is a universal corruption; O for the times of reformation! Those will be as joyful times as these are melancholy ones. Then shall God turn again the captivity of His people; for the Redeemer shall ascend on high, and lead captivity captive, and Jacob shall then rejoice. The triumphs of Zion’s King will be the joys of Zion’s children.”** There is no help in self but only from God!

Glory to God in the Highest

At the birth of Christ our King,
Angels made the heavens ring,
Singing, with a solemn joy,
“Glory to the Lord on high.”

Glory in the highest height,
Blazing with majestic light,
Shines in David’s root and rod,
The incarnate Son of God.

Sinners here by faith may view,
What Omnipotence can do;
And in measure sweetly trace
The rich treasures of His grace.

Come, ye mourning souls, rejoice;
Look, and, with a cheerful voice,
Sing the honours of your Lord,
Blazing in the incarnate Word.

Soon the whole elect shall view
All the glory God can show!
And in bliss immortal sing,
Hallelujah to their King.

~ Rev. William Gadsby (1773-1844)