

Reformed Theological Seminary  
Global Campus

*Sanctified Spouses:  
1 Cor 7:14 and the Newness of the New Covenant*

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## Introduction

Paul's claim in 1 Cor 7:14 that the unbelieving spouse is sanctified by the believing spouse has occasioned a great deal of discussion, but little consensus. If anything, "the net result of a century of critical endeavour has been to envelope this verse in ever greater obscurity."<sup>1</sup> In what sense sanctified? What, if any, are the implications for children of such marriages and children in the church generally? Is it legitimate to use this verse to argue for infant baptism, for example?<sup>2</sup>

In this paper we will not attempt to tackle these questions. Instead, using this verse as a starting point, we will explore a related but distinct idea: that 1 Cor 7:14 illustrates *covenant progression*.<sup>3</sup> Paul's claim is true under the New Covenant; it would not have been true under the Mosaic Covenant. The key thesis of the paper is this: under the New Covenant, the gift of the Holy Spirit means that holiness is now 'infectious' in a way it was not before.

We will structure our argument as follows. First, we will consider the newness of Paul's claim in 1 Cor 7:14 from the angle of marriage and from the angle of holiness, thus establishing that there is something to investigate. Then, examining OT material, we will consider the connection between covenant and holiness, and review the few instances of transmissible holiness in the cult; and finally we will consider the NT picture as a whole and its possible implications.

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<sup>1</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, 'Works without Faith in 1 Cor 7:14', *Revue Biblique* 84, no. 3 (July 1977): 349. Neatly illustrating the point, I disagree completely with the conclusions Murphy-O'Connor goes on to draw! He argues that the holiness of the spouse is ethical: though not a believer, they are living as a believer would in remaining with their spouse. This seems to me to completely miss the logic of the verse, in which the holiness of the spouse is deduced from the holiness of the children.

<sup>2</sup> This is frequently done by paedobaptists and just as frequently argued against by Baptists. For the former, see e.g. Richard L. Pratt Jr., 'Infant Baptism in the New Covenant', in *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, ed. Gregg Strawbridge (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003), 171–72; for the latter, see e.g. George R. Beasley-Murray, 'The Theology of the Child', *American Baptist Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (December 1982): 199.

<sup>3</sup> Although it is usually Baptists who emphasize the discontinuity between the covenants, I should mention that I am not a Baptist – and, if anything, I think the line of thought in this paper makes 1 Cor 7:14 an even stronger verse in support of paedobaptism than is normally recognised. I do not intend to develop that argument here, however.

Before diving in, it is worth making a comment on novelty. The line of argument I pursue in this paper is, to the best of my knowledge, new: while there is no completely new exegesis of any individual text, I am putting them together in a way that I have not seen done before. While novelty carries great cachet in the academy, it should be treated with enormous caution in the church of God. This paper, then, is offered with the prayer that if the exegesis that follows comes from the Spirit, he might make it live, and if not, he might make it die. Likewise, I ask my readers to consider the following as a proposal rather than an attempt at authoritative teaching. I would be very grateful for any feedback!

### **The Newness of 1 Cor 7:14**

The difference between 1 Cor 7:14 and the situation in the Old Testament is striking on more than one level. It reflects a change with regards to both *marriage* and *holiness*. Although our interest is primarily in the latter, it will be helpful to start by looking at the former.

The situation Paul sketches out is fairly clear, both from his own description and elsewhere in the NT. A believer married to an unbeliever should, if possible, stay with their spouse, and should not be concerned that this renders them unholy. On the contrary, they remain holy; their children are holy; and even the spouse is in some sense holy (note that this is the most surprising point, being deduced by Paul from the more obvious holiness of the children). The possibility, though not certainty, of winning their spouse to the Lord is held out (7:16); if this is the case, the fact that the holiness of the children is more obvious means that there is also good hope for their souls. We find a similar set of concerns in 1 Pet 3:1-7: it is assumed that believing wives will remain with unbelieving husbands, and the possibility (though, again, not certainty) of the husbands' salvation is held out. Meanwhile, in the person of Timothy, we appear to have an instance of an actual child of such a marriage growing up to be a believer and prominent saint (Acts 16:1, 2 Tim 1:5).

