

438 Rules rule, OK?!

As my writing quest continues and I try to understand why today's church seems to be failing, I'm getting more radical – going back to the roots of the church.^[437]

Jesus taught that God's way is for us to live by love for God and love for neighbour, selflessly putting God first and selflessly putting our neighbour first – even loving our enemy. His focus was on relationships, not on rules.

Fine, but we need to organise our churches, so we need leaders and rules, right? We can't just have every individual doing what *they* think is right, surely?

It would be great if our churches could be run just on the basis of loving relationships, but that's very difficult – it's too vague. It's much easier to run churches if we err on the side of being rule-based (religiously 'right-wing') and less on the side of allowing people to read the Scriptures and make up their own minds (religiously 'liberal').

But what did Jesus fight against through his ministry years? Religion based on rules.

I'm talking about *religiously* right-wing, but can you imagine how awful it would be if a regime were *politically* right-wing, too? I'm thinking of the Roman empire, when it adopted Christianity, but a contemporary example might spring to mind!

I mentioned earlier^[437] that when the church became right-wing *and* corrupt; it needed some Reformation. But when it then became the Established Church, maybe people needed to be Non-Conformist? Then when even they had become too rule-bound, people set up house churches... and so it goes on. Today, there are estimated to be about 45,000 denominations worldwide!

Churches do need to be organised, yes, but this reminds me of when God's people started complaining to God because all the warring tribes around them had kings, and they didn't. God tried to tell them to trust him, live by faith, and live by his principles of love, but they felt insecure and really, really wanted a king. God knew it would all in tears – and it did!

I know this is all very vague and theoretical, but while we all want to get on and spread the love of God together, maybe we should do a right-wing check?

Does the Bible (as *you* interpret it, remember) lay down clear and specific rules about any or all of the following, and should our churches therefore insist on them?

PTO!

Should divorced people ever be allowed to remarry in church?

Should women be allowed to lead churches?

Exactly *how* does Jesus save us – penal substitution?

When, where and how do people receive the Holy Spirit?

The Lord's supper/eucharist/communion/mass: who (at what age), how and when should we celebrate it? (multifarious issues there)

Who should (not) enter lifelong, committed, intimate relationships? (currently big)

These are some of the issues that have sparked those 45,000 denominations and, yes, we should think out what the Bible teaches, but remember again that Jesus' ministry was a constant battle against right-wing religion.

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