

March 2015

Volume VIII
Issue 3

Perspective

the journal of mount
vernon baptist church

Perspective is a monthly journal with articles and book reviews. It is part of the "equipping" ministry of Mount Vernon Baptist Church, where we exist to KNOW, EQUIP, and SEND one another for the worship and glory of God.

SERMON SCHEDULE

March 1

Knowledge is Not Enough

2 Peter 1:1-11

March 8

Experience is Not Enough

2 Peter 1:12-21

March 15

An Audience is Not Enough

2 Peter 2:1-22

March 22

TBA

Guest Preacher: John Onwuchekwa

March 29

Once is Not Enough

2 Peter 3:1-7

For a full list of past sermons,
visit www.mvbchurch.org.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ARTICLE

Is the Christian Life Supposed to be Boring?

by Aaron Menikoff

1

BOOK HIGHLIGHT

Words From the Fire: Hearing the Voice of God in the 10 Commandments

by R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

by Brad Thayer

5

BOOK HIGHLIGHT

Christianity and Liberalism

by J. Gresham Machen

by B.J. King

6

FIGHTER VERSE DEVOTIONAL

Isaiah 53:4-5

by Brad Thayer

7

Is the Christian Life Supposed to be Boring?

There exists in the soul of every man and woman an insatiable desire for success. That desire may be stronger in some than in others, but it exists in all. No one wakes up in the morning and says, “I think I’ll try to fail today.” We may feel like failures. We may try to fail because we fear disappointment. But nobody truly wants to fail, and nobody runs after a boring life.

In Arthur Miller’s play, *Death of a Salesman*, the main character, Willy Loman, craves success the way cats crave mice. “Some people accomplish something,” Loman tells his wife. His children inherited this longing. One son imagines opening up a ranch out West, “We’d be known all over the counties,” he says. Willy was a salesman, always dreaming of the next big deal. But when the deals died, so did Willy—he committed suicide. A friend tried to explain Willy after the funeral:

For a salesman, there is no rock bottom to the life. He don’t put a bolt to a nut, he don’t tell you the law or give you medicine. He’s a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back—that’s an earthquake.

How to Define Success

God made us to want success. Nobody seeks a boring life. We all want to matter, we all want to do something important; we all want to succeed. The problem is we don’t know what success really is. Willy thought success was getting a smile. A comic aspires to a laugh, an actor a role, a politician a victory, and a chef a good review. What about a Christian? What does a Christian want? What should a Christian want?

Thankfully, God is not silent on the matter! Pay careful attention to what we find in Proverbs:

My son, do not forget my teaching,
But let your heart keep my commandments,
for length of days and years of life
and peace they will add to you.

Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you;
Bind them around your neck;

write them on the tablet of your heart.
So you will find favor and good success
in the sight of God and men.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
And he will make straight your paths (Prov. 3:1-5)

The successful man or woman is a *faithful* man or woman. He remembers the Word of God (2 Peter 3:2). He doesn’t just hear the word; he does it (James 1:22-25). She abides in Christ, dwelling on his promises (John 15:5). She trusts the promises of God, counting them more certain than the rising of the sun (Hebrews 11:1-3). This is faithfulness, and it’s through this kind of life that one finds “favor and good success in the sight of God and man” (Proverbs 3:4).

Of course, only one person modeled perfect faithfulness: Jesus Christ. It was Jesus who remembered the Word of God when tempted by Satan in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11). Jesus did more than preach; he obeyed the words of his Father (Philippians 2:8). He found rest by abiding in his Father (John 14:11). He trusted in the promises of God, even at the cost of his own life (Luke 22:41-42). This is the life of a successful man.

Biblically speaking, success is faithfulness. But even here we can go awry. It’s easy to forget that ultimately, none of us are successful. Each of us is unfaithful, and that’s why we need a perfect Savior to do what we could never do: to live the life we should have led and die the death we deserved to die. The gospel teaches that success isn’t finally found in doing something great but in following Someone greater. Success is being a Christian.

If your definition of success is rooted in your accomplishing something great, than you will never find it. You’ll be like Tantalus who always bent down to drink, only to watch the cool water recede from his mouth. He always reached for sweet fruit, only to find it pulled from his grasp. The kind of success that fills your belly like Christmas dinner will never be found by focusing on what you did but by resting in what Christ did.

