

Freedom in Christ: The World's view of Truth

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Romans 12 v 2.

How do you look at the world?

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.¹

So how do you see the world?

You may have seen the film “A beautiful mind”. It stars Russell Crowe as a man called John Nash. John Nash is regarded as a genius – a man with a brilliant mind. He wrote a thesis on the dynamics of human conflict that revolutionised economic theory. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for his work. He was so gifted that by his late 20’s he was a distinguished professor, but at the height of his career, Nash suffered a breakdown. He once interrupted a lecture to announce he was on the cover of Life Magazine disguised as the Pope; he turned down a prestigious post at the University of Chicago because he said he was about to be named Emperor of Antarctica. He suffered from the condition known as paranoid delusion and when he listened to the voices that only he could hear, and that were unconnected with the truth, they destroyed his relationships, distorted his perception and made him obsessive, irritated and terrified. His thoughts were literally killing him.

I don’t suppose there are many, if any, of us here this morning suffering from paranoid delusion, certainly not in this extreme way. But I wonder how many of us are suffering from the thoughts that are constantly in our minds and although they may not be literally killing us, they are certainly sucking the life out of us.

The story of John Nash is a remarkable one. Over time, Nash was able to learn the art of discernment. That is, he learnt to test the voices and find out which ones were true ones and which ones were false ones. He was never completely free from his illness, but he learned over time that the hold his thoughts had over his mind could be greatly weakened. At one point in the film Nash says to a friend: “I’m not so different from you. We all hear voices. We just have to decide which ones we’re going to listen to.”

Friends, most of us will never suffer from paranoid delusion, but we all have the potential to dwell on the truth as we perceive it, rather than how it really is. We need to cultivate a mind that dwells on the truth – we need to cultivate a beautiful mind.

For some of us this is a bigger challenge than others. There are all sorts of factors that influence the way we think. Our upbringing will influence the way we think and perceive reality. If we were brought up to have a very positive view of

ourselves then it is quite likely that that's how we see the world. If we were brought up like the Navy flier from last week – with a demanding, perfectionist father, then like him, we have to constantly strive to be good enough.

Our personality will shape how we are too. Some of us are optimistic by nature, others are more pessimistic by nature. Significant experiences can have an influence too can't they? The death of a loved one; illness; accidents; breakdown in marriage or relationships; loss of job or career; dashed hopes; shattered dreams.

Our culture too has an influence on the way we think and see the world. We live in what is called the Western or Modern Worldview. A Worldview is like a filter through which you see and understand the world. It is based on assumptions about the truth and reality of how the world is and how it works. So, for us in this country, we predominantly view the world in a certain way, and it is a huge influence as to how we think and act.

Our Western Worldview divides reality into the “natural” and the “supernatural.” God and stuff like that is firmly in the “supernatural”. Daily life is firmly in the “natural” realm and in our Worldview there is little if any relation between the two. Spiritual issues are considered unnecessary for understanding life. We can, for example, teach our children science without any spiritual dimension – and not think we have missed out anything of significance. Scientific law governs the natural realm, and we only believe things to be true if we can test it and prove it scientifically. God may have created the world, but he is a long way away, and he doesn't interfere with it. The church has been influenced by a Western Worldview, even leading some to deny the miraculous.

The Western Worldview is on the decline actually – it is being replaced by what is called the Post Modern Worldview. Essentially this view says that there is no such thing as truth – no absolute truth. There is no big picture, no story that holds everything together or helps to explain the world. In this Worldview, truth can be all sorts of different things. Actually in this Worldview we are free to make up our own truth depending on which community we belong to, but what you must avoid is wanting to impose your truth on another community.

Since all truths are equally valid, any view that claims to have all the answers is to be received with great suspicion. In a Post Modern Worldview – I am what I do. Now, whether we think we are or not, we are in fact all influenced by our culture and the powerful Worldview that exists within it.

There is another Worldview and it is the Biblical Worldview. The Bible is very clear that the truth exists and it teaches the truth about God. “In the Biblical Worldview, truth is that which is ultimate, final 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.”²

It may feel to us like we are being arrogant when we assert that there is truth and it is found in the Bible! I have had many discussions with a friend of mine over exactly this issue. In John 14v6 Jesus says: “I am the way, the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.”

Friends, I think one of the biggest challenges we face as followers of Christ – is the same challenge John Nash faced – which voices will we choose to listen to? If we are not careful we will begin to listen to the voices – the influences and Worldviews – that will pull us away from Biblical truth. It will be very subtle and we probably won’t even notice the evidence that this is happening – which will be that what we say we believe does not match our behaviour, and before we have realised it we are into a mix and match approach to truth.

“The Christian faith is not true because it works; it works because it is true It is not simply ‘true for us’, it is true for any who seek in order to find, because truth is true even if nobody believes it and falsehood is falsehood even if everybody believes it. That’s why truth does not yield to opinion, fashion, numbers, office or sincerity – it is simply true and that is the end of it.”³

The Christian faith is choosing to believe what God said is true because we made a decision that the Biblical Worldview is how things really are. Repentance literally means “a change of mind”. We repent and choose to follow Christ. “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12v2) It is important to notice that this verse doesn’t say ‘transform yourselves by the renewing of your

mind.' Friends, this is good news indeed. This is not something I have to do on my own, it's not something that I will wake up one morning and find has just 'happened'. I cannot transform my own mind. But here's what it does say: be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Only God can change a mind. When God is present in a mind, it begins to flow with a new kind of thought. Truth is we have some work to do – but when God is present in a mind that's when renewal and transformation takes place. Here's the rub friends: it all depends what kind of mind you want to cultivate. Do you want to cultivate a mind that is influenced by the world's view of truth, or one that is influenced by biblical truth?

God's desire is that we have a mind filled with the truth about God, us and the world in which we live. It all begins with a choice – what kind of mind do I wish to cultivate? To cultivate a beautiful mind – one filled with the truth, I must cultivate a mind that becomes the dwelling place of God. How do I do that? I do it by dwelling on the truth :

- Reading the bible
- Wrestling in prayer
- Learning to recognize God speaking to me.

But it begins with a choice. So what kind of mind do you want to cultivate?

1. Freedom in Christ – Leader's Manual, page 64.
2. Os Guinness quoted in Freedom in Christ Leader's Manual page 72
3. Os Guinness *op cit.* page 76

Preached in Crawley Baptist Church on 26th October by Rev. Ian Phillips