

The Roman Pilgrimage (Part 3)



Part 3/20

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By Derek Prince

In this session we're going to continue with Romans 2. We had dealt with the principles of God's judgment and we've seen how they are applied. We also had to acknowledge that there are some things about God's judgment that he doesn't make known to us. His judgments are unsearchable. I suppose that those of us who have experienced the mercy of God in our own lives know that God will always exercise mercy wherever he can do so. So, we have to trust him.

Now we're going to look at the question of conscience which is a rather difficult one to deal with. I want to make it clear that some of what Paul says is not altogether easy to understand or to interpret. But whoever said it would be easy?

Turning to chapter 2, we'll read verses 13–15 and then verses 26–27 which together give us a picture of how God deals with people who don't have a revelation of him in the word either in the law or in subsequent portions of scripture. Verses 13–15:

> "For not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified."

I want to point out to you there, whatever version you are using, that where it says "the Law" twice in that verse, the word "the" is put in by the translators. That is frequently so in the rest of this epistle. You need to understand this. Paul is taking the law of Moses as the great pattern of law, the perfect law, the God given law. But what he says applies also to other forms of law. So he says "the Law" and then he says "Law."

Let me explain this. There are only two possible ways of achieving righteousness. One is by keeping rules, the other is by trusting God in faith. The natural instinct of every human being when challenged on the issue of righteousness is to start to think in terms of rules. I remember when I met the Lord in the British Army, I spent another four and a half years in the Army as a Christian. When I talked to my fellow soldiers about the Lord and about salvation, their reaction was nearly always similar. "Well..." and they'd trot out their list of little rules which they

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kept. Everybody had a list that was tailored to his own life. "I don't commit adultery, I don't get drunk, I don't do this, I don't do that." That was the instant natural reaction. So it is natural with all human beings when the issue of righteousness is raised, to think in terms of keeping rules. What Paul says applies not only to the law of Moses primarily but to every set of rules by which people might seek to make themselves righteous. It isn't possible to achieve righteousness by keeping any set of rules. Really, it's worthwhile looking at your faces for a moment at this point. I knew this would happen.

I was talking to a large group of people somewhere not too long ago and I said casually without even realizing the impact of what I was saying, I said, "Of course, Christianity is not a set of rules." I think if I told those people that there was no God, they would have been less shocked! But that's the truth of the matter, Christianity is not a set of rules. We do not achieve righteousness with God by keeping rules. But rules have a place in life. I'll be explaining that later.

Paul is saying it's not the people who hear law, whether it's the law of Moses or any other law. It's the people who apply it who will be justified. Notice it's not the hearers who are just or righteous—and remember, the two words are the same—but those who apply it will be justified. It doesn't say they'll become righteous, it says God will reckon righteousness to them. None of us can be just unless we are justified by God.

So Paul now goes on and deals with the issue of conscience which is very important. Verse 14:

> "For when the Gentiles who do not have the Law [or Law] do instinctively [or by nature] the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves..."

They don't have any direct revelation of God's law but there's something inside them which does the same for them as law would do. Paul goes on:

> "...so that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts..."

It doesn't come out in the English translation but what is written in their hearts is not the law, it's the working of the law. We have, every one of us, in us somewhere something that works like the law to achieve the same results as are achieved by the law. It is not to make us righteous but it's to bring us to the point where we see we need God's mercy to be made righteous. That's absolutely different.

And then it speaks about conscience which I believe is the function in man which produces this. Conscience tells us "you told a lie." And then Paul pictures a kind of court scene going on inside us. One of our thoughts is, "Well, that's true, I did tell a lie." The other says, "No, it wasn't really a lie, just exaggerated a little." Paul pictures this kind of court scene going on inside us. How many of you know that that does happen? How many of you have experienced that inside yourself? That's what Paul is talking about and he says conscience is doing for people like that the same that the law does. Not making them righteous but showing them that they need God's mercy. And that's the work of the law, it's to show us that we need God's mercy.

Now there are some unanswered questions that I'm going to devote one whole session to the purposes for which God gave law. We'll come to that in a little while.

