

A CASE OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE IN 1 CORINTHIANS 5

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The many problems of the Corinthian church were to a great degree dictated by the phenomenon of the city of Corinth itself. Built anew in 44 BCE by order of Julius Caesar, Corinth at the time of the apostle Paul was a flourishing cosmopolitan city with great ethnic and religious diversity. Corinth, as perhaps no other city in the Roman empire, revealed the great gap between the Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures.

Established in the early 50s of the first century, the Christian community in Corinth presented a clear challenge to existing societal rules and regulations. Moreover, the Christian community itself was in search of answers regarding its identity, purpose, and place in society. The preaching of the gospel brought to life a totally new kind of entity – the Christian church – that in a remarkable way united representatives of different strata of society: men and women, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, masters and slaves. How were they to co-exist? How should believing husbands or wives relate to their unbelieving spouses? How were masters and slaves to embrace each other as members of one community? What should be the role of men and women in the community? These and many other questions prompted the Corinthian believers to seek Paul’s advice.

«It is not heard of even among pagans»

Chapter 5 of 1 Corinthians is devoted to the case of the immoral behavior of one of the members: «It is actu-



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ally reported that there is sexual immorality¹ among you,.. for a man is living with his father's wife» (5:1 NRSV). From this text we can deduce four brief observations. First of all, the phrase «father's wife» was used to designate a non-biological mother (Lev 18:8). Secondly, the present tense of the infinitive εἶναι underlines the continuous aspect of sexual relationships. Thirdly, the text does not mention the father. The fact of unlawful cohabitation points to one of two possibilities: either the father was not alive, or he was divorced from his second wife². Finally, disciplinary measures are suggested only against one side (the son), which most probably signifies that the «father's wife» was not a part of the Christian community.

Paul's special indignation is directed against the tolerant attitude of the community toward the shameful behavior, which «is not heard of even among the pagans»³. Instead of mourning the fact, the Corinthian believers are «arrogant» (5:2) and «boastful» (5:6). It is indeed puzzling how the incestuous relationship could take place in the Christian church and how the seemingly lax attitude of the congregation could be explained. In order to answer these questions, we will analyze some of the theological and social factors that contributed to such behavior.

Corinthian Theological Enthusiasm

One of the major reasons for this and many other problems of the Corinthian church was a doctrinal shift in favor of unjustified theological enthusiasm⁴. The believers in Corinth, like those in Thessalonica, lived as if «the day of the Lord is already here» (2Th 2:2). The hidden irony is in the

¹ The Greek word *porneia* translated into Russian as *bludodeianie*, has a wide spectrum of meaning, such as «unlawful sexual intercourse, prostitution, unchastity, fornication.» The same word can be used to designate «participation in prohibited degrees of marriage.» See Frederick Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* [BDAG] (3d edition; University of Chicago Press, 2000), 854.

² Paul intentionally characterizes the cohabitation as *porneia* and not *moiceia* (adultery) which he would have used if the father was still married.

³ The phrase clearly serves the purpose of rhetorical exaggeration because ancient literature contains examples of such behavior in the Greco-Roman world. See especially, Euripides, *Hippolytus*; Sophocles, *Oedipus*; Martial, *Epigrams*, 4.16. In ancient Rome for a marriage

to be legitimate, at least three requirements had to be met: 1) general consent of all the parties involved; 2) the marrying parties should have reached a certain age (the male party should be at least fourteen years of age and the female party at least twelve); 3) additional legal restrictions. This last requirement specified, among other things, that the marrying parties not be related to each other. The general rule was: «Marriage cannot be contracted between persons related to each other in ascendant or descendant line, as between a father and daughter, grandfather and granddaughter, mother and son, grandmother and grandson, and so on, *ad infinitum*. And if such persons do unite, they contract a criminal and incestuous marriage...» (Gaius I, 58,59).

