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MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Sermon

The Roman Pilgrimage (Part 2)



Part 2/20

The Roman Pilgrimage
By Derek Prince

In our previous two sessions, we have worked through, more or less, the first fifteen verses of Romans chapter 1. In those Paul has introduced himself, the Christians at Rome, and the Gospel. To complete the introduction of the gospel, we'll turn now to verses 16 and 17. Very powerful, famous verses. Paul says:

> "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it [that's in the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'"

Paul sums up the gospel there and he gives one good reason why neither he nor we should ever be ashamed of it. Because it's the power of God. If we are ever prone to be ashamed of the gospel, it's because we have lost sight of the fact that it is the power of God. No one today is ever ashamed of power, least of all of the power of God.

It's the power of God not for destruction, but to salvation, for total deliverance for human personality: spirit, soul and body. For those who believe. The key word is "believe."

And then Paul says it's to the Jew first and also to the Greek or to the Gentile. Historically, the gospel was presented first to the Jewish people and then to the Gentile world.

And then Paul further sums it up in verse 17:

> "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'"

In those two verses we have either the verb "to believe" or the noun "faith" four times. And bear in mind in the Greek, they are closely related. Faith is pistis; to believe is pistueo. So, whereas we have two quite different words in English, the verb and the noun, in the Greek they are the same.

So the essence of this is believing. It's the power of God to those who believe. And it reveals God's righteousness. You

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remember I said the key word of Romans is righteousness. And here Paul emphasizes that through the gospel God has revealed a way by which man can become righteous in the sight of God and he again quotes from the Old Testament, from the prophet Habakkuk 2:4, to prove that what he is saying is not an improvisation of his own, but something that was determined and prophesied by the prophets of God many years previously.

So the key blessing of the gospel is that it brings us righteousness, a righteousness that God accepts. And we shall see as we go on, that it is only on the basis of righteousness that we can receive any of the other blessings of God.

In Romans chapter 5 we'll see that Paul speaks about the gift of righteousness. And then in chapter 6 he speaks about the gift of eternal life. The order cannot be reversed. We would not qualify to receive the gift of eternal life unless God had reckoned us righteous. A righteous God could not bestow His gifts on unrighteous men and women. The first problem was to resolve the issue of righteousness.

You remember the question of Job that I directed you to earlier: How can a mortal man be righteous before God? The answer is: Through believing the gospel.

But when we use the word faith, we need to be on our guard against a misunderstanding that has arisen in the church over the centuries. Both in Hebrew and in Greek the word for faith primarily describes character and then what you believe. So, to reduce the gospel just to a theological proposition is to rob it of its truth. The word means, initially, faithfulness or commitment. So, the gospel is the power of God only to those who, out of commitment to God, believe what He declares. Remove commitment and you have a kind of desiccated, theological faith that doesn't produce the results that God has promised. You cannot be a believer, in the biblical sense, without being personally committed to God through Jesus Christ. Commitment is the basis.

Now, Paul goes on in the next half of this chapter with the opposite side of the coin. He's talked about the revelation of God's righteousness, now he talks about the revelation of God's wrath. And both are contained in the gospel because when we look at what happened to Jesus on the cross, we need to bear in mind that He endured the wrath of God. Why? Because He became the sin offering. He took our sin. He took the judgment for our sin. He paid the penalty. And once He became sin, the total wrath of God was poured out upon Him on the cross. It had to be. And so, if you ever think that the gospel is simply a sloppy, sentimental, Father Christmas message, you've got to see the other side. In it is also revealed the wrath of God against all sin. And I've said this to people many times, "If anybody could have commended sin to God, it would have been Jesus." But when He became sin, God disowned Him. God abandoned Him, and the wrath of God was poured out upon Him. So don't imagine, dear brothers and sisters, there's any way you'll ever get God to condone your sin. He'll deal with it, He'll forgive it, but He'll never tolerate it.

Now let's look at the description of God's wrath against the whole human race. This is a very important part of this first chapter, because a lot of people somehow think, "How could God punish harmless, innocent people?" That's not God's problem, because there aren't any harmless, innocent people! God's problem is, How can He forgive wicked sinners? That's the problem which is resolved in Romans. And in these following verses God makes the sin and accountability of the whole human race abundantly clear. We'll read on now from verse 18:

> "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness..."

