***Religion; and, Knowledge
RO132-02***

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Please open your Bibles once more to Romans 10:1-4. Our subject is "True and False Righteousness," and this is segment number three.

**The Gospel Message**

It's obviously no fun to see someone who is dear to you go negative to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to doom himself to the lake of fire for all eternity. So, we Christians are called, and we are dedicated, to the objective of turning people around from eternal death to eternal life by praying for them, and for the work of the Holy Spirit in evangelism, and by explaining the gospel to the people with whom we secure a hearing.

**The Jews**

The apostle Paul noted that the Jews of his day had a great deal of zeal for God, and they pursued eternal life diligently, but without a true knowledge of how one is justified before God. Satan, of course, is the creator of religion, by which he tricks people so that they end up in the lake of fire forever. This was the problem of the Jews, as we've seen. The Jews had religion, and it was taking them straight into hell.

**Christianity**

Religion and faith in Jesus Christ are not the same thing. And that's why we are reluctant to call Christianity a religion. We prefer to refer to Christianity as a relationship because it is different from religion. It is not man trying to do something for God. It is a relationship of God doing something for man.

**Religion**

So, today, for a moment, let's pause to take a look at this matter of religion.

1. **Religion Seeks God's Approval by his own Works**

Religion, briefly, is man seeking to gain the approval of God by his own human works. That's what religion is – man trying to make it with God by the works that he performs. Romans 4:4 says, "Now to him that works, the reward is not reckoned of grace, but out of debt." And there are many people who are trying to work their way into salvation. Romans 11:6 stresses that same principle: "If by grace, then it is no more of works. Otherwise, grace is no more grace. You either approach God on the basis of a gift from Him, in terms of salvation, or you approach Him on the basis of works – to earn salvation.

1. **In Religion, Man Gets the Credit**

Secondly, Christianity, then, is God doing something for man through His grace, and God is giving the credit entirely for what is done. In religion, man gets the credit. In Christianity, God gets the credit card. Titus 3:5 puts it this way: "Not by works of righteousness (good deeds), which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us; by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Spirit."

Also, of course, the classic passage is in Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace are you saved through faith, and not of yourselves. It is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast."

So, religion is seeking to gain God's approval by your efforts. Christianity is receiving God's approval by something that He does for us.

1. **Religion is a Universal Phenomenon**

Furthermore, religion is a universal phenomenon among all nations in all stages of development. All nations have some kind of religion. All tribal groups have some kind of religion. Where do they get it? It's from the devil. He creates it. So, they all believe in the existence of some kind of powers beyond human – good or bad. They believe these are superior to man, and they believe that these are able to affect the present and the future life of mankind. They all believe in a difference between right and wrong, though that is not always clearly defined. They all believe that there is an afterlife of some sort, with happiness or misery in that life in some measure, dependent upon their conduct, or their observance of rituals in this way.

So, it is not uncommon to find religion with these basic features. Man has an innate sense that there is someone out there, and that that someone has certain demands, and will have certain expectations to make upon him to which he must subscribe, or he will suffer consequences.

1. **Religion is a Satanic Counterfeit of a Genuine Relationship with God**

Furthermore, in the fourth place, religion is a satanic counterfeit of a genuine relationship with God. There are some chapters you can pursue. Isaiah 14 tells us about Satan's own fall from a genuine relationship with God. 2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 13 describe the antichrist's creation of a false relationship. The world will never be without religion, right down to the end.

1. **Religion is Dominated by the Emotions of the Soul**

Now, religion can express itself in very crude ways (crude rituals), or by means of certain dignified rituals. They're all dominated by the emotions of the soul. So, the Pharisees had a very cultured type of religion. They had very cultured rituals, but they were all meaningless. The heathens get up in a terrible frenzy, as you remember, with the confrontation with the prophets of Baal, with Elijah, such that they performed terrible acts of brutality on themselves to try to get their God to listen to them. So, there are religious rights that are extremely brutal and crude in order to please the god. Religion is a ritual, while Christianity, again, is a relationship.

1. **Religion is Pure Human Viewpoint Error**

Next, religion is the greatest opposition to God's views that exist. Religion is always pure human viewpoint error. It is religion that takes people into the lake of fire.

