

What the World Sees

John 8:36 Living Bible

“So if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free.”

The reoffending rate of released prisoners is shockingly high – over 70% in some categories. The church, however, composed entirely of freed prisoners (Luke 4:18) has a reoffending rate of 100%. Our offenses range from the hidden thoughts of the heart to the outright criminal, and to the outside world at times the beliefs and behaviour of the church can be baffling at the best and disgust-inducing at the worst.

As a child I belonged to the baffled brigade. I was puzzled by men parading in long robes and fancy hats in the cathedral of my home town. At school I endured the weekly drone of a rural low-church service with its repetitions, intonings and chants, and as a teenager I had to sit for an hour each week in a Quaker service. I understood that everyone sat in silence until the Spirit moved someone to give a message, but I was perplexed by what seemed to me long rambling messages the Spirit sometimes seemed to inspire. However there are far worse things that have been inflicted by the church on the world than the little things that bothered me. We can all probably think of a few quite easily but without giving a long list of the church’s misdemeanours, let’s just make the point by mentioning the abuse of children by priests and leave it at that.

It is true that over the years Christians have contributed great good to this world of ours, bringing about radical changes in the lives of many peoples – slaves, prisoners, the sick, the addicted and the illiterate, to name a few. It is also true that through our misdeeds and our flawed doctrines the name of God has been brought into disrepute. Our example has often served to bolster people’s deep-rooted antagonism to God and to justify their rejection of his message of grace. We could easily get to thinking that our witness is somewhat of a failure.

Though we in no way condone sin, we need not be dismayed - even our poor behaviour testifies to the greatness of God. It reveals a God of such humility that he will suffer his name to be vilified. More than that, it shows that in his love for us God has bestowed on us extraordinary freedom – a freedom that includes the liberty to err. In his mercy and grace he upholds us and keeps us safely held in his hands, yet he does not control us or impose a rigid conformity upon us as we slowly grow **“to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” Ephesians 4:13 NKJ.**

For those with eyes to see it, our flawed lives point to the extraordinary power of God to grant us complete freedom and yet be able to fulfil his will for all of his wayward children.