The problem was God had made the truth available to humanity, but they chose to suppress it because it didn't suit them to face up to it. Verse 19:

> "...because that which is known about God [or may be known about God] is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His [that's God's] invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they [that's the human race] are without excuse."

Notice, Paul says that through creation God has made the truth about Himself available to all men everywhere. Two particular aspects of the truth—God's eternal power and His divine nature. I would say "His divine nature" means that it reveals a being who is totally other than man, totally greater than man, one who is all-powerful.

Now, how does this revelation come? This is a vital, crucial issue. Because of my background in philosophy, I think,

perhaps I appreciate it more than most people. It's one of the subtlest pieces of reasoning of which Paul has given us so many. He says, "that which [may be] known [of] God is evident [to them or] within them; for God made it evident to them." There's a combination of two things: What is external, and what is within. And it is the combination of those two things that constitute a revelation. First of all, there's the order of the universe, and particularly the heavenly bodies with their manifest beauty and order and system; and then (and this is what is unique about man of all creatures in this earth) there is within man what I call a "logical, mathematical faculty" that can appreciate the logic and mathematics of creation. Now I don't believe cows have that faculty. I don't believe lions have it. I don't believe snakes have it. I believe there's only one creature on the face of this earth today that has that faculty—it's man. So man is uniquely accountable for what is revealed to him of the nature of God because there's something in him that can appreciate it.

Astronomers can calculate where every major star was 3,000 years ago! No other animal on earth can do that. We have the ability to see that the whole thing was designed by a person who has a faculty like ours but much greater.

I... as I've told you, I was a philosopher. I studied under a man whose name probably won't be known to most of you, but he's generally called "the father of linguistic philosophy," which was the fashion in the last generation. His name was Ludwig Wittgenstein. And he said, "We could not say of an illogical universe what it will look like." That's exactly what Paul is saying. He says, the very fact that we can describe the universe and use categories and terms that imply continuity and system and design, means that's the kind of universe we live in.

Now, people who don't believe in God habitually talk about the laws of nature. But really that's a contradiction in terms. Because in our human experience we do not know of any law that was not made by a lawmaker. For every law that is made, there is a lawmaker that makes it. The principle of proper explanation is to proceed from the known to the unknown. But when we talk about a law that was not made by anybody, we're proceeding from the unknown. It's an invalid method of explanation. So, you understand, Paul is saying there are two things together which constitute a sufficient revelation of God. The order and the design and the harmony of the universe—but that's not enough. Because that wouldn't constitute a revelation to a cow. But it does to a being who has within himself the same kind of logical and mathematical faculty that can relate to that. So man has a unique responsibility. He alone, as far as I understand, of all creatures on earth today, is able to appreciate from creation the nature of God.

Now Paul is very emphatic about that. We know today there are millions of people that deny this. Paul very bluntly calls them fools. I personally think he said it in one word. We hear a lot about evolution, but I want to point out to you there's another side and that is devolution. A lot of things are not evolving, they're devolving. We shall see further examples of this in this study. It is illogical to talk about evolution as if it was the only possibility. The fact of the matter is, I think there is greater evidence for devolution than evolution in the world today, particularly in the human race.

All right. Now, going on to verse 21:

> "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God [or literally, they did not glorify Him as God], or give [Him] thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened."

It's very important to notice the first two downward steps of humanity. Very important. They were not positive, they were not things they did, they were things they didn't do. And bear in mind, you can be just as guilty for the things you don't do as for the things you do. What were the first two things they didn't do? They didn't glorify God. They didn't give Him thanks. And let me tell you, dear brothers and sisters, on the basis of observation of many different Christians and from my own personal experience, the moment you cease to glorify God and give Him thanks, you've started on a slippery, downward path. And if you're there at this particular moment, you had better repent. Because Paul describes this path as it goes on downward and downward and downward. And the end is a horrible, slimy pit. We'll go on now.

Verse 22 and 23. What were the first two results?

> "Professing to be wise, they became fools..."

That word that's translated "professing" is a word that means "to keep on saying the same thing again and again." They kept on talking about how wise they were and all the time they were getting more and more foolish.

The second result:

> "And [they] exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."

The first great sin is the breaking of the first commandment: You shall have no other god beside Me. And I have seen in recent years, particularly through traveling in many parts of the world where idolatry is still open and rampant, what a terrible sin idolatry is. There are no words to describe the awfulness of idolatry. Can you even begin to picture the insult offered to the great, eternal God to depict Him in the form (and notice it's downward)—first of all it's men; then it's flying creatures; then it's animals; and finally it's reptiles. You see, it's always downward, it's never upward. Once you've taken those first two steps on the downward path, you're going to go on downwards unless you repent.

