



The Kingdom Perspective

When in Rome...Do as the Christians Do

Hello! This is Pastor Don of Christ Redeemer Church. Welcome to The Kingdom Perspective!

There is no question that we live in a time of tremendous change in society's views on sex, gender, and marriage. For many, this is heralded as progress. For others it is troubling and confusing. Either way, we often forget that there is nothing new under the sun. Many of the changes we see all about us are really not so "new", but something quite old. Much of the contemporary sexual ethic is simply a return to pagan Rome. Christianity was born during the Roman Empire, and early Christians had to navigate all the varied sexual and gender expressions of it.

In this context, the early Christians distinguished themselves on a few key fronts:

First, their tender care of women and children. In Rome, women and children were generally not protected but seen as products to be used and abused for sexual pleasure. This was especially true of the slave class, which comprised nearly 20% of the inhabitants.

Second, Christians were distinguished by – what their pagan neighbors saw as – their strict sexual ethic. Christians were maligned as prudes in a society obsessed with using and abusing others. Christians followed the teaching of Holy Scripture and reserved sex for a loving marital relationship between a husband and wife.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, they were distinguished by the grace they extended to those exploited by Rome's sexual confusion and callousness. The church was a place of refuge and restoration, not a place of shame and ostracization.

Now, in that ancient context, the church was disparaged and persecuted for these values. But the community they created caused it to thrive. Today's church would be wise to aspire to that same example.

Something to think about from The Kingdom Perspective.

“Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.”

~1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 (ESV)

Some sources to consider:

The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History by Rodney Stark (Princeton University Press 2020).

The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbably Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire by Alan Kreider (Baker Academic 2016).

Why You Think the Way You Do: The Story of Western Worldviews from Rome to Home by Glenn S. Sunshine (Zondervan 2009).

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