

More feedback

It seems I'm totally obsessed by all this writing; it has **felt** as if I've been driven (by God), but how do I know? Anyway, I'm now working on the basis that if any one of my articles could help any one of you, then God is perfectly capable of prompting that person to read that article, while ignoring the rest.

In the past few days, with a job coming (now arrived!) I thought I would do less because the job has to be finished before Sue and I fly off to Tenerife on 25th for part of her recuperation. But suddenly I'm getting more feedback from readers, so here I am again.

Dogmatism

At my Friday lunchtime prayer meeting (five friends from five churches) I got really heated (as I do these days!), and the word 'dogmatic' was used, in love, warning me of the danger. I emailed them later to the effect:

I'm really sorry that I came over as being dogmatic at lunchtime.

OED says: dogmatic = Inclined to lay down principles as undeniably true.

I definitely don't think I know the right principles; indeed, that's where I'm saying Christians have gone wrong (I've gone wrong!) for so many years. It's not about right and wrong, but rather about individually and together trying to deepen our relationship with God through Jesus, aided by the Holy Spirit. We're all on a journey.

I'm passionate, yes, but I'm trying desperately not to be dogmatic.

My sect

One feedback was from my cousin, who asked about the sect I have talked about. Now aged 70+, he came to faith at age 48, knowing absolutely nothing about the Bible beforehand. (I must talk to him about *les vingt* [see article 64], to see if he can advise.)

'Harry' was someone I knew from my work with Acorn computers; I invited him on an Alpha course in the mid 1990s; he started attending our church. Unknown to me, he had spiritual gifts he'd had since a child. A few years on, he started a Bible study, which I attended. He had strong prophetic and healing gifts which I experienced first-hand; they were very real. But I foolishly thought that the gifting validated his teaching; and, over the years, that teaching drifted and drifted, such that I didn't notice (a.k.a. the frog in hot water syndrome).

Sue knew it was wrong, but graciously (and sensibly) didn't try to tell me I was wrong; instead, she developed her own spirituality in a more contemplative direction (which I have now followed – another factor in my deepening relationship with God).

Thankfully, in 2011, I suddenly realised that I had become totally obsessed by being right – but that the effect of this 'right' belief was a totally wrong attitude to other people. They had become, in my mind, enemies of the true way, who were trying to draw me away from the true path to salvation – and I lived in fear of losing that salvation. Quelle idiot!

But God graciously used that time to teach me about a number of things. One was the importance of the Gospels, especially the sermon on the mount, especially the beatitudes [see 64!], which Harry said should be seen as the 'be-attitudes', not the 'do-attitudes'. And the other obvious thing

was that being right is **not** what counts, though I only learnt that in retrospect. When I escaped the group – leapt out of the boiling water – I was left with, ‘Well, what **do** I believe? Does God exist, even? Is the whole of the Christian faith just made-up wishful thinking?’

Over the following five years, I got back my **beliefs**, but it still wasn’t a **relationship**. Thanks to Sue, I discovered silence as a wonderful way to develop my relationship with God, but it wasn’t until I discovered the Trinity – that God **IS** relationship – that things really took off.

Chosen or called?

In yesterday’s prayer meeting, as we discussed what to pray about, we mentioned the elder sister of one of the group (who herself is even older than me), who has been strongly resistant to her sister’s Christian urgings. I’m not sure if it was in relation to that, but later another member of the group started saying that ‘not everyone is called’, but as he was speaking I just sat shaking my head. No, no, no! I can’t accept that, sorry.

I haven’t had time to look up the scriptures (I’ve got a book to edit!), but are we really saying that the father of the prodigal son is the same God who actively **decides** that someone is not going to be saved. [That’s probably the point at which I went into dogmatic mode!] I’ve already rehearsed what I have come to believe, that God wants everyone to be saved. That this is God’s **will**. But God’s will is **not** always done. God voluntarily limits his power, out of love for us. He has chosen not to **force** us to follow his way – it wouldn’t be love if he did. So, in that sense God is **not** all-powerful.

In any case, if God is **totally** all-powerful but God doesn’t **do** anything when the innocent suffer, he’s a heartless monster, surely?! No, it’s because, out of love, God limits his power and...

...sorry, I have to stop. This is a huge issue, but an important one if we’re to reach *les vingt* and our F&F [see 50]. The thing is that many of them say (perfectly reasonably) ‘How can a God of love allow suffering?!’ And this is another factor that prevents them from coming to faith.

For their sakes, we need to face these issues; we have a responsibility to them, don’t we?!

Can I encourage you to read Flood’s ‘Healing the Gospel’ if you want to take this seriously – I have a spare copy – and on the suffering thing, Jersak’s ‘A More Christ-like God’.

Father, I desperately want to reach those who don’t yet know you!

Lord, may thy will be done!

Paul Bev. 6.4.19