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Christians and the Second Temple

Paul and the Purity Regulations of Ancient Judaism

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The context for this paper is the discussion of the CBA Continuing Seminar on Biblical Issues in Jewish Christian Relations: Historical Jesus Research and Jewish Christian Relations.¹ Last year we found that a great deal that is written about Jesus’ views of purity in First Century Palestine was in serious dissonance with the findings of scholars of Late Second Temple Judaism. The effects of ritual impurity are frequently exaggerated, the distinction between ritual impurity and moral impurity often ignored.² Considering how much work has been done in the last 25 years to elucidate Jesus’ connections to the Judaisms of his time, and the fact that he was

¹ For a more complete summary of the discussion on the issue of purity and the study of Jesus’ positions regarding it see the section entitled “Ritual Purity” on the seminar’s website on www.bc.edu/cjlearning. Go directly to “CBA Seminar on Jewish Christian Relations” and click on “For Members Only.” Under username give “cbasem”; for password give “exegesis.”

not in abject opposition to all that was Jewish, this is a concern. In spite of what has been written by scholars like Sanders, Vermes, Levine, Frederickson, Harrington, and others who address Jesus’ relation to Judaism, certain presuppositions persist. The opposition of Jesus to the purity regulations of the Pharisees is described by some as “Jesus’ Politics of Compassion versus the Pharisees Politics of Exclusion,”3 which resurrects the old Gospel versus Law polarity by which Christian scholars have for centuries compared “compassionate, inner-focused Christianity” to “exclusivist, formalistic Judaism.” It was suggested in our discussion that such a presentation of Jewish purity concerns may mask anti-Jewish attitudes, or even anti-Catholic or anti-sacramental ones.4

A clear understanding of the meaning and purpose of purity regulations is essential for understanding the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, and, by extension, the nature of Christianity itself. Purity regulations do not only involve social interactions, but are intricately linked to the basic function of the Jerusalem temple as the place in which experience of God was concretized for Israel. The heart of the matter is understanding the Temple System in Israel, and then, the differences between what the temple meant for First Century Jews (including the opponents of Jesus) and for the followers of Jesus.

The focal point of this study will be Paul’s appropriation of purity concerns, especially in 1 Corinthians and Philippians. My ultimate goal is to understand Jesus’ view of the Temple based purity system, but how one understands that depends a great deal on the judgments one makes as to which Gospel passages accurately reflect Jesus’ own views and not the views of the evangelists or their communities a generation or two later. An example is Mark 7:1-23. Jerome Neyrey seems to presume that the discussion there reflects the position of Jesus on purity laws regarding food.5 Many if not most historical Jesus scholars disagree. Had Jesus taken such an unambiguous stand against purity regulations regarding food, it is difficult to imagine what all

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the fuss was about for Peter in Acts 10 or Galatians 2. But this takes us into a discussion of what Jesus is likely or is not likely to have said. I wish to examine Paul because he represents the earliest literary evidence of Christianity. The sayings of the historical Paul are more readily established than the sayings of historical Jesus. And the evidence from Paul is relevant to the picture of the historical Jesus, since historical coherence requires that there be a line of continuity between Jesus’ views on the Second Temple and Paul’s. If the Second Temple and the purity system were important to Paul, it is more difficult to assert that Jesus utterly rejected them.

**The Importance of the Temple-Based Purity System in Ancient Israel**

I must precede my presentation of the evidence from Paul with a broader discussion of Israelite understandings of purity prior to the time of Jesus, and then what I understand to be at stake in the relationship between emergent Christianity and the Second Temple and its purity system.

The canon of the Hebrew Bible reveals its compilers’ view that purity regulations were of central importance. Deuteronomy, the first text to enjoy canonical status, promotes the temple in Jerusalem as the essential place of Israel’s encounter with the God of the Exodus. This set in motion the compilation of the first series of texts that were to become the Hebrew Bible, the Deuteronomistic History. These texts promote the centrality of the Jerusalem temple for Israel’s identity and religious life. Another set of texts compiled slightly later, the Torah or Pentateuch, became the most important set of texts for Israel. Of its total of 187 chapters, 58 chapters—from *Exodus* 20, through all of *Leviticus*, an on to *Numbers* 10—deal with cultic law; the priesthood; the mapping of sacred space; and the regulations governing eating, marriage, sex, and contact with sickness and death. They are among the 58 chapters least familiar to Christians, yet they comprise nearly a third of the collection, and they are at its very center. Lawrence Boadt describes the symmetry of the structure of the Torah, with Genesis and Deuteronomy at the outermost ends, flanking the journey narratives of *Exodus* 1-18 (out of Egypt and up to Sinai) and *Numbers* 11-36 (through the desert and to the border of the Land). This leaves the *halakic* material of *Exodus* 20 through *Numbers* 10 as the core of the work.\(^6\) Walter Brueggemann goes

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so far as to say “The Book of Leviticus is the center of the Pentateuch.” It took modern Christian historical critics some time before they would make anything but disparaging remarks about these chapters. To many Orthodox Jews they are among the most important.

