



PRISONER

INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER

«And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free»

(John 8:32)

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But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness...

Has anyone seriously considered what Jesus Christ really meant when He said to the people in His Sermon on the Mount: **«But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you»?**

No doubt many Christians know this saying very well and use it a lot in theological discussions. However, experience has shown that not everyone fulfills this commandment of Jesus Christ in his or her life. It might be due to an incomplete understanding of the words of the Lord, or because some people do not believe that it could truly happen that if they seek first the kingdom of God, everything else will be added to them. Whatever the case, let us ask the question: have many people tested these words in real life?

What is really behind these words and can one literally understand what has been said by Jesus Christ? First of all, it is very important to mention that the Bible is the true Word of the living God. In the Bible, we have the keys to the most difficult doors of life; joy and happiness are awaiting us behind these doors if we diligently and earnestly apply the right keys to them.

Recall that every word of God is **«living and active»** (Heb. 4:12) and **«all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine»** (2 Tim. 3:16). The Bible does not contain anything unneeded, and all its admonitions and commandments are for our own benefit. Drawing closer to and entering the Kingdom of God can only be achieved by

deep and systematic knowledge of His word and by fulfilling it. An alternative does not exist.

Unfortunately, among «born-again» Christians, residing in various locations, a complete lack of understanding of biblical truths — not to mention their fulfillment — is often evident. For some reason, these people think that if they have fulfilled their obligation to come with their one-time repentance to God, then God has to do everything for them now. They expect other Christians to help them all the time. This is why we hear or see these words very often: «I ask you, for Christ's sake!», and the like. These people are not short of complains and heartbreaking stories that flatter the helper.

When I hear or read such stories, I want to say to these people: Where do you get the idea that God or somebody else has to help you? If you actually came in repentance to God, what have you personally done to deserve someone's help? And most importantly, why does none of you try to practice the commandment which our Lord left for us: **«But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you»** (Mathew 6:33)? These are not just beautiful words — they are real truth which every Christian can prove by living according to them.

The main problem and unhappiness of some Christians is that they do not hear and believe the words of Jesus Christ. Having barely read the New Testament, they suppose that they are

worthy of an award from God. However, after a short period of time, they become disappointed because they think that God does not hear their prayers. And no one remembers what the Scriptures say in this case. It is written: **«Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts»** (James 4:3).

As for God, He is always trustworthy and His every word is certainly true. God has never deceived anyone, because **«God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?»** (Numbers 23:14).

It has never happened in the life of a true Christians that while seeking the kingdom of God, he remained forgotten and without reward from God. The secret is that when we forget about ourselves and serve God with all our strength, not neglecting to grow in our knowledge about God's truth, God Himself starts taking care about us and all our needs. This is the time when help comes through miracles, help that we did not expect.

Then real and true friends will show up in your life and the whole world around you will be filled with colors and joy. However, this will only happen if we seriously accept the truth that Jesus Christ once said: **«But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness...»** Let the one reading this, hear it.

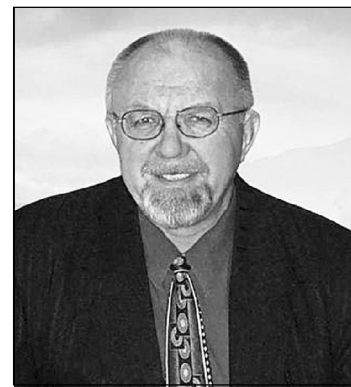
I. GORIK.

YOUR LETTERS

Many prisoners who correspond with Michael Romanovich from Chicago, have asked him how he came to faith. We are happy to publish his story in his own words.
The Editors.

A short testimony of my conversion

I was born in Belorussia in a Christian family. I am a third-generation Christian. Despite the fact that my parents were Christians, I needed to meet God personally. I felt a struggle inside myself, I was lacking something, and I felt as an incomplete Christian. I needed a strong foundation and personal justification or... I needed to choose what I would be: with Christ or without Him? I took my time to reason, doubt, compare and weigh; however, I did not decide anything. Well, obviously, my parents laid the foundation. This time was a very difficult and crucial period of my life. I spent more than a year in such anguish.



One day I felt especially weak from the struggle, and I departed to a place where no one could see me. I found a secluded place in the barn and I fell with a groan on the hay. No, I did not pray. Praying would mean having made the decision. Arguments and counterarguments against the Gospel would flow through my head many times. However, there was one thought that overwhelmed all others: the meaning and purpose of life. It was disgusting and stupid for me to accept the idea that the life of a person (and mine) would end up with a burial mound. What is the point of achieving something in life, to be a good citizen, and then be buried in the ground like an animal? Again and again, I realized that there was no true meaning and no true purpose in life without God. In general, what is life if there is no room for something higher, just, ideal and holy? This barn was something like Gethsemane for me — it was the last cruel fight after which I decided to be with Christ forever! And I have held this decision up to this day. This is my hard-won faith! This is my belief!

I would like many people to come to the same decision. For this purpose, I use my talent for writing which I have received from God. Let the world believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to God and Heaven. He is the meaning and purpose of life!



Michael ROMANOVICH, Chicago, USA.



Please distribute «Prisoner» in Poltavschina

Greetings in peace and love of the Lord Jesus Christ! Greetings, dear editors of the newspaper «Prisoner»!

Not too long ago, a sister gave me the first (8th) issue of your newspaper for 2014. I really liked it: beautiful pictures, talented poetry, great articles. And the most important is literacy which is rare in today's newspapers. Letters were so touching that I cried when reading some of them. Thank you so much for such important and necessary work.

My son returned from prison a few years ago. We used to write letters to each other the size of half a notebook. How useful could a newspaper like «Prisoner» have been! But I did not know anything about newspapers for prisoners at that time. Now I visit the prison in Poltava very often and distribute flyers among the relatives of the prisoners. I could also distribute the newspaper «Prisoner».

This is why I ask you, if it is possible, bless me with «Prisoner». If you could send me multiple copies, I would be beyond happy. Thank you in advance.



Olga KNYAZEVA, Poltava, Ukraine.

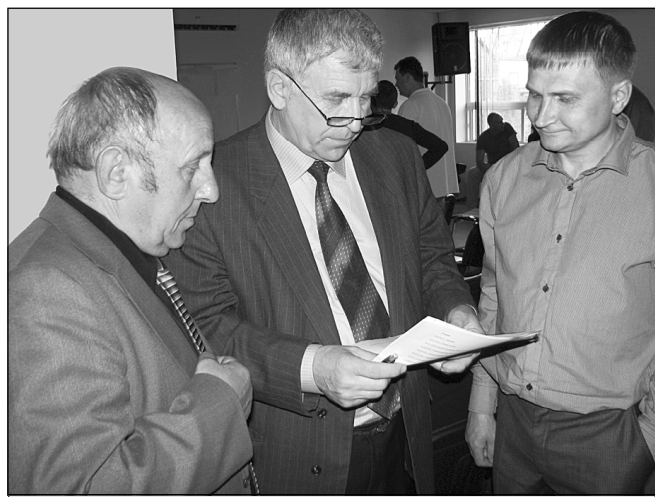
On May 2-3, 2014 about 150 prison ministers gathered for a two-day conference in Irpin, near Kiev. The theme of this conference was «The Fear of God».

During these two days, the brothers and sisters thanked God for the period of time in their lives in which their ministry was richly blessed. The chairman of the Evangelical Baptist Union of Ukraine and pastor of the church «Yasnaya Polyana» in Kharkov, Viktor Dudka, opened up the conference with the word of God and prayer.

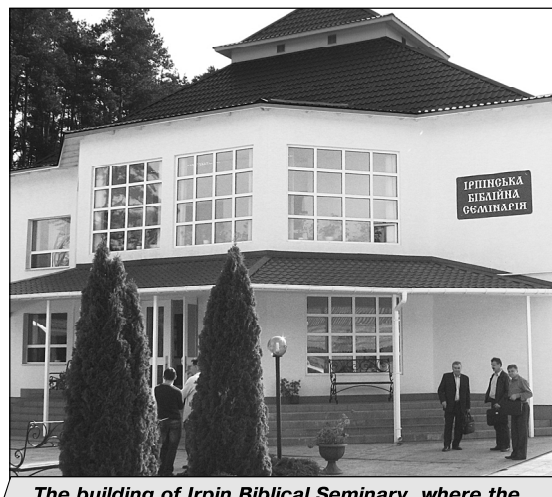
Viktor thanked the leaders for their dedicated service and inspired loyalty to God's calling to serve in any circumstance. Valentine Korenevich's greeting was greatly appreciated.



UKRAINIAN CONFERENCE OF PRISON MINISTERS



Viktor Yakovlevich Dudka (in the center with glasses)



The building of Irpin Biblical Seminary, where the May 2-3 conference of prison ministers was held



Vitaly Adelberg (in the center)



Sergey Vladimirovich Reus

Valentine Korenevich is a reserve colonel, a teacher at the seminary for chaplains, and also a pastor of the church in Kiev on Lukyanovskaya street. He graduated from Irpenskiy seminary, and on the 16th of March of this year started a new church. Rustam Fatullaev's address to the audience was just as welcome. He is the director of a rehabilitation center in Kiev and president of the Ukrainian public rehab organization.

First deputy chairman of the Evangelical Baptist Union of Ukraine, Valery Antonyuk, preached about the greatness of God. The journey through the Bible with pastor Yuri Shelestov of Kiev was an edifying experience. Also, it was nice to meet at the conference Leonid Ivanovich Smetanin. He is responsible for the prison ministry in the Luhansk region.

Valery Gibalyuk represents the church «Gospel» in Fontanka (Odessa region) and is also the director of the music ministry. On the first day of the conference, an international independent Christian newspaper «Prisoner» was presented.

The creator of the newspaper, and its chief editor, is Igor Gorik. The importance of this project and the possibility of its expansion were noted in the newspaper presentation. All participants received a gift of separate excerpts from the newspaper and book by the editor entitled «At the Finish Line».

It was very interesting to hear live testimony from brothers and sisters who not too long ago were prisoners or drug addicts but now are engaged in prison ministry. In the afternoon, participants heard reports from prison ministers about the work done in their regions (brother Oles Belenkin of Kremenchug; Slavik

Lobach of Zaporizhia; Vitaly Adelberg, who is responsible for the service in the women's prison in Kharkiv; Vadim Chubukin of Eastern Region; Alexander Korobkin of Poltava; brother Sergey of Sevastopol).

A great amount of information was brought to light about the situation in the prisons and their internal needs. Then the brothers and sisters had the opportunity to learn about

Poltava. The sisters recited poems. At the conclusion of the conference, Viktor Ivanovich Sikorsky from Mural shared from the Word of God, in which he called young people to trust in the service of God alone. It was a joy to hear his poems recited.

At the end of the conference, a picture was taken with all attendees who were still present. This photo is a symbol of the unity of various faiths to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.



Presenter of the newspaper «Prisoner»



Victor Mural Sikorsky surrounded by sisters during a break



Leonid Ivanovich Smetanin

spiritual management, and how to build their ministries solely on biblical principles and not human ideas.

