
The Christian Worldview in an Age of Sexual Revolution (Part 2)

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality..." (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

Please open your bibles and turn again with me to 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:3. You might remember that we started with this verse last week to provide for us the basis of what God declares as His expectation upon His people. In 1 Thessalonians 4:3 we read:

For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality...

If anyone might think that preaching on the subject of what God has revealed as sexual norms and expectations, this text alone (and there are many more like it) tell us that what we think and how we act with regard to human sexuality is of utmost importance to our God and thus it ought to be of utmost importance to each and every one of us. God is concerned about our sexual purity; God is concerned about your sexual purity and the Scriptures are replete with teachings and imperatives to that end.

In the 1 Thessalonians 4:3 passage, Paul, living in a culture that was in many ways even more sexually deviant than ours (but to which ours is quickly heading), takes the time to make this remarkable statement about the will of God. God's will; that is, His intention, purpose, calling, and expectation upon all those who are called by the name of His Son Jesus Christ, is stated both positively; ***"your sanctification"*** – that is your holiness, your being utterly unlike and distinguished from the world's thoughts and actions; your attitudes and actions that reflect those of Christ; and then negatively; ***"that you abstain from sexual immorality."*** The lives of believers are not to reflect the world's thinking when it comes to human sexuality. In fact, we are to abstain, avoid, stay clear of; be distinguished from any thoughts or practices of sexuality that do not fit God's definition of sexual purity.

Last week we defined the term ***"sexual immorality"*** this way – as any and all sexual activity outside of marriage; marriage as defined by God in Genesis 2 as being one man joined to one woman. Biblically speaking, any "union" other than one man joined to one woman is not and cannot be described as a marriage at all. God's standard for the practice of sexuality is to be found in the confines of the marriage bed; one man joined to one woman. That is the norm; that is normal; that is where holiness and sanctification is to be found according to Scripture. Look with me at Genesis 2:24. There is rightly a sense in which Genesis 2:24 alone is more than sufficient to tell us that any other coupling that one man with one woman is a deviation from God's norm. There we read:

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

Here is what we term the "one flesh" union; a theme that will be carried through the Scriptures, reinforced by the teachings of our Lord Jesus and the apostle Paul. Anything beyond this is a departure, a deviation from God's revealed will and is, by definition, to be regarded as sexual immorality.

It was from this stated purpose of 1 Thessalonians 4:3, we then started in the Old Testament to see that the Scriptures not only present us with the positive description of what is considered by God as sexual morality; but, because often we humans do better in understanding what something is by also understanding what it is not, are given some clarifications as to what

The Christian Worldview in an Age of Sexual Revolution (Part 2)

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality..." (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

God regards as sexual immorality. We saw first in Leviticus 18 that God regards incest, idolatry, adultery, homosexuality and even bestiality as those practices that defile a person and are to be regarded as abominations. Remember that homosexuality is just one of a number of activities that God prohibits because, as He Himself declared, they defile a person and are an abomination to Him. The word abomination, as found in Leviticus 18:22 is to be understood as referring to something that is repulsive, sinister and dangerous. Our current culture has torn down the idea that some of these activities, particularly homosexuality, are repulsive, but to the believer, it is, along with any sin, to be regarded as repulsive. And regardless of whether the culture regards it as repulsive or not; such practices, according to God, will always be sinister (there is an evil, deceiving aspect to such practices) and thus dangerous (hazardous and unsafe) for both the ones practicing such things as well as for the people or culture in which such things are practiced. Look with me at Leviticus 18:26-28 where we see the consequences for not only the individuals who practice such things, but also for the culture that tolerates such things. We read:

26 'But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and My judgments and shall not do any of these abominations, neither the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you 27 (for the men of the land who have been before you have done all these abominations, and the land has become defiled); 28 so that the land will not spew you out, should you defile it, as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you.

