

# Justification, Faith and Salvation

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I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes ...

Romans 1:16

What is salvation? Can we be sure we have it? On what basis?

Paul of Tarsus, nearly two thousand years ago, in a letter to some Christians in Rome, boldly claimed that he had the answers. He said he knew what salvation is, why we need it, and how we can be sure we have it.

That claim is either arrogant folly, or it is the truth. Let us look carefully at what he says in his letter to the Romans, to see and sift exactly what he says. From this, we should be able to see how it relates to us here and now.

## **A. Our Approach**

It has been said that “You can make the Bible say anything!” Sadly, it has often been true.

The reason, however, is quite simple: we can MAKE the Bible say what we want, or, by unconsciously putting thoughts into the writer's mouth, distort our ability to see what he means. We must be careful to let the Bible speak for itself.

Our basic approach, then, should be inductive. We shall first read carefully, to observe what Paul actually says - his words and how he uses them -, prose, poetry, figures of speech, logical argument. We will then ask probing questions to see what he means, and to discover how it relates to us, so we can apply it to our own lives.

The basic text is Romans 1:16 - 3:31. In this section, Paul explains why he preaches. He argues that no man has any excuse for doing

wrong, and that all of us stand guilty and condemned before God. But, God has made a way out! That way is through Jesus, and our response to him.

[NOTE: As Francis Schaeffer points out in *Death in the City*, Paul is here speaking to “the man without the Bible” and so does not start from the creation and fall, but rather from the fact that all men have a sense of right and wrong, but fail to live up to it. This odd fact, as C S Lewis argues in more detail in *Mere Christianity*, is a strong proof that there is a Moral Power behind the universe, a Power we have offended by our hypocritical immorality - see Romans 2:1-3. Thus, by appealing to publicly available evidence, Paul avoids the logical trap of using the Bible to appeal to those who do not accept it, and shows why all men need to respond to the gospel of Christ. In dealing with the highly educated today, I believe it is wise for us to follow this example.]

It would be good to read the section, carefully, in a modern English version before proceeding further.

## **B. First, the Bad News**

Paul's first contention is that God's wrath “is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness”, men who “are without excuse”.

Read Romans 1:18-32:

1. Can any of us honestly say we have never done, said, or thought anything wrong? That we didn't know that we were doing wrong?
2. Paul goes on to comment that our moral judgements are hypocritical (2:1-6, esp. v.3.) Have you lived up to the standards you set for other people?
3. Compare Romans 2:17-25. Does having a list of what we should not do make it any easier to avoid doing wrong?
4. Imagine yourself standing before God on Judgement Day. The exhibits include everything you did, said or thought, including the moral judgements you have used against other people. In the light of this evidence would you be declared guilty or innocent? (ignore for the moment the question of forgiveness through the work of Christ.)

## **C. The Good News**

Paul concludes his indictment “We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin” (3:9). Is there any hope?

Read Romans 3:19-26:

1. What is the effect of knowing what we should do, and not doing it?
2. What does it mean to be “right with God” or to be “at peace with God”? Is this what “righteousness” and “justification” mean?  
[Hint: look at Psalm 32:1-5. and compare Romans 4:1-8 and 5:1-2. What does it mean to be forgiven by God? Also, look up and assess what the word “justification” means. A good Bible Dictionary would be an excellent place to start.]
3. List the things said in 3:19-26 about righteousness. What does your list suggest to you about its importance and relevance to real people in real life?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 and compare it with Romans 3:23-26. Deduce from this what it means to have “faith in Jesus Christ” or “faith in his blood”.
5. What is the consequence of having such faith? (Hint: see Romans 5:1-5.)
6. In the light of Romans 9:30-10:13, esp. 10:8-13, how can we exercise this faith? If we fail to do so, what will be the result?

## **D. Is It really that simple?**

Paul writes that God “justifies the man who has faith in Jesus.” When rediscovered by Martin Luther in the Sixteenth Century, this principle ignited the Reformation and became the pillar of Evangelical Christianity. But, is that the whole story?

## 1 . The Issue of Baptism

Over the past few years, many of us have been challenged that unless we are baptised under the understanding that baptism is necessary for us to be forgiven, then we are not yet forgiven of our sins.

The best way to clarify this is by examining how the early Christians responded to the conversion of Cornelius the Centurion.