The second day of the conference was as spiritually uplifting as the first. At the end of the second day of the conference a fellowship dinner was organized, where each region of Ukraine — Central, East, West, South — and some departments of youth ministry shared the blessings experienced in their ministry. The musical performers were Valentina from Vinnitsa (guitar), Kamenev from Sumy region, and Victoria from

The conference still warms my heart, especially now that I know exactly how God draws people from darkness to light, making them blessed and happy. Of all the ministers present at the conference, most are former prisoners and drug addicts. But that was in the past.

Today they are all children of God who carry His light to those who live in the same spiritual darkness as they themselves once lived in. Thanks to God for His grace and the miracle that He gives everyone who calls on His Holy name!

Irina DOLGUSHINA.

«THE FOOL HAS SAID IN HIS HEART, THERE IS NO GOD»

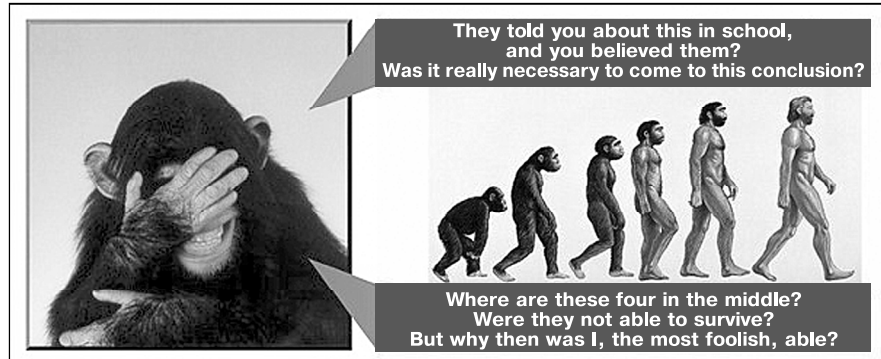
It is sad but humanity is divided into two categories: believers and unbelievers. The believers claim that without faith all humans are destined to hell and eternal torment. The unbelievers mock those who believe in God, claiming that God is only a myth, and faith is simply for weak people. This category is larger than that of those who believe that God is real and that His deeds are proof of their faith. So who is correct in dealing with this complex dilemma?

In order to answer that question, it's important to find out what are the grounds for the claims of both groups.

When I hear the discussions of unbelievers, I have to say that I hear nothing out of them but unfounded claims that are based solely on their emotions. Those

which are recorded in the Holy Scripture, are entirely true. Thus the Scripture says: *«You will know the truth, and it will set you free»* (John 8:32). The Lord sets us free from ourselves and our selfish personality, which dictates our behavior contrary to our conscience and the good that was within us at the beginning.

In light of God's Word, the Bible, we see that we are so miserable in life without God. Faith in God gives us peace of mind. God's Word opens to us treasures of wisdom and love. By means of God's Word light and grace fill our lives. For those who have not found it yet, God delivers the Word: *«Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know»* (Jer. 33:3).



people claim that God does not exist, but none of them can explain the origins of the universe, earth, nature, and man himself. When those people are asked, «Have you descended from monkeys?» such opponents smile, unable to provide an answer. Such people resort to the theory of evolution, and yet nobody would really like to liken himself to a monkey. The claims of the atheists are absurd: there is no evidence for atheism. The atheists are unsuccessful. When I talk to «smart» atheists, I ask them the question: «Have you attempted to approach God before making such a claim?» The answer to the question is negative. Most humans are blind because they simply follow the path of the majority. In fact, none of them ever tried to repent and cry out to the Lord, or open the Bible. It is so foolish to claim what you do not actually know. What is the cause of it? Why do most humans not acknowledge God and wish to repent? What holds an individual back from acknowledging God's rule and yielding to His will? Why do people seek God only when they are pushed to the wall? The Bible answers this question clearly: *«For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ»* (Phil. 2:21).

Praise God for those people who can testify about the wonders of God! The believer knows God, his presence, authority, and power. God reveals to those humans that He is real and that all His words,

There is a vast difference between believers and unbelievers. The former know what is going to happen after death. The latter get older fearfully. While the former have peace in heart, the latter live with frustration. The human soul is not content with the goods of this world. Only drawing near to God allows a human being to feel safe in the face of tomorrow. The apostle Paul says: *«For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain»* (Phil. 1:21).

Paul's words do not resonate with the atheist. Most people live in depression, seeing no light at the end of tunnel. Others gain and live in happiness. The ancient prophet declares: *«Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing»* (Isaiah 40:26).

Unless the individual repents of his sins and cries out to the Lord, he will not be able to understand much, even if countless biblical texts and examples are brought to the fore.

The words of the fool, «there is no God», are not true, for each day shows us the truth contrary to what the atheists claim. God's creation and His marvelous deeds are seen everywhere. Let us just open our eyes widely to see those wonders.

I. GORIK.

Greetings to you, dear publishers of the newspaper «Prisoner» and all readers of this truly wonderful publication! Huge thanks and sincere bows to all whose prayers and financial assistance give life to this newspaper, and to the prisoners who are eagerly awaiting the release of the next issue.

I am not sure that my letter will be published, since you receive many letters and my letter is slightly different from the general type of published materials. The editor Igor Gorik wrote in «Prisoner» 4 (7) that this newspaper was originally provided also for those people who are still on their way to God. I characterize myself as a person who is in search of the way. And what attracted me, among other things, is the fact that «Prisoner» is a publication which does not belong to any one of the specific denominations of Christianity. Therefore, you do not need to make a choice. If you feel more like a Christian than anything else, but aren't sure which is closer to you — Baptists, Adventists, or Evangelicals — and so you delay making your decision for Christ, then «Prisoner» is for you. The vast majority of letters published in the

Conversation on the theme:

PREDESTINATION OF HUMAN FATE



newspaper are letters from those who have already come to God, who have let Christ into their heart. Of course, for those who are still in a spiritual search, the testimonies of their brothers are very edifying and instructive.

For me, someone who is sentenced to life imprisonment, as for many Russian prisoners, fellowship with brothers who are in other correctional facilities, unless they are my relatives, is almost impossible. Consequently, it is not possible for me to write to those whom I would like to write to. However, there is so much I would like to talk about and express my thoughts on various issues. I hope that my voice could be heard in the pages of «Prisoner». I would like to use this opportunity to reflect on certain topics from the pages of this newspaper. I will be very glad to receive any letters, if anyone desires to reply.

I would like to talk about the freedom of choice of the individual. Often I ask myself whether a man has a predetermined fate. Yes, we all supposedly have freedom of choice. At the same time we also know that God is omniscient, that is, He knows everything. The Lord knows everything there was, there is and there will be. That is indisputable. Thus, the Lord knows how the person will use the freedom of choice given to him. Given this, it is before birth that God knows how people will live their lives. *«Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be»* (Ps. 138:16).

So, the person might not be yet aware of what events will take place in his life and how he will act upon them in a certain situations, but the Lord already knows everything. Thus, all our life paths and roads are already determined in advance for each one of us but we only have to choose which of their sides we will walk. But since there is one road, it doesn't really matter which side of it to walk — the left or the right, it will still lead to the same destination. And the final outcome will be the same too.

Since at the birth of a man, God already knows how he will live his life (because God cannot be wrong), can there be any mystery for God about how the person will use the freedom of choice allegedly granted him? No.

So, if at the time of one's birth, the Lord knows and sees that that person will commit an improper action, the person will do so any way, since God cannot be mistaken in his foresight or in His knowledge.

Take, for example, the Apostle Peter. Peter still did not know that there will be a situation in his life when he will deny Jesus three times. But the Lord already knew that and even told this to Peter. Could Peter have acted differently? No. Peter had no choice. He was already destined to do so, because God cannot be wrong.

«And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this day, this night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times. But he spoke with great effort, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee. They all said the same» (Mark 14:30, 31).

Furthermore, Jesus said that He would be crucified. Accordingly, He knew who would crucify him, although the executioners had not known about this themselves till the day of the execution. Did those executioners have a choice? The Lord knew all the participating executioners. They had no choice. They were destined to become the executioners of Christ. That is, even from birth they had a destiny. So what was their fault? Was their fault that they walked the road which was predestined to them and were not able to change their destiny?

And maybe all those prisoners who opened their hearts to Christ, got in prison for a reason. After all, none of you will deny the fact that if it were not for prison, there would be no acquaintance with Christ. In all this, there is hidden God's great plan for us which is incomprehensible and unknown. There is nothing accidental in our life. How often do we act a certain way and later on cannot explain why we did. I think we are acting according to the will of the One who knows all our steps in advance. Each of us has his own unique way prepared for him. We did not come to change it. But what is impossible with man, is possible with God. Therefore, it remains only to turn to the Lord in prayer that He, in His mercy, would reveal to us that narrow path which will lead to the Kingdom of Heaven, and deliver us from the one which can only lead to destruction.

I wish all the brothers in prison God's grace, health and speedy release, despite any length of sentence given to them! And remember that it will be given to you by your faith!

I would be very grateful to you for the next issues of «Prisoner», which, I think, I have come across by no accident through one of my brothers.

With respect to all of you, your brother in Christ —



Андрей ЮДИН,
ФКУ ИК-18, ПЛС, п. Харп, Приуральский р-н, ЯНАО,
Россия, 629420.

CHRISTIAN NEWS

A Christian Pastor is Brutally Beaten in an Iranian Prison

A Christian Protestant pastor is one of 30 prisoners brutally beaten by guards in Iran's Evin prison. According to The Christian Post, Pastor Farhid Fathi was among those who protested against violence in prison last week.

Pastor Farhid Fathi is the leader of an evangelical church, and is serving 6 years in prison as a result of some fabricated political charges. Such brutal beating



resulted in a broken leg and finger. 29 other prisoners of the 350th section received various injuries, including broken ribs, legs and skull bases.

About 100 guards are estimated to have participated in these «educational» measures. In 2012, Farhid Fathi was sentenced to six years in prison for «raising funds for a foreign organization».

His heart attack in 2013 was the result of the psychological pressure he experienced in Evin prison.

News Agency
CNL-NEWS Materials:
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ENVY – A DEADLY SIN

«You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's» (Exodus 20:17, Bible; New English Version).

Envy is one of the sins forbidden by the Ten Commandments; it consists of a desire to have things that do not belong to you. Envy can be a desire for material things as well as immaterial things (beauty, success, virtue, etc.) Those who believe in God know that everything that a person has comes from God, «Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change» (James 1:17).

God gives every person things that are needed specifically for that person to fulfill God's plan for him or her. Therefore, the desire to possess things that God gave to another person by definition contradicts the Creator's intentions and plans. As a result, envy in itself reveals a person's aspiration to have his or her own will and to disprove God's will.

The Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Galatians, includes envy in the list of «works of flesh», contra-distinguishing it from the fruit of the Spirit. He also notes, in his Epistle to Timothy, that envy is not necessarily directed at material things only. The desire to be superior and to have authority is a substantial reason for jealousy. The most striking and tragic illustration is the envy of Pharisees and scribes against Jesus Christ, which led to the death of the Savior on a cross.

