

“Turning the Corner On Discernment”

Recovering the Art of Discernment

Rev. Bob Cummings

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Bob: It is great to be with you guys again. And coming through the rain, I don't know where you're driving from. But this time of year I'm always extra cautious because of the four-legged creatures that seem to pop out of the bush. And my philosophy has always been that on rainy days the deer are not as active. And so they're not as active but we should be active. That's just—

Don Maurer: Rainy days and Fridays always get me down. *(Laughter)*

Ted Wood: That applies to me as well. *(Laughter)*

Bob: At least somebody is awake and not hitting the snooze button this morning. *(Laughter)* That's great. Well guys, let me pray as we begin.

Gracious heavenly Father, we are just delighted to be able to arrive this morning. You have lifted our bodies and you are lifting our spirits and awakening us both in mind and in spirit to Your presence. Enfold us in Your truth, Father. We come before You, seeking You and seeking Your presence in our lives, that You would speak to us today, this morning. This is what we ask most of all as we begin our day with You and with Your word and with each other. We pray that You would bring Your Spirit into this place to be with us and to guide us in the fullness of God in three Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—now and forever. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Bob: So guys, I know I've been kind of challenging you on some really fundamental things about how you have lived or are living your lives. And I say that because in my recent experience I have gone to a lot of different churches across the country. And as I go there I'm trying to help them to find some grounding in leadership, and preparing them for the next pastor to come along the way. And one of the things I've discovered pretty regularly is that we sit down with leaders in the church. And I say to them, “Well what is God doing here?” And there are crickets. And no one seems to know.

Don Maurer: Crickets?

Bob: Crickets. There's nothing; there's no answer. And these are mature men and women in the Lord who are faithful prayers and readers of God's word. And I'm kind of stymied by that, because what that communicates to me is that we are profoundly absent from the experience that God is who God says He is. And knowing who God is is fundamental to our understanding of how to live the life that we want to live in this world.

And so what I've begun to share with you is the challenge that we live our lives in many respects absent from the reality of God. We speak about the reality of God, but we don't dwell in the reality of God. We live as it happened at the Fall, in a distant or non-relational engagement with God, and it affects pretty much every part of our lives. And one of the most significant places where it affects men is in the decision-making process, because as men one of the things that we love to-do—and are capable of doing, by the way and still able to do—is to make decisions. But we're not able to make discerning decisions.

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And there are a lot of reasons for that; they are all related to the Fall. But some of them include one of the things we’ve talked about: that we are tuning our ears to other voices that are affecting and an effect on our lives in sin. We listen to those voices that will ultimately lead to our destruction, even if we don’t want to admit that at the time, because they appear to us to have our best current interests at stake. But in fact they will lead us to destruction.

We talked about that last week. We look for places where we think God will be, in the great places. And we miss the fact that God can regularly speak to us in the stillness and smallness of our lives, which is really significant because our lives are mostly not great, but they’re small.

We talked about the fact that we sometimes listen to the voices of popularity, things that we think ought to be. And so we engage in all of those challenges. And fundamental to all of that is this great question that is actually a philosophical question. It’s the great epistemological question: How do I know what I know?

And of course, if you dig into that philosophically, you engage in a self-focused perspective. How do I know what I know? Well, it’s about my sensory perception. It’s about my accumulation of experience. It’s about all of those kinds of things, including the voices that surround me and speak to my life that I kind of value and place in authority along the way.

But there’s something fundamentally difficult about that and distant from that, because it is separate from the reality of God. And so we have to come back to this assumption: that sin has interfered with all of our daily lives. And in fact it has given to us knowledge without relationship. And that relationship is knowledge that is eternal. So without that relationship we have knowledge that is earthly, that is temporal.

And so when we ask what God is doing, we are asking the question that is removed from everything that we are accustomed to. And I know I’ve challenged you in some basic kinds of assumptions that you’ve had about your lives, because you live in a rational world. And there’s nothing wrong with rationality; we’re going to talk about that in a moment. But the rationality needs to be not temporal in orientation, but in fact eternal.

