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UNDERSTANDING IMAGE BEARING AND IDOLATRY  
WITHIN A CHRISTIAN COUNSELING MOVEMENT

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Adam Burgess Embry  
May 2017



**APPROVAL SHEET**

**UNDERSTANDING IMAGE BEARING AND IDOLATRY  
WITHIN A CHRISTIAN COUNSELING MOVEMENT**

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To my family, in the hope that all of us, Charlotte, Iain, Kimberlyn, Elizabeth, Chloe,  
Gwendolwn, Brayleigh, and I will “taste and see” that the Lord is good.

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## PREFACE

On Christmas morning, 2015, my wife gave me the gift of John Webster's book *Holiness*. Something he wrote reshaped how I understood the task of completing this doctorate: "A holy theology will be properly mistrustful of its own command of its subject-matter; modest; aware that much of what it says and thinks is dust. . . . theology will be characterized less by fluency and authority, and much more by weakness." I tried to write the thesis in the spirit of Webster's words, exercising humility and honesty. My hope is that this thesis will be received with the spirit intended.

Many thanks go to people who have encouraged me along the way. The first person is my wife, Charlotte, who has endured me being in seminary forever. My in-laws, Delmar and Linda Hager, were benefactors at one point, along with my grandmother, Doris Cubley. My parents, Wayne and Brenda Embry, have always taken interest in my topic and encourage me to apply my ideas to myself first before writing. Dr. Burrelli was a supportive and challenging supervisor who helped make the thesis better.

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May 2017

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In 1979, Jay Adams, the pioneer of the biblical counseling movement, wrote the first theology of biblical counseling, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption*.<sup>1</sup> Based on the taxonomy of Reformed systematic theology, Adams applied the doctrines of Scripture, God, man, salvation, sanctification, church, and the future to biblical counseling. Only in the area of the doctrine of man did Adams make the following stark revelation and plea:

Perhaps it is the area that I now propose to study [the doctrine of man] that is of most significance to counselors. I say this, not because I think the study of human beings is of more importance than the study of God, or for any comparable humanistic reasons. . . . I am begging for *volumes* to be written, and why I make no claims about doing more than making a *beginning* at discussing the many matters of anthropology that confront the Christian counselor who wants to be thoroughly biblical.<sup>2</sup>

For Adams, biblical anthropology shaped the truths for understanding how image bearers grow in Christlikeness. He stated, “sanctification is the process by which the image of God is being restored” in believers.<sup>3</sup> In his understanding, “God’s counsel consists in the renewal of the image.”<sup>4</sup> He even stated, “Anything short of effort to bring

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<sup>1</sup>For a comprehensive history of and evaluation of Adams’s influence and theology, see David A. Powlison, *Competent to Counsel? The History of a Conservative Protestant Biblical Counseling Movement* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2008). For a more accessible historical account, see David Powlison, “Biblical Counseling in Recent Times,” in *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 18-30, and Heath Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement after Adams* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

<sup>2</sup>Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 94, 97. Emphasis his.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 120.



about the renewal of the divine image in man is an unacceptable goal because likeness (alone) is God's goal for man. . . . He is not in the business of *reforming* lives, but in the business of *renewing* His image in them."<sup>5</sup> For the founder of the biblical counseling movement, the renewal of the image of God was a distinguishing mark of biblical counseling. Today, the biblical counseling movement still emphasizes the renewal of the image of God, even though there is a paucity of biblical counseling literature on the image of God in the biblical counseling movement (hereafter BCM).<sup>6</sup> Despite this lacuna in the literature on the image of God, the BCM has given much attention to a related topic: idolatry.

The theme of idolatry permeates Scripture, beginning with the creation story. When describing the coming judgment of God's wrath, Paul went to the creation story to place blame on humanity for exchanging the image of God for the image of idols (Rom 1:23). Theologian Richard Lints explains the significance of this exchange:

Human identity is illuminated in the covenantal relationship of bearing the image of God, and is corrupted by exchanging him for graven images. The one made in the image of God "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling humans and birds and animals." This "exchange" highlights the remarkable similarity and absolute difference of imaging God and imaging the idols. The actions are virtually the same but the objects that receive the action are fundamentally different.<sup>7</sup>

The inversion of bearing God's image is bearing an idol's image. This reality is disastrous for human identity, because the goal of the creation narrative is to show God

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<sup>5</sup>Adams, *Theology of Christian Counseling*, 120. Emphasis his.

<sup>6</sup>As most books in the BCM are topical in nature, this leaves little room for a detailed theology on the image of God in the literature. Biblical counselor Robert Kelleman devotes several chapters to the image of God in his work *Soul Physicians: A Theology of Soul Care and Spiritual Direction* (Taneytown, MD: RPM Books, 2007). Biblical counselor Jeremy Pierre includes an appendix on the image of God as a psychosomatic unity in his doctoral dissertation, Jeremy Paul Pierre, "Trust in the Lord with All Your Heart": The Centrality of Faith in Christ to the Restoration of Human Functioning" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010).

<sup>7</sup>Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 36, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 36.

creating humanity in his image.<sup>8</sup> Though the crown of creation (Ps 8:5), man sought to dethrone his King, the center of his world and existence. Depending on which image we bear, whether it is God's or an idol's, "we resemble what we revere, either for ruin or restoration."<sup>9</sup>

The BCM has not made this connection between the image of God and idolatry in its writings, even though the significance of idolatry is documented throughout the movement.<sup>10</sup> Since David Powlison's 1995 article on idolatry, "Idols of the Heart and 'Vanity Fair,'" the BMC has emphasized idolatry as a central issue in counseling.<sup>11</sup> Powlison's article in 1995 proved significant for the development of Elyse Fitzpatrick's book in 2001, *Idols of the Heart: Learning to Long for God Alone*.<sup>12</sup> The same can be said for biblical counselor Brad Bigney in his 2012 book, *Gospel Treason: Betraying the Gospel with Hidden Idols*.<sup>13</sup> After the influence of books on idolatry, Powlison revisited the issue of heart idolatry within the BCM in 2013 and offered the following critique:

Over the years I've heard how people read (or misread), apply (or misapply) my article. I am delighted by how many people have been illumined by this rather

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<sup>8</sup>Dempster notes how the creation of man is the goal of creation because the word count doubles on the sixth day as opposed to any of the other creation days. Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 15, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003), 57.

<sup>9</sup>G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 49.

<sup>10</sup>The BCM is not a monolithic movement, but a broad movement that incorporates various denominations and evangelical theological viewpoints. However, the movement is largely characterized by its exclusive use of Scripture in counseling.

<sup>11</sup>David Powlison, "Idols of the Heart and 'Vanity Fair,'" *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 13, no. 2 (1995): 35-50.

<sup>12</sup>Fitzpatrick wrote, "I'm thankful . . . to Dave Powlison, who selflessly took ten minutes at a conference in the early 1990s and reconfigured my thinking about idolatry." Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart: Learning to Long for God Alone* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 13.

<sup>13</sup>Bigney wrote, "I wrote this book while standing on the shoulders of David Powlison, Paul Tripp, Ed Welch, and so many other biblical counselors who have gone before me and tilled the ground on this issue of the heart [heart idolatry]." Brad Bigney, *Gospel Treason: Betraying the Gospel with Hidden Idols* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2012), 10.

narrow, technical analysis and have found their faith energized. But the most common misreading and misapplication goes in an introspective direction. Am I encouraging you to go on an inward hunt for “the idols” in your heart? Am I encouraging you to hunt for “the idols” in someone else’s heart? Is figuring out what is wrong *the* key to changing? Should we be continually looking in the mirror? No.<sup>14</sup>

Despite Powlison’s critique, the BCM remains committed to helping counselees discover “idols of the heart.” A search for idolatry on The Biblical Counseling Coalition’s website reveals that the topic of heart idolatry is still influential, articles have been written recently by counselors such as Jim Newheiser,<sup>15</sup> Brad Hambrick,<sup>16</sup> Mark Shaw,<sup>17</sup> and others.<sup>18</sup> To speak of heart idolatry has become a commonplace in the BCM, because counselors encourage counselees to discover their idols, otherwise colloquially known as “idol hunts.”<sup>19</sup>

Because of the continuing prominence of the issue of idolatry in the BCM, Heath Lambert, the recent president of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, addressed idolatry in his historical survey of the BCM after its founder, Jay Adams. Lambert believed that the BCM’s understanding of idolatry was still an area in need of

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<sup>14</sup>David Powlison, “Revisiting Idols of the Heart and ‘Vanity Fair,’” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 27, no. 3 (2013): 39.

<sup>15</sup>Jim Newheiser, “Gluttony, Diet, Fitness, and Body Idolatry,” accessed December 15, 2016, <http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2012/09/21/gluttony-diet-fitness-and-body-idolatry>.

<sup>16</sup>Brad Hambrick, “Precision within Idolatry,” accessed December 15, 2016, <http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/blogs/2011/06/09/precision-within-idolatry>, and idem, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/blogs/2011/07/can-or-should-we-identify-idols>.

<sup>17</sup>Mark Shaw, “Addiction: A Super-Sized Issue,” accessed December 15, 2016, <http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/blogs/2013/06/18/addiction-a-super-sized-issue>.

<sup>18</sup>Julie Ganschow, “The Idolatrous Heart,” accessed December 15, 2016, <http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/resources/the-idolatrous-heart>, and Tom Maxham, “Drawing Out Idols of the Heart,” accessed December 15, 2016, <http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/resources/drawing-out-idols-of-the-heart>.

<sup>19</sup>For example, resources on heart idolatry can be found on the websites of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, Association of Biblical Counselors, The Institute for Biblical Counseling and Discipleship, and the counseling ministry at Faith Baptist Church in Lafayette.

advancement. In his evaluation, idolatry is a secondary issue that flows out of the real issues of selfishness from the sin-exalting heart.<sup>20</sup> Lambert argued,

The main problem sinful people have is not idols of the heart per se. The main problem certainly involves idols and is rooted in the heart, but the idols are manifestations of the deeper problem. The heart problem is self-exaltation, and idols are two or three steps removed. A self-exalting heart that grasps after autonomy is the grand unifying theory that unites all the idols. Even though idols change from culture to culture and from individual to individual within a culture, the fundamental problem of humanity has not changed since Genesis 3: sinful people want – more than anything in the world – to be like God.<sup>21</sup>

Lambert later stated that it is not that idolatry has been misunderstood by the BCM, but rather it needs further development.<sup>22</sup> However, biblical counselor Winston Smith, a counselor at the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation (CCEF), reviewed Lambert's book on Adams and the BCM and argued against Lambert's analysis of needing more development in the area of idolatry:

I believe that the self-serving nature of idolatry has been thoroughly explored and described. Many counselors do help counselees see the human heart's self-serving nature. I wonder if advancement lies in a different direction. Perhaps we should be thinking more broadly about all of the ways that Christ redeems us. . . . It seems to me that advancement isn't so much a matter of further clarifying the sinful core of idolatry, but of exploring the variety of ways that the Bible asks us to understand our brokenness and need for redemption.<sup>23</sup>

This thesis will argue that more development does need to occur in the BCM's understanding of idolatry and redemption, though not exactly in the way Lambert and Smith intended. Nowhere in Lambert's evaluation does he connect the image of God to idolatry. In fact, in most of the BCM literature, there is little reference to how image

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<sup>20</sup>Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams*, 139.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 148.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 150.

<sup>23</sup>Winston Smith, review of *The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams*, by Heath Lambert, *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 27, no. 3 (2013): 90.

bearing impacts the desires of the heart. Also, broader thinking about Christ's redemption work in relation to idolatry does needs to occur, though not in the way Smith articulated, because he believes the issue of understanding idolatry has been settled.

### **Statement of the Thesis**

The thesis is that biblical counselors are best able to help counselees when counselors understand that believers have been delivered from a spiritual state of idolatry at regeneration into a state of being renewed into Christ's image. By understanding how the image of God and idolatry relate, biblical counselors will have a more complete counseling framework for understanding the Christian's identity as it relates to the renewal of the image of God. This thesis will combine the disciplines of biblical theology, systematic theology, and pastoral theology to present a theological vision for how image bearers live in the new creation. As such, the thesis will act as a prolegomenon to how the BCM understands the sanctification process. The goal is for biblical counselors to help counselees learn how to envision the renewal of the image of God in such a way that results in the formation of godly desires and habits that reflect the reality of living in the new creation.

### **Theological Rationale of the Thesis**

The theological rationale for the thesis concerns the theological issues raised, if idolatry is the inversion of image bearing. The first rationale is that the BCM has missed that idolatry is the Old Testament description of unregeneracy. Frequently, the BCM's starting point for helping believers with sinful desires is Ezekiel 14:3, where the unbelieving elders of Israel are exposed for their heart idolatry. Biblical counselors believe that like the elders of Israel who had idols in their hearts, so too do believers who struggle with sin. As Calvin said, and is often (mis)quoted in BCM literature, the heart "is

a perpetual factory of idols.”<sup>24</sup> Biblical counselors teach that believers’ hearts, just like the elders of Israel, are idol factories.<sup>25</sup> However, throughout the Old Testament idolatry is the description of “sensory organs” that are spiritually blind, deaf, and hard-hearted.<sup>26</sup> For example, in several places idolatrous Israel is described as having ears that do not hear, eyes that do not see, and dull hearts unresponsive to God.<sup>27</sup> The judgment for idol worship is that the worshipper spiritually resembles the idol.<sup>28</sup> God’s solution for Israel’s idolatry is making a new covenant that would give the people a new heart that cleanses them from their idolatry (Ezek 36:25; 37:23). Biblical counselors strive to help believers locate idols in their hearts on the basis of Ezekiel 14, even though the counselees have been given a new heart, cleansed from their idolatry, and have become Spirit-filled participants of the new covenant based on Ezekiel 36 and 37. Instead, what could it look like if believers in sin were counseled from their new identity of Spirit-filled participants of the new covenant?

The second rationale to explore the relationship between image bearing and

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<sup>24</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 108. In context, Calvin argued against the use of images in Roman Catholic worship. Calvin’s argument is that the use of images cannot be argued biblically because it is pagans who create physical idols and worship them. In Calvin’s commentary on Ezek 14:3, he calls the elders of Israel who have idols in their hearts “reprobates.” John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Twenty Chapters of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, repr., 2003), 2:47.

<sup>25</sup>For examples of references to Calvin in the BCM, see Bigney, *Gospel Treason*, 149; Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart*, 23; Edward T. Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 51; Paul Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002), 67; Robert Kelleman, *Gospel-Centered Counseling: How Christ Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 163; Howard Eyrich and Elyse Fitzpatrick, “The Diagnoses and Treatment of Idols of the Heart,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*, ed. James MacDonald (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 342; Tim Chester, *You Can Change* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 100; Mike Wilkerson, *Redemption: Freed by Jesus from the Idols We Worship and the Wounds We Carry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 190.

<sup>26</sup>G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 379-80.

<sup>27</sup>See Deut 29:4; Pss 115:5-8; 135:15-18; Isa 6:9-10; Jer 5:21; Ezek 12:2.

<sup>28</sup>See Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 36-70.



idolatry is that the Gospels explain how Jesus led a new exodus that rescued idolaters from the kingdom of darkness, in order to bring them into God's kingdom as new creation image bearers.<sup>29</sup> According to Jesus, Israel's unbelief in Yahweh was a confirmation that the nation was still in idolatry.<sup>30</sup> Each of the Gospels record Jesus quoting Isaiah 6:9-10, an Old Testament passage that describes how idolatry impacts sensory organs of hearing, sight, and hard-heartedness, to explain that unbelievers are judged for their idolatry.<sup>31</sup> Jesus' ministry not only judged idolaters but also focused on recreating image bearers. Frequently in the Gospels, Jesus symbolizes the recreation of image bearers by healing physically blind, deaf, and lame people. For example, Mark's gospel narrative displays how Jesus' teaching on idolatry from Isaiah 6:9-10 defined his healing ministry, which is why his teaching on discipleship is followed by healing-of-sight and healing-of-deaf miracles.<sup>32</sup> After the healings, Jesus returned to the significance of Isaiah 6:9-10 by asking his disciples if they are able to perceive and understand his identity.<sup>33</sup> By doing this, Jesus showed that within his teaching and healing ministry there was a correlation between idolatry and image bearing. Idolatry is condemned as self-

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<sup>29</sup>For background to the new exodus, see Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997); idem, "Exodus," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 484-87; also Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 45-59.

<sup>30</sup>See Michael J. Daling, "Idolatry and Reversal: Isaiah 6:9-10 and Matthew's Use of an Isaianic Theme" (Ph.D. diss., Wheaton College, 2012), 28-31; Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 244-48.

<sup>31</sup>See Matt 13:14-15, Mark 4:12, Luke 8:10, and John 12:40.

<sup>32</sup>Jesus' condemnation of Israel's idolatry in Mark 7:6-8 is based on Isa 29:13, another passage that described Israel's unregenerate heart. This condemnation of idolatry is immediately followed by a healing of a deaf and lame man based on Isa 35:5, an Isaianic passage on the new exodus. The discipleship section in Mark is chaps. 8-10. This section begins with a references to Isa 6:9-10 in Mark 8:17-21 then followed by the healing of a blind man in 8:22-26. The discipleship section closes with the other healing-of-the blind miracle in 10:46-52.

<sup>33</sup>Jesus' teaching on Isa 6:9-10 is followed questions to his disciples on whether or not they perceive and understand his teaching (Mark 4:10-13). The theme of perceiving, understanding, seeing, and hearing – all references to Isa 6:9-10 – occur in Mark 4:23-25, 33; 6:52; 7:14, 18; 8:17-21; 9:32.

worship that inverted the image of God, while Jesus' healing power is a symbol of the recreation of idolaters into those who bear his image. Jesus' healing ministry was meant to display that the reversal of idolatry through the renewal of the image of God had arrived in his ministry. Writing on Jesus' common remark, "he who has ears to hear, let him hear," Beale writes that this "sensory organ" language has spiritual healing significance because, "Israel's newly restored organs of perception will also allow it to perceive and thus to reflect the glory of God himself instead of reflecting the image of sinful creation."<sup>34</sup> Jesus came to deliver believers from idolatry and recreate them into his image.

That Jesus delivered people from a state of idolatry is supported elsewhere in the New Testament. Most significantly, at the end of the book of Acts Paul based his Gentile mission on Isaiah 6:9-10 and the promise that salvation will come to those who listen to the Gospel and respond with faith in Jesus (Acts 28:26-28; cf. Rom 11:8). Elsewhere, Paul stated that believers have "turned to God from idols to serve the true and living God" (1 Thess 1:9). For a Christian to commit idolatry was to abandon Christ, to leave the kingdom of light and return to the kingdom of darkness, that is, commit apostasy (1 Cor 6:9, 14).<sup>35</sup> Idolatry is the lifestyle of the non-Christian (Gal 5:20). At the close of the canon, the apostle John stated that idolaters will not inherit the new creation (Rev 22:15). Though the BCM emphasizes idolatry, it has yet to address how this concept of idolatry from the Old and New Testament support the claim that Christians are idolaters. What could it look like if believers were counseled with a complete

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<sup>34</sup>Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 380.

<sup>35</sup>The assertion could be made that Paul's command to the Corinthians to avoid idolatry means Christians can be idolaters. Paul's warning should be interpreted the same way that the author of Hebrews warns believers about abandoning Christ sacrificial atonement: if one abandon Christ, he is forsaking the only way his sins can be atoned. If believers abandon Christ for idols, they have not merely ventured in and out of heart idolatry, but have abandoned the faith altogether.



understanding of their identity as new creatures in Christ because they understand they have been delivered from a spiritual state of idolatry?

### Outline of the Chapters

Chapter 2 will explore the hermeneutical process and argue that the BCM needs to incorporate biblical theology into its hermeneutics to understand how image bearing and idolatry relate. Biblical theology is essential to the hermeneutical task, writes Brian Rosner, because it is “principally concerned with the overall theological message of the whole Bible.”<sup>36</sup> The task of biblical theology forces exegetes to understand the way Scripture has revealed itself for interpretation and then how to apply it because,

it is normal to settle methodological issues before making any positive assertions about the actual theological commitments of the biblical text. It seems obvious to many that before one can ask, “What does the Bible say?” it is necessary to ask, “How do we find out what the Bible says?” Before one does theology, one must know how to do theology.<sup>37</sup>

The same can be said for the interpretive task involved in biblical counseling. The biblical text must be understood correctly before it can be applied accurately. Recently, biblical counselors have begun writing on hermeneutics.<sup>38</sup> With the notable exception of the works of Bob Kelleman and Deepak Reju, the literature of the biblical counseling movement has presupposed certain interpretive practices and theological grids.<sup>39</sup> The historical-grammatical method of interpretation and systematic theology form the

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<sup>36</sup>B. S. Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Grand Rapids: IVP, 2000), 3.

<sup>37</sup>Lints, *Fabric of Theology*, 279.

<sup>38</sup>See Steve Viars and Rob Green, “The Sufficiency of Scripture,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*, ed. James MacDonald (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers), 89-105.

<sup>39</sup>Deepak Varghese Reju, “Toward a Definition of Christian Identity: Using the Interpretive Lens of Creation, Fall, and Redemption in Christian Counseling” (Louisville: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary); Bob Kelleman, “The Bible Is Relevant for That?” in *Scripture and Counseling*, ed. Bob Kelleman (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 177-97; idem, “The Rich Relevance of God’s Word,” in *Scripture and Counseling*, ed. Bob Kelleman (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 202-25.

foundation of the biblical counseling movement. These two interpretive elements are essential ingredients to evangelical interpretation but they are limited in scope. As chapter 2 will demonstrate, the hermeneutics of the BCM developed out of twentieth century American fundamentalism, which viewed biblical truth as propositions discovered through an inductive method of studying Scripture. The result is that the movement has room to improve its hermeneutic to understand the image of God fully. Relying on the hermeneutical influence of Vanhoozer, Lints, Plummer, Klink and Lockett, and Osborn, chapter 2 will conclude with a theological proposal for how biblical counselors can incorporate biblical theology into the hermeneutical task.<sup>40</sup>

Chapter 3 will examine the Old Testament idea that idolatry is the description of unregeneracy. This chapter will introduce the biblical doctrine of image bearing and idolatry, how these themes develop across the Hebrew canon, and how biblical counselors understand them. Drawing on the biblical theology of Lints, Beale, Dempster, Gentry and Wellum, and Dumbrell, this chapter will trace the relationship between image bearing and idolatry through the Old Testament canon.<sup>41</sup> Though created in God's image to rule the world on his behalf, humans exchanged the glory of God for the image of idols. As disastrous as the consequences of Adam's sin in the Garden were for image bearers, the Old Testament data on the image of God appears very limited. However, if

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<sup>40</sup>Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005); Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1993); Keith W. Plummer, "Canonically Competent to Counsel: An Analysis of the Use of the Bible in Integration, Biblical Counseling, and Christian Psychology with a Canonical-Linguistic Proposal for Reclaiming Counseling as a Theological Discipline" (Ph.D., diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2009); Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012); Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012).

<sup>41</sup>Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*; Beale, *We Become What We Worship*; Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1984).

idolatry is understood as the inversion of image bearing, then the significance of the image of God can be traced throughout the entire Old Testament canon, because idolatry is a prominent theme throughout the Old Testament. The historical and interpretive background of image bearing reveals that biblical counselors have adhered to the structural view of the image of God and neglected the covenantal aspect of image bearing. Image bearing is a covenant blessing that defines God's people as sons who rule on his behalf, yet this covenant identity was exchanged for the worship of idols. Idolatry, then, is the inversion of image bearing and is a covenant curse that can only be cured through a new covenant that changes the human heart.<sup>42</sup>

Chapter 4 will argue that Jesus delivered believers out of idolatry to recreate them into his image. Biblical counselors believe Jesus continually delivers believers from heart idolatry, but by labeling believers idolaters they over-look the redemptive-historical reality of Jesus' ministry. This chapter will have two sections. Based on the biblical theology and exegesis of Watts and Beale, the first section will look at Jesus' image-renewing ministry in the Gospel of Mark that described how Jesus' teaching and healing ministry based on Isaiah was designed to either confirm idolaters in their idolatry or elicit faith.<sup>43</sup> Those who had "ears to hear" were blessed because they were brought out of the curse of idolatry (Matt 13:16). Using writers such as Campbell, Beale, Gentry and Wellum, and Schreiner, the second section will look at passages from Paul and other New Testament writers that describe the significance of Jesus' image-renewing ministry.<sup>44</sup> Passages from Romans, the Corinthian letters, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians,

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<sup>42</sup>It is not the case that Old Testament saints were not saved by faith in the Messiah, in whose image they were created. Rather, part of the significance of the new covenant is the broader application of image renewal through the Messiah.

<sup>43</sup>Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark*.

<sup>44</sup>Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012); Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*; Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*.

James, and 1 John will be analyzed to argue that renewal is possible because believers have been united to Christ and delivered from idolatry. As a result, the New Testament epistles describe the renewal process as a present day reality that is ever increasing. Believers are warned to avoid idolatry, because Paul's and John's conception of idolatry was paganism. For Paul, to engage in idolatry was to abandon Christ and return to a life of paganism (1 Cor 6:9-11; 10:21). For John, to engage in idolatry was to follow the teaching of those who abandoned the apostolic message about Christ (1 John 5:21). There are several passages that list idolatry as sin believers can commit (Eph 5:5; Col 3:5), yet even these passages have pagan idolatry in view. These passages reveal that idolatry can be described as greed, and that believers must be on guard against selfishness that characterized their previous unconverted life. However, this does not mean that idolatry is the overarching metaphor to describe the sin issues in the life of believers or that their identity is that of an idolater. It is incorrect, then, to label believers idolaters when they have been united to Christ through faith and are part of the new creation.

Chapter 5 will demonstrate practical aspects of the thesis as it relates to helping counselees grow as new creation image bearers. This chapter will analyze three elements necessary for biblical counseling: biblical truth, biblical vocabulary, and biblical practice. Labeling believers idolaters can obscure the biblical truth about believers' new identity in Christ. Helping counselees believe theological truth that they are no longer idolaters but are now currently in the process of being renewed into Christ's image takes what Vanhoozer calls "eschatological imagination," the ability to conceive that one is already a new creation.<sup>45</sup> The theological language of counseling also changes if believers no longer have the identity of idolaters. Biblical counselors can speak of renewal of the image of God in terms of healing, sonship, and the new creation in ways that are meant to motivate the new heart toward holiness to develop sanctified habits. Speaking about these

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<sup>45</sup>Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 416.

truths encourage “eschatological authenticity” in the lives of counselees, the ability to live out the identity of being a new creation image bearer.<sup>46</sup> The theological practice of counseling can focus on helping change desires without minimizing a proper emphasis on behavior. Based on the influence of Vanhoozer’s idea that the indicative and imperatives are best viewed as gifts and tasks, this chapter will argue that the balance of gift and task is best captured in the concept of the *imago Dei*.<sup>47</sup> The gifts of sonship and healing provide motivation for godly desires, while the task of taking dominion and reflecting Christ’s glory provides opportunities for sanctified habits to be developed in the lives of counselees. The goal is for counselors to help counselees develop an eschatological imagination and eschatological authenticity, so counselees can live godly during times of what Beale calls “eschatological discord”: the moments where new hearts do not desire to act in accordance to their identity in Christ.<sup>48</sup>

The thesis will conclude by answering several objections, namely, the idea that if believers are not idolaters then the “already” is overemphasized at the expense of the “not yet,” that idolatry is rendered a useless metaphor in counseling, and that heart issues are not the main problem with counselees. Several suggestions for further study will also be given.

