

# Christ's Precious Promises

THE BOOK OF ROMANS MADE CLEAR—1

by Desmond Ford

## “A Book About the Issues of Life”

*The glory of the Book of Romans is that it speaks to the four core issues of human existence:*

1. Right and Wrong,
2. Acceptance with God,
3. Self-acceptance,
4. Death.

*These issues are addressed and satisfied in Christ.*



**I**f the people of our world knew just how valuable the Book of Romans really is, and if it were a book that's hard to find—they would fight to get it.

And having found it, they would study it as though their lives depended on it. (Which they do.) They would treasure it more than a rich gold mine, more than a diamond mine.

The Book of Romans contains the remedies for our human ills. The Book of Romans has the answers to our human problems. The Book of Romans goes deep, deep into our souls, and we can only stand what

we see there because Romans also goes deep, deep into the heart of God.

### Bad News Can Be Good

Even the bad news in Romans becomes good news, because that bad news throws us upon Christ. (Even God can't help us unless we have a sense of need.)

The bad news in the Book of Romans is that every thought we have is defiled. Every emotion of our heart, every tendency of our mind, and every inclination of the flesh is tainted—in every one of us—until the second coming of Jesus and glo-

rification.

That's the bad news. But even the bad news in the Book of Romans is good news because it throws us upon Jesus, who alone is our righteousness and our strength and our wisdom.

### Errors from Ignorance

Jesus once said to people at a religious gathering, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (Matthew 22:29 NIV and Mark 12:24). We make mistakes because we don't know the Bible.

The word Jesus used when he

said, “in error” is a word that’s used to symbolize a straying sheep, a planet out of its course, or a falling star. Jesus is saying we’re all a flock of lost sheep because we don’t know the Scriptures well enough.

Jesus implies that if we knew the Scriptures better, we wouldn’t have so much to undo. The problem in life is not so much the doing, as it is the undoing. Undoing our actions is a problem that’s too big for us.

Paul says something similar to the words of Jesus: “Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame” (1 Corinthians 15:34).

Paul’s telling me that if I knew God better, as found in the Bible, I just wouldn’t miss the mark so often.

### 1st Issue: Right and Wrong

Romans has the wisdom to address the four core issues of life.

Life may be a multicolored kaleidoscope, but life’s central issue is right and wrong.

These are what elicit praise from us, or blame, or joy, or hatred. Everything swings and depends on right and wrong.

What philosophers call “the horrible choice,”—the choice between right and wrong—is our burden from the moment consciousness dawns to the moment it leaves us at night.

How we make those decisions depends on what we think about right and wrong. If we don’t know this Book, the Bible, we will go wrong. There’s much religion that’s bad religion because it’s not Bible-based religion.

You’ve heard of the man in the church choir who insisted on singing “Rejoice! Give thanks, and sin,” instead of “Rejoice! Give thanks, and sing.” He was ignorant of what was in the hymnal. On a small scale that’s what people do on a big scale.

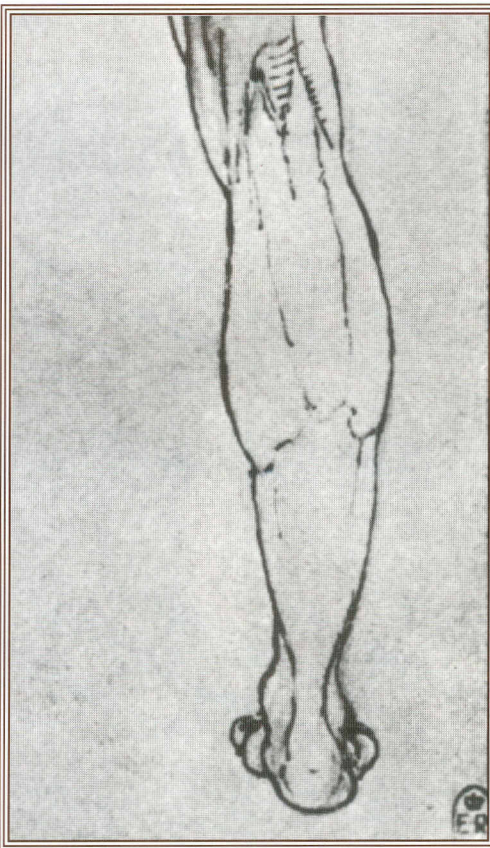
There are even some religious men who think they’re being very faithful to their wife if they are loyal to her six nights out of the week.

There are young people who think they can obey their parents as often as they wish, when they feel they are inclined to.

### Religious Oddities

Religion has all sorts of peculiarities, sacred cows, and shibboleths. Have you heard of the Left-leg Brethren and the Right-leg brethren? They existed in one part of United States.

They believed in footwashing, but were divided over which foot should



be washed. So there were Left-leg Brethren and Right-leg Brethren.

When we come to the book of Romans, we will find what religion is meant to be. True religion, according to Romans, is about faith, hope, love; about the cross of Christ, and the love of God. It’s about the reality of forgiveness—daily forgiveness, hourly forgiveness.