Despite the fact that envy is considered one of the seven deadly sins and that the feeling of envy is very unpleasant, no one was able to destroy it. As time passed, the order of the deadly sins was changed. Pope Gregory the Great, who lived in the seventh century, changed «sadness» into «envy». He ranked it as deadly sin number four. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas rearranged the deadly sins into the order that is still used today: laziness, envy, anger, despondency, greed, gluttony, and fornication; that is, he placed the sin of «envy» in the second spot.

Rene Descartes considered envy to be a special type of sadness mixed with hatred that a person feels when they see other persons enjoying blessings that, in his or her opinion, they do not deserve. This philosopher's opinion was that such a feeling is excusable if it is directed towards those who will turn their blessings into an evil. At the same time, Descartes called envy a vice that reveals the innate depravity of people who are annoyed at the sight of a blessing enjoyed by others. He believed that such a feeling damages the well-being of

people like no other because it takes away the joy of those who envy and those around them.

Unfortunately, we all need to admit that we are guilty of this sin to some extent. Every person has some needs that they cannot fulfill and ambitions that other people exceed them in. It is far easier to explain one's failings, not as the result of one's own mistakes or laziness, but as the result of an unjust Fate which for some reason blessed others instead of oneself.

«Often people boast about their most scandalous passions, but nobody dares to confess to be envious; it is cowardice and timid sin» (Francois de La Rochefoucauld).

All people are guilty of envy to some extent, but almost nobody confesses such sin. Why? Michael Velar answers this question, «Why are we ashamed of our envy? Rather – why are we ashamed to show it? Because it means that we are confessing that the level of our capability is lower than the level of our ambitions; that we cannot reach what we want. It means that we publicly acknowledge our insignificance and weakness, and admit someone else to be higher than us».

ENVY IN OUR LIFE

«By the envy of our enemies we can, to a certain level, judge the extent of our success» (Hermann von Helmholtz).

Dionysius of Syracuse ruled over ancient Greece. He successfully conquered all surrounding land and his country owned a great amount of gold and silver. His subjects seemingly honored and respected him, but there were also multiple attempts to poison him. Damocles, Dionysius's favorite, enjoyed the king's favor and received many benefits from him, but he wanted to occupy the king's throne. To stay close to the king, he said flattering words of admiration and honor. Once, he called the king the happiest of all men, but these words didn't gladden the ruler.

In response, Dionysius offered Damocles to rule for a short period of time. Dionysius allowed him to enjoy all the pleasures of living in a castle. During a feast, Dionysius put Damocles on the throne and sat some distance away.

Damocles rejoiced at his position! All of a sudden he noticed that all the attendees at the feast were looking strangely at the ceiling above him, and then at him, and were whispering among themselves.

He looked up at the ceiling. At the sight of what he saw, he caught his breath and his heartbeat quickened. A huge sword was hanging right above his head. It was fastened with a thin thread made with horse's hair; it



Envy (1360), Giotto di Bondone, Italy

could break off at any moment and split his skull and spine.

Damocles jumped away, full of fear, and sat to the side. From this moment he understood the instability of the king's happiness, and his envy quickly disappeared. He understood that the ruler's fate is very changeable because there are many who want to dethrone him and occupy his position. Damocles begged the king to let him go, because he fully tasted Dionysius's happiness and wanted no part in such a position.

Envy is in everyone, irrespective of gender, temperament, or character (even though there is an opinion that apathetic persons are not as jealous as choleric persons). Many different people suffer equally from this evil; be it a jobless person or a millionaire, mechanic or a star.

Social data shows that envy becomes less intense with age. Its level begins to drop after 60 years of age. It might be because older people start thinking about the transition to «the other side», and try to get rid of at least some of their sins. Or it might be because at this age people finally start to appreciate life and its simple pleasures, and stop complaining about the bad luck that they felt gave them less than they deserved. Young persons between 18 and 25 are the most dissatisfied with the distribution of goods. They want to possess everything right away; they don't understand that money, glory, and other attributes of success are achieved through hard work and are not a gift of blind Fortune.

People are envious of many different things. Women might be

jealous of fashionable clothing, a new hairstyle, elegant shoes, and bright nail polish; even more – the attention of men to other women. Because of this, the object of envy for women is often a husband, a lover, or a friend. Or it might be social status, a good income, a car, etc. Men are more sensitive to a friend's career growth, monetary success, social status, expensive car, vacation home, and recognition.

Envy has been present since the beginning. Let us look in the Bible. Cain killed his brother Abel when his offering wasn't accepted but his brother's was. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery because he was their father's favorite. King Saul tried to kill David multiple times when he learned that Israeli loved his subject more than they loved their king. Jesus was surrounded by envious people throughout his whole life. Multiple stories from the Bible allow us to see that this sin has filled people's hearts and souls since ancient times.

The first book of Moses tells us the famous story of Joseph, who suffered because of his brothers' envy. His father, Israel, set him apart with a robe of many colors as a favorite son, which provoked his brothers' envy and hatred. Moreover, Joseph «tattled» on his brothers, which also contributed to their resentment of Joseph, «[He] brought a bad report of them to their father» (Genesis 37:2). Additionally, Joseph told his brothers about his dreams and that kindled their hatred even more.

«He said to them, «Hear this dream that I have dreamed: Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf». His brothers said to him, «Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?» So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, «Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me». But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, «What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?» (Genesis 37:6-10).

The further development of the situation was practically predetermined. His brothers schemed to kill their arrogant relative, and only at the last minute was his fate alleviated when his brothers decided to sell him into

slavery to merchants traveling to Egypt.

«...So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan. They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. They said to one another, «Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams...» Then Judah said to his brothers, «What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh». And his brothers listened to him. Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, «This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not». And he identified it and said, «It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces» (Genesis 37:17-20, 26-28, 31-33).

Envy awakens the most negative feelings in a person. French philosopher Claude Adrien Helvetius wrote, «Of all the passions, envy is the most disgusting flaw. Hatred, betrayal, and intrigue all stride under its banner». Jonathan Swift, Honore de Balzac, Moyer, Alexander Pushkin, William Shakespeare, and Petrarch all wrote about jealousy. The list can go on and on because the topic will never lose its importance. With the help of satire and tragedy great writers seek to inform the readers of the burden of this feeling.

During the Middle Ages people perceived the world through allegories and symbols. Envy was portrayed as a snake, a frog, a medusa, a scary crone; it was perceived as a creation of the devil. At about the same period of time, people started to marry envy with lies in order to mask their true feelings.

Envy is like a thirst that results from the intake of alcohol, it doesn't get better with drinking more alcohol. The higher the person gets on the social ladder, the more envious he becomes of people who beat him at something.

Y. SHCHERBATYKH,
Russia,

www.no-stress.ru/sin/zavist-greh.html

According to various statistics, masturbation is very common today among youth. It's an interesting phenomenon that some prominent Christian organizations have characterized masturbation as a bad habit, yet not a sinful act. Nonetheless, the rightness of this characterization cannot be determined by the majority opinion of these organizations, but only by what the Bible says.

The Bible clearly and emphatically states that human sexuality is created as a special form of communication between a husband and a wife, in marriage. There are a lot of passages in the Bible about this. Sexual relations between a husband and wife are presented in the Scriptures as something sacred and sublime. For example, in the Epistle to the Hebrews 13:4, it says, «Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge». In the original manuscripts, the word «bed» alludes to sexual relationships, meaning that this type of relationship should be holy. The word «undefiled» (or blameless, pure, holy) means «set apart or dedicated for a specific purpose»; in this case, only for the relationship between the marriage partners themselves. This also implies that any sexuality outside of marriage,

MASTURBATION –

including masturbation and fornication, is a sin and uncleanness.

Furthermore, the Bible says that the point of sexual relations inside a marriage is for the husband and the wife to serve one another, thus expressing their mutual devotion and commitment to each other. «Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife» (1 Cor. 7:3-4). Masturbation, in essence, is the use of sexuality for self-gratification. Not only does it defile the person who enters into a sexual relationship with himself, but it also develops a perverse and sinful idea of what sexuality is. In the future, this can adversely affect the formation of sexual relationships when the person marries, endangering the welfare of his future family. Unfortunately, masturbation becomes a sinful habit for many.

Most often, a person's conscience judges them that they're doing something wrong, but they are not strong enough to overcome this problem. Below are some practical tips to help free a person from this slavery to masturbation.

The Bible doesn't say directly that masturbation is a sin. However, it's certain that the acts leading to masturbation are sinful. Masturbation is the result of lustful desires, sexual stimulation and/or pornography. It's precisely these problems that should be combated with the most resistance. If the sins of lust and pornography are defeated, then the problem of masturbation disappears by itself.

The Bible tells us to avoid even the mention of sexual immorality (Eph. 5:3). Masturbation without a doubt falls into this category. Sometimes to be sure if something's sinful or not, you need to think to yourself, «Would it be pleasing to inform someone else about what I just did?» If you feel shame and discomfort, then, most likely, your actions are sinful. Another good question to ask yourself, «Can I honestly, in good conscience, ask God to bless what

TEN OF THE MOST UNUSUAL PRISONS IN THE WORLD

PIRATES HEAVEN

The Republic of Seychelles is one of the smallest countries on earth, a tiny paradise island off the coast of Africa. Most of the money that goes into the state treasury comes from tourism. However, this republic is also home to a special «pirate prison», built specifically for to hold Somali pirates. Some of the fiercest pirates in the



world spend their days in the banana groves and on benches, lazily tanning, awaiting trial. According to a BBC correspondent who visited the prison, this place is, in fact, a paradise. The captured Somali pirates get a free extended vacation on the island.

MPEMBA PRISON, BURUNDI

Inmates are held indefinitely. Within these walls, children are born and die, and violence and beatings are commonplace. In the middle of all this, there is one of the strangest prison barriers in the history of prison barriers. There is a wall passing right through the middle of prison, originally built to separate the male from the female prison population, dotted with holes. The idea is that the prisoners line up on both sides of the



wall, to relieve their sexual tension through the wall. As a result, the pregnancy rate among women in prison is high. Nevertheless, the guards do not do anything to stop this practice, and even sometimes participate in it.

NAKED PRISON

In Harare Prison, in the capital of Zimbabwe, disease, filth and violence are commonplace. New prisoners need



to spend about a year without clothing. In this prison, all prisoners go without clothes for about a year. Temperature in their cells often falls to zero degrees, and the prisoners themselves spend two years without seeing sunlight. When the temperature drops, no one gives them any blankets or anything to cover themselves.

HIGHLY CORRUPT MEXICAN PRISON

Mexican prisons are notorious for overcrowding and violence. However,



this is only one side of the story. The main characteristic of such prisons is that they are the most comfortable prisons on earth. And it's all thanks to the high level of corruption. In July 2011, the authorities found that state prison inmates in Sonora held a secret lottery. Winning prisoners got luxury suites equipped with a telephone, personal fridge, TV, DVD-player and air conditioning. As strange as this discovery may seem, it pales in comparison to what was found in the prison of Acapulco. According to a BBC report, officials found «100 plasma televisions, 19 prostitutes, two bags of marijuana and 100 cocks for cockfighting».

