

1 Prison Life (Not) . . .

2 Scripture Reading

- Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.
- Do not offer the parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness,
 - but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life;
 - and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.
- For sin shall not be your master because you are not under the law but under grace.

3 Scripture Reading

- What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means!
- Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey —
 - whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or
 - [slaves] to obedience, which leads to righteousness?
- But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.
- You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

4 Scripture Reading

- I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves.
- Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and ever-increasing wickedness, now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness (sanctification).
- When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control (or controlling power) of righteousness.

- What benefit did you reap then from the things you are now ashamed of?
- Those things result in [spiritual] death!

5 Scripture Reading

- But now ...
 - that you have been set free from sin and
 - have become slaves to God,
 - the benefit you reap leads to holiness (sanctification), resulting in eternal life.
- For the wages of sin is death, but the gift (charisma) of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

6 Introduction

- Most citizens are law-abiding people who do not desire to spend time in jail.
- Even ex-cons don't want to go back to the joint.
- Prison is not an attractive option for anyone.

7 Introduction

- Remember television actress Lori Loughlin and her husband, Mossimo Giannulli?
- They were indicted by the FBI and U.S. Attorney's Office in 2019 for fraud and bribery offenses related to a nationwide college bribery scandal.
- Loughlin fought tooth and nail to avoid jail time, spending thousands of dollars.
- Nevertheless, she still went to jail.
- She served her two-month prison sentence at a facility in central California late in 2020 and was home by New Year's Eve.

8 Introduction

- So, (generally speaking)
 - most people don't want to go to prison, and
 - those who are in prison want to get out.
- In fact, prison escapes have been content for many novels and movies.
- Even the Bible has stories of prison breaks and escapes from authorities.

9 Introduction

- For example, in Acts 12, the Apostle Peter is in prison under tight security:
 - "Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison" (v. 6).
- Do you think Peter wanted to be in prison?
- And when "the chains fell off," he went immediately to the house of some friends who were praying for his release and astonished to see the object of their prayers standing before their very eyes!

10 Introduction

- A few people, however, want to go to prison, and some residents of correctional institutions prefer to remain where they are rather than be released to the civilian population.
- A number of years ago, The Buffalo News ran a feature about an ex-con who said he stole shoelaces, a pair of sandals, and other items to get "prison health care that is very good."
- Then there is the North Carolina man who robbed a bank for \$1 for the same reason.

11 Introduction

- Consider the case of a man suffering from a life-threatening liver problem who decided his best bet to save himself was to go to prison.
- Dr. Joshua Mezrich,
 - an assistant professor of surgery in the division of multi-organ transplantation at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health,
 - tells the story of a 41-year-old man who turned to crime to get medical care.

12 Introduction

- The felon was in prison when he got a scan that revealed two aneurysms in his liver.
- Later, a follow-up scan showed the aneurysms had grown, and the prisoner needed surgery soon, but the prison released him before the surgery could be scheduled.
- He realized that a trip back to prison was his best choice since he knew he could get his surgery paid for behind bars.

13 Most People

- I hope that most people going through daily life,
 - working at their jobs,
 - paying their bills, and
 - overeating junk food
- do not want to go to prison for even one day.
- Therefore, they don't engage in immoral or unethical behavior that could lead to imprisonment.
- Or at least, they ensure that the odds of getting caught are very low if they do.

14 Gotta Serve Somebody

- Bob Dylan makes the point in his hit song, "Gotta Serve Somebody," that there's a real sense in which we all have a boss to whom we're accountable.
- No one gets through life without answering to a higher authority.
- You have to work and get evaluated even if you are just an employee.
- And those who do not like this natural order of things may find themselves behind bars singing "Jailhouse Rock."
- "It may be the devil or the Lord, but you must serve somebody.

15 Serve Yourself

- "Nonsense," John Lennon retorted. He wrote a parody called "Serve Yourself."
 - You say you found Jesus. Christ!
 - He's the only one
 - You say you've found Buddha
 - Sittin' in the sun
 - You say you found Mohammed
 - Facin' to the East
 - You say you found Krishna
 - Dancin' in the street
 - Well, there's somethin' missing in this God Almighty stew
 - And it's your mother
 - (your mother, don't forget your mother, la)

- [Chorus]
 - You got to serve yourself
 - Nobody gonna do for you
 - You gotta serve yourself
 - Nobody gonna do for you
 - Well, you may believe in devils, and you may believe in laws.
- [Post-Chorus 1]
 - But if you don't go out and serve yourself, la, ain't no room service here.

16 The Prison of Sin

- You can “serve yourself,” but it’s a bad choice, as the Apostle Paul makes clear.
 - “Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies,
 - to make you obey their passions” (v. 12).
- Notice the words “dominion” and “obey.”
- Sin — the principle of sin, [that is]
 - our fallen nature, as it’s called in other places in the Bible, or
 - our human propensity to make bad choices and fall into bad habits —
 - uses our actual human bodies to get us to do what sin wants us to do.