⁴ Another attractive alternative that dominated theological opinion for some time was Gnosticism, or at least proto-Gnostic influence, in

fact that this kind of expectation was to some extent «provoked» by the teaching of the apostle Paul himself. Indeed, Paul earnestly believed that believers were living in between the first and second coming of Christ, and most probably expected the Lord to come while he (Paul) was still alive (1Th 4:15-18). He also believed that God inaugurated in Christ a new community of faith without discrimination on social, gender, racial, or religious levels (Gal 3:26-28). Paul also believed in the crucial role of the Spirit in the life of the community (1Co12-14). It is this empowering presence of the Spirit that led believers into a new state of freedom (2Co 3:17), peace, and joy (Ro14:17). One of the most radical ramifications of this new freedom for Paul, the Jew, was the believer's freedom from the Mosaic Law (Ro 7).

It should be noted, however, that in Paul's theology the «already» dimension is always counterbalanced by the sobering «not yet» (2Th 2:2-3; Ro 8:23-24; 1Co 4:5, etc). In fact, Paul's view of a believer's existence is best understood as existence in the continuum between «already in Christ» (Ro 8:1) and «still awaiting the redemption of our bodies» (Ro 8:23). It is this dichotomy of our existence, belonging both to the new age of Christ as well as to the passing age of Adam, that creates the tension (Ro 6-8).

The problem with the Corinthian believers was not so much that they misunderstood the teaching of Paul, but rather that they developed it further, emphasizing the «already» dimension and totally disregarding the «not yet.» As a result, we encounter the «rich» (4:8) attitude of those who pride themselves in «wisdom» (2:5; 4:10); «knowledge» (8:1); spiritual status (3:1); and spiritual gifts (ch. 12).

The exclusive emphasis on the role of the Spirit in the context of shifted eschatological expectations became the reason for certain abuses in Corinth. Indeed, if the last days have already arrived, if all the believers have become partakers of the same Spirit, then they have been elevated into a new spiritual realm. «Panta moi ekestin (all things are lawful for me)!»

Corinth. Indeed, some of the terminology used in 1 Corinthians (sofiā, gnōsij, pneumatikoi, sarkinoi etc.) seems to reflect a second century AD Gnostic terminology. Also, some of the Corinthians' problems (sexual license, food sacrificed to idols, denial of the future resurrection) could be explained in terms of Gnosticism's general disregard of the material/physical in favor of spiritual/heavenly reality. However, as James Dunn points out, «the Gnostic hypothesis as an explanation for the divisions in the Corinthian church has proved itself to be increasingly unsatisfactory» [*1 Corinthians* (New Testament Guides; Sheffield Academic

Press, 1995), 40]. Indeed, an overall scholarly consensus considers it erroneous to read a second century phenomenon into the NT period. In particular the lack of evidence of a Gnostic-type Christology in Corinth, with the descent of the heavenly redeemer, does not favor the Gnostic hypotheses. Moreover, Dunn points out further that it is the content of chs. 5-7 that presents the biggest problem for the Gnostic hypothesis. How do we explain the presence of opposites: the licentious sexual behavior in chs. 5-6 and the ascetic tendencies in ch. 7? Both of these had their place in second century Gnosticism, but hardly in one congregation at the same time!

(6:12) becomes the leading slogan of the Corinthian enthusiasts with the underlying assumption that, «Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny»⁵ (2:15).

It seems that the suggested theological reasoning not only provided the basis for toleration of immoral behavior, but also was used to propagate a new kind of «spiritual freedom,» when nobody and nothing can judge a believer⁶. The case of the «previous letter» (5:9-11) seems to point in the same direction. Indeed, how else can Paul's repeated command «not to associate with the sexually immoral person,» be explained unless the Corinthians honestly believed that the category «immoral» belongs only to those outside the church? Those who are «inside» are not under the law, whether Jewish, or Greco-Roman. They are not to be judged, but they may judge anyone (2:15).

As we shall see shortly, Paul will have to introduce a necessary corrective, not by bringing the Corinthians back under the yoke of the Law, but by reminding them that they became «a new batch of [unleavened] dough» (5:8) in Christ. This, among other things, means that they have a new ability to live morally pure lives, or, in Paul's words, to «live according to the Spirit,» not «the flesh» (Ro 8:4).

Sociological Considerations

Socio-historical analysis provides an additional important insight into our understanding of the Corinthian situation⁷.

