

220 *Ethics, attitudes and people*

When we think about sexual ethics, we all want to focus on what the Bible actually teaches, but I want to avoid relying on what we've always been taught – I want to go back to first principles. But we have to remember that this isn't just a theoretical exercise. The putative Anna and Brian I mentioned last time,^[219] both have an inherent gay orientation, and our loving attitude to them is of huge importance, as it would have been to Jesus (it still is!) if he were here now (he is!).

(If you want to argue against the idea of gay orientation, you'll have to argue with the medical profession and with the Christian organisations here and in the States that tried to 'heal' gay men but that have disbanded, the leaders admitting that they largely failed to do so.)

I want us to think how we form a gay sexual ethic but, to remind us to tread warily, let's recall how the church has slowly and painfully changed its views on divorce and remarriage. People's dogmatic views have, over the years, caused great pain – and we're talking about real people in real situations.

So how do we form our ethic on gay sex? Unlike with divorce, we don't have any direct teaching from Jesus, but we do still have to remember that as Jesus' (and Paul's) teaching on divorce was directed towards a specific culture, so we need here to first see how any teaching applied to *their* situation, and then try to tease out some principles to apply *now*.

So when the Bible was formed, in what contexts did men have sex with other men? With thanks to a sermon at one of our readers' churches last Sunday, I gather there were four areas:

- 1) Temple prostitution
- 2) Pederasty (sex with boys)
- 3) Sex with slaves
- 4) Gang rape in the context of warfare

Given that sort of cultural experience, it's hardly surprising that we get the words 'abomination' and 'perversion' in our English translations. But there was no context of male sex within a loving, committed relationship – that was totally absent from their experience.

So when Brian brings his gay partner to our Alpha course, we need to think very, very hard about our attitude! If we are even **thinking** 'abomination' or 'perversion', that is potentially very damaging to our relationship.

Some within the church – myself included – are no longer willing to say that fellow believers in a gay relationship are, in any sense, actively sinning; they have interpreted the biblical ethics on sex within a committed gay relationship differently from 'what we've always been taught', and it's definitely not mine to judge them.

There's a lot I haven't considered here, especially about how we apply the creation principles of one man and one woman, etc. (David Gushee does so in his *Changing our mind*), but for me a simple, 'The Bible teaches that it's wrong, full stop', is no longer acceptable.

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