So here is a Gentile, somebody who has never had any knowledge of God. But somewhere inside him there's something that monitors his conduct. I've noticed in dealing with primitive people or people who had no conduct with God, one of the areas that they're often sensitive about is telling a lie. Often, conscience will convict people "you didn't tell the truth." Another which is common is our improper behavior to the people in our own family. That again is an area in which primitive people are often convicted by God because most of them have a deep sense of obligation to their immediate relatives, much stronger than the contemporary American has.

So there are different ways in which conscience can work. What Paul is picturing is a kind of law court inside our consciousness and conscience is the prosecutor and then inside us there are thoughts that say "that's true" or "I know it wasn't quite true but it really wasn't a lie." That sort of thing. Tell me what's the difference between something that isn't really a lie and something that really is a lie. But we are all eager to justify ourselves, even to ourselves. Have you noticed that? So Paul gives us this very vivid picture of the internal court scene that's going on inside us and he says people who don't have the law or any law can have conscience produce in them the same effect that the law produces. Which is not to make them righteous. I cannot emphasize that too much. But it's to show them that they need God's mercy.

Now let's look down there in verses 26–27.

> "If therefore the uncircumcised man [the nonreligious man] keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his circumcision be regarded as uncircumcision?"

Now the word that's translated "requirement" is a very important word which we'll come to more than once in these studies. It means that which is the right response to whatever demand is made upon you. It's directly connected with the word for righteous. Let me say it in Greek so you can hear the similarity. Righteous is ?dee-ki-ous?. This word is ?dee-ki-oma?. It's the correct response to legitimate requirements. Let me translate it that way.

> "If therefore the uncircumcised man makes the correct response to legitimate requirements, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? And will not he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you [now it's talking to the Jew] who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law?"

So Paul is saying it's not the outward observance of rituals, or forms, or ceremonies; it's the inner response of your heart that determines how God looks at you. And he says very correctly, he says there are a lot of cases in which the religious man has the wrong response, the nonreligious man has the right response.

I don't know whether I dare to tell you this, it may offend you, but a long while ago in the early days of our ministry my son in law, who is our director, was trying to find somebody that would fulfill some requirement. I think packaging or something like that. He said I found a firm—forgive me in advance—but he said rather apologetically, "They're not Christians." I said, "Praise the Lord." How many of you know that Jesus Loves You Bookstore doesn't pay its bills? Do you see what I'm saying? It's not always the people with all the religious talk that can deliver. God is interested in the people who deliver, not in the people who talk.

Now let's go on with this. Verses 17–25, Paul now homes right in on his fellow Jew and he gives a number of specific examples of the ways in which they break the law although they boast about the law. He says:

> "But if you bear the name 'Jew', and rely upon the Law, and boast in God..."

And I have to say without being offensive to anybody, if you live in Israel, this hasn't changed the least bit. Nineteen centuries have changed nothing in this situation. It's precisely as Paul described it. I have to be careful what I say but I remember years ago when we were living in Jerusalem we ordered some furniture to be made by a Jewish carpentry firm. That's a good and honorable trade amongst the Jews, isn't it? The people from whom we'd ordered these chairs delivered them. So to be hospitable I offered them some coffee. They said, "No, we can't drink in your house." I wasn't sufficiently familiar with the tenets of Orthodox Judaism to realize that they could not eat in an unkosher home. Our home was not Kosher; they couldn't eat, they couldn't drink. They would have been defiled. But the problem was they cheated us on the chairs. I tell you, the Bible is the most up to date book. Now please, don't let me suggest to you that it's only Jews who could act that way. How many of you know that isn't true?

We're going on. Verse 18:

> "You know his will, and approve the things that are essential..."

There's a better translation. "You know the subtle differences between this and that." You know what's Kosher and what's not Kosher. Believe me, if you study the rules of ?kashroot?, they are complicated. You have to have a legal mind and an attorney to advise you to be absolutely sure you've done right.

