

**Romans 10:1-4**  
*Contrasting Two Ways of Righteousness, pt. 1*

How committed to God's truth are you?

- The reality is that for every born-again Christian, the truth of God should matter greatly<sup>1</sup>

Jesus Himself was “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14)

- He is “the way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6)

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (John 16:13)

- He allows leads us into conformity to the truth of God's Word

God's Word is truth, “Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth” (John 17:17)

Unbelievers are those who do “not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved” (2 Thess 2:10)

- They are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:7)

If anyone had a concern for the truth of God's Word, it was the Jews

- They were the national people of God
- They were entrusted with the oracles of God
- The city of Jerusalem was a citadel of learning

Yet listen to what God said of His own people

- “Alas, sinful nation, people weighed down with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away from Him. **5** Where will you be stricken again, as you continue in *your* rebellion? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint. **6** From the sole of the foot even to the head there is nothing sound in it” (Isa 1:2-4)
- “For forty years I loathed *that* generation, and said they are a people who err in their heart, and they do not know My ways” (Ps 95:10)
- “THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. **9** BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN” (Mt 15:8-9)

Back in 1968, a Hebrew Christian wrote these words about Israel, “Israel wants to be the captain of her own soul, the master of her own ship. But Israel lost both her rudder and her compass, and now, with her vessel of state careening about in a maelstrom of sin, what is to save her from being drawn into the vortex of hell? Yet this is the condition of Israel today, even as it was in Paul's day.”<sup>2</sup>

How can Israel be so concerned for the truth of God's Word

- Yet be unbelieving?

This morning's message will help to shed some light on this seeming paradox

**Let's read Romans 10:1-4**

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur NT Commentary, Romans 9-16*, 53-54.

<sup>2</sup> Sanford C. Mills, quoted in MacArthur, 56.

In these four verses of Romans 10, the apostle lists two (2) deficiencies of the Jews

- They had a misguided zeal (10:1-2)
- They had a misplaced righteousness (10:3-4)

## **I. The Jews had a misguided zeal (10:1-2)**

10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for *their* salvation.

It is fascinating to compare how the chapter headings for Romans 9, 10, and 11 begin<sup>3</sup>

- Rom 9:1-2, "I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart."
- Rom 10:1, "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for *their* salvation."
- Rom 11:1, "I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin."

Each of these chapters begins with a passionate reminder of Paul's concern for the Jewish people

- It bothered the apostle Paul greatly that the Jewish people, as a whole, had rejected their Messiah

Paul begins Romans 10 with the word, "Brethren"

- This is Paul's 7<sup>th</sup> use of the word in Romans
- He will use it twelve (12) more times in this epistle

This word can denote those who are in the spiritual family of God

- It can also denote those who are part of the national family of Israel (Rom 9:3)

Here in verse 1, Paul is appealing to the born-again Christians in the Roman church about his concern for the unbelieving Jews

- He doesn't want the truth that he is about to unveil to be written off as one who didn't care about the Jewish people

Let's remind ourselves that this is the man who said in Romans 9, "For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh*"

- If God would have permitted Paul's request – which He didn't – then Paul would have voluntarily forfeited his salvation and all the accompanying benefits so that the Jewish people could be spared from God's wrath

No one could say that Paul wasn't concerned about the Jewish people

- Not even the Jewish people themselves could deny Paul's passion for them

Also consider the larger context of Romans 9-11

- Paul has reminded the Jews of God's sovereign, gracious election in Romans 9

But here in Romans 10, when he is stressing human responsibility, what does Paul do?

- He prays!

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<sup>3</sup> W.H. Griffith-Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, 271.

In other words, a strong belief in the sovereignty of God did not stop Paul from praying<sup>4</sup>

- He did not reason, “Since God is sovereign, there is no need to pray.”
- He did not say, “Wow...God must not have chosen the Jews. There is no need to pray for them since they are non-elect.”