All this is in remarkable contrast to the situation in the OT. The consistent refrain of the OT is that intermarriage between covenant members and non-members is a disaster (cf., amongst many

other places, Deut 7:3-4; Neh 13:25-27; Mal 2:11-12). The only instance of a faithful covenant member marrying outside the covenant and remaining faithful is Esther; and there are (to my knowledge) precisely zero instances of such ‘mixed’ marriages producing faithful covenant offspring.<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, holy seed arises from covenant marriage (Mal 2:15) and the result of intermarriage is defilement (Mal 2:12). Most striking of all is the approach taken in Ezra 9-10: in a context where such intermarriages have taken place, the godly response is to send the foreign wives away. Only in this way can the danger to the “holy seed” (9:2) be averted.<sup>5</sup> Fyall notes that “there remains a sense of uneasiness” amongst evangelical interpreters about this passage; it seems to reflect a different practice from that of 1 Cor 7.<sup>6</sup> It does indeed reflect a different practice from 1 Cor 7 – and in doing so, it is merely the most prominent of many OT passages!

If the marriage dynamic in 1 Cor 7:14 differs from the OT, so does the holiness dynamic. We have already observed that there is some overlap here (Mal 2:12, Ezra 9:2). We now turn the focus to the question of holiness more broadly. For the Corinthians, Paul’s comments might well have been quite surprising, for the predominant pattern in the OT is that holiness is not particularly transmissible, whereas corruption and uncleanness spreads like wildfire.<sup>7</sup> There are a few special instances in which holiness is transmissible in the law, and we will return to those later in this paper; but the overall

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that the distinguishing mark here is covenant, not ethnicity – or even morality! As to morality, Jephthah’s mother was a prostitute, Jonathan’s father was Saul, and Josiah’s father was Amon. As to ethnicity, numerous faithful men marry foreign women (Joseph, Moses, Boaz): in such instances, however, the wife should be understood to become a member of the covenant people (cf. Deut 21:10-14).

<sup>5</sup> Robert S. Fyall, *The Message of Ezra & Haggai: Building For God*, BST (Nottingham: IVP, 2010), 123.

<sup>6</sup> Fyall, 135. As I hope to show, this unease can be transformed by a frank reckoning with covenant progression. Rather than feeling uneasy as we read Ezra 9-10, we should both tremble (for holiness is no less important or demanding now than it was then) and rejoice (for the demands holiness makes under the New Covenant are no less difficult, but the outcomes are richer and sweeter).

<sup>7</sup> This is regularly noted by commentators, but in my view they generally do not pursue this line of thought far enough. The assumption is that Paul’s instructions reflect a new teaching; I am arguing that they reflect a new situation. So, for example, Ciampa and Rosner remark that the “notion that holiness rather than uncleanness is contagious has only marginal [OT] support” and go on to propose that Paul got his view from Jesus’ ministry. But – as I hope to show – it is not the case that this view is merely unsupported in the OT; rather, it would actually be *untrue* in the OT dispensation. Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2010), 297. Cf. the similar approach in David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2003), 288–89.

picture is clearly in the other direction. The clearest expression of this principle can be found in Haggai 2:11-14.

In this passage, Haggai asks the priests two questions about the law. The first is about the transmission of holiness; the answer is that such transmission is strictly limited. More precisely, holiness will transfer from the consecrated meat to the garment in which it is carried (Lev 6:20) but no further.<sup>8</sup> The second question is parallel, but with the holiness swapped for uncleanness. The result is strikingly different. Uncleanness will spread from a dead body to anyone who touches it – and then continue spreading from the unclean person to anything *they* touch. The point is neatly summarised by Hildebrand: “Uncleanness is passed on to the third degree; holiness is not. In a word, uncleanness is more contagious than holiness.”<sup>9</sup> The application Haggai draws from these answers makes it clear that the priests have answered correctly.<sup>10</sup> The people are defiled, and so even their offerings are defiled: “for Israel there was no known remedy.”<sup>11</sup> In a world where uncleanness is more contagious than holiness, holiness must be preserved by isolation, and there is no obvious hope for a people who are already defiled.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Verhoef, 117–18.

<sup>9</sup> David R Hildebrand, ‘Temple Ritual: A Paradigm for Moral Holiness in Haggai 2:10-19’, *Vetus Testamentum* 39, no. 2 (April 1989): 161.

<sup>10</sup> Verhoef notes that some disagree with this conclusion and argue that Ezek 44:19 is evidence that the priests answer incorrectly. In my view, this makes Haggai 2 incoherent. There are better ways to understand the contrast with Ezek 44:19, which we shall come to shortly. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 118.

<sup>11</sup> Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 1972), 51.