And so when Paul writes to the Romans, *“Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind,”* what he’s talking about is something not about a completely brain-oriented life. He’s talking about a life that is in fact directly related to what I gave to you early, in the definition: that we think with our hearts, not just with our minds, because what our hearts do is (that they) create the relational orientation.

And so the question that is raised—the great epistemological question—is how do we know what we know? We know because our hearts are oriented in a vertical orientation rather than a horizontal orientation.

So what I’m going to do with you today is to turn the corner with you in that perspective. And one of the great tools that can help us to do that is a small passage in Philippians: Philippians 4:8.

John Gratner: Bob, before you get there,--

Bob: Yes?

John: Would you expound some more on what you mean by the orientation here of God and of man?

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Bob: Yes. So in a rational, epistemological orientation we’re looking at only a horizontal perspective—that which affects me in this temporal realm. We cannot know anything beyond what we experience.

Now that does not mean that what we experience is fundamentally bad. It just means that it is flawed and that it is not whole. There is a wealth of knowledge that’s available to us that is not just in this temporal orientation, this moment or this past perspective.

John: And you’re saying that was lost in the Fall.

Bob: It was lost in the Fall.

John: So where was it restored?

Bob: Ah! It was restored through Christ.

John: Right. But again, in the context of humanity, as everyone approaches their own humanity back to the Garden, where is this restored?

Bob: So it can’t be restored unless Christ brings us back into the relationship with God.

John: Okay.

Bob: Does that make sense?

John: It does. It’s just that they can’t hear the voice of God in the Garden because sin entered the world.

Bob: Yes, correct.

John: So how did they hear the voice of God when He was looking for them and said, “*Where are you?*”

Bob: Because God breaks through that orientation.

John: Okay.

Bob: Just in the same way that God, sending His Son, breaks through the orientation to re-establish the relationship.

John: I’m not challenging any of those things. We just have to talk about it, and it kind of obfuscates the whole thing.

Bob: It does. So I appreciate that. One of the great things that I think I put in one of your earlier outlines is that the way to even conceive that there is a problem is that you first have to be touched by the Holy Spirit—God’s orientation—saying, “I need you to look up rather than to look around. I’m going to move into your heart.” So rather than thinking with our minds, which is just a gathering of huge amounts of information, God is transforming our hearts. And He does that only by a relationship with Christ Jesus.

So the transformation of our minds happens when our hearts are transformed first. And you know, there is a lot of theological discourse on this. Do we decide for Christ? Or does the Holy Spirit work in us prior to our decision for Christ? I’m an old school Reformed guy, so I’m going to say that the Holy Spirit moves in us even before we are able to recognize Him. God speaks to us in terms of remolding our hearts and placing Himself inside of us to draw us closer to Him. But that’s my theological bent.

Ted: Well, it’s correct. (*Laughter*) I was listening to a podcast from John Piper the other day. He made a very interesting statement. He said that in his study he had not found the idea in the New Testament of making a decision for Christ, a decision for God or a decision for faith, the word there for decision or a choice, a relationship or me choosing God in the New Testament. It’s shocking to hear that; I was surprised to hear that. Of course I can’t forego my prejudices. (*Laughter*)

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Bob: Yes, Don?

Don Bishop: You know, from what you were talking about last week, it’s important that we have a good Biblical definition for the heart, I think that what comes to our minds is our Western cultures’ idea of the heart, which is emotions. But it’s not in the Bible..

Bob: It’s not that way in the Bible.

Don: I’ve been researching it, and there are over 700 references in the Bible to the heart. And it tells us something different from what we’re accustomed to. The heart in the Bible refers truly to our essence, our whole being—the mind, everything. And that’s why there’s so much reference to it, both in the Old and the New Testament. When God changes our hearts He has to change our minds, or whatever it is—our thoughts, our emotions, whatever.

Bob: That’s correct. It’s interesting that modern Western thought equates the heart with emotion. That’s not typically how even the Greeks conceived of the heart. They gave the idea of emotions connected to the bowels. *(Laughter)* So the heart had a different function altogether, separate from emotions.

