

Faith and Works - Part 2

by Derek Prince

Derek Prince's sermon explores the critical relationship between faith and works, emphasizing the necessity of relying on God's grace and love rather than self-effort or legalism.

Duration: 29:10

Scripture: Matthew 22:37-40, Romans 13:8-10, 1 Corinthians 15:56, Galatians 5:6, James 2:25

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

Description

This sermon delves into the essence of sin as the refusal to depend on God, highlighting the root problem of humanity's self-reliance and reluctance to trust in God. It emphasizes the importance of surrendering control to God and depending on His grace, rather than relying on our own abilities or following a legalistic approach. The message underscores the significance of love as the righteous requirement of the law, encouraging believers to aim for a life motivated by love and to understand that faith, not perfection, is counted as righteousness.

Transcript

Well, let me give you another passage, in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 56. This is one of those breathtaking statements. The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.

And Paul goes on in Romans chapter 7, he says there's nothing wrong with the law. It's perfect. The problem is in us.

You see, if I can put it this way, law works from without. It says, do this, don't do that. And you say, okay, I'll do this and I won't do that.

And in doing so, you are trusting on your own ability. And that's the problem, because you don't have the ability to do what is right and avoid what is wrong. But you see, the essential nature of our flesh, is to trust in ourselves.

And not to want to depend on God. This goes back to the temptation in the garden of Eden. What was the motivation that Satan used? You will be like God.

There's nothing wrong with being like God. What was the problem? They would be like God without depending on God. They would depend on the knowledge of good and evil.

That's the root problem of humanity. It's the root problem of religious people. We want to be like God, but we don't want to depend on God.

And the essence of sin is the refusal to depend on God. That is sin in its essence. It's not some particular sinful act you commit.

It's an attitude of self-reliance, which shuts God's grace out of your life. And this is the hardest thing, I believe, that God has to deal with in you and me. It's this attitude of self-righteousness.

I can do it by myself, I don't need God. As far as I know, and this is just an opinion, there are only two kinds of creatures in the universe that will want to be independent of God. One is the fallen angels that join Satan in his rebellion.

The other is the human race. Nothing else in the universe desires to be independent of God. The birds don't desire to be independent.

The creatures don't. The fish don't. The stars don't.

They are all happily dependent on God. But you and I, because of the fall and our fleshly nature, have inherited this problem. We don't like to depend on God.

We like to be able to say, I've done it by myself, I didn't need God. Dear friends, you need God in the worst way. And you need God the most when you think you don't need him.

And if you analyze your own Christian experience, I think you'll find that every problem that you've encountered in yourself, stemmed from trying to do it without God. Stemmed from the refusal to depend on the grace of God. Ruth was in hospital some years ago, just awaiting surgery.

And she was very weak. She wanted to read her Bible and she couldn't. And the senior sister, it was a Catholic hospital.

Incidentally I'd like to say, in America, if I had to choose a hospital, I'd choose a Catholic hospital. Because there's at least a little bit of compassion left there. Very little in most others.

Now this may not be true in New Zealand. That's just a comment. But anyhow, Ruth was in this Catholic hospital.

And the senior sister, who was well over 70, was going around visiting the new patients. And she saw Ruth there. And Ruth had her Bible, but she was too weak to read it.

And so this dear sister said, is there anything I can do for you? And Ruth said, yes, would you please read the Bible to me. And the sister said, what do you want me to read? And Ruth said, Philippians chapter 2. And the sister said, well that was the scripture on which I was consecrated as a nun. So they met together.

And then this Catholic sister shared something that had happened. She'd attended a retreat for nuns, at which the speaker was a monk from the Trappist order. Now Trappists are not allowed to speak in their monastery.

They have a vow of silence. But when occasionally they are allowed out, then they're allowed to teach people what they've learned in their silence. And so this Trappist monk was teaching these Catholic

sisters.

And this is what he said. And she passed it on to Ruth. Now this really blesses me, because I see that if God wants something to get around, it'll get around.

Here's a monk who's not permitted to speak, teaching a little group of Catholic sisters who were just a group on their own. But this message reached me, and I've put it on tape so many times, it's basically reached the world. Who planned that? Nobody but God.

