

Evangelical Review of Theology

GENERAL EDITOR: THOMAS SCHIRRMACHER

Volume 39 • Number 1 • January 2015

Articles and book reviews reflecting global evangelical
theology for the purpose of discerning the obedience of faith

Published by



for
WORLD EVANGELICAL
ALLIANCE
Theological Commission

Delivery into the Hands of Satan—A Church in Apostasy and not Knowing it: An Exegetical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 5:5

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I Introduction

The Epistles are not merely doctrinal treatises removed from the practical implications of theology, but in their pages can be discerned both a fervour for orthodoxy and orthopraxy, as well as an uncompromising impetus for holiness. In 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 the author endeavours to balance theological dogmas with consistent principle-based Christianity—an initiative shown to be indispensable to the growth and continued relevance of the church. Unlike current trends, this passage does not condone passivity or spiritual inertia, but instead, it promotes strict moral conduct among those who would be followers of Christ. The Epistles are no strangers to anomalies (1 Cor 11:10; 15:29); thus the seemingly enigmatic and grotesque rhetoric of ‘delivering someone over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh in order that he may be saved’ (1 Cor 5:5) would not have un-

nerved the primary audience, nor the apostle, since the complexities in the Epistles are well attested too.

Scholarly views vary on what precisely is meant by ‘delivering someone to Satan for destruction’. There are those who believe that Paul is referring to a degenerative physical illness that will befall the offender.¹ Some believe

1 W. Barclay, *By What Authority?* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1974), 118; M. Dodd, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), 118; R. A. Knox, *A New Testament Commentary for English Readers* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954), 2, 140; H. Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary on St Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1851), 90; H. Ridderbos, *Paul An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 471; W. G. H. Simon, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians Introduction and Commentary* (London: SCM, 1959), 78; M. E. Thrall, *The First and Second Letters of Paul to the Corinthians*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 40.

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that the command signals a destruction of the offender's sinful nature.² Then, there are those who see it signifying an expulsion from the church community.³ Finally some believe that Paul is referring to the physical death of the offender.⁴ Are all these views correct? If not, then which is? What is the intended

primary meaning? This paper endeavours to find a possible understanding of this anomaly, bearing in mind the inner contextual clues furnished by the text.

Although couched within seeming anomalous rhetoric, this text (1 Cor 5:5) speaks to believers of all ages. Nevertheless, there are questions such as, how can restitution and salvation result from delivering someone over to Satan? Why the apparent rhetoric? How can such an action help the individual, and the church? Are there implications that can be applied to the present Christian church?

Often a casual reading of the text can initiate the hermeneutical trajectory in which any interpretation must be based, but this does not preclude the reader's obligations to engage in a closer exegetical examination. Notwithstanding the works that have already been produced, this paper will endeavour to highlight the relevance of the discipline and salvation motifs to the theology and practice of the church. The combination of salvation and excommunication in the hands of Satan seems incongruent. The question then is, would the primary audience have grasped Paul's intent and not be perturbed by his rhetoric as the modern reader would?

II Historical Background

The letter to the Corinthians, written around AD 55, has been one of the few where Pauline authorship is hardly contested (1 Cor 1:1).⁵ Corinth was a

2 F.W. Farrar *et al*, *1 Corinthians* (New York/London: Funk and Wagnalls, n.d.), 167; F. W. Groscheide, *Commentary on the First Epistles to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 123; M. L. Jeschke, 'Toward an Evangelical Conception of Corrective Church Discipline' (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1965), 149; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Columbus Wartburg, 1946), 217; J. J. Lias, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, CGTC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1888), 67; G. C. Morgan, *The Corinthian Letters of Paul* (New York: Revell, 1946), 83. A variation of the view is expressed by A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, 2d, ICC (New York: Scribner's, 1916), 99.

3 James T. South, 'A Critique of the "Curse/Death" Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5.1-8,' *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993): 539-61; Simon J. Kistemaker, 'Deliver this Man to Satan' (1 Cor 5:5): A Case Study in Church Discipline 'TMSJ' 3 (1992): 33-45.

4 R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York, NY: Scribner's, 1951-55), 1 233; H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Hermeneia, Philadelphia Fortress, 1975), 97, S. M. Gilmour, 'Pastoral Care in the New Testament Church,' *NTS* 10 (1963-64): 395, J. C. Hurd, Jr, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (New York, NY: Seabury, 1965), 137, 286 n 5, G. W. H. Lampe, 'Church Discipline and the Interpretation of the Epistles to the Corinthians,' *Christian History and Interpretation Studies Presented to John Knox* (ed W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule and R. R. Niebuhr, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University, 1967), 349, 353.

5 D. A. Carson, Douglass J. Moo and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 262-263, 282.

thriving metropolis in the ancient Mediterranean with a culturally and linguistically robust populace of different races, mainly Roman veterans, tradesmen, and daily labourers, Jews (Acts 18:2, 7; 1 Cor 1:14; 16:17), Latins (Rom 16:22–23) and Greeks, as well as others. Although the city was populated by Greeks, its cultural moorings were based on Roman norms. The inhabitants came from all stratas of society, all converging on Corinth as an economic and social melting pot. Corinth boasted two harbours, thus serving as an important transit point for vessels traversing from the southern peninsula to central Greece. The seaports of Corinth were always bustling with commerce, trafficking and trade, making Corinth a commercial epicentre.

