

The Invasive Spirit: The Spirit And Sexual Ethics In 1 Corinthians 5-7

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Introduction

In 1995, Dale Martin, a New Testament scholar then at Duke University, published a book entitled *The Corinthian Body*. To say the very least, Martin's work offers a unique interpretation of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthian Church. According to Martin, when Paul wrote his letter, the Corinthian community was in the midst of a dynamic social struggle. Two opposing classes, with contrasting ideologies indicative of their social position within the Greco-Roman world, clashed in the Corinthian Church, causing discord and friction. Paul's objective in writing to the Corinthians was to alleviate this dysfunction by propagating an ideology that effectively resolved the differences between the two opposing social classes, which Martin identifies as the "strong" and the "weak."¹

But Paul's solution to the Corinthians' clashing social ideologies, Martin argues, goes against what many may expect from the Apostle. According to Martin, Paul's solution to the discord in Corinth is, more times than not, to side with the "weak" members of the Corinthian Church, vying for their ideologies as the appropriate means to understand their new position as believers within the body of Christ. Thus in Martin's view, Paul flips the social and ideological hierarchy of the first century Greco-Roman world on its head and argues that the ideologies of the "weak," in this radically new Kingdom of God, are actually "strong."²

Martin's thesis comes full focus early in the book when he asserts that "The theological differences found in 1 Corinthians all resulted from conflicts between various groups in the local

¹ Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 69.

church rooted in different ideological constructions of the body.”³ Here, Martin’s use of body means more than the body of the individual human. In brief, Martin argues that ancient-peoples did not distinguish between the body of the individual, the community, and the cosmos. The human body, then, is but one body in a conglomerate of bodies all connected to one another.⁴

Martin goes on to explain that the conflicting ideologies about the body in Corinth fell inline with the social hierarchy present in the Corinthian community. The “strong” members of the Church possessed an ideology of balance where the health of the individual and social body was maintained through proper regulation. In this view, the individual and social body had a normative order where everything appropriately fell into place. When this order fell out of line, the individual ran the risk of sickness and disease, and the community ran the risk of disharmony.⁵ But while this ideology was representative of the “strong” members of the Corinthian Church, the “weak” members of the Church, according to Martin, held a radically different view of the body. As representatives of a larger superstitious class, these “weak” members believed that the body’s dysfunction, both individually and communally, stemmed from invasive, malevolent forces such as gods and daimons. In their malevolence, these forces hoped to pollute the body. For the “weak,” then, the erection of boundaries against these outside forces protected the health of the individual and communal body.⁶

According to Martin, because Paul, in his letters, aligns himself with the ideology of the “weak,” he propagates this superstitious ideology of disease and assimilates it into the context of Jewish apocalypticism. The outside, malevolent forces, then, that wreak havoc on the individual and social body are appropriately sin and the flesh (σάρξ). Thus siding with the “weak,” Paul

² Ibid., 68.

³ Ibid., xv.

⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁵ Ibid., 34.

argues that the way to protect the body is to erect boundaries against these hostile and invasive forces that threaten to pollute his congregations. The community member does this by adhering to the values of spirit (πνεῦμα), a contrasting cosmic force that is in a dueling relationship with the malevolent σάρξ. Like σάρξ, πνεῦμα holds its own “values” and “goals” and invasively works through the individual and communal body to produce its desired effect. To state the issue simply, then, the individual and communal body reside in the midst of a cosmos where the body is susceptible to the influences of cosmic forces — for Paul, these are σάρξ and πνεῦμα.⁷

Issues with Martin’s reading of 1 Corinthians arise when his interpretation is applied to Paul’s ethical imperatives in 1 Corinthians 5-7. In chapters five and six, Paul deals with instances of sexual immorality. In both cases, members of the Corinthian community have engaged in illicit sexual activity with individuals outside of the Church. For Paul, Martin argues, such interaction gives σάρξ an easy opportunity to pollute the body of the individual and, by extension, the body of Christ, connected to the believer through πνεῦμα.⁸ According to Martin, σάρξ and πνεῦμα are two dueling cosmic forces both susceptible to the influences of one another. When the believer engages in an act of sexual intercourse with an individual outside of the Church, the σάρξ of the prostitute can work over and against the πνεῦμα of the believer, wreaking havoc on the believer’s body and by extension the body of the Church and Christ.

For Martin, Paul’s ethical imperatives to the Corinthians reflect his adherence to this etiology of disease. Thus in 1 Corinthians 5 Paul instructs the Corinthians to rid themselves of an offender to prevent the threat of pollution. And in 1 Corinthians 6, he exhorts the Corinthians to steer clear of sexual activity with prostitutes because such an engagement opens up the boundaries of both the individual and the communal body, providing an easy opportunity for

⁶ Ibid., 161.

⁷ Ibid., 168-174.

σάρξ to pollute the Church. Paul's ethical imperatives, then, are instructions on how to seal up the borders of the body and prevent possible pollution from the invasive σάρξ.⁹

Though this interpretation works well for chapters five and six, Paul's attitude toward mixed marriages in 1 Corinthians 7 works against Martin's thesis. Here, Paul does not exhort his communities to dissolve their marriages with individuals outside of the church who are enveloped in the realm of σάρξ. Instead, he instructs his community members to remain as they are, showing little concern about the potential threat of pollution that the unbelieving spouse brings to the body of the believer, community, and Christ. In fact, Paul asserts that through her relationship to the believer, the unbelieving spouse will be "made holy." This apathy towards the believer's marriage to a non-believer raises the question of whether Paul's ethical imperatives in 1 Cor 5 and 6 are really instructions on how to avoid the potential threat of pollution brought on by sexual relationships between community members and non-community members. Martin himself admits that we would expect Paul, adhering to the logic of disease, to frown upon mixed marriages in chapter seven.¹⁰ But, of course, Paul simply does not do this and this backs Martin into a corner, forcing him to explain away the inconsistency in a short paragraph where he proposes that, in chapter seven, Paul incorporates a cleansing mechanism into his logic. Here, πνεῦμα works over and against σάρξ. Thus σάρξ does not pollute the believer's body, but πνεῦμα cleanses the body of the non-believer. The question that immediately arises is: why here and not there? Why does πνεῦμα, through the connection between a non-believer and a believer, work over and against σάρξ in 1 Corinthians 7, but not in chapters five and six?

Explaining the inconsistency involves rethinking the motivation for Paul's ethical imperatives. As I hope to show, Paul's imperatives are not motivated by fear. He is, in other

⁸ Ibid., 178.

⁹ Ibid., 174.

words, not instructing his communities to steer clear of sexual relationships with outsiders because of the threat of an invasive σάρξ. On a much different note, he is exhorting his communities to live in conformity with their reality as believer's in the body of Christ who, consequently, possesses the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit is a power that enables the believer's ethical life through a process of renewal and produces, Paul thinks, a specific set of concrete ethical actions. Among these are the things Paul exhorts to his communities in 1 Corinthians 5-7.

In the three chapters that follow, I set out to prove this thesis. In chapter one, I deal primarily with Paul's perception of the Spirit/flesh relationship. In Martin's interpretation, πνεῦμα and σάρξ act as cosmic foils, both susceptible to the influence of one another. Such a reading suggests that Paul adheres to a quasi-stoic cosmos where πνεῦμα and σάρξ pervade the cosmos, defining reality and cleansing and polluting as they go. I propose that while Paul may adopt some aspects of Stoic cosmology, his attitude toward πνεῦμα does not fit neatly within a Stoic framework. Instead, Paul views πνεῦμα as the invasive Spirit of Christ, sent by God into the cosmos to invasively reconstitute the foundation of the cosmos, creating a temporary "in-between" cosmic reality. In this "in-between" cosmos the Spirit works over and against σάρξ, engaged in all out assault against the hostile cosmic force. Observing the Spirit's prerogative to destroy σάρξ attests to the superiority of the Spirit and further calls into question the nature of Paul's ethical imperatives. Σάρξ cannot invasively overcome the Spirit because it is, in fact, inferior to the Spirit, always on the receiving end of the Spirit's assault. Thus Paul's ethical imperatives must account for the superiority of the Spirit.

In the second chapter, I attempt to recount a Pauline ethic that assumes the superiority of the Spirit. Relying heavily on the work of Victor Furnish, I propose that the Spirit is responsible for constructing the believer's ethical life in the "in-between" cosmos. The Spirit does this by

¹⁰ Ibid., 218.

imparting the mind of Christ onto the believer at baptism, thus beginning a process of ethical renewal that lasts until the coming eschaton where Paul believes a new cosmos completely defined by the Spirit will come into existence. It is the transitory nature of this process that explains the need for Paul's ethical imperatives. The believer, though indwelt by the Spirit and in possession of the mind of Christ, lives in a cosmos where sin and σάρξ still exist. Thus the believer is still susceptible to the influences of σάρξ, though he or she is no longer under the dominion of sin and σάρξ. In other words, though the Spirit imparts the volition to exhibit the "things" and "fruit" of the Spirit, the Spirit does not transition the believer into the cosmos yet to come, the eschaton, where sin and σάρξ no longer exist. Thus it is necessary to view the Spirit's impartation of ethics as a *process* that incorporates the imperative.

Finally, in the third chapter I further explore the problem of reading 1 Corinthians 5-7 with a Spirit/flesh relationship where σάρξ can conceivably overcome the Spirit. To find a solution to the problem, I incorporate the work done in chapters one and two into a reading of 1 Corinthians 5-7. There, I attempt to show that the Spirit, even in 1 Corinthians 5 and 6, is working over and against σάρξ, creating the believer's ethical life in the "in-between" cosmos. In the end, I simply conclude that the instructions that Paul gives to his communities are best seen as calls for his communities to come to terms with what they are — that is, Spirit indwelt people living in a Spirit indwelt community. This reality necessitates the exhibition of specific ethical actions. And Paul's instructions, coming from someone indwelt by the Spirit, are part of the Spirit's larger process to transform the believer to live in conformity with his/her reality as an indwelt person. Seeing Paul's imperatives in this way eliminates the inconsistency in chapter 7. Paul simply does not think that the Spirit leads believers to divorce their unbelieving spouses.

Chapter One: Paul's World

Where to Begin?

Any attempt to understand Paul's ethical imperatives in 1 Corinthians 5-7 must begin with addressing the relationship between the Spirit (πνεῦμα) and the flesh (σάρξ). At the least, the number of scholars who recognize the importance of this relationship in their interpretations mandates this task.

Dale Martin is one of the many who interpret this text based on an analysis of the Spirit-flesh relationship.¹¹ For Martin, the relationship between the Spirit and the flesh is at the forefront of Paul's ethical imperatives in 1 Corinthians 5-7. As seen in the introduction, Martin considers πνεῦμα and σάρξ two apocalyptic forces that interact with each other in an equal but opposite way. While πνεῦμα sometimes cleanses σάρξ, at other times σάρξ pollutes πνεῦμα. In this topsy-turvy environment, fear, according to Martin, prompts Paul to warn the Corinthians to maintain firm boundaries against anything associated with the corrupting power of σάρξ. They can do this, he hopes, through adherence to a rigid set of ethical rules.

In interpreting 1 Corinthians 5-7, Martin is right to recognize the importance of the relationship between πνεῦμα and σάρξ. Moreover, he is right to interpret πνεῦμα and σάρξ as apocalyptic forces— allied, respectively, to good and evil. But Martin's interpretation of the relationship between these forces misses Paul's underlying narrative about the cosmos. While

¹¹ See also Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 122-140, 817-822.

Martin maintains that σάρξ can pollute πνεῦμα, for Paul, this is not a possibility. Πνεῦμα and σάρξ never exist as equals. In its relationship to σάρξ, πνεῦμα is always in a superior position.

In 1 Corinthians 5-7, however, Paul does not develop a thorough account of the relationship between the two — even if his view is operating in the background. So any attempt to show a hierarchy must start by filling in the appropriate context for Paul’s language regarding πνεῦμα and σάρξ with other data from the epistolary corpus. Fortunately, Paul develops his view throughout his letters, and, elsewhere, Paul’s view of σάρξ and πνεῦμα are situated within a much larger narrative about the cosmos — a hierarchy of Spirit over flesh that explains his imperatives in 1 Corinthians 5-7.

So it is by investigating Paul’s view of the cosmos that the first steps towards understanding the Apostle’s ethical imperatives in 1 Corinthians 5-7 take place. During our investigation of Paul’s cosmos, we will observe how, for Paul, the Spirit works as an ontologically superior force that is rooting out the corrupting forces of the flesh and sin, creating in turn — as we will see in the second chapter — new ethical standards of living.

The Structure of the Cosmos

Though it is impossible to summarize ancient cosmology, a few general observations are necessary to provide context for Paul’s own language about the cosmos. Importantly, these observations reflect what many scholars agree is the state of cosmology by the time Paul wrote his letters.¹² That is, this stuff was in the air, so to speak, during the first century.

¹² It is commonly agreed among scholars that the type of philosophy predominate in the ancient world when Paul wrote his letters was a popular sort of Stoicism. see Hahn, *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology*, xiiv. Here Hahn writes, “From the third century B.C. to the second century A.D. more people in the mediterranean world seem to have held a more or less Stoic conception of the world than any other.” see also Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 213. Wright states, “Whereas the default mode of most modern westerners is some kind of Epicureanism,

Because Paul does not elucidate an exhaustive cosmology, it is only necessary to make a couple of general observations. Two observations are especially important. These are: (1) what “cosmos” probably meant in an ancient, first-century context, and (2) what “elements” are, and, moreover, how elements interact with one another in ancient cosmologies.

Κόσμος originally denoted a moral or political order, as in Herodotus, *Hist.* 8.67.2.¹³ Here a king commands those in front of him to sit according to the honor he has granted them, and they, then, sit in order one after another (ὥς δὲ κόσμῳ ἐπεξῆς ἴζοντο).¹⁴ The word’s underlying sense of order carried over to ancient philosophers, who theorized about the nature of being. Plutarch attests, “PYTHAGORAS was the first philosopher that gave the name of κόσμος to the world, from the order and beauty of it; for so that word signifies.”¹⁵ In short, ancient philosophers used the word (κόσμος) to describe a particular order of the world.¹⁶

Though the account of the cosmos varied according to each philosophical system, ancient thinkers, by the time Paul wrote his letters, generally understood the cosmos as a space. In particular, the cosmos was a space composed of things.¹⁷ What varied substantially between these cosmologies was the origin of this space, what composed this space, and how the things in this space interacted.