It is fair to conclude with Meeks that «a Pauline congregation generally reflected a fair cross-section of urban society»⁸. In 1:26-29 Paul gives us

⁵ This is undoubtedly one of the convincing examples of the misuse of Paul's words, so that in the current epistle he (Paul) had to introduce some corrections to his previously misunderstood admonition. The apostle agrees, «Yes, all things are lawful for me,» but adds, «not all things are beneficial.» See the discussion in Anthony Thiselton, «Realized Eschatology at Corinth,» *NTS* 24 (1977-1978), 512-513.

⁶ The clearest sign of this new freedom can be found in the statement that the one who had an incestuous relationship with his father's wife did this «in the name of the Lord Jesus» (vv. 3-4). Quite understandably for modern readers, the very thought of the possibility of such a rendering of the text seems blasphemous, but at the same time this is the most natural rendering of the Greek phrase (ου(τω)ι του(τω)ι καταργασαμενον: εη τω(ν) ονοματι του(τω)ι κυριου(ν) η(σ)ου(ν)).

See arguments *pro* in Jerome Murphy O'Connor, «1 Corinthians, V, 3-5,» *RevBib* 84 (1977):239-245; and *contra* in Ivan Havener, «A Curse for Salvation – 1 Corinthians 5:1-5,» in *Sin, Salvation, and the Spirit*, gen. ed. D. Durkin (Collegeville: MN: The Liturgical Press, 1979), 334-344.

⁷ The most helpful sources in this area are: G. Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982); W. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983); B. Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995); J. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth* (JSNTSup, 75; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).

⁸ Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 73.

a hint as to the possible social outlook of the congregation:

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth... (1:26-29).

It follows, then, that although the majority of the congregation belonged to the lower strata of society, there were at least some that belonged to the wealthy and powerful, and who most probably played a leading role in the congregation⁹.

The above observation is of special importance for us because the texture of Roman society was characterized to a great extent by «patron-client» relationships. A wealthy person, through the provision of protection, financial resources, and influence, fulfilled the obligations of a patron toward his/her client, who in turn acted on behalf of the patron, providing service and information. The church in Corinth, as a miniature reflection of the society at large, functioned within the same patronal pattern of relationship. Conversion to Christianity, among other things, implied the social transition of a person from one network of relationships to another. Thus, the factionalism in Corinth (1:12) might be understood not only in terms of diverse theological influences, but also and foremost in terms of the diverse network of influences produced by the patron-client relationship. It is quite possible that in 1 Corinthians we are dealing with a confrontation between Paul and powerful Corinthian patrons concerning their right to exercise authority over the congregation (4:18-21).

Any social group continues to exist on the premise that the members of that group adhere to certain shared norms of behavior. Why do different groups/communities react differently toward the deviant behavior of its members? A basic principle of sociological analysis states that, «the more cohesive the group, the more authoritarian its structure, and the more threatened it feels, the stronger will be the demand for conforming behavior and the greater rejection of deviant members»¹⁰. If we apply this principle to the situation in Corinth, it follows that the congregation at large did not feel threatened by the deviant behavior of one of its members. Why not? The answer lies in the following. As was already stated, the theological position of over-realized eschatology elevated the believers of Corinth to what

⁹ In fact, most of the Corinthian names available to us through Acts and the Pauline letters seem to refer to people of wealth or power. Among these are Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue (Acts 18:8); Erastus, city treasurer (Ro 16:23); both Stephanas and Chloe had a household presumably including slaves (1:11; 1:16; 16:15); Phoebe of Cenchrea is called

a patron (Ro 16:2); Gaius (Ro 16:23) had a house big enough to hold the whole church.

¹⁰ H. Himmelweit, «Deviant Behavior,» in *A Dictionary of Social Sciences* (ed. J. Gould and W.L. Kolb; New York: The Free Press, 1964), 197. See also a helpful discussion in Gerald Harris, «The Beginnings of Church Discipline: 1 Corinthians 5,» *NTS* 37 (1991): 1-21.

might be called «no rules» status. It is quite possible that Paul himself, with his critical attitude toward the Jewish law, adhered to this position. Yet this case of deviant behavior caused him to reconsider his point of view in favor of introducing «new rules.» At this point we can sense tension between Paul and the leadership in Corinth over their understanding of what these «new rules» might be. At least some of them might have perceived Paul's line of argument as going back to the «old rules», i.e. Mosaic Law.

