

Knowing Right from Wrong

By Jay Wegter & Massimo Lorenzini

The Futile Search for Ethics in a Landscape without Truth

The public schools are desperately trying to teach moral character to their students. Their purpose is education, but they are realizing that without sufficient character qualities in their students they are not able to educate them. Educators are now promoting character education and encouraging student-led character clubs.

One student who is president of her high school character club was asked recently in a television interview about one thing she can take away from her experience with the character club as she looks to college. She said that the most important thing she learned was *tolerance and understanding*. Does she mean that before her involvement with the club she was a bully who went around punching everyone she didn't like or agree with? No, she meant something very different. We will look at the new understanding of tolerance in a moment. But first, a brief introduction to our subject is in order.

Ethics are from God

When we talk about discerning right from wrong, we are dealing with the subject of ethics. Ethics is the study of the good; the study of right and wrong actions and attitudes. In simple terms, ethics is the study of how to relate to God, others, and ourselves. Ethics govern the creature's relationship toward God, they govern the creature's relationship to fellow creatures, and they govern the creature's relationship to the creation itself.

The foundational ethic to all others is the command to glorify God. Vine's Expository Dictionary describes the command to glorify God in the following manner: In the New Testament "to glorify" is to extol, praise, and honor God by acknowledging Him as to His being, attributes and acts. God's glory is the revelation and self-manifestation of all that is His. Believers glorify God by bearing much fruit (Jn 15:8). To live for God's glory is only possible when we seek to imitate Him in holiness, honor and righteousness (Eph 5:1).

"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31, NKJV).

How can we glorify God?

"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Heb 11:6, NIV).

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt 6:33, NKJV).

So the Christian ethic, the only real ethic, is to glorify God by having faith in Him and giving His kingdom priority in our lives.

God has given us His revelation, His Word, to guide us in ethics, in knowing what we should and shouldn't do.

The book of Proverbs was given to us to teach us right conduct.

“To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, equity [or, doing what is right, just, and fair, NIV]; to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion—a wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov 1:2-5, 7, NKJV).

Life in a Moral Universe

The path of life and the path of destruction

Because God is Creator and sovereign Ruler of all creation, moral law is built into the very fabric of the universe. As the only creature made in the image of God, every action man takes is either an affirmation or denial of God’s moral government. These two moral directions are described in Scripture as two paths—one of life, and the other of destruction (Jer 6:16-19; Matt 7:13).

The book of Proverbs, as the rest of the Bible, teaches us to think in terms of *antithesis*—that there are two opposing ways of looking at life, a right way and a wrong way. In the book of Proverbs we find right and wrong contrasted, and often these occur even in a single verse. Here is one for example:

“In all labor there is profit, but idle chatter leads only to poverty” (Prov 14:23, NKJV).

We see thesis and *anti*-thesis; this way *or* that way. We need discernment to be able to distinguish between right and wrong, between truth and error, and then we need to conform ourselves to the truth or the right way. In fact, we are commanded in Scripture to do exactly that:

“Test [or, examine, NASB] all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess 5:21-22, NKJV).

Jay Adams has this to say about the principle of *antithesis*.

In the Bible, where antithesis is so important, discernment—the ability to distinguish God’s thoughts and God’s ways from all others—is essential. Indeed, God says that “the wise in heart will be called discerning” (Proverbs 16:21).

From the Garden of Eden with its two trees (one allowed, one forbidden) to the eternal destiny of the human being in heaven or in hell, the Bible sets forth two, and only two, ways: God’s way, and all others. Accordingly, people are said to be saved or lost. They belong to God’s people or the world. There was Gerizim, the mount of blessing, and Ebal, the mount of cursing. There is the narrow way and the wide way, leading either to eternal life or to destruction. There are those who are against us and those who are with us, those within and those without. There is life and death, truth and falsehood, good and bad, light and darkness, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, love and hatred, spiritual wisdom and the wisdom of the world. Christ is said to be the way, the truth, and the life,

and no one may come to the Father but by Him. His is the only name under the sky by which one may be saved.¹

Adams suggests that “people who study the Bible in depth develop antithetical mindsets: they think in terms of contrasts or opposites.”² We often refer to this as thinking in terms of black and white, truth and error. How different this antithetical thinking is from the thinking of our culture which claims truth is a fuzzy gray with no center. Also, how different it is from the attitude of many Evangelical Christians who want to only present biblical truth in positive terms but never point out error and especially never point out proponents of error.

