

Faith and Works - Part 1

by Derek Prince

Derek Prince emphasizes that righteousness is attained through faith and grace, not by works or adherence to rules.

Duration: 27:50

Scripture: Romans 3:20, Romans 7:4, Romans 11:6, 1 Corinthians 15:1-5, Galatians 5:18

Topics: "Faith And Works", "Grace And Righteousness"

Description

This sermon delves into the essence of the gospel as outlined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, emphasizing the three historical facts that constitute the gospel: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. It highlights the importance of faith over works in obtaining righteousness, drawing from Romans 4 and the example of Abraham. The sermon explores the relationship between faith, works, and grace, emphasizing that righteousness cannot be earned through works but is a gift of God's grace. It contrasts living under the law with living under grace, stressing the need to be led by the Holy Spirit rather than relying on rules for righteousness.

Transcript

I want to begin by just briefly stating the gospel. So many of us use the phrase the gospel. And we talk about it as if it's something that we absolutely know clearly what we mean.

In actual fact I think a lot of people speak about the gospel and they are not aware of what the gospel actually is. It's stated very clearly by Paul in first Corinthians 15 verses 1 through 5. First Corinthians 15 1 through 5, Moreover brethren I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, and in which you stand. But which also you are saved if you hold fast that word which I preached to you, unless you have believed in vain.

And then Paul goes on to state the gospel. And the gospel is stated in three simple historical facts. It's not complicated.

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received, that Christ died for our to the scriptures, that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures. So the gospel consists of three simple historical facts. Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he was raised again the third day.

And where those statements are not made, the gospel is not preached. There's a great deal of so-called gospel preaching which never actually contains the gospel. Those are the three vital facts that we need to lay hold of.

Christ died for our sins, he was buried, and he was raised again the third day. And the first attesting authority is not the eyewitnesses who saw him after he was raised, but the scriptures. That's the ultimate authority.

Paul says twice, according to the scriptures. Then he goes on to list various people who were witnesses of his resurrection. But bear in mind, the final authority in all matters of faith, is the scriptures.

Now Paul goes on to explain that if we will receive these simple facts by faith. Without works, without what we do, righteousness will be imputed to us. We will be reckoned righteous.

And it's very important to see that Paul says, it's not by what we do, but it's by what we believe. It's not by works, but it's by faith. And he goes on in Romans chapter 4, to discuss the lesson that we can learn from Abraham.

For it says that Abraham had righteousness imputed to him by faith. And Paul then begins to discuss the lesson that we learn from this. And he says in Romans chapter 4, Now to him who works, the wages are counted, are not counted as grace, but as debt.

If you work for somebody and receive your wages, that's not grace, that's something that's owed to you. But he says that's not how we achieve righteousness. It's not by our works, it's not something we've earned.

And then he goes on with the most amazing statement. And I tell people, if you've never been surprised by what you read in the Bible, you've never really read the Bible. Because it contains the most surprising statements.

And so Paul goes on to say in Romans 4 verse 5, But to him who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. So if you want your faith to be accounted to you for righteousness, what's the first thing you have to do? Stop working. To him who does not work, as long as you think you can earn it by what you do, you will not receive it.

This is the hardest thing for religious people. We're so used to the idea we've got to do something to earn God's favor. Favor cannot be earned.

Grace cannot be earned. By definition they cannot be earned. And so the first thing you have to do if you want to be reckoned righteous by God, is stop trying.

Do not work. That's a startling statement to many people. But then the Bible is a startling book.

Much more startling than most of us realize. Now what is the real relationship between faith and works? It's not that works are unimportant. It's the order in which we come.

And Ruth and I quoted a passage from Ephesians chapter 2, which I will go back to. Ephesians 2 verses 8 through 10. For by grace you have been saved through faith.

And that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. We can't even boast about the fact that we had faith. Because we only had faith because God gave it to us.

It is not something we could produce from ourselves. And then it says, not of works lest anyone should boast. And many places where it speaks about people who believe that they've been made righteous by their works, Paul says, no, lest they should boast.

You see, a religion of works fosters human pride. And pride is the great basic sin. And so God has ordained a way of being made righteous which does not foster our pride.