The concern for temple and purity is not limited to the Torah. Ezekiel, who sees God and the impending Exile in temple-theophany terms devotes his final nine chapters to mapping out the holy place and the entire land of Israel in relation to it. In this way he describes Israel’s restoration. 1-2 Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah are focused on the temple and the cult. But the texts which most clearly demonstrate the importance of the temple cult after the Exile are the Psalms. Although most of them were probably composed before the Exile, the edition in which we have them is a Second Temple collection. Since the work of Sigmund Mowinkel and others, the Psalms are best understood as thoroughly associated with the temple cult in Jerusalem and not the pastoral setting of the popular Christian consciousness.

The Psalms which most obviously presume a cultic setting are Psalms 3, 4, 16, 17, 20, 36, 43, 52, 54, 56, 67, 69, 73, 81, 96, 99, 135, 138, 141, and 150. The Psalms of Ascent (namely, Psalms 120-134) originated in various settings, but came to be used in association with the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The pilgrimage is referred to in Psalms 9, 48, 66, 76, 78, 84, 99, 122, 137, and 147:12-20. Processions are described in Psalms 24, 68:24-27, 95, 100, 116:10-19, and 118:19-27. The people who sang the Psalms, whether near to or far from the temple, were consistently reminded of the temple and the presence of God within. The fact that the Zion/ Temple tradition pervades the Book of Psalms is particularly important in light of the dominance of the Psalms in both Judaism and Christianity. They seem to have dominated First Century CE Jewish and Christian worship. If all the references or allusions to the Psalms were removed from the Hodayoth (Thanksgiving Songs) of Qumran, or the Christian hymns in Luke 1 and 2, very little would remain.

7 Walter Brueggemann, Theological Introduction to the Old Testament, 135.
8 I recall a discussion of the Torah with an Orthodox Jew about our favorite books. Mine was Genesis, of course. He said, “Vayiqra’ (Leviticus), that’s the best part.” This was not to provoke me. He said it with a look of great delight, like one might talk about having seen a triple-play in baseball or a really amazing dance performance. At the time I wondered what meant. I am beginning to understand.
In the books of the Apocrypha *Sirach* shows the greatest interest in the temple system, as the priesthood of Simon is the culmination of his tour de force of Israel’s story in chapters 44-50. But *Tobit, Baruch,* and *1-2 Maccabees* also show a great deal of interest in the temple.

The Apocalyptic literature that emerged in what Christians call the “Inter-testamental Period,” originated as the product of a temple crisis. Paul Hanson noted that the dearth of literature in Israel during the Persian and Early Hellenistic periods (ca 538—200 BCE) suggests that the temple system was functioning well in Israel during those years. The desecration of the Temple by Antiochus IV precipitated the Maccabee revolt, but, perhaps more importantly, the writing of the Book of Daniel, one of dozens of apocalypses to be written in the ensuing centuries. Besides the explicit reference to the temple in Daniel 9:27 references to the temple appear in the additions to Daniel, namely in the *Song of Azariah* 15-17 (NAB Dan 3:38-40) and the *Song of the Three Young Men* 31 (NAB Dan 3:53). The first of these refers directly to “holocaust, sacrifice, oblation, and incense” of the physical temple service but moves toward a spiritualization of these cultic actions, replacing them with obedience. The second reference is to “the temple of your glory,” which could as likely refer to the God’s heavenly temple as the temple in Jerusalem. But even this requires a certain respect for the Jerusalem temple. It anticipates the situation of the Talmud, or the Epistle to the Hebrews for that matter, which speak so consistently of God’s temple one would hardly know it had been destroyed. This hymnic material in Daniel is related to a class of songs that emerged later, which are identified by David Flusser as Songs of Zion. They include Tobit 13:7-18, Baruch 4:5—5:9, Psalms of Solomon 11, Sirach 36:1-17, and 11 QPsZion. Their essential themes are: 1) deliverance from foes, 2) gathering of the dispersed, and 3) the future glory of Jerusalem and the restored temple.10

Apocalypses, even when not referring to the temple itself, are jam-packed with worship scenes and purification by fire. The Community at Qumran which was steeped in apocalyptic eschatology was keenly interested in the temple and issues of purity. And the purity system remained essential for early Rabbinic Judaism as it emerged after Jerusalem’s destructions in 70 and 135.11

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11 The most important NT witness to the importance of the Temple System for Christians is Luke. He begins and ends his Gospel in the Jerusalem temple and labors to explain the break
The purpose of this survey has been to indicate how central the temple and purity system were not only to biblical Judaism but also to the post biblical Judaisms contemporary to emergent Christianity. The temple and the purity system were not matters of an ancient past with limited relevance to the first century situation. In fact, history suggests that it is precisely when the physical temple is destroyed that, for some people, emphasis on the purity system intensified. If Jesus, Paul and the early Christians rejected the temple-based purity system entirely, they were in fundamental opposition to something at the heart of the Judaisms contemporary to them and which later emerged. But was there such a rejection? If there was, then the many forms of Christianity which retain significant elements of the purity system in sacrament, ritual, and orders of ministry (as, for example, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and High Anglican) have diverged from the original course set by Jesus and the early church. Bruce Malina in his discussion of purity regulations in *The New Testament World*, argues a nuanced view of Jesus’ opposition to the purity system but sees the re-emergence of purity customs similar to those of First Century Judaism in Roman Christianity of the Fourth Century CE is what you get when “post Jesus groups become embedded in the political framework of Constantine’s empire…”\(^\text{12}\) But at this point I have crossed over to the implications of how one understands what purity regulations are essentially about.