This idea of antithesis is as old as human history as Jay Adams has indicated. It is also the subject of a fascinating early church document from around the end of the first century A.D. called *The Didache*, or *Teaching of the Apostles*. The word *didache* comes from the Greek word for teaching. The Didache is the first manual on church order that we know of. It was written to teach “the doctrine of the two ways.” The opening sentence begins, “There are two ways, one of life and of death, and there is a great difference between the two ways.” It then proceeds to expound on those two ways.

Jesus clearly taught this idea of two ways in His famous Sermon on the Mount:

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult [or, confined, constraining] is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matt 7:13-14, NKJV).

All of us are either on the narrow way that leads to life, or we are on the broad way that leads to death. There is no other alternative. There is no gray area. There is no neutral ground to stand upon.

We cannot know right from wrong without understanding truth

When ethics are divorced from the character of God, they can become vices

In our present godless and humanistic culture, there is a new “virtue” which undermines and opposes everything Christians believe. The new “virtue” is tolerance. (The highest virtue was *justice*, now it is *tolerance*. More on justice in a moment.) Consider the following characteristics of this “new morality.”

1. The word *tolerance* now has a dual definition.
2. Webster’s dictionary gives the traditional definition of tolerance (now known as “negative tolerance”). That definition acknowledges that *tolerance* recognizes and respects the beliefs and practices of others without necessarily agreeing or sympathizing with those beliefs. Everyone has a right to his own opinion.
3. The new *tolerance* is known as “*positive tolerance*.” The new tolerance can be explained as follows: Every single individual’s values, beliefs, lifestyles, and claims to truth are equally valid. So if a person claims that any individual’s values, beliefs, etc. are better or more correct than another’s, that is hierarchy and constitutes bigotry. Thus a bigot is one who believes in moral hierarchy (that there is a lifestyle, belief, etc. that is greater than another’s).
4. Under the U.S. constitution each person has an equal right to hold his or her belief. But under positive tolerance *all beliefs are equal in the sense that they are morally equivalent*. (EXAMPLE: If I say the claims of Christ are superior to the claims of Mohammed, or anyone else, it makes me

¹ Jay E. Adams, *A Call to Discernment* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1987), 31.

² Ibid., 29.

a bigot who is going against virtue.)

5. Traditional tolerance was simply the right to hold to one's belief and practice it and still be respected and treated fairly. However, "*positive tolerance*" demands praise and approval for all beliefs and lifestyles ("Now we not only want your neutral permission, we demand your positive praise and approval"). To be considered tolerant, you must from your own heart, regard the beliefs and lifestyles of others to be equally valid to your own or you're not tolerant. You must treat the ideas of others the same as your own.
6. The most quoted verse has changed from John 3:16 to "Judge not lest ye be judged" (Matt 7:1). Christians frequently are accused of being judgmental the moment they make a moral judgment. (Moral standards are now equated with being judgmental which is equated with being intolerant.)
7. The confusion inherent in "*positive tolerance*" is captured in a quote by National Public School administrator, Frederick Hill, "It is the mission of public schools not to tolerate intolerance." This is a logical contradiction. To be intolerant of intolerance is itself an act of intolerance which they say is wrong.

The position of positive tolerance violates the traditional view of tolerance. Now postmoderns no longer recognize and respect someone who has a differing belief when it comes to the issue of tolerance. Instead, in their quest to be "tolerant" they are unjust because they are being intolerant of someone just because they have a different belief when in the past that would have been tolerated. So justice and "positive tolerance" are incompatible. They are, in fact, antithetical. This is because to make justice possible, one must make a moral judgment on right and wrong. But "positive tolerance" does not allow one to make moral judgments. It actually forbids moral judgments.

