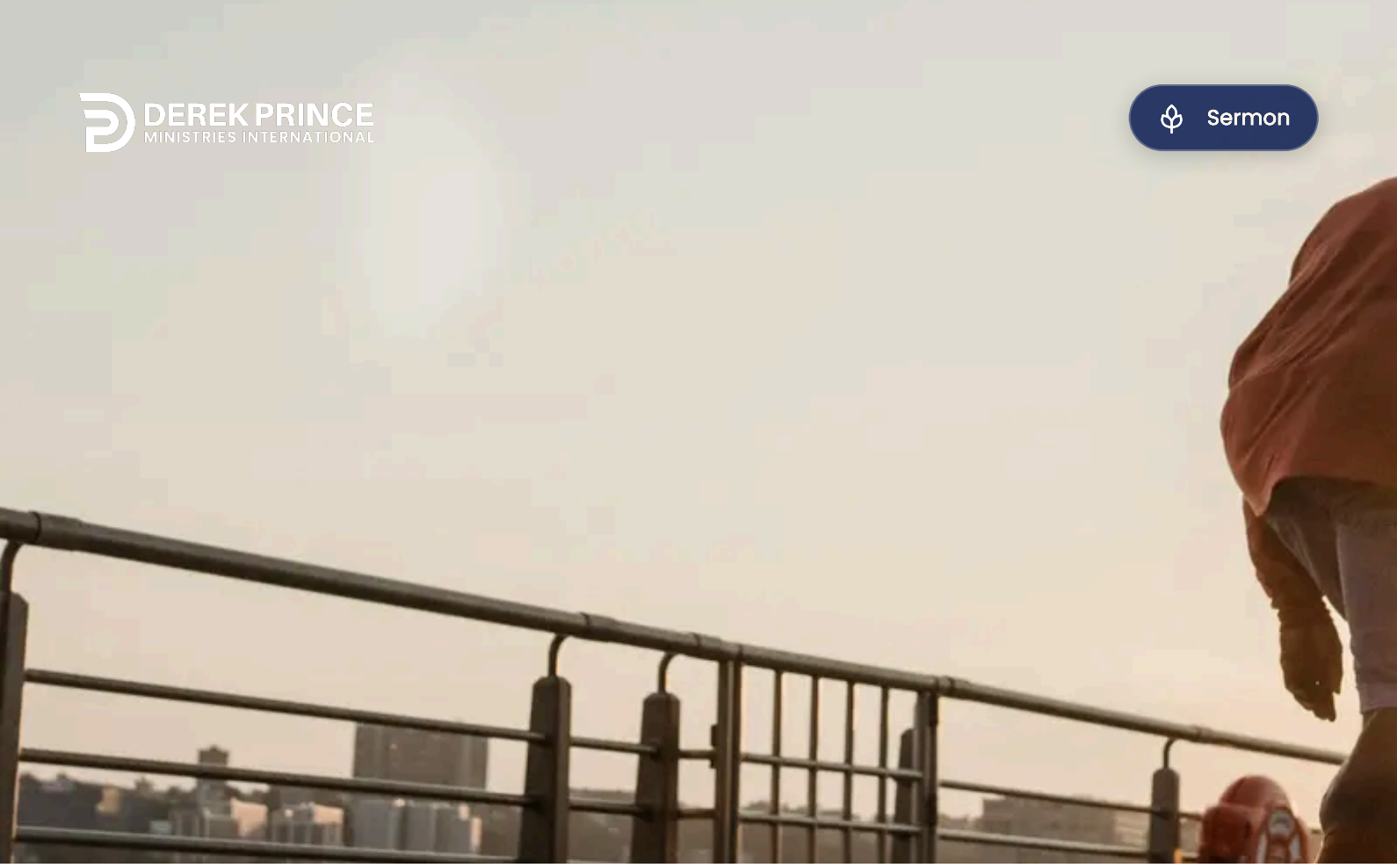

The Roman Pilgrimage (Part 17)



Part 17/20

The Roman Pilgrimage
By Derek Prince

This is the first of four sessions in which we'll be working through the last five chapters of Romans, that's chapters 12–16. The title that I selected for this particular set of messages is "Walking Out Your Faith Under Pressure." I suppose most of us who are trying to walk out the Christian faith would agree that today we are under pressure. All sorts of pressures: social pressures, spiritual pressures, mental pressures, emotional pressures. I said when I wrote a little introduction to this particular series in a phrase that's popular in America, "This is where the rubber meets the road." This is where our faith is tested. Will it stand the test? You can say amen to all the glorious theology of the first 11 chapter of Romans but it's in what we are teaching now that our faith will be proved or disproved. This is the test.

You see, this is true of all of the Bible. It never presents us with abstract, intellectual truth. It always presents truth and then shows how it related to the way we live. You cannot find just abstract, intellectual theology anywhere in the Bible. God isn't interested in it. He's interested in life and the way we live. And all the truths of the Bible are designed to make us live a godly and victorious and fruitful life. If we have a lot of knowledge, maybe many degrees, but we don't have that result, God's purposes are being frustrated in our lives.

