



Would you please explain what Paul meant in 1 Corinthians 5:5, saying that a sinner in the Church should be delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh?

Although the correct answer can be easily ascertained from the Scriptures, many commentaries are actually confused regarding the meaning of this passage. Paul said, in context, in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5:

"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles--that a man has his father's wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Paul wrote this letter during the annual Festival of the Seven Days of Unleavened Bread (compare verses 6-8)--at a time when Church members were abstaining from eating leavened products and were instead partaking of unleavened products. In the Bible, leaven is sometimes compared with sin and pride--which puffs up. The ritual of abstaining from leaven for seven days reminds the members that they have to continuously come out of sin--after their previous sins were forgiven by our Passover, Jesus Christ (compare verse 7). But rather than really concentrating on living righteously, the members in Corinth had become proud and not only condoned, but also perhaps even--to an extent--approved of the terrible conduct of that particular

member (compare Romans 1:32).

(For more information on the meaning of the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, please read our free booklet, "The Meaning of God's Spring Holy Days.")

Paul said that it was "reported" to him that the man had "his father's wife." Some say that he lived together and engaged in continued sexual conduct with his stepmother. However, it appears that the sexual misconduct may have involved his real mother--as Paul said that even Gentiles abhorred this kind of action. Gentiles did not necessarily abhor sexual conduct with a stepmother, but most did reject sexual involvement with one's own mother (even though, as it is known from the times of Roman decadence, even such misconduct was practiced by some Gentiles, and especially by wicked governmental leaders.)

In this context, Paul was saying that the elders of the local Church should have disfellowshipped the person, rather than tolerating his misconduct--especially, as it had become common knowledge amongst Church members. Apparently only a few reported this occurrence to Paul, since their local leaders were unwilling to deal with the situation.

This is Satan's world. Before God called us out of this world, we were under Satan's rule. When someone voluntarily leaves the Church or is disfellowshipped, he becomes once again very much subject to Satan's influences. When the Church takes such drastic action, it is for the good of the Church as well as the excommunicated member, as it is always hoped that that person will see the error of his ways, while living again in this evil world, repent and return to God, while there is time. Fortunately, in the case of the member in Corinth, he did repent and was rightly accepted back into the fold (compare 2 Corinthians 2:3-11).

Paul made the following general comment in 2 Timothy 2:24-25: "And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and

that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will."

It should be obvious that Paul was ordering the suspension or (temporary) excommunication of the sinning brother, with the hope that he might come to his senses, repent, escape the snare of the devil and his spiritual captivity to do Satan's will, and return to the Church congregation in Corinth (as did happen in this case). Paul made this decision "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"--that is, with His power and authority. Christ, as the living Head of the Church, inspired Paul to make this decision, and He was backing it up. Paul said that he wanted to see the "spirit" of that person "saved" in the day of Christ's return--strongly implying that this member had received the Holy Spirit, but was in danger of losing it--and that for that purpose, the "flesh" needed to be "destroyed."

That is, his fleshly desires and his wrong sexual misconduct with his mother (or perhaps stepmother) had to be "destroyed"--his old man with his carnal nature, which died in the watery grave at his baptism but which had been allowed to resurface, had to be killed again. As the flesh and the spirit fight against each other (compare James 4:4-5; Romans 7:25), it is critical that the flesh would lose and the spirit would win. Sometimes, in order to even begin this fight and to end it victoriously, the Church may have to take drastic measures, including suspension, excommunication or disfellowshipment, with the hope that the person repents, swallows his pride, and returns to the Body of Christ.

This should be the clear understanding of the passage in 1 Corinthians 5:5, but it is amazing how far off and totally wrong most commentaries are, when trying to explain it.

Notice the following comments from Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible. He first stated correctly that even the Latin fathers understood this passage to refer to the procedure of "excommunication" (except that they misunderstood the kingdom of God, wrongly believing it to be the church), but he then offered a terrible misconception of what Paul

was teaching:

"Beza, and the Latin fathers, suppose that this is only an expression of excommunication. They say, that in the Scriptures there are but two kingdoms recognized - the kingdom of God, or the church, and the kingdom of the world, which is regarded as under the control of Satan; and that to exclude a man from one is to subject him to the dominion of the other. There is some foundation for this opinion; and there can be no doubt that excommunication is here intended, and that, by excommunication, the offender was in some sense placed under the control of Satan.

