

*In search of...*

# Truth & Right

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## Prisoner Dilemma

Some years back I had the great opportunity to preach in a prison facility. This blessing extended for about two years. It really enabled me to see and understand a great number of things about those inside and outside of the prison system. I am not a person who is in favor of any frills or extras in the prison system. I guess you can say I am a Sheriff Joe Arpaio fan. If an individual breaks the law, my preference is the punishment seriously deters them from every committing the same mistake. Not only should it deter the transgressor, but those who would ever contemplate committing a crime. For crimes against children and murder, I am in favor of public capital punishment. I say this because I want it understood where I am coming from as this article is written.

Every Sunday for the time I and other church members were allowed to preach to the prisoners was time well spent. We were allotted approximately 4 hours with the inmates. The largest portion of this time was spent with the general population in a classroom where we were allowed direct contact. By direct contact, it should be understood there were no guards present or barriers between ourselves and the inmates. For approximately an hour after our visit with the general population, we were able to teach the inmates who were in for violent crimes including murder. The setting was the same as the general population, direct contact with nothing separating us. There were no incidents that ever arose where I felt in danger. The inmates attended each Sunday

by their own choice and 99% of them were very respectful as we were to them.

Some of the inmates we dealt with were to be institutionalized for most of their life. One in particular was just beginning a 45 year sentence with no chance of parole. He was still a teenager. He will be an old man when he gets out. For one year, I and another Christian brother taught him Christ. He listened attentively, studied, prayed, and was baptized by us. He understood by the grace of God he did not receive capital punishment, though he deserved it. His blessing by God, as is the case for all those serving life in prison, is his life, a roof over his head, clothes on his back, and meals each day. With access to the Word of God, it was made clear to him that he had great opportunity ahead of him to lead spiritually though in prison. God expects no less (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

The situation for the short term prison inmate is very different. Many are in for a few weeks up to three or four years and then they are out. Though I have not checked statistics to see how much the average prisoner serves, what crimes they committed, or the involvement with alcohol or drugs as related to their crimes, I can comfortably state that the wide majority of inmates I met had problems with alcohol and drugs. Whether addiction or simply under the influence, these men put themselves in illegal situations where they chose not to have complete control of their senses. The time spent in prison presented these men with a situation

where they were no longer under the control of these substances. A good percentage of these men expressed realization about the positions they had put themselves in due to the use of substances. They wanted a change in their life. They didn't want to be the people they were before. Some became Christians and resolved to live their lives like Christ. I wish it could be said that they were able to do so. Typically, following release, a few weeks maybe a month or two would pass before we would see them imprisoned once again.

The scenario of the prisoner who becomes a repeat offender reminds me of a great number of those who clothe themselves in Christ. They come to a realization that they are under the influence of the sin of the world. That sin becomes theirs through foolish choices. The day they put on Christ they declared their resolve. They truly wanted to be like Christ. For the record, I believe most prisoners felt the same way when they put on Christ. It is was not, nor is it my place to judge a man's conscience. Like the prisoners, many Christians free from their debt of sin, energized in Christ, after a period of time, find themselves to be repeat offenders. They engage in the same sins they embraced before Christ. Why did this happen? What causes the prisoner to return to his crimes, a Christian to return to his sins? What a pitiful situation this is to behold. It is certainly a position which is worse than before (2 Peter 2:22). How they get to this situation is what I call the prisoner's dilemma and what the remainder of this article will focus on.

Proverbs 1:32 – *For the backsliding of the simple shall slay them, And the careless ease of fools shall destroy them.*

The concept of the prisoner's dilemma is when an individual goes back to where he was and does what he did. Why is this? The prison inmate when released typically must return under a system of parole. A system of parole typically demands the prisoner stay within the boundaries of a certain location i.e. city or location until a specified time is fulfilled. Where do these people live? Well, they will likely return to the home or neighborhood they were in before. Their family and friends are generally aware of their return. They are now marked by their crimes and consequently finding work will be more difficult. Having returned to the environment they left before their "cleansing" in prison, they are often subject to the same

temptations as before. Friends, acquaintances, family, will introduce drugs and alcohol back into their lives. Unhealthy communication and living will surround the former inmate. So now he is back where he was, what does he do? He does what he did. He didn't plan on it. He thought he would be free from it. He thought he would resist it. However, he succumbs. He parties, he does things he shouldn't thinking no one will know. He may get away with it for awhile, but sooner or later, he finds himself not only out of control, but in trouble with the law again. Back he goes to prison. He is disappointed, ashamed, frustrated, and each time he goes through this scenario he will be less likely to try to change.

The prisoner's dilemma applies to many Christians as well. At one time, the Christian was under bondage to the sin of the world as all men. As all men he is called to be free (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Those answering the call of Christ were released from bondage (Romans 6:6). However, the Christian while separating himself from the world is still in the world (John 17:11, 16). He must continue on his "parole" unable to leave until his time is fulfilled. Temptations are present. The Lust of the flesh, eye, and pride of life tug at him when given opportunity. Family members and friends tell him it is ok to give in to a little temptation. The Christian is approached with sweet sounding words of falsehood. The Christian has been marked by the goodness of his life in Christ. Much like the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, the world is attracted to the purity and wants to defile it (Genesis 19). If the Christian gives in he finds himself in sin once more. He feels as if he is again part of the world. However, he has the blood of Christ which cleanses him. He simply needs to confess his sins and call upon his savior for forgiveness (1 John 1-2:2). However, with continued sin he becomes disappointed, ashamed, frustrated, and like the prison inmate each time he goes through this scenario he will be less likely to try to change.

