

WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN NEEDS TO KNOW

Lesson 23

Salvation – Faith vs. Works

[TEACHERS: Today we will start 3 more lessons on Salvation. Our philosophy is this: it has been since lessons 11, 12 & 13 that we have discussed salvation in this class. Perhaps you have picked up additional students who either are not believers or who did not hear those previous lessons on salvation. Also, for the sake of students who did hear lessons 11-13 we are introducing 3 more aspects to the topic of salvation - we are not simply repeating lessons 11-13 here.]

Key Scripture: Romans 3:21-31

INTRODUCTION

Several years ago I began to feel sick – some fever, weakness and body aches. I assumed that it was the flu, stayed in bed and drank fluids. I steadily got worse. I called a friend of mine who I heard had the flu – we compared notes and concluded that we both had the flu. In my 4th day of the symptoms I got even worse. In fact, one night my fever spiked up to 105 – I was a sick puppy! So, finally I went to the doctor who informed me that I had bacterial pneumonia. He gave me an injection of antibiotics that day and the 2 days following and I gradually got well.

POINT: I did not know the seriousness of my disease. I had misdiagnosed myself and was in a world of hurt.

Correct diagnosis leads to a correct cure. If you don't know the seriousness of the diagnosis, you can't appreciate the cure and your desperation for it.

It is the same in the spiritual realm. The word "salvation" means deliverance or rescue; we desperately need to be rescued or saved. In this most important area we must have a correct diagnosis so we will have a correct cure.

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND – DIAGNOSING THE PROBLEM

In the Book of Romans from Chapter 1, verse 18 until Chapter 3, verse 20 Paul has had one main goal: to convince his readers that they are sinners. Why does he make such an issue of this for almost 3 chapters? He has to get them lost before he can get them saved. They must have a correct diagnosis which will lead to the correct cure.

ILLUSTRATION: As long as I thought I had the flu and could handle it myself, I didn't feel the need to go to the doctor. When I became convinced that my remedy was not working then I went to the doctor for a correct diagnosis and the correct remedy.

Paul gave his readers including us – the correct diagnosis: we are sinners and cannot save ourselves. We are destined for eternal damnation and judgment.

Romans 3:9 – "...we have already charged that Jews and Greeks are all under sin." Another way to say it is that both religious people and non-religious people are under the curse of sin.

Question: aren't all men sincerely seeking God in their own way? What does Scripture say?

Romans 3:10 – "There is none righteous, not even one."

Romans 3:11 – "There is none who seeks for God"

Romans 3:12 – "There is none who does good, there is not even one."

Romans 3:13 – "With their tongues they keep deceiving"

Romans 3:15 – "With their feet they are swift to shed blood"

Romans 3:18 – "There is no fear of God before their eyes"

Get the idea? So, what is the remedy?

I. WORKS

Some take the approach that we can cure our problem of sin by what we do: going to church, reading our Bible, trying to follow the 10 Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount or the Golden Rule. In the Bible this is called "works" or "the works of the Law". So – what is wrong with this approach? Again, we look to Scripture...

Romans 3:19-20(read). This says 2 things to us...

- 1) When we really understand the 10 Commandments we know we are guilty – we know we aren't measuring up. Let's take the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before Me". Do you always put God first in every thing you do? No? Then you are guilty of breaking the 1st commandment. How about the 3rd commandment – not taking the Lord's Holy Name in vain? Oops – guilty again. Even if you have never once uttered a word of profanity using the Lord's Name (which is hard to believe), have you ever said something like, "Oh, my Lord!?" Or, have you ever said "the Lord told me to..."? We use His Name in vain when we attach His Name to something not worthy of Him. POINT: When we look closely and really understand the 10 Commandments, we know we have broken most if not all of them. That is what Paul means when he says, "that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God." Our mouths are closed because we have no defense – we are guilty and we know it.
- 2) Verse 20 says that "...through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." We just looked at the 1st and 3rd commandments and realized that we have broken them – the Law revealed our sin. This shows us the purpose or function of the Law: to convince us that we are sinners! Thus, Paul's conclusion in verse 20: "...because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight;" John Murray, in his commentary on Romans states, "...every mouth is stopped and the whole world rests under God's judgment." [John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Eerdmans, 1959, page 107]

Question: This is frustrating – why give us the Law if we can't do it?