If we turn now to the 12th chapter, you'll find in the first verse a word that I think particularly appeals to me, with my background in logic. Paul says:

> "I urge you therefore, brethren..."

The word that always leaps out of the page to me is the word "therefore." I've often said, and probably some of you have heard me say, "When you find a therefore in the Bible, you need to find out what it's there for." Because, it always indicates a logical connection with what has gone before. I believe this therefore here in the first verse of Romans 12 is because of all the preceding 11 chapters of Romans. In those 11 chapters, Paul has wonderfully unfolded the divine plan for man to be reckoned righteous with God, to come back into a relationship with God, to receive all the full provision of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. So, all that has been unfolded as only the Holy Spirit through Paul could do.

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But, as I've said already, God doesn't stop there. Now, the issue is how can we live it out? What does this mean in our lives day by day? That's why the therefore is there, because Paul is saying in the light of all that God has done and provided for us, how should we respond, what should be our response? If anything delights me in the Bible, it's this, because the response is so simple, practical and down to earth. I am personally scared of super-spirituality. I tell people the Holy Spirit is the most practical person on earth at this moment. If a thing isn't practical, it isn't spiritual in the true sense of spiritual.

And so as we read this first verse, you will see that God's requirements, the response He asks from us, is very down to earth. I think that's the best way to describe it.

> "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual [or you may say logical] service of worship."

So what is God asking of us? Not something theological, not something that sounds very mystical or intellectually stimulating, but He says, "I want your body. I want that earthen vessel in which you live, that's what I'm asking for. And I'm not going to be satisfied with anything less." He said, "I want you to present your body like a sacrifice on my altar of service." But he says, "A living sacrifice." Why does he chose the word living? Because he has in mind the sacrifices of the Old Covenant where the creature to be sacrificed was first killed and then its body was placed on the altar. Paul is saying, "I want you to place your body just as really on the altar of God, but don't kill it." It's not a dead sacrifice, it's a living sacrifice.

And the language used here is "which is your spiritual service of worship." That word that's used there is the word that's always used of the service of the priest in the temple of the tabernacle. So, we become priests through our faith in Jesus and one of the primary priestly duties that we have is to present our bodies on God's altar as a living sacrifice. This is what God is asking from us. It's not complicated, it's really if anything, too simple.

And you see, once in the Old Covenant anybody placed an animal on the altar of God, he no longer owned that animal. From then on that animal belonged to God. Once it touched the altar and the priest took his hands off, that animal was totally set apart to God. And so, when you place your body on God's altar, from that time onwards you don't own your body, it belongs to God. You don't have to decide what to eat or what to wear, or where to travel, those are God's decisions. Your body is now His property. He can do what He will with it, whether it's to keep it alive or to sentence it to death, that's His decision. That's the response that God asks. And people who try to be Christians without a response like that just end up with endless problems. And then they have endless counseling sessions with endless counselors.

I have discovered that if will you cater to people's problems in the ministry, you'll never end. And people who keep their minds fastened on their problems will never come to the end of their problems. Somehow or other you've got to get out of yourself, and this is God's way to be out of yourself and your problems; it's to place your body on His altar. Surrender yourself without reservation to God. Then you become His responsibility.

In the past, I spent many hours counseling Christians with problems. I came to the conclusion that fifty percent of those problems wouldn't exist if they had truly repented. Repentance is the key. Turning away from self, self pleasing, self will, making my own decisions, doing my own thing. And all that is typified in this beautiful picture of placing your body on the altar. You say, "Well, is God only interested in my body? Isn't He interested in my spirit and soul?" I would say God is clever. See, because when He gets your body He gets the contents. He gets the whole thing. And He's not going to settle for less. You can limp along as a half committed Christian and have a lot of people like you right beside you in the church. But, you'll never know the real satisfaction of the Christian life until you've made that commitment.

Now, as a result of the commitment, Paul then unfolds the consequences that we can look for in our lives. But bear in mind these consequences are not promised to people who haven't made the commitment. So I'm going to read the first verse again and then I'm going to go on. There are a number of successive stages that flow out of this initial commitment.

> "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God..."

In other words, in the light of all that God has done, out of His mercy and grace, we didn't deserve it, we couldn't earn it, we had no claim upon it, he just did it. How do we respond? He says:

> "...to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual [or logical priestly] service of worship."

And then he goes on with a negative:

> "Do not be conformed to this world..."