Anyhow this is what this Trappist monk said to these sisters. Pray to desire not to be esteemed, not to be independent, and not to be in control. How could you, would you pray that? Takes a little doing doesn't it.

I've thought over that a long while. Well not to be esteemed, I don't have a big problem about that. Not to be independent, I realize independence is a mistake.

Secure sorry, not to be secure, let me correct that. Not to be esteemed, not to be secure, not to be in control. Well it's the last two that really troubled me.

Can I really desire not to be secure? Well okay, my security is in the Lord. But there it says not to be independent, not to be in control, sorry. That's the hardest one for me.

Do I really desire not to be in control? In other words, am I really willing to let God be in control? That's the issue, that's grace. When God is in control. I tell you I bless that dear nun, I hope she's still alive.

I thank her for what she contributed through Ruth to my thinking. See I see this as the basic problem of humanity. Is the desire to be in control, to be secure, not to be dependent.

And the essence of sin is to be in a universe that was created by a loving all-wise God and want to be independent of it. And don't tell me, my dear brothers and sisters, you've never had that problem. Because there's none of us that has always been satisfied to depend on God.

To let God be in control. But that is the real walk of faith. That's the walk of grace.

We don't achieve it in a few hours. In fact it's taken me well over 50 years and I'm not there yet. But I'm closer than I was.

Let me encourage you with that. Now let's go on. The law stirs up sin.

Why? Because it says you can do it, go on, rely on yourself. All you have to do is keep these rules and it tricks you into self-reliance, self-dependence. That's the way the Lord deceives us.

And please let me say there's nothing wrong with the law. Paul goes on in the same chapter saying the law is good, the law is perfect. There's nothing wrong with the law.

The problem is in us, in our fleshly nature. We all have a desire to be independent. I am sure most of you have watched a baby.

I notice about two years old, this desire really comes to the top. And you say to this sweet little toddler of two years old, come here. And she turns around and walks in the opposite direction.

Huh? Is that right? That's the old carnal nature manifesting itself in us. And the law is God's diagnostic to bring that problem right out into the open. You see if you went to the doctor and you said doctor I have a stomachache.

He wouldn't just reach up and take a box of tablets. He'd try to find out the cause of a stomachache. In other words, before he prescribed a remedy, he would seek a diagnosis.

And that's how God deals with us. He doesn't offer us a remedy until he's diagnosed our problem. Then we know we need the remedy in the worst way.

So let's go on now to Romans chapter 10, verse 4. Romans 10, 4. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. So if you've become a believer in Jesus Christ, it's the end of the law. Not the end of the law in every sense.

But the end of the law for righteousness. As a means to achieve righteousness with God, Christ put an end to the law. When he died, that was it.

And when he rose from the dead, he offered us a new way of being righteous with God. Which was not the keeping of the law. So Christ is the end of the law for righteousness.

He's not the end of the law, as a part of the Word of God, or as a part of the history of Israel. Or as an example of the way that God deals with people, that the law is still there. But as a means to achieve righteousness, the death of Christ on the cross, finally put an end to the law.

Now let's look for a moment at the example of the Galatian Christians. And Galatians is an interesting epistle. If you were theologically minded, and I were to ask you what is the problem that Paul deals with in Galatians, you might answer legalism.

That's the official theological description of this problem. Now most of the letters that Paul writes to churches, he begins with a glowing thankfulness to God for all the good that's in them. Even the Corinthian church, where there was a man living with his father's wife.

And where there was drunkenness at the Lord's table. He begins with a glowing expression of his gratitude to God for God's grace. But when he deals with the Galatians, he's so, if I may say, hot under the collar, that he doesn't spend any time thanking God for his grace.

What was the problem with the Galatians? Not drunkenness, not immorality. But what? Legalism. And Paul viewed that as a much more serious threat to their well-being, than immorality or drunkenness.

Now please understand, I'm not saying that God condones immorality or drunkenness. But I'm saying it's a much easier problem to deal with than legalism. Because legalism is so subtle, it appears so good.

We feel so right about it, that it's hard for us to be delivered from it. But this is what Paul says, in Galatians 1 verse 6. I marvel that you are turning away so soon from him who called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel. Which is not another, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

See, he didn't have anything good to say. Just said I'm amazed you've turned away so quickly. Into what? Into legalism.

