

Week 1: Welcome to This Strange New World

NCAC Adult Sunday School

October 30, 2022



What do you find strange about the current world in we which live?

The Problem: *“For many people, the Western world in which we now live has a profoundly confusing, and often disturbing, quality to it. Things once regarded as obvious and unassailable virtues have in recent years been subject to vigorous criticism and even in some cases come to be seen by many as more akin to vices. Indeed, it can seem as if things that almost everybody believed as unquestioned orthodoxy the day before yesterday—that marriage is to be between one man and one woman, for example—are now regarded as heresies advocated only by the dangerous, lunatic fringe.*

“Nor are the problems confined to the world ‘out there.’ Often, they manifest themselves most acutely and most painfully within families. Parents teaching their family traditional views of sex find themselves met with incomprehension by their children who have absorbed far different views from the culture around them...The result is often confusion and sometimes even heartbreak as many of the most brutal engagements in the culture war are played out around the dinner table and at family gatherings.” (Strange New World, pp. 19-20)

In your personal relationships, how have you encountered differences of beliefs and attitudes in matters of sex and sexuality? How have you addressed these conflicts?

Key Resource: *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* by Carl R. Trueman (Crossway, 2022)

For more depth: *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* by Carl R. Trueman (Crossway, 2020)

From the subtitle of his book (“How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution”) what can we discern about what Trueman believes regarding the state of our world?

Course Goal: To better understand how a changing concept of self has led to this “strange new world” in which we now live and to consider what Scripture teaches about how we should respond.

- We’re not here to condemn the world, but to better understand our culture so we can more effectively love our neighbors and communicate to them the love and Gospel of Christ.
- We need to recognize that not only are each of our own views of self and sexuality in some ways broken, but we’ve likely even adopted some aspects of the philosophies that we claim to reject.

THE WORLD'S CHANGING CONCEPT OF SELF

Trueman asserts that the unifying factor in the cultural shifts we are witnessing is the changing notion of "self," which is no longer defined by objective external truth, but is "discovered" by looking inward:

*"When I use the term **self** in this book, I am referring...to the deeper notion of where the 'real me' is to be found...The modern **self** assumes the authority of inner feelings and sees authenticity as defined by the ability to give social expression to the same. The modern **self** assumes that society at large will recognize and affirm this behavior...In short, the modern **self** is one where authenticity is achieved by acting outwardly in accordance with one's inward feelings."* (Strange New World, 22-23)

We each now find ourselves living in a world that promotes "expressive individualism":

*"**Expressive Individualism** holds that each person has a unique core of feeling and intuition that should unfold or be expressed if individuality is to be achieved."* (American Scholar Robert Bellah)

As "expressive individualism" has become the norm in Western culture, it has created the push for a "culture of authenticity":

*"[The **culture of authenticity** is one where] each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority."* (Canadian Philosopher Charles Taylor)

What manifestations of expressive individualism do you see in our secular culture today? Is expressive individualism always bad? Why or why not?

Where do you see aspects of the philosophy of expressive individualism penetrating the church? What evidence of expressive individualism do you see in yourself?

THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR SELF IDENTITY

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27)

"For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him." (Col. 1:16)

According to these biblical passages, who are we and why were we created? What do these two verses mean for expressive individualism?