

AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF 2 CORINTHIANS 6.14 - 7.1

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1. INTRODUCTION

To say that there is little consensus among scholars on the passage at hand would be a significant understatement. The differences of opinions on every issue related to this passage are so widespread that it remains virtually impossible to find any two scholars who agree on all the problems inherent in the interpretation of this pericope. As one author has lamented, “everything about 2 Cor. 6.14-7.1 remains disputed in the secondary literature: its origin, its place in context, and its interpretation.”¹ Some commentators despair of finding a clear solution to all the questions raised in the exegesis of this text. After his 23-page treatment of these few verses, Furnish concludes: “This passage therefore, remains an enigma within [2 Corinthians]”.²

This paper will make an attempt to move beyond this despair by bringing together the relevant research and drawing some coherent conclusions. First, we will deal with problems pertaining to the body of text itself, discussing the limits of the section to be studied, a textual variant, and then the ultimate question: Do these verses belong in their current place in 2 Corinthians? Second, we will wade through the issues of interpretation of the text, examining syntax and meanings of words. An attempt will also be made to place the passage in its context, aligning its arguments with the grander scheme of 2 Corinthians as a whole. The author’s argument will be outlined, and the use of the Old Testament will be explored.

2. DEFINING THE TEXT

A. IDENTIFYING THE SECTION AS A UNIT

That 2 Corinthians 6.14-7.1 is a unit is one of the least-contested issues in the scholarly discussions of these verses. The breaks at both the beginning and the end of the passage have been seen by most as “something of a jerk,”³ to say the least. Barrett details the break this way:

There is no connection between vi. 13 and vi. 14, and between vii. 1 and vii. 2. In vi. 13 Paul begs his readers to make room for him in their hearts; in vi. 14 he tells them sharply to have nothing to do with unbelievers. In vii. 1, after quoting Scripture, he urges them to take thought for holiness of life in the fear of God; in vii. 2 he returns to self-defence, and a renewed personal appeal.⁴

¹ James M. Scott, “The Use of Scripture in 2 Corinthians 6:16c-18 and Paul’s Restoration Theology” (*JSNT* 56 [1994]), 74.

² Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians: A New Translation with introduction and notes*. (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 383.

³ C.K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Hendrickson, 1973), 194. Likewise, Harris: “There is no question that the transition from 6:13 to 6:14 (as also from 7:1 to 7:2) is abrupt” (Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 497). Elsewhere Harris writes that the “independent character of the paragraph is beyond dispute” (15).

⁴ Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 193.

So strong are the breaks in thought, tone, and vocabulary that this pericope has been widely seen as a “self-contained unit” that was really not originally placed here by Paul.⁵ Moreover, the “oft-noted unity” of 6.11-13 and 7.2-4 creates a distinctly isolated section (6.14-7.1) in the middle.⁶

B. TEXTUAL VARIANTS

There is only one textual variant of any note in this passage, and it occurs in 6.16. Where the UBS⁴ and NA²⁷ texts read ἡμεῖς γὰρ ναὸς θεοῦ ἐσμὲν, there are variants reading ἡμεῖς γὰρ ναοὶ θεοῦ ἐσμὲν and ὑμεῖς γὰρ ναὸς θεοῦ ἐστε (plus a few minority readings where ἐστε is placed immediately following γὰρ). The ναοὶ is not widely attested, and may easily be explained as an adaptation to match the plural ἡμεῖς.⁷

The ἡμεῖς ... ἐσμὲν / ὑμεῖς ... ἐστε debate is only slightly more difficult. While both readings have strong external support,⁸ the ὑμεῖς ... ἐστε reading might be “very naturally suggested by the recollection of 1 Cor 3.16 as well as by the context (verses 14 and 17).” To the contrary, there is no plausible reason why ἡμεῖς ... ἐσμὲν might be inserted in place of the other.⁹ Clearly, we ought to read ἡμεῖς γὰρ ναὸς θεοῦ ἐσμὲν, as in the UBS / NA text.

C. ORIGIN AND PLACEMENT OF THE TEXT

Stephen Hultgren begins his *NTS* article with these words: “Ever since the literary integrity of 2 Corinthians was called into question by modern scholars, the origin and placement of 2 Cor 6.14-7.1 has been a great puzzle.”¹⁰ The widespread nature of the debate has caused it to move from scholarly circles into the public arena as well:

Scholarly discussions have filtered down to the church, so it is not uncommon to find someone raising this issue in a Sunday-school class or even assuming as fact that 2 Corinthians is not a unity. In particular, the theory that 2 Corinthians is a composite of a number of letter fragments that were editorially assembled when Paul’s letters were being collected is becoming increasingly popular.¹¹

Many writers have put forth many theories about which portions of 2 Corinthians are original, and which parts are merely fragments of other letters inserted at various points. 2 Cor 6.14-7.1 is one of the most hotly debated sections, most often deemed as a “fragment” of some sort. We will attempt to survey the major options now. We will first look at why so many have argued that this passage was not penned by Paul, and then the justification for each non-Pauline view will be presented and evaluated.