Gary Dunbar: For a lot of people, if you’re under great stress you get diarrhea. *(Laughter)*

Ted: Thomas Cranmer in the sixteenth century had a prayer that went, “*For we beseech You by the bowels of Christ.*”

Don Maurer: That took a lot of intestinal fortitude. *(Laughter)*

Ted: Thomas Cranmer was one of the great martyrs of the faith.

Don: I know, I know.

Bob: So here’s how we think about this. As long as we pick the right education for our children, go to the right church, watch the right movies, vote for the right candidate, we won’t have to face a deeper truth about how easily our hearts are led astray. Our choices are right, and so we convince ourselves that we are right as well. And so we then focus our decision-making processes. And what happens in that process is that we’ve chosen what’s right for our kids, for ourselves, for our movies, for our practices along the way. And so we don’t ask the question: Is that what God is doing? Is God in this thing that I’m participating in? Or in fact is God in me? And that’s the deeper fundamental question.

So when we come to the realization, as Paul does, that God is in fact in us, he’s writing this great encouraging letter to the Philippians. (These are) people who have embraced him, yet challenged him and yet support him along the way. Philippians is a wonderful letter; it’s just such an encouraging letter.

Paul says in chapter 4: “*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise—think about these things.*” And what Paul is encouraging us to do in this little phraseology is to transform our rational approach to things in a way that involves the heart orientation, or the heart re-orientation, that in our decision-making process will always lead us to good discernment because it will always lead us back to God.

Let me say that again. In our decision making Paul says that if we re-orient the process to how we know what we know, and bring it into the context of not just a rational thought process, but in fact a transformed heart process that realigns us with the presence of God, then these things will help us to know for sure where God is and what God is doing, so

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that we can be a part of what God is doing. And that, brothers, is a very powerful understanding, because if we are part of what God is doing, what happens to our lives?

Don Bishop: We miss God’s leading.

Bob: Yeah, we miss God’s leading. But if we are re-oriented to what God is doing, what happens to our lives? We become less anxious. We are dwelling in a place of peace. We sit in the place of abundance, because what happens is that our lives are re-connected and re-oriented to the reality of who God is in this world and in us. And so it doesn’t matter then necessarily—though we’ll talk about how it will—what’s going on in the world around us. We are able to delve deeply into things of great significance.

I’m going to try to get to a place, but we may not get there till next week, because what we’re going to do today is to just open the doorway to a couple of these words today. And your assignment is to delve more deeply into the rest of the words for next week. And so I’m just going to give you an example of some of those today.

What Paul says are really discerning words. So when you have a decision to make, you can ask yourself these questions. First of all, for example, *is this true?* And it doesn’t matter what the question is. You ask the question: Is this true? Because what does that question really drive us to?

Michael Rush: That there is such a thing as truth.

Bob: That there is such a thing as truth, that there is something that is what? Eternal, invariable, immovable, right? What is that leading us to? Who God is.

Luke 5 is this wonderful story of Jesus in a room with a whole lot of people. I’m going to read beginning with verse 17.

“On one of those days He was teaching. And there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Him to heal.

“And behold, they were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed. And they sought to bring him and to lay him before Jesus. But finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles in the midst before Jesus. And when He saw their faith, He said, ‘Man, your sins are forgiven.’

“And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, ‘Who is this that speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’

“And when Jesus perceived their question He answered them, ‘Why do you question in your hearts? For which is easier: to say ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say ‘Rise and walk?’ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,’ He said to the man who was paralyzed, ‘I say to you: Rise, take up your bed, and go home.’ And immediately he rose before them, and took up the mat on which he lay, and went home, glorifying God. And amazement seized them all. And they all glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, ‘We have seen strange things today.’”

Now my question to you is: at the moment in which the four men brought their friend through the roof and brought him before Jesus, what did Jesus do? He discerned the truth of what was in front of Him. He looked at the man and said, “What is true about this moment? Is this man here to be healed? Or is this man here to be forgiven?”