In terms of what filled and composed the space, most ancient thinkers agreed that the cosmos consisted of basic building blocks — what we might think of as “elements.” Indeed,

the default mode for many of Paul’s hearers was some kind of Stoicism.” Thus the definitions of Κόσμος and στοιχεῖα described in this section ultimately incorporate aspects of Stoic cosmology. The Stoics described the cosmos as a space that consisted of all things. see D. L., Vit. *Phil.* 7.148.

¹³ Liddell et al., *Greek–English Lexicon*, 985.

¹⁴ Godley, *Herodotus, with an English Translation by A. D. Godley Herodotus*.

¹⁵ Plutarch, *Plutarch’s Morals*, 132. In the Ggreek, Πυθαγόρας πρῶτος ὠνόμασε τὴν τῶν ὅλων περιοχὴν κόσμον ἐκ τῆς ἐν αὐτῷ τάξεως.

¹⁶ For an in-depth discussion of the word Κόσμος inside and outside of the NT see Sasse, “Κοσμέω, Κόσμος, Κόσμιος, Κοσμικός,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 868–895.

most English translations translate στοιχεῖα as ‘elements.’ The *Lidell-Scott* states, “στοιχεῖα were the components into which matter is ultimately divisible.”¹⁸ Gerhard Delling concludes that the plural noun στοιχεῖα, when used in the context of ancient physics or cosmology, “denotes the original material from which everything has evolved.”¹⁹

In the ancient world these elements were traditionally broken down into four. The doctrine of the four elements is attributed to Empedocles, who develops this theory in *On Nature*.²⁰ Though there was a consensus in the ancient world, following Empedocles, that the cosmos was composed of earth, water, air, and fire, how these elements interacted and what their purpose was varied between cosmologies.

To summarize the aspects of ancient cosmology that are necessary to engage Paul: (1) the cosmos is a space that consists of things. (2) These things are composed of fundamental elements. (3) As the basic building blocks of matter, the elements of the cosmos compose and interact with everything in the cosmos, including humans.

With these three things in mind, we have a foundation to engage Paul’s writings — specifically, Paul’s own language regarding the κόσμος and στοιχεῖα. Important questions also surface: Does Paul’s language coincide with the definitions described above, or does he deviate in anyway? That is, does Paul see the κόσμος as a space? If he does, what fills the κόσμος? And how do these things interact?

Paul Through Martin

¹⁷ This definition is, of course, problematic for Plato, whose philosophy incorporates eternal and unseen forms. But, to be sure, Plato regards the seeable cosmos as the reflection of these incorporeal and eternal forms. It is, thus, a space that incorporates existing things. (*Tim* 29)

¹⁸ see Liddell et al., *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1647.

¹⁹ Delling, “Στοιχείω, Συστοιχείω, Στοιχεῖον,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 480.

But before dealing more specifically with what the Apostle says in his letters about the cosmic order, it is important to establish another point of comparison. Scholars, in the past couple of decades, have started to use Stoic cosmology as a means of interpreting Paul.²¹ Because of this prevalent trend, and because Dale Martin builds on a Stoic account of the cosmos, it is necessary to briefly analyze Stoic cosmology.

Yet, once again, to avoid oversimplifying the analysis in this section, only certain aspects of Stoic cosmology are prevalent — namely, those related to the definition of κόσμος and στοιχεῖα described in the previous section. So, then, what are the peculiarities of Stoic cosmology in relation to the definition of κόσμος and στοιχεῖα described in the first section? And how does Dale Martin adopt the Stoic understanding of κόσμος and στοιχεῖα to interpret Paul?

Stoic Cosmology

Contrary to earlier cosmologies such as Plato's, in Stoic Cosmology all of the figures of the cosmos are contained in one space. Whereas Plato understood a natural separation of the visible cosmos and the unseen realm of the forms, In Stoicism everything, including the four major elements, is present in one, coextensive cosmos.²² In other words, nothing exists outside of the space, and everything in the space interacts with everything else based on this confined order.²³

²⁰ Gerhard Delling, “Στοιχέω, Συστοιχέω, Στοιχεῖον,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 672.

²¹ Along with Martin see Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul*; and Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*.

²² So for Plato, there remains behind the visible four elements an invisible entity. But the four natural and visible elements are the building blocks of the visible cosmos. Indeed, they compose humanity (*Tim.* 73e).

²³ See Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy; Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 153-156; Levison, *Filled with the Spirit*, 138-139; Hahn, *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology*, 3-56.

Following Aristotle's critiques of Plato's theory of forms, the Stoics developed an idea about bodily existence.²⁴ Aristotle concluded that Platonic forms — which Plato maintained exist in an unseen and eternal realm — only exist as immanent in particular substances.²⁵ That is, Aristotle proposed that Plato's incorporeal entities were not entities at all; they only exist as conceptualizations within the confines of a material human. Adopting this materialistic mindset, the Stoics went in a similar but opposite direction. They agreed with Aristotle's thesis that incorporeal objects have no unembodied existence. But the Stoics deviated from Aristotle when they concluded that the soul, virtue, vice, and knowledge exist as corporeal objects, as bodies. So, then, for the Stoics, every reality in the cosmic space exists as a corporeal body, which, they reasoned, had the ability to act or be acted upon.²⁶

But, for the Stoics, these corporeal bodies never exist in an isolated state – everything exists in a state of mixture.²⁷ That is, something like virtue, as a corporeal entity, never exists on its own. To support this concept of mixture, the Stoics developed a theory about the four elements of the cosmos. The four elements in Stoicism are thought of as one of two principles — one active, the other passive. The active principle includes fire and air, called *πνεῦμα*, and is considered divine; the passive principle includes earth and water.²⁸ The divine, corporeal, and

²⁴ Martin also makes this connection see Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 9.

²⁵ see Hahn, *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology*, 7.

²⁶ see Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy; Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 153. Long asserts, “Unlike the Platonists and Peripatetics the Stoics confined ‘existence’ to bodies (SVF ii 525). Their position was justified by the assumption that for something to exist it must be capable of producing or experiencing some change, and that this condition is only satisfied by bodies — three-dimensional objects which are resistant to external pressure (SVF ii 359, 381).”

²⁷ see Ibid., 154. Long concludes that the principles can only “be apart for the purpose of conceptual analysis.”

²⁸ see Ibid., 153. “These four ‘elements’ (the traditional quartet of Greek philosophers) are thought of (as?) constituting two pairs, one active (fire and air = *πνεῦμα*) and the other passive (earth and water). Once the cosmic fire has given positive determination to air this derived element joins with fire to form the active component of body, while earth and water constitute its passive counterpart (SVF ii 418).”

active principle πνεῦμα permeates the entire cosmos, and, through different states of mixture with the passive, material principle, shapes the cosmic order.²⁹

Here, we can observe the most relevant aspect of Stoic cosmology for this study. As the shaping and active principle, πνεῦμα exists, for the Stoics, intermixed with all things. That is, in the Stoic cosmos, separate entities can share the same πνεῦμα that permeates the entire cosmos. Moreover, πνεῦμα is a compound of the two elements fire and air that exist within a contained cosmic space.³⁰

Martin's Paul

We can now move on to observe Dale Martin's interpretation of Paul. As with other scholars, Martin often uses first century Stoicism as a way to understand the Apostle. On this he writes, "The kind of popular philosophy that seems to have influenced early Christians, Paul in particular, was of a general moral sort and much more related to Stoic than platonic concepts."³¹ In sum, Martin interprets Paul through the Stoic concepts of the material Spirit, corporeal bodily existence, and mixture. Taken together, these conditions imply a closed cosmic order, where different corporeal bodies – including the flesh and the Spirit – act upon each other.

In the first part of his work, Martin argues that πνεῦμα, for the sake of his interpretation of Paul, is used in Stoic way. He writes, "πνεῦμα is a kind of stuff." Moreover, as a corporeal entity, "πνεῦμα pervades and defines external reality; it is that airy tension the gives form and

²⁹ see Ibid., 154. Long writes, "The physical relationship between the two principles or constituents of 'being' is mixture: 'God is mixed with matter, penetrates the whole of matter and shapes it.'" see also D. L., *Vit. Phil.* 7.142. Diogenes Laertius writes, "Thereupon out of these elements animals and plants and all other natural kinds are formed by their mixture."

³⁰ see Ibid., 156. "A property of πνεῦμα is to 'give coherence,' to 'hold together' the other pair of elements, earth and water (SVF ii 439f.)."

³¹ Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 15.

quality to external objects.”³² Thus as we saw in the previous section, πνεῦμα pervades the entire cosmos, mixing with the passive material elements and giving way to the cosmic order.

Moreover, the human body exists as just another malleable object within this permeable cosmos.

And so Martin writes:

For most people of Greco-Roman culture the human body was a piece with its environment. The self was a precarious, temporary state of affairs, constituted by forces surrounding and pervading the body, like the radio waves that bounce around and through the bodies of modern urbanites. In such a maelstrom of cosmological forces, the individualism of modern conceptions disappears, and the body is perceived as a location in a continuum of cosmic movements. The body – or the self – is an unstable point of transition, not a discrete, permanent, solid entity.³³

There is no doubt that these accounts of πνεῦμα and the body are present in Stoicism. But Martin goes on to interpret Paul based on these perceptions and shows how Paul’s language about πνεῦμα, then, takes on a Stoic tenor.

In Martin’s interpretation, Paul regards πνεῦμα as a pervading and corporeal substance that diffuses out from the cosmologically bound and pneumatic Christ.³⁴ In other words, Christians are connected to Christ through shared πνεῦμα; moreover, Christ, as a figure in the cosmos, is composed of πνεῦμα.³⁵ A quote by Troels Engberg-Pedersen, who builds on Martin’s analysis in his own work, *Cosmology and the Self*, best sums up this situation. Engberg-Pedersen writes:

“‘Being in Christ’ may also be understood in purely physical terms. Here it will mean having one’s body, which is literally informed by the physical ‘Spirit’ (πνεῦμα), be a material part of Christ, who is himself πνεῦμα. Or it may mean having one’s body be a material part of the ‘body of Christ,’ which is itself made up of the physical πνεῦμα, too”³⁶

³² Ibid., 21.

³³ Ibid., 25.

³⁴ Ibid., 63.

³⁵ Ibid., 176: “The man’s body and Christ’s body share the same πνεῦμα; the man’s body is therefore an appendage of Christ’s body, totally dependent on the pneumatic life force of the larger body for its existence.”

³⁶ Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul*, 1.

In short, the Christian's body is literally connected to the body of Christ through the shared corporeal πνεῦμα. And thus, as we saw with Stoicism, πνεῦμα mixes with other elements of the cosmos — in this case, the body of a Christian.

But, for Martin, πνεῦμα isn't the only entity in Paul's cosmos that has the ability to influence and permeate other objects. Building up to his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5-7, Martin demonstrates how ancient, common people — that is, those who are non-philosophical — held superstitious beliefs about disease. For the normal person, Martin contends, disease was caused by outside malevolent forces such as Gods or daimons.³⁷ In turn, Paul, mixing together this idea about disease with Jewish apocalypticism and a Stoic cosmos, believes that σάρξ and other apocalyptic forces exist as corporeal bodies. Thus, as Martin puts it:

Both πνεῦμα and σάρξ are essences that moved in and out of human bodies; indeed, they are cosmological essences that constitute, along with other materials of reality, human beings. Thus they may act upon one another, and each is susceptible to influences from the other.³⁸

In Martin's interpretation, σάρξ acts much like πνεῦμα in that it composes human beings and permeates the cosmos as a corporeal body with the ability to influence other corporeal entities. But the influence of σάρξ is quite different from πνεῦμα. As with other apocalyptic writings, for Paul, σάρξ is a force allied to evil. Its influence, then, to say the least, is entirely negative. And as a cosmic foil to πνεῦμα, it permeates the cosmos, corrupting whatever may come in its path. Quoting again from Martin:

Sarx is everywhere — or, at least, there is the ever-present danger that it may be everywhere. πνεῦμα is everywhere, giving life to all but always under threat from the death-dealing of σάρξ. All boundaries dissolve in the cosmological soup of competing and combatting forces of σάρξ, πνεῦμα, death, life, impurities and cleansings.³⁹

³⁷ Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 156.

³⁸ Ibid., 172.

³⁹ Ibid., 174.

In short, Martin describes the relationship between σάρξ and πνεῦμα as a constant struggle for influence. In this ‘cosmological soup,’ even the body of Christ — composed of πνεῦμα and connected to the Christian — is not, at least in theory, immune to the influences of σάρξ. Thus if σάρξ, as a permeating force of the cosmos, gains entry into the Christian body, it can, and will, through polluting the shared πνεῦμα, make its way to the body of Christ. So for Martin, “Paul’s primary worry is that the πνεῦμα of Christ’s body will become polluted by the corrupting presence of the sinful σάρξ.”⁴⁰

A Divided Cosmos, Paul's Apocalyptic Situation

For the remainder of this chapter, we can now turn our attention to another interpretation of Paul’s cosmology. This section agrees with a larger development in Pauline scholarship that recognizes the Apostle’s apocalyptic situation as a coherent hermeneutic key.⁴¹ Although any assessment of Paul’s thought must remain conscious of the occasional nature of his letters, scholars in the apocalyptic vein recognize, as Beker puts it, that “only a consistent apocalyptic interpretation of Paul’s thought is able to demonstrate its fundamental coherence.”⁴² In recognition of this coherence, this section will deal with Paul’s own assessment of the cosmos, first by analyzing Paul’s general attitude toward the cosmos, then by exploring Paul’s thought regarding the elements, and finally by examining Pauline eschatology.

Importantly, we must keep questions about Martin’s interpretation — which I summarized in the previous section — in the foreground. We can ask questions such as: Does

⁴⁰ Ibid., 169.

⁴¹ See Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 122. Ehrman writes, “‘apocalypticism was a popular world view among Jews in the first century. Apocalyptic Jews maintained that the world was controlled by unseen forces of (??) but that God was soon going to intervene in history to overthrow these forces and bring his good kingdom to earth.’”

⁴² Beker, *Paul The Apostle*, 143.