i. NON-PAULINE AUTHORSHIP OF 2 CORINTHIANS 6.14-7.1

Some have argued that the passage must be non-Pauline in origin simply on account of the fact that it is self-contained and seemingly without connection to the situation at Corinth. As noted above, others find this section a sharp interruption of what would otherwise be a smooth flow of thought from 6.13 to 7.2.¹²

⁵ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 438. Harris, too, refers to the paragraph as “self-contained” (*Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 15) and Martin says it is “a self-contained entity” (Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* [Waco: Word, 1986], 190). Joseph A. Fitzmyer (“Qumran and the Interpolated Paragraph in 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1” [*CBQ* 23, 1961], 271) says “the passage has a self-contained, independent character, forming a unit intelligible in itself, like a short homily.”

⁶ Craig L. Blomberg, “The structure of 2 Corinthians 1-7” (*Criswell Theological Review* 4 [1989]), 13. Though Blomberg himself views this as an argument for the passage’s importance to the argument in 2.14-7.4 (which we will see developed), he acknowledges that this “oft-noted unity” of which he speaks is typically used as an argument for the passage’s isolation rather than its integration.

⁷ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2d rev. ed. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006), 512.

⁸ As Harris notes, “both have Alexandrian and Western witnesses” (*Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 497).

⁹ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 512.

¹⁰ Stephen J. Hultgren, “2 Cor 6.14-7.1 and Rev 21.3-8: evidence for the Ephesian redaction of 2 Corinthians” (*NTS* 49 [Ja 2003]), 39.

¹¹ Linda L. Belleville, *2 Corinthians* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996), 23.

¹² See, for example, William O. Walker, “2 Cor 6.14-7.1 and the Chiastic Structure of 6.11-13; 7.2-3” (*NTS* 48 [January 2002]), 142-144. Walker sees a chiasmus present in 6.11-13 and 7.2-3 when 6.14-7.1 is removed. Although “this phenomenon says nothing at all regarding the authorship of the passage,” nevertheless, “the appearance of this chiasmus when 2 Cor 6.14-7.1 is removed would

Moreover, there are six NT *hapax legomena* and three Pauline *hapax legomena* in this one passage.¹³ Even words which Paul has been known to use (like *σάρξ*, *πνεῦμα*, *δικαιοσύνη*, and *πιστός*) are used in non-Pauline ways.¹⁴ There are no less than three proposed origins of the text at hand.¹⁵

a. *Origin in Qumran.* Among those who believe that this passage is non-Pauline are those who argue that the Essene community at Qumran is really behind the authoring of these verses.¹⁶ It is proposed that the designation of Beliar as Satan and the rigid exclusivism are undeniably *un-Pauline*. By way of contrast, however, Beliar is a well-attested name for the enemy of God in Essene circles.¹⁷ There are many more noteworthy links between this section of 2 Corinthians and the literature of Qumran. Hultgren puts forward six: (1) The triple dualism of righteousness / lawlessness, light / darkness, and Christ / Beliar; (2) Opposition to idolatry; (3) Radical separation of the community from outsiders; (4) Purity of flesh and spirit and perfection in holiness; (5) The quotation formulae and the concatenation of biblical citations; (6) The idea of the temple as a community.¹⁸

While this list may appear compelling at first glance, it is far from convincing in light of other NT evidence. In response, it should be noted that (1) non-ontological dualism is present throughout the NT;¹⁹ (2) opposition to idolatry is common in both testaments;²⁰ (3) exclusivism in some forms is definitely present in the NT community;²¹ (4) purity / cleanliness and holiness are familiar topics to Paul;²² (5) there are multiple examples of Paul and at least one other NT author creating and using catenae;²³ and (6) the concept of the temple as community is not at all unique to Qumran either.²⁴ All these things considered, it seems unlikely at best that these verses are Qumranian in origin.²⁵

appear to strengthen significantly the case for viewing these verses as a later insertion into Paul's letter to the Corinthians" (144). See also the "verbal and conceptual links" of these passages that Harris notes (*Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 16).

¹³ NT: ἐταροζυγόντες, μετοχή, συμφώνησις, Βελιάρ, συγκατάθεσις, and μολυσμός; Pauline: ἐμπεριπατήσω, εἰσδέξομαι, and παντοκράτωρ (from Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 192).

¹⁴ These lists are found many places, including Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 191; and, Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 17.

¹⁵ Without a doubt, the hypotheses are legion. The views given are an attempt to be broadly representative, within the given scope of this paper.

¹⁶ See especially, Fitzmyer, "Qumran," 271-280.

