

## Family Group Outline – September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025

### **WHAT'S HAPPENING AT MBC:**

1. Our monthly Church Workday is this Saturday, September 13th at 8:30am.
2. All members are invited to a special Member meeting on September 14<sup>th</sup> at 6:30pm. Similar to our annual meeting, the Elders will communicate plans for the future, and members will have an opportunity to ask questions and affirm the Elders' continuing leadership.
3. This Fall, the men and women of MBC will gather during the Sunday School hour to hear what the book of Proverbs says about self-discipline, marriage, and parenting. Join us for our first session on September 21st, as we look to see what the book of Proverbs says about the search for wisdom.
4. To prepare for the preaching of the word on this coming Lord's Day, we would encourage you to meditate on the passage ahead of time. The worship service's sermon will be from 1 Corinthians 8:1-6.

**WHAT WE BELIEVE:** We believe that there is one, and only one, living and true God, an infinite, intelligent Spirit, the Maker and Supreme Ruler of Heaven and earth. He is inexpressibly glorious in holiness, and worthy of all possible honor, confidence, and love. We believe that in the unity of the Godhead there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; equal in every divine perfection, and executing distinct and harmonious offices in the great work of redemption. John 4:24; Psa. 147:5; 83:18; Heb. 3:4; Rom. 1:20; Jer. 10:10; Exod. 15:11; Isa. 6:3; 1 Pet. 1:15-16; Rev. 4:6-8; Mark 12:30; Rev. 4:11; Matt. 10:37; Jer. 2:12-13; Matt. 28:19; John 15:26; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 1 John 5:7; John 10:30; 5:17; 14:23; 17:5, 10; Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 2:10-11; Phil. 2:5-6; Eph. 2:18; 2 Cor. 13:14; Rev. 1:4-5.

**WISDOM:** "This new understanding of the autonomous Self has a powerfully religious aspect to it, even if that is not how it was (and is) conceived by those who developed it and live by it. The Self, and the freedom to be ourselves, is not just an idea but an object of devotion. The freedom to create myself according to my own desires has become the highest and final authority." – Matthew P. W. Roberts

**WORD:** *"Idolatry, Then and Now"*, Various Texts

#### **Suggested questions:**

1. Was there anything that particularly challenged, impacted, or confused you from this Sunday's message?
2. Read Exodus 20:1-6. What are the two types of idolatry that we see in this passage? How do they overlap? How are they distinct?
3. Read Ezekiel 28:1-8. How does this self-idolatry of the prince of Tyre manifest itself today in the world and in our own lives?

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Identity and the Worship of Self

<https://www.challies.com/book-reviews/identity-and-the-worship-of-self>

## Identity and the Worship of Self

*Tim Challies*

Identity is everywhere. We can hardly read an article in the news or watch a show on TV without encountering it. Identity defines our relationship to the world around us, to the other members of our society, and even to our own bodies. “This rapid rise in identity-thinking has caused a somewhat tense interaction with the Christian church,” says Matthew Roberts. “From the secular perspective, it has reinforced the assumption that Christians are just an irrelevance swept aside by the inrush of these new insights, featuring (if at all) as just one identity-group, and one for whom not much sympathy is spared. From Christians, it has been greeted with a combination of alarm at the outlandish new doctrines identity politics presents (gender fluidity in particular) and an assumption that there is a lot of new thinking for us to do to make sure that people of different identities are equally offered the gospel and (to a varying extent) included in the church.”

So what are Christians to do? How are we to think about modern notions of identity? That is the subject of Roberts’ new book *Pride: Identity and the Worship of Self*. “The conviction that underlies this book,” he explains, “is that, rather than being a new challenge to the Christian faith, the identity issue is, in fact, a very old one. Men have always identified themselves by their idols, and so the issue of identity is fundamentally one of idolatry.”

Key to understanding the book is his use of the word “Pride.” He does not use that word to communicate the opposite of humility, but as an umbrella term for the various identities more typically conveyed in the ever-changing acronym that begins with L and ends in +.