The city was also noted for its licentiousness and sexual debauchery so much so that the adage ‘to corinthicize’ became a common term for persons involved in sexual immorality. This explains the prominence given to the Greek goddess of love—Aphrodite.⁶ Religious pluralism was accepted in Corinth, allowing different ideologies to co-exist. The Corinthians also allowed many diverse religious groups to practise their faith. With its wealth and recognition, the city felt self-sufficient and aloof from the impoverishment of some of its people. Corinth thrived on

its enviable consumerist culture and economy of trade, business and entrepreneurship.⁷

A population as diverse as Corinth would inevitably have varying conceptions on values—a fact which is reflected in the Corinthian correspondence. The conflicts and concerns in the church might have easily been a clash over ideologies—philosophical, religious and political. The trepidation over rhetorical speaking, castigation of manual labour befitting a moral exemplar, and proper decorum befitting believers appear to stem from a clash of cultures.⁸ The historical circumstance from which the church emerged made it easy to relapse into idolatry and susceptible to fragmentation. One can understand therefore why the Epistle essentially endeavours to prevent these very same phenomena from occurring.

In 1 Cor 5:1–11 an incestuous relationship existed in the church which received a staunch denunciation from the apostle. Incest is strongly prohibited in the Pentateuch (Lev 18:8; 20:11; cf. Gen 35:22; 49:4; Ezek 22:10–11). The punishment associated with an incestuous or even adulterous affair was often a curse or even death (Deut 27:20; 22:22, 24, 30). Even in later Judaism, incest was never tolerated. In the Mishnah it is said that ‘these are [the felons] who are put to death by stoning: He who has sexual relations with his mother, with the wife of his father, (with his daughter-in-law, with a male, and with a cow; and the woman

6 Craig S. Keener and InterVarsity Press, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Rom 16:27; Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, vol. 18, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 5.

7 Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 2–5.

8 *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, s. v. Rom 16:27.

who brings an ox on top of herself.' (*m. Sanh* 7:4; cf. 9:1) Of all the offences that warranted an expulsion in Judaism, incest headed the list (*m. Ker* 1:1; *Jub.* 33:10–13; *t. Sanh.* 10:1; CD-A V; 11Q19 LXVI). Both Josephus and Philo even expressed the reprehensibility of incest (*Ant.* 3.274; *Spec. Laws* 3.13–14; cf. 3.20–21).⁹

In 1 Cor 5, the motif of discipline is associated with the motifs of holiness, the covenant, and corporate responsibility. The common seam that unites all these is the holiness of the covenant community which sets them apart unto righteousness.¹⁰ Thus expulsion of anything that threatens the holiness of the community was considered a necessary act in the same way that cleansing the earthly sanctuary from sin was of paramount importance.

III Literary Analysis

In 1 Cor 1:10–6:20 Paul responds to oral complaints that are brought to him by the house of Chloe (1 Cor 1:10), and also to written reports received from concerned segments of the church (1 Cor 7:1). In his pastoral function he first dealt with a church that was divided internally, and one which misunderstood the role, function, and relationship of the gospel and its messengers.¹¹ Contrary to what was prac-

tised in Corinth, the gospel served as a polemic against human hubris, espousing rather the self-effacement of the message and its messenger (1 Cor 3:5–17; 4:1–21).

The first four chapters of 1 Corinthians essentially addressed the problems of the divisions as reported to the apostle (1 Cor 1:10). The noun *schismata*, 'division', and the verb *schizo*, 'to divide', which are used rarely in Scripture denote either the act of being physically torn (Mt 9:16; Mark 2:21), or being divided due to conflicting aims or ideals (Jn 7:43; 9:16; 10:19; 1 Cor 18; 12:25).¹² The central aim therefore of the letter revolves around mending brokenness or division within the church. It will later be demonstrated that this brokenness existed both in practice and in ideology.

The first section of the letter is built on an antithetical framework where ideal realities are contrasted with opposing or competing ideologies. For example, the so-called followers of Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and Christ are compared with each other (1 Cor 1:10–17); the wisdom of God is compared with the wisdom of this world (1:18–2:13); spiritual and carnal minds are compared (2:6–3:23); correct and improper attitudes towards the apostle are contrasted (4:1–21);¹³ moral perspicuity is contrasted with moral negligence and indifference (5:1–13); legal litiga-

9 Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 596, 602.

10 B. S. Ronser, *Paul, Scripture, and Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5–7* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 61–93.

11 Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 66–89.

12 William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, BDAG, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s. v. 'schisma.'

13 Craig Blomberg, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 42–88.

tion is contrasted with ecclesiastical litigation (6:1-11); Christian liberty is set against the perversion of Christian liberty (6:12-20); marriage and singleness are contrasted (7:1-40); and Christian liberty is viewed in both its proper exercise and its abuse (8:1-14:40). These contrasts are meant to elucidate the ideals of Christian conduct which ought to characterize God's community of faith.