If you consider the people who have rather complicated religions. And I don't want to name any of them because I don't want to appear to attack anything. But basically, the more difficult their religion is, the prouder they are.

They're doing something really hard and difficult. Fasting, sacrificing and so on. And this fosters pride.

God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. So God has devised a way of being found righteous with him that does not foster our pride. I don't know whether you've noticed, but basically, let's talk about Christians.

Christians who are very legalistic, very insistent on rules, are often not very loving people. Have you ever noticed that? If you went to them for love, you might not get much. Actually, legalism and love are more or less opposites.

And so we have to be on our guard continually against anything that nurtures pride. And religion basically does nurture pride. If it's religion without the grace of God, it nurtures our pride.

But there is a place for works. They're not unimportant. It's just to get them in the right order.

And Ephesians chapter 2 verse 10 says it as clearly as anything I know. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. So when God has created us anew in Christ, and the Bible says if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

Then, God has appropriate works prepared for that new creation. But the old carnal nature cannot work, walk in the good works which God has prepared. So you have to be created anew by faith before you can walk in the good works.

Then the good works become extremely important. But you have to get the order right. First of all, the new creation through faith.

Then the good works which God has prepared for us. And I don't know whether you've realized you really don't need to work out what you should do for God. If you've become a new creature in Christ, because God has got it already worked out.

What you have to do is find out the works that God had prepared for you beforehand. Don't try and make your own plan for your life. Find out what God's plan is.

And many times it's very different from what we would expect. Now, let's come to a little bit of definition. And here is where we really need clear thinking.

In fact, you really need clear thinking all the time. How many of you would agree with that? Well now, we need to discuss briefly the nature of grace. Grace is a beautiful word.

But it's often been abused. I was preaching once in a certain church. And I said as a matter of fact the churches that call themselves grace churches often know the least about grace.

And then I woke up to the fact that I was preaching in one of those churches. Nevertheless, it remains true. A lot of people who use the word grace don't have any idea of what it really means.

The root meaning of grace is comeliness, it's beauty. And then it's a beauty that God imparts to us because we believe in Him. He makes us beautiful with His grace.

And then Paul says, here's the crux. In Romans 11 verse 6, If by grace, then it is no longer of works. Otherwise grace is no longer grace.

In other words, in my language, you cannot earn grace. Anything you can earn is not grace. And this is somewhat humbling for many of us.

We've got to depend on His grace. We cannot earn it. Nothing we can do can ever obtain for us the grace of God.

But by grace we have been saved through faith. And just when you're getting excited about the fact that you had faith, remember Paul goes on to say and that not of us, it is the gift of God. You have nothing whatever to boast of if you've been saved by faith.

God has done this to protect you from the greatest sin of all, which is pride. Now, I want to consider the relationship between faith and works. What we believe and what we do.

And as far as I know, all I'm going to say will be taken directly from the New Testament. And yet for many of you, it will be startling and even shocking. I've discovered this, merely to preach the simple New Testament message of salvation by grace is startling to most professing Christians.

I remember once saying in a congregation about this size, of course Christianity is not a set of rules. And then I looked at those people and they were shocked. I think they would have been less shocked if I'd said God is dead.

Their concept of Christianity was a set of rules. Maybe you have the same concept. I want to tell you Christianity is not a set of rules.

You can't achieve it by rules. Let's look at what Paul says in Romans chapter three, verse 20. The theme of Romans incidentally is righteousness.

This is the central issue of Romans, how can we become righteous before God? Many, many centuries before Job had cried out in his agony in Job chapter nine, verse two, how can a man be righteous before God? And his religious friends all ridiculed the idea that anybody could ever be righteous before God. But God heard that cry and many, many years later through the epistle to the Romans, he answered the question, how can a man be righteous before God? And it is not by keeping a set of rules. In Romans three and verse 20, Paul says, therefore by the deeds of the law, no flesh, that's no human being, will be justified in his sight.

For by the law is the knowledge of sin. Now I've read this translation, which is the New King James. The NIV essentially says the same.

Both of them put in two words which are not there. Now I've learned Greek since I was 10 years old. I am confident in what I'm saying.