¹⁷ Hultgren, "Ephesian Redaction," 41. On the charge of exclusivism, see below (n.18) on contrasting parties. To the objection that this is non-Pauline because Paul usually speaks of "Satan" rather than "Beliar," it is necessary to point out (with Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 473) that in 2 Cor 4.4 Paul has already referred to Satan by another name: "the god of this world". This "shows that 'Satan' was not his invariable usage." Thrall also suggests that the use of "Beliar" could also be easily explained as Paul using a term that he had used when he was with them in person, or a term that was less common for shocking rhetorical effect. See also Barrett (*Second Epistle to the Corinthians*), 198, who points out from evidence from intertestamental literature to show that "Beliar (-I) was a vogue word in the first century" which had come to be "a synonym for Satan," and "certainly does not prove any relation between 2 Corinthians and Qumran."

¹⁸ This list has been modified slightly from Hultgren's (Ibid.); the references to Essene literature have been removed. Hultgren himself has built and modified this list from Fitzmyer, "Qumran," 273-279. For another version of this list, complete with references, see Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 19.

¹⁹ Speaking of Paul's contrasting the two parties, Thrall writes that the use of "contrast in a context which divides humankind into two groups does not of necessity support the view that the passage comes from an Essene source. Paul himself can speak of Christians as 'sons of light' (1 Th 5.5), and may well have thought of the rest of humanity as 'sons of darkness'" (Margaret Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994], 1:473). Barrett (*Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 197) argues emphatically with regard to dualistic metaphors like light vs. darkness: "Paul too uses the metaphor (e.g. Rom. xiii. 12; 2 Cor. iv. 6; xi. 14; 1 Thess. v. 5), and there is no reason to suspect here a different kind of dualism from that of Rom. xiii. To describe the church and the world pictorially as *light* and *darkness* can hardly be said to go much further than to speak of 'those who are on the way to salvation and those who are on the way to destruction' (ii. 15)." Cf. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 362.

²⁰ 1 Cor 10.7, 14-22; Gal 5.19-20; 1 Pet 4.3; and 1 John 5.21 are some examples of NT texts warning against idolatry in the NT given by Harris (*Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 20).

²¹ To call this passage anything less than Pauline on account of the exclusivism "is surely a strange judgment when one recalls Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; 10:14-22; Galatians 1:8-9" (Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 438-439).

²² Harris (*Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 20) cites 1 Cor 6:1-6, 15-18; 10:8; Heb 3.12; and 3 John 11 as examples.

²³ Belleville (*2 Corinthians*, 183-184) gives these examples from within Paul: Rom 3:10-18; 9:25-29; 10:15-21; 11:8-10, 26-27, 34-35; 15:9-12. Harris (*Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 20), shows that Peter could use this technique as well, citing 1 Pet 2.6-8. Likewise, P. Barnett (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], 340): "on the basis of comparison between vv. 16d-18b and Rom 3:10-18, it has been argued that the threefold structure of OT citations is demonstrably Pauline in style and not at all Qumranian."

²⁴ While Paul is the only NT author to speak explicitly of the community as the temple (1 Cor 3.16-17; Eph 2.21-22), cf. 1 Pet 2.5; Rev 3.12; 7.15; and 21.3 (references from Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 20).

²⁵ It should be noted as well that the rejection of the notion that a Qumranian source is necessary to explain the language and logic of this passage renders somewhat useless hypotheses like the one advanced by Hultgren ("Ephesian Redaction"), that a later Ephesian source inserted this interpolation, along with one in Revelation 21.3-8, based on a text from Qumran.

b. *An Anti-Pauline Jewish Source.* Building off of the above connections with Qumran, Hans Dieter Betz has argued that the source of this “interpolation” is actually written and placed by Paul’s opponents from the church in Galatia.²⁶ Fundamental to his position is his belief that the ἄπιστοι are Gentile Christians, with whom the Jewish Christians ought not associate, since they do not keep the Torah. In reality, however, “this view is untenable and no evidence exists that the word ever had this meaning.”²⁷ Again, there is not a single record or hint anywhere that “Gentile Christians had ever been charged with ‘unbelief’ because of their ‘lawlessness,’”²⁸ as Betz would suggest. Betz’s hypothetical reconstruction has not met with any real success, and it is prudent to reject his theory as well.²⁹

c. *Another Early Christian Source.* In addition to the highly detailed speculation above, some less specific conjectures have been made about Paul using this material, which was originally composed by someone else. For example, Belleville concludes that there are simply too many *hapax legomena*, too many ideas that seem foreign to Paul, and too much atypical language (especially in the exhortation of 7.1) for this passage to have been written by Paul, even though she goes to great lengths to determine how the passage fits in the context.³⁰ Her suggested solution is that Paul most likely inserted content from a sermon that the Corinthians would have known into his letter, even though he himself had not written it.³¹ It will be seen, however, that this thesis is not needed when the language data from this passage are weighed out more carefully. The next section will show how the arguments against Paul having written this section are far less conclusive than they may appear, thus making a middle-ground position like this one unnecessary.

ii. IS 2 CORINTHIANS 6.14-7.1 PAULINE AFTER ALL?

So far it has been found that none of the proposed non-Pauline answers can be shown to be either helpful or necessary. Could it be that the simplest answer might be the best one? Even though the objections to Pauline authorship may seem impressive at first glance, when taken one-by-one, they are easily dismantled.