SO WHAT AM I TO DO, BE RADICAL?

If the Lord has saved you, by definition you are successful. But, as Francis Shaeffer so famously asked, *How shall we then live?* Even as I type these words, I’m

praying that you care about this question. My fear is many of us don't. We are so accustomed to God's saving grace we've taken him for granted. We are so familiar with his love we've stopped talking about it. William Carey's famous line, "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God." is little more than a pithy slogan that falls like a feather on our conscience.

Few pastors have fought harder to replace that feather with a brick than David Platt. He's devoted his life to the evangelization of the nations. In his book, *Radical*, Platt makes his point well:

**Nobody seeks a boring life.
We all want to matter, we all
want to do something
important; we all want to
succeed.**

You and I have an average of about seventy or eighty years on this earth. During these years we are bombarded with the temporary. Make money. Get stuff. Be comfortable. Live well. Have fun. In the middle of it all, we get blinded to the eternal. But it's there. You and I stand on the porch of eternity. Both of us will soon stand before God on the porch of eternity. Both of us will soon stand before God to give an account for our stewardship of the time, the resources, the gifts, and ultimately the gospel he has entrusted to us. When that day comes, I am convinced we will not wish we had given more of ourselves to living the American dream. We will not wish we had made more money, acquired more stuff, lived more comfortably, taken more vacations, watched more television, pursued greater retirement, or been more successful in the eyes of the world. Instead, we will wish we had given more of ourselves to living for the day when every nation, tribe, people, and language will bow around the throne and sing the praises of the Savior who delights in radical obedience and the God who deserves eternal worship.

This morning I had coffee with a young man just starting out in life. He has a wonderful wife, a good job, and a bright future. The last thing he wants to do is waste it. He knows the danger of the American dream, hates the temptation toward self-indulgence, and wants to make a difference. His identity is in Christ, and he's eager to know how to heed this call toward "radical obedience" worthy of "the God who deserves eternal worship."

What would *you* tell this young man?

The complacent atmosphere that is American evangelicalism needs prophets like Platt, who challenge us much the way Jesus exhorted the rich young ruler to give all away, so that the world might know Jesus as Lord.

More likely than not, if you are reading these words, you need to be challenged to give more money to the Great Commission, more time to the evangelization of the nations, and more energy to the cause of Christ. Just as the Greatest Generation found ways to live on less so the Allies had everything they needed to storm the gates of Berlin, it is probable

you need to think about bringing a wartime mentality to gospel ministry.

If that's you, the best thing for you to do is put down this article and pray. Ask the Lord for wisdom to know how you can be more generous with the gifts he has given you. Ask the Lord for wisdom to know if he would have you sell your home and move to an unreached community across town or across the globe. Ask the Lord for wisdom to know if he would have you foster a child, enroll in seminary, or fund a missionary. Don't assume the path you're on is God's will for your life. Let the weight of the call to radical obedience rest uneasily on your shoulders—not from the lips of David Platt, but from King Jesus who said,

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? (Luke 9:23-25)

SO WHAT AM I TO DO, BE ORDINARY?

And yet, having said all that, you need to know that radical obedience can be found in a pile of laundry, a stack of reports, and a Sunday school lesson waiting to be prepared. Let's not baptize a worldly desire for success by assuming faithfulness to the gospel means moving away from home and changing the world. Every generation wants to matter. We want our lives to mean something. Our non-Christian neighbor wants to be the

next Steve Jobs of his industry, and we want to be the next Jim Eliot—*sans* martyrdom!

God may have that in mind for you. And if he does, you should embrace the call. The church needs men and women willing to risk their lives for the furtherance of the gospel. Ignatius of Antioch gave up his life in the Roman coliseum in AD 107 because he refused to deny the name of Jesus. He was not unwilling to die and, in fact, he urged his Christian friends in Rome to do nothing to change his executioner's mind:

I am writing to all the churches and assuring them that I am truly in earnest about dying for God – if only you yourselves put no obstacles in the way. I must implore you to do me no such untimely kindness; pray leave me to be a meal for the beasts, for it is they who can provide my way to God. I am His wheat, ground fine by lions' teeth to me made purest bread for Christ.