The link between the first five chapters is further illustrated by the use of the noun *kauchēma*, 'boasting' (1 Cor 5:6), and the corresponding verb *kauchaomai*, 'to boast' (1 Cor 1:29, 31; 3:21; 4:7). Moreover, the verb, 'puffed up', (1 Cor 5:2), is also used several times in chapter 4 (vv 6, 18, 19). The unity of chapters 5 and 6 is also seen as evidence of the coherence among the first six chapters of the letter. In 1 Cor 5-6 the word *porneia*, 'sexual immorality' and other derivatives are used (1 Cor 5:1, 9, 10, 11; 6:9, 13, 15, 16, 18). This emphasizes the unitary thrust of the pericope in dealing with matters pertinent to Christian behaviour and decorum.¹⁴

The text under consideration thus falls between two pericopes that address attitudinal concerns towards the gospel and its messengers (1 Cor 1:10-4:20), and the knowledge and practice of gospel principles (1 Cor 5:1-14:40).¹⁵ More specifically the text relates to behaviours befitting those belonging to the community of faith, and the corporate responsibility that

such community has for those within its jurisdiction.

1. Contrasting Attitudes

To deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 5:5 KJV).

The author endeavours to confront the dilemma facing the Corinthian church by establishing the parallels between realities, thus showing the disparity between moral ideals and the present circumstance of the believing community. In response to the reports on sexual impropriety, the rhetorical question is asked, 'What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod or with love and a spirit of gentleness?' (1 Cor 4:21). This was aimed at establishing the dualistic paradigm earlier elucidated. More importantly, it sets forth the focal constituent of the ensuing pericope (1 Cor 5:1-13).

The use of the substantive *ravdos*, 'rod/staff'¹⁶ is a rarity in the NT, but its occurrence is often associated with an instrument of physical support (Mt 10:10; Mk 6:8; Lk 9:3), guidance (Heb 9:4), or judgment (Heb 9:8; Rev 2:27; 12:5; 19:5). As to in what sense it is understood here in 1 Cor 4:21, the phrase 'in love and spirit of gentleness' can shed some light. The noun *prautētos*, 'gentleness'¹⁷ occurs in the NT consistently within the contexts of the attributes of Christ (2 Cor 10:1), fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:23), an attitude of humil-

¹⁴ See Adela Yarbro Collins, 'The function of "Excommunication" in Paul', *Harvard Theological Review* 73 (1980): 251-252.

¹⁵ John B. Polhill, *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 1999), 235-238.

¹⁶ Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, vol. 3, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990-), s. v. 'ravdos.'

¹⁷ BADG, s. v. 'prautēs.'

ity (Gal 6:1; Eph 4:2; Col 3:12; 2 Tim 2:25; Jas 1:21; 3:15; 1 Pet 3:16), and showing consideration (Tit 3:2).

1 Corinthians 5:5 should be understood from the perspective of the subsequent admonition for believers to dissociate themselves from those within the household of faith who live immorally (1 Cor 5:9-13). What was it about the conduct of immoral believers that made it so deplorable? The verb that is used, *sunanamignusthai*, 'to associate' is found elsewhere in reference to shunning people of immoral practices (1 Cor 5:11), recalcitrance (2 Thess 3:14), and indiscriminate association (Hos 7:8). Exhibiting a quite opposite set of values, the Corinthians (1 Cor 5:9) choose to associate with and endorse immorality within the community of faith through failing to address the gravity of the sin.

The central issue at stake in 1 Cor 5:5 is of a two-fold nature. The first is stated in 1 Cor 5:1—immorality within the church. Although the author chose not to divulge much detail of the actual offence, his usage of the adverb *olōs*, 'completely', implied that he was privy to substantial information.¹⁸ The sin committed is identified as *porneia*, a practice that was condemned by the Old Testament (Lev 18:6-8; Deut 22:30),¹⁹ and also receives the staunchest of condemnations from the

New Testament, particularly the apostle Paul (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; 1 Cor 6:13, 18; 7:2; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3).²⁰

The second issue is conveyed by the expression, 'you are arrogant', or to put it another way, you possess 'an exaggerated self-perception'²¹, 'haughtiness and pride'²² (1 Cor 5:2). The use of the plural personal pronoun 'you' is meant to give prominence to the members in question. It may further be extrapolated that the imperative of 1 Cor 5:5 envisions more than a single individual, speaking instead to the entire corporate body. The arrogance demonstrated by the Corinthians seems most worrisome to the apostle partly because it stands in opposition to the very attitude of humility, which is possessed by the apostle (1 Cor 4:21).

The perfect participle, *pephsiōmenoi*, 'you have become puffed up' (1 Cor 5:2) is used periphrastically not just for redundancy,²³ but also to emphasize the present resultative state or condition.²⁴ This means that even up to the moment of writing, believers were

¹⁸ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2d (New York, NY: UBS, 1989), s. v. 'olōs'.

¹⁹ Yonder Moynihan Gillihan, 'Jewish Laws on Illicit Marriage, The Defilement of Offspring, and the Holiness of The Temple: A New Halakic Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:14', *JBL* 121 (2002): 711-744.

