

Do we believe what we see, or see what we already believe?

We would all like to believe that we can stand back and objectively and accurately evaluate what it is that we see, read or hear.

Surely that's not hard to do, we think. After all, if we see someone walking along a street then that person is walking along a street.

Simple scenarios like this can easily lead us to assert that we are people who believe what they see. But how true is that?

In reality, we all look at life through a 'lens', an interpretive lens. Our eyes and ears and other senses take in data, but then our brain interprets that data, using an interpretive lens that has developed over time, but which was particularly shaped in our childhood years.

We enter life with a certain biology. We are born with a certain personality type, a type of mind, and with that mind we interact with the world, reacting to it, and drawing conclusions both consciously and subconsciously. A belief system forms.

The interpretive lens we develop, the belief system we form, is greatly influenced by all manner of things in our environment:

- Our birth order
- how we are treated by our parents and others around us
- what we are told
- what we are taught
- the cultural environment we grow up in
- the religious environment we grow up in

- what injuries or sicknesses come our way or to those close around us
- what happens in the world around us, whether good or bad

All these things will feed into how we end up making sense of the world and our existence.

By the time we are 5yrs old our interpretive lens is well in place, and with that lens we will substantially be 'seeing what we believe', as opposed to being able to see objectively from a neutral place (and from that neutral place form accurate beliefs).

For example, someone who has come to believe that people can't be trusted, will tend to mistrust people's motives and actions, even when they are being honest and genuine. They will 'see' what they believe.

A female who has come to believe that men are abusers will look at a male and 'see' an abuser. A male who has come to believe that women are users will look at a female and 'see' a user.

On a spiritual level:

A believer in '**Gnosis**' who has come to believe that the physical world was made by an inferior lessor God, will read the Old Testament and 'see' a lessor inferior God (not the true God).

A JW who believes that Jesus is not God will read the New Testament and 'see' what he believes. He will see all sorts of proof texts for his belief.

A member of the LDS Church will read the Bible through the lens of the book of Mormon and church teachings. When he reads about God the Father, he will 'see' what he believes. He will 'see' someone who once was human, but is now God, pointing to what we can become.

When a **Muslim** reads the New Testament, he will 'see' the Jesus talked about as a prophet, but not God. He will read the NT through the lens of the Quran, the Hadith, and the Tafsir, and will reject, as corrupted, any NT verses that show Jesus is God.

When a **Hindu** reads the NT he will 'see' Jesus as one of the multitude of gods, or as an avatar of one of the gods. That Hindu will not 'see' Jesus the exclusive Son of God, the One alone through whom we come to the Father, even though that is clearly what the NT teaches.

A Buddhist too will not read the Bible and see an exclusive God. Looking through the lens of their own teachings, the teachings of Buddha and others, they will see someone who sits alongside other important figures in history – a conveyor of truth, but not an exclusive conveyor, and also not a 'saviour' because of Buddhist belief in self-salvation.

Understandably, because our 'interpretive lens' provides us with a foundation on which we base our life, **it will be very uncomfortable for us to see anything that contradicts or opposes what we believe**. To see something that doesn't fit in with what we believe, creates what the psychological field calls '**Cognitive Dissonance**'.

To avoid experiencing 'Cognitive Dissonance' we can very 'skilfully' avoid seeing what would contradict our beliefs.

For example, if a male who believes women are users encounters a female who is kind and caring he may 'not see' her kindness. Her kindness may just not register in his sight. Or, he may interpret her kindness as manipulative or superficial, and amplify any little acts of unkindness in his mind, in order to maintain a belief by which he has ordered his life.

A JW who believes Jesus is not God may not see, or register in his mind verses that point to Jesus being God. Or, if those verses do register, he may find a way to explain those verses away.

Of course, people can and do come to change beliefs about themselves and the world and God, even if in only little ways. This happens when they find they are unable to avoid or resolve Cognitive Dissonance without making adjustments to their 'interpretive lens'. They experience as compelling, information that contradicts their old interpretive lens, and so come to adjust their lens. This can happen very suddenly, or be the result of a long and slow process.

For example, a person who has long believed they are 'unlovable' comes to believe they are lovable in the face of being constantly loved by their partner. Being lovable comes to be incorporated into their interpretive lens, changing radically what they 'see' as they continue to engage with the world around them.

The author of this brochure testifies that, having held onto a belief that God was distant, aloof, and uncaring (and 'seeing' that in his life experience), he was put into a place of cognitive dissonance by compelling evidence after evidence of God's loving care, that was simply too obvious to be denied.

In reflecting on this the author recognizes that it wasn't just a '**wound**' he had carried around all his life, but also a '**hardness of heart**'. He did not 'see' God's love for him because in the hardness of his heart he stubbornly held on to a victim mentality. He did not want to see the truth of God's love because in part he found value in 'seeing' himself as a victim of God's poor care.

The Bible clearly indicates that all people have a 'sinful flesh' that rebels against God, that pushes God away, that wants to rule itself, that is selfish and self-

serving. This absolutely has to be factored into our 'seeing', the interpretive lens we develop in life.

*"Hear this, O foolish and senseless people,
who have eyes, but see not,
who have ears but hear not." Jeremiah 5:21*

On the one hand it is understandable that people who are abused in childhood will come to see and understand life in a very negative way. Such people will be deeply 'wounded' and God's heart grieves with and for them. But a person's wound does not exist separately to their sinful flesh. Yes, they have been 'wounded' by the devil and other people, but their sinful flesh has also participated in the formation of their interpretive lens. What this means is that as God acts to **heal** a person's wounds, God will also be bringing that person to **repentance** over how they have seen wrongly and falsely.

To all those who see a different and lessor Jesus to the Jesus of the Bible - if this is what you have been taught then your 'seeing' here is understandable. But is it possible that you also want to see Jesus the way you do because it suits your sinful flesh,

- To avoid facing the true God.
- To avoid facing the truth that you are totally incapable of making yourself right with God.
- To avoid facing the cost of going against your family, culture, environment.

Lord God, bring us to see you as you truly are, and so have life in your loving presence!

**Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found.
Was blind but now I see.**



Are you really 'seeing' The TRUTH?

