

## Delivered into Satan's Custody

In courtrooms every day, juries issue guilty verdicts and judges issue sentences. People are handed over to the custody of the department of corrections to begin the painful experience of incarceration. In today's Templates of Truth, we learn a sobering truth about another form of custodial correction.

The Apostle Paul issues a disturbing verdict in I Corinthians 5:5 – *I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh*. A person in authority can render many decisions concerning another's fate, but it would seem none could be more terrifying than to be handed over in custody to the ultimate fiend of darkness and evil. This sobering passage of Scripture demands a closer look for a better understanding of its meaning and application.

The *one* to which Paul referred was a fellow believer and member of the Corinthian congregation who was openly and unashamedly living in an incestuous relationship with his stepmother. This was a form of sexual immorality not even tolerated by pagan religions and governments of the day, much less the Christian community. The church at Corinth, however, seemed oblivious to this illicit relationship, and carried on the process of accommodating this man and his lover as church members in good standing. Paul was incensed, not only at the seriousness of the sin, but at the total disregard of the church leaders in tolerating and allowing its indulgence to go unaccounted for, no matter how they sought to justify it.

Paul's treatment of the issue was two-fold: excommunication – *the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst* (5:2); and, solitary confinement into a satanic torture chamber – *deliver such a one to Satan for destruction* (5:5). The harshness of this sentence seems cruel and unjust, but Paul's approach to dealing with the situation was in exact compliance with Biblical instruction. The Law of Moses specifically condemned such behavior with a sentence of death (Leviticus 20:11), and Jesus gave step-by-step instructions for confronting believers with such sinful lifestyles that might eventually lead to exile from the faith community (Matthew 18:15-17). Was the purpose to publicly disgrace a fallen believer and permanently ban him from any further acceptance or inclusion by his Christian peers, or was there a deeper, more spiritual goal inherent in Paul's agenda?

Paul's purpose was clearly stated: *that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus* (5:5b). It is unmistakable that Paul's objective was repentance, redemption & restoration, not condemnation and estrangement. Sin in the life of a believer must be dealt with, and Scripture provides clear indication that Satan is often used as an impetus through which divine judgment and discipline is administered. An example is Peter: *Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers* (Luke 22:31-32). In such an experience, a divine shaking & sifting takes place. God says, *I will shake...the removing of those things which can be shaken...in order that those things which cannot be shaken remain*

(Hebrews 12:26-27). The divine purpose is to destroy from the believer's life all the propensities of the flesh that contributed toward his rebellion, leaving only those qualities of holiness and righteousness that God can once again anoint, empower and use for His glory and Kingdom's work.

As those of us who have endured this process can attest, it is by no means a pleasant experience. It requires intense pain, suffering, loss & destruction to annihilate certain tendencies of the flesh and no one knows how to inflict such pain better than Satan himself. Through the sifting process, Satan only wants to leave exposed all the weakness and depravity of our flesh. Through the shaking process, God assures that those things are destroyed and only that which is holy and acceptable to Him endures. The shaking & sifting process hurts! But it is ultimately necessary for inclusion once again to full fellowship with God and His people.

What is your sin today? You may not see yourself in any danger since you would never stoop so low as to commit some sin of sexual impurity. Paul went on to clarify that thieves, swindlers, covetous, drunken and reviling people & behaviors are just as ungodly (5:10). They too, can warrant the kind of divine intervention as Paul invoked. Sin of any nature cannot be tolerated in a believer's life. When it continues, God eventually deals with it. He expects His people to hold each other accountable for holy living and to deal effectively with "sin in the camp." The best way is for the offender to repent and turn back to God now. But if that route is resisted by a rebellious spirit, God may choose to subject it to an application of Satanic destruction. Believe me, you don't want to go there!

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.