



Mix, Match and Mould

Romans 12:1-9

In this present series which I've called Cry Freedom we've looked at some of the things that when we became Christians, when we accepted God's offer of forgiveness, a relationship with Him and eternal life, God made us accepted, secure, significant in Christ and has blessed us with loads of blessings. We found that God is a loving Father who deeply cares for each of his children. Then we looked at the issue of faith and saw how faith is trusting in the truths that God tells us about Himself and we got 20 "cans".

How come then that we just simply don't live like all these things God has made us? Why don't we live like this stuff is true? Surely if it is true and we believed it was true then it would make a huge difference. Look again when you have time on the list of who we are in Christ. It's amazing, It's mind boggling! It should make us never stop talking about it!

One of the things we need to recognise is that there are a number of pressures on us to not live in the truth that God has given us. One of those pressures is the world in which we live.

SPECS & sunglasses

Have a look at these. Rose-tinted spectacles. If you have tinted specs, you know that they tend to change the colour of what you're looking at. If they are very pink, then everything will look pink. PINK PIC. The specs filter the light so you only see everything as pink. Old fashioned photographers used filters a lot to adjust colour on film.

SEEING THROUGH ROSE-TINTED SPECTACLES *Looking at something in an unrealistically optimistic or favourable light*

Unfortunately that may not actually be a very realistic light. If you'd listened to some of the politicians speaking about their bad showing in the elections last week you'll get what I'm trying to say straight away! If not, we're going to perform a little skit based on a TRUE exchange in a court between a pathologist who carried out a post-mortem and an over-hopeful Lawyer who was trying to prove that his client was not dead before the post-mortem started. SILENCE IN COURT

Lawyer	Doctor, before you performed the post-mortem, did you check for a pulse?
Witness	No
Lawyer	Did you check for blood pressure?
Witness	No
Lawyer	Did you check for breathing?
Witness	No
Lawyer	So then, is it possible that the patient was alive when you began the post-mortem?
Witness	No
Lawyer	How can you be so sure, Doctor?
Witness	Because his brain was sitting on my desk in a jar.
Lawyer	But could the patient have still been alive nevertheless?
Witness	It is possible that he could have been alive – practising law somewhere!

I think if that had been my lawyer, I would have asked for my money back!

How do you view the world? SPECS SLIDE Through rose-tinted spectacles or dark glasses? DARK GLASSES. The truth is that all of us view the world and view God through glasses – things that filter the truth and often distort it or even turn it into untruth! FILTERS Here are a few filters that affect how we think about God. It's surprising how they can influence how we think about God and the things of God. For example past teaching. I was brought up with the teaching that the Authorised King James Translation was the only inspired word of God and modern translations are all an abomination. Look on the internet and

you'll find plenty of sites where people seek to demonstrate this in various ways. It's nonsense and really unconvincing nonsense at that but people really believe that. That's trivial, so let's go for something really sinister. Take apartheid or the troubles in Northern Ireland. People justified brutalising people and taking away their rights on the basis of "Christian" belief whereas in truth it was based on hatred and prejudice. But it wasn't Christian at all – quite the reverse. I think they must have been wearing those X-Ray specs you used to buy from joke shops that had a skeleton etched on the inside of them so that you saw what you wanted to see.

It's astonishing what nonsense has found its way into the Christian faith and Christians often live in denial of it even when the truth is pointed out to them. If we want to live free in Christ, we need to understand how the world influences our thinking, so that we can see what God's way is through that. By His Holy Spirit, God wants us to bypass the specs so that we can see his ways clearly. Take a look at this – it's a jelly mould (MOULD). It's designed to make jelly look like a bunch of asparagus. I think it's intended for those of you who know how to make asparagus jelly. Aside from that I've used it to illustrate Romans 12 verse 2 which J B Phillips puts in an interesting way in his translation: *Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.*

Let me suggest three really big influences the world influences what we believe.