We'll go on now to God's judgment on the human race for these things. And three times in this passage Paul uses the phrase, "God gave them up." What a terrible phrase. I pray, "God, never give me up. I may not appreciate your dealings, God. I may seem to complain, but please, never give me up!"

There's a phrase in the prophet Hosea about the tribe of Ephraim. It says, Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone. That's the worst that God could ever say. "Leave him alone." And notice it was for idolatry, the same thing.

All right. The first thing to which God gave them up was to lust and defilement. Verses 24 and 25:

> "Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."

There's another example of Paul thinking as a Hebrew. Because every time an Orthodox Jew names the word of God, he always concludes with the phrase, baruch hu, "blessed be he." And you see, Paul couldn't write "the Creator," without saying, "who is blessed forever. Amen."

You see, they changed God's likeness into something vile and degrading. God had given them a form which was made in the likeness of God, but because they distorted the likeness of God and defiled it, God said, "All right. I'll let you defile your own bodies through lust and impurity." But that's only the first. The next "gave them up" is in verse 26:

> "For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire towards one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error."

In one word, what is Paul describing? Homosexuality. It's the next step down. It's interesting that these first judgments affected their bodies. We'll see the final judgment affected their minds.

It's interesting that Paul says the women led the way in homosexuality. And as far as Greece is concerned, that is historically correct. On the island of Lesbos there was a Greek poetess named Sappho, about the 9th or 8th century before Christ, who was what we call a lesbian—that's where the word comes from—and wrote poetry glorifying this form of relationship. In a sense very beautiful poetry, but so corrupt. And it's rather remarkable that sometimes excellent art forms are used to glorify the most ungodly things.

And it seems that the men followed the pattern of the women. And I see this as something that's rather common. Men, in some ways, are rather spineless creatures, you know that? If women will take the lead in many places, men will let them do it. But the results are never God's intention. It says, they received in themselves, or "in their own persons the due penalty of their error." What one current phrase would we use to sum that up? AIDS, that's right. But I don't believe AIDS is the only expression of that. I believe it's the latest and perhaps the most drastic. But Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:18: every person who practices immorality sins against his own body. And I've come to the conclusion that we need to take that into account. You cannot practice immorality without doing some kind of damage to your body. And I've come to this conclusion in ministering to the sick—if we leave out this as a very common cause of sickness, we probably will not deal with the root problems of the people who come for ministry. You understand, I'm

not saying it can't be forgiven. But I am saying it has to be faced up to and acknowledged for what it is and the results of it have to be acknowledged.

All right. So that's the second "gave them up." Now we go on to the third, which is just over the page there, in verses 28 through 32. These are terrible verses. I never read them without a sense of anguish, and yet I'm impelled to acknowledge their absolute accuracy. One thing about the Lord is He tells it like it is. Going on now, verse 28:

> "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over..."

Let's pause there, for a moment. They did not want to retain God in their knowledge. Why not? I believe this is the diagnosis of a problem that's universal in the world today. Why did they not want to retain the knowledge of God? Because they knew if they did, they were accountable to Him. They would have to give an account of themself. And I think what I see in humanism at large, the one thing they passionately oppose is the idea that they are subject to God, that they have to give an account to God of what they do.

You see, as a philosopher, I had, of course, to investigate the current scientific theories—not as a scientist, but in their general implications. And I have to say, and thank God, though I was not religious and didn't believe the Bible, I never could believe the theory of evolution. To me it's the most fantastically improbable theory that anybody could every conceive. Why do people believe it? Because they'll tell you frankly, the only alternative is creation. Why don't they want that? They don't want to be answerable to God. That's the real basic motive.

All right. Let's go on quickly now. Just as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge:

> "God gave them over to a depraved mind..."

What can be more terrible than a depraved mind? The previous two cases which God gave them over was to physical problems, physical sins; but now their whole mind is warped. They became:

> "Filled with all unrighteousness..."

Actually this list contains 21 things. We will not have time to analyze them in detail. But I suggest you read them and say, "That's the end of people who refuse to acknowledge God, glorify Him and be thankful to Him."

> "...all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice..."

