

You are affected by what you touch

The danger of spiritual contamination

Introduction

Both the Old Testament and New Testament teaches us that the Lord's people must be separate; indeed that is the basic meaning behind sanctification and holiness. Godly people are those who are separated from the world, the flesh and the devil; without any compromise. The Bible also teaches us, from cover to cover, that association with unclean things brings contamination and a person made unclean by a wrong association, is severely hindered until this false fellowship is terminated. Wrong association means many things: fellowship with sin, sharing with the world, the marriage of a believer with an unbeliever, involvement in demonic practices, compromise with false teaching, and wrong affiliations. The seriousness of this is hard to underestimate. It is valuable to examine some Biblical explanations of this.

Unclean things in the Law

There are large sections of the law given over to the matter of unclean things and what to do about it. We cannot evaluate all these, as it would take many pages, but we can give examples of the chief problems that are described. Thus, for instance, we see laws regarding unclean animals in Leviticus 11; Laws about leprosy in Leviticus 13; laws about plague in Leviticus 14 and laws about sickness in Leviticus 15.

Leprosy

And the priest shall examine the raw flesh and pronounce him to be unclean; *for* the raw flesh *is* unclean. It *is* leprosy.

[Lev 13:15](#)

Unclean animals

By these you shall become unclean; whoever touches the carcass of any of them [unclean animals] shall be unclean until evening.

[Lev 11:24](#)

Dead animals

Or if a person touches any unclean thing, whether *it is* the carcass of an unclean beast, or the carcass of unclean livestock, or the carcass of unclean creeping things, and he is unaware of it, he also shall be unclean and guilty.

[Lev 5:2](#)

Plague

Then the priest shall command that they take away the stones in which is the plague, and they shall cast them into an unclean place outside the city. And he shall cause the house to be scraped inside, all around, and the dust that they scrape off they shall pour out in an unclean place outside the city. ... Now if the plague comes back and breaks out in the house, after he has taken away the stones, after he has scraped the house, and after it is plastered, then the priest shall come and look; and indeed if the plague has spread in the house, it is an active leprosy in the house. It is unclean. And he shall break down the house, its stones, its timber, and

all the plaster of the house, and he shall carry them outside the city to an unclean place. Moreover he who goes into the house at all while it is shut up shall be unclean until evening.

[Lev 14:40–41, 43–46](#)

Human uncleanness

Or if he touches human uncleanness—whatever uncleanness with which a man may be defiled, and he is unaware of it—when he realises *it*, then he shall be guilty.

[Lev 5:3](#)

Any saddle on which he who has the discharge rides shall be unclean. Whoever touches anything that was under him shall be unclean until evening. He who carries *any of* those things shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening.

[Lev 15:9–10](#)

Reasons for the laws on uncleanness

Part of the law's purpose was to effect quarantine in cases of infection. Keeping the infected person separate from the rest of the people was a measure to protect the health of the nation. Religious isolation also kept the worship of Israel pure. Thus we see the requirement of isolation for leprosy and suspected leprosy, the priest shall isolate the one who has the sore seven days, [Lev 13:4](#) (see all of chapter 13).

Separation from what is unclean, both physically and spiritually, was necessary to keep the body of Israel holy, pure and undefiled. Uncleanness was a threat to the body, even of just one leprous person.

Response to uncleanness

The unclean person had to demonstrate to all that he was unclean and say so when anyone approached him. He was to be dressed as if in bereavement (head bare, beard covered, rent garments). No one could salute him and he was to talk to no one, other than warn of his uncleanness by saying, 'unclean, unclean'.

Being unclean, the Israelite was temporarily cut off from the social privileges and worship of the nation ([Lev 22:1–8](#)). Only certain rituals, as prescribed by the priest, could restore the unclean person. There were various types of uncleanness, which lasted for varying periods of time; the most extreme being leprosy. For instance, contact with a dead animal made one unclean until the evening and ended with bathing and the washing of clothes. Contact with a human corpse resulted in uncleanness for a week and required the special 'water of separation'. The uncleanness of leprosy could last for life.

The net effect of being unclean was separation from the social and religious privileges of an Israelite; especially in the case of a leper, it was effectively a living death for the period of uncleanness.

