

Romans 1-3: The Gospel of Salvation

From the Theology of Work Bible commentary on Romans

What is salvation? Salvation is the work of God that sets human beings in right relationship with God and with one another.

Christians have sometimes reduced Paul's gospel of salvation to something like, "Believe in Jesus so that you personally can go to heaven when you die." This is true, as far as it goes, but also grossly inadequate. To begin with, a statement like that says nothing about relationships other than between the individual and God, and yet Paul never ceases talking about relationships among people and between people and the rest of creation. And Paul has much more to say about faith, about life in Jesus, about God's kingdom, and about the quality of life both before and after death than could ever be encapsulated in one single slogan.

Likewise salvation cannot be reduced to a single moment in time. Paul says both that we "were saved" and that we "will be saved." Salvation is an ongoing process rather than a onetime event. God interacts with each person in a dance of divine grace and human faithfulness over time.

We take the trouble to emphasize the ongoing action of salvation because work is one of the preeminent places where we act in life. If salvation were something that happened to us only in the past, then what we do at work (or anywhere in life) would be irrelevant. But if salvation is something going on in our lives, then it bears fruit in our work. To be more precise, since salvation is the reconciliation of broken relationships, then our relationships with God, with other people, and with the created world at work (as everywhere in life) will be getting better as the process of salvation takes hold. Just to give a few examples, our salvation is evident when we take courage to speak an unpopular truth, listen to others' views with compassion, help colleagues attain their goals, and produce work products that help other people thrive.