That's this translation, but the actual word is age. There are two Greek words. World is cosmos, age is ion which gives us the English word "eon." They're not the same. Age is a time concept. We're living in a certain age, a period of time. But Paul says don't be conformed to this time period. Don't live like the people in this time period live. Because in Galatians 1:4 he tells us that Christ has delivered us from this present evil age. Do you know why it's an evil age? Shall I tell you? You'll find the answer in 2 Corinthians 4:5, because it has an evil god. Who is the god of this age? Satan, that's right. And God is not redeeming this age. God is redeeming us out of this age. And Christians who try to live as if they still belong in this age are always in a state of confusion. This has been covered up by translations, it's scarcely ever mentioned as far as I know, in the great body of the American church today. We have to be delivered from this present evil age. God is not going to redeem the age, He's going to close the age. And when this age ends, Satan will no longer be a god. That's why he fights with all this might to continue this age as long as he can. But we are not to be conformed to this age. We're not to live like people who belong in time. We don't. We belong to eternity. The writer of Hebrews says we tasted the powers of the next age through the Holy Spirit and the word of God. One reason why God has allowed us to taste the powers of the next age is to spoil our appetite for this age. See? When you've really tasted what God has to offer through the Holy Spirit, the things of this age would seem so (unintelligible), so unpalatable. Why worry with them, why spend your time on them? Why get so excited about them? They're all passing away. They're all impermanent. They're all tainted, they're all corrupted. There is nothing pure and absolutely clean in the things of this age. It's a corrupt age with a corrupt God.

The mercy of God is that we've been delivered from this age. I think I need to show you that. Galatians 1:4. Otherwise, you'll say where did he get that from? Well, the answer is I got it from Paul. Galatians 1:4. Honestly, I have to say there maybe other people teaching this, I haven't met them. I don't say that to be boastful but I just want to say that there's a total gap in the teaching of the church of this nation concerning this issue. Galatians 1:4, you have to read the previous verse, verse 3:

> "Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins that he might deliver us out of the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father."

Now, it's the same word that's used in Romans 12:2, but this particular translation, and other translations, tend to translate it world. World is another concept. World is a kind of social system. But age is a time concept. We have to be delivered from both. If you go through Galatians, it starts with deliverance from this present evil age and ends with deliverance from this present world. The last statement in it is "God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ by which the world is crucified to me and I to the world." The world and the age are not the same thing. But I don't really believe you can be delivered from this world if you haven't been delivered from this age.

So, coming back to Romans 12:

> "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."

Notice that God does not change us from outside in, He changes us from inside out. He changes the way we think. And then, that changes the way we live. Religion basically, does the opposite. Religion starts with the outside: what you wear, what you eat, what you drink, the places you go to; and tries to make us good by changing the external. But it doesn't work. God's method works. He changes us from inside. He changes the way we think. Once we're changed in the way we think, we'll be changed in the way we live. You cannot think wrong and live right. And you cannot think right and live wrong. The way you think determines the way you live. The essential feature of the people of this age is that they are self centered, they always face every issue and decision with "What will this do for me?" "What will I get out of this?" When your mind is renewed, you are God centered. You don't approach situations and decisions like that. You say, "What will God get out of this? What is the will of God, what is God's plan? Will this glorify God?" That's the change of mind that comes. But that won't come until you've presented your body. God is not making any other bargain. You say, "I want to think different and I want to be different." God says, "Where's your body? Is it on my altar? Do I own it? Have I absolute right to dispose of your body

any way I please? Otherwise, don't talk to me about renewing your mind, because that's my basic requirement." You present your body and God will renew your mind. You hold onto your body and God will do nothing for your mind.

How many of you know that God means what He says? Praise God.

All right, we're going on in Romans 12:2:

> "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is..."

That you may find out God's will in experience. See, there are millions of Christians who have been born again but never discovered God's will for their lives. They're just floundering. They're trying to lead a good life but they have no real motivation. They have no vision. The Bible says without vision people cast off restraint. That's why many Christians are undisciplined; they've cast off restraint because they don't have a vision.

You take the example of an athlete, which Paul uses many times. Why can a man jump higher or run faster than anybody else? Because he had a vision. And because of that vision he exercises, he trains himself, he submits himself to discipline. Discipline that's much more intense than most Christians ever contemplate. The thing that motivates him is a vision. No vision, no discipline. Your life is disorder, it's up one day and down the next. You struggle a little here, you make a little progress there, but you are not doing what Paul said he was doing: pressing toward the mark for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. You don't have a mark so how can you press toward it? The mark only comes when your mind is renewed and God gives you a vision of what He wants to make you personally, individually.

And then Paul says three wonderful words about the will of God:

> "...that which is good, acceptable and perfect."

The more you know it, the better it gets. When you start with God's will, it's good. He wants the best for you. Are you sure of that? Well, He does. Then it's acceptable. The better you know it, the more you enjoy it. And finally, it's perfect. It covers every area of your personality, it covers every detail of your life. It covers where you sit, it covers the food you eat, it covers the clothes you wear, it covers the people you meet. There's not a detail in your life that isn't covered by the will of God when you've discovered His perfect will.