Paul describe the cosmos in a way that agrees with Martin's interpretation? Do πνεῦμα and σὰρξ interact with each other in, more or less, a Stoic way, having the ability to permeate the cosmos and influence each other? Is σὰρξ really the cosmic foil of πνεῦμα? I will come back to these questions at the end of this chapter, but for now let us observe another interpretation of Paul's cosmos.

In the Beginning Division

Throughout his letters, Paul constructs a narrative about a hostile and corrupted cosmos. Sin is responsible for this corrupted state. He informs his readers in Rom 3:9, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned— sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law" (NRSV). Sin, in Paul's conception, is much more than bad choices and wrong actions. It is a cosmic force that defiles and pollutes that which it contacts.⁴³ Campbell's analysis is helpful in understanding this. "As a result of humanity's first transgression," he writes, "Sin enters creation permanently, taking up residence within the very constitution of humanity, that is, in the Flesh. And the entry of Sin facilitates the arrival of the still more powerful and oppressive Death, creating a fundamental human condition of slavery within a kingdom ruled by evil forces."⁴⁴

With this, we can observe Paul's basic dispositions concerning the cosmos. In its current state, the cosmos, and humanity that resides within it, are enslaved to sin and, as a consequence,

⁴³ see Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 379. Here Ehrman agrees, "It should be reasonably clear that sin... is not simply something that a person does, a disobedient action against God, a transgression of his laws. It is instead a kind of cosmic power, an evil force that compels people to live in alienation from God."

⁴⁴ Campbell, *The Quest for Paul's Gospel*, 57.

are suffering. Thus sin and the flesh are negative forces that corrupt the cosmos, causing sickness and, ultimately, death.

But, for Paul, this cosmic state of enslavement is only temporary. While sin may currently have a stronghold on the cosmos, its reign, according to Paul, is quickly coming to an end. Thus for Paul, this poor condition of the cosmos is confined to a specific period of time — an age (αἰών). Each age, subsequently, brings with it a new condition of the cosmos.⁴⁵

In short, Paul's perception of the cosmos is that it is a world defiled by sin within a particular age. In the context of redemption, for example, Paul writes, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen." (Gal 1:3–5, NRSV). Here, Paul's basic point to the Galatians is the following: Christ sets you free from a cosmos and age defined by sin and evil. In other words, Christ ushers in a new cosmic order.

There are, then, a couple of characteristics of the cosmos for Paul: (1) The cosmos is defiled and corrupted by sin and evil. (2) But this defiled state is relative to a specific age. Humanity's role within the cosmos largely fits within these conditions. Consequently, Paul refers to human involvement with the cosmos as one "according to the flesh" (Rom 8:5, 19). This qualifier, appearing throughout his epistolary corpus, describes the condition of humanity when considered under the defiling aspect of the cosmos. In the cosmos during an age defiled by sin and evil, humanity, "according to the flesh," lacks sufficient knowledge, produces insufficient

⁴⁵ The two words (age and cosmos) are intertwined, and Paul often uses age to refer to the current condition of the cosmos defiled by sin. We can see the interchange between αἰών and Κόσμος in 1 Cor 1:20. see also Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd Edition, 32 -33. Here Bauer observes that αἰών can refer to both a defined period of time and "the world as a spatial concept."

wisdom (1 Cor 1:26), falls prey to sin (Rom 13:4), experiences sickness (2 Cor 12:1; Gal 4:13), and ultimately succumbs to death (Rom 8:13).⁴⁶

The Elements of the Cosmos

Having recognized the basic conditions of Paul's cosmos, we can now look more specifically at the Apostle's attitude toward the elements of the cosmos. Like the philosophers described in the first section, Paul too uses the word στοιχεῖα to describe the basic fundamental elements of the cosmos. In Galatians 4:3, Paul uses, on the first of two occasions, the phrase τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, "the elements of the cosmos."

In accordance with the overall thrust of his cosmology, Paul's language regarding the elements is entirely negative. Galatians 4:3 reads, "So with us; while we were minors, we were enslaved to the fundamental elements of the world" (Gal 4:3). Paul, then, not only describes sin as an enslaving force, but even describes the elements as enslaving forces. Thus the elements of the cosmos fit within the condition of the current age of the cosmos defiled by sin and evil.⁴⁷

But what are these elements? And how do they enslave humanity? Regarding these questions, the analysis of J. Louis Martyn is indispensable. Martyn recognizes a long-standing tradition in antiquity to create comparisons between the traditional four elements of the cosmos.

Philo, as he points out, does this in *Who is The Heir Of The Divine Things*. Philo writes:

In the first instance, he [God] made two divisions, the heavy and the light, separating that which was thick from that which was more subtle. After that, he again made a second division of each, dividing the subtle part into air and fire, and the denser portion into water and earth; and, first of all, he laid down those elements, which are perceptible by the outward senses, to be, as it were, the foundations of the world which is perceptible by the outward senses.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ see Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 818 - 819. For Paul, flesh, as a term, extends to the conditions of human experience under the cosmos and in an age defiled by sin.

⁴⁷ see Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 213. In this regard, Dunn recognizes the phrase to mean a cosmos in which humans are subject to the "sway" of cosmic "forces."

⁴⁸ Philo of Alexandria and Charles Duke Yonge, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, 287.

Here Philo pairs the elements according to their weight, creating, in turn, what Martyn calls a “pair of opposites.” As with other philosophers, Philo recognizes the elements as the foundation of the world. But Martyn notes an important difference in Philo’s account. He writes, “from Philo — and from other authors as well — we see the tradition in which the elements are the pairs of opposites that constitute the foundation of the cosmos.”⁴⁹

Paul, Martyn suggests, is familiar with this tradition of opposites. Thus Paul’s language regarding the enslaving elements of the world reflects this familiarity. But are these elements, for Paul, the same, traditional four seen in other cosmologies? Martyn recognizes occasions, in Galatians, where Paul places pairs of opposites against one another. In Gal 6:15, Paul contrasts “circumcision” and “non-circumcision.” In Gal 3:28, he contrasts Jew/Gentile, slave/free, and male/female.⁵⁰

It may seem quite odd that Paul would speak of characteristics like Jew or Gentile as fundamental elements of the cosmos. But unlike the philosophers seen in the previous two sections Paul does not concern himself with developing systematic theories about the elements. Instead, Paul employs the tradition of opposites to convey the impact of Christ’s advent into the cosmos.⁵¹ For Paul, the elements (conceived as pairs of opposites) in the cosmos defiled by sin are dissolved when Christ enters the cosmic order. This dissolution is seen quite clearly in Galatians 3:28, where he writes, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28, NRSV). Galatians 6:15 also conveys this dissolution, “May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

⁴⁹ Martyn, *Galatians*, 404.

⁵⁰ Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul*, 118-119.

For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!” (Ga 6:14–15, NRSV).

So, according to Martyn, “Paul employs the ancient equation of the world’s elements with archaic pairs of opposites to interpret the religious impact of Christ’s advent.”⁵² It is not as if Paul has in mind, when referring to the elements of the cosmos, the four traditional elements. But he is using this tradition of opposites — a tradition that the Galatians would have been familiar with — to highlight the magnitude of Christ’s role within the evil, sinful cosmic age.⁵³ To put it another way, Paul uses the tradition of opposites, and the subsequent dissolution caused by the advent of Christ, to depict the death of one cosmos and the creation of another.⁵⁴ In this newly created cosmos, the elements and, subsequently, the foundation of the cosmos have radically changed due to the introduction of the superior Christ.

But before we go on to observe this new cosmic order under Christ, let us first look at the content of the cosmos prior to the advent of Christ. Martyn recognizes that in this pre-advent cosmos one cosmic force is notably absent.⁵⁵ In contrast to other Jewish traditions — including Stoic, Hellenized Judaism — the Spirit is missing in the pre-advent period of Paul’s cosmology. In other words, where other Judaisms recognize the Spirit as an element present from the moment of creation, Paul does not.⁵⁶ For Paul, the elements in the pre-advent cosmos are entirely related to the corrupting force of sin.⁵⁷

⁵¹ This is very easily an example of Paul adopting the language of the Galatians to explain, in their own words, the Christ event.

⁵² Martyn, *Galatians*, 405.

⁵³ For Martyn’s analysis see both Martyn, *Galatians*, 403 - 406. and Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul*, 111-123; 125-140.

⁵⁴ Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul*, 117.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 120-121.

⁵⁶ See this inference Levison, *Filled with the Spirit*, 253-259. see also Jewett, *Paul’s Anthropological Terms*. Jewett recognizes the absence of the spirit as a Pauline creation.

⁵⁷ This is different from other Apocalyptic thought, such as that found in Qumran. In the Dead Sea Scrolls the Spirit is always present in creation. Moreover, the positive Spirit of truth is always battling the negative Spirit of

The Spirit, then, is a later addition by God into the cosmos (Gal 4:6; 2 Cor 5:5). As an addition by God, the Spirit is not part of the normal cosmic order and, thus, is radically and ontologically different from any of the elements defiled by sin and evil that reside within the cosmos.

A World Caught in Between

Although the second chapter of this study will deal primarily with the role and purpose of the Spirit, we can observe briefly, here, the result of the Spirit's insertion within the cosmos. Indeed, this insertion accompanies the advent of Christ in the new cosmic order. Most importantly, observing this insertion will reveal the hierarchy of Spirit over flesh in this "new creation."⁵⁸

As we have already explored, Paul's emphasis on particular ages supposes a transition between different *cosmoi*. We can see this transition front and center in Galatians 4:3-7.

"So with us; while we were minors, we were enslaved to the fundamental elements of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God." (Ga 4:3-7, NRSV)

So, here, Paul distinguishes between the age defiled by sin and evil, enslaved by the fundamental elements of the cosmos, and the age defined by the advent of Christ and the Spirit. Where there once was enslavement in the old age, in the new age, there is freedom.

deceit. For Paul, the positive Spirit is a later addition into the negative cosmos. "He created man to rule the world and placed within him two Spirits so that he would walk with them until the moment of his visitation: they are the Spirits 19 of truth and of deceit" (1QS 3:18-19). Translation from Martinez and Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, Study Edition, 75.

⁵⁸ This is the language that Paul uses to refer to the cosmos in the "in between" state. See 2 Cor 5:16-18

In this new age, then, the opposites recognized by Martyn — the elements of the cosmos — are dissolved (Gal 3:28; 5:16). This dissolution, caused by the introduction of Christ, is a fundamental transformation of the structure of the cosmos. The old cosmic order — where slavery to sin and to the elements was the only option for humanity — no longer exists. A new cosmos -- one with the possibility for freedom -- has taken its place. And God has sent the spirit of Christ, to humanity, to reveal this new cosmic reality (Gal 4:9).

Thus while fundamental pairs of opposites, allied to sin, composed the old cosmos, the new cosmos contains a new pair of opposites: the flesh and the Spirit. Martyn puts it this way: “they are two opposed orbs of power, actively at war with one another *since* the advent of the Spirit. The territory in which human beings now live is a newly invaded space, and that means that its structures cannot remain unchanged.”⁵⁹ This dueling relationship between the Spirit and the flesh, then, defines the current state of the cosmos (Gal 6:15). In short, the Spirit and the flesh are now the foundational elements of the cosmos.

In this newly invaded space, the flesh still holds onto the previous status of the cosmos — a cosmos defiled by sin and the old opposites (Gal 5:19). But the Spirit, in its superior ontological status, has created a new cosmic reality where these old opposites no longer exist (Gal 3:28). Moreover, the Spirit is, effectively, rooting out the flesh from the cosmos and creating, for humanity, an opportunity for freedom from sin (Gal 4:5-7).

So, then, this cosmos is best defined as “in between.” Even though inferior, the flesh still remains with its allegiance to the old cosmic order (Gal 5:19). Furthermore, the Spirit has not yet finished its work in eliminating the flesh. Paul recognizes this situation that presents itself to him and his communities:

Christ, he writes,

“Gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,” (Ga 1:4, ESV)

Through this,

“We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.” (Ro 6:6, NRSV)

“And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Ga 5:24, NRSV)

And moreover,

“The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.” (Ro 8:2, NRSV)

But even in this liberation,

“Do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.” (Ro 6:12–14, NRSV)

“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” (Ga 5:13, NASB95)

So, here, in this situation, Paul and his communities are caught in an interesting situation.

They can be what they are — that is, defined by the Spirit, which indwells them. Or, they can fall prey to the flesh — which remains as the representative of the old cosmos (Gal 4:9). Campbell’s summary captures the complexity of the situation:

As the Spirit configures people to the template of Christ—specifically to his descent into death and ascent into glory—they too are thereby delivered from their present oppressed and corrupted condition by means of its termination in Christ’s execution and their recreation in a new liberated and transformed condition that is grafted onto his resurrected existence and is now no longer inhabited by the powers of Sin and Death.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul*, 121.

⁶⁰ Campbell, *The Quest for Paul’s Gospel*, 59.

In brief, Paul's "in-between" age is defined by the Spirit's process of rooting out the old cosmos and, thereby, destroying the flesh. The Spirit, then, is best seen as a superior and occupying force that fights an inferior and dying cosmos. It is possible to agree, then, with Fee's sentiment, "Paul, therefore, contrary to popular—and much scholarly—opinion, does not view life in the Spirit as a constant struggle between the flesh and the Spirit, in which the flesh generally has the upper hand."⁶¹

An Imminent Restoration

After the advent of Christ and the Spirit, the cosmos, for Paul, is in an "in-between" state. In other words, the flesh is "on its way out", and the Spirit is "on its way in". Thus the *eschaton*, for Paul, is the guaranteed outcome of this invasive process (2 Cor 5:5). And we have, yet again, another age, another cosmos — this time called by Paul the "day of the lord" (1 Thess 5), which will be brought in through resurrection.

There is much debate concerning the resurrection, but Paul's emphasis on the role of the Spirit in resurrection is recognized by many scholars.⁶² In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul explains the event to a skeptical community (1 Cor 15:12). The flesh and the Spirit, again, make an appearance in his account, but this time, in the age of resurrection, the flesh is gone. "Flesh and blood," Paul writes, "do not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 15:50).

Humanity, in this new age, will no longer be under the reign of the flesh, nor will be caught in an age where the Spirit is in the process of eliminating the flesh. Rather, humanity will be entirely engulfed by the Spirit. Paul's description of the body reflects this:

"So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in

⁶¹ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 817.