The situation might have been even more complex if we consider the possibility that the sinning brother was one of the influential patrons of the church from whom the well-being of many, if not of the whole congregation, depended. In a society where every social group had a prescribed role, any attempt to change «the system» could be a very costly enterprise. This hypothesis could help explain the suspicious silence of the members of the church. It can also explain how a case of criminal behavior (from the point of view of Roman law) went unnoticed by the authorities. John Chow makes a convincing case, arguing that «Roman law served the interests of the powerful and could be manipulated by the powerful for their own ends»¹¹.

But what would make a wealthy person marry his stepmother? First of all, the stepmother could have been a still young and attractive woman. A second marriage for a man in ancient Rome was not an uncommon practice. The age gap between a husband and wife in his second marriage could be as «between father and a daughter or even grandfather and granddaughter»¹². Thus, a stepson and his stepmother theoretically could be of a similar age. Yet a desire to satisfy one's sexual drive was hardly the only reason for this marriage¹³. In addition, there were powerful legislative mechanisms that encouraged a person to marry and have children¹⁴. By marrying a widow, a man not only gained direct access to his wife's inheritance, but also preserved his father's inheritance. We may agree with Chow that, «In Paul's day, material interests, which might include money and power, rather than sex and affection seem to have a bigger role to play in the establishment of a marital relationship»¹⁵.

¹¹ Chow, *Patronage and Power*, 140.

¹² S. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges From the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 401.

¹³ For a man of ancient Rome there were a number of ways to indulge his sexual desire, including the widely spread use of prostitutes. From 6:16-20 it may follow that even Corinthian Christians had a habit of using prostitutes.

¹⁴ An important law, *Lex Julia et Papia* introduced by Augustus in AD 9 prescribed that all men from the ages of 25 to 60, and all women from the ages of 20 to 50, be married and have children. Those ignoring this law had to bear the burden of heavy taxation and were deprived of the right to receive their inheritance. See Sandars, *The Institutes*, 228-230.

¹⁵ Chow, *Patronage and Power*, 137.

It is quite obvious that behind the case of immorality in Corinth we have a complex blend of theological and sociological reasons. The tolerant attitude toward the sinning brother points to the fact that the congregation in general did not feel threatened by this abnormal behavior. The lack of social cohesiveness and non-authoritarian type of structure, coupled with the theological enthusiasm of «no rules» status, provided the necessary rationale for that tolerance. Although not supported directly from the text, the hypothesis that the incestuous man was an influential patron of the church fits well into the socio-economical realities of first century Corinth.

«Hand This Man Over to Satan!»

Verses 3-5, to be sure, are another tough case for interpretation¹⁶. What is the meaning of the phrase, «hand over to Satan?» Where did the apostle find justification for such a practice? And finally, what is the ultimate purpose of the whole pronouncement?

It is noteworthy that although the apostle «already pronounced judgment», he leaves it up to the congregation to implement the judgment. The Corinthian believers themselves «assembled together in the power of the Lord Jesus» have to reenact the decision that had already been prompted to Paul by the Spirit

Coming back to the question of the meaning of the phrase «hand over to Satan» we have to admit that the difficulty arises partly from the fact that the phrase is found only one more time in the New Testament (1Ti 1:20). This has prompted some scholars to find a solution in some doubtful hypotheses¹⁷. It is much more natural to assume that the meaning of the phrase was formed in the «ideological workshop» of the Hebrew Old Testament. It is there that we actually find the idea of «cutting off» the sinning

