

The Roman Pilgrimage (Part 8)



Part 8/20

The Roman Pilgrimage
By Derek Prince

In our previous two sessions we've been looking at stage 8 of our pilgrimage which is God's solution for the old man and we saw that that solution is summed up in one word: execution. But the mercy of God lies in this: that the execution took place when Jesus died on the cross. Our old man was crucified with him. And we are given the privilege through baptism of identifying ourselves with him in his death, his burial and then in everything else that follows on. God has no other program for the old man but execution. So Paul has answered the objection, "Well, if we want more grace let's go on sinning more, let's go on living in sin." He points out that's impossible because to be in the grace of God you have to be dead to sin. It's a misunderstanding of how God's grace operates.

Now we're going to go on to stage 9 which is the second part of chapter 6. This is very practical, how to apply God's solution in our lives. In the previous part of the chapter Paul has given the doctrinal basis. Now he says how do we make this work in our lives? We'll read, first of all, verses 12–14.

> "Therefore..."

Do you notice the therefore? I don't know whether anybody is ever going to count all the therefore's, it would be quite interesting. Of course, it depends partly on the translation you use but the NASV would be a pretty accurate one.

> "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace."

Paul gives instructions here but these instructions can only be acted on by people who've passed through the transition described in the previous part of the chapter. A person who has not put his faith in Jesus and accepted his

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substitutionary sacrifice on his behalf just is incapable of carrying out these instructions. So these instructions only work on the basis of what Paul has already said in the previous part of the chapter.

Now he says you've got to take a firm stand against sin. I heard a sermon preached years ago by somebody who said if you ever want to get to heaven you've got to learn to say no. And that certainly is the truth. Paul says you've got to make up your mind, say no to sin from now on. "You're not going to control me, I take a stand against you, you have no more claims over me, you have no more power over me and I'm not going to submit to you." And sin and Satan are both alike, they only listen when you really mean it. They both have a way of knowing when you're just saying it and when you're saying it and meaning it. You have to say it with determination.

You see, applying the work of Jesus in our lives demands the exercise of our will. It's impossible if we don't exercise our wills aright. I believe through faith in Jesus our wills are liberated from the dominion of sin. After that, it becomes our responsibility to use them aright. And God isn't going to do that for us. Here's the point where we have got to rise up and say this is my responsibility.

I want to illustrate this very briefly from a personal experience of mind during the period that I was pastoring in London. For several years I had a tremendous internal struggle against depression. I cannot describe how depression would come down over me and weigh upon me and shut me in and give me this sense of hopelessness and failure. If you've ever been through something of the same, you can identify. I struggled against this thing in every way that I knew and made no progress. Really, I had to give up, there was nothing more I knew to do and then I was reading Isaiah 61:3 in the King James Version and it says there:

> "In place of the spirit of heaviness the garment of praise..."

As I read those words the Holy Spirit spoke to me inwardly and I read "the spirit of heaviness" and said, "That's your problem." It was like a flood of light came in. I realized I was not fighting against myself. It was another person, a person without a body, a spirit that was tormenting me and oppressing me. When I realized that I was dealing with a person who was not myself I would say I was 80 percent of the way to victory. I actually only needed one other scripture in that case which was Joel 2:32:

> "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered."

So I put that very simply together and I went to God in prayer and said, "God, you've shown me that I'm oppressed by a spirit of heaviness. I'm coming to you now and I'm calling upon you in the name of the Lord Jesus. Deliver me from this spirit of heaviness." And he delivered me, I felt it leave me.

Then God showed me my responsibility began. He showed me that he had done for me what I could not do for myself. But now it was up to me to reprogram my own mind. I habitually thought in a negative way. I was a professional pessimist and God showed me that that was a denial of my faith in Jesus, that he'd liberated my mind from that oppressing spirit but he wasn't going to do for me what I could do for myself. He showed me I had to retrain my mind. And I did. Over a period of years every time a negative, pessimistic thought came to me I would reject it and replace it by something positive based on scripture. Over the course of some years my whole inner working changed completely, I was a totally different person.

