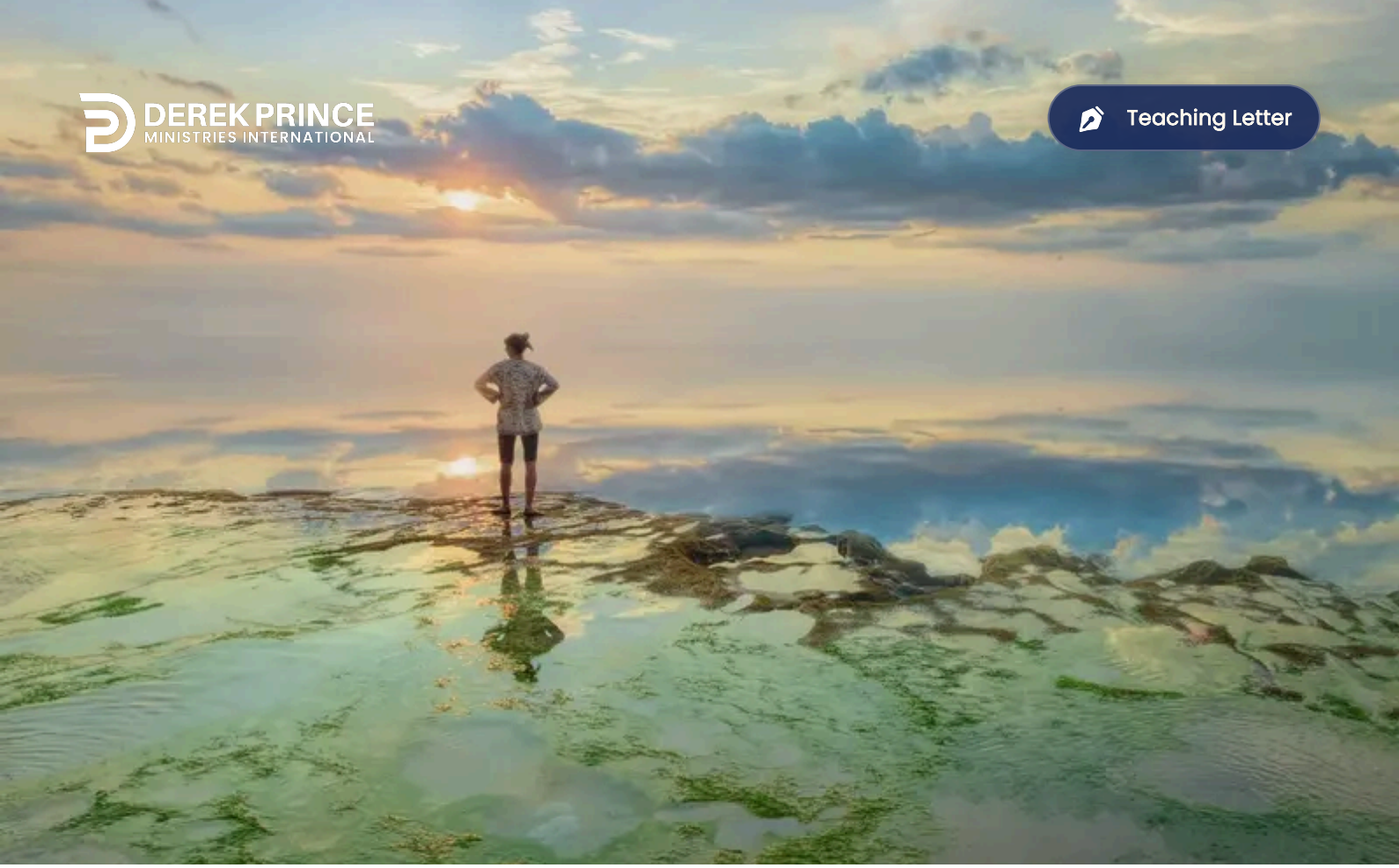


The Delusion of Independence



Teaching Letter
By Derek Prince

"You will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). Surely that is a lofty and commendable ideal—to be like God. How could there be anything wrong with that? Yet in the mouth of Satan—manifesting himself in the form of a serpent—it enticed Adam and Eve into a disaster, the evil consequences of which have affected all their descendants.

