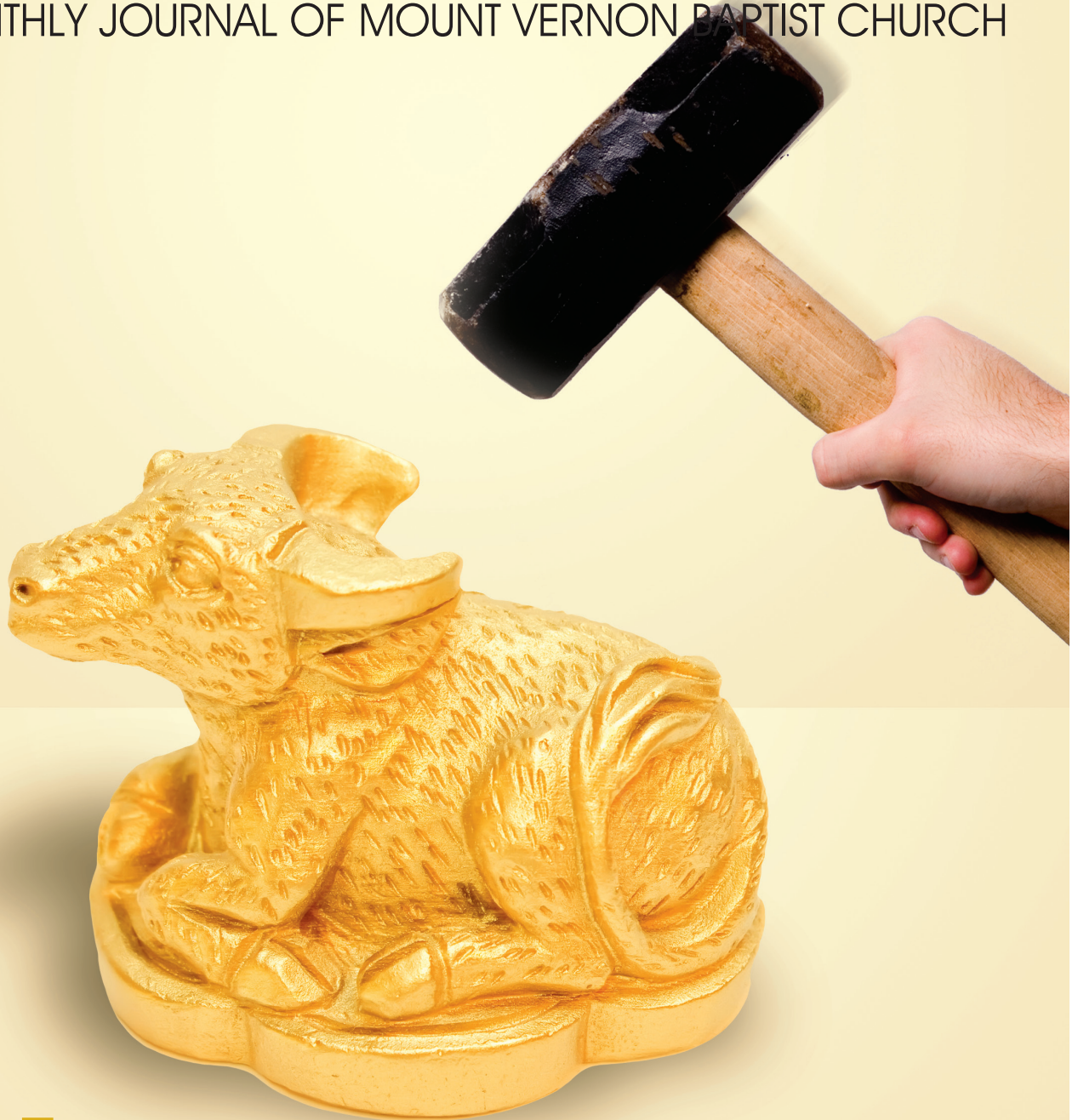


Volume III, Issue 10 \ October 2010

PERSPECTIVE

THE MONTHLY JOURNAL OF MOUNT VERNON BAPTIST CHURCH



Starting the **Christian Life**
START SMASHING IDOLS



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STAFF ▶ **SERMON SCHEDULE**

- October 3** Words on Wealth
- October 10** Words on Friendship
- October 17** Lessons from John: Walk
1 John 1:5-7
 Assistant Pastor: Brad Thayer
- October 24** Words on Family
- October 31** Words on the Heart

▶ **FIGHTER VERSE (Sept. – Dec.)**

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:4-11

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▶ **Ministry Highlight**
 Good Samaritan Health Center

Below is an abbreviated transcript of an interview with Bill Warren, Mount Vernon member and founder and President of The Good Samaritan Health Center, from a recent Sunday evening service.