And of course everybody said, “Well he’s here to be healed; that’s the reality. I mean, look at him. He can’t move. You’re doing great healing things, Jesus, Jesus. We’ve brought him to be healed.”

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And Jesus discerned the truth, which was what? This man has no relationship with God. And the truth was that Jesus wanted to bring him into a relationship with God. So the truth is all about bringing us into the reality of who God is: that He forgives.

I’ve heard it said—and I think it’s true—that we are living in an age not that has too much information, as we’re inundated with information, but too little (of a) shared reality. We have millions of people in the world, millions and millions of shared realities that have a population of one—me. And so my reality is what I perceive the truth to be. And the truth is not in my reality; it’s not in my personal reality.

So one of the things we have to recognize significantly about whatever is true is that it is not personal. It’s not personal; it’s beyond the personal. There’s a second part of understanding truth—

Don Maurer: I’m sorry, Bob. Could you elaborate on that a little bit?

Bob: Yep.

Don: Because you said that if it’s true it’s not personal.

Bob: Truth is not personal. We can personally claim the truth, but it’s not ours alone.

Don: Okay, so it’s not private.

Bob: It’s not private.

Don: Okay.

Ted: The basis of truth is not personal. We believe that; atheists believe something different.

Don: Okay. Thank you.

Bob: So there are a million realities. Everybody says, “Well, this is true.” And an example of this—a really powerful example of this—is happening in the Middle East. I mean, just even look in Pittsburgh. There were protests of two different realities that both claim to be true. And neither of them can be true. I mean, when that happens they are sort of mutually exclusive. And the law of logic says that if they are mutually exclusive they can’t be true at all.

Ted: For me there is one reality with two truths about it, because to me it’s the accurate construction of reality; that’s how it functions.

Bob: So I’m going to grab that and I’m going to say that we can consent to that only partially. Here’s what I mean by that. As long as it leads us back to God and who God is, we can consent to that. But if it’s something other than that,--

Ted: As a Christian that would be my position.

Bob: Okay. So here’s another part of that picture that will help. What do we know about God? We know, for example, that God created this world. So there is something about the physical reality that should also lead us to God. And so for example there are things that are true because God put them in place at the beginning of creation.

An example: For those of you who are good scientists there are laws of thermodynamics. There are laws of physics. We call them laws because they do not vary. They are evident and grounded in the observable created world.

But they are not true in themselves. They are true because of the world that was created for us to observe. And so in a very real sense the visible world will help to attest to the reality of God.

Is this true? Well, does it match a law of thermodynamics? Why do we have that law? Because God gave us that law, and it will lead us back to God.

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And you say, “Okay. Well, what does that mean, Bob?” Well it means that there are some things like this little device in my house. It has a little 0 on the button. And sometimes it has a little / on it. It’s the on and off switch. It’s a binary system; it’s on or it’s off. What’s true about the physical reality is, it’s on or it’s off. It’s connected or it’s disconnected. But why do we know that? Because of the way God created the world.

Now to your point, Ted. The part that’s difficult is that some of the physical realities are not transferable in truth. Here’s what I mean by that. And we have to be cautious because if these things do not lead us inevitably back to God but lead us to an unending question, then they are not true.

Here is how this works in a very practical way. In a binary system it’s on or off. And early on in computer technology it was represented by a 0 or a 1: simple orientation. But in mathematics—a different orientation of the physical realities—what’s the difference between 0 and 1?

Don Rimbey: One.

Bob: An infinite reality. There is an infinite set of numbers between 0 and 1, and that matters. It is without completion. And so what happens in today’s structure is that we transform the reality of mathematics into saying that there is an infinite reality of truth which is not transferable, because it is only oriented in one reality, and that is a physical reality. But it will never lead us to a vertical reality, to the orientation of God. And so it cannot necessarily be true.

And so if you are a true mathematics guy or gal, there are now new symbols to represent this uncertainty. It’s no longer true; it’s uncertain.

