THE QUESTION

Why are children holy, not unclean, when one spouse believes (1 Corinthians 7:14)?

Asked by a THF member on November 15, 2026 · published November 21, 2026 · 11 numbered quotations · the 14 early Christian passages and 78 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/why-are-children-holy-not-unclean-when-one-spouse-believes

The short answer *From the text: says what the passages say*

A believer is not defiled by staying married to an unbeliever, so their children are not unclean but holy. Chrysostom says real uncleanness is in the mind, not marriage. Tertullian says such children are set apart for baptism, Christian training and salvation. Neither the spouse nor the children are saved automatically.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

IN THIS STUDY

1	Paul means marriages that existed before conversion	2
2	The unbelieving spouse is sanctified, not made holy	2
3	Uncleanness is in the mind, not marriage	3
4	So the children are not unclean but holy	3
5	Holy means raised in baptism and Christian training	4
6	Meant for salvation, yet still needing new birth	4
7	Staying holds hope the spouse may be saved	5
8	The verse does not permit marrying unbelievers	5
	What these passages don't tell us	6
	The Sources: 14 early Christian passages and 78 Bible verses, with links	6

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POINT 1 OF 8

Paul means marriages that existed before conversion

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian reads Paul's words closely. Paul does not say "takes an unbelieving wife" but "has" one. So the verse speaks to a person who came to faith while already married to an unbeliever, and it tells that believer to stay in the marriage.

1

“But it is clear that this Scripture points to those believers who were found by the grace of God in the state of Gentile marriage, according to the very words themselves: "If any believer has an unbelieving wife."”

later in the same passage

“It shows that it is the duty of one who was already living in marriage with an unbelieving woman, and has now been converted by the grace of God, to continue with his wife.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *To His Wife* 2.2 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 7, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**

THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 8

The unbelieving spouse is sanctified, not made holy

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Chrysostom points out that Paul chose his words with care. He did not call the unbelieving husband holy. Paul said this to calm the believing wife's fear that the marriage defiled her, and to draw the husband toward the truth.

2

“For he did not say, "He is holy," but, "He is sanctified in his wife." He said this not to show that the man is holy, but to free the woman as much as possible from her fear, and to lead the man to desire the truth.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on First Corinthians* 19 (c. 386–407 AD) **Source 13, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**

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POINT 3 OF 8

Uncleanness is in the mind, not marriage

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Chrysostom explains that the unbeliever's uncleanness is his false worship. The believing wife does not share in that. She shares only in marriage and the union of bodies, which are not unclean. So she is not defiled by staying with him.

3 “For uncleanness is not in the bodies that have union, but in the mind and the thoughts.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** **Source 13, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
Homilies on First Corinthians 19 (c. 386–407 AD)
THF's updated English

4 “The idolater is unclean, but the woman is not unclean. For if she were sharing with him in the thing in which he is unclean, that is, his impiety, then she herself would also become unclean.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** **Source 14, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
Homilies on First Corinthians 19 (c. 386–407 AD)
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 8

So the children are not unclean but holy

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Chrysostom spells out Paul's argument. If the believer were made unclean by the marriage, the children would be unclean too, or half clean. But they are not. Clement of Alexandria, defending marriage against those who called it wicked, likewise says the children of sanctified parents are holy.

5 “If you remain unclean and have children, then the child, since it is not from you alone, would of course be unclean, or half clean. But now it is not unclean.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** **Source 13, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
Homilies on First Corinthians 19 (c. 386–407 AD)
THF's updated English

6 “And the seed of those who are sanctified is also holy, I think. And in our case, not only the spirit must be sanctified, but also our character, our life, and our body.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** **Source 4, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
Stromata 3 (c. 190–215 AD)
THF's updated English

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POINT 5 OF 8

Holy means raised in baptism and Christian training

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian contrasts pagan births, which were dedicated to idols from the first day. A child with a believing parent is different. He says such children are holy because they are born into a Christian family and are brought to baptism and raised in Christian training.