They put in the phrase the law, twice, the law. Paul doesn't say that. He says, therefore by the deeds of law, no flesh will be saved.

For by law is the knowledge of sin. You say, well what was the purpose of the law? The purpose of the law was God's diagnostic. To expose your problem.

To expose that you have a problem which is sin. The law can diagnose your problem, but it cannot solve it. It can only be solved by grace.

So you need the law to get you to the point where you see you need grace. That's its purpose. James says in chapter two and verse 10 and 11 of his epistle, James two, verses 10 and 11, For whoever shall keep the whole law, now he's talking about the law of Moses, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

For he who said, do not commit adultery, also said, do not murder. Now if you do not commit adultery but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. You see what James is saying? You either keep the whole law or you don't keep the law.

To keep 99% of the law is not to keep the law. The law is one whole system. Incidentally, none of us come anywhere near keeping 99%.

The Orthodox Jews say there are 613 commandments that you need to observe. And privately they'll admit to you that they don't observe many more than about 32. No one today alive on the earth keeps the entire law of Moses.

No one ever has done, except one person. You know his name? Jesus, that's right. He said to these people in his day, which of you convicts me of sin? They couldn't answer him.

He's the only one who kept the law perfectly. You and I cannot do it. I discovered when I was in the British army and I got saved, and I began to talk to people about being saved, they all began to think in terms of religion, not of salvation.

And I would find generally speaking, each one of them would trot out a little list of rules that he kept. And that was his righteousness. And it was specially tailored to their own situation.

If there was something wrong they were doing they didn't include that rule in their list. And I thought this is how human mind thinks. I'm righteous by keeping a set of rules.

No you're not. You could be if you kept the whole rule. But you don't.

No one does. So you cannot say I keep so much of the law and that's all that's needed. Because the law is one single system.

You either keep it or you don't keep it. And if you could keep it all, God would consider you righteous. But you can't.

So you're shut up to the alternative, which is grace. Something you cannot earn. Paul has, I've already pointed out and I return to this point in Romans 3 verse 20.

Therefore by the deeds of law, no flesh will be justified in his sight. Don't ever try to achieve righteousness with God by keeping a set of rules. That's what it means.

Because you will fail. If your rules are right, you can't keep them. If your rules are wrong, you're not made righteous by keeping wrong rules.

Do you understand? Now let's go on from there. The next thing I want to say. And this is where people begin to get shocked.

Is law and grace are mutually exclusive. You cannot benefit from both. It has to be one or the other.

You go on in Romans chapter six to verse 14. It says, for sin shall not have dominion over you. For you are not under law, but under grace.

So those are two mutually exclusive alternatives. You can be under law or you can be under grace. But you cannot be under both at the same time.

And if you're under law, you're not under grace. And if you're under grace, you're not under law. And the implications of what Paul says are very far-reaching.

He says sin shall not have dominion over you. For you are not under law, but under grace. The implication is, if you were under law, sin would have dominion over you.

The only way to escape from the dominion of sin is to stop trying to keep a law and avail yourself of God's grace. I told you this would be shocking. And I can see some of you are already a little bit shocked.

Now in Romans 8, 14, Paul says, for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. Who are the real children of God? Those who are led regularly by the Holy Spirit. That's the alternative to keeping a set of rules.

You can keep the set of rules or you can be led by the Holy Spirit, but you can't do both. And there's a little illustration that I use which comes to my mind. I think I'll use it just to make this vivid.

There's this young man, he's just graduated from a Bible school. He's got a degree in theology. He's strong and healthy.

And he's got to make his way from a certain point to a certain destination. And God says to him, now you've got two alternatives. You can either use the map or you can avail yourself of a personal guide.

And this young man says, well I'm pretty smart and I've got a degree in theology and I know how to read maps. I'll take the map, I don't need the guide. And when he starts off, the sun is shining, the birds are singing.

But about three days later, it's dark. It's the middle of the night, he's in a forest, he's on the verge of a cliff and he doesn't know whether he's facing north, south, east or west. And a gentle voice says to him, can I

help you? You know who that is? The Holy Spirit, the personal guide.

