Impure (169) (akathartos from α = without + καθαρ- = cleanse from katharos = clean, pure, free from the adhesion of anything that soils, adulterates, corrupts, in an ethical sense, free from corrupt desire, sin, and guilt) (See study of related word akatharsia) in a moral sense refers to that which is unclean in thought, word, and deed. It can describe a state of moral impurity, especially sexual sin and the word foul is an excellent rendering. The idea is that which morally indecent or filthy. It is not surprising that as noted below this word is repeatedly applied to filthy demonic spirits in the Gospels.

The related term akatharsia refers to filth or refuse! Akatharsia figuratively describes a filthiness of heart and mind (so it is internal) that makes the person defiled. The unclean person sees dirt in everything. The word akatharsia suggests especially that it defiles its participants, making them unusable for sacred purpose. While akatharsia includes sexual sin, it comes from a wider Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew OT) usage where αὐξεινέπλουν = could refer to anything that made a person unfit to go to the temple and appear before God. In a medical sense Hippocrates used this word akatharsia to describe an infected, oozing wound with pus and crusty impurities that gather around the sore or wound. What is αὐξεινέπλουν is filthy and repulsive, especially to God. Akatharsia was a general term often used of decaying matter, like the contents of a grave. In short akatharsia describes any excessive behavior or lack of restraint and speaks more of an internal disposition. Immoral filthiness is on the inside whereas the lawless acts of “immorality” are on the outside.

William Barclay writes that the related word akatharsia means...

everything which would unfit a man to enter into God’s presence. It describes the life muddied with wallowing in the world’s ways. Kipling prayed

Teach us to rule ourselves always,
Controlled and cleanly night and day.

Akatharsia is the very opposite of that clean purity...It can be used for the pus of an unclean wound, for a tree that has never been pruned, for material which has never been sifted. In its positive form (katharos, an adjective meaning pure) it is commonly used in housing contracts to describe a house that is left clean and in good condition. But its most suggestive use is that katharos is used of that ceremonial cleanness which entitles a man to approach his gods. Impurity, then, is that which makes a man unfit to come before God, the soiling of life with the things which separate us from him....Jesus used the word to describe the rottenness of decaying bodies in a tomb (Matthew 23:27). The other ten times the word is used in the New Testament it is associated with sexual sin. It refers to immoral thoughts, passions, ideas, fantasies, and every other form of sexual corruption.”(Barclay, W: The Daily Study Bible Series. The Westminster Press or Logos) (Bolding added)

The root word group (katharos, katharizo, kathairo, katharotes) from which this adjective is derived describes physical, religious, and moral cleanness or purity in such senses as clean, free from stains or shame, and free from adulteration. The word group originally meant clean in a physical sense as opposed to rhuparos which meant dirty (e.g. pure, clean water, Eur. Hippolytus 209), then clean, in the sense of free, without things which come between, as opposed to pleres or mestos, full and then ritually clean, as opposed to akathartos, unclean and in a religious sense, morally pure.

NIDNTT writes that...

The negative terms formed by the addition of alpha-privative, i.e the adj. akathartos and the noun akatharsia, refer to the whole realm of uncleanness, ranging from menstruation to moral pollution through wrongdoing (Brown, Colin, Editor. New International Dictionary of NT Theology. 1986. Zondervan).

TDNT writes that in secular Greek...

At its primitive stage Greek religion follows the customary pattern. At the historical stage, however, the gods are seen as friendly forces, though they must be approached with cultic purity. Rules are thus devised to ward off what is demonic and to protect the holy nature of the gods. These rules are primarily cultic but in personal religion, and especially in philosophy, a sublimation takes place which affects the cultic sphere too. Moral purity as well as ritual purity is demanded in the approach to deity.