7

“Therefore, in no case, speaking of the heathen of course, is there any birth free from idolatrous superstition.”

later in the same passage

“It was because of this that the apostle said that when either parent was sanctified, the children were holy, 1 Corinthians 7:14. This was true both by the privilege of Christian offspring and by the discipline of the institution, that is, by baptism and Christian training.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *De Anima (On the Soul)* 39 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 6, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 8

Meant for salvation, yet still needing new birth

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian says these children are set apart for holiness and salvation, a hope Paul gave to support marriage. But he adds at once that Paul had not forgotten Jesus' words about being born of water and the Spirit. Their holy standing does not replace baptism and new birth.

8

“It is as if he wanted us to understand that the children of believers were meant for holiness, and therefore for salvation, so that by the promise of such a hope he might support marriage, which he had decided to uphold in its full integrity.”

later in the same passage

“Besides, he certainly had not forgotten what the Lord had stated so clearly: "Unless a man is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," John 3:5. In other words, he cannot be holy.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *De Anima (On the Soul)* 39 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 6, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
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POINT 7 OF 8

Staying holds hope the spouse may be saved

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Both writers say the believer stays in hope. Chrysostom says the lost spouse may be saved through the marriage. Tertullian says Paul gives the reason that God calls us in peace, so the unbeliever may be won by the believer. The unbeliever is not yet saved.

9 “It is because here there is hope that the member who is lost may be saved through the marriage.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on First Corinthians* 19 (c. 386–407 AD) **Source 14, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

10 “Accordingly, he also adds a reason: that we are called in peace unto the Lord God, and that the unbeliever may, through the use of matrimony, be gained by the believer.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *To His Wife* 2.2 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 7, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 8 OF 8

The verse does not permit marrying unbelievers

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian warns that some used this verse to excuse a believer marrying an unbeliever. He calls that reading a trap. God's grace sanctifies the marriage it finds when someone comes to faith. A believer who later marries an unbeliever cannot claim the same promise.

11 “It may be that by understanding this warning in a general way, as concerning believers who are married, they think that permission is thereby granted even to marry unbelievers. God forbid that one who interprets it this way should knowingly ensnare himself!”

later in the same passage

“Moreover, the grace of God sanctifies what it finds. Thus, what has not been able to be sanctified is unclean.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *To His Wife* 2.2 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 7, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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THE LIMITS

What these passages don't tell us

- These passages do not say that the unbelieving spouse or the children are saved just because one parent believes.
- They do not give a rule for the exact age or timing of baptism for the children of a mixed marriage.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 14 early Christian passages and 78 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–14, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 15–56, in Bible order), then 36 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF's updated English unless marked "1885 English" (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). "… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *14 passages from 7 writers*

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · source 1*

1 *Second Apology* (on point 7) "certain woman lived with a heavy-drinking husband; she too had once been heavy-drinking. But when she learned the teachings of Christ, she became sober-minded and tried to… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 2–3*

2 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (on point 2) "for this reason, Paul declares that the "unbelieving wife is sanctified by the believing husband." Then again, the prophet names his children "Not having obtained mercy," and "Not a people… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Against Heresies: Book III* (1885 English; on point 3) "God hath shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 4–5*

4 *Stromata* 3 **Quote 6, page 3** "life, and our body. For how does the apostle Paul say that the wife has been sanctified by the husband, or the husband by the wife? 1 Corinthians 7:14… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Stromata* 4.20 (1885 English; on point 4) "marriage, then, that is consummated according to the word, is sanctified, if the union be under subjection to God, and be conducted with a true heart, in full assurance of… [continues online] **read ›**

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Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 6–9*

6 *De Anima (On the Soul)* 39 (1885 English) **Quotes 7, 8, page 4** "says he, were the children unclean by birth: 1 Corinthians 7:14 as if he meant us to understand that the children of believers were designed for holiness, and thereby… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *To His Wife* 2.2 **Quotes 1, 10, 11, pages 2, 5** "in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, where it is written: If any of the brothers has an unbelieving wife, and she consents to the marriage, let him not dismiss… [continues online] **read ›**

