

THE FUNCTION OF SCRIPTURE
IN 1 COR 5,13B AND 6,16

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INTRODUCTION

The quotations of Scripture in 1 Corinthians, as in the rest of Paul's letters, have long been the subject of considerable enquiry. Much attention has been focused on the textual basis of Paul's citations, his citation technique, his exegesis of the Old Testament passages in question and the ensuing theological implications. Each of these subjects have one thing in common: they could be explored irrespective of the fact that the Scriptural quotations under scrutiny appear as an integral part of a new unit of thought within a letter. When the most obvious feature of Paul's Old Testament quotations is recognised, that they occur in epistles, a new cluster of relatively neglected questions comes into focus¹. These include the following: How does Scripture function within a paragraph or unit of thought? Why did Paul choose on some occasions to make his use of Scripture explicit and not on others? Is Scripture central and formative or merely peripheral and illustrative in any given instance? It is possible to answer these questions on different levels, with respect to the viewpoint of the author, the text and various readers. Our concern in this paper is with how Paul intended certain Scriptural passages to function in 1 Corinthians. Answers to such questions must by necessity be given on a case by case basis. The enormous variety of the data across the Pauline corpus, where around a third of the quotations congregate in only three chapters of one letter, Romans 9-11, and some whole letters exhibit not a single explicit citation, cautions against hasty generalisations. We shall restrict ourselves to an examination of two quotations in 1 Corinthians, namely, 5,13b and 6,16. The results bear on the task of studying the Old Testament quotations in Paul's letters and on the nature of 1 Corinthians itself.

1 CORINTHIANS 5,13B

In 1 Corinthians 5,1-13 Paul's purpose is clear: he is writing to persuade the Corinthian Christians to expel a certain member of their

1. I am indebted to Aberdeen University postgraduate Roy Ciampa for this basic insight. Mr Ciampa is working on an 'epistolary analysis' of Paul's use of Scripture in Galatians.

congregation who was having an ongoing sexual relationship with his unbelieving stepmother. In verse 13b he quotes a command of expulsion that appears in Deuteronomy 13,5; 17,7 19,19; 21,21; 22,21; 24,7 (cf. Judg 20,13). In spite of the absence of an introductory formula, 'drive out the wicked person from among you' is it seems a deliberate citation of which Paul was conscious and which his readers were meant to recognize. Three observations support this contention: (1) The words in 5,13b are the same as in the LXX of Deuteronomy, which is a literal translation of the Hebrew, except that to suit the epistolary context the verb is changed from a singular future indicative to a plural aorist imperative; (2) ἐξάιρω occurs only here in Paul's letters; and (3) the lack of an introductory formula, such as γέγραπται, to signal a quotation in v. 13b can be explained in terms of asyndeton suiting the chapter's emotionally charged atmosphere; in some instances no introduction can serve as an introduction.

Peter Zaas suggests that Paul quotes the words in question to exploit the play on words between πόρνος (5,9.10.11; cf. 5,1) and πονηρὸν (5,13b) and to invoke the kindred ethos of expulsion from a community. In his view this rhetorical purpose exhausts the function of the text in its new context. Zaas insists that the "invocation of biblical law as a buttress for apostolic authority" is only "apparent"². In other words, he assigns only a superficial role to the text in Paul's argument. Most commentators make no attempt to answer the sort of questions we have set ourselves.

There are good reasons, however, for assigning a more central role for 13b in the unit of thought. At several points Paul expresses his desire that the man be removed: 5,2b.5a.7a and 11a. None of these are as direct and literal as 5,13b. In fact, in other parts of 1 Corinthians it seems to be Paul's practice to close off a section with what we may have here in chapter 5, namely a climactic appeal (e.g., 10,22b). Furthermore, Kathleen Callow's discourse analysis of 1 Corinthians 5, which distinguishes "prominent and supporting material in each sub-unit" and identifies what she calls "the global theme" (p. 195) focusing on connectives, word order and the mood of verbs likewise assigns 5,13b pride of place as expressing "the main structural theme of the passage" (p. 205)³. Having authoritatively rebuked the Corinthians for their inaction (5,1-5), Paul appeals to their spiritual self-interest (5,6-8), clears up a misunderstanding

2. P. ZAAS, *Cast Out the Evil Man from Your Midst*, in *JBL* 103 (1984) 259-261.

3. K. CALLOW, *Patterns of Thematic Development in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13*, in D.A. BLACK (ed.), *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation*, Nashville, TN, Broadman, 1992, pp. 194-206.

(5,9-11), and then lays upon them the responsibility to act (5,12-13a). In this light 5,13b is in modern linguistic terms, "the thematic head" (p. 206), or in plain English, the main point of the passage.