We also noted the same prohibition along with the punishment for those who might practice such things as being death in Leviticus 20. We then considered an Old Testament example of God's wrath against those who practiced such things by considering Genesis 19 and the account of Sodom and Gomorrah. And while those who want to make light of the sexual sin of these wicked cities, citing that the issue was their inhospitality rather than their desire for inappropriate sexual relations with the two visitors who had come into Lot's house; there is nothing in the text that warrants God's violent destruction of these except for what God called as their sin which was "exceedingly grave" (Genesis 18:20) and to which Jude 7 describes as their indulging in "**gross immorality**" and their going after "**strange flesh**".

My desire in preaching to you on this subject is meant to be both apologetic; giving you basis for why we believe what we believe about what is to be regarded as sexual immorality and thus including homosexuality; and also protective, as our church may soon be on the proverbial firing line as we will be forced to declare where we stand on these matters. Well, we are not forced to make a decision by the political correctness and pressure of our culture; rather we are compelled by the Word of God. I state these truths to you, calling you to sexual purity; calling parents to teach their children God's expectations in this hyper-sexual culture; calling men and women to guard their hearts and minds from even what would be considered the more mild forms of sexual perversions and deviations as seen on TV, heard in our music, talked about in our schools and work places. I think the words of Martin Luther, who stood against his culture's attack to the faithful practice of God's Word out to be our cry today. While our culture tells us we must accept, celebrate and even promote homosexuality and shortly to follow, a whole host of other sexual deviations, I say...

The Christian Worldview in an Age of Sexual Revolution (Part 2)

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality..." (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

"Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of the [pundits] and [the culture], for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."

To get back to our subject at hand, we, as believers, need to know that the Bible teaches as sexually normal and moral versus that which is sexually abnormal and immoral. We have looked at what the Old Testament has had to say on the matter, now let us turn our attention to what the New Testament says.

I. Homosexuality in the New Testament

The New Testament is full of passages that forbid, warn, and call believers from "sexually immoral" activity. Here is a list of just a few: Mark 7:20-23, Acts 15:20, 29, Ephesians 5:3, 1 Thessalonians 4:3, Hebrews 13:4, and Revelation 21:8 and 22:15). None of these passages explicitly speak of homosexuality, but, as we noted, the term "sexual immorality" as understood by any of the first readers of these texts and letters would have included homosexuality and thus it was understood as not being in the will of God. But there are three passages in the New Testament that do speak against homosexuality specifically. The first of these is actually a rather long explanation while the other two simply include homosexuality as being a sin in a list of sins, any of which, if practiced in defiance of God and His God's Word, if such sin or sins are what you are known for; to both embrace and practice; indicates a lack of salvation.

Now, there is no way that I can in these messages address every issue and question that might arise. My goal is to present you with the Biblical understanding of homosexuality; to give you a Christian worldview through which to understand God's will and then, armed with such truth, be equipped to reach those who are ensnared by any such sins, with the only thing that will bring them true peace with God; the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So we begin with Romans 1:18-32. Please turn there in your Bibles. This text will most likely be as far as we will get this morning, but what a blessing to work through such an informative passage as it relates to each one of us seeking to abstain from sexual immorality. Let us read the text:

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. 24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in

The Christian Worldview in an Age of Sexual Revolution (Part 2)

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality..." (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. 28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

This is the most extensive text in the New Testament regarding the issue of homosexuality. But let me be clear, while this is true, homosexuality is not the overarching theme of these verses. The presentation the gospel is Paul desire and to do this, he must first show that all people are under God's judgment and condemnation and thus are in need of the gospel.

Our passage begins with Paul declaring that because the truth of God's existence is visible in nature that all people are without excuse for their rebellion against Him. In Romans 1, Paul speaks of the just wrath of God on all who practice ungodliness. In Romans 2, Paul reminds the more morally minded that as we condemn the sin of others, we are actually condemning ourselves, because in some form or another, we all commit sin; thus we all stand condemned in God's eyes. In Romans 3, Paul declares that everyone is incapable of remedying the situation on his or her own. And so, it does not matter whether one is apart from the law of God or under it, all people stand condemned without partiality before God for all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Paul uses this open the door in explaining the grace of God as found in the person and work of Jesus; this is the good news of the gospel; that there is a way, one way of deliverance from this predicament. So again, the whole section of Romans 1:18-32 is meant to demonstrate how the whole world, in its thinking and in its practice, is unrighteous in God's sight and is in need of being saved.

