

328 *I've been wrong – all this time!*

I like to see myself as someone who thinks radically, yet I *still* find it difficult to see things *other than* the ways I've been taught. I just spotted that I've again reverted to a me-centred 'gospel'.^[325] Sorry! But to be fair to myself, it's difficult after 50+ years of indoctrination.

Is 'indoctrination' too strong a word? Well, I can only speak for myself, but yes, I feel I've allowed myself to be indoctrinated. Let's check with the OED: '*the process of teaching a person or group to accept a set of beliefs *uncritically**' (my un-emphasis). The first bit is what Christians do: we teach people to accept a set of beliefs; we even write them down in carefully worded doctrinal statements.

OK, the OED definition includes 'uncritically', and I do try **not** to be uncritical. Certainly, I've been critical of the death-wielding, hell-threatening view of God, and I've tried to insist on a more restorative justice approach, but even after 300+ articles, I'm still talking mainly in me-and-my-relationship-with-God terms.^[325] Doh!

But you might be saying, 'Yes, that uncritical acceptance is what *you* do in the *established* churches, but we're not bound by all that stuff. We're a free church, and we go back to what the Bible teaches.' Really? Is your church's 'gospel' anything other than: 'Have a relationship with God and you'll be saved'?

Sorry, but while that might be helpful advice, it's not what Jesus announced, nor what the early church announced. Do you *really* think the early church would have been persecuted – even killed – for just saying: 'Here's how to have a relationship with God'? Indeed, would they have killed Jesus for just giving advice on getting closer to God?

Yes, in student days, I was questioning and critical of the basis of the faith presented by the churches I attended, but once I had 'accepted Jesus into my life', I never really questioned it – well, not until I lost my faith totally in 2011.

I was attracted to faith in the first place by seeing loving relationships in action, and I was thankfully drawn back by the same thing in the church I now attend, but is that what turned the world upside down?

I still stick to my claim^[2ff] that the gospel is **not** a set of propositions about God and Jesus, and a transaction we enact ('give your heart to Jesus'). And I do still believe that my life has been totally transformed by coming into a relationship with God through Jesus. And I still rejoice that, through the Spirit's work, I can be a part of the glorious community of God's people... but that's not the gospel. It's excellent and important Bible-based advice, but it's not the gospel.

How do I know it's not the good news Jesus preached? Because it's advice for me, whereas the real good news is about what **God** has done, what **God** will do ultimately, and what **God** is doing now.