John: And they use letters: l, g, b, t, q, i, a. *(Laughter)*

Ted: But they actually live as though they’re certain.

John: Yes.

Ted: We live as if they’re certain. No matter how many points are between 0 and 1, all the points still add up to 1. And we live that way.

Bob: That’s only in my reality. *(Laughter)*

Ted: That applies to everybody. If you would ask them the question they would say that everybody has to live in their own reality somehow. They can’t just throw it up in the air and say—

Bob: And so when you live here—to get to your point, Ted—you live in a place of perpetual anxiety, of incompleteness. And so when you ask the question “Is it true?”, is this going to lead me to a place of perpetual anxiety? Or is this going to lead me to a place of grounding?

Don Maurer: Grounding.

Bob: Grounding, on or off. Will it lead me to God, or will it lead me to the reality of this sinful world? Is this decision that I’m making true because it will lead me to God, or will it lead me to understand that it’s all about me?

John: I’m sorry. This may not make a whole lot of sense, but I’m going to ask it anyway. The second line at the bottom of this handout: what does it say? The 0 and the 1 and the infinite distance between the two? Why is that there? The 0 is on the left and the 1 is on the right.

Bob: That has 0 on the left and 1 on the right. Why do the numbers exist?

John: Sure, that’s a fair question.

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Bob: We're trying to make sense of observable reality.

John: Sure. Why does that exist?

Bob: Because we're uncertain of who God is.

John: Okay. Why does that exist?

Bob: Because we're uncertain of who we are.

John: Okay. Why is that? *(Laughter)*

Bob: Our uncertainty is based on the fact that sin is dominating our lives.

John: Okay. Why is that? I'm not denying that there is an infinite set of numbers between 0 and 1. But we're also saying that God created these laws. So God created the zeroes and the ones and everything in between them. So why does that exist?

Bob: To lead us back to Him as the Creator.

John: Hold on. Is it safe to say that about the zeroes and the ones? I'm not trying to be funny about this, but—

Bob: No, no. Again, it's—

John: So the 0 and the 1 creates confusion. Maybe this will say it better. You say that there is confusion there, leading to anxiety if it doesn't lead us to God.

Bob: If we dwell in here.

John: But my question then is why does that exist? Is sin a reality in line 2 here? Or is that not the case?

Bob: I'm going to say to you that it exists to show us the reality of who God is. And here's why I'm going to say that. What do we know about God? Give me some attributes of God.

Don Bishop: He's infinite.

Bob: He's infinite.

Ted: He's "immortal, invisible, God only wise." *(Laughter)*

Bob: By the way, that hymn was chosen specifically for this morning! *(Laughter)*

Ted: And it was written by a Church of Scotland pastor. *(Laughter)* Holiness; that's the main attribute of God.

Bob: So part of the answer to your question—why does 0/1 exist?—is because it's a reflection of the infinite, eternal God.

John: Sure.

Bob: And so it leads us to say this. Why is there this breadth of life that we don't understand? Because it leads us to a sense that we're not all there is. There is an infinite, eternal God.

John: So what I'm saying is: Line 2 there, with the 0 and the 1 and the circle in the middle between the 0 and the 1, right? That would represent the reductionist theory. So you take these people with the physics and the chemistry, and all the things and whatnot, reducing it to this is truth, right? This is true; there's another number that you can find between 0 and 1. That's true.

Bob: It is true.

John: So that's not confusion; that's just truth. But they keep reducing it to the point back to infinity, right? You can keep doing this, and it seems to have no answer. You just keep going and you keep going and you keep going. So even if we could understand all the things, all the truths of the laws and how they came to be, and how we have the application, and continue to reduce it and reduce it and reduce it, we still have this

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problem—the problem being, where did it come from? And it doesn’t get us to a greater understanding because the reality that it’s either on or it’s off is also true. And you can’t square it with the bottom line.

Bob: Correct.

