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MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Sermon

The Roman Pilgrimage (Part 1)



Part 1/20

The Roman Pilgrimage
By Derek Prince

It's with a sense of real excitement that I come to this first session of our study on Romans 1–8. Also, with a sense of great responsibility. I can assure you I find the responsibility of interpreting this marvelous book of Romans to God's people a very serious one. It's my sincere desire and prayer that I will be both faithful to God's word and sensitive to his Spirit.

I have provided this outline, this study guide, which is called "The Roman Pilgrimage," and in due course I'll explain why I've given it that title. I'd like to begin by reading the introduction that you'll find on the first inside page of the booklet. "Welcome to the Roman pilgrimage. You are setting out on a journey in the realm of the Spirit which will both inspire and challenge you. At times the going will be rough. It will take you through the darkest depths of human depravity and then onto the glistening heights of God's grace and glory. Romans is a unique combination of the spiritual and intellectual without parallel in human literature. It unfolds the most sublime spiritual truths in terms of the most flawless logic. It will not merely illuminate your spirit, it will also challenge your intellect. For this reason, Romans will not yield its riches to careless or superficial reading. If you are to complete this pilgrimage successfully, there are two items of spiritual equipment which are essential. Prayer and perseverance. Let me encourage you therefore, the words of the Lord to Joshua as he prepared to enter the Promised Land. "Only be strong, and very courageous."

Now we'll turn to the next page of the outline. First of all, I want to emphasize that the central theme of Romans can be summed up on one word, which is righteousness. It's a very, very important word. The Bible has a great deal to say about righteousness. God is always presented as a God of total righteousness. Speaking to the children of Israel, Moses said, "His way is perfect and all his works are just [or righteous]."

Psalm 92, it pictures the one who's grown old in the knowledge and service of the Lord. It says that "his life proclaims that the Lord is righteous and there is no unrighteousness in him."

Before we go further I need to explain something about the words that we have to use. In English we have two words, righteous and just, which are somewhat different in their meaning. But in the original languages of the Bible, both the

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Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament, there is only one word. In Hebrew it's ?tsadik? and in Greek it's ?dekile?. That one word is translated either just or righteous, but there's no difference. So, in a sense, we have to adjust our thinking. We could make a difference between justice and righteousness. Righteousness, we might say, is moral character. Justice is the outworking of God's laws and their application to our lives. But there's no difference in the original languages. When we talk about righteousness, we're talking about justice. When we're talking about justice, we're talking about righteousness.

Some years ago I read in the book of Job, in Job 9:2, this prophetic question. "How can a mortal man be righteous before God?" Job was in deep agony of soul and, I believe, he asked that question not believing that there could be an answer to it. But in actual fact, God gives an answer to that question. "How can a mortal man be righteous before God?" The answer is the epistle to the Romans. That tells us how it is possible for any person who meets God's conditions, which are unfolded in Romans, to be totally righteous before God.

One of the key phrases in Romans that we'll keep returning to is "no condemnation." That's really the practical outworking of Romans. That you come to see that you're accepted before God as totally righteous and that there's no condemnation anywhere in your life.

Romans also, I think, relates to the words of Jesus in the Beatitudes. In Matthew 5:6 he says,

> "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled."

They shall be abundantly satisfied. So those of you here tonight who came thirsting for righteousness, I want to tell you that God has promised to satisfy you. But I suspect that some of you really didn't have righteousness at the top of your list when you came. See, I travel very widely amongst the people of God and meet God's people from many backgrounds and many nations. I would not say in the contemporary church that righteousness is very high in the list of the priorities of God's people. I meet people who are seeking blessing, power, healing, prosperity, spiritual gifts, but I don't really meet many people today who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

People who say, "Unless I find righteousness, I cannot be satisfied." They're not only hungry, they're thirsty. In fact, their whole being is a total longing for righteousness. I hope that before these studies come to an end some of you would have experienced a change in your priorities. You'll have a much higher value for righteousness. You see, the other things follow righteousness. In a part of Romans that we will not have time to study in detail, chapter 14:17, Paul says:

> "The kingdom of God is..."

