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How Scriptural Is “Morality”?

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

“*M*orality” is an example of how steeped in religious traditions we are. One would think, listening to the teachers of religion, moral crusaders and the political right-wing pundits of our day, that the words *moral*, *morality*, *immoral* and *immorality* surely would be spread extensively across the pages of the Holy Scriptures. One probably would be shocked to find out that they do not appear, not even *once*.



The fact is, religion loves and incubates things like the “*Moral Majority*,” *i.e.*, customs based on popular consensus (the so-called “majority”). Religious legalism adores dominating others by pressing its version of “morality” on the masses! They are “moral” lords over the people. This is the oppressive heart of Roman Catholicism, and it is alive and “well” in Roman Protestantism, too.

It is amazing how words such as these have worked themselves into the framework of Christendom. “Morals” have *nothing* to do with the Scriptures themselves. What they have to do with is the customs of one’s particular social or religious culture, for “*custom*” is the actual meaning of the word *moral*.¹ Thus, instead of an absolute standard, like the Scriptures, morals are based on the customs of ever changing and varied cultures within societies.

In spite of the fact that the “moral” family of words do not appear in the Bible, a society’s system of “morality” is often made equal to the Scripture. One can hear the religious moralist, “A good Christian would never _____” – and the blank would be filled in by a currently accepted traditional religious “moral” taboo.

One must be careful not to confuse religious “immorality” with the scriptural concept of *sin*. God has no problem identifying *sin*. We do not need to assist Him by adding our customs as “sins.” Adultery, theft, murder, slander and bearing false witness, for example, are all clearly wrong. These scripturally defined *sins* have nothing to do with man’s customs of “morality.” They are not wrong because we think they are; they are wrong because God’s Word says they are. Religious customs and traditions have nothing whatsoever to do with the issue.

RELIGION’S INCREASE OF “SIN”

For you permit a man to bring you into bondage, to devour you, to take of you, to exalt himself, to smite you on the face (II Corinthians 11:20).

1. The etymology of the Latin word *moralis*, from which we obtain our English family of “morality” words, has the meaning of “custom.” *cf.*:

John Ayto, *Dictionary of Word Origins*;
Oxford Concise Dictionary, Oxford University Press;
Walter W. Skeat, *The Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*;
Ernest Weekly, *An Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*;
Robert K. Barnhart, *The Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology*.

Over the centuries, religion, to keep its hold on the masses, has made many more things “sinful” than they really are. By doing so, religion keeps increasing the “need” of itself. In fact, if we have had religious influence pressed on us in our lives, many things

(see *MORALITY*, page 3615) ↗

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This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

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MORALITY (continued from front page)

that we have known as “sin” may indeed not be so.

Religion always seeks to make new lists of “sins.” I personally have heard strange lists of “sins” over the years which have been listed as “immoral.”

Among the things that I have heard condemned as “immoral” by religious standard-setters are:

- playing cards and billiards
- wearing bathing suits
- applying make-up
- women wearing pants
- men and women shaking hands
- watching television
- going to the movies
- visiting a casino
- patronizing a bar
- listening to rock n’ roll music

These, of course, are absurd; but even some of the more popularly accepted lists of “immorality” are to be made subject to the scrutiny of the Word of God.

Religion keeps adding to the “sin catalog.” How many things do we regard as “sin” that in all actuality are only the chains of religion? If something is said to be a “sin” long and hard enough, does that make it a sin? No. Only God can define sin. Don’t give up your freeman status in Christ for bondage in the “sins” of the “moralists.”

THE “MORALITY POLICE”

Beware of those who, under guise as “*ministers* [dispensers] of *righteousness*” (II Corinthians 11:15), propagate their shameful shams to enslave their followers. They preach and crusade for their legalistic bondage to be imposed on others. They are the self-appointed morality police who judge another’s servant (“domestic,” Romans 14:4, *CLV*).

The Scriptures speak of six sins that God hates, seven that are an abomination to Him (Proverbs 6:16-19):

- (1) a proud look
- (2) a lying tongue

- (3) hands that shed innocent blood
- (4) a heart that devises wicked imaginations
- (5) feet that are swift in running to mischief
- (6) a false witness who speaks lies
- (7) he who sows discord among brothers

While the many “moral sins” with which religionists are obsessed (sexuality, crude language, use of alcohol, etc.) are missing from the list of sins that God hates, some of the sins listed are actually very prominent in moralistic, religious circles! Specifically look at the first and the last from the list – “*a proud look,*” and “*sowing discord among the brothers.*” These are what God hates.

No wonder that, when Christ came, He was much more at home with “*publicans and sinners*” (Matthew 9:10-11; 11:19; Mark 2:15-16; Luke 5:30; 7:34, 39; 15:1) and “*prostitutes*” (Luke 7) than with the religious Pharisees!

Christianity, by placing emphasis on the wrong things, is little more than an “ethical” or “moral” system.

FLYING IN THE FACE OF SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS “MORES”

There are many customs or “mores”² that press people into bondage. Jesus Christ strongly opposed the traditions of His day.

In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Matthew 15:9).

