

Christian Reconstruction

61:4

Vol. XII, No. 5

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Sept./Ott., 1988

PRISON EPISTLE NUMBER ONE

[I receive numerous requests from prisoners to be added to the ICE mailing list. Here is the introductory newsletter I send out in response to such requests.]

Dear Inmate:

Somehow, you found out about the ICE mailing list. It always amazes me that I receive so many requests from prisoners to be added to the mailing list. Maybe it has something to do with the boredom of prison life. My newsletters are apparently more interesting to prisoners than whatever other entertainment is available in their present circumstances.

I assume that you are interested in doing something more productive with your life than you are doing now, if and when you are released from jail. Whether you can achieve this goal depends a lot on your present and future attitude. In fact, it depends a lot more on your attitude than it does on external opportunities that will initially be made available to you when you get your next opportunity to go straight. Your attitude is far more powerful in shaping your future than your environment is. Never forget, Adam rebelled against God despite his perfect environment, and Jesus Christ met God's holy requirements despite His lousy environment as a tribute-paying Jew living under Roman tyranny. One of the most corrupting myths in modern life is the myth of environmental determinism. It is used by liberals to keep criminals out of jail, and by released prisoners who want to get back into jail. Attitude precedes action, and actions are what determine where you should (and probably will) be spending your post-release time.

In the past, you had a bad attitude. I can say that with almost complete confidence. (And as my critics never cease reminding me, I say everything with almost complete confidence, which is why so many of them regard me as a confidence man.) You are where you are today because of what you did, and what you did was the result of your general attitude toward life. The devil didn't make you do it; at best, one of third-level assistants only suggested it to your subconscious. A good attitude helps people to resist such suggestions. People with good attitudes rarely spend time in prison. Do you find that most of your present associates are noted for their bright, positive mental attitudes?

Sure, you may be one of those rare inmates who is truly innocent of all charges. But like all of us, you're surely guilty of something else that the authorities didn't find out about. After all, we all know there are more speeding violations on the highways than citations issued. You were convicted in a court of law that makes mistakes, and maybe your case was one of them, but all men will eventually appear in a court of law that makes no mistakes. That's the court you should be worrying about, not the penny-ante one that tossed you in the slammer for a few years. Prison may be unpleasant, but it isn't the lake of fire

(Revelation 20:14-15). If nothing else, you get released from prison. There is also the possibility of parole. Not so in the lake of fire.

So, you have received a down payment on the lake of fire, a sort of preview of coming attractions. Consider ~~yourself~~ **blessed** by God. Most of your peers outside the prison gates are drifting through life only vaguely aware of courts and trials and sentences, all of which reflect and testify to the final sentence that is coming for all of us. On that day, there will be due process of law. There will be no plea bargaining, no suspended sentences. If you are not a Christian in open submission to God on that day, there will be no court-appointed public defender. The prosecuting attorney will be Jesus Christ. He serves either as your kinsman redeemer or as God's blood avenger. Better the former than the latter, by a long shot – by an eternal shot, in fact.

If I were to ask every man in prison what he would do differently if he had his past to live over, I suspect that I would hear the same answer, one related to some piece of evidence that led to a conviction. "If only I hadn't been so stupid!" This is also pretty much the answer I would get if I could interview all the inmates of hell. The inmate's problem wasn't the evidence; the problem was his criminal behavior that left behind the evidence. The problem ultimately was his self-conscious decision to commit the act. In short, we're back to the topic of bad attitudes.

You probably do not respect most of your present associates. I imagine that most inmates are convinced that the majority of the people around them are there because they deserve to be. But really, when you think about it, without the grace of God, we all deserve to be in a far worse environment than wherever you are. Compared to hell, prison is Waikiki beach. So I pose this question: What do you intend to do with the grace of God once you are released from prison?

If for even a moment your thought was "get even," then you still suffer from the attitude that got you where you are. Getting even should be the least of your worries. God will get even for you. "Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord." That statement appears right in the middle of a passage dealing with criminal justice, written by a man who spent years in prison.

Recommence [pay back] to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of [with] evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:17-21).

I am sure that somebody did you wrong somewhere along the way. No doubt he deserves to be punished. So, see to it that he gets punished permanently. How can you do this? By treating him justly. **Heap eternal coals of fire on his head.** But it's not your job to get into the "temporarily hot coal" distribution business. All you are supposed to do is increase the market for future eternal coals. How? By obeying God's law in your dealings with all people.

If your good deeds should lead to God's breaking of the rebellious spirit of your enemy, well and good; you have thereby eliminated your enemy. You have rubbed him out. You have helped kill "the old man" who did you wrong. Maybe you will even be asked to attend his funeral (which we usually call **baptism**). So "put out a contract" on him today by sharing the gospel with him – verbally and also by your righteous behavior toward him in the future. Let **God be your hit man**. He is surely better at it than you are. Cheaper, too.