**What the Temple-Based Purity System Was Essentially About**

My understanding of how the purity system actually functioned has come into focus as I have struggled with the positions of NT scholars, principally the Social Science critics, who conclude that both Jesus and Paul were strongly opposed to the purity system. I have already mentioned the tendency to exaggerate the practical effects of ritual defilement.\(^\text{13}\) But a more subtle concern that arises as I read Bruce Malina’s and Jerome Neyrey’s discussions of purity involves what seems to me a reduction as to the essential purposes behind the purity system, that it was about


\(^{13}\) See p. 1 of this essay and endnotes 2-4. Marcus Borg is the most flagrant example.
exclusion and the propping up of social elites, and it was based on a certain view of “wholeness” or “perfection.”

Social Science critics are right in their assertion that the status and authority of certain groups or individuals was enhanced by the regulations and distinctions rendered in a purity system. But is it right to insist that that is solely or even primarily what is going on in such a system? The status of the Sadducees was propped up in large measure by the temple system. The Pharisees also seem to have derived a certain degree of status from being in a position to distinguish and teach about what constituted purity. But their status had far less institutional support than that of the temple establishment, of which they were not a part. They had to earn a reputation by the way they lived and taught, or by how many disciples they attracted. To presume that they fostered the purity regulations primarily to enhance their status presumes that one can see motives quite clearly.

As for the close association between holiness and wholeness or perfection, it is an unsound support for illustrations of the working and effects of a purity system. By now it is almost axiomatic in many popular presentations on spirituality that “Holiness is really about wholeness.” The problem with this is that the words only sound alike in English. They are not even close to homophones in Greek (ἀγιός and δόλος) and Hebrew (הָגֵיה and בְּרָחַת). One source of this connection is the early work of Mary Douglas. Her conclusion about the significance of wholeness in the purity system of Leviticus depends in large measure on her reading of the list of situations that make men ineligible for participation in holy war in Deut 20:5-7, namely, having built a new house, having planted a vineyard, and having newly married. She sees these as examples of incompleteness. They are not “whole” so they are not “holy.” But many Jewish scholars are not convinced that these three examples have anything to do with the listing.

14 In New Testament World (170) Bruce Malina says outright, “Holiness is social exclusivity.” That is a more sweeping assertion than “holiness involves social exclusivity.” Regarding perfection Bruce writes (in New Testament World 180) “blemished people cannot serve as priest because they cannot represent the perfect individual in the perfect society under the perfect God.” Jerome Neyrey stresses the importance of wholeness for holiness in “Clean/Unclean, Pure/Polluted, and Holy/Profane,” 89-90. He uses Paul’s application of boundaries in 1 Cor 11:2-16 not as an example of how Paul continues to work within a purity system so much as an example of a Christian leader with a need “to control the chaotic social relations of the Corinthians.” (95).

do with completeness. They have to do with a person being deprived of the joys of creation at the moment he is about to partake of them. That is what constitutes his unfitness for the holy war, not the fact that he is less than complete. Another problem with her argumentation about “wholeness” is her conclusion that body fluids which defile do so because they are outside the bounds of the body (and therefore compromise “wholeness”). But her reasoning has been criticized by those who point out that neither tears nor spittle are defiling, even though they are outside of these boundaries. The defiling character of body fluids must be sought elsewhere. The rejection of this connection between holiness and wholeness is important, since the assertion that holiness depends on wholeness quickly jumps to a representation of a purity system as being about “perfection.” Perfection is associated with the effort to demonstrate oneself as superior to others, at best, or as a mild form of obsessive-compulsive disorder at worst. Thus the Pharisees’ interest in purity is reduced to the Pharisees striving to be superior, or being scrupulously clean and pure.

It is my understanding that the purity system was the means by which the people of Israel acted out or signalized the not immediately apparent reality of the presence of a holy God in the midst of a sinful people. The rituals involved in the purity system were a means of expressing that dynamic reality, particularly in the most mundane and dangerous moments of life, such as sexual intimacy, child-birth, eating, death, planting, and harvesting. One of the great insights of Israel was the recognition that God was not to be seen in the same way that other things are. But that leaves one with the problem: how does one deal with an unseen, intangible, transcendent God? The purity system may be described as “the Practice of the Presence of God.” The ritual system of Israel was about how you act in visible, tangible ways, to manifest, recall, and deepen, your perception of the presence of an un-seeable, un-touchable God. Those who take on the practices described in Leviticus are not for that reason punctilious, obsessive people, who wish to be superior to people around them. Every religious group has some of these, but this is not what Leviticus is essentially about. In Purity and Danger Mary Douglas explains that purity rituals have profound practical purposes. She noted that, “…in their symbolic structures there is scope

16 Brueggemann’s discussion of holiness in Leviticus is helpful (Theological Introduction to the OT, 139). “Strict measures associated with holiness exist not to protect God from contamination by the world, nor to protect the world from God … , but to honor God’s character as God and to assure a proper relationship with God in the midst of a world of disorder and sin, a serious matter which God will not take lightly.”
for meditation on the great mysteries of religion and philosophy. Reflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death.” The ritual action “provides a focusing mechanism, a method of mnemonics and a control for experience.” The purity system is essentially about: 1) focusing on the implications of the nearness of the holy God, 2) remembering that presence and what it demands, and 3) using the story or images behind the ritual as a guiding paradigm for life. It is not a matter of obsession with guilt or “feeling dirty.” While we moderns might have reservations about the implications of the Levitical purity regulations for gender relations, it is presumptuous—even arrogant—to dismiss the entire enterprise as meaningless ritual.

