

Sunday 7 October 2007 Sermon - King's Centre Christian Church, Sheffield, UK

Renovation of the Heart Sermon Series Week 2 - Mindset

Nick Allan

Reading – Romans Ch 1:16+

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

Romans 12:1-2

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. 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.”

Introduction

Begun series on ‘Renovation of the Heart’. We recognise that our hearts, our souls, minds, our inner lives are far from perfect. But the plan of our loving heavenly father is that we don’t “conform any longer to the pattern of this world” but are “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.” (Rom 12:2)

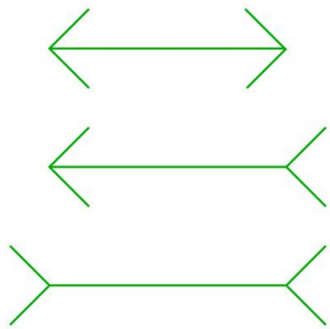
In other words, as Jesus is our mentor, our guide through this life, we want to be as much like Him, to take on His characteristics in our own selves. So we need to learn together to ‘Cultivate the Character of Christ’. We learnt last week that this IS POSSIBLE over time, its not just a pipe dream. Christians across the ages have sought after God’s heart and His agenda, and their characters have changed to be bubbling over with Jesus.

Last week we asked the questions ‘who are you on the inside?’ Because Jesus’ strategy is different from any other – He works on our renovation from the inside–out. You probably all know 1 or 2 people in your experience like this? Often they are older, and perhaps modest and unassuming – but as you meet them you can sense the presence of God, the influence of God’s spirit in them. It rubs off, it over flows, they are peaceful, or kind, or love to pray and be with God, and love you – and it seems *natural* to them. Its inspiring, when we come away we are more hungry for God than when we arrived. Do you know a few people like this? That’s the kind of person I’d like to be known as!

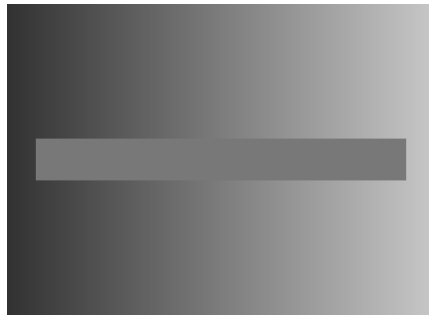
And we learnt last time that this doesn’t just happen by accident! Its when we seek God that we find Him, when we choose to ask that we receive. It requires deliberate decisions and actions from us, and it requires opening our hearts and characters and lives up to the renewing power of the Holy Spirit.

- A balance of a disciplined life and an openness to be changed and led by the Holy Spirit.

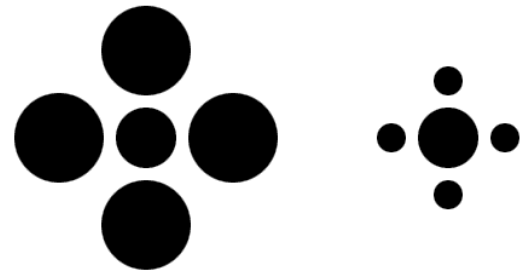
OPTICAL ILLUSIONS:



Which line is the longest?



Where is the middle bar darkest



Which centre circle is biggest?

Mindset is key

When I say ‘heart’ I mean more than that. Jesus said the way to please our Dad in this life is ‘the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ (Mark 12:30) **So Cultivating the Character of Christ needs to involve all the core parts of who we are as people.**

- I’m more than a heart. I’ve got a mind which directs my actions. My feelings, thoughts and decisions come from my mind.
- But I play out life through my physical body. I eat, sleep, talk, interact etc with my body, hands, eyes, legs etc

And all of the parts of a human add-up together to make me the ‘total’ person I am. My heart and soul – the very core of who I am – are intimately connected and related to all the other parts. So if I want a renovated heart – I need all the key parts of me to be heading in that direction.

