

Week 3: How Did We Get Here?

NCAC Adult Sunday School

November 20, 2022



How have the ways in which people think about sex and gender changed over the last few decades?

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

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.

WHY DO WE NEED TO KNOW HOW WE GOT HERE?

Why it is helpful for us to understand how the world got to where it is today—to a place where we have granted decisive authority to our inner feelings?

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”
(Ephesians 4:11-14, ESV)

“Knowing how feelings have come to dominate how we think and bringing [our feelings] to bear against biblical teaching—that’s going to be part of the key for us to think correctly and morally about the world in which we find ourselves as which we move forward.” (Trueman, SNW, Video 2)

ROMANTICISM: THE GRANTING OF AUTHORITY TO INNER FEELINGS

How did we get to a place where we have granted decisive authority to our inner feelings? Trueman admits the story “is a long and complex one.” While humans have “always been aware that they have an inner realm of reflection,” granting a decisive authority to our inner dimension with regard to our identity is a relatively new phenomenon. Trueman says this trend may have been sparked by Descartes and fueled by Rousseau, eventually overtaking the world in an artistic movement dubbed Romanticism.

René Descartes (1596-1650): A French philosopher who sought to find a solid foundation for knowledge. He determined that the one thing he could be certain of was that he existed, proved by the fact that he was thinking—a truth he expressed as, “I think; therefore, I am.” By placing inner thought at the center of human experience, Descartes set the stage for the modern concept of “self.”

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778): A Genevan philosopher who believed we’re all basically good and that our corruption comes from societal pressures, which seek to press into society’s mold and thus keep us from acting in accord with true selves. Rousseau taught that we must learn to push these social pressures out of the way and look inside ourselves to discover our true identity and moral path.

Romanticism: The popular artistic movement (impacting arts, music, literature, and philosophy) of the late 18th and early 19th centuries which emphasized the individual, celebrated imagination, and exalted emotions over reason, while often promoting the idea that sensitivity to the voice of nature is essential if we are to truly find our way and experience life as authentic human beings.

VIDEO: “Session Two”

A central tenet of Rousseau’s teachings is that we are what we feel. As Trueman says, “[Rousseau] locates identity in the inner psychological life of the individual. Feelings for Rousseau are central to who we are.” (SNW, 34)

How have you observed people—even Christians—allowing their feelings to define truth?

²³Search me, O God, and know my heart!

Try me and know my thoughts!

²⁴And see if there be any grievous way in me,

and lead me in the way everlasting! (Psalm 139:23-24, ESV)

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick;

who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9, ESV)

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.” (John 14:1-2, ESV)

How would you summarize what the Bible teaches about our following our hearts?

“Think about some aspect of biblical teaching—moral teaching—that you know in your head is right but that you find really difficult to apply in your daily life and in your interaction with others. Think about why you feel that way.” (Trueman, SNW, Video 2)

Do you ever find yourself conflicted about a biblical teaching because of your feelings? Explain.

How can we strive to ensure we are aligning our feelings with biblical truth rather than allow our feelings to serve as the defining source of truth?

A second tenant of Rousseau's teaching was that he saw "society (or perhaps better, culture) as exerting a corrupting influence on the self. To the extent that society prevents us from acting consistently with our feelings, to that extent it prevents us from being who we truly are. In short, society makes us inauthentic." (SNW, 34-35)

How might Rousseau be correct that our society or culture is corrupting us?

For Reflection: *"Think about your approach to sexual morality. Think about your approach to worldly possessions. Think about your approach to what constitutes the good and the beautiful. And then ask yourself, how much of what you believe about those issues is rooted in you thinking back to first principles—to you thinking in terms of arguments and reason—and how much of how you think about those things is shaped by television programs you've watched, or by stories you've heard, by friendships that you've had, or by relationships you've experienced. Think about how much you think about morality is perhaps shaped not so much by reason as it is by what we might call gut reaction, by feelings." (Trueman, SNW, Video 2)*

ATHEISM: THE REJECTION OF INTRINSIC MORAL VALUE

"The modern self is not simply one that sees inner feelings as authoritative; the modern self also largely rejects the idea that human nature has any intrinsic moral structure or significance. While we accept that there is a biological phenomenon that we might call human nature, something that means we cannot, for example, reproduce with lizards or chimpanzees, *we tend not to draw any great moral implications from this*. To assert, therefore, that human beings by their very nature should not engage in certain sexual practices is something unlikely to meet with popular affirmation today." (SNW, p. 51)

To what extent is the current lack of moral consensus in our society the result of failure to agree on why human beings exist?

How do our beliefs about human nature influence our beliefs about sexual morality?

"The idea that merely being a human carries an intrinsic morality and moral purpose is seen as a fiction, and often regarded as one concocted in order to justify the exploitation of one group by another. These modern aspects of selfhood—the rejection of human nature as having a moral structure and the related

belief that moral codes are inherently oppressive—find profound theoretical expression in the thought of two nineteenth-century figures in particular: Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche." (SNW, pp. 51-52)

Karl Marx (1818-1883): An atheist, Marx believed there was no God who provided a moral order to the world. Marx taught that in truth, it is the economic relationships between people which determine how we think about ourselves, about reality, and about morality—all of which are ever changing. Marx believed that "religious morality is really an expression of the economic concerns of the dominant class" and that overthrowing the dominant class would free the working class from this oppression.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900): Nietzsche viewed belief in God as a crutch by which the weak could avoid the challenge of creating their own personal meaning and identity. Nietzsche was also frustrated at how even those who denied the existence of God still often believed in some form of intrinsic moral code—something Nietzsche argued could not exist if "God is dead." Convinced that no absolute moral code exists, Nietzsche taught that we should each see ourselves as our own master.

VIDEO: "Session Three"

"If you take nothing away from this video, take this: What Marx and Nietzsche do in the 19th century is say, 'There is no such thing as human nature that imposes constant moral categories upon you. It is impossible to move from one time to another, from one place to another, from one person to another and say that what is good and true for them is good and true in all times and all places.' And what Marx and Nietzsche do in terms of complicated arguments in the 19th century has become more or less the default of the way we think in the 21st century." (Trueman, SNW, Video 3)

In what ways do you see us becoming "heirs of Marx and Nietzsche," as Trueman claims?

As you reflect on Genesis 1:27, what might this verse teach us about human nature and what that means for us with regard to determining morality?

"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, ESV)

What does 1 Peter 1:13-16 teach about the basis for Christian morality?

"Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:13-16, ESV)