

Insight Into

November / December 2024

“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night” (Luke 2:8).



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General Information

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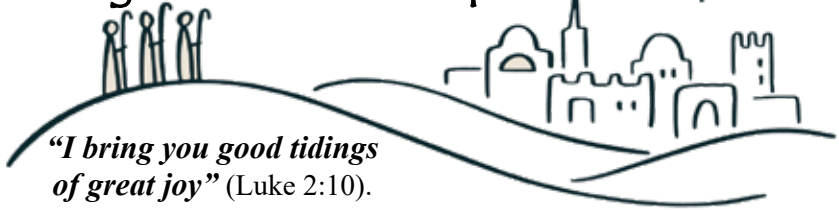
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MEDITATION

The Joyful Message Brought to the Shepherds



*“I bring you good tidings
of great joy”* (Luke 2:10).

Rev. E. Venema (1922-2003)

Suggested reading: Luke 2:8-14

Christmas in the fields of Ephratah, and that for shepherds! Incomprehensible and wonderous. No, that cannot be explained, but only bewildered. “This thing is from the Lord Almighty, It is a marvel in our eyes; Man cannot understand it rightly, Nor fathom it in any wise” (Psalter 427:5). Man has not worked this wonder in Bethlehem. From beginning to end, this is God’s work. That Child in the manger is God’s Son, who desired to become Man to glorify the attributes of His Father.

But there is more. Not only is the salvation lying in the manger God’s work, but the way of the shepherds, who as the first ones may go to Bethlehem, is also God’s work. No, they have not asked after that. Unexpectedly, in one moment, heaven opened above Ephratah. There, filled with heavenly light, an angel announces a message of Christmas: *“I bring you good tidings of great joy.”* Do you understand that? It is not a universal message I bring you! Then it becomes a personal matter, when that word *you* is also engraved in your or my heart. Blessed are they who are not a stranger to this. Behold, then the fruit of Christmas is revealed.

The shepherds do not remain where they are sitting; no, they are driven to go. They desire to see that which they have heard. So they go to the manger, lead by divine light. They do not even think of their livestock anymore; they leave that in the care of the great King. No one needs to show them the way. “God will lead Him safely onward, Guide him in the chosen way” (Psalter 415:6). In the middle of the night, they go to visit a newborn Child. It sounds very strange in the ears of the worldling. It may seem peculiar for the religious one, but for the shepherds it was no longer a strange matter. They had heard it personally out of His own mouth. Therefore, they went, even with haste.

WHAT A RARE THING THANKFULNESS IS

“And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, “Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?” (Luke 17:15-17).

Rev. J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

We are told that of all the ten lepers whom Christ healed, there was only one who turned back and gave Him thanks. The words that fell from our Lord’s lips upon this occasion are very solemn. *“Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?”*

The lesson before us is humbling, heart-searching, and deeply instructive. The best of us are far too like the nine lepers. We are more ready to pray than to praise, and more disposed to ask God for what we have not, than to thank Him for what we have. Murmurings, complainings, and discontent abound on every side of us. Few indeed are to be found who are not continually hiding their *mercies* under a bushel, and setting their needs and *trials* on a hill. These things ought not so to be. But all who know the church and the world must confess that they are true. The wide-spread thanklessness of Christians is the disgrace of our day. It is a plain proof of our little humility.

Let us pray for a daily thankful spirit. It is the spirit which God loves and delights to honour. David and Paul were eminently thankful men. It is the spirit which has marked all the brightest saints in every age of the church. It is the spirit which is the very atmosphere of heaven. Angels and “just men made perfect” are always blessing God. It is the spirit which is the source of happiness on earth. If we would be anxious for nothing, we must make our requests known to God not only with prayer and supplication, but with thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6).

Above all, let us pray for a deeper sense of our own sinfulness, guilt, and undeserving. This, after all, is the true secret of a thankful spirit. It is the man who daily feels his debt to grace, and daily remembers that in reality he deserves nothing but hell – this is the man who will be daily blessing and praising God. Thankfulness is a flower which will never bloom well, except upon a root of deep humility!

