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## 'Drive out the wicked person' A Biblical Theology of Exclusion

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### Introduction

The discipline of biblical theology has experienced something of a revival in recent years,<sup>1</sup> not least among evangelicals.<sup>2</sup> Many authors are attempting to write biblical theology which allows inductive study of the texts themselves to set the agenda, reading them in their historical settings and sequence, and which has the goal of taking into view the full sweep of the canon. Such a 'whole Bible' biblical theology has many potential benefits. It promises to acknowledge and hold in balance the Bible's historical, literary and theological dimensions, taking proper account of the divine and human aspects of Scripture, and it seeks to remedy the regrettable practice of studying the Old Testament and

- 1 See for example the New Testament theologies of Peter Stuhlmacher (*Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, Bd. 1 [Göttingen, 1992]), Hans Hübner (*Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, Bds. 1-3; [Göttingen, 1990-95]), and G.B. Caird (*New Testament Theology* [Oxford, 1994]), the eleven volumes to date of *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* (Neukirchener-Vluyn) published since 1986 and the Cambridge New Testament Theology series. On the questions of method and rationale see Peter Stuhlmacher, *How to do Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1994) and Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh, 1997).
- 2 E.g., Daniel P. Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God's Plan for Humanity* (Grand Rapids, 1992); G. Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: the Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Leicester, 1991); Willem Van Gemeren, *The Progress of Revelation; The Story of Salvation from Creation to the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, 1988). See the surveys by Charles H.H. Scobie, 'The Challenge of Biblical Theology', *TynBull* 42, 1991, 3-30; The Structure of Biblical Theology, *TynBull* 42, 1991, 163-94; and D.A. Carson, 'Current Issues in Biblical Theology: A New Testament Perspective', *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5, 1995, 17-41. Zondervan has a series of studies of Old Testament biblical theology under way and IVP a series covering both testaments.

New Testament in isolation from each other. This essay follows this broad approach in treating exclusion as a topic of biblical theology.

The word 'exclusion' could translate a host of biblical terms. In 1 Corinthians 5 alone the command to exclude the incestuous man is given five different ways, using the verbs αἶρω (v. 2; 'remove'), ἐξαιρώ (v. 13; 'drive out'), συνεσθίω (v. 11; 'eat with'), παραδίδωμι (v. 5; 'deliver') and ἐκκαθαίρω (v. 7; 'purge away'). Ironically, for this very reason the concept of exclusion from the community of God's people is relatively neglected in lexicons and theological dictionaries, especially those which do theology one word at a time. Yet as a concept exclusion picks up a wide range of biblical material, including both laws, which consider the subject in principle, and narrative, which work it out in practice.<sup>3</sup> The laws in Deuteronomy, the case of Achan, and the examples of Ezra and Paul (in 1 Cor 5)<sup>4</sup> will prove to be the key texts in our discussion.

Most treatments of the subject concentrate on who gets excluded (for which sins and heresies), how the exclusion takes place (the procedure to be followed), who authorises it (a leader, the congregation or God) and what it involves (from the withdrawal of certain social contact to permanent excommunication).<sup>5</sup> However, much theology is missing from such an account. In particular, the rationale for exclusion cries out for attention. Why are sinners to be expelled? What are the motives for exclusion?<sup>6</sup>

A major challenge for biblical theology is that of producing syntheses which do not rely on the primarily logical and atemporal categories of systematic theology. In treating exclusion we propose to cover the material under the headings of *community, holiness, covenant, restoration* and *salvation*, all of which lay claim to having a textual basis in a range of canonical witnesses. These five motifs or images are to serve as lenses to focus and guide our reading of the relevant texts and will hopefully help in the task of discerning what is central and fundamental to the subject and in finding coherence.<sup>7</sup>

3 In the Pentateuch we find both genres; along with the numerous laws there appear the case studies of the wood gatherer on the Sabbath (Nu. 15:32–36) and the blasphemer (Lv. 24:10–23).

4 On the biblical and Jewish background to the teaching on exclusion in 1 Cor. 5 see the author's, *Paul, Scripture and Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5–7* (Leiden, 1994), ch. 3 and the articles in *NTS* 38, 1992, 470–73, and *Tyn Bull* 42, 1991, 137–45.

