

241 *False guilt can be a killer*

A bereaved friend confessed to us that she felt guilty because sometimes she just can't get herself out of bed; someone comes to the door and she pretends she's not at home. 'People will think I'm a lazy so-and-so'. We tried to assure her that her feelings of guilt didn't come from God.

In the middle of the night, as I was drafting this article, Sue came downstairs in tears: thinking about her condition and her situation, she couldn't sleep: I reckoned she was feeling false guilt.

But if the Bible teaches **clearly** about something, and we go against that, then our feelings of guilt will be the Spirit's motivation to put it right: to do the right thing or to not do the wrong.

So clearly we need to know what the Bible **clearly** teaches.^[242]

I think we can agree that the Bible clearly teaches that slavery is very wrong even though the Bible has no teaching against slavery; indeed, it tells us how to live *with* slavery. But we can apply general biblical principles: it's demeaning, it's degrading, it's manipulative, it's wrong.

Now sexuality can be a powerful force for good – binding couples together in lifelong union – but if misused, it can be a force for evil, so we clearly need to know what the Bible teaches.^[242]

I think we can agree that pornography is wrong: it's demeaning, it's manipulative, it's degrading. The Bible teaching is clear, even though it doesn't refer to pornography specifically.

As I mentioned,^[239] the Bible is clear that any non-consensual sexual activity is abuse, especially regarding children. People who have suffered such abuse often have feelings of false guilt, which can lead some to self-abuse and some even to abusing others – a destructive chain of abuse. (I've recently discovered this in my own family – amazing that I've turned out even vaguely normal!)

I think we'd agree, because of the Bible's high view of physical intimacy within marriage, that casual sex – even if consensual – is really not God's best.^[239]

Should I mention masturbation? Maybe not, but this article is about guilt and there's certainly been plenty of guilt over this issue. Enough said.

To get to the point at issue: same-sex relations. Even if there were no specific biblical evidence, anything non-consensual is clearly wrong, but what about sexual intimacy within a faithful same-sex relationship? Unfortunately, the Bible doesn't draw that distinction.

What then should we say to same-sex-attracted people? Should they feel guilty for their feelings? And what about faithful same-sex couples? Should they feel guilty for their actions?

Is your church sure enough of what the Bible teaches to insist that gay sex, even within a faithful relationship, is a sin? Should they rightly feel guilty and not take positions of leadership?

Personally, I'm not confident enough in my knowledge of biblical ethics to risk laying false guilt on my brothers and sisters who are same-sex attracted.