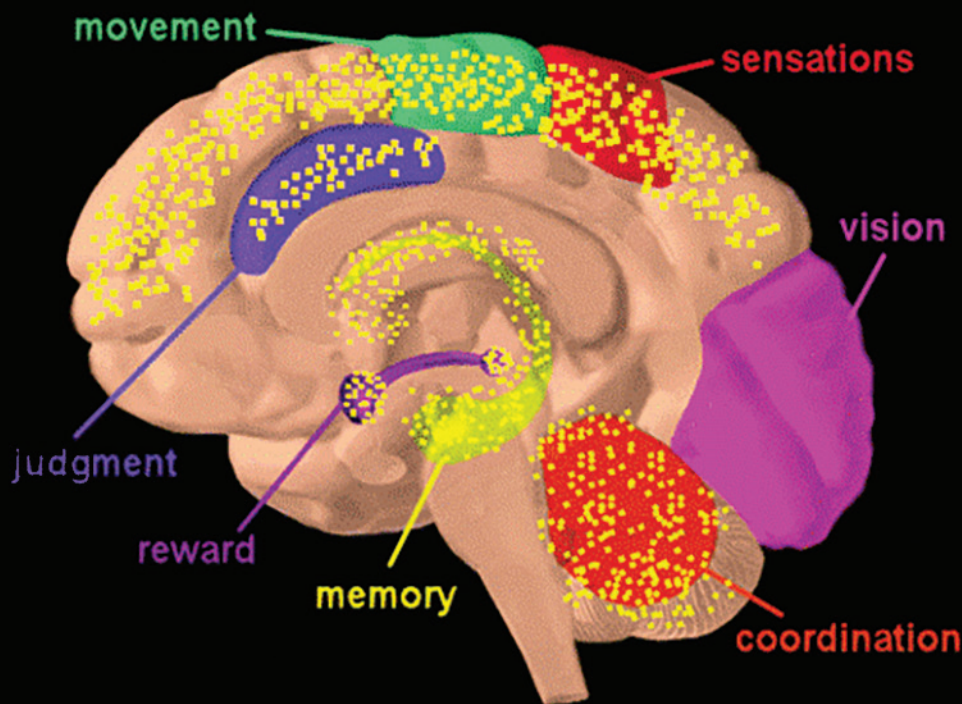


Insight Into

September / October 2024

“Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:12).



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MEDITATION

A Young King Whose Life Began Exemplary

Rev. E. C. Adams

“And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest” (2 Chronicles. 24:2).

Joash had a remarkable youth. As a very young child, he was wonderfully spared while all the rest of the royal house were killed by Athaliah. My young friends, you also resemble Joash as the Lord has watched over you to this very moment. Other young people have been ushered into eternity.

Further, we read in 2 Kings 11:12 that when Joash was crowned king at the age of seven years, he publicly received the testimony. You also have your personal Bible which you should read daily. Joash was lovingly instructed by Jehoiada and his wife Jehosheba.

Joash owed much to the tireless efforts and sacrifices of Jehoiada and Jehosheba. Young readers, I hope you at times may pause and reflect upon all that your parents have done and are doing for you. I hope you try to repay them, if this is possible, with your love and by honouring and obeying them. I hope there are also times when you may be given to reflect on what you owe the Lord for all His bountiful blessings (1 Corinthians 4:7).

The labours of Jehoiada and Jehosheba were not without fruit in the life of Joash. It is recorded that the high places were taken away. The young king also commanded that the money brought to the house of the Lord would be used for the repair of the temple. Joash was zealous concerning the Lord’s house and cause (Psalm 26:8).

Young readers, may I ask you: How do you compare with young Joash? Is God’s Holy Word your guide (Psalm 119:105)? Does the service of the Lord have a special place in your heart and in your life (Psalm 27:4)? Can it be seen by your family, your fellow church members, and your community that you have a baptized forehead (Numbers 23:9)? Can it be seen that you are living according to the old truth and the old ways (Jeremiah 6:16)?