Why I tell that story is because God will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. In this case he will deliver us from the dominion of sin. But after that it's our responsibility to do what we can. It's our responsibility to will aright, to take our stand against sin, to disassociate ourselves from everything sinful. And that we have to do by the exercise of our will.

So Paul says "do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting your members [the members of your body] to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." Paul says deny sin access to your members, don't let it control your hand, don't let it control your feet, don't let it control your tongue, you don't have to. You've been set free.

And he says, on the contrary, yield yourself to God and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. There's a double yielding. First of all, you yield your will to God. You say, "God, not my will but yours be done." If you pray the Lord's prayer, you have to do that for the second petition of the Lord's prayer is "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." When we say "thy will be done," where does it begin? In me, the one who's praying. So we have to yield our will to God.

Then, having yielded our will, we have to yield our members, our physical members to God as instruments of righteousness. Where the translations says "instruments," the Greek says literally "weapons." So that implies, I think, spiritual conflict. It's not just an instrument, it's not just a hoe or a plow but it's a sword. It's an instrument with which we fight.

For me personally, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is the key experience because in that experience, as I understand it, first we yield our will to God, then we yield to God the one unruly member of our body which we cannot control, the tongue. We are actually fulfilling the instruction here, yielding our members, our physical members, to God as instruments [or weapons] of righteousness. And certainly, when the tongue has been yielded to God and taken over by the Holy Spirit, it becomes a weapon in prayer, in testimony, in preaching.

See, God is so down to earth. I've pointed out to you that when Paul is finished the first 11 chapters of Romans, all his theology, there's another therefore.

> "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice to God."

So it's a question really of willing and yielding. You've got to do it in that order because if you don't will, you'll by habit yield to the wrong thing. See? Because you're used to yielding to sin. Paul says don't go on presenting your body, your members, to sin. You've been doing it for a long while. I'd been doing it for about 25 years when I met the Lord. But I had to stop, I had to say that's the end of that. Now my will has been released. I can will one will with God and when I've yielded my will to God I don't have to yield my members as instruments of sin to Satan.

Then Paul comes out with a tremendously important statement in verse 14.

> "For sin shall not be master over you [the old translation said sin shall not have dominion over you], for you are not under law, but under grace."

The implications of that statement are very far reaching. Paul says you are not under law, but under grace. It's one or the other, it cannot be both at the same time. If you're under law, you're not under grace. If you're under grace, you're not under law. You have to decide.

Now we're going to spend quite a long while in this series dealing with the law, the whole of Romans 7. So I don't want to go into it at this present time in detail, just point out it's a choice. Don't try and have it both ways at the same time because you can't.

And, the implication of this is very powerful. Paul says sin shall not have dominion over you because you are not under the law. What's the implication of that? If you're under the law, sin will have dominion over you. I know that's a shocking statement to many people but it happens to be what the Bible says. And it says it consistently all the way through.

So, we have this choice. I'm not under law, I'm not governed by a set of rules, I don't operate on the basis of fear, I've become a son of God, I obey him because I love him, love is my motivation for obedience, not fear, from now on. You see? God doesn't want to make slaves. The law made slaves, God makes sons and daughters. But you have to decide. It's very important that you exercise your will and exercise it aright because if you let yourself be pushed around by Satan, he'll push you around, believe me. He's a bully, he goes for the weak. You can't afford in this area of your life to be weak.

Now comes the next imagined objection. You're getting used to Paul's imagined objections by now. He said we are not under law, but under grace. So, what's the objection? Verse 15:

> "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?"

And what is his answer?

> "Perish the thought!"

Do you see what he's saying? The first objection at the beginning of the chapter was shall we continue in sin that grace may abound. This is different. If we're not under the law then are we free to commit sinful acts when it suits us because we're not under a law that says don't do it? You see? It's not the same objection, it's a different one. This is his answer, and we'll read verses 15–22. We have to deal with this as a section.