⁶² See also Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*

power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a Spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a Spiritual body.” (1 Co 15:42–44, NRSV)\

Here, the body prior to the resurrection is categorized as ψυχικός, carrying with it the perishability, death, and weakness associated with living according to the flesh. Conversely, the body after the resurrection is called πνευματικός, which, in this fully Spiritual state, bears the power and freedom that comes from residing in the Spirit. It is important to note that Paul’s comments are not only concerned with the anthropology of the body, but also reflect the passing of an age defined by the flesh and the establishment of an age defined by the Spirit.⁶³

Thus the resurrection -- which, for Paul, is guaranteed to happen -- is the fulfillment of Christ’s death on the cross and the subsequent arrival of the Spirit (2 Cor 5:5). The things that once defined the old cosmos — sin, death, evil — are long gone and the Spirit reigns supreme, in a new cosmos.

Conclusion

Having described this narrative about a dying cosmos and the subsequent creation of a new cosmic order, I now want to return to the questions raised at the beginning of this section: Does Paul describe the cosmos in a way that agrees with Martin’s interpretation? Do πνεῦμα and σὰρξ interact with each other in a more or less Stoic way, having the ability to permeate the cosmos and influence each other? Is σὰρξ really the cosmic foil of πνεῦμα?

⁶³ see Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 351-352. Wright contends, “The adjective describes, not what something is composed of, but what it is animated by. It is the difference between speaking of a ship made of steel or wood on the one hand and a ship driven by steam or wind on the other.” In this regard, for Paul, the things that drive the individual in the eschaton are the Spirit. Moreover, in the absence of flesh — and all the ties to sin, death, and evil that come with the flesh — the individual, in resurrection, is in an age where the Spirit is the only cosmic force.

While Martin describes Paul's cosmos as a place permeated by the flesh and the Spirit permeate, which interact with other entities in it as they go, the narrative observed in the second part of this chapter, describes the Spirit as an ontologically superior entity that is inserted into the cosmos to create a new cosmic order. Since Paul does not see πνεῦμα and σάρξ as always existing together, in competition, in the cosmos, and because Paul describes the Spirit as a superior and invasive force, it seems unreasonable to think that he feared the possibility of σάρξ polluting πνεῦμα.

By only interpreting πνεῦμα and σάρξ as used in outside sources from Hellenistic philosophy, and by neglecting other places in the epistles where Paul addresses this relationship, Martin misses the larger narrative in Paul's epistolary corpus where the Spirit is a superior force. That is not say that Martin is entirely off the mark. It is quite possible that Paul perceives the Spirit as a corporeal entity, but the significant difference between his view and that of contemporary cosmology is the novelty and power of the Spirit's advent into the cosmos. Because the Spirit is not, properly, just another element in the cosmos, but, rather, the already-but-not-yet of the future new creation, it is not a legitimate worry for Paul, as Martin suggests, that flesh could pollute pneuma.

After observing this narrative about the cosmos, we can now observe the overall scope of Paul's cosmology. Like the cosmologies described in the first section, Paul perceives the cosmos as a space — a space that consists of things. But, for Paul, the things in this space — prior to the advent of Christ — are entirely corrupted. All of these things are conditioned by the presence of sin, which as a cosmic entity creates a fundamental condition of slavery. Humanity, in turn, lives in this environment experiencing, as a result, decay and death.

Importantly, the Spirit is notably absent in this pre-advent cosmos. Thus, for Paul, the cosmos is not a place where all of the figures of the cosmos exist eternally in one universal space. The Spirit enters the cosmos as a radically and ontologically superior force; this is observed in its mission, with Christ, to dissolve the elements of the cosmos that once enslaved humanity. The advent of the Spirit, then, ushers in a new age. This age is defined by the relationship between the Spirit and the flesh. While the flesh holds onto the old cosmic order (a world enslaved to sin, where the elements enslave humanity), the Spirit creates a new cosmos, freeing creation from sin and the cosmic elements. For Paul, this process is invasive. It is a war declared by the Spirit on the enslaving forces of sin and the flesh. It is what Martyn calls a “war of liberation.”⁶⁴ Most importantly, the fate of this war is already decided. In the resurrection the Spirit will reign supreme in a new cosmos, while the flesh and the old cosmos defiled by sin have no place.

From this picture, it is clear that Martin’s use of Stoic cosmology to interpret Paul misses the mark. Though perhaps Paul does think that the malevolent forces of sin and the flesh do impact humanity by causing sickness and bodily decay, his overall narrative about the Spirit entering into the cosmos as an invasive and superior force does not leave room for a relationship with the flesh where the flesh can negatively impact the Spirit. A word from Gordon Fee helps to sum up this situation:

Nowhere does Paul describe life in the Spirit as one of constant struggle with the flesh. He simply does not speak to that question. Where it might appear as though he did, his point rather is the sufficiency of the Spirit as we live in our present “already but not yet” existence. Thus for Paul the language “according to the flesh” describes both the perspective and the behavior of the former age that is passing away; those who so live will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal 5:21). We, on the other hand, have entered the new aeon, where the Spirit is sufficient and stands over against the flesh in every way.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul*, 259.

⁶⁵ Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 817.

If this is the case — that Paul regards the Spirit as entirely superior to the flesh — then his ethical imperatives are not motivated from fear. In other words, Paul isn't directing his communities to shore up their boundaries to prevent pollution — in a permeable cosmos — from the invasive force of the flesh. He is, moreover, not worried about the body of Christ connected to believers through πνεῦμα becoming infected by this association. So in sum, another interpretation of the ethical imperatives in 1 Cor 5-7 is needed — one that accounts for the superiority of the Spirit, but still explains Paul's need to direct his communities to steer clear of sexual immorality.

Chapter Two: The Spirit And Ethics

In chapter one, I made two important observations. The first was that for Paul, πνεῦμα and σὰρξ are not on an equal playing field. In his apocalyptic view of the cosmos, Paul views πνεῦμα as the invasive Spirit of Christ that, in tandem with the advent of Christ, reconstitutes the foundation of the cosmos. In this new cosmos, sin no longer reigns supreme, and for the first time, humanity has an opportunity for freedom from the oppressive apocalyptic force.

But even though Christ and the Spirit have entered the cosmos and reshaped its foundation, the final end of their entrance has not yet occurred. Ultimately, Paul has in mind an eschatological, pneumatic cosmos where sin and the flesh no longer exist, and the Spirit reigns supreme (1 Cor 15:50). To reiterate, this is a future event, thus the current position of humanity in the cosmos, for Paul, is between two cosmic realities.

This “in-between” cosmos, however, is only temporary. Indeed, Paul seems to think that it will not last long at all. The Spirit is quickly rooting out the remnants of the old cosmos and ushering in the “day of the Lord” (1 Thess 5:2).

Observing this invasive process leads to the second important observation. Since Paul has such a high regard for the Spirit and, indeed, regards it as superior to the flesh, his ethical imperatives cannot be, as Dale Martin’s interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5-7 suggests, an attempt to erect boundaries against an equally invasive flesh. The Spirit is simply too powerful in Paul’s schema to think that the flesh could feasibly overcome it. Thus to understand Paul’s imperatives

in 1 Corinthians 5-7 — why he urges his communities to steer clear of sexual immorality — we must account for a Pauline ethic that maintains the Spirit’s superiority.

Paul and Ethics

Victor Furnish’s *Theology and Ethics in Paul* offers a guide for the construction of such a Pauline ethic that more appropriately accounts for the superiority of the Spirit. Concerning Paul’s actual ethical precepts, Furnish admits that Paul’s ethic is not particularly original. In other words, Paul’s exhortations emerge from the ethical atmosphere of the larger Greco-Roman world. As Furnish explains:

Paul himself does not hesitate to employ current forms, concepts, and standards, even secular ones, already familiar to his readers. Two of his specific sources, the Old Testament and the ‘words of the Lord,’ are explicitly identified by him and have in his teaching a special priority. Beyond these, however, important parallels and relationships may also be discerned between his ethical instruction and that of the rabbis, the Jewish apocalypticists, and the Hellenistic popular philosophers.⁶⁶

According to Furnish, Paul is not attempting to produce an exclusively Christian ethic. On the contrary, he adopts a “wide variety” of ethical teachings -- anything, Furnish states, that upholds “the kind of conduct he wishes to commend and the vices he wishes to condemn.”⁶⁷

Nevertheless, Paul’s hospitable relationship to other ethical traditions, Furnish argues, reveals his expectation of the Christian life. Furnish writes:

Paul’s intentions are misread if the concreteness of his exhortations is interpreted as an attempt to define the precise extent of what the Christian is to do. He clearly does not regard his concrete exhortations as supplying an exhaustive catalog of moral responsibilities. Quite the contrary, one effect of his use of a wide variety of traditional ethical materials is to underscore the virtually unlimited extent and breadth of those responsibilities. He is concerned that no good work or noble deed should be excluded from the Christian’s life.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, 65.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 72.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 75.

Paul has no qualms drawing on the sources around him because, for him, the Christian life embodies everything “good” or “noble.” He is always careful, as Furnish notes, “to avoid giving the impression that there is ever any limit either to the good that is required or to the evil that is possible.”⁶⁹

Though Furnish shows that Paul draws freely from non-Christian ethical sources around him, he is quick to add a caveat: “neither the category of ‘rabbi’ nor that of ‘ethical philosopher’ describes Paul very accurately.”⁷⁰ Paul, Furnish concludes, writes “as an apostle, as a man in Christ.”⁷¹ It is the “redemptive event of Christ” — the advent of Christ into the cosmos — that serves as the primary context for the Apostle’s “ethical exhortations.”⁷²

Thus in the heart of his work, Furnish begins his outline of a Pauline ethic with an account of Paul’s apocalyptic situation. Furnish agrees that, as we observed in chapter one, for Paul, the advent of Christ and the Spirit reshapes the foundation of the cosmos, creating a temporary state where two cosmic ages — one allied to the flesh and the other to the Spirit — “interpenetrate.”⁷³ Residents in the cosmos — especially those who have received the Spirit — are, consequently, subject to the new cosmic conditions.

Because Paul is writing to his congregations, his imperatives are directed only to those who have been baptized into the body of Christ — those who have received the particular grace obtained through Christ's advent. Thus, though the vices and virtues that Paul exhorts to his communities are not distinctively Christian, the power that he thinks will bring about moral reform is unique to his apocalyptic viewpoint. Furnish writes:

⁶⁹ Ibid., 75.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 66.

⁷¹ Ibid., 66.

⁷² Ibid., 67.

⁷³ Ibid., 134.

Paul's exhortations, unlike those of the secular traditions on which he admittedly draws, do not presume that the power of the good life is resident in man's "right reason," but presume that it is given, rather, by what God has done for men in Christ.⁷⁴

In short, for Paul, the power that enables a believer to live the ethical life is the believer's sharing in the future victory of the Spirit through receiving the invasive Spirit of Christ. The Spirit, Furnish declares, "is a power representative of the coming age which is already operative in the present."⁷⁵ It resides in the believer's heart. Thus, the ethical actions that Paul describes "are not regarded as expressions of the Christian's own performing or achieving, but as products of his life in the Spirit."⁷⁶

Therefore, what we take away from Furnish is that Paul's ethics are primarily rooted in his apocalyptic theology. When the Spirit enters the cosmos and reshapes its foundation, it transforms those whom it has freed from sin, ushering them into a new cosmic reality and altering their moral disposition. In the remaining pages of this chapter, we will study this process more closely. By doing this, we will observe a Pauline ethic that accounts for the Apostle's apocalyptic situation and consequently the Spirit's superiority, which will enable us to engage and comprehend Paul's imperatives in 1 Corinthians 5-7 more fully.

Apocalyptic Ethics

Taking our cue from Furnish, to observe further the Spirit's role in effecting a moral life, we must return to the central conditions of Paul's apocalyptic situation. As we witnessed in the first chapter, on a macro level, the Spirit breaks the tyrannical hold of sin upon its arrival and creates a new cosmic reality where freedom from the apocalyptic force is possible. But now to

⁷⁴ Ibid., 89.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 129.

attend to the question of ethics we must focus our inquiry more specifically on the Spirit's particular impact on humanity in this cosmic drama.

A New Cosmic Reality

For Paul, the presence of the Spirit differentiates two spheres of human existence. In Gal 4:6-7, he writes, "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God" (Gal 4:6-7, NRSV). In Romans 8:9, he writes, "But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you" (Rom 8:9a, NRSV). On the one hand, those who have received the Spirit are children of God, are free from sin, and consequently live not in the flesh, but in the Spirit. Yet on the other hand, those who have not received the Spirit, Paul reminds his readers, are still enslaved to sin. "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ," he writes, "does not belong to him" (Rom 8:9b, NRSV). In their alienation, these individuals are still subject to the tyranny of the old cosmic order.

Possessing the Spirit means freedom from sin and a place within the new cosmos. If this is the case, how does the individual obtain the Spirit? Paul is quite clear that God gives the Spirit at baptism (Ro 6:3; Ga 3:27). God, he writes, "has sent the Spirit" into the heart of the believer. And he continues saying that all those who are baptized "drink of one Spirit," or maybe even, have had one Spirit "poured" over them (1 Cor 12:13).⁷⁷

Baptism, then, is the point at which the believer receives the Spirit and is released from the grip of sin. On this Paul writes:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was

⁷⁶ Ibid., 239.

⁷⁷ Hartman, "Baptism," *ABD* 1:588.

raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Ro 6:3–4, NRSV)

Because Christ's death and resurrection have broken sin's tyrannical hold, and ushered in the new cosmos defined by the Spirit, the believer's participation in this event effects his death to the old cosmos, his reception of the Spirit, and his knowledge of the new cosmic reality (Rom 6:6-7). Furnish describes it this way:

Christ's death is the actualization of God's power and puts an effective check on sin's tyrannical hold. "For he who has died is freed [δεδικαίωται] from sin" (vs. 7 RSV). The believer's death with Christ has the same result. The Christian too has "died to sin" (vs. 2) because his old sin-dominated self ("the old man" [ὁ παλαιὸς ἄνθρωπος]) has been "crucified" with Christ (vs. 6).⁷⁸

In sum, then, the reception of the Spirit is the difference between slavery and freedom. "Where the spirit of the Lord is," Paul declares, "there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17, NRSV), but this is a freedom with implications. For Paul, the life of freedom, a life in the Spirit, is completely different from a life under the dominion of sin and the old cosmic order. Paul writes, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit." (Rom 8:5, NRSV). Thus freedom from sin means dissociation from anything related to the flesh and the old cosmos. A life of freedom exhibits "the things of the Spirit," which Paul describes elsewhere as specific, ethical actions (Gal 5:22).