Do you know what I've discovered in my own life? The things that I often thought were important and I prayed about them, I agonized about them, turned out to be relatively unimportant. And other things that I hardly had time to think about were decisions that determined the course of my life. I immigrated to the United States by accident. Not many people have known that. I came here on a visit in l963. They said it's too long for a visit. I said, "What can you do?" They said, "You better immigrate." I had no intention of immigrating to the United States. I said to myself, "If there's one nation that's got enough preachers, it's the United States." And that was one of the most significant developments in my whole life. Here am I, I've lived here, goodness, nearly thirty years. I've become a citizen. Never contemplated that. Didn't have time to pray about the decision. There I was at the border, North Dakota —of all places to come into the United States!

I want to bless God for the immigration authorities. Every time I had to deal with one, it was a born again Christian. Don't tell me it doesn't make a difference, because it does. They treated us with kindness, with courtesy, with consideration. It's easy to criticize the officials of a nation, but I want to tell you you need to try some other nations before you criticize your officials. You go too—well, I don't want to tell you where! Why should I make trouble for myself? I might want to go there later.

All right, we're going to go on, pressing on. Then Paul says in verse 3, the next stage:

> "For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment [another translation says to think soberly], as God has allotted to each a measure of faith."

That's the next development. You discover that God has allotted to you a specific measure of faith. God deals with each of us individually. We don't all have the same faith, we don't all have the same kind of faith. Not all preachers or ministers have the same faith. Some preachers have great faith for healing, some don't. But God deals to each person, each servant of His, a specific measure of faith.

And then he warns us that faith and pride are incompatible. Did you know that? That's a truth that runs through the

Bible. Faith and pride are incompatible. The two persons whom Jesus praised most for their faith in His earthly ministry were two people who thought themselves totally unworthy. The Roman Centurion said to Jesus, "I'm not worthy that you should come under my roof." And the Syrophoenician woman when Jesus talked to her about being a little dog said, "True, Lord. I am a little dog, but all I want is a crumb." What did Jesus say to her? "O woman, great is thy faith. Have it the way you want, help yourself." The two humblest people were the two people with the most faith. Pride and faith are incompatible. There's a kind of substitute faith which is very arrogant and boastful, but it's not the faith of the New Testament.

So, when you start and you walk into the bank the first day for a job, don't ask to be president the first day. If they put you to clean out the trash, all right, that's where you belong. Ladders are most safely climbed from the bottom, not from halfway up.

So, God has allotted to each one a specific measure of faith, but it only operates out of an attitude of humility. Now, the next great truth which is so important is the measure of faith that God has allotted to us is related to the place in the body that He has for us to occupy. You see, one of the great lessons of this chapter is that you cannot really become an effective Christian until you've found your place in the body of Christ. You're not just a little finger floating through the air, you're a finger that's got to be attached to hand that's attached to an arm that's attached to a body. There is no room for the person who says, "I'll go it alone, I don't need other people." The longer I live the Christian life the more I know how much I need the body. And sometimes when I begin to get a little maybe self sufficient, God allows things to happen that show me I need my fellow Christians. I need to be in the body, I need to be functioning as part of the body.

Some of you are frustrated. You wonder why it doesn't go right with you, you've not found your place in the body. You've got faith but you don't know what to do with it. Let's just read there what Paul says about the body in verses 4–5:

> "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

So, each one of us is designed to be part of a body. And we can only function effectively when we've found our place in the body and are fulfilling our functions. And you will find that the faith God has allotted to you is the faith that will enable you to fulfill your function in the body.

Let me take a very simple example. If you're going to be a hand, let's say that, you have to have hand faith. Do you understand? But, if you're going to be a foot and God has given you foot faith and you try to be a hand, you'll be a disaster, understand? My hand is very effective when it's working as a hand. But if I try to walk on my hands, that's another story.

Again, the cause of much frustration in the body of Christ is that people are trying to be the wrong part. They're trying to fulfill a function for which God hasn't given them the faith. We all experience that our faith is tested, but basically if you're always struggling for faith, it's almost a certain sign that you're not in your right place in the body. Because, my hand really doesn't have to make a lot of effort to be a hand. It's a hand without doing a lot of thinking. But if I try to make my hand some other part of the body, then there's a lot of effort and strain. There shouldn't be a lot of strain in the Christian life. From time to time we'll be under pressure, we'll be tested, our strength may be tested. But basically, the Christian life should flow as naturally as my hand doing its job or my eye doing its job.

That does not mean that your faith will not grow. God intends our faith to grow, but it will grow in the place where you should be functioning. I can see some of your brows crinkle. It may not show on the outside but it shows on the inside. You really never heard this.

See, one of the curses of American life is individualism. I mean, individuals are real persons and individuality is important, but to try to function on your own independently of other people is a road to disaster. It's a road to frustration. I read a statistic somewhere that the average number of people now sharing a household in this nation are 1.7 people. On the average, two people can't live together any longer. That is not to be a picture of the body of Christ. That's one of the places where we cannot be conformed to the thinking of this age. We have to learn to be part of a body, we've got to learn to function with other people.