God will call Christians to suffer. Should the sword befall us, we must be ready to stretch out our necks and let the blade fall where it may.

Yet, let's not forget radical obedience can be found in unremarkable faithfulness. Christian author Michael Horton offers a course correction to those who think zeal can only be seen in the Christian who moves overseas, adopts a child, or exercises some other example of exciting Christian action. In his book, *Ordinary*, Horton admits he's terrified of being bored. He wants to live an exciting, productive life. But he holds on to the promise that in God's grand economy, little acts of faithfulness matter:

What did you do for the kingdom today?
How did you impact the world for Christ?
Our tendency might be to hesitate at that point, trying desperately to recall something worth reporting. Yet every day, in all sorts of ways we're not even aware of, the kingdom is growing and our neighbors are being served. There may be a quiet reference in the coffee room that provokes a coworker weeks later to ask a question about life and death, maybe even addressing it not to you but to another believer. You made lunch for the kids and got them to school on time. You worked well with your hands to supply neighbors with what they need and—oh, again, “I will build

my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). Keep on point. Don't lose focus. Jesus has bound Satan (Mark 3:27; Luke 10:17). Now we are free to do the little things that matter, without anxiety about how it all turns out in the end.

My life is pretty ordinary. I pastor a church in the South. My days are spent counseling saints, preparing sermons, and planning prayer meetings. Nothing I do makes the papers, and I'm only a hero to four kids (some of whom know me by my alias, Spider-Man). But that means something, not because my identity is found in them, but because I know that how I pastor this church, love my kids, serve my wife, and befriend my neighbors matters. God takes the ordinary actions of an earth full of Christians and makes a mockery of Satan's grand designs.

FAITHFULNESS IS NEVER BORING

Ultimately, success is found in faithfulness. Each of us has been given different gifts, and God will hold us accountable for how we use them. It's worth noting that the same Word that teaches us to carry our cross and follow Christ, instructs us to do so in the daily machinations of life:

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quite life, godly and dignified in every way” (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

“But we urge you, brothers to do this more and more [love one another], and aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may live properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one” (1 Thessalonians 4:10b-11).

“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need” (Ephesians 4:28).

The gospel was just as much at work in the faithful saints who obeyed Paul's command to stay and work, as it was in the faithful saints who left their homes to serve churches in other cities. For you, staying at home and mowing the lawn while mulling over how you are going

to lead your small group is just as important as buying a ticket to meet with underground pastors in China.

Faithfulness to Christ, be it in Atlanta or Azerbaijan, is never boring. May those called to leave do so without boasting, and may those called to stay do so without guilt. Faithfulness can be shown just as easily *here* as it can *there*.

~Aaron Menikoff

Interested in reading more on this topic? Try:

David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (Multnomah, 2010)

John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life* (Crossway, 2003)

Michael Horton, *Ordinary: Sustainable Faith in a Radical, Restless World* (Zondervan, 2014)

Michael Wittmer, *Becoming Worldly Saints: Can You Serve Jesus and Still Enjoy Your Life?* (Zondervan, 2015)

Words From the Fire: Hearing the Voice of God in the 10 Commandments

Written by R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

Bookstall Price \$22



The Ten Commandments may be the most memorized portion of Scripture next to the Lord's Prayer. "Honor your father and mother" is often the first commandment children learn in Christian homes, and rightly so. Yet, Christians commonly underestimate or limit the implications of the Ten Commandments for their walk with the Lord. Al Mohler's *Words from the Fire* is a culturally relevant, and Christ centered exposition of the Ten Commandments with much needed application for the Christian life today.

Mohler rightfully sets his exposition within their historical narrative. He writes, "The propositional truth so clearly there in the law, comes in the midst of a history of a people and God's dealing with the people. It is a relational revelation, and it is a dramatic revelation" (14). The Ten Commandments, therefore, are a merciful gift because in receiving Israel heard the voice of God. It is "sheer mercy" that they heard and lived. Furthermore, they were authoritative in Israel's life then and are today in the Christian's life; thus, the Lord expects full obedience.