Aaron Menikoff: Bill, how did you become a Christian?

Bill Warren: I was raised in a Christian home, and, like so many people, when I went off to college, it was a time to either fish or cut bait...I would have to say during this period of time I was more or less an agnostic—What is truth? What is real? Is there anything that we can really believe in? But I became a Christian through the witness of some other guys in my school. They brought the Gospel to me.

I remember one guy told me, “Why don’t you begin reading the New Testament, the book of John.” That stuck with me. About a year later, I pulled out the Bible and started reading it, and then went right back and read Matthew, then all the way through the New Testament. And it was one of those sort of things where in the beginning I wasn’t a believer, but by the time I finished I was. Something happened along the way, but I can’t tell you exactly what it was, when it was, and how it was, just that it happened.

AM: Yeah. God worked through His Word just like John wanted to have happen as he said in John 20. That is so great. You graduated from college, you went to medical school, and you were a practicing physician in Sandy Springs in a private practice?

BW: Yes.

AM: So how did you go from your private practice to founding an inner city, medical ministry—The Good Samaritan Health Center?

BW: Well, I was in a private practice for general pediatrics and pediatric infectious diseases at Sandy Springs Pediatric. After being there for 13 years, I left to get involved in inner city medical ministry in 1995. We first worked out of the old Techwood Baptist Center for a little over 3 years. We then left and formed the Good Samaritan Health Center and started seeing patients there in January of 1999. For me, it was like a journey because I knew even in medical school that I wanted to be involved in some sort of a medical ministry. But it was when I saw one of my former classmates start and run a center very similar to the Good Samaritan Health Center up in Memphis, it was like a light bulb going off and God said, “That’s exactly what I need to be doing.” It then just took time to evolve and for that to birth. And not everyone was encouraging and supportive, but many were.

AM: Could you define the Good Samaritan Health Center?

BW: Our mission statement is: “Spreading Christ’s love through quality healthcare for those in need.” We are trying to address the healthcare needs of those who typically don’t have the traditional access to healthcare that we all enjoy. By providing it at a very affordable, reasonable cost, people come. But we provide healthcare in a Christian way and try to encourage them in the Gospel and their walk with God.

AM: How does Good Samaritan define success?

BW: There are certain benchmarks we use: how many patients you see a day; how many root canals you do; how many people you help control their diabetes and keep their hemoglobin A1C

under 7; things like this. There’s all kinds of ways you can measure. I think the way we measure success more appropriately is whether we are being obedient to God and serving Him the way He has called us to serve with our talents and gifts. So we believe that we’re successful when we take those talents and gifts that are within our stewardship and use them for His glory and His Kingdom.

AM: Bill, you’re a member at Mount Vernon, and we’re so thankful for that. So how can we be serving you?

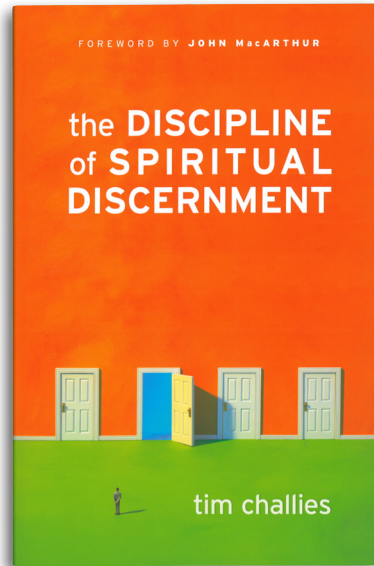
BW: Well, I think Jim Clayton is already trying to do that by encouraging folks to sign up as volunteers. So that’s great; that’s happened. That’s one way, and you came down in person to our prayer room one day.

We have a small prayer room inside the Center where people can pray with both patients and staff. We have a group of volunteers who come at designated times to pray for our patients as well. That’s a great way people can serve.

AM (to congregation): I hope that, if you are able, that you will contact them. And they don’t let anyone do it. You’ve got to present the Gospel and have some willingness to learn and grow in your faith. And that’s wonderful, too. You really demand a lot, and yet it’s very doable. I would strongly encourage you as part of your Christian discipleship, to give some of your time to the Center and certainly your prayers.

