

PILLAR BASICS: *Believe the Gospel*

Understanding the Central Message of the Bible

Pillar Church exists to *Know Jesus and Make Him Known*. It is our desire that the people that live in our community would have the opportunity to hear and understand the message of Jesus. We do not just want you to hear it, but to understand it and have conversation partners and friends in your life that give you time and space to come to grips with its life-changing, powerful message.

In this booklet that is what we aim to do. Take a walk with us through a summary of the good news that Jesus came to proclaim and provide. We will look at four statements you need to be able to say with sincerity in order to embrace the hope Jesus offers all to come and receive. The four statements will follow the high points of a book of the Bible found in the New Testament called The Epistle to the Romans. In Romans, the writer Paul is giving an overview of the major ideas of the gospel and the main points will help us as well through this short study. The four statements we will cover are.

1. I HAVE A CREATOR.

2. I HAVE SINNED.

3. I HAVE A SAVIOR.

4. I HAVE RESPONDED.

An additional session is included to help you understand the vital connection between personal faith and public identification with a local church through baptism.

5. I HAVE IDENTIFIED.

GETTING STARTED: Read the introductory thoughts below and answer the questions

The gospel is the central announcement of Christianity to the world. The word itself means “good news” which helps us to distinguish this central message of the Bible from common understandings of religion and spirituality. Much of what people think about religion and spirituality is built on a complex system of rewards and punishments or enlightening wisdom that promises to help or assist your personal sense of well-being. The gospel is neither of those two things. It is not a system of merit based rewards and it is not wise advice aimed at helping you reach personal fulfillment. It is an announcement about who God is and what He has done through Christ to save us from sin and by grace reconcile us to a new relationship with Him.

In a moment we will look at some of the core information that we must have if we are going to be able to understand what exactly this good news is; but first consider an illustration. Imagine there are two ancient cities expecting an impending attack from a warring neighbor. In each of the cities, their army goes out to meet the foe at a distance beyond what is visible. In each city the remaining inhabitants stay behind and wonder whether to flee for their lives or trust that the army has been victorious. A time later, in the first city, a messenger returns and as he runs through the gates begins to cry, “The enemy is coming, if you escape quickly enough and run far enough away you might be able to survive.” Most people conceive of religion and spirituality a bit like that. If I do the right things quickly enough and long enough I might make it to safety. Meanwhile, in the second city, the army has been victorious and the messenger has run through the gates announcing, “The victory has been won. The enemy has been defeated.” They only need to believe the good news and not flee the confines of the city to enjoy the fruits of the victory. The second city has received good news. The gospel is that sort of good news. What needed to be done has been accomplished by Christ and by faith we enjoy the benefits that he has secured for us at great cost to Himself.

Q. Where did you gain your current understanding of Jesus and His message? What factors have shaped your views and feelings about Christianity?

Q. Is there anything surprising or new to you about the introductory paragraphs above? *Describe your thoughts below.*

I HAVE A CREATOR

Summary: We cannot understand the gospel without coming to understand God as our Creator. It is important to think not only about the reality that God created, but also the implications of God's relationship to us as Creator. God created us to live in His world and designed us to flourish as we live according to His instruction and purposes.

Romans 1:19-23. [[19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. [21] For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (ESV)

Genesis 1:1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (ESV)

Genesis 1:26-27. Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (ESV)

Genesis 1:31a. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. (ESV)

I have a Creator who made everything good. The message of the gospel begins with reminding us that we do live in our own reality that we have created but God's He is the creator, designer, sustainer, and director of life. We can only understand the meaning of our lives when we see and understand them as a part of the grander picture that God is bringing about through His story of redemption. When we live life without reference to God we lose the ability to see life clearly. We experience what is described above as the darkening of our hearts and the futility of our own thinking.

But God's intention from the beginning was to place us in the midst of His good creation as creatures who would bear His image and glorify Him through our lives. We were not created as sinners, we were created as image bearers and the gospel calls us back to this purpose.

Q. How does it change our thinking about life when we believe that God created us rather than seeing life as a cosmic accident?