8 *On Monogamy* 11 (on point 1) a wife." But if you have taken a wife, you have not sinned. This is because, to one who before believing had been loosed from a wife, she will not… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *On Modesty* 20 (on point 3) with the old and the new mixed together. If, however, after the reversal of the sentence of uncleanness, anything of the old nature revives with its tendencies, that which was… [continues online] **read ›**

Novatian, *c. 240–258 AD · sources 10–11*

10 *On the Jewish Meats* 1 (on point 3) sure meaning of the law may be carried out? First, we must believe that whatever God ordained is clean and made pure by the authority of His creation itself. It… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *On the Jewish Meats* 1 (on point 3) by God is treated as though it lessens His authority, then by calling some things impure and unclean, their institution may dishonor the One who appointed them. For in rejecting… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · source 12*

12 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 3) "I ordain you the distinction of clean and unclean creatures, although every creature is good, as being made by me… [continues online] **read ›**

John Chrysostom, *c. 386–407 AD · sources 13–14*

13 *Homilies on First Corinthians* 19 **Quotes 2, 3, 5, pages 2, 3** "For he did not say, "He is holy," but, "He is sanctified in his wife." He said this not to show that the man is holy, but to free the woman as much as possible from her fear, and to lead the man to desire the truth." **read ›**

14 *Homilies on First Corinthians* 19 **Quotes 4, 9, pages 3, 5** "The idolater is unclean, but the woman is not unclean. For if she were sharing with him in the thing in which he is unclean, that is, his impiety, then she herself would also become unclean." **read ›**

THE BIBLE *42 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

15 **Leviticus 11:43** You shall by no means make your souls abominable with any of the creeping things that creep on the earth, and you shall not be defiled by them, and you shall not be unclean through them, **read ›**

16 **Leviticus 12:2** "Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: 'If a woman conceives and bears a male child, she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days set apart for her monthly separation, she shall be unclean. **read ›**

17 **Leviticus 12:5** But if she bears a female child, she shall be unclean twice seven days, as in her monthly separation; and for sixty-six days she shall remain in her unclean blood. **read ›**

18 **Leviticus 15:2** "Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: Any man who has a discharge from his body—his discharge is unclean. **read ›**

19 **Leviticus 15:8** If the man with the discharge spits on one who is clean, that one shall wash his garments and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening. **read ›**

20 **Leviticus 15:13** When the man with the discharge is cleansed of his discharge, seven days shall be counted for him for his cleansing; then he shall wash his garments and bathe his body in water, and he shall be clean. **read ›**

21 **Leviticus 15:16** A man from whom seed goes out shall bathe his whole body in water, and be unclean until evening. **read ›**

22 **Leviticus 15:18** If a man lies with a woman and seed comes out, they shall both bathe in water, and be unclean until evening. **read ›**

23 **Leviticus 15:19** A woman who has a flow of blood, when the discharge is in her body, shall be seven days in her separation; everyone who touches her shall be unclean until evening. **read ›**

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24 **Leviticus 15:24** If anyone lies with her in bed, and her uncleanness comes upon him, he shall be unclean seven days; and every bed on which he lies shall be unclean. **read ›**

25 **Leviticus 21:3** and for a virgin sister who is near to him and has not been given to a husband; for these he may defile himself. **read ›**

26 **Numbers 5:28** But if the woman has not been defiled and is clean, she shall be free and shall conceive seed. **read ›**

27 **Numbers 19:12** He shall purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, and he shall be clean; but if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he shall not be clean. **read ›**

28 **Numbers 19:19** And the clean man shall sprinkle the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day, and he shall be purified on the seventh day; and he shall wash his garments and bathe in water, and he shall be unclean until evening. **read ›**

29 **Numbers 19:20** But the man who is defiled and does not purify himself, that person shall be utterly destroyed from the midst of the congregation, because he has defiled the holy place of the Lord, because the water of sprinkling was not sprinkled on him; he is unclean. **read ›**

