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**PRISONS: Shut Them All Down!**

**Americas Penal System**

Since 1973 only Rwanda and Russia have had more people in prisons or jails than America. Wilmot Robertson, author of *The Dispossessed Majority*, commented on this American travesty:

"The U.S. has a higher proportion of its population in jail than any other country [with the exception of Rwanda and Russia] -- 178 per 100,00, as against Japan's 89 per 100,000 and Britain's 65." **[1]**

In 1993 the national average (including those in local jails) had risen to 531 prison inmates per 100,000 Americans, and in 1997 it had climbed to 645. Do these statistics testify to the fact that America has too many laws, too many criminals or too many prisons? The answer is: All three!

In 1990, in a speech to the National Association of Pretrial Service Agencies, Donald Lay, Chief Judge of the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals, rendered a verdict that the United States "criminal justice system is a disgrace and a complete failure." Prison rate has never lowered crime rate. A law-abiding citizen, today, has a greater chance of being victimized by a violent criminal than he does of being injured in a traffic accident.

With a ninety-five percent chance of never doing any jail time, criminals have very little to lose. A serious crime committed in America will cost the perpetrator an average of 8.5 days in prison. And, four out of five federal and state prison inmates are repeat offenders. With these facts in mind, someone might question as to whether our current prison system can be rightfully called a penal system?

Do not be fooled; today's prison system is accurately identified as a penal system. It may do very little in penalizing criminals; however, it is a system by which the victims of crime are penalized. America's prison system initially punishes the victims by not providing satisfactory justice or restitution for the crimes committed. It likewise falls far short of providing sufficient protection from repeat offenders. Additionally, being forced to pay for the housing, feeding, clothing and entertainment of those who murdered, raped or plundered them or their relatives further punishes the victims of crime.

Under the current "justice" system, the taxpayer must "foot the bill" for the crimes of criminals. For example, Nebraska's prisons (state and federal combined) held 3,287 inmates as of December 1996. It costs $16,659 to maintain one inmate in a Nebraska prison for one year. That is a total of 54 million, 758 thousand, 133 dollars per year to house, feed and clothe Nebraska's prisoners.

The taxpaying citizens of Nebraska (and every other state) are paying double for criminals. We pay when we become the victims of their crimes, and we pay an annual $54,000,000 plus to keep them in prison while they watch television, play cards or molest one another. Even when a fine is levied against a criminal, it is awarded to the government not the victim or the victim's next of kin. Such a system is better described as a racket.

There are other problems associated with America's prison system. For example, non-violent criminals are often housed with hardened violent criminals. The result of such policy is a fulfillment of the principle cited by the Apostle Paul:

"Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Corinthians 15:33 NASV). **[2]**

Place a non-violent criminal in confinement with a violent criminal and the violent criminal is not going to be converted to the non-violent criminal's lifestyle. Instead, the non-violent criminal is much more likely to become hardened and violent. America's prisons are simply fertile training grounds for compounded criminal behavior. More often than not, the non-violent criminals become physical and sexual victims of the hardened lifers.

In no stretch of the wildest imagination have America's prisons proven to be institutions of rehabilitation. The extremely rare exception does not make America's current penal system a viable choice for crime control in a civilized society. Wilmot Robertson summed up two of America's prison system's primary problems:

"Long prison sentences cause immeasurable psychological damage to inmates by wasting their lives away in useless and profitless pursuits, while the soaring costs of prison upkeep place a heavy financial penalty on those who observe the law." **[3]**

Moreover, many of America's prisons are nothing more than slave labor camps. In many prisons the inmates are employed at slave labor wages, anywhere from 22 cents to a $1.10 and hour. Prisoners are "employed" making boxes, stickers, license plates, mattresses, canned goods, textiles, road signs, etc., all to be sold on the open market. Their employer, the Federal Government, d.b.a. UNICOR (trade name for Federal Prison Industries, Incorporated), does not pay social security, unemployment, workmen's compensation, health insurance, pensions, or holiday or vacation pay. They also do not have to pay income tax on their profits.

Someone is likely to respond: "So what! Why shouldn't such criminals, at the very least, be used in this fashion? Why should they deserve decent wages in light of their crimes?" That is precisely how the Federal Government wants you to think about it. The arrangement between UNICOR and the prisons is just another means by which private enterprise is being destroyed in America. The average private businessman is unable to fairly compete on the open market against such a setup.

**YEHOVAH's Penal System**

These examples and more identify the many problems inherent in America's present "penal" system. The question is: What is to be done with today's criminals? The "get tough on crime" conservatives promote "lock them up and throw away the key" legislation, whereas the "tenderhearted" liberals maintain "the criminals are not to blame" mentality. As the means of crime control, the conservatives advocate warehousing prisoners until the convicted criminal's time is up.

On the other hand, the liberals perceive that people commit crimes because they did not have the proper education, they were poor, or they were discriminated against. Consequently, according to the liberals, such disadvantaged people should not be incarcerated at all or should have reduced sentences. An editor of the Scottsbluff, Nebraska *Star Herald* suggested that Nebraskans have a limited number of options when it comes to solving their prison problems:

"Nebraskans have only three options: build more prisons, send fewer people to prison or release inmates more quickly." **[4]**

However, are these viable options for anyone who is genuinely interested in solving Nebraska's or America's crime problems? It might surprise you, but Christians should choose to implement option number two -- send fewer people to prison. In fact, rather than sending any criminals to prison, YEHOVAH's blueprint for crime control should be resurrected. A study of the Old Testament reveals that YEHOVAH made no provision for prisons or jails, except for briefly holding criminals over for speedy trials and sentencing:

"And the Israelite woman's son blasphemed the name of the LORD **[5]** and cursed; and so they brought him to Moses...Then they **put him in custody**, that the mind of the LORD might be shown to them" (Leviticus 24:11-12).

"Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day...They [Moses and Aaron] **put him under guard** because it had not been explained what should be done to him"  (Numbers 15:32-34).

Once a criminal was sentenced, the judgment was carried out immediately. Under such a system prisons are unnecessary; either the criminal is put to death in capital cases, or in non-capital cases he is compelled to make restitution. But, what if a criminal refuses to pay restitution, what is to be done with him, then? YEHOVAH has the perfect solution for someone who refuses to obey court orders. Refusal to make restitution is considered contempt of court, and contempt of court is a capital offense:

"If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which YEHOVAH thy God shall choose; and thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and inquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment: and thou shalt do according to the sentence and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee: according to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand, nor to the left.

"And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before YHVH thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously" (Deuteronomy 17:8-13).

Under such a statute, any rational person would choose to make restitution. YEHOVAH's penal system is flawless, and thus only the criminal pays for his crimes. In capital cases, which included murder, rape, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, kidnapping, witchcraft, idolatry and blasphemy, the perpetrator is to be put to death. In other words, the only prison cell such felons are entitled to is a coffin.

In non-capital cases, such as theft, the perpetrator is required to pay restitution, anywhere from two to five times the estimated value of what was stolen -- Exodus 22:1-4. If a convicted thief is financially incapable of making restitution, he is to be sold into servitude until his debt is paid -- Exodus 22:3.

In other words, in either capital or non-capital cases the criminal is not imprisoned, the victim is not further victimized and the taxpayer is not additionally burdened. Instead, the criminal learns that, indeed, crime does not pay!

**Babylon's Penal System**

Wilmot Robertson discoursed upon the origin of our present-day prison system:

"Humanitarianism, which is the extension of familial love to all mankind, was the chief architect of the present-day prison system. The herding of large numbers of men into vast prison complexes is a relatively new development in criminology." **[6]**

Prisons are a substitute for YEHOVAH's penal system, promoted by those who think it is more humane to imprison a capital criminal than to put him to death. However, anyone who knows what truly goes on behind prison bars would never describe incarceration as an act of humanitarianism. King Solomon aptly described the consequences of such misguided compassion;

"...the compassion of the wicked is cruel" (Proverbs 12:10 NASV).

Humanitarianism, which is often nothing more than an extension of humanism, that is, the creation of one's own laws and morality, was indeed the architect of America's present day prison system. However, this same system can be traced back to an ancient culture that continues to have a profound influence upon modern American culture. Incarceration, as it is found today in America, did not come from YEHOVAH God but from Babylon:

"Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest, the scribe. Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven. I make a decree, that thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not. And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of [Artaxerxes] the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment" (Ezra 7:11-26).

This is the only time in Scripture where incarceration is recommended as a form of punishment. However, the text states that this edict was not issued by YEHOVAH God, but rather by Artaxerxes, King of Babylon. Artaxerxes' decree leavened God's system with man's system. Man's methodology is generally the consequence of humanism as was Artaxerxes' leavened decree. The Prophet Habakkuk succinctly described the consequences resulting from humanism's influence:

"Therefore the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgment proceeds" (Habakkuk 1:4).

When, as a people, we refuse YEHOVAH God and His commandments, statutes and judgments, YEHOVAH warns us that He will allow others (humanists) whose "justice and authority originate in themselves" to rule over us -- Habakkuk 1:5-7. It is time for Americans to return to YEHOVAH God and His law, including YEHOVAH's penal system. YEHOVAH's program for crime control is perfect. Why substitute it with man's fallible policies, which allows criminals to get away with "murder" and makes law-abiding citizens suffer and government to prosper?

Today's liberals declare that education is the answer. I agree, education in YEHOVAH's law! The conservatives say we have too much crime and not enough punishment! Indeed, not enough of the judgments of YEHOVAH God! The liberals say send fewer criminals to prison. I concur, let's send none! Conservatives proclaim that dangerous criminals should be kept off the streets for an appropriate period of time. Amen, let's keep them off the streets forever! Man's answer to our prison problems is: "Build more prisons!" YEHOVAH's answer is: "Shut them all down!"

**Endnotes:**

**[1].** Wilmot Robertson, *The Dispossessed Majority* (Cape Canaveral, Florida: Howard Allen Enterprises, 1972) p. 425.

**[2].** All scripture is quoted from the King James Bible unless otherwise noted.

**[3].** Robertson, p. 426.

**[4].** Lynn Monson, editor, "Seeking solutions to prison crowding," *Star Herald* (Scottsbluff, Nebraska: Star Herald Publishing Co., Inc., April 20, 1993) p. 4B.

**[5].** Where the Tetragrammaton "YHVH" (the four Hebrew characters that represent the personal name of God) has been incorrectly rendered as "the LORD" or "GOD" in Scripture, the author has taken the liberty to correct those passages and insert "YHVH."

**[6].** Robertson, pp. 425-426.

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YEHOVAH’s blessings,

John Keyser for Hope of Israel Ministries.

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