Jeremiah 2:19 – *Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and a bitter, that thou hast forsaken Jehovah thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord, Jehovah of hosts.*

I have been asked before what I think the solution to the prisoner's dilemma is for those who have been released from prison. What will enable them to stop the cycle? First, I personally believe presenting the prisoner with opportunities to improve his lot in society helps. Second, enabling them to be relocated somewhere separating them from the old crowd and its wicked vices. Finally, make

certain they have people surrounding them who they can call on anytime to keep them out of trouble. I believe these steps will greatly help the inmate, but they will still not stop all temptation. Do I see this becoming a reality? Truthfully, I don't, though I wish it would. It is not only a matter of a societal change, but it would have to be the will of the inmate as well and many think they can do the same old thing with different results.

The backsliding Christian can be free of the prisoner's dilemma in the same manner as the prison inmate. God has created man for the purpose of walking in good works (Ephesians 2:10). Open doors abound for the Christian if they are seeking for them (Matthew 7:7-8). To separate himself from the old crowd and its wicked devices the Christian must relocate himself. He must dwell in the Word of God. That is, he is no longer to hang out with the sinful people or in the sinful locations he did before. He is to surround himself with his brothers and sisters in Christ. He is to remove sinful influences from his home. The leader of a home has control of this situation. Those who are not the head of the household will have a greater difficulty. They must rely upon being a good example and refuse to take part in the sin. This type of situation makes the final part of being free of the prisoner's dilemma even more important. The brothers and sisters in Christ must encourage, comfort, and aid whenever and wherever possible (1 Thessalonians 5:14). The Christian must always remember they have a savior who will not forsake them. They have a God who will always be faithful to them (1 Corinthians 1:9). Will these steps stop all temptation and backsliding? As with the prison inmate, temptation will continue and choices will still reside in the lap of the individual. Yet, God has promised no trial will come that they are not able to withstand (1 Corinthians 10:13). He has instructed them to resist the sin (James 4:7).

This is the prisoner's dilemma. An individual is freed from bondage just to go back to where he was and do what he did. It is tragic and it is sad. God does not wish this for man. He desires that none should perish (2 Peter 3:9). He has provided what all men need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Through God's Word is opportunity, separation from the world, and encouragement. God calls daily for the backslider to return and to be free from the bondage of sin. It is up to the individual to humble himself and call upon God (Matthew 5:3, Romans 10:6-10). If the Christian returns to God, none can stand against (Romans 8:31).

*Jeremiah 3:22 – Return, ye backsliding children, I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we are come unto thee; for thou art Jehovah our God.*

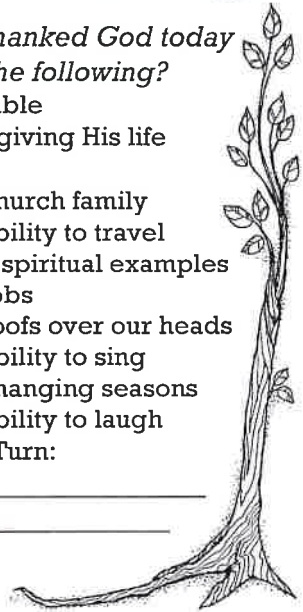
Travis Main

dear God,  
thanks for this  
beautiful life  
and forgive me if  
i dont love it  
enough.

*Have you thanked God today  
for any of the following?*

- The Bible
- Jesus giving His life for us
- Our church family
- The ability to travel
- Good spiritual examples
- Our jobs
- The roofs over our heads
- The ability to sing
- The changing seasons
- The ability to laugh
- Your Turn:

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# Guard the Deposit

K E U U O Y T W W S E T V E R B A N N O  
 P F K K R B H D W N O N X F Q S U Q Z N  
 G E Y W H I U E N N P I W U S R I H T L  
 D N R V P U Y P R E A C H E R E A S O N  
 K Y D K Q E L O S Q S C A L L I N G T Y  
 W T D M I S Y S G D H L S Q D N I O Q J  
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 X W W T L C Q G E F D Z A O P Z J F V B  
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 U P H M X G D B Q I N N E Q Z N E J R X  
 G I I I P C U R V A I Y P G J N J A S B

**DIRECTIONS:** Look up the scripture in the Bible, and find the answer in the crossword above.

- 2 Tim. 1:3, as I remember you constantly in my \_\_\_\_\_  
 2 Tim. 1:4, I long to see you, that I may be \_\_\_\_\_ with joy  
 2 Tim. 1:5, I am reminded of your \_\_\_\_\_ faith,  
 2 Tim. 1:6, for this \_\_\_\_\_ I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God,  
 2 Tim. 1:7, for God gave us a \_\_\_\_\_ not of fear but of power and love...  
 2 Tim. 1:8, Therefore do not be \_\_\_\_\_ of the testimony...  
 2 Tim. 1:9, who saved us and called us to a holy \_\_\_\_\_  
 2 Tim. 1:10, brought life and immortality to light through the \_\_\_\_\_,  
 2 Tim. 1:11, I was appointed a \_\_\_\_\_ and apostle and teacher,  
 2 Tim. 1:12, for I know whom I have \_\_\_\_\_,  
 2 Tim. 1:13, follow the \_\_\_\_\_ of sound words that you have heard  
 2 Tim. 1:14, guard the good \_\_\_\_\_ entrusted to you.