¹⁶ See B. Campbell, «Flesh and Spirit in 1 Cor 5:5: An Exercise in Rhetorical Criticism of the NT,» *JETS* 36/3 (1993): 331-342; A.Y. Collins, «The Function of 'Excommunication' in Paul,» *HTR* 73 (1980): 251-263; G. Forkman, *The Limits of the Religious Community* (Lund, Sweden: CWK Gleerup, 1972), 143-147; G. Joy, «Is the Body Really to be Destroyed? (1 Corinthians 5.5),» *BT* 39/4 (1988): 429-436; S. Kistemaker, «'Deliver This Man to Satan' (1 Cor 5:5): A Case Study in Church Discipline,» *TMSJ* 3 (1992): 33-45; G.W.H. Lampe, «Church Discipline and the Interpretation of the Epistles to the Corinthians,» in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox*, ed. W.R. Farmer, et al (Cambridge University Press, 1967), 337-361; V. George Shillington, «Atonement Texture in 1 Corinthians 5.5,»

JSNT 71 (1998): 29-50; J. T. South, «A Critique of the 'Curse/Death' Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5.1-8,» *NTS* 39 (1993): 539-561; A. Thiselton, «The Meaning of SARX in 1 Corinthians 5.5: A Fresh Approach in the Light of Logical and Semantic Factors,» *SJT* 26 (1973): 204-228.

¹⁷ The late nineteenth century German scholar, Adolf Deismann suggested some pagan curse formulas which allegedly influenced Paul's choice of terminology. He cites, for example, a fourth century AD papyrus: «Death's demon,.. I hand over to you (paradidwmi soi) such and such person...» (*Light From the Ancient East*, 302). Besides the fact that he cites from a much later source, it is difficult to fathom the reasons that would have prompted the apostle to borrow these ideas from a pagan source.

member of the community (Lev 18:24-30; 20:22-24). It is quite possible (especially in view of the argument that follows in 5:11-13) that Paul is guided in his thought by the covenant blessing/curse regulations of the book of Deuteronomy¹⁸. Also, in the book of Job we find a direct parallel with the text under consideration, when Job was «handed over to Satan» for the test of his faith/faithfulness (Job 1:12; 2:6). The book of Job provides us with an important key to our correct understanding of God's sovereign rule in the universe. There is no force or power that is out of God's sovereign rule. Even the arch-enemy of God, Satan, acts exclusively within the limits of God's permissive will. Moreover, as incredible as it might sound, Satan often acts as an instrument of God's discipline upon human beings¹⁹. This corresponds to the apostle's own understanding of the issue. He considers the «thorn in the flesh» given to him as an act of the «angel of Satan», to keep him [Paul] from being too elated» (2Co12:7).

It would be safe to suppose that against the background of the expression «hand over to Satan», lies the idea of «casting out» the sinning member beyond the community's borders, i.e. taking him out of the protective sphere of the Lamb into the sphere where the Destroyer dominates.

No less important is the question of the consequences of «handing over to Satan». What does the expression «for the destruction of the flesh» mean? Some exegetes insist that this could mean only the physical death of

¹⁸ On closer examination we can trace similarities between the list of vices in 5:11 and the book of Deuteronomy. It is even more remarkable that each of the vices in the book of Deuteronomy is followed by the same admonition as in 5:13: «Cast the immoral one out of your midst.»

1 Corinthians 5:11	Deuteronomy
sexually immoral (pornoj)	Promiscuity, adultery (22:21-22:30)
greedy (pl eonekthj)	no parallel
idolater (eijwł ol atrhj)	idolatry (13:1-5; 17:2-7)
reviler (loidoroj)	malicious false testimony (19:16-19)
drunkard (mequsoj)	rebellious drunken son (21:18-21)
robber (afpax)	kidnapping, slave-trading (24:7; LXX uses kleptej – «thief»

See B. Rosner, *Paul, Scripture, and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 69-70. The absence in the book of Deuteronomy of a direct parallel

to the word translated in the Russian Synodal Version as *likhoimets* could be explained as follows. In 5:10, Paul uses the same word together with afpax (h)pl eonektaij kaiñ r pacin). According to the so-called Granville Sharp Rule, the second anarthrous noun in such a construction serves the purpose of further elucidating the first one (See D. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 270-290). That is why, quite possibly, the word «greedy» in v.11 should be read in conjunction with «robber.»