The penalty for mixing uncleanness with divine worship = death

Moreover the person who touches any unclean thing, *such as* human uncleanness, an unclean animal, or any abominable unclean thing, and who eats the flesh of the sacrifice of the peace offering that *belongs* to the LORD, that person shall be cut off from his people.

[Lev 7:21](#)

Say to them: 'Whoever of all your descendants throughout your generations, who goes near the holy things which the children of Israel dedicate to the LORD, while he has uncleanness upon him, that person shall be cut off from My presence: I *am* the LORD.'

[Lev 22:3](#)

Being cut off from the people meant death, usually by stoning.¹ The sentence of death is spoken of as a 'cutting off from God's people'; it is the removal of something polluted and unclean. Anyone who touches something unclean becomes unclean and must go through the process of purification. However, if an unclean person involves himself in divine worship, he is cut off.

Now if we consider the antitype of this today, of course there is no sentence of death for being unclean; but Christians do become unclean and this does result in being cut off from the means of grace. This is why Paul urged the Corinthians to remove the man who had committed incest from among them; it also explains why Paul mentioned the need to separate from sinful or heretical Christians. The church must be kept pure and the worship of the church must remain undefiled.

The church must not have anything unclean in it; there must be no mixture of divine worship and something unclean. Those who are unclean must be removed from the church; if you are in a state of uncleanness you are cut off from spiritual sustenance.

Unclean things today

How do modern Christians become unclean?

Sinfulness

Sin defiles, and it also spreads, just like leprosy; in fact leprosy is often used as a symbol for sin. Obvious, outward, gross sin must be removed from the church at all costs. There must be no tolerance of obvious sin. Thus a person guilty of obvious idolatry (which includes heresy) or fornication must be given the chance to repent, but if they refuse they must be removed.

No fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

[Eph 5:5](#)

Such a removal is serious and is meant to provoke repentance. However, if they fail to ever repent, then it is clear that they were never a true believer in the first place; there is no place in the kingdom for such.

Notice that Paul lists things here that many consider acceptable, such as covetousness. How many church people are guilty of this sin? Also idolatry is a wide subject and many churchgoers are guilty of putting things before God. If Paul were here, such people would be put out of the church immediately.

Compromise

This is when the pure principles (commands) of Christ are watered down in order to accommodate something, often tolerance in fellowship affiliations or acceptance of false doctrine.

Compromise is equivalent to being lukewarm and not zealously hot. We are to be full of zeal for God, boiling with zeal or in the words of Jesus, 'single-minded' and putting the kingdom

first; fervent in spirit, serving the Lord ([Rm 12:11](#); ‘fervent’ means ‘boiling’). Those who become lukewarm through compromise God spits out.

So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth.

[Rev 3:16](#)

It is impossible for a true believer to be fervent in his service for Christ, who is putting the kingdom first, and yet compromise his faith. Compromised believers have ceased acting for God and have become unclean; thus Christ spits them out as unsavoury.

Thus if you are compromised by holding false doctrine, or if you are compromised by fellowshiping with things you should not, you are unclean. Note:

- Being with false brethren puts you in peril: In perils among false brethren, [2 Cor 11:26](#).
- Association with false brethren brings you into bondage: And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), [Gal 2:4](#).
- The doctrine of Jewish Root teachers ruins families: For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision [i.e. Jews and Judaisers], whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, [Titus 1:10–11](#).
- Demonic doctrines will be prevalent in the church at the end: Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, [1 Tim 4:1–2](#).
- The philosophy of the world and deceitful teaching brings you into captivity: Beware lest anyone cheat you [lit. ‘take you as prey’] through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ, [Col 2:8](#).
- False doctrine carries you away from Christ: tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, [Eph 4:14](#).

All these things are forms of uncleanness—you are no longer separated unto God; no longer holy. Thus, if you are in bondage you are unclean and not living by faith. If you are ruined, subverted or overthrown by the enemy you are unclean. If you depart from the faith you are unclean. If you accept doctrines of demons you are unclean. If you give heed to deception you are unclean. If you are taken as prey by the enemy you are unclean. If you are tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, and have no stability in Christ, you are unclean.

Compromise with false doctrine or wrong affiliations results in uncleanness and Christ will spit you out. Compromise, though a credit in the world, is a great sin for the believer. It is a cardinal issue to continue in separation from the world, the flesh and the devil. Some theologians call this the doctrine of the antithesis. The Christian is always in antithesis (the direct opposite) with the world.

