

## 230 *What is sin, anyway?*

What we have been ‘discussing’ (a bit of a one-sided discussion?) is the ethics of gay sex. What is your interpretation of the Bible’s teaching? At the end of my previous article I offered four stances that a Bible-believing Christian might take.<sup>[229]</sup>

In the conversation I referred to, one person said that their church welcomes gay people, but those in an active gay relationship aren’t allowed ‘to take an up-front role’. So, they are clearly saying that being actively gay is knowingly sinning – hence their rule (I wonder how they enforce it).

Another view, which two people have expressed to me recently, is that if we back down on gay sex being a sin, where will it lead? In what other area will we allow our views to be affected by the world? Indeed, in my lifetime, some churches (not all) have changed their interpretation on women in leadership,<sup>[153,154]</sup> and on divorce and remarriage.<sup>[221,224]</sup> Where will it all end?! (Excuse me, but should fear affect our biblical interpretation?)

David Gushee (an acknowledged expert in Christian ethics) says that he has changed his view, and he sets out very carefully, quoting Greek and Hebrew, *why* he has changed. But *first* he makes clear that what matters far more is our attitude to those who hold a different view from our own – and when he went public he experienced the negative of that in full force!

One of the passages quoted to argue that gay sex is a sin is Romans 1<sup>26,27</sup>, but the main thrust of Romans 1 and 2 (or am I wrong? please check me out) is to say: Look at all the terrible sins ‘they’ commit! And then, having got his readers saying, ‘Yes, yes, terrible, isn’t it?!’, he slams into them with, ‘Therefore [which I was always taught was an important biblical word] don’t you dare judge other people, since you do the same things!’<sup>[2:1-4]</sup>

So I think Paul would say that what really matters is not the ethics of gay sex; rather, it’s our attitude to those who hold a different view.

To return to my title, what is sin anyway? To anyone *outside* the church it’s ‘doing naughty things’ or rather, ‘doing things that the church says is naughty’. And why do they think that? Maybe it’s because that’s what we *inside* the church tend to concentrate on?

But would Paul agree with that definition? I think not – and neither would Jesus, judging by his ‘discussions’ with the Pharisees. Primarily, sin is wrong attitudes of the heart – and pretty high up on Paul’s list and on Jesus’ list is ‘judging others’.

When Paul was discussing the ethics of eating food offered to idols,<sup>[1 Cor 8]</sup> his point wasn’t, ‘Is it a sin or not?’ but ‘How does my attitude and what I do affect other people in their faith?’

So how does what I think and say and do affect the lives of people whose interpretation of the Bible differs from mine?

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