AM (to Bill): Brother, I’m going to pray for you, and thank you so much for following God’s leading in founding this Center. We’re going to pray that you would be faithful and we would be faithful with you. Let’s pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you so much for Bill and for all those with whom he is partnering to keep going the Good Samaritan Health Center. We want to be known as believers who love you and believers who express our love for you by loving others. And we know that the Good Samaritan Health Center is seeking to do that, and so we pray that you would grant them success. We pray that they would be able to look at their days and their weeks and their months and their years and see that, by Your grace and for Your glory, they were faithful. We pray that the healthcare offered there would be good, that it would serve those clients well. We pray that those clients would hear the Gospel, and for those that do not know you, that they would repent and believe the Good News, that they would know regardless of what is going on in their body, that you are a God that desires to heal their souls. And so we pray that salvation would ring throughout the corridors of that center. Thank You for the work that You have called Bill to. We pray that You would provide for him and his family; we pray that You would provide the Center with all of the resources that they need to remain faithful in the months and in the years to come. We love You, and we pray all of this in Jesus’ name. Amen. ■



The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment

by Tim Challies

Reviewed by Scott Sullivan

PROVERBS 9:10 TELLS US THAT “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.” We live in a culture where everything seems to be colored in shades of gray. Every day, whether it is on the television, in advertising, in music, in the latest popular book or even in the church, Christians are faced with competing ideas, new perspectives, emerging trends, compromising values and often, tragically enough, counterfeit doctrine. How do we determine what is right and what is wrong? What is truth and what is error? How do we respond and act in response? These questions, amongst others, are what Tim Challies attempts to answer in *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*.

Tim Challies is, in his own words, a “blogger, author, web designer and book reviewer.” Challies has his own blog (www.challies.com) and edits a website called The Discerning Reader (www.discerningreader.com) offering thoughtful reviews of books that would be of interest to Christians. Both of these websites are visited thousands of times a day by Christians, and Challies is a respected authority on the concept of spiritual discernment. In writing *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*, Challies attempts to show that spiritual discernment is, in fact, a discipline like Bible reading and prayer, and that it is a discipline that should be practiced continually by growing Christians. The challenge is for Christians to *think* biblically about all areas of life so that they can *act* biblically in all areas of life (16).

The book begins with a simple call to discernment. In 1 Kings, as King Solomon is offering sacrifices, God appears to him in a dream and tells Solomon that He will give him whatever he asks. Solomon humbly prays for “an understanding mind... that I may discern between good and evil” (1 Kings 3:9). Though we are often taught that Solomon asked for wisdom, Challies points out that God granted him a “wise and discerning mind” (1 Kings 3:12b). Wisdom and discernment are connected, and God granted him both. This teaches us that God values discernment and honors those who seek after it (21).

Challies goes on to show that Scripture describes that a lack of discernment is evidence of spiritual immaturity or backsliding,

as well as demonstrating the benefits and blessings of discernment. Spiritual discernment allows us to keep the gospel central and allows us to guard against error (34).

Chapter two discusses the challenge of discernment, looking at three types of influences that make discernment a particular challenge in our day and in our culture. The internal influence is the sin in our hearts that attempts to draw us away from Christ even as we pursue godliness (39). Spiritual influences are the tactics of Satan who constantly seeks to lead us astray and to deceive us by offering us a counterfeit version of the truth (41). Cultural influences are the ideas of the culture that seek to destroy those who love Christ including things like a secular worldview and low views or lack of respect for God and Scripture. As Christians, we must stand firm against these forces (51).

It is not until the third chapter that Challies actually defines the kind of discernment. Discernment is shown to encompass wisdom, the two being “inexorably connected as with two sides of a single coin” (57). Discernment is wisdom skillfully applied to real-life situations, applying the truths of the Bible to our lives and seeing things through God’s eyes as they really are. More eloquently stated, “Discernment is the skill of understanding and applying God’s Word with the purpose of separating truth from error and right from wrong” (61). It is this definition of spiritual discernment that provides the foundation for the remainder of the book.

Judging is not popular in our culture, and yet Scripture tells us that we are to test everything (1 Thessalonians 5:21). So what are we to judge, and when is judging wrong? These questions get to the heart of discernment, which Challies presents in chapter four. Challies quickly concludes that not all judging is equal (76). Using Scripture, he notes that Christians should not judge others on matters that the Bible does not give explicit instruction nor in matters of conscience (Romans 14:1-4). However, using the Bible as the objective standard of truth, we are commanded to test, to judge, everything that is relevant to the Christian life and faith (83). Challies is careful to clarify that “testing” does not equal “trying.” All teaching we encounter, any decision we

make, leaders, and even our own lives are all areas that should be examined and then approved or rejected in light of Scripture.