1. **Religion is Human Good Production**

Next, human good production (you might call that do-goodism) is the basis for religion. Romans 2 and Matthew 20:3 describe human good production as the basis for a religious experience. It is religion that seeks to solve human social problems that we have today by man's efforts and man's devices, without personal regeneration. People are always trying to change society without realizing that society can only be controlled because of the sin nature. But changes for good come when people themselves have been changed internally. Do-goodism is satanic in nature, and it is basically a worship of Satan. The human good from the old sin nature comes from Satan, so it ultimately serves his goals as well. And there is a lot of human good in our society that people esteem, but that's an expression of religion.

1. **Religion Appeals to the Lust Patterns of the Old Sin Nature**

Religion appeals to the less patterns of the old sin nature, and to the emotions which have been disoriented by that nature. There is little connection between a person's religion and his personal morality. There are people who go to church, and then live like the devil the rest of the time. They have no connection between their religion and their personal morality. That's the way it is with Satan's creation. Religion has often, as a matter of fact, hallowed gross immorality, and even insisted on it as part of religious worship. All of the phallic cult religions of the ancient world had, at the core of their expression of worship, illicit sex, and that was an expression of worship of the god. So, religion appeals to the lust patterns of sin nature.

1. **Religion is the Greatest Threat to Human Life and Freedom**

Religion is the greatest persecutor and murderer of human life and freedom. This has been expressed in the form of human sacrifices to the gods. It has been expressed in the form of undermining the sacredness of life which God has given to every human being. It is the religion of humanism that is slaughtering unborn infants. It is the religion of humanism that seeks to invade the privacy of individuals. It is the religion of humanism that is seeking to undermine the personal freedom (the personal volition) of the individual American today. And people don't understand that there is a religion out there which dominates the mentality of the political life of this nation. But it is not the relationship to God. There is a very great difference.

This is why it is essential that we have a separation of church matters and political state matters; that is, because religion always wants to combine the two, so that it can impose its will upon the people of God.

1. **Religion is Money-Minded**

One of the characteristics of religion, I need not remind you, is that it is money-minded. It is the religion oriented crowd that is constantly drumming away at raising funds by every technique it can think of – mostly by tithing, and other pressure systems. And they are always calling upon you to cough up what you have promised to do, and maybe you are not able to do. Religion seeks to control, through the granting of financial favors. Religion controls through granting financial favors. So, religion is very money-oriented, not service-oriented.

1. **Religion is a Mass Solution**

Furthermore, religion is a mass solution, while Christianity is a personal solution. Religion is the worst thing in the world. Christianity is the best thing in the world.

1. **Religion Blinds Mens' Eyes to Spiritual Truths**

Nothing that Satan has ever done has been so successful in blinding mens' eyes to spiritual truths as religion. Religion has been his ace card from the very beginning. Religious, empty, pointless ritual ceremonies are the way Satan is able to control the minds of people, and keep them out of the light of the Word of God (Revelation 13:5-8, Revelation 13:13-17). So, it is clear that Satan has been very successful in controlling human beings, and leading them into the lake of fire, along with himself, through religion.

1. **Religion Becomes Degenerate and Corrupt**

Finally, there is one other thing about religion. And that is that, over a period of time, it has a tendency to become very degenerate and very corrupt.

**Knowledge**

Now this was the problem that Paul was facing as he ministered to his fellow countrymen, the Jews. And as we've been reading in these opening verses of Romans 10, he has a great concern. He has a great desire for their salvation. But he recognizes, as he pointed out in verse 2, that their zeal is not according to knowledge. They do not have a genuine knowledge of God because their religion has blinded them.

**Epignosis**

He used that word "epignosis." "Epignosis" means "full knowledge." It is in contrast to the word "gnosis," which is simply information. There is a distinct difference between these words. And this was the problem that the Jews faced.

**"Gnosis"**

Briefly, here it is. Within every human being, there is a human soul. Within a born-again Christian, there is also a living human spirit. This is within the human body. And that's what the Bible says: "We are a body; we are spirit; and, we are a soul." What Paul was saying that is that the Jews were given Bible doctrine information. It came to the perceptive side of their minds; that is, where they learned things. And they had "gnosis" information. That's just plain knowledge. That's simply information. But they refused to accept that as truth. So, everything got short-circuited, and that's all they had. It was just information up in their heads.

However, for the Jew here and there, who believed, this knowledge was, by faith, transferred down to the human spirit where it became "epignosis." That's why there is this difference of the words, because it is "epignosis" (knowledge of the Word of God) that you can use. You can't use "gnosis." to live by. That doesn't function in your life. We have plenty of Christians who are running around with heads full of information, but they have mental reservation toward that information. Therefore, it is unusable to them, even though it is the clear truth of God. It is what we have accepted under the instruction of the Holy Spirit that then gets stored in our human spirit, with all these various compartments of various categories of doctrinal truth.

