

# THE SALTSHAKER

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## The Power of Discernment

By Rev. Sean McCann

*“But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.” (Hebrews 5:14)*

Most of us would agree that Christians should be more discerning, but who is it exactly that needs to be more discerning? Which group of Christians are blindly “drinking the Kool-Aid” and need to “see the light”? Well, the answer to that is pretty simple and obvious: *them!* When it comes to discernment, most of us think that *we* have it, and *they* lack it; *we* see what is going on while *those over there* are foolish and gullible. When you saw the title to this article, did you think that you needed to read it...or that someone else really needed to read it? Not surprisingly, it actually seems to be the case that those people who most strongly claim their own powers of discernment are in fact the ones most lacking it! So, who am I writing this article for? You. Not them; you. You my friend, if you are in Christ, have been given the gift of discernment, and are called by God to train that gift by constant practice in order to grow more discerning in your ability to distinguish good from evil.

Tim Challies defines discernment as, “the skill of understanding and applying God’s Word with the purpose of separating truth from error and right from wrong.” Throughout Scripture we see blessing when discernment is present (“Love may abound with knowledge and all discernment” Philippians 1:9), and hardship when it is lacking (“A people without discernment” Isaiah 27:11). Ever since Adam and Eve failed to discern good from evil and ate the forbidden fruit, our human powers of discernment have suffered and led us astray from God and his truth.

We only regain our powers of discernment through the gracious work of Christ. Christian discernment is a gift from God and a fruit of regeneration that we receive by the power of the Holy Spirit. And as with all gifts from God, we steward this gift through development and training in order to use it for the purpose God intended: to distinguish good from evil. This has always been important,

and today is no different. How are we to evaluate the avalanche of updates, breaking news, and alerts that flood our screens daily? How can we make sense of a never-ending news cycle that continually calls us to be outraged and alarmed by the crisis of the hour? Are we reading facts or editorials? Are we watching legitimate reports or veiled propaganda? How can we know who to trust? Without discernment we are carried along by the current, and are not able to understand the things of God (1 Cor 2:14). In the words of Hebrews, the undiscerning “need milk, not solid food.” Therefore, all of us – regardless of background or perspective – must train our powers of discernment, for “the discerning sets his face towards wisdom.” (Prov 24:17)

How do we do this? How can we grow to distinguish good from evil and “set our face towards wisdom”? One of the most helpful verses for me in this regard is Proverbs 18:17: “The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.” You probably know how it feels to be judged by only one set of facts, and you are also probably guilty of judging others before the full story has been told. This proverb means that we must resist the rush to judgment. We need to slow down, to listen, to clear our head and evaluate what we know and how we know it. Here are some examples of what it might look like if this were to be consistently practiced in our lives.

First, we would reject instant certainty and replace it with humble curiosity. Uncertainty can be unsettling, so we are tempted to rush our judgment of a person, event, or organization in order to have the comfort of certainty. But as the proverb warns us, we do not have all the facts when we first meet a person or hear a story. Discernment means allowing time to hear other perspectives. We yearn to see things in black and white, but in a fallen world it is rarely that simple. Discernment means training our minds to listen patiently and allow time for various perspectives to be considered before we render judgment.

**Morning Worship Service Indoors, Sundays at 10:00 am** - Due to weather conditions in the cooler months, we are offering two options for indoor worship. In addition to our service in the Sanctuary (where masks are required), we have added a set-up in the Fellowship Hall, where a projector will simultaneously broadcast the service from the Sanctuary. We encourage all worshippers to wear masks, but do not require it of those who choose to attend in the Fellowship Hall. We also encourage social distancing in both locations, and it is up to those who attend all services to assume the risk.

**Livestream Worship Service, Sundays at 10:00 am and 6:00 pm** - Morning and evening services are live streamed every week on our website and continue to be a source of encouragement for those who are not able to attend in person. We usually have 20-30 viewers of the livestream, and our experience setting this up has enabled us to help other sister churches do the same. The services are also posted on our YouTube channel every week.

**Evening Worship Service, Sundays at 6:00 pm**— Our pastors are teaching through the book of 1 Corinthians during these services. This service meets in the Sanctuary, and masks are required. There will be no evening service on January 3. The service will also be broadcast in the Fellowship Hall.

**Lord's Supper:** We will celebrate the Lord's Supper at the morning services on the third Sunday of each month; March 21st and April 18th are our next two celebrations.

