

## **Pardoned & Released**

There is not a prisoner incarcerated today who would not love to hear a judge or parole board declare, “Pardoned & released!” A Corinthian man was delivered by Paul into the custody of Satan earlier. We find out what happened to this man in today’s Templates of Truth.

In the first letter to the Corinthian church, we read the account of a man involved in an incestuous relationship with his stepmother. Paul’s directive to the church was for him to *be removed from your midst* (I Corinthians 5:2). In a more direct application of spiritual authority, Paul *delivered (him) to Satan for the destruction of his flesh*, not for the purpose of permanent exile and annihilation, but so that *his spirit may be saved* (5:5). A redemptive purpose was always Paul’s intent. Did it work? Did the man repent, change his ways and come back into fellowship with God and His people?

We cannot know with absolute certainty, but the indication is, he did. By the time of Paul’s fourth letter to the church, which is the New Testament book of II Corinthians, we find reference to *such a one* (II Corinthians 2:6,7), which is the same designation given this man in I Corinthians 5. In Paul’s comments about him here, he says, *sufficient...is the punishment which was inflicted by the majority* (2:6). The application of church discipline had obviously rendered a positive effect in this man’s life. We see indication of the man’s remorseful, repentant spirit because Paul expressed concern that he might be *overwhelmed by excessive sorrow* (6:7). Until a person has experienced this kind of banishment and alienation, one cannot know the tremendous sorrow, loneliness and personal rejection one feels. Yet, these emotions are part of what God uses to accomplish the work of repentance & restoration in the person’s life. Apparently this man had ended his immoral relationship, sought God’s forgiveness and had turned once again to God’s people for grace and compassion. Paul directed them how to respond.

*Forgive him* (2:7) – This Greek word means to show favor and freely bestow pardon. To freely bestow pardon means that forgiveness is without conditions. We forgive each other with the same expression of forgiveness with which God freely gives us. He removes our sin as far as the east is from the west, and He remembers it no more. We often say that we forgive but we cannot forget, justifying that attitude with the idea that sin often has permanent consequences that can never be overcome. In God’s economy, forgiveness & forgetfulness are not subject to conditional consequences. His grace is sufficient regardless, and our expression of grace toward others should manifest the same degree of sufficiency.

*Comfort him* (2:7) – This Greek word means to call one into close proximity in order to encourage and exhort him. By this time in his journey of discipline, God has removed much of the propensity to his sinful failures, and his heart is softened once again with the qualities God can anoint and use in his life. Those qualities must be nurtured, and the church’s willingness to bring him back into close fellowship, working alongside him to help him develop & grow in His

relationship with God once again will bring great comfort & strength to his life.

*Love him* (2:8) – That is the classic New Testament word for God’s love – AGAPE. Paul defined this love in his first letter to these believers (I Corinthians 13). Among its attributes is that such love is patient, kind, does not take into account wrongs & offenses, bears, believes, hopes and endures all things. That’s the kind of love that is required to forgive and restore a fallen fellow believer. We love him that way, because it is the way God loves us. It is a love that is steadfast (never fails) and unconditional.

*Reaffirm Him* (2:8) – This interesting Greek word means to make valid by ratification. To ratify something means to approve, endorse, accept, sanction, permit and confirm. Not only were they to move him back into the close proximity of brotherly fellowship again, they were to publicly affirm and accept him back into a restored capacity in their midst. Gradually and eventually, this meant that he would be encouraged & permitted to use his talents and spiritual gifts to serve God in ministry through the church. As trust was restored, and the sincerity of his repentance timely proven, he would ultimately serve God freely once again from any conditional restraints from his past failures. Both David and Peter are prime Biblical examples of this kind of restoration.

For a church to refuse this kind of response to a genuine repentant believer is to welcome demonic assault in its midst. Paul warned the church they were to restore this man *in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan* (2:11). Satan still holds the keys of victory in the defeated lives of fallen, yet forgiven believers & churches today because God’s people refuse to totally forgive, comfort, love and reaffirm them back into a restored fellowship once repentance has been genuinely expressed. Could that be a reason so many churches today are declining in numbers and deficient in ministry?

That’s today’s Templates of Truth. This is your Bible teacher, Rick Smith, reminding you to attend church this Sunday for Bible study and worship, pray for one another, and always strive to abide in Christ. Until next time, have a blessed and glorious day in the Lord Jesus.

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