

The Roman Pilgrimage (Part 10)



Part 10/20

The Roman Pilgrimage
By Derek Prince

In our last three sessions we've been working our way through stage 10 of our pilgrimage which is the last stage, the stage before we reach our destination. That concerns the relationship of the believer to the law. This will be our final session in stage 10. I pointed out in the previous session that confrontation with the law provokes and internal conflict within the one who wants to do the will of God. I pictured like the situation of Rebekah when she was pregnant with twins, Esau and Jacob. Esau, the type of a carnal man; Jacob, the type of the spiritual man. I said that Paul himself obviously went through the same kind of spiritual conflict. And at the end of Romans 7 he cried out in agony, "Oh, wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from this body of death?" And then he came out with a triumphant response, "I thank my God there is a way out through our Lord Jesus Christ." I said that the way out is through the cross. It's through the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus because on the cross in Jesus our old man, this body of sin, was put to death. And through that execution on the cross we can be delivered from the dominion of the old carnal nature. We can be released to serve God in the Spirit.

Romans 6, I think we might just look at it for a moment. Verse 6:

> "Knowing this, that our old self [or our old man] was crucified with him."

That's a historical fact as I pointed out. Whether you know it or don't know it, it's true. But knowing it and believing it will change you. It was done in order that:

> "...our body of sin might be done away with..."

I prefer to say rendered ineffective or put out of action.

> "...that we should no longer be slaves to sin."

The implication is that as long as the old man is still allowed to have his way, we will be slaves to sin.

In Romans 6:6, this is presented as something that was done for us. Our old man was crucified with him, our fleshly

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nature. But there's another side to that truth that I want to deal with now. There is something we have to do. It doesn't all happen because Jesus did it, there is a certain response of faith that we have to make. And so I'd like to turn to Galatians 5:24 which speaks, I believe, of the response that we have to make.

> "Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

Notice this is the distinguishing mark of those who truly belong to Jesus. It's not a doctrine, it's not a denomination; it's something that's taken place in them by an act of their own will and faith, they have crucified the flesh. Romans 6:6 is God's side, our old man was crucified. That lays the basis. Galatians 5:24 is the response required from us. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh. On the basis of what Jesus did for us, we have applied the cross to our own fleshly nature.

Now the cross is not an easy way to die. It's painful. And there is a certain amount of pain inevitable in entering into this life of freedom and victory. We can only do it as we crucify our flesh. And in a certain sense, we have to take the nails and put them through our own hands and our own feet and take our place willingly on the cross identified with Jesus in his death. I want to emphasize again this is not free from pain, but it's the best way.

I'd like to turn to a scripture that used to puzzle me for many years in 1 Peter 4:1–2.

> "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose..."

In other words, make up your mind you're going to have to suffer in the flesh.

> "...because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin..."

Now that was a statement that astonished me because I said to myself, "I thought Jesus did all the suffering. All that was done on the cross. So why do we have to suffer in the flesh?" But I was attracted by that statement "He who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin..." I thought to myself it would be wonderful to have ceased from sin. So though I was, in a way, put off by the statement, I was attracted by the consequence. So I began to pray and meditate on this.

Now, let's look at the next verse before we go any further. He has ceased from sin:

> "...so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh [that's in the physical body now] no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God."

Again, I'm tremendously attracted by that possibility to live the rest of my life no longer for the lusts of my fleshly nature but to do the will of God. That, as far as I know my own heart, is my sincere desire to do the will of God. But here it seems the way is going to be painful. So I don't know how long I meditated on this but I believe God has shown me the answer which is what I want to share with you. I think it's extremely practical. I would say that, in a sense, you've got two options. You can suffer God's way or you can suffer your own way, but suffer you will. Anybody who tells you there's no suffering in the Christian life is deceiving you and he's going flat contrary to scripture.