Surely, the high priest and his wife could greatly rejoice over Joash when all their endeavours were crowned. This young king gave much gladness and joy to those who loved the walls of Zion well. How they must have rejoiced as the old apostle John did in 2 John 4, *“I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth.”*

Yet, in our text we read of something that gives reason for concern - even raises alarm. It is specifically recorded, *“...all the days of Jehoiada the priest.”* This implies that after the death of the priest, who did so much for Joash and meant so much to him in his young life, Joash departed from the right way.

Insight Into

General Information

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Read the whole history of this king in 2 Kings 11 and 12 and in 2 Chronicles 23 and 24. We read that after the death of the 130-year-old godly Jehoiada, the rulers came to the king with their worldly requests. He hearkened unto them, not having the courage to deny their requests. Consequently, profound and solemn words were spoken by Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada the priest in 2 Chronicles 24:20, *“Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, He hath also forsaken you.”*

Young people, may I simply ask you, do you resemble young Joash in the early part of his life? Maybe there are people who will answer, “I used to resemble the king; I had a tender conscience and a sincere resolution to have God’s Word as my guide. I did not walk or dress as the world does. I even had convictions concerning the seriousness of life and of the one thing needful. However, now I feel and see that I am starting to resemble king Joash. My young heart is more and more drawn away by manifold temptations.” May your experience reflect what is written in Psalm 112:1, *“Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in His commandments.”*

I have a few concluding thoughts for you to consider. In the first place, my young friends, read your Bible, daily asking the Lord to apply it (John 5:39). Secondly, watch tenderly over your conscience so that it does not become hardened (1 Timothy 1:19). Thirdly, seek friends who have respect for God’s Word, His house, and His institutions (Psalm 119:63). In the fourth place, ask the Lord that he may grant you a wife or husband who is willing to sacrifice for the old truth and old ways (Genesis 24). A religion without sacrifice is not the religion of the Bible (Matthew 16:24). Fifthly, ask the Lord to keep you from temptation (Matthew 26:41). In the sixth place, do not only pray, but also use the means, as so many people have been ruined by open internet (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

My young readers, if you have fallen into temptation, do not give up or despair. Bow your knees and return to the Lord and His Word with confession, because with the Lord there is mercy. Consider it a blessing that there may still be people like Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, who care enough about you to speak to you. And then I hope you do not despise their advice.

Finally, above all things, do earnestly and continually ask for the grace of God. We need a new heart that loves and fears the Lord and hates sin. Our heart needs to be washed in the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was the crucial matter that was missed in the life of Joash.

We all need the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour. He not only began His life, but also finished it without sin. He was born without original sin (Luke 2:35). We need Him, who being 12 years old, said in Luke 2:49, *“Wist ye not that I must be about My Father’s business?”* Jesus testified in John 8:46, *“Which of you convinceth Me of sin?”* He was the perfect, willing Servant of the Father who cried out, *“It is finished”* (John 19:30). In Him lies a full and free salvation for guilty sinners.

A Congregation in Need

“We went through fire and through water”
(Psalm 66:12).

These words from Psalm 66 remain in my thoughts as we begin this article for the “From Overseas” section.

Rev. H. Hofman

On Saturday, June 22, a flood ravaged the municipality of Rock Valley, Iowa. You have been able to read about it in the Dutch newspaper, the *Reformatorisch Dagblad* (RD). After heavy rainfall, a dam collapsed, and the consequences have in many cases become profound. Many households were given only a few minutes to leave their homes because of the rapidly rising water in that night from Friday to Saturday, around two o'clock. The reports that have reached us almost daily since then have been shocking. Dozens of families from the municipality of Rock Valley have lost everything. Those who have experienced water damage know what water damage is. It is a miracle that there has been no loss of life, at least not in the church community.



Church Under Water

Our brother, Rev. J. J. Witvoet, was supposed to be elsewhere that Sunday, but he travelled back to his congregation in need on Saturday. When I contacted him, he had just arrived at his church, and he wrote: “Water is still three steps from entering the sanctuary. Basement is full.” It was clear that there would be no pulpit for him on Sunday, at least not in the place where the congregation normally meets.

