

The Matthew Road To The Kingdom of Heaven

or

What Is Wrong With The Romans Road To Salvation

You may have heard of the “Romans Road to Salvation.” It is a collection of verses from the letter of Paul to the Romans. It is usually most of these verses in roughly this order: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23, ESV), “none is righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10, ESV), “for the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23, ESV), “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8, ESV), “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” (Romans 10:9, ESV), “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13, ESV), “since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1, ESV), “there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1, ESV) & “for I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39, ESV). People use these verses to present everything they think someone needs to know in order to “get saved” and have assurance of getting to heaven. A person is usually told that all they must do is have faith (or believe) in who Jesus is, what he did by his death on the cross, and to accept his free gift of salvation. Often a person using “Romans Road” will mention the need to feel sorry for your sins and ask God forgiveness, although the verses used do not mention this. Some will suggest that you must turn from your sins, although it is not common to hear a definition of what that means. The person who is being showed the “Romans Road” is then commonly advised to pray a prayer asking Jesus to come into his heart and become his personal savior. People who do that are usually assured that all of their sins, including the ones they have not yet committed, are already forgiven and that a place in heaven is assured for them. The people who use this and similar presentations would not say that a short presentation could have everything a person should know about being a Christian but that it is everything *necessary* to “get saved” and have assurance of going to heaven.

It does not seem to occur to many people who use the “Romans Road” that it is strange to try to present how to be a *Christian* without ever referring to what *Christ* had to say on that topic. Few people seem to question the idea of asking someone to pray a prayer that Jesus never asked anyone to pray or of offering assurance that Jesus never offered anyone. Nor does it seem odd to many people to present a message supposedly about how to become a disciple of Jesus, using

nothing but quotes from a letter written to people who were already disciples of Jesus. Sadly, even though Jesus had much to say on the topic, what he said is often not mentioned.

It is worth noting that a letter like Romans can be used to construct a few different “roads”, all leading in different directions. That is not to say that Romans contains false information. It is just the reality of what can be done when taking a few small snippets from a larger work out of context. Even in the early days after Jesus, what Paul said about salvation in his letters was being twisted and this was leading people to destruction; 2 Peter 3:14-18 warns about this.

With those dangers in mind, here is a different “road”, one based on the words of Jesus from the good message of Matthew:

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 4:17, ESV)

Jesus began his preaching ministry with this call to repentance. God had always called people to turn away from sin. For those who do so, the coming of Jesus brought a new opportunity. Now the kingdom of heaven was within reach.

“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:20,ESV)

Jesus never told anyone that it was impossible to be righteous. Rather, he called people to live a righteousness that exceeded the righteousness of the Jewish religious leaders. As Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, even the righteousness required by the law of Moses was not sufficient in God’s kingdom (see especially Matthew 5:21-48). Therefore, while announcing a new kingdom, Jesus also taught a new law.

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” (Matthew 7:13-14, ESV)

The way that Jesus called people to is a difficult one. The easy way that just requires acceptance of some truths or good intentions without any real work or suffering is the way to destruction.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 7:21, ESV)

Good words without obedience will not get a person into the kingdom of heaven. Jesus did not leave room for any doubt about who does the will of his father when he said the following:

“What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?” (Matthew 21:28-31a, ESV)

To agree to do the will of the Father and to actually do the will of the Father are two very different things.

“Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will

never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3, ESV)

Entry into the kingdom of heaven requires the simplicity and humility to accept what Jesus taught like a young child would accept what his earthly father taught.

“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
(Matthew 5:48, ESV)

Being perfect or complete is not an option but a demand. So many people think they can not be perfect but Jesus taught how it was possible:

And behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.” He said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The young man said to him, “All these I have kept. What do I still lack?” Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” (Matthew 19:16-21, ESV)

Again Jesus makes it clear that obtaining eternal life requires us to obey God. Jesus left us the example of simple obedience to his father and he calls us to follow him in that. Good intentions alone will not get us where Jesus went. Jesus taught plainly what would be required of those who wanted to be his disciples and find the way to life:

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.” (Matthew 16:24-27, ESV)

Nothing less than true self-denial and self-inflicted death of our flesh and following Jesus will lead to life. If we seek to keep our lives or the things we love in this world, then in the end we will lose our lives. We must really forsake everything and not just the extremely wicked things. Jesus had to give up heaven and submit himself to death before he could be resurrected. We must walk in his footsteps if we want to follow him into his kingdom; there are no short-cuts. If we live in the fear of God that comes from the knowledge that Jesus is going to come back to judge the living and the dead and repay us for what we have done, we will be ready to face the trouble that Jesus faced:

“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” (Matthew 24:9-13, ESV)

The one who endures all these troubles and yet remains righteous will be

saved in the end but the one who turns back will face certain destruction. With that in mind we will heed the strong warning that Jesus gave:

“Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

(Matthew 24:42-44, ESV)

Unlike “Romans Road” and similar presentations, this one will not end by giving you any assurances that Jesus did not give. The information presented above is possibly not enough for you to truly count the costs of following Jesus. Just from reading the verses above it may not be clear to you some of the specific ways that Jesus calls you to deny yourself and take up your cross. Perhaps you have anger against your brother and need to hear that Jesus taught that even angry words would put you in peril of hell (Matthew 5:21-22). Perhaps you lust after women and need to hear that Jesus said that even private lust was adultery and could cause you to be thrown into hell (Matthew 5:27-30). Perhaps you are divorced and have been remarried and need to hear that Jesus said that you are committing adultery (Matthew 5:31-32). Perhaps you desire to defend your possessions, loved ones or yourself from evil people and you need to hear that Jesus said to love even your enemies and not to resist evildoers (Matthew 5:38-48). Perhaps you have chosen not to forgive someone and need to hear that Jesus taught that God will not forgive you if you do not forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15). Perhaps you want more things than you need and need to hear that Jesus commanded you not to store up treasure on earth (Matthew 6:19-21). No prayer or belief or intention will do you any good if you do not follow the road of self-denial, suffering and death that Jesus walked.

If the way presented here seems different than what you understood the way into the kingdom of heaven was like, then you would do well to read all of the good message of Matthew and then the rest of the accounts of Jesus life and teachings written by Mark, Luke and John. Keeping in mind the danger mentioned previously, consider everything that Jesus had to say about entering into the kingdom of God and being ready for his return and judgment. If you are not able to present the good message that you believe using the words of Jesus in the good message of Matthew, then you can be sure you have been deceived and that you believe a different good message than Jesus taught. The same is true for the good messages of Mark, Luke and John.

When you have understood Jesus’ message, then you will be ready to read Romans and all the other books of the New Testament. If you start with the master first, you will find that Peter, John, Paul, James and Jude all preached and walked the same “road” that Jesus did.