

What is Jesus doing now?

Part 2 – Jesus removes our resistance to God

We believe as Christians that Jesus is reshaping our minds. We say, therefore, that we are different because, for instance, we no longer fear death, our consciences are free, we live to God, and we love each other. And these things only happened to us and no one else because “we have the mind of Christ,” **1 Corinthians 2:16**.

But what’s so special about not fearing death when millions of NON-Christians don’t fear death either? They don’t live life in dread of death, they live full lives as if death doesn’t exist. They have families, develop careers, they travel, meet with friends, have lots of laughs and fun together. Some live to a ripe old age, active and full of beans ‘til the day they die. They’re not even *thinking* about death, let alone fearing it.

Most people don’t seem to be bothered much by their consciences either. They say and do pretty well whatever they like without a care in the world. They aren’t worried about the consequences of their actions - especially in some fictional heaven or hell somewhere - nor do they look too deeply into the motives for their actions.

Millions of non-Christians would also claim to “live to God” - Buddhists, Muslims, religious Jews and a host of others focus their entire lives and behaviour on pleasing some deity, or dedicating their lives to a spiritual ideal, like defending the environment or tuning into Mother Nature.

And what’s so special about Christians loving each other? Tons of non-Christians love each other too. Non-religious married couples all over the world love each other. Parents in all cultures love their children. Caregivers sacrifice their lives for their ailing spouses, their handicapped kids, and their Alzheimer parents. Communities pour money, time and love into charities and fund-raising events. Volunteers travel to foreign lands, risking life and limb to make life better for others. Millions of people put their lives on the line fighting for justice, defending the weak, getting evil off the streets and protecting their countries from exploitation and terrorism. And friends spend many happy hours together, travelling overseas, hiking in the wilds, enjoying sports, chatting the night away and being there for each other when tragedy strikes.

So what’s so different about us Christians that proves something extraordinary is happening in our Christian minds that isn’t happening in the minds of non-Christians? Well, there’s one very simple answer to that: Try talking to non-Christians about the God of the Bible and see what happens.

Confront most people with the biblical God and they'll likely recoil as if stung by a wasp. They mumble an incoherent reply or find excuse for a quick exit. Bolder ones, on the other hand, relish the chance to argue, be sarcastic, call you names and quote all the usual criticisms against God and Christianity. Others, meanwhile, may show an interest in God to begin with but soon run for cover if their comfortable little cocoons are in danger of being pierced.

It certainly brings out another side to people. They may be jolly nice to each other, and be doing all kinds of noble things for others, but don't bring up the subject of God.

And why is that? Because we're "hostile to God," **Romans 8:7** - and hostile in Greek is a strong word. It means repelled by God. We find him disgusting and horrible. Deep down at heart and core we don't like God at all. No wonder people don't like talking about him in conversation, except to find fault.

But why are we so hostile to God? Because, **verse 5**, we "live according to the sinful nature." and in Paul's experience that sinful nature was a nasty piece of work. It created "every kind of covetous desire" in him, **Romans 7:8**, and worse still he was unable to resist. Even when Paul knew a desire was wrong he couldn't stop thinking about it or wanting to do it. And if he had a right desire, like wanting to do good or delighting in God's law, Paul found to his horror and shame that "evil is right there with me," **verse 21**. There was this monstrous something in his head that immediately twisted his thoughts against God. It didn't want anything to do with God. And like all humans Paul felt the strength of this dreadful evil, that's "alienated (us all) from God," **Colossians 1:21**, and made us "enemies (of God) in our minds."

It's a pure miracle, therefore, when a human being ISN'T alienated from God and doesn't think of God as an enemy. But that's where Christ comes in, because he's been working at this miracle for thousands of years. It's THE great miracle God has given him to perform on our behalf, as Paul mentions in **2 Corinthians 5:18** - "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ."

"Reconciled" means restoring our relationship with God, where all our hostility toward him is removed, and we no longer think of God as an enemy. Instead, we find ourselves drawn toward him in love and trust. It's as if we've been lifted into a whole new world, because we see God in a completely different light. He's no enemy at all. We see instead, in **Colossians 1:22**, that he's "reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation." And **that** then becomes the reason why we don't fear death, why our consciences are free, and why we live to God and love each other. It's based entirely on God's miracle of reconciling us to himself through his Son, and through that miracle totally reshaping our minds and our attitude toward him.