PRISON FOR TWO



Sark is a tiny island located between Britain and France. The population does not exceed 600 and the first elections were held here in 2008. Sark Prison is just the sort of strange, eccentric prison, which you would expect to find on a semi-abandoned island.

The prison looks like a public restroom. It is tiny — microscopic, the kind of prison that could be shown in comedies. This is the only place on the island where drunks can sober up. The prison can accommodate only two persons. This fact makes this prison officially the smallest and most ridiculous in the world.

A PRISON WITH ITS OWN PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS

The State Prison in Pelican Bay of the United States is notorious for its solitary confinement section where inmates are not allowed to communicate with the outside world or other people for 22 hours of each day. They are kept in cells with fluorescent lighting and no sunlight. They are allowed to exercise only once a week.

A study of a random sample of 100 prisoners in Pelican Bay Prison in California found that 91% suffered



from anxiety and nervousness. More than 80% of the prisoners experienced lethargy, headaches, and sleep disorders; 70% had fear of «failure» and more than 50% had nightmares and dizziness in conjunction with an increased heart rate.

More than 80% had difficult thinking, 77% had chronic depression, and 41% had hallucinations.

A PRISON WITH ITS OWN GOLF COURSE

Louisiana State Prison is probably the only maximum security prison on earth which has a golf course. And that's not all. The building has its own



radio station, a printing press, television studio and runway. The prison is more like a self-functioning city, filled with violent criminals.

In other words, it looks like New York City from the futuristic movie «Escape from New York», only on its territory it has even a golf course.

A PRISON BUILT BY SPECIAL REQUEST (THE PITCAIRN ISLANDS)

The Pitcairn Islands are very distant islands in the Pacific Ocean with a population of about 60 people. In 2004, it was found that one in ten of these islanders had been implicated in some rather serious and unpleasant acts involving underage girls. The Pitcairn Islands have no judicial system. The



islanders are descendants of mutineers from the ship «Bounty», and no one knew precisely who had jurisdiction over these islands.

In the end, Britain took responsibility for the punishment of criminals there, and found that there were no institutions on the Pitcairn Islands that remotely resemble a prison.

In 2006, builders and criminals from the UK built a prison; it housed ten percent of the population and then protected them until their prison sentences expired after a few years. At the moment, the islanders are going to turn the now empty prison building into a cafe or a yacht club.

PRISON FROM «THE DARK KNIGHT RISES» (RWANDA)

Remember the prison in which Bane tossed Batman into in the movie «The Dark Knight Rises», the prison which was like hell on earth? Well now, meet



the equivalent in real life: Tollbooth Gitarama in Rwanda. It's not more than just a dusty hole in the ground. Unfortunately, now that hole is filled with a number of people which exceeds the capacity of the prison by more than 20 times.

Frequently, there's a mass epidemic of infections with people starving. There are even reports that prisoners engaged in cannibalism to survive. This is all happening without considering the most important thing: conditions. Each cell only has enough room for a person to stand up. Human waste covers the entire floor, and prisoners often have rotting limbs because of the unsanitary conditions.

PRISON HOLIDAY (NORWAY)

Located just an hour's drive from Oslo, the island Bastøy is a picturesque place, reachable only by boat. There are several beaches, and the prison is equipped with tennis courts and even a sauna.

Instead of living behind bars, 115 inmates at this amazing prison live in comfortable wooden houses. The island of Bastøy doesn't have barbed wire or guards with machine guns and sheepdogs. This is despite the fact that some of the most notorious criminals live there, from drug dealers and extortioners to rapists and murderers. With regard to the detention regime, the primary responsibility of each prisoner is labor. They all have a job at which they must work from 8:30 to 15:30.

Prisoners receive a daily salary of \$10 and can spend it on products at a local store, thus providing breakfast and dinner upon request. Dinner is mandatory for all; the camp chef cooks it — both for the prisoners and the guards.

The purpose of the prison on the island of Bastøy is not to offend the good citizens of Norway by pampering rather than punishing criminals, but to change criminals and allow them to return to society. «The main thing is to create a situation in which prisoners can open themselves up to a



new side and again to start to respect themselves», says the head of the prison, Kvernvik Arne Nielsen.

As surprising as it may sound, the method works. According to statistics, 20% of offenders who serve time in Norwegian prisons come back again after a few years of being released. Of those who had the opportunity to serve a term on the island of Bastøy, the recidivism rate is only 16%.

WE ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS

Praise God that our editorial office not only receives letters of gratitude, but also that readers always ask questions that are very important for a Christian. Already more than once we have been asked questions concerning gluttony, namely, to what extent is it a sin, and also about the significance of fasting. Today on the pages of «Prisoner» we answer these questions, and we thank everyone who asks them. So, what exactly is gluttony?

For example, in the dictionary The Primer of Faith (<http://azbyka.ru/dictionary/23/chrevougodie.shtml>) it says the following in this regard. Gluttony is obsession with tasty and rich food. Gluttony is the root of eight leading obsessions, and it is

also called the «root» obsession. The types of gluttony are: overeating, eating sweets, keeping food in the mouth in order to enjoy the flavor, drunkenness, and eating secretly. Gluttony is a violation of the second commandment, as it is a type of idolatry. Since gluttons elevate fleshly pleasures, then, according to Apostle Paul, «[their] god is their belly» (Philippians 3:19).

Their body is their god, their idol.

The opposite of gluttony is the virtue of abstinence.

From the Editor.

Adam's sin, passing from generation to generation, includes in itself the potential of all human sins.

Holy fathers, through the years-long experience of asceticism, saw the depth of the human soul — this hiding place where thoughts and desires are born. Out of a complex mosaic of sins they identified and described eight leading obsessions — eight sores of the soul, eight rivers of dead water, flowing from hell, out of which brooks and currents are the beginning of the other sins. These riverbeds, like meridians, circle the earth, and their origins and their estuaries connect in the underworld.

the triumph of the flesh, which was the beginning of the end. Humanity not only descended into a swamp of materialism, it also forgot God. Itself dust of the ground, it constructed idols out of dust — new, dead gods. Sin began to spread like a plague throughout the whole world: sins of idolatry, sorcery, witchcraft, debauchery and cannibalism. The cult of the flesh turned the history of mankind into an endless orgy. Already before the worldwide flood, humanity had spiritually perished in the flood of its obsessions. The worldwide flood, like a grave digger, merely dug a mass grave for the dead and turned the floor of the ocean into

weapon. In the first minute he still resists, but then falls, torn by the claws and fangs of the predator. In the beginning a glutton adheres to a strict diet and looks at those surrounding him triumphantly, like Hercules after another feat, but then, not able to withstand the stomach pain, he attacks the food as if trying to catch up.

Two obsessions can be distinguished in gluttony: eating food merely to fill up the stomach, without thinking of the taste; and keeping food in the mouth in order to enjoy the flavor. Eating food to fill up the stomach, without thinking about how it tastes, is an insatiable desire for

unable to work and so become a burden to others. Those at home will look anxiously at his plate, strongly urging him to eat more.

Holy fathers recommend limiting the intake first of spicy food and food that increases appetite, then sweet and pleasant food, then fattening food. One should eat slowly — that way, there will be a feeling of fullness quicker. One needs to get up from a meal when the first hunger is gone, but while there is still a desire to eat. In the old days it was a custom to eat silently. Outside conversations distract a person's attention, and the person, fascinated by the conversation, can automatically eat everything on the table. Elders also advised saying prayers to Jesus while eating.

Concerning the amount of water to drink, it is necessary to remember that thirst is sometimes real and sometimes false. To distinguish between them, one should hold some water in his mouth without swallowing it: if the thirst is false, then it passes, but if it persists — it is real.

All obsessions are connected with each other; their combination is like a colorful puzzle or like intricate patterns in a tapestry. Gluttony can be combined with the passion of anger. With some people in a state of anger, and general excitement and anxiety, there is a desire to chew something to distract the thoughts. Since an angry man is almost always worried, he gets used to constantly putting food in his mouth. Gluttons justify their obsessions and passions due to their mental state — they desire to relieve stress. But this does not make them calm, they only gain extra pounds.

Gluttony is sometimes combined with stinginess. Such a person is ready to consume spoiled, moldy food, just to not throw it away. Stingy gluttons store food like a relic, rejoicing that they have reserves for a long time. Only when the food begins to spoil do they decide to eat it. Misers, when feeding guests, hate them in their soul as invaders and are tormented by every bite they eat. But they themselves like to go to friends for dinner and even make a schedule — when and to whom to go.

Gluttony paired with vanity results in eating secretly. A vain person fears being seen as a glutton. He eats with restraint when around people, but when left alone, he is in a hurry to satisfy his obsession. He has a secret place where he hides food from prying eyes. Looking around and making sure that no one is there, he goes to the cupboard, like a stingy knight to a treasure chest, and devours his food quickly. It must be said that the Slavic word «devour» means «to make a sacrifice». A glutton brings a sacrifice to his belly like a pagan to an idol.

There are sins that are related to gluttony; for example, eating a meal without prayer, complaining about food, making obscene jokes, or swearing, arguing and quarreling during meals. Demons flock to such feasts like flies to honey, and defile the food with invisible filth.

It can be said that the sin of gluttony is the gradual eating of the soul by the body, which extinguishes his heavenly and spiritual beginning, leaving him blind flesh.

Archmandrite **RAPHAEL**
(Karelin).

WHY DO WE NEED TO FAST?

Fasting is an ancient virtue. Along with prayer, it prepares the Christian for crucifixion and resurrection. Fasting is food for the soul.

Fasting teaches us abstinence, which is necessary for everyone. It teaches us renunciation of extravagance, luxury and abundance. Fasting is almost the only thing that a person can present as «a gift» to God.

Of course, the Lord is in no need of anything, and we are the ones who primarily need fasting. The benefit of abstinence is varied: while fasting, we are sober and focused, and our prayer becomes more attentive, heartfelt and deep. Fasting is our appeal to God, evidence that we want Him to come into our lives.



Fasting is inextricably linked with repentance. It is a God-given opportunity, which should not be overlooked.

Fasting should be done willingly and joyfully, not formally and reluctantly out of duty. We need to bring fasting to God wholeheartedly.

Adam and Eve lost Paradise because of not being abstinent. Fasting opens the gates of Paradise for us once again.

Fasting should not remain only at the level of rejection of certain foods. We must take the next step of refraining from our sinful passions and evil. Then the period of fasting will become essential for us and a turning point on our way to God.

Fasting gives us moral purity, producing repentance and contempt for sin. Fasting is not the goal, but a means to achieve the goal of an encounter with God. According to St. Basil the Great, fasting is the estrangement from evil, the curbing of language, avoiding anger and rejection of evil habits.

For those who are seriously ill, there is no need of fasting. After all, abstinence from food is necessary in order to humble the body. When the body is sick, it is humbled and there is no need to torture it. In any case, this is an issue which must be addressed after consulting with your confessor.