> "Perish the thought! Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in

> death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?"

So Paul says when you yield yourself to someone to obey him, you become slaves of the one you obey. So if by a decision of your will you decide, "I'm going to commit this sinful act." Let's say an act of immorality, "I'm not under the law so I can do it." Paul says if you do that, you're yielding to immorality, what happens? You become a slave of immorality. I'm not going to ask people to put their hands up but I think some of you know that by experience. You can't yield to such a thing without becoming the slave of such a thing. So you have to decide whom do you want to yield to.

I'd like to turn for a moment, keeping your finger in Romans 6, to Joshua 24:15. Now Joshua is confronting Israel at the end of his career with a choice. Some of us don't like choices, do we? We'd rather get along without having to decide but in the spiritual life you can't avoid choices. He says to Israel:

> "Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and truth... [verse 15] If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve..."

He said will you serve the true God or will you serve false gods? Notice what the choice is, and it's never changed. It is not choose whether you will serve, it is choose whom you will serve. Serve you will.

So, the only choice you have after you're redeemed is am I going to serve sin or am I going to serve righteousness? Before you were redeemed you didn't have any choice, you couldn't help sinning, there was no other option. This is only addressed to those who've experienced redemption through faith in Jesus Christ.

Going back to Romans 6 now, verse 17:

> "But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed..."

That's very important. We can't dwell on it but the word "form" there is the same word that's used for putting metal in to cause it to set in a certain shape. And it always impresses me that when people are newly converted they're warm, they're hot. And it's very important to put them in the right form right at the beginning. Lots of people get wonderfully converted, they're enthusiastic but they go to some church or group which doesn't really present the truth of the Bible and they get set in the wrong form. Then it's hard to change them.

To me, this is a passionate concern, that people will get set in the right form. I've been to many evangelistic crusades and I've seen thousands of people go forward but I've always had this question in my mind what form is that hot metal going to be poured into, how will it set? And I'm sorry to say that many, many times it doesn't come out right.

I was a counselor at Billy Graham's first crusade at Harringay at London in l954, if you can believe that people were alive in those days! I counseled 22 people and I appreciate very much the counseling instruction that we had. We were not allowed to tell them what church to attend. We had to maintain contact with them by phone or by letter, follow them up. I did everything I could but out of those 22 people I eventually concluded that there were only two that you could say were solid converts. By a coincidence they joined my church! I really didn't want them to, I pushed them away but they tasted something and they wouldn't go for anything else.

Now this is no criticism of Billy Graham, you understand that? I admire him and appreciate him. But the evangelist is not responsible for the form that the converts are put in. Somebody said in Britain at that time about the new converts, "it's a shame to put a live chick under a dead hen." I won't interpret that!

Going on, verse 18:

> "...having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness..."

So it's choice. Something is going to control you. Which is it? Is it going to be sin or righteousness? Now you say it'll be righteousness. Believe me, you'll be tested. You will really be tested. The devil doesn't give up as long as he thinks he's got a chance of succeeding. I've noticed when people are tested and tempted, the devil will go on until that person's come to the place where the temptation just doesn't mean anything to him. He's not even going to entertain the thought. And the devil is clever enough not to waste his time on people like that. You see? But if there's any doublemindedness in you, the devil will exploit that. You have to make a firm decision.

Going on, verse 19:

> "I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness..."

If you go into lawlessness, it increases. You become more and more lawless. Many of us can trace that in our own lives. I certainly can.

> "...so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification [or holiness]."

You're going to go one way or the other. It is almost impossible to stand still in the spiritual life. You're either going to go forward or you're going to go backward. You're either going to go further into rebellion or you're going to progress in holiness. But standing still in the spiritual life is almost impossible.

Paul goes on again. He's very explicit and remember, he's writing in a society where slavery was a very normal thing. So all these people knew what it was to be a slave. If they weren't slaves, quite probably they had slaves. So he's using a figure which was very appropriate in those days.

