

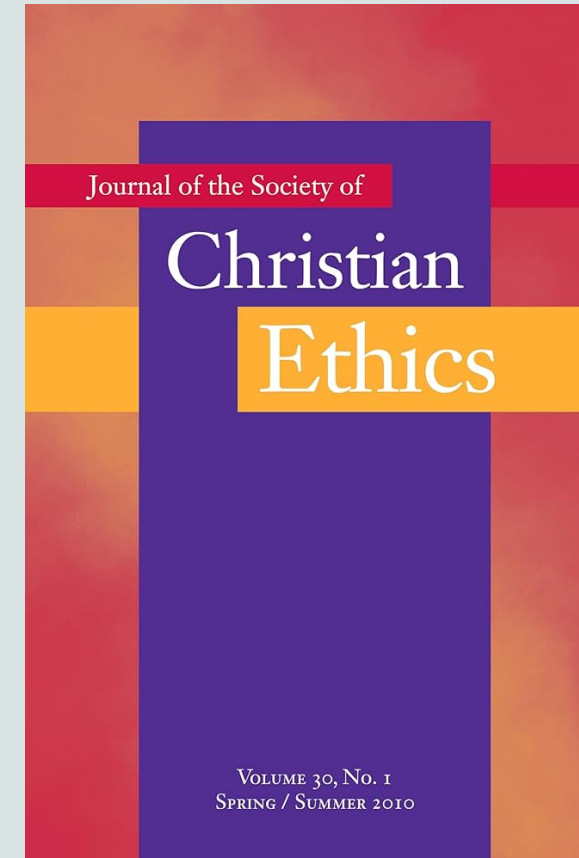
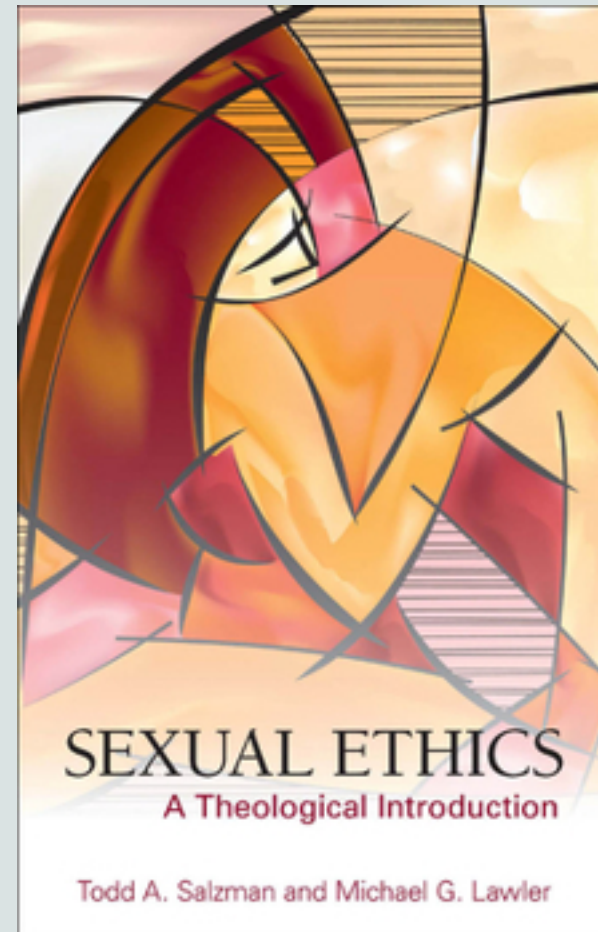
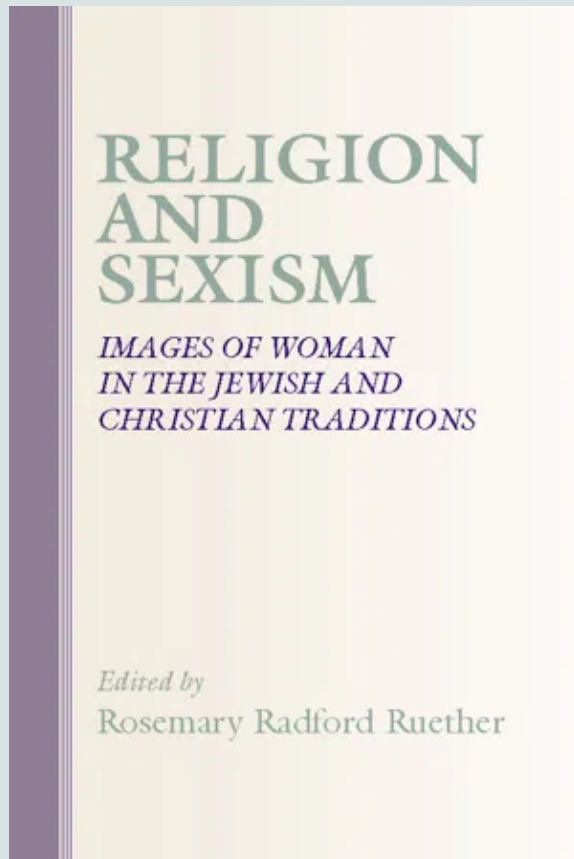
Greystone Baptist
Church: Exploring
Ethics Then and Now
March 13, 2024

