

364 Knowledge puffs you up, love builds you up!

Looking at 1 Corinthians, after being arrested by Paul's teaching on immorality, 5–7,^[361-3] I was hit by 8:1, quoted above from the KNT, which made me feel distinctly queasy. What am I doing? For years, I've been building up 'knowledge' and then encouraging people to change their minds about some of the things we've been taught in our churches over the years (centuries?). Am I not 'puffed up'?

Certainly, I have expressed some very strong views in my articles (and sometimes even disagreed with myself!), but I do still feel very cross that, right from the start, in my student CU, I was encouraged to feel that we were definitely 'right', and we had to stand up for what 'the Bible teaches'. One particular target then was the SCM (Student Christian Movement) who had 'gone liberal' and were 'reneging on the gospel' as we then defined it (penal substitution). Anyway, back to 1 Corinthians...

So I read through the whole thing, copiously applying a 6B pencil to Tom Wright's Kingdom New Testament, and I got the impression of a church trying to live in a highly sexualised society, and that also had a lot of issues over division – sounds familiar! Paul sets up front and central that 'King Jesus is Lord', and he had a lot to say about *building up*, our being a *temple* and a *body*, and helping us to know what to do when we disagree about things.

He says that what counters that *building up* is 'knowledge' – and Tom even puts the word in quotes sometimes: you think you've got 'knowledge'! In ch 4, I hear Paul speaking out strongly against people like me-as-a-student (and in following years): I felt it was my job to correct other people's wrong theology. Ouch!

When we lived in Kenya, there were many churches that had split over some theological issue. But I can't say it's 'them over there': I have friends here in Norwich whose church split when the leadership felt that God was leading them to invite a woman to be their new pastor. Indeed, when I was churchwarden, my CofE church decided not to invite women to apply for the job of vicar – we decided it would be too divisive.

So how do we apply Paul's Corinthian principles to the issue of gay marriage? How do we *build up* our churches and let *love* unite us? That's actually very difficult, which is why I'm persisting. It depends how strongly you feel about gay sex. If you feel it's clearly immoral, and yet people are persisting and setting a bad example, then maybe you should apply ch 5? You stop them taking leadership roles, but should you expel them from the church?

Of course, the Bible is very clear on God's ideal intimate, supportive, loving, nurturing relationship – a male plus a female – but how do we *love* and *build up* people who are gay? No easy answers, I fear!

Paul Bev. 7.1.24