SCRIPTS AND SCRIPTURE

The word *script* can denote a type of handwriting, the written dialogue of a play or movie, or the shortened term for a physician’s pharmaceutical order. One uncommon definition of *script* is it being a particular idea, value, or norm. Sometimes it’s applied psychologically to explain one’s behavior; or, sociologically, to explain a social trend in culture. There are scripts that are theological, political, ideological — every “-al” there is. They float around in scenarios influencing us from birth.

Scripts are powerful providers of security, purpose, and meaning. They tell us what to say, how to think, when to move, how to feel. In many ways, they are not the operating systems of our lives but the coding that makes them up. You put these scripts together and, when systematized, they create an overarching narrative to give meaning, explain purpose, and provide security. They come from media, commerce, political systems, education, communities, and even our families. All the while, we all absorb them, are influenced by them, and pass them on.

Though the Bible has been around for a while, its true embodiment as a primary script has yet to be realized. This is made most evident in the realm of sexuality. Rather than understanding what sexual scripts the Bible has to present, humanity has imposed its own scripts onto the Bible, causing much confusion, suffering, and misery. Before delving into the sacred principles of relationships and physical intimacy, we will look at the role of not scripts, but Scripture.
Write out Romans 12:1, 2 from the translation of your choice. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
One script that has floated around for centuries is Platonic dualism. It is one of the most powerful and enduring ideologies that may impact you—from your social media habits to the way you eat breakfast. Don’t roll your eyes at the mention of a Greek philosopher, but Plato (and notably, the entire school of thought associated with the idea) defined the human being as having two compartments.

The first is the physical body, including the organs, bones, and muscle tissue. Because the physical world was associated with evil and the body is in this physical world, the body is also associated with evil. Activities connected with the body belong to this ephemeral world, destined to decay and disappear. This includes things like appetite and sexuality.

The second part is the spirit, often depicted as a white sparkling asterisk-shaped globule that floats around in the air like a dandelion seed in the wind. This part is where your thoughts, memories, moral self, and your self-identity reside. Some would mistakenly label this as the soul. Dualists would conclude that all that is evil is in your body, but all that is good is in your spirit. It was the moral task of the human being to choose the spirit over the body to achieve spiritual victory.

Later, institutional Christianity adopted Greek philosophy, merely placing monotheistic elements into the original polytheistic framing. While found in many other places and denominations, dualism scripts are most evidenced and visible in Roman Catholicism, where sexuality in many ways is considered to be in opposition to spirituality. In trumpeting the script of dualism, dualistic religions proclaim that bodily pleasures are contaminated. Sex is seen as “dirty,” to be avoided, one of the root evils in human existence, and incompatible with spiritual things. In line with thinking of sexuality as evil, monasticism promotes celibacy as the equivalent of sanctification. In this view, rather than being a positive perspective, sexuality exists only for reproductive means, and advanced spirituality is achieved through abstinence.

On the other hand, with the rise of atheism and evolutionary biology, another dominant script is floating around in society as well. Rather than being compartmentalized, the human being is singular, and it is just the body. The spiritual sphere is not accepted but argued away as some vestige of primitive anthropology. The ethic of this script looks to the animal kingdom for normative human behavior. The thinking is that since humanity came from animals, beasts should provide the model for what is proper conduct. Since animals procreate without regard to “socialized” rules and regulations, sexual norms look to creatures rather than the Creator for moral, social, and ethical authority (Romans 1). The satiation of powerful hormones, the allure of the mating process, and the passing down of genes all point to the human being as defined as the human body only.

Whereas physical needs are denied in the former script, they become paramount and even enter the world of morality in the latter script. According to these two scripts, sexual activity is either a necessary evil or a limitless indulgence; something to be denied or something to be binged on. Like the Jews who were stuck between the king of the North and the king of the South (also interestingly identified as, respectively, the false religion of Rome and the atheism symbolized as “Egypt” in some schools of prophecy), believers of God’s Word today are also stuck between the two ideologies of asceticism and hedonism.
BEYOND SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS

In the Old Testament history of Israel and Judah, these sister nations politically interfaced with the southern superpower of Egypt under some kings, while under other royals they placated the various northern superpowers of Mesopotamia. Geographically sandwiched between the empires of the Nile and the empires of the Tigris and Euphrates, the people of the Jordan were always caught between two sides. Rather than subscribing to either of the imperial scripts, the prophets implored God’s people to rely on the scripts of the Ultimate Superpower of superpowers.

Contemporary society has similar challenges, but rather than two sides, there are multiple ideologies of sexuality seeking to influence us. One is secular counterculture. Anything that goes against the current is extolled. Whether it be art, fashion, politics, or entertainment, pushing boundaries or questioning society’s norms is the fad. But too often, being countercultural can be so … cultural.

Another is the culture of institutionalized traditionalism. Found in all denominations and organizations, it seeks to legitimize, preserve, stabilize, and pass on the standards of society, whether they are biblical or not. It is not the content of the values that is emphasized, but the resistance to change that is eulogized.

The former seeks to analyze, point out hypocrisies, highlight weaknesses, and revel in the excitement and creativity of the new. The latter enjoys the comfort of mindlessness and security of the existing social architecture, while disparaging others who may remove this warmth and coziness. Both these cultural dominations enslave their practitioners to a mediocre and even deceived understanding and practice of sexuality. It is the challenge for the next generation of Christ-followers to avoid ditches on all sides.