So he says, Holy Spirit I really need you. And the Holy Spirit gets him out of his position and they start off on the road again. And then after a little while, he says to himself, you know I think I was a bit silly.

I could have handled that without any help. I really didn't need to panic. And he looks around and his guide is no longer there.

He's on his own. So well, I can make it. So another three days later, he's in the middle of a bog.

And every step he takes, he sinks deeper and he can't get out. And the gentle voice says to him, perhaps you need me now. Oh Holy Spirit, please help me.

Only you can get me out of this. And so he goes on with the Holy Spirit, walking on the way that leads to his destination. And then he says to the Holy Spirit, to his guide, he says, you know I've got a very excellent map.

Maybe I could share the map with you. And the guide says, thank you, but I don't need the map. I know the way.

Besides, I was the one who made the map. You see the message? How long will it take before we realize we cannot do it on our own. It's not our good works.

It's not our keeping rules. It's the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of grace. As many as are regularly led by the Holy Spirit.

These are the sons of God. And then in Galatians 5, Paul returns to this theme. And I want to say to you, this theme is one of the major themes of the New Testament.

Anybody that has never really mastered this theme is in a state of twilight. And I think that's where a lot of Christians live. They live in a kind of twilight.

Halfway between law and grace. And they don't know which is which. And they don't know how to avail themselves of God's grace.

But in Galatians 5 and verse 18, Paul says, but if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now he said earlier, as many as are led by the Spirit, these are the sons of God. So you've got the choice.

You can live like a son of God, be led by the Holy Spirit. Or you can turn your back on the Holy Spirit and try to keep the law. But you cannot combine the two.

This is the essence of what I'm trying to say to you. This is where people get into a twilight. They're half trusting grace and half trusting their own little set of rules which they are keeping.

Now please understand I'm not saying it's a bad thing to keep rules. What I'm saying is keeping rules does not make you righteous. Did you get that? Think I better say it again.

Keeping rules does not make you righteous. Now most of you belong to some kind of church or denomination. And it has its rules.

And I think if you belong to that particular group, you ought to keep the rules. If you can't keep the rules, you shouldn't belong. But keeping the rules does not make you righteous.

In fact, it's really a major source of division in the body of Christ. Because most religious groups have got their own set of rules. And the Catholics have one, the Baptists have another, the Seventh-day Adventists have another, the Pentecostals have another, and so on.

And most of the people in those groups think well keeping our rules makes us righteous. Then they look at the people that keep a different set of rules and say well they're not really righteous, because they're not keeping our rules. And so you see what legalism does? It divides the body of Christ.

The Baptists are free to keep their rules, provided they're scriptural. The Pentecostals likewise. The Catholics, provided they're scriptural.

But bear in mind, none of them are made righteous by keeping their rules. They're made righteous by faith. And the problem is, if we get focused on rules, we'll probably miss out on faith.

And we'll find ourselves in that twilight again. Or like the young man who thought he could do it by the map and ended up in a bog. Some of you know what it's like to be in a bog.

In fact some of you are here now because you got out of the bog and you realize you needed the Holy Spirit. Amen, amen. Now, I'm going to make another shocking statement.

I wouldn't dare to make it if Paul hadn't made it first. You find it in Romans chapter seven. The further you go with him, the more shocking he becomes.

Romans chapter seven verse four and following. Therefore my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another, even to him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. Paul says at one time, if you were a religious Jew, you were married to the law.

And for you to depart from the law and be married to somebody else would be adultery, spiritual adultery, unless you found out that the law had died. But through the death of Jesus on the cross, the law was but the death. Do you understand? This is a real problem for most Jewish people.

They feel, if they don't try to keep the law, and basically they don't know much about that, they are being unfaithful to their husband. They has to have a revelation that the law was put to death in Christ so that they can be married to another, the risen Messiah. And through him, both they and we can bring forth fruit.

You understand? Fruit only comes by union. What we are united to will determine what we bring forth. But if we are united in union with Christ, then we will bring forth the fruit of the Spirit.

Now going on, Paul says, for when we were in the flesh, the passions of sins which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. That's an amazing statement, isn't it? The passions of sins which were by the law. In other words, Paul says, the law stirred up sinful passions.

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