Let me give you a little example which I think will make it easier than a lot of elaborate explanation. Here we have this beautiful young Christian lady, she's about 20 years old, she's had a wonderful encounter with the Lord, been filled with the Holy Spirit, really desires to serve God, is a member of a good church and has a loving, gracious, mature pastor. Then a young man comes into her life. Of course, this never happens in real life, this is just imaginary! And he's not a committed Christian but he gets very, very interested in her and he says, "Well, I'll go to church with you, I'll do whatever you want, I want to marry you. Anything I have to do to marry you, I'll do."

So he comes to church and sings the hymns and listens to the sermons. The young lady goes to her pastor and says, "This is the man that's come into my life, he wants to marry me. What shall I do?" And the pastor says, "Don't marry him. He's never made his own personal commitment to the Lord, he's only coming to church because he wants you and when he's got you and you're married to him, you've no guarantee that he'll go on coming to church."

Now, bear in mind I've raised nine daughters so I have some experience in this area. Now that young lady has got two options. The right thing is to apply the cross to her fleshly nature. Her fleshly nature longs for this man. She has all sorts of beautiful pictures of a home and children and happiness. She continually pictures the man the way

she wants him to be. Have you noticed how easy it is for us to do that with people? We don't see them as they really are, we see them as the way we'd like them to be. And then, in due course, we're horribly disillusioned when we discover how they really are. That's not happened to any of you but there are people to whom it has happened.

So solution number one is I'll obey the word of God through the mouth of my pastor. I realize he has my best interests at heart and so I'm going to put the nails in my own fleshly nature. I'm going to take my place on the cross and say I'm crucified with Christ. Those desires in me that are not godly, that are out of the will of God, I'm putting them to death. I'm taking my place on the cross. I'm driving those nails through my own whims and desires and passions. Now that's painful. But the pain doesn't last long, the pain leads to something that's beautiful and wonderful, a life that's truly lived for God.

The other solution is the bad solution. She doesn't listen to her pastor and she goes ahead and marries this man. Fifteen years later he leaves her with three children for another woman. And she's had a miserable life for 15 years. Don't tell me that isn't painful. That's a lot more painful than taking God's solution. At the end of 15 years she got the message it doesn't pay to marry the wrong man. But it's been a very long painful way to get the message.

Whichever way she comes into the purpose of God and the understanding of God's will, it's going to cause pain. Do you understand? But you can have pain God's way by applying the cross in your own life or you can have pain the world's way and that's very, very unpleasant. It's a long, long way back when you've stepped out of the will of God and followed your own desires and yielded to your own fleshly nature.

I don't doubt that there's at least one person here tonight to whom God is speaking right now. I have a certain sense when I'm saying something that's directed to somebody. I have no idea who it is and it's not my intention to find out. I just want to say to you if I'm describing your situation or something like it, my advice is choose God's way. It's painful, you have to deny yourself, you have to take up your cross. Do you know what your cross is? Somebody's defined the cross these two ways. First of all, it's the place where your will and God's will cross. Every one of us that follows Jesus has to come to a place sometime when we say, "Not my will but thine be done." Jesus is not the only person who had to say that.

The other description of the cross is it's the place where you die. It's the place of your execution. God won't impose the cross on you. Jesus said, "If anyone will come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me." And you can't follow Jesus until you've denied yourself and taken up your cross. The cross is the instrument of execution but it's the way of deliverance. It's the way out. And when you have really accepted the cross in your life you can say, "I've ceased from sin. Now I'm living my life for the will of God." So you can say like Paul, "I thank my God there is a way out through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Let me close this particular session by trying to describe the difference between obeying God under the law and obeying God under grace. In each case the ultimate purpose is to obey God but it's done different ways. To illustrate this I want to take a simple commandment which is given both in the Old Testament under the law of Moses and in the New Testament in one of the epistles. Exactly the same words and they apply whether we're under the law or whether we're under grace. I want to try to sketch out for you briefly the difference as to how they apply. The commandment is "Be holy for I am holy." It's a very simple command.

Now, one place where it's given is in Leviticus 11:45. God speaks here through Moses to Israel and he says:

> "For I am the Lord who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God, thus you shall be holy, for I am holy."