“Hear This”

***“The word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel.
Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants
of the land” (Joel 1:1-2a).***

Rev. H. de Leeuw

Joel is a common name for us today, but in the Hebrew language this name is powerful. It means “Jehovah is God.” This name reveals the truth. If you lived in the time of this Bible verse and you saw Joel the prophet going through the streets, you would say to yourself, “There goes Joel!” Immediately, then, along with the sight of the prophet named Joel, you would receive a message: “Jehovah is God.” It happened more often that the prophets’ names already held a message.

Joel is a man whose lineage is not well-known. The only thing that is known are the contents of his Bible book. But that is enough! It is also not clear where Joel lived or in what time period he was called to be a prophet. Some place him 800 years before Christ and others place him 350 years before Christ. There are varying opinions on this. However, two things are clear from his small Bible book: God was judging Israel and Joel was called to warn the Israelites of the coming day of the Lord.

How did Joel walk through Judah? He called, “*Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land*” (Joel 1:2a). The prophet was calling people to a specific task: “*Hear this.*” It is very clear in verse 1 that Joel has received a message from the Lord, and now he has to bring that message to the people. His introduction is: “*Hear this.*”

This is a call to listen. Joel does not only mean to listen with your ears; he is not just asking his hearers to pay attention to him. No, it’s deeper: he is asking his hearers to listen with their hearts because the Lord has a message for them that “Jehovah is God.” This call to listen is not only for Joel’s listeners at the time, but for all who hear and read God’s word. That includes us all. Remember this, then, when the Bible is opened, a minister preaches, an elder reads, or when your teacher or your parents are explaining the Bible: “*Hear this!*”

The true prophets were great gifts to Israel. They had messages of truth. And so it is today: ministers who may bring the truth - together with

elders who may read sound sermons - are great gifts. The question that needs to be asked is: "Do we listen?" Jehovah is God.

In his prophecies, Joel is going to give context to how Jehovah is God in his day. We hope to continue with a series of articles to slowly study the prophecies of Joel.

"He Careth for You"

Near the time of the American revolutionary war, a godly old couple by the name of Jones lived in a town in the state of Connecticut. They were both infirm and very poor. All of their children had either died or moved away. There was no one to care for them, except that occasionally a neighbour came to give assistance. Their little house was on a road that was somewhat remote, and it was hidden from view by high knolls and large rocks.

One winter, there was a very severe snowstorm. Strong winds blew the snow about furiously, and the front of the Jones' cottage was buried almost completely out of sight. The aged couple had only a little wood left to keep them warm and a very scanty supply of food. At length, the last mouthful of food had been eaten. The storm finally cleared up, but it was bitterly cold. The roads were all blocked by the snow. The neighbouring farmers had plenty to do in looking after their cattle and digging out paths. Who would first think of the poor old couple?

Mrs. Jones tried to open the outside door, but she found there was a snowdrift against it, higher than the top of the door. Then she took her broom and pushed it up, making a small hole through the snow to the top of the snowdrift. She had scarcely drawn back the broom, when a fine large partridge flew into the house through the hole. The aged couple chased the partridge around the room and finally caught it. Very soon, it was cooking in the pot over the fire. What a good meal those hungry ones had from the fine bird that God had sent them!

God, as we see, was the first to think of them and the first to send them help. They gratefully remembered this incident all the rest of their days. They would take up the Bible, which they always kept nearby, and read about God feeding Elijah by means of the ravens. Then they thought of how God had also provided for them in a time of great need. *"O fear the LORD, ye His saints: for there is no want to them that fear Him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing"* (Psalm 34:9-10).

~ Taken from *Friendly Companion*



POSITIVE CRITICISM

“Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way” (Romans 14:13).

Rev. P. van Ruitenburg

It’s good to be critical in a positive way and young people often are. When you’re young, you sometimes see things sharper and clearer than older people. That is why older people can also learn from young people, and they must learn to listen and be honest, without holding on to old patterns. But as you might expect, I would also like to highlight another side.

There is often something beautiful in old traditions that you lose if you throw them overboard. I would also like to appeal to young people to be lenient and cautious with traditions that in themselves do no harm, as the Apostle Paul did. The apostle was led by God’s Spirit and was therefore able to say things honestly - and at the same time very wisely. He was quite clear about the forgiveness of sins without the works of the law, yet he asked Timothy to be circumcised because otherwise, the Jews would not accept him. He really stood next to the people and didn’t immediately criticize or judge. He was a Jew to the Jews and a Greek to the Greeks. Why would he immediately offend people and push them away so hard that they would no longer listen to him?

