

### **235 What is sin? Part III**

A beloved friend of many years has joined in the debate and says, 'I'm really not sure what you're trying to achieve or who you're trying to convince'. Good question!

I'm not trying to convince you about, 'Is gay sex (not) a sin?' Well, I've not put forward any biblical arguments to that effect. That's not the point. If you want to engage with that issue then you could study the arguments put forward by David Gushee in *Changing our Mind*.

So what am I trying to achieve? Well, I can't do a lot, but in whatever way I can, I'm trying to stop people – especially minorities – getting hurt, feeling alienated, feeling judged, and feeling rejected, whether that's people already in the church or people who wouldn't darken the doors.

Why the title then?! Well, I'm not asking, 'Which things are sins and which aren't?' Rather I'm asking, 'What makes God cross?' and to answer that, we could ask, 'What made Jesus cross?' And you already know the answer to that! I could end the article here. (But no such luck!)

Input from another friend is to the effect that sin is what harms our relationships with one another and with God; and another friend wants (and I agree) to extend that to our relationship with the whole of creation.

But there's one problem with a definition of sin that relates it to (not) building up relationships. It's too complicated, and it can be messy and confusing. Let's face it, we prefer the security of knowing exactly what's right and what's wrong. So when someone by the name of Paul says, 'Well, it just depends on the situation, on who we're talking about, on the person's level of faith, etc, etc,' it unsettles us.

And I'm not talking about me, but my biblical namesake. Try reading 1 Cor 7 and 8 and tell me that defining sin is simple. There's stuff in there about things being right for one person and not right for others – and there's stuff about sexual passions, too. I'm sorry folks but as much as we'd like to talk about 'the plain meaning of Scripture' and 'objective truth', the Bible (certainly post-Jesus) sometimes says, 'Well, it depends on the situation'.

For example, a missionary friend raised this: If a man comes to Christ in a society where polygamy is allowed, what should he do? The 'plain meaning' of Scripture is clear. So should he divorce all but his first wife, sending the others (and their children) away? Or maybe continue to live together but only have sex with his first wife – think of the tensions that would cause!

Yes, we should take sin (relationship breaking) seriously, but let's build one another up in love and not concentrate on working out what is a sin and what isn't, and certainly not (in my personal view, anyway) on deciding whether certain people are sufficiently free of sin to do certain jobs.

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