The holiness system of Leviticus is what the entire Temple System was essentially about – making present in visible, tangible ways the fact that God is near. It is not magic, nor does it necessarily trigger fear or dread. One of Mary Douglas’s most surprising findings was the fact that in cultures that had rain making rituals, the ones who led the ritual were often personally skeptical about whether this would actually cause it to rain. It was just something you needed to do given the way things were. The doing of it expressed certain fundamental convictions about the convergence of the sacred with life in the physical world.

When assessing Jesus’ view of the purity system it is necessary to take into account these deeper issues that supported the purity system. Take for instance the interpretation of Jesus action in the temple in Mark 11:11-19 and parallels. In our group’s discussion last year we noted that the meaning of that event and even its historicity are debated. It is not possible to arrive at absolute certainty about whether it was an apocalyptic (or prophetic) sign, or an act of “cleansing” that involved a challenge to how the priestly establishment was running the temple cult. A good case can be made for the possibility that Jesus’ concern about the positioning of the sellers and money changers was a concern for proper rules of temple purity, rather than an outright rejection of the temple system—as it was later to be understood by Christians.

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18 This is how Marcus Borg characterizes it in his very negative presentation of what he calls “the priestly story” in *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 46-68.
20 Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus: A Intimate Biography*, (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 219-23 asserts without question that Caiaphas was the first high priest to allow animals to be sold in the southern court of the temple and that he had moved the market place formerly on the Mount of
though we were not of one mind on which of the two it involved, none of us saw the event as indicating that total opposition on the part of Jesus to the “formal religion” of the temple. If Jesus were opposed to the entire temple system then why did he come to the temple for Passover, and why did he just happen to arrive with enough time for ritual purification prior to participating in the feast? Or why were the Jerusalem Christians after the death of Jesus still participating in the temple system as we see in Acts 2:46 and as is implied in Matt 5:23-24?

**Paul and Purity in 1 Corinthians and Philippians**

I have chosen to focus on the writings of Paul since so much of what is reported about Jesus’ views of purity in the Gospels involves the views and concerns of the evangelists and their sources. It seems advisable to start with Paul and then watch how the trajectory continues in the Gospels or can be traced back to Jesus himself. The NT Social Science critics upon whom I have focused so far present Paul as rejecting the purity system. Bruce Malina sees Paul as applying only the 10 Commandments to the Gentiles.21 Jerome Neyrey acknowledges the presence of purity language in 1 Corinthians but seems to see it as a matter of tactics on Paul’s part, rather than as an aspect of his fundamental worldview.22 I must bracket for the time being the entire question of Luke’s presentation of Paul and purity. He has Paul taking a Nazirite vow twice (Acts 18:18 and 21:23-24), and thus apparently still interested in participation in the temple cult. But is this a reflection of Luke’s view of the importance of the temple or Paul’s? I am reluctant to dismiss Luke’s understanding of Paul’s relationship to the temple, since although

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Olives to the Southern court of the temple when he banished the Sanhedrin from a chamber near the temple to the Mount of Olives. Craig Evans, “Jesus’ Action in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction” in *Jesus in context: Temple, Purity, and Restoration* (B. Chilton and C. Evans eds., Leiden; New York: Brill, 1997) 430-32, (see also *CBQ* 51.2 (1989): 265-67), takes a more nuanced position. Caiaphas may have been the first to institute this Temple Court Market, and it may have coincided with his banishment of the Sanhedrin to the Mount of Olives around the year 30 CE. The source of this argument is Victor Eppstein, “The Historicity of the Cleansing of the Temple,” *ZNW* 55 (1964) 42-58, which Evans assesses critically and only partly accepts.21 Bruce Malina, *New Testament World*, 181-82. His source for this view is the argument in the *Didascalia* that the original Torah was only the Ten Commandments, and all the rest of the commandments, judgments, and mitzvoth were given after the worship of the Golden calf. 22 Jerome Neyrey (“Clean/Unclean, Pure/Polluted, and Holy/Profane” 95) writes, “Paul’s strong control of the physical body [in 1 Corinthians] mirrors his urgent need to control the chaotic social relations of the Corinthians.” His very next line is “Holiness’ is related to ‘wholeness,’ which helps to explain Paul’s dedication to the unity or wholeness of the social body.” I have voiced my objection to this assumption earlier in the paper.
Luke employs freedom as an author to create dramatic details, his picture of Paul has to have some degree of verisimilitude with Paul’s actual behavior, or the details would have little convincing effect on Luke’s readers.23

Analysis of 1 Corinthians and Philippians

My initial findings on references to holiness or purity issues in 1 Corinthians and Philippians are summarized in chart form. Summary comments follow.