> "For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness."

Now he says think it over. Have you noticed another therefore? Verse 21:

> "Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death."

So Paul says think it over for a moment. When you were serving sin, when you were a slave to sin, what did you get? Some of us got headaches and the morning after feeling and a sense of shame, and many of us wondered whether life was really worth living, what was it all about. We lived many times in disagreement and contention and disharmony with the people closest to us. Is that right? So Paul says think it over, just bear in mind where you used to be. Do you want to go back there?

In my experience in the Christian life I had many temptations and many discouragements. But I'll tell you one thing. I have never once entertained the thought of going back to the old life. Because, as far as I'm concerned, it just has nothing to offer. For me, that's clear. When I shut that door, I threw away the key. I mean, I've often wondered where are we going, God, have you forgotten me, what's the problem, what am I doing wrong, but one thing I've never felt I wanted to do was turn back. By now I've gone to far to know the way back, thank God!

> "For the outcome of those things is death."

Then Paul says:

> "But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life."

So Paul says stop looking back and cultivate looking ahead. Where are you headed for? You're headed for a life of holiness, you're headed for eternal life which doesn't end with this life but goes on into eternity. That's where you're going. It's difficult to walk forwards if you're looking backwards. Did you know that? So Paul says just turn your back on all of the past.

What a privilege to be able to do that, isn't it? I think there are millions of people on this earth today who would gladly do it if someone would tell them how to. That's why I have a passionate concern to get the word of God to everybody. I wonder if you realize how fortunate we are. We know what to do about guilt. We know there's a solution to guilt. But there are, I think, billions of people on earth today who feel guilty and don't know where to go. They never tasted God's goodness, his grace, his mercy. They've never heard that there is forgiveness. I'm concerned about them, I'm not interested in the past. I only refer to the past by way of illustration, that's the only interest I have in the past, the lessons that I've learned from it.

Then Paul sums this up with characteristic clarity. What is the real choice? Verse 23:

> "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Those are the options. If you want your wages which is the due reward for what you've done, remember, you're a

sinner. And God is just and if you take that option, you'll get your wages. What are your wages? Death, that's right. That's the justice of God.

But if you refuse that option and say, "God, I don't want what I deserve, give me what I hadn't deserved. Give me your free gift, [Greek, charisma] grace gift that I can't earn, [that's eternal life] Lord, that's what I want.

I trust that everyone of us here has made that decision. And if you've made that decision here, I just feel that it would be appropriate at this moment to tell God once again that we yield to him our will and we yield him our members. Now if you want to join me, do this. Say, "Lord, I yield my will to you now and I lift up my hands in token that I'm yielding my physical members to you. In Jesus' name, Amen."

(end session one)

Session 2

At the end of our last session we came to the end of stage 9 of our pilgrimage. Stage 9 dealt with God's program for the old man which we stated was execution and in the final session we dealt with how to apply that solution in our own lives. I pointed out that it consists in two basic things. First of all, willing the right thing and secondly, yielding ourselves and our members to God as instruments or weapons of righteousness.

Now we're moving into the final stage of this journey before we reach the conclusion which is Romans 8. The final stage is Romans 7 and in my opinion, according to my observation and my own experience, it's the hardest one to go through. I used to think that Paul had put this in the wrong place because it's dealing with the law and I thought we deal with the law before we're converted and after that there's nothing more about the law. But I learned by observation and by experience that that's not true. After we've been converted, after we've experienced deliverance from the old man, we come face to face with this tremendously difficult issue: What is the place of the law? How do I relate to law? I don't know, I mean, I'm not widely read in contemporary literature but I don't know of any work of Christian doctrine that really faces this question squarely and deals with it. If there is one, I don't know it. It's one that's always attracted me from the moment I was converted and began to read the New Testament because of my background in philosophy. I think that training showed me here's a problem that has to be resolved if the Christian life is going to work.