As Romans talks about bearing and forbearing, giving and forgiving, we learn what true religion is. True religion is the union of the heart with God that brings an overflow to our relationship with other people.

It’s not a matter of shibboleths and sacred cows. It’s not a matter of creeds.

This is one issue that Romans deals with: this issue of right and wrong. Thus we can avoid the mistakes that fall to us so naturally.

### 2nd Issue: Acceptance

Here’s a second issue: The basic drive of our lives is for acceptance. Relationships are the real essence of our lives. Not wealth, reputation, or strength, but relationships. Even washing dishes is fun if you do it with the right person.

We all have a great passion to be accepted. But there’s a problem, an obstacle. We do many, many things that rupture relationships.

Some of them we do unconsciously, some of them consciously. Some of them we do with premeditation, some carelessly.

All great literature of the ages, throughout the world, has made human responsibility and guilt the central issue, because it is the central issue of life.

We want to be accepted, but look how we behave. You find this theme whether you go back to the Greeks with Aeschylus, or to the Latins with Virgil. You find it in England’s Shakespeare, Germany’s Goethe, and the best American novelists.

### Acceptance with God

Most of all, we want to be accepted with God. Walt Whitman said that animals don’t lie awake at night and weep for their sins, but human beings do. Here then is the second thing: Not only do we have the knowledge of right and wrong so we can avoid making mistakes, but, “How do I find acceptance?”

If I find acceptance with God, then I can accept myself—not until. Conscious guilt always leads to increasing guilt. Conscious guilt leads not only to increasing guilt but to illness, accidents, self-hatred, and self-punishment.

We know that if sin is not forgiven, it must be punished. And sometimes we punish ourselves in our guilt. That’s why the second issue that Romans deals with—acceptance—is dealt with in terms of forgiveness. Romans is a book about forgiveness.

### Forgiveness and Justification

The forgiveness in Romans is much better than we could ever have imagined, because in Romans we discover the word “justification.” Justification is

*Self-acceptance  
begins with knowing  
God accepts me.*

a key word in Romans. It's used about fifty times. Justification means forgiveness **plus**.

It means forgiveness, but it means going beyond forgiveness. It means God treating us as though we never had any need to be forgiven. What a wonderful concept!

### **Romans So Far**

Let's go over this important ground again. The basic issues in Romans, so far, are: **1.** Right and Wrong. **2.** Acceptance.

If evil becomes a trifle, virtue becomes a toy. We have to understand the basic things of life—what is good and what is evil—and Romans tells us.

But we won't be motivated to choose the good and shun the evil, unless we have acceptance with God. Unless we know today, this hour, this moment, that God accepts us just as we are, warts and all, flaws and all, mistakes and all, fumbblings and all, stumblings and all. Unless we know that acceptance, we will never be motivated to do what is right.

The worst person in the world knows more about duty than the best person **does**.

At the heart of every one of us is a selfish core. It taints everything we do. Nothing we do is untainted. We never pray a prayer, preach a sermon, sing a hymn, or do anything, that is not tainted. I'm talking about Christians. We desperately need forgiveness.

We haven't started to live until we believe that all our sins are like a grain of sand beside the mountain of God's forgiveness. We haven't started to live until we are aware that all our guilt is but a spark falling before the ocean of God's mercy. We haven't started to live until we believe that God is more willing to forgive than a mother is to save her child from a burning house. We haven't started to live until we know it's more difficult to take love out of the

heart of God than it is to take the salt out of the ocean or the blaze out of the sun. We haven't started to live until we know these things.

### **3rd Issue: Self-Acceptance**

There's a third issue Romans deals with: **3.** Self-acceptance.

"You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures," said Jesus. But Romans shows us right and wrong so we can make decisions and avoid mistakes. Romans tells us about acceptance with God in Christ when we miss the mark and don't know God.

But only when I know God accepts me can I accept myself. And no one can accept his brother and his sister until they accept themselves. Romans explains that God accepts me, and that leads to self-acceptance.

Self-acceptance begins with knowing God accepts me. What right do I have to complain about someone else's warts when God has accepted me warts and all? God accepts me in Christ despite my failures, my blotches, my follies and stupidities.

The thing I find most humbling is not when I sin, but when I do something stupid. Of course, that's just another form of sin, because we ought to be wiser.

But we have a great and a good God who knows all these things, who knows all about our weaknesses.

### **4th Issue: Death**

The fourth issue addressed by Romans, dear friends, is death.

We humans are the only living things that fear death. Animals don't fear death. They relax and pass away.

Walt Whitman was right when he said that animals don't lie awake and weep about their sins. Animals don't fear death either. But we do.

The Bible says the sting of death is sin (see 1 Corinthians 15:56). Romans deals with the basic issues—and what a book Romans is. It's the greatest masterpiece the human mind has ever conceived.

As we shall see, this masterpiece not only addresses the four great issues of life. What is more important, it brilliantly reveals how these issues are met and satisfied only in Christ and the gospel. ♦