The Spirit's role in producing the believer's ethical life, however, does not stop here. It is not up to the believer, freed from the grip of sin by the Spirit, to live an ethical life in the "in-between" cosmos according to his own volition. On the contrary, because of its presence in the believer, the Spirit itself enables free, ethical living in the "in-between" cosmos. This process

⁷⁸ Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, 172.

occurs through the Spirit's entrance into what Paul would have considered the very foundation of a person, the heart: "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our *hearts*" (Gal 4:6, emphasis mine).

Many scholars agree that, for Paul, the heart is the central organ of the human being. Johannes Behm writes that the heart in the New Testament is the "center of the inner life of man" and the "main organ of 'psychic and spiritual life.'"⁷⁹ Jewett writes that the "heart as the center of man is thought of as the source of will, emotion, thoughts and affections."⁸⁰ Thus when the Spirit of Christ enters the heart of the person, it enters the foundation of a person, and establishes a new human condition -- one capable of living according to the new cosmos, exhibiting "the things of the Spirit."

The Renewal of the Mind

In brief, the "things of the Spirit" are the ethical expressions of the heart of a believer who has received the mind of Christ. But it is important to remember, as Furnish rightly concludes, that these things "are not regarded as expressions of the Christian's own performing or achieving, but as products of his life in the Spirit."⁸¹ For Paul, living a life "according to the Spirit," then, is an outworking of the Spirit's entrance into, and subsequent transformation of, the heart of the believer, which is the source of "will, emotion, thoughts and affections."⁸² We can examine this process in greater depth in Paul's words to his Corinthian community. He writes:

These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

⁷⁹ Behm, "καρδία in the New Testament," *TDNT* 3:611.

⁸⁰ Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms*, 448.

⁸¹ Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, 239.

⁸² Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms*, 448.

Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor 2:10–16, NRSV)

Though his comments are, as Gordon Fee points out, primarily directed against a Corinthian pursuit of wisdom, Paul, nonetheless, also addresses what it means to possess the Spirit — to be “πνευματικός.”⁸³ Importantly, it means to possess the Spirit that is “from God,” as opposed to a spirit that is innate within the Corinthians or as a result of φύσις. In contrast to the Stoic πνεῦμα, which is immanent in nature universally, this Spirit is uniquely from God. It alone “searches” the “depths of God” and “comprehends” God. It alone enables the Corinthians to “understand the gifts” from God. It alone teaches “spiritual things to those who are spiritual.”⁸⁴ Thus from Paul's words, one thing is clear: spiritual people are those woven into the fabric of God through baptism, so much so that Paul concludes a few verses later that they “have the mind of Christ” (v. 15). Paul's comment, although perhaps made offhand, is quite revealing. The Spirit does not dwell idly in the believer's heart, but rather, it brings with it the powerful and active “mind of Christ.” Such a possession has important implications for the Spirit's construction of ethical life.

Though is difficult to interpret Paul's use of νοῦς, many scholars agree that Paul's use of the word does not reflect philosophical thought. That is, “νοῦς is not the divine or the divinely related element in man.”⁸⁵ Weiss concludes νοῦς is “not an instrument of thought” but a “mode of thought.”⁸⁶ Jewett writes, “νοῦς is the constellation of thoughts and assumptions which makes

⁸³ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 105-108.

⁸⁴ See Martyn, *Galatians*, 530. Martyn describes in detail the otherness of the Spirit. It is not an “inherent component of the human being” To the contrary, it is “the Spirit of God's Son, the Spirit that God has sent invasively into the human orb.”

⁸⁵ Behm, “νοῦς,” *TDNT* 4:958.

⁸⁶ Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, 68. qtd in Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 275.

up the consciousness of the person.”⁸⁷ Schlatter suggests that this constellation “provides the criteria for judgments and actions.”⁸⁸

Therefore, for Paul, possessing the mind of Christ has two related consequences. The first is that the believer has the thought process of Christ and is, thus, able to understand the things delivered by the Spirit from “the depths of God” — namely, Christ and the Spirit’s impact on the cosmos. Paul refers to this impact as the “word of the cross,” which is more precisely the death and resurrection of Christ that has reconstituted the cosmos (1 Cor 1:18). As a partaker in the new cosmic reality, someone who is πνευματικός, the believer understands this new cosmic reality because of the Spirit’s presence in his heart. Those who have not received the Spirit, who Paul refers to as Ψυχικοὶ, are unable to know God through their own natural intuition and wisdom (v. 11, 14). They are incapable of comprehending “the word of the cross” because the message of a crucified Christ is “folly” to them (1:18, 23; 2:14).

But, second, possessing the mind of Christ means more than just mere knowledge about the cosmic order. It is also, as Schlatter’s definition suggests, a power that transforms the practical reasoning of the believer. In other words, the believer who possesses the Spirit (and by consequence the mind of Christ) and who is aware of his position in the new cosmos has the disposition to live accordingly in this reconstituted cosmos, to live a life “according to the Spirit” and to exhibit “the things of the Spirit.”

The Spirit as Enabler of Ethics

In an essay on Paul’s pneumatological statements, T.W. Martin states that, for Paul, “The Spirit provides a new rationality by bringing the mind of Christ to the human heart, the center of

⁸⁷ Jewett, *Paul’s Anthropological Terms*, 450.

human volition and cognition.”⁸⁹ In other words, when the Spirit enters the human heart, it imparts the knowledge of Christ and, thus, completely renews the believer’s own cognition and volition, leaving him with a mind capable of discerning “the things of god” and exhibiting “the things of the Spirit” (1 Cor 2:11). Paul describes this process of renewal in Romans 12:1-2:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Ro 12:1–2, NRSV)

Here, Paul writes that the renewed mind is the means of renewing the believer’s ethical life in the “in-between” cosmos. The renewed mind, in this case, does not conform to “this world” — the cosmos defiled by sin. This mind, on the contrary, is able to discern and conform to the “will of God,” which Paul describes as “what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Furnish elucidates this process:

As the Christian’s whole life is “transformed” and his critical faculties of ethical discernment and decision are “renewed” (contrast the “reprobate mind” [ἁδόκιμος νοῦς], Rom. 1: 28, with “the renewal of the mind” [ἡ ἀνακαίνωσις τοῦ νοῦς], 12: 2), he is enabled to “find out what the will of God is, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”⁹⁰

It is this process of renewal, then, that enables the believer to live in conformity with the reality of the “in-between” cosmos and to live in a way that is “good and acceptable and perfect.” Elsewhere Paul elaborates:

But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. (Ro 6:17–18, NRSV)

⁸⁸ A. Schlatter, *Die Theologie des Judentums nach dem Bericht des Josephus*, 27. Referenced in Jewett, *Paul’s Anthropological Terms*, 361.

⁸⁹ Martin, “Paul’s Pneumatological Statements and Ancient Medical Texts,” 121.

⁹⁰ Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, 189.

Whereas in the old cosmos all of humanity was enslaved to sin, believers in the “in-between” cosmos who have received the Spirit through baptism are “slaves of righteousness.” In other words, believers no longer live under the tyrannical hold of sin, but are now imprisoned to Christ and the Spirit, freed from one cosmos, but held captive by another. Indwelt by the Spirit, the believer is actively renewed to live under the strictures of his new master. Thus his obedience comes from the very place that the Spirit has indwelt — the heart. At baptism the believer receives the Spirit and is freed from sin, as the Spirit enters the heart and begins reconstituting the believer’s thought process (nous). The believer, then, becomes “obedient from the heart.”

It is the reception of the Spirit that impels this process of renewal by imparting the mind of Christ and, by consequence, restructuring the believer’s volition to live as a “slave of righteousness” and to exhibit “the things of the Spirit.” In other words, the Spirit uses the mind of Christ to create the believer’s ethical life.⁹¹ Thus as Richard Hays argues, “To have the mind of the Lord is to participate in the pattern of the cross.”⁹² As we have seen, Paul thinks that baptism is participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. But after baptism, Paul sees this participation as a process that continues to unfold. This is clear in Philippians 2:1-9 where Paul writes:

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in

⁹¹ See Campbell, *The Quest for Paul’s Gospel: A Suggested Strategy*, 77. Campbell describes the situation this way: “The Spirit is creating Christians at the behest of the Father but using the template (literally ‘image’) of the Son (see v. 29). What the Son has done, and where he has been, is what Christians are currently being ‘mapped onto’ by the activity of the Spirit. This process is by no means complete; however, it is decisively inaugurated—it is this inauguration that delivers a greater ethical capacity, free from slavery to Sin and Flesh, and that also provides an unshakeable assurance concerning the future that is grounded ultimately in God’s love.”

⁹² Hays, *First Corinthians*, 47.

human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name. (Php 2:1–9, NRSV)

In this passage, Paul calls on the Philippians to share the mind of Christ, which means possessing the mind of the crucified and resurrected Christ and, therefore, exhibiting ethical qualities such as humility and selflessness. This is all possible, Paul reminds the Philippians, because “it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Php 2:13, NRSV). Furnish describes it this way:

That the obedience of Christ has the character of humble, selfless love and service is made clear by the context into which Paul draws the hymn of Phil. 2: 6-11. Christ’s “obedience unto death” (vs. 8, probably Paul’s own interpolation 26) is regarded as the ultimate expression of humble concern for others (vss. 3-4). Moreover, the apostle intends Christ’s obedience to be paradigmatic for the believer. What he has done becomes an “incentive of love” (vs. 1 RSV), a “paraclesis” (vs. 1 RSV: “encouragement”) in the double sense of gift and demand. 27 The believers’ obedience— to which Paul summons them in vss. 12-13— is made both possible and imperative by God’s working within and among them (vs. 13), and its character is to be that of Christ’s own obedience.

Paul provides concrete examples of ethical actions that the Spirit produces when it renews the believer’s mind and ushers him into the “in-between” cosmos as a slave of righteousness. The believer whose mind has been renewed is free from sin (Rom 6:6) and alive to Christ (Rom 6:11). And since the believer is no longer a slave to sin, and has the mind to perceive this and live accordingly, he should neither obey the “passions” of sin, nor let sin “exercise dominion” over his body.

Therefore, on the one hand, those who live as slaves to sins fall prey to the “passions” and “works” of the flesh. For Paul, these are clear:

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal 5:19–21, NRSV)

The believer, on the other hand, is not under the dominion of sin and is, consequently, not of the flesh, but of the Spirit (Rom 8:9). As such, for Paul, the actions of a believer reflect his position. The believer lives a life according to the Spirit and avoids the work of the flesh:

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Gal 5:22–24, NRSV)

Here, the governing metaphor for Paul's exhortations reflects his view of ethics. Because the Spirit has freed the believer from sin and has reconstituted his mind, the believer's actions are a "fruit," a production, of the Spirit. They are not something that the believer can strive toward on his own. On the contrary, they are made possible only by the believer's new disposition in Christ -- by the presence of a new power and governing orientation for action.

In listing these vices and virtues, Paul concretizes the dichotomy that he has drawn between two distinct human realities, both of which are conditioned by the nature of the "in-between" cosmos. Human action, then, is a product of the human's position in the cosmos. Commenting on Galatians 5:19-24, J. Louis Martyn argues, "None of the things in either list is an autonomous act of a human being that can be correctly called that individual's vice or virtue. On the contrary, Paul lists actions that are without exception effected by the two warring powers, the Flesh and the Spirit."⁹³

Paul's Expectations

Before moving on to 1 Corinthians 5-7 and seeing whether or not the interpretation described above helps to explain the text, a couple of other observations are noteworthy. Even

⁹³ Martyn, *Galatians*, 532

though Paul regards ethical life as a production of the Spirit, he is not afraid to give specific examples of what this life “in Christ” looks like. We have already seen this in Galatians 5 where he lists the “works of the flesh” and the “works of the Spirit.” Paul provides additional lists of vices and virtues in his other writings (cf. 1 Cor 6:9, 2 Cor 6:6).

For Paul, however, these lists are not exhaustive. In fact, an exhaustive list of virtues would contradict his emphasis on Christ’s advent. Since Christ has abolished slavery to sin, created a new human reality, and, through his Spirit, produces life in this reality, a single set of virtues would harken back to the days before Christ in which adherence to the law, a written code, was impossible because of the deception of sin (Rom 7:7-12).⁹⁴

So those who live “according to the Spirit,” Paul reminds his readers, “serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code” (Rom 7:6). The Spirit, then, as Furnish rightly perceives, produces a conglomerate set of normative ethical actions. Indeed, in Philippians 4:8, Paul instructs his community to do “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable” (Phil 4:8).

Even though Paul does not provide one concrete set of ethical actions, he does have an idea of what it means to be “in Christ” and the associated actions. In fact, he sees himself as the model worth emulating (Phil 17; 1 Cor 4:16). Thus it is no surprise that the occasion for most of Paul’s letters is to correct deviances from his expectations of “life in Christ.”

Life in the "In Between"

⁹⁴ See Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 296-297. Commenting on Galatians 5:16 Dunn writes, “the key to moral effort and acceptable conduct lies in the prompting of the Spirit from within, not in the constraints of the law from without; that moral living springs from inward engagement and motivation enabled from God rather than from outward compulsion.”

Knowing that Paul views ethical life as a production of the Spirit raises an important question. Why do Paul's converts, whom he believes possess the Spirit, fall short of his expectations for "life in Christ?" Why do they fail to produce the "things" and "fruit" of the Spirit? After all, the Spirit is in their heart and is, conceivably, bringing with it the mind of Christ and the volition to live in the Spirit while in the "in-between" cosmos. But, of course, Paul does have to comment on the shortcomings that he sees in his communities. Indeed, the presence of ethical imperatives in his letters implies the need for some sort of instruction.