The apostle began with the main issues and not with the side issues. Paul thought in black and white in some things, but by no means in everything. Paul pleaded for a certain tolerance, even putting up with those who did not seem so tolerant. This requires self-denial, humility, prudence, and love for the Jew and the Gentile, for the pious churchgoer, and for the ungodly neighbour. Young people are sometimes very annoyed by pious people, and I can understand that, but they are also people, and they may see things better than you do on certain points. Let us respect one another and not judge.

“One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord,

for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks” (Romans 14:5-6).

“For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law” (1 Corinthians 9:19-21).

“That state is surely best which keeps you dependent on God and thankful to Him; and so you shall find it in the end.”
- Author Unknown

Lost Time

A wealthy lady had a scroll hanging in her bedroom with the following inscription: “Lost, between sunrise and sunset, one golden hour, set with sixty diamond minutes. No reward is offered for its recovery, for it is gone forever.” What a solemn meaning those last few words convey! In whatever way it may have been spent, time can never be recalled. If we carefully consider the year that has just passed, every one of us must sadly exclaim, “Much of the time has been wasted.” We cannot recover lost time from the past, but we may ask for God’s help to improve the present and the future!

~ Adapted from *Cheering Words*

Faithful in Old Age

An old man in Sutherland, England, stricken in years and living a long way from the church, appeared one stormy day at the service. His minister was amazed to see him and asked why he had ventured out in such weather. The aged man replied, “I had the mind to come, and God gave me the strength. I also thought that I might be of some help to you here. Besides, I did not want to grieve the Spirit of the Lord by leaving my place empty in His house.” What a contrast to the lukewarm spirit that is often seen in the present day!

~From *Gleanings of Highland Harvest* by Murdoch Campbell



The Dead Hearing the Voice of the Son of God

John Calvin (1509-1564)

Now when our Lord Jesus Christ says that His voice has power to raise the dead, He is speaking in the form of a similitude. For whatever life we suppose ourselves to have, yet, despite that, if we are separated from God, we are in spiritual death, however much the unbelievers imagine themselves to be more than alive in their own wisdom and virtue. And they harden themselves in it and make their boast of it to the uttermost. But let us see where the fountain of life is. It is in God, and they are alienated from Him. Also, let us see what is the true life of man. It is not that he should be shrewd and quick-witted, and be able to conduct his business well in this world by his own skill and wits, or to purchase great renown for himself, or to be knowledgeable and well advised, able to give counsel to all other men; it is not that he should excel in all human sciences and in all arts; neither is it that he should be esteemed and renowned as a man of noble courage or as one that has the other virtues commendable among men. But it is a higher thing that we must begin at, namely, to know that God is our Father, that we are defended and preserved by the light of His Word, and enlightened by faith to know the way of salvation, and to assure ourselves that our whole welfare lies in Him, so that we seek it there with all lowliness.

It also lies in our knowledge of the means whereby we attain to it, that is to say, by having our Lord Jesus Christ in whom the whole fulness of grace is presented to us. Thus you see what the spiritual life of man is and where it lies, namely, in the light of God's Word, and in the working of the Holy Spirit, so that we are fashioned anew according to the image that was lost and utterly defaced in us by Adam's sin. And is that to be found among worldly men? Even among those who are most honoured? Certainly not! It is not without reason, then, that our Lord Jesus Christ uses this similitude, saying that we are raised from death by means of the

gospel. For no matter how much we may flourish, no matter how splendid we may appear before men, and no matter how much we possess to invite the esteem of men, yet we are only wretched, putrefying flesh. There is nothing but rottenness and infection in us. God loathes us; we are damned and lost before Him; the angels abhor us; all creatures curse and detest us; and all things demand vengeance on us because we defile them. For there is such corruption in men that heaven and earth must be infected with it, until God has brought about a change. Our Lord Jesus Christ's saying means, then, that until we are renewed by the gospel and by the faith that proceeds from it, we are but as dead men. There is not one drop of life in us that deserves the name of life. And, to be brief, we are as if buried in the grave, and it is necessary for us to be drawn out of it again, by which we are given to understand that we are cut off from God's kingdom, and consequently that there is nothing but filth in us. And yet, in spite of all this, God vouchsafes to be linked and united with such as put their trust in Him and His goodness. That (I say) is, as it were, our rising again.