Romans 8:18-23. [18] For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. [19] For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. [20] For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope [21] that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. [22] For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. [23] And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (ESV)

I have a Creator who promises to renew the goodness of creation. It is God's plan to bring renewal to Creation under the Lordship of Jesus Christ in his timing and plan. He is not absent like a watchmaker that has wound up the watch and is sitting back disconnected from what is happening.

Q. How is the created world described in its current state in the passage above? (v. 19-20) How do you see this reality in the world around you?

Q. What does the passage above say that creation itself is waiting for (v. 21)?

Acts 17:30-31. [30] The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, [31] because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." (ESV)

Hebrews 9:27-28. [27] And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, [28] so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. (ESV)

I have a Creator who will bring justice and hold me accountable through Christ. No one has a problem with believing in God until they are faced with the idea that God will hold them accountable. We want to believe that we can live our lives in whatever manner we want and never face any justice. But the Scriptures remind us, though God's justice has been delayed in order to offer us mercy, there is a day when Jesus will call our lives into account. That moment has been appointed for each of us and in the words above is a fixed appointment when we look our Creator and Judge in the eye.

Q. If you had to stand before Jesus and account for your life decisions, what concerns would you have?

SUMMARY THOUGHTS

The Creator is both our authority and the author of our story. If we are going to understand the gospel we have to begin from the perspective that God is entirely different than everything else that exists, including ourselves. God, as Creator, has a special claim on the world that we do not have. He made us; we did not make him or anything else around us. As Creator he has the authority to dictate to us how we are to live in the world he made and the purpose for our existence. Even better He alone possesses the wisdom and insight that can help us make sense of our lives.

The Creator has not left us without reasons to believe in Him. If you struggle to believe in the existence of God as our Creator, take some time to do some reading on the subject from solid Christian thinkers who can help you think through the important questions. Here are two books I would recommend you consider reading:

The Case for a Creator, by Lee Strobel

The Reason for God, by Timothy Keller

IS IT REASONABLE TO BELIEVE IN GOD?

In our day and age, many people seem embarrassed to admit to believing in a personal God who created the universe. Truth be told, in the United States a recent poll showed that more than 83% of people say they believe in God and out of the other 17% remaining, only 9% said clearly that they do not believe in God at all.

Statistics like this are not surprising to Christians. We read in Romans 1:19-20, that “what can be known about God is plain” because God has made Himself known. It goes on to say that “His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.” Simply put, the world around us and our experience in it furnish us with regular reminders of God’s existence. If we stop and think about these reminders they bolster our confidence. They also give us the necessary motivations to seek out a relationship with the God who left His fingerprints all over His creation. ***Here are a few reasons that belief in God is a reasonable conclusion for intelligent people:***

We can see the purposeful, intelligent design in nature. It is not crazy to look at the language of DNA and conclude someone wrote the code. It is not unreasonable to see the intricate design of a bird feather, or a chameleon’s ability to change color and conclude that a master engineer is behind it all. Take the bacteria flagellum for example. It has a design structure that allows it to run like a motor and propel the organism’s movement. Michael Behe calls it an irreducibly complex feature, meaning that there are a lot of components to the biological design that would have had to be present immediately for the tail to provide any real function.

Further, It’s not absurd to learn about the perfect conditions that allow earth to be inhabitable for carbon-based life and conclude that a master builder created a home suitable for us that is a rarity in the known universe. Astro-Physicist Guillermo Gonzalez demonstrates even further that the unique features that allow human life to thrive on Earth just happen to correspond with the features that allow Earth to be a place from which intelligent beings like us can see out into the universe for discovery. So the builder gave us a home with a view! For all of these reasons and more, it is reasonable to look at the purposeful design of the created world and conclude that there is a God who made it all.

We recognize that our moral awareness needs deeper roots than nature. As human beings we have an insatiable desire to know what is good and right. Although we have plenty of problems with following through with actually doing it, we spend a great deal of time wrestling with what is right and wrong. We naturally expect others to recognize certain big ideas as right or wrong as though we are all working off the same underlying concepts.

Even though there may be many disagreements about the details, there are simpler and clearer things that we believe everyone should acknowledge; for example, “It is wrong to murder babies for fun” or “love is better than hate”. As soon as we say, “you *ought* to be against murdering babies for fun” we are saying that there is a certain way that human beings were made to live. **If there is no God, then this idea that we *ought* to do one thing rather than another makes no sense** and is just a figment of our imagination.

