

GOD WITH US
Part 10: EARLY LETTERS

Message 13 – Romans
God’s Solution
Romans 3:21 – 5:21

Introduction

The book of Romans unfolds systematically and progressively. First Paul outlined the sin problem, as it impacts all of humanity (chs.1-3). Next, he described God’s solution for the problem (chs.3-5). Romans 3, 4 & 5 provides the fullest description in the Bible of the doctrine of salvation by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. It is of utmost importance that we understand what is written here, as it will shape our answer to the core question: How can we be made right with God?

God’s Solution: 3:21-25

“But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely (a gift) by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of His blood—to be received by faith” (3:21-25 NIV).

These are some of the most important verses in the New Testament. In just a few lines, Paul summarizes God’s plan to save humanity from the sin problem. Verses 24 and 25 contain **seven key phrases that define the doctrine of salvation.**

- 1. JUSTIFIED:** God declares guilty sinners to be “not guilty.” We are made “right with God” (ie: legally declared to be in good standing with God). Justified = *Just-as-if-I’d* never sinned!
- 2. FREELY:** Salvation comes to us as a free gift from God. It is not something we can earn or we deserve.
- 3. by His GRACE:** The gift of salvation springs entirely out of God’s grace (His unmerited, undeserved/unearned favor).

4. through the REDEMPTION: God paid the ultimate price- the precious blood of His sinless Son: 1) to redeem us or buy us back from the penalty of the broken Law (eternal death/separation from God) and 2) to set us free to live in new relationship with God and a new life in Christ.

5. that came by Christ JESUS: This redemption was accomplished by Jesus, and only by Him.

6. a sacrifice of ATONEMENT*, through the shedding of His blood: The blood of Christ mediates the relationship between Holy God and sinful humanity, by paying the penalty for sin.

7. to be received by FAITH: We take hold of this gift by placing our faith (trust, confidence) in what Jesus did for us.

*Behind the phrase “a sacrifice of atonement” there is an interesting Greek word: hilasterion. The NASB translates this word: “propitiation.” Kenneth Wuest explains:

“The word hilasterion (propitiation) is used in Leviticus 16:14 to refer to the golden cover on the Ark of the Covenant. In the Ark, below this cover, were the tablets of stone upon which were written the ten commandments which Israel had violated. Before the Ark stood the High Priest representing the people. When the sacrificial blood is sprinkled on this cover, it ceases to be a place of judgment and becomes a place of mercy. The blood comes between the violated law and the violators, the people. The blood of Jesus satisfies the just requirements of God’s holy law which mankind broke, pays the penalty for man, and thus removes that which had separated between a holy God and sinful man, sin, its guilt and penalty.” Kenneth Wuest (Word Studies)

The cross of Christ is the place where the blood sacrifice covers our sins, thus making a place where holy God and sinful man can meet. It is our propitiatory (mercy seat) sacrifice granting us forgiveness, for it turns condemnation into mercy!

Summary: Salvation is the act in which God declares a guilty sinner to be “not guilty” as a free gift flowing from His kindness. Salvation comes to us through Jesus, whose death was the satisfactory sacrifice God required. To receive the gift of salvation, one must place his/her faith, or trust, in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

Himself only by faith, whether they are Jews or Gentiles” (3:27-30).

There will be no proud people in heaven, only people who are grateful for the undeserved gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Paul has now explained in some detail the fundamental problem of mankind – the sin problem. He has also outlined in very compact space (3:21-31) the only solution that works for God *and* for us: the death of Jesus *for our sins*.

No Exceptions: 4:1-25

Paul continued to drive home his point that salvation is a gift from God, not something that can be earned by good behavior. In Ch. 4, he discussed two spiritual heavyweights in the Jewish world: Abraham and David, showing that neither of them earned God’s favor through their own good works. They were both made right with God by His grace, through their faith, not their good works.

Abraham and David: 4:1-8

“Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of our Jewish nation. What did he discover about being made right with God? If his good deeds had made him acceptable to God, he would have had something to boast about. But that was not God’s way. For the Scriptures tell us, “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.” When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned. But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners” (4:1-5).