Pictures of Jesus

Question: *Why is it wrong to have pictures of Jesus?*

Answer: Most children's books on the New Testament are full of pictures of the Lord Jesus. Many people cannot see anything wrong in this. Why do we not agree? First: We are strictly forbidden to make any "likeness" of God (Exodus 20:4), and Jesus is God. Images, stained glass windows, and pictures, however sincere the intent, have never had a good spiritual effect. Second: We do not know what the Lord Jesus looked like. The four gospels abound with details of His holy character, His love, His righteousness, the things He did, and the words He spoke, but the Holy Ghost is silent concerning His human appearance. He has not seen fit to give us one detail about the colour of His hair, or anything else. These so-called pictures of the Lord Jesus are not what He looked like, for no one knows. How would we feel if a person who had never seen us sent everyone an imaginary picture he had drawn of us (that was nothing at all like us) and said, "That is So-and-so"? Third: It is wrong to separate the Godhead and the sacred humanity of the Lord Jesus. He is God as well as Man. The most beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus (even if it were exactly true) could only show His humanity. It would be impossible to convey what our hymnwriter says: "The God shines graciously through the Man."

- Rev. B. A. Ramsbottom (1929-2023)

A Striving Against Sexual Sins (2)

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 were 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.

Pornography Has a Detrimental Impact On Your Brain

Pornography is proven to be addictive, and there are similarities to an addiction to heroin. These addictions are similar because they are both caused by a "high" created by the release of chemicals such as dopamine in our brain. Dopamine is very important in a natural sense, as it makes you feel good and enhances attention and memory. It focuses the mind on a single task and ignores other concerns. It also provides the rush that an individual feels when they view pornography, and the combination of focus and pleasure ties it to addiction. Another chemical is testosterone, which is the chemical that has been known to drive sexual interest. When sexual cues are identified, a swell of testosterone production is triggered, which arouses the body. Testosterone is slow to dissipate; therefore, men who watch pornography regularly create a chemical imbalance in their brains and, in turn, a higher sexual craving. These and other chemicals in the brain "etch" the experience and images that are seen into the brain and enslave the person to that activity. When sexual intimacy is experienced between husband and wife, these chemicals strengthen the bond between them, but in situations such as pornography, they have very negative consequences.

Between the ages of 12 and 20, our brain goes through a malleable phase where billions of synaptic connections are made. This can lead to higher rates of addictions, but it also is during those ages that synaptic connections help to develop both social and moral characteristics. Synaptic connections, which are sometimes called neural pathways, are like pathways that neurons in the brain use to make associations. These pathways can be compared to a pathway in the woods. The more that pathway is used, the broader and deeper it gets. Similarly, for activities repeated frequently, the brain develops neural pathways to make the activity easier to think about and complete. Therefore, the more someone lusts after a woman or looks at pornography, the brain will develop multiple onramps that will lead to the satisfaction that comes from releasing these addictive chemicals in our brains.

Ongoing pornography consumption often has ties to other addictions like alcohol or drugs. Sometimes, these are used as a coping mechanism in times of high stress, loneliness, anxiety, or low self-esteem. Because the dopamine release in the brain causes feelings of pleasure, alcohol, drugs, and pornography can all reinforce a cycle of craving, using, and seeking more of the same addictive substance to combat depression or other negative emotions. This cycle can both create an addiction to pornography or contribute to the progression of an addiction to pornography. For the individual, pornography can feel like a temporary escape from the real world, but using pornography as a coping mechanism is ultimately self-defeating. The creation of negative consequences such as guilt, shame, and isolation reinforces the negative emotions that had initially triggered someone to view pornography in the first place.