So the irony here is that the more open-minded you become (not making moral judgments), the more close-hearted you become (don't care about justice for people). The end result of positive tolerance is moral and intellectual intimidation or bullying to get you to no longer hold to moral standards or pursue objective truth. Romans 1:18-32 gives us insight into the cause behind this trend and where it will lead our society (see Addendum).

Christians are considered the most intolerant people on the face of the earth Consider the following changes that have taken place in our culture in less than fifty years.

1. By the mid-nineties 2800 major corporations were taking their employees through training in tolerance. Now the person who dares make a moral judgment is commonly greeted with a response such as, "*You're a bigot. You're judgmental. What gives you the right to say that? Who do you think you are?*"
2. The truthfulness of what one says is no longer the issue. One's right to speak the truth is jeopardized by "*positive tolerance*." The Bible is not quoted much in public anymore because its content is regarded as bigoted and anti-multiculturalism.
3. Multiculturalism has also changed. It is no longer confined to racial issues. It now is the application of *tolerance* to culture in such a way that all cultures are equal in belief, values, lifestyle, and truth claims. If you deny this, you are regarded a bigot. (Francis Schaeffer warned more than four decades ago that we are moving from a post Judeo-Christian culture to an anti-Judeo-Christian culture.) We are now at a point where we have gone from the Christian view being dominant in American public life to it not being tolerated in public. The most dangerous person in America now is the Bible-believing Christian who says there is such a thing as right and wrong for everybody.

The tolerance intended by our forefathers was based upon God's absolute truth

When considering the dual definition of tolerance, there is no intelligent way to discern between them without appealing to absolute truth. By “absolute” is meant that the truth of God’s infallible Word is universal and unchanging. It applies to all men everywhere and it always will do so. No man has ever taken a “moral holiday” from God. God’s moral government will be in force in both heaven and hell. The righteous man utters, “Oh, how I love Thy law!” God’s moral law is revealed in His Word, and it is also an unchanging standard that is written on the conscience of man (Rom 2:15). Due to the fact that sinners suppress the truth of God and sear their consciences by presumptuous acts of sin, there is a constant need to sensitize and educate the conscience of man by means of the Word of God.

Culture is being devoured by a hideous and rapacious beast known as “lawless love”

Scripture demands that human dignity, life’s sanctity, and love’s boundaries are founded upon God’s laws. Lawless love is the patent denial that justice is inseparable from Christian love (Micah 6:8).

Consider the following contrast between biblical love and the lawless “love” espoused by positive tolerance.

1. Under “*positive tolerance*” justice is regarded as the enemy of tolerance because ***justice demands a moral base apart from oneself to discern right from wrong.*** (By contrast the new tolerance says that there is no universal moral basis for right and wrong. The Bible teaches that the moral basis for right and wrong is both fixed and outside the individual; it resides in God and His immutable Word.)
2. The new tolerance and justice cannot coexist because justice requires moral judgment. (The tragedy is that younger folks are not insisting upon justice).
3. The new tolerance says, “I must be indifferent when it comes to values and lifestyles. I must not impose my values on another. I must not make moral judgments.”
 - a. The moment you are not indifferent regarding values, truth claims, and lifestyle, you have crossed the line into bigotry.
 - b. You are biased, prejudiced, and discriminatory if you care enough to make a moral evaluation.
4. Christian love says, “I must act and speak truth in love. So if I see someone in a destructive belief or lifestyle I will stop to speak truth in love. ***Therefore, positive tolerance is opposed to Christian love!*** (because Christian love makes a moral judgment). Jesus exposed the lifestyle of the woman at the well (John 4) as a sinful lifestyle—what He did in confronting her was love!
5. ***Truth and morality cannot exist separately.*** History is filled with a record of the tragic consequences of attempting ethics apart from God’s truth. Oppressive regimes have always sought to set aside the truth of God’s moral government in order that they might have uncontested power. Pol Pot of Cambodia taught evolution in order to do away with the concept of God. The dictator’s motive, by his own admission, was to make state the supreme authority—the holocaust known as the “killing fields” was the result. (Other examples of ethics attempted apart from God’s truth include the following: the French Revolution, fascism, and morality by popular opinion resulting in infanticide and euthanasia. Moral chaos, anarchy, and sexual perversion thrive in a climate of “ethics” without truth.)