How many of you know what's first?

> "...righteousness, peace and joy..."

But you cannot change the order and get God's results. If you put either peace or joy first, God doesn't meet you on that basis. God says if you'll seek first righteousness then peace and joy will follow.

Now, I want to give you a brief outline of Romans. First of all, let me just say that scholars believe it was written in AD 57 in the city of Corinth. There is a reference in Romans to a man named Erastus who was the chamberlain or the public works manager of the city of Corinth. Quite recently archaeologists have discovered at Corinth an inscription with the name of Erastus on it, crediting him with doing some public work at his own expense. So that's a wonderful confirmation of the accuracy and up to date reliability of the scripture.

I'd like to suggest to you that we'll view this epistle as divided up into four main sections. Although I've outlined all four, we'll only deal with the first. The first section is chapters 1 through 8 and it presents the logical and scriptural basis of the gospel.

Then, chapters 9 through 11 deal primarily with God's dealings with Israel. Some Bible commentators have considered this a kind of irrelevant addition. I don't see it that way. I believe God's dealings with Israel are an essential part of the whole truth of the gospel. I think it's somewhat, I would say, almost out of order to call Romans 9, 10, and 11 an addition or an excursis as though Paul had a temporary mental lapse and forgot where he was going. There's nothing of that in the epistle to the Romans. But the essential question of 9 through 11 is God's election because what comes out of it is the ultimate deciding factor in human experience is what God has chosen. That's a very unpopular truth to the humanistic mind today. That's partly why Israel is not popular in every section.

The third, chapters 12 through 15, is a application of the preceding truths to daily living. This is characteristic of the whole New Testament. The New Testament never presents us with abstract theology. Never. Wherever it comes out with general spiritual truth and revelation, it always includes

some very down to earth teaching on how this applies to the way we live. It's characteristic of Paul that he begins Romans 12, this part of the section, "I beseech you therefore brethren, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice to God." That's the practical outworking of all the glorious theologies of God in the previous eleven chapters. "Give God your body." Down to earth.

And the final section, chapter 16, consists of personal greetings and a benediction. And some people again consider that irrelevant. There are many different individuals whose names are included. But I believe the Holy Spirit does it to show us that personal relationships are very important. We're not just dealing with humanity in the masse, or even the church. But there are intimate, valuable, personal relationships which are built in the body of Christ which are of great value in the sight of God. None of us is just a number with God. When I was called up to the British Army in l940, they gave me a number; they took away my clothes and gave me a number. From then on I was 7385778 for five and a half years. But God doesn't do that with you. You're not just a number with God. He knows you personally. And he wants us to know one another personally. He attaches great importance to personal relationships.

Now we're going to go back to the first section and that's all we're going to attempt to deal with in this series of studies. And believe me, if we succeed in doing that, we'll have done something tremendous! I want to view chapters 1 through 8 as a spiritual pilgrimage. There could be many different ways of looking at this but I feel this will help us to break it up into material that we'll be able to assimilate. The destination is Romans 8 which is the Spirit controlled life: liberty, joy, peace, righteousness. And the previous chapters, chapters 1 through 7, are stages on the way to that destination.

In previous times, when I've been teaching on these chapters, I've compared it to the difference between percolated coffee and instant coffee. Nowadays not many people percolate coffee so the comparison is a little out of date but most of you are old enough to remember when coffee was percolated. What I say is Romans 8 is percolated coffee. To get it, you have to go through the previous 7 chapters. A lot of Christians want instant Romans 8 but God doesn't provide that. You can't have just little powder, pour some water on it and get the same results. You have to go through the percolator. And really, in a way, this study will be something like going through a percolator.

Let's turn now to the first half of this chapter and I'm going to read these verses to you because unless we all have them before us, we really won't fully understand where we're headed. I'm going to read the first 17 verses. You'll find there are certain minor differences in the text of the New American Standard according to what year it was published. Don't let that confuse you.

