

PREFACE

I would like to once again make the case for having and using multiple translations of God's word. My preparation for this week's session is a case in point.

I have used and favored as my principal translation since the early 1980s the NASB—New American Standard Bible—which is considered by most scholars to be the most literal of all the modern English Bible translations. For this reason it may not always “read” as smoothly as other translations, but it is highly prized for in-depth study.

As I have pointed out before, however, no translation is perfect, and this week I was, at least for a while, thrown off-course by three words the editors of the NASB inserted in v5 of our text. Not just reliable commentators, but the rest of our common modern translations (*NIV, KJV, NKJV, ESV*) interpret this differently. We will get to the particulars in a moment, but I want to use this opportunity to encourage you to have at your disposal, and to use regularly, multiple translations—not just in your study, but in your reading.

There's nothing wrong with having your favorite, the translation with which you are most familiar and comfortable. But please do not limit yourself to that version. In this instance, if I had restricted my study to the NASB, I would have come away with a skewed understanding of the relationship between Paul and the Corinthian church in this scandal—and I would have come to this class to teach an erroneous picture of what Paul was saying to the church.

In our previous session we learned that Paul, in a mystical yet powerful way—“in S/spirit”—intended to be present with the Corinthians when they dealt with this scandal—scandal, that is, to Paul: the most scandalous aspect to the apostle was that the church did not see it as a scandal! And Paul was saying in v3, and in v4, that when the church had this letter read to them, and followed through on his instruction, he would be there with them—if not bodily, so powerfully in spirit it would be as if he *were* there bodily. And in vv4-5 he gets down to brass tacks.

Read 1 Corinthians 5:3-5.

v4-5

As I mentioned last week, this is a challenging paragraph, primarily in knowing which parts of the sentence go together. For example,

ESV: When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present...

But this rightly raises the question, Why would they be assembled together *not* in the name of the Lord Jesus—especially for so important a task? So this phrasing (unnecessarily) speaks to *the nature of their gathering*.

NASB: In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus...

Here the phrasing connects “In the name of our Lord Jesus” with what Paul expects them to do by “the power of our Lord Jesus”; that is, to put the man out of the church. So we will do our best to put this in order—and we must begin, not with the beginning of v4, but with the beginning of v5, because it is here we encounter the unfortunate NASB translation. By addressing this first we will get a clearer picture of what Paul is attempting to accomplish by long distance. (Frankly, he would have benefited by having Skype at his disposal.)

The NASB opens v5 with “*I have decided* to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh...” Because the first three words are rendered in italics, we know that the NASB editors have inserted them. That is, the italics telegraph to the reader that these words are not in the original Greek or Aramaic, but have been inserted for clarity, because the editors are of the opinion that they are *implied* by the text. Unfortunately in this instance they do not clarify, but confuse.

Until I began comparing v4-5 to other translations (and reading the commentators), based on the NASB I heard the voice of Paul standing majestically and judicially on high, handing down his sovereign verdict on the Corinthian miscreant.

In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh...

The only way to read that is Paul demanding that the Corinthian church follow his dictate to put the man out, whether they like it or not. That is the effect of “I have decided”; and it is given extra strength by the inclusion of the calls to the “name of our Lord Jesus” and the “power of our Lord Jesus,” as if these were qualifying Paul—and Paul alone—to hand down this judgment. But that is not Paul’s intent, and the truer picture is captured by the other translations. We could pick any of them, but let’s use the NKJV.

Read 1 Corinthians 5:4-5. (NKJV)

So there it is. Church discipline is not to be conducted by one, or even a few, but *by the church*. And it all is to be conducted in the name of and the power of “our Lord Jesus Christ.” That authority is given to the church, not just its pastor, or elders, and certainly not just its founder.

Paul has already voiced his position; he has “already judged...him who has done this deed” (v3). And here in v5 he voices his position again, that the man should be delivered to Satan. But his is one voice added to the many. When the church executes this discipline, Paul, there in spirit, will cast his vote along with everyone else. He expects them to do what is right, but he is not dictating their behavior as lord of the manor.

In the name of... with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ...

The two calls to Christ Jesus are meant to bathe the entire process in the authority (“name of”) and power that comes only from above. Alternatively we could order this such that the first is for Paul, the second for the church with Paul, as Gordon Fee interprets vv3-4: “As for my part, even though not physically present, I am present with you in S/spirit, and as such I have already, by the authority of our Lord Jesus, pronounced sentence on the man who has perpetrated this deed; therefore, when you and my S/spirit are assembled together along with the power of the Lord Jesus, you are to carry out the verdict of turning him over to Satan.”

The effect of this “high Christology” is to place all proceedings “under Christ’s own divine jurisdiction” (Fee). Bottom line: Whereas, under the influence of the NASB, I saw a high pontiff declaring his verdict from the mount, backed up by the name and power of Christ, in truth Paul is ensuring that *the church* in its holy responsibility, along with him, proceeds under the power and auspices of Christ.

The church’s responsibility for this action is confirmed in the pronouns at the end of this chapter.

Read 1 Corinthians 5:12-13.

deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh,

Now let’s see what Paul means here by not just putting the man out of the church, but delivering “such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh.”

Sidebar: The original NIV’s “**so that** the **sinful nature** may be destroyed” is an unfortunate translation, implying that it is possible this side of glory for that regrettable aspect of the human experience to be extinguished. The updated NIV is in alignment with our other common translations with, “for the destruction of the flesh.” The original “so that” also suggests that this was Paul’s *purpose* for the excommunication.

We must understand that the destruction of the man's flesh is not the *purpose* of his excommunication, but only the *result* of his being put out; the purpose is his salvation "in the day of the Lord Jesus."

There are *reams* of discussion over what is meant by delivering the man to "Satan for the destruction of his flesh," but, while it is true that the word translated "destruction" (*olethros*) can certainly refer to death, this result would not fit with Paul's purpose in the man being ultimately saved in the day of the Lord.

Let's think of this in practical—and especially *first century*—terms. When a believer is removed from the Christian communion, he loses its fellowship, encouragement, and counsel; he loses its regular instruction and, most important in this instance, its reproof. To be put out of the church over egregious, unrepented sin is to lose the benefit of the body's regular rebukes over smaller offenses—which shape and form our walk in Christ.

Now, in our day, when one is put out of a local church (in the rare instance when this actually occurs), one can just stroll down the street to another congregation of similar ilk. No harm, no foul. But in the early days of the church, this would not be the case; being put out of the assembly would be akin to spiritual limbo: one would not fit in anywhere, and would be thrust back into the realm of Satan after the relative safety of the church. The church does not have a firewall against Satan's wiles, but it at least offers the protection of biblical instruction, encouragement, and the friendship and counsel of like-suffering souls. Now, losing the protection of Christ's kingdom, this man would be more vulnerable to Satan's.

This "destruction" could refer to possible sickness or injury, but probably more to the point, Paul hoped that the result of this excommunication would be this man's repentance—the "death" of his winking at sin—and his return to the church.

that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Why? What was the apostle's ultimate goal in this verdict of the church? That when the church is literally greeted by her returning Lord, this man would be counted among them. As he does elsewhere, Paul is using eschatological language to speak of the man's salvation—salvation in the here and now, but only fully realized at the "Day of the Lord." Let's close with what Solomon says about a similar situation.

Read Proverbs 23:13-16.

Paul wanted his "inmost being," and that of the church, to rejoice when this man is rescued from the clutches of Satan, and turns back to "speak what is right."