

“Saving Faith”

Romans 3:25

October 12th, 2008

Wednesday night we had around 50 kids from the AWANA's program standing to my left. One of their leaders had a box wrapped in red paper. She informs me that this is a gift from the SPARKS to me. Now when she told me those words and handed me that gift, I could tell by the looks on their faces that this was not a gift you take home and unwrap in private. No, their little eyes wanted me to open it right then. So I tore into that box and pulled out a gift. That gift was a t-shirt, but it was more than a t-shirt, it was a gift. I held it up, and it said "SPARKS love Bro Ricky". Every SPARK had written their name on the front of that t-shirt. Some of them were crooked, some were sideways, some were right-side up, some were upside down, and some were backwards, but every SPARKS name was on that shirt, even the leaders. Now, I had not done anything to hold that gift in my hand, other than to reach out and receive what those kids presented to me.

Let's look again, intently, at Romans 3:25. The verse is referring to Jesus as we see from verse 24.

Scripture

“Whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness because in His divine forbearance He had passed over former sins.”

We will be looking at the phrase "*to be received by faith*." We are going to look at 4 aspects in the next two studies of saving faith.

1. The Source
2. The Object
3. The Nature
4. The Evidence or Fruits

It is important for me to remind you that even though we are looking at this phrase, this whole paragraph in verses 21-26 is powerful. Paul almost summarizes every major biblical doctrine in these verses. These verses are the key to understanding not only Romans, but all of the New Testament. This paragraph alone is worthy of us spending months and years on, but we will not. We tried to break it down several weeks ago and show you the big picture in its entirety. Now we are looking at the minuteness of it. We are looking at it in its details and intensity. But so we understand why we are talking about saving faith, let me remind you again what this passage is teaching. There is a way now, without Law, by which a sinner who is separated from God because of his sin can be made right with God. This, making a sinner right with God, is actually accomplished by God's grace as a gift. This means that we did not do anything of our own accord that brought us into a right relationship with God. The very reason we are in a right relationship with God is because of God's enabling power. He bestowed His enabling power on us without cause in us, or without cost to us. Therefore our right standing with God is a gift from God. Now if God is just, on what grounds can God make or declare a sinner right? It is on the grounds of Jesus Christ, specifically the redemption or the setting free from the chains of sin by a ransom payment or purchase price. So that we would fully understand our redemption and what great cost it was to God, he goes on to say that when Christ redeemed us God had actually set Christ as a propitiatory sacrifice. In Christ, God not only removed our sin, which is what was wrong with us, but he actually turned God's wrath from us. Not just so God in His holiness could be appeased, but so God could be approached by sinful man. So now, based on the blood of Jesus Christ,

sinner can approach God who is holy. Wow! Do you realize this passage is teaching us that God rolled out the red carpet of His Son's blood so that we would know we are welcome to come into the presence of God who is holy? Then he puts this little phrase, "*it* (the propitiatory benefits of Christ's death) *must be received by faith*". Just as I did not do anything to work for the gift the kids presented me, all I did was respond to the gift by reaching out my hand and taking it. You must see that in the biblical sense, saving faith is nothing more and nothing less than a sinner reaching out his hand to receive the gift of what God has done for him at the cross. Faith is not a meritorious work. It is not something you add to the salvation that is in Christ. True saving faith is a life response to the declaration that God says is true, and that is in Christ you have been redeemed and set free. You can now approach God and live in a right relationship with Him.

We are going to talk about the first two aspects of saving faith in this lesson. As we begin with the ¹source of faith, I must add this adjective of *saving* faith, because I believe we are living in a time where there are many people that have faith, but it is not biblical faith. It is not saving faith. It is a faulty faith. It is a false faith. I must take the time to distinguish between true biblical faith that saves, and the kind that people are manufacturing today. The reason is that there are a lot of professing Christians who have a false faith, and it is giving Christ and the Church a really bad name. People are looking at those Christians with a faulty faith, and they are drawing the conclusion that they do not need Christ. I do not think I want to be like him or her. If I can get on to us as Baptists, we have been the worst. Because of a misunderstanding of our true doctrine of eternal security of a believer, and I do believe in it, we are letting our families and neighbors hide under that banner. When in reality they are not under that banner because the faith they have is not a true faith. It is a faulty and false faith. It is time someone steps forward and calls the Church out on letting people think they are ok when in reality Scripture would teach they are not ok. How are we going to do that?