I would say the majority of Christians that I know and I travel with and meet with—and there are many exceptions to this—but the majority of Christians today aren't even aware there is a problem let alone what the solution is. In my series of books, the Foundation Series, I use this little example of the man who went to the doctor with a pain in his tummy. The doctor sounded him out, examined him and said, "I think your problem is appendicitis." He said, "Appendicitis, what's that?" The doctor said, "That's inflammation of the appendix." The man said, "Up to now I never knew I had an appendix to be inflamed." A lot of Christians are like that. They have a problem, they have a pain. When they go to the word of God the word of God says, "Your problem is that you're wrongly related to the law." And the Christian answers, "I never knew there was a problem, this is the first time I've heard about it."

So, God helping us, we're going to devote four sessions to the 7th chapter of Romans. I'm just praying for grace for me and for you that we'll get through it with a clear understanding. I don't think it's easy but I do think it's possible by God's grace.

We're going to deal now in this session with the first 6 verses of this 7th chapter. Where Paul uses what I would have to say is a rather involved metaphor from marriage to explain a release from the law and our freedom to live another way. So I'll read it and then I'll try to interpret it for you.

> "Or do you not know, brethren..."

And I've observed that Paul uses that kind of phrase probably half a dozen times in writing to Christians. My somewhat cynical comment is that in most places Christians don't know today.

> "Do you not know, brethren, (for I am speaking to those who know the law)..."

And it's "the law," not law, it's the law of Moses.

> "...that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?"

Once you're under the law there's no escape except by death. It's a lifetime commitment.

> "For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband."

Paul is using this analogy of marriage. I better go on and read and then try to explain it.

> "So then if, while her husband is living, she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God. For while we were in the flesh, [and you remember the special use for the word flesh?] the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, [please note that statement] were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. But now we have been released from the law..."

From what have we been released? Are you sure?

> "...having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter."

That's the analogy. Now let me try and interpret it. First of all, let's take the basic fact that under the law if a man married a woman, as long as the man remained alive, the woman was not free to marry another man. And if she married another man she would be stigmatized an adulteress, she would have committed adultery. But if the man to whom she was married died, then she was free to marry another man without being an adulteress.

Now, I'm going to step out of line for a moment and point out something which is my personal conviction and some of you probably disagree with me violently. I've heard that scripture used as an argument against a woman whose first husband committed adultery from having the liberty if he divorces her to remarry another. I just want to point out to you that that's not consistent because if you apply the law in that situation, you've got to apply the law all the way. And that happily releases any woman whose husband is an adulterer because the mandatory penalty for adultery under the law was death. There was no alternative. The Jews reminded Jesus of that, they said, "What do you say about this woman taken into adultery?" And then they said, "Moses said she should be put to death." They weren't doing it because they weren't observing the law of Moses.

So dear ladies, and I know there are hundreds of women who are struggling with this problem. If your husband has been unfaithful to you and left you for another woman and committed adultery, legally he's dead and the law that bound you to him is no longer valid. Do you understand?

You can't apply the law on one hand and say it doesn't apply on the other. If you're going to apply the law it has to be applied all the way. James said that, you can't keep one commandment and ignore another. If you break one commandment you've broken the whole law. The law stands or falls in its entirety, you can't take one little piece and say we'll observe this, we don't observe that. Which is what the majority of people do. They say we'll observe this, we won't observe that. For instance, in Judaism, Orthodox Jews have 613 commandments and they admit privately that they keep about 32 of them. Conservative Jews decide what they're going to keep—which is a reasonable point of view in a way. Reformed Jews just do whatever they like. And you have similar groups inside the Christian church. I can't go into that but I don't ever want to leave women or men under guilt when they don't have to be under guilt.

I'll go a little further and say sometimes if a man tells me his wife has committed adultery and shows no evidence of repentance, I'll say divorce her. Get the best lawyer you can. You might not agree with me on it but that's—not always. If there is any possibility of repentance and reconciliation, that's another matter. But I don't trust people who say they've repented because it suits them. You might guess from what I'm saying that I've been involved in some situations. I have.

