

*"Celebrating the Centrality of Christ in the Local Assembly"*

Author: Patrick J. Griffiths ©  
 Date: January 29, 2006  
 Title: The Cross and Moral Purity - I  
 An Overview of 1 Corinthians 1-10: Part III – Chapters 5-7  
 Text: 1 Corinthians 6:18-7:5  
 Theme: The cross work is big enough to keep His body morally pure.

**Introduction:**

As we continue to review our past studies, the next section within the book of 1 Corinthians we will revisit is chapters 5-7 that address the area of morality.

I would like to begin with a rather lengthy introduction.

**What are the threats against moral purity?**

You and I live in a context in which we are bombarded by images of biblically inappropriate imagery. The political scene and television culture promotes moral compromise and seek to sell it as politically correct and those who would censure such activity are labeled as intolerant and hateful.

Often we find ourselves laughing our way down the slippery slope of moral compromise until we find ourselves committing grievous acts in the recesses of our minds and ultimately through the instrumentation of our bodies.

**What are the cultural attacks that would compromise our moral purity?**

We have no restraints placed on us by our culture. Unless we heed the biblical call and embrace the innate consequences of the cross-work, we will find ourselves betraying our biblical foundations.

It is fitting for us to examine more closely the biblical call to moral purity as the outworking of the cross-work of Jesus Christ.

**Why am I teaching this? Is this material applicable?**

In 1991, The Fuller Institute of Church Growth did a survey on "How Common is Pastoral Indiscretion?" The results were shocking. Thirty-seven percent of the respondents confessed to having been involved in inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in their church. Another survey of 300 pastors by Leadership Magazine indicated that 23% admitted to having been sexually involved with someone other than their spouse. It is also reported that some large hotel chains report some of their largest revenues for adult TV channels have occurred during Christian conventions.

### **How will they best hear?**

I recently came across a statement that reads as follows, “There are only two types of people that don’t struggle with lust: dead ones and liars.”

In Called to be Holy by the Archbishop of Milwaukee Timothy Dolan, the author records a conversation between an older priest and a younger priest. The younger priest asks the question, “When will I stop lusting?” The older priest responded with the following answer, “5 minutes after you are dead!”

### **What am I asking you to do?**

I ask you to be honest with yourself and with God. God you have not fooled, but you may have fooled yourself. Perhaps you have deceived yourself into thinking that your compromises are excusable, that somehow what you do is not as bad as the actual perpetrator of the sin. Friend, you are deceived.

Often we think we have won major wars, yet we are still giving up ground in smaller areas. We are conceding areas and by so doing setting ourselves up for event failure.

Without wanting to be flippant, our battle with lust is no respecter of age or gender, race or geographical location. Although each of us might have certain idiosyncrasies as to what we lust after and how that lust reveals itself, we are all doing battle with a lust which when left unchecked will defile us, destroy us and detach us from the people we love the most.

Our text this morning allows us the opportunity to consider the idea of biblical purity.

The issue of morality in our present text is defined as moral purity. It deals with personal holiness but only as it relates to the area of one’s morality. It is not dealing with ethical issues like just war or cloning or labor laws.

While looking just at USA Today over 1,000 hits were found where the idea of losing one’s moral compass was highlighted.

In 1995 William J. Bennett wrote, The Moral Compass. Through various literary devices he seeks to show what is right and wrong, good and bad during the various stages of one’s life. It is not a book addressing sexual purity, but social and/or ethical purity. We could speak of dishonesty through speech and action in all of the various relationships at multiple levels whether it is between husband and wife, parent and child, employee and employer, citizen and state, or nations against nations, but our text deals only with moral purity as it relates to one’s sexual expressions.

We live in a culture where sexuality and immorality have become blurred entities. **We are sexual by design but we are immoral by choice.** The two are not the same.

“Human sexuality is a much larger concept than sexual behavior. Its focus falls more on what people are than on what they do.”  
(New Dictionary of Theology, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, J.I. Packer, “Sexuality,” D.H. Field, 637, c1988)

Our present study will focus on biblical purity and sexual behavior.

We have skewed our sexuality and thus have made immorality common. I cannot begin to tell you how many shows on TV, that are either fabricated or real life, where immorality is openly displayed and not given a moments thought as to its rightness.