While many argue that this passage is an interpolation because it is a self-contained unit, without connection to the surrounding paragraphs, this cannot be proven. To the contrary, many have shown quite plausible connections to Paul’s surrounding argument. How this passage fits in its context will be examined in greater depth below, but for now one example will suffice. In his rhetorical analysis of the arguments of Paul in 1 and 2 Corinthians, Witherington finds our passage to be a digression, or *egressio*. Noting Thrall’s work, amplified by Murphy-O’Connor,³² he notes how 6.11, 14ff refer back to Deut 11:16 and its context. “This not only explains the references to open hearts in 6:11 and to idols in v. 16 but also connects the two.”³³ Moreover, “in a rhetorical digression in the midst of a discourse it was expected that the rhetor would return to the point from which he digressed.” He therefore suggests that “this explains why 6:11f and 7:2f are so similar.”³⁴ This unit then, while seemingly a whole within itself, must be seen to have intrinsic ties to the verses around it, making it unlikely to be a non-Pauline interpolation. Furthermore, since he is speaking of εἰδώλων, which are a known issue in the city of Corinth (1 Cor 8, 10), there is at least one obvious connection to the situation at Corinth.

There are also plausible explanations for the sharp introduction of this section in 6.14. Barnett notes that there are no connecting verbs or phrases to begin the passage and states that the command is given using asyndeton “to make freestanding statements and thus to heighten the impact of his words.”³⁵ The simple fact that so many have noted the sudden “jerk” effect bears witness, that it has—at least in some sense—fulfilled its purpose of attracting the reader’s attention. Far from being disconnected because it is unrelated, this passage is given as disconnected in order to emphasize the importance of the command.

²⁶ Hans Dieter Betz, “2 Cor. 6.4-7.1: An Anti-Pauline Fragment?” *JBL* 92 (1973): 88-108.

²⁷ D.E. Garland, *2 Corinthians* (Nashville: Broadman, 1999), 331-332.

²⁸ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 372.

²⁹ Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 403: “Few if any scholars have accepted this suggestion.”

³⁰ Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 28.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “Relating 2 Corinthians 6.14-7.1 to Its Context” (*NTS* 33 [1987]), 272-275.

³³ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 403.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, n.3.

³⁵ Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 344.

The issue of how many *hapax legomena* are present is made to be larger than it is. Of the nine supposed *hapaxes* ἐμπειρατήσω, εἰσδέξομαι, and παντοκράτωρ are unique in Paul, but present in the LXX—which Paul would have known.³⁶ Again, if μετέχω—μετοχή and μολύνω—μολυσμός are seen as legitimate cognates (which they are), they are not true *hapaxes* either. Still another for consideration is ἔτεροζυγέω. Is it really “that much different from similar compounds with ζυγός and σύζυγος?” And as for συμφώνησις and συγκάταθεσις, they “simply follow the pattern of other Pauline compound words formed with the prefix συγ(μ).”³⁷ The conclusion Martin draws, then, is that the only *hapax* worth noting is βελιάρ, and “it is hardly reasonable to think that a term, so entrenched in Jewish thinking should necessarily be excluded from Paul’s thinking.”³⁸ If one is still unconvinced, it should be noted that “a digression ... may be characterized by greater vehemence and freedom of speech than the surrounding argument,”³⁹ which is precisely what we find in 2 Cor 6.14-7.1. Clearly, the evidence presented stands in favour of seeing this unit as original to Paul himself, and none of the so-called *non-Pauline* features are persuasive enough to cause us to conclude that this paragraph does not belong precisely where it is.⁴⁰

Thus far we have defined the boundaries of our text, determined the author, and the place of the passage simply by examining characteristics of the text. Now attention will be given to the actual interpretation of these verses, and it will be made even clearer that the apostle Paul is the author, using clear logic and purpose to forcefully command that the Corinthians be pure and holy in their service to God. We will attempt to answer the question Barnett poses: “If the passage is Pauline, a remaining question is, Why does it appear in this position, as the climax of the entire apologia for Paul’s new covenant ministry, which he began (at) 2:14?”⁴¹

3. ISSUES IN INTERPRETING THE TEXT

A. THE PLACEMENT OF THE TEXT IN THE ARGUMENT OF 2 CORINTHIANS

It would scarcely be an overstatement to say that the theories and attempted explanations of Paul’s line of reasoning leading up to and including 6.14-7.1 are as numerous as the commentators. With a view to the overall argument of 2 Corinthians 1-7 (which is nearly universally recognized as a unit of thought separate in some sense from 2 Corinthians 8-9), the best visual representation has been given by Craig Blomberg, and is reproduced below.⁴²

³⁶ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 192.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 402. Martin puts it another way: “Pauline outbursts containing a high percentage of *hapax legomena* are not uncommon” (*2 Corinthians*, 192). To this it should be added that 2 Corinthians is a book full of *hapaxes*. Philip E. Hughes (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2d ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962], 242) counts over 50 *hapaxes* in this book alone. In fact, in 2 Cor 6.3-10 (the verses immediately preceding our passage) there are six *hapax legomena* (Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 192), yet no one considers that an interpolation.