## Conclusion

The hope is that because of this thesis biblical counselors will have a better

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<sup>46</sup>The term “eschatological authenticity” is N. T. Wright’s term quoted by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Putting on Christ: Spiritual Formation and the Drama of Discipleship,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 8, no. 2 (2015): 164. Also see N. T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: Harper One, 2010), 26.

<sup>47</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 128-29; idem, “Putting on Christ,” 154.

<sup>48</sup>Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 865.

understanding of believers' identity in Christ and use that identity as the starting point for helping counselees cultivate godly desires and habits that are reflective of being new creation image bearers. The thesis will argue against a several decade-old understanding of counseling, namely, that they are idolaters and the main problem is the idols in their hearts. The difference between image bearing and idolatry cannot be reduced to semantics. Counseling believers as idolaters based on Ezekiel 14:3 fundamentally disagrees with the reality of who they are now in Christ and how they are renewed into his image. This does not mean that biblical counselors are heretical or have not been helpful with counselees. It does mean that their theological understanding of identity with Christ is incomplete to the degree that it diminished the dignity that is bestowed upon believers united to Christ. To remind counselees that they are recreated in the image of Christ is a different starting point than telling counselees that they are fundamentally idolaters and that will not change until they are in Christ's presence.

The tension for counselors is helping people who live with "eschatological discord," those who struggle to live in the already-not-yet. Pastorally, the reality is that renewal into Christ's image is a present reality that is ever increasing, however slow it might increase. Miscommunicating to counselees the realities of a new heart skews the emphasis on image renewal. Labeling Christians idolaters and encouraging them to look for idols in their heart consistently obscures the truth about their identity in Christ. The central point for counseling is that Christians no longer bear the image of idols but are renewed. One day, believers will awake in Christ's presence with sight that is "satisfied with your likeness" (Ps 17:15). Until then, counselors can help struggling sinners and sufferers have the eyes of their hearts enlightened to realize their Father can do abundantly more in them than whatever they could ever ask or think (Eph 1:18; 3:20).

## CHAPTER 2

### THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE BIBLICAL COUNSELING MOVEMENT

The biblical counseling movement has to adopt a redemptive-historic hermeneutic, in order to understand the relationship between image bearing and idolatry. The movement has shown a commitment to the grammatical-historical method of interpretation and systematic theology but has not adopted biblical theology into its process of interpreting Scripture. Though the early part of the movement, as characterized by Jay Adams's writing, had a hermeneutic that resulted in propositionalism, more recent counselors have begun to adopt a redemptive-historical framework in their writings. However, even as recent as several years ago, publications within the movement still retain a hermeneutic that does not account for biblical theology. This chapter will cover the history of hermeneutics within the movement and offer a way forward to understand how image bearing and idolatry relate.

The movement can be divided into either a first or second generation (Lambert), or traditionalist and progressive (Johnson) distinction. Both Lambert and Johnson see a difference between early biblical counselors such as Adams and later biblical counselors such as David Powlison and his colleagues at the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation (hereafter CCEF).<sup>1</sup> Following Johnson's distinction between traditional and progressive biblical counselors, Keith Plummer's

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<sup>1</sup>Heath Lambert sees a first and second generation of biblical counselors, with Jay Adams as the first generation, and those after him, most notably CCEF, as the second generation. See Heath Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement after Adams* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012). Eric Johnson, a Christian psychologist, also sees a divide in biblical counselors, labeling them traditionalists, who follow Adams, and progressives, who follow CCEF. See Eric Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 106-25.



doctoral thesis under Kevin Vanhoozer analyzed the hermeneutics of integrationists, tradition biblical counselors, progressive biblical counselors, and Christian psychology. Plummer argues “integration and early biblical counseling have tended to equate being biblical with attending to biblical propositions.”<sup>2</sup> Later biblical counselors, most notably David Powlison and Christian counselor Eric Johnson, have developed hermeneutics that could allow for a better understanding between image bearing and idolatry.<sup>3</sup>

References to the image of God in Scripture are sparse, appearing exclusively in the beginning parts of Genesis and the New Testament letters. But if the relationship between image bearing and idolatry is traced across the storyline of the canon, a more complete understanding of the image of God emerges. Richard Lints explains this connection:

There is a theological dynamic in which the language of the image of God is manifested across the breadth of the canon, though the language itself changes. The very change of terms across the canon is itself indicative of larger theological points. This is clear in at least two ways: at the point where the language of image drops out, the language of idolatry becomes prominent; and secondarily the re-emergence of the language of “imaging” is most strongly connected to the arrival of Jesus Christ, who is both the restorer of the image of God and the one who ultimately breaks the power of the idols by overcoming the temptations of the evil one.<sup>4</sup>

As a result, a hermeneutic that relies exclusively on the grammatical-historical hermeneutic and systematic theology, which are necessarily limited to the handful of texts on the image of God, will miss the connection between image bearing and idolatry

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<sup>2</sup>Keith W. Plummer, “Canonically Competent to Counsel: An Analysis of the Use of the Bible in Integration, Biblical Counseling, and Christian Psychology with a Canonical-Linguistic proposal for Reclaiming Counseling as a Theological Discipline” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2009), 45.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 265-68.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 36, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 80.



that is stretched across the canon. But the BCM has a dedication to studying and applying Scripture that should allow it to return to Scripture for a more fully articulated theological method.

Throughout its history, the BCM has been defined by its commitment that Scripture is sufficient for counseling in the grace and truth of Christ.<sup>5</sup> The reliance upon Scripture alone defines the movement, is the source of its counseling knowledge on anthropology, and distinguishes it from secular and Christian psychology. This vision has been formed in contrast to secular and Christian psychology and grows out of the belief that Scripture is sufficient to help sinful and suffering believers grow in “life and godliness” (2 Pet1:3).

Though the BCM believes Scripture is sufficient, it has only recently addressed the issue of how Scripture should be interpreted.<sup>6</sup> What has held together the BCM, which is comprised of various denominations across the evangelical and fundamentalist spectrum, is the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture and not a certain position on biblical hermeneutics. The issue of hermeneutics has been neither a unifying or dividing issue in the movement. Yet if heart idolatry is as central an issue in the lives of believers as the BCM claims, then it should be supported exegetically and theologically.

This chapter will argue that the BCM’s understanding of idolatry needs

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<sup>5</sup>Heath Lambert, “The Sufficiency of Scripture, the Biblical Counseling Movement, and the Purpose of This Book,” in *Counseling the Hard Cases: True Stories Illustrating the Sufficiency of God’s Resources in Scripture*, ed. Stuart Scott and Heath Lambert (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2012), 1-24; Paul Tautges and Steve Vairs, “Sufficient for Life and Godliness,” in *Scripture and Counseling: God’s Word for Life in a Broken World*, ed. Bob Kelleman (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 47-61.

<sup>6</sup>For a defense of the sufficiency of Scripture, see Lambert, “The Sufficiency of Scripture, the Biblical Counseling Movement, and the Purpose of This Book.” For recent writing on hermeneutics in the BCM, see Bob Kelleman, “The Bible is Relevant for That?” in *Scripture and Counseling: God’s Word for Life in a Broken Word*, ed. Bob Kelleman and Jeff Forrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 177-98, and idem, “The Rich Relevance of God’s Word,” in *Scripture and Counseling: God’s Word for Life in a Broken Word*, ed. Bob Kelleman and Jeff Forrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 202-25. Also Steve Viars and Rob Green, “The Sufficiency of Scripture,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God’s Changeless Truth*, ed. James MacDonald (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 89-106.

refinement because it has not asked the question, “How do we find out what the Bible says?”<sup>7</sup> The BCM has emphasized the grammatical-historical hermeneutic and systematic theology over and against biblical theology. Biblical theology, however, is an essential factor in analyzing the relationship between the image of God and idolatry. This chapter will examine several recent attempts by biblical counselors on how to interpret Scripture and then offer a hermeneutical way forward on how the image of God and idolatry relate.

### **Hermeneutics of the First Generation**

The movement’s founder, Jay Adams, believed the written Word was foundational for the ministry of counseling. “The Holy Spirit expects counselors to use his Word, the Holy Scriptures . . . His counseling work is ordinarily performed through the ministry of this Word.”<sup>8</sup> Adams’ book *Competent to Counsel*, written in 1970, was a call for pastors and the laity to return to their responsibility to counsel believers with the word. His book attacked psychodynamic, humanistic, and behavioral theories, and in doing so he began a conservative Protestant anti-psychiatry movement.<sup>9</sup> Originally, Adams’ dispute with secular and Christian psychiatric theories focused not merely on the use of Scripture in counseling, but on framing biblical counseling as a competitive worldview. Christian counseling had integrated secular psychiatry into its counseling beliefs and practice with the result, as Adam’s believed, that it had turned dangerous

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<sup>7</sup>Lints writes, “It is normal to settle methodological issues before making any positive assertions about the actual theological commitments of the biblical text. It seems obvious to many that before one can ask, ‘What does the Bible say?’ it is necessary to ask, ‘How do we find out what the Bible says?’ Before one does theology, one must know how to do theology.” Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*, 279.

<sup>8</sup>Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 23.

<sup>9</sup>David A. Powlison, *Competent to Counsel: The History of a Conservative Protestant Biblical Counseling Movement* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 1996), 10-15.

because, “in the area of psychiatry, science largely has given way to humanistic philosophy and gross speculation.”<sup>10</sup>

Adams defined hermeneutics as “the science of biblical interpretation or explanation” that included “the theories, principles, and practice of Bible interpretation.”<sup>11</sup> The Bible offered “data, information, exhortation,” about God.<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere, Adams calls the Bible “a counseling textbook.”<sup>13</sup> For Adams, Scripture alone offered a theological vision for a biblical philosophy of counseling against secular and Christian psychology.

Historically, Adams’ doctrine of Scripture emerged out of twentieth-century Protestant fundamentalism that stressed the epistemological antithesis between secular and biblical counseling systems.<sup>14</sup> Like Adams, early twentieth century fundamentalists eschewed secular psychology, because it embraced an evolutionary anthropology. Evangelicals, however, integrated psychology into Christian counseling. It is for this reason that Adams’ early writings on biblical counseling in the 1970s and 1980s impacted fundamentalists more positively than mainstream evangelicals.<sup>15</sup> In particular, Reformed circles within fundamentalism took to Adams’ writings. For example, the biblical counseling movement impacted Presbyterianism at Westminster Theological Seminary with its historical heritage of covenant theology and the Reformed, while also

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<sup>10</sup>Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, xxi.

<sup>11</sup>Jay E. Adams, “Biblical Interpretation and Counseling,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 16, no. 3 (1998): 8.

<sup>12</sup>Jay E. Adams, “Biblical Interpretation and Counseling, Part 2,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 17, no. 1 (1998): 26.

<sup>13</sup>Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), xiii.

<sup>14</sup>Powlison, *Competent to Counsel*, 47.

<sup>15</sup>D. Powlison and J. H. Coe, “Biblical Counseling,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology and Counseling*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill (Grand Rapids: Baker 1999), 134.

embraced by dispensationalists at The Master's Seminary.<sup>16</sup> Though varying in their understanding of redemptive history, both educational institutions adhere to the inerrancy, inspiration, authority of Scripture, and are noted proponents of the biblical counseling movement. The doctrine of sufficiency of Scripture, not a hermeneutic on redemptive history, held these two schools together in their commitment to biblical counseling.

Overall, Adams' worldview coincided with traditional fundamentalist themes such as "the authority and scope of Scripture; the antithesis between Christian and secular thought; a relatively uncomplicated counseling method promising relatively rapid progress; an activist call to arms and action, rather than to reflective or scholarly concern," among others.<sup>17</sup> Fundamentalists, however, were not immune to the intellectual influences of their cultural environment.<sup>18</sup> Like secular psychologists, they embraced the scientific method. Fundamentalism rejected the use of science in counseling, yet embraced a scientific model of biblical interpretation that impacted how they interpreted Scripture and did theology. How fundamentalists used the scientific method for interpreting Scripture can be traced to nineteenth-century Princeton Theological Seminary.<sup>19</sup> For Princetonians such as Charles Hodge, theology was a science. "The Bible is to the theologian what nature is to the man of science. It is the store-house of facts; and his method of ascertaining what the Bible teaches is the same as that which the

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<sup>16</sup>The Master's Seminary and Westminster Theological Seminary are used as examples due to their publications on biblical counseling and faculty commitments early on in the history of the BCM. Other Bible colleges and seminaries also support the BCM.

<sup>17</sup>Powlison, *Competent to Counsel*, 39-40.

<sup>18</sup>Lints describes this as the "fundamentalist fallacy" – the conviction that God reveals himself outside of a cultural setting to communicate timeless truths to people who themselves are not influenced by their own cultural setting." Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1993), 8.

<sup>19</sup>Throughout history, theology had been viewed as a science. Louis Berkhof, *Introductory Volume to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1932), 44-468.

natural philosopher adopts to ascertain what nature teaches.”<sup>20</sup> Echoing this thought later in the 1800s, A. A. Hodge wrote, “Theology, in its most general sense, is the science of religion.”<sup>21</sup> Theologian B. B. Warfield would also echo this sentiment by stating, “Systematic theology, as distinguished from its sister disciplines, is a science, and is to be conceived as a science and treated as a science.”<sup>22</sup> Historian George Marsden traced the impact on the scientific method in fundamentalism, noting the influence of the inductive method on biblical interpretation.<sup>23</sup> According to Marsden, the interpreter gathers the teaching of Scripture and then deduces general principles to arrange the facts. A further implication of the inductive method was that it was based on common sense philosophy, the ability to interpret and arrange doctrinal facts from Scripture. As such, early fundamentalism had set into place a form of biblical interpretation that resulted in the inductive model of literal, historic, and grammatical interpretation ready to produce propositional truth that could be systematized into theology.<sup>24</sup>

Writing as a contemporary of Warfield at Princeton, but from a different theological vantage point, was Geerhardus Vos. Vos was an evangelical proponent of biblical theology. Biblical theology examined biblical truth through the historical unfolding of the story of redemption from Genesis to Revelation, whereas systematic

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<sup>20</sup>Charles Hodge, “Introduction to Systematic Theology,” in *The Princeton Theology, 1812-1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Warfield*, ed. Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 125.

<sup>21</sup>Archibald Alexander Hodge, “Outline of Theology,” in *The Princeton Theology, 1812-1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Warfield*, ed. Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 212.

<sup>22</sup>B. B. Warfield, “The Idea of Systematic Theology,” in *The Princeton Theology, 1812-1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Warfield*, ed. Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 243.

<sup>23</sup>George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 55-62.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 109-18; Mark A. Noll, introduction to *The Princeton Theology, 1812-1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Warfield*, ed. Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 30-33.

theology collected the data from biblical texts to make logical and coherent truths. Vos, however, did not see a disjunction between the disciplines of systematic theology and biblical theology, but his view was different from other Princetonians. He viewed the relationship between them as a family resemblance of siblings rather than parent-to-child.<sup>25</sup> Vos argued that systematic theology was structurally dependent on biblical theology, because biblical theology studied the self-disclosure of God's history. The biblical text, not the logical ordering of doctrines, provided the inherent and organic structure of how God revealed himself in redemptive history. This is why Vos argued, "The Bible is not a dogmatic handbook but a historical book full of dramatic interest."<sup>26</sup> Biblical theology, in contrast to systematic theology, allowed Scripture to set its own agenda.

Vos's view on biblical theology did not gain a broad audience outside the academy. For fundamentalists and evangelicals alike, the discipline of systematic theology in the twentieth century served the purpose of defending Protestant doctrine against theological liberalism in ways biblical theology was not designed to do. Adams was familiar with Reformed denominations that were impacted by liberalism and jettisoned their doctrinal beliefs of inerrancy, inspiration, and the authority of Scripture.<sup>27</sup> Because of his experience, Adams believed that any counseling model that unanchored itself from Scripture was also in doctrinal error and an invalid model of counseling. With urgency, he wrote, "Truths that the church does not treat systematically (i.e., theologically) it has a tendency to lose."<sup>28</sup> A systematic approach to Scripture was what

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<sup>25</sup>Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 15; Lints, *Fabric of Theology*, 181-90.

<sup>26</sup>Lints, *Fabric of Theology*, 186.

<sup>27</sup>Powlison, *Competent to Counsel*, 81-84.

<sup>28</sup>Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), xi.

Adams believed the church needed to understand biblical counseling. How biblical theology fit into biblical interpretation was by-passed altogether during Adams' influential years.<sup>29</sup> Systematic theology, grounded in the historical-grammatical hermeneutic, became the capstone in biblical interpretation for biblical counselors.

In evaluating Adams' hermeneutics, Keith Plummer notes that Adams' hermeneutical goal is to get propositional truth out of Scripture.<sup>30</sup> Adams believed different genres required different hermeneutical study tools, yet he did not articulate in his writings how different genre should be applied in specific counseling cases. For example, Adams does not explain how a proverb is used in Scripture to convey a truth differently than a narrative would. The genre itself must be involved in the act of communication. Kevin Vanhoozer explains why Adams' usage of biblical literature is problematic. "The main defect of propositionalism is that it reduces the variety of speech actions in the canon to one type: the assertion."<sup>31</sup> For example, Vanhoozer explains that the genre of narrative is not merely meant to assert historical facts that can be translated into theological truths. Narratives communicate a way that God wants his people to look at the world, a point of view. "By inculcating a world-view, narrative is far more than a way of transmitting information; it is rather a process of *formation*, a training in *seeing as*."<sup>32</sup> What Vanhoozer means to communicate is that each literary genre gives believers different ways of thinking, seeing, and experiencing God and what he has done through the biblical texts. Vanhoozer goes on to say,

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<sup>29</sup>It is a mistake to say that Adams did not believe in the significance of redemptive history for biblical counseling. Foundational to his book is that redemption in Christ takes believers to a redeemed state beyond that which Adam enjoyed in the Garden of Eden. This idea, though, is developed systematically and not across the biblical canon. See Adams, *Theology of Christian Counseling*, 174-83.

<sup>30</sup>Plummer, *Canonically Competent to Counsel*, 89-90.

<sup>31</sup>Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 266.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 284. Emphasis his.



Exegesis therefore involves much more than lexical, historical, and grammatical knowledge, much more than mastering information about the text. As a *scientia* or type of disciplined knowledge, the goal of exegesis is to come to know the text for what it is, for what it says, and for what it does; this ultimately involves not mastery so much as *apprenticeship*. The discipline required by exegesis is at once intellectual, spiritual, imaginative, for it involves nothing less than training readers to undergo the hard formation of following Scripture so that literary forms merge into forms of life, so that *seeing as* translates into *experiencing as*, at the limit, into *being as*.<sup>33</sup>

Ironically, the counseling group that holds a similar hermeneutic to early traditional biblical counselors are integrationists. Plummer notes that integrationist James Beck of Denver Seminary believes that “the Bible functions as a repository of true principles and propositions.”<sup>34</sup> Like Adams, Beck describes Scripture as “data base” of theology.<sup>35</sup> For Beck, theology’s primary task is to identify, organize, and harmonize Scripture’s propositional teachings into a coherent theological system.<sup>36</sup> Along with his colleague Bruce Demarest, Beck writes, “God makes known principles for living well in propositional form.”<sup>37</sup> Plummer rightly observes the result of taking all forms of genre and flattening them into propositions when he writes,

A parsing of the Bible into propositions and principles runs the risk of losing a sense of the canonical whole as well as the narrational unity that causes its various elements to hang together. Beck is right to note the importance of literary, historical, and cultural backgrounds if one is to properly interpret the Scriptures but he fails to

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<sup>33</sup>Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 285. Emphasis his.

<sup>34</sup>Plummer, *Canonically Competent*, 68.

<sup>35</sup>James R. Beck, “General Revelation and Christian Psychology,” in *49<sup>th</sup> National Conference of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Santa Clara, CA: Theological Research Exchange Network, 1997), 9.

<sup>36</sup>James R. Beck, “The Role of Theology in the Training of Christian Psychologists,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 20, no. 2 (1992): 103.

<sup>37</sup>James R. Beck and Bruce A. Demarest, *The Human Person in Theology and Psychology: A Biblical Anthropology for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 108-9. As Demarest explains in his systematic theology, “Although many revealed assertions are not in [propositional] form, propositions in logical form may be presupposed or inferred from the poetry, letters, biographical descriptions and narratives. Assumptions and inferences about God and humanity are implied in what has been stated in nonpropositional form.” (Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology, Three Volumes in One* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 120).



adequately address the importance of understanding particular biblical passages in their broader contexts.<sup>38</sup>

### **Hermeneutics of the Second Generation**

Despite the propositionalist influence in the BMC, the movement has had recent development and openness in incorporating biblical theology into its hermeneutical methods. Three works by biblical counselors will be examined to understand the current hermeneutics of the movement. The first is a chapter by Steve Viars and Rob Green who echo the hermeneutics of Adams. Though limited in scope, their vision for hermeneutics does not offer a place for biblical theology in the interpretive task. The second work is by Bob Kelleman. Kelleman is more comprehensive in his view than Viars and Green, using two descriptions of biblical theology. In his view, systematic theology is an interpretive level above biblical theology, and so limits his reading of biblical texts. Third, the work of Deepak Reju will be examined. Reju argues that an understanding of redemptive history is necessary for the biblical counseling task. His work is the most significant for advocating biblical theology into the counseling repertoire. After these three works are examined, a proposal will be made that will set the course for chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis for interpreting the image of God and idolatry.

Steve Viars and Rob Green wrote on the sufficiency of Scripture to support the idea that biblical counseling must be Christ-centered. These authors contend that Scripture alone is sufficient to inform the counselor's views of human nature and nurture. Viars and Green build their argument on Scripture's sufficiency with a discussion of the Reformation and sufficiency and then introduce definitions of sufficiency by systematicians, Berkof and Grudem. Viars and Green believe the human heart needs to change because of the effects of sin, namely, the noetic effects of the fall. It is for this reason they dismiss the argument made by Christian psychologists that "all truth is God's

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<sup>38</sup>Plummer, *Canonically Competent*, 79.

truth.” Instead, the authors view psychological data as suspect, and Scripture alone is all that is needed for life and godliness. These concepts lead the authors to claim, “God’s Word produces a gospel-centered, heart-focused counsel that allows both nurture and nature to function as informers of our theology work.”<sup>39</sup> To visualize a model of Scripture’s sufficiency for hermeneutics, the authors create the following method of interpretation:<sup>40</sup>

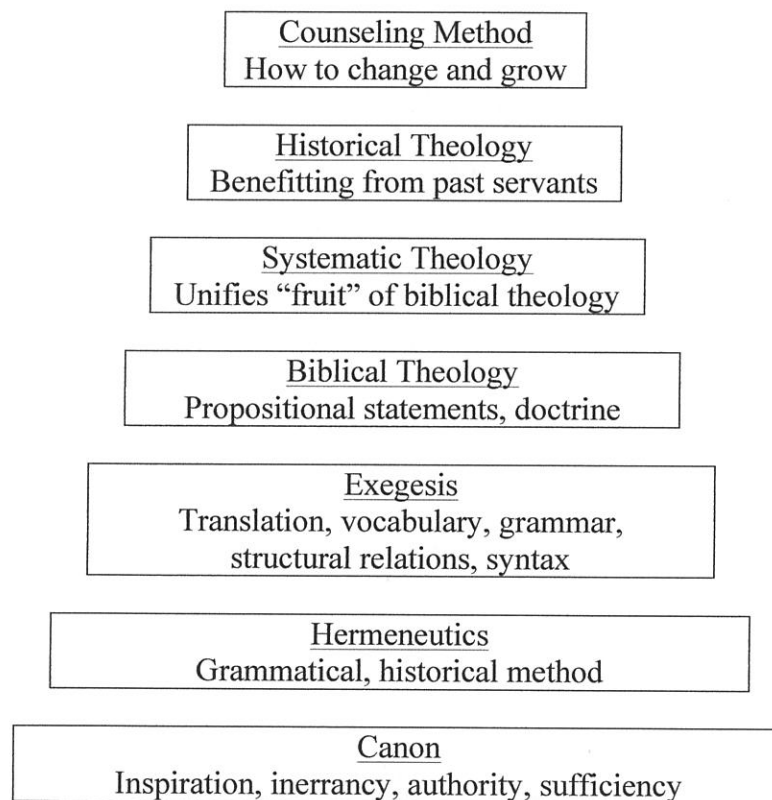


Figure 1. Viars’s and Green’s hermeneutical model

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<sup>39</sup>Viars and Green, “The Sufficiency of Scripture,” 103.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

For Viars and Green, the foundation for a biblical counseling model must be supported by the doctrines of inspiration, inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency. Next is the hermeneutical process where grammar and historical background is studied for any particular text in question in the counseling process. Exegesis is then needed to understand the translation, vocabulary, grammar (again), textual structure, and syntax. The authors then define biblical theology as propositional statements and doctrine. Systematic theology unifies the doctrines garnered from biblical theology. After systematic theology is the study of historical theology, the texts and topics discussed in church history. Historical theology offers the vantage point of learning from other theologians. Taken together, these concepts support a biblical counseling model of how people change and grow, as “this pyramid leads the counselor to place central attention on what God’s Word says about changes that need to take place at the level of the heart.”<sup>41</sup>

There are several noteworthy aspects of this pyramid. First, the pyramid is constructed in response to the psychological discussion on nurture and nature. For the authors, God’s Word must inform psychological and medical claims. The authors encourage medical help and psychotropic medication to alleviate distressing symptoms. In keeping with Wayne Grudem, whom the authors cite for a definition of Scripture’s sufficiency, the position taken by Viars and Green supports the idea that Christians “are to add nothing to Scripture . . . and are to consider no other writings of equal value to Scripture.”<sup>42</sup>

Second, the authors’ understanding of biblical theology does not correspond to any typical definitions of history of redemption, worldview story, or canon.<sup>43</sup> Viars and

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<sup>41</sup>Viars and Green, “The Sufficiency of Scripture,” 104.

<sup>42</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 131.

<sup>43</sup>See the views represented in Klink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology* 22-25.

Green interpret biblical theology to mean theology that comes from the Bible and even classify it as “propositional statements.”<sup>44</sup> Like the biblical counselor Adams or the integrationist Beck, exegesis leads to propositions. Viars and Green do not explain how an interpretation of the history of redemption fits into their hermeneutical framework. For Viars and Green, biblical counseling hermeneutics is built on a systematic and doctrinal foundation, not from the storyline of Scripture.