The Lust of the Mind Leading to Deeper Sins

As mentioned earlier, pornography often leads to further sins of adultery or even abuse, but there may be exceptions where these acts did not start with porn use. However, if we peel another layer off, 100% of cases of adultery, fornication, sexual abuse, and porn consumption have started with lust. The person involved has first lusted in their mind and possibly has been lusting so often that they do not even realize it is wrong. And although some people may say that they have not fallen into the sin of pornography or adultery with another woman, very few men can say they have not lusted in their mind. In Matthew 5:28, the Lord Jesus says: *“But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”*

Just as pornography can change us, similarly, lusting and fantasizing

can program neural pathways in our brains. Some people may not even realize that their mind has been changed in this way. They may say that lust was a problem in their adolescent years, but they do not realize their brain is still the same. It can be that as boys go through puberty, they look at and fantasize about women. This releases chemicals like dopamine in their minds that give excitement and pleasure, stimulating and encouraging that boy to continue looking for the same feelings. Even though this is on a different scale than pornography, it creates the same neural pathways in the mind. These pathways are reinforced through sexual self-pleasure. From that, the brain is trained to constantly look for something that can stimulate it and provide that warm, fulfilling feeling that occurs with dopamine release in the brain.

Sadly, even as boys grow out of puberty and into adulthood and their behaviours change, they do not erase those learned behaviours in their brains. Many adult men do not think they are looking for stimulating things in their daily activities. Still, their eyes and their brains are actively looking. Women may notice when a male they are talking to has his eyes on their body, while the man talking to them may not even realize it. Perhaps you do not know it yourself. With pornography, it is well documented that a person will not outgrow their addiction naturally when they get married and grow older, but the same is also true for the obsession of lust.

It is clear that sinful lusting is wrong, but there are also practical problems associated with it. Our secular society does not want to acknowledge that. Instead, you can find articles about the benefits of porn consumption and sexual self-pleasure. The adverse side effects of pornography have been clearly outlined earlier, but some might wonder about lusting after another woman. There may be many excuses – no one is getting hurt, it is an innocent release of stress, no one even knows, etc. The biggest practical issue is that, just like pornography, it leads to the objectification of women in a man's brain. The more something is imagined, the more real it becomes, which means that frequent fantasizing and lust will impact how a man treats and respects women. Frequent lust and self-pleasure can become addictive, where a person compulsively returns to that action to feel happy, which can cause depression. In addition, thinking about and imagining other women will cause men to be less satisfied in their own marriages and become overly critical, which will strain marriage bonds. Finally, lust is the gateway to other sexual sins, which have clear, practical consequences. Observing society's promotion of lust, pornography, and promiscuity, is it then not clear as it says in Isaiah 5:20: *“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!”?*

(Part 3 to follow, the Lord willing)

“Only Once”



One winter afternoon, a boy named James was walking home from school. One of his friends ran up to him, saying, “Stop a minute, James. We’re going to go skating down the river tonight. We will build a fire on the island and have a grand time. Please come with us.”

“No, George, I can’t. Father says I must only skate on the canal. I know it isn’t so wide, nor quite so good for skating, but it is safer,” answered James.

“Nonsense! The ice on the river is at least two inches thick, even in the thinnest places.”

“No matter,” said James. “I can’t skate on the river.”

“Well, then, at least come to the canal. You can skate out to the fork, where it joins the river, and see us all. Will you do that?”

“Yes.”

“All right. Be there at seven.”

James was ready with his skates at the time appointed, and he was about to leave the house, when his father asked, “Where are you going now, James?”

“I’m going to skate awhile on the canal, Father.”

“Well, it’s a bright evening, but don’t stay late, and don’t go on the river.”

James crossed the field before the house, and he was soon on the canal, gliding swiftly towards the river, from which the sound of merry voices reached his ear. As he wheeled splendidly at the entrance of the canal, the boys saw him and came swiftly skating towards him like a fleet of ships before the wind.

“Hurrah, James!” cried a dozen of them, as they joined company with him on the canal.

There they amused themselves with racing, skating backward, and cutting all sorts of fancy figures on the ice, until George gave the word, “Now for the island!” With loud shouts, they shot out together upon the river, all but James.

“I must leave you now,” he said.

“Oh, James, please don’t!” cried several voices at once.

“Now, see here, James,” said George, “what’s the use of being so stubborn? Go down with us this one time.”

“Father said, ‘Don’t go on the river.’”

“Well, as to that, you’ve already been on the river two or three times. Look at your marks.”