⁴⁰ Here it is assumed that if the passage is Pauline in origin, it is in its proper place, but that is not unanimous; some see the passage as written by Paul, but misplaced within the argument. The wildest of these theories seems to be that of Walter Schmithals. Schmithals thought that Paul’s opponents at Corinth were Gnostics, and took this section and inserted it before 1 Cor 9.24, at the beginning of what he referred to as “Letter A”. Eventually he would change his mind, placing this section (6.14-7.1) before 1 Cor 6.12 instead. According to Betz, Schmithals just looked for where the passage “seems to fit best. No thought is given to the epistolary composition and rhetorical argument of individual sections, or to the macrostructures of the epistles” (Hans Dieter Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9: A Commentary on Two Administrative Letters of the Apostle Paul* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], 19-20). This is obviously a fringe view, however, and need not concern us here.

⁴¹ Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 341.

⁴² From Craig L. Blomberg, “The structure of 2 Corinthians 1-7” (*Criswell Theological Review* 4 [1989]), 8-9. Positing extended chiasmus such as this is risky at the best of times, and no one is more aware of that than Blomberg. In this somewhat lengthy article he lays out nine criteria that he feels should help eliminate picking out chiasms on a whim; though admittedly, his own standards are such that he feels hardly any chiasmus would fit the criteria *in toto*. Nevertheless, the criteria are somewhat rigid, and this extended chiasmus seems to stand, even though it is—to be sure—not without its challenges.

<p>A 1:12-22—the Corinthians can rightfully boast in Paul</p> <p>B 1:23-2:11—grief and comfort over the painful letter; hope for forgiving the offender</p> <p>C 2:12-13—looking for Titus in Macedonia</p> <p>D 2:14-4:6—a series of contrasts—belief vs. unbelief, centered on Christians as the letters of the living God, in glory being transformed into his image</p> <p>a 2:14-16a—death vs. life</p> <p>b 2:16b-3:3—false vs true approaches to ministry</p> <p>c 3:4-18—old covenant vs. new</p> <p>b' 4:1-2—false vs. true approaches to ministry</p> <p>a' 4:3-6—darkness vs. light</p> <p>E 4:7-5:10—surviving and triumphing despite every hardship (see esp. vv. 8-10)</p>	<p>A' 7:13b-16—Paul can rightfully boast in the Corinthians</p> <p>B' 7:8-13a—grief and comfort over the painful letter; joy after forgiving the offender</p> <p>C' 7:5-7—finding Titus in Macedonia</p> <p>D' 6:11-7:4—a series of contrasts—belief vs. unbelief, centered on Christians as the temple of the living God, in light being transformed into his holiness</p> <p>a 6:11-13—widen your hearts</p> <p>b 6:14-7:1—separate yourselves from uncleanness</p> <p>a' 7:2-4—open your hearts</p> <p>E' 6:1-10—surviving and triumphing despite every hardship (see esp. vv. 8b-10)</p>
<p>F 5:11-21—the theological climax: the ministry of reconciliation</p>	

Yet, even in such a broad, over-arching sweep, our passage remains the one which is most difficult. Blomberg admits, “The least obvious pair matches 2:14-4:6 with 6:11-7:4.” Yet he defends this pairing, all the same:

Still, both of these sections linger long on the clear-cut contrasts between true Christianity and its opposition: false teachers in Corinth, improper responses by the Corinthians, and inappropriate application of the old covenant in the age of the new. More strikingly, both sections focus heavily on key OT Scriptures which bear on the situation in Corinth.⁴³

While Blomberg may be the only one to have pointed out this extended chiasmus, he is not alone in connecting it to the theme of the ministry of reconciliation.

With this powerful appeal (6:14-7:1) Paul now brings the apostolic excursus, begun at 2:14 to its climax. More immediately it relates to the passage begun at 5:18. God has given to Paul the ministry of reconciliation and entrusted to him the message of reconciliation (5:18-19). On that basis he has exhorted the Corinthians to be reconciled to God (5:20-6:2). His exposition of his sufferings, in which the power of God is nonetheless active (6:3-10), provides moral authority for his appeal that the Corinthians be reconciled to God, and, in the passage following (6:11-13), to him also. Now follows

⁴³ Ibid., 11.

the strong exhortation to which all this has been leading and for which it has served as the foundation. The Corinthians must separate from all that is unclean in Corinth.⁴⁴

To these notions of connection should be added the oft-noted realization that in giving this command on the heels of asking the Corinthians to “widen their hearts” to him, he is most likely indicating the reason why their hearts have been “restricted”; namely, their double-allegiance.⁴⁵

Having now placed the passage within the flow of thought in 2 Corinthians, we will shift our focus to the internal analysis of the passage; namely, some notes on syntax and semantics and then a summary of the structure of the argument.