As individuals, we have given up too much ground to the unbelieving. Our concessions have made us unbiblical in our expressions of biblical sexuality and godless immorality. This study is a call for us to be a people who are morally pure. Morality is not an issue over which the local church can be silent. Martin Luther King, Jr. made the following observation.

“We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.” (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

It is possible that our silence as individuals and as a fellowship has unknowingly empowered those who have opposed biblical morality.

#### ILLUSTRATION:

There is an old story about a just man who came to Sodom hoping to save the city. He began picketing. What else could he do? He went from street to street, marketplace to marketplace, shouting, "Men and women, repent! What you are doing is wrong. It will kill you, it will destroy you." They laughed but he went on shouting until one day a child stopped him. "Poor stranger, don't you see it's useless?" asked the child. "Yes," the just man replied. "Then why do you go on?" the child asked. The man answered like this, "In the beginning, I was convinced that I could change them. Now I go on shouting because I don't want them to change me."

Friends, we must never stop warning against the horrible consequences of physical immorality.

Now let us begin to draw ourselves into the Word of God.

Let us consider again the historical context in which we find Paul's call to "Flee immorality."

The sexual immorality of Corinth was so internationally well-known that the expression, "to act like the Corinthian," was descriptive of the immoral condition of the city. It came to mean "to practice fornication." Corinth stood for everything that is sinful. The city was the center of immorality with the Aphrodite temple, the Greek goddess of love, and its 1,000 prostitutes who came down into the city from their mountain temple at night. Greek plays commonly portrayed a citizen of Corinth as either a drunk or a prostitute. It is interesting to note that the heathen idolatry and gross sexuality immorality that Paul described in Romans 1:18-27 he wrote while in Corinth.

“Corinth was perhaps the most wicked city of that day, and the Christians needed to be particularly careful.” (Earle, Word Meanings in the New Testament, 227).

When you consider the letters that were written from the city of Corinth and the messages they contain, it adds much to the weight of what is said. This is seen in the Thessalonian letters (1 Thess 4:3) and Romans (Chapters 1-3).

Inside of this historical context Paul makes his initial appeal, “Flee immorality.” Yet we would be foolish if we were to think that our day is any less wicked than their day.

It is my desire to be discreet in the presentation of this material.

I recognize the difficulty that can exist in trying to communicate the issue of morality before a mixed audience both by way of gender and age. I have labored over this material and I will stay guarded. I do want to put you at ease. I am not here to embarrass you in any way. However, I do believe the Scripture deals with these areas in a sensitive way and it is necessary for us to hear what God wants to say.

“Scripture is overwhelmingly positive in its treatment of sexuality. The theology of creation strongly affirms the goodness of sex and give the lie to an ascetic ideal which denies its value (Prov. 5:18, 19).” (New Dictionary of Theology, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, J.I. Packer, “Sexuality,” D.H. Field, 638, c1988)

There are guidelines that define what constitutes right relationships with one’s self and with others and these guidelines are right because they are biblical.

### **What is the biblical idea?**

When one examines the book of Leviticus there is a specific call to personal holiness and its opposite in moral defilement. Within the book of Leviticus moral defilement is to become ceremonially unclean, to have been set apart from the nation of Israel and her God. Just the opposite is true when it speaks of personal holiness. Personal holiness is to have been set apart to the nation of Israel and for her God. Leviticus 18 is a graphic listing of the various sexual sins that can make an individual unclean or defiled. Such sexual sins separate a person from the nation of Israel and her God.

Although the capital offense of the various sins have been re-addressed under the New Covenant, their polluting capacity is no less true.

### Acts 15:20

The Scripture exhorts us to abstain from fleshly lusts. When the council met in Acts 15 at Jerusalem to decide the fate of the Gentile believers as to their relationship to the Mosaic Law, there was a three-fold statement made. It is not my intent to discuss the nature of the three prohibitions, but to note how the inclusion of moral purity was accented.

Ac 15:20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.

The exhortation to Gentile believers was for them to abstain from fornication. Fornication is the word porneia. The idea of abstaining is “To hold oneself off, to refrain.”

### Acts 15:29

Acts 15:29 reiterates the decision of the Jerusalem council and adds the statement, “if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well.”