Now in this translation the word "malice" is used twice, which is strange, because it's a different word. The first time I would suggest that a better word is "vice."

> "Being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, [vice]; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God..."

Brothers and sisters, let's notice where gossips appear on the list. That's important. Because in my opinion gossiping is the churchgoing sin. And they're put next to the murderers and the haters of God.

> "...insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents [notice where that comes], without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful..."

The word that's translated "untrustworthy" means people that you cannot make a covenant with. And that's perhaps the most conspicuous feature of our age—people are no longer willing to make covenants. Nations break treaties, governments break promises, and men and women break their marriage vows to one another. The deepest problem of our society is that men and women are not willing to make covenants. And finally:

> "...although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them."

It astonishes me how sometimes people who are in this kind of thing approve one another. I think they feel they'd be lonely if they stood on their own. So anybody who's as wicked as they are, they endorse them.

Now I point out to you, we don't have probably time to go through it, that in 2 Timothy 3:1–5 you'll find a historical

parallel, where Paul says in the last times "men will become" and he describes nearly all of these things. Romans is the logic and 2 Timothy is the historic outworking of that. So we need to bear that in mind. It is being worked out.

And let me close by this one phrase I have there: Corruption is irreversible. This is of vital importance. The result of man's sin is corruption in every area of his being. Corruption cannot be reversed in any area of life. So God's program is to make a new creation, to start over. But those who do not enter into the new creation must endure the inevitable progress of corruption in their lives.

(end of session one)

Session 2

In our last session we went through the first stage of this pilgrimage of the Roman epistle and I'll briefly review what that stage was. It's contained in the second half of chapter one and it deals with the universal guilt of the human race. And Paul establishes that all men of normal understanding have received through creation and through their own internal logical and mathematical capabilities an adequate and sufficient revelation of God in certain of His aspects. And consequently they are responsible for that revelation. But Paul says in actual fact what has happened with the human race is that it did not suit them to remain to retain the knowledge of God and that they turned away deliberately and immediately began to create for themselves false gods. They fell into idolatry, which is the greatest sin and is the breaking of the first commandment. And out of that idolatry they set on a path that took them steadily downwards. And when they took this course, God eventually "gave them over": first of all, to lust and impurity; then to homosexuality; and finally to what Paul calls "a depraved mind," which expressed itself in every kind of vileness and wickedness. And that's where chapter 1 ends. We are, as it were, at the bottom of a horrible pit.

How many of you can remember what the first two downward steps that humanity took that led them to that horrible conclusion. They did not glorify Him and they were not thankful. That's wonderful. Wonderful class.

Now today we're going to go into chapter 2 and we're going to consider the next stage of this pilgrimage. Chapter 2 deals with people who have been guilty of all the things of which the human race has been guilty but nevertheless, because they have required a certain religious knowledge, genuine knowledge, feel that they're better and in a different class because of the fact that they know what is right and they know what is wrong. And in essence, Paul simply points out that so far from making better, this merely increases their responsibility. They are all the more accountable for the fact that they know more.

Now we need to remember that Paul was writing nineteen centuries and more ago. And so he addressed his remarks primarily to his own Jewish people. Because at that time the Jewish people were the ones who had the advantage over all other nations—that they had, as Paul says, the oracles of the word of God, they knew God's standards of right and wrong which most other nations didn't know. But Paul says, so far from making them better, that simply makes them more accountable for the wrong that they do.

Now I think it's important to understand that after nineteen centuries, in a certain sense, the boot is on the other foot. Now it's not so much the Jews that have the knowledge; it's the professing Christians. Many of us, because of our national and racial backgrounds, have behind us centuries of Christian tradition and knowledge of God, familiarity with the Bible. So, in this respect of responsibility for what we know, we are now in the place of the Jews nineteen centuries ago. That doesn't exonerate the Jews, but it places upon us the same kind of responsibility that was on the Jewish people in that time. So, though Paul says, and he speaks to his own people and says, "You, being a Jew..." I'm not going to change the words, but I want you to think that it should be today, "You, being a Christian." You see, I think it's very clear from the state of the church today that multitudes of Christians are content with knowing more than other people, but not able to apply it. That was precisely the problem of the Jews in Paul's day. I don't want to go into any particular details of scandals in the church because sooner or later they'll be out of date and there'll be fresh scandals. But let's face the fact: we are in the same position as the Jews of the first century. We are the ones who have the most to account for. And we'll see that as we go along.