5 Exclusion is often treated in articles entitled Excommunication, Discipline or Punishment.

6 When the purpose of exclusion is discussed, its remedial intent in helping to reform the sinner is often emphasised to the detriment of other motives (see. e.g., J. Carl Laney, 'The Biblical Practice of Church Discipline', *Bib Sac* 143, 1986, 356–57).

7 For my understanding of 'focal images' I am indebted to Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (Edinburgh, 1996), 193–205, who discusses their use in another context.

In tracing our theme across the canon the literature of second temple Judaism will be occasionally referred to when it is judged that such material helps explain the differences between the testaments and/or the forms of expression in the New Testament.

**The Solidarity of the Community**  
**'so that it may go well with you' (Dt. 19:13)**

The foundational texts for a biblical theology of exclusion are found in Deuteronomy. Those guilty of idol worship, contempt of the Lord, sexual offences and a variety of social crimes are condemned with the formula, 'you must purge the evil from among you' (cf. 13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 24:7; cf. Judg. 20:13; 1 Cor. 5:13b), which signals what might be called the most extreme form of exclusion, namely execution. However, in the history of its transmission and interpretation, regularly in Targum Onkelos, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and Sifre and usually in the LXX, a curse of exclusion is substituted for the death penalty in these formulae. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 5:13b we find 'the evil man' instead of 'the evil' is to be 'put away'.

A motif associated with the formula in Deuteronomy 19:13 and 21:9, where the crime of murder is in view, is the notion of corporate responsibility.<sup>8</sup> The motivation for the expulsion/execution of the offender is 'so that it may go well with you', namely, the nation (19:13, cf. 21:8). The community, it seems, is held responsible for the sin of the offender while he or she remains. The lesson is reinforced in 23:14b where Israel is warned about sin in the camp, lest the Lord 'see among you anything indecent and turn away from you' (cf. 29:19-21). The same unfortunate solidarity is evident in a number of incidents throughout the Old Testament, involving Sabbath breaking (Ex. 16:27-28), the sin of Korah, Dathan and Abinam (Nu. 16:24-27), Achan's sin (Jos. 7:1, 26, 22:20), and the supposed sin of setting up an altar by the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh east of the Jordan (Jos. 22:16-1-8).<sup>9</sup> Not unlike the pagan sailors who felt compelled to eject Jonah in order to restore a safe passage for their ship, the people of God removed certain offenders as an exercise in corporate responsibility, in order to avoid impending judgement and to protect the felicitous existence of the community before God.

The prayers of Ezra (ch. 9), Nehemiah (chs. 1,9) and Daniel (ch. 9) involve a similar association with the guilt of others. In each case the

8 Cf. Calvin Roetzel, *Judgement in the Community: A Study of the Relationship Between Eschatology and Ecclesiology in Paul* (Leiden, 1972), 116: 'The Old Testament often speaks of the judgement of an individual offender for the purpose of purifying the community, and how the entire community can be implicated by the sin of one of its members.'

9 Cf. Rv. 3:14,20.

leaders mourn (LXX:  $\pi\epsilon\nu\theta\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ ) over the unfaithfulness of the exiles (cf. Ezr. 10:6; Ne. 1:4; Dn. 10:2), just as Paul enjoined the Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:2) to mourn ( $\pi\epsilon\nu\theta\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ ) over the sin of the incestuous man. When used in reference to sin  $\pi\epsilon\nu\theta\acute{\epsilon}\omega$  signifies a mourning in the sense of confessing the sin of others as if it were one's own.

Such judgements are to take place in the presence of the whole community and the Lord (cf. Deut 19:16–20). The 'entire assembly' is to stone the Sabbath-breaker (Nu. 15:35) and the blasphemer (Lv. 24:14,16), and to judge the murderer (Nu. 35:24), just as the decision to exclude the sinner in 1 Corinthians 5:4 is to take place when the church is 'gathered together'. Indeed, Paul addresses the church as a body throughout the chapter (cf. the nine occurrences of the second person plural pronoun) and directs them to act as a group.

The first thing to notice about exclusion from the community in the Bible is that it is no private matter; individuals are dealt with by the community and for the community's sake. Upon what basis does the solidarity of the community rest? The following section suggests that holiness is the feature of the community which entails its essential unity.