The purpose of testing doctrine is to reveal two great categories of understanding: the truth of God and the will of God. Challies unpacks these two categories in chapters five and six. The task of discernment involves separating what is truth from error. Truth is what God is, does, thinks and has revealed of Himself in Scripture, and all that is true flows from Him (94). We can best identify error by knowing truth. When we know what is true about God, we can rightly know His will for our lives. And though we do not seek to know God’s secret will, His revealed will tells us to exercise discernment when we distinguish between choices that are consistent with God’s self-revelation and those that are not (122).

In chapter seven, Challies addresses the issue of discernment as a spiritual gift and concludes that there are Christians who have a special ability to separate truth and error. This gift, like other spiritual gifts, should be used to protect and edify other believers and to protect and unify the local church (134). However, even though not all believers have been given the gift of spiritual discernment, all believers are responsible for what they choose to believe (129) and are to pursue the discipline of discernment (137).

Chapter eight examines the potential dangers inherent in a distorted understanding of discernment. One of these is spending undue time and attention on evil in trying to draw distinctions between what is good and what is evil. When we know what is true, we will more easily be able to discern what is error (144). Other dangers include judging a person or doctrine based on the beliefs of others rather than on Scripture, allowing matters of disputable importance to be elevated to the level of foundational doctrine, stirring up anger and disagreement, and the sin of pride amongst others. Spiritual discernment is a matter of the heart and must be practiced with a pure heart and pure motives (152).

In chapter nine, Challies reviews the requirements that allow a Christian to grow in discernment. Believers are to pursue,

desire, and pray for discernment (156). The proper context for growing in discernment is in a local church, where believers can help others grow in their knowledge and application of Scripture (158). And a believer who wishes to be discerning must be humble before both God and man (159). The life of a discerning believer is found in their obedience to Scripture and in their maturity as Christians.

In the final and longest chapter, Challies provides a practical example of spiritual discernment, by analyzing the suspicious-sounding concept of “forgiving yourself” found in the lyrics of a popular contemporary Christian song. Walking through sixteen practical steps including verifying, praying, clarifying, assessing the issues and one’s conscience, searching and observing Scripture, researching and judging, Challies shows how this concept of self-forgiveness can be discerned to be in error. However, just determining that the concept is in error is not the end. A believer must also hold fast to the truth that our sins are committed against God, and ultimate forgiveness comes only from God. When a doctrine is in error, we must flee from it and substitute instead what is true (182). Challies concludes by noting that in practicing discernment, we can grow and mature in our faith and bring glory to God, and that we must guard the precious deposit of the gospel that has been entrusted to us.

At 184 pages, I found this book to be a very easy read. Challies does an excellent job keeping the reader engaged with real-life examples, and he fully supports his arguments with Scripture. Challies not only presents the concept of the discipline of discernment, but also provides practical examples in how to develop and practice spiritual discernment. The book also includes an appendix of useful resources for further study. I would agree wholeheartedly with John MacArthur who states in the Forward to the book that “*The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*...should be required reading not only for church leaders, but for all sober-minded laypeople as well.” I would encourage anyone desiring to learn more about spiritual discernment to begin with this book. ■



Starting the Christian Life

START SMASHING IDOLS

to damage another family's life. We have our own sin to consider as well. We can drive others away with our sinful words. Consider Proverbs 24:9, "The schemes of folly are sin, and men detest a mocker." More than one marriage has been ripped apart because of sinful words. Every human life is affected by sin. Like a wave that will inevitably make it to the shore sin is sure to impact our lives.

What effect has sin had in your life? The answer is usually messy. We have all, at one time or another, felt the consequences of another person's sin. Think of the child killed by a drunk driver. That driver's sin was not bottled up for his own consumption but was uncorked

I learned as a little boy how to get rid of weeds. It isn't enough to grab the leaves and pull. You'll just rip the top off the plant, and it will come back again. The only effective way to get rid of a weed is to get rid of the root. If the root is alive, the weed will return. If the root is killed or removed, the weed is gone. And most weeds have long roots, and they are firmly embedded in the soil. They don't come out easily.

Sin is like a weed. It can be attractive, but it cannot be controlled. The root must be killed. If you attack sin at the surface level, it will simply grow back. It has to be addressed at the heart level. To overcome sin in our lives we have to discover its root. The Bible calls the root of sin, idolatry. Therefore, to understand our sin and its consequences we have to understand idolatry.