These verses hones in on those primarily outside the faith, outside the general practice of Christianity. Paul addresses a Gentile culture that largely embraces idolatry as well as increasing wickedness. How did the people in Paul's day do this and how do they continue to do it today? Beginning in verse 21 and following, Paul gives three examples of how what people already know about God instinctively has been exchanged for something else. Note these three things with me.

First, in verse 23, people exchange, replace "the glory of the incorruptible God" for images of creatures, including man himself. In verse 25 we are told that people exchange "the truth of God for a lie" which leads to idolatry and the worship of created things. And then, in Romans 1:28, they exchange the knowledge of God for a depraved mind. How is this depraved mind revealed? Look at verses 26-27 again where we are explicitly, clearly told what one of the inevitable indicators of depraved thinking is. We read:

26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one

The Christian Worldview in an Age of Sexual Revolution (Part 2)

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality..." (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

In this passage, the great and final exchange made by an unrighteous culture is the natural function of human sexuality for that which is unnatural and this leads to a culture of total depravity and anarchy where pretty much anything goes. But from verses 26-27, let us note two significant truths.

A. Truth #1 – Homosexual behavior is unnatural

First, note that Paul says that homosexual behavior is unnatural and it is unnatural for both women (thus prohibiting lesbianism) and for men (thus prohibiting homosexuality). I know that this is difficult for some people to hear. Today we are being told that same sex attraction is normal and natural. We are being told that it would be unnatural for a person with same sex attraction to go against his or her orientation. This is an argument that you will hear over and over again.

But such an argument does not find any support in our text. The words "natural" and "unnatural" do not, hear this, do not describe a person's subjective experience of what "feels" or "seems" natural to him or to her, but rather, in context, speaks of the way things are fixed in creation by God Himself. What Paul is speaking of is that it is what God established in the beginning as being "natural" or normal and thus, since God created Adam and Eve; not Adam and Steve, and since God blessed the union of male and female, but did not ever bless the union of male and male or female and female, that such behavior is "unnatural" – it is not according to God's plan or design, but stands in defiance of God's created order.

For those who want to argue by saying, "But God made me this way!" or with "I was born this way" – such have a biblical problem. What Paul is saying in Romans 1 is that our "nature" now, as we experience it, is not natural; it is not the way God intended it. Listen, each one of us have desires that have been wrapped and twisted by our fallen nature, correct. Lying is "natural" for the fallen human nature, but it is not "natural" for the way God would have us live. Anger may be "natural" for some in their fallen nature, but anger is not the natural way God would have us live. Our behavior is tainted with our fallen, sinful nature; and living according to this fallen nature is not natural, or what God intended for humanity. Thus, when we do what we feel is natural according to the fallen nature, those things which God has called us to abstain from; we are actually reflecting how sin has distorted us, not how God has made us.

Now, Paul language here is intense and clear and yet do not jump to the conclusion that he is teaching that homosexual behavior is the sin of sins; or the unpardonable sin; or the chief of sins. Paul uses it as an example here because, to some degree or another, it was an issue for his readers in Rome. But more important is the principle Paul is teaching in this passage and it represent for a proper and biblical worldview; that is, *"as a person rejects God and God's stated will for his life, he will find himself increasingly craving that for which he was not naturally designed to do."* If we can grasp this truth, and understand it as it relates to ourselves as well as how it relates to those who are ensnared by any particular sin, we stand much better prepared to share the liberating power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. A Christian worldview looks to what God has stated is normal and seeks after that normal, which can only be done by the grace of God.

The Christian Worldview in an Age of Sexual Revolution (Part 2)

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality...” (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

So, then as both the Old Testament and now Romans 1 reveals, homosexuality and indeed all sin is an abandoning of what is God’s natural intent for humanity.