Wrong associations of clean with unclean

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ

with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among *them*. I will be their God, and they shall be my people.' Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.'

[2 Cor 6:14–17](#)

This is a broad principle here—the necessity to separate from apostates of all sorts in order to keep the church pure. We see here:

- **UNEQUAL YOKING WITH UNBELIEVERS.** This is any partnership with unbelievers that damage the church. Such a partnership would include utilising gift-aid to recover tax since it destroys the divine principle to not accept help from the world. Another example would be joining the church to political activism. An individual example would be the marriage of a believer with an unbeliever.
- **FELLOWSHIP OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WITH LAWLESSNESS.** This is where the church gets involved with anything lawless, anything contrary to the commandments of Christ.
- **COMMUNION OF LIGHT WITH DARKNESS.** This is where the church is polluted by adopting spiritually unclean methods, such as occult practices or worldly practices, or where it adopts demonic teaching. Anything worldly or from demonic sources is included here. Many modern church practices come under this heading; especially Charismatic churches.
- **AN ACCORD OF CHRIST WITH BELIAL.** In general what is implied is the contrast between good and evil. Belial is the transliteration of Hebrew word for worthlessness, which is applied to Satan in the Book of Jubilees, 1:20. Paul is contrasting Christ and Satan. Thus we can have no fellowship with anything demonic or satanic.
- **AFFINITY WITH UNBELIEVERS RE-EMPHASISED.**
- **IDOLATRY.** Anything which takes the place of God in the church. An example would be following Jewish Root ideas.

Thus Paul uses six different words for close association to emphasise his point:

- yoking
- fellowship [*metoche*]
- communion [*koinonia*]
- accord [symphony]
- portion
- agreement.

Six is the number of man and Paul is implying that the church should have nothing in common with sinful man but must keep itself spiritually pure in union with Christ.

All wrong associations make a Christian or a church unclean. This is a simple fact.

The result of becoming unclean

The chief result is losing the means of grace; the flow of grace to an unclean person ceases. That is not to say that God turns his back on such. If the person is a genuine believer then God is still that person's Father but the person ceases to have the benefits of being in God's family in his experience; i.e. he feels isolated and cut off. God still loves him but the person is under God's

chastisement for a time until the uncleanness is purified by repentance and the application of the cleansing blood of Christ.

For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

[Heb 9:13–14](#)

Dead works, such as being involved in a wrong association, defiles the conscience and makes us unclean. This needs to be dealt with by the blood of Christ after repentance; only then can we serve the living God again.

We have seen this in experience over many years when a very zealous believer decides to join, or remain in, an apostate body, such as the Anglican Church or the Roman Church. Initially they were full of zeal in a crusading spirit to try to change things, but as time progresses they just become more and more worn out until they are spiritually dead. Dead churches produce dead people. The uncleanness of the larger body makes those in it unclean also.

Those who remain in an unclean church do not grow any further in the Spirit. They tread water until they deal with the issue of uncleanness. Thus the children of Israel who rebelled at Kadesh Barnea had to wander for forty years until they came back to Kadesh Barnea and then made the right choice. In that forty years all the unclean people died. These are an example to us today not to rebel.

Now with whom was He [God] angry forty years? *Was it* not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. ... Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

[Heb 3:17–4:1, 11](#)

In the case of a leper or unclean person in the OT, the chief loss was fellowship in divine things. He could not be part of the Tabernacle services and could not partake in the sacrifices. Indeed, he had to live outside the camp and could not even have a social conversation. It is the loss of spiritual fellowship that affects believers today who become unclean. They may not even know it, but their life of fellowship with God is severely hindered. They have no light in their conscience and thus all the means of grace are darkened. If this were not true, then all the apostolic warnings about separation and purity make no sense. The apostolic answer to a wrong association is, 'come out of it'.

Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

[1 Cor 10:14](#)

Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean.

[2 Cor 6:17](#)

Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.

Withdraw yourself.

[2 Cor 7:1](#)

O man of God, flee these things.

[1 Tim 6:5](#)

Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.

[1 Tim 6:11](#)

[Rev 18:4](#)

The symbolism of leaven as uncleanness

Christ repeatedly warned his disciples not to be involved with the Pharisees and Sadducees or to accept their teaching.