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To get started....

- 🕒 Sources which are basic to what I'm about to present:





But to start, let's have some definitions....

🕒 **Morals** – Principles or habits relating to right or wrong conduct, based on an individual's own compass of right and wrong.



🕒 **Ethics** – Rules of conduct in a particular culture or group recognized by an **external source** or social system. For example, a medical code of ethics that medical professionals must follow.

The problem with “Christian ethics”.....



- ⌚ It's all over the place because....
- ⌚ A – there are dozens of Biblical interpretations/traditions/doctrines
- ⌚ B – Western ethics tend to be rooted in Aristotle (you got his ideas on women last month); Kant sees duty as highest value; utilitarianism (is it good for the most people)
- ⌚ Can you be a Christian and.... (drink, smoke, eat pork, lie, cheat, kill, be gay, vote for....?)

Still.....are there some core things all Christians consider at the core of their ethos?

- ⌚ Yes.... We are followers of “The Way” of Jesus; the Son of God; the full expression of God on earth who taught us how to live....
- ⌚ No....Just look at the diversity of denominations! Some groups have L-O-N-G doctrinal statements and strict behavior codes (think Amish or fundamentalist groups), while others adhere to simple statements as “The Great Commandment” or “Jesus Christ is Lord.”



What are you, as God's family at Greystone doing? Ethics work!

- 🕒 *Christian ethics happens wherever Christians offer moral instruction to those in their care and Christian believers attempt moral discernment, rooted in their confession of Christ... It is offered in parental talks and Sunday sermons, in private prayers and small group meetings, in ethicists writing monographs and friends talking together. It is any serious effort to help Christians try to align their story with the story of what God has done in Jesus. (Gushee, p.3)*
- 🕒 In simple terms, you are attempting to develop a sexual ethic for **your** community!

So.....now...let's get started on our journey...

- 🕒 Last month with Dr. Bashaw you heard....
- 🕒 The influence of Aristotle (and his idea of women as “deformed men;”)
- 🕒 That, as Baptists we tend to ignore tradition/culture as an influence on our theology;
- 🕒 She quoted Dr. Peter Enns who pushed us to understand the times of the Biblical writers and to allow science, history, insight and the Holy Spirit to allow our theology to change vs. a view that “the Bible says it and that’s that” static view of theology.

Let me make a point....and it will impact your ethics...

🕒 *IF* you see the Bible as static – the God who speaks in Genesis 1 is exactly the same God who speaks in Revelation 21....

🕒 *IF* you see the Bible as authoritative but the authors are influenced by their culture; their moment in time; the common theology of the day.....



TO BEGIN, TAKE YOUR MIND BACK 4000 YEARS TO A PRE-SCIENTIFIC WORLD...

- 🕒 What did the ancient Babylonians/Egyptians/Greeks believe about sexual reproduction?

