

417 One man's dogmatism...

Here's the conundrum: one man's dogmatism is another man's maintaining biblical principles, so how do we know which is which? *From the Bible, of course.* Ha! I wish it were that simple!

You don't need to be an expert historian to see how much damage has been done over the centuries by churches unwilling to check out their interpretation of the Bible. I can certainly see that I was dogmatic, and it took a total loss of faith for me to realise. I could say that I had simply worked out from the Bible what was right, and stuck to that, but how much did I *actually* work out, and how much did I just accept what I was taught (dogma)?

Today, some of my friends think I'm too liberal – leaving too much to the individual's conscience before God, but what I want to look at is, as churches, how do we actually **change our minds**? Not the actual decision-making systems – councils, synods, elders' meetings – but how do we change our own intransigent hearts? God really has a difficult job to do!

When thinking about this, I looked at the churches' attitudes to divorce, especially the remarriage of divorcees. The Baptists have long said that churches should decide on a case-by-case basis, but it was only in 2002 that the Church of England adopted that policy, and the Catholic Church still insists that you can only ever be married to *one* person, so civil marriages of divorcees are invalid. I guess that means that remarried divorcees are 'living in sin'? This isn't to criticise any church; I'm just asking what does it take to make us 'change our minds'?

Should our biblical interpretation be pure, cold logic, or do we need to pay attention to the pain caused by our maintaining 'biblical principles'? And as regular readers will know, I apply this especially to the pain experienced by my brothers and sisters in the Lord who are gay.

The logic of the main verses we apply to them is very clear, yet each is in the context of 'obvious' sins: murder, robbery, gay sex, orgies etc. One says that *therefore* such people 'will not inherit the kingdom', ^{1 Cor 6:9,10} and another refers to gay sex as 'shameless lust'. ^{Rom 1:26,27}

But Paul's purpose^[416] was not to teach *about* gay sex; rather it was mentioned as something that was 'obviously wrong'. The traditional teaching takes those and other passages to *prove* that *any* gay sex is sinful, so if my gay friends feel they want a lifelong, supportive, intimate relationship, they can't, sorry! And if they are *already* in such a relationship when they come to faith, how should we advise them?!

I'm being stark, but when we see married divorcees in church do we see them as 'living in sin'? And if Paul saw a loving gay couple, would he see 'loathsome lust' and warn them about not inheriting the kingdom? The logic of our traditional interpretation says he should.

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David Gushee's 'Changing our minds' (2015) might help.