Robert Kelleman wrote two chapters on interpreting Scripture for The Biblical Counseling Coalition’s edited book on Scripture and counseling. His chapters describe how to view and use Scripture in counseling through what he calls a “gospel narrative,” the story of redemption.<sup>45</sup> The story of the Bible is a gospel story in that it describes the creation, fall, redemption, and consummation of salvation. He writes,

The Bible provides relational wisdom for significant soul issues in a gospel narrative form. This requires that we view the Scriptures and life through the biblical lens of Christ’s gospel of grace and through the biblical grid of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. This grand narrative perspective provides the framework we use to conceptualize problems using biblical wisdom principles that apply the gospel of grace to the complexity of real and raw life lived in a fallen and broken world.<sup>46</sup>

In this regard, Kelleman’s understanding of redemptive history fits with what is known as the Chicago School of biblical theology, which seeks to develop a “whole-Bible theology.”<sup>47</sup> Kelleman’s aim is to teach how to do biblical exegesis for biblical

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<sup>44</sup>Viars and Green, “The Sufficiency of Scripture,” 103.

<sup>45</sup>Bob Kelleman, “The Bible Is Relevant for That?” in *Scripture and Counseling: God’s Word for Life in a Broken World*, ed. Bob Kelleman and Jeff Forrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 180.

<sup>46</sup>Kelleman, “The Bible Is Relevant,” 181.

<sup>47</sup>The Chicago School is named after the influence of the writings and editing of D. A. Carson, professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago, Illinois. See Klink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology*, 70.

counseling.<sup>48</sup> He lays out the following linear step-by-step method for how counselors can study and apply the biblical text:

|   |
|---|
| Redemptive narrative theology   |
| <u>Academic theology</u><br>Systematic Theology<br>Biblical Theology<br>Exegetical Theology<br>Lexical Theology<br>Textual Theology |
| Spiritual theology  |
| Practical/Pastoral theology   |
| Historical theology   |

Figure 2. Kellemen's hermeneutical model

Kellemen describes each aspect of academic theology.<sup>49</sup> Textual theology is the connection between academic theology and spiritual theology; it is a time to consider what the text says. Lexical theology covers the particular words and ideas described in the biblical text that need lexical examination. Exegetical theology is the hermeneutical process of Bible study of any particular passage. Biblical theology asks questions of the text “through the eyes of one author, one book, and with continual reference to the setting/purpose of the book and the culture of the day.”<sup>50</sup> It “involves exploring a theme, topic, issue, or question as developed in one biblical book, or by one biblical author, or

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<sup>48</sup>Klink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology*, 181.

<sup>49</sup>Bob Kellemen, “The Rich Relevance of God’s Word,” in *Scripture and Counseling: God’s Word for Life in a Broken World*, ed. Bob Kellemen and Jeff Forrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 204-12.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 206.

even chronologically through the history of the text.”<sup>51</sup> In defining biblical theology this way, Kellemen describes the Dallas School of thought for biblical theology: “Working inductively from the text, proponents of this approach move from the micro-context of each passage to produce an account of the theological content of each book, ultimately building” a particular theology of the Pentateuch, the Gospels, or Paul, for example.<sup>52</sup> Systematic theology is the culminating hermeneutical step, as it “involves the orderly arrangement of everything the Bible has to say about a given topic.”<sup>53</sup>

Kellemen’s model is an improvement on Viars’s and Green’s for several reasons. First, Kellemen states that he is less concerned with the order as he is the process, though he is adamant that Scripture is the basis for biblical counseling. Second, his model is more expansive in scope, covering more aspects of the hermeneutical process. Third, he incorporates legitimate uses of biblical theology into his model. Rather than defining biblical theology as “propositional truth” as Viars and Green, Kellemen appears to have both a broad view of a whole-Bible biblical theology (Chicago School), as well as the book or author level view of biblical theology (Dallas School). He believes that a “whole-Bible” theology supports a gospel-centered focus on biblical theology because it emphasizes the major contours of the canon in creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.

Deepak Reju’s doctoral dissertation uses the structure of creation, fall, and redemption to understand Christian identity in counseling. Understanding and employing the storyline of Scripture in counseling is central to his thesis. He begins with the

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<sup>51</sup>Kellemen, “The Rich Relevance of God’s Word,” 206.

<sup>52</sup>The Dallas School is named after the teaching method and publications of Dallas Theological Seminary. See Klink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology*, 67. Kellemen has the Dallas School in mind by giving an example: “With pneumatology, we might study all of John’s writings on the Spirit – moving from John’s gospel to 1, 2, and 3 John and to Revelation.” Kellemen, “Rich Relevance,” 206.

<sup>53</sup>Kellemen, “Rich Relevance,” 204.

questions, “How do evangelicals formulate Christian doctrine? What methods do we use to construct doctrine?”<sup>54</sup> Though church history shows that theologians, pastors, and counselors use systematic theology to construct doctrine, Reju argues, “Scripture has its own way of unifying biblical ideas that is implicit to the Bible’s design – redemptive history.”<sup>55</sup> Reju’s definition of biblical theology is based on Vos’s work on redemptive-history, acknowledging that the Christian counseling field has done little to develop the biblical templates of creation, fall, and redemption. He then develops how each aspect applies to human nature. Reju’s goal is to show that, “By intentionally reframing identity data in terms of creation, fall, and redemption, the Christian counselor shifts the focus onto biblical aspects of identity.”<sup>56</sup>

The identity Christians have is best understood when viewed through the major events of the biblical narrative. Creation declared that God created humanity “very good.” The fall distorted and disrupted humanity’s relationship with God and each other through the entrance of sin into the world. Redemption introduces Christ, first through the Old Testament preparation for him, then through his death, resurrection, and reign in the New Testament as he awaits his return. Outside of his introductory remarks on the differences between systematic theology and biblical theology, Reju does not develop how biblical theology fits into a larger hermeneutical grid. Even still, his work highlights the usefulness of redemptive history for counseling because “Christian identity is profoundly shaped by redemptive history.”<sup>57</sup> Reju’s contribution to the biblical counseling literature exemplifies how to apply the storyline of Scripture to a certain topic

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<sup>54</sup>Deepak Varghese Reju, “Toward a Definition of Christian Identity: Using the Interpretive Lens of Creation, Fall, and Redemption in Christian Counseling” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), 2.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 280.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 265.

in counseling, namely Christian identity. He is able to do this because he incorporates biblical theology into his hermeneutics as a method of interpretation that is not secondary to systematic theology.

The three views presented share in their commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture for biblical counseling, yet their interpretive methods differ. For Viars and Green, the hermeneutical process results in propositionalism that is grounded in the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture, does not include biblical theology, and culminates in systematic theology as the ultimate theological support for counseling. Kelleman builds on a similar systematic foundation, though he incorporates various understandings of biblical theology into his hermeneutical hierarchy underneath systematic theology. Reju believes biblical theology is an essential hermeneutical framework for constructing doctrine that will be directly applied to counseling.

### **Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology**

In his work on hermeneutics, Grant Osborn acknowledges that biblical theology is a forgotten element of serious biblical research.<sup>58</sup> He defines biblical theology as the collection and arrangement of themes “that unite the passages [of Scripture] and can be traced through a book or author as a whole.” Three steps show the progression of how to do biblical theology: “study the theological themes in terms of individual books,” then “explore the theology of an author,” and “trace the progress of revelation that unites a Testament and even the Bible as a whole (that is, the historical development of these themes throughout the biblical period). In this way biblical theology collates the results of exegesis and provides the data for the systematic theologian to contextualize in developing theological dogma for the church today.”<sup>59</sup> Unlike Vos, Osborne views

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<sup>58</sup>Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 373.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 347.



biblical theology as a “bridge discipline” from exegesis to systematic theology, though he does view them as interdependent and so believes that exegesis, biblical theology, and systematic theology “stand together in an ongoing trialogue.”<sup>60</sup> Biblical theology and systematic theology are “inseparable and interdependent.”<sup>61</sup> Osborne diagrams the interdependence of the theological disciplines as follows, showing how our presunderstanding (presuppositions), the biblical data, biblical theology, and systematic theology are interconnected.<sup>62</sup>

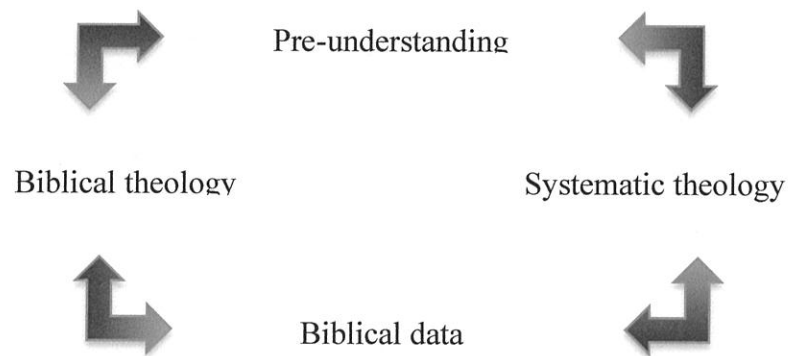


Figure 3. Osborne’s hermeneutical model

In writing on the possibility of harmonizing of the biblical data with systematic theology, D. A. Carson diagrams three possibilities, the linear view, the circular view, and the connected view.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 351.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 353.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 356.

<sup>63</sup>D. A. Carson, “Unity and Diversity in the New Testament,” in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 91.

Exegesis → Biblical Theology → [Historical Theology] → Systematic Theology

Figure 4. Carson's linear hermeneutical model

Carson argues the diagram above (figure 4) is too naïve, as “no exegesis is ever done in a vacuum. If every theist is in some sense a systematician, then he is a systematician *before* he begins his exegesis.”<sup>64</sup> Another angle to view the hermeneutical process is the hermeneutical circle, a circular connection of the disciplines that feed into each other (figure 5).

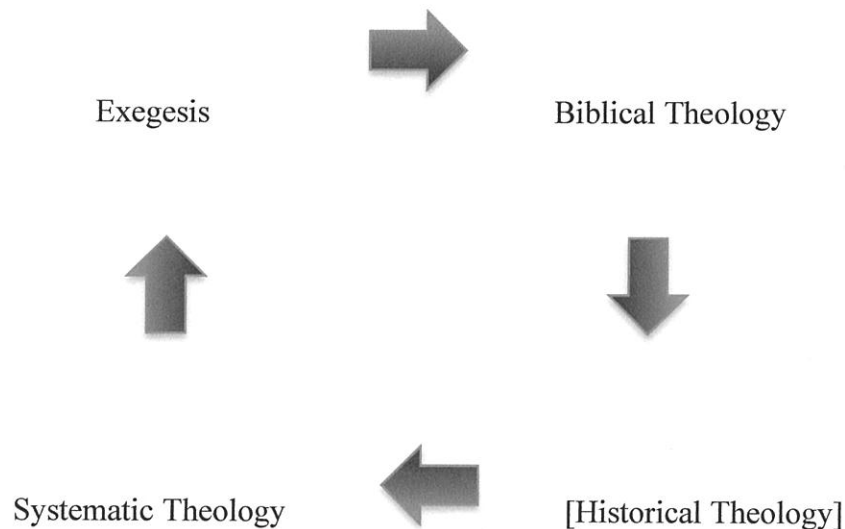


Figure 5. Carson's circular hermeneutical model

Carson believes this is a progression from a linear understanding of hermeneutics, yet it does not adequately diagram the feedback loops from each discipline

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<sup>64</sup>Carson, “Unity and Diversity,” 91. Emphasis his. Historical theology is bracketed as it makes a contribution from biblical theology to systematic theology but is not part of the line.

that are integral to hermeneutics. Carson offers a final diagram he believes is best, the connected view (figure 6).

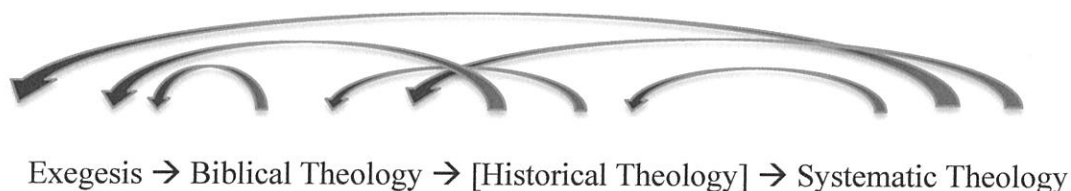


Figure 6. Carson's connected hermeneutical model

Carson argues that this diagram displays the necessary feedback lines of how the various disciplines relate. He comments, "It is absurd to deny that one's systematic theology does not affect one's exegesis. Nevertheless the line of final control is the straight one from exegesis right through biblical and historical theology to systematic theology."<sup>65</sup> Scripture harmonizes all of the disciplines and points them back to Scripture (exegesis) as the source for theological methodology.

Biblical theology provides several layers of context that build upon a grammatical-historical hermeneutic. For example, John Frame notes how propositions comprise only a limit portion of scriptural revelation. Whereas biblical counselors Viars and Green want to limit theology to what can be defined as proposition, Frame argues, "The whole Bible, not merely the propositional 'part,' is the doctrinal basis of our theology."<sup>66</sup> Though all Scripture is propositional revelation in that God conveys truth, an

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<sup>65</sup>Carson, "Unity and Diversity," 92.

<sup>66</sup>John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Theology of Lordship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 201.

imbalanced and incorrect understanding of biblical language and its usage truncates theological methodology, because theology is built of the different genres in Scripture. Frame also notes the disjunction between traditional theological programs such as exegetical, biblical, systematic, and practical theology. Instead, Frame views each as “related perspectively – each embracing the whole of theology and therefore embracing the others. . . . They are, that is to say, different ways of doing the same thing, not sciences with different subject matters.”<sup>67</sup> Exegesis is theology because exegesis ascertains the meaning of the biblical text. Biblical theology analyzes God’s history with creation, though Frame prefers to call the biblical theology the “history of the covenant” to emphasize the difference between using biblical language in theology and the practice of biblical theology.<sup>68</sup> Systematic theology is inseparable from exegesis and biblical theology, as each are “mutually dependent and correlative; they involve one another.”<sup>69</sup> Frame does not view practical theology as a result of the other disciplines because “meaning and application are two ways of looking at and of talking about the same thing.”<sup>70</sup> This means practical theology is the science of communicating Scripture whether in preaching, teaching, evangelism, or counseling.<sup>71</sup>

Questioning the place of systematic theology within the hermeneutical process, theologian Richard Lints questions whether stringing together Christian doctrines like pearls on a string undermines the essential unity of Scripture. He believes that contemporary evangelical theology has created a patchwork of various doctrines,

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<sup>67</sup>Frame, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 206.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 211.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 213.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 214. As Frame explains, “To ask for the meaning of an expression is to ask for an application” (97).

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 214.

stitching them together after individual treatment, making it impossible to see overarching or connecting themes that unite systematic theology as a whole. There are logical starting points (typically either the doctrine of God or the doctrine of Scripture) and ending points (eschatology), but their doctrine is not built around the trajectory of the storyline or covenantal aspects of Scripture. Lints contends that “the essence of theology is the interpretation of the history of redemption.”<sup>72</sup> How God acts and speaks to his people in biblical history should form the framework for doing systematic theology. In this way, the hermeneutical process is directed to seek out the questions that Scripture is asking rather than looking for questions the interpreter thinks Scripture is asking. Lints also argues that the disciplines of exegesis, redemptive-history (biblical theology), and systematics are integrally related.<sup>73</sup> Theological methodology involves listening to the text to hear what themes revelation and the structure of revelation make prominent within the larger narrative from Genesis to Revelation.

Borrowing on the work on Edmund Clowney, Lints proposes that there are three contents in examining “biblical parts and biblical patterns” that construct a theological framework: a text’s immediate setting (textual horizon), its setting in a particular epoch (epochal horizon), and its setting within all of biblical revelation (canonical horizon).<sup>74</sup> The textual horizon is any particular text, but it is insufficient merely to understand what a text “means,” as it is equally important to understand “the manner in which that meaning is conveyed and the impact it is to have on life.”<sup>75</sup> This means not only that correct interpretation of various literary genres must be made but that

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<sup>72</sup>Lints, *Fabric of Theology*, 268.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 272.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 285, 293. Edmund Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1961).

<sup>75</sup>Lints, *Fabric of Theology*, 296.

correct understanding of the effect any particular text is meant to have on the reader (or listener) should be made. The text should be asked questions such as, does the text describing a state of affairs to be believed, a command given for action, or an emotion to embrace? God gave the literary functions of biblical revelation a power to accomplish its task, a purpose to complete in the lives of his people. The epochal horizon reveals God's progressively revealed redemption in history. The biblical epochs are unified and identified through God's covenants from the Old to New Testaments. Questions to ask of the epochal horizon are, "What are the central covenantal terms of the period? What are the particular intentions of the author(s) in that epoch? Why are certain issues repeated time and again in particular period? How do the central themes of one epoch relate to the central themes of another epoch?"<sup>76</sup> The canonical horizon encompasses all of Scripture, so a central aspect of understanding its importance are the promises made in the Old Testament that have been fulfilled in the New Testament in Jesus Christ. Central to understanding the promise-fulfillment model is typology, which Lints defines as "symbolism with a prospective reference to fulfillment in a later epoch of biblical history."<sup>77</sup> God's promises were progressively fulfilled as redemptive history unfolded. God's promises and their fulfillment also unify the biblical canon, thus providing an organic relationship between types and antitypes from Genesis to Revelation, which means that Scripture sets its own theological agenda.

Regarding propositional theology such as the kind Viars and Green support, Kevin Vanhoozer states, "Hard questions will never nevertheless have to be asked of a method that appears to reduce the diverse modes of language in the Bible to the assertive and propositional . . . The Bible is more than divine data."<sup>78</sup> Such questions would be

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<sup>76</sup>Lints, *Fabric of Theology*, 303.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 304.

<sup>78</sup>Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 5.

whether or not propositionalism is adequate for understanding the variety of biblical texts with their given aesthetic and affective qualities? Is God's design in the complexity of Scripture merely to inform? The problem with the view that equates doctrine with proposition is that it reduces the varieties of genre and how God communicates to only the assertion.<sup>79</sup> Against mere assertion, Vanhoozer writes, "What literary genres communicate is not simply propositional content but ways of processing and organizing content into meaningful wholes: ways of thinking, ways of seeing, ways of experiencing."<sup>80</sup> Scripture does not merely communicate propositions to believe but strategies to help believers see, taste, and feel truth.<sup>81</sup> Exegesis, Vanhoozer believes, is more apprenticeship than a science. Exegesis involved intellectual, spiritual, and imaginative aspects of directing believers to be changed by Scripture, to see, experience, and be what the text intends for them to be.<sup>82</sup>

### **Biblical Theology and the Image of God**

Image bearers are revelation receivers.<sup>83</sup> Humanity was made to be responsive to words, and in particular, God's words.<sup>84</sup> The basis for Christian theology – and the basis for a theological vision for biblical counseling – is primarily grounded in God's self-disclosure in history as Father, Son, and Spirit. This means that the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture is an implication of divine revelation, and divine self-disclosure is the foundation for hermeneutics. Christian theology, then, is possible because of God's

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<sup>79</sup>Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 266.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup>Paul Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002), 40.

<sup>84</sup>Reju, *Toward a Definition of Christian Identity*, 31; Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 40-41.

self-communicative character as the Father, Son, and Spirit.<sup>85</sup> The purpose of divine revelation, then, is reconciliation.<sup>86</sup> Theology is done within the sphere of theology of the Triune God's presence, who brings the truth to bear upon our broken lives.

Being an image bearer who receives revelation means that hermeneutics is more than a science, but also as Grant Osborne states, an art and spiritual act.<sup>87</sup> This means that hermeneutical methods that reduce varying modes of language to assertions and propositions – Viars' and Green's definition of biblical theology – need to be questioned.<sup>88</sup> Vanhoozer writes, "Doctrine is a response to something *beheld* – beheld not theoretically but, as it were, theatrically: a *lived* performance."<sup>89</sup> The result of propositionalist theology is that it takes the drama, the narrative storyline, out of Scripture.<sup>90</sup>

Figure 7 on the next page shows that the biblical counselor is a revelation receiver, as God's self-disclosure comes from above and also forms the center of our hermeneutics. For biblical counselors, every aspect of hermeneutics must have an instinctive movement toward the Gospel as revealed by Father, Son, and Spirit. It does so to override sinful misconceptions, stubborn opposition, and cherished lies both counselor and counselee hold, yet also turns toward the Gospel to cultivate knowledge, love, and the fear of God. A fully developed hermeneutics that incorporates biblical theology draws us to revelation, not merely to propositions but to a person, a divine presence, who counsels us first before we counsel others.

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<sup>85</sup>John Webster, *Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 12-13.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>87</sup>Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 21-22.

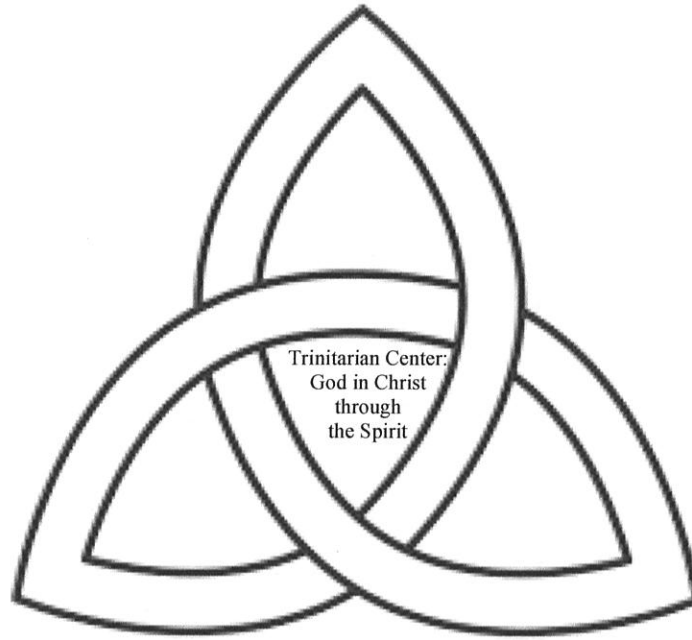
<sup>88</sup>Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 5.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 87.



Hearing the Word:  
Exegesis and  
Biblical Theology



Considering the Word:  
historical theology and  
systematic theology

Speaking the  
Word: preaching  
and counseling

Figure 7. A new hermeneutical model for counselors<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>Symbolically, the chart is the medieval shield of the Trinity. This is to show that the Trinity's self-disclosure can model how we understand what the Father, Son, and Spirit have communicated.

## Conclusion

As figure 7 indicates, exegesis and biblical theology is the practice of understanding the words God has spoken. Biblical theology flows downward to listen to how others have heard him speak in systematic theology and historical theology. But biblical theology also flows downward into pastoral theology in order to speak to others directly about who God is. God's character and plan of salvation are delivered in time and history, which is redemptive history. Systematic theology and historical theology, however, flow upward to listen anew to God's word in order to understand God's word for today. Pastoral theology always turns an upward ear to listen to divine revelation for prayerful insight. As Thomas Oden states, the care of souls will seek to avoid "an antihistorical view of pastoral theology; an antipastoral approach to historical theology; and an antitheological style of pastoral care."<sup>92</sup> Figure 7 seeks to capture a biblical hermeneutic for the care of souls.

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13. <sup>92</sup>Thomas C. Oden, *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984),

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE INVERSION OF THE IMAGE OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Of all the visions Ezekiel had seen, there was nothing like what he experienced in the valley of dry bones. The situation was that Israel was in exile because of their idolatry. Like Israel during Isaiah's ministry several generations before, the people still had spiritual blind eyes, deaf ears, and hard hearts (Ezek 12:2; cf. Isa 6:9-10). Image bearers designed to respond in worship to Yahweh had inverted their spiritual responsiveness through idolatry. The wonder of God's works and the wisdom of his written word were ignored and rejected. As a result, the people were unregenerate, spiritually dead. Ever faithful to his covenant promises, God told Ezekiel the people would be cleansed from their idolatry and be given a new heart through a new covenant and enter a new creation (Ezek 36:26-27, 35). In that valley Ezekiel saw the Spirit of God breathe life into those dry bones, creating human life as God did in Genesis 2:7 when he breathed into his image bearer, Adam (Ezek 37:10). In the new covenant God recreated image bearers so they might not be defiled by their idolatry again by giving them new hearts filled with the Spirit (Ezek 37:23). The Old Testament hope was that one day God would deliver his people from idolatry and receive new hearts to live in the new creation.

Biblical counselors are correct that idolatry is a heart issue, but according to the Old Testament idolatry is the description of the unregenerate heart. Idolatry is more than a metaphor for sinful desires because it is the inversion of bearing the image of God. The Old Testament witness is that people became like what they worshiped. When faithful Israel worshiped Yahweh, they reflected and represented his glory as his image

bearers. When they worshiped idols they reflected and represented the idols they worshiped. As such, idolatry is used as a description of unregeneracy.

This chapter will introduce the biblical doctrine of image bearing and idolatry, how these themes develop across the Hebrew canon, and how biblical counselors understand them. The conclusion is that idolatry deadened the hearts of faithless Israel but God's new covenant brought about a new creation where image bearers are renewed into the image of the long awaited Old Testament Messiah. Instead of counseling believers that they are idolaters like ancient Israel, biblical counselors should understand that the redemptive-historical truth that believers have been purified from their idolatry and were given new hearts to live holy lives in the new creation.

### **The Image of God**

Regarding the image of God in the Old Testament, Stephen Holmes remarks, "It is noteworthy that beyond the foundational text of Genesis 1:26-27, and its reprise in Genesis 5:1-3 and 9:6, the phrase never occurs again in the Old Testament."<sup>1</sup> The initial significance of the image of God, however, is not found in how frequently it is mentioned throughout Israel's history, but in its place at the beginning of the Old Testament canon where the storyline of Scripture begins. The biblical data in the early Genesis narratives and genealogies have offered little information for theologians and interpreters to define the image of God. For that reason, G. C. Berkouwer noted that it is not merely the term "image of God" that provided theological significance but also the concept.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen R. Holmes, "Image of God," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 318.

<sup>2</sup>"If we examine the biblical witness regarding man, we soon discover that it never gives us any kind of systematic theory about man as the image of God. It is indeed rather striking that the term is not used often at all, and that it is far less 'central' in the Bible than it has been in the history of Christian thought. This apparent discrepancy vanishes, however, when we note that Scripture's references to the image of God, whenever there are such, have a special urgency and importance. Furthermore, there is the possibility that Scripture often deals with the concept of the image of God without using those exact words, so that we surely should not *a priori* limit our investigation of the concept to considering only those places

The term “image of God” is found in only in a few places in Scripture, dividing the usage of the term into three categories: in the Old Testament primeval world when humanity is made in God’s image, in the New Testament epistles where Christ is described as the perfect image of God, and believers are described as being conformed to his image.<sup>3</sup> Table 1 below visualizes the gap between the early parts of Genesis and the New Testament epistles.

Table 1. Direct references to the image of God

| Biblical Section   | Biblical Reference  | Biblical Concepts  |
|--|---|--|
| Early Genesis Narratives   | Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1-3;<br>9:6  | Humanity is made in<br>God’s image   |
| Old Testament Historical<br>Books                                  |   |  |
| Old Testament Wisdom<br>Literature, Psalms, and<br>Prophetic Books | Cf. Psalm 8   |  |
| The Gospels and Acts   |   |  |
| New Testament Letters  | Romans 8:29<br>1 Corinthians 11:7<br>2 Corinthians 4:4<br>Colossians 1:15; 3:10 (cf.<br>Ephesians 4:24)<br>Hebrews 1:3<br>James 3:9 | Christ is the perfect<br>image of God<br><br>Believers are conformed<br>to the image of Christ |

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where the term itself is used.” G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 67.