B. ISSUES OF SYNTAX AND SEMANTICS

As Barnett notes, this section begins with asyndeton, for rhetorical effect.⁴⁶ The present periphrastic construction, rather than implying stopping⁴⁷ or not starting⁴⁸ an action, has general gnomic force; it is something the Corinthians ought never do.⁴⁹ William Webb addresses the semantic range of ἐτεροζυγοῦντες and suggests that it should be limited by the five synonyms that follow and the two covenant formulas in the catena. He concludes: “On this basis the prohibitions do not appear to be against causal contact, but against forming covenantlike relationships with pagans, which in turn violate Christians’ existing covenant with God.”⁵⁰ The identification of the ἄπιστοι who the Corinthians are to avoid being yoked with is perhaps not as hard to determine as some have suggested. Despite a plethora of options, on the whole, “the evidence strongly favors a traditional understanding of the ἄπιστοι as non-Christians outside the church community.”⁵¹

Wallace makes note of the substantial use of πισττ and ἀπίστου in 6.15.⁵² Furnish finds the ἡμεῖς at the beginning of 6.16b “very emphatic.”⁵³ With regard to the repetition of the introductory formulae, Thrall notes that Paul may intend “to stress the divine and authoritative origin of the exhortations he quotes.”⁵⁴ Zerwick notes that εἰς + acc. following γινομαι or εἶμι (as in 6.18) is common, and most likely a result of Semitic influence, given its frequent presence in OT quotations.⁵⁵ The anarthrous παντὸς stresses “each and every” form of defilement (μολυσμοῦ),⁵⁶ while σαρκὸς and πνεύματος just refers to the totality

⁴⁴ Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 337-338.

⁴⁵ Blomberg (“Structure,” 13) says it is “likely that the partnership with unrighteousness which is apparently plaguing some in Corinth (6:14) is the very reason why they are restrained in their response to Paul (6:12). But if they recognize their status as God’s children (6:18), and act morally as that status demands, then they will be able to accept Paul’s relationship to them as a father to his spiritual children (6:13).” Cf. Ernest Bernard Allo, *Seconde épître aux Corinthiens* 2e éd. (Etudes Bibliques. Paris: Gabalda, 1956), 183.

⁴⁶ Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 344.

⁴⁷ As Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 176: “Actually the command is even more pointed: ‘Stop yoking yourselves to unbelievers.’ Use of the present imperative shows that Paul is not merely warning the Corinthians about a potential danger (‘do not start’) but instructing them to stop an action already in progress.

⁴⁸ As Barnett (*Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 344) argues. Cf. Blass, Debrunner, and Funk § 354, where μή γίνεσθε with the participle may prohibit the entering of a state. See also Furnish (*II Corinthians*, 361): “The presumption is not that those addressed have already gotten *mis*yoked; they are simply warned against that.”

⁴⁹ So Wallace, 525: Present tense in didactic literature, “especially when introducing an exhortation, is not descriptive, but a general precept that has gnomic implications.” Likewise, Harris (*Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 498): “The negated present imperative prohibits either the continuation of an action (‘cease to,’ ‘stop’) or a course of action that must always by [sic] avoided (‘keep from,’ ‘don’t ever’). So, correspondingly, the sense may be ‘Stop forming intimate and inconsistent relations with unbelievers’; or, ‘Do not be mismatched with unbelievers’ (NRSV)... Neither interpretation can be excluded: the Corinthians may well have been guilty of such relations, and Paul could be issuing a general prohibition that was applicable to both the present and the future.”

⁵⁰ William J. Webb, “Unequally Yoked with Unbelievers, Part 2: What is the Unequal Yoke (ἐτεροζυγοῦντες) in 2 Corinthians 6:14?” (*BSac* 149 [1992]), 163-164.

⁵¹ William J. Webb, “Unequally Yoked with Unbelievers, Part 1: Who Are the Unbelievers (ἄπιστοι) in 2 Corinthians 6:14?” (*BSac* 149 [1992]), 44. This is Webb’s conclusion after an extended discussion of the various options. Before arriving at his conclusion, he discusses five possible referents for the “unbelievers”: (1) untrustworthy persons, (2) Gentile Christians who do not keep the Law, (3) immoral people within the church community, (4) false apostles, and (5) non-Christians, pagans outside the church community. See also Belleville (*2 Corinthians*, 177), who connects these ἄπιστοι with those mentioned in 4.4 who have been blinded by the god of this world.

⁵² Wallace, 294-295.

⁵³ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 363.

⁵⁴ Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:478.

⁵⁵ Zerwick, § 32.