Now, Ruth lived as a Jewess, and is still a Jewess, for many years and when the issue of Kosher in her home came up, she was ready to go for it more or less until she discovered that you had to have two dishwashers. One for the plates that were used for meat and one for the plates that were used for milk. Her economical or unreligious mind just said "I won't go that far."

But that's somewhat typical and there are much finer refinements than whether you have two dishwashers. We're going on.

> "You approve the things that are essential [you know the subtle differences], being instructed out of the Law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a

> light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher to the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth..."

How would you describe such a person in one word? Pride, that's right. Arrogance. And you see, I think nothing creates pride more easily than religious knowledge. How many of us are in danger of becoming proud because we have knowledge? Yes, let's be careful.

> "...you therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?"

Now, brothers and sisters, I just want to ask you this: Don't you think at the present time the world out there is saying this to the church? Don't you think that it applies exactly to us who call ourselves Christians? You see, the boot is on the other foot now. The world still judges Jews by different standards but nevertheless, the focus of world attention in this part of the world is on us who call ourselves Christians because we're doing the things that we're telling other people they shouldn't do. Is that right?

Listen. Last year—I'll just mention this—Ruth and I traveled right around the world. And from Australia we went to Papua New Guinea and from there to Malaysia and from there to Singapore and from there to Indonesia. On the headlines of all those papers in all those nations there were the scandals that were taking place in the television ministry. Everyday on the headlines, lots of much more important news never made the headlines but the whole world heard about what the church is doing in America. See what Paul is saying? I want you to understand this is up to date. This is not just something from the past or just religious theory. This is reality. We just need to put ourselves in the place of the people to whom Paul was speaking saying could this be said legitimately to us today?

Verse 21, go back there.

> "You who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?"

I'd have to say, and we'll come to this more precisely later, living by rules against doing things makes you disposed to do them. We'll come to that in greater depth. But let me suggest to you. You have a little daughter aged 5. You go out of the house one night and you come back. She's opened all mother's drawers and pulled out all her handkerchiefs and her underwear and so on and had a wonderful time. Well, you're mildly provoked. You say, "You shouldn't do that." Then a week later you go out again and you say, "Now, listen. I don't want you to touch those drawers. Don't you go near to those drawers." Do you know what goes on in their little minds? There's just one thing I want to do. What is it? Open the drawers, you understand? This is true. It's true in religion too. Preaching against things ultimately makes people want to do them.

I can remember growing up in my teenage years. I didn't have many restrictions in my home by comparison with many people but anything I was told not to do, that's what I wanted to do.

So, this is true, and again, I want to be careful. I want to say these statements apply exactly to the same people in Israel today as they did nineteen centuries ago. The Bible is so accurate, so up to date.

> "You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?"

I have to admit that I'm not quite sure why Paul says that. But let me show you something in the prophet Malachi which I think could interpret this. Malachi 3. Malachi is the book in which God held a reckoning with the Jewish people after fourteen centuries of the law. Not quite fourteen centuries, let's say twelve centuries. This is the message to Malachi in Malachi 3:7.

> "From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, How shall we return [what do we have to do. And then God says] Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, How have we robbed thee? In tithes and contributions."

So there God specifically charges Israel with robbing the sacred things. I think that's probably what Paul had in mind but I cannot say that for certain. He said you teach other people that you shouldn't steal but you're stealing from God. Could that be said of Christians today? Are some of us stealing from God? Are some of us putting our hands on things that rightfully belong to God? I don't believe that tithing applies to Christians as it applied under the Law of

Moses but I certainly do believe that the tithe belongs to God. So when you help yourself to God's portion, what are you doing? Stealing, that's right. I suppose it's much worse to steal from God than it is to steal from your fellow human beings.

We go on now with God's attitude toward external ordinances. I think we've really covered that but let's just look at it again. Verses 28–29.

> "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God."

Paul is saying whatever you do outwardly isn't what really matters. What really matters is what is your heart relationship to God? You know that the word Jew is taken from the name Yehuda or Judah. And the meaning of Yehuda is praise. So Paul says you're only a real Jew, a real Yehudi [which is the Hebrew word for it] if your praise comes from God and is based on what you are inwardly, not on all your outward and external ordinances.