<sup>12</sup> Although it lies outside the main thrust of this paper, there is an interesting debate as to the exact hope that Haggai then offers. Hag 2:19 makes clear that the Lord will now bless the people, but on what basis? The majority view (e.g. in Baldwin, Verhoef) is that the turning point is the laying of the temple foundation. Hildebrand notes, however, that this requires some assumptions about the punctuation of 2:18 and the dates involved that are by no means obviously correct. He proposes that the real turning point is not the laying of the foundation but the repentance of the people. Griffiths, however, has suggested that the true answer is even simpler: the point of 2:11-19 is to rule out all mediate causes, *particularly* the laying of the foundation, and to attribute the blessing merely to God’s unmerited favour (though he, like Hildebrand, also stresses the importance of repentance in this section). Baldwin, 50; Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 115; Hildebrand, ‘Temple Ritual’, 167–68; Jonathan Griffiths, *Wholeheartedness: A Message from Haggai for Today* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2014), 62–66.

Haggai, then, presents uncleanness as more contagious than holiness; but Paul in 1 Cor 7 seems to assume the opposite, with the believer's holiness somehow more contagious than the unbeliever's uncleanness.<sup>13</sup> It will hardly do to say that these are different perspectives! There is here a real discrepancy, and the natural question to ask is whether this change in teaching is explained by a change in epoch. In other words, might it be that holiness *actually* operates differently in Paul's day than in Haggai's? To answer this question, we need to consider the newness of the New Covenant.

### Holiness and the Newness of the New Covenant

The connection between covenant and holiness is not particularly prominent in Genesis; in fact, the word 'holiness' is barely used and is not connected with covenant (though the lack of the word holiness hardly means that the concept is absent - cf. Gen 17:1-2). Holiness particularly comes to the fore at the time of the Exodus,<sup>14</sup> and a firm link between covenant and holiness is established by Exod 19:5-6. If the people "keep my covenant," the Lord tells Moses, they "will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." The two descriptors are of course parallel, since the priestly task is pre-eminently to distinguish between the holy and the common (Lev 10:10). In a similar vein, we find in Exod 31:13 that the Sabbath is to be a sign to the Israelites of the Lord who "makes you holy"; the Sabbath itself is holy, and anyone who breaks it is to be put to death. The Israelites are to be holy, for the Lord their God is holy (Lev 19:2).

There is a tension here that can be brought out by comparing two texts in Deuteronomy. In Deut 7:6-11, Israel *is* a holy nation: the God who keeps covenant has covenanted with them. But in Deut 26:16-19 the present becomes future and apparently conditional; at the very end of Moses' great exposition of the law, the people are told to "do all these statutes and rules", and they "shall be a

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<sup>13</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 288.

<sup>14</sup> The revelation of holiness in Exod-Deut is far too rich a theme to explore in detail here; but note, for example, that the Sabbath is particularly associated with the Mosaic covenant, despite being a creation ordinance; in fact, it is the only creation ordinance explicitly connected with holiness in Genesis, and it is not mentioned between Gen 2 and Exod 16.

people holy to the LORD your God". There appears to be a kind of "now but not yet" principle at work here. The people are in one sense already holy, set apart to the Lord; but in another sense their holiness is made conditional on their obedience, an obedience that Deuteronomy is very clear they will not in fact maintain (Deut 31:16-29).

Nor is this tension a mere matter of words; the point is made visible by the entire tabernacle apparatus. Access decreases as holiness increases. It may be the intention that the whole people should be holy, but most of them can nevertheless come no closer than the outer court. Korah's rebellion underlines this in the most dramatic fashion: in Num 16:3, the excuse for the whole upheaval is that "all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them." This is precisely what has been *promised*, but it has not yet been *realised*. The outcome of the story is a dreadful example of the dangers of over-realised eschatology! Hundreds of years later, Uzziah learned a similar lesson (2 Chron 26:16-21); some have been "consecrated" in a way that even the king has not (26:18). As we have seen, one of the last books in the OT describes the offerings of the whole people as unclean (Hag 2:14). In other words, the tension that is clear in Deuteronomy persists through the whole OT. The Lord has promised to make his people holy, but the people remain unholy.