Love that is not established upon the foundation of truth is incapable of coming up with its own ethics

When all values, truth claims, and beliefs are equal, you lose the ability to choose right from wrong. This is because if all views are equal, then it doesn’t matter which one you choose. They have no substance and they are inconsequential. One’s beliefs have nothing to do with the real world of cause and effect. We see this clearly in our Christian youth.

1. Today there is no connection between belief and behavior. There is a gaping chasm between theology (Christian beliefs) and behavior.

- a. EXAMPLE: Josh McDowell brought the sharpest young people to the front of a church he was visiting. He asked, “Would you lie to get out from under a situation? 204 of the 209 said that they would lie.
 - b. But here is the shocking part, 99% of the kids said lying was wrong, but said, “I’d do it anyway.”
2. It is devastating to have young people say that something is wrong because mom says it is wrong. It is inadequate moral preparation for adult life. (Among those who give young people moral instruction, the common approach is to cite the precept, “The Christian religion requires that you do not lie, after all, the Bible says, ‘Thou shalt not lie.’” As McDowell cautions, “[At best,] We are [preparing] a whole generation to live by legalism.” We say “at best” because most likely most of these youth will not be in church once out of the home.

Without God’s truth, there is a radical loss in moral discernment

When young people only discern right from wrong by precept or commandment, they are inadequately grounded. Without a foundation in God’s truth, pragmatism and sentimentality can easily cloud the discernment needed to make right ethical choices. Moral relativism has so fully permeated our culture, we can no longer successfully train our youth in ethics by using dated and unscriptural methods.

1. We cannot preach the way we preached before the age of positive tolerance.
2. The old way of instructing in morals was, “It is wrong because God says, “Thou shalt not” But, culture has changed so radically, we can no longer do our moral instruction the old way. The old way is lacking in moral authority. The precept is not simply “one among many equally valid claims.” It is THE truth, the *one and only* truth!
3. We must show our young people that *right choices* depend upon knowing absolutely *right from wrong*, and *right from wrong* depends upon knowing the *truth*.

In order to teach right from wrong, one must teach the truth

Culture has changed; relativism has ushered in a deadly perspective that believes we no longer have morality, only differing opinions (morality is separated from God)

When we teach morality, we tend to start with a precept. But, if you stop with a precept, you are left with moralism (or legalism). We must communicate the fact that behind every precept is a moral principle (a broad standard or norm).

God’s moral principles are grounded upon His absolute truth.

1. What is absolute truth?
 - a. It is true for all people, in all places, at all times. It is constant and unchanging.
 - b. It has an objective basis outside of self. God and His Word are an unchanging (immutable) reference point external to us.
 - c. Truth is to be distinguished from personal standards. (EXAMPLE: Different sets of parents have different policies for their children when setting the time of curfew.)
2. There are two models of truth.
 - a. **God establishes absolute truth (absolutism).**
 - b. **Man determines truth (relativism).**
3. When asked to give the definition of truth, only 4 out of 7000 Christians could do it. Truth is that which corresponds with reality. Another definition found in Webster’s Dictionary is: “Truth is that which has fidelity to an original.”
 - a. EXAMPLE: If I say that I have a one-liter container, and someone says, “No you don’t!” Truth can settle the matter. “Fidelity to an original” comes into play when I take my container and my friend to the International Bureau of Weights and Measures to measure

- my liter against the *original* liter. There is *fidelity* if my container is equal to the original.
- b. The “original” is the unchanging reference point.
- c. Ethics can’t operate without truth (situation ethics demonstrate that ethics divorced from truth cannot provide an immutable standard).

Right from wrong is nothing less than the revelation of God’s righteous character

Something is right or wrong because it is true in God.