### **The Maintenance of Holiness**

#### **'you are God's temple . . . God's temple is holy' (1 Cor. 3:16–17)**

Whereas in Old Testament teaching on exclusion social crimes are associated with the notions of 'purging' or 'utterly removing' the evil and the curses in Deuteronomy 27 and 28, the term 'to cut off' has to do with ritual offences (cf. Gn. 17:14; Ex. 12:15,19; 30:33,38; 31:14; Lv. 7:20, 25:27; 17:4,9,14; 19:8; 22:3; 23:29; Nu. 4:18; 9:13; 19:13,20; Ju. 6:25,28,30 1 Sam. 2:33). and has points of contact with the cult and holiness. However, it was the laws of temple admission that did most to establish the link between exclusion from the community and the maintenance of holiness.<sup>10</sup>

The exclusion of individuals from the 'assembly of the Lord' on the basis of physique and descent in Deuteronomy 23:1–8 is the starting point in this connection. Ezra 9:1–2 and Nehemiah 13:1–3, 23–27 allude to this passage for the exclusion of foreign wives and the lamentation over the destruction of Jerusalem in Lamentations 1:10 also recalls it.<sup>11</sup> However, in the progress of revelation moral requirements become critical to the question of admission. Biblical evidence for this evolution includes the 'entrance-torot' (Pss. 15; 24:3–5; Is. 33:14–7), the exclusion of rebels in Ezekiel 20:38–40 from the future congregation, and the indictment of Israel for admitting the 'uncircumcised in

10 Göran Forkman's study of community exclusion in the Old Testament, *The Limits of the Religious Community* (Lund, 1972), identifies covenant and holiness as key themes.

11 Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford, 1985), 116–17, 125–26, 128 respectively.

heart' into the sanctuary in Ezekiel 44:6–9. Josephus and Philo present Deuteronomy as excluding not only aliens but gravely-offending Jewish sinners.<sup>12</sup>

When we turn to 1 Corinthians 5 it is no accident that the thought of the community as God's holy temple is introduced only 23 verses earlier in 3:16–17.<sup>13</sup> In calling for the incestuous man to be removed Paul effectually cleanses the temple, calling for his destruction (5:5), for 'if any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him' (3:17).

In biblical thought holiness and unholiness do not mix and the danger of contamination is taken seriously not only in the laws in Leviticus but with the ban, a curse directed against people and objects which must be excluded because of contact with foreign gods (cf. Dt. 7:26; 13:14–18); whoever takes possession of a devoted thing must also be devoted. Likewise for Paul the sinner must be removed because holiness and unholiness cannot co-exist, 'a little leaven leavens the whole lump' (1 Cor 5:6).<sup>14</sup> After cleansing the temple it was customary, at least in Old Testament times, to celebrate the Passover (See 2 Ch. 29:5,35; 30; 35:1–19; 2 Ki. 23:1–23; Ezr. 6; cf. Mt. 21:12–13; Mk. 11:15–18; Lk. 19:45–47; Jn. 2:13–22). Paul seems to reflect this practice. In 5:7–8 he calls on the Corinthians to 'keep the Festival' (spiritually) once they have got rid of the old yeast (a metaphorical reference to excluding the man). The death of Christ is the basis for Paul's demand that the community maintain its sanctified status: 'For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed'. As Titus 2:14 observes, 'Christ gave himself . . . to purify for himself a people that are his very own.'

If the solidarity of the community and the maintenance of holiness supply warrants for the practice of exclusion from the viewpoint of the body corporate, the offender's point of view is best understood in terms of the notion of covenant.

### **Breach of Covenant**

#### **'he has violated the covenant of the Lord' (Jos. 7:15)**

In both the Deuteronomic expulsion formulae and the curses listed in chapters 27 and 27 (cf. Lv. 26), which censure virtually the same offences, discipline is enacted because of failure to keep the covenant obligations. In Deuteronomy 17:2–7, for example, the evil is purged

12 On the evidence for the practice of excommunication in pre-rabbinic Judaism, see William Horbury, 'Extirpation and Excommunication', *VT* 35, 1985, 13–38.