The Old Testament reflects the same general development. Uncleanness, which may be contracted in contact
with birth or death (Lev 12:2, 4, 5, etc, Nu 19:11) is a positive defiling force. So is anything linked to a foreign cult. Animals formerly devoted to deities are disqualified. Hygiene, of course, plays a role (Lev 11:29, 30). Stress also falls, however, on the holiness of God, so that the concept of purity develops with special force. Purifications by washing, sacrifice, or transfer restore forfeited purity and open up access to God. As God's holiness has moral content, ritual purity symbolizes moral purity. The prophets emphasize this aspect even to the point of castigating purely ritual conceptions, though not of totally rejecting them. Some groups in later Judaism tend to the opposite extreme, but Hellenistic Judaism (cf. Philo) strongly spiritualizes the older cultic concept. The cultic rules of cleansing are upheld, but their significance is primarily symbolical; moral purity is what God requires. [F. HAUCK, III, 413-17] (Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Eerdmans)

In Scripture, akathartos pertains to that which may not come into contact with that which is holy and set apart. (Acts 10:14, 28, 11:8 - these passages refer to acting in accordance with the Levitical laws - see all the uses below in Leviticus) In the Septuagint akathartos refers almost universally to ceremonial uncleanness or to whatever (or whomever) is ritually defiled.

In 2Cor 6:17 Paul says to "touch no unclean thing" and in context refers primarily to those things that relate in some way to idolatry which defiles everything it touches and was a common practice among the pagans in Corinth and was part of the "baggage" that many if not most of the believers brought with them into the church body.

In Rev 17:4 akathartos is associated with sexual immorality or fornication.

As noted below, all of the uses of akathartos in the Gospels refer to unclean spirits or demons. In Acts 5:16 Luke describes "those afflicted with unclean spirits" who were healed (see Acts 8:7).

There are 32 uses of akathartos in the NT - Mt. 10:1; 12:43; Mk. 1:23, 26, 27; Mk 3:11, 30; 5:2, 8, 13; 6:7; 7:25; 9:25 (All uses in Gospels = unclean spirits = demons); Lk. 4:33, 36; 6:18; 8:29; 9:42; 11:24; Acts 5:16; 8:7; 10:14, 28; 11:8; 1 Co. 7:14; 2 Co. 6:17; Eph. 5:5; Rev. 16:13; 17:4; 18:2. The NAS translates akathartos as impure person(1), unclean(29), unclean things(1). The KJV translates it as unclean 28, foul 2.

There are 122 uses of akathartos in the Septuagint (LXX)- Lev. 5:2; 7:19, 21; 10:10; 11:4, 5, 6, 24, 25, 26, 31, 32, 33, 38, 39, 40, 43, 47; 12:2, 4, 5; 13:11, 15, 36, 45, 46, 51, 55; 14:19, 36, 40f, 44, 45, 57; 15:2, 4, 5, 6, 16, 17, 18, 17:15; 20:25; 22:5, 6; 27:11, 27; Nu 5:2; 9:6, 7, 10; 18:15; 19:7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 19, 20, 21; Deut 12:15, 22; 14:7, 8, 10, 19; 15:22; 26:14; Jdg. 13:4, 7, 14; 2Chr 23:19; Job 15:16; Pr 3:32; 16:5; 17:15; 20:10; 21:15; Eccl 9:2; Isa 6:5; 35:8; 52:1, 11; 64:6; Lam 4:15; Ezek 4:13; 22:5, 26; 24:14; 44:23; Ho 8:13; 9:3; Amos 7:17; Zech 13:2

One thing that Paul is teaching in this section of Ephesians is that sexuality is a key revealer of a person's heart (Eph 5:3, 4, 5, 6, 7). In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ declares sexuality to be an issue of the heart, "Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:28-note). It is not enough to say, "Because I have not physically committed adultery, therefore I am pure," for lust itself breaks the command against committing adultery. There is another way of saying this: A person's behavior in the area of sex is a key revealer of what is ruling his heart. Paul states it very plainly in Ephesians 5:5: the sexually immoral person is an idolator. Sex always involves the thoughts, motives, desires, demands, expectations, treasures, or idols of the heart. When we deal with sexual sin, it is not enough to simply avoid committing acts of physical immorality. We must uncover the heart sins that acts of physical immorality reveal. (Paul David Tripp)