What was the undetected snare to which Adam and Eve fell prey? It was motivated—unstated, but implied—by the promise of *independence*. Once you know good and evil, you will be free to make your own decisions. You will no longer be dependent on God.

This self-asserting desire for independence has been transmitted by inheritance to the whole human race that is descended from Adam and Eve. It is the distinctive mark of the "old Adam"—the fallen sinful nature that lurks in each of us.

Different Routes to Independence

Historically, there have been various routes that humanity has followed in seeking independence from God. The first is *knowledge*. In the garden of Eden there were two special trees—the tree of life and the tree of knowledge. It was a critical moment in history, when Adam and Even turned away from the tree of life and chose the tree of knowledge.

Ever since, the attainment of knowledge has been one main goal of humanity. Over the last two or three centuries this has expressed itself in an ever-increasing emphasis on science. (Our English word "science" is directly derived from *scientia*, the Latin word for "knowledge.")

This explosion of science has not, however, solved humanity's most basic problems: injustice, cruelty, war, poverty, disease. In fact, in some ways it has increased them. Science has provided man with weapons of mass destruction that could obliterate the entire human race and turn the whole earth into a desolate waste. Furthermore, some of these weapons are in the hands of cruel and wicked men, who would not be deterred from using them by any considerations of mercy or morality.

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A second route which humanity has followed in seeking to achieve independence of God is at first surprising. It is *religion*. In various different forms men have established religious rules and systems of worship so complete and all-sufficient that there is no further need of God. All they have to do is to keep their rules.

This is true of some forms in which various of the world's major religions are practiced—Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and even some versions of Christianity. In all these religions people can become so satisfied with their rules and procedures that they become independent of God Himself. This explains why earnest, religious people are sometimes the slowest to respond to the gospel's offer of grace that cannot be earned.

Yet another way that man seeks to achieve independence from God is by amassing large amounts of money and material possessions. Jesus told a parable of a rich landowner who became so successful that he had no more room to store his crops. He decided to build even larger storage facilities and then he would say to his soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" (Luke 12:16–20).

Countless people throughout history have been lured by the same desire for independence into making the same tragic error. Countless people are still making it today.

This desire to be independent of God is the distinctive mark of all who belong to the kingdom of Satan—rebellious angels, demons, fallen humanity. It is also the distinctive mark of the "world," concerning which Jesus said of His disciples, "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (John 17:16).

In this sense, the "world" consists of all the people who have never submitted themselves to the authority of God's appointed King—the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of these are moral, religious people, but when they are challenged with God's requirement of unreserved submission to the Lordship of Jesus, the rebellious, independent "old man" rises to the surface and they reject God's offer of salvation through grace alone.

Lonely, Alienated Humanity

This desire to be independent of God separates men from God's other creatures, who exhibit a uniform, unquestioning dependence on their Creator.

None of the heavenly bodies display any desire for independence. "The moon marks off the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down" (Psalm 104:19, niv). The stars answer to their names when God calls them. "He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name" (Psalm 147:4).

No matter how turbulent the elements may at times appear to be, they always obey their Creator—"fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy wind, fulfilling His word" (Psalm 148:8).

The same is true of the animal creation. "The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their food from God" (Psalm 104:21). "This great and wide sea, in which are innumerable teeming things, living things both small and great. ... These all wait for You, that You may give them their food in due season" (Psalm 104:25, 27). Concerning the birds, Jesus tells us, "Your heavenly Father feeds them" (Matthew 6:26).

No wonder that rebellious man at times feels lonely and alienated from the universe around him, in which the other creatures all function together in unquestioning dependence on their Creator.