James now saw that, in the excitement of their sport, he had repeatedly rushed out of the canal across the channel of the river. How he wanted to go with the boys! He did not really think there was much danger; the discovery that he had already broken his father’s command without realizing it did not help him in his hour of weakness and temptation. The boys all begged him to join them. James slowly glided out of the canal. He stood still for a moment, and then the tempter prevailed. “Well, I’ll go down this once – mind you, only once,” he thought and he darted like an arrow to the front, for he was the best skater in the company, and soon he was far in advance of the rest.

Alas! None of the boys knew of the dangerous “breathing hole” which had opened that day in the ice in the channel. It now lay right in James’ path, waiting to receive him; and the first notice they had of its existence was a despairing cry of terror from him as he plunged in. All was confusion among the boys; but George, more self-possessed than the others, hurried to the shore and shouted, “Hold on, Jamie! I’ll help you out.” He broke off the limb of a tree, as large and long as he could handle, and brought it on the ice. By carefully creeping towards James, he tried to put it within his reach.

However, the current was strong, the water was bitterly cold, and James, who had been urging his friend to hurry, now began to lose his strength. He became numb with cold, and before the limb came within his grasp, he said, faintly, “Oh, George, I can’t hold on any longer! Ask father . . . to forgive . . .” and he went down with the current.

An hour later, men at the mill below were watching and waiting in expectation of their mournful task. They had broken up the ice above the barred outlet of the dam. They lifted James out of the water and tenderly carried his body home. We have seldom told you a sadder story. Oh, that we could impress the lesson of obedience to parents upon your young hearts so deeply that it will never be forgotten! If you are ever tempted to do wrong, even if it is “only once,” may you be helped to resist the temptation. Remember James. The sad consequence of disobedience is not always so immediate or fatal, but one sin often leads to another. The Word of God says, “*Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth*” (Ephesians 6:1-2). We think of the Lord Jesus Christ, who never gave in to temptation, not even once. He was “*in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*” (Hebrews 4:15-16). May our eyes be unto Him for help in times of temptation and especially for the salvation of our souls.

~ Adapted from *The Little Gleaner*

Should I Play Cards?



The History of Playing Cards

Playing cards probably originated in Hindustan (Northern India) around 800 A.D. The mention of cards in Europe is first found in Italy in 1279 A.D. The four suits of thirteen cards each in a standard deck of fifty-two cards originated in France under King Charles VI.

Charles VI reigned as king of France from 1380 to 1422 A.D. In 1392, he suffered a mental breakdown. After this, he often lapsed into fits of anger, depression, wickedness, and insanity until he died. During one of his spells, he named and grouped present-day playing cards in a most blasphemous and rebellious manner.

King Charles VI divided his deck of cards into two red suits of hearts and diamonds (called squares at the time) and two black suits of spades and clubs. Each suit contained ten numbered cards and three faces: the jack (knave), queen, and king. His wicked plan was to poke fun of, joke with, and blaspheme God. The “King” card was to represent Satan, who is most clever and reigns overall. The “Queen” card represents the Virgin Mary. She is tricked by Satan (the king) and gives birth to the Joker, or the fool. The “Joker” is the Lord Jesus Christ. The ten numbered cards represent King Satan’s laws of sin, which are in direct opposition to God’s ten commandments. The black spade was a symbol of Satan, and the black club was a sign of a murderer in the Middle Ages, one who directly follows Satan’s commands. Satan reigns over the hearts of men (red hearts) and the affairs of men in the world (red squares or “diamonds”). This terrible, devilish, insane, and blasphemous plan is the basis upon which present-day standard playing cards are organized.

Knowing this, our church forefathers have historically always condemned the use of standard playing cards. Our early English forefathers, the Puritans, called this deck of cards “The Devil’s Picture Book.” Various European and American governments have enacted laws in the past forbidding the owning of this deck of cards, and later, the playing of these cards in public. Knowing this historical background, should I own or play with these cards?

The Use of Playing Cards

The present-day standard deck of playing cards has never been associated with the church or the Christian home throughout history. It is also directly connected with all types of gambling (which breaks God's ordinance of diligently working for our earnings and carefully using the substance which the Lord has given to us). Playing cards are commonly associated with gambling, casinos, nightclubs, drinking parties, and a type of lifestyle which runs directly contrary to that which is promoted in the Word of God. The danger of "addiction" to card playing is also a sad reality which can be attested to by a large number in our society today.