Some people live to eat. They «travel» from table to table, go to banquets and restaurants. Eventually they fall ill from eating too much. Intemperance in eating causes obesity and many diseases.

But we do not fast for the sake of bodily health (although fasting helps us in this), but for the sake of spiritual health. Fasting has nothing to do with diets which people follow for the sake of beauty and a slim figure. Fasting is the brother of the virtue of abstinence. Let's not forget the words of St. John Chrysostom, who said that the money saved on food should be used to feed the hungry and needy.

Let fasting be accompanied by prayer and love. Then it will find value, meaning and significance.

Elder
Moses SVYATOGORETS.

Read the conclusion to «WE ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS» on page 8

GLUTTONY

Eight obsessions are connected with each other like chain links, with which the devil binds people and leads them around like a captor. These are the eight heads of the hydra, with which every Christian is supposed to engage in battle; they are an invisible net, into which Satan has been trying already for eight millennia to entrap his prey, the whole earth.

The first chain in the link is gluttony. To many people it seems to be an innocent weakness, not especially dangerous; all the more so since the results of this sin, like the scabs of leprosy, are not seen right away, but only after years have passed. However, we need to remember that after the fall of Adam, the harmony between the soul and body of a person was disturbed. The body — an extension of the soul and the physical part of a person — became a substratum of obsessions and lust. The body is the slave of the spirit. This slave, having been cared for by the soul, wanted to command it. Like Eve did Adam, the body sometimes seduces the mind with the false pleasures of lust, and captivates the heart with the dark mysteriousness of sin; at other times, it rebels against the soul, trying to depose it from the throne to become the queen of the human triad — the spirit, the soul, and the body.

The body is an evil friend and a kind enemy. A person does not exist without the body. Without the body, the spirit and soul cannot express themselves through words and deeds. The evil flesh is always ready to betray the soul for the copper coins of cheap pleasures — like Judas, who sold his Master to die for thirty pieces of silver. The body is the perfidious companion of the soul on the thorny path to the Heavenly Kingdom, which sometimes obediently follows it, and sometimes tries to entice it towards the wide, paved road that leads to eternal death. The soul and body can be compared to a rider and a wild horse: if the rider loosens the bit, then the horse will rush where the eyes look, and both will fall into a pit.

Gluttony is the defeat of the spirit by the body; it is an open field on which all obsessions grow wild. It is the first step of a steep, slippery ladder, leading to the underworld. In the book of Genesis, it is written that God looked upon the earth and saw that all people are flesh, and His Spirit cannot dwell with them. Humanity before the Flood did not fulfill its purpose: the fleshly beginning defeated the spiritual, as it were swallowing it. This was

a graveyard for all flesh. The bodies of belly-pleasers were swallowed by the belly of the sea, and the souls of demon-pleasers by the ravenous belly of the underworld.

The story repeats itself. The Lord compared the times of Noah with the Last Days. Once again the flesh starts to triumph over the spirit, and the demons over the flesh, debauching, corrupting it and mocking it in all manner of ways.

Gluttony disfigures the human. At the sight of a glutton we unwillingly recall the market, where hang bloody carcasses brought from the slaughterhouse. It seems that the body of a glutton hangs on his bones, like skinned carcasses on iron hooks.

The belly, heavy with food, causes the mind to plunge into a dark slumber, making it lazy and stupid. A glutton cannot think deeply or reason about spiritual



things. His belly, like a lead weight, pulls down the unspiritual soul. This person is especially aware of his infirmity during prayer. The mind cannot enter into the words of prayer, just like a dull knife cannot cut bread. In this sense, gluttony is a constant hinderance to his praying.

It should be noted that gluttony also darkens the intellectual and creative powers of man. Almost none of the outstanding poets and artists was accused of being a glutton and having a body resembling a beer barrel.

Often a glutton — tired from the weight of his own body that leads to breathlessness and exhaustion, and from the need to constantly overcome the size of his own stomach in order to bend down to pick up an item from the floor or tie his shoelaces — decides to declare war on the demon of gluttony and destroy like an enemy his own fat. He copies a diet out of a magazine and announces to his loved ones that his figure will soon look not like a figure in a Flemish painting, but like the statue of Apollo. However, a glutton on such a diet most often appears to be in the role of a gladiator, who enters into a fight with a wild animal without a

food; an attack of the body against the soul; the constant harassment of the belly, which like a cruel tax collector requires of individuals an excessive tribute; the madness of the stomach, which indiscriminately absorbs food like a hyena and its prey. The stomach of this man is like a bag into which a greedy master indiscriminately stuffs things, as if getting ready for a long journey, and then with difficulty manages the unnecessary burden.

Keeping food in the mouth in order to enjoy the flavor is a constant desire and temptation for gourmet food. It is the lust of the throat. Man must eat to live, but here he lives to eat. He prepares his menu in advance with such carefulness, as though he were solving a puzzle or math problem. He spends all his money on goodies, and like a gambler loses his fortune.

There are other kinds of gluttony: eating secretly — out of a desire to hide one's sin; eating early — when a person, barely awake, starts to eat without having experienced the feeling of hunger; hasty eating — when a person tries to fill his stomach quickly and swallows food

without chewing, like a turkey; failure to observe a prescribed diet — when a person eats foods harmful to his health because of a desire to satisfy his tastes. The ancient ascetics even considered the excessive consumption of water to be gluttony.

How does one get rid of gluttony? Here is some advice. One should secretly pray before a meal that the Lord would give self-control and help him put a limit to the satisfying of the belly and throat. One should remember that our body, anxious for food, will itself sooner or later become food for the worms. Formed out of the earth — it is a handful of dust. One should imagine what happens to food in the belly. One should determine in his mind how much he would like to eat, and then set aside one fourth of it. At first, the person will be hungry, but once the body gets used to it, set aside another fourth part from the food — so advises Reverend Dorofei in his sermons. This is the principle of the gradual reduction of food to the amount necessary for life. Often the demon tempts a man by scaring him into thinking that he will become weak and ill from a lack of food, that he will be

(Continued from page 7)

What is prayer? Prayer is a dialogue with God, seeking God within ourselves. Prayer is a means of communication and connection with our Creator.

Habakkuk 2:1-2: «I will stand on my guard post and station myself on the rampart. And I will keep watch to see what He will speak in me, And how I may reply when I am reproved. Then the LORD answered me and said, «Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets, That the one who reads it may run».

Isaiah 26:9: «At night my soul longs for You, Indeed, my spirit within me seeks You diligently; For when the earth experiences Your judgments The inhabitants of the world learn righteousness».

Psalms 27:8: «When You said, «Seek My face», my heart said to You, «Your face, O LORD, I shall seek».

Proverbs 4:23: «Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life».

WHY SHOULD WE PRAY?

Prayer is a means of connecting with God. Every believer must strive to understand and know God at a deeper level through prayer, becoming one with the Lord, as it is written:

«Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus» (Philippians 2:5).

1 Cor. 6:17: «But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him».

Prayer fills up bowls with prayers in heaven.

Revelation 5:8: «When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints».

Revelation 8:3-4: «Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand».

When we pray, we fulfill Christ's commandment.

Luke 18:1: «Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart».

Matt. 26:41: «Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak».

WE ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS

FASTING and PRAYER

Luke 21:36: «But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man».

Prayer is needed in order for God's will to be done on earth and in order to save the lost.

Luke 10:2: «And He was saying to them, «The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest».

2 Tim. 2:1, 3-4: «First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men... This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth».

Prayer is needed in order for us to understand God's will and for it to be done in our lives.

Eph. 5:17: «So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is».

Rom. 12:2: «...understand what the will of God is, that which is good, acceptable and perfect».

Prayer is necessary for healing.

James 5:16: «Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much».

WHAT IS FASTING?

Fasting is a spiritual exercise. It consists of abstaining from food, drink, and entertainment, remaining in prayer and meditation on God's Word, and doing good deeds.

Why is fasting needed? Biblical goals of fasting

Fasting is commanded by God.

Isaiah 58:6: «Is not this the fast that I have chosen?»

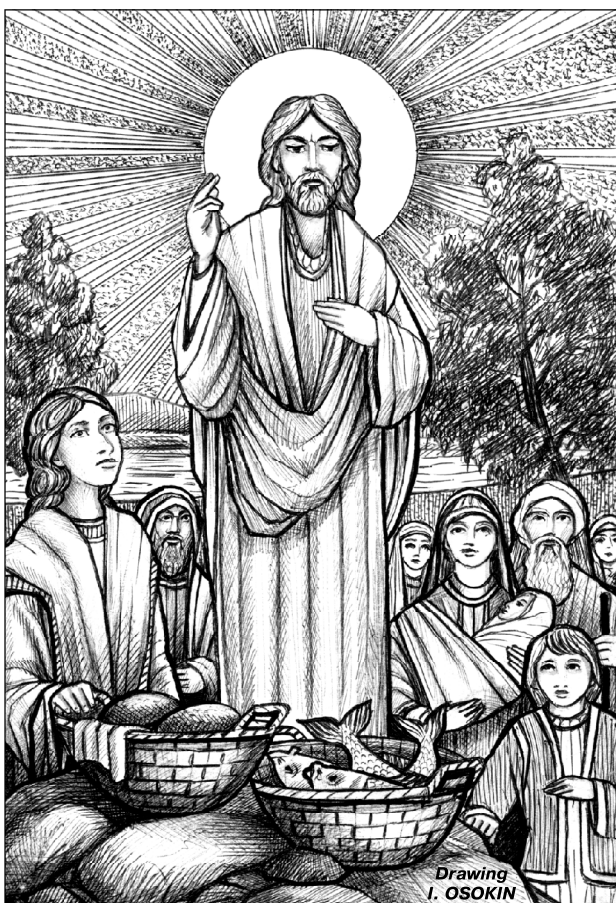
Joel 1:14; 2:15: «Set apart a fast; call

a solemn gathering; gather the elders and all the people of the land into the house of Jehovah your God, and cry to the Lord. Blow a trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn gathering».

Fasting is a way to humble oneself. In the Old Testament, the word fast is often used to mean to humble oneself.

Ezra 8:21: «Then I called a fast there at the river Ahava, so that we might humble ourselves before our God, in order to seek from Him a right way for us and for our little ones, and for all our goods».

Lev. 23:29: «For any soul who is not humbled in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people».



Dan. 10:12: «Then he said to me, Do not fear, Daniel; for from the first day that you set your heart to understand

and to chasten yourself before your God, your words were heard. And I have come for your words».

Dan. 10:2-3: «In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no food for delight, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, until three whole weeks were fulfilled».

Fasting in order to be heard by God. The Ninevites fasted in repentance. Ezra fasted and prayed for God's protection in travel. Daniel, Saul and Cornelius fasted and prayed and received an answer. (Dan. 10:2-12; Acts 9:9).

Acts 10:30-31: «And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour. And at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing. And he said, Cornelius, your prayer is heard, and your merciful deeds have been remembered before God».