Then, under the filling of the Holy Spirit, when we are in touch with God the Holy Spirit – walking with all known sins confessed so that He can lead us, He picks out categories of truth that we need at a certain point in time, and bring them up here to our directive capacity of the mind, from whence we make decisions. It is in the directive side of our mind that we have a viewpoint. If our mind is being fed with "epignosis" is knowledge, we have divine viewpoint. If our knowledge is coming over directly from the perceptive side, that's human viewpoint knowledge. And that's how the unbeliever learns. He goes from perceptive right to the directive.

When we have the "epignosis" knowledge being cycled up to our directive capacity, we also build a frame of reference. That's why people will sometimes sit in church, and they say, "I didn't understand what you were talking about." Well, that doesn't upset me. I know that I'm a brilliant expositor. Everything that I say is crystal clear, but if you don't have a frame of reference, you won't understand it. Now that's not true about me, but it is true about the fact that if you don't have a background, we're going to say things that just fly right over you. It is this information that gives this to you. And that's why sitting in church is such a valuable experience, if the Word is being taught.

**Conscience**

Furthermore, it is this information that feeds your conscience. That's one of the most valuable things that "epignosis" knowledge does. Conscience is empty until you give it a set of values. A few years ago, some missionaries were killed in Ecuador, these men who had come to do them a service, and had treated them kindly, and had never done anything unkind to these natives. These natives had a conscience understanding that anytime an alien walked in, he should be slaughtered on the spot. Their conscience was wrong. It had had wrong information fed into it. So, they took the lives of those missionaries. Your conscience does not necessarily lead you to do what is right, unless it is schooled in God's viewpoint and principles.

So, all of this valuable capacity is stored in that directive mind. And it is from here that your directive mind gives information to your emotions about how you should feel about your money, and your possessions, and your houses, and your cars, and all the other temporal things that we have in life. It is the directive mind that guides you in how you should feel about spiritual things; about church; about Christian service; about being a servant of the Lord; about using your gifts and capacity; and, about investing your time, and treasures, and talents. The Word of God keeps you from going astray, and keeps you on target.

Furthermore, from your directive mind, information goes to your volition. It hits the positive side of your volition, and you produce, under the filling of the Holy Spirit (which is the system working) – you produce divine good actions. So, you are a Christian who is living in terms of emotions that are reflecting what God feels about things; that is, operating and making decisions that are God's approved decisions. A Christian can have a mental viewpoint (a set of values and standards – a frame of reference) that reflects the mind of Christ. That's an enormously wonderful system that God has given us.

**The Grace System of Perception**

This is just an overview of the great system of perception we've talked about. It's just a way of looking at how the Word of God functions. You might revise it in some other way. But this is basically the difference between having "gnosis" up in your head that is useless, and "epignosis" (full knowledge) down in your human spirit that works.

On the other hand, if you are negative to the Word of God, then the "gnosis" knowledge goes no place. So, in your directive mind, you have a human viewpoint, and you have no frame of reference to compare your thinking with God's thinking. Your conscience is functioning on evil principles, and the result is that you have bad information moved to your emotions on temporal things. You let the material thing become your master. And you have bad attitudes toward spiritual things, because that is being cranked out from your old sin nature. The old sin nature has picked up information to your directive mind. That, in turn, feeds the emotions with these misinformed directions.

So, there was a time in your life when you didn't have anything, and you were very devoted to the things of God, and you knew how to handle what you had. It was all for the Lord's glory. But when you let the sin nature take over, it distorts all of that, so that your prosperity, now instead of becoming a blessing, becomes a curse to you. So, your relationship to God, instead of continuing to be an expanding prosperity, becomes a curse to you, so that you have the wrong attitudes right down the line.

Furthermore, it kicks into your negative volition side, and it feeds out into human good actions, so you waste your life chasing rabbits of human good, for which God will never reward you. It is this working of the Word of God in our lives that preserves our lives: "What shall it profit a Christian man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own life." That's what the Bible says. And the answer is, "nothing." You waste your life down a rat hole. You knock yourself out to keep up an existence. And at the end, you stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, and tears streaming down your cheeks, as you realize what might have been had you functioned on this basis of what God had provided.

This is what distressed Paul. