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# An Exegetical Study of I Corinthians 5:7b

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PAUL'S USE OF THE BRIEF STATEMENT—*kai gar to pascha hēmōn etuthē Christos*, "for, our Passover lamb, Christ, has already been sacrificed"—in I Corinthians 5:7b elicits the exegete's interest for several reasons. First, since this is the only appearance of the term *pascha*, "Passover lamb," in the Pauline corpus, one wonders what possible factors led the apostle to employ it here.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the contribution of this particular statement to the whole of Paul's argument in I Corinthians 5 must be explored. Finally, the precise connotation which the terms had for Paul's readers must be sought.

This brief study will endeavor to provide probable answers to these questions and, in doing so, will address related matters. Our approach will strive to be inductive (in so far as is possible); to this end we will begin with an examination of the phrase itself in relation to its context, then move to a perusal of scholarly commentary on the passage, and, finally, strive to evaluate the various possible positions in view of our own study.

The opening *kai gar*, "for," of 5:7b should be noted because it links what Paul is about to say with the context and intertwines the two.<sup>2</sup> The apostle, far from viewing 7b as a hiatus or interruption in his thought, appeals (via the *gar*, "for") for support, i.e., what is to follow provides reason and substantiation for the points he has made in the immediate context. *To pascha* (possible translation given in body of manuscript), a key element in Paul's thought here, is a substantive and is variously applied in the New Testament writings. Its usage is fourfold:

- (1) It may refer to the seven-day Jewish feast of the Passover.
- (2) It is occasionally used to denote in a narrower sense the actual Passover (held on the eve of the 15th Nisan).
- (3) As in the Old Testament, the New Testament uses this term for the Passover Lamb, slain at mid-day on the 14th Nisan in the forecourt of the temple at Jerusalem and then eaten after sundown.
- (4) In some Christian usage, Easter is called *pascha* (John 2:13).<sup>3</sup>

The combination of *pascha* with *etuthē* is a very strong indication that Paul is here using the term in the sense of (3), *paschā* as designation for the Passover Lamb. In fact, his usage approximates very closely the Septuagint phrase *to pascha thusate*, "sacrifice the passover lamb," in Ex. 12:21 and *to pascha thuseis*, "you will sacrifice the passover lamb," in Dt. 16:2.<sup>4</sup> An important grammatical note in this case is the tendency of the substantive to express the thought which bears emphasis.<sup>5</sup> A. T. Robertson notes that it is normal for the substantive to come after the subject, but cites I Cor. 5:7 as an

example of the reversal of this order.<sup>6</sup> This writer, aware that Hebrew puts those words first which it wishes to stress, wonders whether the "abnormal" position of *to pascha*, "passover lamb," might not add additional emphasis.

*Hēmōn*, "our," is also significant in that it ties Paul to his readers and in turn joins them both to *to pascha*, "passover lamb." It also joins with the *kai gar*, "for," in intertwining this statement with the surrounding context. *Etuthē*, "he has been sacrificed," the aorist passive of *thuō*, "to sacrifice," is, as we noted, the normal word for the sacrifice of the passover lamb.<sup>7</sup> One point of interest is that the great majority of the occurrences of this word, in conjunction with *pascha*, "passover lamb," are in the active voice (e.g. *thusate*, *thuseis*, "sacrifice," "you will sacrifice"). Here, however, Paul puts it in the aorist passive. The writer would like to suggest that what we may have here is Hebrew circumlocution to avoid use of God's name along the lines of the aorist passive *egerthē*, "he was raised" (Matt. 28:6, 7), i.e., it was God the Father who sacrificed *etuthē*, just as it was He who raised Him (Jesus) from the dead.<sup>8</sup>

*Christos*, can, I believe, without extended discussion, be regarded here as carrying with it Messianic overtones. The Old Testament milieu of the context and the fact that Paul chooses it rather than *Iēsou*, "Jesus," as in 5:4 would strongly suggest that it is not employed here only as a *nomen*, though this dimension is perhaps present to a lesser degree.<sup>9</sup>

In turning to a more thorough examination of the meaning of Paul's statement as a whole, we must note that the context (the whole of chapter 5) deals with a very real practical problem for Paul as pastor, namely, the well-known presence of an incestuous relationship in the congregation. In chapter 5, the apostle in vv. 1-5, quickly comes to the point, expresses his dismay that the Corinthians are "puffed up" (*pephusiōmenoi*) rather than "mourning" (*epenthēsaté*) under such circumstances, and then renders his apostolic verdict that such a man should be handed over to Satan (v. 5). Then, in vv. 6-8, he uses language from the Passover or Feast of Unleavened Bread to underscore the total incongruity of an incestuous relationship in a Christian congregation. Finally, in vv. 9-13, the apostle again exhorts to an abstinence from immoral ones (*pornois*), urges that it is indeed necessary to judge those who are inside (*esō*), and concludes by restating his apostolic decision—*exarate ton ponēron ex humōn autōn*, "cast out the wicked one from among you."

