

Editing Scripture?

We all do it. Yes, we all choose to ignore some parts of the Bible, while loving others. Even the churches (eg. their official lectionaries) do. (It's the nature of the human mind: the moment we open any document, whatever it is, our reason comes to work, we sift, interpret, select).

To be fair, the emerging Christian Church has always had an ambiguous attitude to what we call the Old Testament, and the Judaic Law. Jesus spoke of not a jot or tittle of the Law disappearing, and yet the Church from the beginning rejected the entire rituals and practices of what we know as *kosher*, 'unclean' meat etc., and also such requirements as circumcision.

Today, few would practice, or in any way defend, the concept of stoning people who commit certain acts (as is indeed is, of course, true of modern Judaism). And – let's be honest – other parts (not only of the Old Testament) are rather boring, particularly if read in church (though I have heard it) such as extensive genealogies (yes, we know that they're there for a good reason); and ... I suspect I am the only person, in church or synagogue, who finds King David a bit of a bore (all the defences of the fallible, imperfect, yet truly faithful, nature of this man don't help me).

But a further step is the ethical objection (as found in the case of the requirement to do lots of stoning); yes, those Old Testament passages in which thousands of not-very-evil people, plus children, get struck down, do take some stomaching (and there are some summary deaths in the New Testament also which can seem a bit hard).

The question is: how far do you go in editing out – even in your reading – those bits that seem ethically suspect? A few years ago I remember someone publishing a version of the New Testament that had all the bits he disapproved of edited out (including, I seem to remember, the entire *Book of Revelation*). How long before we are making cuts in order to make the Christian faith conform to what we think it should be, or should not be? How long before we are simply committing *Oughtism*, or producing a version of Christianity that is merely culture-compliant, the kind of thing which the Establishment and its media outlets might approve of? We all avoid those bits that require stoning, and discard them, but ... this is a slippery slope. Where do you (at least, presently) stand on that shifting ground?

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