> "Paul, a bondservant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared with power to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead, according to the spirit of holiness, through Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son..."

Now you'll notice, those of you that have this text, those words "in the preaching of the" are in italics. Do you know why that is? Because they're supplied by the translators. I've met countless Christians who don't know why some words are in italics. The answer is the translator is showing you that he's put them in to make good English. But I personally prefer that without the interpolated words. Verse 9:

> "For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now

> at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. And I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented thus far) in order that I might obtain some fruit among you also, as even among the rest of the Gentiles. I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome."

I think we'll pause there for this particular period. Ancient letters, as they're found in the New Testament, had a kind of layout which is not unlike what we have in business letters today. If you can picture the page of a business letter in front of you, on the right-hand side at the top will be the name and address of the person writing the letter, usually also the date. Then, a little lower down on the left-hand side will be the name and address of the person to whom the letter is written. And then the salutation, Dear So and So. Then, often across the top before the body of the letter begins there is the subject of the letter. Re: Your Application for Membership—in whatever it may be. That's often underlined. So you have these three elements. The name and address of the sender, the name and address of the person to whom it's addressed, and an outline or a statement of the main theme of the letter. You'll find very much the same in this letter to the Romans and in basically all New Testament epistles, though there's some differences.

So Paul, in this passage that we've been reading, introduces three things. Himself, the gospel, and the Christians in Rome. If you want to view it in terms of a modern letter, the top right-hand corner is "Paul the apostle," et cetera. On the next side, on the left-hand side, a little lower down is "The Christians in Rome." Then the heading is "Re: The Gospel of Jesus Christ." That's how it works.

I think we have just time to look at Paul's introduction of himself. Then in our next session, God helping us, we will look at Paul's statement about the Christians at Rome and what he says about the gospel, which is of tremendous importance. Let's pause now and look at Paul's introduction of himself which is in verse 1, 5 and 9–15. I think I must read those words again so that we have them clearly in mind.

> "Paul, a bondservant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God..."

Then in verse 5, speaking about Jesus, he says:

> "Through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake..."

Paul then describes himself, first of all, as a bondservant (but the Greek word is the normal word for slave) of Jesus Christ, and secondly he states he was called as an apostle. You'll notice all the apostles in their letters always call themselves first of all, a servant or a slave and then define their particular field of service which in this case was apostleship.

Then, he also goes on with a further definition. He says, "Set apart to the gospel of God." Paul had a very special—in fact, unique function in the whole history of the church. His function was to present in its entirety the gospel. So much was his revelation that a little later on in chapter 2 verse 16 we find he actually calls it "my gospel." That's very significant. You remember that Paul had such an abundance of revelations that to keep him humble God had to permit an angel of Satan to buffet him. Well, I think there's no question the revelation contained here in Romans was part of that.

There are two epistles of which Paul is the only author. All the other epistles it's Paul and somebody else like Paul and Silas and Titus. Or Paul and Silas and Timothy. But the two epistles of which he is the sole author are Romans and Ephesians.

That's not an accident because each of them contains a revelation which is uniquely the revelation of Paul. Romans is the revelation of the gospel and Ephesians is the revelation of the church. In these two areas Paul made an absolutely unique contribution to the whole Christian church. I think it's good that he started by calling himself a

slave. I think some people in the church today might describe themselves as bishops or presbyters or who knows what. But Paul says first and foremost, "I'm a slave committed totally to the service of Jesus Christ. My particular function is an apostle. My particular area of apostleship is the revelation of the gospel."

Then in verse 5 he says of Jesus:

> "Through him we receive grace and apostleship."

Notice before the apostleship comes the grace. Paul is very careful not at any time to aggrandize himself. He says our particular area of service is obedience [or faith] among all the Gentiles. And elsewhere he's called "the apostle of the Gentiles."

