

## **What We Believe...About Salvation** **Romans 5:1-11**

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If you've been worshipping with us this summer you know that we've been exploring the foundational beliefs of Christianity in a series of sermons entitled "What We Believe". We've covered a lot of ground but nothing could be more basic to comprehending our faith than today's topic – an understanding of salvation, the saving or delivering individuals from the power and penalty of sin.

Unfortunately, many people are only dimly aware of what is involved in the process of salvation. Now you don't have to be a theological scholar to be saved, thank goodness. Even the most unlearned individual can grasp what is essential. I've often laid out those essentials in the form of what's been called "the Roman Road" because all four verses come from the book of Romans.

At its most basic, salvation entails a realization that, first, all of us have sinned, that is, we've all disobeyed God's laws (Romans 3:23). Second, we must understand that the wages, or consequences, of our sin is death, that is, eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23). Third, we must realize that God has provided a perfect sacrifice who paid for our sins by dying in our place, His Son, Jesus (Romans 5:8). Fourth and finally, each of us must personally believe and acknowledge that Jesus is our Savior, having paid for the sins we commit (Romans 10:9).

Like any attempt to summarize a complex subject, the "Romans Road" doesn't address salvation exhaustively. For example, it doesn't specifically mention "repentance", the turning away from sin and to God (Acts 3:19) or seeking forgiveness for our sins (Acts 2:38; Ephesians 1:7). It doesn't even explicitly mention placing our faith, or we might say trusting, in Christ as our Savior (II Timothy 3:15). Again, the "Romans Road" verses are an attempt to *summarize* salvation by conveniently using four short verses from one biblical book, not explore it exhaustively. Still, we can use these verses effectively to present the gospel message, that is, how someone can be saved by making a decision to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Salvation is no dry, theoretical issue. Every one of us has sinned and so every one of us would face God's wrath (Ephesians 2:3; 5:6), that is, eternal punishment in hell. There is no more serious issue to resolve. We're talking about where we will spend eternity – in heaven with God or in hell being eternally punished (Mark 9:43). It's just that straightforward. Thankfully, the Apostle Paul tells gives us hope when he says in Romans 5:9 "Since we have now been justified by his [Christ's] blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him [Christ]!"

If you've yet to receive Christ – placing your faith in Him as the perfect sacrifice for your sins, asking His forgiveness and receiving Him as your Savior – today is the day to settle that in your heart. Life may seem endless but none of us knows when a

car accident, a hunter's stray bullet in the woods, a ruptured blood vessel, or any of a thousand other things might suddenly bring our life to a close, and then it will be too late to make a decision for Christ, our eternity in hell will already be settled. Today is the day, now is the time, to put your faith in Jesus as your Savior.

So far what we've done is lay out what a person needs to know to make a decision to receive Christ as his or her Savior, and that's the essential information of the gospel. But to appreciate fully all that God has done in bringing us salvation, it's helpful to explore it a little more deeply.

How exactly does God work to save us? Well, first, the Scriptures declare that God *calls* us, inviting us and drawing us to Jesus. II Thessalonians 2:13,14 says "[13] But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. [14] He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." So God uses the truth of His Word, the Scriptures, along with the power of His Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see our need of salvation.

Now it's clear that apart from God's call, none of us would seek to know Jesus as our Savior. We might acknowledge Him as a sincere figure, we might appreciate His teachings, we might even try to imitate some of His ways because they strike us as being good. But because of our sinful natures, we would be unable to recognize our need for salvation. Only God's gracious call opens our eyes to see our need for Christ as our Savior.

Next, God *regenerates* us. Regeneration is the change God makes in us to replace our inner, fallen, sin-dominated human nature with a new nature that will respond to God's gospel call. It's clear from so many places in Scripture that we are locked into or bound by our sin nature and so we would never, on our own, choose to follow Christ. Jesus Himself said "...a bad tree cannot bear good fruit" (Matthew 7:18) and that a radical change in us is necessary, a change so radical that Jesus described it this way in John 3:3 "In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is *born again*." Jesus went on to explain to a man named Nicodemus that this radical change in nature is made possible by God's Holy Spirit (John 3:5) and not by us.