I think it's important to point out, as I understand it, and you're free to disagree with me, but I believe that Paul is not saying in these scriptures everybody who believes in God is a Jew. I've heard that interpretation. I don't believe that. We are members of the body of Christ in which both Jew and non Jew come together and form one body. But being a Christian doesn't make us Jews. Can you accept that? It's very important because there's a teaching today that we're all Jews and everything that was said about Jews and to Jews applies to us. You see, what Paul is doing is not increasing the number of people who are entitled to be called Jews, he's restricting it to those who fulfill the inward conditions.

This is so important because our attitude toward the Jewish people is very, very important in the sight of God. I'd like to turn to a similar passage in Romans 9 and here we're dealing, as I said earlier, with God's choice, God's election. Paul is speaking about the unfaithfulness of many of the Jewish people. He says this with great grief and then he says in verse 6:

> "But it is not as though the word of God has failed, for they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel."

Now again, that doesn't mean that some people are not descended from Israel. What it means is some people who are descended are not Israel. You see what I'm saying? It's complicated but try and work it out.

What are the qualifications? Paul says:

> "Neither are they all children, [that's children of Abraham] because they're Abraham's descendants. But through Isaac, your descendants will be named. That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants."

So the vital qualification for being accepted as a true Jew or as true Israel is not the outward ordinances but it's embracing by faith the promise of God. And without turning there, we will find that in Galatians 6—well, we'd better turn there, excuse me. Galatians 6:15–16. Again it's the same principle, it isn't the outward but it's the inward.

> "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."

What really matters is what happens inside you by the power of God.

> "And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God."

Now, there are both Gentiles and Jews. Those who walk according to this rule, the new creation, are Gentiles who've been born again by faith in Jesus, have this inner transformation which comes from the new birth. And then he says "and upon the Israel of God." Who are the Israel of God? Now, habitually Christians use that phrase to refer to the church, but I don't believe that's legitimate. The Israel of God is that section of Israel which has embraced the promise, acknowledged the Messiah and entered into the blessings of the New Covenant. Paul talks there about Gentile believers as those who walk according to this rule, and Jewish believers as the Israel of God.

However, that is exceptional. I think in the whole New Testament there are only these three places. Romans 2,

Romans 9 and Galatians 6 where Paul limits the word Jew or Israel to those who are true believers. Throughout the rest of the New Testament basically the word Jew and the word Israel are applied to all who fulfill the qualification of being descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But here Paul is pointing out it's not the outward that's important, it's the inward. Let me say in Christian terminology, it's not the fact that you were baptized, the question is what's happened inside you? That's where God looks, that's the important issue. I have to tell you that always in dealing with religious people, this truth is unpopular. It's unpopular with professing Christians, it's unpopular with Jews, but it's the truth. We need to give heed to it.

(end of session one)

Session 2

In our previous session we dealt with the sins of religious people and the Jews were singled out by Paul as an example but not as the only example. I pointed out to you that in many ways what was true of the Jews in the first century is equally true of Christians in the twentieth century. We don't need to read those words as simply something about other people that don't apply to us. We need to see how they apply to us.

In that particular session we looked at the five principles of God's judgment which we'll briefly recapitulate. First of all, God's judgment is according to truth, the truth of his word. Secondly, it's based on our deeds, on what we do. Thirdly, there is no partiality, no respect of persons. Fourth, we are judged according to the measure of the light available to us. The greater the light, the more strict our judgment. And fifth, the judgment is not merely of external actions, but it's of the inner motives and intents of the heart.

Then Paul sums up those whom God accepts and those whom God rejects in a general category that covers all ages and all races. God accepts those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor and immortality. The word doing indicates works and the word seek indicates faith. It's faith that works. That is what God looks for.

Then Paul dealt with the difference between external ordinances and the reality of an internal experience with God. He points out and gives various different examples that God does not accept external outward ordinances or ceremonies or rites as qualifying to be accepted as righteous.

