

Simply Christ

Gospel Newsletter

Sharing the simplicity that is in Christ

May 6, 2017

SPIRITUAL PRISONS

I ministered a service recently for a group of men who had become very circumspect in every aspect of their lives. They wore modest clothing and clean cut hair. They would not have contact with the opposite sex without having someone else present, neither would they use alcohol or drugs. As a matter of fact, even the food they ate and the people they associated with were very much restricted by certain preordained guidelines. Yet this rigid lifestyle of these men was not evidence of their righteousness. To the contrary, it was actually evidence of their unrighteousness. You see, I was ministering a service for inmates in the Texas prison system. The rules and laws that governed the daily lives of these men were not given to make them righteous, but to control their unrighteousness. Before I left the prison service I told the inmates, "This place may change what you do, but Christ changes what you are. If what you are is not changed, when you get out of this prison you will go back to doing the ungodly things that put you here."

Religious law always serves as a spiritual prison for the unrighteous. The apostle Paul tells us that *"the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; Knowing this, that THE LAW IS NOT MADE FOR A RIGHTEOUS MAN, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners..."* 1

Timothy 1:8-9 The Law of Moses was not given to a

holy people, but to a people who rejected the voice of God and worshipped a golden calf. This is why Paul said it was for *“the ungodly and for sinners.”* If the children of Israel had a heart for God they would have received His voice when He spoke from the mountain and the Law of Moses would have never been given. Paul tells us the Law of Moses *“...was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made...”* Galatians 3:19 It was a spiritual prison given to keep Israel’s transgressions in check until Christ, the promised seed, would come. The Law’s very existence declares the unrighteousness of those who serve it. In the last days of Moses’ life he commanded Israel, saying, *“Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, THAT IT MAY BE THERE FOR A WITNESS AGAINST THEE. For I know thy rebellion, and thy stiff neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the LORD; and how much more after my death?”* Deuteronomy 31:26-27

The gospel of Jesus Christ does not work by changing what you do; it changes what you are. This difference is the same as the difference between plucking bitter fruit off a wild tree or cutting the tree down. Religious laws and commandments pluck the sinful fruit off a person’s life, but Christ cuts the sinful tree down. John the Baptist spoke of the work of Christ when he said, *“And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.”* Matthew 3:10

Paul, who was an apostle to the Gentiles, testified of how righteousness came to the

Gentiles through Christ without the Law. He said, *“For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness...”* Romans 2:14-15 The righteousness of Christ changes the heart and nature of a person so their natural actions please God. God’s children do not need a religious law to order their life because their very nature is pleasing to God. Peter gives witness of this, telling us that through the promises of the gospel we are made *“...partakers of the divine nature”* II Peter 1:4.

What would you be if you cast off your religious restraints? THAT is what you truly are! If your religion has caused you to appear righteous in deed, but it has not made you to be so in heart and nature, your religion is just a spiritual prison that you dwell in. And, if your religion has not caused you to be righteous in both your deed and your heart, it is not Christ’s work at all. For the promise of the gospel is that *“by the obedience of one (Christ) shall many be made righteous”* Romans 5:19.

You can always tell when religious law is speaking. It says *“DO THESE THINGS AND LIVE BY THEM”* Romans 10:5. Beware! This is the “prison warden” speaking and not the voice of Christ. The voice of Christ does not tell you to “do” to live; it tells you to “see, believe, and live.” Paul tells us how a sinner is transformed into a righteous person. He wrote, *“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness...”* Romans 10:10. The transforming power of the gospel only comes to you through hearing, seeing, and believing the

glorious work of redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ upon the cross. Redemption changes what you do by changing what you are. You do not need a religious “prison warden” to give you the laws of religion, but we all need to hear and know the gospel truth that makes everyone who believes it “free indeed!” ***“For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ”*** John 1:17.