But **what it took** to produce this miracle on our behalf is the stuff of legend for Christians, because it goes right back to what happened when we humans first appeared, and the first time God said “Don’t” to us. Rather than do what God said, Adam and Eve did the exact opposite. So humans resisted God from the very start. It was a telling moment, just like it is for parents when their child first yells “NO” in response to a command, because they discover to their shock and dismay that their dear little children have minds of their own.

And after many experiences of their children doing the exact opposite of what they’re told, parents talk of their children as being “strong-willed.” Now that’s a telling moment too, because it reveals the very obvious presence of a “will” in us humans. And it’s revealing how a Dictionary defines this “will” of ours too. It’s defined as the “power of the mind to do or not to do something.” It is a POWER, take note, a *wonderful* power that God has given us in creating us like himself, yes - but a *terrible* power too, because it gives us the ability to defy God with it.

But why would we want to defy God? Because, as Paul mentioned back in **Romans 7:21**, “*evil is right there with me.*” Now that’s interesting because at the time Paul said that he also said, “*For in my inner being I delight in God’s law,*” **verse 22**, so his will was very much in favour of God - BUT, he discovered - there was another strong influence **affecting** his will, that not only constantly and relentlessly twisted his will against God, it stirred all kinds of other wrong and weird thoughts in his head as well.

So we’ve got a real problem on our hands as humans. We’ve got a will that can be easily influenced by evil into defying God. And to illustrate just how HUGE a problem that is for us, God confronted us with it immediately after creating us. He faced Adam and Eve with a serpent whose mind had already been deeply affected by evil, so that Adam and Eve knew such evil was real, *and* that it was weird and deadly.

But did falling for evil wake them up to its power? Not at all. It didn’t shock them into seeing how easily they’d been swayed against God, or how easily their relationship with God had been broken, or how their view of God had been so quickly poisoned. And it didn’t seem to matter either. They didn’t turn to God in repentance or for help.

So now what could God do? Well, that’s where God’s plan through Christ comes in, because it would turn the human will back to God and prevent evil having its deadly influence on humanity ever again. And it all began with preserving one small group of humans from the headlong rush to destruction that evil had caused, because out of that group - 1900 years or so after Adam and Eve - up popped a man called Abraham. And to Abraham God made incredible promises that not only told of the plan’s ultimate success but **how** it would come about as well. And so began an amazing tale, the details of which would fill the Old Testament as God confronted us humans with our resistance to him.

The problem soon became obvious when Abraham's descendants, the nation of Israel, were faced with genocide at the hands of an evil Pharaoh, and there was nothing they could do about it. It was a perfect picture of humanity under the influence of "the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient," **Ephesians 2:2**. Evil had Israel in its grip, and so tight was evil's grip that when God offered to rescue Israel through Moses in **Acts 7:35**, they sneered at Moses and replied, "Who made you ruler and judge?" It was an act of utter defiance toward God, because the answer to their question was obvious (same verse): "He (Moses) was sent be their ruler and deliverer by God himself." But their defiance perfectly illustrated the presence of a "spirit at work" that so easily turns the human will against God.

Things then turned from bad to worse, **verse 38**, when Moses "received living words (from God on Mount Sinai, verse 37) to pass onto us. But our fathers refused to obey him," **verse 39**, "they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt." The Israelites didn't want anything to do with God. Instead they wanted Aaron to create *other* gods to meet their needs.

But their attitude served God's purpose splendidly in showing us in vivid detail what our biggest problem is, because here's this nation that God wishes to bless personally, but they resist him every step of the way. And they never resolve their hostility to God all the way up to the time Stephen summarizes their attitude in **verses 51-52**, when he yells to the assembled Jewish religious hierarchy, "You stiff-necked people...You are just like your fathers. You always resist the Holy Spirit. Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him..."

There was no denying Stephen's accusation either. For centuries Israel's resistance to God was well known and recorded. But what was the Jewish hierarchy's reaction to these obvious facts? **Verse 54**: "When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him," thereby proving Stephen's point exactly, that we humans really have a problem with God.

But this is what God chose Israel for. He lifted them out of obscurity and imminent genocide, rescued them in the most amazing way from the most powerful nation on Earth, and took them to a desert where it was just him and them together. And what happened next was a direct and very personal relationship between humans and God, the likes of which had never been seen before on such a large scale.

And who was the one dealing with Israel in such a direct and personal way? **1 Corinthians 10:4**, "for they (Israel) drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ." So Christ was already at work on the human mind long before he came here as a human himself. And it's through Israel that he shows us what the biggest problem in the human mind is.