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Second, we would reject isolation and replace it with community. The COVID restrictions are driving us into an isolated and self-focused existence. We are alone more often than not, and we are processing and evaluating everything that is going on without the benefit of embodied community. Instead of regular interactions with a group of people with a diverse range of experiences and opinions, we turn to the echo-chamber of social media and effectually hear only what we want to hear. For example, a recent study of Facebook revealed that each person's newsfeed is so tailored to their interest that it only reinforces their preconceived notions and opinions of the world. I think this in part explains the anger and vitriol of the last twelve months: we are missing the balance that comes from fellowship with deep and complicated people who share our core commitments but not our every conclusion. We were not designed to live this way! Iron is supposed to sharpen iron. We need personal relationships and community to push and challenge us, to comfort and console us, and to reset our perspective on the things that matter most.

Finally, we would reject loyalty to our positions and replace it with loyalty to the truth. A discerning person collects and evaluates the facts and judges them according to God's word as accurately as possible. This means that a discerning person is loyal to the truth, not their opinion. Our great temptation is to only read news and believe reports that confirm our previously held views, but that is the opposite of discernment. If we really are seeking to grow and learn, then we will be challenged to regularly reevaluate our opinions. Through curiosity and community, we will see multiple perspectives and exercise discernment

to confirm, or maybe change, our judgments. Think of it this way, who is more discerning: the one who is always so sure they are right, or the one who knows how much they do not know?

An account in 1 Samuel records a telling tale of discernment. David, not yet king, is out of favor with Saul and living on the land in wilderness of Paran. His presence protects the locals, and he expects some food and provisions in return, but foolish Nabal denies his request and provokes his anger. A fight is imminent, as neither man will back down, and destruction seems inevitable: death for Nabal and his men, bloodguilt for David and his. But then God intervenes through Nabal's wife Abigail, a woman "discerning and beautiful." She convinces David to relent, thus avoiding bloodshed and earning his blessing: "Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from working salvation with my own hand!" If God had not trained Abigail's gift of discernment, that fateful day would likely have ended not with good, but rather with death and evil for all.

So, who is this article for – you or them? Well, ask yourself this: are you like David and Nabal – convinced you are right in your own eyes and set upon destruction? Or are you like Abigail – one who sees the whole picture, sets her face towards wisdom, and brings about peace and blessing? May God make us a people like Abigail, that through curiosity and community we will remain loyal to the truth and so be trained to distinguish good from evil and "discern what is pleasing to the Lord." (Eph 5:10)

## The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Chris Brown



In our evening worship services we have begun to work through 1 Corinthians. Scholars believe that Paul founded a Church in Corinth around 51-52 AD. 1 Corinthians is his second letter to the Church, and was written on his third missionary journey as he has stopped in Ephesus, just four years after he founded the Church. In just four years, Paul has had to write twice to this Church. Already, it is beset with issues of division and dissension. We have titled the sermon series, "Built to Unify", which points out one of the main themes of this letter—that God has built His Church in order for us to be unified together in the cause of Christ. Issues of division and dissension have plagued the Church since her inception, and, of course, plague us today as well. As we work through this God-breathed letter, it is our hope that we will see how the sinful tendencies of

the early Church are lodged within our own hearts. We too, like the Church in Corinth, value things that inflate our ego rather than the things of Christ. We too, like the Church in Corinth, are tempted to neglect Church discipline or to sweep our problems under a rug. It is also our hope that the pastoral addresses that Paul makes to this struggling Church will be what the Spirit uses for us. Paul does not tell the Church in Corinth, "You must not be a Church at all! Look how terrible you are!" Instead, he reminds them of their unworthiness of salvation, yet Christ's incredible humility and love for them. He reminds them of their absolute need to prize Christ Jesus above all things. As we too consider the worth of Christ, we will, Lord willing, be drawn to serve Him in the areas of our lives where we may struggle like the Church in Corinth. We hope that this study in 1 Corinthians will serve to build us up to be a Church unified on the gospel message of Jesus. We pray that we, together, will treasure Christ above all things in the midst of a difficult season of life.

### Preaching Schedule

Date	Morning	Evening
Mar. 7	Gen. 3:8-25	1 Cor. 3:10-23
Mar. 14	Gen. 4:1-26	1 Cor. 4:1-5
Mar. 21	Gen. 5:1-6:8	1 Cor. 4:6-13
Mar. 28	Gen. 6:9-8:19	1 Cor. 4:14-21
Apr. 4	Gen. 8:20-9:17	No Service
Apr. 11	Gen. 9:18-10:32	1 Cor. 5:1-13
Apr. 18	Gen. 11:1-26	1 Cor. 6:1-8
Apr. 25	Gen. 11:27-12:9	1 Cor. 6:9-11

