

245 *What most hinders the good news?*

If you feel that the traditional interpretation of the Bible texts on gay sex is unarguable, that's fine: we'll just have to agree to disagree and continue to work together for God's kingdom.

Or maybe you're nervous of the strength of that interpretation and wonder if it should be left more as a matter of conscience. But are we just giving in to pressure from the world? What if we are compromising on biblical principles?!

One church that some readers will know of is so concerned about compromising on biblical principles that the vicar was involved in a campaign within the Church of England. They hold to the traditional interpretation of Scripture: women should *not* be in leadership. No compromise!

Now, we all want people to hear the good news, so what most hinders that wonderful gospel? If we are compromising on God's standards, might that be undermining the Bible, so that the good news won't be taken seriously?

On the other hand, maybe our willingness to take modern knowledge seriously and to recheck our interpretation could actually *help* the gospel. Remember, there are still churches that insist on the traditional interpretation that the earth was created in a six literal days – again, no compromise!

The difficulty is deciding where we should hold to the traditional view as the *only* interpretation and where we should accept that other Christians might hold a *different* interpretation. There is certainly room on a number of issues for two views within one church.

Getting this wrong was what made Paul so angry in Galatians. (I have just started Tom Wright's *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians* for the study group I attend.) Their issue was whether, to be properly Christian, males should be circumcised. But what struck me was not the issue about interpretation, but about Peter's compromise.

God had shown Peter clearly that Gentiles were very much part of God's good news movement, and although he knew that circumcision wasn't necessary anymore, he was worried about what certain people within the church leadership would think of him, so he had Luke(?) circumcised. Thus he was going against what he actually believed, simply to avoid conflict and condemnation. Paul was angry that the Galatians' compromise was hindering the gospel.

What resonated with me from Tom Wright's comments (interesting, given what he wrote^[243] in 2011 – but maybe he has now softened) was that gay Christians have felt forced to hide because of what other people in the church would think of them, and they were even worried about the way they would be treated – perhaps banned from leadership for sexual immorality.

Personally, I think we should have confidence to go back to Scripture and check out the traditional teaching about sexuality. I do not believe, in the slightest, that accepting an alternative interpretation compromises God's standards. For me, trying to insist that same-sex activity within a faithful gay relationship is immoral actually hinders the spread of the good news.