There are not many books written today explaining and applying the Ten Commandments. It may be a point of discussion in books about the relationship between the Old and New Covenant, a topic on which Mohler provides a very helpful introduction, but evangelicals are not spilling ink on Old Testament "thou shalt's" because it lacks the fizz and popularity of topics such as relationships and finances. Yet, that's exactly what makes *Words from the Fire* such a good and necessary read. These ancient words are not simply a list of dos and don'ts. Rather, Mohler shows how they have far-reaching implications for a Christ centered, God-honoring life in a culture that celebrates its rebellion against God.

– RECOMMENDED BY BRAD THAYER

Excerpts from the Book

1

"The great philosophical crisis of our day is an epistemological crisis – a crisis of knowing and a crisis of knowledge. It is a challenge for the Christian thinker, the Christian theologian, the Christian minister, the Christian preacher, and the Christian institution – the whole of Christianity. The crisis can be summed up in one question: How do we know and teach what we claim to know and teach?"

– Introduction. p. 12

2

"We are here because God has spoken, not only in the fire, but also in the Son-in whose name we gather as the church and in whose name we serve. The voice at Horeb points to its ultimate fulfillment in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate. For beyond the miracle of Israel hearing God's voice and surviving, we can now know the Word of God made flesh...and be saved."

– Introduction. p. 24

3

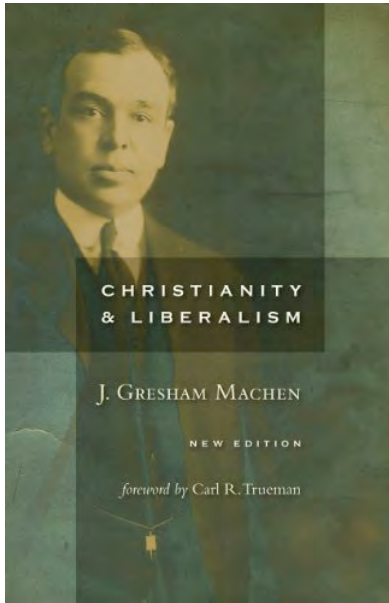
On the 2nd commandment: "Simply put, our worship betrays our theology. To worship the right god in the wrong way is to testify to the wrong god. That is the danger of worship...We must memorize this formula, and inscribe it upon our hearts and upon our churches: right God = right worship. The wrong worship implies the wrong god."

– The Second Commandment. p. 48

Christianity and Liberalism

Written by J. Gresham Machen

Bookstall Price \$12



Christianity and Liberalism is both an exploration and a defense. It explores the relationship between traditional, biblical Christianity and a new form called "liberalism" or liberal Christianity. It then seeks to show why liberal Christianity is rooted in an entirely different foundation and (despite the appearance of similarities) is an entirely different religion than biblical Christianity. Throughout his book, Machen is unapologetically clear that he sees liberal Christianity as a uniquely deadly form of non-Christianity. His great fear is that liberal Christianity would act like a

vaccine and give its adherents just enough of Jesus to be inoculated to the whole of Him. As Machen says, "Liberalism regards Him [Christ] as an Example and Guide; Christianity, as a Saviour: liberalism makes Him an example for faith; Christianity, the object of faith." (82).

The book divides smoothly into topical chapters around flashpoint issues between the two faiths: Doctrine, God and Man, The Bible, Christ, Salvation, and The Church. In each section, Machen systematically and skillfully breaks apart various arguments both against biblical Christianity and for liberal Christianity.

Despite its age (originally published in 1923), *Christianity and Liberalism* remains relevant to the church in 2015. The issues that Machen covers are the same issues being wrestled with in the hearts of believers today. Many of the arguments that Machen dismantles are still being used by liberals today to show why Jesus would support gay marriage, why the Bible is unreliable, or why all religions are the same. The relevance of this near century-old book should be a reminder to us that we are not the first Christians to face the questions of skeptics. We can take confidence in the fact that we continue to stand after millennia of deadly attacks on our faith. The Christianity of the Bible is trustworthy. It is rock solid.

– RECOMMENDED BY B.J. KING

Excerpts from the Book

1

"...The Christian movement at its inception was not just a way of life in the modern sense, but a way of life founded upon a message. It was based, not upon mere feeling, not upon a mere program of work, but upon an account of facts. In other words it was based upon doctrine."