Now in this division of the chapter, we turn specifically to vv. 6-8, and, of course, especially to the role played by verse 7.<sup>10</sup> In verse 6 Paul begins by noting that boasting is the most inappropriate response conceivable in the present state of affairs. To pinpoint the danger which he perceives in this attitude, he quotes what must have been a well-known aphorism—*hoti mikra zumē holon to phurama zumoi*, "a little leaven leavens the whole lump."<sup>11</sup> Clearly in the context the incestuous person=*zumē*, "leaven," and the congregation=*phurama*, "lump." The key point here is that the readers status, their identity, if you will, is such that it stands over against

and in sharp antithesis to the presence of an incestuous person and relationship. At this pivotal point in his exhortation Paul introduces with the *kai gar*, "for," the thought which serves to underline both the inappropriateness of the presence of the *zumē*, "leaven," and the people's unique status—to *pascha hēmōn etuthē Christos*, "Christ, our Paschal lamb, has already been sacrificed." This is followed quickly in verse 8 by the exhortation to celebrate the feast, not with the old leaven, but with the unleavened loaves of sincerity and truth.

Returning to our opening queries, we now wish to explore for those possible factors which may have recommended to the apostle the employment of 5:7b in exhortation on this practical, but also theological, problem. The language of leaven, dough, the Passover Lamb, and the verb *heortazōmen*, "celebrate," in v. 8a surely suggest that Paul is here drawing his language from the feast of the Passover or Unleavened Bread.<sup>12</sup> This general conclusion is supported by the majority of commentators.<sup>13</sup> More specifically, then, we want to explore the nature of this feast and its constituent elements so as to discern its present applicability.

The extensive study by J. B. Segal on *The Hebrew Passover* contains a discussion of the Passover as it was celebrated throughout Israelite history.<sup>14</sup> The section which treats the Passover's celebration in the first century—that practice undoubtedly known to Paul's readers—reflects many practices (sometimes identical with the most ancient practices) which are most significant. First, there can be no doubt that the role of unleavened bread in the feast was crucial to its proper execution. We read:

The distinctive feature of the Passover week, was, however, the feature from which it received its name—the unleavened bread. The name tends to stress a positive rather than—as would be in fact more correct—a negative aspect of the festival. The documents are agreed in declaring that 'seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread.' But it is not the order to eat massoth whose infringement carries the extreme penalty of excommunication; it is the prohibition against leaven. And so firm and definite is the rule against fermenting matter that it applies not only to all Israelites, but also to *gerim*, whether circumcised or not.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond this, it is obvious from a review of Strack-Billerbeck that Rabbinic Judaism certainly did not relent to any extent in these requirements. Though the perplexing problem of the date of some of the materials remains with us, presumably many of them reflect practice from as early as the Tannaitic period. As an interesting example of the strong strictures which remained in force against leaven, we cite:

Pes. 3:1 Folgendes wird an Passah beseitigt: Babylonischer Brei (bestehend aus Molke, Salz u. verschimmeltem Brot (Pes. 42a), Medische Met (weil Gerstenwasser dazu gebrauch wurde (Pes. 42b), Edomitischer Essig (weil mit Gerste angestellt (Pes. 42b), Agyptisches Bier (weil aus Gerse (Weizen), Saffor u. Salz bereitet (Pes. 42b), die Bruhe der Farber . . . Dies ist



Regel: Alles was eine Getreideart ist, wird am Passah beseitigt (soweit es mit Wasser in Beruhung gekommen u. dadurch der Sauerung ausgesetzt ist. Siehe, diese sind in der Verwarnung (Verbot) mitenthalten . . .