These thoughts concerning card playing will often provoke the following questions. Are then all forms of amusement or recreation wrong? Don't all forms of amusement have the danger of becoming "addicting"? Is it wrong to play cards if I only do it for "the fun of it"?

In response to these questions, the original English words "amusement" and "recreation" come from "muse" (to meditate) and recreate (to enliven or refresh). To allot some time in our day for "meditating" and for "refreshing" our mind and body is permissible. Rev. Á Brakel wrote that it is permissible to play chess, checkers, or ball - not to waste time, but for the purpose of refreshing our mind and body. Physical exercise for health reasons and other activities for family or group participation and friendship are allowed. However, each of these "meditating" or "refreshing" activities does contain an "addicting" danger. Our thoughts or actions must not center upon these activities. We must not live for these things. We may not give our life for, spend a great deal of time on, or purchase tickets to support others whose lives and occupations are spent on these things. This needs to be especially stressed today in our "sport-and entertainment-sick" society.

Permissible "meditations" or "refreshments" do not include playing with a standard deck of cards. God's Word commands us to flee from that which is associated with evil.

After hearing the history of what is commonly associated with a standard deck of cards, should I be using them?

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22).

"Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good" (Romans 12:9b).

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness" (Proverbs 14:12-13).

~Translated from the Gereformeerde Kerkblad

The Preciousness of the Lord's Day

Rev. Thomas Watson (1620-1686)

We should hold the Christian Sabbath we now celebrate in high veneration. The Jews called the Sabbath “the desire of days, and the queen of days.” This day we must call a “delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable.” Metal that has the king’s stamp upon it is honourable and of great value. God has set His royal stamp upon the Sabbath; it is the Sabbath of the Lord, and this makes it honourable.

We should look upon this day as the best day in the week. What the phoenix is among birds, what the sun is among planets, the Lord’s day is among other days. “This is the day which the Lord hath made.” God has made all the days, but He has blessed this day. As Jacob got the blessing from his brother, so the Sabbath got the blessing from all other days in the week. It is a day in which we converse in a special manner with God. The Jews called the Sabbath “a day of light.” So on this day, the Sun of Righteousness shines upon the soul.

The Sabbath is the market-day of the soul, the cream of time. It is the day of Christ’s rising from the grave and the Holy Ghost’s descending upon the earth. It is perfumed with the sweet odour of prayer, which goes up to heaven as incense. On this day, the manna - which is angels’ food - falls. This is the soul’s festival-day, on which the graces act their part. The other days of the week are most employed about earth, but this day, about heaven; then, you gather straw, but now, pearls. Now Christ takes the soul up into the mount and gives it transfiguring sights of glory. Now He leads His spouse into the wine-cellar and displays the banner of His love (Song of Solomon 2:4). Now He gives her His spiced wine, and the juice of the pomegranate (Song of Solomon 8:2).

The Lord usually reveals Himself more to the soul on this day. The Apostle John was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day. He was carried up on

this day in divine raptures towards heaven. This day a Christian is in the altitudes; he walks with God and takes as it were a turn with Him in heaven. On this day, holy affections are quickened and Satan falls like lightning before the majesty of the Word.

Christ wrought many of His miracles upon the Sabbath; so He does still: dead souls are raised and hearts of stone are made flesh. How highly should we esteem and reverence this day! It is more precious than rubies. God has anointed it with the oil of gladness above its fellows. On the Sabbath, we are doing angels' work; our tongues are tuned to God's praises.

The Sabbath on earth is a shadow and type of the glorious rest and eternal Sabbath we hope for in heaven, when God shall be the temple and the Lamb shall be the light of it (Rev. 21:22-23).

“The clock of life is wound but once,
And no man has the power
To tell just when the hands will stop
At late or early hour.

To lose one's wealth is sad indeed,
To lose one's health is more,
To lose one's soul is such a loss
That no man can restore.

The present only is our own,
So live, love, toil with a will,
Place no faith in “Tomorrow,”
For the Clock may then be still.”

- Rev. Robert H. Smith (1932-2006)