The first is MYSTICISM AND SUPERSTITION. Idolatry is a religion as old as the human race. Many religions in the world are based on animism – spirits of the dead, or based on nature and they are often worshipped in special places or through images that people create. They have found their way into organised religion. They recognise good and evil G & E but inevitably it requires some special person SPECIAL PERSON to contact the spirits for you – a witchdoctor, witch, shamen, medium or whatever. They usually control by fear.

Some modern religions are strongly like this – Hinduism for example. Mysticism is still woven deeply into our society. People may have abandoned a Christian view of God, but they haven't abandoned a whole raft of stuff which is held at various levels of seriousness. What sort of things: horoscopes, fortune-telling, ouija boards, consulting mediums, doing "lucky" things, being superstitious. Worse, I have found its way into the church. I know lots of Christians that have dabbled in these things. In one sense idolatry is nonsense, but as we shall see in a later week; it can be very dangerous nonsense that has real evil behind it. Worse, our Christian traditions have lots of animism in them whether we like that or not. It's called syncretism. The most horrific example of animism is Easter. Here it is, the most holy Christian festival of the year. On the continent they call it Passiontide – which is scriptural. Here in Anglo-saxon Britain we call it Easter: after Oestra, the Saxon goddess of fertility! What's that about? Quite.

MODERN WESTERN VIEW

To give its correct name is rationalism. Interestingly one of the main sources of the modern western view came from Christian Europe but has its origins in Greek and Arabic philosophy. It came out of a genuine desire to explain the world and science is the way in which it expresses itself. We have used our knowledge gained to develop the world we have around us. We discover the truth through science and study. We study to get to the truth. To do that we separated the world into the natural and supernatural. The natural world we could analyse and manipulate, the supernatural was up to God. Of course, atheists just cut the God bit out. Because we have a world we can control, then GOD IS CUT OUT of modern life – we don't need Him.

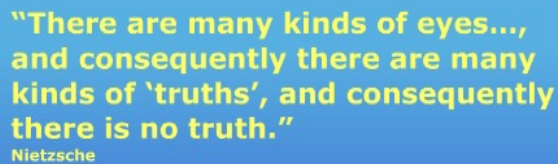
How does that affect Christians – profoundly. How often do we pray? Do we bring every part of our life before God. Lots of Christians have their God bit and their bit. You won't be surprised to know that this kind of thinking is world thinking, not God-thinking. As a result we push God out of whole areas of our lives He wants and needs to be part of. When we are ill, we suffer, go to the doctor and take our pills. What about God? When we get family problems or financial problems where do we go? To God or is He left out? In fact I'd say many of us will only go to God when something goes wrong, we mess up or things go out of our control and then we send up an emergency prayer. That isn't a God way, it's the world's way.

REALITY Unless I can see, I won't believe. That's the world's way when it comes to faith. I know lots of people who struggle with the whole concept of faith because God is a Spirit and they can't see Him. That said they have no trouble with electricity. They can't see it but it works. And what about the wind? They can't see that but try going down to the seafront on a windy day! That idea doesn't cut the mustard anyway. The problem is we get sucked in to that too. How many Christians look for their faith to be strengthened by hoping that God will do some stunts for them – a healing here, a miracle there, a prophetic word, a vision perhaps. That's world thinking. God just asks us to trust His word – and when we do, then we find out

everything He says is true – and you get to see the miracles. But it doesn't start with proof – it starts with trust.

POST MODERNISM

You may well have never heard of this word. For something you have never heard of, you are about to find out that it shapes your thinking far more than you want. It's a product of the me consumer society that we have created over the last 30 years or so. If you are under 50, then you will be thoroughly post-modern. If you are over 50 you'll still show strong traits as you are the generation which spawned the idea without even being aware that you did. It has its origin at the end of the C19 through a philosopher called Nietzsche. He summed it up like this.