In Romans 15:18–19 Paul speaks further about this apostleship to the Gentiles. It's worth turning there quickly for a glance at it. He says:

> "For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders..."

So he had a special ministry to bring the Gentiles to believe in Jesus and it was by attestation of the supernatural. I want you to notice the phrase "obedience of the faith." A lot of people say obedience is what matters. That's perfectly true, but unless it's received from faith, it won't work. You try obeying God in your own strength, in your own ability. See, I've dealt with this on the mission field in Africa. We had lots of Africans that were really trying to obey the gospel but they weren't doing it out of faith. The result was frustration. So bear in mind emphasize obedience but always explain that it must proceed out of faith.

Then we just have time to look at this one interesting fact that Paul had been praying for a long while for a good journey to Rome. The old King James says "that I may have a prosperous journey by the will of God." Interestingly enough, in John 3:2, John uses the same word when he says, "Beloved, I pray that above all things thou mayest prosper and be in health as thy soul prospers." The same word. I want you to consider for a moment what kind of a journey Paul had because it's very vividly described in Acts 27 and 28. He did not travel first class, he was a prisoner in chains. The ship on which he was traveling was in an amazing storm that lasted 14 days and 14 nights when they were without food. After that it was shipwrecked on an island and just to climax it, when he was gathering fuel for a fire a viper bit him on the hand. I want to ask you, did God answer Paul's prayer? A prosperous journey. That's a very important thing because a lot of people are telling you today, an I can tell you too, God's will is prosperity. But don't define prosperity in terms of modern America and culture because that's out of line.

What is the real meaning of prosperity? I'll offer you my understanding. It's being totally equipped to do the will of God and when you have successfully done the will of God, you have prospered. It may be you'll get bitten by an adder, who knows. Maybe you'll be in a shipwreck. Don't let that disturb you. What matters is are you doing the will of God? (end of session one)

Session 2

In our first study we looked briefly at the structure of the epistle to the Romans. I suggested that it could be divided into four sections. Chapters 1 through 8, the logical scriptural basis of the gospel. Chapters 9 through 11, the theology of divine election illustrated in the case of Israel. Chapters 12 through 15, the application of all this teaching in personal Christian living. And chapter 16, personal greetings and benediction.

I also pointed out to you the kind of basic structure of an epistle. It will give you information about the writer, it will give you information about the ones to whom the letter is addressed and it will probably give you some brief indication of the main theme of the letter, all of which we find here in Romans.

Then I suggested to you that in this first main section, chapters 1 through 8, we are on a spiritual pilgrimage. Our destination is chapter 8 which is the kind of life we all should be living. The kind of life, I believe, we all would like to be living. But I said you can't get there unless you go through the percolator, remember that? The percolator is chapters 1 through 7. So we've just begun to put ourselves in line to go through the percolator.

Then I spoke briefly at the end of the previous session about Paul's introduction of himself. First of all, a slave. Second, an apostle particularly separated out to the gospel and particularly the gospel as it's presented to the Gentiles.

Now we'll continue with this outline that you have in your little booklet and we'll come to—I think we'll deal next with the people to whom the letter is addressed. In your outline that is section C. So we'll go back to section B, which is the

gospel, in a few minutes. Let's consider what Paul says about the people to whom this epistle is addressed. Verses 6, 7 and 8. I'll read those verses once more. I hope you understand the repetition of scripture is really not a bad thing. In fact, it's important. I was a trainer of teachers, I was a principal of a college for training teachers in East Africa for five years a good while ago. One of the things we taught our student teachers is recapitulation is an essential part of good teaching. So I never apologize for recapitulation. Here we are, Romans 1:6–8.

> "Among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ..."

That word "called" is a very important word because that's what determines whether we are Christians or not. This, of course, is a little bit out of line with our whole theme but you don't become a Christian because you decide. You become a Christian because God called you. You have to respond but the initiative, dear brothers and sisters, is not with us, it's with God. He calls us. The word calls could be translated "invited." The church in Greek is called ekklesia. The word for called is ?klatos?. They're directly related. Ekklesia is a company of people called out, that's what the preposition "ek" means. What are we called out from? The world, that's right. It's very important to remember that. We're not part of the world, we've been called out from the world. If you belong to the true church of Jesus Christ, you don't belong to this world. You can't belong in both places at the same time.