The answer to this dilemma is twofold. The first thing to keep in mind is that for Paul, the cosmos is still in transition; it has yet to reach its final fulfillment.⁹⁵ Thus, the incomplete character of this state affects the believer's life in the cosmos. Though the believer has been released from the absolute hold of sin, sin still presides in the cosmos, and the believer is still vulnerable to its temptations. Victor Furnish rightly declares that "Nowhere does Paul say that sin has, as such, been abolished. Thus, to speak of being 'freed' from sin (vss. 7, 18, 22) implies that sin still seeks to enslave, even though, being 'dead' to it, one no longer stands under its dominion" (vs. 14).⁹⁶

It is inappropriate, then, to see the Spirit's entrance into the heart of the believer as its final act in the creation of the believer's ethical life. On the contrary, the Spirit's impartation of the mind of Christ is merely the beginning of a process of ethical renewal that lasts until the coming *eschaton*. Thus when the Spirit enters the heart of the believer, it does not simply turn on a switch that enables the believer to live ethically, nor does it impart a domineering mind of Christ that forces the believer to live as an ethical automaton. On an entirely different level, upon

⁹⁵ see Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, 118. Furnish writes, "God alone is able to destroy the alien forces which are ranged against him, but this will occur only in the future; it is one of those things still "to come" (cf. Rom. 8: 38; I Cor. 3: 22). The power of God is not, therefore, a this-worldly power, but is transcendent of this age and will have its full effect only in the age to come when the present powers are finally subdued and abolished.

its arrival, the Spirit frees the believer from the absolute hold of Sin and the flesh, allowing the believer, for the first time, to live in a reality where he is free from the grip of a force that, in Paul's view, dictates every thought and action.

But caught in this new reality, the believer's life cannot remain unchanged. Paul's logic prohibits such a notion. Upon arriving in the heart of the believer, The Spirit brings with it the mind of Christ and the volition necessary to live in a new cosmic reality where sin and the flesh no longer have absolute hold on the believer. A consequence of this new disposition is the exhibition of the "things" and the "fruit" of the Spirit, ethical actions associated with the believer's newfound freedom.

Nevertheless, while the Spirit delivers the volition to live out these things, it apparently does not impart absolute knowledge about the nature of these things. Perhaps at first Paul himself takes this for granted. Holding such a high regard for the Spirit, in his initial missionary work, it is possible that Paul failed to convey specific ethical lists to his congregants, expecting the Spirit simply to take care of this. Thus as Richard Hays notes, "Paul's reluctance to specify narrow behavioral norms was perhaps one of the factors that led to trouble in the Corinthian community."⁹⁷ Paul's imperative, then, only appears in his later writings out of necessity. His communities have failed to produce the ethical actions that he considers the "fruit" of the Spirit. Paul writes with instruction to set them straight.

Therefore, though perhaps at first neglected by Paul, the imperative becomes part of the Spirit's larger process in constructing the believer's ethical life. When the Spirit enters the heart of the believer it brings with it the volition to live out the "fruit" of the Spirit, but it does not bring with it absolute knowledge about this fruit. Because sin and σάρξ still exist in the "in-

⁹⁶ Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, 173.

⁹⁷ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 43.

between” cosmos, the believer can still go astray and associate with the “things” of the flesh. This is, however, not a deliberate act of disloyalty, but an act of confusion. And this appears to be what was occurring at Corinth. The congregation was confusing the “things” of the flesh with the “things” of the Spirit, gallivanting around the community as πνευματικοί when in reality, according to Paul, their actions resembled the flesh.

But as Spirit indwelt human beings, the Corinthian church possessed the volition to exhibit the “fruit” of the Spirit. Thus Paul’s imperatives, first and foremost, are directed to a Corinthian church that he believes possesses the Spirit and the volition necessary to exhibit the “fruit” of the Spirit. As J. Louis Martyn proclaims the community is only addressable “because of the indwelling Spirit.”⁹⁸ The imperative, then, is meant to convey the nature of the “fruit,” but the volition to exhibit the fruit still originates from the Spirit’s transformative entrance into the heart of the believer.

The Conclusion: Be What You Are

It is quite clear that Paul does not view momentary setbacks as evidence of a superior flesh. Even when his converts fall short of his expectations, Paul does not question their possession of the Spirit. Thus Paul’s exhortations are not instructions on how to achieve a spiritual status; they are precisely the opposite. To quote J. Louis Martyn, Paul calls on his communities to be “what they are.”⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul*, 264.

⁹⁹ see Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul*, 264. Concerning the relationship between the Spirit and the flesh, Martin writes, “He does not exhort them, therefore, to make a sovereign choice between the two, as though the Spirit and the Flesh were two paths, both of which lay equally open before them. On the contrary, with his imperative, Paul calls on the Galatians steadily to be what they already are.” see also Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 98. Commenting on Paul’s exhortations to the Corinthians, Fee writes, “His concern throughout is to get the Corinthians to understand who they are.”

His communities already have the spirit of Christ. Their minds have already been reconstituted. They are truly “in Christ.” It would be foolish, then, to think, as Paul rhetorically asks the Galatians, “Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?” (Gal 3:3). Commenting on the Corinthian letters, Furnish describes the situation this way:

In his Corinthian letters Paul seeks in the most urgent way to demonstrate their concrete ethical responsibilities. The believer is “in Christ” or ‘in the Lord,’ he is at the same time ‘in the world.’ (Gal. 2:20; Philemon 16). This means not only that he is still subject to worldly cares, pressures, and temptations (1 Cor 5:9-10), but also that he is still obliged to act responsibly in the world in accord with the new master whom he has pledged to serve.¹⁰⁰

In short, Paul’s indicative precedes his imperative. That is, Paul believes that the Spirit of Christ has entered the cosmos and embedded itself into the heart of the believer, freeing him from the tyrannical hold of sin and ushering him into a new cosmic reality where he is, consequently, a slave of righteousness. In this newfound freedom, the Spirit imparts the mind of Christ which begins a process that transforms the believer’s own moral disposition, giving him the volition to exhibit “the things of the Spirit.” Thus when Paul urges his communities to demonstrate particular ethical actions, his imperatives are, as J. Louis Martyn points out, directed toward communities “that are able to hear God’s imperatives because of the indwelling Spirit.”¹⁰¹

Knowing this, we can now observe Paul’s imperatives in 1 Corinthians 5-7. If the observations made in the first chapter and in this chapter are correct, then we should expect Paul’s imperatives to account for the superiority of the Spirit and the Spirit’s role in constructing ethical life in the “in-between” cosmos.

¹⁰⁰ Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, 74.

¹⁰¹ Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul*, 264.

Chapter Three: A Renewed Reading

Introduction

At this point, we have two pertinent observations on the table. The first is that the Spirit and the flesh are not equals. Throughout his letters, Paul works in the context of a “in-between” apocalyptic cosmos where the Spirit invasively frees humanity from the clutch of sin and its puppet the flesh.¹⁰² This is not a spirit innate to the cosmos or to Paul’s communities. To the contrary, it is the Spirit of Christ sent by God into the cosmos to eradicate the power of sin and usher in a eschatological, pneumatic cosmos (1 Cor 15:50). J. Louis Martyn puts it this way: “The human orb has been subject to an alien, occupying power, the flesh. With the sending of the Spirit, then, God has invaded the territory of the flesh (cf. Gal 1:4), inaugurating a war against that monster.”¹⁰³ This is the Spirit’s war against the flesh, and the flesh stands no chance. Indeed, Paul thinks that the invasive Spirit will quickly bring in “the day of the Lord,” a new cosmos where sin and the flesh no longer exist (cf. 1 Thess 5:2; 1 Cor 15:50).

The second major observation is that, because Paul views the Spirit as superior to the flesh, his ethical imperatives cannot be directions to avoid the threat of pollution by sin and the flesh. Paul simply does not think that the flesh can work its power within his communities and

¹⁰² The nature of the flesh is not entirely clear within Paul’s cosmic drama. Is the flesh itself a hostile cosmic force, or is it, as I have described it here, an agent of sin? The flesh certainly contradicts the Spirit. But Paul spatters enough neutral references to *sarx* throughout his letters to make one wonder whether the flesh is merely fallen prey to the tyranny of sin. For further clarification see Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, 117.

¹⁰³ Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul*, 258.

then pollute both them and the Spirit of Christ. To the contrary, his imperatives must be seen primarily in light of the superiority of the Spirit.

Therefore, as we observed in the second chapter, Paul views ethical living as a production of the believers connection to Christ through the invasive Spirit. As PHEME PERKINS concludes “For Paul the ethical life of Christians expresses their new identity as persons who are “in Christ,” able to walk in the Spirit.”¹⁰⁴ Paul’s imperatives, then, are not calls for his communities to achieve a specific list of instructions that will, consequently, construct a blockade against the flesh. His imperatives merely recall his expectations for what life “in Christ” and “according to the Spirit” should look like.

Yet the idea of imperative implies the need for correction, and indeed, this is the case for Paul. His communities, even though enlivened with the Spirit, do not always exhibit the “fruit” of the Spirit that he expects. But even though this is the case, disillusionment does not imply defeat. FURNISH describes the situation this way. “Paul,” he writes, “does not deny that other powers, good and evil, inhabit the cosmos, but he does deny that they have any legitimate claims upon men.”¹⁰⁵ Sin still exists in the “in-between” cosmos and still “seeks to enslave,” but the believer “no longer stands under dominion.”¹⁰⁶

In other words, when his communities fail to exhibit the “fruit” of the Spirit, Paul does not jump to the conclusion that sin and the flesh have entered within the community and overpowered the Spirit, leading his converts to exhibit vice and evil. Indeed, despite his communities’ delinquency, Paul still acknowledges their life in the Spirit. Paul’s imperatives, then, are simply requests for his communities to be what they are — that is, Spirit-indwelt humans. Such an exhortation is only possible because of the Spirit’s presence within their lives.

¹⁰⁴ Perkins, “Ethics: New Testament,” *ABD* 2:660.

¹⁰⁵ Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, 170.

Without it, Paul thinks that his communities could never truly exhibit ethical virtues (the “fruit” and the “things” of the Spirit).

Thus, to reiterate, Paul’s imperatives are not instructions on how to shore up boundaries against the flesh; quite conversely, his imperatives are simply expectations for what his communities, as Spirit-indwelt people, are supposed to be doing by virtue of the power of the mind of Christ in them. When his converts stray from his expectations, Paul believes they have fallen prey to the conditions of the “in between” cosmos (sin’s temptation that still exists). But he does not think that sin has re-enslaved them, nor polluted the Spirit within them. They are only momentarily out of line, and a reminder from him, he hopes, will realign them to who they are.

Observing Paul’s view of the Spirit and flesh relationship (Chapter One) and constructing an ethic where the Spirit is superior to the flesh (Chapter Two) enables us to finally look in-depth at Paul’s imperatives dealing with sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians 5-7. The goal, here, is to apply the observations made in the previous two chapters to Paul’s imperatives in this particular text and to see whether or not they account for the complexities of the text. In the end, the hope is that they will explain inconsistencies, as I will outline below, that one encounters when reading Paul’s imperatives with a Spirit/flesh relationship where the flesh is equal to the Spirit.

The Problem

Before moving on to an in-depth observation of 1 Corinthians 5-7, we must observe in detail the problem with assuming that the flesh is equal to the Spirit. This is, as I noted in the introduction, what has prompted this entire investigation in the first place.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 173.

In his book *The Corinthian Body*, Dale Martin offers an interpretation of Paul that, inevitably, requires the Spirit and the flesh to function as equals within Paul's cosmic order. In Martin's interpretation, the Spirit functions much like the Stoic perception of πνεῦμα. In this regard, it is a "stuff" that pervades the entire cosmos. "Πνεῦμα," he writes, "pervades and defines external reality; it is that airy tension that gives form and quality to external objects."¹⁰⁷ For Paul, Martin contends, as a divine "stuff," πνεῦμα physically connects the believer to the body of Christ. He writes, "The man's body and Christ's body share the same πνεῦμα; the man's body is therefore an appendage of Christ's body, totally dependent on the pneumatic life force of the larger body for its existence."¹⁰⁸

But Paul, Martin continues, is part of a superstitious class of individuals in the first century Greco-Roman world. Along with many others, Paul thinks about disease as malevolent forces inflicting sickness and harm on human beings. Such a view is a perversion of the Stoic concept of mixture and the pervasive πνεῦμα. Thus these outside forces function much like πνεῦμα in that they pervade the entire cosmos and cause sickness and disease, instead of health and life. As a Jewish apocalypticist, according to Martin, Paul adopts this superstition to fit his own theology. Σάρξ, then, is a pervasive, material force, like πνεῦμα, that pervades the cosmos causing corruption, sickness, and death. Martin writes:

Both Pneuma and sarx are essences that moved in and out of human bodies; indeed, they are cosmological essences that constitute, along with other materials of reality, human beings. Thus they may act upon one another, and each is susceptible to influences from the other.¹⁰⁹

For Martin, because Paul regards σάρξ as the cosmic foil to πνεῦμα and believes that πνεῦμα is, indeed, "susceptible" to the influences of σάρξ, his ethical imperatives are directives

¹⁰⁷ Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 21.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 176.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 172.

to avoid a potential attack from the hostile cosmic force.¹¹⁰ “Paul’s primary worry,” Martin writes, “is that the πνεῦμα of Christ’s body will become polluted by the corrupting presence of the sinful σάρξ.”¹¹¹ Since, as Martin explains, “Pneuma and sarx have their own values, their own goals, and their own spheres of power,” Paul’s readers must avoid any of the values and goals associated with the flesh, if they wish to prevent pollution from the assailant force.¹¹² Moreover, anything associated with the sphere of the flesh that exists or makes its way into the congregation has the potential to wreak havoc on Christians and even the body of Christ, connected physically to the congregation through shared πνεῦμα.¹¹³

Though Martin’s reading is sophisticated and supported by relevant material, a problem immediately surfaces when applying his observations to 1 Corinthians 5-7, in particular to Paul’s views regarding sexual morality.

According to Martin, sexual intercourse, for Paul, is a possible route of pollution for σάρξ. Commenting on this, Martin writes, “Paul is worried that the integrity of the body — both the individual Christian’s body and the body of Christ — will be compromised by the breach in the wall occasioned by dangerous sexual intercourse.”¹¹⁴ In other words, sexual intercourse is a boundary breaking activity that, for Paul, joins together two human beings, “blending” the male and the female’s body, Martin states, into one body.¹¹⁵ Consequently, if one of the members partaking in the act brings with them an association with the flesh, then the two face a possible risk of pollution. And even more threatening, if one of the members is a believer, then the

¹¹⁰ see *ibid.*, 172. Martin writes, “Both Pneuma and sarx are essences that move in and out of human bodies; indeed, they are cosmological essences that constitute, along with other materials of reality, human beings. Thus they may act upon one another, and each is susceptible to influences from the other.”

