

## 96 *Knowing right from wrong*

### *Disclaimer*

Despite having read quite a few theological books in the past couple of years I'm certainly not a theologian, so I'm not trying to tell anyone what to think. Indeed, as I've said repeatedly, thinking that 'I am right' has been a 'bad thing' in my life.

Rather, I'm openly expressing my thoughts about theological matters because (a) I find it helps me to think things through and (b) some of you have found occasional articles helpful.

So I'm bold today to mention something that has been 'bubbling under', and on which my views have changed, though for some it may be a step too far.

### *The meat of the matter*

While I've been disparaging about insisting on being right, we do have to make decisions for ourselves and, if things are not to descend into anarchy, make decisions for society. So how do we decide what's right and what's wrong?

Rather, how do we decide on the different types of right and wrong? (At this point, I wish I were a theologian because presumably they will be able to articulate this much better than I can.)

As I planned this article, I was hoping to say that when we ask whether something is wrong, we know that some things are fundamentally wrong – wrong in principle – and some things are more 'ethically wrong', and that the answer to the question, 'Is this wrong?' may change over time, for whatever reason. But as I began writing, I realised it was more complicated than that.

Clearly, historically, our right/wrong answer on some issues has changed: what about slavery? or capital punishment? or corporal punishment? Society's views *have* changed on the first and *are* changing on the other two.

The question in my mind as I tried to frame this article from a Christian (Bible-based) perspective was: are some decisions 'just ethical', and are some things '*spiritually* fundamental'? I tried to apply this idea to the three issues above, and also to physically chastising children, Sunday observance, divorce, contraception ... and one other biggy that I'll come to in a minute.

This article is aimed at people who, like me, want to base their life-decisions on what God thinks, and who therefore look to the Bible for guidance. And you have to admit that 'our' views have changed over the years, decades, centuries. Why have they changed? Well, society has changed, and our knowledge about human beings has increased. Our growing understanding of how humans 'work' has, in cases such as physically chastising children, made us change our views.

So my question is how open am I, how open are we, to changing our minds in the light of increasing human understanding? I ask that because the main issue I have in mind is: Are we willing to think again about homosexual partnerships? (I've chosen that term carefully as I'm thinking about loving, committed, exclusive relationships.)

Some of you reading this may feel that 'homosexual activity' is simply a sin – non-negotiable. And you have come to that conclusion because you have thought through the Bible's teaching. So you would presumably work on the principle of 'love the sinner but hate the sin'. But I have to admit that I had, until recently, never even looked at the Bible's teaching: I just 'knew it was wrong' – obviously! But I started to change my mind when I looked at Romans 1: 26, 27 *in context*, and thought 'I wonder what other New Testament teaching there is on this?'

If you're willing to be challenged and to consider the biblical teaching and the scientific evidence then you could try Andrew Davison's book 'Amazing love'.

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