<sup>3</sup>C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2006), 62.

The dearth of references to the image of God from Genesis 10 throughout the rest of the Old Testament and through the four Gospels and Acts raises a theological question for biblical counselors: how can biblical counselors make renewal of the image of God a focus in counseling if there is so little biblical information about image bearing? With so little biblical data, the answer to this question cannot be answered by the grammatical-historical method and systematic theology alone, but must also include biblical theology, the practice of understanding how themes develop across the canon.

Holmes argued that “the possibility of a family of thoroughly theological readings is opened” when the image of God is understood first from the New Testament and read back into the Old.<sup>4</sup> Holmes, however, offered no suggestion on what “theological readings” were possible to interpreters. Writing on the relationship between image bearing and idolatry, Richard Lints offered a theological reading of the image of God across the canon:

There is a theological dynamic in which the language of the image of God is manifested across the breadth of the canon, though the language itself changes. The very change of terms across the canon is itself indicative of larger theological points. This is clear in at least two ways: at the point where the language of image drops out, the language of idolatry becomes prominent; and secondly the re-emergence of “imaging” is most strongly connected to the arrival of Jesus Christ, who is both the restorer of the image of God and the one who ultimately breaks the power of the idols by overcoming the temptations of the evil one.<sup>5</sup>

A biblical theology of how image bearing and idolatry relate is the key to understanding the renewal of the image of God in believers, a significant task in the biblical counseling process.

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<sup>4</sup>Holmes, “Image of God,” 319.

<sup>5</sup>Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 36, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 80.

## Historical Interpretations of the Image of God

Historically, theologians and interpreters have not made the connection between image bearing and idolatry that Lints has. Though the topic of the image of God has various interpretations throughout church history, the interpretations can be grouped into three major views: the structural, relational, and functional views. Theologians in the early church and Middle Ages held the structural view, which taught that the image of God is a quality of being, primarily found in human rationality. Irenaeus believed the image of God remained after the fall and was primarily found in human rationality.<sup>6</sup> Gregory of Nyssa stated that, “the image of God is present in the whole [human] body, but is fullest in the human intellect.”<sup>7</sup> Augustine taught that the image of God was found primarily in the memory, intelligence, and will.<sup>8</sup> Thomas Aquinas, like many early church fathers before him, believed the image was found in the intellect and reason.<sup>9</sup> More recently, Karl Barth advanced the relational view of the image of God. He taught that because humanity was created in the image of the Trinity, image bearing meant being in relationship with God and others.<sup>10</sup> Many modern biblical studies scholars teach the functional view.<sup>11</sup> Rather than a quality of being or a relationship, the image of God is a function that humanity performs. Based on the exegetical concerns of Genesis 1:2-28

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<sup>6</sup>Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 33-35.

<sup>7</sup>Ellen T. Charry, “Doctrine of Human Being,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 311.

<sup>8</sup>Sinclair B. Ferguson, “Image of God,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998), 328.

<sup>9</sup>Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 36.

<sup>10</sup>Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 24.

<sup>11</sup>Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “Image, Form,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 644.

and 2:17, the functional view teaches that humanity was made in God's image to rule on his behalf.<sup>12</sup>

### **Biblical Counseling and the Image of God**

A survey of biblical counseling literature reveals that the BCM adheres to the structural view of the image of God more than the relational or functional views. Jay Adams believed the image of God resided in humanity's rationality and morality when he wrote, "It is his likeness to God that makes man different from the animals, and that man is an intelligent, morally responsible creature."<sup>13</sup> Elyse Fitzpatrick taught the structural view when she wrote that God created Adam and Eve "with certain mental and spiritual capacities that defined their role in creation."<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere, she stated, "Adam and Eve . . . reflected the personality of their Creator but also as those whose personal attributes responded in ethical obedience to him (truth-informed thought, holy purpose, righteous decision, etc.)."<sup>15</sup> Heath Lambert took a multifaceted approach, finding value in the structural, relational, and functional views.<sup>16</sup>

Biblical counselors Bob Kelleman and Sam Williams describe various aspects of image bearing that comprise the human personality. Humans are relational, rational, volitional, emotional, embodied, embedded (social beings), and eternal.<sup>17</sup> Though this is a

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<sup>12</sup>Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, 24-25.

<sup>13</sup>Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 118.

<sup>14</sup>Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart: Learning to Long for God Alone* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 127.

<sup>15</sup>Elyse M. Fitzpatrick and Dennis E. Johnson, *Counsel from the Cross: Connecting Broken People to the Love of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 96.

<sup>16</sup>Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 188. Cortez critiqued the multifaceted approach when he wrote, "Any multifaceted approach, then, needs to provide an explanation of how it can hold these seemingly disparate theories together while allowing each to retain its own significance." Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, 29.

<sup>17</sup>Bob Kelleman and Sam Williams, "The Spiritual Anatomy of the Soul," in *Christ-Centered*



comprehensive list, the authors do not list any biblical passages to justify these categories.<sup>18</sup> Instead, the authors use the Trinitarian character of God as the analogous starting point for understanding what it means to be created in God's image. Kellemen's and Williams' interpretive method begins with the premise that humans are like God, and so they look for categories where this resemblance can be theologically true.

Elsewhere, Kellemen connects image bearing to being like Christ when he states, "What does a healthy image bearer look like? A healthy image bearer looks like Christ – our inner life (relational, rational, volitional, and emotional) increasingly reflecting the inner life of Christ."<sup>19</sup> Though Kellemen and Williams never define image bearers as covenantal beings, they do state that "one of the central components, perhaps the essence, of the *imago Dei* is the capacity for a particular type of relationship with God, characterized by love, worship, and obedience."<sup>20</sup> This statement is movement toward an understanding of the image of God grounded in the covenantal language of Genesis 1-2, a theological and interpretive move yet to occur within the BCM, but a view that I will contend is necessary and foundational to understanding image bearing. With their focus on Christology and worship, the authors capture some of the themes of a covenantal relationship without developing it textually and comprehensively.

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*Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God's Changeless Truth*, ed. James MacDonald, Bob Kellemen, and Steve Viars (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 108-16. Kellemen also develops this understanding in *Gospel-Centered Counseling: How Christ Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 214-18.

<sup>18</sup>Kellemen and Williams exemplify Cortez's critique of the structural view: "The most glaring weakness of the approach is its lack of exegetical support. One looks in vain for any clear (or even implicit) biblical link between the *imago* and some essential attribute of the human person." Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, 19.

<sup>19</sup>Kellemen, *Gospel-Centered Counseling*, 113.

<sup>20</sup>Bob Kellemen and Sam Williams, "The Spiritual Anatomy of the Soul," in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God's Changeless Truth*, ed. James MacDonald (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 120.

## The Old Testament and the Image of God

Biblical counseling rightly emphasizes that worship, love, and obedience are central to being an image bearer and that re-ordering worship in the life of the counselee is central to the counseling process. However, the BCM has not adopted a covenantal understanding of image bearing.<sup>21</sup> It is important to understand the image of God as a covenantal concept, because then image bearing can be connected to the covenantal narrative of Old Testament, from creation, to the Noahic, Mosaic, Davidic, and the New Covenant. Foundational to understanding the role image bearing plays in the Old Testament are several points: image bearing involves a covenantal relationship, image bearing reflects divine sonship, and image bearing results in representative divine rule.

First, image bearing involves a covenantal relationship. The idea of covenant needs to be central to biblical counseling because it is a central idea in the Bible. Wellum and Gentry believe “covenants constitute the framework of the larger story [of Scripture],” as they are the “backbone of the biblical narrative.”<sup>22</sup> As Wilson and Grant contend, “The idea of covenant is fundamental to the Bible’s story. At its most basic, covenant presents God’s desire to enter into relationship with men and women created in his image. . . . Covenant is all about relationship between the Creator and his creation.”<sup>23</sup> Scott Hafemann concurs when he writes, “the concept of the covenant relationship

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<sup>21</sup>Three of the major books on the theology of biblical counseling do not mention a covenantal aspect of image bearing. See Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Robert W. Kelleman, *Gospel-Centered Christian Counseling: How Christ Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014); and Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

<sup>22</sup>Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 138.

<sup>23</sup>Alistair I. Wilson and Jaime A. Grant, introduction to *The God of Covenant: Biblical, Theological, and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Jamie A. Grant and Alistair I. Wilson (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 2005), 12.

provides the structure that serves to integrate the interrelated themes developed throughout the history of redemption delineated in the Scriptures.”<sup>24</sup>

Covenants were common throughout the ancient Near East, whether they were international treaties, clan alliances, personal agreements, national agreements, or loyalty agreements such as marriage.<sup>25</sup> The major Old Testament covenants had features of both suzerain-vassal treaties and royal grants, meaning Yahweh entered into a personal relationship as the king over his people, his servants, establishing the terms and conditions of the relationship that required obedience from them. As Wellum and Gentry state, “At the heart of covenant, then, is a relationship between parties characterized by faithfulness and loyalty in love.”<sup>26</sup> At question is the issue that the term covenant (*bērît*) is not mentioned in Genesis 1-2. Its first appearance occurs in Genesis 6:18 where God tells Noah that he will “establish my covenant” with him. It is for this reason that Paul Williamson argued that since the term covenant is not mentioned in Genesis 1-2, there is no covenant established between God and humans at creation.<sup>27</sup> However, as William Dumbrell has demonstrated, the term “establish” in Genesis 6:18 (see 9:11-12) refers to an existing unilateral covenantal relationship already initiated by God.<sup>28</sup> The meaning of the phrase, “cut a covenant” initiates covenants, whereas “establish a covenant,” confirms a covenant relationship that already exists.<sup>29</sup> God’s covenantal relationship with Noah in

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<sup>24</sup>Scott J. Hafemann, “The Covenant Relationship,” in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 23.

<sup>25</sup>Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 130-31.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>27</sup>Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 72.

<sup>28</sup>W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1984), 19.

<sup>29</sup>Dumbrell explains, “The verb translated ‘established’ in [Genesis] 6:8 means, however, in its sustained use in the covenant contexts of the OT, ‘to confirm what already exists.’ Second, when used in the divine and secular covenant contexts of the OT, the word ‘covenant’ gives quasi-legal backing to an already existing relationship. It is never used in the sense of initiating a relationship.” William J. Dumbrell,

Genesis 9:1-8 brought back into existence the existing creation covenant God made with Adam in Genesis 1.<sup>30</sup> The significance of the creation covenant for image bearing is that God created people to be in covenant relationship with him. As Cortez explains,

The image of God can be understood as God manifesting his personal presence in creation through his covenantal relationships with human persons, whom he has constituted as personal beings to serve as his representatives in creation and to whom he remains faithful despite their sinful rejection of him.<sup>31</sup>

Second, image bearing reflects divine sonship. In writing on the biblical and cultural background of image bearing, Wellum and Gentry argue, “The relationship between humans and God is best captured by the term sonship.”<sup>32</sup> What Wellum and Gentry specifically argue is that the definition of the image of God is not merely a functional one as seen in Genesis 1:28, but an ontological one as seen in Genesis 1:27. The image bearing identity is first found in the relationship with God and then results in a function. Man’s identity as an image bearer defines what he does. Kingly sons rule on behalf of the divine Creator.

In the ancient Near East images were made for the gods. These images resembled the king who was considered the son of the god. For example, in the thirteenth century BC, a statue was made of Pharaoh Ramesses II because he represented the Egyptian god on earth.<sup>33</sup> The most familiar biblical example occurs later in Israel’s

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*The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 25.

<sup>30</sup>The immediate context of Gen 1-2 contains covenantal elements such as the suzerain-vassal relationship that required obedience (Gen 2:16-17), the identification of the covenant Lord, Yahweh (Gen 2:4, 5, 7, 8), and the creation of the kingly image-bearers (Gen 1:26). See Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 135-36; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* 177-221.

<sup>31</sup>Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, 37.

<sup>32</sup>Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 200.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 192, and John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 114-15. D. J. Wiseman, “Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996), 810.

history after 605 BC when King Nebuchadnezzar made a statue in Babylon for worship of Marduk and Nabû (Dan 3:1-7).<sup>34</sup> Lints explains the significance of these divine images:

It was common practice for ancient rulers to place statues in conquered lands representing their rule. The statue would bear some resemblance to the king, signifying his real though not physical presence in a conquered land. By so doing the king asserted his sovereignty over regions where he could not be physically present. In turn ancient kings were often described as vice-regents of distant deities, imaging those deities in the discharge of their duties. The king was a sort of living statue of the gods, representing their sovereign control on earth.<sup>35</sup>

The king who bore the image of a god was entrusted with sovereign rule because he was considered a son of god.<sup>36</sup> For example, the god Amon-Re addressed King Amenophis III, “You are my beloved son, who came forth from my members, my image whom I have put on earth. I have given to you to rule the earth in peace.”<sup>37</sup> The Akkadian-Aramaic text on the Tell Fakhariyeh inscription records the ideas expressed in image (*tselem*) and likeness (*demuth*) found in Genesis 1:26. The use of the Hebrew word for image (*tselem*) establishes humanity as a ruler, the king of creation, who acts on behalf of the covenant Lord.<sup>38</sup> The Hebrew word for likeness (*demuth*) complements the concept of image and helps reinforce the dignity humanity has in being image bearers.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Wiseman, “Nebuchadnezzar,” 810.

<sup>35</sup> Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*, 69.

<sup>36</sup>Wildberger writes, “One may determine, then, that the origins of the concept of humanity’s divine image are associated with ancient Near Eastern concept of the king as the son, the representative, viceroy, proxy of God on earth.” H. Wildberger, “Tselem,” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 1083.

<sup>37</sup>Raymond C. Van Leeuwen “Image, Form,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 643.

<sup>38</sup>Wildberger, “Tselem,” 1083. Wildberger writes that “humanity’s divine image and ‘investiture’ [of taking dominion] are closely related.” Because image bearers are divine rules, this means the concept of image bearing is not found in human intellect, spiritual nature, or Barth’s “I-thou” relational model of image bearing (1083-84).

<sup>39</sup>H. D. Preuss, “Demuth,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. 3, ed. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 259. Furthermore, because *tselem* and *demuth* are used interchangeably in Gen 1:26 and 5:1, 3, there is little distinction between the two words.

In the Tell Fakhariyeh inscription, the author is a family member and loyal subject to the king and claims that like the king's father before him, he is the very image of the god, Bel.<sup>40</sup> Bearing the very image of the god is passed from kingly fathers to royal sons. The use of image and likeness in Genesis 1:26-27 is repeated in Genesis 5:1-3 within the context of Seth's sonship to Adam.<sup>41</sup> Stephen Dempster explains the connection when he writes,

By juxtaposing the divine creation of Adam in the image of God and the subsequent human creation of Seth in the image of Adam, the transmission of the image of God through this genealogical line is implied, as well as the link between sonship and the image of God. As Seth is a son of Adam, so Adam is a son of God.<sup>42</sup>

The result is that the terms image and likeness are used to describe the relationship between the Creator and his image bearers, which is an analogy for sonship.<sup>43</sup> As Blocher comments, "God created man as a sort of earthly son, who represents him and responds to him."<sup>44</sup>

Finally, image bearing results in representative divine rule. The purpose or result of creating image bearers is found in verse 26, since the correct translation is "let us make man . . . so that they may rule."<sup>45</sup> The commands in verse 28 to be fruitful, multiply, fill, and subdue the earth are grounded in the duality of gender, because only

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<sup>40</sup>Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 193.

<sup>41</sup>For the relationship between image and sonship, see Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Image, Form," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 643.

<sup>42</sup>Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 15, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003), 58-59.

<sup>43</sup>Elsewhere in Scripture, sonship and likeness to God are represented in Luke 1:38, where Adam is called the son of God; Exod 4:22-23, where Israel is called the son of God; and in 2 Sam 7:14-15, where the Davidic king is called the son of God.

<sup>44</sup>Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1984), 89.

<sup>45</sup>Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 188. Emphasis theirs.

male and female can complete the task together for reproduction. Though humanity is created in God's image, people share many common physical traits with animals, such as the ability to think, see, produce offspring, and relate. The distinguishing feature is ruling. This does not mean image-bearing equals dominion. Rather, the image serves as the basis for ruling. As Silva contends, "God made Adam and Eve like him and so they are able to exercise dominion over the earth."<sup>46</sup> In contrast to the surrounding cultures, Israel believed not just the king but all males and females were living statues of God, representing his sovereign control not just locally in the Garden of Eden, but globally across the world. As Beale puts it,

In the light of Genesis 1:26-28, this meant that the presence of God, which was initially to be limited to the garden temple of Eden, was to be extended throughout the whole earth by his image bearers, as they themselves represented and reflect his glorious presence and attributes.<sup>47</sup>

A final issue must be covered regarding the image of God: does it still remain after the Fall? Concerning the loss or destruction of the image of God after the Fall, theologian Henri Blocher noted that Scripture does not teach the disappearance of that privilege when he asks, "If mankind no longer possessed this privilege [of being image bearers], why would it be scandalous to take away his life, or to curse him at the same time as one is blessing the Lord?"<sup>48</sup> Sin does not make the image disappear, as that would be a contradiction, turning human nature against itself, making humanity inhuman. Instead, Blocher asserted, "Mankind remains the image of God, inviolable and responsible, but has become a contradictory image, one might say a caricature, a witness

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<sup>46</sup>Moises Silva, "God, Language and Scripture," in *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation*, ed. Moises Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 207. Silva's comment focuses on the ruling aspect of image bearing. It should not be denied that in the call to "be fruitful and multiply," humanity images a God who creates life.

<sup>47</sup>G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP 2004), 82-83.

<sup>48</sup>Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 94.



against himself.”<sup>49</sup> Lints described the contradictory image as idolatry, which is a turning upside down or inversion of the image of God.<sup>50</sup> Pauline language in Romans 1:23 is that of an exchange, when humans exchanged the glory of bearing the image of God for bearing the image of idols. The concept of a contradictory image, then, is best understood as idolatry.

### **Idolatry and Biblical Counseling**

Biblical counselors hold two primary truths related to the task of biblical counseling: helping counselees be renewed in the image of God and helping them defeat idolatry. What has not been analyzed in the BCM is how these two tasks intersect. On the basis of on Ezekiel 14:3, biblical counselors help counselees discover their “idols of their heart” to deal with their sinful desires. Biblical counselor David Powlison wrote a seminal essay in which he argued that “‘idols of the heart’ is a great metaphor” that is useful in counseling.<sup>51</sup> Following Powlison’s lead, Fitzpatrick and Eyrich note that the phrase, “idols of the heart,” is a particular concept within the biblical counseling movement.<sup>52</sup> Welch acknowledged that, “Biblical counseling is not shy about identifying the idols of our hearts.”<sup>53</sup> In his book on idolatry, Bigney encouraged believers to “look for idolatry in your heart every day.”<sup>54</sup> Welch even speaks of “Christian idolatry.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 94.

<sup>50</sup>Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*, 82, 103.

<sup>51</sup>David Powlison, “Revisiting Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 27, no. 3 (2013): 42.

<sup>52</sup>Howard Eyrich and Elyse Fitzpatrick, “The Diagnoses and Treatment of Idols of the Heart,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God’s Changeless Truth*, ed. James MacDonald, Bob Kelleman, and Steve Viars (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 339.

<sup>53</sup>Ed Welch, “Who Talks About Idols Among Friends,” accessed October 3, 2016, <https://www.ccef.org/resources/blog/who-talks-about-idols-among-friends>.

<sup>54</sup>Brad Bigney, *Gospel-Treason: Betraying the Gospel with Hidden Idols* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2012), 214.

<sup>55</sup>Welch writes, “All this talk about lurking idols seems foreign to many Christians. After all,



Biblical counselors are correct that idolatry is a heart issue, but idolatry is the description of the unregenerate heart. Idolatry in the Old Testament is more than a metaphor for sinful desires. According to Brian Rosner, “Idolatry is a defining feature of the heathen.”<sup>56</sup> Idolatry inverted the image of God in worshipers so that they reflected and represented the image of the god they worshiped, as Lints explains:

Both [image-bearing and idolatry] contain connotations of reflection. Image language is suggestive of mirroring and reflecting, as a statue serves the function of imaging a dead war hero. In the ANE idols likewise reflected the deities to which they pointed. In fact the Hebrew term for ‘image’ (*selem*) had the semantic range to include idols as well. At an explicit level both carried the substantive denotation of making visible that which was not readily seen. The *imago Dei* was/is the visible representation of the invisible God. Idols were the visible representations of deities, who though they did not exist, nonetheless exerted powerful influence. Both constructs in their religious usage connoted a demand for worship.<sup>57</sup>

Beale also notes that the biblical description of idols and idolaters correspond to each other because

the purpose of the identical description is to indicate mockingly that the worshiper, rather than experiencing an expected life-giving blessing, has received a curse by becoming as spiritually inanimate, empty, rebellious or shameful as the idol is depicted to be.<sup>58</sup>

Motyer explains that idolatry results in spiritual death when he stated, “Man’s contact with the false god infects him with a deadly spiritual blindness of heart and

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we don’t have idols in our homes and we have already sworn allegiance to Jesus Christ. Don’t forget, however, that idolatry quietly resides in every heart. Christians are not sinless yet; that will only happen when Jesus Christ returns. In the meantime, we battle, especially at the level of our motivations and imaginations. The warnings against idolatry and hypocrisy are rightly directed to us. Christian idolatry is more subtle than an outright, vocal abandonment of Christ . . . It doesn’t seem so bad because we haven’t actually renounced Christ, but this compromised trust is equivalent to turning away from God.” Edward T. Welch, “Motives: Why Do I Do the Things I Do?” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 27, no. 2 (2003): 53.

<sup>56</sup>Brian S. Rosner, “Idolatry,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 571.

<sup>57</sup>Lints, *Image and Idolatry*, 81.

<sup>58</sup>G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 21.

mind.”<sup>59</sup> According to Psalm 115:8 and 135:18, those who worship idols become like them. A similar idea is captured in Hosea 9:10, when Hosea states that those who consecrate themselves to idols “become detestable like the thing they loved.”<sup>60</sup> The Old Testament description of idolatry was that of total depravity and spiritual inability.

The rest of this chapter will demonstrate that idolatry is an inversion of the image of God by examining several key Old Testament passages such as Exodus 32-34, Psalms 115 and 135, Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 14, and the new covenant passages in Ezekiel that offer the solution to idolatry.

### **Idolatry in the Mosaic Covenant**

The book of Exodus and the repetition of the law in Deuteronomy highlight several areas of significance for image bearing and idolatry. According to Exodus 4:22-23, Israel was God’s son, created to worship and serve him. Dempster highlights the significance of Israel’s sonship when he writes, “Israel is a first-born son, a new humanity among the nations, one in whom the image of God is transmitted.”<sup>61</sup> In Exodus 32 Israel exchanged its identity as God’s son when it worshipped the golden calf. The creation of the golden calf broke the first and second commandments by placing Yahweh within a group of gods that delivered Israel from Egypt and attributed a created image to him (Exod 32:4).<sup>62</sup> Later in Israel’s history, Ezekiel would trace Israel’s idolatry back to

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<sup>59</sup>J. A. Motyer, “Idolatry,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed. J. D. Douglas (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 496.

<sup>60</sup>Beale notes that the biblical description of idols and idolaters correspond to each other because “the purpose of the identical description is to indicate mockingly that the worshiper, rather than experiencing an expected life-giving blessing, has received a curse by becoming as spiritually inanimate, empty, rebellious or shameful as the idol is depicted to be.” Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 21.

<sup>61</sup>Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 98.

<sup>62</sup>Beale explains why the idol was a calf or bull: “The likely reason is that a calf or bull was among the most important of the Egyptian animal images that represented Egypt’s gods.” Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 84. Beale also notes how hermeneutics are involved in the description of idolatry of Exodus 32: “There is no explicit propositional statement in Exod 32-34 that says Israel became like the calf, but the idea appears to be expressed through the story form genre” (86).

the golden calf incident (Ezek 20:16). Like the stiff-necked calf they worshipped, God described Israel as a stiff-necked people (Exod 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9). Because of their idolatry, Israel corrupted themselves and resembled the god they worshipped (Exod 32:7). Psalm 106:20 calls Israel's idolatry with the golden calf an exchange of the glory of God's image: "They made a calf in Horeb and worshiped a metal image. They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass." Echoing Psalm 106:20, Jeremiah 2:11 states that when Israel committed idolatry, the nation "changed their glory for that which does not profit."

Yet God did not let the idolatry of Exodus 32 ruin his covenant relationship with his people. He reinstituted the covenant with Moses in Exodus 34. Although the people were "stiff-necked," resembling their god rather than Yahweh (Exod 34:9), for a brief time Moses reflected God's glory on Mount Sinai (Exod 34:29). When Moses descends with the law, "his faces shines with the glory of God and he is unaware of it; he descends the mountain as the image of God, man as he was meant to be. It is not the golden calf that represents God but rather human beings in converse with him."<sup>63</sup>

Like Exodus, Deuteronomy reinforces the idea that idolatry is the sin that destroys the covenant relationship between God and Israel. In Deuteronomy 4:26-28 God places a curse on idolaters, so that those who make idols will perish.<sup>64</sup> Deuteronomy 4:28 describes the spiritual deadness of idols: "And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell." Deuteronomy 12:2-4 teaches how Israel is to destroy idols in the Promised Land. In Deuteronomy 17:2-4, idolatry is treated as apostasy, and so idolaters are killed.<sup>65</sup> Deuteronomy 29:2-3 describes how idolatry spiritually deadens the hearts of the people:

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<sup>63</sup>Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 106.

<sup>64</sup>J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 109.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 289.

You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders. But this day the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.

Those who worshipped spiritually dead gods became like the gods they worshiped. Beale explains, “The point of the later development in [Deuteronomy] chapters 28-29 appears to be that the specific traits of inanimate idols whose purported sensory organs like sight and hearing do not work have been passed on to the worshipers of these dead idols.”<sup>66</sup> Beale’s remark on sensory organs highlights a significant area of idolatry that will be seen throughout the Old Testament. An analogy is made with sight, hearing, and the human heart to that of spiritually seeing, hearing, and responding to God. Just as idols are carved to have a mouth and ears that do not actually speak or hear, so too an idolater will have a mouth and ears that do not function spiritually toward Yahweh. The result is that idolaters are spiritually blind, deaf, and have hardened hearts. As a result, Deuteronomy 30:6 proposes that only a new heart will be able to solve the problem of idolatry. As Dempster states, “It is almost as if another covenant is needed, one in which the heart is transformed to conform to the demands of the law.”<sup>67</sup> The Mosaic Law teaches that because the people have engaged in idolatry, they functionally resemble the idols they worship and are unable to keep God’s law and love him as they should.

### **Idolatry in Psalms 115 and 135**

Psalms 115 and 135 also teach that idolaters become like the idols they worship. Both Psalm 115:8 and 135:18 state, “Those who make [idols] become like them; so do all who trust in them.” The gods of the nations were made by human hands, having mouths that do not speak, eyes that do not see, ears that do not hear, noses that do not

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<sup>66</sup>Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 72.