There is only one resort. Especially for the realm of sexuality, we must seek answers and scripts from God and His revealed truth. Only Scripture presents a legitimate platform of authoritative scripts that provide both the hope of change and the power of security that we desperately need.

Romans 12:2 states that we are not to be conformed to the scripts of this world. Since these earthy scripts are so “sticky,” we must be transformed by the renewing of our minds on a regular basis, if not daily, to ascertain the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God. Instead of seeking Scripture to support existing ideas and practices, we must subject ourselves to its transformative power to recreate our “operating systems” by implanting its scripts into our minds. This openness is what verse 1 speaks about, presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice—completely open, exposed, vulnerable, and unguarded from the influence of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Word. Only when we do so shall a beautiful and much more amazing picture of sexuality emerge.
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What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

1 John 2:15–17
Matthew 7:24–28
Titus 2:11–15
1 Corinthians 3:18–23
1 John 5:1–5

What other verses come to mind in connection with being countercultural?

Review your memorized verse from Romans 12:1, 2.
JESUS THE COUNTERCULTURAL

In this world that seeks to call people out, eschew fakeness, and stand for something or someone, it is hard to ascertain that which is genuine, truth, and even whether it is worth it. Many stand for countercultural causes because the causes themselves have become culturally acceptable. Being countercultural can be so cultural.

The basic principles of the external social world must be juxtaposed with the basic principles that lie deep in our value systems. Jesus did not come to teach a message of being nice to fellow humanity, but a comprehensive worldview that was incompatible with the world. Once this juxtaposition occurs, there are clear dissonances with society that cause the follower of Jesus to act and live counter to that value. This is the beginning of the countercultural.

Jesus did not come to change social systems for the sake of social change, as some portray Him. By the same token, Jesus was not an ascetic who diverted followers away from the world, as others view Him. He came to live out the principles, or scripts, of Scripture that gave a comprehensive framework of principles and values that would compel His followers to address all forms of injustice, inequality, and immorality, regardless of whether it was popular, fashionable, or cultural. In other words, being centered on God, His Kingdom, His will, His work, His power, and His Spirit would result in the greatest counterculture of all (Matt. 6:33). Not only would this result in social change in certain contexts, but it also involves the salvation of the world, the explanation for God’s dealings with evil in our world, and the removal of sin, evil, and its results for all time.

The social debates about sexuality are more than politics, sociology, ethics, and religion. They deal with who humanity acknowledges as having authority, sovereignty, and rights as Creator, Redeemer, and God. Why be part of a local cause when you can be part of a galactic movement that appeals to your sense of justice, fulfills your need of mercy, and satisfies your longings as a human socially, mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually?
THE COUNTER-SCRIPT OF LOVE

“The efficiency of Satan’s kingdom is found in the blending together of satanic forces to extend the contagion of evil; but the Lord Jesus has devised a plan whereby He may work counter to the work of Satan. He designs to imbue His human agents, the subjects of His kingdom, with the principles of love and unity. With sanctified heart they are to build one another up and strengthen and extend that which is good. Reciprocating Christ’s love, they are to deal in the goods of heaven. His church is to bear His superscription, and thus testify to the world that God has sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world. . . . Love is to be interwoven as threads of gold in all their actions.

“Every Christian who is happy in the Lord will work zealously to bring the same happiness into the heart and life of one who is in need and affliction. Followers of Christ will produce their own happiness in the hearts of others by performing Christlike works. They will diffuse an atmosphere which is pure, peaceful, and Christlike. They will act out heavenly attributes, and will produce fruit after the heavenly kind and quality. That which they sow they shall also reap.” (Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*, 185.)

“The children should be surrounded by the best of influences and associations. Parents who undertake this work in the fear and love of God, will guard every word, that they may hear nothing that would pain them when their own conversation is repeated by the children. They will seek to supply the weakness, ignorance, and deficiency in their children by high moral instruction, that they may grow up strong in purity, with well-established habits that tend to health and happiness. With such an education they will gather up that kind of knowledge that will perfect the character in symmetry and strength.

“If the youth are left to pick up an education, they will find that every facility will be furnished. From a variety of sources the knowledge of evil will be brought to the mind, and, perhaps, in after life it can never be wholly effaced. When parents neglect their duty in laying the foundation of character for their children, bringing the very best principles as timbers for their character building, this neglect will be supplied by the enemy of God and man, and the youth will be indifferent to virtue and truth. The home should be made the most pleasant place in the world. What is the outward and the artificial compared with the true and the natural? The Lord has given to the children faculties that need the most careful training from both parents and teachers. . . .

“To mould and fashion the character of children and youth is a work of the very highest importance, and in this work it is essential to present Christ in His matchless love to the mind, that His counter and stronger charms may eclipse the attractions of the world. The youth must not merely see a theory, however logical, but the loving character and glory of Christ. They must be led to behold the riches of the eternal world, until they are encouraged, animated, and won. The love of Jesus must be the motive of all effort. It impels, it constrains, it captivates.” (Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, 51, 52.)
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Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

What scripts are you aware of in your mind?

How do you become aware of scripts that are hidden?

What are some scripts of sexuality that you hold?

Give an example of dualism/asceticism in society. Give an example of hedonism in society.

How do you see examples of traditionalism and its impact on sexuality?

Where are areas that the scripts of society clash with the scripts of Scripture?

How have you dealt with this dissonance in the past? Does this make you more resolved or more reticent?

How can you be transformed by the renewing of your mind?