God has His way of teaching us. You may or may not know, but I was an only child, I never had any brothers or sisters. I got my way through college and university by scholarships. I was very successful academically. I arrived really, at the upper level of academic life in Britain without ever having to

bother much with other people. If I didn't like them, I didn't fight with them, I just let them go do their own thing. I really hadn't been troubled with the curse of insecurity. I had to learn what it is for people to be insecure. Because, my problems were different. If many people didn't like me, it didn't worry me. That's their problem, it's not mine.

Well, then God obviously saw that I was highly qualified and would give me a nice intellectual job. Ha! I got married to a lady who was adoptive mother to eight girls. So, the day I got married I not merely got a wife, I got eight daughters. And six of them were Jewish, one was Arab, and one was English. Later we acquired a ninth, an African. But you see, God, what would I say, dropped me in the deep end all of a sudden. I mean, if you ever thought of a person who was qualified for that position, I would have been at the bottom of your list. But God did it because I had to be reshaped in my thinking. I had to learn to relate to other people. I had to learn that women don't think the way men do. I mean, I assumed everybody thinks like a college professor. I discovered it wasn't so. But I thank God for the lessons. Our family has survived. Today, together with Ruth, we have about a hundred and fifty members in our family. That's a testimony to God's grace. So, if God drops you in the deep end, remember, He'll make sure you can swim. You may swallow a few mouthfuls but you'll come up smiling sooner or later!

We're going on. We have to reach still the final stage of this progress which is in verses 6 and following.

> "And since we have gifts..."

Rejoice Charismatics, the word is charismata, since we have charismata.

> "...that differ according to the grace given to us..."

And the word for grace is charis. Charisma is a derivative of the word for grace. They are grace gifts, gifts you can't earn. So, once you've found your place in the body, then God will equip you with the gifts that you need to function in that place. Do you see that? It's really not sensible to pray for gifts in the abstract. "Lord, give me this gift or give me that gift." You need to seek out your place in the body and then you will know what gifts you need. As a matter of fact, God will begin to give them to you.

I remember when I got thrust into the ministry of praying for people to be delivered from demons. I remember very early on a man brought his sister to my first wife, Lydia, and me for ministry. I sat there and looked at her and I said, "You need to be delivered..." and I named eight demons. I thought to myself, "How did I know that?" I thought, "God must be giving me a word of knowledge." See? But I didn't get it in the abstract, I got it in the situation where I needed it. Because, that was part of my job in the body.

God will not leave you unequipped. And I agree with what Bob Mumford says, "The spiritual gifts are not toys, they're tools." We need them to do the job, they're not a little extra chrome on the car. They're part of the engine. The car doesn't work right without it. But, they're very practical. They're not ornaments.

And, they are practical when you've found your place in the body and you're functioning as that part of the body. God will equip you. Let's look at the list of charismata. And this is not a comprehensive list of charisma. You'll find another list in 1 Corinthians 12 and others. I've counted twenty-two different things that I call charismata. And one of the most exciting, just to whet your appetite—do you know what it is? It's celibacy. Is that one you've been praying for! 1 Corinthians 7, Paul says every man has his charisma. One after this manner, another after another. Mine, he said, is celibacy. I could pray for everybody to be the same, but he said, I won't.

So, don't limit your concept of spiritual gifts to one or two things like miracles or healings or prophecy, because it's a very wide range. And here we have, I think, seven or is it eight. Let's have a look. Verse 6:

> "Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly..."

That's put in by the translators, though I think it's legitimate.

> "...if prophecy, according to the proportion of faith..."

Now, that is very, very important. Because, a lot of people begin to prophesy, they have seen exciting results and their minds get blown up. They get beyond the proportion of faith and they start to say things that are not from God. And they create, in many cases, a lot of confusion. I have to say that I have reservations about people prophesying over me. If it's a professional activity, I've had a lot of prophecy over me and I praise God for it. But I don't go to somebody as you would go to a fortune teller to find out what's going to happen next. Because, you sometimes get fortune telling and not prophecy. They're very, very close together.

There's just a razor edge division between the true prophetic gift and a divining spirit.

Think about the young woman in Philippi. When Paul and Silas arrived there with their companions, she went out everywhere saying, "These men are servants of the most high God which show us the way of salvation." Every word she spoke was true. She knew it supernaturally but she didn't know it by the Holy Spirit. Eventually, Paul got so provoked he cast out the divining spirit.

I've commented sometimes that modern missionaries would have made her a charter member of the church in Philippi. This is not just idle, I mean this is a problem that confronts us very really today. There's a great upsurge of prophesying. Thank God for it, but let's have the real thing and let's be cautious we don't get involved in a counterfeit.

So, according to the proportion of faith. Don't go beyond your faith. Don't strain yourself. I've seen when people strain for results they get into problems, whether it's healing or whatever it is. The most exciting healings that have taken place in my ministry usually happen, as I've been saying, by accident. You know? I didn't plan it. Like, a well known lady in the Charismatic movement came to Ruth and me about two years ago in Hawaii. Her husband said, "I want you to pray for my wife." She was scheduled for triple heart bypass. I didn't feel the least bit like praying for her. I was very tired, it was the end of the meeting and I thought, "Well, here he is. He's a brother minister. If I don't pray for his wife I'll offend him forever." So Ruth and I prayed and forgot about it. We met the lady last October in Britain. She said, "I want to tell you, I was completely healed of a need of a triple bypass." We didn't plan that.