<sup>67</sup>Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 121.

smell, hands that do not feel, feet that do not walk, and throats that are unable to vocalize any words to their worshipers (Ps 115:4-7). The psalmist's conclusion is that idolaters became like the idols they worship, also having spiritually malfunctioning organs (Pss 115:8; 135:18).

In singing these psalms, God's people confessed that idols were useless and worthless. The congregation reminded themselves to trust in God and that all blessings come from him. God alone should receive glory, and idolatry robs God of the glory he should receive. Moving into the exilic period of Israel's history, the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel, in particular, will use sensory organ language to pick up on the fact that idolaters became like the idols they worshipped. In particular, Isaiah 6:9-10 uses the language of Psalm 115 and 135 to describe how idolaters become like the idols they worship.

### **Idolatry in Isaiah 6**

Isaiah 6:9-10 is the foundational Old Testament text that teaches that idolaters become like the idols they worship. In the passage it describes the effects of idolatry on the sensory organs:

Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.<sup>68</sup>

Isaiah's message was to "tell the people not to understand and to effect heart-hardening and spiritual blindness!"<sup>69</sup> Verse 9 describes the sensory faculties of hearing and seeing, while verse 10 describes the heart faculties of understanding and perceiving. The collective impact is that Israel's eyes, ears, and heart have "a total inability to

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<sup>68</sup>Israel's spiritual condition of deafness, blindness, and spiritual inability is the exact representation of idols, which, as described in Deut 4:28, were gods that could "neither see, nor hear, not eat, nor smell."

<sup>69</sup>J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 78.

comprehend” the prophet’s message.<sup>70</sup> The judgment for idolatry was that the people were spiritually dead. Young explains that the deficiency in receiving Isaiah’s message is with the sinful heart of the people:

The blindness of the nation is to be ascribed to its own depravity. . . . In preaching, Isaiah is offering hearing, sight, and understanding to a deaf, blind and ignorant people. These blessings come with the message as its fruits, when the Spirit of God applies that message to the heart. It is therefore not the content of the message itself which is a savor of death unto death. . . . The evil effects come not from the Word, but from the heart of man, which stands in desperate need of regeneration.<sup>71</sup>

Isaiah’s personal cleansing in Isaiah 6:1-8 represented the healing Israel needs for its idolatry. In contrast to the idolatrous practices in which Israel participated that exchanged their image bearing function for idolatry, Isaiah enters the heavenly temple, is purified from his sin, and represents “the human image of God that God originally intended,” becoming a reflection and representation of God’s design for image bearing that Israel had rejected in turning to idols.<sup>72</sup> This cleansing ritual is in the background of Isaiah’s vision, therefore, “the scene in Isaiah 6:1-8 would be a way of mocking the idolatrous institutions of the day and show that Isaiah himself is the true living image of the true God.”<sup>73</sup>

Isaiah preached to a people who were judged because of their idolatry. Those who did not have faith in Yahweh but had faith in idols were spiritually blind, deaf, and hard hearted. However, Isaiah 64:4 states that God would bring about a new creation

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<sup>70</sup>Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 78.

<sup>71</sup>Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 1, *Chapters 1 to 18* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 259-60.

<sup>72</sup>Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 68. In the ancient Near East, it was believed that the living presence of the local deity would be transferred into the idol through a ritual washing of the idol’s mouth. As Beale explains, “The cleansing rite enabled the mouth of the image to be opened and to become the conduit through which the god spoke; generally the ritual activated the image’s sense and caused the human senses (smell, taste, seeing, and hearing) to become enlivened so that the image became both human-like and a representation of the divine.”

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 64.

work: “From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him.” Isaiah’s message came to Israel in a time of judgment for their idolatry, but through the life and ministry of a Servant who redeemed the people, the Lord restored the spiritual senses of idolaters, allowing them to see the king of Israel in all his beauty (33:17).

### **Idolatry in Ezekiel**

Like Isaiah, the prophet Ezekiel taught that idol worship transformed worshipers into the idols they worship. During Ezekiel’s ministry, the people “had eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not” (Ezekiel 12:1). Similar to Isaiah 6:9-10, the people had exchanged bearing God’s image for resembling the idols they worshiped and deserved judgment. Israel had spiritually dead sensory organs.

Besides Ezekiel 12:1, another prominent description of idolatry in Ezekiel is the mention of “idols of the heart” in Ezekiel 14:3. Jay Adams believes that Ezekiel does not encouraged counselors to help others look for “idols of the heart.”<sup>74</sup> Adams’ interpretation of Ezekiel 14:3 was that the idols were “on the heart,” meaning the idols were physical amulets or idolatrous tattoos, not sinful, internal desires.<sup>75</sup> More likely, however, the phrase is best translated, “idols of the heart,” referring to the

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<sup>74</sup>Jay Adams, “Looking for Idols in Ezekiel 14,” accessed December 28, 2016, <http://www.nouthetic.org/blog/?p=6869>. “The passage says nothing about *looking for idols* in counseling or for any other purpose. What, then, was going on? These same people, going out to Babylon, were about to carry images of the idols they were supposed to leave behind in their hearts! They were ‘setting up’ these idols upon their hearts so that, even when not physically present, they would be able to put them ‘before their faces.’ That’s what the passage is referring to. The idols (now in imagery) would accompany them as they went off in exile. There is nothing about their hearts manufacturing idols; nothing about seeking such imaginary idols in order to deal with counseling problems (biblical counseling was the farthest thing from Ezekiel’s mind).” Emphasis his.

<sup>75</sup>Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 425.



internationalization of idolatry. The word “heart” designates rational faculty, moral will, and inward commitment, so Ezekiel 14:3 portrays idolatry as a state of mind.<sup>76</sup>

Today, biblical counselors do not follow Adams’ interpretation of Ezekiel 14:3. On the basis of Ezekiel 14:3, Bigney believes that believers commit idolatry because “it’s our very nature to be idol-makers.”<sup>77</sup> Lou Going believes idolatry is always a possibility for believers, since “our hearts are hardened, darkened, and deceived, and they also possess (and are possessed by) idols.”<sup>78</sup> Though believers are “free from their idols, the idols were not far away, and there were always new ones ready to take hold in their hearts.”<sup>79</sup> Welch teaches that believers construct “unseen Baals” in their hearts.<sup>80</sup> For this reason, “The prohibition against idolatry is ultimately about ‘idols of the heart’ (see Ezek 14:3).”<sup>81</sup> For Welch, “All idols are objects of the heart’s self-centered affections (Ezek 14:3).”<sup>82</sup> Believers act like the elders in Ezekiel 14 by constructing idols in their hearts, because believers no longer find satisfaction in God and want to craft an idol for their own benefit. Idolatry is a root struggle even for the Christian heart, a heart which “becomes more than an idol factory,” so that believers can demonstrate an

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 425-26. Block writes, “More likely, [the elders] were inwardly longing for the idolatrous observances (such as had been portrayed in ch. 8) they had left behind in Judah. Though separated from their homeland, they had not yet been weaned off the syncretistic ways that had precipitated their present lot. These pagan commitments remain the most serious obstacle to divine favor.”

<sup>77</sup>Bigney, *Gospel Treason*, 104.

<sup>78</sup>Lou Going, “Modern Idolatry: Understanding and Overcoming the Attraction of Your Broken Cisterns,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* Spring 20, no. 3 (Spring 2002): 46-52.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>80</sup>Edward T. Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 49. Welch also has a journal article that summarizes his position on addictions. See “Addictions: New Ways of Seeing, New Ways of Walking Free,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 19, no. 3 (2001): 19-30.

<sup>81</sup>Welch, *Addictions*, 48.

<sup>82</sup>Welch, “Motives,” 51.



“affinity for Satan.”<sup>83</sup> For Welch, like other biblical counselors, Ezekiel 14:3 teaches that heart idolatry affects believers and unbeliever indiscriminately.<sup>84</sup>

However, commentator Iain Duguid notes that the elders in Ezekiel 14:3 were not regenerate and calls them “non-Spirit-filled”:

Their actions provide a shocking contrast to the seventy ‘elders of Israel’ in the Pentateuch, Israel’s leaders in the desert period, who received the unique privilege of seeing God (Exod. 24:1-11) and were endowed with the same Spirit as Moses (Num. 11:16-30). Here [in Ezekiel] these ‘non-Spirit-filled’ elders find justification for their conduct in the belief that the Lord does not see [their idolatry] (Ezek. 8:12).<sup>85</sup>

Duguid further remarks that the elders in Ezekiel 14 exemplify Paul’s description of idolaters in Romans 1:22, because these elders turned their backs on God and worshiped creation (Ezek 8:16).<sup>86</sup> Whereas biblical counselors after Jay Adams believe that believers can have “idols of the heart” like Israel’s elders, Ezekiel describes the elders as unregenerate. These elders had not been cleansed from idolatry and given a new heart.

God’s solution for Israel’s idolatry was to enter into a new covenant with them to cleanse them from their idolatry. The new covenant was referenced in Ezekiel 11, 18, and 36-37. In Ezekiel 11:19-21, God promised to give Israel a new heart by putting his Spirit within the people. In Ezekiel 18:31, God commanded Israel to repent from their sins and receive a new heart and a new spirit. In Ezekiel 36:18 God’s wrath focused on Israel’s idolatry, because their idolatry defiled a covenant people and a promised land (36:18). As a result, God judged Israel according to their idolatrous actions (36:19). The

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<sup>83</sup>Welch, *Addictions*, 51.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>85</sup>Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 132.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, 133.

people were driven away from God's presence. Those who committed idolatry were unable to reflect God's glory, so God's glory left Israel.

In Ezekiel 36 God's resolution for Israel's impurity involved ritual cleansing and the giving of a new heart.<sup>87</sup> Idolatry legally defiled God's covenant people and the covenant land (36:25), so God externally purified the people with clean water. God then removed the people's dead hearts and replaced them with living hearts that will enable them to obey his law (36:26-27). The result was that Israel was restored to an Edenic state where God dwelled with his people once again (36:35).<sup>88</sup> Deliverance from idolatry brought about a new creation experience for the people of God.

Ezekiel 37 is the picture of new creation that Israel experienced when they were purified from their idolatry and given new hearts. Like dead bones, the people had unresponsive spiritual hearts, blind eyes, and deaf ears. They received God's breath, the Spirit, who animated them.<sup>89</sup> Because of the indwelling Spirit, God stated his people were cleansed from idolatry, never again to defile themselves with false worship (Ezek 37:23).

God's solution for Israel's idolatry and spiritually unresponsive hearts was the giving of the Spirit. Allen described the impact of the new covenant on the people's heart:

Yahweh would creatively endow Israel with new wills that were to be sensitive rather than stony and hard in their reactions to Yahweh's will. Thanks to him, their lives would be governed by a new impulse that was to be an expression of Yahweh's own spirit. He would re-make their human natures, so that they marched to the music of the covenant terms that expressed Yahweh's nature and will.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Block, *Ezekiel 25-48*, 354-55.

<sup>88</sup>Other Edenic reference is found in Ezek 36:11, which echoes the creation mandate given in Gen 1:28.

<sup>89</sup>"The in-breathing echoes the verb of Genesis 2:7, when Yahweh 'breathed' into the human being the breath of life." Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 29. (Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1994), 185.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 179.

Some biblical counselors are not explicit in their writings on idolatry that the new covenant was the solution for idolatry. For example, Bigney makes no reference to Ezekiel 36-37 or the new covenant mentioned elsewhere throughout the Old Testament in his book on idolatry, *Gospel Treason*. Welch also makes no reference to the impact the new covenant has on cleansing God's people from idolatry.<sup>91</sup> Fitzpatrick mentions Ezekiel 36:26 (see Jer 31:33) in reference to God placing his law on his people's heart, but does not connect the verse to how God covenantally cleanses his people from idolatry.<sup>92</sup> This is not to say that these biblical counseling authors do not consider Jesus and the Gospel as solutions to sinful desires. The problem is that these counselors do not view idolatry as unregeneracy, a spiritual state that brought God's judgment. Instead, believers are counseled as if they are the "non-Spirit-filled" elders from Ezekiel 14:3 when they have experienced the life-giving power of the Spirit in Ezekiel 36-37. Believers are told to look for "idols of the heart" when they have been given new hearts that have been cleansed from idolatry.

### Conclusion

The biblical and theological analysis in this chapter runs contrary to how biblical counselors understand image bearing and idolatry. When biblical counselors have approached understanding people as image bearers, they have not considered God's covenants. In doing so, they have severed the relationship between image bearing and idolatry. Those who commit idolatry become like the idols they worship and deserve Yahweh's judgment. The new covenant was specifically designed to deliver Israel from idolatry, recreating people into image bearers who reflect and represent their covenant Lord. The starting point for understanding believers in Jesus, then, is not Ezekiel 14, but

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<sup>91</sup>Welch, *Addictions*, 47-55.

<sup>92</sup>Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart*, 54.

Ezekiel 36 and 37. The fundamental identity of believers is no longer idolatry. The task of biblical counselors is to help believers develop godly affections and habits since they have been delivered from idolatry and been united to Christ in the new creation.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE RENEWAL OF THE IMAGE OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The disciples were finally alone with Jesus to ask him questions about his parable of the sower. Jesus explained that the parable was designed to elicit the same response about the kingdom of God described in Isaiah 6:9-10. Like Isaiah, Jesus spoke in parables so those who have eyes to see his ministry but do not perceive and have ears to hear but do not understand his message would be confirmed in their idolatry.<sup>1</sup> Jesus did this because receptivity to his message was based on whether or not the listener was enslaved to idolatry. Cautious of whether or not the disciples would succumb to unbelief like the Jewish religious leaders, Jesus asks them several times if they understand this parable and its implications for them (Mark 4:13; 7:18; 8:17-18, 21). Would the disciples, too, like the Jewish leaders have hardened hearts (6:52; cf. 2:8; 7:18)?

At a different time, a crowd had gathered on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee to see Jesus perform another miracle. They brought him a deaf and mute man, a man who had eyes but could not see, ears but could not hear. Jesus gently led the man away from the crowd, needing a personal moment with him. Jesus' fingers slipped into the man's ears, and then Jesus' moistened fingers touched the man's tongue, healing and recreating him. Once the crowd saw the healed man, they exclaimed, "Jesus has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak" (Mark 7:37). Frequently,

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<sup>1</sup>Idolatry was Israel's main sin that led to the exile. Isaiah records that idolatry infiltrated Israel's cultic worship (Isa 2:8-9; 44:9-20), political alliances (28:15; 30:1-5), and led them to be covenantally unfaithful (57:1-13). All four Gospel writers reference Jesus' quotation of Isa 6:9-10, the description of how idolaters resemble their idols, indicating the problem of idolatry during Isaiah's time period was still prevalent during Jesus' time. See Matt 13:14-15, Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10, and John 12:40.

Jesus symbolized the recreation of spiritually deaf and blind idolaters by healing the physically deaf and blind. Jesus' life and ministry was designed to recreate image bearers by delivering them from idolatry.<sup>2</sup> The Gospels teach that the renewal of the image of God occurs because Jesus delivers believers out of a spiritual condition of idolatry.

The BCM recognizes that believers are conformed to the image of Christ. In his theology of biblical counseling, Lambert writes, "The goal of counseling should be to facilitate the restoration of the image of God to its proper functioning in all of the practical ways that it has been shattered in the lives of those who come to see a counselor."<sup>3</sup> The BCM also believes Jesus helps people overcome idolatry. "The Lord Jesus has forever conquered our slavery to it [idolatry] and declared that we are His freely loved children," writes Eyrich and Fitzpatrick.<sup>4</sup> Bigney concurs when he asks, "So what's the answer to our idolatry? The cross. Christ died on the cross to set us free from living on substitutes, to set us free from cramped hearts that are full of idols."<sup>5</sup> Yet when these biblical counselors write on Jesus delivering believers from idolatry, they mean that Jesus continues to deliver believers from idolatry because believers commit idolatry everyday. However, the deliverance from idolatry that is described in the New Testament is a definitive event that occurs when people "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess 1:9). In helping believers fight idolatry, Eyrich and Fitzpatrick urge believers to find encouragement from the doctrine of justification, a one-time

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<sup>2</sup>For this theme in the Gospel of Matthew, see Michael J. Daling, "Idolatry and Reversal: Isaiah 6:9-10 and Matthew's Use of an Isaianic Theme" (Ph.D., diss., Wheaton College, 2012), 28-31; G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 244-48.

<sup>3</sup>Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 190.

<sup>4</sup>Howard Eyrich and Elyse Fitzpatrick, "The Diagnoses and Treatment of Idols of the Heart," in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*, ed. James MacDonald, Bob Kelleman, and Steve Viars (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 350.

<sup>5</sup>Brad Bigney, *Gospel Treason: Betraying the Gospel with Hidden Idols* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2012), 130.

definitive moment whereby God legally declared sinners righteous in Christ.<sup>6</sup> These authors teach that even though believers have already been recreated in the image of God (Eph 4:24), they are still idolaters. But according to the theology of the New Testament, to be a new creation in Christ means deliverance from the realm of idolatry. Believers cannot partake in idolatry and Christ at the same time (2 Cor 6:15). Because biblical counselors believe that Christians are idolaters, they have overlooked a redemptive-historical reality that Christians have been delivered from idolatry. Telling believers they are idolaters undermines the redemptive-historical realities that are true in believers' lives. The reason why the BCM does not capture this redemptive-historical truth is because the movement uses idolatry exclusively as a metaphor for sinful desires and not to describe a spiritual state of unregeneracy.<sup>7</sup>

What has yet to be explored adequately by the BCM is how also Jesus delivers believers from idolatry. This exploration is an interpretive task that must go beyond the literal the grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture, because the words "idol," "idolatry," and "image of God" are not found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. This does not mean that the concept of image bearing and idolatry are not found in the Gospels. The gospels do not state in propositional form that Jesus' death cleansed idolaters of their idolatry. Nor do the gospels describe in propositional form the spiritual recreation of idolaters into a renewed image of God.<sup>8</sup> The gospels do, however,

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<sup>6</sup>Eyrich and Fitzpatrick, "Diagnoses and Treatment," 349-50.

<sup>7</sup>This is how a counselor such as Brad Bigney can use heart idolatry from Ezek 14 as his paradigm for biblical counseling yet never include God's covenant solution for idolatry from Ezek 36. Bigney does not have a redemptive-historical hermeneutic.

<sup>8</sup>Writing on the Gospel of Luke, Roger Stronstad noted that typical evangelical hermeneutics have made the distinction between narratives in the gospels and instruction in the New Testament letters. Such a distinction deemphasizes the theological purposes of narrative. Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984), 5-9. Lints stated that this placed emphasis on the speech of God (instruction) rather than the acts of God (narrative). See Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1993), 264.

use physical healing of sight and deafness – the “sensory organ language” – to show how image bearers are healed of their idolatry. Idolatry spiritually blinds, deafens, and hardens hearts, but Jesus heals and renews them.

In each synoptic gospel, Jesus bases his ministry on Isaiah’s ministry of condemning idolatry and healing image bearers.<sup>9</sup> In Mark, Jesus bases his teaching ministry on Isaiah 6, which is designed to judge Israel in its idolatry and deliver his disciples out of a state of idolatry by recreating spiritually blind eyes, deaf ears, and hardened hearts.<sup>10</sup> As a result, Mark’s gospel narrative in particular tells the story of Jesus’ reenactment of Isaiah 35, a mission to lead the blind and deaf out of spiritual exile and into the new creation.<sup>11</sup>

Chapter 4, then, will describe two aspects of image bearing. The first is Jesus’ image-renewing ministry in the Gospel of Mark. The second includes themes in the New Testament passages that describe the renewal of the image of God that Jesus accomplished for believers. The New Testament epistles teach that renewal flows out of

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<sup>9</sup>Both Matt 13 and Mark 4 base Jesus’ teaching ministry on Isa 6. Luke 4 bases Jesus teaching ministry on Isa 61.

<sup>10</sup>For brevity, only the Gospel of Mark will be analyzed in chapter 4 making several cross references to Matthew, Luke, and John. Mark’s thematic emphasis of a new exodus at the beginning of his Gospel in 1:1-3 makes Mark the natural choice to analyze the relationship between idolatry and Jesus’ ministry.

<sup>11</sup>Even though Israel returned to the land under the guidance of Ezra and Nehemiah, the land remained under foreign control and no Davidic king sat on Israel’s throne. Israel’s rejection of the Messiah in the first century signaled that the exile was still a reality. The Gospels begin with allusions to the exodus and the prophetic hope that the exile would end. For example, Mark 1:1-3 quotes Isa 40, Mal 3 and 4, and Exod 23 to establish the fact that deliverance from the “exile” occurred in Jesus. Matthew connects the events in Jesus’ life with that of Israel’s in the exodus by citing Exod 2 and Hos 11 in the infancy story of Matt 2. In Luke 4, Jesus’ ministry began with the proclamation of the new exodus from Isa 61. John’s gospel makes the parallel to Jesus and Moses (cf. John 1:14; Exod 25:8) to argue that a new exodus arrived in Jesus. For further explanation of the new exodus theme in each gospel, see R. E. Watts, “Exodus,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 484-85. Also see Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 73-75, and G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 566-72.



believers' union with Christ. The conclusion is that idolatry is not an appropriate redemptive-historical metaphor to apply to Christians.

### **The Renewal of the Image of God in the Gospels**

Biblical counselor Rob Green has written on how to use the Gospels in biblical counseling. He offers several hermeneutical principles worth noting. Based on the use of the Gospel of Mark, Green concludes that every Gospel writer has a theological reason for writing because he is telling a theological biography of Jesus.<sup>12</sup> He concludes, "The apostle Paul stresses our identity *in* Christ, but the gospel writers are far more concerned with the identity *of* Christ."<sup>13</sup> The Gospels are indeed concerned with Jesus' identity. However, an aspect of Jesus' identity that can be overlooked is healing and, and how as healer purposefully connects his teaching on how idolatry has deafened and blinded Israel with how he heals the deaf and blind in his ministry. Jesus does this by using the "sensory organ language" of idolatry in Isaiah 6:9-10 (deaf ears, blind eyes, unresponsive heart) to symbolize spiritual healing. What follows is an overview of several key places in the Gospel of Mark that highlight Jesus' image-renewing and idol-judging ministry.

The Gospel of Mark begins with a declaration that the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the awaited Messiah from Isaiah 40:3 by highlighting Jesus' teaching (1:21-28) and healing ministry (1:29-34).<sup>14</sup> Both demonic presence and sickness are prominent in Jesus' ministry, indicating that the human condition during Jesus' time was characterized by demonic indwelling and external diseases (1:35-45). When Jesus pronounced forgiveness of sins and backed up that claim by healing a lame man (2:1-12),

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<sup>12</sup>Rob Green, "Using the Gospels in the Personal Ministry of the Word," in *Scripture and Counseling: God's Word for Life in a Broken World*, ed. Bob Kelleman and Jeff Forrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 355, 365.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 355.

<sup>14</sup>The subordinating conjunction, *kathos*, in v. 2 links Mark's introductory statement in v. 1.

he acted in accordance with Isaiah's expectation of how Yahweh would forgive and heal (33:23).<sup>15</sup> Spiritual healing, then, involved forgiveness of sins and was demonstrated through physical healing. When confronted about why Jesus spent his time with people who were sinful and unclean, he responded, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (2:17). The relationship between forgiveness of sins and healing confirms that the Isaiah's long-awaited Messiah had arrived.

Jesus is met with opposition from the Jewish religious leaders because of his teaching and healing ministry. Reaction to his ministry divided people into "insiders," those who accepted his teaching, and "outsiders," those who reject it (3:31-35).<sup>16</sup> Jesus used a series of parables to explain why some people accepted his message and entered the kingdom and why others rejected it. The message of the gospel falls on various soils, which represent different spiritual conditions. The explanation of the parable was given to his disciples, while the "outsiders" remained in the dark (4:11). Why are some people receptive to the word of the gospel and for others it bears no fruit? For his explanation, Jesus quotes a passage on idolatry from Isaiah 6:9-10: "They may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven."

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<sup>15</sup>Watts asks, "But why the link between sins and the paralytic? Isa 33:23f may provide a clue. The restoration of Israel's fortunes under Yahweh as rightful king is described in terms of the forgiveness of sins which is specifically linked with the absence of sickness (cf. Ps. 103:3). . . . If this background is in mind, then Jesus' granting of forgiveness (see Isa. 33:24; 43:25; cf. 40:2; 44:22f) in association with the healing of the lame man (33:23; cf. 35:6) may be intended to testify to the breaking-in of Yahweh's reign expressed in Isaianic new exodus terms (33:22; 52:7; cf. Mark 1:15)." Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997), 174. Also, Rikki E. Watts, "Mark," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 131-33.

<sup>16</sup>"Parables are thus a way for Jesus to speak to 'outsiders' who have ears to hear but do not hear. Outsiders include the public gamut, from declared opposition in the scribes and Pharisees, to those who may even sympathize with Jesus but who hear only casually or carelessly and 'do not bear fruit.'" James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 132.

The purpose of the quote is to explain why some enter the kingdom and others do not.<sup>17</sup>

The purpose of the parables was to convey that Jesus' message was rejected because of the idolatrous hearts of the people.<sup>18</sup>

The purpose of Jesus' parables confirms the spiritual hardening that has occurred in those who reject his message.<sup>19</sup> Bruce Hollenbach captures the idea when he paraphrases Mark 4:12, "so they may indeed see but not perceive, and indeed hear but not understand because the last thing they want is to turn and have their sins forgiven!"<sup>20</sup> Given the understanding that idolatry deadens the spiritual senses of the idol worshiper, Jesus' quotation of Isaiah 6 indicates that receptivity to his message is based on whether or not the listener is enslaved to idolatry.

Jesus' follow-up questions to his disciples about the parable of the soils focus on their spiritual understanding.<sup>21</sup> He asks them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?" Though the disciples are given an explanation of the secret of the kingdom of God, they are later told to "look and listen" to Jesus' teaching on the kingdom.<sup>22</sup> Mark comments that at some point the disciples had

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<sup>17</sup>In this context the Greek conjunction *hina* denotes purpose.

<sup>18</sup>"Parables have a dual function and purpose: to reveal and to conceal, to bring blessing and judgment . . . Jesus' parabolic ministry therefore comes as God's gift to some and as his judgment to others." David Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1989), 243-44.

<sup>19</sup>The question as to whether or not Jesus' parables based on Isa 6:9-10 are meant to confirm or bring about spiritual hardening is debatable and outside the scope of this thesis. France leans toward Isa 6:9-10 describing the fact of human resistance rather than divine intention. Yet he strikes a balance when he writes, "within the purpose of God there will always be bad soil as well as good." R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 201.

<sup>20</sup>As quoted in France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 200.

<sup>21</sup>Following the quotation of Isa 6:9-10 in Matt 13:14-15 are Jesus' words in 13:16-17, "But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." For more background on Matthew's use of Isa 6, see Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 377-80.

<sup>22</sup>Jesus' words "look and listen" in Mark 4:24 are more than a call to pay attention, because they also echo "seeing" and "hearing" from Mark 4:12 (cf. Isa 6:9).

hardened hearts to Jesus' identity and message (Mark 6:52). The chart below highlights how Mark emphasized the Isaianic trio of understanding, seeing, and hearing Jesus' message as the narrative progresses.

