

338 Person, Purpose and Prejudice

My dad was a lovely man – everyone agreed. They often said, ‘He’s a real gentleman.’ He was indeed a real *gentle man*, and he would do anything for anyone. But if you talked to my mum you’d get a very different picture. For whatever reason, their relationship broke down, and no matter what my father did or said, Mum would interpret it negatively. It’s an all too familiar story: it’s called prejudice. We judge someone’s words and actions according to what we think of that person.

Now, I believe that the purpose of the Bible is to tell us about a Person – it records the actions and words of this Person, especially in relation to a people. And I see the Bible as helping us, as a community, to build a relationship with that Person, and to build relationships generally – including with the place that God gave us.

We’re human and we make value judgements – we have to in order to survive: ‘Is this plant food or poison?’ and ‘Is that person friend or foe?’ The trouble with relationships is that once we’ve made up our mind about someone – what they are like and what their motives are – it’s very difficult to change it. It’s called ‘prejudice’.

If you had never met my dad, and relied on what Mum said, then clearly you’d start off at a disadvantage. And isn’t that very similar to how we introduce people to God/Jesus? Indeed, isn’t it also true of how we read and apply the Bible? We interpret the purpose of a passage of Scripture according to our view of the Person we believe it is telling us about. We may think we are *objectively* studying the Bible, but if we are more realistic, maybe we should admit to some degree of prejudice?

I’m prejudiced when I read Romans 1 & 2: I’m looking for a restorative God who wants at whatever cost and in any way possible to draw people into relationship. So I read those verses looking for that kind of interpretation. Yes, I’m prejudiced; I admit it!

In the past few articles I’ve rehearsed how my view of God has changed. As a student I recited those prayers about God’s wrath and indignation against me, and frankly I don’t think that was too helpful! It prejudiced me.

Is it actually true that ‘the wrath of God is revealed against...’? (1:18) Yes, I believe it is. However, based on what the Bible shows Jesus-God to be like, I now see the **purpose** of that passage differently. Talking to Christians, Paul was not trying to educate them to the **fact** that God judges sinners; he was mainly telling them not to be judgmental. He’s saying, ‘You know God, so you are in a privileged position, and so you will be judged with greater strictness!’

How do Christians often come across to people outside the church? And how do we portray God? As judgmental?

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