²⁰ See William Horbury, 'Extirpation and Excommunication', *Vetus Testamentum* 35 (1985): 13-38. Incest was shunned even by the Romans, see Cicero *Pro Cluent* 5.11-14.

²¹ Bauer, BDAG, s.v. 'phusioō'.

²² Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg and Neva F. Miller, vol. 4, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker's Greek New Testament library (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), s.v. phusioō, Kistemaker, 'Deliver this Man to Satan', 36.

²³ See Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 647.

²⁴ See Cleon L. Rogers Jr. & Cleon Roger III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 356.

filled with maleficent pride. The aim therefore of 1 Cor 5:5 is not merely to address a single member living immorally, but more so a church in apostasy and oblivious to that reality. Additionally, the participle also functions as a predicative adjective in that it makes an assertion about the subject in question.²⁵ The Corinthians' arrogance seemed to have been so constitutive of who they are that it created the greatest hindrance to the community of faith. This arrogance was earlier alluded to in 1 Cor 4:18, 19; now a practical depiction of this arrogance is at work as demonstrated in their attitude to immorality within their midst.²⁶

The attitude of the Corinthians is further highlighted by the call 'to mourn' (*epenthēsate*, 1 Cor 5:2). The aorist indicative here seems to have a constative nuance where the action is stated as a matter of fact as opposed to indicating whether or not it has begun or even been completed.²⁷ The focus therefore is not on the nature of mourning but rather on the act of mourning that is warranted by the circumstance. Judging by the context, it can be assumed that the act of mourning among the Corinthians that should have been in occurrence was yet to begin. The verb *pentheō*, 'to mourn', speaks of a godly sorrow that accompanies a particular state or condition (Mt 5:4; 9:15; 16:10; Lk 6:25; 2 Cor 12:21; Jas 4:9).²⁸

2. The Apostle's Judgment

Up to this point it can be said that the apostle is aggrieved at the failings of the Corinthians. Rather than exhibiting godly sorrow they are demonstrating arrogance, and thus cannot see there is one among them so much in need of discipline and restoration. The apostle then compares his uncompromising stance with their inconsistency. The expression, 'on the one hand although I am away in body, on the other hand in the spirit I have already judged', expresses his consistent position on the side of principle. The use of the present participles *apōn*, 'away', and *parōn*, 'present', if understood as concessive, then would imply that the action or state of the main verb *kekrika*, 'to judge', is true irrespective of the state of the participles.²⁹

Two things can be inferred at this point: first, the action of the apostle would be the same whether he was present or absent: second, the present nature of the participles implies the simultaneous or consistent nature of the action. Further, the perfect tense points to the continuing or perpetuating results of the action of being judged. It in some ways mirrors a consummative perfect where the emphasis is on the completed act in the past which explains the present state.³⁰ Thus the focus here is on the consistency of the apostle Paul's standards whether present or absent, as opposed to the inconsistency and failings of the Corinthian believers.

The apostle invokes two authorities in his attempt to pronounce his verdict

25 Stanley E. Porter, *Verbal Aspects in the Greek of the New Testament With Reference to Tense and Mood* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1989), 484.

26 See Paul S. Minear, 'Christ and the Congregation: 1 Corinthians 5-6', *Review & Expositor* 80 (Sum 1983), 343.

27 See Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 557-560.

28 See also Bauer, BDAG, s.v. 'pentheō'.

29 Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 634.

30 Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 577.

on the offender. The first was a divine authority as indicated by the expression, 'in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor 5:4a), and the second is his own apostolic authority energized by the power of God (1 Cor 5:4b). Several interpretational alternatives have been suggested concerning what the expression 'in the name of the Lord' qualifies.³¹ This study assumes that here the author seems to be drawing on a technical terminology which invokes his apostolic authority.

The question that requires some clarity is whether or not the offender of 1 Cor 5:5 was at the time of writing still committing the acts of immorality, or if it was something committed only in the past. The answer to this question is contingent on how one views the participle *katērgasamenon*, which can be understood either attributively as 'committing', or predicatively as 'committed'. The former, while describing the action, also makes it a continuous activity, while the latter emphasizes the reality of the action without any reference to the beginning or end. The articular usage of the pronoun, 'this one', points to a something that was well known,³² both to the author and the audience, and therefore might allude to an action that has been persisting even up to the time of writing.

1 Corinthians 5:5 begins with an imperatival infinitive *paradounai*, 'to handover', which gives the impression that the apostle is laying down a norm that he expected to be practised, both at

Corinth and wherever else it might become applicable. The verb *paradōmi* is used in the NT over 117 times and carries the nuance of giving up something that is held too strongly (Mt 25:20, 22; Lk 4:6), committing something for preservation and care (Acts 15:40; 14:26; 1 Pet 2:23), or making it possible for something to happen (Mk 4:29). In the epistles, the primary sense denotes ownership (Rom 1:24, 26, 28; 4:25; 6:17; Eph 4:19; 1 Tim 1:20).

3. Destruction of the Flesh

The use of the articular 'such a one' (1 Cor 5:5) points anaphorically back to *ton touto*, 'this one/him', (1 Cor 5:3), thus adducing to the fact that the same person is meant. The sense in which a person is delivered to Satan must be understood more as a dative of sphere rather than destination. The one to be delivered is delivered in the sense of being allowed to function in the realm of Satan, and not necessarily as being sent to Satan—as a recipient.