⁵⁶ Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 184.

of the purity / holiness.⁵⁷ The prepositional phrase ἐν φόβῳ θεοῦ “defines the circumstances or manner in which the exhortation is to be carried out.”⁵⁸ Finally, it should be noted that the cohortative nature of the reiteration of the command combined with the address ἀγαπητοί, is designed to reveal a loving, pastoral heart.⁵⁹

C. STRUCTURE OF THE ARGUMENT

The simplest outline of Paul’s argumentation comes from James Scott, who sees this unit as a parenthetic section in a ring structure, wherein the initial exhortation that they should not be “allied” with unbelievers is restated using different terminology at the close of the section. He fills out the middle of the section in this way:

Between these exhortations come two separate lines of substantiation for 6.14a: the rhetorical questions in vv. 14b-16b and the scripture citations in vv. 16c-18. There can be no doubt that the function of these citations is to substantiate v. 14a; for the exhortation in v. 17, which reiterates v. 14a, comes at the center of two sets of corresponding Scripture promises (vv. 16def and 17d-18b), which provide the theological basis of v. 17 and thus of v. 14a. Quite logically, therefore, these promises also provide the basis for the concluding exhortation in 7.1, thereby closing the ring.⁶⁰

Thus Paul begins with an exhortation, amplifies with rhetorical questions intended to polarize the audience, and then reminds them of the promises that are theirs as they partake of his new covenant ministry that the old covenant itself had prophesied. But just as in the old covenant, these promises are for those who love the True God exclusively. This discussion of Paul’s argument naturally leads us to the issue of how to interpret Paul’s use of the Old Testament.

D. PAUL’S USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

In Paul’s argumentation here, the OT is being more or less directly quoted, for the purposes of enforcing his position that the new covenant church is the promised temple—the dwelling place of God with man. Paul’s first OT quotation is a conflation of Lev 26.11-12 (καὶ θήσω τὴν διαθήκην μου ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ οὐ βδελύξεται ἡ ψυχὴ μου ὑμᾶς καὶ ἐμπεριπατήσω ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ ἔσομαι ὑμῶν θεός καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔσεσθέ μου λαός) and Ezek 37.27 (καὶ ἔσται ἡ κατασκηνώσις μου ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτοῖς θεός καὶ αὐτοὶ μου ἔσονται λαός). Scott makes an important observation about the bringing together of these texts: in the Leviticus text, God is dealing with Israel in their *protology* (that is, when God led Israel out of Egyptian bondage at the Exodus, established the nation and the covenant relationship between Israel and himself, and began to dwell among them as their God). In the Ezekiel text, however, God is dealing with Israel’s *eschatology* and their grand return to the presence and fellowship with God.⁶¹ It is precisely this type of movement *within the OT itself* that Paul was so keen to elaborate on earlier in the letter, giving evidence that his ministry is the fulfillment of that which was promised.

It is also significant to note that the context of Ezekiel 37, which Paul has just alluded to, speaks of the new life (creation) in the new covenant (also themes which Paul has already addressed).⁶² Perhaps even more important, however, is the realization that in this same context (37.21, 23) God has promised the return from exile in Babylon, with the last verse of chapter 37 reading: “Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore” (ESV)—the very thing which Paul has said is happening with the Corinthians, and the very reason why they must be holy!⁶³

⁵⁷ Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 356.

⁵⁸ Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 185.

⁵⁹ Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 355. Likewise, Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:480.

⁶⁰ Scott, “The Use of Scripture”, 75.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

⁶² Peter Balla, “2 Corinthians,” In *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. eds. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 770.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

The connection to the present context grows even stronger when Paul cites Isaiah 52.11 (ἀπόσπυτε ἀπόσπυτε ἐξέλθυτε ἐκείθεν καὶ ἀκαθάρτου μὴ ἄπυεσθε ἐξέλθυτε ἐκ μέσου αὐτῆς ἀφορίσπυτε οἱ φέροντες τὰ σκευῆ κυρίου) next, in 2 Cor 6.17. This passage also speaks of return from Babylonian exile, and “all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God” (52.10b). This is Isaiah’s context for calling the Israelites to be holy, as they carried the holy cultic vessels, used in temple-worship of God; the fulfillment of these things is Paul’s context for calling the Corinthians to be holy, since they themselves *are* the temple.⁶⁴

Without warning that he is quoting a new text, Paul cites Ezek 20.34 (καὶ ἐξάξω ὑμᾶς ἐκ τῶν λαῶν καὶ εἰσδέξομαι ὑμᾶς ἐκ τῶν χωρῶν οὗ διεσκορπίσπυτε ἐν αὐταῖς ἐν χειρὶ κραταιᾷ καὶ ἐν βραχίονι ὑψηλῷ καὶ ἐν θυμῷ κεχυμένῳ). In this immediate context

the contrast between God’s people and their surroundings is emphasized: the people should not think of being “like the nations” (20:32-34). Then God warns his people that he will have to “enter into judgment” with them (20:35), and he will “purge out the rebels” from among them (20:38). Thus the context is about God’s people being cleansed from the impurity that they acquired from their pagan neighbors.⁶⁵

Paul’s final OT allusion in this passage is no less suited to the context at hand. Here Paul cites 2 Sam 7.14, where the promise given to David is that “your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established forever (7:16). Thus Paul applies a promise originally uttered for David’s royal house—and through it for the whole chosen people—to the new people of God (to whom the Christians in Corinth belong).”⁶⁶ When Paul quotes 2 Samuel, however, he adds the words καὶ θυγατέρας. Thrall suggests that this is another instance of conflation (of an ingenious sort). She suggests that it is “occasioned by OT promises of the restoration of Israel in which ‘daughters’ are often mentioned with ‘sons’.”⁶⁷ She cites Isa 43.6; 49.22; and 60.4. What makes this so significant, of course, is that it concludes this catena by rounding out the readers’ thoughts on the “second exodus” of Isaiah 40-66.

