

## PRISONERS

**“Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.” (Gal 3:23 NIV)**

Almost everyone can understand the idea behind prisons and prisoners. When someone breaks a law, and poses a threat to society, we want to isolate that person and put them in prison. Since they cannot be trusted, the prison regulates almost every aspect of their lives. The prison operates on the assumption that prisoners are basically evil and would therefore take advantage of freedom to commit more crimes.

This is precisely the assumption behind the Law of Moses. The Bible states explicitly that we were “held prisoners by the law”. Jeremiah explained why the law was necessary: **“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jer 17:9)**. Since man’s heart was evil, he had to be treated like a prisoner. He could not be trusted. Take, for example, something as basic and simple as the offering a sacrifice (See Lev. 17:1 - 9). The Israelites were not trusted to make these sacrifices on their own, they had to bring them to the entrance of the tent of meeting.. Before this “law” the Israelites were prostituting themselves by making sacrifices to the “goat idols”. This “law” was designed to make sure they would “bring to the Lord the sacrifices . . .” (Lev. 17:5). Anyone who disregarded this law was to be “cut off” from the people (Lev. 17:7 - 9). Since the heart of man was “deceitful above all things”, it was a foregone conclusion that he had to be forced into compliance and made to do the will of God.

When “faith came”, however, man was set free from the prison of law. Faith did something that law was powerless to do (Rom. 8:2). Faith wrote God’s law on man’s heart and in his mind (Heb. 8:10). Faith gave to man a new and different kind of heart. Note this promise: **“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” (Ez. 36:26, 27)** People who have been transformed by faith experience a “righteousness without law” (Rom. 3:21, 22).

Evangelist Willie White drove home this point by saying that he got drunk all he wanted to, robbed everyone he wanted to, etc. Of course, he did not drink at all, or steal anything. He didn’t want to! Faith had given him a new heart and a different spirit. Faith enabled him to become a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). What the law could not do, faith did. Someone who does not want to do wrong does not need a law to forbid or a prison to restrain. Someone with the Spirit of Christ dominating their lives does not use their freedom to commit sin.

The Spirit of Christ enables the believer to turn prohibitions into promises. Here are the Ten Commandments. To the “old man” with a “deceitful heart” they were like a prison. To the “new man” with the Spirit of Christ, they are like wonderful promises.

1. You will have no other gods before me.
2. You will not make a graven idol and bow down and worship it.
3. You will not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
4. You will remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.
5. You will honor your father and your mother.
6. You will not commit murder.
7. You will not commit adultery.
8. You will not steal.
9. You will not give false testimony.
10. You will not covet anything that is your neighbors.

The Scriptures make crystal clear that after faith has come we are no longer under the supervision of the law (Gal. 3:25). The Covenant that came from Sinai brought slavery, but the new covenant brings freedom (Gal. 4:24 - 26). We are to stand firm in this freedom, and not allow anyone to burden us again with a yoke of slavery (Gal. 5:1). If we are led by His Spirit we are not under law (Gal. 5:18).