Now we're going back to the real issue. Paul says through the law you were married. The law was like a marriage covenant and it was for life. What were they married to? This is the difficult part. They were married to their fleshly nature. See? Because the whole essence of the law, and this is the problem of the law, is you're required to do it in your own ability. You're relying on your fleshly nature. That's why it never works as we'll see as we go through.

But the law is like coming under the law and the only nation that's ever come under the law was Israel. It's a pattern for all of us. Coming under the law is like a marriage ceremony in which you're married to your fleshly nature. As long as your fleshly nature remains alive, you can't marry somebody else. Okay? Because you'll be an adulterer or an adulteress. But, what Paul is saying, the good news is your

first husband died. When did that first husband die? When Jesus died on the cross. Our old man was crucified with him. See? When you grasp that you say, "Praise God. I'm free. I don't have to go on with this awful husband of mine that gave me an awful life and gave me no blessings, no peace, no righteousness. I'm not tied to him any longer. I can be married to another man."

What's the alternative? To be married to whom? To the one who rose from the dead. The risen glorified Christ. He can become your husband whether you're man or woman. What we're talking about is a relationship in the Spirit. Just that you see this for a moment, the real possibility of it, keep your finger in Romans 7 and turn to 1 Corinthians 6:17. We have to read verse 16 to get the context. Paul is teaching against fornication and sexual immorality and he says in verse 16:

> "Do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot [or a prostitute] is one body with her? For he says, 'The two will become one flesh.'"

That's the background. Then he comes out with a totally different alternative but it's on the same basis.

> "But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him."

Now the picture was of sexual union between a man and a prostitute. On the basis of that picture Paul says there's another kind of union that you can have with the Lord. It's not sexual, it's spiritual. That's a marriage relationship with the Lord. He that is joined to the Lord is one? Not soul, not body but spirit.

I would ask you a question and your answer could be as good as mine. What is the act by which we are joined to the Lord in one spirit? Worship, that's right. You see, that's why worship is the highest activity of the human being. And worship is procreated. If you can see what I mean, it's when we're joined to the Lord in worship that we begin to bring forth, to birth, the things that God wants brought forth. Worship is not a sort of appendix to the Christian life, it's not a little addition to services, it's the culmination. It's the confirmation. If I could say it without offending anybody, it's the consummation of our marriage to the Lord. We are united with him in one spirit. And when we have that union, marriage union is always for the sake of procreation. That's when we procreate, that's when we bring forth. That's when spiritual fruit comes out of our lives. Can you see that?

See, you need to know which husband you're united to. Let's turn to Galatians for a moment, chapter 5. I want to say I really appreciate worship leaders. I appreciate our worship leaders here. I think they've done a most magnificent job. Don't clap them now because of problems with the tape. Otherwise we'd give them a hand right now. I've observed another thing which is just by the way. Casualties among worship leaders are very high. They are almost the number one target for Satan. You need to pray for them.

Galatians 5:19 and following. Now we're going to look at the two kinds of offspring from the two kinds of marriage union. Okay? Verse 19:

> "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident..."

They are. All too evident, they show. You can tell people that you're spiritual but if you're fleshly, it'll show.

> "...which are, immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousings, and things like these..."

Now let me ask you, do you want that kind of children? But that's what the flesh brings forth. You cannot find one good thing in that entire list. Okay. The flesh cannot produce anything acceptable to God. It is corrupt. That's the key word describing our fleshly nature. Jesus said a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit. It's impossible. Paul says in Romans 8, and we'll get there a little later, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. It's impossible because none of the things in this list please God.

Now what's the alternative? You're married to Christ, joined to him in this sacred, spiritual union. Verse 22:

> "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..."

Find something bad in that list. Can you see it's not a question of gray, it's a question of black and white. The works of the flesh are totally bad, the fruit of the Spirit is totally good.