The best way to make sense of this universal moral baseline is to recognize that a purposeful, moral being created us with intentions that reflect His own character.

We understand how complex things get their start. In the 20th century, scientists concluded that the Universe began in an explosive powerful moment. The conclusion that the universe had a beginning was troubling for most theoretical physicists because they quickly understood that *intelligent agents* produce complex things that have a beginning and we appear to be living in just such a universe. One with a beginning caused by an intelligent being.

One such physicist was NASA scientist Robert Jastrow. He said, "Astronomers now find they have painted themselves into a corner because they have proven, by their own methods, that the world began abruptly in an act of creation to which you can trace the seeds of every star, every planet, every living thing in this cosmos and on the earth. And they have found that all this happened as a product of forces they cannot hope to discover. That there are what I or anyone would call supernatural forces at work is now, I think, a scientifically proven fact."

The formal expression of this argument for God's existence is something called the *Kalaam Cosmological argument*, an argument for God from the existence of the universe originally formulated by William Lane Craig. It goes like this. Everything that begins to exist has a cause. The Universe began to exist. The Universe has a cause. Event causation can carry us back to the beginning, but before that there is neither time or space to allow an event to be the cause, therefore it is reasonable to conclude that an agent outside of time and space caused the universe to begin.

We realize that without God we cannot explain the origin of things like equality, justice, love, science and human reason. Christians believe that God created all people as intelligent beings who can discover truth in the world around us, were created in the image of God making us equal to all other people, have a real need for love, and a responsibility to display justice to one another. Why? It is because these things are at the heart of who God is and who He made us to be.

Worldviews that deny the existence of God have to explain these ideas on their own terms and simply cannot do so adequately. If there is no God, our sense of equality is just a misguided moral idea in an amoral universe. If we evolved the way materialists describe evolution, then we are not really equal. Inequality is reality and to pretend otherwise is sticking our head in the sand. Try explaining all of these things above without robbing from Christian Theistic ideas. You will have trouble doing so.

For example, Science requires the idea that there is an underlying pattern and design to the universe, that our minds are actually built to adequately take in data, reason intelligently, and do so honestly. If there is not a God and irrational forces produced us, then we are irrational creatures who wrongfully believe that we possess rationality. When you start actually examining life, you realize that the existence of God explains so much more about our actual human experience and desires for life, than a cold scientific worldview. Because of this, it is reasonable for intelligent people to believe in God and want to discover more about Him.

We have personal experiences or know of personal experiences that are hard to explain away. The first four reasons above require more intellectual reflection, but many people can attest to personal experiences of seeking to know God and encountering His presence and work in their lives personally. Sure, some experiences may be easy to discount or explain as wishful thinking. But many people can give intelligent, powerful testimony to ways they have personally experienced God's presence and work in their life. There are stories of transformation, personal answers to prayer, miraculous healing, divine guidance, and other similar experiences that remind us that God is not just there, but incredibly personal.

Ultimately there are many good lines of reasoning that support a belief in God. We will discover during our study that there are some things that cloud our view of who God is and what He is like and for some call into question whether He is really there. But here at the beginning it is good to be reminded that pursuing a deeper knowledge of God and His plans and purposes for your life is not a fool's errand. It is worth every minute you devote to it.

I HAVE A SINNED

Summary: Our understanding of the gospel is tied to the clarity we have about our own status as sinners. Many people do not feel the need for the saving work of Christ in their lives because they do not see or understand the reality of the situation they are in as sinners. According to the Bible, Sin is our problem. It has set us against God, deceived us about what is good, and spoiled every aspect of our lives in some manner.

Romans 1:18, 24-25 . [18] For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

...

[24] Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (ESV)

Romans 2:1-5. [1] Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. [2] We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. [3] Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? [4] Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? [5] But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. (ESV)

I have sinned and set myself against God. Notice the surprisingly strong language that begins the passages above and really can be seen throughout. God's wrath is set against our ungodliness, every sense of unrighteousness. It says in the second passage, that as a result of our sin, God's judgment "rightly falls on those who practice such things". We will look at those things in a moment, but our sin is obviously serious simply because of the fact that it puts us at odds with God's righteous justice. The passages of scripture end by saying that our sin causes us to "store up wrath" for ourselves when God's wrath against sin and evil is finally revealed. In all of this we are told that our own actions "condemn" ourselves so that we know this is true about us.