Verse 7:

> "To all who are beloved of God in Rome..."

That's the next important thing to remember, that God loves the people he calls. That's good news, isn't it? God called us because he loved us. He loved us before the foundation of the world. He'd made all these important decisions before time ever began. But it's only when we hear his call that we begin to enter into the experience.

I remember very vividly how and when God called me. I had non intellectual knowledge of the gospel whatever. I was a philosopher reading the Bible as a work of philosophy. But by a strange set of circumstances I ended up in a Pentecostal church. I'd never been in one, I didn't know there were such people. After that, I didn't know there were such people as Baptists! But, in that church, God called me in a very unorthodox way because when it came to the end of the sermon which I didn't understand, the preacher said, "To anyone who wants this [whatever that was], put your hand up." I had no intention of putting my hand up. I felt indignant and embarrassed that anyone would ask me to put my hand up in a place like a church. I sat there, I was in soldier's uniform, stony silence, no background music, nothing to alleviate the embarrassment and two inaudible voices were speaking to me. One of them said, "If you put your hand up in front of these old ladies and you're a soldier in uniform, you're going to look very silly." The other voice said, "If this is something good, why shouldn't you have it?" I was paralyzed, I could not respond to either voice. Then I experienced my first personal miracle. I saw my own right arm go right up in the air and I knew I had not raised it. That was the frightening thing. For one thing, in my own confused way, I knew God had called me. Somehow by intuition I knew that I could never count on him calling me again but I had to make my decision. Thank God about five days later I made that decision. To me, being called is very solemn and very serious. I would never dare to trifle with the call of God.

Paul says these Christians in Rome are called by God because they're loved by God. God's call is the outworking of his love. He reaches out his hand and says, "If you'll take my hand I'll lift you out of that mess you're in and I'll place you on a rock beside me." I didn't know all those words then but he did it anyhow.

Then Paul goes on in verse 7:

> "...called as saints..."

Now you'll notice a little earlier he said "called as an apostle" of himself. But if you look at one of those versions that have the words in italics that are put in, you'll notice that "as" is in italics. What Paul said was he was called an apostle. What he says of those Christians are they're called saints or holy ones. It's good to leave out the "an" because, you see, when God calls you something, you are what he calls you. You may not feel like it, people may not see you that way but what God calls you is what you are going to be. When you're called holy one, you're going to end up a holy one. You might as well start quickly. God means business.

Then he gives this beautiful, familiar New Testament reading:

> "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

What a beautiful greeting. It would be interesting for you to notice how many times in the first eight chapters of Romans

Paul uses the name Jesus, the word Christ or Messiah, and the word Lord. I think it's 32 times. That's why Romans is so powerful because it centers on the center which is Jesus. Wherever we get off center and get centered on anything but Jesus, the power begins to leak out and we have to resort to human energy, human methods. When our single desire is to present and uplift the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit says, "I'll give you all the help you'll need."

Notice the order. Grace and peace. Many of you, I'm sure, have been to Israel. You're familiar with the typical Hebrew greeting, Shalom, which means peace, that's right. But notice that in the New Covenant we have grace before peace. Grace is what we can't earn, we'll be studying that in greater detail a bit later. Grace is the free, unmerited favor of God. We didn't earn it, we can't deserve it, we just receive it. So before we get peace we need to remember it's by grace. Grace and peace.

Then in verse 8 Paul says:

> "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all."

