



## [The Pathology of Purity](#)

In observing American fundamentalism for more than a decade there is one common thread that runs through the movement. It is the romanticized [idea of purity](#), particularly sexual and doctrinal. While the idea is ostensibly innocuous, in practice it can be insidious and always threatens to politically spin out of control.

The idea of applying purity to human beings - who are impure by definition - creates an impossible standard that can't be met. The result is that millions of people are haunted by perceived moral failure and tortured by unnecessary guilt. Instead of producing healthy spiritual lives, this concept can create neurotic people with various complexes, who view themselves as worthless sinners. Such a damaging belief system may have a corrosive affect on self-esteem and creates needless internal conflicts.



The pursuit of unattainable perfection has led to a cottage industry of so-called "experts" who allegedly can help one achieve the unachievable. The proliferation of products and websites profiting from "purity" is problematic. There is no shortage of charlatans to fight "The War on Pleasure" and strictly forbid any form of fun for a fee. In some cases, the rules are so stringent that masturbation is considered a menace.

"God designed sex to be profound, which masturbation is not; it is shallow," wrote Dr. Harry W. Schaumburg on the website [Restoring Sexual Purity](#). "God made sex to be fruitful, but masturbation treats sex like a commodity rather than a capacity for producing life. God made sex to be selflessly God-centered, not self-centered and self-satisfying."

Ultimately, religions and cults that focus on purity have an ulterior motive, which is to maintain control over the lives of its followers. If pleasure is policed, then faith-based father figures can ration it. By squeezing out the "impure" competition, such groups create a monopoly over one's mind.

The idea of protecting the potential sinner from "falling" is as elusive a goal of purity itself. No matter how cloistered, people will seek to explore their humanity, which includes enjoyment and fulfillment. Some fundamentalists hate secular society because temptations - epitomized by the concept of demons - are often stronger than their faith.

Instead of learning the healthy practice of moderation, many of these individuals embark on the pathological path of prohibition. Indoctrinated with a "just say no" ethos, the repression builds up until the fantasies become overwhelming fetishes that spiral out of control.

Unable to extinguish the fire internally, some of these individuals work through external means - namely politics - to eliminate temptations. This is why they have feverishly fought to close down adult bookstores and nude beaches. Such nosy behavior mirrors that of the teetotalers who fought to enact the disaster known as prohibition. Those who cling to this philosophy subconsciously want to ban from society what they cannot banish in themselves.

The quest for "purity" takes its most perverse form in the hands of Christian Reconstructionists. They believe that in order for Christ to return, they have to purify the world by instituting theocracy. This vision often includes executing gay people and adulterers.

The equivalent of such repression is already carried out in many Islamic countries. In Malaysia, which is considered a relatively moderate nation, a Muslim woman was recently sentenced to be whipped for the "crime" of [enjoying a beer](#). God forbid Allah Time had to compete with Miller Time for personal satisfaction.

Of course, the puritanical enforcement of behavior rarely extends to those on the top of the moral hierarchy. In his chilling book, "The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power", Jeff Sharlet writes in alarming detail about members of Congress who believe they are above the law because they are ordained by God as leaders. This must-read book gets into the heads of the hypocrites and allows one to grasp how they justify their tawdry affairs, while passing laws to penalize the very behavior that they had embraced on the sly.

The quest for purity is a sign of sickness and insecurity. It comes from individuals with serious hang-ups who want other people to be as miserable as they are. In order to make the world antiseptic, these zealots often become virtually anti-everyone and everything. It is with great irony that the more a person or nation obsesses about moral cleanliness the filthier, more violent and corrupt they usually become.

In chasing a concept that is elusive, many fundamentalists have become more elitist and exclusive, while intellectually reclusive. This helps explain the perpetual anger, bitterness and frustration that defines populist and political social conservatism.

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