In handing over to Satan one of two things eventuates—destruction of his flesh or the saving of the spirit. Do these two happen together, or does the occurrence of one abnegate the reality of the other?

In the NT the noun *olethron*, 'destruction', denotes a state or act of destruction, ruin or even death (1 Thes 5:3; 2 Thes 1:9; 2 Tim 6:9). The destruction referred to in 1 Cor 5:5 therefore is meant to bring a climax to that which it targets. This destruction either targets the life of the offender or his actions. Based on the context it seems evident that since salvation is still a real possibility, the destruction intimated points to attitudes more than actions.

31 Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 97.

32 Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 225.

In fact the verb *sōzō*, 'save', speaks either of rescue from natural disasters or afflictions (Mt 14:30; 24:22; 27:40, 42, 49; Mk 13:20; 15:30; Lk 23:35, 37, 39; Psa 21:9; 59:4; John 11:12; Acts 27:20, 31), or being rescued from transcendent danger or eternal death (Mt 18:11; Lk 19:10; John 12:47; 1 Cor 1:21; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 3:5; Jas 4:12; 1 Tim 1:15; 2 Tim 4:18; Heb 7:25). Adela Collins suggests that flesh and blood in the epistles speaks more of attitudes towards life (Gal 3:3; 5:13, 16-26; 6:8; Rom 8:3-18).³³ The prepositional and subjunctive phrases, 'destruction of his flesh' and 'in order that the spirit be saved' attest to the pre-eminent purpose of the author in this execration dictum.³⁴

The phrase, 'in the day of the Lord', implies that the salvation spoken of is of eschatological significance. The clause, 'in order that the spirit be saved', indicates both the purpose and result of handing over the offender to Satan. Bearing in mind that the entire church was essentially implicated for its silent acquiescence of the offender's immoral conduct, it seems prudent to see the dictum here as including the whole corporate body and not necessarily the single offender.³⁵

Robertson and Plummer suggest that Paul is here alluding to a 'solemn expulsion from the Church' and plac-

ing the offender outside the covenant (Eph. 2:11, 12) where Satan functions as ruler (Jn 12:31; 16:11; 2 Cor 4:4). The destruction of the flesh is seen as the burning away of the lust accompanied by the requisite physical pain. On the other hand the saving of the spirit is meant to be remedial, and the result of suffering.³⁶ Gordon Fee, while agreeing in principle with the above, sees the destruction of the flesh as referring to the life oriented away from Christ, while the spirit refers to the life oriented towards God.³⁷ Garland believes that the language is meant to highlight the defencelessness that one incurs outside the protection of Christ.³⁸ Others postulate that the imperative pertains more to God allowing Satan to have his way through physical affliction (1 Cor 11:30, 32), and the destruction of fleshly lust (Rom 8:13, 23).³⁹ Some of the views which have been refuted include the idea that Paul intended to turn the offender over to the civil authorities⁴⁰ or that it is meant

33 Collins, 'The function of "Excommunication" in Paul', 258.

34 Bath Campbell, 'Flesh and Spirit In 1 Cor 5:5: An Exercise In Rhetorical Criticism of the NT', *JETS* 36 (1993): 335.

35 See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 213-314.

36 Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1911), 99.

37 Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 212-213.

38 David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 173-174.

39 Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, A. R. Fausset et al., *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), s.v. '1 Cor 5:5'.

40 William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, *I Corinthians: A New Translation, Introduction, With a Study of the Life of Paul, Notes, and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 186.

to show how God uses Satan amidst all his evil plans to accomplish his plans.⁴¹

4. Execration texts

1 Corinthians 5:5 can best be understood from the perspective of the ancient concept of execration or curses where persons were devoted to the gods of the lower world. An examination of the history of execration texts shows that both secular and religious literature contained this kind of terminology.⁴² Often a person who wished to harm someone else for wrong committed that person to the gods via incantation or execration rites. These rites can be found in both Jewish and pagan texts, the only difference being that in Jewish setting Satan replaced the gods of the underworld.⁴³

Paul's language of extirpation and excommunication finds parallels both biblically and extra-biblically. Here are some extirpation formulas, which could have been possible precedents or allusions for Paul's usage.

In the London Magical Papyrus (4th) it is said:

I say to demons of the dead, 'this you are, if I will deliver to you him, how not he will do the deeds whether he receives....'⁴⁴

The Paris Magical Papyrus (3rd BC) states:

I will bind her ... in fellowship with Hecate, who is below the earth, and the Erinyes.

In the epitaph from Halicarnassus it is said,

But if any one shall attempt to take away a stone ... 'let him be accursed'.⁴⁵

In the Damascus Document it is said to betrayers of the covenant

12 ... [And whoever], 13. divulges the secret of his people to the pagans, or curses his people or preaches 14. rebellion against those anointed with the spirit of holiness and [leads his people to] error [or rebels against] 15. God's word (4Q270 [= 4QDe], fragment 2.12–15).⁴⁶

In the Rule of the Community a liturgy is prescribed for the admittance of new members into the community.