Now in the context it means you've got to keep a tremendously complicated set of rules which are the rules given in the preceding verses of this chapter. This way of holiness is "I have to do this. I have to do that. I have to do the other. I must not do this. I must not do that." That's the response of legalism through the requirement of holiness.

Listen to some of the commandments. I don't think many people have realized all that was involved in being under the law of Moses. If you go to verse 26 of that chapter, the same 11th chapter of Leviticus, just read some of the preceding commandments.

> "Concerning all animals which divide the hoof but do not make a split hoof, or which do not chew the cud, they are unclean to you; whoever touches them becomes unclean."

All right. So if you touch one of those animals, like a camel which divides the hoof but does not chew the cud, you

become unclean. You're shut out from the fellowship of God's people till sunset. And you have to go through a lot of cleansing rituals. All right? Going on:

> "And whatever walks on its paws [that includes your little Fido and your sweet pussycat], among all the creatures that walk on all fours, are unclean to you; whoever touches their carcass becomes unclean until evening. And the one who picks up their carcasses shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening; they are unclean to you."

That's not altogether simple, is it? So if you're going to be under the law, remember that any time you touch a dead cat, you've got to be unclean till evening. Then you've got to wash your whole body and change all your clothes.

> "Now these are to be unclean among the swarming things which swarm on the earth: the mole and the mouse, and the great lizard and the gecko, and the crocodile and the lizard, and the sand reptile and the chameleon. These are to be unclean among all the swarming things. [And then goes on the list:] Now, also anything on which one of them may fall when they are dead becomes unclean..."

So if just a dead lizard drops on anything, it becomes unclean and you know, lizards tend to die and drop. At least if you live in Florida they do!

> "...including any wooden article or clothing or a skin or a sack; any article of which use is made, it shall be put in water and be unclean until evening, then it becomes clean. As for any earthenware vessel into which one of them may fall, whatever is in it becomes unclean and you shall break the vessel."

You're no longer to use it ever again. All right.

> "Any of the food which may be eaten on which water comes shall be unclean, and any liquid which may be drunk in every vessel shall become unclean."

And we can go on. You understand? It's very elaborate. It goes down to a lot of tremendously complicated details. At the end of that, the end of this list the Lord says:

> "You shall be holy for I am holy."

What does that mean in that context? What does it mean to be holy? It means to keep every one of those rules without breaking them. That's the holiness of the law. It's perfectly valid if you can do it. As Paul said, the law is perfect but it's pretty hard to keep.

Now turn to 1 Peter 1:16. We could read from verse 14. This is addressed to Christians who've accepted the redemption of Jesus on their behalf.

> "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

Where is it written? Leviticus 11:45. Do you understand? Is Peter telling us we've got to observe all these rules about lizards and cats and dogs? Obviously not. So he must expect something different. What is the alternative? The holiness of the law says, "I've got to keep all these rules. I've got to do this, I've got to do this, I mustn't do that, I mustn't do that." What is the response of faith to this? What's the alternative? I think this is a very important question, I'll try to make it simple and I will not dwell on it. The response of faith is Jesus in me is my holiness. I don't rely on myself, I don't follow a set of rules, I let Jesus be holy in me and through me.

There was a lady who was in a certain congregation who was well known for her very holy life. Somebody said to her once, "Sister So-and-So, what's the secret of your life of victory?" She said, "Every time Satan knocks at the door, I just let Jesus answer." That's the simplest description I can think of the holiness of faith. I don't meet Satan in my own strength, I don't face these challenges in my own strength. I know I'll be defeated. I just turn to Jesus and say, "Jesus in me, you take care of this situation."

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Let me just read just a few verses about this. 1 Corinthians 1:30.

> "But by his doing [that's God's doing] you are in Christ Jesus..."

And it wasn't our doing, it was his doing that put us into Christ Jesus.

> "...who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification [that's holiness], and redemption..."

So if I am faced with a situation in which I need wisdom, what do I do? Come up with my own clever answers? No. I say, "Jesus, you're my wisdom, I release you to be my wisdom." If I'm faced in a situation where I'm tempted and my righteousness is challenged, what do I do? I'm going to try hard? No. I'm going to say, "Jesus, you are my righteousness, take care of this situation." If I'm faced with this challenge of holiness which we are discussing, I say, "Jesus in me is my holiness."