If you have ever worked in a bank, they teach you how to tell counterfeit bills. They teach that by showing you the real thing. We are going to try over the next two studies to show you what real saving faith is. But remember, I am not making this up. James, in his short letter, actually said the demons have faith and they shudder, but they are not saved. He uses that as an example when he is talking about a person who claims to have faith. But if he has a faith that does not produce a life change, James asks if that kind of faith can really save a man. James' answer is no. If you have a faith but it has not and is not producing a life change from you, if the faith you have is not appropriating Christ's death in you, and setting you free from sin, according to Scripture you have a faith that is not real. It is false.

John 2:22-25 teaches there was a group of people who Jesus was ministering to and they saw His signs and believed in His name. But the next verse said that Jesus did not entrust Himself to them. That word **entrust** is a heightened, intense form of the same word **belief** that is used in the verse before it. It says they believed in Jesus but Jesus did not believe in them. That is scary! How can that be? Well the next verse says that Jesus did not need anyone to tell Him what was in man. Jesus knew what was in man; therefore He did not commit Himself to them. What is that saying? It is saying there was a group of people who came under Jesus' ministry and believed, but they did not believe to salvation because their belief was faulty. It was wrong, shallow, and intellectual, and Jesus did not believe in them. Which leads me to ask this: does this not teach that it is more important for Jesus to believe in us than us to believe in Him? We are going to talk about evidence of true faith, but that evidence is not for God. God sees into your heart. He knows what is in your mind at this very moment. The evidence of saving faith is for you and those around you to know you have really been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

The word **faith** in a Greek dictionary says "to believe in, to trust in, to adhere to, to rely upon, and to commit to". Then as an example it would have this phrase: "to rest upon, to lean against". That is what it means to

believe. That is what it means to have ***faith***. It means you quit resting upon yourself and you transfer your rest to another. It means you quit leaning upon what you are doing or have done, and you totally lean on another.

I read a story of a translator of the Word of God to a tribe in a remote part of Africa that did not have the gospel. As he went into this tribe and began to translate the Bible after learning their language, he came to the words belief and faith, in the Greek New Testament but he did not have a word for them in their language. They did not have a word for trust or belief. So trying to translate it into their language, he was always looking for a word that conveyed what it means to believe. One day he had a tired man come into his hut, and he plopped down onto a chair and made an exclamation word, and the translator said what? The guy said the word again. The word meant ah, I am just going to rest! He asked what it meant to rest and the man said he was going to transfer his weight to this chair. So they translated the word belief with that word because that is what saving faith is!

We are going to talk in depth about the nature of faith next week, but I said all of that to say this: we could be here this morning and not have a true saving faith. That should scare us to death. That should humble us. So let's examine faith over the next two weeks and see if we have it. If we do not have it, we want to get it. I have reread verses 21-31, and in verse 21 this right standing with God is based on faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. Then after talking about the right relationship with God based on the death of Jesus as a propitiatory sacrifice by His blood, he then says it must be received by faith. Then he goes on in verse 26 to say this is to demonstrate God's righteousness so that God can be both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Then in verses 27-31, four more times he talks about this right relationship being based on the principle of faith. Whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, it is faith! Now I want to say this again, and I do not mind you telling others I said this because I believe it to be true: If there were any other response to the gospel, other than

faith, it would have been written in these verses. If the response to a right relationship with God as a gift was faith plus something, the plus something would have been put in these verses! The way we are made right with God on the basis of faith and the propitiatory effect of Jesus' death on a cross is given eight different times in these verses. It is by faith and faith alone! The reason is the source of faith. I want you to see faith as nothing more, and nothing less than the hand that receives the gift of a right relationship with God.

The source of saving faith, according to Paul later in the letter, is whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. I believe that to be true. I believe the moment a person calls upon the name of the Lord they are saved. But verse 14 says "*they will not call on whom they have not believed*". You will not call on God for salvation if you do not believe in Him, or what He has said is true. Then he says you cannot believe unless you have heard, and you cannot hear unless there is a preacher, and there cannot be a preacher unless he has been sent. Then to summarize this whole thing, he says "*so then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.*" This means the source of saving faith is not the sinner; it is the Word of God. Do you see this? I want to be on record as saying that I believe the faith that you respond to the gospel with is yours, but you would never, as a sinner, respond to the propitiatory work of Christ on a cross if it was not for the Word of God breaking into your life and personally telling you what God did for you on that cross. You can be under the Word and not have it break into your life. That is why in the reformed Church we talk about a general call, and an effectual call.