But even more important than getting even with your enemy is getting even with your victim, or more to the point, letting your victim get even with you. Why is this necessary? Once you're released, won't you have "paid your debt to society"? (By the way, "society" – we taxpayers – has shelled out more money per year to keep you in prison, "paying your debt to society," than it would cost to send you to the most expensive private university in the country for a year.) Paying your debt to society doesn't put bread on the table of your victim. Paying taxes to keep you locked up is taking more bread off his table.

What does the Bible say? It says that you owe him double restitution: the return of whatever you stole, plus an equal portion to compensate him for his trouble (Exodus 22:4). This system makes a lot of sense. If there were no penalty payment, then the thief would have nothing to lose if he should get caught. Before the theft he does not have the stolen goods, and after the theft – if he gets caught and convicted – he also will not have it. If he does not get caught and convicted, he keeps the goods. So why not "go for it"? After all, "you only go around once in life." (These days, beer commercials provide Americans with their world-and-life view.)

But the Bible adds a kicker: the convicted thief has to pay a fat penalty. He will be worse off than he was before he stole something if he gets caught and convicted. The victim may or may not be better off, depending on how upset he was after the theft, but at least he has more goods than he did before the theft. Better an extra pile of goods than a pile of tax receipts for keeping the thief in jail, "paying his debt to society."

The victim would be better off if the courts enforced the biblical law of double restitution. The taxpayers would also be better off. Most thieves would rather be paying off a debt to a victim than sitting behind bars. Then why don't we have a system of **restitution**? Why did we ever build prisons? Because the American "experts" who redesigned the criminal justice system from about 1800 to 1820 thought they were smarter than God. (There is a book about this, David Rothman's *Inventing Asylum*, published in 1971.)

Yes, you have wasted time in prison. Then why do you owe the victim anything? Because your time in prison is basically nothing more than a tribute payment to a Bible-rejecting State. So is the tax money they have taken from those of us on the outside to keep you on the inside. Look, if we taxpayers have to pay tribute to the bureaucrats in

order to keep you locked up (and also in order to keep ourselves out of jail on tax-evasion charges), why should the fact that you're locked up get you off the hook for repaying your victim? You owe restitution to your victims whether or not you are in jail.

Who was your victim? What happened to him? Wouldn't he be better off today if your paths had never crossed? Why not write him a letter, apologize, and agree "to pay him something – anything – when you get out?" And then do what you say when you get out. Tell him why you're doing it, too: because God says you owe him restitution (Exodus 22:4). He may have never heard that God lays down the law to us. It may remind him of what he owes God.

If you could buy your way out of prison today by agreeing to pay off the victim, and then doing it, would you agree? The system ought to let you do this, unless you're a murderer. If you are, you should be executed. The Bible is clear about this (Genesis 9:5). If you have escaped execution because of the ideas of the Bible-rejecting do-gooders who designed the present penal system, you still have a moral obligation to do something to make amends. What about the heirs of the victim? What will you do for them? You can't make full restitution, which is why the Bible requires the death penalty, for murder is a crime beyond human restitution. You can still do something. And if the victims' heirs do not want to hear from you, then do something positive for some other victim of someone else's crime.

What can you do? I would suggest this. Take 100%, minimum, of everything you make for the rest of your life, and pay it to victims of the crime you committed, or to their heirs, or to other victims of similar crimes. This is in addition to the 10% that you owe to God through a local church. Keep paying until double restitution is made. This may take many years. It may take the rest of your life. Do it. You only go around once in life, so you have to make restitution during this trip.

If you commit privately to this, right where you are right now, you will be far more likely to get out of jail earlier than planned, and stay out much longer than most of your colleagues will. But be sure to remember what it is you have agreed to do after you are out. Write it down, in code if necessary. Keep it as a reminder. Vows to God must be paid (Numbers 30:2).

As the victim of their criminal actions, God gets even with all men. Faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ on Calvary is one means of making restitution to God. Spending eternity in the lake of fire is the other way. Better for each person to confess his crimes now, confess faith in Christ's restitution payment now, and start making tribute payments to God (the tithe) now, than to pay double restitution forever in the lake of fire.

Life on earth after the rebellion of Adam is a kind of prison experience, a holding place prior to our delivery before the Judge. At the very least, life is a probationary period; we get time off for good behavior – Christ's good behavior. We are supposed to call our Probation Officer daily, and once a week all of us ex-cons meet together to celebrate our freedom. You understand what this means far better than most of those outside the walls. I suggest that you not forget your lesson when you get outside again. It would be a shame to waste such a potentially profitable educational experience.