

## 284 *The trouble with Christians...*

(Disclaimer: I'm writing this while sitting facing a mirror; you can probably guess why.)

Sue and I thank God for the lovely people he's given us to share the final stage of our lives with, but we all know that fellow Christians aren't always the easiest to get on with! Why?

Well, try this: think of Christians that you find difficult. What is it about them that you struggle with? For me, it's often their insistence that they are right about things [checks mirror], and also that they have a bee in their bonnets about certain things [checks again].

To be fair to ourselves, God has given us the Bible, and the Bible tells us what's right and wrong, so we have a responsibility to tell others what's right and wrong.

Really? Is that what God wants Christians to do? Certainly, the common caricature of Christians is that they sound off about this and that sin (while often busily sinning, anyway). Unfair? Maybe, but caricatures are usually based on actual observation of a person's character, even if they are somewhat exaggerated.

In our churches, we do have to make some decisions about right and wrong, but is every issue susceptible to that simple binary judgement? [Have you yet detected a buzzing bee?] Is everything either 'right' or 'wrong'? Can some things be more ideal and some less so?

Sure, it's comforting to know exactly what's right and what's wrong – much easier than dealing with, 'Well, it depends on the situation', but I do think Christians tend to err on the side of being too prescriptive, too simplistic.

The Pharisees were constantly probing Jesus with implied or direct questions: 'Is such and such right or wrong?' But Jesus, knowing that real life is more complicated, pointed to a better way.

[Releases the bee...] So what should a gay Christian do? Simple! Gay sex is a sin; you must therefore remain celibate. End of.

Your desire for a lifelong soul partner with whom you can share deeply and form a stable base for yourselves and to serve others is not for you, sorry! And because gay sex is a sin, you'd better avoid getting too close to those of the same sex, lest you fall in love: you know that your love for that person cannot and must not be allowed to flourish. Paul is clear on this whole area in 1 Cor 6; and in v18 he says, 'Flee from sexual immorality.'

The intimate relationships of marriage and the (hopefully) stable base those marriages form are a crucial part of a life-affirming social setup, but while some Christians are called to celibacy, those who are gay have no choice, sorry – that's the rule.

Do you see this as a simple right/wrong issue? Fine, but *if you are mistaken*, you carry a heavy responsibility: you could be causing unnecessary pain for a significant proportion of Christians, and turning people away from Jesus' kingdom by your insistence on your view.