Fasting to sanctify oneself. Fasting is a strong tool in attaining victory of spirit over flesh. Fasting removes the debris of everyday worries and stresses. Fasting and prayer help us see clearer and help us place our desires under the control of the Holy Spirit. It becomes easier for us to identify which desires are of our flesh and which are of our spirit.

1 Cor. 9:27: «But I buffet my body, and lead it captive, lest proclaiming to others I myself might be rejected».

Isaiah 58:5: «Is it such a fast that I have chosen? A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast and a day pleasing to Jehovah?»

Fasting to carry out God's will and direction.

Acts 13:2-4: «As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, So, then, separate Barnabas and Saul to Me for the work to which I have called them. Then having fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they let them go. Then these indeed sent out by the Holy Spirit went down to Seleucia. And from there they sailed to Cyprus».

Serving God with fasting and prayer.

Luke 2:37: «And she was a widow of eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, serving God with fastings and prayers night and day».

Acts 13:2: «As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, So, then, separate Barnabas and Saul to Me for the work to which I have called them».

Aleksandr BORISENKO.

YOUR LETTERS

Cherish Freedom

Greetings to God's people!

My name is Roman. I am 38 years old. At the moment, as I am serving my time in prison, 5 years are left until my release. Shortly after I was put behind bars, I had a lot to rethink and understand. Over time, the Holy Spirit revealed to me that this term is part of His plan in my life. At that time I had already spent 17 years in prison. I walked into the cell and knelt down to look outside the window. It was a warm summer day, and in my thoughts one question tormented me, Why has my long-awaited freedom ended so quickly?

Before my eyes flashed the life I had spent in freedom. Looking around at the walls and bunks, I realized that I was alone, my pockets were empty and I was not surrounded by those friends who were near me yesterday. I was convicted, and looking at the term ahead of me I was afraid of something far worse. The fear of knowing that after being released I might once again end up behind bars. I couldn't help but ask myself: «Why does my life consist of spending time behind bars and then only temporary freedom?»

Shortly after that the Holy Spirit revealed to me that, «If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed». Today I am in prison, but in my heart I am free. I came to know the truth, and the truth made me free once and for all. The Lord gave me not just a regular certificate of release, but a ticket to eternal life!

Dear brothers and sisters, God made us free so we can show others the way to freedom and victory.

Friends, look around you, see how the devil has captured the thinking of many people, creating an illusion of a successful and comfortable life. Perhaps that person standing near you is the same person you were yesterday, that is, a slave to sin and his or her fleshly desires. Give them a helping hand and show them the true path of peace, love and freedom!

I wish you abundant blessings!

Your brother, Роман ЛАНТУХ,
ПИК-49, отд. 9, ул. Полевая, 1, с. Ново-Стародуб,
Петровский р-н, Кировоградская обл.,
Украина, 28310.

Perhaps on life's path
It will help you be courageous.
This heart had many wounds
But they are all healed,
When the Almighty gave to me the
Answer: «Your sins have been
written off».

I write with my heart –
not with my mind,
Read the sincere story
of the fact that I breathe Christ –
He is my Lord and my conscience.

This is one of my favorite poems,
written by our brother in the Lord,
Sergei Saponenko, back in 1996 in

My faith is strengthened by «Prisoner»

soul. I thank you, especially, for the fact that I have the opportunity to receive in prison this much needed Christian newspaper, free of cost.

It is through «Prisoner» that I'm acquiring a living faith in God, and eternal life with Him. I came to believe not so long ago, in fact only six months ago, so I am a newcomer. In my spiritual life, I am still very weak, but I have a great desire to become closer to God and grow spiritually. I thank the Lord that I already have spiritual brothers and sisters not only in the prison but also outside it. Through «Prisoner» I want to thank them all very much for all the good that they have planted in my soul. May our Heavenly Father bless them in their work in the vast fields of this lost world! May our Heavenly Father bless all who read the newspaper «Prisoner», which you publish! May the Holy Spirit touch their hearts, acquiring them for the Kingdom of Heaven.
*I am the heart that pounds
in the chest,
To you I pour out myself on paper.*

Gomel Church, of which he is has been a member since 1992. (Editor's Note: Sergei Saponenko is a poet, born December 27, 1966. Until 2008 he lived in Gomel, Belarus, and now lives in the U.S.)

The fate of this man is amazing. Since early childhood, Sergei has been an invalid. He is paralyzed, has no control over his hands and feet, has difficulty speaking, and cannot feed himself, much less write. He reads the Bible by using his lips to flip pages. In 1996 some friends gave him a computer, and since then he writes poems by typing with his nose. I want to take this opportunity to thank Sergei, our brother in Christ through the newspaper «Prisoner».

Thank you, Sergei, for the pure and brave heart that gives us these lines. Please publish this story of Sergei and his poem.

Respectfully, brother
Сергей ВЕРЕЩАК,
ИК-91, отр. 8, Макошино,
Менский р-н, Черниговская
область, Украина, 15652.

I'm bringing God's Word to others

Hello, dear brothers and sisters in Christ! Peace, mercy, health, happiness, and blessings to you from God! This is Eugene writing to you from Tyumen. I'll tell you a little about myself. I have been recently released from prison. I came to know Christ while in prison where I attended services led by Christian people. Now I go through the village and tell people about Jesus, how He saved me from death and how I came to know Him.

I also shared the gospel in the hospital, telling others of the great and beloved Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. I try to share with others whatever I have.

But sometimes I lack wisdom and intelligence to bring to people God's word. I have a big request, can you please send me your newspaper, «Prisoner».

Glory and praise be to our Father and Jesus Christ for everything forever and ever! Amen. Thank God for the work which you are doing.

God bless you! May the grace of God abide with you!
With sincere love in Christ,
Yevgeniy.

Евгений БУХАРОВ,
ул. Гагарина, д.24,
п. Винзили,
Тюменская обл.,
Россия, 625530.

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS



«Thank you Jesus for everything!»

Irina was born in Severodonetsk, Russia. She grew up in a nice, friendly family. From her childhood, her parents had given her all the best. Looking at them, she dreamed of having the same kind of family for herself. As Irina was growing up, her life was changing; she was irresistibly drawn to the street crowd. As a result, she first tried drugs at seventeen years old.

«I became addicted and was not able to extricate myself», says Irina. «My mother accepted the news very gravely, but did not give up and tried to help me as much as she could. I relocated from place to place and promised my family and myself that this is the last shot, and tomorrow will be different. We brought the issue to many different psychics, psychiatrists, and shamans, but nothing could help me. After some time passed, I was returning to drugs again and again».

It lasted for long eight years. During one of the examinations, I was diagnosed with HIV. This news deprived me of my last hope for deliverance from



addiction. The idea that I will never have a family caused so much pain that I started taking even more drugs. I reconciled with the fact that I will die young, and nothing else could help me. Soon I started to have health problems, and others could see it. However, it was not the most horrible fact I had to deal with. During all these years, only one person remained close — my mother. She accepted me in any state, helped, supported, forgave everything, but one day, her patience came to an end. I had to choose either to make changes in my life or lose my mother. It was a great shock, which helped me to face the reality.

I was already so broken that I just hated myself. At this point, I said in my heart the simple words: «God, if You exist please change my life!» One day mom came to our house with a group of Christians. All of them had been addicted to drugs in the past, but now, they are all free and happy people.

They offered me to go through rehabilitation at the village of Pochuyki Zhytomyr. During my rehabilitation, God gave me repentance, freedom from all addictions, and most importantly — a new life in Jesus Christ. In 2008, after successfully completing rehabilitation, I started to serve girls and women who were in the same

situation as I was. Later, at the rehabilitation center, I met my husband, Eugene Bakhtin, who was also addicted in the past. Eugene's life was not easy, but the grace of God was always upon him. We got married on October 30, 2010, and very soon God made us a huge gift — I had a new life inside me.

The Lord gave me everything I dreamed of but never hoped to receive. After my life started get back to normal, my mother also repented and now goes to the local church. We restored our relationship. But as it turned out, there was a real test of faith waiting in front of us. A test not everyone can pass.

«In the 14th week of pregnancy, I entered the hospital with pneumonia. The doctors did some tests and the results showed that I had a very low number of CD4-

lymphocyte cells. I had 14 while a healthy person usually has between 450 and 1600 cells. The doctors told us that the baby takes a lot out of my immune system, and recommended an abortion. The question was tough, «either my life or the child's». Eugene and I decided to leave it to God and not to have an abortion».

The doctors began strongly to attack our faith seeing that were not going to follow their advice. It reached such an extent that after the next ultrasound they told us that the baby was developing improperly, and that he had disproportionate limbs. On the advice of our friends, I was retested in another clinic. The results further strengthened us in our hope — the baby was developing normally.

When the pregnancy reached around 30 weeks, I was diagnosed with tuberculosis. It was very difficult to accept. Again there was a question about abortion, and listening to our arguments, one of the doctors asked, «Well, where is your God?» At that time we had nothing to reply, but we know the Lord is kind. At this time, the church prayed for us, called me, strongly supported and helped us. At 30 weeks, I started to have irregular labor. I had contractions for five long days and nights, and again we heard from the doctors: «We told you so!» And there, I was beginning to give up. I had no more strength and was ready to settle for an induced birth, which could be lethal for the baby. Thank God that He saw my drooping hands. I called one of the sisters from the church and asked her to pray for the Lord to give me the opportunity to make the right decision. Then I had a conversation with our pastor, Rustam Fatullaev. He said, «Do not worry. We will pray for you in our home group and everything will be fine!» At that moment, I somehow did not attach any importance to this. I was tired and exhausted, I was ready for anything, perhaps the Lord will take me, but then the doctor came, examined me and said that everything is fine, and an hour later he would do the delivery.

And so it happened. May 19, 2011, the tiny baby was born weighing 1500g and 40 cm long. For a half month, little Alice was under observation in the hospital. The doctors had different predictions for her life with different diagnoses, but the Lord had a different prediction for her. Today, she is healthy and developing normally, HIV is not evident, and all those diagnoses that were given during pregnancy have not been confirmed.

«My husband and I hope and believe that the Lord's mercy will be extended in the life of our daughter. The Lord is also healing me and gives me strength. I thank Him many times for His kindness and love. Our family and church prayed to Him, trusted in His mercy, and believed that our trust in him will not be put to shame. All the glory be to Him alone forever. Amen».

Irina BAKHTINA, Ukraine.

<http://skinia.org.ua/svidetelstva>

Make a choice to be free

My name is Valery Gibalyuk, and I am 50 years old. I am married to Yelena, although I call her Olya (but why I do is another story). My wife and I have been married 30 years. We have two daughters who are both married, and they have given us three beautiful grandchildren. Sadly, for 16 of our 30 years of life together, my wife and I were completely addicted to drugs.