These must be removed at Passover: Babylonian beer, Median beer, Edomite vinegar, and Egyptian barley-beer; also dyers' pulp, cook's starch-flour, and writer's paste . . . This is the general rule: whatsoever is made from any kind of grain must be removed at Passover. These are included in the prohibition . . ."<sup>16</sup>

In addition to this, there are specific prohibitions against any contact of the paschal lamb with leaven.<sup>17</sup> Thirdly, the key position of the slaying of the lamb in the whole festival is also important to note in view of Paul's *etuthē* (sacrificed). The fact that the lamb had been slain meant: (1) The Passover was in full effect. (2) No uncleanness dare interrupt the already inaugurated worship.<sup>18</sup> The significance of this point for Paul's argument is crucial—when the lamb has been *etuthē* (sacrificed), then a new order, a new state of affairs exists, which dare not be contravened.

Finally, the fact that the Passover found its original *Sitz im Leben* in the Exodus tradition inserts a very real "change of allegiance" motif into all subsequent celebrations. This point is expressed by David Daube:

A section of the Passover eve liturgy opens: 'Originally our fathers were servants of strange service' . . . which means, idolaters, worshippers of false worship—'but now God hath drawn us close to his service (slavery)—his true worship. The context shows that the change of allegiance here includes the whole process . . . That, paradoxically, this change of master follows from a rescue into liberty is already an element in the original scheme: a captive brought back becomes his ransomer's bondsman, the Israelites pass under God's rule because it is he who frees them from the Egyptians.<sup>19</sup>

These various emphases converge to demonstrate the appropriateness of Paul's statement in 7b. It both gives the theological basis for, and strengthens the nature of, his exhortation concerning the case of incest. On a theological level, Paul's introduction of the Passover Lamb ties his exhortation to God's prior action, i.e., he holds the indicative of God's grace next to the imperative of obedience. The two are inseparable.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, by employing the aorist tense, Paul reinforces the total inappropriateness of the presence of the "old leaven" (disobedience).<sup>21</sup> It is also safe to assume that Paul's audience would have understood these implications. Jeremias takes this position and goes on to assert that the widespread employment of this imagery may well indicate an origin in the life of Jesus. He writes:

The casual way in which Paul says: *To pascha hēmōn etuthē Christos*, I C. 5:7, suggests that this comparison was already familiar to the Corinthian church. It is indeed common in the

N. T. (1 Pt. 1:19; John 1:29, 36 . . .) and probably goes back to Jesus Himself, for since *sōma/haima* [body/blood] =dm'/bsr' are, like *ekchunnesthai* [to distribute], sacrificial terms, one may conclude that in the saying at the Lord's Supper (Mk. 14:22-24 and par.) Jesus was comparing Himself with the paschal lamb, and calling His death a sacrifice. This comparison is the core of a rich Passover typology in the primitive church.<sup>22</sup>

On the practical level, 5:7b would scream out, as it were: "Out with the old leaven!"<sup>23</sup> It is also important to note, however, that Paul does not use the Passover in an allegorical way.<sup>24</sup> Rather, Paul sees Jesus as the antitype, of which the Old Testament passover lamb was a type. In conjunction with this employment of the Passover motif, some have pointed to possible cultic vocabulary in I Cor. 5:6-8. Hence Windish:

The following phrases may be singled out as formulae of priestly and cultic admonition: *ekkatharate tēn . . . zumēn . . . , kai gar to, páscha etnthē . . . hōste hcortazōmen mē en zumē . . . all' en azumois.*<sup>25</sup>

Also noteworthy is the fact that the same author views this pericope as a classic example of how cultic concepts can be translated into ethical exhortation.<sup>26</sup> From this writer's perspective, the presence of such cultic vocabulary would be quite natural in view of Paul's use of a Passover typology.

### CONCLUSIONS

I believe our investigation of the text and scholarly commentary on it has provided support for the following conclusions concerning Paul's use of the statement *kai gar to pascha hēmōn etuthē Christos*, "for our Passover lamb, Christ, has already been sacrificed":

- (1) Paul here points to the indicative of God's action (the lamb has been slain) as reason for obedience, i.e., he grounds his ethical exhortation in God's prior action for the Corinthians. This interpretation is consonant with a view which would summarize the Pauline ethic in the phrase "become what you are!" The fact that the lamb has been slain transports Paul's readers into a new state of affairs, into a new identity; they are now celebrants in the festival; *therefore* they should conduct themselves with an eye to their status.
- (2) By linking this statement to the "old leaven-lump" imagery, Paul certainly underscores the *urgency* of having the offending incestuous party dealt with and removed. In a word, the apostle brings out and rightly stresses the obedience dimension of the Passover state of affairs.
- (3) As far as authenticity goes, we have seen that though this is the only occurrence of *pascha* in the Pauline corpus, there is no need to posit an insertion by a later redactor. Rather, Paul is using material which had wide distribu-

tion in the primitive church and which was heavily freighted with theological meaning that most would readily understand.

