



The Matthew Road to the Kingdom of Heaven

or

What Is Wrong with the "Romans Road to Salvation"

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You may have heard of the “Romans Road to Salvation,” a collection of verses from the letter of Paul to the Romans. It usually consists of at least some of the following verses, in roughly this order:

- “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23)
- “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.” (Romans 3:10)
- “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 6:23)
- “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)
- “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” (Romans 10:9)
- “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:13)
- “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1)

- “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1) Note the last half of the verse is not quoted!
- “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)

People use these verses to present everything they think someone needs to know in order to “get saved” and have an 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 for 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 really means. The person who is being shown 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 contains 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 become a Christian ... but without ever referring to what Christ had to say on that topic. Likewise, few people seem to question the idea of asking someone to pray a prayer that Jesus never asked anyone to pray, or of offering an 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 several 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 out of context from a larger work. 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 Gospel of Matthew:

- “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 4:17) 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 about to be established on earth.

- “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:20) 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 ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matthew 7:13-14) The way that Jesus called people to is a difficult one. The easy way that only requires acceptance of some truths or good intentions without any real work or suffering is the way to destruction.

- “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 7:21) 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: “But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he

came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father?” (Matthew 21:28-31) To agree to do the will of the Father, and to actually do the will of the Father are two very different things.

- “And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3)

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.

- “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48) Being perfect or complete is not an option, but a demand. So many people think they cannot be perfect, but Jesus taught how it was possible: “And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said

unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.” (Matthew 19:16-21) 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.

Isn't it strange to try to present how to become a Christian ... but without ever referring to what Christ had to say on that topic?

- “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.” (Matthew 16:24-27) Nothing less than true self-denial and self-inflicted death of our fleshly desires 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 shortcuts.

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 shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” (Matthew 24:9-13)

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: “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.” (Matthew 24:42-44)

If you are not able to present the gospel that you believe using the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, then you can be sure you have been deceived ...

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 while your first spouse is still living, 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 Gospel of Matthew, and then the rest of the Gospels. 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 gospel that you believe using the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, then you can be sure you have been deceived and that you believe a different gospel than Jesus taught. The same is true for the gospels 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. ~