Then Jesus said to them, 'Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. ... How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? -- but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

[Matt 16:6, 11-12](#)

Now the Pharisees were understood, at that time, to be the strictest and purest example of the Jewish religious parties. It was shocking to the disciples that Christ should condemn them. But more than condemn them, the Lord warned that the teaching and practices of the Pharisees and Sadducees were like leaven (yeast); just a small portion would multiply amongst them and do immense damage, just as a tiny amount of yeast makes a loaf rise.²

Another group that Christ condemned was the Herodians, and this group represents worldly compromise ([Matt 22:16-21](#); [Mk 8:15](#)). Thus together these three groups represent: false teaching, hypocrisy, wrong practices, denial of spiritual truths and compromise with the world. All these are symbolised as leaven.

False teaching and false practices are like yeast in the church; even a small amount allowed within will do immense damage invisibly. It may take years for the true damage to be seen, but it will begin causing havoc immediately. The problem with leaven is that it affects the whole body in the end; leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened, ([Matt 13:33](#)); a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ([1 Cor 5:6](#)). The only response to the leavening of a wrong association is to purge the leaven out, purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump ([1 Cor 5:7](#)). However, if the church has become leavened then the only way forward is for you to leave.

Christ's warnings about leaven must be taken seriously.

Thus any close association with false teaching, religious hypocrisy, aberrant practices, denial of spiritual truths and compromise with the world must be avoided. If tolerated they will leaven the whole lump and ruin everybody. So, churches that have made formal affiliations with bodies that include any of these things have become tarnished and are leavened. The only way out is either the church must repent and repudiate the affiliation, or the true believers in the church must leave.

The severity of apostolic teaching on uncleanness

For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. And again, 'The LORD will judge His people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

[Heb 10:26-31](#)

Many Reformed commentators (struggling to interpret this) claim that the reference is to those who appear to be saved in the church but are not. This is a foolish interpretation.

The apostle (in my opinion, Paul) is labouring in this letter to exhort Jewish Christians not to turn back to Judaism, something they were tempted very strongly to do by Judaizers. If the passage had merely professing Christians in mind it would make no sense in the apostle's argument up to this point, which has been strongly focused on believers pressing on in the faith.

Furthermore, look at the statements made about these people. They had 'received the knowledge of the truth'; they had received 'the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified'; they had known the Spirit of grace. Finally, he says that the point is that God will judge his people, not unbelievers.

No, Paul is rather showing the seriousness of falling back and compromising one's faith. The matter is serious.

The sin of such people is compromise; it is falling back into Judaism, which is effectively joining Christianity with a false association. It is saying that 'I can still be a good Christian even though I fellowship with false brethren'.

Paul says that such thinking is not only dangerous but disastrous. If you join an apostate body you are actually rejecting Christ and the holy church he instituted. You are joining something unclean. You are rejecting the only thing in which there is a true sacrifice for sins (the genuine Christian church). Falling back into compromise will result in divine judgment. To compromise one's faith and join with other compromisers is to hold Christ up to contempt and say that his church was not good enough for you, you needed something additional. This is as good as trampling Christ underfoot (the apostle makes the exaggerated emphasis not me).

Paul hammers home the fact that compromise in church matters results in uncleanness and judgment; those who do this will receive no blessing from God but rather chastisement.

Having said all this, Paul then says,

But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a

better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.

[Heb 10:32–35](#)

Firstly, using the word 'illuminated' further points to the fact that these people were true Christians. Secondly, he comes to the point of his threats, 'don't cast away your confidence'. In other words these are true Christians in danger of doing this. His point is don't compromise, don't turn back, don't get mixed up with false doctrine or false brethren, continue having confidence in Christ and you can expect a reward for your sufferings. It was these sufferings which had led these Jews into considering a softer life in Judaism. In chapter 12 he explains this in a different way by showing that rejecting the suffering of persecution and falling into sin would receive divine chastisement.

He ends by summarising,

'Now the just shall live by faith; but if *anyone* draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.' But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

[Heb 10:38–39](#)

Here is the argument in a nutshell: the just must live by faith and not compromise, not turn back. Any that do will earn God's displeasure and those who never return will be destroyed. However, these particular folk were not like that but would return to Christ and save their souls in doing so. They had a close scrape by considering compromise.

Compromise in church matters is uncleanness and it will result in divine displeasure and judgment. Genuine Christians must not fall into this satanic trap. If their church has compromised, then they must leave it to avoid being hurt by the plagues now within it.