In the book’s first part, he explains that human beings are defined by worship—by what or who we worship. Created by God in the image of God to worship God, we fell into a state of sinfulness in which we will worship anything or everything in place of God. Yet our most basic and essential identity is defined by who we were made to worship. “Being images, our true identity is found in the God whose image we are, and whom we are made to love with all our heart and soul and strength. And so those who worship false gods, giving them the love due to the true God, cannot help but define themselves by those gods instead.” Not only that, but “individuals and peoples come to reflect the character of the (fictional) gods they worship. And integral to this is that individuals and peoples come to identify themselves by the gods they worship.”

This causes endless problems since “for all fallen human beings, there is a basic identity-conflict in play. We are one thing; we believe ourselves to be something else. We have a true identity, though we deny it and seek to suppress it; and we have a false identity, centred around our idols, which we cling to fiercely even though it diminishes our humanity.” The most basic issue with *Pride* is that it offers an identity created by humanity and, therefore, in direct opposition to the true identity assigned to us by the Creator God. “If we want to know who we are, we must worship the God who made us and, if we worship idols instead, we will believe ourselves to be what in fact we are not.”

The situation has gotten more serious in that many Christians have bought into the idea that *Pride* is an identity—that what are rightly behaviors are considered to be identities. This is

an assumption that may flow naturally from a Pelagian understanding of humanity, but not an orthodox, biblical one. Turning to the deep riches of historic Protestant doctrine, Roberts shows that sinful desire is itself sinful. “While it is true that it is not sinful to be tempted externally, when temptation involves a struggle against our own desire to sin, it certainly is.” Hence, Christians cannot grant that sinful desires can lead to identity. We will certainly have sinful desires, but we must never say we are our sinful desires—to make them a point of identity.

Our desires are not basically good and harmless things which may be arranged equally well in any way we wish, like furniture in a living room. What we want to do with our bodies is not a matter of orientation, like deciding which wall of a room to hang a picture on. We are talking about powerful disorders of our nature which have taken what is good and ruined it, and thereby threaten to destroy us and others around us. Love and lust are not the same thing rotated slightly. We cannot speak of them as ‘orientations’ any more than we could say that kindness and cruelty, thankfulness and gluttony, humility and pride, or even righteousness and sin are just different ‘orientations’. They are diametric opposites. Neutral language is not appropriate to describe such things.

This leads to the book’s second part which addresses the ways in which God restores sinful human beings to be true worshippers. To do this he must free us from idolatry and restore us to our true identity. “Idolatry tells compelling lies about the nature of reality, about the significance of ourselves, about how we can find fulfilment, about what behaviour will lead to blessing and what will lead to curse, about what is good and what is evil. It first legitimizes sin, then normalises it, then demands it, promising blessings that it cannot deliver and threatening curses for non-compliance that it cannot carry out. And the human heart, with sinful desires unchecked by the grace of God, cannot escape from the power of such idols.”

God restores us to our true identity by giving us grace to stop creating an identity based on our desires. This will at first strike us as unfair or judgmental, for “it is of the nature of sin to deceive us with respect to this, and thus it is always the case that Jesus’ call for us to repent of sin is heard by sinners first of all as an attack on their identity and a threat to what they consider good.” And then God equips us to repent of that sin without considering it a great personal cost to do so, for “repentance is never in the Bible considered part of the cost of discipleship. Rather, it is one of its principal blessings, as we are freed from the clawing, clutching power of sin on our hearts and the destruction that it brings. The call to repentance sounds like bad news to the sinful heart, and it can be difficult and painful to walk away from sin. But it is never actually bad to do so. For sin is, in fact, bad, and it is a joy and a delight to be free from it.”

The fact is, “As creatures, our identity cannot come from inside of ourselves, for that is true of God alone, who unlike all His creatures is the ‘I am’, taking His being and His nature from Himself. Our nature is entirely contingent. That is why the identities of idolatry are always a shrunken version of what we really are, for we are seeking to be images of gods which do not really exist.” If we are to repent and follow Jesus, we need to be willing to leave behind any false identities we once claimed and receive the one the Lord has already given us.

There is much more in this book—far more than I can adequately summarize. Suffice it to say that I found it fascinating, compelling, and so very helpful. It has given me a great deal to think about as I consider society’s obsession with identity.