

Truth and Love

Part 1

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If the axis of authority shifts, even subtly, from Scripture to personal experience, if all arguments related to nature are rejected, if pleasure and relational satisfaction or even faithful covenant bonding are the highest values in sexual ethics . . . the groundwork is laid for the kind of overall revision of Christian sexual ethics that has, in fact, been occurring in recent decades. (Kingdom Ethics by Glen Stassen and David Gushee, p. 310)

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." ¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. ²⁴Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator . . . ²⁶For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. ²⁸And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³²Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. Romans 1:16-32 (ESV)

How Does Unrighteousness Play Out in Humankind?

Step #1: We choose rebellion against our Creator.

Step #2: God hands us over to what we prefer.

Step #3: We act out our evil desires based on our darkened thinking and reject our Creator's design.

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Romans 2:1 (NIV)

We need to remind ourselves that the entire biblical sexual ethic is deeply counter-intuitive. All humans beings some of the time, and some human beings most of the time, have deep heartfelt longings for kinds of sexual intimacy or gratification (multiple partners, pornography, whatever) which do not reflect the creator's best intentions for his human creatures, intentions through which new wisdom and flourishing will come to birth. Sexual restraint is mandatory for all, difficult for most, extremely challenging for some. God is gracious and merciful but this never means "so his creational standards don't really matter after all." (N.T. Wright, Interview in Religious News Service, June 3, 2014)