30 **Numbers 30:8** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

31 **Numbers 30:9** The vow of a widow or of a divorced woman, whatever she vows concerning her soul, shall remain on her. (Septuagint Numbers 30:10 (Numbers 30:9 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

32 **Numbers 30:12** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

33 **Deuteronomy 32:5** Blemished children, not his, have sinned, a crooked and perverse generation. **read ›**

34 **2 Kings 4:9** And the woman said to her husband, “See now, I know that this is a holy man of God who passes by us continually. **read ›**

35 **Ezra 7:11** And this is the account of the decree which Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the book of the words of the commandments of the Lord and of his statutes for Israel: **read ›**

36 **Ezekiel 14:4** Therefore speak to them, and you shall say to them: Thus says the Lord: Any man of the house of Israel who sets his thoughts upon his heart, and places the punishment of his unrighteousness before his face, and comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him in the things in which his mind is entangled, **read ›**

37 **Daniel 11:16** And he who comes in against him shall do according to his will, and there is no one standing before him; and he shall stand in the land of Sabi, and it shall be consumed by his hand. **read ›**

38 **1 Esdras 7:11** and all the sons of the captivity together, for they were purified; for the Levites were all purified together. **read ›**

39 **Wisdom of Solomon 3:13** their offspring is cursed. For blessed is the barren woman who is undefiled, who has not known a bed of transgression; she will have fruit at the visitation of souls. **read ›**

40 **Wisdom of Sirach 25:1** In three things I was made beautiful, and I stood up in beauty before the Lord and men: harmony among brothers, and friendship among neighbors, and a wife and husband who suit each other. **read ›**

41 **Wisdom of Sirach 26:1** Blessed is the husband of a good wife; the number of his days will be doubled. **read ›**

42 **Wisdom of Sirach 26:2** A courageous wife gladdens her husband, and she will fill out his years in peace. **read ›**

43 **Wisdom of Sirach 26:3** A good wife is a good portion; she will be given among the portion of those who fear the Lord. **read ›**

44 **Wisdom of Sirach 33:4** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

45 **Wisdom of Sirach 35:22** and guard yourself against your own children. **read ›**

46 **1 Maccabees 1:48** and to leave their sons uncircumcised, and to make their souls abominable with everything unclean and profane, **read ›**

47 **4 Maccabees 18:23** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

48 **Matthew 19:13** Then little children were brought to him that he should lay his hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. **read ›**

49 **Matthew 19:14** But Jesus said, “Allow the little children, and do not forbid them to come to me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to ones like these.” **read ›**

50 **Mark 10:13** They were bringing to him little children, that he should touch them, but the disciples rebuked those who were bringing them. **read ›**

51 **John 2:16** To those who sold the doves, he said, “Take these things out of here! Do not make my Father’s house a marketplace!” **read ›**

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52 **Romans 14:14** I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean of itself; except that to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. **read ›**

53 **1 Corinthians 7:12** But to the rest I say, not the Lord: if any brother has an unbelieving wife, and she agrees to live with him, let him not send her away. **read ›**

54 **1 Corinthians 7:13** And if a woman has an unbelieving husband, and he agrees to live with her, let her not send him away. **read ›**

55 **1 Corinthians 7:14** For the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. **read ›**

56 **1 Corinthians 7:15** But if the unbeliever separates, let him separate. The brother or sister is not enslaved in such cases; but God has called us in peace. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *36 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Genesis 1:29

Leviticus 11:4

Matthew 3:9 · 5:17 · 5:42 · 19:3 · 19:6 · 22:30

Mark 10:2 · 10:9 · 10:11 · 12:23 · 12:25

Luke 3:8 · 6:30 · 20:35

John 2:18

Acts 10:15

Romans 7:14

1 Corinthians 3:2 · 6:13 · 7:1 · 7:7 · 7:17 · 7:39 · 10:25 · 15:22

2 Corinthians 11:2

Galatians 3:17

Ephesians 2:12

Philippians 3:8 · 3:12

Hebrews 5:11

1 John 2:18

Jude 1:7

Revelation 6:4

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Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

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THE END OF THIS STUDY