Though the brevity of this study prevents further probing, we have sought to indicate at least the outline of the significance of verse 7b for the development of Paul's exhortation in I Corinthians 5.

### FOOTNOTES

1. W. F. Moulton and A. S. Geden, *A Concordance to the Greek Testament* (Edinburgh, 1897), p. 778.
2. Robert W. Funk, *A Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, 1961), p. 236.
3. Jeremias, *pascha*, "passover lamb," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. V (Grand Rapids, 1967), p. 897.
4. Alfred Rahlfs, *Septuaginta*, vol. I (Stuttgart, 1935), pp. 105 and 316.
5. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament In the Light of Historical Research* (New York, 1914), p. 398.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 399.
7. It is noteworthy, however, that *thuo* is used to translate several Hebrew verbs, namely *zbh*, *tbh*, *ktr*, *sht*, and *shth*. Cf. E. Hatch and H. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint*, vol. I (Oxford, 1897), p. 659.
8. I owe this insight concerning *egertho* to Dr. Victor Pfitzner, a New Testament Professor from Adelaide, Australia. Though one must not become too dogmatic, I do believe this interpretation to be a real possibility.
9. Grundman, "*Christos*," *TDNT*, vol. IX (Grand Rapids, 1974), supports this viewpoint. See especially the pertinent passages on pp. 544-546 and p. 579.
10. We follow Barrett and others in considering chapter five to be a unit of thought and vv. 6-8 an appropriate subsection within that unit. Cf. C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary On the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York, 1968), pp. 119ff.
11. Windish, "*zume*," *TDNT*, vol. II (Grand Rapids, 1964), p. 905, calls it a "proverbial saying" and points to Gal. 5:9 as a parallel.
12. Though originally separate festivals, by Paul's time the two had merged into one. Cf. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 898.
13. A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *First Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (Edinburgh, 1911), pp. 101-102. All commentaries consulted took this position.
14. J. B. Segal, *The Hebrew Passover* (London, 1963), *passim*.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
16. H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash*, vol. III, München, 1951), p. 360. This quote is but representative of extensive material which sought to fence about passover practice so as not to be contaminated with leaven.
17. Segal, *op. cit.*, p. 259. "The animal was, however, specially designated as Pessah victim, and it received thereby a certain sanctity. (Mesh Pes 5, 2) . . . No leaven was permitted to come into contact with the victim."
18. *Ibid.* ". . . but the significance of the association at the Pesah began, not with the meal, but with the actual sacrifice of the victim which was the central feature of the whole Pesah." Even more interesting is the footnote: Mish Pes. 8:3 'Others may always be received . . . within the number and withdraw from it, until such time as (the victim) is slaughtered.'
19. David Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible* (London, 1963), p. 45.

1. Hans Conzelmann, *Der Erste Brief an die Korinther* (Göttingen, 1969), p. 119. This point is made succinctly: "Der Imperativ wird durch den Indikativ begründet: Die Heiligkeit ist nicht Ziel, sondern Voraussetzung des Verhaltens." Translation: "The imperative presupposes the indicative: holiness is not the goal, but the prior assumption of the command."
1. The fact that Paul sees a moral dimension implicit in the Passover celebration is supported by 5:8 where he uses the terms *kakias kai ponerias*, "malice and wickedness," in antithesis to *eilikrineias kai aletheias*, "sincerity and truth."
2. Jeremias, op. cit., p. 900.
3. Harold Sahlin makes this point in "The New Exodus of Salvation According to St. Paul," *The Root of the Vine* (edited by Anton Friedrichsen) (Westminster 1953), p. 85. "Here St. Paul distinctly alludes to the celebration of the Pesach. The purging out of all that could be designated leaven, and the sacrifice of the Pesach lamb, were the principal elements of the feast."
24. E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1957), pp. 126-127; especially footnote 2 on page 127 where F. Buschel is quoted.
25. Windisch, "zume," *TDNT*, vol. II (Grand Rapids, 1964), p. 903.
26. Ibid. An intriguing footnote (n. 15) relates: "On the debated Rabbinical question how much leaven must fall into the dough to give effect to prohibition, we have a judgment of the elder Gamaliel, the teacher of Paul (Orla 2:12). Paul's interest in these questions may thus derive from his Rabbinical training."