1. Why does the Bible say, “You shall not murder?” The reason is because God is life. He is the source and giver of life. The command flows from and is the expression of God’s very Person and nature! It is the life of God that gives sanctity to life. We are to pursue sexual purity because God is pure and holy.
2. Because our culture has adopted the twisted values of relativism and postmodernism, we must now teach biblical morality the Scriptural way; by connecting the command or precept to the Person of God.
3. When it comes to teaching right from wrong, the Scriptures never disassociate the precept from the divine Person. Josh McDowell offers the following paradigm for understanding how we should present moral truth:
 - a. **Level One – is PRECEPT** (a specific moral command)
 - b. **Level Two – is PRINCIPLE** (or broad moral principle)
 - c. **Level Three – is PERSON** (behind every principle is the Person and character and nature of God Himself.)
4. Without level three, you are left with moralism (or legalism).

The character of God is the basis for discerning right from wrong

Right and wrong do not change, because God’s character does not change

1. Our moral foundation has a truth foundation. “*Fidelity to an original*” is fidelity to the very nature and character of God.
2. God’s commands are not for Him, but for us. They are for our good. They are to protect us and to provide for us. They are the safeguard of love. *EXAMPLE: Like an umbrella, if you remove yourself from obedience, you remove yourself from protection and provision.* (On a hot summer night, a high school athlete walked past a sign that said no entry, danger, no trespassing. He climbed over a fence with a girlfriend. In the dark she saw his silhouette dive off the diving board into an empty swimming pool. He was paralyzed for life.)
3. We must teach our young people that God’s moral absolutes flow from His love to us. He is trustworthy. He wants to provide for us and protect us.

Because we live in a moral universe, love is impossible apart from delayed gratification

Instant gratification by indulgence of our lusts destroys love of God and neighbor. When the lower nature is allowed to set the standard of our moral conduct and behavior, sin and bondage are the result. Love is guarded by the ethical boundaries God has established in His moral law. Part of the deceptiveness of positive tolerance is found in its attempt to define freedom in terms of throwing off God’s moral standard. Jesus reserves some of His sternest warnings for this kind of error (see Jn 8:34-44, also see 2 Pet 2:18-22).

Young people tend to make choices that are based upon immediate return.

1. There is a paradox associated with moral choices:
 - a. Most right choices have immediate “negative” consequences (sacrifice, planning, delayed gratification, self-denial, peer disapproval, etc.)

- b. Most wrong choices have immediate “positive” consequences (temporal pleasure, peer acceptance, false sense of freedom, etc.)
2. In the long run, there is a total reversal of consequences. Wrong choices bear more and more bitter fruit and right choices produce ongoing well-being.
3. The reason for the above truth is the character of God. This is a moral universe ruled by a holy God. Therefore, the universe is built upon delayed gratification, not indulgence.
4. Purity and chastity is power because self-control and love are virtues solely found in those who are living free. It takes God’s truth and God’s strength in order to live free. Our entire identity is bound up in the fact that we were created in the moral image of a holy God. Sin is deadly because it is a distortion of God’s image. Man as image-bearer of God lives in a universe that is not now normal. Death, decay, suffering, injustice, and disease are reigning because of sin. Not until sin is dealt with will these byproducts of sin be expunged from creation. Thus we proclaim from the rooftops, there are two paths, two kingdoms, two masters, two destinies! If we trust our sinful preferences, we will remain in a state of darkness and deception. By nature we are part of the problem, but through Christ we can be part of the solution.

Youth can’t see the result of choices long term.

1. In order to make the sacrifices that are inseparable from right moral choices, young people must be taught that God loves them in Christ and that God is trustworthy.
2. This is the only way that they can be equipped to make consistent right choices. We must show them that they are to walk through the maze of life by the precepts of a trustworthy God, even when they cannot see the immediate results. *EXAMPLE:* Josh McDowell uses the following illustration when teaching young people. He speaks to the young person who has been blindfolded: “You know me, you trust me. Now start walking. I will get you safely through this maze, telling you when to stop and turn.”
3. Though we can’t see the results of right choices in the immediate, God sees the end from the beginning.
4. In summary, when instructing, counseling, and discipling our youth, we must not stop at level one or two. We must move from precept to principle to the Person of God. Each moral choice needs to be anchored in the Person and character of God. *EXAMPLE:* Using all three levels, how would you respond to the phrase, “If you loved me, you would sleep with me.” The **precept** says, “Flee sexual immorality” (1 Cor 6:18). The **principle** is God’s standard for sex is based upon love, purity, and faithfulness (within marriage). The **person** level states that God is love, pure, and faithful.