John: The bottom line is also true. But it’s true not because you can’t find the answer behind it but because these two lines that are brought together are basically not brought together. Those two lines find their genesis in the reality that truth is in a Person. So your statement about personalness is correct. It’s only one Person, but it’s the Person of Christ.

Bob: Correct.

John: Which everything else is a derivative from.

Bob: Correct.

John: And so—

Bob: It’s not in me as a person or you as a person; it’s in Christ as a Person, who is, by the way,—

John: The truth.

Bob: The truth.

John: Correct, yes.

Bob: And who is, by the way, eternal.

John: Right. And immortal and invisible.

Bob: And immortal and invisible. *(Laughter)* Right.

John: Just so that we don’t get sidetracked on saying that this part isn’t true. That part is true. But that part is only true as it is derivative from a Person—not a truth that is a concept—but a Person from which all truth is.

Bob: Correct.

Don Maurer: *“In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”*

Bob: Yes. And so you read passages like John 16:3.

Transcriber’s Note: John 16:13, NKJV. *“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.”*

Bob: It says that the role of the Holy Spirit is to guide us to the truth which is both immediate and eternal, to lead us to the Person of who God is—the Person of Christ, God the Father, the Holy Spirit—the eternal God, Three in One—which is beyond binary, by the way—a wholeness and completeness that has no edginess to it.

And so we can keep going on this. Truth is not of my own making. It’s not in my world or your world. We say, “Well that’s my truth or your truth.” Truth is not something that is personal in that regard. But it is in the Person of Christ.

It’s also observable in this world in that God gave us the ways in which we observe the realities of who He is, so that we might be drawn back to Him. He gave us His Son as the means by which that is a clear, observable reality. And so He is the truth. It’s easy to say.

And so we say, “What is this truth?” Is it something that is observable about God’s reality? Is this something that is not my own creation, of my own decision-making process? Is this something that points beyond to that which is immortal, invisible, eternal?

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And truth is not forsake able; it doesn't vary; it doesn't change. So someone says, “Is this true? Well, it's my truth or your truth, or it's yesterday's truth or today's truth.” And so one of the things that is difficult about conversations with many people around us today is that they try to re-orient the truth. “Oh, the Bible doesn't really say that. That's the wrong translation of this word.”

Well then, the question is: Does it speak to that which is eternal, or does it speak to that which is temporal? I'm being generic in this regard, and purposely generic. A lot of conversations that I'm getting back from some of the sexuality conversations is: well, the Bible doesn't really speak about homosexuality. It's a mistranslation.

No, it isn't; it's not a mis-translation, because the direction is an observable reality of the world that you are orienting to. But it's clear that in those terms that it is a term that is descriptive of a separation from eternal reality. This is not how God created us. This is not what God wants for us, and so it is not true.

The role of the Holy Spirit is to guide us into truth. And so the role of the Holy Spirit is to guide us back to God. If the Scripture which is inspired by the Holy Spirit is to guide us back to God, and we say that this term is not leading us to God, then it's a misunderstanding; it's not true. It's a mis-translation; it's a misrepresentation.

So, “*whatever is true.*” And the word is *alethea*; it's a Greek word. It's not the only word for *true*, by the way. But it is the word Paul chooses, which is a significant word for that.

Let me quickly go through the other words; I'll pick one in particular: “*whatever is honorable.*” The word is *sema*; it's to be weighty. Does it have value? Does it have significance? It's not us versus them. It is something that is reflective of the image bearer; we are created in God's image. Does it give us that kind of value?

The word *just* is the word for that which is righteous. The word *pure* is the word for undiluted; it means “undiluted.” Is this diluted in some fashion? Is this decision being diluted? Does it dilute who God is? Does it dilute the reality of redemption and restoration in Christ Jesus? Does it dilute those kinds of things? Is it pure, or is it impure?

And of course the word *lovely* is the word *prosthelio*. “Out of desire, out of pleasure, beauty prompts for a search for a precedent.” One Harvard professor said, “*The mind keeps tripping backward until it at last reaches something that has no precedent, which may very well be the immortal.*” Is it lovely? Does it take us back to that which is immortal?