Two things stood out to me. First of all, the poignant fact that just in that week -- still completely unaware of what was going to happen in Rock Valley -- I had been burdened with the state of God’s Church as an institution, both in North America and in the Netherlands. The enormous

confusion and the almost incessant gnawing at the “institutional unity of the church,” as it was recently called, distressed me. Will there come a time when we will lose the structures of our church life? Have we already forgotten the consequences of COVID-19 when we could not have church services either? Are we alert to how quickly things develop and follow each other?

I thought of reports in the RD about synods here and there, about denominations that threaten to fall apart on matters such as the authority of Scripture. It does not pass our door either. Here the water seems to overflow us; there we are threatened by fire (Psalm 66:12)!

The Prophet Daniel

What touched me was that from one moment to the next, the church of Rock Valley closed. Everything was flooded, completely unexpectedly. It will also take some time before the church can reopen. We reflected on it in our own congregation. We sang Psalter 76, from Psalm 29. “The Lord ruled in might at the flood of great waters, A King whose dominion is never to cease.”

I couldn't help but think of Daniel's prophecies. They are prophecies about times that are difficult to understand, but which can also, as has sometimes been expressed, become times that will turn the lions of King Darius and the wild beasts of Emperor Nero into child's play; the time of the antichrist who will disturb the saints of the high places; the time when God's day will no longer be honoured; the time that Sunday will disappear as the first day of the week. Do we now see the harbingers of that? Scripture faithfulness and Scripture bondage are coming under more and more pressure.

When the time comes that the church is no longer there to “take in” you or me, will we be safe behind the Blood? Do we have more than the structures and the walls? Can we then meet King Jesus without terror?

Great Togetherness

The second thing that struck me is that at such moments, despite the large distances, a great togetherness immediately becomes apparent. The willingness to sacrifice is spontaneous and enormous. People sympathize intensely, near and far. Powerful intercession has been made in all the congregations overseas.

Despite much that fills with care, you suddenly feel a warmth that feels beneficial. It is the warmth of: “*And whether one member suffer; all the members suffer with it*” (1 Corinthians 12:26). In the same way, we also recommend you remember those who are afflicted in your intercession, and that our eyes may be fixed on Him who vouches for His Church, through all the woes of the world, even though the proud waters raged.

~Translated from *De Saambinder*

“Every Knee Shall Bow”

“For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God”

(Romans 14:11).

Rev. P. van Ruitenburg

The great purpose of all is God’s glory, and God will receive that glory no matter what. God will be eternally applauded by His own, but His enemies will also bow down to Him and give Him the glory. There will be no room for self-pity. No one will be able to say that He has sought but not found. No sinner will be able to say that he or she is lost, because he or she was not chosen. No one will feel sorry for themselves and be able to blame God. No, it’s not fate, and no one will say it’s a pity it wasn’t given to him or her. Our true nature will be revealed, and the wicked will fully understand that they must perish. Every tongue shall confess Christ, and *“every knee shall bow.”*

So God’s purpose for this world also has this dark side. Pharaoh hardened his heart, and God hardened his heart, so that he would not let Israel go and thus have the opportunity for God to show who He is. God has decided and allowed everything to happen for the glory of His great name. God will avenge Himself and justice will be done for the believers! God will show which side He is on in everything. He puts the wicked in slippery places, and they will fall low. The fall of their house will be great.

Asaph thought that he had served God in vain and that the wicked had prospered. He didn’t understand that and struggled with the meaning of life, which seemed unfair to him. Once He understood what the end of the wicked was, that put everything in place. Therefore, when life seems unfair and we think we can criticize God’s policy, surrender it to Him who judges righteously, and seek forgiveness from the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen.” (Revelation 1:7).

“For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew My power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth” (Romans 9:17).

“The LORD hath made all things for Himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil” (Proverbs 16:4).





God Must Punish Sin

Submitted

Let me tell you a story. It is a striking one and sets out in a true light how easily men will be brought, in times of danger, to believe in a God, and a God of justice, too, though they have denied Him before. In the backwoods of Canada, there resided a godly minister, who one evening went out to meditate, as Isaac did, in the fields. He soon found himself on the borders of a forest, which he entered, and he walked along a track which had been trodden before him, musing, until at last the shadows of twilight gathered around him, and he began to think how he should spend a night in the forest. He trembled at the idea of remaining there, with the poor shelter of a tree into which he would be compelled to climb.