It is no surprise, then, that when the OT considers the prospect of a New Covenant, the theme of holiness should come to the fore. This is already hinted at in Deut 30:6, with the promise of circumcised hearts; but it becomes explicit in the prophets. Over and over again, the bright future after judgement painted by the prophets is connected to holiness. Relevant passages include Isa 4:2-6, 27:13, 66:20; Jer 31:40; Ezek 36:22-29; 37:26-28; 40-48 *passim*; Joel 3:17; and Zech 14:20-21.<sup>15</sup> We

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<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting how many of these references occur right at the end of a major section or even of a whole book; the same was true with Deut 26:16-19 (note also the sudden density of holiness language in Exod 40). Holiness appears to be an idea that belongs naturally to the conclusion of things, an end-point in which matters come to rest. One is tempted to draw parallels to the Sabbath – the pre-eminent institution of holiness is also the institution of rest and consummation! Also, given this trend of "holiness at the end", we might add to our list Pss 134 and 150; the last psalm of the Songs of Ascents and the last psalm of the whole Psalter both apparently take place *in* the sanctuary. While these psalms are not explicitly prophetic, it is natural to read them as anticipatory.

obviously cannot develop all these passages in detail; instead we will discuss two important features of this material.

Firstly, what is envisaged is generally not a mere restoration of holiness but an expansion and even transformation of it. Two examples will suffice. In Isa 4:2-6, the holiness of the remnant (4:3) is pictured in terms of the theophanic Sinai-cloud, but this cloud is extended from the tabernacle to cover “the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies” (4:5). This is an explicit and remarkably beautiful contrast with Exod 33:7-11.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, Zech 14:20-21 describe the bells of Jerusalem’s horses and all the pots in Jerusalem and Judea as holy. The intention is clearly not to limit holiness to these items, but rather to indicate that, if such mundane items are holy, then *everything* is holy: this is no less than “the cessation of the Levitical distinction between the holy and the common.”<sup>17</sup> And with the abolition of this distinction comes a new access: now all may come and boil the sacrificial meat in whatever pots they choose.

Secondly, this new holiness is connected to the arrival of the New Covenant. Here Jer 31:40 is particularly significant, since it occurs at the end of the most famous New Covenant passage of all. Again we have holiness extended (all of Jerusalem and beyond) and transformed (note particularly the mention of the “valley of the dead bodies”: the epitome of uncleanness is now made holy). We see similar themes in Ezek 36-37. In Ezek 36, the people are not explicitly called holy, but they are cleansed and given the Spirit and given new hearts (cf Deut 30:6!) in vindication of God’s holiness (36:22-23); the culmination of both chapters is the repeated promise of the sanctuary in their midst (37:26,28), at precisely the point that the whole arrangement is described as an “everlasting covenant” (37:26).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: 1-39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1996), 149; J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah*, 1st Edition, TOTC (Nottingham, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2009), 68–69.

<sup>17</sup> John L. MacKay, *Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi: God’s Restored People*, Revised edition (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2010), 318.

<sup>18</sup> Note, too, that Ezekiel’s famous vision of the valley of dry bones echoes Jer 31:40; the valley of the dead is made holy. Given this expansion in Ezekiel, Jeremiah’s prophecy should be seen to contain the promise of resurrection.



Certainly, the terms of some of these prophecies (one thinks particularly of Zech 14:20-21) will only find complete fulfilment in the New Creation. But the New Covenant context in Jeremiah and Ezekiel leads us to expect that there will be some measure of fulfilment in these last days – some extension of holiness, even if not yet consummated. But before we turn to the NT, we have one more aspect of the OT witness to consider: the few cases where holiness is transmitted.

### Transmission of Holiness in the OT Law

Four times in the Law we are told that whatever touches (נגג) a certain thing will become holy (שדק): Exod 29:27; 30:29; Lev 6:18,27 (MT 6:11, 20). The last of these items is the flesh of the sin offering, which provides the needed background to Haggai 2:11-14; the flesh makes whatever it touches (the fold of the garment) holy, but that holiness is not transmitted any further.

The other three instances can be grouped together: the altar (Exod 29:27), the apparatus of the Holy Place (30:29) and the grain offerings (Lev 6:18). What ties all these three together is that they are not only consecrated by blood (Heb 9:22; note that the grain offering is never offered except as the accompaniment to a bloody sacrifice), but they are also consecrated by *oil*: in the first two cases, the sacred anointing oil is used, and in the case of the grain offering, the grain is mixed with oil.

The picture seems to be, then, that the bloody offering makes things holy, but the oil goes a step further: it not only makes things holy but makes things into transmitters of holiness. And the oil can only come in the context of blood.