So for example, when we read 1 Corinthians 13, and a description of God's great love, and Paul talks about what love is and is not, he's taking us back to what kind of love?

Don Bishop: Perfect love.

Bob: Perfect love; godly love. Why? Because that is immortal. That is the precedent for which we seek. “*It does not insist on its own way.*” It calls us to forgive.

So there are lots of really wonderful things. Jesus talks about that kind of desire when He talks about the pearl of great price in Matthew 13. And there are lots of other places where that's really true.

We find it lovely because He finds us lovely. We find it beautiful because He first declared us to be beautiful. We find it worth sacrificing for because He first sacrificed Himself for us. We go back to the precedence: that which is lovely.

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“That which is commendable.” These are great things. What I’m saying is that in this list that Paul gives to us he gives us tools which can help us to discern not just what we’re doing, but who God is in the midst of what we’re doing. And so when we ask the question: What is God doing here? “I don’t know.”

Well, yes you do. Is what we’re doing true? Is what we’re doing honorable? Is what we’re doing lovely? Is what we’re doing bringing us back to who God is?

When Jesus says to *“love the LORD your God”* with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, He’s suggesting that we learn to think with our hearts, with our minds, with the wholeness that is not just about an observable reality of how we know what we know by what is around us, but in fact re-orienting our whole life to a heavenly perspective.

We’re coming to an end, and so I have to wind it up a little bit. Paul Tripp put it this way: *“With sin still living inside of us, we are still torn between our love for the claustrophobic little kingdom of self and the grand and glorious purposes of the kingdom of God. We still are tempted to want our own way and to write our own rules. We tend to value comfort and pleasure more than we love redemption. And that’s the spiritual war of which Paul writes in Ephesians 6.”*

I love what Paul Tripp said there. So the struggle that we have in our question of discernment is how do we know this will take us back to God?

When you sit as leaders in your Bible studies, when you sit as leaders in your churches, when you sit as leaders in your homes, and you have to make a decision, and you ask the question: “Do I need discernment?”, the answer is yes—for everything. How do I discern what God is doing? I first need to discern who He is and where He is.

Is He here? Of course He is. Will He be there in the future? Of course He will. Has He been there in the past? Of course He has.

The Scriptures attest to that over and over and over again. There is a very real sense that the Scriptures are the physical reality by which we find who God is, because they point us from beginning to end back to God. That’s why the Scriptures are so valuable. Truth always brings us back to God.

So is this true? This thing I’m wondering about, is it true? Will it ultimately bring me back to God? Or is it ultimately about something else? Is it about my pleasure? Is it about my purpose? Is it about popularity? Is it about evil? What is true about this decision? Because if it doesn’t ultimately lead me back to God, it cannot be true.

Okay. So your homework assignment is to go through the rest of the words and to ask the question: What is this word telling me about God?, because if we are thinking with our hearts and not just our minds, our hearts are inevitably being drawn back to God.

That’s what God says; that’s what Jesus says. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart.” Why does He start with the heart? Because the heart is the place where we first orient our lives to God. And then our minds come in, and then our lives come in.

Okay, questions? Tough stuff! I know it’s a great philosophical question. I’m always grateful for my education at Grove City where we would deal with these kinds of questions. It’s always a challenge, because I used to sit in class and go, “Wait a minute, wait a minute!” You know, I was one of those people going, “Let’s stop and think about this!”

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But the more you look at the world with these kinds of questions, you realize how it functions very practically. For example, I was reading. And I was trying to remember which of the existentialists committed suicide. I couldn't—

Ted and Don Maurer: Sartre. Jean-Paul Sartre.

Bob: Camus; it wasn't Sartre.

Don: Oh!

Bob: I always thought it was Sartre; I had to look that up. But here is what existentialism does. It is such an influence even today because it doesn't ask what is true. It's a self-serving principle. And where do we find an example of self-serving principles? Critical race theory. In the educational system we have to reckon with interminable existentialism, which leads us to the value of the self, which is what? Nothingness.