And what we see in Christ's relationship with Israel was, as one writer phrases it, "the natural offence to God deeply embedded in the human heart¹." Or, as Paul phrases it in **1 Corinthians 10:6**, "[Now these things occurred as examples, to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.](#)" Put those two quotes together and you've got the whole grim story, that "evil is right there with us" creating a hostility in the human heart toward God that's alienated us from him and made us think he's our enemy.

Israel was simply God's way of bringing all this to the surface and of laying bare what's really happening inside the human heart when confronted with God. It resists God; it contradicts God; it doesn't like the way God thinks; it finds fault with God's actions; it reacts against God at the slightest threat to one's safety and well being, and it blames God for bad things happening. And Israel expressed every one of these typical human attitudes in their head-to-head dealings with God.

All of Israel's reactions were planned by God as "examples" to the rest of us humans, because when God stuck the sword into Israel to slice open what was really in their hearts it was to show us all what's in **every** human heart.

And look at the lengths God went to in bringing all this to the surface. No other nation or group of people had ever been dealt with this way by God, and none since either. His relationship with Israel was intense, unrelenting, extremely painful, and uncompromising. Whenever Israel showed their true colours and displayed the resistance to God they really felt, God exposed every bit of it. When they didn't trust him, or muttered against him or dabbled with other gods, he nailed them with venomous snakes, a destroying angel and mass killings (verses 8-10). He never let them get away with any rotten attitude toward him, because it was so important that Israel be an example of what's really lurking in the human heart.

And why was that necessary? Because we humans can think we're doing just fine, as Paul brings out in **verse 11**, when again he says, "[These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us](#)" - but warnings of what, exactly? **Verse 12**: "[So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!](#)" In other words, we can underestimate how easily our will can be turned against God. But that's why the Old Testament is so helpful in reminding us of the lengths God went to (through Israel) to show us that we **aren't** "just fine." The human heart is constantly being bombarded by "[temptation](#)" (verse 13), and look how easily Israel fell for it.

That's not something to fear because God can help us resist the evil that's always there with us (verse 13), but keep in mind what God chose Israel for. It was to reveal our biggest problem, that with evil ever-present it doesn't take much to turn us against God.

¹ The Mediation of Christ - by Thomas F. Torrance, page 11

And that's a warning to those who think their religion, or their spirituality, or their good nature, or the strength of the human spirit is all they need to lead a good life and be a good person. But chuck them in a desert for forty years dealing directly with God like the Israelites had to, and what might they discover about themselves then?

They would discover exactly what the Israelites discovered - that their human hearts aren't so rosy after all, despite all their spirituality and community spirit. And the proof of that is plain for all to see right now as well, as God confronts the entire world with its increasing helplessness against overwhelming problems, including massive disasters that make a mockery of every god we've created to provide for our every need, and look how we respond. Does humanity **in its first thoughts** cry out to God for his loving guidance and help? Never. Instead, we blame God and call bad things that happen "Acts of God."

But at least it reveals the problem - that something mighty powerful has us thoroughly turned off God, and there's absolutely nothing we can do about it. We resist God and we can't help it. So how on earth can this resistance be removed?

Some Christians might say, "Just preach Christ crucified," because the death of Christ will change a heart. But the evidence of our culture speaks otherwise, because there are thousands of churches all preaching Christ crucified, and millions of Christians wearing crosses, all making it clear and obvious to people that Christ died because God loves us, but it hasn't resulted in a massive change of heart toward God, has it? A church on every corner, dozens of Christian programs on radio and TV, and the world even celebrating Christian holidays like Christmas and Easter, haven't broken down the wall of hostility between humanity and God. And any threat to people's safety and well being soon proves that, because God is the first one to get the blame.

We also have the amazing evidence of Judas, who watched and worked with Jesus in person, and even shared in the bread and wine picturing Christ's sacrifice, but it didn't change his heart either. It proves there is a great chasm between us and God, that cannot be bridged by any message we preach, by any tactic we use (like threatening people with hell), or by our shining example of morality and good works, or even by Jesus being here in person.

But God already proved that point in Israel. He clearly demonstrated over many centuries of Israel's history that the human heart **cannot** deal with its underlying hostility to God. It's been our biggest problem ever since the day Adam and Eve would not follow God's instructions,. That's why we need a totally new mind, and fortunately, that's exactly what Jesus through the Holy Spirit is creating in us. Our minds are literally "being transformed into Jesus' likeness with ever-increasing glory," **2 Corinthians 3:18**. And that's the only solution there is to our biggest problem: We need a new mind, and Jesus is the only one who can create it.