References to Holiness and Purity in 1 Corinthians

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<th>chapter</th>
<th>verses</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>...called saints...with all who call on the name... Paul plays with the terms call...called...call upon in this section indicating that the name of Christ Jesus (used 10 times in as many verses) plays some sort of role in the identity of the community members as saints, as do χάρις and χάριμα. 9 The Corinthians have been called into the fellowship of [God’s] Son, Jesus Christ Our Lord. 13-15 imply they have been baptized into the name of Christ as opposed to, say, the name of Paul. 30 From [God] you are in Christ who became for us...sanctification. Here Paul establishes that both their identity and their holiness are established by association with Christ. This is vital for all further argumentation in the letter on this matter.</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>14-16 In the context of Paul’s pronounced differentiation of flesh, and psyche from spirit having the Spirit of Christ or the mind of Christ implies full association with Christ, and gives the speaker authority, which one who is motivated by the soul or flesh lacks.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>The community is associated with God as God’s building but holiness is yet more explicit in the 16-17 16 You are the Temple of God and the Spirit of God lives in you. This reinforces the identity issues established in chapter 1. 17 If anyone destroys/corrupts (φθείρει) God’s temple God will destroy/corrupt this one. For the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. The notion of corruption in φθείρει will emerge in 1 Cor 5:6-7 around the issue of leaven, and more explicitly in 1 Cor 15:54 corruptible is clothed with incorruptibility. 26 You are Christ’s and Christ is God’s re-asserts the association with God which holiness implies. This may also look ahead to 1 Cor 15:28.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>Paul’s identity as a servant of Christ puts him beyond judgment. He does not judge himself but renders judgment, the prerogative of the spiritual man who judges everything (1 Cor 2:15) as he will in 1 Cor 5. He reminds us of his having the mind of</td>
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23 Luke’s reference in Acts 20:16 to Paul’s concern about getting to Jerusalem by the time of Pentecost is supported by Paul’s own reference to Pentecost in 1 Cor 16:8. I do not mean that 1 Cor 16:8 refers to the same date as the Pentecost in Acts 20:16, but simply that it provides evidence that Paul still thinks in terms of the Jewish festal calendar, and expects his non Jewish readers to understand such references.
Christ after rendering judgments about marriage and sexual ethics in 1 Cor 7:40. Ultimate judgment is reserved for the coming of Christ (4:5).

4-5 The “curse ceremony,” when you are gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus reiterating the association of the Name of Jesus and the Corinthians’ identity. 5 Paul again stresses the differentiation between flesh and spirit. Ultimate judgment is reserved for the day of the Lord as in 1 Cor 4:5.

6 A little leaven leavens the whole dough. With this image of corruption Paul seems to render a spiritualized application of Exod 12:19-20 and 13:7.

7 Clean away the old leaven, so that you be new dough, as you are (in fact) unleavened. The language of purity is no more direct than here, and once again it is associated with the identity of the Corinthians, as it was in 3:16-17 and 20 and as it has been since the opening verses of the letter.

8 Christ our Pasch was sacrificed so let us keep the feast not with the old leaven. Paul’s spiritualized application of Torah extends to keeping a sacred feast.

9-13 On not mixing with the sexually immoral, greedy, idolaters, revilers, drunks, or thieves in the community. Paul differentiates the community from the world.

1-6 continues the application of the principle “do not mix.” The Corinthians err in letting their cases by tried in the courts of unbelievers. As in 1 Cor 2 and 4. the spiritual should judge, and not be judged by the non-spiritual.

11 The Corinthians were but no longer are in the catalogue of the unrighteous. You were these, but you have been washed, made holy, and justified by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ by the Spirit of God.

15-19 Union with prostitutes constitutes becoming one body with the prostitute, which Paul contrasts to their identity as being one spirit with Christ. Paul sees this behavior as a particularly harmful violation on holiness boundaries. Once again Spirit is the means of union with God as in 1 Cor 2:14-16 and 3:16-17.

19 Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, which is in you. You are not your own. This also appears in 1 Cor 3:26 and 7:4.

1 Paul begins this chapter with purity issues but the eschaton dominates the chapter. The eschaton seems to intensify rather than diminish the importance of purity, but Paul makes practical accommodations where he can. Sexual intercourse between spouses does not compromise purity.

5 One may refrain from sexual relations by agreement, for a (limited) time...for prayer, - setting mutually agreed holiness boundaries.

14 the unbelieving man is made holy by the believing wife and vice versa otherwise your children would be unclean, but of course, they are holy. Though the holiness of the children less than obvious to us, Paul seems to expect no objection on this. It must have been clearly established among the Corinthians.

19 neither circumcision nor uncircumcision are anything, but keeping the commandments of God (is something). This verse seems on the face of it to wave off the significance of physical signs of holiness, yet “keeping the commandments” is certainly not just a spiritual or mental thing. Paul seems to be indicating pertinent commandments by means of a particular kind of biblical interpretation.

40 By I think I have the Spirit of God Paul reminds them that he has the authority to declare sacral law, by means of his applications of Torah.
6 But for us, God the Father is one…from whom all things are and we in [God]. And the Lord Jesus Christ is one…through whom all things are and through whom we are. This renders explicit the holiness by contact with God that is effected by “being in Christ.”

8 Food does not commend one to God. So food does not matter, but eating food in a context that scandalizes a brother/sister is a sacral violation. Here again, Paul seems to make light of physical sacral boundaries, but he ends up asserting them by his interpretation in Christ.

12 By sinning against the sisters/brothers…you sin against Christ. The identity of believers “in Christ” renders the harming of them a violation of the holy. This emerges again in 11:17-34.