I served three prison sentences for possession and use of drugs. My wife served two sentences for burglary. Our life was a complete mess, a nightmare. Everyone around us suffered: our children, our parents, brothers and sisters on both sides of the family, as well as our friends and neighbors. There wasn't a single person we knew whom we did not hurt in some way, whether spiritually, morally, materially, or physically. Our life was a living hell. Our drug addiction sometimes drove us to do things that are still shameful and painful to remember. Sometimes in order to get money for drugs we had to steal and deceive



others, even those closest and most precious to us. Thinking only about our own comfort, we sometimes forgot about our daughters and our parents, who needed our help and support.

This is precisely why I don't like to talk about what happened in the past, because there was very little good there. Instead, we now try to tell everyone what the Lord has done for us!

Praise God, He found us on the side of life's road, like shattered clay jars. He found me when I was half-paralyzed, and my wife He found when neither she nor I were accepted by anybody. Everyone literally turned away from us and refused to help us. Nobody could change our life, not our family, not our friends, not the doctors or authorities. But God raised us up out of the dust and set us on our feet, so that we might again live a full life and glorify His name!

God also gave me the ability to compose poems, music, and songs, as well as preach His word. He made my wife to be a wonderful helper in my ministry and in all aspects of our life.

Out of broken clay vessels God made vessels which could hold living water and be of service, not only to God Himself, but to people. In the place where we once served our sentence, we now preach the gospel. We also serve in the evangelical Baptist church in the village of Fontanka, in the region of Odessa. I preach and lead the music worship. My wife sings with me in our worship team, and is active in various service projects.

God has returned to us abundantly everything that had been stolen from us by Satan. Our family has been preserved, and my wife and I lead a full, happy, Christian life, despite the devil's schemes. We never stop praising God for everything which He has done, and continues to do, in our life. We have experienced ourselves what it means to believe in God, on the basis of His Word, the Holy Scriptures, and we can say with full confidence that everyone who believes in Him shall not be ashamed.

May God help everyone who does not yet know Him to meet Him and dedicate the rest of his life to Him. For it is not written in vain that whoever believes in Him has eternal life and will not come into judgment, but whoever does not believe is condemned already! Remember, the choice is ours! Do not delay to come to Him, while the door of salvation is still open!

Valery and Yelena GIBALYUK,
Fontanka, Odessa region, Ukraine.



My TESTIMONY

May God's peace dwell in your hearts! Before anything else, I would like to thank the Lord that in His mercy He permitted His unworthy servant to write this testimony. He inspired me to share His wonderful deeds. I never imagined that after all this time of my depressing life, I would have a meeting with the living God!

But the fate of each of us is determined by Him, and to everyone His call goes out: **«Come unto me...»**. The choice is ours. You cannot avoid tragedies, no matter how hard you try, if you go the way that leads to evil. And I probably did not know that good exists. I deserve the punishment which I have received. I committed terrible deeds, and only faith in my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has helped me realize all the guilt, all the horror of my past life, and start looking for a different path — the path of goodness.

On the evening of June 28, 2002, the door to the solitary confinement cell slammed behind me. I had on a striped robe, and all I had left of my personal belongings was a photograph of my children. There were double doors, and in the window frame instead of the usual grating there was a steel sheet perforated in several places to let air in. Instead of a prison bunk there was only a concrete slab, and a dim bulb in the ceiling. The cell was damp. The dark green paint was peeling off the walls along with the farewell inscriptions on them of those who were led from the chamber for execution. Everything smelled of death. When I came to, as if from a bad dream, I remembered these words: **«On behalf of the Russian Federation, the Criminal Court of the Saratov region finds the defendant guilty of the murders of three persons... The Court believes that the crime deserves the ultimate punishment — the death penalty... The Court recognizes that at this time the death penalty cannot be administered, and so pronounces an alternative sentence of life imprisonment»**.

In neighboring cells, people like me — not even people but only what is left of them — are consumed with hatred and malice. Time came to a standstill for me. I look out the window and can't tell whether it's day or night outside. Everybody turned their backs on me: my wife, relatives, acquaintances, friends, and accomplices. I was no use to anyone. They simply buried me alive. There is no possible future for me. I increasingly began to think suicidal thoughts. I saw no reason to live. But glory and praise to our God! He did not allow me to kill myself. He, and only He, saved me by sending a guard at an off hour to check my cell, where I was already hanging in the noose. I had no idea then that after death I will have to give an answer to my Creator for how I lived the years allotted to me on earth. I tried to justify myself but I couldn't. It's easy to lie to people, but the Lord knows all our ways and the thoughts of our hearts: **«I the Lord search the heart, I try the**

reins, even to give every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings» (Jer. 17:10).

I did not agree then with the verdict. I blamed the judges, who had issued a just verdict. I blamed my accomplices who dumped their guilt on me alone. I blamed my wife and relatives who had turned away from me. Everyone except me, in my opinion, was the cause of my troubles. I fancied myself a real fighter for justice, and this gave me the right to decide who is right and who is worthy of death. While in the «Black Dolphin» prison for lifers for more than ten years, I had enough time to remember and rethink a lot...

The first time I landed in prison I was 14 years old (a friend and I had robbed a stall). The court sentenced me to two years imprisonment in a juvenile detention center. After serving my sentence, I hadn't learned anything. I was soon arrested again, this time for a robbery committed with a group of others. The court sentenced me to ten years imprisonment. During my entire sentence I practiced boxing with a punching bag, building up my strength and technique for delivering punches. I feuded constantly with others and treasured up malice in my heart. I lived with wolves, and so I howled like a wolf. If before this sentence something human was left in me, after ten years I was an animal.

It was 1990, prime time for bold and ruthless bandits such as I became. At that time there was a popular song by V. Asmolov: «We used to be athletes». These words guided my future lifestyle. We formed a gang of about 15 people. We roamed everywhere in search of victims. We took from people everything they had: money, gold, cars, apartments. This life of freedom could not last long could. I again landed back in a prison bunk, where I began for the first time to think about my life: past, present and future. What lies ahead? And what is the meaning of life? All the books on spiritual topics which came my way attracted my interest. I read about magic, karma and other useless stuff. But I did not come across the Bible. In the prison where I spent 6 years, I unfortunately did not meet any believers. I think that if evangelists or missionaries had come to the prison at that time, I would have repented before God. But this did not happen, and I continued to live a sinful life.

While in prison, I became pen-pals with a girl who later became my wife. The Lord gave us a son, then a daughter. I thought that after my release I would never go back to my old way of life, since I had become a family man and a father. But I was wrong, since I relied on my own strength. Soon everything began to repeat itself: robbery, theft, extortion. I hid this from my wife as best I could. And then

came the day when I crossed the line. To all my sins and crimes I added yet another: murder. I realized later that the judge's sentence was not the worst punishment in my life. I came to experience fully what grief is: I don't know anything about the fate of my children or my wife. My mother, upon hearing that her son was a murderer, took to her bed stricken with paralysis and died horribly after a few years. I was destined to know hunger, and what it means to be cursed and hated by all. The Lord has lifted the veil from my eyes. I've looked at life from the other side. My whole adult life I sinned before the Lord. I stole, robbed, cheated on my wife, lied, took advantage of everybody, and even shed human blood. Indeed, there is no sin of which I was not guilty. For what I have done, I deserve to die a hundred deaths. But with the Lord, **«he who conceals his sins does not prosper; but he who confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy» (Prov. 28:13).**

Thank God that I finally met Christians and heard about the Lord for the first time. I learned that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in order to fulfill the will of His Heavenly Father, came to earth, was born a mere man, and suffered and died for our sins and for our salvation. For my salvation! That I, a sinner, might repent of my sins and receive Jesus Christ into my heart as my personal Savior. That I might by the grace of God receive the forgiveness of sins and be called a child of God. Now day by day the Lord teaches, instructs, and convicts me. In Him alone I hope. For a long time already I hold no grudges against anyone. On the contrary, I ask forgiveness from all whom I have wronged or hurt by my words and actions. I ask forgiveness from my wife Natasha, my son Andrey, and my little daughter Alyonushka. I ask forgiveness from my companions for not preventing the shedding of blood, when I could have. Forgive me, people, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake!

I thank God that through your newspaper, «Prisoner», people like I can tell about our sorrows and ease our souls, find friends and make new acquaintances.

I ask you, dear brother Igor and editorial staff, please print my testimony. Perhaps at least one person who reads it will examine his life and not make the mistakes that I made, but will come to God. Perhaps some of my friends will by chance read it and forgive me with all their heart and wish to write me. I thank you in advance. Abundant blessings to you from our loving Lord! I pray for you all.



Юрий МИХАЙЛОВ,
ФКУ ИК-6, 3-й отр., 10-й пост, к. 59, г. Соль-
Илецк, Оренбургская обл., Россия, 461505.

My thorny path to the Lord

Greetings to every person reading this testimony of God's grace and glory!

I thank God for the opportunity to testify of His glory, grace, and wonders in my life on this page of the newspaper «Prisoner»!

The Bible is the word of the living God. In the book of Revelation it reads: **«And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives even unto death» (Revelation 12:11).**

So I overcome the evil one (Satan) by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and the word of my testimony. I believe that through this word God will touch you also.

I was born in 1972 in a happy middle-class family. I was loved and never lacked anything, so of course I grew up as a spoiled child. My grandmother and aunt were teachers. My parents also had a higher education. Both parents and all my relatives were honest, hardworking and kind people. I also had a younger sister. Unfortunately, our family did not believe in God. My sister and I were raised and taught by the same parents but we grew up completely different people. My sister graduated from high school and college, and grew up to be a good and decent person. But as for me, despite the fact that I was a good person, I was quietly sucked into street life.

At age 14, I started smoking and drinking alcohol, and at 16 already smoked marijuana. I was first convicted at age 17, but the sentence wasn't harsh because my father occupied an influential position in our city at that time. My father soon died, and my mother, trying to protect me, sent me to the army. I got into a construction battalion in the Arctic, and my criminal case was miraculously closed. Army for me was just a name. Basically, most people in the army had a criminal record; that is why we had drunkenness, theft and the like. I went into the army of the USSR and returned to an independent Ukraine.

Upon my return at age 20, I tried **«shirk»** (a drug that is made

at home). Soon I got married and together with my wife started to use this drug on weekends and holidays. After two or three months this became a routine.

At that time I left to Moscow where I engaged in fraud, theft and robbery. We had no need of money and it seemed to us, at that time, that we were the masters of our destiny.

In Moscow, I got acquainted with members of a gang. Simple fraud and theft escalated into extortion, or, as they say, into racketeering. We went to the train station as if to a job. Our drug dose grew and with it our crimes. Of course, my health was also worsening. Several times I tried to stop using drugs, but all my efforts were in vain. Finally I ended up in jail. While I was in prison, my wife died from an overdose. Our three-year old daughter stayed with my grandmothers. I made a successful escape from jail but less than a year later I was arrested for another offense. For this crime I received seven years which I served fully.

I do not know how to explain it all, but all my life I somehow believed in God, though now I understand that this belief had no strength or power.