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 173.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 177.

contact with illicit sexual activity outside of the boundaries of his community threatens the entire congregation and the body of Christ. Martin writes:

The body of Christ is not polluted by mere contact with the cosmos or by the body's presence in the midst of the corrupt cosmos, but it may be polluted if its boundaries are permeated and an element of the cosmos gains entry into the body.¹¹⁶

In order for σάρξ to pollute the body of Christ through sexual activity, one of the members partaking in the act must bring with them an association with the outside world — the spirit of the cosmos defiled by σάρξ. Martin's thesis, then, works well for 1 Corinthians 5 and 6. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul lashes out against an act of sexual promiscuity that, according to him, "is not even tolerated by the pagans." Paul conveys that the act in question is that "someone has his father's wife" (1 Cor 5:1). Though some ambiguity about the situation exists, most scholars agree that a man has engaged in sexual activity with his step-mother. The whereabouts of the father are unknown, but many propose that he is deceased.¹¹⁷

Nevertheless, Paul categorizes the act as πορνεία, an act of sexual promiscuity. According to Martin, by engaging in an act of πορνεία the incestuous man has associated himself with the sphere of the flesh and has threatened the boundaries of the community and the body of Christ. "Paul's primary worry," Martin writes, "is that the pneuma of Christ's body will become polluted by the corrupting presence of the sinful sarx represented by the body of the immoral man."¹¹⁸

The only way, then, to alleviate the threat of pollution is to cast the man out of the community. Martin writes, "the church is dangerously susceptible to becoming yet another battleground for the attacks of Sarx on Pneuma, which is why the expulsion of the offender is so

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 170.

¹¹⁷ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 386.

¹¹⁸ Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 169.

important.”¹¹⁹ Because the individual has brought in the threat of the flesh through his sexual activity, he must be cast out to ensure the health of the larger community and the body of Christ.¹²⁰

Though Martin never explicitly makes the connection, his argument works especially well if the stepmother does not belong to the community. Later on in interpreting 1 Corinthians 6 and believers’ sexual activity with prostitutes, Martin argues that Paul is particularly concerned “about possible pollution of the pneuma through the boundary-breaking activity of sexual intercourse with outsiders.”¹²¹ In 1 Corinthians 5 this very well may be the case. When Paul exhorts the community to remove the individual from among them, he employs a singular aorist participle to refer to the individual who has committed the act (ὁ τὸ ἔργον τοῦτο πράξας). It seems likely that if the stepmother was part of the community, Paul would have opted for the third-person plural (πράξαντας) — the text reading, then, “those who have done this deed.” If the mother is not part of the community, then the sexual interaction between the two constitutes a union, as Martin would argue, between two opposing spheres of reality, the believer, a representative of his community and by extension the body of Christ, and the stepmother who is outside of community and is fully enveloped in the cosmic sphere of the flesh. The believer, then, would threaten the larger community and the body of Christ by bringing in πορνεία and the σάρξ of an outsider.¹²²

Regardless if this is the case for 1 Corinthians 5, it is certainly the scenario playing out in 1 Corinthians 6. Here, Martin argues that two individuals of radically different ontological

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 173.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 171.

¹²¹ Ibid., 178.

¹²² see Hays, *First Corinthians*, 81. Hays writes, “As commentators universally note, the woman surely was not a member of the community of believers; otherwise, she too would have been subject to the disciplinary action that Paul order in verses 2-5.”

statuses unite together in an act of sexual intercourse. He writes, “The prostitute’s being is defined by her status as a representative of the cosmos; the Christian man’s being is defined by his participation in the body of Christ.”¹²³ And when these two individuals effectively blend themselves together, the σάρξ of the prostitute (radically different from the believer’s πνεῦμα), Martin writes, “threatens the body of the male penetrator and, by extension, the body of Christ.”¹²⁴

Taking his argument to its logical conclusion, Martin cites 1 Corinthians 6:18 as evidence that sexual intercourse with a prostitute, for Paul, could open up a boundary for sin to completely overwhelm the body of Christ. Martin writes:

The man, by penetrating the prostitute, is himself penetrated by the sinful cosmos. He penetrates himself with sin. Thus, whereas in 6:16 – 17 Paul’s rhetoric implied that sexual intercourse between the Christian man and the prostitute enacted sexual intercourse between Christ and the prostitute – in which case, Christ is sexually penetrating the evil cosmos – in 6:18 the roles are reversed: the man is fucked by sin, so Christ is fucked by the cosmos.¹²⁵

Martin’s argument works well for 1 Corinthians 5 and 6 where two issues of outside, illicit sexual activity threaten the body of Christ through sin’s invasive ability to pollute. But issues with his argument appear when reading 1 Corinthians 7. Here, Paul addresses the issue of mixed marriage — marriages between members in the community and those outside of the community. Frustrating Martin’s argument, Paul does not press his converts to divorce their unbelieving spouses. Instead, he expects the believer to remain married, and that somehow through this marriage the unbelieving spouse will “be made holy” (1 Cor 7:14).

Martin admits that this is a deviation from his reading of Paul. He writes, “We would expect him [Paul] to think that the believing partner runs a risk of incurring pollution and thereby

¹²³ Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 176.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 177.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 178.

of polluting the entire body of Christ. Yet this is not the position we find him espousing”¹²⁶ To explain the text, Martin argues that Paul’s concern about boundaries and pollution also incorporates a cleansing mechanism. He maintains:

Whereas we often think about contamination as resulting from proximity, Paul here allows that the opposite of contamination, cleansing, may also work by proximity. He insists that the purity of Christ holds such power that it may, in certain situations, purify even nonbelievers.¹²⁷

Several questions arise from Martin’s explanation. Why would cleansing occur here in this particular situation as opposed to the other scenarios found in chapters five and six? If pollution occurs there, and cleansing occurs here, then what does this say about Paul’s attitude toward the relationship between σάρξ and πνεῦμα? Does Paul think, as this situation would lead us to believe, that σάρξ normally prevails over πνεῦμα with the situation in 1 Corinthians 7 being an exception? Perhaps Martin has the answer when he writes, “As so often, Paul shows himself here to be something of a pragmatist, adjusting to the necessities of the social situation.”¹²⁸ In other words, Paul breaks his own logic due to the social structures of his time. Could this mean that Paul doesn’t view sex with prostitutes as hazardous to the πνεῦμα of Christ, but views the act as socially unacceptable?

Perhaps Martin would argue that Paul’s language unarguably incorporates the logic of pollution, and one must interpret him accordingly, taking the situation in 1 Corinthians 7 in stride. But with Paul read in this way seemingly contradicting himself within the span of two chapters, could another interpretation explain the circumstances in 1 Corinthians 5-7?

Moreover, perhaps most problematic, Martin’s interpretation situates the Spirit and the flesh as equals within Paul’s cosmos. As he writes:

¹²⁶ Ibid., 218.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 218.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 218.

“Both Pneuma and sarx are essences that move in and out of human bodies; indeed, they are cosmological essences that constitute, along with other materials of reality, human beings. Thus they may act upon one another, and each is susceptible to influences from the other.”¹²⁹

But as seen in chapter one, Paul does not think this way. For Paul, the Spirit works over and against the flesh. Thus the solution to the problem in 1 Corinthians 5-7, then, is to read the text based on an interpretation of the Spirit’s superiority where the Spirit actively constructs ethical living in the “in between” cosmos.

Applying The Solution

Overall, the solution to the problem is simple. Paul’s ethical imperatives, including those in 1 Corinthians 5-7, are simply reminders of expectations for what he assumes the Spirit will produce in the life of the believers within his communities. These expectations, as we have observed, are similar in content to other moral and ethical teachings of the time period. Thus we should expect that in these chapters the Spirit is responsible for producing standard ethical virtues within the community. Moreover, we should expect Paul to react to deviations in the community by exhorting the Corinthians to be what they are — that is, Spirit-indwelt human beings.

1 Corinthians 5

Ultimately, Paul’s upheaval about the incestuous relationship in 1 Corinthians 5 confirms these assumptions. As we have already noted, here, Paul is combating a relationship between a stepson and his stepmother. Paul’s ultimate ruling on the situation is for the community to cast

¹²⁹ Ibid., 172.

out the offender. While Martin concludes that Paul's solution to the problem reveals his anxiety about the invasive power of the flesh to overcome and pollute the Spirit of the entire community, other features of the text lead to the opposite conclusion. In other words, the Spirit is actually working over and against the flesh.

Evidence for this position comes from a careful consideration of Paul's words. Paul writes:

"When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord." (1 Co 5:4–5, NRSV)

There is no doubt that Paul thinks the man's presence is a communal issue. Indeed his solution to the problem involves assembling the entire community, and having them as an assembly cast the man out. But in contrast to Martin's theory of pollution, there are other tangible reasons why Paul involves the entire community — apart from the man's presence polluting the πνεῦμα of the Corinthians and Christ.

Many scholars translate Paul's opening appeal to the Corinthians as "it is actually reported."¹³⁰ Paul, they assume, is alluding to the oral report from Chloe's people that he has mentioned before. The incestuous relationship, then, is just another piece of information contained in the report. But other scholars choose to render the adverb ὅλως as *everywhere*. Conzelmann, for one, does this. The phrase (Ὅλως ἀκούεται) then comes to mean, *It is universally reported*.¹³¹ In other words, wide ranging reports of the incestuous relationship have left the borders of the Corinthian community.

¹³⁰ see Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 199, and Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 385.

¹³¹ see Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 95.

The man's presence, then, is not an issue of pollution, but an issue of reputation. Situated in their midst is an individual who has committed such an egregious act that his presence within the Corinthian church threatens to smear the reputation of the entire community. Paul thinks that the man's presence and the Corinthian's apathy toward his action wholeheartedly contradicts the Corinthians' life "in Christ." Thus he appeals to them to rid their loaf of the leaven (ζύμην,) because they are, indeed, unleavened (ἄζυμοι) (v.7). The combination of imperative and indicative, here, illuminate Paul's ethic. Commenting on this, Barrett writes:

The people of God have in fact been freed from sin; because this is so, they must now avoid sin and live in obedience to God's command. The imperative is unthinkable without the indicative, which makes the otherwise impossible obedience possible; the indicative is emasculated if the imperative, which gives it moral bite, is wanting.¹³²

In other words, Paul is simply calling the Corinthians to be what they are, that is, Spirit-indwelt human beings residing within a Spirit filled community. The offender in their midst contradicts this reality. So in order to save their reputation as a community "in Christ," the Corinthians must expel the man. Paul, then, does not exhort the Corinthians to expel this man because he threatens to pollute the community's πνεῦμα and, by consequence, the πνεῦμα of Christ. To the contrary, Paul urges the Corinthians to cast the man out because he outwardly contradicts the entire community's position "in Christ."

But what of the man? Paul's call for expulsion appears quite harsh. He writes, "you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord." Though Martin takes this text to be another example of Paul's anxiety of the flesh polluting the Spirit, Paul's language, rather, demonstrates the power of the Spirit over and against the flesh. Martin takes the instance of τὸ πνεῦμα here to refer to the Corinthian's communal πνεῦμα. Gordon Fee, however, has amassed ample evidence to show that Paul

employs the definite article (τὸ) before πνεῦμα to refer to the spirit present within man.¹³³ Thus the issue is the man's spirit, not the communal spirit.¹³⁴

Though many commentators have questioned what Paul means by the “destruction of the flesh,” Paul's words are not, as many have concluded, a sentence of death. Commentators who make this assumption render Paul's use of σάρξ to mean the physical body. So when Paul instructs the Corinthians to cast out the offender for the “destruction of the flesh” they are actually pronouncing physical death. But as we have seen in this text, and as many commentators have shown elsewhere, Paul's use of σάρξ is hardly limited to the physical body. A word from Hays best reveals Paul's use of the word. He writes:

In that case “the flesh” would refer — as in 1 Corinthians 3:3; Romans 7:5, 18, 25; 8:3-8; Galatians 5:13, 19, 24 — to the rebellious human nature opposed to God. The meaning of the destruction of the flesh, then, must be interpreted in light of what Paul declares in Galatians 5:24: “Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”¹³⁵

Though seemingly negative Paul's call for expulsion is, in fact, positive. This is clear when he writes, “so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (ἵνα τὸ πνεῦμα σωθῇ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τοῦ κυρίου). On this phrase Fee notes, “Most interpreters consider the prepositional phrase to express purpose. But since there is one clear purpose clause in the sentence... it is more likely that the prepositional phrase expresses anticipated result.”¹³⁶ Thus the offenders salvation is the primary reason for expelling him. By casting him out of the community, Paul expects this to happen. But how?

¹³² Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 128.

¹³³ see Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, Chp 2, and 127. Commenting on the issue at hand, Fee writes, “It should be noted finally, in support of our conclusions in ch. 2, that in both of these cases, where the primary referent is the human spirit in contrast to “body” and “flesh,” Paul uses the definite article with πνεῦμα, which he tends to do in the vast majority of instances where the human spirit is in view.

¹³⁴ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 396. Thiselton argues that both the community and the man are in question.

¹³⁵ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 86.

¹³⁶ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 126.

Somehow Paul believes this occurs when the man is handed over to Satan. The phrase παραδοῦναι τὸν τοιοῦτον τῷ Σατανᾷ is hard to interpret, but Paul probably means something along the lines of giving the man over to the cosmos defiled by sin and excluding him from the Church and fellowship that lives in the new cosmic reality where sin no longer holds absolute power.¹³⁷ As Gordon Fee writes, “this man is to be put back out into the world, where Satan and his “principalities and powers”¹³⁸ still hold sway over people’s lives to destroy them.” Outside of the Church, Paul expects the Spirit to combat the flesh that defiles the man, freeing him from the clutch of sin and leading to his ultimate salvation.