The Way Back to Dependence

On the cross Jesus provided a double remedy for our fallen condition. First, He paid on our behalf the full penalty for all our sins and thus made it possible for God to forgive our sins without compromising His own justice. Second, Jesus also identified Himself with the independent, self-seeking ego that dominates our fallen nature. In Jesus that rebel was put to death. "Our old man [the rebel] was crucified with Him" (Romans 6:6).

To become disciples of Jesus, we must each avail ourselves of this double remedy. First, we must make sure that—through repentance and faith—all our sins have been forgiven. Second, we must agree to the sentence of death pronounced upon our rebellious, independent ego.

Hence the conditions for discipleship that Jesus laid down: "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:33).

The word translated "forsake" could be rendered "say farewell to." Becoming a disciple of Jesus means saying farewell to everything on which we would normally depend —family, friends, money, career, worldly honor or prestige. Once we have truly renounced all these things, God may return to us any of them that fit in with His purpose for our lives. But we are no longer possessors; we are merely stewards, required to give an account of the use we make of them. Our dependence, however, is solely upon God.

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Sometimes it may take a crisis—or even a seeming disaster—to bring us to the place where we fully acknowledge our dependence on God. I think of Paul's journey to Rome, described in Acts 27. God had a special plan for Paul to go to Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire. As the "apostle of the Gentiles," he had a unique contribution to make to the Church there.

Yet Paul traveled as a prisoner in chains. The ship he traveled on encountered a storm so terrific that for two weeks they never saw the sun by day or the stars by night. Finally they were all shipwrecked on the rugged coast of Malta. There—to cap it all—Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake! (Acts 27:13–28:6). If it was God's will for Paul to go to Rome, why did he experience such extraordinary trials on his journey there?

As I pondered this, I recalled a phrase in Acts 27:20: "all hope ... was finally given up." That was the purpose of Paul's trials: to bring him to the place where all hope was given up. Now Paul had nothing left to hope in but God Himself. That was when he proved in experience that God is all-sufficient. He brings us to the place of total dependence upon Himself, to demonstrate that He is totally dependable.

Having come to this place of total dependence, Paul was ready for his ministry to the Christians in Rome. His journey there had prepared him. Emptied of all self sufficiency, he was a yielded channel through which God's blessings could flow to the Christians of Rome. We tend to forget that although Paul was an apostle, he was also still a disciple—under the Lord's discipline.

Gradually—through the years—I have been learning this lesson of total dependence. I have to confess that I have been a slow learner. God has used different circumstances at different times to enforce the lesson. But I have discovered that the more completely I depend on God, the more He surprises me by the results that follow—results that I could never have achieved as long as I depended on my own efforts.

Jacob's Surrender

Jacob is one character in the Bible who had a literal, physical struggle to give up his independence. As a young man, he was astute, ambitious, self-seeking. He exploited a moment of physical weakness in his brother Esau to buy his birthright—as the elder son— from him for a bowl of soup. Then to obtain the paternal blessing (which normally went together with the birthright) he deceived his father Isaac—who was blind—and passed himself off as Esau.

Yet neither the birthright nor the blessing did Jacob much good. To escape Esau's vengeance he fled to Mesopotamia and became a refugee with his uncle Laban. Here again he demonstrated his astuteness. He married Laban's two daughters and acquired most of Laban's wealth.

Then the Lord told him that it was time to return to the land of his inheritance. On his way back, however, he encountered a mysterious stranger who wrestled with him all night. Eventually the stranger dislocated Jacob's thigh (the strongest muscle in his body) and Jacob clung to him in helpless dependence.

Only after that encounter could Jacob actually return to his inheritance. But for the rest of his life he walked with a limp—the outward mark of independence surrendered.