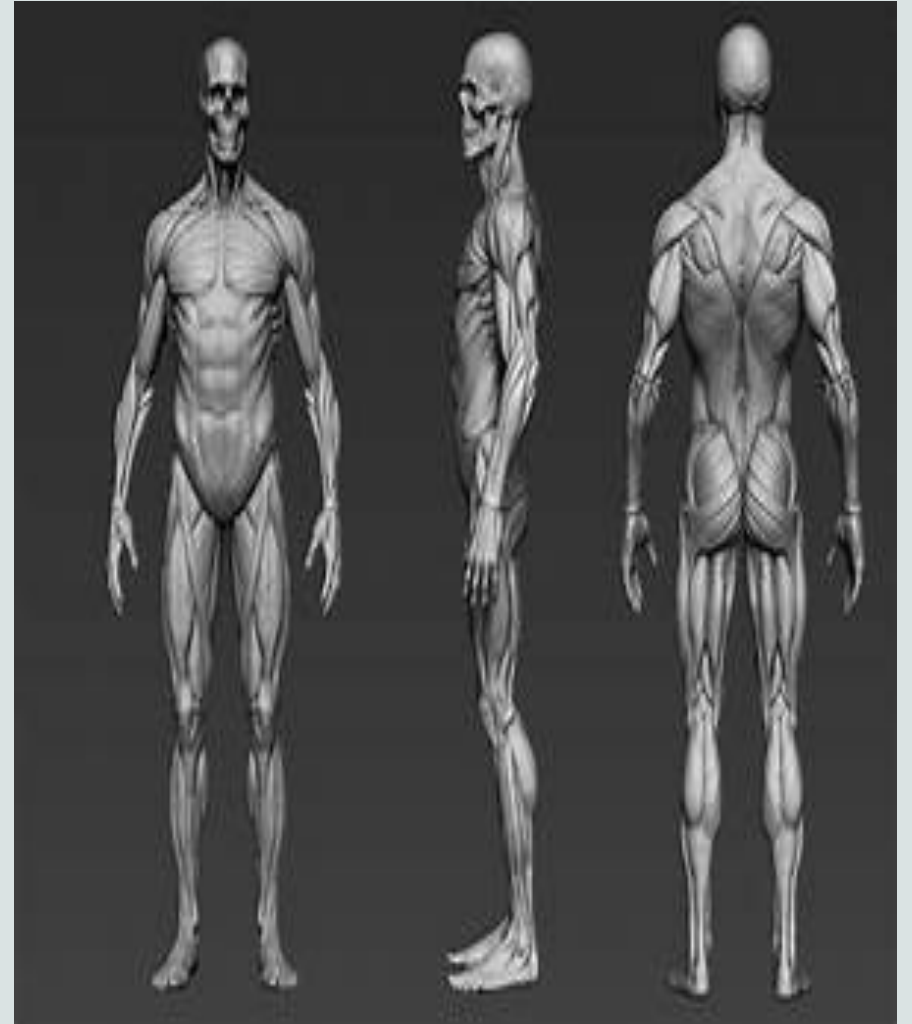


No one had seen a mammalian egg....so what did they think was happening?



- ⌚ You have a “cause and effect” understanding. No sex; no reproduction.
- ⌚ What could you see? That the male was producing semen....
- ⌚ Therefore, the male was “making” a baby!

- 🕒 Males were producing a “living seed”
- 🕒 Where do you plant a seed?
In fertile ground.
- 🕒 Therefore, the male is producing all that is needed to make a child....





- 🕒 Females are “fertile ground” – passive receptacles to incubate the new life.
- 🕒 AND...if the man is doing his part and pregnancy does not occur....
Who’s fault is it?

Aristotle

- 🕒 His “logic” is based on assumed sexual reproduction:
- 🕒 If men produce the child, it should come out as male
- 🕒 If the child is female, something went wrong; it must be “deformed” – lesser, not fully human....



Now...let's see how a culture theologically interprets this...

- 🕒 **Ancient semitic cultures** (think Old Testament city/states)
- 🕒 Male AND Female gods who had sex
- 🕒 Sex was a sacred “worship” act to honor the gods.
- 🕒 Cultic prostitution; orgies; more sex is honoring the gods.



- 🕒 **Roman/Greek cultures**
- 🕒 If male is the “true” image of humanity, the gods made men superior. Women are for sex/reproduction but a man can only truly “love” another man. Bisexuality a norm for upper class men.
- 🕒 Marriage vs. slaves vs pederasty vs lover



The Hebrew theology has a different understanding...but still male dominant



- 🕒 Unitary God
- 🕒 Genesis 1-3 frame the theology
- 🕒 Genesis 1 = God is male and female; we are both “image of God” but designed to be unitary as God is.
- 🕒 Genesis 2-3 (post-Babylonian priestly work) sets up male as superior; woman “helper;” woman is to birth children. If barren, God “closed” her womb as punishment.

So what.....?

- 🕒 Like ethnic neighbors, sex is a divine gift but...
- 🕒 Sex is family oriented – the production of children is a “sacred duty” – so procreative sex is the normative will of God.

But slave surrogacy/concubinage and polygamy is OK (Genesis 16:1; 29:15ff; 1 Kings 11:3)

- 🕒 As the male produces this “living protoplasm” that is basically a child, any form of sex that is not vaginal sex is prohibited as it “kills” the child.

For example, Onan 38:9

If vaginal sex is the only acceptable form of sex....

🕒 What does that say about...

🕒 Masturbation?