The word “keep” means “To watch thoroughly, to observe strictly.” It is a compound word made up of a prefix and the word meaning to guard or protect. It is used in the context of a jailor guarding a prisoner (Acts 12:5, 6, 16:23 [READ]). The suggestion is that moral purity is a result of diligent intensity. It does not just happen. Those who give themselves to the task of being morally pure do well.

### 1 Thessalonians 4:3

This same idea is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:3.

1 Thessalonians 4:3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality;

A.T. Robertson correctly notes how, “Pagan religion did not demand sexual purity of its devotees, the gods and goddesses being grossly immoral. Priestesses were in the temples for the service of the men who came.” How tragic that moral purity is to be the hallmark of Christian morality. This quality is becoming more pronounced as our culture becomes more anti-God.

It is God’s will for you to be morally pure. Remember how earlier I noted that, **“We are sexual by design but we are immoral by choice.”** In the outworking of my position before God, He has set me apart from immorality. His calling is for moral purity. The same words are being used for abstain and fornication throughout.

### 1 Peter 2:9-12

Peter also calls his audience to moral purity. His statements are powerful. Note 1 Peter 2:9-12 (READ).

Peter establishes who we are in verse 9. He gives us the consequences of our glorious position in 9 and 10 (“So that . . .”). Verse 11 is the exhortation to persevere in the area of moral purity and why such an exhortation is needful (“They war against your soul”). Verse 12 notes how such behavior on our part is excellent and brings glory to God.

Our “fleshly lusts” war against our souls. The word “war” communicates a military campaign. The world, the flesh, and the devil are in a campaign to destroy your moral purity. Notice the language of Acts 15:29 for “keep” and that of a military campaign in 1 Peter. There is intensity in the language used. This Scriptural idea is not less prominent in 1 Corinthians 6:18 and following.

Under the New Covenant, our union with Christ guarantees the certainty of our relationship to Him, yet the polluting impact of sexual sins is no less damaging. Their damage, however, expresses itself in ways that are different (Capital Punishment) than inside of a theocratic nation. We do well to understand the crippling power of sexual sins penetrating hold that it has on the perpetrator of the sin. It is for this reason our text calls us to “Flee immorality.”

We need to define the term.

#### I. What is immorality (6:18)?

Before we attempt to define immorality I would like us to ask the question, “What is morality?” When you begin looking at a definition for morality, you start to find an enormous body of literature that wrestles with the idea from a philosophical perspective, yet without the wrangling let us agree that we can determine what is or is not moral.

Morality cannot be determined by one's conscience. Many in our present culture have no conscience as it relates to morality. It is pleasure driven and sensory dictated. Our conscience is only as good as the information which feeds it.

Our society struggles with the defining of morality. In a society or culture that abandons a reference point outside itself, morality becomes relative. As believers we can define what is moral because the Bible defines what is moral. Our greater cultural conscience has lost any resemblance of biblical morality. It has a morality, but it is a godless morality dictated and defined by the sinful hearts of a collective society.

Some might argue there is a danger that we will legislate morality. Friend, the issue is not can we or should we legislate morality, but whose morality will be legislated?

Let us go back to asking the question, "What is morality or what is moral?"

Here is a biblical definition of morality. Morality is defined by conformity to who God is. For example, if we take the statements of Philippians 4:8, we begin to see what biblical morality looks like.

Biblical morality is honorable, right, pure, lovely, well spoken of, excellent, worthy of praise, these are the kinds of things that define for us biblical morality.

Morality is large, but it is never questionable. When the Scripture says, "Flee immorality" what exactly does it mean?

The Greek word is porneia. It is our English word "Porno." We might want to believe that trying to define pornography is like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall, but moral compromise is not negotiable. If you want a definition of what constitutes pornography for a guy, let them define their compromises to you and you will get a pretty good idea of what defines pornographic material.

This is no less true for women. Your moral compromises might appear different than a man's, but you are no less culpable and compromised.

#### APPLICATION:

1. Be honest
  - a. With God
  - b. With yourself
  - c. With others (same gender)
2. Be thorough – no more compromise
3. Be guarded – Cf. Acts 15:29, "Guard the prisoner"