Now we're going to move into chapter 3 but we're going to continue this same thing, this same theme which is that knowledge of what is right, knowledge of God's laws, does not by itself make us righteous. On the contrary, it increases our responsibility. Again, in the first verses of chapter 3 Paul applies this to his own Jewish people. He says:

> "Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?"

Somebody might say if circumcision doesn't make us accepted with God, why do it? Why did God impose all these ordinances upon the Jews? What is the benefit? He says there's a great benefit.

> "Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God."

That's the Jewish people. I have to point out to you today it's the Christians who are entrusted with the oracles of God. It's we who have available to us the full word of God.

> "What then? If some did not believe, [it's better to say if some were unfaithful] their belief [or their unfaithfulness] will not nullify the faithfulness of God..."

I pointed out to you at the beginning that the word faith doesn't merely cover what we believe intellectually, it covers our personal commitment to God. So rather than saying unbelief here, it's better to say unfaithfulness. Their unfaithfulness, the unfaithfulness of some of the Jewish people, did not nullify God's faithfulness. God remains faithful even when Israel were unfaithful. That's what Paul is saying. So he says shall their unfaithfulness nullify the faithfulness of God? Then, the next words in this translation are:

> "May it never be!"

The Old King James used to have God forbid. Again, Paul is thinking like a Jew. It's a typical Hebrew phrase. ?Ha-lee-lach?. I was wondering how to render it the best way and I thought really it means "perish the thought." How could you think of such a thing? So from now on wherever we read ?Ha-lee-lach?, I'm going to say perish the thought. The name of God is not in the word, it just means it's something unthinkable, how would you dare to mention such a thing or suggest such a thing. So let's say perish the thought.

> "Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, THAT THERE MIGHTEST BE JUSTIFIED IN THY WORDS, AND MIGHTEST PREVAIL WHEN THOU ART JUDGED."

Now that is quoted from Psalm 51 which is David's great prayer of repentance after he was convicted of the sin of murder and adultery. The words that proceeded are these. "Against thee, thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight." Now those are amazing words because David had murdered a man and taken his wife. You'd say he'd sinned against the man and he's sinned against the wife. But at this moment of tremendous agony David says "Against thee, thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight."

And there comes a point which only the Holy Spirit can bring us to when we realize that no matter how much our sins and our evil doing may affect other people, the terrible thing about them is how they affect God. I think Charles Finney defined that as true repentance. He said we have not come to true repentance when we simply look at the consequences of our sins in others. True repentance is getting a vision of what our sins have done to God. I'd have to say there's very little of such repentance in the contemporary church. I think the results are evident.

So David had this terrible inner revelation of how his sin affected Almighty God. The agony that it caused the heart of God. The man whom God had chosen to be king had betrayed God, betrayed his trust. Then he says, "In the light of that God, whatever you say is true. When you enter into judgment with us, your truth prevails." I think it's very important that we somehow, by some route, come to that place. What God says is right, what he says is always true, he's never wrong. How many times we're tempted to think God really didn't do quite the right thing in that situation. "God, I'm not altogether sure that I can trust the way you're handling this situation." It really takes a deep dealing of the Holy Spirit to bring us to that faith.

I remember reading one day in one translation in Revelation 4:11 where the Old King James says "for thy pleasure, everything is and was created." But this translation said in essence, and I can't give you the exact words, "they were created that way because you wanted them that way." And I had a revelation. I don't know if I can share it with you but the best reason for anything is because God wants it that way. There's no higher reason that can ever come than the fact that that's what God wants. These words sound so simple but we need to come to the place of bowing before God, his judgments, his ways, his will and say, "God, everything you say and do is totally perfect."

I come back to the words of Moses to Israel. "His way is perfect and all his works are righteous." God has never done anything unrighteous. I hope that as a result of studying Romans you'll get a new picture of the total righteousness of God. For that we have to humble ourselves. We may not have committed precisely the sins that David committed but in every one of us there are those things which have been horrible in the sight of God. I think Finney is right that there's a place we have to come to where by the revelation of the Holy Spirit we see what our sins have done to God.