🕒 Oral or anal sex – or anything that “spills seed?”

🕒 Lesbianism vs. male homosexuality?



But there emerges more than one “Biblical sexual ethos”

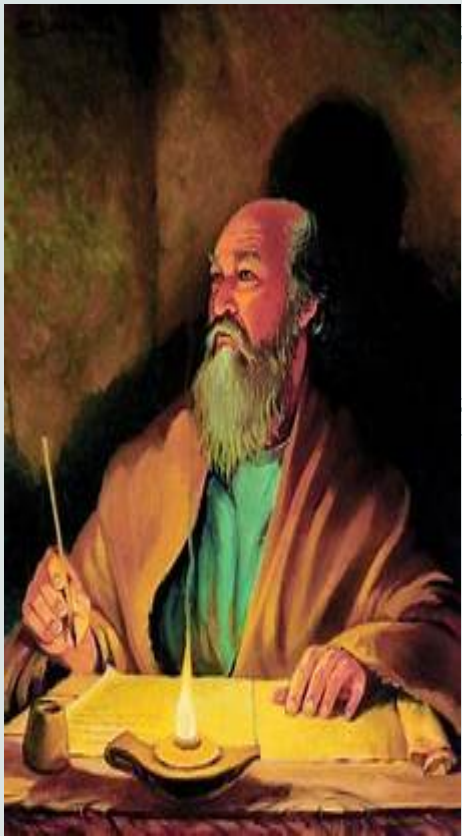


Babylonian exile; Greek and Roman culture wrought changes in structure: One wife; sexual monogamy becomes normative (revulsion of pagan sexuality which is often seen as libertine and impure.

Jesus and Paul start a reframing of sexuality....

- 🕒 Jesus can even sound “anti” family at points. (*And looking at those who sat around him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.’* Mark 3:34-5ff; *Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.* Luke 14:26)





Paul sees “the end is near,” so suggests **marriage/family are distractions** to spiritual life. Paul suggests to be single and celibate to be the best Christian. However, if you get married (rather than “burn”), while he sees sex as a distraction, he is egalitarian in sexual matters.

‘It is well for a man not to touch a woman.’ But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another.... To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.... he who marries his fiancée does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better. 1 Cor 7:1-5; 8-9;38

Let me pause to recap..... Between antiquity and First Century:

- 🕒 There is no unitary Biblical sexual ethic but what would seem to be a transformational understanding of human reproduction based on pre-scientific thinking. Culturally/theologically, sexual ethics moved from sex as gift of God to opposite sex monogamy to support a pro-childbirth theology.
- 🕒 Jesus and Paul are not “anti-sex” but appear to have a totally different focus – “the Kingdom of God” which was underway. Such redefines family and so the purpose of sex. Which leads to the theology of the early church Fathers.....

Saint Augustine

- ⌚ Power of Greek Gnostics – duality of soul and body
- ⌚ Augustine (4-5th C) born into the rise of this and developed a strong anti-sex theology.
- ⌚ Adam and Eve virginal
- ⌚ The “original sin” is **concupiscence**
- ⌚ As male erection is involuntary, it must be lust created by “evil woman causing it and males have no control over their sexual desires.



🕒 **Therefore, one cannot have sex without lust; every sexual act is sinful and that sin is passed onto the child – assumed biologically. In this theology, every child is “conceived in sin” and is tainted by “original sin.”**

(Ruther p. 62)



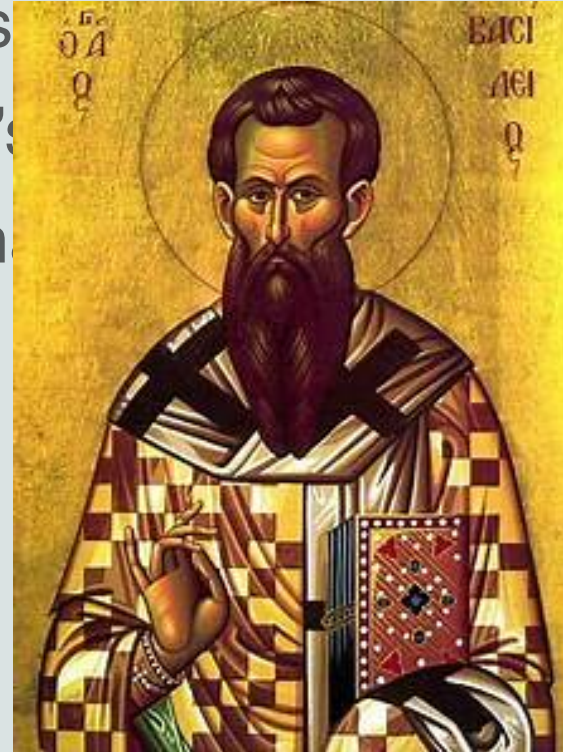
Augustine makes pleasurable sex bad; suffering good