"We resemble what we revere"

It is not difficult to find or to understand idolatry in the Old Testament. It is prohibited quite clearly in Exodus 20:4, "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God." In the second commandment Israel is told not to make substitutes for the true God. In that sense, the second commandment is the logical conclusion of the first, "You shall have no other gods before me." To make an idol of stone or wood, to bow down to it and honor it, is to say, in effect, "You are my god, and I will serve you."

It is difficult for us in the twenty-first century, western world to appreciate the temptation to revere an object. We'll return to this idea in a moment. For now it is important to understand that the ancients bowed down to statuettes. God denounced this idolatry. He sent a prophet named Habakkuk to Israel to condemn the practice as vile:

¹⁸Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. ¹⁹Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life!' Or to lifeless stone, 'Wake up!' Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it. ²⁰But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him (Habakkuk 2:18-20).

Bowing down to idols is obviously ludicrous. They are perishable—made of wood or stone. They are lifeless. You can speak to an idol all day long, but it will never respond. Putting one's faith, hope, and confidence in an idol simply makes no sense.

The nations surrounding Israel used idols in their worship. But the LORD of Israel allowed no such nonsense. In fact, when describing how Israel received the Ten Commandments, Moses made clear that God's message was not transmitted through an idol; God spoke to his people directly: "You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice." No form would do justice to God. So whether it was worshipping the true God in the form of an idol or worshipping a false god—idolatry was prohibited among God's people.

G. K. Beale of Wheaton College wrote an excellent book entitled, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry*. In it he points to Isaiah 6 as a "foundational example" of the temptations and dangers of idolatry. In this chapter, a man named Isaiah is commissioned by God to be a prophet to his people. Isaiah lived in Jerusalem in the 8th century BC. He received a call from God in about 740 BC. This began a forty-year career of prophecy. Many would reject his message. But Isaiah persevered. His perseverance was rooted in a vision of God. Isaiah was permitted

to see the holiness of God. At first, Isaiah trembled, "Woe to me...I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty" (6:5). But eventually his trembling turned into determination. God would have him go. So Isaiah dutifully responded, "Here am I. Send me."

But here's the problem. God tells Isaiah that the people will not listen. Isaiah will preach to a people whose hearts are so hardened that not even Isaiah's words will change them. Instead, Israel will listen to Isaiah and their hearts will be hardened all the more. Beale nicely summarizes how preposterous this sounds:

If God appeared to us and said, "When you preach your sermon or give your Bible study or lecture to your theology students or share the gospel with someone, I want you to harden the people's hearts in doing so, in order that they won't be saved but destroyed." If God appeared to us that way, I am sure we would either seek counsel or we might keep reading the Scriptures and look for another word from the Lord. However, Isaiah did not. What is going on here?

Israel is being judged for years of idolatry. For years they turned their back on God. They rejected his message. They spurned his love. Now, God has come to them in holy justice. His patience with that generation has come to an end. Thus, here is what Isaiah is told to do:

Go and tell this people: "Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving." Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed (6:9-10).

Isaiah is charged by God to speak a word of definitive judgment to Israel. But what does this have to do with idolatry? To help us understand, Beale calls our attention to the nature of the judgment. First, Isaiah's listeners will be blind and deaf. Though they have ears to hear, they won't *truly* hear; they won't properly understand. Though they have eyes to see, they won't *truly* see; they won't perceive Truth. Beale notes that throughout Isaiah, Israel is charged with being blind and deaf (Isa. 42:17-20; 43:8; 44:8-19). Why is Israel charged with being blind and deaf and judged with chronic blindness and deafness? For an answer, Beale calls our attention to Psalm 115:4-6. About the idols of Israel, the Psalmist wrote:

But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.

The judgment on Israel on display in Isaiah 6 is that God will turn them over to what they truly love. They will be blind as the idols they serve are blind. They will be deaf as the idols they worship are deaf. They have sought idols with all of their heart so God will give them their heart's desire. The psalmist proclaimed, "Those who make [idols] will be like them, and so will all who trust them." This is exactly what is happening. God is being true to his word. As Beale put it,

The principle for them and for us is: *we resemble what we revere, either for ruin or restoration*. What God's people had revered in Isaiah's time, they had come to be like, and this likeness was spiritually destructive to them...This is an expression of that well-known proverbial principle that

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Prov 14:12; 16:25). Their punishment was ironically patterned after their sin: You like idols? If so, then you are going to become like your idols, and this likeness will devastate you.

