

## 257 *An ongoing learning situation*

As a child grows, it learns – new experiences, new situations. As parents, we seek to care for our children by teaching (and modelling!) the principles of caring, sharing, loving and giving. But we do have to enforce some ‘because I say so’ specifics – early days: fire, roads, strangers; and later: time-keeping, alcohol, sex, drugs. As the child’s understanding grows, there’s less need for specific rules, but it’s always a difficult balance. Who would be a parent, eh?!

But what must it be like for God?! Let’s see *you* start with a bunch of kill-or-be-killed cave-dwellers, for whom the gods are angry and capricious, needing (human) sacrifices to mollify them. Then see if *you* can guide us as our world knowledge increases.

It seems God has worked mainly through exemplars. God found a teachable, trusting individual (Abra[ha]m) and formed a people-group (Israel) whom he sought to guide, so that they could be exemplar to the rest of humanity: ‘Through you all the peoples of the world will be blessed.’

But this was largely as precursor to actually coming as an individual human exemplar. Then, through Jesus’ resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit, God was able to create a worldwide exemplar, The Way. (I’m not saying ‘the church’ – too much baggage in that word.)

And the Bible? God inspired its writers to provide a written source to show us those principles, the spirit, the movement, the change and the embetterment of humanity that was possible if we (in due course) were to follow The Way of Jesus, through the transforming power of the cross.

Yes, the Bible carries specific rules that would help specific people at specific times – such as ‘Don’t eat shellfish!’, sensible advice with no refrigeration. But with some issues, the prohibition might be lifted, ‘as the child grew older’, i.e. as human knowledge increased.

Given God’s overall plan of improving the way humans live together, through love, care, respect etc., it seems truly amazing that it wasn’t until the early *19th century* that the inhumane practice of slavery started to be abolished.

And we could say the same about the treatment of women, or of beating children. Why does it take so long for God to change people’s minds?

I think it’s our fear of change, our fear of admitting that our assumptions were wrong in the past. It’s fear of accepting that some of the specific prohibitions might contradict the overall principles of The Way. But which specifics is it right to release?

Back to the awful history of the church. It’s been a constant battle, as (our interpretations of) specific Bible teachings have had to change, and people have fought (sometimes literally) to avoid change – or fought to encourage change!

Move too fast and you let those ‘evil liberals’ sweep away the Bible’s teaching, or drag your feet and you allow those ‘evil conservatives’ to bring the church into disrepute.

We have to change, but how soon, and on which specifics? Difficult! But very, very important!!