Abraham was the father of the Jews, thus he was highly esteemed. Yet, Paul shows that Abraham placed his faith (trust) in the promises of God. When he did that, God counted him to be a righteous man “*because of his faith*” (not because of his works).

****ABRAHAM’S FAITH JOURNEY:*** *The life of Abraham (and his wife Sarah) in Genesis Ch’s 12 & 15-21, provide a very human story of faith. When Abraham was already 75 years old (ch.12), God declared that HE would make Abraham a great nation and all the peoples on earth would be blessed through him. Years went by and Abraham and Sarah (then called Abram and Sarai) still had no heirs to begin God’s promised nation. God appeared again to Abram (ch.15:1-6), and promised him an heir from his own body, telling him to look to the stars, declaring his descendants would be as numerous. Then the*

verse that is quoted in Romans 4:3, **“Abram believed God and He credited it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6)**. Abram had no outward sign that Sarai was pregnant. He had to just ‘believe God’ and His promise. Sarai was Abram’s ONLY wife, so it makes sense that Sarai would be the woman to carry Abram’s promised child. However, they had an Egyptian maid for Sarai, named Hagar. 10 years later (ch.16), still waiting for God’s promise, Sarai told Abram to take Hagar the maid to be his concubine, and produce an heir for her through Hagar. **There is no mention that Abram prayed and asked God if this would be the way that God meant to fulfill His promise!** When Abram was 86 years old (ch.16:16), Hagar bore him a son named Ishmael and what seemed like a ‘good idea’ turned into an on-going conflict between Sarai and Hagar. God did not visit Abram and Sarai and restate His promise of an heir until Abram was 99 years old (ch.17). He renewed His promise from when Abram was 75 years old, and added more details. God also spoke of Sarai being the one to bear Abram’s son the following year (ch.18:10)! God changed their names to Abraham (father of many nations ch.17:5) and Sarah (mother of many nations ch.17:15,16). It was at this late time at 99 years old, that Abraham’s faith was firm and ‘against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and... without weakening in his faith...being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what He promised’... Sarah at 90 years old conceived their son! (Romans 4:18-22)

The story of Abraham’s faith journey is an important part of Paul’s explanation of salvation. It proved that God declared him to be ‘righteous’, or ‘right with God’, because Abraham had placed his faith in God’s declared promises. It doesn’t mean that through all the years of waiting, Abraham and Sarah didn’t try to hurry God along by ‘helping Him out’. Obviously, God was not on their time-table! Waiting on God is hard! In the end when their bodies were far beyond the child-bearing years, finally God’s time-table was ready to fulfill His promise. NOW, it was humanly even harder to believe God’s promise! It had to be ALL GOD. But Abraham and Sarah were all in, and trusted God to do what only He could do. Their story of faith and being declared ‘righteous’ although they didn’t walk out their story without some detours, truly gives us all HOPE! How do YOU gain HOPE from Abraham and Sarah? God NEVER GAVE UP ON THEM!

Just as Abraham was made right with God through faith (not good works), so the same was true for Israel’s most famous king – DAVID.

“David also spoke of this when he described the happiness of

those who are declared righteous without working for it: ‘Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight. Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of sin’” (4:6-8).

Paul quotes from Psalm 32, which David wrote after his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah as recorded in 2 Samuel 11. In this Psalm, David celebrated *God’s merciful forgiveness, knowing well that he didn’t deserve it*. Israel’s greatest king knew that the only way to be right with God was by a sheer act of God’s mercy and forgiveness, not by his own goodness. It often takes a series of bad choices and consequences to force us to see our own true inner self-centered condition. David did not feel remorse over his actions for almost a year. It took God sending the Prophet Nathan to David to tell him a story of something David could relate to- sheep. Seeing the self-centered behavior of a rich insensitive man owning many sheep, and another humble man owning only ONE sheep, which the wealthy man took from him, David finally triggered deep in his soul and wanted to bring justice to this self-centered man. It was then that Nathan could compare David to ‘that man.’ David broke when he realized how he had acted just like him.