In sum, Paul views the man’s presence as an outward contradiction of the Corinthian Church’s position “in Christ.” He is committing an act “not even found among the Pagans” (1 Cor 5:1). Thus Paul calls on the Corinthians to be what they are, Spirit-indwelt human beings, and to cast this man out of the community. Paul expects the invasive Spirit to work over and against the flesh of the offender and ultimately

1 Corinthians 6

In 6:12, after a brief aside dealing with lawsuits, Paul returns to the issue of sexual immorality and insider and outsider relations. This time the issue, as we have seen, is with community members having sex with prostitutes. Again, Paul’s language coincides with his larger views of the Spirit/flesh relationship.

Paul begins his response to the Corinthians by quoting a phrase from them: “All things are lawful for me.” Here, Paul starts a trend of stating a Corinthian slogan and then subsequently

¹³⁷ see South, *Disciplinary Practices*, 43. South concludes that this means putting the man “outside the sphere of God’s protection within the church and leaving him exposed to Satanic forces of evil in hopes that the experience would cause him to repent and return to the fellowship of the church.

¹³⁸ Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 126.

disqualifying it. Apparently, the Corinthians have latched on to Paul's gospel of freedom and have taken it to an extent that Paul himself does not agree with.¹³⁹ Perhaps they have heard Paul say elsewhere "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." (2 Co 3:17, NRSV). But the Corinthians have turned Paul's theological thinking into an opportunity to act as they please, without any sort of restriction. As Gordon Fee notes, "for Paul that is not freedom at all, but a form of bondage even worse than before."¹⁴⁰ Thus Paul is quick to remind them "I will not be dominated by anything."

Paul begins verse 13 with another quote from the Corinthians. He writes, "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food," and God will destroy both one and the other" (1 Cor 6:13a, NRSV). Translations differ on where the quotation ends, but many scholars agree that the quotation should encompass the clause "and God will destroy both one and the other."¹⁴¹ Otherwise, the clause runs contrary to Paul's later emphasis on the resurrection of the body (1 Cor 15). Thus taking 6:13a as a Corinthian slogan, Paul retorts with, "The body is meant not for πορνεία but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (6:13b).

The Corinthians, then, are using the slogan in 6:12 and 6:13a as justification for their illicit sexual activity with prostitutes. Hays captures their logic well when he writes:

The Corinthian *sophoi*, seeing the body as transient and trivial, have concluded that it makes no difference what we do with our bodies. If we are hungry, we should eat; if we are desirous of sexual gratification, we should seek it. None of this makes any difference, they say, because it concerns only external physical matters, which are of no lasting significance.¹⁴²

Paul, however, lashes back, writing, "The body is meant not for πορνεία but for the Lord." His reason for this becomes obvious in the next verse: "And God raised the Lord and will

¹³⁹ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 43. Hays writes, "Paul's reluctance to specify narrow behavioral norms was perhaps one of the factors that led to trouble in the Corinthian community."

¹⁴⁰ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 252.

¹⁴¹ see Hays, *First Corinthians*, 102, and Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 254.

¹⁴² Hays, *First Corinthians*, 103.

also raise us by his power” (1 Cor 6:14, NRSV). In other words, the body is important because, ultimately, God will resurrect it. The body, though it will be transformed, will transcend the cosmic ages. Thus, for Paul, Christ’s advent into the cosmos not only has eschatological implications, but present implications as well. The process of liberation has started, and the body has certainly felt its effects.

In this regard, Paul describes the believer’s body as a μέλη, a body part, of Christ. The believer, then, is an extension of Christ, a product of Christ’s proactive work in riding the cosmos of sin. Thiselton puts it this way: “Paul does indeed see the public, embodied life of Christ’s people as the instantiation of the gospel which points to, and thereby identifies, Christ for the world.”¹⁴³ When Paul contemplates the idea of a liberated member of Christ’s body joining himself with a prostitute who, as Martin describes correctly, is a “representative of the cosmos,” he lambasts at this idea with a definitive, rhetorical “Never!” A comment from Gordon Fee on the nature of verses 16-17 best sums up the entire situation. He writes:

“Paul’s point is singular. It does not have to do with the union of whole persons in sexual relations — which is true in marriage but irrelevant here; nor does it have to do with the “mystical” union of the believer to Christ, and through Christ to his body the church — which is also irrelevant here. Paul’s point is that the physical union of a believer with a prostitute is not possible because the believer’s body already belongs to the Lord, through whose resurrection one’s body has become a “member” of Christ by his Spirit.”¹⁴⁴

For Paul, the idea makes no logical sense. The believer, who is joined to Christ through the invasive Spirit, belongs to Christ (6:20). Thus to “take away” (αἶρω) this member from the realm of Christ and to join him to a prostitute constitutes joining together two mutually exclusive realms. Thiselton writes:

¹⁴³ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 466.

¹⁴⁴ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 260.

The Christian cannot claim the privilege of being redeemed or purchased (6:20) as one who belongs to Christ and simultaneously take away (back) the limbs and organs which have been grafted onto Christ for un-Christlike purposes that wrench them apart again.¹⁴⁵

In Paul's mind, believers do not partake in sexual activity with prostitutes because doing so contradicts their reality as liberated members of Christ who possess the Spirit. As in 5:7, Paul's indicative conditions his imperative. This is made clear in vv. 18-20. Here, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to "Flee from sexual immorality" (imperative) because "your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit" (indicative). Continuing to reinforce the indicative, Paul tells the Corinthian believers, who possess the Spirit "from God," that "you are not your own, for you were bought with a price." Paul language evokes the imagery of slavery that is essential to his ethical thought. And the indicative is simply this: God has freed the Corinthians from the tyrannical hold of sin, but now they belong to a new master. They are slaves of righteousness, reconstituted from their heart to live in conformity with the reality of the "in between" cosmos.

Of course, some of the Corinthians are not doing this. Some are, indeed, having illicit sexual relations with prostitutes. But does Paul tell them to stop because of the threat of pollution? Does he think that σάρξ can use the Corinthians mishap to overcome the body of Christ? As Dale Martin writes, "In the face of such cosmic consequences of coitus, Paul insists on limiting the freedom of the Christian man."¹⁴⁶ Is this really the case? Is this what motivates Paul's imperatives?

This sort of reading seems unnecessary. Here Paul, as he has before, and will again, exhorts the Corinthians to be what they are, Spirit-indwelt human beings living in a Spirit-indwelt community. Only by coming to terms with this can they "flee πορνεία" and "glorify God" in their body.

¹⁴⁵ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 466.

Thus Paul is not concerned about the potential threat of pollution, he is concerned about the outward contradiction of reality that the Corinthians are exhibiting by having sex with prostitutes. This is simply not an action that Paul believes the Spirit produces

1 Corinthians 7

Smoothing over the bumps in 1 Corinthians 5 and 6 leaves little to say about the situation in 1 Corinthians 7. What is clear is that the situation is not a sudden deviation from Paul's logic of pollution. To reiterate the point from the previous two sections, Paul does not instruct his communities to live a certain way because of the threat of pollution. Instead, he instructs his communities to live in accordance with their reality as Spirit-indwelt human beings. The situation in first Corinthians 7 is no different. Seemingly, Paul believes that those who possess the Spirit should not dissolve their marriages to unbelieving spouses.

Nevertheless, before leaving the text behind, we can make another observation. Paul's apathy towards mixed marriages evokes the question of whether or not pollution dominates his thought process, or bothers him at all. In fact, it seems as though some of the Corinthians are concerned about the idea of pollution, and Paul is actually dispelling such a notion. Indeed just a chapter earlier, Paul accused the Corinthians of misinterpreting his exhortations and concluding that contact with outsiders is impermissible (5:9-10). Here, Paul seems to think that the closest contact possible between two individuals of different cosmic realities does not lead to pollution. This, taken with the observations of the previous two sections, seems to contradict Martin's claim that Paul's "primary worry is that the *πνεῦμα* of Christ's body will become polluted by the corrupting presence of sinful *sarx*" and that to avoid such corruption, Paul anxiously "maintains

¹⁴⁶ Martin, *The Corinthian Body*

firm boundaries” to prevent anything from the outside cosmos from gaining entry into the community.¹⁴⁷

At least in this text, Paul seems to distance himself from the logic of pollution. And this calls further into question the motivation for his imperatives in chapters 5 and 6. Are Paul’s imperatives calls to erect boundaries against the invasive flesh? Or, are his imperatives, as I have proposed in the previous two sections, exhortations for his communities to be what they are, that is, Spirit-indwelt human beings who exhibit the “fruit” of the Spirit. The apathy toward pollution in chapter 7 seems to support the latter claim.

Conclusion

In summary, reading into Paul a logic of pollution that necessitates a Spirit/flesh relationship where the flesh often invasively overpowers the Spirit produces an inconsistency in Paul’s ethical imperatives in 1 Corinthians 5-7. According to this logic, in 5 and 6 two instances of outside sexual activity lead to the potential pollution of the Corinthian community and, by consequence, the body of Christ. But the logic falls apart in Chapter 7 when Paul urges his communities not to dissolve their marriages to unbelieving spouses. Here, the closest sort of contact possible between two individuals of different cosmic status does not lead to pollution. As Martin admits this appears to be a deviation from his reading of Paul, and the only way to sort out the problem while maintaining the theory of pollution is either to propose a cleansing mechanism or to assume that Paul adjusts his logic due to the social constraints of his day.¹⁴⁸ But neither of these two solutions seems necessary.

¹⁴⁷ Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 169, 170.

¹⁴⁸ Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 218.

If Paul's imperatives in 1 Corinthians 5-7 account for the superiority of the Spirit and the Spirit's role in creating ethical life, then not only is the logic of pollution invalid because of the Spirit's superiority, but the problem of inconsistency disappears. In all three chapters, Paul is simply exhorting the Corinthian community to be what they are — that is, Spirit-indwelt human beings living in a Spirit-indwelt community. As we observed in chapter two, the Spirit is responsible for constructing the ethical life of the believer in the “in-between” cosmos by imparting the mind of Christ and, therefore, the volition to live accordingly in this new cosmic reality. 1 Corinthians 5-7 falls inline with this paradigm. Paul's imperatives, then, are merely recalled expectations for what the Spirit is supposed to be producing in the “in-between” cosmos. In this case, that is individuals who do not maintain incestuous relationship, individuals who do not engage in sexual activity with prostitutes, and individuals who do not divorce their unbelieving spouses.

Conclusion

Twenty years since it first appeared, Dale Martin's *The Corinthian Body* still provides a fascinating interpretation of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthian Church. Though I have picked a bone with Martin, so to speak, arguing that his view of the Spirit/flesh relationship misses Paul's underlying apocalyptic narrative about the Spirit's invasive prerogative to reconstitute the cosmos, defeat the flesh, create life in this new cosmic reality, and ultimately usher in a future cosmos free from the malevolent flesh, I cannot help but praise Martin for the underlying motivation of his thesis. The notion of an ideological class warfare occurring at Corinth is fascinating. And Martin's wish to align Paul, in most cases, with the ideology of the "weak" class is admirable.

At the end of *The Corinthian Body*, Martin writes, "On a deeper level, one goal of this study has been to argue that religious language must be analyzed ideologically. How does it intersect, challenge, or protect the structures of power in a given society? Whom does it help? Whom does it hurt?"¹⁴⁹ Here, Martin challenges the interpreter to remain cognizant of his or her reading of religious texts and figures. By doing this, Martin's thesis breaks forth from the strictures of the ancient world and becomes applicable to our own modern context. Are we reading Paul as an elitist? And if so, should we, as Martin has proposed, read Paul as an advocate of "weak" ideology? Is Paul flipping — in many cases — the social structure of his day? As he expresses it in the final sentence in *The Corinthian Body*, Martin's hope is for us as modern readers of 1 Corinthians "to examine the often unrecognized implications of our own constructions of the bodies of ourselves and others."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 251.

¹⁵⁰ Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 251.

But as admirable as Martin's thesis is, my efforts in this work have called into question whether or not he can sustain his interpretation of Paul when the Apostle's own apocalyptic narrative is the central interpretive key for 1 Corinthians 5-7. As I have expressed on several occasions throughout this work, Martin's interpretation of Paul seems to fall apart between chapters 5 and 7. As Martin himself admits on the last page of his work, "It is hard to see how Paul can insist that sexual intercourse between a Christian man and a prostitute pollutes the pneuma of Christ and simultaneously argue that the holiness of Christ's body works the other way in the case of mixed marriages."¹⁵¹ , I believe that in his desire to associate Paul with the ideology of a lower social class, Martin backs himself into a corner where Paul's logic falls apart within the span of three chapters. Though I do not doubt that at times Paul demonstrates inconsistency throughout his writings, especially throughout separate letters, I do not believe that Paul's logic falls apart in the span of these three chapters. This is because the inconstancy in chapter seven disappears when Paul's apocalyptic situation, which I outlined in the first chapter, serves as the central interpretive key in these texts.

In sum, the Spirit of Christ, an invasive apocalyptic force sent by God into the cosmos to eradicate the flesh and create a new cosmic reality, is responsible for instituting a process of ethical renewal in the life of the believer. Imparted with the mind of Christ, the Spirit actively empowers the believer to live in conformity with the reality of the "in-between" cosmos, a reality that necessitates certain ethical actions. Paul's imperatives in 1 Corinthians 5-7 are simply calls for the members of the Corinthian community — confused by the remnants of the flesh — to come to terms with their reality as indwelt persons and, as a result of their indwelt status, flee from the "things" of the flesh, which are, in this case, incestuous relationships and sex with prostitutes. The issue in 1 Corinthian 7 follows the same logic. Coming to terms with their

¹⁵¹ Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 251.

indwelt nature, the believing spouse should not divorce the unbelieving spouse. The Spirit's place in the heart of the believer does not lead to this outcome.

In the end, it remains unseen whether Paul, in the interpretation that I have proposed, turns the social world of his day on its head. Though I don't believe that Paul falls neatly inline with this "weak" logic of pollution that Martin proposes in his work, I suspect that Paul does cut against the grain of his contemporary Greco-Roman culture. A further investigation into Galatians 3:28 and Paul's overturn of social boundaries, in the context of Christ's apocalyptic advent, may yield these result. But whatever the case may be, at least in the context of this study, Paul's apocalyptic situation appears to explain the inconstancy that Martin's interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5-7 causes. As Beker acclaims in his groundbreaking study of Paul's apocalyptic situation, "only a consistent apocalyptic interpretation of Paul's thought is able to demonstrate its fundamental coherence."¹⁵² This study has attempted to do just this, and I think has rightly benefited from it.

¹⁵² Beker, *Paul The Apostle*, 143.

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