Suddenly, he saw a light in the distance among the trees, and imagining that it might be from the window of some cottage where he would find a welcome retreat, he hastened to it, and to his surprise he saw a space cleared and trees laid down to make a platform, and upon it there was a speaker addressing a crowd. He thought to himself: "I have stumbled on a company of people who, in this dark forest, have assembled to worship God, and some minister is preaching to them at this late hour of the evening concerning the kingdom of God and His righteousness." But, to his surprise and horror, when he came nearer, he found a young man declaiming against God, daring the Almighty to do His worst upon him, speaking terrible things in wrath against the justice of the Most High, and venturing most bold and awful assertions concerning his own disbelief in a future state!

It was altogether a strange scene. It was lit up by pine knots, which cast a glare here and there, while the thick darkness in other places still reigned. The people were intent on listening to the speaker, and when he sat down, thunders of applause were given to him, each one seeming to try to equal or excel the other in his praise. Thought the minister: "I must not let this pass. I must rise and speak. The honour of my God and His cause demands it." But he feared to

speak, for he knew not what to say, having come there suddenly; but he would have ventured, had not something else occurred. A man of middle height, hale and strong, rose, and leaning on a staff, he said: “My friends, I have a word to speak to you tonight. I am not about to refute any of the arguments of the speaker; I shall not criticize his style; I shall say nothing concerning what I believe to be the blasphemies he has uttered; but I shall simply relate to you a fact, and, after I have done that, you shall draw your own conclusions.

Yesterday I walked by the side of yonder river. I saw on its floods a young man in a boat. The boat was unmanageable. It was going fast towards the rapids. He could not use the oars, and I saw that he was not capable of bringing the boat to the shore. I saw that young man wring his hands in agony. Before long, he gave up the attempt to save his life, kneeled down, and cried with desperate earnestness: ‘Oh God, save my soul! If my body cannot be saved, save my soul!’ I heard him confess that he had been a blasphemer. I heard him vow that, if his life were spared, he would never be such again. I heard him implore the mercy of heaven for Jesus Christ’s sake and earnestly plead that he might be washed in His blood. These arms saved that young man from the flood. I plunged in, brought the boat to shore, and saved his life. That same young man has just now addressed you and cursed his Maker. What say you to this, sirs?” The speaker sat down.

You may guess what a shudder ran through the young man himself, and how the audience in one moment changed their attitude and saw that, after all, whilst it was a fine thing to brag and boast against Almighty God on dry land and when danger was distant, it was not quite so grand to think ill of Him when near the verge of the grave. We believe that where the conscience is listened to, it will convince that God must punish sin, and that in every proud scorner’s heart the Words of Scripture, sooner or later, will find an awful echo: “*God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, He will whet His sword*” (Psalm 7:11-12). “*How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at My reproof: behold, I will pour out My Spirit unto you, I will make known My words unto you*” (Proverbs 1:22-23).

“Saving faith is an immediate relation to Christ, accepting, receiving, resting upon Him alone, for justification, sanctification, and eternal life by virtue of God’s grace.”

~ Rev. Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)



WRAPPING PAPER

The Blessing of a Piece of Cheese

Submitted

Suggested reading: Mark 4:26-34

In the city of London in 1831, in the shopping district, a man walks into a shop to buy some cheese. After it is weighed on the scales, the purchased item is packaged. A torn page from a worn-out book serves as wrapping paper, because plastic packaging is unknown in the nineteenth century. How simple life can be.

While putting away the groceries, the man's eyes spontaneously fall on the printed wrapping paper. Is he reading it correctly? "Pause, my soul, and ask the question; Art thou ready to meet God?"

Those words hit like a bolt of lightning. With one sentence, the Holy Spirit convicts him of his sin. He sees his fate and becomes a debtor before God. In time, he may find Christ, the Pearl of Great Price. The short sermon on the wrapping paper, the small seed in God's hand, silently does God's work and becomes an eternal blessing.

