

221 *The plain teaching of Scripture?!*

If you hold the traditionalist line that gay sex is a perversion, what would you do if Brian and his partner^[219] came on your Alpha course? It's OK to say, "Hate the sin, but love the sinner", but how would you counsel Brian and Ian if they came to faith? According to you, they are continuing in their perverse behaviour. Would you allow them to be part of your church and indeed to take communion because, according to you, they are knowingly carrying on sinning?

Personally, I have come to the conclusion – for good biblical reasons, and following the respected ethicist, David Gushee in *Changing our mind* – that, within a committed relationship, gay sex should not be seen as a sin. While I totally accept that other Christians will have a different view, I would argue that Gushee's view is a perfectly legitimate interpretation of Scripture, and that neither of us should judge the other person's view.

And this is not just a theoretical discussion; I am praying that Brians and Ians will feel welcome in our churches and will indeed come to faith. As more and more Christians are changing their minds on this issue, I believe that this will happen in our lifetimes, making gay people feel welcome and fully accepted into our lives.

Now let's consider an example where the church has already changed its mind, where we have changed how we interpret and apply Scripture – not just any Scripture, but Jesus' own words:

*It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, **except for marital unfaithfulness**, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.*^{Matt 5:31,32} (my bold)

That teaching is pretty plain, isn't it? Now there are people in our congregations who were divorced due to a relationship breakdown **without any unfaithfulness**, and if you take a purely literal reading of this text, if they remarry, they are committing adultery! But some (many?) of us have changed our mind: we now take a more realistic, compassionate interpretation, because society has changed and because we have taken into account Jesus' wider teaching about (a) loving relationships, and (b) not being judgemental.

Now when Paul lists murder, envy, deceit, God-haters, ruthless, etc.,^{Rom 1:29-31} I simply can't see Brian and Ian's loving (physical) relationship as 'perversion' and therefore make it an item in that list. In any case, Paul's purpose in those verses was to then say, 'Therefore, don't you **dare** judge others – you do the same things!' ^{Rom 2:1 (free paraphrase)}

I hope and pray that more and more Christians will be able to put aside their own personal feelings about gay sex, look more carefully at the teaching of the Bible as a whole, and adopt a more compassionate attitude to our brothers and sisters who have a different sexual orientation.

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