Making the Word of God of no effect through your traditions (Mark 7:13).

An example of such a tradition was the Jewish custom of ceremoniously washing their hands before they ate. This washing was NOT a sanitary action, for health reasons. This was a “moral” ritual – a “baptism” – that was socially recognized by all of that day. It was said that “*all the Jews*” practiced this “*tradition of the elders*” (Mark 7:3). ▶

2. The accepted traditional customs and usages of a particular social group. — *American Heritage Dictionary*

Well, all but the disciples of Jesus Christ. As His followers they had been taught and led into the truth regarding religious traditions and mores. Since “*all the Jews*” observed this, their eating with “morally” defiled hands was an extremely intentional act. For them NOT to ceremonially wash their hands was quite bold and deliberate. This flew in the face of social and religious *mores*. It spoke loudly, and the Pharisees heard it. They addressed Christ directly concerning the actions of His followers.

Why aren't your disciples walking according to the tradition of the elders, but are eating bread with unwashed hands? (:5).

The stage was now perfectly set. Christ does not apologize for the offensive action of His followers, nor does He make any attempt to soothe the moral sensitivities of His objectors. Instead, He uses the uncouth actions of disciples to brashly confront the evils of the religious and social traditions of His times. Listen to His astonishingly powerful words:

Rightly prophesies Isaiah concerning you hypocrites, as it is written, that “This people with their lips is honoring Me, Yet their heart is far away from Me. Yet in vain are they worshipping Me, teaching for teachings the directions of men.” For, leaving the precept of God, you are holding the tradition of men of the baptism of pots and cups. And many such like things you are doing. Rightly are you repudiating the precept of God, that you should be keeping your tradition? (:6-9).

Christ rightly called them “hypocrites.” He said that they honored God with their lips, but that their hearts were far from Him. He said their worship was vain. He said that they had left and repudiated the precept of God.

We take too lightly the customs, mores and traditions of men. We wrongly view them as harmless. They are extremely dangerous. They are one of the greatest foes of truth.

Yet, be forewarned: the pathway against such tradition will not be easy. The religious will oppose a life free from the bondage of religious tradition. Most

of the hostility will likely come from your closest friends and family members who are blinded by these very traditions of men, traditions from which you seek and have found freedom.

PAUL COUNTED HIS “MORALITY” AS DUNG

Self-righteousness was at the heart of Paul’s past pride (Philippians 3:6). Like “moralists” of our day, he had rested in his good “moral” character. He took pride in his list of “do-and-don’t” performance. Paul could match his “morality” with anyone.

Paul started the catalog of his past pride with these words,

If any other man thinks that he has whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more (Philippians 3:4).

What was Paul’s conclusion to his great “moral” superiority? Paul counted it “*dung*,” “*waste*.” What caused the change in Paul? What caused him to view his own “righteousness” as “loss”? It was the living person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the entrance of a different kind of “righteousness” – “*the righteousness of God*”! The Lord Jesus Christ had become his righteousness (I Corinthians 1:30). Through Him he had been constituted righteous (Romans 3:24).

Paul, the Apostle to the nations, knew all too well the vanity and struggle of religion. Paul had staked his outcome on his own good “moral” character and deeds. Christ separated Paul from his *self-righteousness* – the “righteousness” that came by performance.

NOTHING UNCLEAN OF ITSELF

I know, and am convinced by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him who esteems anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean (Romans 14:14).

I have perceived and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is contaminating of itself, except that the one reckoning anything to be contaminating, to that one it is contaminating (CV).

Paul unapologetically declares that “*there is nothing unclean of itself.*” In the clearest possible words Paul strongly rejects Pharisaical, Platonic, Moralistic and Gnostic concepts of sin. His is a refutation of all religiously-based prohibition:

Touch not; Taste not; Handle not (Colossians 2:21).

Paul, in proclaiming, “*I know and am convinced,*” is speaking with clear, absolute apostolic conviction – a direct revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ. He was not saying, “It is my personal opinion, that probably ...”

Paul is convinced. He is convinced by revelation. He is convinced by revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ. He derived it directly from the Lord Himself – not from social considerations, not from popular viewpoints, not from religious teaching, not from “moral” standards. Paul allows no debate on this; it’s not some culturally relative “ethical” standard. He is convinced “*by the Lord Jesus.*”

FALSE BROTHERS WILL SPY OUT OUR FREEDOM

Yet, it was because of the false brethren who were smuggled in, who came in by the way to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they shall be enslaving us – to whom, not even for an hour do we simulate by subjection, that the truth of the evangel should be continuing with you (Galatians 2:4-5).

Wow, religious spies! We are talking about legalistic espionage – with its snooping, prying and eavesdropping.

This is staggering, but true: there are those who will so despise your freedom and liberty that they will instigate a spying operation against you. They will covertly investigate – under the guise of brotherhood – every little detail of your life that they can, so as to “dig up” something on you in an effort to entangle you in the bondage of their legalism.