This is clearly seen in John chapter 6. Jesus again says to a group of people that they are following Him for the wrong reason. He said you have seen the signs that I do but you are not following me because of the signs. The signs were supposed to help them see He is the Messiah. But He said they were only following Him because He fed them, and they got satisfied, and had come to Him as a free meal ticket. Jesus understood there were people following Him for the wrong reason. So He said, "*Labor not for the*

food that perishes, but labor for eternal life." Now the Pharisees picked up on this because Jesus said labor for it, and they are a works oriented people. So they thought wow, we can work for eternal life. So they asked what they had to do to know they were working the work of God. Jesus came back and thought, man you guys just do not get it! But He said, *"This is the work of God that you believe in Him who God sent."* Then the Pharisees asked how they could know who God sent and asked to give a sign. He tells them here is the sign: Do you remember how God gave manna in the wilderness? Well I am the true Bread from heaven and whoever believes in Me has everlasting life. Then He said but you do not believe in Me. In verse 37 of John chapter 6 Jesus said some words that just makes people cringe and makes them mad. But guys I did not invent this, and I will never back down from the truth of God's Word. He said, *"All that the Father gives to Me comes to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will in no wise cast out."* They still do not get it and began to murmur. Finally He looked at these Pharisees who did not believe in Him and said, *"No one can come to Me unless My Father who sent Me draws him."* I want to say something to you here. You see, the source of saving faith is not within you, it is within the work of God the Father drawing sinners to Himself by the enablement of the Holy Spirit using the Word of God to create faith.

Now, I want to be on record, and I want to be clear because I get misquoted a lot. I get misquoted because of association a lot. I love my brothers who differ from me, but I believe with all of my heart that when Jesus died on that cross He died for the sins of the whole world, and He made salvation available to every sinner who has ever been born. Let me tell you what this verse does not mean, and this verse proves it. There are some people who believe this and you are just wrong, I am sorry. God did not hang Jesus Christ on a cross and just make salvation available, and then just leave it up to sinful man to decide when he wanted to decide to believe in Jesus. Because if that had been true and the intent of the cross, there would be no one saved, no one, from Adam to the last man. No one would ever come to the cross because man is a sinner. Man is dead in sin

and he is enslaved to the shackle of sin, and does not want God. Paul has just told us in Romans 3, "*There is none who seeks God, there is none who does good, there is none righteous, no not one.*" So you have to see that was not the only intent of the cross. We know to be true that when Jesus stepped out of heaven to go to the cross and make salvation available, He also went knowing there was a group of people who had been elected by God before the foundation of the world and they were going to be given from God to Jesus as a gift. When He went to that cross, He went to redeem them. Do not ever let anyone tell you that Jesus would have died on that cross if no one was going to believe in Him. That is not why He came. He came because He knew when He came there was a people, out of every tribe, every tongue, and every nation who were going to believe in Him. The source of the faith they would have would not be left up to them, but it would be God Himself opening their eyes by the Word of God, under the leadership of the Spirit of God regenerating and opening their eyes to see the beauty of Christ, and drawing them to saving faith. The faith is really ours as a sinner, but as a sinner dead in sin, you will never exercise faith until the Word of God and the Spirit of God converge on you and open your eyes to Jesus Christ. If a person could be saved at any moment in their life, Jesus would have never said that no man could come to Him unless the Father draws him. In context this passage teaches that at that very moment Jesus recognized the reason the Pharisees did not believe in Him, and it was because they were not being drawn by the Father. That does not mean He might not draw them later, but at that present time they were not under the drawing power of the gospel. Instead of making you mad, let me tell you what this should do. It should make you humble. It should make you recognize that without the Word and the Spirit converging upon you, you never would come to Christ. If you are a sinner and right now you sense the Holy Spirit of God identifying with you that this is true, do not believe that you can walk away and come back here next Sunday and be saved. Paul wants us to know from Corinthians that now is the accepted time, today is the day of salvation. The day of salvation is not just any day you are alive and breathing, it is the day God's

Spirit is at work in your heart and life. Without that working of God, you would never come to Christ. Therefore, those of us who believe what we believe, we are not arrogant. We are not boastful. We are humble. You do not feel better than the atheist, or the agnostic, or the sinner who is still strung out on alcohol and drugs because you know, "but for the grace of God" there you would be also! Do not ever listen to someone tell you that this makes us arrogant, no! It makes us fall on our face before God and say thank You that you loved me when I was not lovable! You are the only hope for another sinner like me! So when you pray, you pray for God to be God and step into someone's life and open their eyes to the truth of the gospel! That is what it takes because the source of faith is God and God alone through His Word and through His Spirit. God help us when we lead people to say they believe in Jesus when they are not under the conviction of God's Holy Spirit. It is not real. You can lip something with your mouth but you will never live it out if it was not orchestrated by God.

