

216 A question of morality?

We should be salt and light in society, right? We should be careful not to get dragged along by the cultural slide, OK? If something is morally wrong, we should speak out against it, yes?

The only slight snaglet is: how do we decide if something **is** morally right or wrong? We use the Bible, of course, but it first has to be (translated and) interpreted and then applied.

When it comes to sexual immorality, Christians have been particularly outspoken, but with good reason: (a) sexual immorality, in terms of both betrayal and domination, is massively destructive of human relationships and (b) the sex drive is so strong that it can sweep away logic, reason and common sense – and biblical interpretation.

So how should we do our interpretation and application of Scripture? And today I have in mind the issue of gay sex, one of particular importance within today's church.

So here are the guidelines I want to suggest:

- 1) *Beware basing your views on your personal feelings.*
- 2) *Be willing to challenge 'what we've always been taught'.*

As an illustration, I used to think that gay sex was clearly immoral, but that was based purely on (1) my feelings and (2) what I was taught. Study the Bible? No need, it's obvious!

- 3) *Be willing to accept that science can inform biblical interpretation.*
 - We no longer believe that the sun revolves around the earth, despite what the Bible says clearly, and the NT writers believed.
 - Given the evidence that beating children can cause psychological damage, Christians generally have moved away from the Bible writers' view, although some Christians do still say it's right to beat children.
 - We probably have a range of views on evolution/creation, but we do need to look at the science and at our Bibles and be willing to change our views, if necessary.

- 4) *We do need to very careful what things we call 'morally wrong'.*

Murder? Sure, I don't have a problem with naming that, but what about divorce? The church has softened its stance on divorce in my lifetime, but is that just succumbing to 'cultural slide'?

What sparked this whole line of thinking was this statement from a commentary on Rev 2:12-17. It's from a senior Christian leader whose teaching I respect and greatly admire, and whose writings have been hugely formative of my renewed faith (my bold):

Sexual morality isn't, as it is so often portrayed, a matter of ancient rules clung to by some rather conservative persons when the rest of society has moved on. It [**i.e. sexual morality**] is, rather, a matter of the call of the creator God to faithful **man-plus-woman** marriage, reflecting the complementarity of heaven and earth themselves. ... Married love is a signpost to the faithfulness of the creator to his creation. The reason **immorality** is so often coupled with idolatry...

It seems to me that the writer is framing gay sex as immoral, and yet the passage has nothing to do with gay sex, as far as I can see, just sexual immorality.

So I wonder what the writer would say to two strong Christians who are in a loving, faithful, same-sex relationship? That couple (and a growing number of Christians generally) have changed/are changing their views on gay sex, as long as it's in the context (as with all sex) of a faithful relationship.

(If you do want to consider revisiting your views, I'd recommend David Gushee's *Changing our mind*, the unnamed book behind my articles ^[145-157].)

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