– Doctrine. p. 18

2

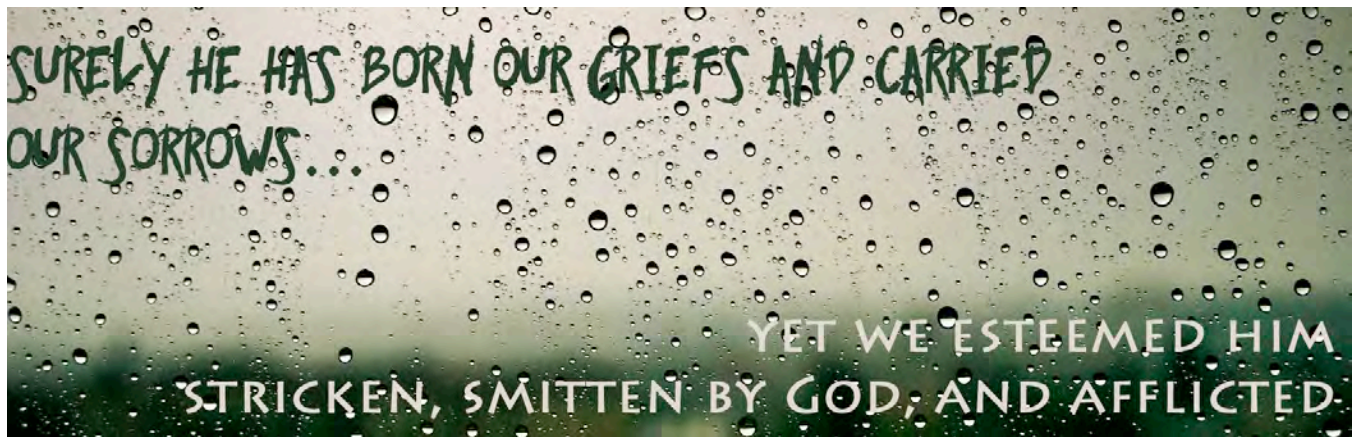
"It is no wonder, then, that liberalism is totally different from Christianity, for the foundation is different. Christianity is founded upon the Bible. It bases upon the Bible both its thinking and its life. Liberalism on the other hand is founded upon the shifting emotions of sinful men."

– The Bible. p. 67

3

"...Even after the historian...has succeeded in reconstructing a purely human Jesus, the Jesus thus constructed is found to be entirely unreal. He has a moral contradiction at the very centre of His being – a contradiction due to His Messianic consciousness. He was pure and humble and strong and sane, yet He supposed, without basis in fact, that He was to be the final Judge of all the earth! The liberal Jesus, despite all the efforts of modern psychological reconstruction to galvanize Him into life, remains a manufactured figure of the stage."

– Christ. p. 98



*Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our
transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that
brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
— Isaiah 53:4-5*

*These new monthly devotionals are intended to aid you in
your memorization and mediation of the Fighter Verses.*

Of all the titles given to Jesus, none may offer any greater comfort to the believer than that of Suffering Servant, as he is known to be in these verses. If someone has served you undeservedly, you know what it is to experience love and selflessness. But Jesus is not just anyone. As the second person of the Trinity, he has “emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant...he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phi. 2:7-8).

When someone we love is suffering, we wish desperately that we might serve them by relieving them of their burden. How many parents have wept wishing they could bear their child’s ailment and suffering? And yet the sinless Son of God, who had no cause for grief or sorrow in eternal fellowship within the Godhead, condescended to bear our most burdensome of griefs and

sorrows. There is no greater sorrowful burden we have known than the one that preceded our new birth. It is the one our souls could not bear when the Holy Spirit awakened our hearts’ eyes to see the heinousness of our transgressions and the defilement of our iniquities before a holy God. How many of you wept, as I did, with tears from the deepest wells of contrition upon such a revelation that you deserved God’s infinite, righteous judgment?

But praise be to God that such sorrow has been carried away! What peace do we now know with God and experience in our hearts because God, in his great love, chose that his Son would be pierced, crushed, chastised, and wounded for us. What greater comfort is there than this: the Son suffered on the cross to serve us by dealing with our sins and the Son suffered on the cross to serve the Father by upholding his righteousness! There is no greater service known than the substitution of the Suffering Servant.

— BRAD THAYER

For more devotional material
and memorization tools, visit
www.theversesproject.com