Into keeping a set of rules. And believing that they could be made righteous by that. And then in Galatians chapter 3, he returns to this theme.

Beginning at verse 1. Oh foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? I remember years ago reading that verse and suddenly realizing that quote Pentecostal or charismatic Christians could be bewitched. Because there's no question that these were charismatic. It solved a big problem in my mind, because it explained to me a situation that had arisen in a church I was pastoring.

I don't want to spend time on this, but I just want to open up to you the fact that this is a possibility. In fact, in some places it's a probability. All right.

Oh foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? Before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. Paul says I presented to you the message of the cross. I depicted to you Jesus crucified for our sins.

How can you have been moved away from that to some other basis of righteousness? This only I want to learn from you. Did you receive the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? Were you baptized in the Holy Spirit because you kept a set of rules or because you heard the message and received it with faith? Let me ask you that question. Is there anyone here in this particular session who was baptized in the Holy Spirit as a result of keeping a set of rules? The answer is no one.

We need to bear that in mind. We were not saved by keeping a set of rules. We didn't receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit by keeping a set of rules.

We received them, as Paul says, by the hearing of faith. We listened with faith to the message we heard, we believed it, and we received. And then he says, are you so foolish, having begun in the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? When it's put that way, it's stupidity, isn't it? If you needed the Holy Spirit to start you in the pathway of righteousness, how can you ever cease to be dependent on the Holy Spirit? How can you ever rely on your own little set of rules? But you see, this is very real.

Paul goes on in the tenth verse, for as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse, for it is written, cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. If you're going to be justified by keeping the law, you have to keep the whole law all the time. And if you try to keep the law and do not keep the whole law all the time, you come under the curse, pronounced uncursed is the one who does not keep the words of this law all the time.

Is it possible for Pentecostal and charismatic believers to come under a curse? I want to tell you, it's very possible. In fact, I know it from my own experience. But I want to tell you, my dear brothers and sisters, this is not something from the remote past.

This is something that's still happening today. People who begin in the Spirit, and then try to be made perfect by their fleshly nature, come under a curse. I think myself, if I may say so, that a large part of the church is under a curse.

Let me give you one other scripture, which is Jeremiah 17, and verse 5. Jeremiah 17, verse 5, thus says the law, cursed is the man who trusts in man, makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord. Now because it says his heart departs from the Lord, it's clear that such a man had a relationship with the Lord. But after he'd got that relationship, he began to trust in man, in himself.

And his heart departed from the Lord. Well I think that's happened to the majority of the professing Christian church. And I'm not going to give any names.

But most of the significant denominations or movements in the church, that we know about, were brought into being by a sovereign work of the Spirit of God. By the grace of God. They would never have amounted to anything apart from that.

But how many of them today are continuing in the grace of God? I would say very few. So they've brought themselves under the curse, pronounced in Jeremiah 17, verse 5. Cursed is the man who trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm. Now in Leviticus 11:44 and 1 Peter 1:16, we have the commandment, be holy.

This is a commandment from God. But if you read in Leviticus chapter 11, it comes at the end of a very elaborate set of rules about what you may or may not eat. And the implication is, if you're going to be holy, you've got to keep all these rules.

But in 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 16, it's not attached to any set of rules. The message is, be holy. And it's a message from Jesus.

Let me live out my holiness in you. Totally different. No longer relying on our own efforts.

But relying on the grace of God and Jesus, to do what we cannot do for ourselves. You have the choice. Now, we've just got a little while left to consider the positive side of this.

And I want to turn to Romans chapter 8 verses 3 and 4. And just take note of what is said there. Romans 8:3 and 4, for what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh. Notice there's nothing wrong with the law, it's our weakness.

What the law could not do, God did by sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin, he condemned sin in the flesh. Now what's the positive? That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Now that raises what the Americans would call a thousand dollar question.

What is the righteous requirement of the law? Have you ever given any consideration to that? I can answer you in one word, of four letters, and it's not a dirty word. It's love. Love is the righteous requirement of the law.

And I'll show you that very quickly, through a number of scriptures, and then we have to close. In Matthew chapter 22, Matthew 22, Jesus was asked by a lawyer. You know what the legal mind is like.

