

Understanding 1Corinthians 5

It is actually being reported that there is sexual sin among you, and it is sexual sin of a kind that is condemned even by pagans—a man is living with his stepmother! And you stay proud? Shouldn't you rather have felt some sadness that would have led you to remove from your company the man who has done this thing? (1Cor.5:1-2).

The issue Paul is facing is two-fold, 1) the presence of an unrepentant sinner within the Corinthian congregation and 2) the congregation's failure to deal with this matter correctly, Whilst Paul is dealing with a specific transgression here, we must not forget what is said in James,

'For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.'
(Jas.2:10).

Whilst we tend to see some sins worse than others this is not the case with YHWH, when we transgress YHWH's Torah/Law no matter what the transgression is, we get a 'failed' rating from YHWH. In other words, any transgression will put us on the wrong side of YHWH: sin is sin.

Now let us consider the remedy Paul requires of the Corinthian congregation,

Deliver such a one to Satan for destruction of the flesh, in order that his spirit be saved in the day of the Mashiach.

- Deliver such a one to Satan.

How is it possible to deliver a sinner over to Satan? In the Scriptures there are but two kingdoms recognized - the kingdom of Heaven, and the kingdom of the world, which is regarded as under the control of HaSatan. To exclude a man from one kingdom is to subject him to the dominion of the other kingdom. Here the apostle is advocating the transgressor be excommunicated from YHWH's kingdom. Because of excommunication, the offender is delivered to and placed under the control of, the prince of this world: HaSatan.

A further particularly important reason for removing a person who is unrepentant, is because permitting such a person to remain among the congregation may cause a stumbling block for others – what is permissible and what is not permissible? This would be a particular problem for newcomers into the congregation. This is the point the apostle is alluding to in verses 6 and 7,

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the entire lump? Therefore, cleanse out the old leaven, so that you are a new lump, as you are unleavened.

Allowing one to sin sends a false signal to everyone.

- For the destruction of the flesh.

Fleshly desires birth sin. These must be destroyed. Some have held that this meant to miraculously send some painful disease, but no mention is made of such an affliction. I believe that it refers to the mortification of the offender, being cast out and shunned by the congregation. Excommunication has a dual effect 1) it creates shame and embarrassment 2) and more importantly, it takes away the protection offered being a member of a congregation and leaves the person isolated and vulnerable to Satan's control. The congregation serves as the believer's sanctuary, and it is the responsibility of all leaders to protect the purity of the congregation.

- That his spirit be saved.

This is the object of all true discipline. It was calculated to bring a person to repentance, not to judgement and we learn from the apostle's second letter to this congregation that it was effective in this instance,

*But if anyone has caused sadness, he has not made me sad, but in some degree you all – not to be too harsh. For such a one this punishment, **by the many**, is sufficient, so that, on the contrary, you should rather forgive and comfort, lest somehow such a one be swallowed up with too much sadness. So I appeal to you to confirm your love to him. Besides, I wrote for this purpose also, that I might know the proof of you, if you are obedient in all matters. And whom you forgive any matter, I do also. For indeed, if I have forgiven any matter, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the sight of Messiah, lest Satan should take advantage of us, for we are not ignorant of his thoughts.(2Cor.2:5-11).*

There are some who believe the phrase 'delivered to Satan' is not referring to excommunication by the congregation, but a spiritual handing over to HaSatan at the hand of the apostle. However, the phrase highlighted is referring to punishment handed out by the congregation itself, which supports excommunication is the object.

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