On the contrary, Paul’s theology was spot on

- He had a strong sense of God’s sovereignty
- But he also had a strong sense of human responsibility

Paul would not have prayed for the unbelieving Jewish people unless he believed that God could have saved them

- In other words, Israel’s rejection was not final<sup>5</sup>

Let’s take this a step further

- Paul not only prayed
- But he prayed to the Sovereign God

Praying in and of itself is not effective

- We must pray to the true and living God

Paul prayed to the God who could save sinners

- Paul’s prayer was not hopeless

Rather, it was grounded in the assurance that God could bring about salvation<sup>6</sup>

- Only God could overcome the hardness of heart from sinful individuals

I think it is highly significant that Paul begins Romans 10 with a reminder to the Gentiles

- There is some evidence that the church at Rome had a more predominant Gentile audience

Could it be that the church at Rome had become cold to the Jewish people?

- Could they have become convinced that God was finished with the Jewish people?

Paul shoots one “over the bow” of the Gentile church to remind them that God had not abandoned the Jewish people

- Despite His rejection of many, He would still save the remnant

The apostle says, “**my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is their salvation**”

- You can hear the sincerity and passion

We are told much about Paul’s prayer life

- It is convicting to see the priorities within Paul’s prayers

He doesn’t pray for temporal issues that consume much of our prayer lists

- Rather, Paul emphasizes the eternal, spiritual truths that matter most to God

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<sup>4</sup> Alva J. McClain, *Romans: The Gospel of God’s Grace*, 185-86.

<sup>5</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield, *ICC, Romans 9-16*, 513.

<sup>6</sup> Steven A. Kreloff, *God’s Plan for Israel*, 55.

Consider your prayer life over the past week

- How much of it was temporal compared to eternal?
- I would venture to say that for most of us, a high percentage of our prayers relate to things temporal

But Paul's desire and prayer was for the "salvation" of the Jews

- Not their job situation
- Not their health
- Not their comfort

Listen to Jesus' words, "For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mt 16:26)

- Paul understood what Jesus was telling His disciples

He understood that one's salvation was the most important issue

- So he prayed for others to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ

10:2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God,

Why does Paul pray so fervently for the Jews to come to faith in Christ?

- Didn't the Jews already know a lot about the Bible?

Yes, the Jewish people were entrusted with the oracles of God

- Their nation was especially blessed over the centuries
- And this made them more accountable and more responsible

Paul could even say, "I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God"

- He could vouch for the fact that the Jews were a very religious group of people

But is being religious the goal?

- Will merely being religious be enough?

Paul could write of the men of Athens, "I observe that you are very religious in all respects."

- But they were clearly not born-again

The apostle Paul has labored in the book of Romans to show the Jews that being Jewish is not enough

- They can't rely on their family lineage
- They can't rely on their circumcision
- They can't rely on their knowledge of the Torah

The Jews have always had a tremendous zeal and passion for God

- During Paul's day, the Jewish boys were meticulously trained
- They spent hours learning the Torah

But over time, the Jews began to substitute their own human traditions and interpretations in place of the Bible

- Jewish teachers began to usurp the place of the Holy Spirit as the teachers of God's Word

The Jews had a misguided zeal

- Their zeal was taking them away from God
- Not toward Him

The same can happen today

- If you are reading or listening to a religious person who takes the focus away from the Bible, then stop reading and listening!

What about sincerity?

- Doesn't God care if someone is sincere in his pursuit of God?

God cares that we follow His truth

- He desires that we step into alignment with the Bible

A person can be sincere and be sincerely wrong

- Zeal isn't enough

Many religions spend lots of money and pour lots of effort into their activities

- But that doesn't equate to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ

On Mt. Carmel, the many prophets of Baal were cutting themselves for many hours

- But this was clearly not a zeal for the true and living God

The Jews had a tremendous passion and zeal for God

- But their zeal was misguided

Paul puts his finger on the problem in the second part of verse 2

but not in accordance with knowledge.