Table 2. Understanding, Hearing, and Seeing

| Passage      | Reference to Understanding, Seeing, and Hearing |
|--------------|---|
| Mark 4:13    | Understanding                                   |
| Mark 4:24    | Seeing and hearing                              |
| Mark 4:33    | Hearing   |
| Mark 6:52    | Understanding                                   |
| Mark 7:14    | Hearing and understanding                       |
| Mark 7:18    | Understanding                                   |
| Mark 8:17-18 | Understanding, seeing, hearing                  |
| Mark 8:21    | Understanding                                   |
| Mark 9:7     | Listening                                       |
| Mark 9:32    | Understanding                                   |

In his confrontation with the religious leaders in Mark 7 Jesus makes idolatry the main issue by quoting Isaiah 29:13. That passage describes how the Lord caused Israel to fall into a drunken stupor due to the blindness of their idolatry.<sup>23</sup> Mark's narrative shows that the impact of idolatry during Isaiah's time still impacted Israel during Jesus' ministry. As Watts explained,

The blinding and deafening announced in Isaiah 6 and described in Isaiah 29 and elsewhere was to be understood as Yahweh's ironic judgment on Israel for relying on its own idolatrous wisdom. The people and in particular their leaders were, metaphorically, to be 'recreated' in the image of the lifeless and uncomprehending idols they worshipped.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Isa 29:9-10 has 6:9-10 in view with the parallels of blindness and Yahweh's judgment for idolatry.

<sup>24</sup>Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 241.

Jesus' evaluation of Israel's spiritual condition was to quote Isaiah 29:13, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." Like Israel during the events that lead to the exile, the Jewish leaders in Jesus' time had enacted man-made laws that reinforced idolatry rather than true worship of Yahweh. Jesus explains that the concern for ritual purity is not the issue that is decisive for God; rather, what is in a person's heart is determinative of purity. The heart of an idolater is what defiles him because in the heart come "evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness" (Mark 7:21-22).<sup>25</sup> Jesus' return to Isaiah 6 and Isaiah 29 provides insight into his understanding of Israel at the time: the people needed deliverance from idolatry because of their sinful hearts.

Mark continues to arrange his narrative to teach that faith in the Messiah brings healing to idolatrous hearts. In contrast to the man-made idolatry of Israel is the faith of the Syrophoenician woman in Mark 7:24-30. Faith brings healing for those who are receptive to Jesus. The healing events of Mark 7:31-37 reenact Isaiah 35:5-10.<sup>26</sup> In Isaiah 35:5-6, "the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy." The promise of future healing in Isaiah is experienced in the life of the deaf and mute man in Jesus' time. Isaiah foretold of a highway that led to a place where Israel's uncleanness is gone, a way for the redeemed to find joy in their salvation: "And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to

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<sup>25</sup>The parallel passage in Matt 15:13-16 also highlights the unregeneracy of the Pharisees, who are "blind guides." In Matt 15 Jesus condemns the Pharisees' hearts through two illustrations. The first is that they are not part of God's planting, and so they will be uprooted. The second is that they are spiritually blind, unable to interpret and lead people in the truth of the Law. The picture of the heart described by Jesus is characteristic of those who do not follow him. See D. A. Carson, *Matthew in The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 2:350.

<sup>26</sup>Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark*, 172-77.

those who walk on the way..." (Isa 35:8-9). Jesus led this new exodus, and his people were expected to follow him on the highway out of idolatry and into salvation. Mark uses the parallel from the healing of the blind and mute man to transition into his own "highway" section in chapters 8-10.<sup>27</sup>

In Mark 8-10 Jesus leads his disciples on an Isaianic journey out of idolatry by taking them "on the way" to the cross.<sup>28</sup> The reversal of idolatry and the recreation of image bearers come through faith in Jesus. Jesus' death and believers' identification with his death is what delivers people from idolatry. The beginning of the "way" section focuses on the hard-heartedness of the disciples, who exhibit disbelief in Jesus like the Pharisees (8:17).<sup>29</sup> Jesus uses Isaiah 6:9-10 to confront the disciples' unbelief (8:18, 20). Jesus then heals a blind man, who is one of two men who receive their sight "on the way" (8:22-26; 10:46-52).<sup>30</sup> Peter makes a confession of Jesus identity as the Messiah, so Jesus begins to teach his death (8:31-38).<sup>31</sup> Jesus tells the disciples they too must take up their cross, follow him, and die (8:34). Jesus' death would put an end to idolatry for God's people, but people of faith must be willing to follow him to the cross to put to death their old life. The "way" section concludes with a contrast between the disciples who ask for positions in the kingdom of God (10:35) and a blind man who asks for his sight (10:51). The disciples ask for positions of power, whereas the blind man asks for healing. Like

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<sup>27</sup>Mark 8-10 is known as the section in Mark where Jesus focuses his attention on teaching his disciples about the cross. For example, see France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 320-21.

<sup>28</sup>Five times in Mark 8-10 Jesus is described as being "on the way" to Jerusalem (Mark 8:3, 27; 9:33, 34; 10:52). Three times "on the way" he tells his disciples he is heading to Jerusalem to die (Mark 8:31; 9:30; 10:33).

<sup>29</sup>For the background on the disciples' struggle to believe Jesus' message in 8:14-21, see Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 80-82.

<sup>30</sup>Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark*, 222. Mark bookends his "way" section with two healing-of-the blind miracles, Mark 8:22-26 and 10:46-52.

<sup>31</sup>For background to Jesus as the Messiah, see Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 205-13.

Peter, blind Bartimaeus confesses Jesus' identity (10:47). Jesus commends Bartimaeus for his faith and heals him. The healing-of-sight miracle concludes the "way" section and reinforces what is necessary to gain spiritual sight: faith.<sup>32</sup>

The promise of a new covenant to cleanse the people of their idolatry made in the Old Testament was fulfilled in the death of Jesus. Mark concludes his gospel by taking the reader to the foot of the cross to listen to the idolatrous religious leaders entice Jesus to come down from the cross, so they might "see and believe" in the Messiah (15:32). But off to the side of the cross stood a Roman centurion who "saw" the way Jesus died and said, "Truly this man is the Son of God" (15:39).<sup>33</sup> Jesus' death opens spiritually blind eyes to see who he is.

### **The Renewal of the Image of God in the Epistles**

The New Testament letters theologically expound on the truth that Jesus renews the image of God that was inverted. Jesus delivers believers from idolatry because he is the image of the invisible God, the second Adam that brought about the new creation through a new covenant. Because believers are united to the image of God in Christ, they are continually renewed into his image and now live in a new creation kingdom. Believers still sin, but they are not categorically idolaters. At one time believers were spiritually blind, following their desires and living in the kingdom of darkness as sons of wrath. Presently, believers are renewed into Christ's image because they no longer bear the image of idols.

The BCM teaches that believers are idolaters. The concept of idolatry is the

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<sup>32</sup>Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 240. For background to Jesus' identification as the Son of Man, see *ibid.*, 213-26.

<sup>33</sup>The thesis to Mark's gospel was that Jesus was the Son of God (1:1), a theme repeated by a man of faith who had eyes to see the significance of Jesus' death. For the connection between Mark 1:1 and 15:39, see Peter G. Bolt, *The Cross from a Distance: Atonement in Mark's Gospel*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 18, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 138-39.



major paradigm for understanding the problem with the human heart, even the Christian heart. But how does this understanding take into account a redemptive-historical heart change in the believer at regeneration? A new creation brought about new creation image bearers, and a new covenant brought about new hearts for God's people. The old age of sin has ended for believers so that they no longer live in the kingdom of darkness and bear the image of idols. Because idolatry is the inversion of bearing God's image, being united to an idol and united to Christ are incompatible theological concepts. As Grenz has argued, the image of God should be understood "within the entire salvation-historical narrative, climaxing in the new humanity and the eschatological community."<sup>34</sup> The fundamental spiritual disposition of Christians has changed because believers are united to the image of Christ and is renewed by him. The rest of chapter four will expound on the believers' union with Christ and the renewal process.

### **Union with Christ, the Image of God**

The reason believers are renewed in the image of God is that they are united to Christ, who is the image of God. Several passages describe Jesus as the image of God (1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15). In Pauline theology, Jesus is the second and better Adam, introducing a covenant that brought life and salvation (Rom 5:12-21). As Beale explains, "Christ has come in human form and accomplished that which the first Adam did not; consequently, as the divine and ideal human, Christ reflects the image that Adam and others should have reflected but did not."<sup>35</sup> Since Christ is the image of God, he fully shares and perfectly reflects the divine intention as the original image of God.<sup>36</sup> By

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<sup>34</sup>Stanely J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 279.

<sup>35</sup>Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 444-45.

<sup>36</sup>Kittle, "Eikon," 395. "When Paul calls Jesus the image of God in 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:15, the emphasis is on the equality of the image with the original."



participating in union with Christ believers manifest the divine image in a new way, so that Paul can speak of this transformation as both a present reality (2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:9-10), and a future eschatological event (1 Cor 15:49).

Renewal is possible presently and in the future for the believer. The renewal of the image Paul spoke of in 2 Corinthians 3:18 happens because believers are transformed into the image of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor 4:4). For this reason, believers are “renewed day by day” (2 Cor 4:16) because they have been called out of idolatry and into a new covenant to live holy (2 Cor 6:14-7:1). When Paul states that believers are renewed in the image of their creator in Colossians 3:9-10, the creator Paul spoke of was Christ, “the image of the invisible God” who created all things (Col 1:15-16), and brought believers out of their destructive lifestyle and united them to himself (Col 1:21). The Colossians, then, were to consider their renewal a present day eschatological reality that impacted the way they lived (Col 3:1). The author of Hebrews called Jesus the exact imprint of the Father’s nature (Heb 1:3), meaning that Jesus is the exact image of the Father. Because Jesus united himself to humanity as an image bearer, believers in him are made sons who will dwell in glory (Heb 2:10).<sup>37</sup> Renewal will also occur fully in the future as an eschatological event. In 1 Corinthians 15:49, Paul states that at Christ’s return believers will “bear the image of the man of heaven.” Future renewal will be eschatologically complete at Christ’s return. With Christ’s return in mind, the Apostle John wrote, “when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>The author of Hebrews uses the language of an imprint to convey the idea that Jesus perfectly resembles the image of God. The author also quotes Ps 8:4-6 in Heb 2:6 to establish Jesus’ rule and sonship, aspects of being the divine image of God.

<sup>38</sup>Note the emphasis on sight in 1 John 3:2, that is, seeing Jesus transforms believers into his image.

The pathway that connects the present reality of renewal to future completeness is that believers are united to the narrative of Christ's life, death, and resurrection as the second Adam. The story of the second Adam taking dominion over the new creation becomes the story for believers, because believers enter this story as renewed image bearers who fill the earth to represent and reflect God's rule under the kingship of the second Adam. Schreiner writes, "Believers who were in the old Adam and the old age are now members of the new age inaugurated in Christ, and they are in Christ rather than in Adam."<sup>39</sup> When believers identify with Jesus' death and resurrection through faith, "they become a living part of the redemptive-historical storyline, in which they are not only a part of the new creation but are also involved in the expansion of it in their own lives."<sup>40</sup> Because believers are united to Christ, they leave behind the storyline of idolatry and enter into a new creation story. Furthermore, "being in Christ is an eschatological reality, signifying that God's covenantal promises are theirs," and as a result, "they have been freed from the power of sin and death because they are united with Christ."<sup>41</sup> As Campbell states, "Dying and rising with Christ means that believers identify with his representative death and resurrection, and it facilitates a change of lordship as the believer dies to the dominion of sin and death and enters a new life in the realm of Christ."<sup>42</sup> Ethically, this means, "what a person is in the resurrected Christ is the basis for how that person should behave."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 314.

<sup>40</sup>Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 836.

<sup>41</sup>Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 316-17.

<sup>42</sup>Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 352.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

## Present and Ever-Increasing Renewal

The truth of union with Christ provides the basis for Christian growth in sanctification. What has happened in the life and death of Jesus is applied to believers and provides the motivation for holy living. Understood grammatically, there are indicative statements in the New Testament describing fact and truth. There are also imperatives given to believers that are based on the indicatives. Believers should live in response to the truth of the Gospel. As Beale explains, “The ‘indicative’ of the new creation must precede the ‘imperative’ to act as a new creation.”<sup>44</sup> In other words, the indicatives of the Gospel are the basis for living out the imperatives of the Gospel.

The issue of balancing the indicatives and imperatives has been a dividing issue in the history of the BCM in relation to the renewal of the image of God. Jay Adams was criticized by the second generation of biblical counselors for an imbalance in how he understood the imperatives of the Christian life.<sup>45</sup> According to Lambert’s history of the BCM, Adams interpreted the “putting off” and “putting on” passages in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 to mean that Christians need to be dehabituated and rehabilitated, that is, modify their behavior according to the truth of the gospel.<sup>46</sup> Biblical counselors after Adams reacted to what they understood to be an overemphasis on the imperative to change behavior. However, instead of seeking to balance the imperatives with the indicatives, the biblical counselors after Adams shifted the emphasis on behavior with an emphasis on motivation, namely, heart idolatry.<sup>47</sup> The concept of heart idolatry

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<sup>44</sup>Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 840.

<sup>45</sup>Heath Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 67-70.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 67. For Adams’ language, see Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 178.

<sup>47</sup>Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams*, 71-80. Ed Welch, in particular, was instrumental in highlighting how Adams’ understanding of “flesh” was deficient. Adams took “flesh” to mean learned behavior. Welch, along with Powlison, instead focused on the motivation behind behavior, which they believed was idolatry, even for the Christian.

gained momentum after Powlison wrote on idols of the heart.<sup>48</sup> For example, Fitzpatrick states the believer's need to put off the worship of idols for the worship of God.<sup>49</sup> Every action is an act of worship, so sanctification is a "process of change whereby God transforms our hearts back into His image and likeness."<sup>50</sup> Kellemen also concurs that for believers, "putting off" involves repenting of "the insane idols of their heart."<sup>51</sup> In seeking to correct an imbalance on behavior, the modern BCM has undermined an eschatological reality for believers – they have been changed at the heart level and have been delivered from idolatry. Bigney believes that it is the believers "very nature to be idol-makers."<sup>52</sup> How can this be when believers are new creations in Christ (Eph 2:10)? The spiritual strength to obey the imperatives is found in the reality that believers are no longer idolaters.

Biblical counselor Stuart Scott has written on the need for balance of the indicatives and imperatives of Scripture for biblical counseling.<sup>53</sup> He warns that too much emphasis on godly practice (imperatives) deflates the biblical emphasis on the believers' position in Christ (indicatives). Conversely, too much emphasis on the believer's position in Christ (indicatives) can lead to an imbalance of not emphasizing enough godly practice (imperatives). The biblical balance is emphasizing the indicatives and the imperatives, truth and the commands, together. Scott uses the book of Ephesians as an example when he writes, "The book of Ephesians so clearly indicates, the imperatives (chapters 4-6) are

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<sup>48</sup>Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams*, 75-80.

<sup>49</sup>Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart*, 156-71.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 156.

<sup>51</sup>Kellemen, *Gospel-Centered Counseling*, 275, 283.

<sup>52</sup>Bigney, *Gospel Treason*, 104.

<sup>53</sup>Stuart Scott, "The Gospel in Balance," in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*, ed. James MacDonald, Bob Kellemen, and Steve Viars (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 167-79.

based on the indicatives (chapters 1-3).”<sup>54</sup> Scott is right insofar as truth about Christ forms the basis for obedience to Christ. Yet he reads the letter to the Ephesians solely in propositional terms of statements of fact and exhortations, indicatives and imperatives, rather than redemptive-historically. He does mention that believers live in the “already-not-yet,” but that concept is descriptive not prescriptive. The reality might be “already-not-yet,” but the pastoral understanding is that our new life in Christ is present and ever increasing.

Several New Testament epistles describe the definitive aspect of deliverance from a spiritual state of idolatry in redemptive-historical terms. Passages from Romans, 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, and 1 John come with an understanding that deliverance from idolatry is part of entering the new creation that enables believers to change motivations and behavior. Understanding believers in light of redemptive history is the theological and pastoral mindset for Paul. As such, believers have a new quality of nature that comes from union with Christ and is contrasted to their former unregenerate state of idolatry. The renewal process involves learning new habits of changed behavior, but is more than “rehabilitation,” because the renewed image is different than before. Biblical counseling should not abandon the concept of habit development, as long as it is understood in terms of learning to see, hear, and respond to Christ, that is, sanctified habits. Uncovering sinful motivation in counseling is helpful to figure out what sinful proclivities appealed to believers before they entered the kingdom. However, how could counseling be different if believers were counseled in light of the definite nature of what they experienced at regeneration? There can be eschatological discord in the Christian life, moments where believers do not consider themselves dead to sin and alive to Christ. Though there may be times of eschatological discord,<sup>55</sup> there is

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<sup>54</sup>Scott, “The Gospel in Balance,” 172.

<sup>55</sup>The term “eschatological discord” is used by Beale. “That which is unholy is not meant to dwell with that which is holy, so that there should be a high-level of conflict within Spirit-filled believers

not eschatological incongruence. Believers bear Christ's image by living with eschatological imagination, actualizing what is presently true and ever increasing.<sup>56</sup>

**Romans.** The book of Romans teaches that people exchanged the image of God for the image of idols (Rom 1:23). Idolaters had lustful hearts and dishonorable passions that resulted in idolatrous worship (Rom 1:24-26). Consequently, God's law judged idolaters, legislating the punishment of death (Rom 3:23). However, if idolaters die to themselves in Christ, they receive new life (Rom 6:1-11). As a result, those who have found new life in Christ are called sons and are renewed into his image (Rom 8:19, 29). Whereas believers once inverted the image of God into idols and were given over to God's wrath (Rom 1:18), they now bear the image of God with hope, recognizing God is now for them (Rom 8:29, 31). Some people, such as unbelieving Israel, will not believe in the Messiah and remain blind in their idolatry (Rom 11:8-10).<sup>57</sup> Believers, however, should now view their lives as an eschatological sacrifice of worship (Rom 12:1-2).<sup>58</sup> Knowing Jesus' return is near, believers presently live in eschatological war where they clothe themselves with the armor of light, which is Christ himself (Rom 13:12, 14). Romans spans the scope of redemptive-history, teaching that those who were once

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when sin occurs. We may call this 'eschatological discord,' which inevitably will result in conviction of sin and repentance for the genuine saint." Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 865.

<sup>56</sup>The term "eschatological imagination" is used by Vanhoozer. "To put on Christ, it takes eschatological imagination, the ability to see as 'already' started what is 'not yet' compete." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 129. Also see his use of the term in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 374-80.

<sup>57</sup>For Paul's use of idolatry from Isa 29:10, Deut 29:4, and Ps 69:22-23, see Mark A. Seifrid, "Romans," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 667-71.

<sup>58</sup>Schreiner explains the eschatological aspect of Rom 12:1-2: "He [Paul] understands the OT cult as now being fulfilled because the new age is inaugurated. In other words, Paul's understanding of the cult is fundamentally eschatological. The call to worship causes the theme of the letter to resurface, for the fundamental sin is the failure to worship God (see Rom 1:25)." Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 646.

idolaters have been transformed into Christ's image. Growth in holiness is lived in light of this definitive change.

**1 and 2 Corinthians.** Paul's letters to the church in Corinth teach two truths related to idolatry and image bearing. First, in both epistles Paul teaches that participation in idolatry is mutually exclusive to participation in Christ.<sup>59</sup> Believers are to avoid idolaters (1 Cor 5:9-11). Idolaters will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10). Idols are not real gods, but they do represent the demonic (1 Cor 8:4-10; 10:20-21).<sup>60</sup> Believers were previously idolaters (1 Cor 5:11; 12:2), but now are indwelt by the Spirit and confess Jesus is Lord (1 Cor 12:3). In 2 Corinthians 6:14-16 Paul asks five rhetorical questions to reinforce the idea that idolatry and union with Christ are incompatible.<sup>61</sup> To support his argument, Paul quotes Ezekiel 37:27 in 2 Corinthians 6:16-18 to show that God delivered his people from idolatry through a new covenant.<sup>62</sup> Those who are united to Christ are no longer united to the forces of darkness and now empowered to live holy lives. Believers can follow Paul's pastoral reasoning in 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1 because they have been delivered from idolatry.<sup>63</sup>

Second, in 2 Corinthians Paul teaches that believers are inwardly renewed day-

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<sup>59</sup>Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 630, 916; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 372, 463; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 510, 524.

<sup>60</sup>Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 281.

<sup>61</sup>Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 504-5; George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 351.

<sup>62</sup>For Paul's use of Ezek 37:27 in 2 Cor 6:16-18, see Peter Balla, "2 Corinthians," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2007), 769-74.

<sup>63</sup>Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 514.



by-day because they now bear Christ's image and reflect his glory. Second Corinthians 3:18 teaches that believers have an ongoing, face-to-face relationship with Christ and are transformed into his image because they gaze at his glory.<sup>64</sup> Sinclair Ferguson explains.

In Scripture, image and glory are interrelated ideas. As the image of God, man was created to reflect, express and participate in the glory of God, in miniature, creaturely form. Restoration to this is effected through the Spirit's work of sanctification, in which he takes those who have distorted God's image in the shame of sin, and transforms them into those who bear that image in glory.<sup>65</sup>

This restoration described in 2 Corinthians 3:18 is permanent and irreversible.<sup>66</sup> The transformation of the same image from one degree of glory to another refers to the inner person that is transformed into Christ's image. Transformation is a present reality, ongoing, continual, and progressive. Initial transformation begun at regeneration will continue through the *parousia*.<sup>67</sup> The new covenant recreates spiritually blinded people who were prevented from seeing the image of God in Christ (2 Cor 3:14; 4:4).<sup>68</sup> At the dawn of the new creation the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in Christ shone into the hearts of believers, making them into a new creation (2 Cor 4:6; 5:17). Consequently, renewed image bearers are renewed daily (2 Cor 4:16) and are given covenant promises that God dwells with them and spurs them on to holiness (2 Cor 6:16-7:1).

**Ephesians.** Ephesians 4:17-24 describes the believers' deliverance from idolatry and renewal in the image of Christ. Believers have received every spiritual

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<sup>64</sup>Note the emphasis on the inability to see God's glory in Christ and sight (beholding) in 2 Cor 3:12-18. For the Old Testament background to 2 Cor 3:16, see Balla, "2 Corinthians," 753-62.

<sup>65</sup>Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996), 139-40.

<sup>66</sup>The perfect participle stresses permanency. See Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 313.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, 316.

<sup>68</sup>For Paul's use of Gen1:3 in 2 Cor 4:6, see Balla, "2 Corinthians," 762-64.



blessing in Christ, from forgiveness of sins to adoption to the reception of the eschatological Spirit. Before conversion, believers were under Satan's influence, fulfilling sinful desires and were children of wrath (Eph 2:1-3). By grace through faith, believers are now part of the new creation (Eph 2:10), being brought together with other believers to form a new humanity (Eph 2:15) that is filled with the Spirit to form God's end-time temple, the church (Eph 2:21-22). The new life believers have in Christ should be distinguished from their previous lifestyle of idolatry as described in Ephesians 4:17-20.<sup>69</sup> Futile thinking was used in the Old Testament to describe the thought pattern of idolaters.<sup>70</sup> Darkened understanding refers to spiritual blindness. Hardness of heart refers back to the hardening effect of idolatry in Isaiah 6:10. Before Christ, believers were darkness, though now they are light.<sup>71</sup> These are the indicative truths of the Gospel.

At question is whether or not believers should continually "put off" an old self or old man and "put on" a new self or new man. O'Brien considers the infinites "to put off," "to be renewed," and "to put on" as exegetical infinitives, that spell out the way the believers were taught the truth of Christ.<sup>72</sup> Thielman notes the parallel of Ephesians 4:20 to Romans 6:6, where Paul states that the old self or old man died when believers were united to Christ.<sup>73</sup> Beale highlights that Paul describes what took place in the past at conversion.<sup>74</sup> At conversion believers learned a different way of life, which occurred

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<sup>69</sup>O'Brien notes that futility of mind, darkened understanding, spiritual alienation and ignorance, and hardness of heart describe idolatry. See Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 320-23. Rosner notes that of the vices lists that describe paganism, the list in Eph 2 is the strongest expression. Rosner, *Greed as Idolatry*, 154.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 320. See Isa 28:29; 30:14; 33:11.

<sup>71</sup>Gentry and Wellum note that Eph 4:17-24 parallels 5:6-14. The old humanity given to idolatry made people darkness. The new creation community is light. See Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 567.

<sup>72</sup>O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 326-27.

<sup>73</sup>Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 302.

<sup>74</sup>Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 839.

when they put off their life in Adam and put on a new life in Christ. All three commentators recognize that the infinitives have a past imperatival sense that carries with it implications for present day living. The point of Paul's statement, though, is to show that past connection believers had with the old creation and life in Adam is now over because of the new creation life they now have in Christ. Consequently, *anthropon* in 4:22 and 24 is best rendered "man" and not "self" (ESV) or "nature" (RSV); Paul contrasts the old creation life of Adam with the eschatological new creation life that believers have in Christ. Believers are new humanity, that is, new image bearers in a new creation. Beale summarizes Paul's thought when he writes,

The point is that once the 'old man' has been laid aside, the sins that characterized the 'old man' also begin to be laid aside. As one grows as an inaugurated new-creational being, one increasingly sheds the sinful lifestyle traits that characterized the former existence of the 'old man.'<sup>75</sup>

What is typically described as the process of sanctification by some biblical counselors is actually conversion in Ephesians 4:17-24.<sup>76</sup> The result of regeneration does lead to implications for Christian living, but the eschatological framework of new creation grounds Paul's imperatives in 4:25-32. The significance of Ephesians 4:17-24 is that it teaches that believers were once idolaters but are now new creation image bearers. A new creation life in Christ has replaced a life of idolatry.

Idolatry is mentioned in Ephesians 5:5. Those who practice idolatry will not inherit the Kingdom of God.<sup>77</sup> Believers are warned not to commit idolatry, which is described as greed. Greed is an expression of idolatry because of the connection between

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<sup>75</sup>Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 841.

<sup>76</sup>For example, see Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart*, 155-56; also Stuart Scott, *The Exemplary Husband* (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2002), 312-15.

<sup>77</sup>Idolatry in Eph 5:5 is image-worship to a pagan deity. The same term for idolatry is used in the Shepherd of Hermes, where idolaters were labeled apostates. Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 280.

idolatry and the economics of temple worship.<sup>78</sup> Paul's pastoral warning against idolatry served to reinforce to the Ephesians (and Colossians in Colossians 3:5) that believers should no longer live like their pagan past.<sup>79</sup> Judgment will come to idolaters, who are also described as sons of disobedience in Ephesians 5:6, a description of unregeneracy Paul used earlier in Ephesians 2:2. Rather than giving into greed, believers are no longer rivals to God and his kingdom, but can now live as renewed image bearers, that is, beloved sons (Eph 5:1).

