

by Brad Jersak

# "Are You Saved?"

I never used to blink twice when asked. When someone asked me if I was *saved* I recognized the question was as normal as asking a stranger whose accent you recognized where they were from.

"Are you Canadian?"

"Yes, how did you know, eh?"

"Oh, I could tell by your accent?"

"Are you saved?"

"Sure am! Glad you could tell!"

After a while, the "are you saved" question *did* cause me to blink—sometimes because of mistaken identity ("No, I'm a



Buddhist") and other times because it felt invasive (like, "Are you pregnant" or "Are you gay?"). I also began to wince because I am suspicious about our assumptions as to what *saved* means.

So...are you saved? How?

And when? In Scripture, depending on the passage, *saved* can be past, present, provisional or prospective:

- **Past**—being *saved* can be framed as an experience we've already had ("...for it is by grace that you *have been saved* ...") as in Ephesians 2:8; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5. Even assuming I was saved, when exactly? When Jesus died or when he rose? When I believed, or when I said "The Sinner's Prayer" or

when I got baptized?

- **Present**—being saved is also described as an ongoing process in the present ("...to us who are being saved...") as in 1 Corinthians 1:18 and 2 Corinthians 2:15. I'm on a salvation journey, whenever that starts and ends. "Being saved" means I am still a "work in progress."

- **Provisional**—other texts present "being saved" as a conditional promise ("...you are *being saved*, if you hold fast...") as in 1 Corinthians 15:2 or Hebrews 3:6-14. Many have debated how secure our salvation is. Once saved, always saved? Or might we still fall away and "lose" our salvation?

- **Prospective**—finally, the Bible also reserves salvation for the future ("...how much more *shall we be saved*...") as in Romans 5:9-10; 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10; and 1 Peter 1:5. In this case, the fullness of salvation is only finally experienced at the

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resurrection, when we are completely restored in every way—body, soul and spirit.

The complexity of this layered salvation can cause me to wince when someone reduces it to a particular, calendar-ready crisis. Some relate to a “born again” moment like Paul’s conversion. Others, like Peter, may feel their faith grows in fits and starts as the seeds of the word break through alternating strata of soil and clay. When exactly was Peter *saved*? That’s harder to nail down.

One helpful snapshot comes from the book of Romans 5, where Paul offers clear categories for the past, present and future of God’s work of grace.

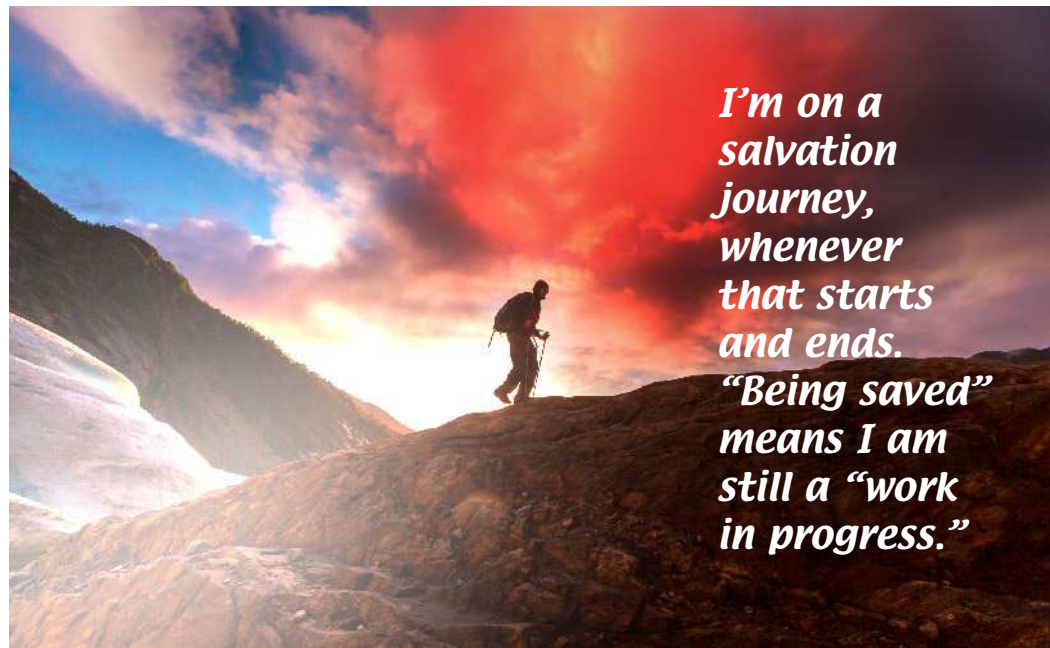
In verses 6-11, Paul talks about *reconciliation* and *justification*. Reconciliation is obviously relational...as in the parable of the prodigal son who is restored to his father. But so is justification. The Reformers who made justification a *legal* solution to “guilt” through

God’s declaration of “imputed (assigned) righteousness” missed the mark. To “be justified” is not just a verdict. It describes restoration to a covenant relationship...and Jesus has done this for us. He has reconciled us, justified us and restored us.

Now in Romans 5, all of that is in the past tense. Not just *when we believed*, but before that—*when* we were without strength, still sinners, still enemies—indeed, even before that! *When* were we reconciled? *When* were we justified? Paul tells us: *when* Christ died for us!

Oddly, Paul doesn’t say that we were saved, either at the Cross or when we responded to the Cross. *Saved* in this passage (and all of Romans) is tied to a future event: our resurrection. Just as we were reconciled by Jesus’ death, so we will be saved (i.e. *resurrected*) by Jesus’ resurrection.

Paul promises, “...if while we were enemies we *were reconciled* to God through the death of his Son, how much more having been reconciled *shall we be saved by his life*” (Romans 5:10, my emphasis). In other words, our past reconciliation is the promise of our future salvation...*if what?* If God is faithful! We can trust that God is faithful. This is Paul’s Gospel to the Romans—and to us, thanks be to God! ☐



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