I don't have to strive. I don't have to struggle. I have to let Jesus take control of me and the situation. Likewise redemption.

Then again, a beautiful scripture which many of us are familiar with in Philippians 4:13:

> "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

How much can I do? All things. Now that doesn't mean I can do anything I want. Please don't think that. It means I can do all things that God has told me to do. I can do all things that express obedience to God through Him who strengthens me.

I'd like to give you a more literal translation of that:

> "Through the one who empowers me within."

I think that's a very accurate rendering of the Greek. I can do all things through the one who empowers me within. I'd like you to say that after me. "I can do all things through the one who empowers me within."

And then just one other statement in Hebrews 12:10 dealing specifically with this theme of holiness. Speaking about earthly human fathers, the writer says:

> "For they disciplined us for a short time as seen best to them, but he [God] disciplines us for our good that we may share his holiness."

Notice it's not our own holiness. We become partakers of God's holiness through Jesus the Holy One dwelling in us. The key, as I see it, is not to flex our faith muscles and say, "I can handle this situation." It's to say, "God, I can't handle this situation. I'm weak. I know my own weaknesses. I'm just going to yield to you Jesus, I'm going to let you take over."

I'm not saying that's easy. For me it's by no means easy because of my background as an only child and successful academically all through my life, I'm used to taking care of things myself. It's very hard for me to say I can't handle this, I'm going to let Jesus handle it.

I remember once I traveled with my first wife for the first time I motored to the United States from Canada. We were very frightened of this very large, rapid country. We carefully kept away from the freeways because the minimum speed was 40 miles an hour. We made our way to the destination where we were going with the map perfectly, not a single mistake. So, before we started back Lydia said we'd better pray about this. I said there's no need to pray! God help me! I'll never say that again. We got on the freeway, I missed the exit and drove 27 miles to the next exit knowing I'd have to come back 27 miles which was 54 miles. And when we got off the freeway the engine broke down! I have never said again we don't need to pray. But you see what I'm trying to say? I was relying on my own ability.

So, I'm not saying this is easy and I'm not saying it doesn't take strength but it takes a different kind of strength. The strength is saying I won't trust myself, I will yield to Jesus, I will let him take control. You still have to exercise your will. Believe me, the will plays a major part in Christianity. It's not a spineless let and let everything take its course. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about willing the right thing. Every time you have a need or a problem—and we can't do this immediately, it's something we have to learn stage by stage. We say, "God, I can't handle this problem. I'm not equal to this. I don't have the wisdom, I don't have the strength. But Jesus, you're in me. I can do everything that God tells me to do through the one in me who empowers me from within."

You know what I find, just to share this as a weakness that none of you have? I find when I face the big problems I turn

to God. But the little ones I try to handle on my own. I think I'm getting better but then it turns out that the little problems become big problems! So I hope you've got the message.

(end session one)

Session 2

We have now completed the 10 stages of our Roman pilgrimage and we stand now at the entrance to our destination which is, as I've told you before, Romans 8, a beautiful unfolding of the nature of the Spirit controlled Spirit filled life of the Christian who's met God's conditions.

Just by way of interest, I speculated out loud as to how many therefore's there were in the areas of the passages that we've been reading. One diligent member of our congregation has surprised me with the answer for which I'm very grateful. So if you want to know how many therefore's there are in the New Testament, there are 370. In Paul's epistles, 120, which means Paul accounts for about one third of them. In Romans, 28. So that's just an interesting little statistic.

Now we come to the entrance to this destination. It's extremely important. Romans 8:1.

> "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

The critical phrase there is "no condemnation." As long as there is any kind of condemnation in your life, you cannot live and function in Romans 8. The purpose of God in the previous 7 chapters was to eliminate every possible cause of condemnation in our lives. If we have faithfully followed through, understood it and believed it, we should be able to say now, "there is therefore now no condemnation in my life."