13 Cf. 2 Cor. 6:16–18 which calls on the motif of the temple to underscore the separation of God's people from the world.

14 Cf. Adela Y. Collins, 'The Function of 'excommunication' in Paul', *HTR* 73, 1980, 262: 'The more or less explicit reason for expelling the incestuous man in 1 Corinthians 5 was to guard the holiness of the community'; and Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia, 1975), 96: 'Paul does not explicitly state the ground of his judgement, because the ground is self evident: the community is the temple of God'.

because the offender has 'done evil in the eyes of the Lord your God in violation of his covenant' (17:2). Likewise, in the case of Achan, Joshua 7:15 charges that, 'he [Achan] has violated the covenant of the Lord' (cf. 23:16). Building on such teaching the Damascus Document also explains expulsion from the community in terms of breaching the covenant. Ezra too conceived of the reform of the returned exiles in terms of a return to covenant obligations (Ezr. 10:3; cf. Ne. 9:32).

This material underscores the notion of personal responsibility. Certain norms, when broken, automatically exclude the offender. The list of sins in 1 Corinthians 5:11 that call for exclusion is remarkably parallel to the sins in Deuteronomy which are connected to the formula Paul quotes in 5:13b. Even if excluded primarily for the sake of others, he or she has no one else to blame. As Titus 3:10-11 explains with reference to a divisive person who is to be avoided, he or she is 'self-condemned' (αὐτοκατάκριτος). The gracious gift of membership in the community carries with it certain demands. In neither testament is open rebellion against God tolerated.

Another reason for exclusion in this material is the deterrence of a further breach of covenant in the community. Deuteronomy 19:19b-20a states: 'you must purge the evil from among you. The rest of the people will hear of this and be afraid and never again will such an evil thing be done in Israel'.<sup>15</sup> The dissuasion to further sin is also a reason for expulsion in Deuteronomy 13:12-18; 17:2-7, 12-13; 21:18-21. In the New Testament this motive is clear in 1 Timothy 5:20 ('Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning'), in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, where following their deaths, 'great fear seized the whole church' (presumably out of concern over further outbreaks of judgement) and with the leaven proverb in 1 Corinthians 5:6 and Galatians 5:9, which has a modern equivalent in the saying, 'one bad apple spoils the whole barrel.'

The notion of exclusion reminds us how seriously the Bible takes the setting of both a good and bad example. Even in material which stresses the offender's personal responsibility his or her effect on others is never far from view.

### **The Hope of Restoration 'for the destruction of the flesh' (1 Cor 5:5a)**

Whereas in the case of community, holiness and covenant the Old Testament supplies the key texts and examples, which are confirmed in the New Testament, the notion of exclusion for the purpose of bringing about the repentance and restoration of the sinner is a

15 Cf. 11 QT 41, where these verses are loosely quoted.

Christian contribution to the subject which was anticipated in some strands of Judaism.<sup>16</sup>

The remedial function of exclusion is implied in Galatians 6:1 ('If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently (cf. Jas. 5:19) and evident in 2 Thessalonians 3:14–15 ('If anyone does not obey our instruction . . . Do not associate with him . . . Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother'). That such continuing concern for the one under discipline was meant to lead to reinstatement is clear from 2 Corinthians 2:5–9, where Paul admonishes the Corinthians that since the one who has been punished has shown genuine repentance he should be lovingly restored to the fellowship.<sup>17</sup>

In Matthew 18:15–20 the main concern is for the restitution of the sinner, at least up until the point of exclusion, rather than for the purity of the church. As Victor C. Pfitzner contends: 'Matthew reflects a gospel concern rather than interest in preserving the church's a community of the pure in the cultic sense'.<sup>18</sup> The point of the cautious steps leading up to the excommunication (private, then semi-private, than open rebuke before the church) is obviously to 'gain the brother' (18:15b). We need not interpret this as in opposition to a passage like 1 Corinthians 5, however, since as G.W. Lampe notes, 'we are introduced to the Corinthian story at a late stage, possibly after such appeals for penitence had taken place'.<sup>19</sup> There is an implicit condition in the case of the 1 Corinthians 5 exclusion; if he repents, restoration will occur. That this is the case is perhaps seen in the fact that whereas in the Pentateuch single acts of transgression brought exclusion, in 1 Corinthians 5 the character and lifestyle of the sinner, not an isolated offence, is the focus (5:10–11).