Below the lines of the words on the wrapping paper is the name William Gadsby. This poet and pastor was 18 years old when he was converted. He has been able to bring God's Word to thousands of people in England for many years. His life is Christ, and his death is gain. Gadsby's last words are, "I will be with Him. Victory forever; free grace."

Gadsby's 1156 hymns are still sung with blessing in churches and families. The Lord sometimes converts thousands of people in one day (Pentecost). But there is no less joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, even if it is by means of a piece of wrapping paper. Rest for a moment, my soul, and ask the question: "Am I willing?"

"Faith alone justifies, but justifying faith is not alone. Good works, though they are not the causes of salvation, yet they are the evidences. Faith must not be built upon works, but works must be built upon faith." ~ Rev. Thomas Watson (1620-1686)

A Striving Against Sexual Sins

The Modern Media Committee has overseen the formation of a booklet entitled, "A Striving Against Sexual Sins." What follows is a shortened synopsis divided into three parts for inclusion in "Insight Into." In the first part, the types of sexual sin will be addressed; in the second part, the effects upon the mind and heart will be examined; and in the third part, constructive suggestions will be recommended. This article is written out of a deep concern for the lives and souls of those in our community, especially in the dangerous times we live in. How many of us may live an outwardly blameless life but inwardly are struggling with pornography or lust? This impacts our young boys, who will be the church's future leaders, but this also affects middle-aged and older men; technology has introduced new temptations to lure older ones to fall into sin. Sexual immorality is such a slippery slope that each progressive sin is easier to commit once we no longer strive for sexual purity.

There are numerous examples in the Bible of the severe consequences of sexual sin and of how we cannot stand against sexual sin by ourselves. After all, even Samson with his great strength, David with his heart after God, and Solomon with his great wisdom all fell into sin with women. One of the most striking examples of the devil using sexual immorality to turn the anger of the Lord against Israel is in the history of the children of Israel at Moab. In this history, Balaam could not curse the children of Israel and instead suggested that Balak invite them to a feast, so they would sin against the Lord. And that is what happened, as is written in Numbers 25:1 to 3: *"And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel."*

It is certain that if Balak had sent out his army against the children of Israel, they would have bravely fought against them. However, on the advice of Balaam, Balak set out a stumbling block instead to separate them from the Lord. He sent his beautiful women among them and invited them to his idolatrous feasts. Similarly, we can be more easily overtaken by the charms of an enticing world than by threats from an oppressive world.

The children of Israel did not just commit fornication with the women of Moab, but they also were entertained in the idolatry of Baalpeor. Once the initial breach of modesty has happened, it is much harder to resist other sins; the sin of immorality requires quieting the conscience, which can then lead to further sins.

In his commentary, Matthew Henry notes that so many of the children of Israel fell into this sin that it became a national sin, and the Lord came with a national punishment of pestilence. Knowing this, is it not important that we examine our own hearts, so that we do not turn the anger of the Lord against us? In our Reformed communities, we are not exempt from the sins of sexual abuse, adultery, lust, and pornography. Lust is mentioned as a fire of the soul, as it consumes all convictions, comforts, and conscience. Will we then be punished as a church community? Or, perhaps, is the hardening of our hearts the judgment of the Lord? We may fear that if this sin continues to thrive in our lives and communities, the Lord may remove the candlestick of His Word from among us.

Sexual Abuse

In this article, we will go through the different types of sexual sin and we will try to find the root of the issue. One of the most blatant sexual sins is sexual abuse, especially against children. Sadly, we are not spared from this sin in our communities.

Naturally, we feel the worst type of abuse would be against a child, because they are still developing, vulnerable, and defenseless. It is written in Matthew 18:6: *“But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”* This text refers to the little ones that believe in Christ, but it shows the special care and concern that we should give to defend the purity and safety of all children. When children are abused, it often leaves them with lifelong physical, mental, and spiritual impacts. Many turn to excessive drug and alcohol use, develop severe depression and suicidal thoughts, and sadly, sometimes even become sexual abusers themselves. When the perpetrator of abuse is someone in the church community, the victim can often have a distorted image of themselves, the church, and religion in general.

