

## 292 *Shining like stars*

I've recently been rereading a book I found helpful in 2018, near the beginning of my faith-rethink: Brad Jersak's *A more Christ-like God*, and Chapter 3 hit me so powerfully I kept rereading it. I desperately wanted to digest it for you, but I couldn't...not until our homegroup reached Philippians 2.

His chapter 3 is titled 'Freedom or love?' – about what we think God is like. Its importance is that, by worshipping God, we actually *become* like what (we think) God is like. This has helped me to see how I could have got it so wrong for 50 years.

We say that we base our faith on the Bible, right? And we have to interpret it, right? But we (translate it and) interpret it on the basis of what we/our church **think God is like**.

Philippians 2 nailed it for me. The chapter is all about our behaviour – shining like stars in the universe – a glorious vision of what the church could be like, please God! And near the beginning we read what 'shining' looks like:<sup>6-11</sup> Jesus, who, being in *very nature* God, emptied himself, and gave up his life in love for us. Glorious!

But that's not just an *example*; it's telling us what *God is like by nature*. And when we want to know the meaning of different bits of scripture and how to apply them, we must ask if our view fits with Jesus's (God's) very nature: love.

For example, what about verse 12: 'continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling'? As good post-Reformation Christians we cry out: you do **not** get to heaven by what you **do**; it's by faith alone! And I'm grateful to God for their clearing that up for us.

But what about the (Reformation-based?) translation, 'with fear and trembling'? Tom Wright renders it, 'with utter seriousness' – a better fit with the God of 6-11. Only a small issue, yes, but it illustrates how our view of God changes our view of *everything*.

Now a personal example of how I once felt about God and how I responded: A repeating image for me was that I'm on a clifftop, and I see a blind man walking straight towards the cliff. What do I say? 'Excuse me, sir, might I have a few moments of your time?' or '*Hey, mate, stop!*' This image motivated me towards many years of evangelism: I spent hours and hours on the internet trying to *persuade* people that I know what God is like, what Jesus has done, and how they need to turn and believe, or [implied] they are doomed!

And how many people do you know today who won't touch church with a bargepole because of the way it portrays God? We might not be pulpit-thumping preachers, but we can still believe in, and portray (and embody?), a highly non-Philippians 2 God.

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, yes,<sup>2 Cor 4:4</sup> but partly *he's used us(!)* worshipping a non-Christ-like God!

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