Both of these great men had flawed faith journeys. Yet, Paul was moved by the Holy Spirit to use them as people who in their brokenness, recognized the futility of trying to be a ‘somebody’ before a Holy yet gracious God. Yet, God still declared them righteous! Remember- being ‘righteous’ doesn’t mean being ‘perfect before God’. It means that God has declared us ‘not guilty’ because we have believed in Him. But once we have realized the impact of God’s amazing love and desire to be in relationship with Him, we should like Abraham and David be full of worship and thanksgiving no matter what life brings our way. How do these 2 men’s stories motivate you?

The same deal for Jew *and* Gentile: 4:9-17

Paul was chosen by God to be the bearer of Good News *to the Gentile world* – the Good News that they also, not just the Jews, were the objects of God’s amazing, saving grace. He points out that Abraham was made right with God, through faith, *before* he received the rite of circumcision as the sign of the covenant between God and the Jews.

“Now, is this blessing only for the Jews, or is it also for uncircumcised Gentiles? Well, we have been saying that Abraham was counted as righteous by God because of his faith. But how did this happen? Was he counted as righteous only after he was circumcised, or was it before he was circumcised? Clearly, God accepted Abraham before he was circumcised! Circumcision was a sign that Abraham already had faith and that God had already accepted him and declared him to be righteous—even before he was circumcised. So Abraham is the spiritual father of those who have faith but have not been circumcised. They are counted as righteous because of their faith” (4:9-12).

Paul was showing the Gentiles that they were spiritual “children of Abraham” once they have placed their faith in Jesus for salvation. Salvation is the gift of God for *all people*, not just the Jews.

Believing in a God of resurrection: 4:18-25

When Abraham was almost 100 years old, God reaffirmed His promise to give him children through Sarah (who was 90). In spite of the seeming impossibility of the situation, Abraham believed that God could raise his old, weary body ‘from the dead’ and give Sarah and him the ability to have a child. God DID raise their frail old bodies and He DID give them that long-awaited child, Isaac. Thus, the object of Abraham’s saving faith was a God of resurrection. Like Abraham and Sarah, we also are called to believe in a God of resurrection, a God who has raised someone else from the dead – Jesus. When we place our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are made right with God.

Results of our Salvation: 5:1-11

Paul has told us how any person can be made right with God. By placing one’s faith in Jesus Christ, the gift of salvation becomes ours. From that moment on, you are a child of God, destined to spend eternity in heaven with Him. You are “justified” (declared righteous) before God. But a lot of extras come with the deal. Here Paul lists just a few of the many benefits of our salvation.

1. Peace with God (5:1).

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . .”

There's a difference between the peace OF God and peace WITH God. The peace OF God, the calming of an anxious heart, is a byproduct of your prayer life (Philippians 4:6,7). Peace WITH God, on the other hand, refers to the end of all hostility in the relationship between God and a person due to our sin. This peace comes as a result of the finished work of Christ on the cross, and the result of placing our faith placed in Christ, being justified.

2. An introduction (5:2a).

“. . . through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand . . .”

In Paul's day, when a person wanted an audience with a king or some other important dignitary, an "introduction" (a sort of special invitation) was needed. With such an "introduction," an individual could approach the king and "stand" before him. Those who have placed their faith in Christ have been given an introduction into the King's throne room filled with *grace*. We have full access to God because of what Jesus Christ has done for us. We can stand before the King of kings without fear of being rejected from His presence. We are welcome guests who have been declared not guilty and forgiven.

3. Standing in grace (5:2b).

“. . . into this grace in which we stand . . .”

When a believer walks into the throne room of God, "*we stand before Him in grace.*" We are covered from head to toe in a sea of grace as we stand before our King. We are clothed from top to bottom in grace – the grace that comes to us from Jesus, the King's very own Son. There is no other ground upon which we may stand before the King. It is grace, all grace.

4. Destined for glory (5:2c).

“. . . and we exult in hope of the glory of God.”

Death has no victory over the believer, because death transports us into another realm where we begin to share the glory of God in a whole new way. Death, for the believer, has become a means of great *GAIN* (Philippians 1:21). This is the certain hope for every believer – sharing in the glory of God. Paul revels in the hope of glorification in Romans 8:18-25. We'll ponder that more later!

5. Purpose in trials (5:3,4).

“We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance (perseverance). And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.”

God is in control of every trial that He allows to touch His beloved children. All trials serve His purpose of refining our faith and shaping our character. We can live under the assurance that God makes no mistakes. Every trial has a purpose, and every trial is measured by Him exactly to accomplish in us what He desires.