I personally believe that condemnation is the devil's favorite and strongest weapon. I have encountered countless numbers of Christians who are not free from condemnation. I believe the reason is they haven't taken the pilgrimage, they haven't worked through the percolator. A lot of people, as I said, want instant Romans 8 but that doesn't work. You have to deal with every possible cause of condemnation. We can't enumerate them all now but bear in mind that in chapter 3 we dealt with the fact that all our past sins could be forgiven.

Then in chapter 6 we went through the execution of the rebel, the old man.

Then, as I said, what I believe is the hardest of all, in chapter 7 we came out to the place where we're under no condemnation from the law. In Colossians 2 Paul describes what God accomplished for us through the death of Jesus on the cross and he says he spoiled or stripped principalities and powers. That's the principalities and powers of Satan. I think we'd better look there for a moment. I didn't intend to, but keep your finger in Romans 8 if you're there and turn to Colossians 2. Let me say something about Colossians while you're turning there. If you're dealing with people who have been in any kind of a cult, Colossians is the best answer. A person who read and believes Colossians can never become involved in a cult again. Colossians 2:13:

> "You who are dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him [Jesus], having forgiven you all transgressions [that's the past dealt with], having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us."

That's the law dealt with. Jesus nailed the law to the cross and that's where it ends. Beyond the cross the law has no claims on you. Remember, he that is dead is justified, you've paid the last penalty, the law has no more claims on you.

Then it says in verse 15:

> "He disarmed the rulers and authorities..."

That's Satan's evil hosts in the heavenlies that seek to dominate us and destroy us. And then—now here's another therefore, this is where I was headed, verse 16:

> "Therefore, let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink, or in respect of a festival or a new moon, or a sabbath day."

Notice that? Paul doesn't say we're not to observe the sabbath, that's a matter of personal decision. But we're not to let anybody condemn us in respect to that. Understand?

Being free from condemnation demands a certain amount of backbone because there are a lot of religious people whose favorite occupation is to bring you under condemnation. You've got to learn where you stand in Christ and you have to say, "I'm not going to let anybody

condemn me in respect of any other requirements of the law, including the sabbath." Which, as you know, is the fourth of the Ten Commandments. I can see some of you haven't fully completed the journey yet but at least this is where we ought to be.

Now we're going back to Romans 8.

> "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death."

There are two laws at work. One is the law of sin and death which pulls you down. The other is the law of the Spirit of life only operating in Christ Jesus. It does not operate outside of Christ Jesus. That lifts you up. To give you a very, very simple example, take this booklet that I have in my hand. If I let go, the law of gravity operates. What will happen to it? It will fall. We all know that. However, if I take this book with my left hand and put it into my right hand, in my right hand the law of my will overrules the law of gravity and my right hand can lift that book up which otherwise would be falling. That's what it is to be in Christ. You're delivered from the law of sin and death and the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus works the opposite way.

Going on, verse 3:

> "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh..."

And always Paul points out there was nothing wrong with the law. It was our fleshly nature that was the problem.

> "...weak as it was through the flesh, God did; sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh..."

In the flesh of Jesus on the cross God finally condemned and disposed of sin.

There are two scriptures in Hebrews that we need to glance at for a moment. Hebrews 9:26. I'm only going to read the second half of the verse.

> "...but now once at the consummation, He [that's Jesus] has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

What did he do by the sacrifice of himself? He put away sin, he disposed of sin. He put sin right out of the way, he terminated its power and its claims.

Now, side by side with that we need to glance at Hebrews 10:3, talking about the sacrifices of the law, it says:

> "In those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year..."

The sacrifices of the law never put away sin, all they did was remind people of their sins and cover their sins until the next sacrifice was due. So far from disposing of the sin question, the sacrifices of the law constantly and continually brought it up again.

But Jesus, when he offered his sacrifice of himself, put away sin and therefore there now remains no further sacrifice for sin. Nothing more will ever be needed, it has all been done by the death of Jesus on the cross.

Now we come on to the important practical issue which comes out in Romans 8:4. God did this through the sacrifice of Jesus:

> "...in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."