¹⁹ It is interesting in this regard to note that extra-canonical Jewish literature sometimes depicts Satan as the one who exercises God's punishment. Thus, for example, in the book of Jubilees (49:2) the slaughter of the first-born in Egypt is ascribed to the «powers of Mastema,» i.e. the angels of Satan. Or, the plague of Nu 16:41-50 is interpreted in Wisdom of Solomon (18:25) as inflicted by the «destroyer,» who in later Rabbinical literature is often identified with Satan (*Shebu'oth*, 6, 37a, 57). See more on this in T. Thornton, «Satan – God's Agent for Punishing,» *ET* 83 (1972): 151-152; also in L. Johnson, «Satan Talk in Corinth: The Rhetoric of Conflict,» *BTB* 29 (1999): 145-155.

the sinner²⁰. The problem with this understanding arises from the fact that the ultimate goal of church discipline is the «salvation of the spirit in the day of the Lord Jesus.» That is, if we were to follow the logic of the proponents of the fatal ending, we would have to conclude that the sinner is able to redeem his sin at the price of his own suffering. It is quite obvious that such a conclusion contradicts the New Testament view of salvation. Moreover, although the notion of the salvation of our spirit/soul (i.e. immaterial self) is widespread, it does not correspond to the teaching of the apostle, who always speaks of the «holistic» character of our salvation («spirit, and soul, and body» 1Th 5:23). For Paul, the goal of salvation is our future existence in resurrected, «spiritual» bodies (15:35-50).

For the correct understanding of the apostle's thought, it is necessary to consider the meaning of the words *sarx* and *pnēma*. Undoubtedly, Paul uses the word *sarx* many times synonymously with the word «body» (6:16; 7:28; 15:39), and likewise the word *pnēma* to designate the immaterial part of the self (5:3; Col 2:5). However, in this text we are dealing with a unique case where the meaning of each word is defined through its contextual interaction. As Thiselton convincingly showed, in the overwhelming majority of cases when *sarx* and *pnēma* stand next to each other, they denote not the separate parts of a self, but rather the person as a whole in his/her subjugation either to the «flesh» or the «Spirit»²¹.

Therefore, «casting the sinner outside of the camp» has as its goal not physical destruction, but rather that of bringing the sinner to a state of remorse and repentance. Being «outside the camp» does not preclude the possibility of physical sufferings by means of which the Lord breaks up the sinner's fleshly self-reliance. It is much more important to remember the ultimate goal of disciplinary measures: the salvation of the spirit, i.e. the salvation of the person as a whole, whose life after repentance will once again be led by the Spirit.

The Community of the New Exodus

In vv. 6-8 Paul continues to argue that the Corinthians' lax attitude toward sin is incompatible with their status as members of the Body of Christ. By using the metaphor of leaven the apostle points to the far-reaching consequences of such an attitude for the well-being of the whole community. In other words, the problem of the sinning brother was *their* prob-

²⁰ See, for example, H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*. Hermeneia. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), p. 97; Lampe, «Church Discipline,» 349; Forkman,

The Limits, 146; Havener «A Curse for Salvation,» pp. 339-341.

²¹ See A. Thiselton, «The Meaning of SARC,» pp. 214-215.

lem: «A little yeast²² leavens the whole batch of dough» (cf. Gal 5:9). A tolerant attitude toward sin might exert a paralyzing effect on the existence of the community as a whole²³.

The «leaven» metaphor naturally evokes for Paul the theme of the Passover celebration (vv. 7-8), the central event in Jewish history, that signified the deliverance of the people of Israel from the bondage in Egypt. As the Israel of old, the New Testament people of God are also invited to take part in a new exodus from the tyranny of sin toward «newness of life» (Ro 6:4).

Yet just as the Israelites had to cleanse their houses from all leaven (Ex 12:15), so the Christians at Corinth have to remove the «old leaven» and thus prepare themselves for the Paschal celebration. It is noteworthy that Paul switches the metaphor from «a little» leaven and «a whole batch» of dough (v. 6) to «old» leaven and «a new batch» of dough (v. 7). The new pair of counterparts (the «old leaven» and «new batch of dough») reverberates in our memory with the previously mentioned paradoxical existence of a believer between the «already» and «not yet»: in Christ we, figuratively speaking, are already made out of «new dough,» yet «Adam's leaven» can still make itself known in our lives.