That is not how God sees us, so it's not true. So we've got to put these things in that kind of perspective. You go, “Is this true?” No, that (kind of) education is not true. We need to find a different kind of reality for that education with which we involve our children and our families. Don, go ahead.

Don Maurer: I don't know if we have time. But I've heard conflicting interpretations of John 16:3, (*John 16:13*), where Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will “*guide you into all truth.*” I've heard one which says that He was talking to the apostles, and that the Holy Spirit is going to be bringing to remembrance what Jesus said to them, so that when the Scriptures were written that under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit they will be able to write Scripture. And then I've heard others that say that this is talking to all of us, that the Holy Spirit illumines the Scripture for us to remind us of and to bring us into all truth. So is one or the other or both?

Bob: It's both.

Don: Okay.

Bob: It's both. There are a lot of good, interesting things. If you actually look at some of the contemporary things that are posted out there, it's fascinating. The reality is that the Holy Spirit is going to lead us back to the Scripture; it's the word of God. The word of God is truth. Why? Because it always leads us to God.

Don Maurer: Right.

Bob: The Scriptures are always leading us to God. So therefore they are true because it is the word of God itself. It's given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit is leading those who write them to lead us back to God. So it's a both/and kind of question. I don't share the mutuality of exclusivity in that process of the interpretation of Scripture; I see them both.

There was a young guy, one of the great professors who would say that “*we are in a river that is taking us away. And we are drowning in that river of sin. And God is going to throw a life preserver to us, to rescue us and redeem us.*”

And we would say, “Yes, we have to grab onto the life preserver. But why do you think you have the ability to do that without the role of the Holy Spirit saying that you need to be saved?” Because we don't recognize, as we're floating down the river, that we need to be saved, because we're just floating along. Even though the reality is that we're drowning, we're just kind of perceiving that we're just floating along. And we would argue with the professor who is saying that we have to choose to grab hold of that life preserver. You can't do that in and of yourself; it's the role of the Holy Spirit.

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Don Maurer: Well, the Calvinist would say that we’re dead, not that we’re drowning and that we don’t need a life preserver. We need a resurrection.

Bob: That’s correct. We’re dead and we don’t even know we’re dead.

Don: Right.

Bob: And it’s the role of the Holy Spirit to move us into that direction. There was an interesting conversation. There is a leading Stanford professor who now says that you don’t have free will at all, which is an interesting kind of perspective. I think that’s actually Paul in Romans, because sin so dominates our lives that we can’t recognize the need for salvation until Christ first intercedes for us. We’re so chained by what we have.

I have friends who say, “Bob, I can make decisions all the time. I can decide which way I want to go to Sheets today. I could go the easy way, which is just to go out of the parking lot and turn right and go and take the first left. The first left is at the traffic light, and Sheets is right down the street.

“But I don’t have to do that. I can go out of the parking lot and turn left, and go down the hill and wind my way around to 65 and then go up to 79, and come back up 79 and get off at the Mount Nebo Exit, and then find Sheets at Mount Nebo and turn left into Sheets. I can go that way.”

You can. You can do all those kinds of things. Ultimately the reason that you can do those kinds of things is because ultimately God is in your decision-making. Is it what pleases you, directs you, influences you? Or are you in your decision saying, “God, what are You doing today that will lead me to Sheets?, because I know that You are going to be there and that You have something that You want to do through me where I am, because I will see You in that process? What is the true path that You’re taking me to today?” That’s just an example of that kind of thing.

We’re way over time. (*Laughter*) Let me pray for you all. Father, I just thank You for the opportunity to engage in something this morning which is both the reality of who You are; You are eternal, immortal, invisible, God only wise, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent. Who You are is the truth that changes us and influences us, because You want to re-establish that relationship with us that You created for us since the beginning of the world. So remind us how valuable we are and how beautiful You are: that we would seek You in the midst of our days and lives, and discern that You are here for us, especially Your Son Christ Jesus. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen. (*Applause*)