## Christ's Image for Turbulent Times

By Rev. Chris Brown

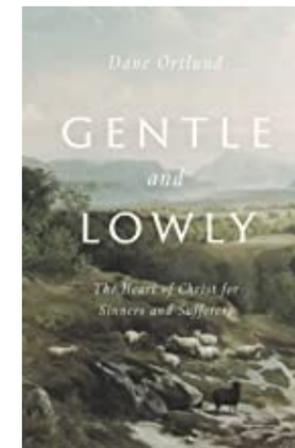
Our society desperately wants to understand how to view race, politics, and disease. In particular, I think that our society wishes to both defend the implicit sense we all have that people are worthwhile and dignified no matter the color of our skin or cultural background. But there are as many voices clamoring that they have the solution, as there are individuals in our nation! With *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (see Carl Trueman's recent publication by that name), our society no longer has any objective standards on which to base its views on dignity, or with which to propose solutions to ensure our dignity is maintained. Aside from a wide variety of views, there is also the simple problem of our human finitude. As creatures, our knowledge is limited and frail, and so even the wisest human cannot necessarily know the appropriate way forward.

And yet God has addressed our limitations and our groundless standards with His revelation. He has spoken to us, and told us why people are dignified, and indeed, how to ensure people are treated with dignity. We recently heard a sermon by Pastor Sean on Genesis 1:26-31, which partly focused on how mankind is made in the image of God. God Himself has created all mankind in His image and likeness, endowing us all with souls that contain wills, minds, and hearts, as well as moral characteristics like the conscience. Though our first father sinned, and lost the original gifts of righteousness, holiness, and knowledge that displayed God's character most clearly, all humans still maintain some remnant of His image. But that image is in desperate need of reformation. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul says, "we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

The main premise here is that the Lord makes us like Himself as we consider Him. Our job as Christians is to affirm the dignity of others by acting like Christ Jesus does in His tenderness towards creatures, and also by pointing others to their need of Christ Jesus. Christ can restore the image from its shambled state, and make it like Himself. Christ comes to those who have been injured, and He offers not a paycheck, but His Person. He comes to those oppressed by the state, and offers them not political retaliation, but peace with God. He comes to those in sin, and offers them not a pass, but a sight of His cross. He says to us in the cross, "Look at the horror of sin, and look at My sufficiency to save." And as we consider His glory, trusting in Him, we become like Him in all of His compassion, in all of His knowledge, in all of His righteousness. This is what our world desperately needs. Our friends, neighbors, and family need to be conformed to Christ's image more than they need any social or political agenda. Do they know that? Do they know that you believe that?

## Gentle and Lowly

by Rev. Sean McCann



One of the most popular Christian books of 2020 was *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers* by Dane Ortlund. On its own, the book is a wonderful meditation on the heart of Christ as he is revealed throughout Scripture, and would be a welcome read at any time in history, but after the unsettling year of 2020 it is the perfect antidote to the chaos that rages around us. What better way to quiet our angry and anxious hearts than to reflect on the gentle

and lowly heart of our Savior?

We all know who Jesus is, at least we know generally what he does in Scripture. We know of his birth, of his miracles and teaching, of his suffering and atoning death, and of his resurrection and ascension. As Christians we know the general outline of his person and work, but do we really know him? This question is the driving force of the book, and to answer it the author searches out key passages that reveal the heart of Jesus. He starts with the most prominent verse in Scripture that speaks of Jesus' heart, Matthew 11:29 "I am gentle and lowly at heart." Here is Jesus' heart opened to us, and we see who he truly is: gentle and lowly.

From this foundation, Ortlund goes on to open up many other passages that reveal different aspects of Jesus' heart: his happiness (Heb 12:2), his sympathy (Heb 4:15), his welcome (Jn 6:37), his mercy (Lam 3:33), his love (Rom 5:8). With each chapter he unpacks a different aspect of the very heart of Jesus. The lasting impression is a welcoming and accessible Lord who stands ready to embrace all who come to him in repentance and faith. Ortlund is not so much building a case about Jesus, but rather, "looking at the single diamond of Christ's heart from many different angles."

Though the book is not written as a devotional, that is how I used it, and why I recommend that you pick it up. From the first page, you can quickly understand the author's arguments and agree with his conclusions, but that is not his goal. Rather, Ortlund wants you to sit and meditate on the word, and there, in the gospel of grace, see the heart of Christ. The book has 23 chapters, each one devoted to examining one verse of Scripture in order to learn what it teaches about the heart of Christ. I read one chapter each morning for a month and was blessed to start each day peering into the heart of Christ, and I know you will be too. Take up this book and meditate on the heart of Christ, and you will find rest for your soul!