- My heart isn’t going to be right if my mind is being filled with lots of unhelpful stuff.
 - Egs – jealousy, unforgiveness to people, sexual images, low self-esteem
- Likewise, I could have the best intentions to fill my mind with good thoughts, but if my physical body is engaging in wrong or unhelpful behaviour
 - Egs - excessive *sensual* behaviour – overdoing it with food
 - seeking to fulfil my need for love through sex without being in a safe, committed, lifelong marriage relationship
 - overdoing it with extreme sports to get the adrenaline rush I never seem to find in following God)

What I’ve come to appreciate increasingly this year, is that **our mindset** – the way we think and our attitudes – **has a tremendous influence over how we live**. And a huge impact on how we operate as Jesus People in daily life too.

Mindset is exactly what the Romans 1 reading is all about. Paul explains how human kind can’t use the excuse that they didn’t realise God exists as a reason why they choose to ignore him. He says ‘just look at the natural world around you – it clearly shows God is real!’ Instead, humans keep deliberately choosing NOT to honour God, or give thanks to him, for the lives they lead. As a result, their minds become tainted. People start to make other things, created things, idols – Gods – in their lives. Sadly, “they exchange the truth of God for a lie” (Rom 1:25).

Human's mindset is absolutely key to whether our hearts are heading towards, or away from God.

For Nick this year, it influenced my attitude to healing & deliverance. My faith has grown, through positive experience of seeing healings happen when I pray. Mindset changes over time, rarely instantly. But DOING SOMETHING is vital! Its got to be practical action in tandem. Putting our faith into action. And as your experience changes, so does your mindset, and so your whole way of operating can change too

WALK out the mini-steps of faith, that take you right down the room in time

- One small step – ‘little old me’ can pray for healing for this person
- ‘That wasn’t so hard’
- ‘I had a sense of God speaking & shared it with the person’
- ‘It blessed them’
- I’ll pray again – this is worth it
- This time, the person improved
- I’ll pray again
- This time, the person was healed instantly
- I’ll pray again
- This time, nothing has happened physically – yet – but my experience tells me it could, so my faith level doesn’t drop
- I’ll pray again.....
 - o Now my faith has moved me right across the room, one steady step at a time

What is the real deal – the real state of things?

If mindset is so key, lets look at what the prevailing mindset of our world, our British society is today, and compare it to the kind of mindset Christians need to have, as outlined by the bible.

Prov 9:10 - The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

This is the upside-down nature of how God has designed His world. The real definition of wisdom – knowledge for living life properly, tapping into the DNA of the universe, is to acknowledge God in everything. To be truly wise, truly informed is to realise that God is centre of the universe, NOT YOU!

Fear of the Lord is not cringing in a corner, its recognising that God the Trinity is awesome, holy, loving, powerful and created everything you are presently sitting on and breathing in! If you acknowledge that, and live in response to that then you will live differently from many other people – you’ll live with appropriate reverence because you know you’re not the boss!

But – the sad fact is that ‘fear of the Lord’ is not the default for today’s societies. The prevailing mindsets, the way people think, in our culture around us is usually saying and acting in quite the opposite fashion. And often, people don’t even realise it. And that’s what it means to be lost.

GROUP BRAINSTORM

- What does the world tell us is of value, worth knowing, of worth?
 - Wealth
 - Power & Position
 - Fame & celebrity
 - Love & Sex
 - Looks & image
 - Sensual experience – sex, drugs, rock & roll
 - Possessions & consumption
 - Career, value from ‘what you do’
 - Philosophies to understand life

Who is at the centre of all of these? Who is the main player, who are they aimed at?

- ME. YOU. Humans are the centre of this universe.

This is just what Paul writes about in Romans 1 – eg v.22 “Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.”

Our society is lost

- What happens instead is that God ‘gives you over’ (eg. Romans 1:21,24,26,28) to just those not-God things you so desire, and it ruins you

Not God

This is manifest all around us in the messages society throws at us. We are part of a consumer society which says, as its underlying message: “Whatever you say, goes.” “You’re the boss. You’re number one” “You have the right to hold whatever opinion you like”

This stems from the philosophy of the mid-late 20th Century, based on a secularist understanding. They assume - there is no God. Because of this, the only will and way you as a human need to follow is your own (not even your neighbour’s). Basically – YOU ARE GOD - Or at least, you think you are, and you act as if you are.