Then as a kind of afterthought Paul adds about the fruit of the Spirit:

> "...against these things there is no law."

The people who bring forth that kind of fruit do not need to be governed by the law. They're not under the law. They've escaped from their marriage to the flesh under the law, they are free to be married by the Holy Spirit to the resurrected Christ and bring forth the kind of fruit which is appropriate to that union.

You see, the key to the Christian life is not effort, it's union. Most of us are far too busy trying. You show me any vine that every brings forth grapes by trying. I'll be interested to see what it looks like. See? All the significant figures in the New Testament speak about a living personal relationship with God which without effort brings forth what God wants.

Let's turn, as an example, to John 15, the well known parable of the vine. Just the first 5 verses. Jesus is speaking:

> "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser."

I'm so glad for that statement incidentally because I've had people trying to dress me, prune me! The only one who is skillful enough to prune is the Father. Don't let human beings get at you with their choppers. Going on, verse 2:

> "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, He takes away..."

That raises an interesting theological question. How can you be a branch in Jesus without being a believer? And yet if you don't bear fruit, he'll take you away. Anyhow, I leave you to settle that.

> "Every branch that bears fruit, He prunes, that it may bear more fruit..."

Some of you are going through pruning and you may be fighting it wondering and saying, "What's gone wrong?" Nothing has gone wrong. This is part of the process. You're not being pruned because you're a backslider or because you're wicked or because you're uncommitted. You're being pruned because you've been bringing forth fruit. And you're being pruned in order that you may bring forth more fruit. We've got to distinguish between God's chastisement and God's pruning.

> "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. [Verse 4:] Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in me."

What is the key? It's abiding in Jesus. It's not effort, it's union. And out of that union the Holy Spirit brings forth the beautiful, luscious grapes which are the fruit of the Spirit.

Jesus goes on:

> "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing."

When you're out of relationship with me, there's nothing you can bring forth that is good. That's a beautiful parable, really. It contains very simply the three persons of the Godhead. Jesus the Son is the vine. The Father is the vinedresser and the sap that rises up through the vine into the branches and brings forth fruit is what? The Holy Spirit. Do you see?

So that's what the Christian life is about. It's not a set of rules. I'm not saying rules don't have their place. But we are not made righteous by rules. If we have been made righteous by faith, we will keep the appropriate rules. But we're never made righteous by keeping rules.

I think Christians really need to understand this here in America because I find so many people passionately concerned about politics. Christians. I believe Christians should be interested in politics but if you imagine that you're going to change this nation by getting new laws, you're deceiving yourself. Laws never change people's hearts. I suggest that for many it would be more important that you make sure you're bringing forth the fruit yourself. Okay. No matter who gets elected as president, it isn't going to change this nation very much. What's going to change this nation is the power of the Holy Spirit.

I say to many people listen. The problem with America—and it's just the same problem with Britain and many other nations—is that the bad people are outnumbering the good people and they're growing in number daily. Okay? You see, let me ask you this question for a moment. Which kind of country would you rather live in. A country with good laws and bad people or bad laws and good people? If you choose the good laws and the bad people, you're a fool because history shows very clearly that even if a nation has good laws, bad people will put a bad use to them which is exactly what's happening in the United States today. The

solution is not changing the laws, it's changing the people. What will do that? Only one thing, a revival.

Some of the effort that's been directed to politics would be better directed toward revival. In my naive way I say this: The only solution for America, for Britain, for many other nations is something that will very rapidly and thoroughly change bad people into good people. What will do that? The Holy Spirit. Nothing else. How many of us know by experience you can be changed from being a bad person to a good person overnight? Bless you, I know too. I'll put both hands up. I started one night as a sinner and ended up next morning as a servant of the Lord. I met Jesus.

All right. You see, what they're teaching here about laws has got a lot of practical outworkings. In many senses, people turn to law through laziness. If you understand what I mean, they want the law to do something that only they can do.