In sum, Paul’s use of the OT in this passage shows a masterful understanding of the scriptural texts and their contexts, as well as the flow of redemptive-history. Paul’s use of the Scriptures here (as elsewhere in 2 Corinthians) “underscores his conviction that the new covenant of the new creation has been inaugurated in Christ. As a believer in Christ and apostle to the gentiles for Israel’s sake, it was this perspective that shaped Paul’s self-understanding, served as an apologetic for his ministry, and supported his admonitions to the Corinthians.”⁶⁸

4. CONCLUSION

In most evangelical circles this passage is not cited for any other reason than as a proof-text for why Christians should not marry non-Christians. However, the challenge Paul lays before the Corinthians is much greater. They are to cleanse themselves “from every defilement,” pursuing perfect holiness in the fear of God, in light of the promises of his presence. Their refusal to give their whole hearts and lives to God had constrained their affections for God’s minister—Paul—and had greatly damaged earthly relationships.

Earthly relationships, however, for their own sake are not Paul’s goal. Rather, he needs to be reconciled to the Corinthians because the whole defence of his apostolic ministry as that of the new covenant depends on their partaking of the Spirit, since they themselves are his “letter of recommendation.” This passage is nothing short of a passionate plea for holiness from the people who were called apart to be holy. They must separate themselves from the cult worship and all defilement because they are the temple where God dwells; God is their Father, and they are his children, the heirs of all his promises.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 771.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1:479. See also Scott, “Use of Scripture”, 86-87.

⁶⁸ Scott J. Hafemann, “Paul’s Use of the Old Testament in 2 Corinthians” (*Interpretation* 52 [Jl 1998]), 255.

Surely, his children are to in a manner appropriate for being in his presence. This includes respecting their covenant relationship with God by not joining with outsiders in covenantal-type relationships, but surely it is even broader. We must see that this passage teaches us, just as it did the Corinthians, that in opening our hearts to God, the proper response is absolutely exclusive.

APPENDIX 1
2 CORINTHIANS 6.14-7.1 DIAGRAMMED

Μὴ γίνεσθε ἑτεροζυγοῦντες → ἀπίστοις·

γὰρ	τίς μετοχή	δικαιοσύνη	καὶ	ἀνομία,
ἢ	τίς κοινωνία	φωτὶ	πρὸς	σκότος;
δὲ	τίς συμφώνησις	Χριστοῦ	πρὸς	Βελιάρ,
ἢ	τίς μερίς	πιστῶ	μετὰ	ἀπίστου;
δὲ	τίς συγκατάθεσις	ναὰ θεοῦ	μετὰ	εἰδώλων;

γὰρ
ἡμεῖς ναὸς θεοῦ ἐσμεν ζῶντος,
καθὼς εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς τι
Ἐνοικήσω
ἐν αὐτοῖς
καὶ
ἐμπεριπατήσω
καὶ
ἐσομαι αὐτῶν θεὸς
καὶ
αὐτοὶ σονται μου λαός

διὸ
ἐξέλθατε ἐκ μέσου αὐτῶν
καὶ
ἀφορίσθητε,
λέγει κύριος,
καὶ
ἀκαθάρτου
μὴ πτεσθε·
κἀγὼ εἰσδέξομαι ὑμᾶς
καὶ
ἐσομαι ὑμῖν εἰς πατέρα
καὶ
ὑμεῖς σεσθέ μοι εἰς υἱοὺς καὶ θυγατέρας,
λέγει κύριος παντοκράτωρ.

οὖν
ταύτας χοντες τὰς ἐπαγγελίας ἀγαπητοί,
καθαρίσωμεν ἑαυτοὺς
ἀπὸ παντὸς μολυσμοῦ
σαρκὸς
καὶ
πνεύματος,
ἐπιτελοῦντες ἀγιωσύνην
ἐν φόβῳ θεοῦ.

APPENDIX 2
HOMILETICAL OUTLINE

1. The Command: Don't Get "Hitched" with Sinners (6.14a)
2. A Parallel Plea for Holiness: Don't Get Dirty with Sin (7.1)
3. Why Be Separate from Sinners and Sin?
 - a. The First Reason: You have nothing in common (6.14b-16a)
 - b. The Second Reason: You're supposed to live with God (6.16b, 18)
 - c. The Third Reason: You've been saved to serve in holiness (6.17)

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