13 Those who work the holy things (adverbial accusative) eat from the holy/temple (things). This is the nearest Paul comes to calling himself a priest. It is nearly as strong as his statement in Rom 15:15b-16 “because of the grace given to me by God to be a minister (ἐνα γελετοῦργόν) of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles carrying out the priestly service (ἱερωγόντα) of the Gospel of God.” On one hand his comparison of apostles to those who work in the temple is just a metaphor, yet once again holiness seems to be his pervasive operational context.

21 Paul has to clarify that he is not an “outlaw of God” but (if you will allow me) an “in-law of Christ.” That does not actually work in Greek, but I could not resist.

1-5 Paul sees types of Christian Baptism and Eucharist in the Torah (Exodus and Numbers). They ate spiritual food and drank spiritual drink. Paul opposes a magical understanding of such events: God was not pleased with most of them, they were destroyed in the desert. But Paul draws practical consequences:

7-10 Do not be idolaters...do not fornicate...do not test Christ/God...do not grumble. Here most clearly Paul declares sacral law by means of his interpretation of the Torah.

14-22 Paul firmly opposes idolatry not only in a spiritualized or symbolic way, but by direct prohibition of participation in pagan rituals (the cup...or the table) at pagan temples.

23-30 Eating idol-food at a pagan’s house is more complicated, it all depends on who is there and what is said about the source of the meat.

2-16 Though many of the particulars of the practice Paul is forbidding remain unclear to us, Paul is very concerned about the attire of women in a specific cultic role: while she prays or prophesies.

10 Paul presumes the presence of angels at the believers’ worship, which seems from the 1QSa parallel, to imply the angels’ interest in proper cultic order – something Paul himself will demand by the end of chapter 14.

17-22 Inappropriate action toward fellow believers at the Lord’s Supper shows contempt for the Church (a violation of holiness?)

27-34 Eating the bread and drinking the cup in an unworthy manner renders one guilty of the body and blood of Christ. This seems more than a metaphor. Paul points out its serious physical consequences.
1 Paul’s discussion of the **spiritual gifts** begins with blessing and curse. Implied in the entire discussion is the fact that the charisms are “holy things” (as the Spirit is the vehicle of holiness) but can only be judged as truly of God (and holy) if they build up the community. They are not to be curtailed but neither are they to “run wild.”

1-13 Without love they are nothing. All is set against the horizon of the End-Time. **Pursue love but be zealous for the spiritual gifts especially that you may prophesy.** (It entails divine presence).

26-33a The *Apostle of Freedom* insists on **holy order** in the believers’ worship. Someone added this. I cannot reconcile its contradiction to 11:2-16.

20 + 23 Paul’s conception of **Christ as first fruit** seems more than metaphorical. He seems to think of it in rather literal terms: the Resurrection of the Dead has begun. Christ has risen, we will rise at the *Parousia*.

28 **The God will be all in all.** This is nothing less than the sacralization of the universe. The beliefs expressed in this chapter are meant to motivate action in the world now.

35-52 The spirit/flesh dichotomy of 1 Cor 2-3 re-emerges. **We will be changed.** (literally!)

2 **First day of the week** – possible early reference to Sunday as a sacred day.

8 **Pentecost** seems to remain a significant holy day for Paul.

15 members of **Stephanus’ household subject themselves to the service of the holy ones.**

20-24 **The holy kiss, the curse for those who do not love Christ, the greeting of grace…and Paul’s love.**

**Summary Comments on 1 Corinthians**

1) Purity concerns are not only to be found in 1 Corinthians, they pervade the letter and are essential to Paul’s argumentation in that letter. This is why I had to examine Philippians also, to be sure that the prevalence of purity concerns in 1 Corinthians is not due only to the particular problems Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians. Purity concerns are enunciated in the opening chapter, then grow in importance in chapters 3-4. They dominate the discussion of chapters 5—7, and remain essential in 8—10. Since 11—14 involve worship, it is no surprise to see purity language at work there too. References to purity decrease in chapter 15, perhaps because Paul deals more with theory and less with praxis in that chapter. But the particular references re-emerge in the “signing off” or “housekeeping chapter” 16. There is explicit talk about the temple (the “ground zero” of purity concerns) in chapters 3, 6, and 9.

2) A connection can be discerned between Paul’s emphasis on the conflict of *spirit* and *flesh* and issues of purity. For Paul (1 Cor 2:14-16 and 7:40) *spirit* associates one with the Divine and gives one the power of judgment. *Flesh* seems to reverse that (1 Cor 3:1-5). In Paul’s view it is
the flesh that incites the Corinthians to make judgments about who baptized them, or about what charisms they manifest, and these judgments result in their divisions.