I'm going to read now the first sixteen verses of the second chapter of Romans. Romans 2, beginning with verse 1:

> "Therefore..."

Every time Paul says "therefore," you need to prick up your ears and say, "Why does he say `therefore'?" Many of you have heard my little slogan, "When you find a `therefore' in the Bible, you need to find out what it's there for." Well, this "therefore" is there because of chapter one, which has concluded that all humanity is guilty. Now we come to the people who judge others because they know more, but they're in the same category. So that's why the "therefore" is there.

> "Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God..."

Let me pause there and say that's a terrible thing to be doing, isn't it? Storing up wrath for yourself.

> "God, who will render to every man according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God. For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law; and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; for not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the word of the Law written in their heart, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them..."

Now, as usual, Paul is pretty intense and that takes a good deal of care to find out precisely what he is saying. Let me point out to you, first of all, which is very important, that Paul gives us here five main principles of God's judgment and we'll look at those first and then look at some of the other things that Paul says in that passage.

The first principle of God's judgment is found in verse 2 but I'm going to take the marginal reading, which I believe is nearer to the original. The text that I read says, "the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things," but the literal text is, "the judgment of God is according to truth on those who practice such thing." So the first principle is that the judgment of God is according to truth. And I believe, primarily, that means it's according to the truth of God's Word. This is very important.

In John 17 and verse 17, Jesus speaking to the Father, says: "Thy Word is [the] truth [or 'truth']." That's tremendously important. "Thy Word [God's Word] is the truth." I think it would be good if we would just repeat those words once together: "Thy Word is the truth." Say it once more: "Thy Word is the truth."

So when Paul says we will judged according to the truth, what he is saying is we will be judged according to the Word of God. And Jesus Himself said that. In John 12, verses 47 and 48, John warned the people of his day that they would one day face judgment according to the words that he had spoken to them. John 12:47–48, Jesus is speaking:

> "And if anyone hears My sayings, and does not keep them, I do no judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day."

So we need to bear in mind as we read the Scriptures we are already facing our judge. And that's why Paul says in 1

Corinthians chapter 11, we should judge ourselves that we should not be judged by God. If we read the Word of God, apply it to our lives, repent and bring our lives into line with the Word of God, we have judged ourselves. For this is the standard of divine judgment. If we do that, God will not judge us. We really have just two options, all of us. We can judge ourselves according to the Word of God and bring our lives in line with the Word of God; or we can refuse to do that, then God will have to judge us according to this Word. But one of the greatest mercies of God that He's given us through the Bible is that He's given us God's standard of judgment that we might apply them to ourselves. And as Paul indicates in this particular chapter, the person to apply the standard to is not your brother, nor you neighbor, but yourself.

The second principle of God's judgment is stated in verse 6, where Paul says God "will render to every man according to his deeds." All through the Bible, it is emphasized that God's judgment will be based on our deeds, on our works, on what we do. We will not be judged by the claims we've made or ever the prayers we've prayed, we'll be judged by what we have actually done.

If you turn to 1 Peter 1, Peter emphasizes this in very clear language. 1 Peter 1:17:

> "And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work..."

These words are addressed to Christians, you notice. If we call God our Father, which we have the right to do as Christians, we need to bear in mind that He impartially judges according to each person's work. Then it says, and this is a remarkable statement, which most Christians would not be very ready to receive. It says:

> "...conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth..."

I don't hear that said in many places. But there is a sense in which we should live in the fear of God, knowing that one day we're going to account to God for the lives we've led. And making it clear that it's Christians he's speaking to, Peter continues in the next verse (verse 18):

> "Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life... but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ."

You see, one reason why we need to walk so softly with God is the tremendous price that He paid to redeem us: the blood of His own Son. The lifeblood of Jesus. That's the value that God set upon us. And the more you value something, the more careful you are about that thing. And so, God has a very careful scrutiny upon the lives of each one of His redeemed children because of the price He paid to redeem us.

If you walk into a cheap store and buy a cheap piece of jewelry, you're really not too concerned if you lose it. But if your husband (let's suppose you have a husband and he's generous) has bought you a really beautiful and rather costly ring (or whatever it might be—My wife is smiling at me at this point. She likes this.) you're going to be very, very careful about what happens to that ring, isn't that right? Not merely because of its value but because of the one who gave it to you. And so Peter is saying we need to be very careful about the lives we lead because of the tremendous investment that God has made in each one of us.