About the same time in Hawaii—and things do happen elsewhere other than Hawaii, I want you to know! But in Hawaii we had lunch with a man who is the author of a very significant book, it's called Target Earth. I don't want to get involved in telling you about it. Anyhow, while we were at lunch he told us his wife had an incurable disease in which her body didn't develop enough protein, or didn't digest protein. She was being studied at Duke University. They told her, "We can't help you but we'd like to get the statistics and the figures so that we can try to help other people." And after the meal as we walked back through the parking lot, Ruth said to this lady, "I feel I want to pray for you." So right in the parking lot without any preparation, without any worship, music or—Ruth prayed for her. I just stood by and said amen. We discovered a few weeks later that the lady had been miraculously healed. A total miracle, there was no possibility of having it healed medically.

So, what I want to say is don't force it. Let it come naturally, let it flow. The Holy Spirit is compared to olive oil. Olive oil flows. It's not jerky, it's very smooth.

Let's look quickly at the other possibilities.

"...if service..."

It could be deaconship. If you're to be a deacon, and a deacon is another word for servant. I've often thought that Baptist churches would be different if they called the Board of Deacons the Board of Servants! Yes or no? And that's what they should be because the word deacon is just the translation of the Greek word for servant. So, if you're to be a servant, specialize in serving. And serving is an art, did you know that? One thing I've learned about people who serve—because Ruth and I have to have people—when you're serving a person you don't do things the way you think you ought to do them, you do things the way the person wants them done—even whether you think it's right or not. That's an art. To adjust your thinking to the thinking of another person and do it the way the other person wants.

We've had a number of young women who have served Ruth and they've all been wonderful. But some of them have been really gifted with the ability to serve. It is a gift, you see? It's not something you can really work out. I must be careful because these tapes get around! I mean, I want to say we appreciate them all.

We're going on.

"...he who teaches, in teaching..."

And I want to say that the Bible says we shouldn't have too many teachers. Did you know that? James chapter 3. Don't be a teacher unless God has called you, stay out of it. I know God called me. Whether I'm a good teacher or bad teacher, one thing I know is God specifically called me to be a teacher of the scriptures. I can't help teaching. You can stand me in the corner on my head and I'll start teaching, it's just in me! I hear people teaching, I say, "Dear God, he has a gift but that's not it."

"...he who exhorts, in exhortation..."

See, a lot of people have got this wonderful gift of exhorting but it isn't teaching. Don't become a teacher when you should be an exhorter. Stick in your profession. There's some wonderful evangelists but when they become teachers, every time they open their mouth they put their foot in it.

"...if you give..."

Do you realize there's a ministry of giving? It's a ministry, it's a gift. Do it with, it says liberality, but simplicity. Don't make a big deal out of the fact you're giving. I thank God for the ones that support our ministry. I have discovered that some people want to manipulate us by their giving. And we have to be very, very careful that we don't go that route.

All right. I'm not going nearly as fast as I should. The next on is showing mercy. That's a gift. I have to say it's a gift I don't have. I mean, for me to visit people in hospital is a chore. I'll do it if it's absolutely necessary but I have friends who are like a duck in water when they get to the hospital. It's their natural gift. And it's a very precious and wonderful gift. And I thank God for the people who have had gifts of mercy that have ministered to me with. But I just know for me it's not a gift. I do it as a duty if it's necessary. Some people are not happy unless they're showing mercy. So, if that's your gift, cultivate it. Whatever your gift is, cultivate it.

Going on, is there another one? Yes. "He who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." Okay, we've come to the end of that. Now we come to the next sort of section of this chapter which I have to work through in the next I don't know how many minutes.

The key word or the key phrase is "let love be without hypocrisy." As we go through these chapters we'll see again and again the fountainhead of all Christian living is love. So Paul starts here with love. He says sincere love. And everything else in this chapter flows out of love. This is not a set of rules that you have to follow, it's guidance for how to direct the love that God has put in your heart. Can you see the difference? Suppose you are trying to water a big garden with a watering can and you had to go back to the faucet every time and carry it to and fro, and you were getting hot and sweaty and tired. You weren't doing much of a job. But somebody said, "Why don't you try a hose? Attach it to the faucet, take the thing in your hand and all you have to carry is the hose." And when you've got the hose, this is where you need to direct the water, that's what Paul is saying here. This is how to direct the water. But if you've got the water in your hose, if you haven't got any love, you've got nothing to direct. Don't make this into a set of rules. This is suggestions for watering your garden when you've got a hose. If you don't have a hose, the first thing you need to do is get one and attach it to the faucet. Don't try to lead the Christian life as a set of wearisome religious rules, that's not what it is.

I love to read 1 Timothy 1:5, especially in this translation, it's just so good.

