

108 *The greatest sin?*

We've just enjoying watching some of the old episodes of Cadfael, and even some episodes of Father Brown that claim to be new. But what I love about both (as well as trying to work out 'who done it') is the positive, restorative, forgiving attitude of the central character. It's a tonic to see Christians portrayed (and by extension God portrayed) as NOT being judgmental, bigoted, condemnatory – unlike Brother Jerome, wringing his hands in anguish (or rubbing his hands in glee?), and obsessing about 'mortal sin', when Brother Oswyn admits to having had thoughts of kissing a woman.

For years, I've complained about the media's attitude to Christians, saying basically, "It's not fair, the way they portray us!"

My article about why we study the Bible [106] was rather confused, but I do think it carried an element of truth: We all too easily study the Scriptures, work out what is 'right', and then slip into judgmental attitudes towards those who have come to a different conclusion.

Let's try to look at this objectively. Let's look from outside the Christian church, perhaps with the eyes of someone in the media, wondering how to portray Christians...

This person looks to see what "Christians" are saying or have said that "the Bible teaches..."

- Women should not be in (certain) leadership roles in the church.
- Men in leadership must be celibate.
- Men who are homosexual must remain celibate.
- Women who are homosexual must remain celibate.
- Infant baptism is wrong. (Didn't people fight and kill each other over this one?)
- If you don't speak in tongues, you're not really a proper Christian.
- If you pray for healing and don't receive it, you're somehow not praying right.
- If you're a Christian then God will bless you (financially? health-wise?).
- (My history's poor, but I guess that) the Spanish Inquisition believed they were being biblical.
- Witches should be burnt.
- All the Catholic/Protestant stuff (yes, there's politics in there too, but it started theologically).

My point is not that the people holding any of the views above were/are right or wrong. Rather, the greatest sin, I think (and according to my reading of Romans 1 & 2!) is judgmentalism. Look back at that list and think how much suffering we Christians have **caused** by our attitudes – we're supposed to be *alleviating* suffering! And it's not just the physical suffering (torture and

murder), but also the mental and emotional suffering we have caused, and are still causing now, today!

Can we not agree to disagree about some of our interpretations of the Bible, and live in love for one another, live in community, respecting one another's views? And wouldn't that be a witness to those outside the church?!

(There is a day conference in Norwich next week aimed to "help those who experience same-sex attraction to stay faithful to Biblical teaching on sexual ethics and flourish at the same time". Please pray that they – and we – may have the mind of Christ.)

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