

154 Changing our minds VIII – “The letter kills”

Probably a terrible thing to say (but when has that ever stopped me?!), but with my editor’s hat on I think that Paul, like me, probably wasn’t actually a terribly good writer – with those long, rambling sentences! And I wonder what he would have thought of the thousands of PhDs and books on the finer points of his teachings. But don’t worry, I do think he was inspired by God – really inspired!

Something I thought of when I awoke yesterday led me to think of “we with unveiled face behold the glory of the Lord”, so I looked at 2 Cor 3 – typically ‘excited’ – he just can’t stop talking about ‘glory’ and ‘Spirit/spirit’. As I read it, it seemed very relevant to this mini-series.

He’s really excited by the new covenant, but sad that people are locked into the old. Now there’s nothing wrong with the old, he insists – it was glorious and necessary part of God’s Big Plan. The danger is that we can be so focused on the old (letter) that we miss out on the new (spirit).

And “the letter kills”!

The ‘letter’ is not unimportant but if it is overemphasised, the greater glory of life, love, spirit, freedom (read the passage, it’s bubbling!) gets overshadowed, veiled.

Now, what are Christians known for? Yes, OK, people do see that Christians have been – and still are – involved in some wonderful caring work, but how do we come across, chiefly?

We feel it’s our job to tell “them” what’s right and what’s wrong – we’re being “salt and light”.

But we even do it to ourselves! OK, we no longer hate and murder each other over the right interpretation of Paul’s teaching, but we can become obsessed by it (yes, I admit it, I’m obsessional too!), and so we read our ideas *into* our Bibles.

And because we *translate* our Bibles on the basis of our *interpretation* of the Bible, those of us with no knowledge of Greek and Hebrew are stuck with believing what we are told to believe.

The book I referred to yesterday was by a highly respected Christian leader whose sermons have helped countless people over the years, including me. But I think he has read **back** his idea of ‘leadership is male’ **into** Genesis. He believes the principle he reads **from** the relationship of Adam and Eve is that Adam’s sin was that failed to lead as he should, and “Eve, as typical woman, was more likely to be misled and therefore more likely to mislead” and so she misled Adam (OK, that was written 33 years ago).

Similarly, we need to be *very* careful in our “reading” of Scripture on the LGBT issue. Have church leaders read their interpretation **back** into the translation, and also, are we taking sufficient account of the cultural influences in the OT days and on Paul (and Peter)?

So let us pray, be humble, and be gentle with one another, especially where we disagree.

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