And he emphasizes God is going to judge us by what we do. Bear that in mind. You're not going to be judged by your denomination, you'll be judged by what you've done. You won't be able to walk up to God and say, "Well, I'm a Methodist or a Baptist." God will say, "That's not the point. The point is how have you lived?"

Going back to Romans chapter 2, the third principle of judgment is stated in verse 11: "there is no partiality with God." God is impartial. That word "partiality" doesn't fully bring it out. The old King James says, "there is no respect of persons with God," which is a better translation if you can understand it. The word "person" in Greek is the word "face." But it means the outward appearance of a person. I don't know whether you've ever read old-fashioned plays (they probably don't do this now) but they have a list at the beginning of the Dramatis Personae—the Persons of the Drama. And then they'll tell you the various characters that are listed. That's the meaning of the word. It's what you are on the stage. The part you play. And Paul says God isn't interested in the part you play. God's interested in what you really are. So nobody's going to be judged because of their role in life. The general will be judged just the same way as the private in the army. The preacher will be judged just the same way as the new convert. The wealthy man will be judged just the same way as the beggar in the street. There

is no looking at people's external appearances and judging them on that basis.

In the epistle of James, James rebukes the Christians of his time because he said, "You make a difference between the rich man who comes in in fine clothes and the poor man who just has nothing to commend himself. You're looking at the outward part." Peter says and James says and Paul says, "God looks at what is inside."

And then the next principle of judgment is very important for us today is implied (it's not stated) in verse 12: "For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law; and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law." The way I interpret that is we will be judged according to the light that we have. If we've had the full light of the Law, we'll be judged by that. But if we haven't had that light, we will be judged by the light that we do have. And again, I have to apply this to you and me today, the countries in which we live. I would ask you, Has there ever been a generation of Christians in the history of the church that has greater light available to it than our generation where we live. We have as many Bibles as we can afford to buy, commentaries, interpretive books, devotionals. We go to conferences and meetings; we switch on the radio and hear a preacher. That's wonderful. Thank God for it. Thank God for the liberty that makes it possible. But bear in mind it carries with it a tremendous responsibility. We're going to have to answer God for the measure of light that is available to us in our day and in our generation. And I really, honestly, tremble when I think of what that entails for me, personally.

And finally, the fifth principle in verse 16:

> "On the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus."

When I said that God is going to judge our deeds, I didn't merely mean the outward deeds, but He's going to judge the motives and intentions behind those deeds. You see, two people may do something that seems outwardly the same but their motives may be quite different. Two persons might make a generous contribution to some Christian cause, one might do it out of a sincere heart of love for the Lord and His people and His work; the other might do it to impress his fellow church members. The outward act is the same, the amount is the same, but the motives are totally different because God looks at the motive.

I'd like to look at a passage there in 1 Corinthians 4 and verse 5. 1 Corinthians 4:5:

> "Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God."

Many times we are warned against judging one another. And the particular reason given here is we don't have all the facts. Because we only see the outward acts, but God looks on the inner thoughts and motives of the heart and God will take those into account when He judges.

Now, going back to Romans 2 for a moment. I want to deal with one other rather difficult topic. We go back to chapter 2, verse 6. God says, "will render to every man according to his deeds," and then He speaks of two different kinds of people: those whom God accepts and those whom God rejects. They're described in the next verses. He says, verse 7:

> "Those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, [God will give] eternal life. But to those who are selfishly ambitious [or self-seeking—and I think the essence of the problem is being self-centered here. I've noticed one thing in dealing with people, is the one conspicuous feature of people who are under the power of Satan is they're almost always extremely self-centered.] but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation."

So there's the two kinds of people: those who by perseverance and doing good, seek for glory and honor and immortality—will receive eternal life; those who are selfishly ambitious and refuse the truth of God by whatever means it may be revealed to them, but prefer unrighteousness—God will give wrath and indignation.

Now, I think to assess the total judgment of God is beyond the capacity of any of us, but let me point out about those

who are described as receiving eternal life. There are two features: first of all, they persevere in doing good (it's deeds); secondly, they seek for glory, honor and immortality. To me, the word "seek" indicates faith. They believe that God will reward them according to their response to Him and according to what they've done. I believe those are the two basic requirements to be accepted by God in any age or any generation. Before the gospel or during the gospel. The two basic requirements are doing good, applying what you believe; and believing. Without faith it is impossible to please God. But there are many different ways in which faith expresses itself in different ages and generations.