> "The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart, and a good conscience, and a sincere faith."

The goal of our instruction is love. Is that true of us in the ministry? Is the thing that we're aiming for love? Then Paul goes on to say if you get involved in anything, you're just wasting time. Anything in the church that does not ultimately produce love is a waste of time and misapplied effort.

How much time is wasted in how many churches?

Going back now to the hose, and we've got to go very, very quickly. I'm just going to show you various parts of flower beds, different types of flowers you can water.

> "Abhor what is evil, cling to what is good."

I think I've got a list of twelve here. Hate evil, love good. No neutrality. I'm not going to turn there to the scripture reference, we don't have time. Psalm 45:7, a prophetic scripture about Jesus as Messiah:

> "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity, therefore God thy God has blessed thee."

Why did God bless Jesus? Because He loved righteousness and hated iniquity. You can't be neutral about evil if you love God and love righteousness.

Psalm 97:10 says:

> "You that love the Lord hate evil."

There can be no compromise with evil and those that truly love the Lord.

Going on, the next one in verse 10:

> "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; [and then it says] give preference to one another in honor."

Be devoted to one another and prefer one another in honor. Give more honor to other people than you seek for yourself.

I used to have a lot of trouble with that because I thought to myself, "Well, how can I honor that brother and I don't think he's as good as I am?" Of course, you never have that

problem. And then I saw Paul says those who compare themselves amongst themselves and measure themselves by other people are unwise. I realized there's only one standard and it is Jesus, that's right. When you measure yourself by Him it's easy to prefer other people.

Going on, verse 11, the third one:

> "...not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord..."

I've translated that not lazy but diligent. You search the Bible and see if you can find one good word in it about laziness. Drunkenness is a sin but laziness is a much worse sin. You'll find laziness is much more severely condemned than drunkenness. The strange thing is we'll tolerate lazy people in our churches but we don't want drunkards. You don't have any lazy people in your church, I know, it's different there. You don't have any people who are too lazy to get up and read their Bible or too lazy to pray or too lazy to go out and visit door by door. Do you know what laziness is? According to the Roman Catholics it's a deadly sin.

All right. The second part of that, serving the Lord with passionate dedication. I love the statement of ? Lamatashal?, that's William Booth's daughter, Catherine Booth ?Clippen?. She said this, "Jesus loves us passionately and He wants to be loved passionately." Let me ask you that. Do you love the Lord passionately? I have a wife who loves the Lord passionately, that's one thing I can say about my wife. She happens not to be here this morning so I take the opportunity to say it. She loves the Lord with a passionate devotion. There's very little real passion in the church today. We need to get that hose attached to the faucet.

Going on, verse 13:

> "...contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality."

I've translated that sharing with fellow believers, practicing hospitality. Hospitality is a ministry, did you know that? God has blessed some of you with it. Cultivate it as a ministry and use it for the glory of God. Do you remember what Jesus said, "Don't invite the rich, invite the poor, the blind, the people who can't pay you back." Because He said a wonderful thing, He said you'll be paid back in the resurrection. You see, if you get your reward now you get nothing then. If you forfeit your reward now, then you have it waiting for you in the next age.

Then verse 14 is so important.

> "Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not."

How easy do you find it to bless those who persecute you? Well, I have to say this, I'm writing a book at the moment called Curse or Blessing, and I happened to deal with the subject. And God has dealt with me, I couldn't finish the book, writing it, until I had come to the discipline of regularly forgiving people that had done anything against me and blessing them. I'll tell you, it's lifted me onto a new level. The people that have been mean and unkind and uncharitable, I say, "Lord, I forgive them. And having forgiven them I bless them in your name, Lord." So, if you want to get blessed—and this is not a serious statement—be mean to me and I'll bless you! But, you've still got to answer to God.

I think of the woman with the alabaster jar of very precious ointment when I think about blessing. See, one of our greatest privileges as Christians is to bless. Because, it's godly to bless. I think we have a lot of critics, we have a lot of people that are against us. But think of that woman that anointed Jesus with that very expensive ointment which was worth about a year's salary. And people criticized her. But they still got to smell the scent of the ointment. You can be a bearer of perfume bringing perfume into people's lives. They may criticize you but they still get the ointment. You remember what Jesus said, He said, "Let her alone. Stop criticizing her. She's done a good work. And wherever this gospel is preached, what she has done will be spoken of." So, that's the attitude God has to those who pour out the perfume. And blessing if pouring out perfume. When you bless people there's a little area of perfume around you from that time onwards.

We've got to go on, we've got to move on. Verse 15 which says:

> "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep."

I have to say again my wife is a wonderful example of that. She's a good rejoicer and she's a good weeper. I can't say I excel in those, really. See, the problem there is self-centeredness. You can't really rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep until you've been delivered from being self-centered.

And let me tell you something, if you want a sure recipe for unhappiness, cultivate being self centered. I'll guarantee

you you'll be unhappy.

Verse 16:

> "Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation."

