

The Doxy Problems  
February 14, 2017

In a recent class, we had a discussion about orthodoxy and orthopraxis. I suspect that these words would be foreign to most people sitting in the pews of our churches and yet both pose very real problems and real issues for us today.

First, let us identify the terms. Orthodox means, “conforming to established doctrine especially in religion, i.e., *orthodox* principles, the *orthodox* interpretation.”<sup>1</sup> The emphasis of orthodoxy is upon believing the right things. The orthodox view of belief is that which conforms to that which is traditional or established.

Orthopraxis, on the other hand, is “correctness or orthodoxy of action or practice.”<sup>2</sup> Rather than focusing on belief, orthopraxis centers our attention on doing the right thing. The emphasis on action takes precedence over right belief or thoughts.

Here is the question that I think modern Christianity must ask: Is it more important to believe the right things or do the right things?

Can a person believe all the right things about Jesus, salvation, God, eternity and do the wrong things? Or...

Can a person act rightly in their lives and yet have their beliefs flawed and not fully conforming to traditional or “orthodox” theology?

How do we respond to these types of questions? I know in my church experience (and in the cultural approach of “evangelical Christianity”) we have often emphasized right belief over right action. While most churches and Christians would argue that it is important to make our actions conform to Christ, I think many would say that the problem is not with behavior but with thinking. If we only change our thoughts, our actions will follow suit.

Thus the emphasis in many churches on discipleship, bible study, devotional times and the like. The work of spiritual disciplines is often in the line of shaping the way we think so that we believe the right things – so that we are orthodox. If there is a deficiency in our action (we do things that we shouldn’t do), we believe that grace is sufficient to cover a multitude of sins.

As a result of this emphasis on believing the right thing, I have seen some very judgmental activities and attitudes toward those whose beliefs have been deemed unorthodox (or even slightly off center from our conservative theological statements). These same individuals who are intolerant of beliefs that are less than traditional will tolerate the presence of gossip, anger, dissension, disputing, lying, adultery, promiscuity and a multitude of other social violations.

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<sup>1</sup> "Orthodox." Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed February 14, 2017. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/orthodox>.

<sup>2</sup> “Orthopraxy”. Dictionary.com *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/orthopraxy> (accessed: February 14, 2017).

This judgmentalism is because, for these individuals, it is more important to believe the right things than it is to do the right things.

And yet...I have known numerous people who are “good people,” who respond to the people in their lives in the right way and who do the right thing when temptations arise. These “good people” believe in Jesus, but their belief is not quite orthodox. They think differently about creation or the end of times. They may have different views of the nature of sin in the human experience, or they have a different understanding of the church and the Christian’s role in the world.

They have an orthopraxy but not necessarily orthodoxy. Are they less Christian than those who believe the right things, yet do the wrong things. I really don’t think so.

The reality of the human condition is that we just don’t get anything all correct – sometimes our thinking is deficient; something our actions are not quite up to snuff. Sometimes we do the wrong thing; sometimes we think the wrong way.

Occasionally, we get things right and sometimes even think rightly about theological issues. But if you’re like me, you get things wrong just as often (either in thinking or doing). But I rest in the promise of the Scripture that says God’s grace is sufficient for me (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Can someone believe something different than me about faith, Jesus, resurrection, creation or any other theological issue? Yes...does that make them wrong? Not necessarily; I could be just as wrong. It may make them less orthodox than I but where there is a lack of orthodox (right belief) I am convinced that grace covers the “sinful” or wrong thinking.

Can someone act different than me, even doing wrong things while thinking the right things? Sure...because I believe grace covers sinful behaviors as well.

So instead of condemning someone who claims Christianity but thinks differently than you...celebrate the grace that makes us for the deficiencies in our orthodoxy.

Instead of ridiculing another who sins in practice differently than you do...celebrate the grace that forgives our action and the shortcomings in our orthopraxy?

For me, I want to believe the right things, and I want to do the right things. But I also know that I don’t always measure up to that standard – nor do I think others do so all the time.

I want grace to cover my doxy problems – and I am so glad it does! Aren’t you?