

244 *The pastoral implications*

As you can imagine, given my deluge of articles about same-sex attraction, I've spent many, many hours thinking and reading and talking about it. Four of the people I've talked to have said, effectively, that they don't see why I'm bothering because there's nothing to discuss. The Bible's teaching is clear: same-sex relations are immoral.

So why *do* I bother? Because it's people's spiritual lives that are at stake!

And if you're not aware of the massive amount of pain that the church's attitude to gay people has caused, I would urge you to read at least the first two chapters of David Gushee's book, *Changing our Mind*.

But I received a helpful challenge from a friend yesterday, relating to the table I used for focusing on the one single area of sexual relations that many Christians are questioning – there's no challenge to the sanctity of marriage or questioning of the immorality of the other categories.^[243]

	male–female	same-sex
with children	×	×
non-consensual	×	×
casual/unfaithful	×	×
within a faithful relationship	✓	?

Now, I used the term 'faithful relationship' to avoid using 'marriage' for box 8, and my friend's response was that there should be ten boxes, all with crosses except one. I assume:

	male–female	same-sex
with children	×	×
non-consensual	×	×
casual/unfaithful	×	×
within a faithful (unmarried) relationship	×	×
within marriage	✓	×

This friend's church is the one I mentioned that welcomes gay people but won't allow them to take any up-front roles if they are actively gay. So my thoughts extended from the putative Adam and Brian, Clare and Diane^[231] to include Emily and Frank who are in a long-term relationship but not actually married.

The clear teaching of the Bible on sexual immorality? (I trust I'm not quoting out of context.)

Eph 5:3 But among you [in the church] there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

1 Cor 5:11 But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone [in the church] who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

I'm not trying to tell anyone *what* to think, but simply *to* think – very carefully – and to consider the pastoral implications. If you are adamant about the traditional historic interpretation of those few verses that mention gay relations, you need to work out how you will explain this to individuals who are thus being sexually immoral.

And maybe also decide how to explain your stance when, at your next Christianity Explored or Alpha, someone asks why you exclude gay people from your church – because people outside the church see this stance as pure prejudice and discrimination.

There are no easy answers on either side, but we can't just ignore this; it won't go away.

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