

# HOW CAN A SINNER APPROACH GOD?

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**ROMANS 10:1-4 • TV066A**

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By

**HENRY T. MAHAN**

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Zebulon Baptist Church

6088 Zebulon Highway

Pikeville, KY 41501

PH: 606-631-9053

## **Romans 10:1-4**

*“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.”*

The message I will be bringing to you today will be perhaps the most important message that you will ever hear. I believe that, I’m convinced of it.

I’m going to speak to you on this subject: **“HOW CAN A SINNER APPROACH THE LIVING GOD?”**

And I want you to take your Bible and open it up with me to the **book of Romans chapter 10**. We are going to look at the first four verses of **Romans chapter 10**.

Now, will you take your Bible and follow along and let me speak to you on this subject: **“HOW CAN A SINNER APPROACH THE LIVING GOD?”**

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Paul said in **Romans chapter 10:1**: *“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.”* *“That’s my desire, that’s my heart’s desire, and that’s my prayer to God for my people Israel.”*

Now the problem is these people thought they were saved. That’s the problem. They thought they were saved. Paul knew they weren’t. He was praying to God and desiring in his heart that they might be saved (but they thought they were).

After all, they were Israelite’s. They were God’s chosen people. They were Abraham’s seed. And after all, they had the law. The law was given to Israel.

The prophets; they had the ceremonies, they had the sacrifices, and they were religious people, very religious people. They kept all the Holy Days and the Sabbath Days and the Feast Days. And they had their ideas about what salvation was. They felt they were saved. And most religionists today are confident that they are saved.

Now, there are many different ways of salvation as there are definitions of salvation. What is salvation? Well, some people say that salvation is to believe in God, to believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross. That’s salvation to them, to believe in God, and to believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross.

But wait a minute! James said in **James chapter 2:19**: *“Thou believest there’s one God; thou doest well. The devil believes and trembles. But wilt thou know O vain man that faith without works is dead?”*

So, salvation is not just to believe there’s one God because clearly the Scripture says, “The devil believes there’s one God and the devil believes Christ died on the cross.” He tried hard enough to keep Him from that cross. He tried every way he knew to keep Him from the cross of Calvary. So, this evidently is not salvation, just to believe there’s one God.

And then some people say, “To be saved is to reform your life, to begin to live right, to turn over a new leaf, to eat the right things and drink the right things and to go to the right places, and do the right things.

But our Lord said this, *“It’s not that which goeth into the mouth that defileth a man; it’s that which cometh from the heart. For out of the heart proceeds murders, evil thoughts, adulteries, blasphemies, and these are the things that defile a man.”*

To eat with unwashed hands didn’t defile anyone. Did not our Lord say this to the Pharisees, the most religious moralists of His day? He said, *“Even so you outwardly appear righteous unto men.”* How do they appear righteous unto men, by the things that they did, by the food that they ate, by the places where they visited. They appeared righteous unto men but He said, *“Within, (on the inside) you are full of hypocrisy and full of sin and iniquity.”*

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So, salvation evidently is not just to eat the right things and go to the right places. It's not that which goeth into my body that defiles me; it's that which is already in there and comes out through my mouth.

And then others say, "Well; to be saved is to be a disciple of Christ." Judas was a disciple of Christ. He was not saved. To be saved is to be a preacher or a deacon or a church member. Judas was an apostle. He was one of the 12 chosen apostles and he didn't know the Lord. He was a church member. If to be saved is to be a church member then Judas has to be saved. But our Lord said, "*He's the son of perdition from the beginning.*"

And then others said, "Well, to be saved is to be baptized." Well Judas was baptized. So was Simon Magus to whom Peter said, "*Your heart's not right with God.*" Washing the outward flesh doesn't cleanse the soul. The soul must be washed in the blood of the Lamb, not in the waters of the Jordan.

