

A PROBLEM SHARED

WE DISAGREE OVER SALVATION



(Left to right: Steve, Jo, Paul)

The national body of a para-church ministry we work with has publicly rejected the traditional theology of judgement. They now say that all people, irrespective of their faith position, will go to heaven. The project and their staff team do incredible work and add a huge amount to our church's ministry. Should we continue to work with them when they now represent a diversion from what we believe?

SC: Begin by finding out more about what is going on in this organisation. Is this their corporate view, or is it just one leader within it who holds this line? Are the people who work in your church required to share that belief? You also need to consider its in the context of your church. How influential is it?

One of the scriptural metaphors used for leadership is the metaphor of the shepherd. Shepherding is about care, guidance and protection. There is also an exhortation for shepherds to guard the church against false teachings.

When it comes to talking about issues of doctrine, there are minor and major issues. For me, this is a major issue. If I understand your question rightly – that this group say that all people, irrespective of their faith positions, are going to enjoy the age to come – that doesn't seem to be part of the historic orthodox interpretation of scripture. Therefore as a leader and a shepherd, if I were in your position I would want to take some action to protect the church. That might involve a difficult conversation, possibly involving asking the group to leave

ministering in the context of your church. If you do this, it will take careful handling and processing.

PAW: You make the interesting presupposition that this is some sort of heresy. While I accept it's not a widely held view of judgement, it is one view. If you see God through the lens of omnipotent love, it's a valid perspective. We need to be a little bit careful, because if we don't allow ourselves enough scope to reflect, express and extend our faith, it is worrying. One person's heresy is another person's doctrine. Religious people tend to like conformity, but God does inclusion, and the problem with inclusion is that we might not like the answers.

Every church needs to figure out what it believes as its fundamental truths. I worry that as Christians we tend to exclude an awful lot of people that God will include. If we look at the New Testament, one of the chilling things we see is that Jesus seems to be very comfortable around people that religious people feel uncomfortable around. If this group was in my church, I would say that from a doctrinal point of view we would need to align our teaching – but how this works itself out in what we're doing in the community, there is much more latitude on that.

JC: As a leader, my job is to create safe places for conversations around doctrines to be held in a way that actually honours everybody's stories, everybody's belief systems, and enables people to leave the room still friends at the end



ONE PERSON'S HERESY IS ANOTHER PERSON'S DOCTRINE

of it. I have to be willing to change my mind; I have to be willing to be wrong.

Part of following Jesus is about recognising that the kingdom of heaven is present here and now. Our end goal isn't a future heavenly position; part of the Church's role is to usher in the kingdom of heaven in the present. If the people in this group are doing a huge amount to build the church's ministry, they are helping people to notice the kingdom of heaven now. If they are helping people to glimpse grace, then I would still want to work with them.

STEVE CLIFFORD is general director of the Evangelical Alliance

JO COX is the learning and development coordinator for the London region of the Methodist Church

PAUL ANDERSON-WALSH is the senior elder of the International Gospel Church in North-West London and founder of The Grace Project

This page tackles pastoral and relationship issues. If you have something you would like our panel to discuss, email lucinda.vanderhart@premier.org.uk