A poisonous exchange

Is it any wonder that when Paul writes to the church in Rome to help them understand the devastation of sin, he uses the same idea we find in Isaiah. Here is the ludicrous end of sin:

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and *exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images* made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles (Rom 1:21-23).

Do you see the poisonous exchange? In nature and preeminently in God’s Word we see the glory of the immortal God. He is unlike anything and anyone. As sinners we would rather replace this God for images we can touch and taste and fully understand.

But the writers of the New Testament do not limit this poisonous exchange to “images made to look like mortal man and birds and

As SINNERS we would rather REPLACE GOD for IMAGES we can TOUCH and TASTE and FULLY UNDERSTAND

animals and reptiles.” That would be too easy. There were many, even in Jesus’ day, who were idolaters and yet never bowed the knee to an object of wood or stone. They were still idolaters because idolatry is a matter of the heart. Take Colossians 3:5 as an example, “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.” Greed is a heart condition. It is idolatry. It is a reflection of a heart that has exchanged the glory of the immortal God for homes, cars, and retirement accounts. Our hearts yearn for money more than for God thinking money will provide more than God. We are duped into a poisonous exchange.

Imagine a drug dealer coming up to you in a dark alley. He sees that you are healthy, he sees you are wealthy, and he can tell you are down. He comes up with a smile on his face with an offer you will find hard to turn down. For a few dollars, he can make you happy. Just let go of your money and he will give you a substance that will make all your problems go away. Are you willing to make the exchange? Are you willing to exchange a few dollars for happiness? If you *truly* think it will make you happy, you might do it. But it is a poisonous exchange. It is a lie to think you are only losing a few dollars. The truth is you are losing your freedom. The more drugs you buy the more you will serve the drugs. Even when they fail to give you happiness, even when you know they will hurt you, you will come back for more and more and more. This is a poisonous exchange. You bought a momentary lift but it cost everything.

And so Paul writes, “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature.” Put to death those things that will rob

you every day, every second. Kill them. You think that they will please you, but they won’t. These idols will smash you. Like an addict serving cocaine the greedy serve money. But idolatry goes beyond greed. Idols are not limited to money. An idol is whatever you exalt in place of the Triune God. B. S. Rosner offered these important reflections:

The fundamental question of theology, “What do we mean by ‘God’?”, can be answered from a variety of angles by exploring God’s various relations to the world and to ourselves. Ironically, the study of idolatry also gives us some insight into the nature of the true God. What constitutes a god? Martin Luther’s answer, as he reflected on the first commandment of his large catechism, was “whatever your heart clings to and relies upon, that is your God; trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and idol.” We wish to confirm this view, but also to emphasize love and service: a god is that which one loves, trusts and serves above all else.

Many in ancient Israel had hearts that clung to idols of wood and stone. They became deaf and blind—just like the idols they worshiped. In the first century, there were many who fell head over heels in love with images of God they had made. They became as senseless as these images. “Therefore God gave them

over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with on another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.” These “created things” go beyond idols of wood and stone, these “created things” include whatever our hearts cling to and rely upon. These “created things” include whatever “one loves, trusts and serves above all else.”

“Whatever your heart clings to and relies upon”

This isn’t mere theology we are thinking about now, it is the difference between life and death. The fact of the matter is, we all make idols—all of us. We manufacture them with relentless skill. We are not just capable idol-makers, we are excellent. Our idols are so subtle, so smooth, hardly anyone knows they are there. But we know they are there. They grab our attention. When we least expect it they poke their heads around the corner. When our thoughts or our eyes wander our idols come into full view—sometimes for a second, sometimes for day. When fed, these idols grow stronger and more powerful. When starved they slowly die. In this world, this side of Jesus’ return, idols will persist. Daily we will be asked to make that poisonous exchange. The pathway to refusing the exchange begins with recognizing what our hearts are tempted to cling to and rely upon.

Ed Welch, a Christian counselor, speaks bluntly to the power of idolatry in our lives:

The object of your affection, which was once only a line of powder, a bottle, or underwear models in the daily paper, morphed into an idol. It had its own sacred place in your life, and you worshiped it whenever you could. This idol, however, drained the life out of you...

When you devote yourself to anything other than the true God, it will eventually betray you. It will make promises, but it won’t deliver on them. Gradually, it will corrupt

everything around you and hurt both you and other people.

What is your heart tempted to cling to and rely upon? This is your idol, your god—the root of your sin. To dig that root out, the god(s) of your life must be identified and replaced by the One who is worthy of being clung to and relied upon.