Now notice the law is not to be fulfilled but the requirements of the law. Now that's a word I've commented on already. I'll show you two other places where it's found. We've seen it once in Hebrews 5:18. If you want to turn there for a moment and we'll just look at the second half of the verse, speaking about what Jesus did again:

> "...even so, through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men."

That's the same word, an act of righteousness.

Then, as we've seen, in Romans 8:4 it says "the requirement of the Law." And I think the NIV says "the righteous requirement of the Law" because the word is connected directly with the word for righteous.

Then in Revelation 19:8 we have a picture of the bride ready for the marriage supper. This is a glorious picture. I'd like to take time to dwell on it but I don't have time.

> "And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."

That's the same word again. So it's the righteous acts of the law or the righteous requirements of the law that is to be fulfilled in us. We are not going to keep the law but we are going to fulfill the righteous requirement of the law.

Now, the $64,000 question is what is the righteous requirement of the law? And if you don't know that, you're groping, you're stumbling, you have no real idea what's expected of you or what direction to face. I can answer that question in one short word of four letters and it's a good word. It's a four letter word but it's a good word. How many of you know what it is? Love, that's right. L-O-V-E. Very simply, very practically, very definitely the righteous requirement of the law is love.

Now we'll look at a whole series of scriptures which state this. Turn, first of all, to the words of Jesus in Matthew 22. I always like to turn to Jesus as the first authority. Verses 35 and following. This is a conversation between Jesus and a teacher of the law.

> "And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law? And Jesus said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the prophets."

So Jesus gave a very clear, specific, unequivocal answer. Which is the great commandment? Number one, thou shall love the Lord thy God. What's the second one? Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. What's the key word in both commandments? Love, that's right. And Jesus said, "On these two commandments all the law and the prophets hand [or depend]."

Imagine for a moment I wanted to hang my jacket up and there was a peg over there. I take my jacket off and I go and hang it on the peg. Very simply the peg has to be there before I can hang my jacket on it, isn't that right? So these two commandments were there before the law and the prophets were hung on them. Do you see what I'm saying? They are the basis of all that's in the law and the prophets. The whole impact and direction and purpose of the law and the prophets is summed up in love for God and love for your neighbor. That is the righteous requirement of the law.

Oh, how good to make it simple, isn't it? I always appreciated Corrie Ten Boom, whom I had the privilege of knowing just a little. And my favorite saying from her is "Kiss, K-I-S-S, keep it simple, stupid." That's my sincere aim. When I get complicated, I get frightened. When other people get complicated, I think where's the Holy Spirit gone?

Let's go on looking at these scriptures. Romans 13:8–10.

> "Owe nothing to anyone..."

And incidentally, that applies too. Don't be in debt. But I'm not going to preach on that, aren't you glad!

> "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore [notice the therefore] is the fulfillment of the law.

It's very, very clear. God doesn't leave us any reason to doubt.

Then in Galatians 5:14. You'll find there's a close correspondence between Romans and Galatians.

> "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word in the statement, You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

How much of the law? The whole law, that's right.

And then one of my favorite scriptures, 1 Timothy 1:5–7. I particularly like the New American Standard translation.

> "But the goal of our instruction..."

The goal of our instruction, the one thing we're aiming at when we preach and teach is what? Love, that's right.

> "...from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."

There are three requirements for love. A pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith. But the aim is love. Verses 6 and 7:

> "For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions."

In other words, any kind of talk about the law that doesn't direct people to love is fruitless discussion. How much fruitless discussion have we had in our churches? I can't get past this scripture without a little story. I don't have any funny stories of my own, I borrow them from other preachers. I borrow this from another brother in the Lord but I won't give his name away, he might be embarrassed. But the story is about a mother and her son who are arguing. The mother wanted the son to go to church and the son didn't want to go to church. So the son said, "I don't want to go to church. I don't like those people and they don't like me. Why should I go to church? Give me two reasons." And the mother replied, "First of all, you're 40 years old. And second, you're the pastor of the church!" What volumes that story tells, doesn't it? He's the pastor of the church but he doesn't like those people and they don't like him. Are there any churches in America like that? What a lot of wasted time on religious activity that didn't produce the one thing that really mattered.