Then Demas was baptized. And Paul said later, "*He hath forsaken me having loved this present world.*" And the thief on the cross was never baptized. Yes, we have as many different ways of salvation as we do definitions of salvation.

But the Bible is clear on what it is to be saved. This is what Paul wanted for these people. He wanted them first of all to know God. My friend, to be saved is to know God. We have this on the authority of God's Son.

He said in **John 17** and this is holy ground this is the priestly prayer of the Master. And He said in **John 17:3**: "*This is eternal life that they might know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*"

So salvation, first of all, is to know God. It's not just to believe in God or about God, but to believe God, to know Him. This is what Paul's talking about when he said in **Philippians 3**: "*O that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection (His resurrected life).*"

Eternal life is to know God; as John said: "*Our fellowship is with the Father.*" We have communion with God. God is not a myth. God is not a historical character. God is not somebody up there in the great blue yonder, the wild blue yonder; God is a living person, one with whom Enoch walked, one with whom John I talked, one who lives within, that is to know God.

And then salvation according to the Scriptures is to be in Christ. John said, "*This is the record, God hath given to us eternal life.*" And that's what I'm interested in, aren't you, eternal life? And that's not just the length of it, that's the quality of it.

It's a new life. It's a divine life. It's the life of holiness. It's the life of God. Everybody's going to live eternally but eternal life is to know God. "*And this is eternal life,*" John said. "*God has given us the record. He has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son.*"

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It's not in the law; it's in His Son. It's not in the baptismal water's. It's not in the church membership. It's not even in the preacher's hand; it's in His Son and *"He that hath the Son of God hath life. And he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."*

Paul wrote later and said, *"Christ in you; that's the hope of glory,"* to be in Christ and Christ in you, *"Is to be accepted in the beloved."* That's salvation.

And then salvation, according to **2 Corinthians 5:17**, is to be a new person. *"Therefore, (God said) if any man be in Christ, he's a new creature."* John said, *"He that loveth not knoweth not God."*

If you know not how to forgive then you're not forgiven. This is what the Scripture says. *"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, meekness, longsuffering, and patience."* These are the marks of a redeemed person.

A man or woman who is saved is a new person, a new being, not just a professor but a new person, not just a new proselyte but a new person, not just a new addition to the church but a new addition to the family of God, a family member.

We're baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit. We become one with the Son of God. *"And if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ he's none of His."*

All right, to be saved is to be under a new government, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That's what salvation is. It's coming to know and to recognize and to submit to the Lordship of the Son of God.

*"You're not your own,"* He said. You don't belong to yourself. *"You are bought with a price."* The Lord said, *"If any man comes to me; he's got to come to me as Lord of his life. If he loves father, mother, brother or sister, husband or wife, even his own life, more than me; he's not fit to be my disciple."*

*"If any man put his hand to the plow and turns and looks back; he's not fit for the Kingdom of God. He that taketh not up his cross and followeth after me cannot be my disciple. If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus to be Lord, (not just confess that He died on the cross)."* Satan knows that. Everybody who was there knows that. That's a historical event that's recorded in the history books. Josephus wrote about it. Salvation's not just to believe that; it's to bow to His Lordship.

*"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus to be your Lord and believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead thou shalt be saved."* It's to be a new person under a new government. And God says, in **Jeremiah 31**, *"I'll not just write my law on tables of stone; I'll write my law on their hearts."*

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Now the believer doesn't pray because he has to; he prays because he loves God, because he loves communion with God. The believer doesn't live an honest, godly life, because he has to, because it's a rule, because it's a law, or because it's a statute; he does it because he loves God.

The believer doesn't worship God and pray to God and witness for God because he's required to. We don't live by laws. Do you have a set of laws on the wall of your home by which the family members abide?

You say, "Well no; our home is a home of love." Well why do you want to put laws on the walls of God's home and ask His family to live by law? God's family lives by love. They do what they do because they love God.