Q. What is the argument being made in Romans 2:1-2? How would you put the point in your own words?

I have sinned and deceive myself about what is good. In Romans 1:18 above the Apostle Paul is describing the general condition of all of mankind. When he does he speaks the truth about us that we are often slow to admit. Here it is, we "suppress the truth" we know about God so that we can go on living in ways that are contrary to His instruction. Part of the way that we sin, is described in verses 24-25 above as it continues with this idea. Because we suppress the truth about God, we live our lives worshipping created

things rather than God. What that practically means is that we sin by putting greater emphasis and value on our material possessions, earthly relationships, personal pursuits over loving God and living for Him. We deceive ourselves and buy into the lie that everything else is so much more important and God has allowed us to go on in our deception and experience the real confusion and emptiness of sin. The only way to a new beginning is to acknowledge that we have centered our lives on the wrong things and turn to God to lead us out of the confusion created by living with ourselves at the center.

Q. Can you think of ways that you have demoted God from His rightful place in your life as Creator and promoted other things above Him? List a few below.

Q. What do you think the Apostle Paul's point is in Romans 2:4-5? Can you think of ways we presume upon God's kindness?

Mark 7:14-23. [14] And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: [15] There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him." [17] And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. [18] And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, [19] since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) [20] And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. [21] For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, [22] coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. [23] All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." (ESV)

I have sinned and sinful patterns permeate the heart of my life. Notice what Jesus does in this passage in Mark 7. He makes it clear that our problem with sin is not primarily an external problem. We do not participate in sin because of our circumstances, or because of our culture, or because of external factors in our lives. Sin is a matter of the heart. Sin is our broken, twisted response to the world that results from ignoring God. He uses the term "defiled" here to describe our status. Essentially, the poison is in our well. It is at the very core of our life, our heart. Out of the heart, we respond to the world around us and we either trust God or twist the world to our own purposes. That is the root of sin.

Q. Based on the teaching of Jesus above, do you think it is possible for our actions to be sinful even at times when we do not realize it on the surface?

Q. What are some examples in your own life of actions that looked good on the surface, but in your heart had a sinful motivation?

SUMMARY THOUGHTS

Jesus came for sinners. In Luke 5:31-32 Jesus says, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. [32] I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” The irony is most people think Jesus is for the religiously cleaned up and straightened out, but the truth is just the opposite. Jesus came for sinners. When Jesus spoke these words he was not dividing the world up into two categories, the sinners and the righteous. He was really helping us to see that only those who are really willing to see themselves as God sees them, as sinners in need of mercy, will be able to understand what Jesus really came for.

We ARE sinners, not just people who have sinned. As we have learned, sin has so distorted and permeated our lives that we cannot simply cease from participating in it. Because of this we are not in a right standing with God and can never be on our own. Self-improvement cannot erase past guilt for breaking God’s commands. Will-power cannot untangle the web and remove the poison from the well of our hearts. All of our best efforts cannot tip the scales to cause us to earn the blessing of God and remove the stain of sin. Any belief otherwise falls short of taking the problem seriously, sort of like a cancer patient who attempts to treat their illness by taking two Tylenol each morning.

Q. What other questions do you have about the topic of sin?

Q. Are you able to say with sincerity, “I have sinned against God” and acknowledge that you need his help?

I HAVE A SAVIOR

Summary: Once we understand the reality of our sinful condition, then the work of Christ becomes all the more clear and meaningful. If sin is our problem then the good news is that Jesus is our solution. He saves us from the penalty and effects of sin and reconciles us back into a relationship with our Creator.

Romans 3:21-26. [21] But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—[22] the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] 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. [26] It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (ESV)

Romans 5:6-11. [6] For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. [7] For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—[8] but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. [9] Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. [10] For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. [11] More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (ESV)

Romans 8:1-2; 11. [1] There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. [2] For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death...[11] If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. (ESV)

I have a Savior who gives righteousness as a gift. Our sin has made us unrighteous and guilty before God. In legal terms that means our 'standing' or position before God is a guilty standing. Romans 3:22 explains the heart of the good news of Salvation in Christ. There is a righteousness from God that belongs to Christ made available to count for those who believe and change their standing. Verse 21 says that this righteousness is not a righteousness that comes from us keeping the law. It is the righteousness that Jesus himself has earned by His life and then offers to apply to us as a gift as an undeserved and saving favor toward us. So when it comes to our standing before God, even though all have sinned, through Christ they can be counted righteous by receiving His gift by faith.