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16 That exclusion might have a reformatory effect is perhaps implied in the Qumran modification of the death penalty for gathering sticks on the Sabbath (Nu. 15:34f) into seven years in a sectarian guard room (CD 12:4–6 and in 1QS 7 where different periods of penance are prescribed for various offences (from thirty days to two years). Discipline at Qumran was based on the community's self-conception as the holy camp (cf. Num. 5:2ff.; 19:11ff.).

17 Whether or not the person in question is the incestuous man of 1 Cor. 5 does not affect this basic point. For a reconstruction which favours a positive identification see Colin G. Kruse, 'The Offender and the Offence in 2 Corinthians 2:5 and 7:12', *EvQ* 88, 1988, 129–39; for the alternative position see V. Furnish, *II Corinthians* (New York, 1984), 159–66.

18 Pfitzner, 'Purified Community—Purified Sinner: Expulsion from the Community according to Matthew 18:15–18 and 1 Corinthians 5:1–5', *AusBR* 30, 1982, 40. cf. E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew* (London, 1975), 370: 'What matters is the sinner, not a "pure community" '.

19 Lampe, 'Church Discipline and the Interpretation of the Epistles to the Corinthians', in W. R. Farmer, et al. (eds.), *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox* (Cambridge, 1967), 346.



One text in the New Testament which appears to go against the idea of the remedial purpose of exclusion is 1 Corinthians 5:5 where Paul says that the man is to be, literally, 'handed over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh'. This sounds as if exclusion is a final and irrevocable punishment. Such an apparently contrary witness calls for careful scrutiny. It is commonly held that Paul here enjoins the pronouncement of a curse on the immoral man that will lead to physical suffering and ultimately death (cf. NEB: 'this man is to be consigned to Satan for the destruction of the body'). The word 'destruction', ὄλεθρος, it is argued, is so strong a term that it can only mean death. In the LXX it frequently denotes utter ruin and sudden death (as in Exod. 12:23; Josh. 3:10; 7:25; Jer. 2:30, etc) and Paul uses a related term in 1 Corinthians 10:10 to indicate the loss of life at the hands of 'the destroying angel.' Furthermore, Paul can use 'flesh', for the physical body (as in 1 Cor. 6:16; 15:39,50). Supposedly parallel ancient curses can be found in secular Greek (the magical papyri) and Jewish sources and similar tragic episodes of serious sin leading to loss of life can be pointed to in Acts 5:1-11 and 1 Corinthians 11:30. Finally, Paul's 'thorn in the flesh,' 'a messenger of Satan' (2 Cor. 12:7), establishes a clear link between physical suffering and the work of Satan. Conzelmann states the conclusion which seems to follow: 'the destruction of the flesh can hardly mean anything else but death.'<sup>20</sup>

However, the curse/death view of v. 5 is not in fact the best interpretation. To hand the man over to Satan is to turn him back out into Satan's sphere, outside the edifying and caring environment of the church where God is at work.<sup>21</sup> In other words v. 5 states metaphorically what Paul says literally in vv. 2 and 13: the man is to be excluded from the community of faith. A similar metaphorical elaboration is given in v. 7 with the words, 'get rid of the old yeast'. 'The destruction of the flesh' refers not to his death but to turning from evil desires, from his 'self-sufficiency' (Thiselton), 'the destruction of the sinful nature' (NIV). That a strong term like 'destruction' can be employed metaphorically, especially in reference to 'flesh', is clear from Romans 8:13 (do not 'live according to the flesh' but instead 'put to death the misdeeds of the body'), Galatians 5:24 ('crucify the flesh') and Colossians 3:5 ('put to death whatever belongs to the flesh').<sup>22</sup> When Paul contrasts flesh and spirit, as here in v. 5, flesh refers almost without

20 Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 97.

21 The discussion here builds upon James T. South, 'A Critique of the "Curse/Death" Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5.1-8', *NTS* 39, 1993, 599-61; Gordon E. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, 1987), 208-13; and A.C. Thiselton, 'The Meaning of ΣΑΡΧ in 1 Corinthians 5.5: A Fresh Approach in the Light of Logical and Semantic Factors,' *SJT* 26, 1973, 204-28.