Is it possible that this quotation of words from Deuteronomy occurred to Paul because his mind was moving along the lines of Deuteronomy's teaching on exclusion from the community associated with the expulsion formula and its variations? There are in fact several points of contact between 1 Corinthians 5 and the teaching of Deuteronomy on exclusion from a community⁴. In Deuteronomy the formula in question is the verdict pronounced on certain sins which are roughly equivalent to Paul's list in 5,11: sexual promiscuity (22,21), idolatry (17,3,7), malicious false testimony (19,18-19), the rebellious son who is a profligate and a drunkard (21,20-21) and theft (24,7). The overlap with the sins Paul lists in 5,11 which the church is to judge is difficult to miss. Of all the vice lists in Paul's letters, although not a perfect fit, the one in 5,11 best matches this Deuteronomic teaching. The specific sin which Paul condemns is given the equivalent condemnation in Deuteronomy 22,22 ("If a man is found sleeping with another man's wife ... you must purge the evil from Israel"); and the penalty for the incest prohibited in 23,1 (22,30) is the same formula quoted in 5,13b. Furthermore, Paul's notion of the corporate responsibility of the Corinthians, who he addresses with the plural pronoun throughout, and calls upon to mourn over the sin of the erring man as if it were their own, is again reflected in teaching associated with the expulsion formulae in Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy 19,13 and 21,9 the community is held responsible for the sin of an individual until the expulsion is carried out. Finally, the judgement scene of Deuteronomy 19,16-20 which includes the formula quoted in 1 Corinthians 5,13b may be compared with the procedure described in 1 Corinthians 5,4. In both cases the discipline is to take place in the presence of the congregation and the Lord.

Thus there is good evidence that the quotation of Scripture in 5,13b plays a crucial role in Paul's argument. It is rhetorically prominent and evidently exercised a formative influence on the paragraph.

1 CORINTHIANS 6,16

In 1 Corinthians 6,12-20 Paul responds to the report that some believers were having sexual relations with prostitutes. The function of the quotation

4. For a detailed discussion see chapter three of B.S. ROSNER *Paul, Scripture and Ethics. A Study of 1 Corinthians 5-7* (AGJU, 22), Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1994.

of Genesis 2,24 in 6,16, like so many other details in the passage, is far from easy to ascertain. The paragraph has been described as “disjointed,” “obscure,” “unfinished”⁵, “imprecise”, extravagant” and even “incoherent”⁶. Paul’s words assume a first-hand knowledge of the situation in question and are uttered with some exasperation: they are therefore quite elliptical. Much needs to be supplied to unravel the train of his thought. Many commentators believe that Paul employs Genesis 2,24 in 6,16 in an altogether unconvincing manner. He misuses a text that concerns the sanctity and value of monogamous marriage to underscore the danger of being joined to a harlot, without explaining the connection between the two notions.

In contrast to this pessimistic view I wish to assert in this short paper that a serious look at Genesis 2,24 in 6,16 goes a long way towards recognising the unity of thought in what is an admittedly difficult paragraph. The quotation functions in three ways. First, Paul uses it to prove that sexual intercourse with a prostitute is not merely an insignificant and casual affair. As the explanatory γάρ in 6,16a indicates, Genesis 2,24 is cited to supply a reason for the assertion in 6,15 that “the one who cleaves to a harlot becomes one body (with her)”. A compound of the verb to cleave, occurs in the part of LXX Genesis 2,24 that is not quoted: “for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave (προσκολληθήσεται) to his wife”. It is surprising that Paul’s response to prostitution in 6,12-20 makes no explicit mention of marital unfaithfulness, assuming that some of the Corinthian men involved were married. Does Paul assume that with Genesis 2,24 his readers will supply the thought of marriage? The quotation of Genesis 2,24 in Matthew 19,5 and Ephesians 5,31 with explicit reference to marriage, its accepted interpretation in Jewish circles, indicates the prominence of the text in the early church and suggests the likelihood that Paul’s readers would have assumed with Paul its immediate reference to marriage. Thus, on one level Paul’s citation of the text is a subtle and indirect reminder of what the paragraph otherwise goes without saying: sexual relations belong to marriage.

Secondly, on another level Genesis 2,24 in 6,16 draws attention to the spiritual marriage of the believer with Christ, a union which Paul assumes calls for faithfulness and sexual purity. Paul in effect presents two mutually exclusive alternatives in 6,16-17: cleaving to a prostitute

and cleaving to the Lord. The text is used not only to prove the seriousness of sexual union with a harlot, but to introduce the notion of the believer’s nuptial union with Christ. Though only a few commentators have found spiritual marriage imagery in 6,12-20, many elements in the passage are congruent with it⁷. Language which is characteristic of a marriage union appears in verse 13, where Paul says that the body is meant for the Lord and vice versa (cf. Song of Solomon 2,16; Rom 7,2-3). Similar things are said of literal, human marriage in 7,1-7 (cf. esp 7,4 and 6,12b). Furthermore, spiritual marriage imagery is implicit in 7,32-35, where pleasing the Lord and pleasing one’s partner are compared. In the Jewish Scriptures both physical (man to woman) and spiritual (God to Israel) marriage carry the implication of ownership: the woman belongs to the husband. 1 Corinthians 6,13b and 19b envelop the passage with this same thought. Finally, the use of Genesis 2,24 in Ephesians 5,31 to move from the thought of physical marriage to spiritual marriage, whether Paul wrote it or not, supplies a precedent for the same move in 1 Corinthians 6.