The need to distinguish uncleanness and holiness

When you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. *It shall be* a statute forever throughout your generations, that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean.

[Lev 10:9–10](#)

Christians are intended to understand what is clean and unclean and avoid the unclean; they are those who have, their senses exercised to discern both good and evil ([Heb 5:14](#)).

Becoming unclean is a serious matter indeed; note the words—lest you die. When you become unclean you die spiritually and become unholy. Instead of being separated to God for service, you have become attached to the world, the flesh or the devil. The only way of purification is to repent of this sin and to seek the forgiveness of God in the blood of Christ. Such repentance would involve a clear separation from that which made you unclean in the first place. There can be no spiritual purity if you remain attached to that which makes you unclean. Remember that no unclean person can be involved in divine worship.

Secondary issues

Many Christians make a serious mistake here and think that they are not unclean by being in a church which is unclean. Thus many Christians remain in the apostate Anglican Church thinking that they are safe because their pastor is an evangelical or that they are remaining true to Christ.

This is folly. If their pastor is an evangelical, then he is a hypocrite who has denied his vows to the Anglican synod made before God. Such a man can never be blessed and is unclean by his hypocrisy. Christians in dead works become unclean.

But others are also unclean by the association of their church with wider bodies that includes apostate or compromised works. This association makes their church unclean. Such a body could be a compromised para-church organisation or an affiliation of disparate churches that are compromised or apostate in various ways. If your church attaches itself formally to such a body, then your church becomes unclean and all in it become unclean. The only way out is the way out. True believers must leave compromised churches. The leaven spreads like cancer and leavens the whole lump.

John gives us this principle in Revelation,

Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.

[Rev 18:4](#)

You share in the sins of the body in which you are a member. If you are loyal to this body, then you will share in the compromises that afflict this body. The only way for purification is by leaving it. For every day that you remain in this compromised body, your works will be dead and the means of grace hindered. You are made unclean by being in something unclean. If this were not true the apostle would not demand escape.

Why is this so?

Let's take the example of a marriage. In a marriage the two people become one flesh. They are a spiritual unit under God. If a believer marries an unbeliever he has joined the life of God to a sinner and thus becomes unclean and backsliding. The key point is the unity of one flesh.

A similar situation applies to all the members in a church; they are one body in Christ; they are all spiritually united by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. If that church is then formally linked with a regional apostate or compromised body, then that church becomes spiritually united with all the churches in that body. This means, by the principle of spiritual unity, that all the members of the church also become united to the wider group.

Now if that wider group involves unbiblical practices and doctrines, then the church members share in those sins, according to [Revelation 18:4](#). For instance, church 'A' joins a regional compromised affiliation. In that association there are churches that have women leaders, women pastors, wrong practices and a false Gospel. These are sins against God; they are leaven. Church 'A' that does not have women leaders, nor women pastors, nor wrong practices, nor a false Gospel is, however, now tainted with the sins of those churches to which it is formally attached. The attachment is a covenantal relationship that defiles all within it.

Association with apostate churches defiles those who join it; they become unclean.

Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits.'

[1 Cor 15:33](#)

Uncleanness is sin; if we become unclean through an association, we are affected by the sins in that association even if we have not committed them ourselves. Israel's sins began when they associated with Canaanite nations long before they built their own high places for idolatry.

Paul tells us that whatever is not of faith is sin ([Rm 14:23](#)); when we live in doubt we sin, he who doubts is condemned. Many people in bad church associations are not wicked people, but they have grave doubts over this association; to continue in this situation is to sin. The doubts are signs that there is wrongdoing in this association; their conscience is warning them of the evil it causes. To fail to act on conscience is sin.

When a righteous believer marries an unbeliever, he has committed sin by association with something unclean; in the same way the people in a decent church are defiled by joining in a formal association with other churches that are apostate or compromised.

Holiness is separation

And you shall be holy to me, for I the LORD *am* holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.

[Lev 20:26](#)

The key issue undergirding holiness is purity and this purity arises from keeping separate from pollution. Over and over again the principle of separateness is hammered home in Scripture. Just look at the principles surrounding the construction, establishment and erection of the Tabernacle; every aspect had to be kept separate from corrupting influences, even down to the smallest spices and anointing oil.