I take this very seriously. From time to time I check on myself and I say, "Brother Prince, what are you producing by what you teach? Because if you're not producing love, you're wasting your words, your time and your strength, and the time of all the people." Brothers and sisters, how much wasted time there is in church today. And the results show we are not loving one another. Jesus said to his disciples, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another."

I was on a program just recently where somebody was complaining that the world was judging the church. I want to tell you that Jesus has given the world the right to judge the church. By his own words he said, "If the world doesn't see you loving one another, they've got every right to say you're not my disciples."

Now we know what the requirement of the law is. The righteous requirement. Do we know? What is it? Tell me. Love, that's right. Now you know, now I know. Now we are answerable for what we know.

I'm going to talk briefly about the nature of this love and of course, you could preach for a week on this subject but I'm going to deal with it in brief outline. First of all, this love is supernatural. It can come only from God. There is no way you can work it up, religion won't give it to you. It comes only through the new birth. 1 Peter 1:22–23.

> "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God."

Notice what Peter is saying? Your ability to love one another only comes from the fact that you've been born again. If you hadn't been born again of the seed of God's word, this kind of love would be impossible. What's brought into being by this seed is fulfilled by the Spirit. We go back to Romans 5, a scripture we've looked at already, Romans 5:5.

> "Because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

First of all, it's brought forth out of the seed of the word of God as a nature within you. And then the whole of the fullness of God's love is poured out into your heart through the Holy Spirit. It is totally supernatural. No human effort can ever produce anything that's even a counterfeit of the love of God.

Now, the next thing we need to say is love is inseparable from obedience. Love is not sloppy sentimentality and sweet words, it's manifested in obeying Jesus in everything. Let's look in John 14:21.

> "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me."

Who is the person who really loves the Lord? The one who prays the loudest and the longest? Not necessarily. The one who has his commandments and keeps them. That's the proof of love.

Furthermore, love is the motive for our obedience. John 14:15 Jesus said,

> "If you love me you will keep my commandments."

So if we don't keep his commandments, the problem is we don't love him. We can say we love him, we can talk a lot about it but if we're disobedient, we don't love him. Love is the motive for obedience.

And in verse 23 of John 14 he comes back to them with this same truth.

> "Jesus answered and said to him, If anyone loves me, he will keep my word."

Obedience is the test of our love and it's the motive of our love. We are not motivated by fear. Paul says in Romans 8:17:

> "You have not received the spirit of slavery again to fear..."

You haven't come back under the law where you're threatened with penalties every time you do something. We are motivated by a totally different motivation. It's love.

Now you who are parents, you can see the wisdom of this. If you have small children in your home, you can make them obedient by threatening them and punishing them and shouting at them and doing whatever you will. You'll get obedience but when they become teenagers, you'll have rebels. Is that right? Some of you did it and some of you are the rebels. But if you really cause those children to love you, even when they're 40 years old they'll still want to do what you want. Love is a much more powerful motive than fear. And God is wise enough not to base his relationship to us on fear, but on love.

Then let me say something which I think will relieve you. The moment you're born again and even baptized in the Spirit, you are not perfect in love. You've only just started. Love is progressive. Paul says in Philippians 1:9:

> "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment so that you may prove things that are excellent."

So we have love but it needs to abound more and more. We need to increase in love. Our love needs to expand. And the more we have of love, the more sensitive we'll be about the things that please God. Again, parents know that. The child that really loves you is sensitive to your smallest requirements. You don't even have to say, is that right? That's the relationship that we should have with God. An ever increasing love which expresses itself in ever increasing sensitivity to what pleases our Father.