Now, let us note one final thing from this Romans 1 text, something that is hard to say and also hard to hear and yet it is the clear teaching in this passage. Here is the second truth...

B. Homosexual behavior is a sign of God’s judgment

Let me take you back up to Romans 1:16 and remind you that before Paul launched into how people and culture reject God, he actually started with the good news; the gospel saying, **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”** Paul’s intent is to lay out the gospel, the good news of salvation. But before this good news can be seen as good, Paul lays out the bad news; and Romans 1:18-32 can rightly be labeled as “The bad news concerning those who reject God and His ways.”

So then, right after the promise of a powerful salvation being available, Paul outlines what people need to be saved from. There is a common misconception that people need to be saved from sin (and it is true that in Christ we are delivered from the power, the penalty and one day from the very presence of sin), but sin, that which God calls sin, that which our text here clearly identifies as sin, is only the behavior that incites the righteous anger of God against us. In other words, what we need to be saved from is the wrath of God.

In Romans 3:23, the Word of God says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. This means that it is our sin, our sinful behavior, our deviation from what God has stated that, in the words of Isaiah 59:2, have made a separation between you and your God, the result of which is death, which is not simply eternal separation from God in some kind of quiet darkness, rather it is eternal separation from God to experience forever His deserved wrath against your sin. In Mark 9:43-48, Jesus described hell a place of unquenchable fire, where the worm does not die and the fire is never quenched. That is what is meant by the wages of sin deserving death in Romans 6:23. Additionally, Ephesians 2:3 tells us that we all, are, because of our trespasses and sins, children of wrath; those who deserve the eternal wrath of God. That is the bad news. And the only way to be saved from this wrath of God is to have faith in the person and work of Jesus on the cross to forgive you of your sins. Only Jesus can turn away the righteous judgment of God upon sinners and make the right with God.

In Romans 1:18, we are told about this wrath of God, that it is not simple something that “is yet to come” – although according to Romans 2:5, **“But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God...”** – there is a fullness of His wrath to come; but notice, in Romans 1:18, it is also a wrath that is now being “revealed”; it is now being made know against all those who practice ungodly and unrighteous behavior.

Have you ever wondered what the wrath of God that is right now being revealed looks like? What typically comes to mind when you think of the wrath of God? We might envision epic disasters scenes from movies; fire and brimstone being rained down from heaven, right? But what does Paul say is the current revelation of God’s wrath? The answer might surprise you. Paul says the current revelation of the wrath of God is this, *God giving us what we want*. There is no way around it, we learn in this text that one of the ways God reveals His wrath today is giving us what we want as we sin.

The Christian Worldview in an Age of Sexual Revolution (Part 2)

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality..." (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

Recall the three exchanges sinners engage in, exchanging the glory of God for images of creatures (v. 23), exchanging the truth of God for a lie (v. 25), and exchanging the natural or intended way in which God declared as proper for human sexuality for that which is unnatural and unintended. Now, let us notice the three results of such behavior, the way in which God's wrath is now being revealed. Three times, in verses 24, 26, and 28, we are told that God "gave them over" to live how they want to live along with all its consequences. By the way, the moral decay of a culture is just a small foretaste of the full wrath of God to come. But I would have you notice that with each instance of God giving a people over to their sin; it results in even deeper, darker expressions of depravity. In verse 24 God gives a people over to their own lusts and impurity which leads to their bodies being dishonored among them. We don't have time to going into what all this means, but I take it to mean in part the increasing lack of respect for human body, looking at one another as objects rather than people. In verse 26 God gives people over to "degrading passions" – the actual working out and acting out of lustful thinking; giving people over to the exchanging of God's natural and normal means of expressing sexuality to unnatural ones. In verse 28, this all leads to an insightful, horrific and yet not complete list of behaviors that indicate a culture that has rejected God and has been given over to a depraved mind...notice it again with me beginning in the middle of verse 28

...to do those things which are not proper, 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

It is not simply that people increasing do these things. Beloved, those who do such things have been given over to such things by God and this is the revealing of the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. In other words, sin brings the judgment of God and the judgment of God is give people over to further sin.