- ⌚ Entire run of aesthetic ideas.
- ⌚ Pope Gregory declares any pleasure in sex (even in marriage) is sinful.
- ⌚ OF COURSE, it's the woman's fault she makes men lust! A 3rd Century council voted on whether women had souls (they do). But....
- ⌚ ***For evil are women, my children, and since they have no power or strength over men, they use wiles by outward attraction...women are overcome by the spirit of fornication...and in their hearts plot against men... (quoted in Ruther, p.93)***



Tertullian (3rd C)

- ⌚ (to women) You are the Devil's gateway. You are the unsealer of that forbidden tree. You are the first deserter of the divine Law. You are she who persuaded him whom the Devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image of man. On account of you...even the Son of God had to die. (quoted in Ruther p. 157)





Jerome (5th C)

Of all the ladies of Rome, but one had power to subdue me and that one was Paula. She mourned and she fasted. She was squalid with dirt. Her eyes were dim with weeping....The Psalms were her only song.... (quoted in Ruther p.173)

Where did Catholic theology go....?

🕒 Over 1500 years the theology, based on Augustine...

Infant baptism

Celibacy for priests

Ban on birth control (other than rhythm)

Any other type of sex is simply (evil) pleasure.

But then came the Protestant Reformation

🕒 **Luther reclaimed a more positive theology of sex:**

If it's solo scriptura, then Augustine falls

🕒 **Marriage is God's design and so sex is a good gift of God to be enjoyed.**

🕒 **Priest/pastor can (should?) be married.**

🕒 **Status of women increased (but still secondary)**

🕒 **Baptists and Anabaptists reject Original Sin**

w/“age or innocence.”



Luther writes that change in understanding of Scripture occurs...

- 🕒 ***Interpretations shift because believers continue to be transformed and see the world differently. The process of reading God's word is spiritual and relational – and therefore formational. Believers are converted (over and over again) in the reading and these changes shape our lenses, open our spirits and soften our hearts in ever new ways. (Soderstrom, p. 104)***

Then modern science changes the mindset.



- 🕒 By the mid 1800s, Augustine’s biology is proved wrong....but the ethos still lives in Catholic theology....and even in American thinking about sexuality (is sex “dirty?” What is behind Purity Culture?)
- 🕒 We have over the years done studies on human sexuality and know it’s not the binary of heteronormativity or masculine dominance.... (APA research changed homosexuality from “sick” to “non-normative;” women are not “deformed.”)
- 🕒 1930 Anglicans declare birth control acceptable (making pleasure OK!)
- 🕒 But we are products of the culture....(sociology helps here)

Where is the debate in Christian sexual ethics today?

1939, Dietrich von Hildebrand - “biological materialism” – that is we think of marriage/sex as a biological function more than a spiritual union.

IF sex is a spiritual act where “two become one,” then, what kind of sex is “spiritual?”

The primary end of sexual intercourse is the loving communion between the spouses, a communion that is both signified and enhanced, or “made,” in the intercourse. Popular language is correct: in their sexual intercourse spouses “make love.” And God is love.... (Saltzman and Lawler, p37)

- 🕒 *If* love is the defining element of how we understand human sexuality, where does that lead us in thinking about non-normative sexuality? What is our sexual ethic?
- 🕒 LBGTQ+ sexual relationships?
- 🕒 Pansexual or polyamorous relationships?
- 🕒 Gushee notes three “branches” of sexual ethics: mainline, Catholic and evangelical.
- 🕒 The debate is wide open!!!

My Resources (plus the books)

- 🕒 De La Torre, Miguel, 2013. *Orthoeros: A Biblically-Based Sexual Ethic, Professional Sexual Ethics: A Holistic Ministry*, Fortress Press.
- 🕒 Gushee, David, 2018. Christian Ethics: Retrospect and Prospect *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 38: pp. 3-20
- 🕒 Ruther, Rosemary, 2013. Sexual Ethics in Church History, *Professional Sexual Ethics: A Holistic Ministry Approach*, Fortress Press
- 🕒 Salzman, Todd and Michael Lawler, 2012. Sexual Morality in the Catholic Tradition A Brief History, *Sexual Ethics: A Theological Introduction*, Georgetown University Press