Despite how terrible sexual abuse is, statistics show that there may be as many as one in four girls and one in six boys who experience sexual abuse. How abuse statistics compare in our own communities is difficult

to estimate. It is generally believed that sexual abuse is underreported in Christian communities because of higher levels of respect for positions of authority and the associated guilt the victim feels. Abuse is also underreported when the abuser is a family member or a respected community member. On average, one perpetrator has multiple victims and will continue to abuse for many years if he or she is not stopped. Therefore, sexual abuse should never be covered up, because it will likely lead to additional victims in the future. Ultimately, it is important to realize that the same perverted heart that is at the root of crimes committed in the general public is also in us.

Fornication

Another easily identifiable sexual sin is adultery, which is a form of fornication. As our secular society continues to devalue marriage, rates of infidelity keep increasing. We may be afraid that these sins are also becoming more frequent in our communities. The consequences of adultery are high; since adultery is a betrayal of marriage vows, it often leads to broken families and divorce. It shatters trust, which is the foundation of a relationship. Consequently, it can break even the strongest bonds of marriage.

Fornication is directly related to the sin that the children of Israel committed with Baalpeor in 1 Corinthians 10:8: *“Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.”* Fornication includes adultery, but it also includes premarital sexual intimacy that occurs among young people. This can range from people who live promiscuously to couples who plan to get married but do not wait for marriage to engage in sexual intimacy.

Premarital sexual intimacy is a sin and is clearly against the Word of God, as it says in Hebrews 13:4, *“Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.”* Part of honouring marriage is complete abstinence before marriage. Before marriage, a couple has no binding vows and may not engage in the culmination of those vows. A young man and woman may feel that they are in love and that they will be together for the rest of their lives; yet, a short time later, they may break up. Dating couples should talk about these things with their significant other and make a commitment to save sexual relations for marriage.

Pornography

Perhaps one may wonder how an outwardly respectable person could fall into sin such as adultery or sexual abuse. In many cases, both sexual abuse and adultery have started with a person consuming and becoming addicted to pornography. Usually, an addiction to pornography is progressive, which means that the person who is addicted continually needs more and more stimulation. Often, addiction may start with softer forms of pornography and, in time, move to more extreme versions of porn consumption. Sometimes, the user is enticed to extreme forms such as homosexual porn, bestiality, or child porn.

In some cases, those who are addicted can become involved in adultery or sexual abuse when they desire to act out what they have seen on their screens. Both the violence and the objectification of women that are found in pornography increase the risk of abusive behavior by those who consume pornography. Jon Uhler, an advocate for victims of sexual abuse, has said that of the sex offenders and predators he has worked with, not one of them believed he or she would end up offending. Instead, they had simply saturated themselves with porn and played on the edge of their restraint.

For the older generations, it may be hard to overemphasize the impact that porn has on our society and our circles. This is because of the drastic increase in the availability of pornography, especially for young people today. It is said that a porn addiction needs three pillars: **availability, affordability, and anonymity**. All three of these pillars are making this issue much more severe than it has ever been in the past. Previously, if someone wanted to find porn, they would have to look for it to purchase it. Not only was porn harder to find, but there was less anonymity, so especially in religious circles, shame could hold some people back from purchasing pornographic magazines. Sadly, with cell phones and private computers, it has become too easy to view pornography in secret. Today, porn is readily available, and it has never been more anonymous, which could mean that religious circles have similar levels of porn addiction as secular circles.

The availability of pornography has several significant effects. The first is that today, even if someone is not looking for porn, it is very likely that they will be exposed to porn online. In addition, if a teenager is curious and is looking for porn, there are various apps and websites that will likely not be blocked by an internet filter. The second main effect of

the availability of pornography is the ease of access to endless amounts of different materials. In previous generations, if teenagers found a single magazine, it was not as likely that they would get addicted, solely based on the difficulty of obtaining new pictures. Now, with the internet, porn is available on demand, and someone who stumbles on it can binge on unlimited pictures and videos. This repeated activity with easy access to new content quickly leads to addiction.