The image that comes to my mind when I think about idolatry is the Indiana Jones movie where the adventurer finds himself in the jungle standing before a golden idol. He wants to steal the idol from an ancient temple but he knows the idol has been placed on an ancient booby-trap. If he moves it the trap will be triggered. Indiana Jones is prepared. He’s brought a sack of sand to trick the booby-trap. He’ll simply grab the idol, replace it with the sack and be off to glory and fame. He makes the exchange, but it doesn’t work! The booby-trap knows the difference. The sack is either too heavy or too light. Either way, it doesn’t matter, Indiana Jones must run for his life.

Many of us try to replace our god with sacks that are either too heavy or too light. We try to dislodge our idol with church attendance. But that won’t work. Church attendance is important but it will never meet the needs our god met. We try to dislodge our idol with family. If we invest more in our spouses or our kids we think our idols will disappear. But they won’t. The best family is ill-suited to fill the God-spaced hole in our hearts. The only way to defeat idolatry, to root out sin in our lives, is to replace it with Someone worth clinging to and relying upon—Jesus Christ himself. Beale said we resemble what we revere. We fight idolatry by revering Jesus Christ.

“Of ourselves we cannot do it”

In 1656 a Puritan named John Owen published a book entitled, *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*. Owen mined Scripture to discover how believers can put to death sin in our lives. He took Romans 8:13 as his start, “For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death [mortify] the misdeeds of the body, you will live.” Only a believer, Owen argued, can put sin to death. You cannot put sin to death yourself, Christ must do it, and Christ is only at work in the lives of believers. “Mortification of any sin,” wrote Owen, “must be by a supply of grace. Of ourselves we cannot do it.”

Owen taught that we, as believers, can expect help from Christ. We are not alone in our sin and will not be left alone. Christ will

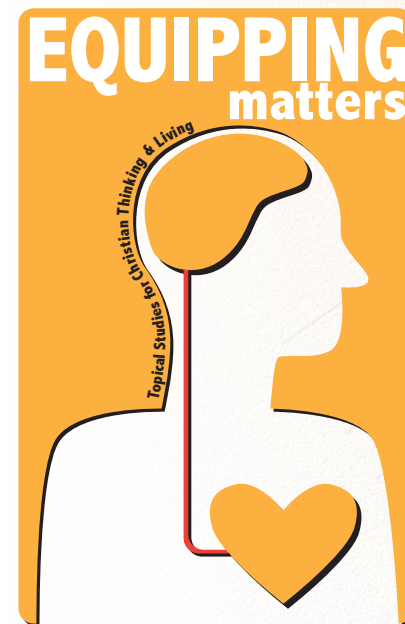
help. But how do we know this? How do we know that when the evil of idolatry crashes into our lives we can turn to Christ and trust he will not let us down? Owen directs us to the only sure and certain hope: Jesus’ death. This passage is lengthy and hard to read—but worth the effort:

Mortification of sin is peculiarly from the death of Christ. It is one peculiar, yea, eminent end of the death of Christ, which shall assuredly be accomplished by it. He died to destroy the works of the devil [1 John 3:8]. Whatever came upon our natures by his first temptation, whatever receives strength in our persons by his daily suggestions, Christ died to destroy it all. “He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). This was his aim and intention (wherein he will not fall) in his giving himself for us. That we might be freed from the power of our sins, and purified from all our defiling lusts, was his design. “He gave himself for the church, that he might sanctify and cleanse it; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27). And this, by virtue of his death, in various and several degrees, shall be accomplished. Hence our washing, purging, and cleansing is everywhere ascribed to his blood (1 John 1:7; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 1:5). That being sprinkled on us “purges our consciences from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb. 9:14). This is that we aim at, this we are in pursuit of—that our consciences may be purged from dead works, that they may be rooted out, destroyed, and have place in us no more. This shall certainly be brought about by the death of Christ.

Alone we cannot smash the idols in our lives, we cannot prevent that poisonous exchange to take place every day. We need Christ. More specifically, we need the power of his death and resurrection.