God sometimes has to take us by a hard route but that's the place that Paul is talking about here in this passage.

Then he goes on, and now very frequently in Romans Paul imagines an objection against his teaching. He states the objection and then answers it. Again, it's a typically Jewish way of thinking. They think in terms of what I would call the Talmud, these propositions and counter propositions. That's why I think so many successful lawyers are Jews because it's right there in the Jewish mind from their background, this way of balancing one thing with another. Another thing about Jewish people is if you ask them a question they'll usually answer with a question. I don't know whether you've ever noticed that. If you study the teaching of Jesus, he was a real Jew. Almost invariably when he was faced with a question, he answered with a question. What shall we do about divorce? Haven't you ever read? And so on.

So here Paul is anticipating the objection of his fellow Jews. And believe me, every one of his objections are still made today by Jewish people who are confronted with the gospel. So he says:

> "But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) May it never be! [Perish the thought!] For otherwise how will God judge the world?"

See? He imagines somebody saying, "Well, what you're telling us is the more unfaithful we'll be, the more glory that gives to God for his faithfulness. So if we want to give glory to God, let's go on being unfaithful." Do you understand?

That's the objection. And this is his answer. Perish the thought!

Then he returns to the same theme in verse 7.

> "But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?"

So if my sin has glorified God by bringing into focus his faithfulness, why should I be judged? Understand? Believe me, those objections would still be made today.

> "And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say), 'Let us do evil that good may come'?"

That's a perversion of the truth of the gospel. But I would tell you out of my experience in the Middle East, it's a common misrepresentation both for Jews and for Muslims. They misrepresent the Christian faith as being a way of doing what you want and getting away with it. That's a typical Middle East reaction. Paul deals with it. He doesn't waste much time with this, he says:

> "Their condemnation is just."

I'm not going to waste time on people who think like that. They deserve the condemnation because they've heard the truth and deliberately rejected it.

Coming on to verse 9:

> "What then? Are we [Jews] better than they [Gentiles]? Not at all. We have already charged that both Jew and Greek are all under sin..."

They're all guilty of sin. Whether we're Jews or whether we're Greeks, we all have this in common. We are all sinners. Again, it seems God wants it this way but I've dealt for many years with Jewish people and I have a Jewish wife. The hardest thing for Jewish people today is to see that they are sinners. You'd be amazed how hard it is for them to see that. And they're not insincere. It's amazing.

So when Paul now comes out with this whole series of scriptures taken from the Old Testament, each one of which affirms the sinfulness of all men, but particularly the Jews, he knew what he was dealing with. He knew his own people. So he comes out now with a whole series of quotations from the Old Testament all proving that we're all guilty before God. It begins in verse 10:

> "As it is written..."

That is, written in the Bible.

> "There is not one righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one."

I think it would be good to turn to one of the two passages in the Old Testament where those words are found. They're found in Psalm 14 and in Psalm 53. So God, by the Holy Spirit, caused that statement to be recorded twice in case anybody might miss it the first time around, they're bound to come up with it. Psalm 14. You see there's a little bit more and it's very important. We'll start in verse 1.

> "The fool has said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; there is no one who does good."

Notice believing wrong leads you to live wrong. You cannot believe wrong and live right. Otherwise, you cannot believe right and live wrong. Our living is the product of our believing. When they said there is no God, they exposed themselves to all forms of evil.

Now, I want you to notice verse 2.

> "The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men..."

This is the total human race. The Hebrew phrase is "the sons of Adam." I want to point out to you—we will not be able to go into it—the Bible only deals with Adam and his descendants. Wherever it says "men," the Hebrews says "the sons of Adam." This is important. I'm not going to be able to go into it but there are many Bible commentators who believe that there quite possibly were other races of men upon the earth but they're not dealt with in the Bible. The Bible deals only with Adam and his descendants. It's very important because it can lead to many misunderstandings.