22 Cf. also 8:11 where someone being 'destroyed' refers to a serious spiritual set back.

exception to the contrast of evil and good tendencies, as in Romans 8:5–17 and Galatians 5:16–24. 'Flesh' refers to the person oriented away from God and 'spirit' to the person oriented towards God. The man viewed as one at enmity with God is to be 'destroyed'. The resemblance of v. 5 to ancient curse formulae is only superficial. The closest parallels are OT formulae using the terms 'to drive out' and 'to cut off'. Second Temple Judaism regularly replaced execution with excommunication when applying these texts to their communities.<sup>23</sup> Job 1:12 and 2:6 may also be parallel, where Job is 'handed over' to Satan, in which case suffering led to a positive result and the loss of life was specifically excluded. Acts 5:1–11 and 1 Corinthians 11:30 do report cases of what might be called capital punishment, but neither are as a result of a solemn curse delivered by an assembled church. Finally, Satan's role in serving God's purposes is not out of keeping with Paul's understanding. 'Satan's messenger' in 2 Corinthians 12:7 led to Paul learning about the sufficiency of God's grace. As G.G. Findlay states, 'that Satan's malignity should be (as one may say) overreached by God's wisdom and mercy . . . is nothing very wonderful: hate is proverbially blind'.<sup>24</sup> It is not that Satan will not inflict the man with suffering, but if he does, unwittingly and ironically the suffering will be, Paul hopes, remedial. That the man in 1 Corinthians 5 is not expected to die, at least immediately, is clear from v. 11 where the Corinthians are told not to 'associate with' him and from 1 Timothy 1:19–20 where Hymenaeus and Alexander are 'handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme' (that is, to change their behaviour). In our view the incestuous man was handed over to Satan to be taught not to commit sexual immorality in the hope of his restoration to the Christian community.

### **The Prospect of Salvation**

**'that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus' (1 Cor. 5:5b)**

Exclusion is not always undertaken, however, with a remedial intent. Sometimes individuals are excluded or exclude themselves, usually on the basis of false belief rather than conduct, because they do not belong to the company of the saved. 2 John 10–11 is a clear example: 'If any one comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting; for he who greets him share his wicked work' (cf. 1 Jn. 2:19). Such texts raise the question of how exclusion is related to the question of an individual's salvation, on which there is surprisingly little New Testament evidence.

<sup>23</sup> See W. Horbury, 'Extirpation and Excommunication', 27–30; and Rosner, *Paul, Scripture and Ethics*, 82.

<sup>24</sup> Findlay, *St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London, 1900) 809.

On the one hand, damnation can be conceived of as exclusion, as a final and retributive exclusion from God's presence (cf. 2 Thes. 1:9) and in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, Ephesians 5:5 and Colossians 3:5–6 those who have no future with God are guilty of roughly the same sins as those who should be excluded from the community according to 1 Corinthians 5:11. On the other hand, there is no hint that the act of excluding someone damns them. On the contrary, in 1 Corinthians 5:12–13 such judgement is explicitly said to be God's exclusive prerogative.

Exclusion and salvation are linked in 1 Corinthians 5:5b, but it is not the case that the former leads to the loss of the latter. On the contrary, the express purpose of the expulsion here is the offender's salvation.<sup>25</sup> Paul's ultimate aim in excluding the man is his own good. How is this purpose to be understood? There is the assumption, spelt out in 6:9–11, that those who persist in flagrant sin have no future with God; in this sense 6:9–11 clarify 5:5b. Yet Paul is confident that God's faithfulness will confirm believers 'until the end blameless at the day of our Lord Jesus' (1:9). However, future salvation is not a forgone conclusion for one 'who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral' (v. 11). The passage does not teach that ethical failure results in the loss of salvation, but that assurance of salvation depends in part on ethical progress; cf. 6:11: 'that is what some of you *were*.' Paul does not answer the question of whether the man is presently saved. His point is that so-called brothers who engage in blatant sexual misconduct will only be finally saved 'on the day of the Lord' if 'the sinful nature is destroyed'. This assumption is spelt out in 11:32: 'But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened so that we may not be condemned along with the world.' According to 5:5b exclusion is undertaken not only to benefit the community and the individual in the present, but to assure the salvation of the sinner in the future.