**"There are many kinds of eyes...,
and consequently there are many
kinds of 'truths', and consequently
there is no truth."
Nietzsche**

In other words, there's no such thing as absolute truth. NO ABSOLUTE TRUTH We may have religion, or we may have science, but each person is free to make up their own mind about what truth actually is and it will be shaped by which community you belong to. It's where "political correctness" comes from For examples in history lectures, lecturers find that there are an increasing numbers of students who believe that there was nothing wrong with the Holocaust. Rather than express disgust at the students for holding such a warped view, in some places they are instructed not to impose their views on these students.

Silly, but I expect you can come up with far better ones than that. Before we all chuckle too much at PC, it's an idea that can too readily get into the church. God says something is wrong in His word but the world says we should accept that it is OK if it is OK for the person who believe it. So churches are under increasing pressure to ordain practising homosexuals for example. But it filters down to moral dilemmas more personally for Christians – the question of integrity at work, materialism – it's fine to do it because everyone else does it.

REJECTION One of the worst things about post-modern thinking is the idea that *"If you disagree with my truth you reject me."* Therefore because Christians don't agree with the notion that all religions lead to God, we are rejecting and unbending. That's the PC view. It's quite a pathetic idea really because Christians invented the idea of respecting other people's views and entering into a dialogue with those of differing views. But we draw the line at agreeing that their beliefs are valid. That is no longer acceptable to some who try to pressure Christians that the beliefs of others are equal to their own.

BIBLICAL

The bottom line is that all three of those ideas I've just given you are completely different from what God's approach to truth is in the Bible. ABSOLUTE TRUTH does exist – Jesus said I am the Truth. GOD IS TRUTH. And what's more It makes sense. I'm sure some of you will be watching the Apprentice tonight. Sir Alan Sugar will say "the first prize will be working for me, the second prize is .. there ain't no second prize. That's how the world works. There's a right way of doing most tasks whether that's driving a car, programming a video, using a computer or cooking the dinner. The wrong way means it doesn't work or you make a mess of yourself and someone else. It works the same way in matters of faith. One Christian writer Os Guinness once said "In the biblical view, truth is that which is ultimately, finally and absolutely real, or 'the way it is', and therefore is utterly trustworthy and dependable, being grounded and anchored in God's own reality and truthfulness"

So does it worry you when you tell people that Jesus is the only way to knowing God. Then let me come back to the only piece of information that no-one disagrees is going to happen to us all – it's a piece of absolute undeniable truth COFFIN – we are all going to die. What is the answer to that? The Christian answer is uncompromising – no-one comes to the Father except through me. People have been trusting and testing this belief for 2000 years. In fact many of those who have trusted it have found that by choosing to believe it, they have been able to accomplish, or be a catalyst for extraordinary things: Christians have been at the forefront of major issues: slavery, apartheid, justice, social change.

BEWARE OF MIX AND MATCH

What I want us to take away this morning is the understanding that our upbringing and experiences have led us to look at life in particular way. The problem is that Christians often just add their faith to the values they have inherited. Mix and match is dangerous. We say one thing and do another. We say we believe in the power of prayer, but does the amount of time we spend in prayer bear this out? Or do our actions show that we actually just sort out our lives for ourselves in our way? How many Christians read a horoscope? More than you might imagine. You'll find Christians that believe in reincarnation.

WHY ARE YOU A CHRISTIAN?

All these are answers people might give. The most valid answer is the third because that's what the biblical position is. Many Christians are influenced by post-modernism may say the others. The problem with having those reasons underpinning faith is that when difficult times come people fall away because it will no longer have the right feel. If you are convinced something is true, then you'll believe it whatever.

OS Guinness: THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IS NOT TRUE BECAUSE IT WORKS; IT WORKS BECAUSE IT IS TRUE.

Have we let the world squeeze us into its mould? Let's come before God repenting of that and let Him change us and free us to live in the way He wants us to.

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