Because of this increase in availability, the rates of porn consumption are mind-boggling. It is estimated that the average age of first exposure to pornography is as young as eight to nine years old, and 98% of adolescents have seen it. Of that percentage, 64% of young people admit to viewing pornography at least weekly. Perhaps the most worrying statistic is that 90% of teenagers do not think porn is wrong. Some statistics show lower percentages of young people are exposed to pornography, but sadly, that is because many of these statistics are based on society's perception of pornography. In one survey, only 24% of adults believed that a fully nude image was pornography. That shows how the moral compass of society is continuing to degrade.

How would these statistics compare in our communities? Are our statistics much lower, because we are taught the evil of porn and sexual sins? Let us compare the conditions that allow porn to thrive. The first factors are exposure and availability of porn. These are likely lower than in secular societies, as most teenagers get a smartphone later, and most parents try to filter their internet. However, even with these restrictions, with social media apps that are not filtered, friend groups sharing explicit images, and young people's technological skill at evading filters, it is certain that the majority of teenagers are still being exposed to pornography.

Further, two main factors that influence addictions are accountability and our heart. In particular, boys - who have the inclination to be curious about sexual things and who are more visually stimulated - will not naturally flee from pornography. This same heart is in all of us by nature; we are all inclined to sin. When our sinful nature is tied to a lack of accountability, there is a grave danger of becoming addicted to pornography. Could accountability be worse in our community than in some other circles, because the issue of pornography has mainly been hushed in the past? Those who have struggled with pornography have been shamed, stopping others from coming forward with these issues to try to help. This has led to an increasing lack of accountability as this sin remains hidden.

Pornography use can be closely compared to the Israelites worshipping Baalpeor. With the worship of Baalpeor, it is thought that sexual acts were performed in a high place visible to others, who, in turn, fell into sexual sins themselves. The depraved sexual acts that were watched are similar to the depraved acts that someone may look at in pornography. Likewise, just as the children of Israel fell into other sexual sins after viewing them in the idolatrous worship of Baalpeor, those who watch pornography often sin through self-pleasure or other versions of fornication. In 1 Corinthians 6:18, it is written: *“Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.”* Can this text not be applied directly to the depravity of pornography? It degrades and defiles the body and is often said to destroy the soul.

Besides the sinful nature of pornography consumption, many negative impacts come from viewing porn. The most direct effect is that women are viewed as objects rather than humans with a soul. Further, it leads to an exaggerated perception of sexuality and promiscuity in society, a belief that marriage is confining, and a lack of attention to family. These beliefs and perceptions can lead to marriage issues, infidelity, and divorce. Excessive use of pornography is also linked to social anxiety, lack of focus, and depression. Due to this, pornography can make men introverted, more controlling, and narcissistic, which can strain marriage bonds and cause family issues.

(Parts 2 and 3 to follow, the Lord willing)

The Five Solas of the Reformation

Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone): *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Sola Fide (faith alone): *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast”* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Sola Gratia (grace alone): *“Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 3:24).

Solus Christus (Christ alone): *“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”* (1 Timothy 2:5).

Soli Deo Gloria (glory to God alone): *“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God”* (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Marijuana: Now Legal But Still Harmful

Dr. Scott Timmer

Man's quest for happiness and contentment goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Outside of the One who alone gives "life," this quest has taken the human race down many paths. Some have pursued riches, which, once acquired, only lead to demand for more. Some have thirsted for more power and so dream of climbing the ladder of popularity and esteem which, if achieved, only leads to isolation. Others have turned to alcohol and drugs to escape the hardships of present realities, only to awaken surrounded by yet more misery. Each of these avenues is comparable to those who float on the ocean without drinking water, and then out of desperation take the first sip of salt water. Soon a craze for more encompasses them and a terrible, unquenchable thirst follows that ends in death, as salt pulls water out of the body. Is there any hope in this spiral of death?

Some years ago, I wrote an article about the mental and physical harms that can be caused by marijuana (cannabis) use. There are many detrimental effects, some of which I have witnessed first-hand in the hospital. The recreational use of marijuana was legalized in my home state of Michigan in 2018. Since then, marijuana use has become legalized in Canada and many more states in America. Due to legalization, marijuana use has become much more widespread. Even professing Christians in some circles are using this substance. It is important that we as Christians are well informed of the inherent dangers of this mind-altering substance.