Q. Why do we need the righteousness of Christ rather than just offering our own to God by committing to do good works? *cf. Isaiah 64:6-7*

Q. Read John 1:1-4; 13. How would you describe the identity of Jesus from these verses? What does that say about who it is that has come to save us?

I have a Savior who removes the guilt of sin. The two passages above are both explanations of the significance of what Jesus did by dying on the cross. Jesus himself described the cross as a sacrificial act where he was suffering the punishment that we deserve for our sins. In Romans 3:25 we read that at the cross Jesus was “put forth by God as a propitiation by His blood”. Jesus was righteous himself, but became a sin-bearer for us. The word propitiation here means that he bore the punishment that our sins deserved and removed the guilt of our sin through paying for it on the cross.

Q. What does Romans 5:7-8 tell us about God’s motivation for sending Jesus?

I have a Savior who renews my relationship with God. The language of reconciliation dominates Romans 5. Romans 5:1 says that through what Christ has done we have “peace” with God. We see that through Christ, the wrath of God toward our sin is removed. We who have been like enemies toward Him because of our sin are no longer like enemies, but we are instead reconciled. The language of peace and reconciliation is relational language. We do not just have our sin legally removed, but Jesus connects us back to a real relationship with God. It is both legal and familial. We are not just acquitted of our guilt but brought into the family.

Q. How significant is it to you that God wants you to be reconciled to Him? Have you ever thought of yourself as estranged from God?

I have a Savior who rose from the dead and gives the promise of eternal life. In Romans 8:1-2 we see that Jesus has interrupted the law of sin and death and brought us under the law of the Spirit of Life. What does that mean? It means that instead of sin dominating our life and it ending in death and destruction, we can have the hope of something more. Jesus accomplishes our Salvation by giving us the promise of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God’s presence and power to indwell us and make us new. Through the Holy Spirit we share in the same power that raised Christ from the dead and have within us the promise of the resurrection to eternal life. The law of the Spirit is the promise that those who are indwelt by the Spirit through Salvation will be raised with Christ to new life. The law of sin and death condemns us to be punished for our sin, but the law of the Spirit of Life unites us to Christ who has removed our sin and given us the credit of His righteousness.

Q. Summarize what Jesus contributes to our Salvation from what we have read so far. Summarize what we contribute. Compare the two lists.

SUMMARY THOUGHTS

Christ has accomplished our Salvation and offered it to us on the basis of grace. One definition of grace is “unmerited favor” and from our study we should understand that Salvation is an offer of unmerited but real favor from God where we are counted righteous because of Christ’s perfect obedience, cleared of guilt because of His sacrifice on the cross, and promised eternal life through the giving of His Spirit. Jesus has accomplished and provided all of this to save us, that is good news for anyone who has genuinely felt lost and guilty because of sin.

Q. What other questions do you have about the way that Christ has provided for our Salvation?

Q. Are you able to say with sincerity, “I have a Savior” and understand what that means from the passages we studied?

I HAVE RESPONDED

Summary: It is possible for someone to be offered a valuable gift and never open it and enjoy the gift in substance. Over the past couple of sessions we have looked at our need for forgiveness and transformation as sinners and we have looked at what Christ did to offer Himself for us and provide Salvation. But it is important to note that Christianity is not a general philosophy that we try to follow, it is a personal response to God's offer to save us and give eternal life. Many people may like the idea of being forgiven but prefer to keep God at a distance rather than open their life to his transforming work through repentance and faith in Christ. Let's look together at what it means to respond to this good news.