Read Acts 10:23-11:18, esp. 10:43-48 and 11:14-18, and compare Acts 15:1-11, esp. verses 7-9.

1. List the sequence of events leading up to the baptism and acceptance into the Church of Cornelius and the other Gentiles who were with him.
2. What was the significance of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles who were listening to Peter's sermon? When did this happen during the sequence of events - was it before or after their baptism?
3. Closely examine 15:7-9. What was the condition for purifying the hearts of the Gentiles? Was this any different from the condition for purifying Jewish hearts? [What do hearts need to be purified from?]
4. In the light of Acts 10:43, Romans 3:22-26, 4:4-8, 5:1-2, 9:30-10:13, Ephesians 2:8-10, John 3:13-18 and 36, 5:24 etc., can this be dismissed as an exception to the general rule? What, then, is the condition for God to forgive us?
5. In the light of Romans 4:4-5, 10:17 and Hebrews 11:6, how would you exercise "faith"? If you trust Christ, given Ephesians 2:1-10, how will it affect your life? How does this tie in with "faith without works is dead"? [Cf. James 2:14-26 and 1 John 1:5-2:2 - the point is growth in grace, not "sinless perfection"!]
6. In Matthew 28:18-20, we are commanded to baptise new disciples. As we saw with Cornelius, this expresses faith in Christ and marks acceptance into the visible Church. Read Romans 6:1-4, which discusses baptism as a symbolic burial and resurrection. Given all that we have seen, how should we view the role of baptism in our lives? How should it affect how we live?
7. Classically, salvation is viewed as having three phases: Justification - salvation from the penalty of sin; Sanctification - salvation from the enslaving power of sin; Glorification - salvation from the presence of sin. (See Romans 5:1-5, 6:1-4, 8:1-4 and 28-30.) Given the above, where does baptism fit in with these phases?

## 2. Keeping the Ten Commandments

A second challenge we often face is the question of whether or not we are bound by the laws of Moses, and especially by the Ten Commandments.

Read Romans 13:8-14, esp. 13:8-10, 14:1-6, 13-18, and 22-23.

1. Compare Paul's remarks in 13:8-10 with Jesus' in Matthew 22:34 - 40. Given, for example, Jesus' point that lust is a species of adultery [Matthew 5:27-28], does Paul's stress on cultivating the attitude and actions of love as the basis for practical morality make sense?
2. Should we view lists of do's and don'ts as the basis for how we should live, or as tests which help us to see how well or poorly we are working out love to God and to men (who are made in God's image) in our lives?
3. Re-examine Romans 9:30-10:4 and Acts 15:1-11 (esp. verse 5). Read Galatians 2:15-21, esp. 16 and 21, and Colossians 2:13-17:
  - Is keeping the Law/Commandments a condition of being forgiven by God?
  - Given Colossians 2:16-17 and Romans 14:5,6 and 13-18, can we fairly conclude that we are bound by the Jewish Sabbath and dietary laws?
  - Do we have any right to censure another believer over his practice in these and similar areas? [Examine Romans 14:14, 15, and 19-23, esp. 23.]
  - How would you respond to Mary, who is not sure she should wear makeup, but does so anyway?

### **3. Discipleship**

In this final part of this study, we will explore just how broad the challenge implied by a commitment to Jesus as our Lord and Saviour is. This will help us correct the tendency to live as if Salvation affects only a small part of our lives.

Read Matthew 28:18-20, and Ephesians 1:15-23 & 4:8-16.

1. What is the extent and what is the purpose of the Lordship of Jesus?
2. What are the tasks he assigns to the Church as it operates under that Lordship?
3. What are the responsibilities of the leaders and general membership of the Church under its mandate to fill the world with Christ's fulness?
4. We are told that we are to disciple the nations. What are the specific characteristics - knowledge, commitments, skills, attitudes and habits which are the hallmark of a disciple of Jesus? How can we help one another, and 'wall nations,' develop these characteristics?
5. Commitment to Christ implies surrender to his Lordship. What are some concrete steps you can take to work out these broader implications of Salvation in your life?

As we began this study, we asked "What is Salvation?" As we explored the issues, we asked and responded to many hard questions. As we close, I ask that you consider whether your answers are satisfactory, but more than that, I ask you to consider how to move these issues out of the Ivory Tower of academic debate into the real world of discipleship lived under the Lordship of Jesus.