

Key to Biblical Doctrine

“He that comes to me I will not reject for any reason whatsoever”

-Jesus (John 6:37)

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Immorality

But **immorality** or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ¹

Ephesians 5:3-5

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to **immorality**, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

Colossians 3:5

Cultural Immorality

*Immoral*²

adjective

1. violating moral principles; not conforming to the patterns of conduct usually accepted or established as consistent with principles of personal and social ethics.
2. licentious or lascivious.

Immorality, like a few other English words, is indefinite, pertaining to several or many specific conditions. Adultery is immoral. Rape is immoral. Murder is immoral. Abortion is immoral. The problem with indefinite words is that they take their meaning from the cultural norm of the day.

In certain Mideastern nations, it is immoral for women to dress as American women commonly dress. We Americans don't think the average American woman dresses immorally, but if Mideastern women were to dress likewise, Mideastern men would assume they are prostitutes. They would probably be right, because prostitutes in the Mideast, accepting their cultural mores, dress as American women: not wearing a burka, having a short dress and perhaps even a bright red dress.

¹This and all scripture references are taken from the *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*. (1995). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

² <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/immoral?s=t>

We do the same thing in the United States. We have certain stereotyped ways for homosexuals to act. Young men, discovering their homosexuality for the first time, frequently accept their culturally imposed pattern and adopt a flighty, effeminate manner.

Translating the word “immorality” into another language with a different culture would create a different list of activities that the reader calls immoral.

We should never interpret or translate the Bible using 21st Century culture to understand 1st Century comments.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:15

It is shameful to mishandle the message of God in a careless way, but it rates God’s approval to receive and understand His message with the meaning He intended.

“Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography.”³

So says the Southern Baptist Convention in their Statement of Faith and Message. You see how they allow themselves to interpret whatever they want to be “immoral”, and that includes adultery, homosexuality and pornography. Did you know that pornography, or even the concept of pornography, is not in the Bible or talked about in the Bible? A person can find an obscure comment, such as “keep your minds pure,” (Matthew 5:8, Philippians 4:8) and say that includes pornography, but they cannot find pornography itself.

The concepts of purity and morality as defined by one’s own culture is so strong that it goes without challenge. Anyone who disagrees with their culture is thought to be immoral and blaspheming God. They assume that their culture is, in fact, God’s culture because it came from God and the Bible. That is, it came from *their* interpretation of the Bible. Whatever is thought to be culturally improper, whether wearing a short, red dress or looking at nude pictures, is considered to be immoral, godless and anti-God because, they say, “It’s in the Bible,” when actually it’s in their culture.

A person can take an indefinite word, like sinful, and insert an innocent word into a list of sinful things, expecting it to tarnish that innocent word. “God wants us to avoid and repudiate godless people, such as murderers, god-haters, idolaters, Democrats, drunkards, and adulterers.” What I just did is comic, but things like that are done all too often, and we need to be alert to manipulation like that.

Barred From Heaven

For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Ephesians 5:5

³ The Baptist Faith and Message
The 2000 Baptist Faith & Message
XV. The Christian and the Social Order
<http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp>

That is a very serious statement; it explains that certain people will never “see the kingdom of God.” That is, they never make to heaven. A serious student should carefully consider exactly what Paul is saying here. This is too important just to assume things without thought.

Our Christian doctrines state that a person who accepts Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior is saved (Acts 16:31), and that a Christian can sin but be forgiven (1 John 2:1). Therefore, we should meticulously consider what Paul is really saying in Ephesians 5:5.

An immoral person will *never* make it to heaven? An impure person will *never* make it to heaven? A covetous person will *never* make it to heaven? How many Christian pastors have you heard about are still in the pulpit even after committing adultery? Or pastors who committed adultery and are still called Christians?

How many impure people do you know? What? You don’t even know what an impure person is? You only have a vague notion of what it might be? Don’t you think that getting to heaven, or barring⁴ someone from heaven is certainly serious enough to find out *exactly* what “impure” means?