Romans 10:5-13. [5] For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. [6] But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) [7] "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). [8] But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); [9] because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. [11] For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." [12] For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. [13] For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (ESV)

I respond by calling on the Lord not by proving my commitment. Here in Romans 10 the Apostle Paul is talking about what it means to respond to the gospel. He begins by contrasting the message of the gospel with the foolish idea that we could make ourselves right with God by keeping the law. He is saying in verse 5 that you have to live by all of them (all the time) if you hope to attain a righteous standing by the law (an impossibility). In contrast he says that the righteousness that is credited to us through faith in Christ does not come by great demonstrations of spiritual effort. We do not attain it by somehow climbing up to heaven spiritually or diving deep down somewhere where Christ must be hidden. Why not? Because God brings his Word near to us. If we hear his word, the good news of his saving work through Christ, then we know He has done it all for us and we only need to call upon Him. He is close by. The response happens in our heart and on our lips.

Q. What do verses 9-10 above tell you about the importance of personally and publicly believing in Christ?

Q. Why do you think the Apostle Paul wrote verse 13? Do you think there are some people who may believe that they could never be saved?

Luke 5:29–32. [29] And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. [30] And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” [31] And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. [32] I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” (ESV)

Mark 1:14–15. [14] Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, [15] and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (ESV)

Acts 20:18–21. [18] And when they came to him, he said to them: “You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, [19] serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; [20] how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, [21] testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. (ESV)

I respond by calling on the Lord in repentance. Repentance means in its simplest form to change direction and return to God. The truth of the matter is, that we have trusted in a lot of other things above trusting in God. We have made our own pursuits of more importance than following God’s heart and obeying His instruction. Because of that, responding to the gospel means that we stop trusting ourselves over God, we stop being devoted to other things above God, and we stop looking to other things for our Salvation over looking to Christ alone. Notice how clear the emphasis on repentance is in the passages above. Jesus has come to call sinners away from their sinful lifestyles to return to God and repent. The summary in Mark 1:15 of what Jesus was telling people to do in response to the gospel was repent and believe. The Apostle Paul in Acts 20 tells us that the best way to describe what he was calling people to do in response to the teaching was to repent and place their faith in Jesus Christ.

So when we call upon the Lord, we are saying that we want God to change our direction in life and are turning from our wisdom, desires, and patterns to trust in Christ.

Q. What would you describe as your biggest barrier to repenting and turning to Christ? Is there a particular area of life where you do not want to submit to God’s design and instruction?

Ephesians 2:8–9. [8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (ESV)

Philippians 3:7–9. [7] But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [8] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— (ESV)

Galatians 2:16. [16] yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. (ESV)

I respond by calling on the Lord in faith. Faith in its simplest form means to trust or believe the promise of God. In faith we are relying on what Christ offers us through his death and resurrection rather than our good works to save us. In faith we are believing the promise of God to grant forgiveness and eternal life to all those who believe the offer that Jesus makes to receive Salvation as a gift. Faith is what happens in our heart when we see the promise of the good news of Jesus Christ and believe it and trust in it as our ultimate hope. So when we call upon the Lord for Salvation we are calling on Him in faith and it is on the basis of our faith in Christ that he grants forgiveness of sin, the promise of eternal life, and the renewing work of the Holy Spirit to transform our lives.

Q. In Philippians 3, the Apostle Paul summarizes his own experience of repentance and faith. Read verses 1-9 in a Bible and describe in your own words what it meant for him to repent and believe.

SUMMARY THOUGHTS

Sometimes defining terms can help make things clearer. Here are a few terms that we have been using that might need some clarification.

Grace – Unmerited favor, an undeserved blessing or status that was not earned

Faith – Belief in a promise or a person's word, personal trust or reliance on an idea or person

Repentance – To change direction, turn from sin or self-reliance. To return to God from the other things we have trusted in or loved above Him.

Justify – To declare as righteous or in right standing with someone.

The substance of calling on the Lord is more important than the form. Maybe at this point you have come to believe "I Have a Creator, I Have Sinned, and I Have a Savior" but have not responded to the good news in the ways we have talked about in this session. You may be wondering how do I do that? There is not magic formula or special way to ask. God delights in the sincere desire of our heart to be saved and forgiven. He hears our prayers when we call upon Him and express our faith in the promise of Jesus to save all those who trust in him. Spend time even now pouring out your heart to Him and asking Him to give you this gift of Salvation personally. When you are done, rest in the promise of Romans 10:13 that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Q. Are you able to say with sincerity, "I have responded" and understand what that means from the passages we studied?