So you want to be in control. Of life, of decisions, of future, of direction, of pleasure and pain. Of your self-esteem, of where your value comes from.

As St Augustine wrote – God being God offends human pride. If God is running the universe and has first claim on our lives...Guess who ISN’T running the universe. Guess who DOESN’T get to have things just as they please? You and me!

This is a major blow to our self-esteem. Because it means that really – I’m NOT OK, and you’re NOT OK. Our hearts and characters are flawed, and what we do superficially, on the surface won’t actually make much difference. So the natural human reaction is to deny this! To deal with our own corruptness, to paper over the cracks, people deny anything is wrong, and that they are not in control. We try to stay in control so much – because we fear the truth which is that we are not in control.

This message is backed-up by the mainstream media and advertising industry. The main reason they tell us this, is to make us buy things! If you think you are number one, you’ll want to treat yourself to what you deserve!

Adverts – Play ‘Spot the lie’

- L’Oreal – ‘Because you’re worth it
- Nescafe – ‘its all about you’
- Lloyds TSB – ‘Get to where you want to go in life’

NOT OF THIS WORLD

The key characters of the NT 'got' this deep down, and so the way they acted externally was fundamentally different to what you might expect. They were 'in' this world, but not 'of' it.

- Jesus – “don't expect me to overthrow the roman authorities – my kingdom is not of this world”
- Stephen – “stone me if you want to! My body is far less important to me than you might think. My eternal destiny is set.”
- Apostle Paul's message – he learnt to be content INWARDLY, whatever the OUTWARD circumstance (Phil 4:11-13)

The counter-balance is this: Jesus said the same thing – “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matt 6:33)

'Not God' example – book by the historian of Alcoholics Anonymous (Ernst Kurtz) (quote from Philip Yancy *Christianity Today*, 10 July 2000, p.72):

“To acknowledge, deep in the soul, not being God. No mastery of manipulation and control, at which alcoholics excel, can overcome the root problem; rather, the alcoholic must recognize individual helplessness and fall back in the arms of the Higher Power. 'First of all, we had to quit playing God,' concluded the founders of AA; and then allow God himself to 'play God' in the addict's life, which involves daily, even moment-by-moment, surrender.”

Our response to this

- Who is really god in your life?
- Who is at the centre of your universe?
 - You? Your family? Your job? Your car?
 - I watched a TV programme on cars one night - 5 minute feature on a man who had spend £100 000 on souping-up his Ford Escort so it had 500bhp. He said something along the lines that 'I never meant to spend £100000 on my car, it just kind of happened'
- What are you investing in?
- Mindset – where are you playing God?
 - Keeping control
 - Keeping God out
- Where do you need to return a healthy dose of “fear of God before their eyes” (Rom 3:18)

Here is **Jesus' response to the world's fundamentally wrong assumption** – that the universe revolves around us: “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”

And instead here is the correct way: Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." (Matthew 16:26; 24-5)

Not necessarily instant, happens over time with consistent application on our part – one step at a time, but look back – and you'll see you have walked a long way!

You can do it!

You CAN do this (expand briefly on 'this') or the bible wouldn't tell us so! We've got to choose. To involve our mind, our will, our choices in this process.

We must remember how key our mindset is to living out the Christian life, following Jesus' ways, which are 'not of this world'. Let's choose to look out for those ways of thinking which don't tarry with the word of God, and character of God, the commands of God.

- And when you find yourself out of kilter with God's mindset
 - o Acknowledge it
 - o And be accountable – share what you are doing with others, or you'll risk returning to your 'worldly' ways quickly
 - o Lay it down at the foot of the cross (the place where Jesus makes change in our lives possible)
 - o Ask Holy Spirit to help you take on Jesus' ways instead
 - o Matthew 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."