Not only is cannabis more accessible than ever before, but the concentration of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the mind-altering component in marijuana joints or vaping liquid, is steadily increasing. For example, before the 1990s, THC concentrations averaged around 2%. Today, this number averages around 18% and can be up to 30% in certain strains. This makes the THC compound much more potent than in the past, with increased rates of psychotic episodes, recurrent vomiting, and higher risks of addiction and adverse medical effects with long-term use.

It is very important to realize that marijuana use is linked to many

types of mental illness. Most concerning is the risk of cannabis-induced psychosis and schizophrenia. There are tragic stories about young people with healthy minds whose lives were destroyed by cannabis. One example in the news recently was a teenager by the name of Johnny, a happy, intelligent youth who grew up in a Christian home. His story is written by his mom who has now started an organization known as “Johnny’s Ambassadors” as a way to help prevent other people from suffering the same fate.

Johnny had a 4.0 GPA and a perfect 800/800 score on the SAT math portion. He attended church and youth group and did regular family things. At 14, Johnny began smoking marijuana when he attended a high school party and wanted to try getting high with his friends. At 16, he moved on to dabbing high-THC products like wax and shatter. At 18, he experienced psychosis and delusional episodes, a suicide attempt, and by 19, he was diagnosed with “Severe THC Abuse” and schizoaffective disorder from Cannabis-Induced Psychosis. Tragically, despite our repeated efforts at rehab and support, he refused to take the antipsychotic medication he now needed, and he died by suicide on November 20, 2019, convinced “the mob was after him” and “everyone knew everything about him.”

To some extent, we are all influenced by the culture around us. The Bible gives a clear example of this in 1 Corinthians, especially chapters 5 and 6. Reading through this book, it seems that the Christians in Corinth tended to minimize and overlook the sin of fornication. The church leaders had not even dealt with people that were living openly in the sin of incest, and thus Paul rebuked them for that. How could this happen? I think there were likely multiple reasons, but one of the main reasons may have been that the sin of fornication had become so widely accepted in their own culture. Instead of having their minds and consciences shaped by the word of God, they formed their own opinions and judgments based on the current thinking of the world around them. Sin can have a numbing effect on a culture and can cause us to be blind to our own faults and ignorant of the evil nature of our sins, simply because we become used to them.

Since the use of marijuana has been normalized by the society around us, we might tend to think (often subconsciously) that it is relatively safe and not such a big deal. As our Western culture becomes more anti-Christian, however, we can no longer form our sense of morality based on society’s opinion or what the government makes illegal or declares is harmful to us. Just because something is legal does not mean it is moral, necessary, helpful, or wise. Sadly, in some cases our government now promotes what is evil and outlaws that which is good. Think, for example,

of “anti-conversion” laws in many states that outlaw giving biblical counseling to those who are suffering from transgender identity disorder.

You may be unaware that the rate of substance abuse in the United States is the highest of any country in the world. Canada is not far behind with the fifth highest rate. This raises an interesting question: Why is this? Could it be because we are among the most spiritually empty of all people in the world? I believe all our outward prosperity has led to a symptom of widespread emptiness among our population. As Blaise Pascal, the 17th-century French scientist, mathematician, and religious philosopher wrote: “There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man, which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus.”

Paul witnessed the awful effects of sin as he ministered throughout the world in places like Corinth. He saw the devastation on human lives as people lived in all manner of sin, as spiritual death yielded eternal death. He wrote to those who were fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners (see 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). But by the powerful work of God he could say, “*And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God*” (1 Corinthians 6 vs: 9-11). Paul also rejoiced in the salvation of the person mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5, verses 1 to 5. Church discipline had yielded the fruit of repentance, confession, and forgiveness as Paul expressed in 2 Corinthians 2, verses 6 to 11. Paul witnessed the wonderful freedom brought about by the Holy Spirit. He saw people freed from the shackles of sin, having experienced it himself, and so could exclaim, “*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief*” (1 Timothy 1:15). Yes, there is hope and deliverance for all manner of sin through the Triune God.

“Justification by faith is the hinge on which all true religion turns.”

~ John Calvin (1509-1564)

“We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.”

~ Martin Luther (1483-1546)