The Jewish zeal was “not in accordance with knowledge”

This does not imply that the Jews were totally lacking in knowledge and information about God

- On the contrary, they had plenty of information about God

But the problem was that the Jewish zeal was not in alignment with “knowledge”

- The word implies a real, experiential knowledge
- Not just a superficial, intellectual knowledge

Many people profess to know God

- They may know some of what the Bible teaches

But some of these people don't really have a relationship with God

- To them, the knowledge is just intellectual
- It is not experiential

How sad it is to think of the Jews along this line of thought

- They had been entrusted with so much

But successive generations of the Jews had not carried on the same personal knowledge and relationship with God

- Many Jews were very content with knowledge about God
- This is far different than knowledge of God

Paul was uniquely qualified to write on this misguided zeal

- Before God saved him on the Damascus Road, Paul was Saul

Saul was a religious fanatic

- He was being trained by Gamaliel, one of the leading teachers of the day

Saul's zeal for God was attested through his intense persecution, "For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions." (Gal 1:13-14)

- Saul tried to destroy the Church through his persecution!
- Saul's loyalty was with "ancestral traditions" instead of the Word of God

A locomotive engine has tremendous power and potential, as long as it stays on the tracks<sup>7</sup>

- But if you take that locomotive off the tracks, the engine has great potential for destruction

In no way could Israel blame God for their rejection of Him

- They could only blame themselves

Their zeal was evidence against them that they were pursuing that which they thought to be right

- But they were chasing the wrong target

Their religious zeal was actually their greatest barrier<sup>8</sup>

- Their zeal for God was actually keeping them from having a righteous standing with God

You may be very zealous for God

- You may be engaged in church work
- You may be diligent in reading the Bible

But if you are trusting in something or someone other than Jesus Christ for your righteous standing with God...

- Then you are lost in your sins
- You are in need of forgiveness by Christ Himself

**The Jews had a misguided zeal**

- **But they was a second deficiency on the part of the Jews**

## **II. The Jews had a misplaced righteousness (10:3-4)**

10:3 For not knowing about God's righteousness.

Notice how Paul's logic flows from verse to verse

- In verse 1, Paul speaks of his desire to see the Jewish people saved
- In verse 2, Paul explains why he prays – because the Jews were zealous for the wrong reasons
- In verse 3, Paul will explain that the Jews were trying to establish their own righteousness
- In verse 4, Paul will show that the Jews had totally overlooked Christ as the end of the Law

Verse 3 really helps us to define what the misguided zeal of the Jews looked like

- It identifies the real source of the problem

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<sup>7</sup> Griffith-Thomas, 272.

<sup>8</sup> Everett F. Harrison, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Romans*, 110.

The New American Standard says, “for not knowing about God’s righteousness”

- But this is not the best rendering of the verb
- The ESV and New King James are more correct in using the phrase, “being ignorant”

But this ignorance was not one based on innocence

- Their ignorance was willful and deliberate

Paul himself confesses of his pre-conversion zeal, “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service; 13 even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim 1:12-13)

- Saul acted with great religious zeal
- But he did so because of ignorance

Again, the Jews were not totally lacking in knowledge

- That is not what Paul has in mind here

The Jews were ignorant of the fact that true righteousness – the righteousness of God – was always a gift

- It was never for sale
- It was never achieved by human works

The Jews thought that righteousness came about through adherence to the Law

- But that was not God’s design

Abram, the spiritual and physical forefather of the nation Israel, was declared righteous on the basis of his faith alone

- Before the Law was given
- Before circumcision was instituted

The Law was designed to show humanity their sinfulness

- And in turn, to show humanity their need of Jesus Christ (Gal 3:24)

The Jews, however, targeted the Law as their source of salvation

- They stumbled over the stumbling Stone

The Jews prided themselves on knowing parts of the Old Testament<sup>9</sup>

- But they had neglected to put those portions of God’s Word into practice
- Jesus referred to them as hypocrites, white-washed tombs, and vipers

In the word of Romans 3, “in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” (3:25-26)

- God was just – the holy, righteous Standard
- God was the Justifier – the only One who could declare undeserving sinners righteous

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<sup>9</sup> William R. Newell, *Romans: Verse-by-Verse*, 388.

and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.

The misguided zeal of the Jews did something terrible

- Instead of humbly submitting to God's righteousness, the unbelieving Jews sought to establish their own righteousness

The contrast could not be stronger, as it is expressed in the original language

- Literally, this phrase reads, "being ignorant of the of God righteousness, they were seeking the one's own righteousness"

What a difference between "the of God righteousness" and "the one's own righteousness"

- Those are polar opposites!