It's very important to notice that Paul almost invariably began his epistles by thanking God for the people to whom he was writing. That's a very important principle. I tell people this: If you can't thank God for somebody, don't pray for them. I don't think it's legitimate. There's just one interesting exception. The Corinthian church was in confusion, they had adultery, they had drunkenness at the Lord's table, and Paul said, "I thank my God for the grace of God which is given you." There's one church he didn't do it. Do you know which one that was? Galatia. What was the problem in Galatia? It wasn't drunkenness, it wasn't adulterers, what was it? Legalism. That's the one thing that upset Paul. He knew everything else could be dealt with but legalism, that kind of set him aback.

One more thing about these Christians in Rome. He says:

> "I thank God because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world."

Of course, Rome as the name indicates, was the great capital city of the Roman Empire which dominated the whole of that area of the earth of that time, and so whatever happened in Rome would affect the whole of the Roman Empire. And one of the principles of Paul in his missionizing was get to the main cities, get to the capital cities. He never went to little villages unlike some modern missionaries. He didn't start out in the jungles. I was with a mission that did that. It was so romantic. We wore pit helmets and we were right off the beaten track but we were really missing the point. The place where things happen is the cities. If you reach a city, you'll reach the places around it because things will go out from the city. If you study Paul's methods, it was always strike at the heart, strike at the main city wherever it is.

Now he hadn't been to Rome but he had a lot of friends in Rome and he was proud of the fact that the whole empire was talking about these Christians at Rome. How did they achieve that? I think there are a lot of possible answers but I really believe the most important instrument that the early Christians had was their personal testimony. Jesus said, "You shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you shall be my witnesses." You see, here were people from all sorts of different backgrounds: national, social, every kind of different background all saying the same thing. "This person Jesus has changed my life." And everybody started to want to know who is Jesus? They got the amazing answer. He was a carpenter's son who was crucified some years ago. But that wasn't the only answer. They also got the answer that he rose from the dead the third day. And I would say of all the various spiritual instruments available to the early church—and I think they used them all—the most effective single instrument was personal testimony.

Now let's come to the other—in fact, the main theme of this introductory section which is the gospel. It's dealt with as you'll see from your outline in verses 2–4 and then in verses 16–17. So let's look, first of all, at verses 2–4. Verse 1 ends with the words "the gospel of God". And then concerning this gospel Paul says:

> "Which He [that is God] promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy scriptures..."

You'll find that Paul is always extremely careful to make sure that no one thinks he's improvised this gospel, that it's something he thought of, that it's his idea. He invariably emphasizes that the whole concept and coming of the gospel was clearly predicted in the Old Testament scriptures. He says all we are doing is fulfilling what the scriptures have said.

That's very, very important especially when you deal with the Jewish people. Probably some of you would not be familiar with their way of thinking but in l979 Ruth and I lived with a Jewish family in Jerusalem for nearly three months who spoke virtually no English. We were studying at

the Hebrew University and we chose a family that didn't speak English because we wanted to be forced to speak Hebrew. It was an interesting experience, we've never met one another before we arrived at their house, we'd made the arrangements through an agency. They were a couple probably in their late 50s, I think, at that time, or early 60s. Both of them from Poland, each of them the only survivor of a total family. At first we were very careful and discreet about how we spoke to one another and we kind of kept very polite and on our best behavior. But after a little while somehow the wall was broken down and I don't know how it was but the man asked me, "How did you become what you are?" By a miracle of grace I gave him my personal testimony in Hebrew, which was not easy. He got so interested. Then I told him the story of my first wife and we lent him the book to read. I can't go into all that but he said one thing to me that stayed with me ever since. He was familiar, of course, with what the Jewish people call the Tanach, what we call the Old Testament. He'd never seen a New Testament in his life. When I told him I believed the Old Testament and the New, he asked this questions. "How did you make this synthesis between the Old and the New?" The question revealed to me the depth of difference between his background and mine. I'd never known a Bible without a New Testament. He'd never known a Bible with one.