I emphasize that regeneration is God's work because at times people fail to fully appreciate the grace of God in their lives. The Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:7,8 "[7] the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. [8] Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God." Simply put, we would never, on our own, have seen or responded to the gospel call. But because of God's mercy, He regenerates us and makes possible our eyes being opened and our reception of Christ. This is why Jesus said in John 6:44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him..." and again in John 6:65 "He went on to

say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.”

We might think of it this way. Imagine that you are swimming into the ocean away from the shore in the middle of the night in some remote area. You go out further and further, beyond the breakers, and your friends on the beach become concerned. They begin calling to you, bidding you to come back to shore before you tire and drown, but you ignore them. In the darkness, you are convinced that you’re going in the right direction, oblivious to the fact that you are headed *away* from safety. Suddenly, and for no explicable reason, you change direction and begin swimming back to the safety of the shore. It wasn’t because you heard the shouts of your friends or saw the lights on the shore or even because you began to have doubts about whether you were going in the right direction. It was simply that *something* changed your mind about your course and now you were willing to hear the call of your friends to come back to the shore. Spiritually speaking, that “something” was the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, giving us what in the Old Testament is often called a “new heart” (Ezekiel 36:26,27) and in the New Testament we’re said to be “new creations” (II Corinthians 5:17).

Because we’re “new creations”, freed from the control of sin, we can then place our faith in Christ as our Savior. This saving faith is also not of our own doing, in other words, we would not have thought to put our trust in Christ for salvation. The Apostle Paul makes it clear in Ephesians 2:8,9 that even faith is a gift from God, “[8] For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—[9] not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Because God calls us, open our eyes to our need of Christ and gives us faith to respond, we are *justified* in His sight. Justification is a biblical word that you may have heard defined as “just as if I never sinned”. That’s close to it but not quite. Justification is God delivering us from judgment and wrath by declaring us “not guilty” on the basis of Christ’s righteousness. In other words, God takes the finished work of Christ on the cross as He paid for our sins and applies that to us so that we are no longer required to pay the penalty for our sin. Paul said in Romans 5:9 “Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!” The wonderful truth of justification was what captured Martin Luther as he studied Romans 1:17 “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” In fact, it was this glorious truth that God declares us “not guilty”, justified by Christ’s righteousness applied to us, solely by His grace and mercy and not by any work we do, which sparked the Reformation.

To “complete the loop” of salvation, so to speak, I just want to mention that salvation does not stop at the moment a person accepts Christ as his or her Savior. It also includes another aspect which we call “sanctification”. The word “sanctification” comes from the Greek word for “holy” and refers to the work of God’s Holy Spirit in

those who are saved to increasingly bring them under the Spirit's control. It's the process of causing us to turn away from sin and to Christ (II Thessalonians 2:13; I Thessalonians 4:3).

Finally, there's the last step in our salvation, which is "glorification". The Apostle Paul places glorification at the end of the process of salvation in Romans 8:30 "And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." Glorification refers to our existence in heaven with God, when we will receive our eternal bodies. Paul said of Christ in Philippians 3:21 "who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." And Paul described our new bodies in II Corinthians 5:4 as a "heavenly dwelling", one designed for eternity.

All of our salvation is God's work – from the *gospel call* which by the Spirit's power opens our eyes to our need of a Savior, to *regeneration*, which makes possible our response to the gospel message, to the gift of *faith* which allows us to trust Christ as our Savior, to *justification* which removes us from God's wrath and gives us Christ's righteousness so that God no longer views us as guilty sinners, to *sanctification*, by which God increasingly turns us from sin to become more and more like Jesus, until someday when we are with Him in heaven for eternity and experience *glorification*, with new bodies that will live forever.

When we stop and think of what we're saved *from*, that as sinners we were headed straight for hell, and deservedly so, with no hope of changing that destiny on our own. When we realize that God didn't *have* to save us but in spite of our sin sent His Son, Jesus, to die for us. When we understand that He by the power of His Holy Spirit reached out, opened our eyes and made it possible for us to receive Christ as our Savior. Well, is it any wonder that for the ages of eternity we'll sing His praises for what He's done for us – providing a salvation that washes us clean from sin and ensures that we'll be with Him in heaven? What else can we do but worship Him, give thanks to Him, love and serve Him all our days?