I noted that more than once that Paul carried out a certain kind of interpretation of the Torah in which the purity agenda was opposed on practical/physical levels, yet upheld in principle with practical consequences. Paul renders judgments on how the Corinthians are to deal with the man living with his father’s wife based on Torah passages about Passover. He reaches for a Genesis passage in arguing against union with a prostitute, since it involves “becoming one body with her…and those who cling to Christ become one spirit.” In chapter 7 I am not sure what is the source of his conviction that “the children are holy,” but by 7:19 he argues against the importance of circumcision or un-circumcision” but upholds “keeping the commandments of God.” Clearly Paul’s ethics for Gentiles is not limited to the 10 Commandments but involves the passages mentioned already and then yet more such as: “Do not muzzle the ox while it treads grain” (1 Cor 9:9) and “those who work (with the) holy things eat from the holy/temple” (1 Cor 9:13).24 He ends 1 Corinthians 7 by declaring, “I have the Spirit of God,” which seems to provide his foundation for making judgments about how to apply the Torah. By chapter 10 he engages a complex discussion of more episodes from Exodus and Numbers than most modern Christians can keep up with to declare firmly: “Do not be idolaters…do not fornicate…do not test Christ/God…do not grumble” (1 Cor 10:7-10). He uses Genesis as part of his argument about women prophets wearing head coverings. The best examples of the rejection of a particular purity regulation are in 1 Cor 7:19 and his entire discussion of meat offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 10. In both cases he ends by insisting on certain behavior.

3) Paul’s strong attachment to apocalyptic eschatology seems to intensify rather than mitigate his concern for purity. This was the biggest surprise to me in carrying out this examination of 1 Corinthians. There are as many or more references to the end-time in this letter as there are references to the temple and purity. But the frequency of both may be due to the fact that apocalyptic literature had its birth in a temple crisis. The radical distinctions of insiders/outiders, the righteous/the lawless, the saints/the persecutors, spring from the paradigms of a temple system. Even the matter of “final judgment” can be seen in the context of an effective

24 Incidentally, Paul’s lists of forbidden behaviors in chapters 5 and 6 exceed the prohibitions of the 10 Commandments and show no relation to their sequence.
separation of sacred from profane. Paul’s view of the nearness of the *eschaton* does not relegate the temple to the margins of his thought. Although he never seems to encourage visits by the Corinthians to the temple in Jerusalem to participate in the sacrifices there, (for them, that would be totally inappropriate), he still seems to work within a view of the world oriented toward the temple. Not only do the categories of sacred and profane remain as traditional abstractions, but they call for concrete action and prohibit certain concrete behaviors. The emphasis upon judgment that the *eschaton* carries is never far from Paul’s argumentation about what the Corinthians should or should not do.

### References to Holiness and Purity in Philippians

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<tr>
<th>chapter</th>
<th>verses</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>…to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi… As in 1 Corinthians the saints are “saints” by being “in Christ.” It is less explicit than in 1 Corinthians but the expression “fellowship of the spirit” in Phil 2:1 resonates with the language of the holiness of the community in 1 Corinthians. 9-10 Paul prays that they increase in the perception and experience of mutual love more and more with the end result that they “be pure and blameless (εἰλικρινείς καὶ ἀπρόσκοποί).” The purity involved seems to reside more in ethical behavior or right thinking about it, but by verse 11 Paul indicates the outcome he hopes for is that they are “fulfilled as to the fruit of righteousness, which is through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.” Here the emphasis is on ethical purity – but in speaking of it Paul moves into a doxology of God. 17 Some proclaim Christ through selfish ambition, not purely (ἀγνωστος) thinking to raise the level of suffering from my chains. This seems to be an example of holiness language used in a purely metaphorical way. But the question is why does Paul choose to keep using such language even as metaphor?</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>14-15 Do all things without grumbling and arguing so that you be/become blameless (ἀμεμπτοι) and pure (ἀκέφαλοι), children of God without blemish (ἀμωμοι) in a twisted an depraved generation among whom you shine out like lights in the world… Again the holiness language abounds. Here the Philippians are contrasted with the “unholy” of the world. Are we to infer they are different from the unholy only because of their ethics, or does it rather come from proximity to Christ? 17 But even though I am being offered as a libation over the sacrifice and ritual service of your faith. Paul is certainly using liturgical language metaphorically here. But the question is, Why does he continue to use such language to speak to the Philippians? 30 Paul refers to support from the Philippians as “ritual service to me.” This is yet another use of ritual imagery.</td>
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| 3       | 3 We, who perform cultic service by the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and are not persuaded by the flesh, are “the circumcision.” In the context of referring to a
cultic requirement which Paul rejects for Gentile believers. Paul chooses to use the language of ritual service. Is he simply replacing the cultic system with a “ministry of the word” or do those two realities overlap each other?

6 ...As to righteousness in (or by) the Law, blameless (ἀμεμπτός). It is significant that Paul uses this expression to indicate his status before his encounter with Christ and that he continues to encourage the Philippians to be blameless (ἀμεμπτός) as well (in Phil 2:14).

19 ...whose god is their belly... I simply want to note that this is not an unambiguous rejection of food purity laws, as if by it Paul means “all those people think about is food laws.” It seems to me more likely to call into question the selfishness or venality of Paul’s opponents.

8 ...whatever is true, whatever is honorable (σεμνά), whatever is just, whatever is pure (ἀγνά), whatever causes delight, whatever is praiseworthy, if there is any excellence, if anything is worthy of praise, think about these things. Of the eight categories named two are related to purity. The first (honorable [σεμνά]) less directly, but the second (pure [ἀγνά]) quite clearly so. The adverbial form of this term (ἀγνώ') occurred in 1:17. Its use here is not specifically directed toward cult or purity laws, and like some of the other purity words that have occurred so far may be principally metaphorical. But it keeps coming up.