**Colossians.** Colossians teaches a new cosmic order has broken through into the world to renew image bearers who should reflect the King and the qualities of his kingdom. A new Adam, who bears the image of the invisible God, rescued believers from the kingdom of darkness and delivered them into his new creation kingdom (Col 1:12-15).<sup>80</sup> Believers live in the new Adam, having been forgiven of their sins and delivered from spiritual enemies who oppressed them (Col 1:19-20; 2:6-15). Rather than living by worldly philosophies, new creation saints set their minds on heavenly realities (Col 2:20-3:4). New creation life is to be lived in Edenic knowledge and obedience, when believers take off the sinful clothing of the old creation and put on divine clothes that display divine qualities of living in the new creation.<sup>81</sup> One of the qualities of the old life was idolatry, which Paul calls greed (Col 3:5).<sup>82</sup> Whereas "put off" and "put on" were

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<sup>78</sup>Rosner, *Greed as Idolatry*, 150-51. O'Brien notes the sexual connection between greed and idolatry. O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 362-63.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 155.

<sup>80</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 111.

<sup>81</sup>Beale remarks, "Paul seems to be using the Gen. 3 'clothing language analogically: the new clothes with which Adam himself was clothed to indicate his restored relationship with God are analogical to and proleptic of Christians being clothed with the new clothes of the last Adam." Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 843.

<sup>82</sup>Rosner notes how the definitive article distinguishes greed in the list of sins, meaning believers should especially avoid idolatry, which is greed. Rosner, *Greed as Idolatry*, 109.

infinitives in Ephesians 4:22-24, they are participles in Colossians 3:9-10 and “are likely not commands and are understood better as a description of the reality of what has happened in the past: ‘since you have put off the old man . . . and since you have put on the new man.’”<sup>83</sup> Moo elaborates on the practical meaning of 3:9-10:

We have been brought into a new realm of existence, a realm in which the old self, Adam and all that he represents, no longer dictates our thinking or our behavior. We have, then, made a decisive break with the old self: we are no longer identified with Adam, and his sin and death no longer rule over us (Rom. 6:6; Col. 3:9-10).<sup>84</sup>

Because believers participate as image bearers in a new humanity, renewal is a constant and enduring process (Col 3:10). By identifying with Christ’s death, the death believers died was not a mere figure of speech but “a real event which has severed links which bound you to the dominion of sin.”<sup>85</sup> While Paul’s description of the old life in Adam was the description of idolatry in Ephesians, he refers to kingdom language in Colossians. In both parallel contexts, however, Paul describes a definitive break that believers made with the lifestyle of the heathen.<sup>86</sup> Loyalty to worldly philosophy and sinful desires once ruled believers before Christ, but now they are new creations, no longer bearing the image of idols and Satan’s kingdom but Christ and this kingdom.

A tension exists in what sin remains in the life of the believer. In Colossians 3:5, Paul states that certain sins still need to be put to death, including idolatry. However strong greedy desires are in the life of the believer, the new creation life in Christ has displaced the old life in Adam. In reference to Colossians 3:5, Bigney states that idolatry

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<sup>83</sup>Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 843. Also see G. K. Beale, “Colossians,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 866-68.

<sup>84</sup>Moo, *Colossians*, 268.

<sup>85</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 139-40.

<sup>86</sup>Rosner, *Greedy as Idolatry*, 153.

takes over a believer's heart.<sup>87</sup> In contrast to Bigney, whatever sin remains in the believer does not control the believer. Believers once lived as idolaters, but no longer (Col 3:7). The perversion of idolatry, then, is that it mischaracterizes the new identity believers have and places them in a tenuous spiritual position of potential apostasy. Those who persist in unrepentant idolatry throughout their life will be like those in Ephesians 5:5 who receive God's judging wrath, proving that they were not part of the new creation in the first place.

**1 Thessalonians.** In 1 Thessalonians, Paul teaches that because believers have left the spiritual darkness of the realm of idolatry, they are now able to engage in spiritual warfare against sin. Paul begins his letter to the Thessalonian church by commending their saving faith that lead them to turn from serving idols to serving God (1 Thess. 1:9-10). Believers now served the living God instead of serving idols that represented spiritual death, the demonic, and separation from God. Morris notes that the break with idolatry was evidence of the Thessalonians' conversion.<sup>88</sup> Those who broke with their past way of life should now await Jesus' future return (1 Thess 1:10). However far off his return was, believers should stay ready for it in the meantime, being ready for eschatological war (1 Thess 5:1-11). Having left the darkness of idolatry, believers are now "children of the light."<sup>89</sup>

Because believers have entered the eschatological light of the new creation,

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<sup>87</sup>Bigney, *Gospel Treason*, 24.

<sup>88</sup>Leon Morris, *The Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 39.

<sup>89</sup>G. K. Beale, *1-2 Thessalonians*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 146. Beale explains the light and darkness imagery: "The contrast of darkness and light in the Old Testament often reflects the light of the first creation breaking into the darkness of the world and later refers to the light of the end-time new creation that will shine into the realm of the old, fallen world of darkness. The New Testament uses the similar light-darkness contrast also to depict the inauguration of the in-breaking latter-day new creation through Jesus and his followers."

they are able to live in ways that please God. They once lived in darkness, which meant living in spiritual ignorance, sinful deeds, and being ruled by Satan, all of which were traits of the old creation that is passing away with the dawning of the new creation.<sup>90</sup> Believers are able to obey God as a result of having a new creation nature (1 Thess 5:8). Believers already have put on the new creation, making a definitive choice to fight on Christ's side and with Christ's armor.<sup>91</sup> Paul's eschatological exhortation to the Thessalonians draws its basis from the fact that believers are no longer idolaters. As a result, they now have the spiritual resources to fight sin as they await Christ's return.

**James.** Though James 4 does not mention idolatry, biblical counselors reference verses 1-4 as a passage on idolatry because of the emphasis on sinful desires.<sup>92</sup> Bigney interprets the passage to mean "idolater," even though the passage uses the term "adulterer."<sup>93</sup> The sinful desires within the church community led to infighting that demanded repentance.<sup>94</sup> According to Scot McKnight, James directs his warning and call to repentance to the church's teachers (cf. 3:1), the double-minded who desired control of the Messianic community.<sup>95</sup> James states that the actions and desires of the teachers have

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<sup>90</sup>Beale, *1-2 Thessalonians* 147.

<sup>91</sup>For Paul's use of Isa 59:17 in 1 Thess 5:8, see Jeffrey A. D. Weima, "1-2 Thessalonians," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 882-83.

<sup>92</sup>For example, Bigney, *Gospel Treason*, 13. Ed Welch states, "Adultery emphasizes the more intimate features of idolatry." Edward T. Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 58.

<sup>93</sup>New Testament scholars see the Old Testament background of Israel's unfaithfulness, her adultery, in view in Jam 4:4. See Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 160; Dan G. McCartney, *James*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 209; Ralph P. Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 48 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), 148.

<sup>94</sup>Moo states that the call to repentance in verses 1-10 is the strongest worded call to repentance in the New Testament. Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 186.

<sup>95</sup>Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 322. Martin believes James has a

led to a decision point, so that he does not call them “brothers” but “adulterers,” those who desire friendship with the world and enmity with God – which side will the teachers choose? James’ categories of either being a friend of the world or a friend of God “are absolute, precluding compromise and evasive over-qualification,” meaning their “self-seeking is tantamount to apostasy.”<sup>96</sup> In this context, the sin of adultery is equivalent to apostasy.<sup>97</sup> The teachers have made an active choice to “constitute themselves” (make themselves) God’s enemies because “such worldly behavior borders seriously on apostasy.”<sup>98</sup> Their actions prove they are unfaithful to God’s covenant and “tantamount to adultery,” that is covenant unfaithfulness.<sup>99</sup>

The charge of adultery is more objective than subjective from what James’ audience realizes.<sup>100</sup> The tipping point for the church depends on repentance. Bigney understands that selfish desires are the root of relational struggles in James 4:1-4.<sup>101</sup> Yet his evaluation does not embrace the idea that apostasy is the result of unrepentant worldliness. In this regard, his diagnosis on how to help believers who struggle with selfish desires (i.e., idolatry, spiritual adultery) is weakened. James’ admonition could best be understood as a plea for repentance in counseling, a moment that defines the allegiance of the professing believer to God instead of the world.

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converted Zealot community from Jerusalem in mind in the church community. The term for Zealot has its root in the verb “covet” from James 4:4. Martin, *James*, 143.

<sup>96</sup> Davids, *Epistle of James*, 161. Ortland states that James’ audience has “to choose between one allegiance and another, opposing allegiance.” Raymond C. Ortland, Jr. *God’s Unfaithful Wife: A Biblical Theology of Spiritual Adultery*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, Vol. 2. Ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996), 141.

<sup>97</sup> Martin, *James*, 148; Davids, 161.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> McCartney, *James*, 210.

<sup>100</sup> Ortland, 142.

<sup>101</sup> He references the passage at least 10 times in *Gospel Treason*.



**1 John.** The Apostle John's first letter was written with the redemptive-historical reality that the darkness is passing away and the light of the new creation has come (1 John 2:8). Living in the light means following apostolic teaching and rejecting the teaching of the antichrists at the end of the age (1 John 2:18). John's last warning to his readers is to avoid idolatry. In 1 John 5:21 John warns them, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." Biblical counselors appeal to this verse to teach that believers need to avoid heart idolatry.<sup>102</sup> Welch believes the warning means avoid heart idols, because John has in mind "the craving of sinful man, the lust of the eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does" (1 John 2:16). Welch believes that, "John is concerned about the pernicious, unseen Baals that are constructed more by the heart than the hands," because physical idols are not mentioned in the letter.<sup>103</sup>

Biblical commentator Colin Kruse lists various interpretations of idolatry in 1 John 5:21 and none of them is heart idolatry.<sup>104</sup> Commentators typically connect John's warning to either persecution that tempted believers to deny Christ (1 John 2:22-23; 4:3; cf. 2 John 7), the sin that leads to death (1 John 5:16-17), the doctrines of the Docetics (1 John 4:3), or the teaching of the secessionists who follow the anti-Christ (1 John 2:19). Raymond Brown defends the secessionist view, writing, "The last words [in 1 John 5:21] are a warning cried out in parting to the Johannine Christians, presumably against secession, for those who have gone out professing a false Christology have gone over to idols – a term used elsewhere for false teaching."<sup>105</sup> Thielman notes that the warning is

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<sup>102</sup>See Bigney, *Gospel Treason*, 19; Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart*, 19, 28, 56; Eyrich and Fitzpatrick, "Diagnoses and Treatment," 339, 350.

<sup>103</sup>Welch, *Addictions*, 48-49.

<sup>104</sup>Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 200-02.

<sup>105</sup>Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1988), 122.



for believers not to substitute false teaching about Christ that is disconnected from the historic Jesus, who in John 1:14 took on flesh and dwelt among us.<sup>106</sup>

The immediate context of 1 John 5:21 supports Brown's and Thielman's view. At the close of the letter John reminds his readers in 1 John 5:19 of two eschatological factions, those who belong to God and those who belong to the evil one.<sup>107</sup> A new eschatological age has dawned (1 John 2:8), and people will either be in the light or the darkness, following either John's apostolic witness or heresy. In 1 John 5:20 John mentions that Jesus has come, which is something John witnessed personally in contrast to his opponents who deny Jesus' bodily appearance.<sup>108</sup> Also in 1 John 5:20 John returns to the theme of eternal life found in Jesus, which was mentioned at the beginning of his letter in 1 John 1:2. Furthermore, God is called the living God in 1 John 5:20, a contrast to the lifeless idols in 1 John 5:21. The living image of God appeared in Jesus, and John saw and heard him (1 John 1:3).<sup>109</sup> To abandon John's message is to following idolatrous teaching. As Marshall summarizes 1 John 5:21, "John urges his readers to have nothing to do with false ideas of God and the sins that go with them."<sup>110</sup> John's warning about idolatry, then, cannot be reduced to heart idolatry without abandoning John's redemptive-historical vision of seeing and hearing Christ in the new creation (1 John 2:8). For John, idolatry is believing heresy and rejecting apostolic Christology. As such, idolatry in 1 John 5:21 is apostasy.

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<sup>106</sup>Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 545.

<sup>107</sup>I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 253.

<sup>108</sup>Kruse, *Letters of John*, 146-47.

<sup>109</sup>Note John mentions seeing and hearing (along with touching) Jesus in 1 John 1:1-4. John was witness to Jesus, the image of the invisible God.

<sup>110</sup>Marshall, *Epistles of John*, 255-56. Also see Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*, 104.

## Conclusion

For many biblical counselors, the concept of idolatry has been reduced exclusively to a metaphor for sinful desires. Is it the case that believers “very nature is to be idol-makers,” as Bigney contends?<sup>111</sup> When this happens, the larger theological and redemptive-historical picture of idolatry as a spiritual condition of unregeneracy and a new spiritual state for believers is lost. Jesus’ teaching ministry, healing miracles, and death were designed to rescue believers from idolatry. His resurrected life brings believers into the new creation as renewed image bearers. When the New Testament letters mention the practice of idolatry, it does so in reference to the pagan cultic practices that believers were delivered from. The apostolic writers knew that deliverance from idolatry occurred when believers were united to Christ. To return to idolatry was to abandon the faith, because idolaters do not inherit the kingdom.

The truth that Jesus delivers believers from idolatry and brings them into the new creation offers several practical implications. A definitive break has occurred in redemptive history when a believer identifies with the death of Christ through faith. Paul does not teach that a dichotomy exists in the believer between the “old man” and “new man.” As Beale explains,

If Paul’s addresses were both an ‘old man’ and a ‘new man’ at the same time, there would be redemptive-historical and psychological schizophrenia. The true believer is someone who is no longer an unbelieving ‘old man’ but instead is a believing ‘new man.’<sup>112</sup>

God empowers believers because they have made a definitive break from the old creation life of idolatry and put on a new creation life that is renewed in the image of Christ. The imperatives, then, highlight the fact that believers have new creation power to obey because they are united to Christ (Eph 1:19; 2:10). Not only that,

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<sup>111</sup>Bigney, *Gospel Treason*, 104.

<sup>112</sup>Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 845, 847.

True saints should be psychologically motivated to fulfill God's precepts because they know that God has given them the power to do so . . . the reason Paul so often mixes the commands with believers' standing in Christ is to show that the basis for fulfilling the commands is in Christ's and God's power, which provides the motivation to obey.<sup>113</sup>

Labeling believers idolaters, then, is an inappropriate psychological recommendation and undermines the spiritual power given believers to obey new creation commands. Christians have the ability to have the eyes of their hearts enlightened to know the hope to which they are called (Eph 1:18). Because believers have been delivered from idolatry, they are presently and ever increasingly renewed into Christ's image.

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<sup>113</sup>Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 850.

## CHAPTER 5

### IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING

The pastor arrives at his office Monday morning ready for a week of studying, meetings, and counseling sessions. His first counseling session includes Bill and Mary, a married couple whose marriage is falling apart. The husband is overworked, anxious, and distant. The wife is lonely, overeats, and bitter. The second session is with a sexually abused man, Don, who struggles to overcome the shame of his past. For his part, multiple illicit relationships and several failed marriages have resulted in psychiatric assessments and court orders. The pastor's final counseling session is an elderly widow, Patrice, who still bears grief over her husband's loss. Lonely and without family, she struggles to engage people at church. The pastor's mind wanders in and out of prayer as he considers the counseling sessions. What truths help him understand these individual image bearers who are all sinners and sufferers yet are so different in their expressions of sin and grief? What vocabulary will he use to help them connect to their life right now yet also connect them to where God wants them to be? What specific practices will he encourage them to live out this coming week?

This scenario should be familiar to any counselor, whether pastor, staff, or lay-member. Counselors wonder if people will heal, obey, and be properly motivated for obedience. They desire to understand biblical truth, speak with a biblical vocabulary, and recommend biblical practices for those they counsel. As much as the BCM is devoted to truth, vocabulary, and practice, it is also devoted to people – image bearers who seek counsel. But will counselors recognize the core identity of believers that are counseled? Biblical truth, vocabulary, and practices need to be applied correctly, but they can be applied most fully only when the counselees understand their core identity. Is it

fundamentally true that the married couple, abused man, and lonely widow – each professing Christians – will walk into the pastor’s study as idolaters, that the main issues in each of their lives are idols of their hearts?

This thesis has argued that Jesus delivers believers from idolatry and consequently renews them. Idolatry is the inversion of image bearing, and as such, idolatry is unregeneracy. If this is the case, then this impacts how biblical counselors understand image bearers, how they speak about them, and what counsel they give. This concluding chapter will examine theological truth, theological vocabulary, and theological praxis as it relates to the *imago Dei*. It will also examine three objections to the idea that believers should not be identified as idolaters: the idea overemphasizes the “already” and underemphasizes the “not yet”; the idea guts the BCM of the usefulness of the metaphor of idolatry, and the idea devalues heart issues in counselees.

### **Theological Truth**

How should counselors understand new creation image bearers? Are they idolaters or not? At stake is the truth about Christian identity. Are we, to borrow Luther’s phrase, *simul justus et peccator*, and similarly, *simul imago Dei et idolatris*? Believers are no longer idolaters because they now are united to Christ and so reflect his image and not those of idols.<sup>1</sup> The difficulty in understanding this truth is that it is not fully realized in daily experience because of remaining sin. In what way can counselors speak about sinful desires that need to be put to death (Col 3:5) in the life of the counselee yet bring clarity about counselees’ position in Christ and the spiritual mindset they need to have to overcome these desires?

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<sup>1</sup>As Letham describes, “When Christ died and rose from the dead, we died and rose with him, and so our status and existence was dramatically changed. Since, following Christ’s ascension, the Holy Spirit was sent to bring us to spiritual life and indwell and renew us, our participation in Christ’s death and resurrection is vitally dynamic and transformative. These two elements are inseparable.” Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2011), 85. Union with Christ, then, is both definitive and transformative. Justification, as understood by the Reformed tradition, is exclusively judicial whereas sanctification is transformative.

What helps bridge the gap between living out what one already is and pressing forward in sanctification is having the mind of Christ. Living out this theological truth takes what Kevin Vanhoozer calls eschatological imagination, the ability “to discern what is not yet fully or wholly present” in the Christian life.<sup>2</sup> The imagination described here is not making up something that does not exist. Eschatological imagination is seeing, hearing, and experiencing the world as it truly is now in Christ.<sup>3</sup> Counselors can be used as a means of grace in the lives of counselees, practicing what Vanhoozer calls, “cognitive-affective therapy, helping disciples to see, feel, judge, and act theodramatically.”<sup>4</sup> Yet because believers do not act out their identity in Christ all the time,

[They] suffer from a deficit of eschatological imagination, unable to accept the first article of faith: ‘If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation’ (2 Cor. 5:17). . . . To put on Christ, it takes eschatological imagination, the ability to see ‘already’ started what is ‘not yet’ complete.<sup>5</sup>

Theological truth, otherwise known as doctrine, helps clarify the indicative and imperatives of the Christian life, the reality about who Christians are now and what God requires of them. Rather than use the terms indicative and imperative, Vanhoozer uses the terms gift and task. The gift is union with Christ, and the task is becoming like Christ.<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere, Vanhoozer defines the terms and concepts:

Gift: God has given Christ to us and us to Christ. This is the gift of the doctrine of union with Christ, which spells out what it means to be in Christ and to partake of

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<sup>2</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 416.

<sup>3</sup>The BCM would not deny that helping counselees become who they are in Christ is an aim in counseling. However, they have not emphasized this in relation to image bearing and idolatry.

<sup>4</sup>Vanhoozer, “Putting on Christ,” 168.

<sup>5</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 128-29.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 392.

all the spiritual blessings that appertain thereunto. Task: Christ calls us to follow him, to become increasingly more like him.<sup>7</sup>

The concepts of gift and task are a part of the theological composition of what it means to be an image bearer. Image bearing is ontological and functional, bringing together who we are and what we should do, the indicative and the imperative, a gift and task. Image bearing is a gift, a divine blessing given by God at creation. The gift human nature rooted in divine nature. The hope is that Jesus, who is the image of God himself, recreates this fallen, idolatrous image of believers into his image. Being a new creation image bearer is also a task, a commission to reflect the glory of God in Christ (2 Cor 3:18). The task finds its source in the gift.

Labeling believers idolaters can obscure biblical truth regarding Christian identity. In helping believers fight sin, the identity of idolatry inadvertently rewinds the redemptive historical clock and gives them an identity that does not accurately reflect the fact they are a new creation. The description of idolatry in the Old and New Testament is the theological description of unregeneracy. The Christian's identity is bound up in Christ's story of which they now participate, because they are united to him. Definitive sanctification has occurred.<sup>8</sup> Believers already bear the identity of the eschaton. They have not yet fully experienced what that identity will fully reveal in the future, but the gift of being in Christ will not change. To remind counselees that they are recreated in the image of Christ is a different starting point than telling counselees that they are fundamentally idolaters and that will not change until they are in Christ's presence. Out of this different starting point can flow a new way of engaging counselees, a way that the

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<sup>7</sup>Kevin J. Vanhooer, "Putting on Christ: Spiritual Formation and the Drama of Discipleship," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*, 8, no. 2 (2015): 154.

<sup>8</sup>For New Testament passages that speak of sanctification as a complete work in the life of the believer, see 1 Cor 1:2; 6:11; Heb 2:11; 10:10; 10:29. For an exposition of this theological position, see David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, Vol. 1, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995).

BCM already believes (i.e., believers are new creations in Christ), but is now rightly placed as the origin and motivation for godly change.

This different starting point challenges the idea that, “Our hearts don’t just drift aimlessly; the drift is always away from the gospel, away from our Savior, and into the grip of something or someone else.”<sup>9</sup> Is it theologically true that believers inevitably drift away from the Gospel and Christ? Even though unintentional, this view downplays the power of the Spirit and the unconquerable work of sanctification that God has done and still does in the heart of the believer through the New Covenant. Paul’s pastoral approach to the Christian life begins with the definitive work of Christ as a motivation and expectation that the Christian will progress in holiness in what has already been accomplished for them – there is every reason to have hope that present and increasing renewal will continue (2 Cor 3:12-18). As John Webster writes,

‘Sanctification in the Spirit’ means; it is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And ‘Christ lives in me’ means by the Spirit’s power I am separated from my self-caused self-destruction, and given a new holy self, enclosed by, and wholly referred to, the new Adam in whom I am and in whom I act.<sup>10</sup>

Living a new-creation life takes eschatological imagination on the part of the counselor and counselee. Believers can do this because they have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16). Yet believers are also instructed to “have the mind of Christ” (Phil 2:5). Because believers have the mind of Christ, they are able to envision and desire that new life. Believers are to exercise the task of being new in Christ because they have been given the gift of union with Christ; that is, they live in the reality of realized eschatology. As Peterson states, “What the saints are continually to ‘put on’, therefore, is new for them and makes them new, but it is not novelty with God. . . . While the ‘truth’ of their renewal

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<sup>9</sup>Brad Bigney, *Gospel Treason: Betraying the Gospel with Hidden Idols* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2012), 19. “Our hearts don’t just drift aimlessly; the drift is always away from the gospel, away from our Savior, and into the grip of something or someone else.”

<sup>10</sup>John Webster, *Holiness* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 84.



is already present ‘in Jesus’, the saints still need to be ‘transformed into the likeness’ of the New Man (2 Cor 3:18).”<sup>11</sup> The gift, then, allows the task to be put to proper use. Even though the BCM would agree with encouraging Christians to live out who they are in Christ, the language of idolatry detracts from this truth.

### **Theological Vocabulary**

How should counselors speak of the *imago Dei*? Because Jesus delivers idolaters, the language of image-bearing can speak of healing, newness, and familial security.<sup>12</sup> When idolaters believe in the Gospel, they are healed from their spiritually blindness, deafness, and hard-heartedness. Another way of putting it is that idolaters are renewed, becoming new creations in Christ, forming new spiritual habits as they learn to walk after and imitate Christ. Idolaters also leave a life of alienation and become sons who learn to trust, love, and be dependent on their Father. In sum, image bearers are healed so that they may live in a new environment in Christ’s kingdom as members of a new family. These concepts help form the language of biblical counseling, a way of speaking the truth in love to people who fail to live with eschatological imagination.

The fact that Jesus delivers believers from idolatry, the language of healing can be prominent in biblical counseling. It is not too far off to say that the BCM can encapsulate a true meaning of therapy, that is, of healing that no other psychology can.<sup>13</sup> The Gospel announces the healing power of Christ, who brings judgment upon those who

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<sup>11</sup>Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 132.

<sup>12</sup>These three items are not an exhaustive list of examples of how image bearing can be applied. Hopefully more biblical counselors will come up with other biblical concepts connected to image bearing.

<sup>13</sup>Today’s English word “therapy” is derived from the Greek word for healing, *therapeúō*. See the Greek, Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 453; H. W. Beyer III, “*Therapeúō*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 331-32.

remain in their idolatry and healing to those who believe in him.<sup>14</sup> The unregenerate need spiritual healing because their heart is afflicted with sickness (Isa 1:5). The unregenerate have blind and confused minds (Deut 28:27). Yet God promises to come and heal, to bind up the wounds that have been inflicted because of sin (Hos 6:1-2). The Suffering Servant brings healing by bearing our sinful wounds on the cross (Isa 53:5). Healing is often mentioned after the announcement of the Gospel message to repent and believe because healing symbolized the long-awaited salvation prophesied by the Old Testament that had arrived (Matt 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14; Luke 6:18; 9:6).<sup>15</sup> As demonstrated from Mark's gospel in chapter 4 of the thesis, healing-of-sight and healing-of-deafness miracles were timely placed after Jesus' teaching on idolatry in Mark 4 and 7. In Luke 4:18, Jesus reads from Isaiah 61:1-2 to announce the good news that the blind will receive their sight. People will know the kingdom of God has come because they have been healed (Luke 10:8). The physical healings were meant to display the spiritual reality that Jesus heals people from their idolatry.

The language of healing directs us to see what has been done at regeneration and its continued effects on the new heart.<sup>16</sup> To carry the medicinal metaphor of healing a

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<sup>14</sup>Though the concept of healing is not prominent in the BCM, it does have a basis in the classic tradition of soul care as used by Gregory of Nazianzus, Chrysostom, Gregory the Great, and Martin Bucer. See Thomas C. Oden, *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 69-70, and Andrew Purves, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (Louisville: John Knox, 2001), 23, 48, 91. The Protestant reformer Martin Bucer was comfortable with the language of healing. He called pastors "physicians of the soul," thought of repentance as medicine, and used healing as a metaphor for forgiveness of sins. See Martin Bucer, *Concerning the True Care of Souls* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 121, 131, 159. Calvin also speaks of healing in relation to the renewal of the image of God. "From this it follows that that part in which the excellence and nobility of the soul especially shine has not only been wounded, but so corrupted that it needs to be healed and to put on a new nature as well." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 253.

<sup>15</sup>The Old Testament frequently connects healing and forgiveness of sins as a restorative act undertaken by God, Israel's healer (Exod. 15:26). For examples of healing of Israel, see 2 Chr 7:14; Hos 6:1-2, and for personal healing, see Ps 103:2-3.