Can covetous people make it to heaven? Do you say “Yes, if they have accepted Jesus as their savior”? Sorry, but according to your reading of the Bible, a covetous person has *no* inheritance in the Kingdom of God. It says that right there in Ephesians 5:5.

We’ve found out that “immorality” applies to a list of activities done as defined by one’s own culture. To understand “immorality” as used by Paul around the year AD 60, we must find out what it meant to him, not what it means to us, 2,000 years later. Obviously, some of these offenses will overlap, such as murder and adultery. But other offenses do not overlap, such as pornography.

I can imagine some devout person telling others about me, “He’s trying to make morality something relative.” But actually, I’m doing just the opposite. I’m trying to find out exactly what Paul meant and how it applies to us. Isn’t that the responsible thing to do? Isn’t that exactly what 2 Timothy 2:15 says we ought to do?

Biblical Immorality

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to **immorality**,
Colossians 3:5

We already know what “immorality” means to us, but what did it mean to Paul? After all, in the Bible, it’s not what we want a word to mean; it’s what it meant to the author.

⁴ Barring someone from heaven is when you tell a seeker that he or she cannot go to heaven or be saved because they are gay, lesbian, had an abortion (murder), or any such thing.

Biblical immorality is from the Greek πορνεία (*porneia*). Perhaps you can see immediately that *porneia* is where we get the English word, porn, or pornography. It does not mean pornography; it means “fornication, sexual immorality, sexual sin of a general kind, that includes many different behaviors”⁵

Even that is a little too broad for us to accept. It says, “that includes many different behaviors.” Those are any behavior that the speaker wants to include, just as the Southern Baptist Convention said “sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography”. If we go that way, we’ve got to accept the doctrine that nobody can know for sure if they’re saved until they’re actually in heaven.

“Fornication” is “voluntary sexual intercourse between two unmarried persons”⁶. In our Christian churches, if two young Christians date and she gets pregnant, the church forgives them, helps her with her pregnancy and allows them to get married. It has nothing to do with having “no inheritance in the kingdom of God.” We assume they are still saved and going the heaven, whereas the Bible says, “Absolutely not! They have NO inheritance in the Kingdom of God” *if* we use the common understanding of immorality and fornication. Oh, is that too strict for you? But that is your own use of the Bible. It is you using your own cultural interpretation of the Bible instead of seeking what Paul, God and the Bible really says and means.

God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), especially in something as important as this.

What does Paul mean by πορνεία (*porneia*), immorality? He did not define that word here, in Ephesians 5:5, therefore it must already have been defined in the minds of both speaker and audience. If Paul used the general population’s meaning of the word, it would mean “sexual sin of a general kind, that includes many different behaviors”. Or he could have meant it the way it is used in the Bible.

The Bible, in Paul’s day, was the Tanakh, the Old Testament. More specifically, it meant the Septuagint. The Masoretic Text did not exist until 600 years later. Hebrew was no longer generally spoken in Jesus’ day; the people in Judea spoke Aramaic and koine Greek. Koine Greek was common Greek, the people’s Greek. They read the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, just as we read the English translation of the Hebrew scriptures.

In Nazareth, Jesus stood in the synagogue to read.

And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "The spirit of the lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the lord."

Luke 4:17-19

Jesus’ quote is straight from the Septuagint, Isaiah 61:1. It is not from the Hebrew or Masoretic Text at all. Read your own Bible’s scripture Isaiah 61:1 and compare it with what Jesus said in Luke 14:17-19, especially

⁵ Swanson, J. (1997). Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament) (electronic ed.). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

⁶ footnote 2 above

the last phrase. They are not the same, because your Bible translated Isaiah 61:1 from the Masoretic Text but Jesus quoted from the Septuagint.

Hebrews 4:6-7 quotes the Septuagint,

What is man, that you remember him? Or the son of man, that you are concerned about him?