There is one more instance of transmitted holiness that is worth considering, especially since it has been raised as a possible discrepancy with Haggai 2:11-14,<sup>19</sup> and that is Ezekiel 44:19. Here the priests must change their garments before leaving the Holy Place for the outer court, “lest they transmit holiness to the people with their garments.” Block notes that this reflects “a stricter stance

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<sup>19</sup> Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 118.

than the Mosaic Torah.”<sup>20</sup> Broadly speaking, however, there are at least two ways to understand this detail without positing any contradictions. The first is that Ezekiel is in fact portraying a change from the Mosaic regulations, a change in which holiness is now more transmissible than it was before; after all, he is not describing the situation in his own day but in the eschatological temple. In this case there is no conflict with Haggai: Haggai describes the situation in his own day, Ezekiel describes the situation in the days to come.

The second possibility is that Ezekiel is merely making explicit what was already implicit in the Law. Even though the Pentateuch does not mention the garments transmitting holiness, the priests are wearing the garments when they are anointed with consecrated oil (Exod 28:41); on the principle that the anointing oil makes objects into holiness transmitters, Ezekiel’s detail is quite natural. In this case the only change from the Mosaic cult is that the priests are finally wholeheartedly doing their duty (Lev 10:10)! And here, again, there is no contradiction with Haggai. The garment in Haggai is made holy by the sacrificial flesh, the garment in Ezekiel made holy by the anointing oil; the former does not transmit holiness, the latter does. Personally I lean towards this latter explanation, on the basis that 44:19 occurs in a section (44:15-31) that almost exclusively restates Mosaic regulations without changing them.

In summary, transmission of holiness does occur in the OT, but in very limited circumstances: direct contact with a sin offering, or contact with an item consecrated by blood and anointed with oil. One point is particularly worth noting, however, which is that *people* never transmit holiness. A person may transmit uncleanness (Haggai 2:13-14), and in fact this is a constant concern in the law; but, even though the priests are anointed with oil, it is at most their garments and not their persons that transmit holiness.

Having surveyed the OT data, we are ready to survey the situation in the NT.

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<sup>20</sup> Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1998), 641.

## New Holiness in the New Covenant

Even before the formal inauguration of the New Covenant in the upper room, there are striking signs in the gospels that something new has arrived. One of Jesus' first acts in ministry is to touch a leper, the paradigmatic example of uncleanness (Lev 13-14); rather than receiving uncleanness, Jesus transmits cleanness to him and the man is healed (Mark 1:40-42). The pattern continues: Jesus transmits cleanness and healing to the woman with bleeding through his garment (Mark 5:27-29; cf. Lev 15:25-27), and even touches and imparts life to the dead (Mark 5:41-42; cf. Hag 2:13-14). All the basic sources of uncleanness in the OT law are thus shown to be no match for his touch.<sup>21</sup> Something new has arrived.

This newness does not only operate on the physical plane. Blomberg has discussed at length the phenomenon of Jesus' interaction with sinners, particularly in the context of sharing meals. He discerns a radical newness in Jesus' approach. The Jews of Jesus' day, drawing on plentiful OT teaching, saw unholiness and uncleanness as contagious and therefore a threat;<sup>22</sup> consequently, they would "be defiled by associating with corrupt people," and tried to keep their gatherings pure. Jesus' approach is the opposite; rather than himself being polluted by sinners, "his purity can rub off on them and change them for the better."<sup>23</sup> This is exactly right; but it can be sharpened. It is not merely that Jesus has a different and superior perspective to the Jews of his day; it's that he *is* something different. When he is critiqued for associating with tax collectors and sinners, he rebukes the Pharisees not for

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<sup>21</sup> Intriguingly, although Jesus regularly uses touch to heal of physical disease and even death, there is no recorded instance of him doing so to drive out unclean spirits: in such cases he commands but does not touch. An unclean spirit, of course, is not mentioned in the law as a source of uncleanness for the person they torment, so the ceremonial situation is rather different. Still, it would be fascinating to see this theme developed further.

<sup>22</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*, NSBT (Leicester, England : Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 2005), 93.