My life was a constant struggle with myself. I could not get rid of drugs, meaning I had to commit crimes in order to get the money to buy drugs. One day I came across my ex-girlfriend with whom I moved in. However, my dissolute sinful life soon became a barrier in our relationship. My love, Marina, soon got tired of enduring all my tricks, lies, and the likes. Then came the moment when she gave me a one-year timeframe to change my ways of life. She just could not live with me in the ongoing nightmare, nor could my mom.

I had exactly one year to correct my way of life. I went to Kremenchug to meet a friend, whom I had met in a rehabilitation center where I tried to get rid of my drug addiction. My friend worked as a social worker and helped people like me.

I tried many ways to become better and change my habits but

everything I had to get rid of (drugs, alcohol, smoking, lying, profanity, rudeness, and etc.). I began to take the first steps to try not to sin. Some things were easier to change in my life, some were much harder, but I constantly kept asking God for mercy, while reading His word. This continued for several months. And then one



Vasily Stylov (second from the left) during the National Conference of Prison Ministers

regretfully there was no change, it was all a waste of time. But the loving God, in spite of everything, still continued to take care of me and lead me to redemption. In my life I had met a lot of brothers and sisters from different churches, and they all told me about the love of Christ, of His power, grace, mercy, His principles and His Word. As I understand it now, it was my way to the Lord!

Time passed and I continued to use drugs, although I sincerely and strongly struggled with my drug addiction. In the end, I told Marina and my mother that if God would not help me then nothing would help. I started going to church regularly, prayed, fasted, and knelt down on my knees for hours. I cried and asked the Lord to forgive me, pardon and change my life.

I came across a Christian book in which I read that every Christian should read the Bible daily, because the word of God is a living and healing word. And I began to read His word every day, although I continued to sin. While reading the Bible, the Lord showed me

morning, as always, I got up and prayed, read the Bible and had breakfast. I did something else that day but do not remember exactly what it was. And only at lunch time I noticed that since the morning I had not smoked a cigarette, although I usually smoked three packs a day. Praise be to Jesus Christ, because it was the day of my liberation from the chains of Satan!

Since that day, almost five years ago, I do not drink, do not smoke and do not use heroin, but constantly try to do good and not sin. I was baptized, knowing that it means that I made a promise to God to serve Him with a good conscience. I became a member of a Baptist Church in town, and the Lord has entrusted me with the prison ministry, which by His grace I have been doing for the fifth year. My love, Marina, also accepted the Lord as her Savior, and the Lord has blessed our marriage. Today in Christ we are one family! Both of our mothers came to Christ and our whole family is on the way to salvation. God gave me a wonderful profession as a

plumber. At every opportunity and in every place I testify of Jesus Christ, of His mercy and grace.

This is the brief story of my path to the Lord. To tell all the details of my life a whole book will need to be written.

In conclusion, I want to say: God is alive, dear friend! He loves each one of you and wants to live in you and help you in every way!

Call upon His name and ask Him into your life and you will feel His mercy and grace, and will inherit eternal life! We are pilgrims and strangers on this earth. Our homeland is in heaven.

May these few quotes from the Bible warm and open someone's heart.

«For there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved» (Acts 4:12), and his name is Jesus Christ!

«For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life» (John 3:16).

«See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil» (Deuteronomy 30:15).

«I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live» (Deuteronomy 30:19).

«This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success» (Joshua 1:8). **«So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God» (Romans 10:17).** **«For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of thoughts and intents of the heart» (Hebrews 4:12).**

Dear friend, all of those words are of the living God. God bless you!

With the love of Jesus Christ,
Vasily STYLOV,
Gradizhsk city, Poltava
region. Ukraine.



We are seeking fellowship by mail with Christians

Gebauer Viktor Grigorevich, Sid #18345612. Two Rivers Correctional Institution 82911 Beach Access Rd Umatilla, Or 97882.

Lepesh Timothy V., Sid #8065841. Oregon State Penitentiary 2605 State Street Salem, Oregon 97310-0505.

Yudin, Aleksandr, Sid #14341448. Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution 2500 Westgate Pendleton, Oregon 97801-9699.

Timothy Lamanov, Doc #322535 8d-10-4. Washington State Penitentiary 1313 N 13th Ave Walla Walla, Wa 99362.

Tasmaly Yuriy, Doc #370792. Stafford Creek Corrections Center 191 Constantine Way Aberdeen, Wa 98520.

Vladimir Sudnach, Doc #369275. Mcc/Msu/C407u Po Box 7001 Monroe, Wa 98272.

Aleksandr Nosov, Reg. #01130-748. Fci Schuylkill Federal Correctional Institution P.O. Box 759 Minersville, Pa 17954.

Alexandr P. Yaromich, Reg. #07527-052. Fci Schuylkill Federal Correctional Institution P.O. Box 759 Minersville, Pa 17954.

Musiyenko Mykola Ivanovich, Sid #19702694. Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution 2500 Westgate Pendleton, Oregon 97801-9699.

Andryushchenko, Paul, Sid #18084307 Two Rivers Correctional Institution 82911 Beach Access Rd Umatilla, Or 97882.

Alexander V. Sviridiuk, Reg. #41871-086. Fci Sheridan Federal Correctional Institution P.O. Box 5000 Sheridan, Or 97378.

Maksim V. Burich, Doc #369159. Clallam Bay Corrections Center 1830 Eagle Crest Way Clallam Bay, Wa 98326.

Volodimir D. Burich, Doc #338747. Airway Heights Corrections Center 11919 W. Sprague Avenue Po Box 1899 Airway Heights, Wa 99001-1899.

Yarovoy Aleksandr, Sid #16225534. Oregon State Penitentiary 2605 State Street Salem, Oregon 97310-0505.

Vezikov Stanislav A., Doc #865276. Coyote Ridge Corrections Center 1301 N Ephrata Ave Po Box 769 Connell, Wa 99326.

Fleyta Alexander A., Doc #359729. Clallam Bay Corrections Center 1830 Eagle Crest Way Clallam Bay, Wa 98326.

Yurevich Vitaliy S., Doc #364773. Washington State Penitentiary 1313 N 13th Ave Walla Walla, Wa 99362.

Artem Egiazaryan, At #063168-9, Unit 33 P.O. Box 7001 Atascadero, Ca 93210.

Belei, Andrei, Cdc #K44461. A2-250, Pleasant Valley State Prison P.O. Box 8500 Coalinga, Ca 93210.

Melnik Anatoliy V., Doc #888727. Coyote Ridge Corrections Center 1301 N Ephrata Ave Po Box 769 Connell, Wa 99326.

Misiak Mark A., Doc #825259. Coyote Ridge Corrections Center 1301 N Ephrata Ave Po Box 769 Connell, Wa 99326.

Aleksey A. Dzyuba, Reg. #054551-359. Fci Oakdale Federal Correctional Institution P.O. Box 5000 Oakdale, La 71463.

Stepan Botsvynuk, Reg. #65953-066. Fci Victorville Medium I Federal Correctional Institution P.O. Box 3725 Adelanto, Ca 92301.

Mikhail Markhasev, #P-08669. P.O. Box 3476-4a4r-11 Corcoran, Ca 93212-3476.

Borodulin Aleksandr, Doc #343154. Mcc, Wsr 16550 177th Avenue Se Po Box 777 Monroe, Wa 98272.

Kostenyuk, Valeriy V., Doc #318008. Washington State Penitentiary 1313 N 13th Ave Walla Walla, Wa 99362.

Kornuta, Oleg D., Doc #356933. Washington State Penitentiary 1313 N 13th Ave Walla Walla, Wa 99362.

Gensitskiy Sergey V., Doc #359966. Coyote Ridge Corrections Center 1301 N Ephrata Ave Po Box 769 Connell, Wa 99326.

Stepanov Vladimir, Doc #371700. Washington Corrections Center 2321 West Dayton Airport Road Po Box 900 Shelton, Wa 98584.

Zhuk Sergey P., Doc #302981. Washington State Penitentiary 1313 N 13th Ave Walla Walla, Wa 99362.

Palanchuk Viorel G., Doc #792816. Coyote Ridge Corrections Center 1301 N Ephrata Ave Po Box 769 Connell, Wa 99326.

Kalachik Nikolay, DOC #372632, SSU-C9U, Larch Correction Center, 15314 NE Dole Valley Rd., Yaolt, WA 98675.

Dmitriy Dudkin, #Am3109 Z-167, High Desert St. Prison P. O. Box 3030, Susanville, CA 96127.

If You Have Any Questions Please Contact our Hope Of Freedom Pen Pal Coordinator **Larisa BORISENKO** @ (206) 660-8440 Or lborisenko1217@gmail.com

ATTENTION!

Dear Readers, «Prisoner» is currently published in two languages, Russian and English, and printed in both the Ukraine and the USA. This newspaper is published and distributed exclusively from voluntary financial contributions. Those who wish to offer their «widow's mite» in support of «Prisoner» will find details on the last page of each issue. For American Christians who wish to support «Prisoner» and the prison ministry, we have added a tear-off card to indicate the amount of your financial assistance and for which specific need it is designated. May God bless you!

Our main focus is ministering to inmates in jails and prisons.

Hope of Freedom
P.O. Box 4053
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That you may say to the prisoners, «Go forth», To those who are in darkness, «Show yourselves» (Is. 49:9).

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Christian News

Over the year, the number of Christians in Ukraine increased by 11%

According to sociological surveys, 93% of people in the Western region and 63% in the Eastern region of Ukraine consider themselves believers. The percentage of non-believers or atheists is lowest in the West (1%), and highest in the South (14%) and East (12%), reports Interfax-Religion.com.

The number of those wavering between belief and disbelief almost halved — from 15% in 2013 to 8% in 2014. 5% are indifferent to matters of faith, while 4% are undecided.



The vast majority (70%) consider themselves to be Orthodox: 80% of the population in the center and 67% in the southern region of the country. In the west, 36% of respondents identified themselves as Greek Catholics; there are also a lot of «just Christians» — 10%. In the south and east, the percentage of citizens who do not consider themselves to belong to any of the denominations is 18% and 22%, respectively.

According to sociologists, the Church continues to hold the number one position among social and political institutions: 66% of interviewed people trust the church (88% in the west and 53% in the east).

The survey was conducted from April 25 - 29, 2012 among people in all regions of Ukraine.

Information Agency, CNL-NEWS, NEWSru.com

Dear readers of «Prisoner»!

The newspaper office requests that you enclose your postal address with your material (testimonies, sermons, articles, etc.) for publication in «Prisoner». If you enclose photos with your material, we will be glad to publish them.

And for those of you just on the way to God, it's time to turn to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with a short prayer:

«Lord Jesus, I believe you are God's Son; You died for my sins and rose again for my salvation. I accept you as my personal Lord and Savior. Please forgive all my sins and grant me eternal life. Amen!»



PRISONER

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s/a 4405885822937253. For postal orders: **Dolgushina Irina Nikolaevna**, box 60/15, Severodonetsk, Lugansk region, Ukraine, 93406. For transfers via Western Union and Money Gram
Our contacts:
redakciya.uznik@mail.ru
tel.: +380645225707
+380661395801

Mailing address from U.S.

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Hope of Freedom,
P.O. Box 4053 Everett,
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