Equally sympathetic with those who rejoice and those who weep. Verse 16, I'm just going to give you the Prince Version, you can read the other. "Living in harmony, humble, not conceited or arrogant. And above all, avoiding pride." Because the book of Proverbs says when pride comes, contention starts. The greatest single cause of quarrels, disunities, is pride.

Verse 17, number nine:

> "Never pay back evil for evil, maintaining a reputation for right dealing."

And I think it's that one that says "give room for God." No, that's a little further on, verse 19.

Verse 18, the tenth:

> "Sincerely seeking peace with all."

But you can't have peace with everybody, some people won't make peace. But as far as it lies in you, make peace and keep peace with everybody. It'll do your digestive system good. Do you know how many times our tummies get tied up in knots because we've become resentful, bitter, unforgiving? Do you know the word peace in Hebrew, shalom, it means completeness. It's a beautiful word. When you give out peace you get peace.

Going on, verse 17:

> "Never returning evil for evil, maintaining a reputation for right dealings. [verse 18] Sincerely seeking peace with all. [verse 19–20] Never repay evil with evil but with good. And if somebody does you wrong, don't revenge yourself."

Paul says a very frightening thing, he says "make room for the wrath of God." That's frightening. If you don't revenge yourself, God is going to revenge you. Which would I rather have? Brother Jay's dealings or God's dealings? I mean if Jay avenges himself, I'm not afraid of Jay. But if God takes over Jay's case, that's frightening. You can't do anything more frightening than step back and say, "I won't revenge myself. God is going to deal with you."

And then we come to this marvelous last verse:

> "Meet and overcome evil with good."

Respond in the opposite spirit. That's the teaching of Loren Cunningham, the founder of YWAM. Respond in the opposite spirit. And here are just a few examples. Meet hatred with love, meet bitterness with sweetness, meet anger with gentleness. Never meet a bad person on their own level. Overcome evil with good. The only thing that's powerful enough to overcome evil is good. But it is powerful enough. So either we are overcome by evil or we overcome evil. But you know for whom heaven is made? For whom? For overcomers, that's right. Amen.

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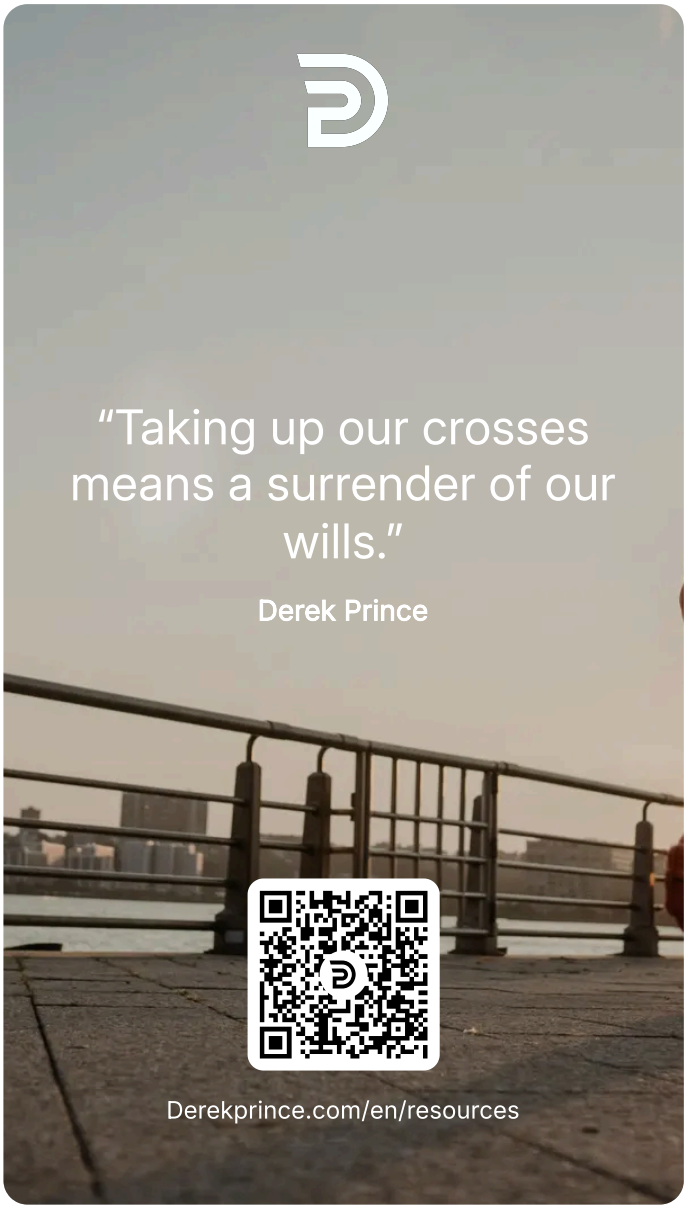
Sermon

Transcript: MV-4315-100-ENG
Last Updated: 16 Sept 2026
Website: Derekprince.com/en/resources



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