In verse 35, then one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, testing him and saying, Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? A specific question, and Jesus gave an immediate, specific answer. Jesus said to him, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.

And the second is like it, like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. What's the key word? Love.

Love for God, love for our neighbor. And then Jesus commented on these two commandments, hang the law and the prophets. Now if I were getting hot, which I am, and I wanted to take my jacket off and hang it up, I'd need a peg to hang it on.

And the peg would have to be there before I could hang my jacket on it. And these commandments are the peg on which the whole law and the prophets are hung. In other words, when you've read all the law and the prophets, what it's saying is, love God, love your neighbor.

That is the righteous requirement of the law. And then in Romans 13, verse 8 and following, Paul says, owe no one anything except to love one another. For he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

I believe in being out of debt. But there's one debt I can never get out of. What's that? To love my fellow Christians.

To love my fellow human beings. I owe that. I'm continually in debt.

I can't get out of that debt. Paul goes on, for the commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, you shall not covet. And if there's any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Love does no harm to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. That's very clear, isn't it? And then in Galatians 5 and 14, it's marvelous how Romans and Galatians kind of hang together. Galatians 5, 13, for all the law is fulfilled in one word.

All the law is fulfilled in one word. Even in this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. And then a little further back in Galatians 5, verse 6, it says, for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

How does faith work? Tell me, through love. All right, and in James epistle it says, faith without works is dead. And faith works by love, so you come to this equation.

Faith without love is dead. That's a shocking statement, but it's true. You can have all the faith that you claim.

But if there's no love in your life, it's a dead faith. And then we read in 1st Timothy chapter 1, verse 5, 1st Timothy 1, 5. I could quote it, but I want to read it. Now the purpose of the commandment is love.

From a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith. From which some having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk. The New American Standard Bible says, the goal of our instruction is love.

And when I read that, I said to myself, is that really the goal of my instruction? Am I really aiming to produce loving people? And I've heard about some of the people that have sat under my ministry, and I wasn't so sure. Because I am essentially a teacher. And a teacher imparts knowledge.

And you know what knowledge does? It puffs up. It makes people proud. And I've learned to try, by all the means in my power, to teach without producing proud people.

But I have to look back at some of the people I've produced, and say well, I didn't do a very good job. The goal of our instruction is love. And then Paul says, and if you stray from that goal, all you're doing is idle talk.

Now let's just for a moment contemplate the church as we know it. How much idle talk goes on in church. How much preaching and teaching and activity that does not produce love.

And it's all wasted effort. It's all totally ineffective. Brothers and sisters, if you are in any kind of ministry, I want to challenge you.

Analyze your motives. What are you aiming to produce? And secondly, if you're aiming to produce love, are you producing it? And if you're not aiming to produce love, all your talk is just empty words. That's a far-reaching statement, isn't it? You see, law motivates us through fear.

But Jesus motivates us through love. He says, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. Fear doesn't produce the result.

There are many religions that motivate people by fear, and they produce the most terrible results. Including some professing forms of Christianity. Then I want to say, and we're coming to the end, the obedience of love is progressive.

You're not perfect in love, okay, join me. I'm not perfect in love. But that doesn't mean I'm not accounted righteous.

Because until we achieve the goal, our faith is accounted to us for righteousness. Can you receive that? As long as you continue believing, your faith is counted to you for righteousness. This is wonderfully exemplified by the words of Jesus to Peter, at the Last Supper.

He said, Peter, you're going to deny me three times. Jesus said, Peter said, not I, never. And then Jesus said, but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail.

What's the really important thing? That our faith will not fail. We may make a lot of mistakes. We may even commit sins.

We haven't arrived, we're not perfect. But as long as we continue believing, our faith is accounted to us for righteousness. Until we arrive.

And let me close with one scripture from James, which I love. I don't have time to comment on it. But just let me give it to you.

James chapter 2, chapter 1, verse 25. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. What is the perfect law of liberty in one word? Love, that's right.

You see, if you really love, really love, you're the only totally free person. Because you can always do what you want. You can always love people.

They may snub you, they may persecute you, they may even try to kill you. But they cannot stop you loving them. The person whose motivation is love, is the only totally free person in the world.

Amen? Amen.

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