

## ***424 Gay marriage – a final summary***

My discussions have continued with two very dear friends who, with their spouses, welcomed me and Sue seven years ago into our lovely church here in Taverham. My two DFs both passionately believe that gay intimacy is sinful, so gay marriage would allow people constantly to live in sin.

As you have probably gathered, I believe equally passionately that they are mistaken but, by a real work of God's grace, our friendships are still strong. Thank you, my dear friends!

Their honest comments have helped me to think through, logically, the full implications of their view, and this then is a summary of those thoughts. In particular, by reminding me of 1 Cor 5, they have pointed me to some crucial, but negative, conclusions.<sup>[423]</sup>

Church leaders cannot and must not tolerate members of their congregations constantly sinning; that is for the sake of their own salvation, but also because they could be encouraging others to fall into sin. Neither should they tolerate people like me, I suppose, who are encouraging other people to enter sinful relationships.

Paul's clear teaching is that we should not associate with brothers and sisters who are sexually immoral – indeed, we should not even eat with them.<sup>5:11</sup> So, if Christians in gay relationships refuse to repent of their sin, their church leaders should exclude them.<sup>[423]</sup>

Indeed, if a believing member of your family enters a committed gay relationship, I guess you should obey the same clear biblical principle: if they refuse to repent, you should exclude them from your family. Some Christian families have done that, despite the pain that it has caused.

All of this is based, remember, on the assumption that the teaching of the Bible is *absolutely clear*: any gay intimacy is sinful, regardless of the context – that's God's rule.

But the pain that could be caused by pursuing this view makes me feel that God might want to point us towards a change. This past seven years, I have come to believe that people who are gay should not be made to feel guilty; they should be allowed follow their own consciences.

Some friends have argued that if we give in and allow people to do what they want, what will they seek to allow next?! I do understand that fear, but this approach clouds the discussion; I'm asking us to think about just one issue: gay marriage.

So I would encourage my friends to consider the implications of pursuing their view. If they are mistaken, and God really is trying to get us to think differently – as I and others now believe – then they could be contributing to: (a) false personal guilt for gay Christians, (b) Christian families splitting unnecessarily, (c) possibly even churches splitting, and (d) unbelievers being turned away by what they see as our judgementalism.

Willing to think it through again? Various books are available.