You have made him for a little while lower than the angels...

The Septuagint says “angels.” The Masoretic text says “gods”. “Gods”, or “*elohim*”, is frequently translated “God,” as in YHWH God. We could read that text, “You have made him for a little while lower than God.” That quote is from Psalm 8:5. Read it in your own Bible and see what it says. It might say God, gods or angels.

The point is that Jesus, the apostles, Paul, the priests, the Pharisees, the disciples and the first church for around 100 years all read the Septuagint. Therefore, we ought to inquire what the Septuagint calls “immoral.”

The Septuagint uses two words that are translated into English as “immoral” or “immorality.” One is ἀνόμημα, (*anomāma*) such as Leviticus 20:14, which means lawlessness. It is translated into English as immorality (NASB95⁷), depravity (LEB), iniquity (LES) and wickedness (NKJB).

The second word translated as “immoral” or “immorality” in the Septuagint is found in 2 Kings 9:22, from the Hebrew זְנוּנִים (*z̄nune*) meaning fornication. It is translated to the Greek Septuagint as πορνεία (*porneia*), which we have already noted above. In English it becomes harlotries (NASB95), whoredoms (BLXXE), immorality (LES) or prostitutions (LEB).

When Joram saw Jehu, he said, “Is it peace, Jehu?” And he answered, “What peace, so long as the harlotries of your mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?”

2 Kings 9:22

The important thing to notice here is that *this* harlotry, fornication or immorality, is used in reference to Baal and Asherah worship. That is worship of a fertility god using sexual rituals. Paul used this same word, *porneia*, in Ephesians 5:3 and Colossians 3:5, which is translated into English as “immorality.”

The Hebrew has another word, זָדִיךְ (*qadesh*), which is translated into Greek as πόρνη (*pornā*). *Qadesh* is a temple priest in a fertility god cult. He is a priest in a fertility religion that worships his gods (Baal and Asherah) using sexual rituals.

God calls such an activity “adultery.” That is, spiritual adultery. You see, Israel had vowed to worship Yahweh only. Yahweh was their God, Lord, Master, Father, Husband. When they began worshipping another god, another husband, in a sexual way, Yahweh called it adultery. The word “Baal” actually means father, husband, lord, and master. But Baal was not Yahweh.

When πόρνη (*pornā*) is used in the Septuagint, it refers to sexual worship of a fertility god. The earliest Christian church (of the first 100 years) used the Septuagint as their Bible. To them, *porneia* was sexual idolatry. This is

⁷ These references are given for the convenience of those people who know what they mean. Otherwise, they are unnecessary and you may disregard them. They simply identify different versions of the Bible. NASB95 is the New American Standard Bible, 1995; NKJB is the New King James Version, and so on.

what was translated as “immorality” from the Greek into English. Sexual idolatry was as prevalent in Rome as it was in ancient Israel.

You can see why a pagan sexual idolater has no inheritance in the Kingdom of God. God’s command is and always has been,

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Deuteronomy 6:5

Jesus said,

‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment.

Matthew 22:37-38

Worship of any god but Yahweh bars your entrance into the Kingdom of God.

Sexual immorality in the Bible is not about sex with another person. It is about engaging in the sexual worship of an idol, a fertility god. You can see why sexual idolatry, *porneia*, is called “immoral”. You can see why Paul said it should not be discussed or contemplated among Christians. You can see why this immorality will bar a person from the Kingdom of God.

You can also see why today’s Christians, who call *porneia*, “immorality” referring only to sexual expression to another person without the idolatry attached, and who give a cultural meaning to immorality so as to include homosexuality and pornography but not idolatry, have committed a grave sin. They are tormenting souls by accusing them of a grave sin that God or Paul did not intend.

Porneia, translated as “immorality” in the New Testament, refers to sexual worship of another god, a fertility idol. In the first church, it never did mean things like homosexuality and pornography.