And the levites shall curse all the men of the lot of Belial. They shall begin to speak and shall say: 'Accursed are you for all your wicked, blameworthy deeds. May God hand you over to terror by the hand of all those carrying out acts of venge-

⁴¹ C. K. Barrett, *Black's New Testament Commentary: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1968), 126.

⁴² Adolf Deissman, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Greco-Roman World* (New York and London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), 92-94.

⁴³ Deissman, *Light from the Ancient East*, 303-304.

⁴⁴ Greek Papyri in the British Museum, ed.

Frederic G. Kenyon, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1893), 75.

⁴⁵ Deissman, *Light from the Ancient East*, 304-305.

⁴⁶ David Flusser and Azzan Yadin, *Judaism of the Second Temple Period* (Grand Rapids, MI; Jerusalem: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2007-), 81. See also Göran Forkman, *The Limits of the Religious Community: Expulsion from the Religious Community within the Qumran Sect, within Rabbinic Judaism, and within Primitive Christianity* (ConB; Lund: Gleerup, 1972), 87-108.

ance. May he bring upon you destruction by the hand of all those who accomplish retributions. Accursed are you, without mercy, according to the darkness of your deeds, and sentenced to the gloom of everlasting fire. May God not be merciful when you entreat him. May he not forgive by purifying your iniquities. May he lift the countenance of his anger to avenge himself on you, and may there be no peace for you by the mouth of those who intercede ^a. And all those who enter the covenant shall say, after those who pronounce blessings and those who pronounce curses: 'Amen, Amen' ^a... May God's anger and the wrath of his verdicts consume him for everlasting destruction. May stick fast to him all the curses of this covenant. May God separate him for evil, and may he be cut off from the midst of all the sons of light because of his straying from following God on account of his idols and obstacle of his iniquity. May he assign his lot with the cursed ones for ever ^a. And all those who enter the covenant shall respond and shall say after them: 'Amen, Amen. (1QS Col. II. 5-10, 16-18 (= 4Q256 II, III; 4Q257 II, III; 5Q11)).

Concerning persons who engage in wilful callous behaviour it is stipulated in Col VIII

All who enter the council of holiness of those walking in perfect behaviour as he commanded, anyone of them who breaks a word of the law of Moses impertinently or through carelessness will be banished from the Community council 23 and shall not return again; none of the men of

holiness should associate with his goods or his advice on any 24 matter. Col. VIII. 21-24 (= 4Q258 vi, vii; 4Q259 II-III)

The Mishnah has outlined sixty-six reasons for extirpation Interestingly, sexual misdemeanours head the list, attesting to the reprehensibility with which the Jews perceived them. In Mishnah Keritot it is said:

Thirty-six transgressions subject to extirpation are in the Torah: B. He who has sexual relations with (1) his mother, and (2) with his father's wife, and (3) with his daughter-in-law; C. He who has sexual relations (4) with a male, and (5) with a beast; and (6) the woman who has sexual relations with a beast; D He who has sexual relations (7) with a woman and with her daughter, and (8) with a married woman; E. He who has sexual relations (9) with his sister, and (10) with his father's sister, and (11) with his mother's sister, and (12) with his wife's sister, and (13) with his brother's wife, and (14) with his father's brother's wife, and (15) with a menstruating woman (see m. Ker. 1-13; cf. Lev. 18:6ff).⁴⁷

The above parallels do not infer Paul's dependence but rather they attest to the ubiquity of formulas for extirpation and excommunication both in biblical and the extra-biblical writings. These texts like the biblical text were designed to maintain a moral balance within the corporate community.

⁴⁷ Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 836.

5. Delivery into the Hands of Satan

Paul has referred to execration formulas in other places besides our current text, 1 Cor 5:5. In fact a seeming identical reference can be seen in 1 Tim 1:20 where it stated concerning those who abandoned the faith, 'Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme' (1 Tim 1:20 NAS). Later on he described the chatter of Hymenaeus as 'gangrenous', thus attesting to its malevolent nature. In other passages Paul emphasized the importance of removing sinners from the midst of the congregation lest their influence spread throughout. In 1 Tim 5:20 he advises, 'Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.' (NASB). Is Paul now putting into practice this very counsel? It seems precisely this, because to leave the offender untouched would inflict a grievous wound, while extricating him can lead to his repentance and restoration.⁴⁸

Apart from inferring apostolic authority, delivering into the hands of Satan points primarily to a disciplinary motif at work in 1 Cor 5:5. This discipline is not to be seen as an ultimatum but rather as remedial with the possibility of restoration,⁴⁹ since the text alluded to salvation as a real possibility in the Day of the Lord. The handing

over to Satan is a transference of the realms/spheres of protection,⁵⁰ or to put it another way, it is placing someone at the behest of Satan's power.⁵¹ In 2 Thessalonians 2:11 it is said that 'God sends a deluding wonder' which causes unbelievers to believe the lie of the Satan and the man of lawlessness. Essentially God allows the effects of sin to be fully manifested without his mitigating grace, thereby allowing the sinner to bear the consequence of his actions.