As we have seen in Romans, righteousness is both a status and a standard

- God, in His mercy, declares sinners righteous through faith
- But God also holds sinners accountable to the standard of righteousness, best exemplified in the person and work of Jesus Christ

But the Jews did not submit to Jesus Christ

- In the words of Romans 9:32, "**they stumbled over the stumbling stone**"

Jesus Christ is the eternal dividing line in history

- He is the line drawn in the sands of time
- What you do with Christ determines your eternal future

Every person in the history of the world must answer the question that Pilate raised, "**Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?**" (Mk 15:12)

- Worship Him
- Or reject Him

In seeking their own righteousness, the Jews were guilty of rejecting the righteousness that God has provided

- They were guilty of minimizing the holy and righteous standard that God Himself had set

The Jews began to think of themselves as being morally ok<sup>10</sup>

- When compared to others, they weren't that bad

They had the attitude of the Pharisee, "**God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer**" (Lk 18:11)

- They viewed themselves with an air of superiority

In Exodus 15:11, Moses speaks of God, "**Who is like Thee among the gods, O LORD? Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?**"

- How could Israel read this and then say that they didn't need the Messiah?

Bottom line, according to Paul, the Jews "**did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God**"

- They refused to submit to God

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<sup>10</sup> Alan F. Johnson, *Everyman's Bible Commentary, Romans*, 182.



Instead of humbly submitting to God and His holy standard, the Jews arrogantly set up their own standard

I can't help but think of the incident with the golden calf

- Moses was on the mountain, in the very presence of God
- The people were told to wait for Moses

But the nation of Israel grew impatient

- They asked Aaron, the second-in-command, to form a god they could worship

So the people brought their gold to Aaron

- He fashioned the gold into a calf
- Then the people worshipped that calf, saying, “**This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt**” (Ex 32:4)

In a very willful and deliberate action, Israel exchanged the glory of God for a golden calf

- They refused to submit to God's Word, choosing instead to form their own standard

They committed the sin of idolatry

- They wanted a god to be made in their image

This was the error of the Jews

- And it is still the error of many today

Dear friend, you are either submitting to God and to His righteousness, or you are not

- There is no middle ground
- There is no compromise

The problem with the Jews, and with unbelievers today, is that they are seeking to establish their own righteousness

- They are trying to establish their own standard of right and wrong

But such people will never find righteousness

- It is a never-ending pursuit
- There is no assurance and confidence in self-righteousness

The first step toward obtaining the true righteousness of God is to renounce any attempt at self-righteousness<sup>11</sup>

- God will not tolerate any of our righteousness

Isaiah 64:6 says, “**For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment**”

- That is the very best that we offer to God

Yet isn't it strange that humans think that they can merit favor with God based on their own self-righteousness?

- It is simply absurd!

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<sup>11</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans*, 383.

Think of the countless references to animal sacrifices in the Old Testament<sup>12</sup>

- The Jews should have been reminded that fellowship with God and forgiveness from God came about only through a payment for sin
- Works did not factor into the equation

The Jews would have been very familiar with this truth from the book of Leviticus, “**For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement**” (17:11)

John the Baptist identified Jesus Christ as “**the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**” (John 1:29)

- Isaiah 53, another portion of the Hebrew Scriptures, foretold of Jesus’ horrible death
- This death was the ultimate payment for sins

Israel should have recognized their Messiah as being the fulfillment of so many Old Testament prophecies

- But they were blind to their need of a Messiah
- They stumbled over the stumbling Stone

We are told of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearance to the two men on the Emmaus Road

- They didn’t recognize Jesus at first

Then Jesus said, “**“O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?’ 27 And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.”** (Lk 24:25-27)

- What a sermon that must have been!

Imagine Jesus Christ taking the Old Testament and pointing out passages that referred to Himself

- That’s Me in the pillar of fire
- That’s Me in the burning bush
- That’s Me in the Rock
- That’s Me...

Yet unbelieving Jews were blind to these realities

- They just didn’t see their need of a Messiah
- So they weren’t looking for Him!

“***It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.***” (Mt 9:12)

- Unless a person realizes his need for the Divine Physician, he won’t come to Christ

### 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness

The Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus Christ

- They were like a neon sign pointing to the Messiah

The Law was never to be followed as an end in itself

- It was a means to a greater end
- To point sinners to their need of the Messiah

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<sup>12</sup> Kreloff, 59.