And anybody who has to have a set of rules and regulations and laws to regulate and rule over his life to tell him what he can and can't do, and can get by with and can't get by with, is not yet brought into the family of God, into a living, loving, relationship with Christ.

When our Lord sat down and talked with Peter about preaching the Gospel on what did he base it? He said, "*Peter; do you love me?*" Peter said, "*Yes Lord I do.*" "*Then you feed my sheep.*"

He said three times, "*Peter, do you love me?*" Peter finally was troubled because the Lord asked three times if he loved Him. He said, "*Lord; you know everything. You know I love you.*" Then He said, "*You feed my sheep.*"

And our Lord said two or three times in the Scriptures, "*That the whole law is summed up in these two, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and thy neighbor's as thyself. And on these two hinge all the law.*" It's a family of love, it's a home of love and it's a relationship of love. That's what it is to be saved.

And Paul knew the condition of these people. Turn back to **Romans 10** there and stay with me a moment. Paul knew the condition of these people because he'd been in the same condition, religious but lost. He thought he was saved because he was an Israelite, because he had the law, because he went through certain ceremonies, because he did certain works, because he had the prophets, and because he had this, that, and the other, but he didn't know Christ. He didn't know God.

He'd never been born again. He'd never been brought through regeneration to a living, vital union, with Christ. And he says: "*Brethren; my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.*"

Now look at **verse 2**; "*I bear them record; (I bear them record, I know them, because I've been there.)*" He said, "*They have a zeal of God but not according to knowledge.*" They know there's one God. They know there's one God and they have a certain enthusiasm about that one God, a certain enthusiasm but they do not know who God is.

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*“They have a zeal of God.”* They have a certain enthusiasm about God but it’s not according to knowledge. They are ignorant. They are ignorant of who God is and how a sinner may approach God and how a sinner may have fellowship with God and how a sinner may be accepted of God.

And most men and women today are laboring in the same darkness and plagued with the same ignorance. They know there is a God and they have an enthusiasm for God but the chief ignorance lies in this; they know nothing of His holiness, they know nothing of the degree of His holiness and the degree of their sinfulness.

Now this is important. Paul saying, “I want these people to be saved. I bear them record; I know them. They have a zeal and enthusiasm for God. They have a certain knowledge of God but it’s not according to true knowledge. They know nothing of His holiness and they know nothing of their sinfulness.”

Look at **verse 3**: *“For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.”* They’re ignorant of God’s righteousness. That’s where the ignorance lies. They have a zeal for God. They have an enthusiasm for God but they’re ignorant of God’s righteousness.

What are we talking about here? Well, we are talking about two or three things. They’re ignorant of God’s holiness, how holy God is. They’re ignorant of God almighty’s holy law. They interpreted the law in the light of outward actions only and not inward thoughts. They interpreted the law as a legal matter and not a spiritual matter.

And then they were ignorant also of God almighty’s accepted righteousness, that righteousness on which a sinner could approach Him, what God had promised, what God had purposed, what God had provided, the righteousness of His Son. They knew nothing of that and consequently they were going about to establish their own righteousness and would not submit to God’s righteousness.

Now here’s the ignorance, men do not know how holy God is. We reached up and brought God down. We called Him all kind of foolish names, “The man upstairs or somebody up there or the good Lord.” What do we mean by, “Good Lord?” Is there a bad Lord and a good Lord? Is that what we mean? There’s just one Lord and yet we’ve given Him all of these names.

The Scripture says, *“Holy and reverend is His name.”* The Scripture says that, *“He is the ruler of heaven and earth.”* The Scripture says, *“God’s in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence.”*

In **Exodus chapter 3:5** He said to Moses, *“Come not hither. Take off your shoes for the place on which you stand is holy ground.”* He said in **1 Samuel 6:20**, *“Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?”*

And I’ll tell you like Isaiah; when Isaiah saw the holiness of the Lord, **Isaiah 6:1-5**; he said; *“When King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord high and lifted up. His train filled the temple. And the*

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*cherubims and seraphims covered their faces and covered their feet and they cried: Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of Hosts."*

And Isaiah said, *"When I saw His holiness I cried: Woe is me; I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips."* Isaiah saw God's holiness. And when he saw God's holiness he saw his sin.