Now, in order to help you, I asked God to show me some example of people who didn't come to God on the basis of the gospel but who fall into this category of persevering and doing good and seeking for God's blessing. And I would like you to turn, just briefly, to Luke chapter 11, verse 31 and 32. Jesus is rebuking the men of His generation and He says:

> "The Queen of the South [that's the Queen of Sheba] shall rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here."

Now, it appears to me that those two classes of persons—the Queen of Sheba and the men of Nineveh—are not going to be resurrected with the resurrection of Christians because they're going to stand up with the same resurrection with the people whom God has rejected. But they will be accepted on the basis of what they did. According to the light available to them, they responded in faith to God with their actions. So those are the two categories of people: those who, by what they do, express their faith in God; and those who reject the truth of God and prefer unrighteousness.

Now, in case you should immediately start to try and work out exactly who belongs in which category, let me give you one other statement from Romans 11 with which we'll close this study. Romans 11:33:

> "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"

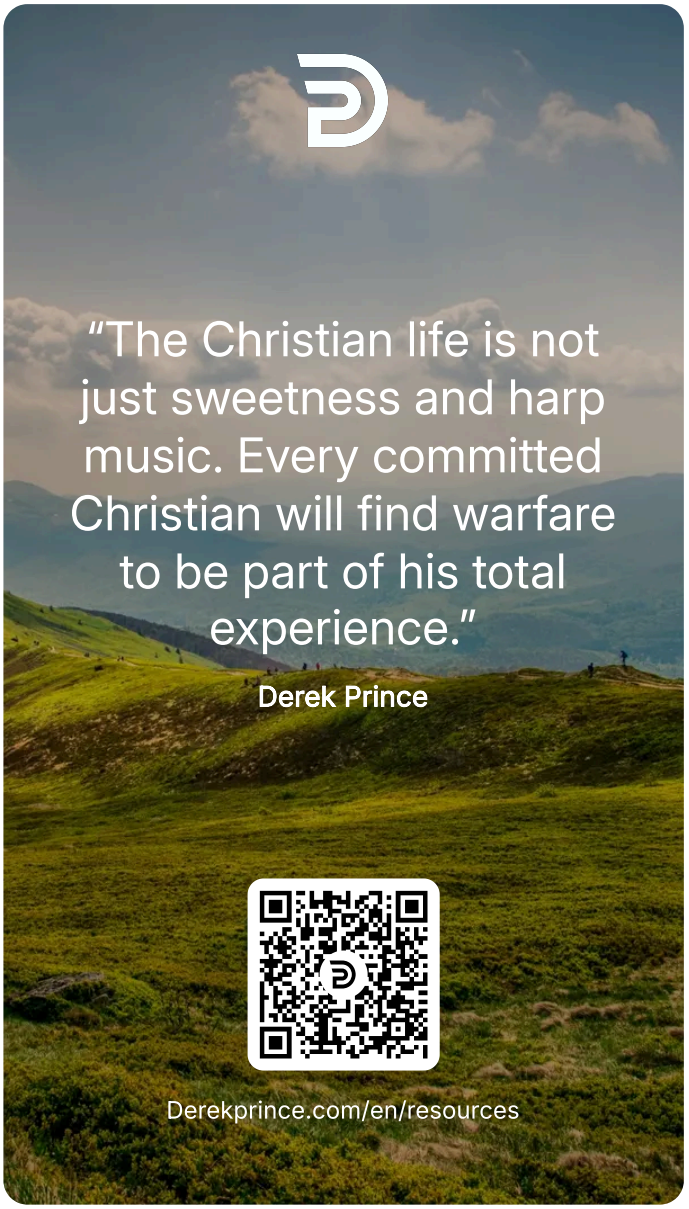
So let me warn you against immediately taking the office of judge. It doesn't belong to you. There's only one judge and that's God. And we are specifically told that His judgments are unsearchable. You cannot search out the judgments of God. In the last resort you have to take the stand of Abraham who said, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"

When I was a young preacher, which is a long while ago now, I used to think that I was responsible to know exactly who was going to heaven and who wasn't. And the more I investigated, the smaller the number of people became whom I thought were going to heaven. It eventually boiled down to about 15½ and I wasn't sure about the half. But God showed me that wasn't my business. Thank God! So, don't take the place of judge. It's not ours.

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Sermon

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