None of the separated items could be mixed with something impure or placed upon something not allowed. Thus even a well-meaning Israelite who put out his hand to steady the Ark was immediately killed by divine wrath. The Ark was separated to the Levites alone. The holy oil and spices used in the Tabernacle could not be applied to anything other than that which God commanded ([Ex 30:31–38](#)). Anyone making a similar oil or incense was cut off; anyone putting the oil or incense on something unholy was cut off. Divine things are holy and cannot be mixed with something unclean. Holiness is separation.

Even priests had to follow the divine order; when rebellious priests made their own offering by putting the incense in a censer they were killed by divine judgment ([Lev 10:1–2](#)). They were unauthorised to perform the incense service and the work was done by two instead of one, but the main issue is that they took 'strange fire', that is, common fire from somewhere other than the bronze altar. Despite being priests, they were killed.

The word 'holiness' first appears in [Exodus 15:11](#) in reference to God, Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?. Here the word 'holiness' means 'separate'. The holiness or sacredness of God is based upon his separation from earthly things. Thus those things that are associated with God are to be separate from the world. Therefore, a little while after this, God told Israel that, you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation ([Ex 19:6](#)). Because God is separate from earthly things, so Israel was to be separate from other nations. The essence of holiness is separation.

The great temptation

So what is the key satanic tactic to ruin God's people? In a word, [syncretism](#)! The fundamental temptation used by Satan against Israel was to pollute her religion by association with

uncleanness. Failing to get a prophet (Balaam) to condemn her, he quickly got Israel to join with pagan women at Baal Peor and the harlotry led to idolatry; Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel ([Num 25:1-9](#)). Israel's sin was a wrong association; what began as fornication with heathens soon became an affiliation with a demon. As a result, all the leaders were hanged in the sun. Twenty four thousand died as a result of this association.

This temptation to a wrong association with Canaanite tribes, Moabites, Egyptians, Syrians and so forth continued to be Israel's besetting sin. Political alliances and idolatry led to divine accusations of adultery. The root cause was failing to be separate.

The matter of separation continued to be emphasised throughout Scripture from the prophetic warnings to apostolic commands. The final separation is when the sheep are separated from the goats at the Last Day.

This lack of separation is still a besetting problem for the Lord's people; the modern church is filled with syncretism of all sorts. Charismatics associate themselves with occult practices and doctrines; institutional bodies (like Anglicans) associate themselves with the world. Others make affiliations with worldly politics and try to push through certain agendas (e.g. the Christian coalition and moral majority in the USA). Others make formal affiliations with compromised and apostate global bodies, such as the World Council of Churches, while others link up with compromised associations at a regional level. The church is full of wrong associations and thus it is unclean, unholy, and apostate.

As the Lord was separate, so the church must be separate:

For such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens.

[Heb 7:26](#)

Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.

[Heb 13:13](#)

The reproach of the Lord lies in his separation from all that was unclean and thus he was expelled from the fellowship of those who considered themselves to be God's people. If we follow the principles the Lord both practised and commanded we too will come under that reproach and be dismissed by those who consider themselves to be God's people. Nevertheless, those who truly honour the Lord will accept this reproach and separate themselves from all that is unclean.

Conclusion

Uncleanness is a serious issue and it is an issue that affects Christians today. It is my belief that the majority of modern believers have become unclean as a result of remaining in works that are compromised or apostate. The worse the apostasy, the worse the uncleanness.

For example, there is no doubt that many Charismatic churches have taken on practices and doctrines which arose from occult sources (we have [explained this in many papers](#)); even their system of hierarchical leadership is demonic. Well-meaning believers who stay in such churches

are unclean by virtue of the uncleanness of the church they are in. They will remain in a state of spiritual decline until they repent and leave.

The issue of holiness and separation from uncleanness is a fundamental matter for the believer. Failure to appreciate this will ruin the person's growth in grace. However, the discerning believer who understands this and separates himself continually from what is unclean will grow in righteousness, truth and holiness.

A central issue for believers is the matter of separation; unless believers commit themselves to this principle they will be damaged by bad associations, which lead to sin. If we wish to be holy then we must be separate.

Footnotes

1 You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people, [Ex 31:14](#).

2 The evil of the Pharisees was hypocrisy and religious externalism. The problem with the Sadducees was a denial of the supernatural, such as angels or resurrection ([Matt 22:23](#)).