Also David; David spoke of God's holiness; he says: *"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy hands; what is man that thou art mindful of him?"* Listen to Daniel; he said: *"I saw the Lord and, my comeliness (my beauty), melted into corruption."*

Job said: *"I've seen the Lord. I've heard of Him but now mine eye has seen Him. I hate myself. I abhor myself. I repent in sackcloth and ashes."* Paul said, *"When the law of God came (in its holiness; old Paul died) I died."*

And this is what people are ignorant of; they have a zeal for God, they have enthusiasm for God like these Israelite's of old but Paul said, *"They being ignorant."* They don't know the degree of His holiness. They don't know the degree of their sinfulness or they would not even entertain the thought that they could approach unto God's presence. They don't know.

And when we see His holiness and when we see our sin the question automatically comes: *"What is man that thou art mindful of him?"* The question automatically comes, the one Job asked in **Job 15:15**: *"What is man that he should be clean or he that is born of a woman that he should be righteous? Behold; the heavens are not clean in God's sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man that drinketh iniquity like the water."*

When we see the degree of God's holiness, infinite, immutable, holiness, so holy that even the cherubims of heaven cover their eyes and their faces when they are in His presence; holy is God and how sinful is man, the question automatically rises: *"How then can man, (the most sinful of creatures, lower than the beasts of the field) how can man be just with God? Behold the moon; it shineth not. The stars are not clean in His sight."*

How can man that is born of woman be justified before almighty God? How can he be accepted? How can he approach unto a holy God?" Well Paul said, "That's the question."

And these Israelites; do you know what they were doing? He said, *"Being ignorant of God's righteousness they're going about to establish their own righteousness."* I thought of our day when I read that, *"going about,"* much activity, much enthusiasm, much organization, and much promotion. We're just *"going about,"* all this activity, ever working, ever learning, ever organizing, ever doing, and ever serving all these things, never coming to a knowledge of the truth.

I think about the Lord as He sat there in the chair and Mary was sitting at His feet. And she was listening to Him and feasting her eyes upon Him and enjoying His presence and learning from His words.

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Martha came charging in from the kitchen (she was busy). She was busy working around the house and doing all these things. And she said, “Lord; don’t you care, don’t you care that my sister has left all the work to me? Here I am working and taking care of you and entertaining you and serving you and my sister sits there at your feet and does nothing. Don’t you care?” He said, “*Martha, Martha; you’re anxious and troubled about many things but Mary hath chosen the good thing.*”

That’s our problem. We’re going about. What are we going about to do? What are you doing? You religious people are so busy, busy, busy, with all your goings about and your activities. What are you trying to do?

Will you wait a minute? Answer me; what are you trying to do? Well, “I’m trying to get to heaven preacher; I’m trying to get to heaven; that’s what I’m trying to do. I’m trying to get saved. I’m trying to miss hell. I’m trying to get God to accept me. I’m trying to get God to look with favor upon me. I’m going about all this work trying to find peace in my heart.”

Friend, would you be offended if I told you that you’re going about it the wrong way; you’re going about it the same way that these people here in **Romans chapter 10** were going about it and Christ said of them that they were ignorant of God’s righteousness.

You’re going about it the same way that the people in **Matthew 7** who stood at the Judgment and said, “*Lord; we preached in your name and cast out devil’s and did many wonderful works.*”

And He said, “*Depart from me ye workers of iniquity; I never knew you.*” Going about, going about, to establish what; your own righteousness, your own merit, your own works, your own foundation, acceptance before a holy God.

