

231 Words are powerful and potentially harmful

In my person-to-person discussion of the ethics of gay sex the other day,^[229] I said something like, ‘If you say that gay sex is evil...’ and one friend replied, ‘That’s your word, not mine.’ Sorry, that was thoughtless of me!

Words are important because they are powerful and potentially harmful.

In an email discussion, another friend referred to ‘the plain meaning of Scripture on sexual behaviour.’ So if the Bible has a set of words about something, and those words taken on their own have a ‘plain meaning’, do we just accept them at face value?

What about, ‘if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him’?^{1 Cor 11:14} But I guess we would say that (1) it was a cultural thing and (2) it’s a one-off – there’s no other verse to support that view.

And on gay sex? (my italic) ‘Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their *perversion*.’^{Rom 1:27} and ‘You shall not sleep with a male as one sleeps with a female; it is an *abomination*.’^{Lev 18:22} Those words sounds pretty plain to me.

But one problem that we all face is that it’s very difficult to be objective in our (translation and) interpretation of Scripture when we’ve always been taught that gay sex is sinful or evil – or is that *not* what you’ve always been taught and believed?

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So you share the gospel with Adam and Brian, a married couple, and they come to faith. And then maybe they (and also Clare and Diane, another couple) grow in their faith and are full of love for God in their new-found faith. Great! They are outgoing and would be great welcomers, or they are good musicians and offer to help lead worship. What is your church’s policy on this, and what do we say to them?^[230]

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If your fear is that the church is giving in to the pressure of the world, and that gay sex is indeed sinful,^[229] then I guess that someone will need to make this clear to your friends A, B, C and D. And there could be serious the pastoral implications of getting them to follow your church’s teaching. Would you insist that the couples should split? or become celibate? Difficult, but if that’s your church’s stance, maybe you need to consider it?

(If your church policy is that being gay is something that requires healing,^[229] then I guess this discussion about A, B, C and D is a bit academic.)

It’s not easy, but I believe that this is a very important area to think through, because it’s people for whom Jesus died that we’re talking about. Our attitudes to them, and what we say to them, could be crucial in their finding the life and love of Jesus.

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