The correct understanding of v. 7 is of vital importance: «Clean out the old yeast,.. as you really are unleavened.» *Paul admonishes the believers at Corinth to get rid of the old leaven, not so that they could become the «new dough» but so that they could realize that they are already the «new dough.»* The Divine Indicative («you are the new batch of dough») should always precede the human Imperative («get rid of old leaven»)²⁴. In other words, Paul does not ask the believers to try their best to become something they would never be able to become by themselves. Rather, he asks them to put aside the «old leaven» so that the «new person» (Col 3:10) that each one of them has already become in Christ, might be revealed.

²² Here NRSV's (also NIV's) rendering of the Greek word *zvmh* as «yeast» is somewhat misleading, and «popularly suggests a product foreign to ancient baking practices» (BDAG, 429).

²³ One of the reasons the Israelites were commanded to cleanse once a year from all leaven was a sanitary one, because leaven kept in the house throughout the year was prone to become a source of infection (see G. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 216). Thus the Mishnah prescribes in detail the procedure for cleaning a house: «On the night preceding the fourteenth [of Nisan] they seek out leaven by the light of a candle.» Leaven is well attested in later rab-

binic literature as a symbol of evil inclinations. (See *J. Ber.* 7d; also *Gen. Rab.* 34.10). An equally negative attitude toward leaven is also found in Greek literature (See Plutarch, *Moralia, Quaest. Rom.* 109).

²⁴ Unfortunately, the current state of affairs in evangelical churches is far out of balance. Whereas some churches tend to accentuate the reality of the Divine Indicative (though often at the expense of total neglect of church discipline), other churches go to the opposite extreme by placing an exclusive emphasis on the human Imperative, thus often neglecting the presence of the «One who began a good work among us» (Php 1:6).

As was stated above, the cleansing of a house always preceded the slaying of the Passover lamb. The situation in Corinth was absolutely abnormal, when, in the words of Paul, the «paschal lamb (toV pavsca), Christ, has been sacrificed» (v. 7b) but the believers did not prepare the «house» for the celebration!

The Passover imagery brings the person of Christ into focus, the supreme reason for the Corinthians' new «unleavened» status. It is because the Passover Lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed, that the believers in Corinth can be assured that they are under the protection of blood of the Lamb; that they are the community on its way to their spiritual Exodus²⁵. It is because Christ died for them that the believers became a «new, unleavened batch of dough» which, in turn, opened the privilege of living according to the Spirit, not the flesh.

CONCLUSION

The case of immoral behavior in Corinth became a matter of special concern for Paul. The reputation and future of the Christian community at Corinth were under threat. The congregation, however, did not realize the coming danger, primarily because it mistakenly considered the deviant behavior as an example of the new «spiritual» freedom of believers.

As the prophets and scribes of the Old Testament, Paul, under the guidance of the Spirit, creatively reconsiders the word of God, applying it to a qualitatively new situation in the life of the community of faith. Like the scribe «who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven» Paul «brings out of the storeroom» a treasure of new meaning (Mt 13:52). As a result, the same word that was spoken authoritatively to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament now is addressed to the Christian community in the city of Corinth. The same hermeneutical task, I believe, awaits ministers of the Word today. Instead of trying to freeze the meaning of God's Word «for all times and peoples» the scribes of our day have to be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit, so that the Scriptures can address the people of God authoritatively and meaningfully in the particular circumstances of their existence.

²⁵ This is the only time that we encounter the direct analogy of Jesus' death with the Passover lamb in Paul's letters. The function of the lamb here is not to atone for sins, but rather to set apart Israel as a distinct people whom God was about to deliver from slavery. This image only reinforces the earlier supposi-

tion that «handing over» the sinning person to Satan most probably means putting the sinner back into the sphere unprotected by the «blood of the lamb» and thus exposing him to the threat of «the destroyer» (Ex 12:23). See, R. Hays, *First Corinthians*, 83.85.

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