Moderate obedience was not enough

- Near perfect obedience was not enough
- Absolute and perfect obedience was required

“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all” (James 2:10)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven... Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Mt 5:20, 48)

- The standard of righteousness was not the Pharisees
- The standard of righteousness was God Himself

So how could a sinful individual attain the status of Divine righteousness?

- Humanly, this was impossible
- But it was possible because of Christ

Christ came to the Earth as the God-Man

- As God, He was able to live the perfect life that the Law demanded
- As Man, He was able to offer His life as the one and only Sacrifice for sins and Substitute for sinners

In living a perfect life, Jesus offered His life on the cross as the only means of salvation

- God treated Christ as if He had committed every sin ever committed by every person who would ever believe

Because Jesus paid for our sins, God could then do something else amazing

- God could declare every believer to be righteous
  - o Not because of what we have done
  - o But because of what Christ has done

You don't believe me?

- “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Cor 5:21)

So where is there room for boasting?

- Only in Christ!

Because of Christ's perfect life, substitutionary death, and victorious resurrection, sinners can be declared righteous

- But only through faith in that finished work on the cross

For those who believe, Paul writes in Romans 10:4, “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness”

- What does Paul imply by this statement?

One explanation is that Christ has brought an end to the Law

- In other words, after Christ's death, there is no need for anyone to heed the Law

But this isn't true

- Even at late as 2 Timothy, Paul upholds the entire Old Testament as “inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (3:16)

What Paul is saying here in verse 4 is that Christ is the goal and fulfillment of the Law

- He is what the Law pointed to

One writer has compared verse 4 to the finishing line of a race<sup>13</sup>

- The finish line serves as the termination of a race (the race is over when someone reaches the finish line)
- The finish line also serves as the goal of a race (the race is run for the sake of reaching the finish line)

Likewise, Christ is the “finish line” of the Old Testament

- Christ is the end of the Law (he brought that era to a conclusion)
- Christ is also the goal of the law (He is what the Law anticipated and pointed toward)

to everyone who believes.

How I love the way that Paul ends verse 4, “to everyone who believes”

- This is the way to have a righteous standing with God

How different things would be if righteousness was on the basis of

- Money
- Family lineage
- Acts of religious service

With this simple reminder, the apostle Paul holds up the mirror of God’s Word

- The Old Testament Scriptures unanimously agree that salvation has always been by faith
- From Abram forward

No, Paul isn’t preaching a new Gospel

- He is simply telling the Jews what God has made clear in the Old Testament

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.’” (Rom 1:16-17)

- The Gospel is the power of God for salvation
  - o It has the ability to change your life radically
- The Gospel is for anyone who believes
  - o Not for those who work
- The Gospel reveals the righteousness of God
  - o How a sinner can be declared righteous in God’s sight

When we don’t see God as He really is, we will never see ourselves as we really are<sup>14</sup>

- When Isaiah came into the presence of Divine holiness, he said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” (Isa 6:5)

I wonder if you have seen your unrighteousness

- Do you see yourself as being sinful apart from Christ?

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<sup>13</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *NICNT, Romans*, 641.

<sup>14</sup> MacArthur, 63.

Listen to these powerful words from the hymn, Rock of Ages

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee;  
Let the water and the blood,  
From Thy wounded side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure;  
Save from wrath and make me pure.

Not the labor of my hands  
Can fulfill Thy law's demands;  
Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears forever flow,  
All for sin could not atone;  
Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to the cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress;  
Helpless look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly;  
Wash me, Savior, or I die.

While I draw this fleeting breath,  
When mine eyes shall close in death,  
When I soar to worlds unknown,  
See Thee on Thy judgment throne,  
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee.

Is that your hope this morning?

- Is this your song of joy and salvation?

If you will humble your heart and submit to God's standard of righteousness, you will see yourself as sinful and undeserving of forgiveness

- If that describes you, then you are exactly the kind of person who God can save

Don't try to earn something that can only be obtained as a free gift

- Don't allow your pride to stand in the way of your sins being forgiven<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *NAC, Romans*, 208.