12 In everything and in all things I have become an initiate pure (μεμυμηματι) both in being well fed and in hungering, in having a lot, and having but little. This is a very “soft” usage of ritual language, but why does he like it so?

18 ...having received from Epaphroditus the things from you—[they are] an odor of sweetness (ὀσμήν εὐώδιας), an acceptable offering pleasing to God. The ritual language is metaphorical, but recurrent. “An odor of sweetness (ὀσμήν εὐώδιας) appears in Leviticus (1:9, 13, and 17) referring to a burnt offering as ἔκτισιν ἐκτίσιν and again in Lev 2:12 in a prohibition of burning something. The odor of sacrifices is referred to in Lev 26:31 and Amos 5:21. There are spiritualizations of the term in Sir 24:15 and 39:14. The most explicit spiritualization occurs in Testament of Levi 3:6 which tells of the angels in the highest reaches of heaven offering to God “a pleasing odor, a rational and bloodless oblation.” As with Paul’s terminology of sacrifice the term is not being used to describe a physical, sacrificial offering, but the conceptuality of the purity system is required for the reader to derive meaning from the terms.

21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. This reiterates Paul’s view of the members of the community as holy by their association with Christ. The next verse carries this on.

22 All the saints greet you.

Summary Comments on Philippians

1) The language of purity does not pervade Philippians as it does 1 Corinthians, but it does appear, and it appears at the beginning, middle, and end of the letter. In Philippians the same view of the Jesus believers as “saints” appears, but the role of the spirit in this sanctification is
not addressed as in 1 Corinthians. Shortly after the standard reference to the community as saints we encounter Paul’s desire that they be “pure and blameless” (εἰλικρινεῖς κ. ἀπρόσκοποι) (1:10) by Phil 1:17 he refers to wicked apostles who preach Christ, but “not purely” (ἀγνωστος). One could object that this is an entirely metaphorical use of purity language. It certainly is less direct that Paul’s command to remove the sinner from the community in 1 Corinthians 5. But by Phil 2:14-15 he is again urging the Philippians to be blameless and pure, but now with the more explicitly ritual terms (ἀμεμπτοι καὶ ἀκέραιοι) and in Phil 3:7 he gives himself as a positive example of one “blameless in the Law.” The purity language in the final chapter (Phil 4:8: Whatever is true…whatever is holy) may be entirely metaphorical as well, but we should not miss the fact that he insists they think on holy things, which he follows immediately with a command to “Do these things which you learned and received, and heard, and came to understand through me.” As in 1 Corinthians the holiness language does not lead to insistence of Jewish cultic practices, but it is Paul’s vehicle of ethical exhortation. I suggest it is an interpretation of the purity system, but involves the purity system nonetheless.

2) Three times in Philippians Paul refers to his ministry using terms from temple service. In 2:17 he says he “is being offered as a drink libation, poured out upon the sacrifice and cultic service of your faith (ἐπὶ τῇ θυσίᾳ καὶ λειτουργίᾳ τῆς πίστεως ύμων)” and he describes the Philippians’ generosity as their “cultic service” (λειτουργία) on his behalf. In 4:12 he claims to be “an initiate in being fed and being hungry.” And in 4:18 he uses the most explicitly cultic language “an odor of sweetness” (δόσμην εὐωδίας) to describe the Philippians’ financial support that was brought to him by Epaphroditus. The imagery and language of purity and cult seem to be very much on Paul’s mind.

3) The importance of the distinction between spirit and flesh that we saw in 1 Corinthians as relevant to the issue of the holiness of the community and the holiness and authority of the apostle appears more subtly in Phil 3:3: “We, who perform cultic service by the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and are not persuaded by the flesh, are the circumcision.” As in I

25 I am fully aware that the meaning of λειτουργία is not limited to religious service but can include many forms of public service, but given the context provided in Phil 2:17 it is hard to think of it as not referring to cultic service here. I also do not think it likely that Paul has in mind pagan cultic services, because, although they were public, I find it doubtful that he had much of an idea about what went on in them, anymore than a Catholic or a Baptist would know what goes on in the temples of the Church of Latter Day Saints.
Corinthians, while rejecting the cultic practice of circumcision, Paul still invokes a principle from the purity system, namely that “the spirit and not the flesh” imparts holiness, in this case defined as being the people of God in Christ.

Conclusion

Although I intend to continue this study with an examination of the other letters of Paul, I have seen enough to suspect that purity remains a terribly important matter to Paul, and not simply as a vehicle of social control. He re-interprets the holiness legislation of his Bible, but so did other Jews of his day. The re-interpretation did not involve a complete rejection of the very idea of holiness, and actions that were required by it. Nor does the purity system seem to be a dwindling residue of his “Jewish past.” He sees himself as a Jew, and the temple system and the holiness it involves remain at the heart of his thinking about God and what living in the presence of God demands. While I still need to work out Paul’s means of interpreting scriptures on this issue and how he applies them to Christian ethics, I can conclude with some assurance that if Paul was as concerned about purity issues as he seems to be, and if Jesus was opposed them as forcefully as Borg and others insist, then Paul was indeed a great distoriter of Jesus and his message, as it was fashionable for people to think early in the last century. I find it far more likely that both Jesus and Paul were intensely concerned with holiness and purity issues.