

Shouldn't You Be Out There Stoning Someone? No Excuses, Now!

It's often argued that if orthodox Christians are not prepared to follow the letter of Old Testament punishment requirements, they are not entitled to require adherence to God's injunctions as to what people can or cannot do. Indeed, at times, "liberals" (which often means revisionists) seem to be more than a little preoccupied with stoning.

One argument is that if orthodox Christians decide to ignore the Bible's injunctions regarding punishments, while keeping prohibitions (particularly, those relating to sexual morality), then they are adopting a "pick and choose" attitude to the Bible, which they elsewhere condemn when others do it (indeed). But the Christian Church, from early times, decided that various requirements in ancient Judaic law, belief and practice were not required for the salvation promised by Jesus Christ (but others, such as legal injunctions as to morality, were). Thus, abandoning Old Testament punishment forms, but keeping legal injunctions, is not the same as adopting a "pick and choose" approach that is *based essentially upon what "modern society" considers acceptable* (ie. accepting the primacy of this-worldly values), which is an accusation that can often with validity be made against revisionists. Rather, it is fidelity to authentic Christian traditions.

Revising previous levels of punishment does not require decriminalisation: In past centuries, we are often told, men could be hung for stealing sheep. The fact that punishment for sheep stealing was changed to prison, fines, and – no doubt, now – probation, did not require us to declare all sheep removal, and other thefts, acceptable and no longer-criminal. Attitudes to appropriate punishment are unconnected with rightness and wrongness.

July 2012