Then another piece of good news, even if we fail—and some of us perhaps have failed. It's possible none of us have been perfectly loving. It's certainly true of me. But listen, here's the good news. Even when we fail, our faith is still reckoned to us as righteousness. So we don't have to be perfect the first five minutes or the first five years. As long as we are in the faith God will deal with our imperfections just as he dealt with Abraham. But even when Abraham was doing the wrong thing, his faith was still counted to him as righteousness. If anything is good news, that is. That's been held back from the people who believe most in justification by faith. They haven't seen this truth. That even when we're doing wrong, as long as we're in the faith, our faith is still reckoned to us for righteousness. And God says, "I'll take care of the consequences. I'll straighten them out. I've got my way to do it." But meanwhile, their faith is reckoned to them as righteousness.

Then, closing, 1 John 2:5, how is love made perfect, how do we come to perfect love?

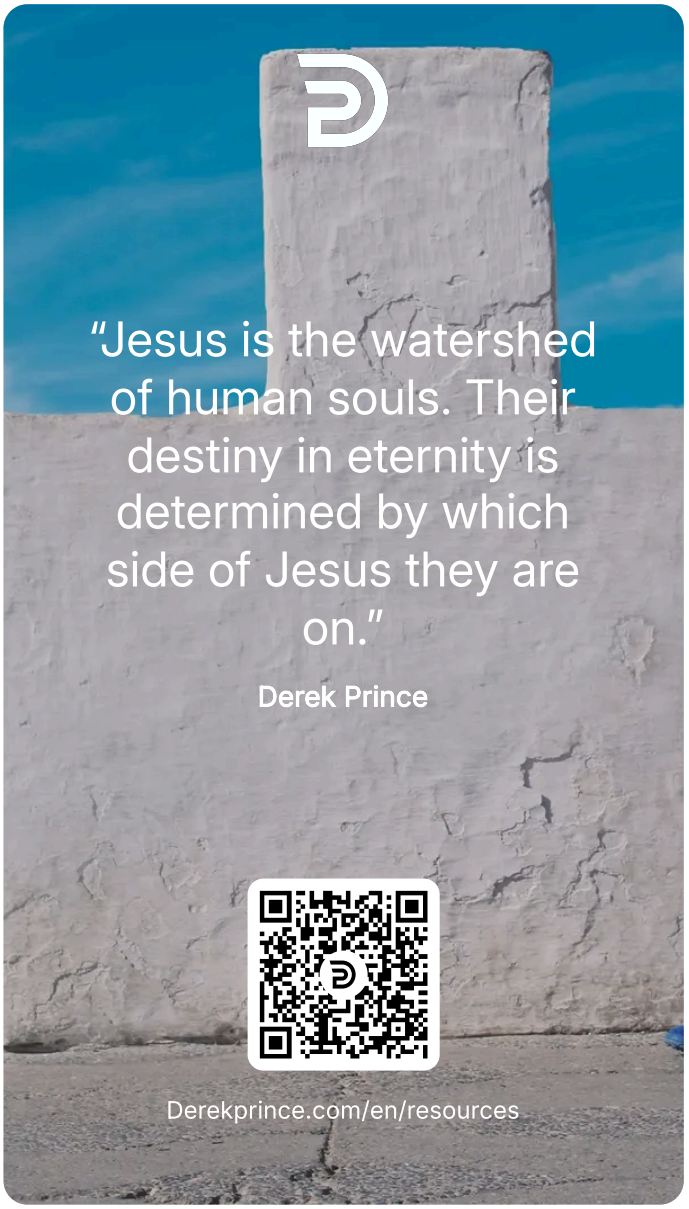
> "Whoever keeps His word [God's word], in him the love of God has been truly perfected."

All right. How do we perfect the love of God? By keeping his word. Don't try to feel loving, that's not the way to get love. Suppose I said to my wife, "I'm really trying to love you." Do you think that would please her? I'd have a problem. We don't have to try to love. Listen, don't focus on your feelings, focus on obedience. Do everything God says.

A good many years ago now in the midst of a whole forest of religiosity I came up against this tree. The thing that really matters is love. I said to myself I'm not a very loving person. I was an only child, I grew up without brothers or sisters, I always fended for myself and I did a good job. It was difficult for me to be really concerned about other

people. I said, “What am I going to do?” I got this scripture, 1 John 2:5. Don’t try to be loving, obey his word. That’s my recommendation to you.

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