“Moralists” and legalists are insulted by freedom. They refuse liberty and want to make sure that oth-

ers are not free either. They will have contact with you so they can spy out your liberty and bring you into bondage. Beware of these freedom-killers; they are everywhere! Christianity is literally filled with them.

They, like their Pharisee counterparts, use manipulation and intimidation to reach their goals. These spiritual captors terrorize their victims. They use strong-arm tactics to attack the very root of our freedom in Christ. They do so with their attitudes, language and misuse of Scripture. With judgmental spirits they attempt to bully the believer back into manmade bondage. This “*form of godliness*” is nothing short of the victimization of believers.

This vicious oppression has gone on for too long. It is time for their sinister work to be exposed. Paul would not put up with it! He refused to subject himself to their petty inquisitions and pious lordship. He refused to tolerate this ungodly behavior and attitude, not just for his sake, and that of his own personal liberty, but for the very “*truth of the evangel*” that it “*might continue*” freely in others.

Paul faced these spies in his day and called them “*false brethren.*” He refused to submit to their tyranny, “*not even for an hour.*”

Warning: Professional legalists have had two thousand years of perfecting their misuse of Scripture and abuse of saints in order to bring them into bondage under their control! Beware of them; *they are dangerous!*

Beware that no one shall be despoiling you through philosophy and empty seduction, in accord with human tradition, in accord with the elements of the world, and not in accord with Christ (Colossians 2:8).

For freedom Christ frees us! Stand firm, then, and be not again enthralled with the yoke of slavery (Galatians 5:1).

SLANDEROUS REPORTS

Teach these truths, ever so plain, and these adversaries *will* slander you. They will lie against you, ►

twist your words, and pervert the truth. Such was the case with Paul. Listen to his words:

We are slanderously reported, and some affirm that we say, "Let us do evil, that good may come?" (Romans 3:8).

Why not say, according as we are calumniated and according as some are averring that we are saying, that "We should be doing evil that good may be coming?" (CV).

If you boldly teach the truth of grace as Paul taught it, you will be calumniated, slandered, maligned, misquoted and said to have taught things that you do not even believe regarding evil. The "moralists" will never have such accusations leveled at them. Only the followers of Paul will have such charges laid on them.

THE PROFESSIONAL WEAKER BROTHER

The legalist will even pawn themselves off as "weaker brothers" to achieve their goals; but these actually are religious professionals at work – who are not "weak," nor are they "brothers" – but diehard moralists.

Resist man-made restrictions. Reject legalistic regulations. Refuse to live under the "moral" edicts of those who have appointed themselves police-and-magistrate, judge-and-juries of our lives.

Liberty is worth fighting for, not only for ourselves, but for others, so that they, too, may enjoy the freedom for which Christ made them free.

Christ has set us free for freedom. Be free. Stand firm and strong in this godly freedom. Do not allow yourself to be "entangled again in the yoke of bondage." Reject the attempt of anyone to play "God" in your life. Stop desiring the approval of others. Guide others to freedom. Encourage their freedom. Give them the grace to be free. Live free yourself.

THERE MUST BE DIVISIONS

For it must be that there are sects also among you, that those also who are qualified may be

becoming apparent among you (I Corinthians 11:19, CV).

There are many sects, parties or factions within Christendom. There always have been, there always will be.

Note Paul's words well – these divisions are important. He says it "must be" so. They are necessary to serve the divine purpose: they identify the qualified and, of necessity, also the unqualified.

If one stands firm in the freedom for which Christ set us free – he will be targeted by the "moralist." There will be a high price to pay on many levels. Such is the suffering of those who will dare to stand with Paul for the truth against the idolatry of the religion that bears Christ's name. Along with him you will be seen and charged as an "evil-doer" (II Timothy 2:9, Young), "malefactor" (CV), "criminal" (Weymouth).

There are a host of causes of these abundant divisions. Some splits come when there are those who, beyond the scope of Scripture, attempt to hold others to their own "moral" standards of "right and wrong." When moral busybodies seek to exercise authority and then judgment over the lives of others – and when their objects do not submit, they sow and generate discord.

Division by division, one after another, there are those who are being separated out from Christendom, and those who are returning to it. May God strengthen the former for their lonely battles, and may God grant the latter repentance to the realization of the truth (II Timothy 2:26).

Now a slave of the Lord must not be fighting, but be gentle toward all, apt to teach, bearing with evil, with meekness training those who are antagonizing, seeing whether God may be giving them repentance to come into a realization of the truth, and they will be sobering up out of the trap of the Adversary, having been caught alive by him, for that one's will (II Timothy 2:24-26).

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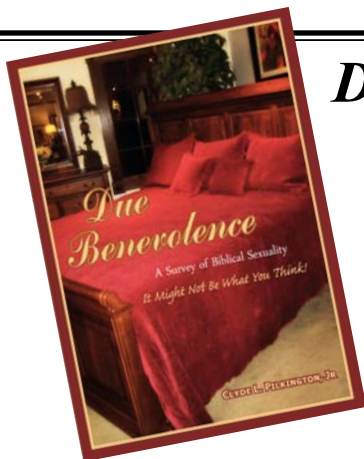


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