Answer: To show us how sick we are.

ILLUSTRATION: The Law is like a thermometer – it reveals our condition but it doesn't cure us. When my thermometer showed me that my fever had spiked up to 105, it had served its purpose – it couldn't make me well. It showed me that I desperately needed to go to the doctor.

Response

So, once we understand that we are guilty before the Lord and condemned by Him, there are 3 possible responses...

1. "Woe is me – I fall on my knees and beg for mercy!"
2. "Hey, I am trying to be as good as I can; I'm sincere; God understands that I am not perfect but I am trying my best and I believe that in the end – that will be good enough."
3. "I am not a bad person. Look at Hitler, Stalin, death row inmates and axe murderers: they are the sinners. I am a good guy!"

The best response, the only response is number one! When we reach that point we are ready for the remedy. The purpose of the Law is to drive us to despair and then to Jesus Christ.

II. THE GIFT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

Read Romans 3:21-24. There are some extremely important theological words that we must understand...

"JUSTIFIED" – is used in 3:20 – "...because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified..."; and in 3:24 – "...being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;" The noun form of this word is "justification". What is the meaning of the word?

The Baptist Faith and Message states, "Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God."(page 11)

Dr. C.I. Scofield in his notes from *The New Scofield Reference Bible* states, "The believing sinner is justified, i.e. treated as righteous because Christ, 'who knew no sin', bore his sins on the cross..."; "Justification is an act of divine reckoning and does not mean to *make* a person righteous."(p. 1215) We are not made righteous (we're guilty) but we are declared and treated as righteous by God.

"FAITH" – Romans 3:22 – "...even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe..." We need to understand the NT concept of faith.

It is NOT...positive thinking, wishful thinking or just an intellectual belief ("I believe Jesus existed as a historical figure"). The word means to adhere to, to trust in, to rely on, put your full weight down on.

ILLUSTRATION: One level of belief would be to say, "I believe that Dr. Duncan is the best heart surgeon in the country." Another level of belief is to say, "I believe that Dr. Duncan is such a gifted heart surgeon that I am going to let him do open heart surgery on me." That second statement captures the meaning of the NT concept of faith. It is to trust Jesus Christ alone for our salvation.

“REDEMPTION” – Romans 3:24. Again, to quote John Murray’s commentary on Romans, “...redemption is to ransom by the payment of a price...Redemption contemplates our bondage and is the provision of grace to release us from that bondage.”(pages 115-116). The word was also used to indicate the release of a slave. Jesus said in John 8:34, “Truly, truly I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.” So, our redemption from the slave market of sin was paid for by the purchase price of the blood of Jesus Christ. A great verse for this point is 1 Peter 1:17-19(read). It specifically says we were redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

John Piper, in his book *The Pleasures of God*, states: “If God was simply going to acquit guilty, God-belittling sinners by faith, then something terrible and awesome had to happen...And that something was the death of His Son.”(page 168)

Romans 3:27 – Paul asks a great question: where then is boasting? What can we brag about in our salvation? Nothing. We didn’t do or contribute anything – He did it all – all we did was believe and receive the gift!

Romans 3:28 – this is his conclusion: we are justified (declared and treated as righteous) by faith apart from the works of the Law.

On this verse F. F. Bruce states, “Paul does not mean that the works of the law should not be kept, but that even when a man keeps them tolerably well, he is not thereby justified in God’s sight.”[*Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, The Epistle to the Romans*, The Tyndale Press, 1963, page 108]

CONCLUSION

TEACHERS: Share the Gospel with the class using the “Steps to Peace With God” booklet or “My Second Chance” booklet. Read through the entire booklet as they follow along silently. Do not assume that your class understands this! Have a booklet for each person to keep; encourage them to talk to someone if they trusted Christ today for the first time.

Here’s a great closing quote from Lewis Sperry Chafer:

“Anyone could devise a plan whereby good people go to heaven. Only God could devise a plan whereby sinners go to heaven.”

Amen and amen!

NEXT WEEK: SALVATION - ELECTION