But you see what Paul was fighting, this separation of the Old and the New. He said everything we are preaching in the New has its origin in the Old. If you really want to be able to reach the Jewish people you have to come to the place where you can show them that directly out of their own scriptures. There is a gospel of the circumcision and a gospel of the uncircumcision. The circumcision are the Jewish people, the uncircumcision are the Gentiles. It's not a different message but it's a different approach. You can just go amongst Africans or others and present Jesus. But to go to the Jewish people you have to show them this is what was promised right from Genesis onward.

So Paul, as I say, was very, very careful never to open up to the possible accusation that he was improvising something.

> "...which he promised through his prophets in the holy scriptures..."

Now we come to the very essence of the gospel which is verse 3.

> "...concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared with power to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead, according to the spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord."

Please remember that Christ represents the Greek word for which the Hebrew word is Meshiach or Messiah. Every time you say Jesus Christ, whether you know it or not, you're saying Jesus the Messiah. And every time you talk about the Messiah, you're talking about the Christ. Again, there's a tremendous gap. Both multitudes of both Christians and Jews don't realize that Christ is just the same as Messiah. When we talk about Jesus Christ, we're saying Jesus the Messiah.

So the gospel centers in one person. Who's that? Jesus, that's right. And this is what Paul says about him. He was the Son of God and he was also the son of David. He had a human nature, he had a divine nature. Verse 4, he was declared or separated out as the Son of God by a mighty act of power which was the resurrection from the dead, according to the spirit of holiness.

Now, Paul wrote in Greek but there's many evidences he thought in Hebrew. And sometimes if you're not aware of the Hebrew phrases, you won't understand. Hebrew doesn't talk about the Holy Spirit. It speaks about the spirit of holiness. ?Ruach acordesh? And so when Paul says the spirit of holiness, my conviction is he's saying the Holy Spirit. But he was thinking like a Jew and it got into the language.

What was the power that raised the dead body of Jesus from the tomb? The Holy Spirit, that's right. What did the Holy Spirit do by that? He declared Jesus to be the Son of God. He separated him out from all other men who had ever died and been buried as the Son of God, as the spirit of holiness. As the spirit of holiness he bore testimony to Jesus' perfect holiness. If there had ever been anything unholy in the life of Jesus at any point, he would never have been resurrected. But the resurrection attested that he really was what he claimed to be, the Son of God and it attested his perfect, stainless holiness.

You see, God reversed the decision of two courts. A Jewish court and a Roman court had sentenced Jesus to death, appointed that he was to be buried and—it's a strange thing. The unbelievers have much more faith in the resurrection than the believers, have you ever noticed that? The enemies of Jesus were really anxious in case he should arise from the dead. The disciples couldn't believe. So after his death and burial the Jewish leaders went to

Pilate and said, "Now we know that deceiver said that he would rise on the third day. So we don't want that to happen. Would you give us a guard to protect the tomb?" And Pilate said, "You can have your guard and you can take the seal and seal the tomb" so that the stone could never be moved without the seal being broken. So these two courts, in a sense, pinned their all on Jesus staying in the tomb. But on the third day God reversed their decisions, in the highest court in the universe, and brought Jesus out from the tomb.

Now when the women came, they found the stone rolled away. This is just a personal opinion. I don't believe the stone was rolled away so that Jesus could get out of the tomb. I believe it was rolled away so that the ladies could see the tomb was empty. No stone could have kept Jesus in that tomb when he was resurrected.

But, bear in mind that the gospel centers in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. If we ever get away from those central, historical facts we're not dealing with the gospel. I have to say that there's a whole lot of what is called gospel preaching which doesn't contain the gospel at all. The gospel consists of three certain, simple, historical facts. It's unlike other religions which just have sacred books that present abstract truth. The gospel relates to human history. It's either true or it's false, but it must be one or the other.

And also, it's attested in human experience. See, God impinged human history with Jesus. He's made something available to us which is both attested by history and confirmed in our personal experience. That's the gospel, the good news.

I'd like to look at two other passages which state the gospel and you'll see that in both cases the emphasis is the same. In Romans 4:23 and following, we'll look at this later more fully. But notice that Abraham is taken as the pattern of believing God and having righteousness accredited to him. Paul goes on to say in verse 24:

> "But for our sake also, to whom it [that is righteousness] will be reckoned, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, He was delivered up because of our transgressions and raised because of our justification."