<sup>16</sup>In the same way that salvation is something that was accomplished, continual, and future, so too does the concept of healing have the same sense. Surgery heals illness yet there is a healing time afterward so the body can recover and learn to function again properly.

bit further, regeneration is a heart transplant (Ezek 36:26). Spiritually blind eyes were opened to see the significance of the cross. Spiritually deaf ears heard the Gospel message. The new heart pounded with new life and breathed the air of new-creation life in the Spirit. After the spiritual heart transplant of regeneration, spiritual healing begins to take its course. This is where the counselor steps in to act as a spiritual doula, an assistant who provides care so healing can continue (Gal 4:19). Counselors are spiritual optometrists, directing believers' gazes heavenward to see the new life they now have in Christ (Eph 1:18). They are spiritual audiologists, speaking truth in love (Eph 4:15) and warning against the dangers of sin (Col 1:28). Counselors encourage counselees to listen to the voice of Christ "today" (Heb 3:7). They act as physical therapists, encouraging the spiritually weak and lame to find healing in Christ (Heb 12:12-13). The metaphor of healing clarifies the need for repentance when sin has occurred. Because Christ's wounds provide healing, believers identify with his suffering and live righteously (1 Pet 2:24). The language of biblical counseling should be the language of soul care,<sup>17</sup> therapy in its most eschatological form, where people in need can come and hear Jesus and be healed (Luke 6:18).

The language of image bearing brings with it a vocabulary of newness, in particular, the creation of new habits. As noted previously in chapter 4, the second generation of biblical counselors critiqued Jay Adams' emphasis on habit. He taught that renewed image bearers need to be rehabilitated, that is, learn how to put off the old man and put on the new.<sup>18</sup> However incorrect Adams understanding of the flesh and habits

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<sup>17</sup>For the historical background to the term "soul care," see Thomas C. Oden, *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), and Andrew Purves, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

<sup>18</sup>Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual: The Practice of Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 178; cf. Heath Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 67-75.

might be, the creation of new habits in the Christian life is needed for counselees.<sup>19</sup> The solution is not to ditch the language of habit but to develop a correct view of habit correctly.<sup>20</sup> Biblical counselors need not worry that an emphasis on habit is behaviorism, if the identity of the image of God is correctly understood as being a new creation in Christ.

Vanhoozer has argued for the development of sanctified habits in the Christian life.<sup>21</sup> The cultivation of spiritual habits in the life of the new man is having the disposition to “see, judge, and act according to canonical patterns and practices.”<sup>22</sup> Believers learn godly habits since having put on Christ and live out the new life they have in Christ. Putting on the new man is not pretending to be someone we are not. Rather, it is to participate in the new humanity Christ brought about, to have counselees “‘taste and see’ (Ps 34:8) that one is already living in the kingdom of God.”<sup>23</sup> The ability to taste and see that the Lord is good takes eschatological imagination, the ability to believe and feel that one is already a new creation in Christ. It also takes what N. T. Wright describes as “eschatological authenticity,” the ability to practice now what one will fully have in the future.<sup>24</sup> As Vanhoozer states, “Christian character formation – putting on kingdom

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<sup>19</sup>See Ed Welch’s critique of Adams’ understanding of habit in Ed Welch, “How Theology Shapes Ministry: Jay Adams’s View of the Flesh and an Alternative,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 20, no. 3 (2002): 16-25.

<sup>20</sup>Lambert notes that the second generation differed from Adams’ view on behavior and moved the biblical counseling movement to an emphasis on motivation. See Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams*, 70-80.

<sup>21</sup>Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 374.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 376.

<sup>23</sup>Vanhoozer, “Putting on Christ,” 162.

<sup>24</sup>As quoted in Vanhoozer, “Putting on Christ,” 164. For Wright, see N. T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: Harper One, 2010), 26.

virtues – is a matter of progressively becoming on earth what one already is in heaven.”<sup>25</sup>

The language of habit, then, is a central concept that reinforces what the language of healing seeks to accomplish. Biblical counselors help counselees heal by developing sanctified habits that act out who they are in Christ.

The language of image bearing also helps counselors speak more of realizing their sonship. New creation image bearers are sons of the Father and brothers to Jesus (Rom 8:15; 29). Sonship and image bearing are intertwined in Paul’s letter to the Romans. The suffering of the present life – the suffering of sanctification described in Romans 8:12-17 – will result in glory for adopted sons (Rom 8:18-19). Sonship is the family identity for image bearers who are conformed to the image of the Son, Jesus, who now calls believers brothers (Rom 8:29). The language of divine family, adoption, sonship, and brotherhood provide the vocabulary of hope for sufferers (Rom 8:24). Sons endure, bear spiritual fruit, and have a secured future. Sonship motivates believers during hardship, giving them true belonging and security. Sonship allows sin-suffering image bearers to cry out to their Father for help and know that he will give them all things in Christ. He will never leave them because they are his sons.

If idolatry is the inversion of image bearing, then it is also the inversion of sonship. The controlling relationship of the idol over the idolater is a perversion of authority, a manipulation of the relationship, the false promise of security and divine protection. When believers are delivered from idolatry, they were delivered from a demonic realm (1 Cor 10:21) where they lived as sons of disobedience and children of wrath (Eph 2:2-3; 5:6). The Apostle John described Satan as the father of idolaters who do his devilish desires (John 8:44).<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, believers are brought into a

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<sup>25</sup>Vanhoozer, “Putting on Christ,” 164. Jay Adams said counselors should help counselees “see who they are. They must help counselees to look upon themselves as God sees them: now perfect and risen to newness of life in Christ.” Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, 163.

<sup>26</sup>Idolatry is in view in John 8:39-47. Jesus’ words in John 8:47 echo Isa 6:9-10 when he stated that the Jewish leaders were not children of God because they did not hear God’s words.

relationship with a Father who rules through love, care, and divine promises that have been displayed in his care for his Son. The language of sonship takes new creation image bearers into a new relational world where the Father's promises motivate sons to holiness (2 Cor 6:18). The language of sonship allows the biblical counselor to enter into the comfort the Father wants to give his afflicted children (2 Cor 1:3-7).

Consider how Jesus speaks of the Father in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus guides his listeners along by establishing their identity as sons who live under the watchful and loving gaze of their Father who parents them on earth with heavenly attention (Matt 6:9-10). He sees the struggle of his children and guides them. He knows their desires to live like sons, to avoid hypocrisy, and not to be overcome by temptation. Prayer, then, takes eschatological imagination and a desire for eschatological authenticity. Purity of heart opens the eyes of blessed children to see their Father, directing them to be peaceable toward others because of their identity as sons (Matt 5:8-9). Their simple good deeds shine the eschatological glory of their Father into the world (Matt 5:16). Because they are now sons and not enemies, they can love their enemies as the Father has loved them (Matt 5:45; 6:14). The identity of sonship cuts through the pretense of false worship displayed to make themselves look good before the watching world (Matt 6:1). They can live honestly and openly with their faith and foibles, because the Father sees and knows their heart and hears their prayers (Matt 6:4, 6). Worry and anxiety about life are nothing compared to the protection and care their heavenly Father provides (Matt 6:26). The danger is that they will live hypocritically, preferring to worship the things of the world rather than God (Matt 6:19-21). Ultimately, sons will not serve two masters (Matt 6:24). They will not live like hypocrites because their relationship with the Father is lived in terms of parental obedience instead of performance (Matt 7:21-22). At the end of all things, the Father will welcome his children who have sought to do his will (Matt 7:21).

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus gets to the heart struggle of what weighs

down believers in this life, the practical issues of worrying about how to pay the bills, how to deal with someone they despise, the value of obedience, and faithfulness in life's relationships. In all of these issues there is the chance for hypocrisy, to live falsely before others (and toward yourself).<sup>27</sup> What really matters in the Sermon on the Mount? What matters is that the heavenly Father knows everything believers go through, and this reality holds a greater sway over their heart than the desires to live otherwise. A well-lived life, according to Jesus, is rooted in the identity of trusting and obedient sonship. Jesus makes the main issue whether or not his listeners will believe it is true that the Father cares for them. Seeking the kingdom first is living humbly under the Father's heavenly gaze. In other words, godly motivations are cultivated when Christians believe they are blessed children who can live obediently because the Father will direct, provide, and attend to them. Jesus is not hesitant to motivate his listeners to respond to his message with a reward, the reward of knowing that the Father who watches them is pleased that his children have responded to his heart. It takes eschatological imagination for Christians to believe they are actually living a blessed kingdom life now, that the law can be fulfilled inwardly in their heart, that the heavenly gaze of their Father is always on them for their good and his glory and will one day welcome them into his presence because of their identity as his sons. Living this way means living eschatologically authentic lives.

The theological vocabulary of healing, newness, and sonship offers both biblical counselor and counselee an opportunity to enter into a redemptive-historical dialogue. Biblical counselors want to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15). Peter Gentry has demonstrated that love and in Ephesians 4:15 has the Old Testament background of

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<sup>27</sup>Vanhoozer defines a hypocrite as someone "who fails to achieve identity, a 'pretender' who avoids the project – the privilege and responsibility – of achieving integral selfhood. Hypocrisy is wrong not simply because it deceives others, then, but also because it injures oneself." Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 366.



God's loyal love and faithfulness.<sup>28</sup> He writes that believers "must address violations of the covenant requirements not simply as offenses against God but as a destructive path that constitutes social injustice and inhuman behavior."<sup>29</sup> In other words, by speaking the truth in love believers help each other be the new creation image bearers they are meant to be. Speaking the truth in love is not communicating propositional truth with a kind disposition. It is lovingly communicating the redemptive-historical reality of the indicatives – the gifts – found in Christ through the counselor's own experience of knowing the surpassing greatness of the love of Christ (Eph 3:14-21). Speaking the truth in love is verbally articulating eschatological truths, a key part of the process to renew the mind. Speaking the truth in love is helping counselees comprehend their Father's love for them in Christ in practical ways that affirm they have entered into Jesus' narrative of life, death, and new creation. It is prayerfully helping them realize that the Father can do abundantly more than they could ask or think possible in their life because the power of the resurrected and ruling Christ now dwells in them.

### **Theological Practice**

How should biblical counselors offer counsel? The result of theological truth and theological language about image bearing is theological practice. Theological practice is spiritual orthopedics, the skill of helping counselees walk in newness of life. It involves speaking to counselees about heavenly realities in a healing environment where they can now cultivate sanctified habits that reflect the image of Christ and help them put

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<sup>28</sup>Gentry notes that the Hebrew word, *hesed*, means loyal love, an obligation of loyalty in God's covenants with his people. Taken with the word, *'emet*, meaning faithfulness, God's covenant relationship with his people is faithful loyal love. Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 140-45.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 586-87. Also see Peter J. Gentry, "Speaking the Truth in Love (Eph. 4:15): Life in the New Covenant Community," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (2006): 70-87.



to death sinful desires. Eschatological imagination is needed by both counselor and counselee to view counselees as image bearers who have left the realm of idolatry and are now new creations in Christ. Eschatological authenticity is needed so that when they are tempted with sin or overburdened with suffering, new creation image bearers will know how to deal with what Beale calls eschatological discord:

That which is unholy is not meant to dwell with that which is holy, so that there should be a high-level of conflict within Spirit-filled believers when sin occurs. We may call this “eschatological discord,” which inevitably will result in conviction of sin and repentance for the genuine saint.<sup>30</sup>

According to the BCM, eschatological discord exists because believers are idolaters and remain such until Christ returns. The theology, language, and practice of biblical counseling have been reduced to heart idolatry. Biblical counselors help counselees overcome sinful desires by locating idols in their heart, repenting, and living in a godly manner. The goal in this counseling paradigm is correct: Christlikeness. However, labeling believers idolaters undermines the theological foundation whereby believers find strength to overcome sinful desires. Believers have been given the gift of a new heart, have been delivered from idolatry, and been made into new creation image bearers. As Webster writes,

To be human in holy fellowship with God is to be granted one’s being in the history of the triune God with us. In that history, the old, self-enclosed and polluted existence has been and is continually set aside, and a new existence is ‘eschatological’ in that it emerges from the comprehensive overthrowing and reordering of human life and history with is called regeneration. . . . Holiness is indicative, but it is also imperative.<sup>31</sup>

It has been the contention of this thesis that the indicative nature of holiness in the life of new creation image bearers has not been developed by the BCM. Believers have been brought out of idolatry and now reflect the glory of Christ. It remains to be

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<sup>30</sup>G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 865.

<sup>31</sup>Webster, *Holiness*, 87.

seen, however, how counselors can help people fight sinful desires if Christians are not idolaters. Counseling new creation image bearers means helping them develop new affections and new habits to live in the new creation. Counselees need to understand how their identity in Christ is a gift that healed them of idolatry and enables them to live in newness of life. They also need to be counseled on the task of what they are to do and how they are to do it, namely, take dominion of their lives by reflecting God's glory in Christ. To summarize, bearing Christ's image is both a gift and task whereby new desires and new habits are expressions of the new heart.

The balance of gift and task is best captured in the *imago Dei*. God has given the identity of sonship and the gift of healing to those he has renewed in the image of his Son. Who are new creation image bearers? They are sons. Why are they part of the new creation? Their spiritual sensory organs have been healed. They are also given the task to take dominion and reflect God's glory. What do new creation image bearers do? Take dominion of their lives and the vocation God to which calls them. How do they take dominion? Reflect Christ's glory in their particular situation. The gift of being a new creation image bearer is the basis for godly motivations that flow out of a new heart because action flows out of nature, the new nature of being in Christ. The task of image bearing forms the habits of a new heart. Consider Tables 3 and 4:

Table 3. The Gift of Image Bearing

| The Gift of Image Bearing |   |   |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Who are we?               | We have been made sons.                   | Cultivating new desires<br>in the new heart |
| Why are we sons?          | We have been healed from our<br>idolatry. |   |

Table 4. The Task of Image Bearing

| The Task of Image Bearing |                               |  |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| What are we to do?        | Take dominion for Christ.     | Cultivating new habits of<br>the new heart |
| How are we to do it?      | By reflecting Christ's glory. |  |

Image bearing involves both gift and task, who we are and what we are supposed to do. Believers are healed sons, taking dominion over their Father's earth for his Son's glory with Spirit-filled hearts. Renewed image bearers have a new heart that wants to reflect God's glory. When this does not happen, there will be eschatological discord. For the believer, dissonance will resolve into consonance. The dissonance demands onward movement toward resolution. To continue the musical analogy further, counselors step in to hear the suspended chord, to feel the impact of the tension, and give direction for resolution. God wants to use counselors in ways that Paul prayed for the Ephesian church: that the eyes of the hearts would be open to see gifts in the life, the indicatives of election, adoption, Spirit-filling, a heavenly inheritance, and recognize how these gifts flow into new-creation good works. Counselors, then, help new creation image bearers use spiritual sensory organs that were inverted by idolatry. Hearing (Eph 1:13), seeing (Eph 1:18), strengthening (Eph 3:15; 6:10), speaking (Eph 4:15; 6:19), growing (Eph 4:15), and walking (Eph 2:10; 4:1; 5:8, 15) – all of these are new creation sensory organ analogies used to describe the new humanity. Freedom from idolatry (spiritual sight in Eph 1:18) enables believers to see gifts of grace (salvation in Eph 2:8) and then do good works (new creation living in Eph 2:10). Eschatological imagination is needed to realize that we are already seated with Christ in a heavenly reality (Eph 1:19; 2:6; 3:20). Eschatological discord is fought by pursuing maturity (Eph 4:13), living in new creation

light (Eph 5:8), and preparing preparedness for spiritual warfare (Eph 6:10).<sup>32</sup> The focus on being a new creation image bearer does not detract from heart issues. It was to people delivered from idolatry that Paul prayed Christ might dwell in their hearts through faith (Eph 3:17). Believers' hearts are always the focus in counseling, but they are new creation hearts united to Christ. So counselors and counselees have every right to believe that God will "do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us" (Eph 1:20). The expectation of sanctification, then, is that it will be eschatological astonishing.

### **Answering Objections to the Thesis**

The first objection is the thesis that believers are no longer idolaters is over-realized eschatology. For example, it would be incorrect to say that the new man is as perfect now as he is ever going to be. That is not what this thesis argues. What it does state is that there has been a definitive break from idolatry. Believers bear the image of Christ and no longer invert the image of God by bearing the image of idols. The concepts of newness and renewal are related in that newness is the gift and renewal is the task. Over-realized eschatology would be to state that new creation image bearers no longer have sinful desires. It should be remembered that Paul states believers are now spiritually seated in heaven with Christ (Eph 2:6; Col 3:1). The author of Hebrews states that believers have entered the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22). Peter believes that Christians are God's end-time people that have exited the darkness of sin and entered the new creation light (1 Pet 2:9). In each of these examples from Paul, Hebrews, and Peter the eschatological reality does not negate the present day imperative for holy living. Rather, it demands it (Eph 2:10; Col 3:2). Because believers have already entered the heavenly Jerusalem, they can offer acceptable worship in the fear of God (Heb 12:28-29). Because

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<sup>32</sup>Paul also emphasizes the eschatological nature of spiritual warfare in Rom 13:11-14 and 1 Thess 5:1-11.

believers already are God's eschatological people, they can live holy lives awaiting Christ's return (1 Pet 2:11-12).<sup>33</sup> Realized eschatology is what the New Testament authors use to motivate believers toward holy living.

The second objection is that thesis guts the BCM of the usefulness of the metaphor of idolatry. It should be noted, however, that the BCM's understanding of heart idolatry is not monolithic even though the idea that believers are idolaters is widely accepted as true. For example, Powlison has told counselors to stop going on idol hunts with counselees,<sup>34</sup> yet Bigney encouraged believers to look for idols in their heart everyday.<sup>35</sup> Which is it? Lambert has stated that idolatry is not the main issue in counseling but rather it is the self-exalting heart.<sup>36</sup> Lambert even acknowledged that,

Idols are external elements that the world, the flesh, and the Devil use in influencing people to feed the lust of their self-exalting heart. Idols, then, are those outward things that the sinful heart fixates upon to fulfill its desires in its exercise of attempted self-sufficiency.<sup>37</sup>

The key words in Lambert's analysis are "external" and "outward" because they acknowledge the physicality of idolatry in Scripture. Idols were physical statues used in cultic pagan worship. Fitzpatrick, on the other hand, wrote, "we've inconveniently categorized idolatry as something that exists outside of us (little stone statues) rather than something that lives within our hearts."<sup>38</sup> Are idols external or not?

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<sup>33</sup>For how Peter applies Old Testament texts to the church in 1 Pet 2:9-12, see D. A. Carson, "1 Peter," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 1030-33.

<sup>34</sup>David Powlison, "Revisiting Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 27, no. 3 (2013): 39. Powlison writes, "Am I encouraging you to go on an inward hunt for 'the idols' in your heart? Am I encouraging you to hunt for 'the idols' in someone else's heart? Is figuring out what is wrong the key to changing? Should we be continually looking in the mirror? No." Emphasis his.

<sup>35</sup>Bigney, *Gospel Treason*, 214.

<sup>36</sup>Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams*, 148.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart: Learning to Long for God Alone* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 16.

Even without the argument of this thesis, it is clear that the movement itself does not have a consensus on heart idolatry, even though the BCM would agree that heart-idolatry is an issue in counseling.

According to Paul, believers must put to death sin, including idolatry, which he describes as greed (Eph 5:5; Col 3:5). How does Paul's command square with the truth that believers have been delivered from idolatry? Without a proper understanding of their identity in Christ, believers were tempted to succumb to worldly philosophy (Col. 2:8), cultic rules (Col 2:16), self-made religion (Col 2:23), and their pagan past (Col 3:7).<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, those who partake in idolatry, if they remain unrepentant, will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Idolaters desire to leave the reign of Christ, and they will receive their punishment for doing so. The description of idolatry in Ephesians 5:5 and Colossians 3:5 speaks to how believers must guard against remaining sin that strokes the greediness of self-made religion. On the other hand, idolatry in Galatians 5:20 is listed as one description of the works of the flesh among many. Because idolatry is one sin listed among many, this indicates that idolatry is not the main root heart issue for believers anymore, much less an identification of their identity.

Idolatry can be a useful category when talking about non-Christians. As such, discussing external idols with believers is not illegitimate, because believers were previously idolaters (1 Cor 6:9). Paul frequently lists the description of the unrenegade life as a contrast to the new life believers have now and as a warning not to return to that way of living.<sup>40</sup> Though it will be different for every counseling situation, counselors can probe into what sins the counselee was enslaved to before conversion. Counselees will need to develop new sanctified habits to walk in newness of life contrary to the way they

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<sup>39</sup>Powlison notes the cultural context of idolatry in Scripture. "The Bible treats idolatry as a central feature of the social context, "the world," which shapes and molds us." David Powlison, "Revisiting Idols of the Heart and 'Vanity Fair,'" *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 27, no. 3 (2013):

<sup>40</sup>For examples, see 1 Cor 6:9-11; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 2:1-3; 4:17-19; Col 3:5-9.

thought and lived before Christ. Idolatry shows the biblical counselor which idols the new believer was rescued from and where their sinful proclivities remain. Counseling ministries can aid the local church in helping new converts learn Christ and live out the new man or woman they are in Christ in contrast to their former life of idolatry. Calling brand new believers idolaters, however, would be incorrect and confusing in a counseling session. New believers should be encouraged with their faith that has led them to repent of idolatry and follow Christ (1 Thess 1:9-10).

The third objection is that the idea devalues heart issues in counselees. It does not follow that because believers have been rescued from idolatry, there are no heart issues in their life or that what goes on in believers' hearts cannot be a focus on counseling. The idea that believers have been delivered from idolatry is based on the new covenant as described in Ezekiel 36:25-26. God gives his people new hearts, and those hearts are renewed through the Word and Spirit and are drawn toward the Lord. Believers' hearts do not always drift away from Jesus as Bigney contends.<sup>41</sup> In actuality, the heart becomes more central if the focus on image bearing is eschatological, because the heart is viewed as having divine enablement for change. Bigney, on the other hand, does not make one reference to any Old Testament passage on the new covenant and its design to purify the heart from idolatry. By failing to frame sanctification in covenantal terms and concepts, Bigney downplays the biblical data on the heart, especially as it relates to a Christian's heart. No less than six times does he describe Christians from Jeremiah 17:9, stating that believers hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Bigney, *Gospel Treason*, 19.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 22, 33, 102-03, 132-33, 155. Also see Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart*, 99. Jeremiah 17:5-10 is significant for biblical counseling. Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp build their paradigm of sanctification off the description of the cursed shrub and the blessed tree. These authors draw together both the shrub and the tree as one picture of the Christian heart, whereas Jeremiah uses the shrub and tree distinctly for the individual who is cursed because he has rejected Yahweh and the individual who has embraced Yahweh respectively.



The reality might be that we live in “already-not-yet,” but the pastoral understanding is that our new life in Christ is present and ever increasing. Our hearts experience the blessings of the eschaton now. Bigney’s words downplay what happened to the new heart at regeneration and the hope that is promised for future renewal before heaven. Lambert, however, is correct when he notes that it is not helpful for Christians to express things that are no longer true of themselves:

Christians are not vile, wretched, miserable, and blind. Though Christians do sin frequently, it cannot be said of believers in Christ that ‘all of their power of body and soul are defiled.’ Christians are new, and if we deny this fact, we deny the biblical truth of regeneration. It is harmful and confusing to believe doctrines, pray prayers, or live lives that minimize that truth.<sup>43</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The late theologian John Webster wrote that because theology is a human discipline it should be “characterized less by fluency and authority, and much more by weakness,” because it “participates in the frailty and fallibility of its practitioners and of their times.”<sup>44</sup> It is the hope that the argument of this thesis was written with a spirit of humility that Webster describes, because the thesis argues against a well-established line of reasoning. For several decades now, Christian counselees have been told that they are idolaters and that their hearts are continually manufacturing idols. Long-held theological beliefs do not change quickly. It has been argued that God made humanity in his image, but that image was inverted through idolatry. Jesus, however, rescues believers out of idolatry, conforming them into his image, so they might now reflect his glory as part of the new creation. This understanding on the relationship between image-bearing and idolatry teaches that believers’ hearts are motivated by the gifts of being an image bearer united to Christ and, as a result, their hearts can engage in the task of bearing Christ’s

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<sup>43</sup>Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 283.

<sup>44</sup>Webster, *Holiness*, 28, 30.



image for his glory. The hope for all biblical counselors is that what took place at regeneration becomes a present reality that is ever increasing in the lives of counselees. With the emphasis on identity in Christ, this thesis helps reinforce that goal. It is the hope of this thesis that counselors will begin to exercise more eschatological imagination with their counselees and help them realize the greatness of the gift of renewal that is theirs and how to use that task for Christ's glory.

The thesis is not an attempt to offer a definitive answer to Adams' challenge for more works on biblical anthropology to be written by biblical counselors. Nor is the thesis the final answer on idolatry and the Christian life. It should also not be viewed as an outright rejection of the contributions of the second generation of biblical counselors, which have been helpful in recognizing the impact motivations have on behavior. During the course of writing this thesis, several counselors and counselees have affirmed that they believe looking for idols of the hearts is the main task of the counseling process.<sup>45</sup> Though the BCM is committed to helping counselees grow in sanctification, it should be troubling when Christian counselees view their fundamental identity as idolaters who commit idolatry every day. Bigney, Going, Welch, and Fitzpatrick, for example, state as much in their writings in spite of Powlison's warnings. Undoubtedly, the BCM argues that the Gospel is the solution for Christian idolatry. But is this really how the Gospel-centered life is described in the New Testament, that new creations in Christ are still enslaved to the idols of their heart which they are constantly manufacturing because their hearts are desperately wicked?

It is the hope that the thesis would spur further research into several areas that need development in biblical counseling, such as a follow-up to the thesis with practical application, research that acknowledges the physicality of image bearing and how it relates to counseling and the use of medicine.

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<sup>45</sup>These affirmations took place through correspondence and personal conversations.

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## ABSTRACT

### “HE HAS DONE ALL THINGS WELL”: JESUS, IDOLATRY, AND THE RENEWAL OF THE IMAGE OF GOD

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Chapter 1 introduces the background to the thesis and the thesis statement, which is that biblical counselors are best able to help counselees when they understand that believers have been delivered from a spiritual state of idolatry.

Chapter 2 covers the hermeneutics of the biblical counseling movement. Several hermeneutical models used by biblical counselors are made and a new model is presented that shows biblical theology is needed to understand the relationship between image-bearing and idolatry.

Chapter 3 explains the concepts of image-bearing and idolatry from the Old Testament. Idolaters were described as being spiritually blind, deaf, and hard-hearted. The Old Testament ends with the announcement that a new covenant would cleanse idolaters from their idolatry as Israel is led into a new creation.

Chapter 4 argues that Jesus delivers believers out of idolatry and recreates them into his image. Often in the Gospels, Jesus heals the blind and deaf to symbolize the spiritual restoration of image bearers who are delivered from idolatry. The renewal of the image in believers is a present-day reality that is ever increasing for believers.

Chapter 5 looks at the practical application of the thesis. The application involves three ingredients: biblical truth, biblical vocabulary, and biblical practice. The goal is for counselors to help counselees develop an eschatological imagination and eschatological authenticity during times eschatological discord.

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