### Conclusion

The present investigation has been limited to the exclusion of *individuals* from the community, in the interests of space, even though the exclusion of *the nation* from the land could be seen as not unrelated. The subject of exclusion could also be treated as a part of the larger categories of discipline and judgement. The study makes no pretences to being finally definitive. Others might construe and present the material in other ways. As Richard B. Hays notes, 'descriptive and synthetic accounts are a contingent interpretative performance, the question of which to ask is not, is it the only way valid way to speak meaningfully about the topic, but, is it 'illuminating'?'<sup>26</sup> With respect

<sup>25</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 209.

<sup>26</sup> Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 199.

to exclusion, few topics in biblical theology do more to stress the corporate dimension of the Christian faith, the seriousness and consequences of sin and the holiness of God. In the Bible, to reiterate the main lines of our study, serious offenders are excluded from the community because of the solidarity of the community, in order to maintain the holiness of the group, due to a breach of covenant, in the hope of restoration and because of the prospect of salvation.

We have presented an overview of the theology of exclusion in the Bible. But to return to the remarks which opened our study, what place or relevance does this material have for a biblical theology? To cite the two most obvious areas of interest, exclusion teaches something about both God and the people of God. The topic of exclusion is a case study of how the holiness of God works itself out in relation to his purposes. It reminds us that God's grace in election cannot be taken for granted and that certain standards for conduct may not be continually transgressed. The gift of being included in God's people involves the demand of behaviour becoming that people. In the present evil age, in anticipation of the age to come, God uses various means to call out and purify a people for himself, one of which, ironically as it sounds, is exclusion. He deals with this people, not only as individuals, but above all as groups. Exclusion is a powerful reminder that such groups, or churches, are responsible to one another as well as to God. Their behaviour, both in terms of doing good and committing sin, affects the community's well being; exclusion underlines the profound interrelation and interdependence of believers in the body of Christ.

What relevance do our findings have for church life today? The practice of church discipline today varies widely, from a complete absence and ignorance of the concept to a terrible abuse of it in cruel and harmful ways. It depends largely on the more basic question of ecclesiology and the relation of the church to society as a whole. Some churches have so blurred the boundary that it is difficult to distinguish any longer the church from the world. The church must avoid being censorious and unrealistic, for people's growth in holiness is not uniform and according to our findings the Bible at most calls for exclusion as a last resort in only the most serious cases where a lifestyle of open rebellion threatens to destroy the church and with the explicit goal of restoration.

On the other hand, if our synthesis represents the Bible's teaching fairly, to fail to undertake some form of discipline in such cases puts in jeopardy not only the individual's salvation but also the continued blessing of God for the church as a whole. A refusal to exclude cannot be based on a supposed difference between the testaments. Some modification and mollification of the teaching is evident, but the basic mandate and rationale is confirmed by the New Testament.

Flexibility in terms of what exclusion might mean in particular contexts must be granted. Even within the New Testament we find different forms and degrees. Perhaps the greatest obstacle to exclusion today is the pluralism in terms of churches which is prevalent especially in urban areas. Exclusion as a form of remedial discipline has little effect when a person can simply switch from one church to another. At the very least, a biblical theology of exclusion challenges us to build churches which foster not only networks of support but also a measure of accountability.<sup>27</sup>

### Abstract

This article attempts to treat the exclusion of individuals from the community as a topic of biblical theology. It focuses on the neglected rationale or motives of exclusion rather than the practicalities of exclusion (i.e., who gets excluded? in what way? for which sins? by whom?). Five motifs or images serve as lenses to focus and guide the reading of the relevant texts and assist in the task of synthesis. In sum, serious offenders are excluded because of the solidarity of the *community*, in order to maintain the *holiness* of the group, due to a breach of *covenant*, in the hope of *restoration* and because of the prospect of *salvation*. By way of conclusion some reflections are offered on the relevance of this teaching for biblical theology in general and for the practice of church discipline today.

27 The present study was written while I was a Humboldt fellow at the University of Tübingen. I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung and the helpful advice of Professor Peter Stuhlmacher.

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