Connecting belief and behavior.

1. We must now show our youth how beliefs are consequential in the real world, that there is a cause and effect relationship between beliefs and behaviors that have good or bad consequences. God’s moral standards are not only based on truth, they apply to them in a practical way. We must show them what truth can *do* for them.
2. We show them the *practicality* of the truth when we show them how God’s standards protect them from harm and provide for their well-being. God’s commands are for our good. “And now Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today *for your good*?” (Deut 10:12-13, NKJV). God’s commands are not arbitrary. They serve a practical purpose. He never gives commands like, “You shall paint your right ear lobe green.” The apostle John declared, “And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3b). He never tells us to walk twice as far as we need to go just because He commands it. No, all of His commands have a practical purpose. They are for God’s glory and our good.

3. In the example of illicit sex, God's standard of purity **protects** them from guilt, unplanned pregnancy, STDs, and emotional distress. Sex with marriage **provides** spiritual rewards, optimum environment for raising children, peace of mind, truth, true intimacy.

How to teach the truth to our youth

1. By relationship, example, and truth.
"Hear, O Israel: The Lord [is] our God, the Lord [alone] [**Truth**]! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength [**Example**]. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart [**Example**]. You shall teach them diligently to your children [**Truth**], and you shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up [**Relationship**]. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" [**Truth**] (Deut 6:4-9, NKJV).
2. Rules without relationship = rebellion. Parents, use the following questions as a self-test to see how you are doing in relating with your youth:
 - When was the last time you laughed together?
 - When was the last time you cried together?
 - Do you know what his/her current favorite song is?
 - Do you know who he/she sits with in the school cafeteria?
 - When did he/she last seek your advice?
 - When did you last forget or cancel a commitment to him/her?
 - Do you more often ask questions of or make statements to him/her?
 - Have you recently admitted a mistake or fault to him/her?
 - What do you know—really know—about his/her spiritual life?
3. The answers to such questions help reveal the depth of your relationship with your child and may suggest places to start deepening them right now.

An Addendum on Postmodern Tolerance

An assessment of our times

Postmodern (PM) tolerance is having a disastrous effect on moral virtue in our society. Its corrupt fruits are seen in divorce, recreational fornication, homosexuality, abortion, profanity, and perversion. These sins are defended in the name of tolerance and freedom.

On the worldwide web there are numerous sites filled with bitter anti-Christian material. These are often the same sites that are promoting tolerance. Why is there such ferocious opposition from the "paragons" of tolerance? The reason is because the truth claims of Christianity (which are absolute and exclusive) are the death-blow to postmodernism which is simply a cloak for intellectual and moral self-government (i.e., self-centeredness, self-worship, idolatry).

A theory we have as to the motivation behind the postmodern tolerance view is that when people think of positive tolerance they primarily have in mind sexual freedom. Firstly, homosexual rights and acceptance in Western culture and, secondarily, other deviant lifestyles surrounding sexual immorality like pornography, abortion, fornication, adultery, transsexual/transgender lifestyles seem to be the driving motivation. We believe in the near future that we are going to see this emphasis on tolerance of sex sins spread into even more vile sins such as pedophilia, incest, bestiality, orgies, and public sex acts. It is quite plausible to believe that positive tolerance is really an irrational and demonic defense for an exploding sexual revolution in our culture.

Positive tolerance has become our culture's highest virtue and coming alongside that is a heightened value placed on sexiness. Being sexy has become most fashionable. Case in point, at a recent awards ceremony Madonna and Brittany Spears kissed on stage (this was planned in advance). We must be reminded that sexiness is not a virtue, it is a vice. It doesn't have God's approval but His condemnation.