17 The Prison of Sin

- Sin leads us into addictions that ...

- dominates us;
- bullies us;
- coerces us to obey our basest impulses.
- And when that happens, ...
 - we don't look so pretty,
 - we don't look smart,
 - And we're not happy.

18 Sin is a Bully

- Why?
 - Because we're in an awful place where we are bossed around,
 - told what to do, and
 - must obey the prison guards even when we don't want to.
- This is why the Scripture says, ... (Romans 6:16 NLT-SE)
 - Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey?
 - You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or
 - you can choose to obey God, which leads to holy living and eternal life.

19 Who Has the Keys?

- The good news is that we do not need to toil in this prison — serving ourselves when we could be serving God instead.

- Why serve Sin when we could walk in the Spirit?
- The bad news is that our mortal human bodies provide constant opportunities for us to be tempted every which way.
- Especially since the Devil is all-powerful?
- Isn't it true that he is 99.9% of the problem?
- How can we resist?

20 Flip Wilson & Geraldine

- The character Geraldine Jones was first introduced by name on Labor Day, September 1, 1969, in a television special on NBC.
- The show was called The Flip Wilson Special, and its success led to Wilson's variety show, The Flip Wilson Show, first broadcast on September 22, 1970.
- Wilson first performed the specific routine of Geraldine defending her new dress on The Ed Sullivan Show on January 11, 1970.

21 Geraldine

- In the routine, Wilson takes on the persona of a preacher's wife.
- The wife (Geraldine) explains to her angry husband why she has an expensive new dress, telling him that "the devil made me buy this dress."
- She describes how the devil ...
 - followed her on the street and flattered her with praise,
 - showed her the dress in a shop window,

- push her into the shop,
- put a gun to her head, and then,
- forced her to sign the preacher's name to a check.

22 Geraldine

- However, the preacher is doubtful about all of this;
 - he says she is too quick to blame the devil.
 - For instance, the time when she rammed the car into the side of the church.
- She counters by saying that, at the time of the car accident,
 - she was trying to wrest control of the steering wheel away from the devil, and
 - she was also trying to kick the devil, which prevented her from using the brake pedal.

23 The Devil isn't our Biggest Problem

- Just as Geraldine's husband, Pastor Jones, suspected that Geraldine was too quick to blame the devil, so should we.
- Our pleasure-seeking parsons, along with our over-inflated ego, are really our biggest enemy.
- Nevertheless, the devil does have a role.
- What he does is just like he did in the garden, supporting the notion that there are no consequences to compromises.
- As the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die, ..." (Genesis 3:4)

24 The Principle of Sowing & Reaping

- This is why the Apostle Paul says the following in Galatians 6:7–8.

- Do not be deceived:
 - God cannot be mocked.
 - A man reaps what he sows.
 - The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature, will reap destruction;
 - The one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit, will reap eternal life.

25 The Source of Most Temptations

- From within! (James 1:14–15)
 - As the Apostle James says, "Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."
- From the world! (1 John 2:15–17)
 - As the Apostle John says, Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.
 - For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world.
 - The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

26 War Going on Inside!

- As the Apostle Paul says in Galatians 5:16–17, ...
 - So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.
 - For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.
 - They are in conflict with each other, so you do not do what you want.

- But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

27 How to Walk in the Spirit

- Walking in the Spirit is basically living to please your conscience.
- He ...
 - Affirms our good choices and actions, which gives us feelings of satisfaction, or
 - Disapproves of our bad choices and actions, which causes us to feel sad.
- Again, if we live to please the Spirit, the Spirit inside us will produce the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22–23)

28 Transformational Grace

- So then, what's wrong if we don't have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?
- We're not sowing to the Spirit.
- If we can't say no to the desires of the flesh,
 - it's not because of the devil.
 - it's probably because we're not sowing good seeds.
- If we're not sowing good things where the Spirit of God can do his transformational magic (grace), we probably won't become mature Christians who find freedom in Christ.

29 Review of Romans 6

- Let's look again at our beginning text from Romans 6:22-23.
- But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness (sanctification), and the result is eternal life.

- For the wages of sin is death, but the gift (charisma) of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- The word translated gift in verse 23 does not mean gift or grace.
- It is the word charisma, which means the workings of grace.
- When we sow to the Spirit, the working of God's grace transforms us from the inside out so that we can walk out of jail and enjoy the freedom and peace of mind we have in Christ.

30 Conclusion

- So if we are still in prison and sin still keeps us in bondage, it might be because we not sowing good seed and we lack the workings of God's grace in our lives.
- However, if we were to sow to the Spirit, we would have the fruits of God's Spirit and the grace to walk in victory.
- As the Apostle Paul says,
 - So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (Galatians 5:16)
 - But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. (Romans 6:22)
- Do not be deceived. We always reap what we sow.
- Choose Freedom! In Christ, the prison door is already unlocked.