And the Scripture plainly says that: “*In the flesh shall no man can please God.*” The Scripture plainly says, “*Not by works of righteousness which we’ve done but according to His mercy He hath saved us.*”

And the Scripture plainly says, “*By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified.*” And the Scripture plainly says: “*That your righteousness’s in God’s sight are filthy rags,*” and yet we continue.

Let me tell you something; all the religious works and deeds and law keeping and good works that have ever been done by all the religious people of all the world and by all generations wouldn’t save one sinner.

That’s right! Men are saved not by works but by the grace of God, not by what they’ve done but by what Christ has and is doing and shall do.

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He says, *“I want Israel to be saved.”* Oh they think they are but they’re not because they have an enthusiasm for God but its ignorance. It’s based on ignorance and it’s built on ignorance. How do I know?

Well, they are ignorant of God’s righteousness, the way a sinner approaches God. And they’re going about with all this activity and Holy Days and Sacrament’s and Communion and ceremonies, rituals, and ordinances, trying to establish a righteousness on which God will accept them.

They have not submitted; now listen, here’s the key; here’s what’s wrong! **Romans 10 Verse 3:** *“They have not submitted themselves; (to submit is to be in subjection; it’s to surrender, they have not surrendered themselves) to the righteousness of God.”* Christ is the righteousness of God! It’s not your church membership, not your baptism, not your good works; Christ is God’s righteousness.

Now you turn to **Romans 3:19**; let me read you some Scripture; *“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, (that’s you and me; that’s every human being, every son of Adam) that every mouth may be stopped.”*

It’s time we stopped our mouths and opened our ears and our eyes and listen to God and quit listening to our heritage or tradition, *“That every mouth may be stopped and all the world become guilty before God.”*

And because they’re guilty; look at the next verse: *“Therefore, by the deeds of the law, (works of the flesh, the energy of the flesh) shall no flesh be justified in God’s sight.”*

Now you may be justified in your sight and the sight of the preacher and the sight of the church and the sight of your fellow man but not in God’s sight. He sees your heart. *“Man looks on the outward countenance; God looks on the heart.”*

*“Now the righteousness of God, (the holiness of God, acceptance on the part of God) without the law, (and if I ever have it it’ll have to be without the law) is revealed, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all that believe for there is no difference. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”*

That’s why Christ came to the world. A dear man who died just a few weeks ago whose funeral I preached, had been listening to me on television, 76 years of age, and he said to me; “You know preacher; I never knew why Christ came into the world. I knew He did but I didn’t know why. I didn’t know why He came. I didn’t know that He came down here as my representative, as my substitute. He came down in human flesh, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those born under the law.”

“That as a man He was tested and tried and tempted in all points as I am, yet, without sin. That before the holy God He worked out for me a perfect righteousness, a perfect obedience. In every

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got and tittle of God's law He kept it perfectly for me on my behalf and imputed unto me because I believe on Him. And that He went to the cross of Calvary and because God said in His Word:

*'The soul that sinneth shall die' and He died. 'The wages of sin is death' and He died. And there on that cross He bore my sins in His body on the tree that I might be made the righteousness of God in Him."*

Yes, that's why He came, to work out for us by His obedience and by His life, a perfect righteousness. And my friend; there's no way to God except through Christ. He plainly says, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life."*

Phillip said; *"Lord; we don't know where you're going. How can we know the way?"* And He said: *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by me."*

The Scripture plainly says; *"Seeing that we have such a great high priest who is seated at the right hand of the Father, who by one offering hath perfected forever them that are sanctified; let us come boldly into His presence. Let us come boldly, (confidently)."*

God will accept me; yes He will, the chief of sinners, not on the basis of what I'm doing but on the basis of who Christ is, my Substitute, my Saviour, my Representative, my Mediator, the one who pleads for me. He is my Substitute!

There is one Mediator, one foundation, and one righteousness. Now then, submit yourself to Him. *"As many as received Him to them gave He power (the right, the privilege) to become sons of God, even to them that believe on His name!"*

**Romans 10:4; "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."**