In principle something similar occurs in 1 Cor 5:5. By handing over the offender to Satan, Paul allows the offender's decision to associate with immorality to become a reality so that he can experience the full ramifications of such actions. Thus Richard Hays' assertion that this action is meant to put the offender outside the realm of God's redemptive protection, is appropriate.⁵² Belonging to the believing community is a privilege, but it also has immense responsibility attached to it. It gives both an identity and a protection to those who are part of that community. When one is handed over to Satan it is basically God allowing their identity and protective garb to be altered. Therefore what eventually happens is

⁴⁸ Craig S. Keener and InterVarsity Press, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), s.v. 1 Cor 5:5.

⁴⁹ John G. Butler, *Analytical Bible Expositor: I & II Corinthians* (Clinton, IA: LBC Publications, 2009), 49.

⁵⁰ Franklin H. Paschall and Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Teacher's Bible Commentary: A Concise, Thorough Interpretation of the Entire Bible Designed Especially for Sunday School Teachers* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman P, 1972), 725.

⁵¹ Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of First Corinthians*, (Escondito, California: Ephesians Four Group, 2000), 108.

⁵² Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 1997), 85.

that the individual self-destructs, because sin by nature is destructive,⁵³ and if not addressed it infects all within its environs.⁵⁴

6. Decisive Action

The reason why prompt and decisive action was needed by the believers at Corinth is given in 1 Cor 5:6-8. The Greek word *zumēn*, 'leaven', in its literal meaning refers to yeast and by implication to that which affects the whole group.⁵⁵ Metaphorically it speaks of that which permeates attitude or behaviour.⁵⁶ Here the leaven can be understood in both senses, because it typifies sin and its insidious work. Some scholars see the Passover motif at work in verses 6-8,⁵⁷ and I cannot help but concur. In verses 6-8 Paul here refers to corporate ownership of the offender's guilt.⁵⁸ The shared responsibility for the offender's sin can

be seen in the shift from the singular 'deliver such a one' (1 Cor 5:5), to the plural, 'your boasting is not good' (1 Cor 5:6). The sins of immorality and deceptive boasting are symptomatic of spiritual complacency.

The aorist imperative *ekkatharate*, 'cleanse out' (1 Cor 5:7), implies a call to commence an action not yet started.⁵⁹ This action denotes a single, momentary action,⁶⁰ which was future from the time of speaking, and thus a mere hypothetical possibility.⁶¹ It explains why the future, subjunctive and optative were used as alternatives for the imperative.⁶² The apostle is thus hoping that his rebuke would be an impetus for an immediate action. This is substantiated by the use of the purpose clause, 'in order that you may be a new lump' (1 Cor 5:7).⁶³ The extrication was not meant to be a permanent exclusion, but momentary, again attesting to the redemptive thrust of the dictum.

The optimism on the part of the author that the believers would get it right is seen in the phrase, 'just as unleavened you are' (1 Cor 5:7). This is more a futuristic hope than a present reality. Although still pompous and

53 Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 85.

54 Gerald Lewis Bray, *1-2 Corinthians*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture NT 7. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1999), 46.

55 Ralph Earle, *Word Meaning in the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 225.

56 Bauer, BDAG, s.v. 'zumē'.

57 Paul Ellingworth, Howard Hatton and Paul Ellingworth, *A Handbook on Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians*, UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 116; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 172-173.

58 R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing, 1963), 219-221.

59 For more on the imperative see Ray Summers, *Essential of New Testament Greek*, rev. by Thomas Sawyer (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 127.

60 William W. Goodwin, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses of the Greek Verb* (Boston, MA: Ginn & Heath, 1878), 12, 30.

61 A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1934), 942-943.

62 Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 942.

63 For more on the use of the subjunctive see Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 471-478.

boastful it is the hope of the author that the body will return to that which they ought to be. The inference in verse 8 intimates the logical goal of removing the leaven so that sincerity and truth will be restored to the community. The true intent therefore of the apostle's adherence to excommunication is the communal rectitude and holiness.⁶⁴ The offender and his immorality were only symptomatic of a church being disconnected from God and his ideals.

IV Contemporary Application

This question asked by Paul is still very pertinent for today. The rod or gentleness of spirit—are these mutually exclusive? The author uses a dialectic relationship to highlight the problems and the requisite discipline, a continuing issue for both the church and the home—should gentleness abrogate the use of the rod? Can the latter be used with an attitude of gentleness? This dilemma that confronted the early believers is still with every one entrusted with a position of authority over subordinates. The approach taken to administering discipline as depicted in 1 Cor 5:5 is of salvific importance; hence the need to ensure that discipline is carried out within the spiritual context.

Through their failure to deal with the issue forthwith, the corporate body became equally responsible for the sin. Believers are covered with the blood of Jesus just as the Israelites had the blood of animals as a type; outside of this covering they have essentially crossed the realm of protection (Ex

12:12–13, 21–27). Deliverance to Satan signifies a relinquishing of divine restraint upon the offender so that he can experience the enormity of persisting in sinful practices and so find himself at the mercies of Satan. The hope is that he will later recognize his utter helplessness and return to Christ.