> "The Lord looked down upon the sons of Adam, to see if there are nay who understand, who seek after God."

I want to point out to you that there is no one in his natural fallen condition who seeks after God. It isn't in the human heart to do it. This became very real to me because I never had any problem believing I was a sinner. That was one of the advantages I started with when I met the Lord. I came to the Lord about the same time as a friend of mine in the Army who was very religious. I made progress about ten times faster than he did simply because I had no problem in seeing that I was a sinner. But, I used to say to myself, "After all, I really was a sinner." But I had this in me that I was looking for the truth. From the age of twelve upwards I really was looking for the truth. One day I read this psalm and God said to me, "You were only looking for the truth because I put that in your heart. If I hadn't put it in your heart you'd have never been interested in the truth." So I realized I couldn't take credit for that, you see? It's very important. There is no one naturally who seeks for God. Many of you probably from childhood because of your background or your upbringing or the mysterious dealings of God in your life, you've had a longing for God. You wanted to know God, isn't that true? But never take credit for it. You would have never had it if God hadn't put it there. Left to yourself, you don't understand, you don't seek God.

> "They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one."

How many? Not even one. That is so emphatic, isn't it? And there it is, in the book of Psalms, twice. But it's so hard for people to see it.

We'll return to Romans 3 and we'll read these other passages there. They're taken from the psalms and from the prophets. We won't turn to every reference, but to some. Verse 13:

> "Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, there is no fear of God before their eyes."

As you contemplate that list for a moment, I want to ask you a question. What area of human personality is most emphasized and dealt with first? I didn't hear it. The mouth, that's right. How true that is. I think all the first four statements are about what we do with out mouth. You see, James said the tongue is an unruly evil. No one can control his own tongue.

I remember I was in a conference on the future of society, which was a ridiculous thing, in the first year of World War II. It wasn't a religious conference but someone stated that. No one can control his own tongue. I said to myself that's true. It was really my first contact with the Bible as being true and practical and relevant. No one can control his own tongue.

So Paul quotes there from the psalms and from the prophets. He goes on in verse 19:

> "Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God..."

That's very important. It's addressed primarily to the Jewish people. It says it's no good your pointing the finger at Gentiles and saying this is what they did, this is the kind of people they are, because this is your own book. It was given to your first, it applies to you first. It applies only to other people second. Your own book tells you there is none who does good, no not even one. All are corrupt, all have gone astray.

So he comes to this great summation and he worked hard to get here and I think you probably feel you've been working hard to get here, too. But it is hard work. Verse 20:

> "...because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in his sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin."

Notice again that the "the" is put in. Do you see that? So you can either say "the Law" or you can say "Law." First and foremost it applies to the Law of Moses but it also applies to every other kind of law. No one will be ever justified in the sight of God by keeping rules. That's the important basic statement. You see, I smile at my Protestant brothers and sisters. So many of us say, "Well, we're not under the law, thank God, we're not under the law." Then we make our own silly little laws. Every denomination has its own laws. The Baptists have one law, the Pentecostals

have another, the Catholics have another. But no religious law will ever cause anybody to be reckoned as righteous in the sight of God. You see, what we've done is switch from the Law of Moses which was a perfect law which was given by God, and we've turned to our own law. I'm not saying that a movement doesn't need laws. Any group of people needs laws to keep them under control. But keeping those laws, even if you keep every one of the thirty-three rules of the Pentecostal church you belong to, doesn't make you righteous. Is that right? Is that true?

God opened my eyes to this truth many, many years ago I think because of my philosophic background. The main issue in the New Testament is whether we're made righteous by keeping laws or by faith. And as I've gone through my Christian experience and ministry, I've hardly ever encountered people who've given any serious consideration to that question at all. What we've done is jettisoned the Law of Moses and substituted our own silly little seven rules. Not that all the rules are silly by any means but they're silly if you think they're going to make you righteous before God.

Now, if I were to ask you to put up hands, and I'm not going to, a lot of you would have to admit that really you thought you were made righteous because you kept the laws of your particular group. Let me say it this way. You're not made righteous by that. But if you have been made righteous by faith, you probably will keep at least the relevant laws, you understand? But keeping rules will never make you righteous in the sight of God.

