

To Prove Man's Inability To Save Himself



Foundations (Day 101)
by Derek Prince

The second main purpose for which the law was given was to show men that, as sinners, they are unable to make themselves righteous by their own efforts. There is a natural tendency in every human being to desire to be independent of God's grace and mercy. This desire to be independent of God is in itself both a result and an evidence of man's sinful condition, although most men do not recognise it as such.

Thus, whenever a man becomes convicted of his sinful condition, his first reaction is to seek some means by which he can cure himself of this condition and make himself righteous by his own efforts, without having to depend on the grace and mercy of God. For this reason, throughout all ages religious laws and observances have always made a strong appeal to the human race, regardless of differences of nationality or background. In practising such laws and observances men have sought to silence the inward voice of their own conscience and to make themselves righteous by their own efforts.

This was precisely the reaction of many religious Israelites to the law of Moses. Paul describes this attempt of Israel to establish their own righteousness.

> "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God." (Rom. 10:3)

As a result of attempting to establish their own righteousness, Israel failed to submit to God and to God's way of righteousness. Thus, the basic cause of their error was spiritual pride – a refusal to submit to God, a desire to be independent of God's grace and mercy.

Nevertheless, whenever men are really willing to be honest with themselves, they are always obliged to admit that they can never succeed in making themselves righteous by the observing of religious or moral law. Paul describes this experience in the first person; he himself had at one time striven to make himself righteous by the observance of the

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law. Here is what he says, as recorded in Romans 7:18-23:

> "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

Here Paul speaks as one who sincerely acknowledges the righteousness and desirability of living by the law. The more he struggles, however, to do what the law commands, the more he becomes conscious of another law, another power, within his own fleshly nature, continually warring against the law and frustrating his strongest efforts to make himself righteous by observing the law.

The central point of this inward conflict is expressed in verse 21.

> "I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good."

This is an apparent paradox, yet it is confirmed by all human experience. A man never knows how bad he is until he really tries to be good. Thereafter, every attempt to be good only brings out more clearly the hopeless, incurable sinfulness of his own fleshly nature, in face of which all his efforts and good intentions are entirely in vain.

Devotional

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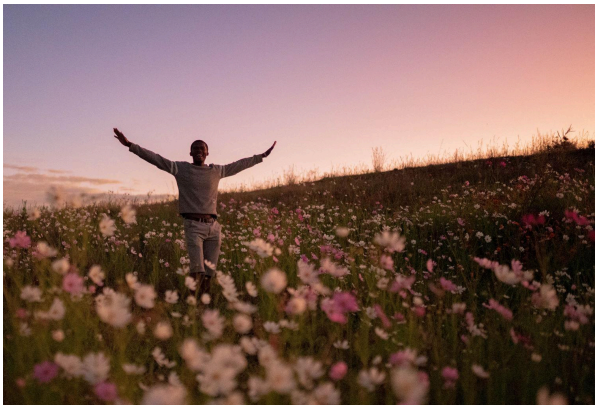

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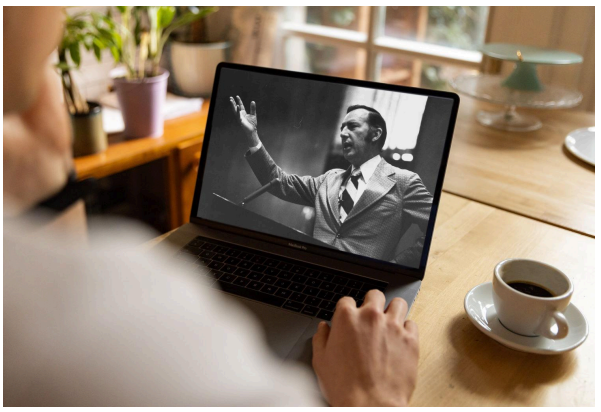

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