As we see all these sinful acts unfold and increase, it is a reminder to us we are just getting to see a foretaste of the full wrath of God to come. Because homosexuality is included in this list, it is an indication to us of the twisted, God-rejecting, God's wrath inviting culture in which we live.

As we close, let me remind you that Paul is address a culture that rejects God in these verses, not specific individuals. For those persons, family or friends that struggle with same-sex attraction (not activity but attraction), this does not mean you, or they have necessarily turned from God more than those who struggle with any other sin. But like anyone who has a particular propensity toward a specific sin, be it anger, lust, pride, selfishness, being without mercy, homosexuality or any other form of sexual immorality, we must, by God's grace, resist the temptations to act in a way that is not God's natural design for humanity.

Let me make this parallel with suffering. Just because one person may suffer more than another in this life does not mean that such a person has sinned more. The presence of suffering in this life is a reminder to us that humanity is experiencing the penalty of sin and that humanity is even now experiencing some of the wrath of God because of our collective sin. In a like manner,

The Christian Worldview in an Age of Sexual Revolution (Part 2)

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality...” (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

the person who struggles with same-sex attraction is to be reminded that such desires are not right, not God’s will, because this world is not right. Our culture has turned from God and is being given over to sin with each of us struggling with a particular sin or sins.

But here is where the good news comes in. There is hope. God’s will, His expectation, is not only our abstaining from sexual immorality, but it is to be made in the image, the likeness of Christ. To be like Jesus and through faith in Jesus, to be delivered from the unnatural desires to which our sinful hearts would lead, away from God; and to be made new, washed, sanctified, justified by Jesus to live with the natural desires that God intended for humanity. There is deliverance from sin and this is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And what is the gospel, this good news? The gospel is that Jesus died for our sins on the cross, that He was buried, and rose from the dead on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). His death was a sacrifice that turned away the wrath of God for all who believe on Him (1 John 2:2). This is the only way to be saved.

Jesus died for the sins of the world; not just for the sins of the Jews, but for those from every tribe, language and nation (1 John 2:2). Jesus is the only way to the God the Father (John 14:6). And so, it is only through Jesus that you can and must be saved from the wrath of God (Ephesians 2:3). Jesus is able to forgive you of your sin (Luke 5:20; Matthew 9:2), remove the guilt that is upon your soul, and set you free from the bondage of sin that blinds your eyes, weakens your soul, and, at some point or another, will bring you to despair. Jesus is able to do this because He Himself bore our sin in His body on the cross (1 Peter. 2:24) that those who trust in Him would be saved; would be brought to God; would be made right with God.

If you are not a Christian or are unsure of your standing before God and long for deliverance from the righteous judgment of God you deserve as a result of your sins against Him, then come to the One who died for the sin. Come to the One who died for sinners (Matthews 11:28). Turn from your sins, whatever they may be. Believe and trust that Jesus died for you so that you might live for Him. Receive Jesus, God in flesh, the one who died and rose from the dead as your Lord and Savior. Ask Jesus to forgive you of your sins and He will. Receive Christ by believing who He is and what He has accomplished for you (John 1:12). For only Jesus is able to wash you clean from your sins and only Jesus can deliver you from the righteous judgment of a holy and infinite God and only Jesus can enable you, by His Spirit who will indwell within you, to be dead to sin, but alive to God. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

And for all of us, let us remember, ***“For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality...”*** Let us prayerfully pursue a life of distinguished behavior to the glory of God, to the drawing of others to the power of the gospel to transform lives.

Soli Deo Gloria

Copyright © 2014 Edward K. Godfrey. *This message is the sole property of the copyright holder and may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this message must contain the above copyright notice. This message may not be copied in part (except for small quotations used with citation of source), edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of the copyright holder. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Edward K. Godfrey, Pastor, Hope Community Bible Church, 1001 W. Walnut Suite 5a, Rogers, AR 72756.*