I think I'd like you all to just say that. I'll say it once and you repeat it after me. Don't say it if you don't believe it. "Keeping rules will never make me righteous in the sight of God." Okay? "Keeping rules will never make me righteous in the sight of God." I don't think some of you realize how far you've come. See, if we can't get through this, we'll never complete the pilgrimage. This is just stage two, there are a lot of stages to come. If we don't see this clearly and embrace it and realize how true and how relevant it is, we can't go any further, we'll keep slipping back into the same problems.

Personally, I believe that legalism is the greatest single problem of the Christian church. I believe that legalism also is the cause of much of the sin in the church because lots of sincere and honest men have embraced this set of do-nots—do not commit adultery, do not look at another woman, do not this and do not that—and they've focused their attention on them and become enslaved by them. See? The way to be pure is not to keep resisting lust because the more you resist lust, the more it dominates your thinking. There's a totally different way of becoming righteous which is a righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ. So in our next session we'll continue to deal with that.

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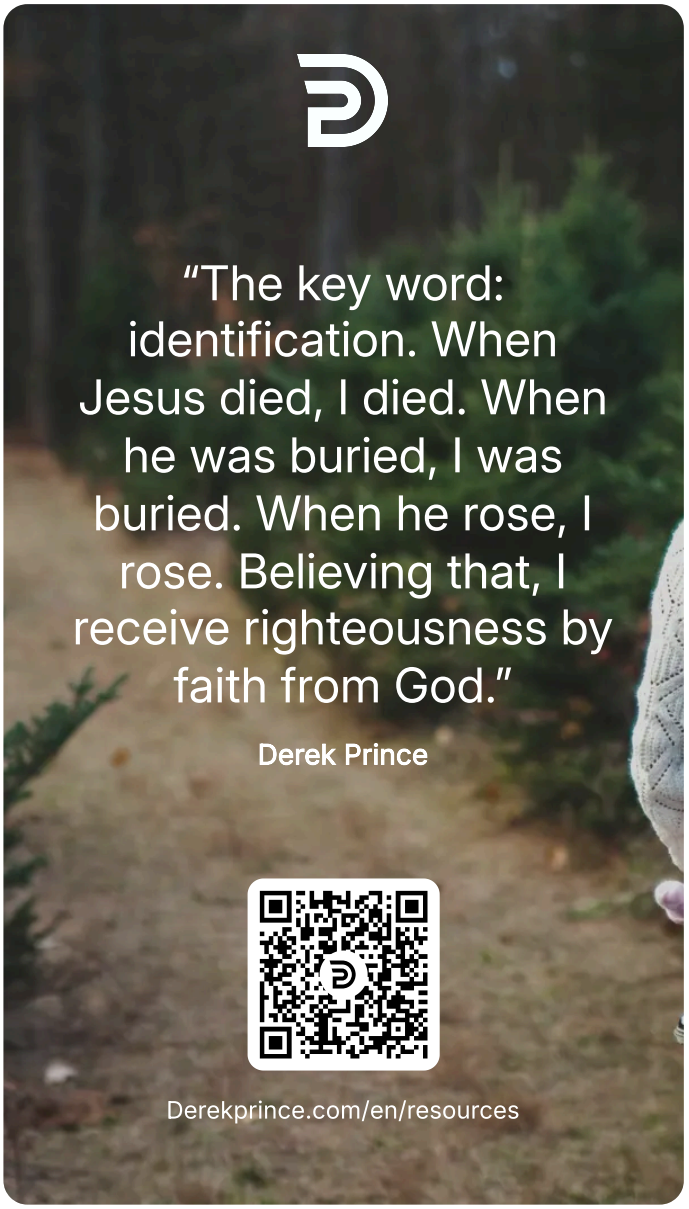
Sermon

Transcript: MV-4227-100-ENG
Last Updated: 16 Sept 2026
Website: Derekprince.com/en/resources



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