Thirdly, Paul takes up the thought introduced by Genesis 2,24 in 6,16, that of the permanence of sexual relationships, to highlight the uniqueness of the sin of porneia in 6,18b. 1 Corinthians 6,18a gives yet another reason why the Corinthians ought to flee immorality (6,18a): unlike other sins, porneia is a sin against one’s own body. This statement has puzzled commentators. An obvious way to understand it is in the light of the immediately preceding context, 6,16-17. Porneia is unacceptable because its legacy is permanent; the one who cleaves to a harlot becomes one body with her, one flesh. Such a union is “against” the body because the believer’s body belongs to Christ (6,15), is indwelt by the Spirit (6,19), having been bought by God (6,20).

Why did Paul cite Genesis 2,24 in 6,16? He did so, if our interpretations are deemed correct, because it was pivotal to much of his argument in the entire passage. In 1 Corinthians 6,12-20 Paul bodily spells out the implications of this text as he sees them in relation to *porneia*.

CONCLUSION

Two conclusions may be drawn, albeit cautiously in the light of our limited sample of only two quotations. The first concerns the task of studying Old Testament quotations in 1 Corinthians (and for that matter,

7. See ROSNER, *Paul, Scripture and Ethics*, ch. 5, for a fuller defence.

5. J. HÉRING, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, Transl. A.W. Heathcote and P.J. Allcock, London, Epworth, 1962, p. 47.

6. T.A. BURKILL, *Two into One: the Notion of Carnal Union in Mark 10;8; 1 Cor 6:16; Eph 5;31*, in *ZNW* 62 (1971) 115-120.

Paul's other letters). In both our case studies attention to the larger Old Testament context of the quotations was crucial to determining their function in their new contexts. This goes against the frequently asserted opinion that Paul is ignorant of or at least ignores the original context of his quotations. Secondly, the quotations of Scripture in 1 Corinthians may have played a more formative function in the letter than is sometimes assumed. Much of 1 Corinthians may be implicitly exegetical. Many of Paul's responses to Corinthian problems, although appearing to be emotionally charged and *ad hoc*, may nonetheless be building upon Biblical teaching.

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CONTROLLING THE BODIES

A THEOLOGICAL PROFILE OF THE CORINTHIAN SEXUAL ASCETICS (1 COR 7)

While interpreters of 1 Corinthians 7 used to find evidence only for Paul's preference for celibacy here, now there is a general concensus that some *Corinthians* themselves inclined toward or even advocated and practiced it, and that Paul writes partly to contest their position¹. But why did these Corinthians favor celibacy? How did it fit into their Christian self-understanding? How could they support it on the basis of Christian tradition or theology? Scholarly attempts to reconstruct Corinthian sexual asceticism have provided some generally accepted answers: It is grounded in the belief that celibacy characterizes eschatological existence and in a strong sense of eschatological fulfillment manifested especially in a lively pneumatism.

Yet by no means have we already gained a full and clear picture of Corinthian sexual asceticism and the theology which supported it. The present investigation is offered as an effort to close some of the gaps. It also attempts to fill a lacuna in scholarship by mining 1 Corinthians 7 itself more thoroughly than others have done for a reconstruction of the theological rationale for celibacy in Corinth. In particular, I will argue from this chapter that Corinthian sexual asceticism was based on Corinthian pneumatism, a theology of ἐξουσία, a view of the physical

1. Early representatives of the view that a tendency toward sexual asceticism in Corinth forms the occasion for Paul's discussion here are J. WEISS, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (KEK, 5), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910, p. 169; H. LIETZMANN & W.G. KÜMMEL, *An die Korinther I* (HNT, 9), vol. 2, Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, ¹1969, p. 29; A. ROBERTSON & A. PLUMMER, *The First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, ²1914, pp. 130-133; H. CHADWICK, 'All Things to all Men' 1 Cor. IX.22, in *NTS* 1 (1954-1955) 261-275, pp. 263-264; see also more recently, W. SCHRAGE, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther I* (EKK, VII/1), Braunschweig, Benziger-Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener, 1991, p. 54, who says that the practice of sexual asceticism by some Corinthians is "so gut wie sicher"; G.D. FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT), Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1987, pp. 269-271; contrast W. SCHMITHALS, *Gnosticism in Corinth. An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians* (tr. J. E. Stealy), Nashville, TN - New York, Abingdon, ³1971, p. 235; G. SELLIN, *Hauptprobleme des ersten Korintherbriefes*, in *ANRW* II 25.4 (1987) 2940-3044, p. 3003; C. CARAGOUNIS, "Fornication" and "Concession"? *Interpreting 1 Cor 7.1-7*, in this volume, pp. 543-559. Not all Corinthians were advocating or practicing sexual asceticism, however, as especially indicated by 7.5. There Paul states that temporary abstinence in marriage must be ἐκ συμφώνου, "by agreement," which implies that some spouses did not want to submit to such a practice.

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