Title: The background, meaning, and intent of the expression "hand the man over to Satan" in I Corinthians 5:5

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Date completed: December 2007

Granting Institution: Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIIAS)

Description: Unpublished Thesis (MA): 296 pages

Abstract:

Scholars give different competing views regarding the background, meaning, and intent of the expression “hand the man over to Satan” in 1 Cor 5:5. That said, this study attempts to investigate through historical-grammatical method of exegesis the meaning of the aforementioned expression, the possible backgrounds against which it can be better understood, and its intent expressed in the phrase, “for the destruction of sa/rc (flesh)” and the clause “in order that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord.”

The background study shows that there are several possible backgrounds that can potentially shed light on 1 Cor 5:5, particularly the enigmatic expression “hand the man over to Satan.” Possible backgrounds include the following: (1) parallels in Job 1:12 and 2:6, (2) the handing over of Israelites to their enemies as punishment for breach of the covenant in Lev 26, (3) the person of Satan in extant Jewish literature prior to Paul, and (4) the Deuteronomic excommunication formula.

On the other hand, the exegetical analysis of 1 Cor 5 reveals that the expression “hand the man over to Satan” simply means removal of the offender out of the fellowship of the church; it is analogous with the call for removal in vv. 2,7,13. However, the expression itself may further imply that the offender will suffer physically at the hands of Satan. This is indicated by the
parallels in Job 1:12 and 2:6, the breach of the covenant in Lev 26, and Paul’s use of the term paideu/w (to learn) in 1 Tim 1:20—a passage where the handing over of an offender also occurs.

The anticipated result of handing the offender over to Satan is the “the destruction of sa/rc.” Sa/rc here has an ethical sense, and hence the phrase means that the offender will change his sinful lifestyle, particularly his immoral act; it does not envision the death of the offender whether immediate or not. On the other hand, the ultimate purpose of the handing over is the salvation of the offender on the day of the Lord—that is, his redemption.