6. The Holy Spirit living within (5:5).

“For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.”

God Himself comes to live within us, in the Person of the Holy Spirit. We now have not just a ‘legal’ relationship with God (justification – declared ‘not guilty’), but we have a very ‘personal’ and ‘real’ relationship with God. *“God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him” (Philippians 2:13)*. Paul will deal at length with the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer later (Romans 8).

7. Assurance of God’s great love for us (5:6-8).

“When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.”

God sent Jesus to die for us when we were still “utterly helpless sinners.” That is the proof of His great love for us. He didn’t wait for us to clean up our life and somehow *become lovable*. He knew we never could. As a Christian, I never have to live in doubt about God’s love for me. I KNOW He loves me, and will never stop loving me. It says in 1John . . . *There is no fear in love. Perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. (1John 4:18)*. In this life I will never fully comprehend the amazing love that God has for me; but by remembering the sacrifice that Jesus made for me, I can be

assured that His love for me is deep and unchanging. Paul prayed that people would know this deep love of God (Ephes. 3:14-19).

8. No fear of condemnation (5:9).

“And since we have been made right in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God’s condemnation.”

“There is therefore now NO CONDEMNATION for those who are in Christ Jesus!” (Romans 8:1). There is no more fear of condemnation before God. God will discipline (train) me when I sin; but this is the loving discipline of a Father toward His child to shape me as His disciple (one who learns from Him). There is no condemnation in this discipline; there is only love, with the purpose of making me more like Christ.

9. Friends of God (5:11).

“So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.”

In James ch. 2 it says that Abraham was called *“the friend of God”* (James 2:23). Here Paul says that we’re ALL friends of God through Jesus. Jesus introduced us to His Father and turned us from His enemies into His friends.

Without the Holy Spirit choosing to reveal these truths to the Apostle Paul (and the other writers of the New Testament), we would be left ignorant to the amazing truths of theology and perspective from God’s view. As we stop and really ponder each one, as we grasp them, our heart should rejoice and revel in the unbelievable reality of how much God has and does love us, in spite of all the ways that we have gone our own way, and caused His love and grace to be wasted. Take time to really contemplate the impact of these 9 truths. Which ones cause you to revel and rejoice in God’s love for you the most? Why did you choose them?

From Adam’s family to Christ’s: 5:12-21

In the last half of Romans 5, Paul looked back to Genesis and taught about the significance of the 1st Adam’s actions and compared them to the 2nd Adam’s actions. Adam and Christ (Jesus is called the “last Adam” in 1Corinthians 15:45) are the 2 representative heads of the human race. They each did things that brought about results for every human being.

2 Men 2 Acts 2 Decrees 2 Results 2 Rulers

Adam: Transgressed > Judgment > Condemnation > Sin & Death

Christ: Died > Grace > Justification > Grace & Life

We are in Adam's family BY BIRTH. We inherit a sin condition when we are born. You never have to teach a child to be bad. Here is what the Minnesota Crime Commission reported about the human condition:

"Every baby starts life as a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it: a bottle, the mother's attention, his playmate's toy, and his uncle's watch. Deny these and the baby seethes with rage and aggressiveness, which would be murderous, were the baby not so helpless. This means that all children, not just certain children, are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in the self-centered world of infancy, given free reign to impulsive actions, every child would grow up a criminal, a thief, a killer, a rapist."

We are in Christ's family BY RE-BIRTH. We must respond to God's grace by receiving the gift of salvation. Notice carefully verse 17.

"But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, FOR ALL WHO RECEIVE IT will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ."

Thus, a section of Romans that began with the wrath of God being revealed to God-rejecting humanity (1:18), ends with the grace of God being lavished on God-receiving humanity – on all who receive the gift of His grace, given to us in Jesus Christ (5:17).

Discussion Questions

1. What have you learned about SIN and SALVATION as you have read/studied Romans 1-5? Anything new in your thinking?
2. Look back at the list of results that come with salvation (5:1-11). Which of those results bring you the most joy?
3. How does Romans 1-5 impact your view of our world, its problems, and the various solutions that people push for?
4. What can you do to spread the message of God's solution to others around you?