Let's go back to Romans 7 and see if we can make sense of it again. I think I need to say one more thing but probably we don't need to turn there. What I am teaching you as best I can is God's provision for righteousness. Okay? And it's solely through faith in Jesus, his atoning death and resurrection, the power of the Holy Spirit. And God has made a perfect provision. I believe not merely for personal righteousness and holiness but for health. I personally believe that the atonement of Jesus provided healing. That's my personal conviction. I was in the hospital a year on end, I didn't get out of it until I believed that. So I have reasons to think I'm right, apart from what the Bible says.

We need to be very careful that we don't assume we are what we are. Okay? In other words, because I've been teaching this and you believe it, don't walk out of here telling everybody you'll never sin again. Be sure of one thing, you'll trip up before the day is out. Okay? I don't think I have time to complete this, I probably need to move into the next session which will be coming shortly. But there is a great difference between the legal and the experiential. Legally you're totally righteous. Experientially you may have a long way to go.

So if somebody would be kind enough to remind me when we begin the next session, I'll go on with this very important distinction between the legal and the experiential. What I am teaching you is what your rights are in Christ. But whether you've appropriated them or not, that's another matter.

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Sermon

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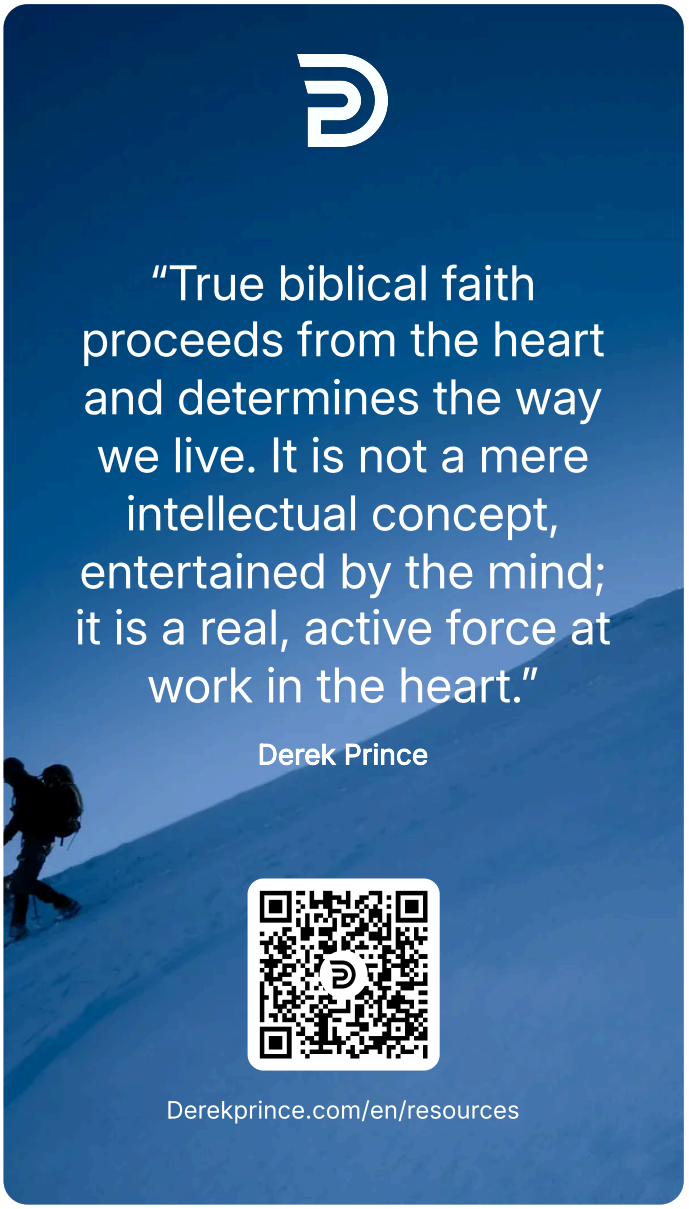

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