<sup>23</sup> Blomberg, 128.

their failure to do likewise but for their failure to recognise his identity and mission (Matt 9:9-13; cf. Luke 19:1-10).<sup>24</sup>

Quite what it is that makes Jesus different in precisely this way is not explicitly drawn out in the gospels. Still, it is not hard to see some relevant themes. On the one hand, he is God, the source of all holiness (Mark 1:1, John 8:58). On the other hand, he is anointed by the Spirit, receiving in reality what the old consecrating oil typified. Then again, he is the true temple, being in his very body the sanctuary of God with man (John 1:18; 2:21).<sup>25</sup>

After Jesus “provided purification for sins” (Heb 1:3), he poured out his own Spirit on his people (Acts 2). The oil follows the blood. And the result is that the purified people start to have some of the same characteristics as their Lord. This is portrayed on the physical plane again in Acts, as the apostles repeat some of the Lord’s miracles of healing (Acts 19:12; 20:9-10; 28:8). But it is also present in the warp and woof of the New Covenant context. Now all God’s people can be collectively referred to as “saints” (e.g., amongst many others, Acts 9:41; Rom 16:15; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1; Colossians 1:2); in the OT this designation is rare outside the Psalms and Daniel, where it is not clear that it refers to the whole covenant people but rather seems to refer to a faithful subset of them. This is more than just a label. The Jewish diaspora had maintained their distinctiveness by taking with them the “dividing wall”, keeping separate even in a foreign land. In the church, however, sanctity is not maintained by isolation (1 Cor 5:9-10); the dividing wall has been taken down.

In 1 Corinthians, these themes are touched on repeatedly before we get to chapter 7. The presence of the Spirit is a key theme developed at length (1 Cor 2); because of the Spirit’s indwelling, believers form the temple of God (3:13) and indeed each individual believer is such a temple (6:19),

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<sup>24</sup> In a similar vein, he critiques the Pharisees for thinking they are so very different from the ‘sinners’: Luke 7:36-50; 15:11-32; 18:9-14. But none of this is the same as telling the Pharisees that they should have been unconcerned about moral contamination. If they were to associate with sinners, it would be because they recognised there was little difference between them, not because they would have any hope of achieving what Jesus achieves.

<sup>25</sup> McKelvey notes that John presents this theme with a heavy dependence on Ezekiel’s prophecy. Michael G. McKelvey, ‘Ezekiel’, in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised*, ed. Miles V. Van Pelt (Crossway, 2016), 316.

and moreover members of the body of Christ (6:15a), a fact with enormous practical implications for relating to the world (6:15b). The believers are, in short, “sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be saints” (1:2). Their holiness is a present reality and one they are called to live out.

Given both the NT context and the immediate context of 1 Cor 7, then, it seems we are justified in seeing 1 Cor 7:14 as not merely a new perspective but a new paradigm. Paul does not need to flag it as such explicitly, for the newness has already been extensively developed in the previous chapters. In describing the new status of mixed marriages, he is merely mentioning one more application of the truths he has already been expounding.

### Conclusion: Joy without Presumption in the Last Days

It remains only to mention a few pastoral implications of this material.

Firstly, it is important to note that there is a strong “now and not yet” aspect to this extension of holiness. The holiness that the unbelieving spouse receives is no guarantee of salvation (1 Cor 7:16). More than that, uncleanness remains contagious; it is still true that “bad company corrupts good character” (1 Cor 15:33), and the author of Hebrews can repeat Moses’ warning of the infectious “bitter root” without obvious modification (Heb 12:15; cf. Deut 29:18). It is still true that without holiness, no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:14), and the saints still need this warning.

Consequently, it is vital to guard against any presumption when considering these matters. In particular, it is extremely important to guard against the idea that it is now less serious for believers to wilfully marry unbelievers. On the contrary, widows (presumably specified because they are the prospective spouses with the most choice in their own marriages!) are told explicitly that they can only marry in the Lord (1 Cor 7:39). In general, the warning against being unequally yoked applies (2 Cor 6:14). Those with any pastoral experience know that many Christians who marry unbelievers see no conversion in their spouse; many see their children walk away; many fall away themselves. To wilfully marry an unbeliever remains a piece of bitter foolishness.

However, our desire to make this point should not stop us from also applying and rejoicing in the comfort this theme provides. For the believer in such a marriage (whether by past foolishness or by conversion), 1 Cor 7:14 provides a very real comfort and hope, a hope unlike anything available under the Old Covenant, a spur to patient faithfulness and fuel for much prayer. And for the whole church, this theme is a great encouragement: no longer is holiness a fragile thing that needs shielding from uncleanness. Rather, the holiness we have is more powerful, more infectious, than the uncleanness around us. In our personal sanctification, in our engagement with culture, and in our mission to the world, this is a glorious truth. Jesus is truly the mediator of a better covenant.

*Soli Deo Gloria.*

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