Secondly is the ²object of our faith. The object of our faith is Jesus. You say we know that, no, we do not know that. I have been studying about some of the reformation fathers and they discovered in their day that people thought faith was saving them. But when they began to talk and counsel, they discovered the people who were thinking they were saved by faith did not have Jesus as the only object of their faith. I believe the Bible teaches in this paragraph that we are brought into a right relationship with God by grace alone as a gift, through Christ alone, and by faith alone. But the faith that is really saving faith has to have the right object. You can have faith, but have faith in the wrong object. You can have the ability to believe, to trust, to adhere to, to commit to, to rely upon, and to rest fully upon. But if you are not resting upon the right object, you are not in a right relationship with God.

I read in John Montgomery Boyce's commentary on Romans about a church committee that was accepting a new member into membership. They wanted to make he was saved like we try to do here, except we do not have a committee, we have counselors who have that authority. He

said the committee asked the man what he believed for his salvation. The man said he believed what the church believes. The committee thought they had better make sure of what the church really believed so they asked him what the church believed. The man said they believe what I believe. The committee thought they had a problem. They put their heads together and asked him what he and the church believed. The man said they believed the same thing. I am convinced that some have faith they are in the right church, and because they are in the right church, it makes them saved because they are the only church. Some believe because they have right doctrine they are saved. Some believe because they have faith they are saved. You see, you can have faith in faith, faith in yourself, faith in something you have done, and you are not saved. A right relationship with God never comes to a person who believes and has faith in partly what God did on the cross, and partly on what they do now. Are you listening? I cannot tell you how many people I talk to assure me they are saved because they walked an isle when they were 12 years old, and they prayed a sinner's prayer. I ask what they are trusting in and they say they are trusting in when they walked that isle they got saved. I trusted when I said that prayer I got saved. Listen to me, you can have real faith and walk an isle and express it, you can have real faith and express it in a sinner's prayer, but the only object of faith that saves is a person who is completely, 100% leaning, trusting fully, and casting all of his weight on the truth that in Christ God dealt with your sin once and for all.

This past summer Celisa was with her niece Emma at my sister's swimming pool. Celisa was in the water and Emma was on the concrete ledge around the pool, and she was perfectly content to stay there. But Celisa wanted Emma wanted her to get into the water. If I can use a biblical word, Celisa started wooing Emma to come to her. That is the word for **draw** in John 6:44. Get this picture; Emma is fine where she is but Celisa is not fine. She wants Emma where she is so she starts drawing all of Emma's attention. She starts trying to get Emma to leave where she is and come to where Celisa is, but Celisa is not going to pick her up and force her. Celisa starts

talking and wooing her, and the next thing you know Emma is in a dilemma. Emma was fine; she was minding her own business and having fun around the pool. She never thought about getting in the pool but now she realizes she is not where Celisa is. She realizes she is on the security of the concrete and Celisa is in the water. All of a sudden Emma now wants to be where Celisa is, but the only way she can get there is to jump. Celisa assures her that if she jumps she will catch her, and then she will be with her. Do you know what eventually causes Emma to let go and get into the water where Celisa is? She had to trust Celisa. The moment she trusted Celisa, arms and legs came flying toward her, but that was frightening for her because Celisa is in the water.

A sinner likes where they are, and likes being in control of their own life. When you start sensing the wooing of God, and it gets your mind off of you, and you begin to see Him and realize He is holy and you are separated from Him, you begin to think about how you can make that jump. There is only one way, and that is the blood of Jesus Christ. It allows you to step out of a life of sin onto the red carpet of God's Son's blood, and find yourself where God is because you trust it is true. There was a time when I did not trust it to be true. Then there was a time when I did, and it changed everything in my life. I do not care what kind of church you have been in; you need to ask yourself what the true object of your salvation is right now. Who is the true object of your faith? Is it Jesus Christ? Do you know the Holy Spirit of God has convicted you of being a sinner, and you have turned from a life of sin to Christ? If not, and you are listening and you have felt nothing, and you sense nothing, and you believe nothing, then just continue to sit there. But if you sense something going on in your mind and heart that is moving you toward God and away from sin, that is the work of God I promise you. It is not your unredeemed flesh, or Satan. He does not want you to move toward God, he wants you to stay where you are. Your unredeemed flesh wants you to stay where you are, but God wants you to be where He is! The evidence of that is the Holy Spirit. If you are a sinner and you feel nothing, I would fall on my face before God and

ask Him to be merciful to you a sinner, because your only hope is in God. God will not turn the person away who comes to His Son Jesus Christ, but you cannot come until God moves in your heart.