Dear Christian, new or old, as you struggle with sin, don’t give up the fight. A day is coming when the struggle will end. In the meantime, get to the root. What is your heart clinging to and relying upon? Admit the root of your sin. Confess it to God and to a brother or sister in Christ. Then, like a thirsty man runs to a fountain for water, run to the cross of Christ. Remember, “of ourselves we cannot do it.” ■

~ Aaron Menikoff



Equipping Matters: Topical Studies for Christian Thinking & Living is a series of studies offered Wednesday nights to change the way we think and live. Come and learn every Wednesday night at 6:30 pm. Below is the course schedule through the end of the year.

| | september | | | | | october | | | | november | | | | december | | | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|---|----|----|----|---------|----|----|----|----------------|----|----|----|----------------|---|----|----|----|
| | 1 | 8 | 15 | 22 | 29 | 6 | 13 | 20 | 27 | 3 | 10 | 17 | 23 | 1 | 8 | 15 | 22 | 29 |
| BASICS | Christianity Explained | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| BIBLE | | | | | | | | | | Bible Overview | | | | Bible Overview | | | | |
| HISTORY/THEOLOGY | Church History I | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| GROWTH | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| FAMILIES | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| WOMEN | Women's Group | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| MEN | Men's Group | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

October 2010

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|---|---|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|------------------------|----|----|----|-------------|----|----|------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 |
| | | 6:00 pm Lord's Supper | | | | | | | 12:00 pm Special Church in Conference | | | | | | | | 12:00 pm RW&A Luncheon | | | | 7:00 pm USO | | | 4:30 pm Church in Conference | | | | | | |
| | | 10:30 am Guest Preacher: Brad Thayer | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

EVENTS

Churchwide

October 5 6:00 pm Lord's Supper
We encourage members to examine their hearts and relationships with one another in preparation for this celebration of Christ's death and resurrection.

October 12 12:00 pm Church in Conference
There will be specially-called Church in Conference to vote on the proposed Constitution and Transition Plan immediately following the morning service.

October 24 4:30 pm Church in Conference
All members are encouraged to attend the quarterly church in conference where we will discuss matters of membership, finances, and more.

Missions

October 22 7:00 pm USO
This missions fund raiser for our orphans ministry in the Ukraine includes dinner, a silent auction, live music, and lots of fun. (See ad on bottom-right.)

BIRTHDAYS

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1 Renee Drexler | 16 Inez McDonald |
| 2 Patty Stanfield | Kelly Poole |
| 2 Buddy Ennis | 17 Tommy McNeese |
| Mary Anne Knowles | Carolyn Roberts |
| 3 Barbara Bear | 18 Scott Houser |
| Parks Houser | Ryan Lambert |
| Martha Morgan | Mark Mosby |
| Hanna Paxton | 19 Pat Orchard |
| Jerry Sexton | Phyllis Tatum |
| 4 Bo Hamby | 20 Paige Clayton |
| Aaron Menikoff | Stephanie Morris |
| Happy Perkins | Michael Varzi |
| 5 Chip Cofer | 21 Marilyn Early |
| Evelyn Wells | Lark Ivester |
| 6 Kaylee Morgan | Richard Sweet |
| Don Rozema | Jeanette Wallace |
| 7 Gerry Chatham | 22 Megan Gryder |
| Carey Louthan | 23 Rebecca Long |
| 9 Patrick Peon | 24 Rebecca Reagan |
| David Scott | 25 Rhonda Hatley |
| 10 J. C. Poole | Dawn Lamprecht |
| 11 Jim Bryant | Jerrie Woodward |
| Ed Goodgame | 26 Nick Birmingham |
| Becky King | Chad Zimmerman |
| 12 Margaret Boomhower | 28 Julia Borchers |
| 13 Betty Lowndes | 29 Suzanne Timmons |
| Ron Williams | Daniell Yancey |
| 15 Pete Vanderzee | 31 Wynette Fleming |



Knowing MVBC: The Membership Class is a four session course that introduces you to life at Mount Vernon, covering the following topics:
 Knowing Our Commitments: Church Covenant
 Knowing Our Beliefs: Statement of Faith
 Knowing Our Disciplines: Personal Discipleship
 Knowing Our Structure: Nuts & Bolts
 Anyone interested in membership or knowing more about life at Mount Vernon is invited to *Knowing MVBC: The Membership Class*. All four sessions will be offered Sunday, November 14 (session 1 at 9:15 and sessions 2-4 starting at 12:00). Lunch will be provided. You may sign up on the edge of the bulletin or by contacting the church office at 404-255-3133.



OCTOBER 22, 2010

7:00 PM TICKETS: \$10*

* \$10 if registered ahead of time. Tickets will be \$15 at the door.

*Authentic Multi-Course
Ukrainian Dinner*

*Silent Auction
7:30 pm - 10:00 pm*



Mount Vernon

BAPTIST CHURCH

850 Mount Vernon Highway NW
Sandy Springs, GA 30327