We'll go into that more fully later but let's just notice that the gospel centers in three historical facts. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. And the more we can focus our testimony and our teaching on those, the more effective it will be. It is not primarily a matter of emotion. Many attempts to stir people emotionally will produce a temporary response but it doesn't last. What we've got to do is communicate to people's minds and spirits these three glorious facts. Jesus died for our sins, he was buried and he rose again the third day.

We'll turn also, for a moment, to 1 Corinthians 15 which is the well known glorious resurrection chapter. Paul says in the first four verses:

> "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preach to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received..."

Now what did he deliver? You notice:

> "...that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures..."

What is the gospel? Try and say it together. "Christ died for our sins. He was buried. He was raised on the third day." Let's say that again. "Christ died for our sins. He was buried. He was raised again the third day."

So from now on, never let yourself be distracted from these great central facts.

Now, we go on to the closing two verses of this passage that we're looking at now in verses 16–17. Paul says:

> "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of [Jesus] Christ."

Sermon

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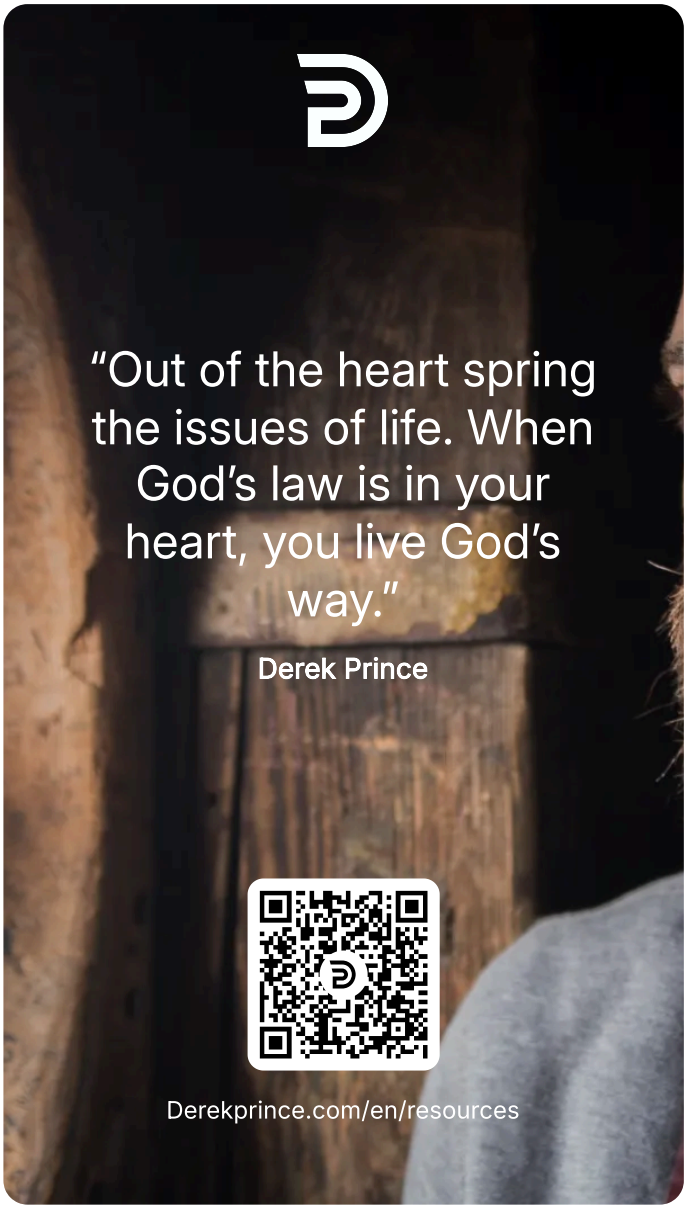

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