Who was the stranger that wrestled with Jacob? (Genesis 32:24–30) First, he is called a Man. But next day Jacob said, "I have seen God face to face" (Genesis 32:30). Later the prophet Hosea said of this encounter: "Yes, he [Jacob] struggled with the Angel ..." (Hosea 12:4).

So this same Person was a Man, yet God, and also an Angel—that is, a messenger from God. There is only one Person in the universe who answers to this description: a Man, yet God, and also a messenger from God. It is the Person who was manifested in human history as Jesus of Nazareth—a Man, yet also God and a messenger from God to man.

Jacob's destiny was finally settled by this encounter. After this, he was restored to his inheritance and was also reconciled with his brother Esau.

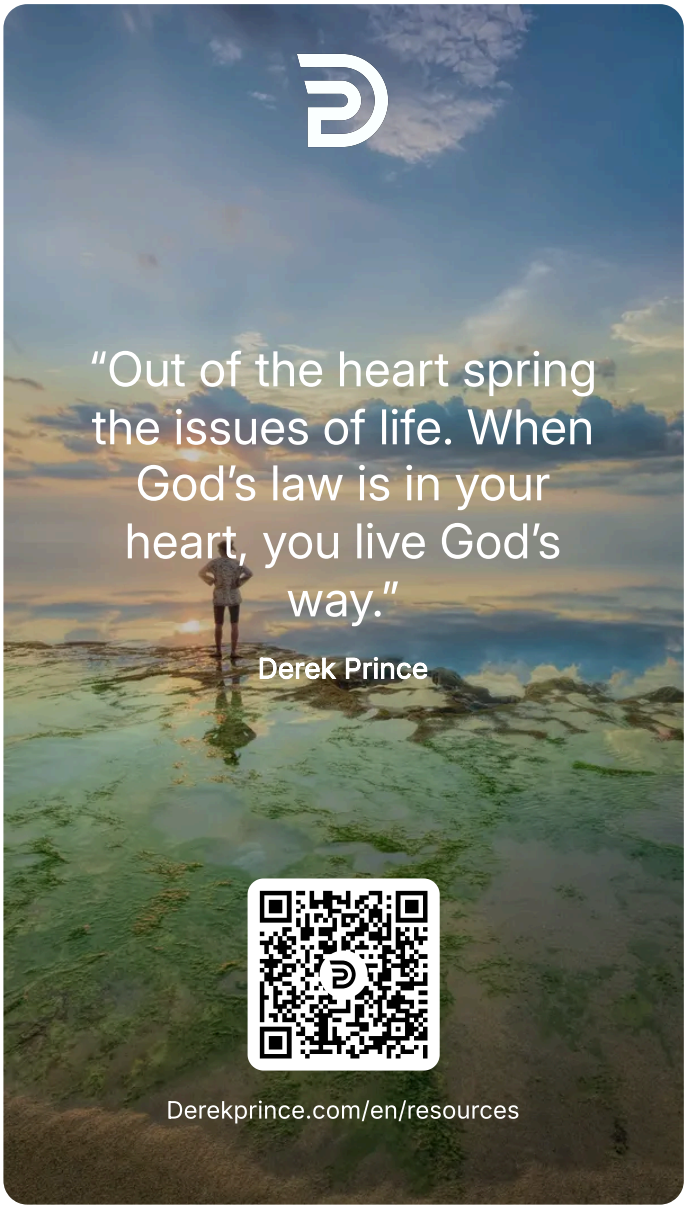
Perhaps you have seen something of yourself in this experience of Jacob. You, too, have been struggling in your own strength to gain a spiritual inheritance which you feel God has for you but somehow still eludes you. You need to do just what Jacob did: surrender yourself without reservation to the Lord Jesus Christ.

But remember: from now on you may walk with a limp!

Lord Jesus, I believe that you truly are my Savior and that you have an inheritance for me. But I recognize that I have been relying on my own strength to enter into it. I repent! I lay down my independence and I submit myself without reservation to your Lordship. From now on I will depend on your all-sufficient grace.

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