
Purity in the Christian Way of Life

The apostle Paul told Timothy, “Keep yourself pure...”. Good advice for a young man in the ministry. And when you look at all of the passages in the Bible that have something to do with personal purity, you realize that this Christian characteristic has a prominent place in God’s plan for the Christian believer.

Jesus Christ exalts purity to the realm of the spirit, a type of purity that is far greater than the ritual purity of ceremonial cleansing seen in Jewish and other religions. This paper is aimed at showing you what Christian purity is (and is not) and how you can grow to have this purity.

The New Testament Greek word for purity is *καθαρός* (**katharos**). It is found in several New Testament passages, notably in Titus 1:15, “Unto the pure all things are pure...” **katharos** is the usual Greek word for purity and was used for several types of purity in the Greek world:

- Ceremonial purity of a physical object, such as a vessel in a temple
- Ceremonial purity of a temple worshipper
- Purity in the spiritual nature of a person

In the ancient world, ceremonial cleansing would have been by some ritual. In the New Testament, there is a deeper meaning: purity refers to the result of cleansing of the soul by God. In this context, purity is a characteristic of a believer in fellowship who has experienced the “cleansing from all unrighteousness” promised in 1 John 1:9 to the one who confesses sin to God.

Titus 1:15, *Unto the pure all things are pure...*

Reading this phrase, a cynical person may draw the wrong conclusion, namely that a totally pure person can touch anything or think about anything and remain pure as the driven snow. But this thinking involves lifting this phrase out of the whole context of the Bible in order to make it meaningless and false.

This does *not* mean, “All things are pure in the judgment of the pure.”

It’s true that a pure-minded man will not usually put evil constructions or interpretations on things. But to say that something is pure because he judges it to be so, or because he cannot be defiled, is false. The context of Titus 1 makes it clear that the apostle Paul is referring to matters of Judaistic practice, ceremonial purifications, among other things, that have been misconstrued by false teachers.

Read the following passage from Luke 11:37-44.

And as he spoke, a certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him: and he went in, and sat down to meat.

And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner.

And the Lord said unto him, Now do you Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness.

You fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also?

But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you.

But woe unto you, Pharisees! for you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

Woe unto you, Pharisees! for you love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them.

Christ exalts purity to the realm of the spirit, which automatically does away with ceremonial purity. A pure mind cannot be contaminated by physical contact; and the purest minds will have no relish in seeking defilement.

The following passage in 1 Timothy 1:4-7 talks about love out of a pure heart, the fruit of the Holy Spirit. This is not a ritual love, nor is it a love gained by striving for it. Here “good conscience” means “cleansed” or “in fellowship”.

Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do.

Now the end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned:

From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling;

Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.

Problems of impurity in life are attacked in the area of the mind. Timothy was commanded to “flee also youthful lusts...”. But he was told in the same verse how to do this, to “follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” (2 Tim. 2:22).

How often only the first part of the above verse is quoted, so that the believer never learns how to have victory over areas of weakness. Lust is desire - and desire is a mental attitude. So to “flee lusts” is to nip the sin problem in the bud, while it is still only in the mind. Confess, isolate, and forget the sin. Then, enjoy one more measure of victory.

1 Timothy 6:9-11

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

But you O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

1 Peter 1:18-23

Forasmuch as you know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;

But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,

Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.

Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that you love one another with a pure heart fervently:

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides for ever.

Salvation is not by ceremony, but by the sacrifice of Christ. Morality is not by ceremony, but by the purification of the soul through the Word of God.

What is Christ's purpose for the Church? “...Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.” (Eph. 5:25,26)

Purity is brought into the Christian's life and maintained through (1) Confession of sins which maintains fellowship with God and (2) edification, which is the basis for growth in all areas, including having victory over sin.

Related Topics: *Confession; Sin; Godliness; Separation*
