

## Revisionism and Orthodoxy

Labels are often unhelpful, divisive and very imprecise. However, they can also be useful in helping us to identify the central tenets of an approach or methodology.

In recent times the label 'revisionist' has been used to describe the approach that some (including evangelicals) have adopted towards Scripture and its teaching on human sexuality.

Revisionists take Scripture seriously. However, their hermeneutical method is different from that of traditional evangelicals in a variety of ways. Whilst it is impossible in a short article to comprehensibly explore and define 'revisionism', it is helpful to note its following characteristics.

Firstly, a revisionist position might consider something to be 'normal' in Scripture without necessarily being thereby normative for all time. Marriage – in biblical times – was between a man and a woman. Scripture does not tell us stories of people in same-sex relationships (see the article *Does the Bible have examples of same-sex relationships?* for an investigation of the relationship of David and Jonathan etc.). However, according to revisionist argument, these observations cannot be used to conclude that male and female marriage is the only form of marriage for all time (i.e. normative).

Secondly, revisionists consider that Paul (and other New Testament writings) do not address the issues of human sexuality that we face today – simply because they were not issues in their own time. By way of contrast, a traditional evangelical interpretation of Romans 1 and other passages would hold that Paul was thoroughly familiarised with the range of same-sex relationships being explored today. (For a fuller response to this argument, see the article *Does the Bible fail to endorse committed same-sex relationships because it had no awareness or knowledge of them?*)

Thirdly, a revisionist ethic of human sexuality is built more on 'internal' considerations than 'external'. In other words, actions are evaluated and judged by their internal motivations and dispositions rather than their external behaviour or nature. Thus – in the area of same-sex relations – a relationship is legitimised by the quality, sincerity and genuineness of the love between two individuals rather than by whether it fits into any particular 'category' of relationship (i.e. revisionism does not accept that the 'category' of same-sex erotic relations is necessarily unscriptural).

Revisionism can be distinguished from liberalism in that it affirms the authority of Scripture but interprets it in a new and different way from traditional understandings. Liberalism – by contrast – is infused with questions about the authority of Scripture and is often (in shorthand) seen as describing Scripture as 'man's thoughts about God' rather than 'God's revealed thoughts about man'.