Throughout scripture God has often allowed Satan to exercise his restricted power (see Acts 5:1–11; 13:11; 1 Tim 1:20). Satan is sometimes given power to try the godly, as Job (Job 2:4–7), and Paul (2 Cor 12:7, also Peter, (Lk 22:31), and he is dubbed the ‘accuser of the brethren’ (Rev 12:10).⁶⁵ In several instances in the OT, Satan functioned as an adversary (cf. 1 Sam 29:4; 2 Sam 19:22; 1 Kings 5:4; 11:14, 23, 25; Job 1, 2; Zech 3:1). In 1 Cor 5:5 the role of Satan is not solely to inflict physical punishment (though not excluding it), nor is he a party in the salvation schema, but rather he allows the sinful nature to become alive. When people are outside the realm of Christ, they are most vulnerable and at their weakest (Eph 2:12; Col 1:13; 1 John 5:19).

The central concern of 1 Cor 5:5 is the holiness of the communal body. Holiness within the community serves as deterrent to the practice of sin. Sin when left alone destroys both the sinner and those within his sphere of influence. It is no surprise that throughout Scripture a pungent appeal is made with regards to abstaining from all forms of impurity and unholiness. Paul's command to excommunicate the erring offender is essentially an exer-

⁶⁴ Collins, ‘The function of “Excommunication” in Paul’, 259.

⁶⁵ Richard L. Pratt, Jr, vol. 7, *I & II Corinthians*, Holman New Testament Commentary; Holman Reference (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 75.

cise of brotherly concern and love for the erring mingled with godly sorrow and a divine wrath against sin. Much to the surprise of the reader, those with whom the offender associated showed that they possessed neither godly love for the sinner nor hatred for sin through their negligence in correcting his wrong. Whenever sin is left unheeded it grows into wanton indulgence and seeks only to plunge the sinner deeper into enslavement.

The reason the Corinthians must remove the leaven among them runs even deeper than the mere offender; rather it hinges on who they are in Christ—they are his temple (1 Cor 3:16, 16; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16). As God's temple he requires from them scrupulous moral rectitude because the Holy Spirit ought to be dwelling within their bodies. Sin existing in the church both communally and individually poses an affront not only to the witness of the church but also to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁶ Therefore believers were cautioned to shun any desecration of the temple of God. In 1 Cor 6:18-19 the imperative is given:

Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? (1 Cor 6:18-19 NAS)

The violator of God's temple will evidently be destroyed. The believers were warned, 'If any man destroys

the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are' (1 Cor 3:17 NAS). Therefore what was at stake in 1 Cor 5:5 was not merely an act of gross immorality, but the sanctity of God's indwelling among his people and their ultimate damnation was at stake. The call to deliver the offender to Satan is thus meant to awaken both a church and an individual dead to sin and destined to destruction unless redeemed.

In the light of the aforementioned the following practical lessons can be gleaned from 1 Cor 5:5 for the church today.

1. The church exists foremost as a community of holiness and as such must never be compromised by the presence or indulgence of sin by any member within the community
2. The corporate body has a sacred responsibility for ensuring that the spiritual wellbeing of every member is prioritized especially when that member is in wrong.
3. When sin however small is left untouched, its consequences eventually expand to a wider domain
4. A failure to deal with known sin is tantamount to being an accomplice in that sin, thus making the corporate body equally culpable for the wrong
5. When sin is corrected the wellbeing of the sinner must never become subsumed in well-meaning but often misguided actions. Correcting sin in Scripture is always remedial and never an ultimatum against the erring
6. Sin though forgiven must invariably carry some physical and emotional scars which the offender will have to bear knowing fully well that

⁶⁶ See Campbell, 'Flesh and Spirit in 1 Cor 5:5', 340; Paul S. Minear, 'Christ and the Congregation: I Corinthians 5-6,' *RevExp* 80 (1983): 341-350.

whom the Lord loves he chastens.

7. The offender must recognize the seriousness of sins committed and be willing not to continue in order that true forgiveness and restoration be made effectual

V Conclusion

In 1 Cor 5:5 the echo of a shepherd is heard as he beckons the flock which is spiralling towards destruction. This paper has shown that discipline within the church is an imperative both for the eternal salvation of the offender and the church at large. Discipline ought always to be redemptive with the sinner given all possible opportunity to make restitution. A failure to administer discipline with dispatch and decisiveness results in the perpetuation of its debilitating effects on both the sinners and those around them. A prompt and decisive approach to correcting the erring safeguards the holiness of God's temple, and creates the framework in which the offender can begin the process of restoration. Conversely a protracted and negligent attitude in

correcting corporate wrongs within the community of faith allows for its perpetuation and it makes the sacred intent of discipline to be merely mundane and ineffectual.

The author of Corinthians has shown that God is more interested in making his church holy than their mere adherence to religious formality. Sin stands as an affront to holiness and must always be resisted by all in whom the Spirit of God dwells. Sin must be dealt with decisively and with dispatch lest it become infectious. The old adage, 'a stitch in time saves nine', holds true for sin—if dealt with expeditiously both the sinner and others can be saved.

The church of God today must become more proactive than ever in its resolve to maintain its purity both individually and collectively. This will mean requiring from members the highest possible moral code and ensuring that they are committed to its strictures. A failure to act promptly often complicates the entire process and eventually disgraces the name of God and his church.