

## ***280 Why don't they believe? (Or, what is it they don't believe in?)***

Have your children followed the faith? If not, what should our attitude be to them? What have we been taught? Clearly, if they don't believe, they are going to hell and so we should try to persuade them back, or at least get them to come to church – maybe at Christmas – to 'hear the gospel'.

Let's try a different approach. Let's try to see things from *their* point of view – otherwise we're making the same mistake that I made by trying to persuade some of my friends (some of you!) to change your minds.<sup>[265]</sup>

They are (well, my 'kids' are, at 42 and 44) loving, caring members of their families, and their communities, concerned about global issues, etc, etc. And so what did we give them as children? Well, I think we gave them a series of stumbling blocks to belief, some of which I've discussed over these past few years, some of which I've come to believe are unbiblical, un-Jesus-like.

The most crucial is the 'good news' based on a 'crime and punishment' paradigm<sup>[272]</sup> (sin as wrongdoing) instead of the real Good News of knowing a person – the prodigal Father, the self-sacrificing Jesus, the ever-present Helper. But I've talked about this endlessly as I've journeyed...

I hate being negative, but that's what stumbling blocks are – negative. Here's one example I baulked at in a book I was just given, celebrating the work of an excellent young people's group that we supported for many years. It was in a photo of a youth leader 'giving a sex talk' in the 1990s (when our kids were that age). On his flip chart, in capitals, numbered 1 to 3, were: 'lasciviousness', 'concupiscence' and 'defraudation'. I had to look up the middle word (a posh word for 'lust'), but I have no idea about 'defraudation'. (Maybe you know? But the OED doesn't recognise it as a word.) But why are Christians so obsessed by sex?!

Looking with their eyes, another example is that they see us as saying that people born in other cultures/religions are going to hell because they haven't believed in what we believe in.

And I haven't even mentioned the massive stumbling block that their loving, faithful gay friends are 'idolising self-fulfilment through sexual desire', as one local vicar put it. And maybe that's a discussion for another day: 'When does sexual desire become lust?' Does a marriage certificate make the difference? I think you can see the problem.

To me, the underlying problem is our dualism. Our whole thinking is binary: have you got 'it' or not, but relationships are not binary.

Which reminds me of another stumbling block in our family: 'Have you received the gift(s) of the Holy Spirit yet [or not]?' Binary, again. Polarising.

No solutions, sorry. Well, unless... Tim and I do strongly agree on the desperate need for community, from individual level to nations. Maybe 'the kingdom' that Jesus talked about?

Would Jesus recognise the 'gospel' we are preaching? Did Jesus preach exclusion or inclusion?

Paul Bev. 27.05.23