Romans 1:18-32 demonstrates the progression (or, more accurately, regression) into sin is marked by sex sins. We can parallel the steps into moral degradation in Romans 1 with what we witness in our own society in the last 100 years. In verse 18 we recognize that we have entered upon the wrath of God, being given up to our sins, as a society by the following:

- Step 1 – v.18b, ***Suppression of the truth***. We removed the Bible and God from public thought (beginning with higher criticism then on down to the public schools—early 20th century and up to the fifties and sixties).
- Step 2 – v. 21-22, ***Futile thinking***—nihilistic worldview, existentialism, postmodernism, relativism, etc. filled the void left by the removal of a Christian theistic worldview (early 20th century up to the present).
- Step 3 – v. 23, ***Change of focus from God to the creaturely world***—materialism, consumerism (beginning in the fifties and on up to the present).
- Step 4 – vv. 24-25, ***Sex sins increase along with an increase in materialism*** (the sixties, the sexual revolution and up to the present).
- Step 5 – vv. 28-ff., ***The rise of sins of every kind; moral anarchy***.

In the midst of such moral chaos, Christians must not be duped or intimidated. We must retain confidence in the power of God who stands behind His unbreakable Word. We must remain bold in proclaiming Christ as the only hope for people in the world. It's vitally important that we rise above the confusion—there is a source of absolute truth; it is outside of us, it is true no matter how you feel (Ps 119:151; John 17:17).

Postmodernism says there is no such thing as knowable absolute truth. Truth is only the creation or construct of the human mind. Therefore, there is no religion superior to anyone else's. Right and wrong cannot be based on theology, but "what I believe is right for me." In other words, truth has now become preference, and these preferences are determined by a perverse and wicked human nature.

In postmodern thinking, confident faith is demonized while skepticism is enthroned. Strong convictions are equated with intolerance. If a person has strong convictions he may even be compared to terrorists because he wants to persuade people to adopt his own convictions.

Postmodernism leads its proponents into extreme irrationalism. To know absolute truth is considered arrogant. Dogmatism about the truth is regarded as bigotry and pride. PM tolerance is highly irrational. PM views two contradictory propositions as simultaneously true! By contrast, the Word of God indicates that whatever contradicts truth is error (1 Tim 6:3, 4). This is the law of non-contradiction (A cannot be B in the same way and at the same time.). Human history has unequivocally held to it and still does in all realms with the exception of the current moral and ideological anarchy. In other words, in all areas on human endeavor like science, medicine, engineering, driving, sports, etc., we use the law of non-contradiction. Only in the moral and ideological realm (namely the metaphysical) do we seem to allow the law of non-contradiction (and other laws of logic) to be violated.

Scripture truth is unchanging because God is unchanging (1 Pet 1:25). Repentance is the only proper and rational response to postmodern thought. Our thoughts and affections must be adjusted to God's invariable truth.

Postmodernism attacks the clear meaning of Scripture, suggesting that God's Word to humanity has countless meanings for countless people. The Word says the opposite. Scripture has one meaning. That meaning is perspicuous (having clarity). It is not "whatever it means to me" (2 Pet 3:16).

The Word of God is the starting point and final test of truth. The Scriptures, being the infallible Word of God, are totally rational because God is the only source of rationality. Without God one cannot explain the origin of rationality.

The natural man (a person not born again) is at war with the truthfulness of God (Rom 1:18). He or she does not receive God's truth. It is regarded as foolishness (1 Cor 2:14) because the natural man is darkened in his thoughts and driven by a relentless lust for autonomy.

We must recover our love of biblical truth and the conviction that it is unassailable truth (2 Thess 2:13-17). We must proclaim it, for it is a sin to keep it to ourselves (2 Cor 5:11-21).

God is Building a Kingdom of People whom He has enabled to Choose Right from Wrong (Titus 2:11-14)

God's plan for the recovery of fallen mankind involves the writing of His laws on the hearts of those saved by Christ. This not only means that the conscience is tuned to God's moral will, it also means that the desire to obey God's law is stamped upon the hearts of the redeemed. Right moral choices become a function of having been set apart by and in Christ. God-glorifying ethical living is the expression of a new nature that is empowered by God's Holy Spirit. Christians are not establishing their identities by right moral choices, instead their ethical conduct is the manifestation of who they really are. Thus their transformation by God's truth and daily righteous living is a function of them becoming what they really are in Christ, sanctified by truth.

The following words from the Lord Jesus interceding for His elect are a most fitting benediction to end with:

"I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As you have sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth" (John 17:14-19, NKJV).