"It is further evident that it is here supposed that by being thus placed under him [Satan] the offender would be subject to corporal inflictions by the agency of Satan, which are here called the 'destruction of the flesh.' Satan is elsewhere referred to as the author of bodily diseases. Thus, in the case of Job... A similar instance is mentioned in [1 Timothy 1:20], where Paul says he had delivered Hymeneus and Alexander to 'Satan, that they might learn not to blaspheme.' ...

"Many have supposed that by the 'destruction of the flesh' Paul meant only the destruction of his fleshly appetites or carnal affections; and that he supposed that this would be effected by the act of excommunication. But it is very evident from the Scriptures that the apostles were imbued with the power of inflicting diseases or bodily calamities for crimes... This was an extraordinary and miraculous power."

As mentioned, this is a terrible misconception. It sounds as if Paul used some "voodoo" magic to "curse" others and to inflict sickness or diseases on them. This example illustrates how careful one must be when reading worldly uninspired commentaries, trying to gain from them insight and understanding of spiritual matters.

The explanations by the Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary follow the same line of twisted reasoning as the previous one, except that they are much worse. Even their statement that the Corinthians had the power to excommunicate

needs to be clarified in the sense that the ministry had that authority--but not all the members, and it was not done by majority vote either. But also note the additional outrageous annotations:

"Besides excommunication (of which the Corinthians themselves had the power), Paul delegates here to the Corinthian Church his own special power as an apostle, of inflicting corporeal disease or death in punishment for sin... Here it is... for the affliction of the body with disease, and even death..., so as to destroy fleshly lust..."

However, the commentary then explains correctly, but quite inconsistently, what Paul meant with the "destruction of the flesh":

"The 'destruction of the flesh' answers to 'mortify the deeds of the body'... Temporary affliction often leads to permanent salvation..."

Vincent's Word Study comes closer to the truth, but even he allows, quite unnecessarily, for some kind of a "power" which went beyond excommunication, even though he is not willing to say what it is, and does not seem to support the ridiculous idea that Paul had and USED the power to inflict sickness and disease on others. He writes:

"To deliver... unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh. On this very obscure and much controverted passage it may be observed: 1. That it implies excommunication from the Church. 2. That it implies something more, the nature of which is not clearly known. 3. That casting the offender out of the Church involved casting him back into the heathen world, which Paul habitually conceives as under the power of Satan. 4. That Paul has in view the reformation of the offender: 'that the spirit may be saved,' etc. This reformation is to be through affliction, disease, pain, or loss, which also he is wont to conceive as Satan's work... Hence in delivering him over to these he uses the phrase 'deliver unto Satan.'"

However, no special voodoo-like curse-inflicting power of the Apostle Paul is implied here. Paul is ordering excommunication--which the local ministry in Corinth had FAILED to carry out. The

goal was for the person to see that continuing to live that way might mean, continuing to wither away and be ultimately burned in the lake of fire; and realizing this, to come to his senses and repent and change and mortify his fleshly desires; and to become subject to God, so that he could be allowed to return to the Church congregation in Corinth.

Paul had in mind the salvation of the person, so that at the time of Christ's return, "in the day of the Lord Jesus," he would be given the privilege to enter the Kingdom of God as a spirit member of the Family of God. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:23: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul ordered excommunication of the member who was openly practicing horrible sins in plain sight of the other Church members, who were also indirectly effected by that sinful conduct. The person had to learn to use the Holy Spirit to put to death the DEEDS of the BODY, so that HE would live (Romans 8:13). Even after baptism, we have to continuously "mortify" the members of our body, by putting off the old man.

In contrasting those unwilling to repent with converted Church members, Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:17-24:

"This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the LIFE of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

"But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness."

If we do this, then God promises us the following in
2 Peter 1:10-11:

"Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to
make your call and election sure, for if you do these
things you will never stumble; for so an entrance
will be supplied to you abundantly into the
everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus
Christ."

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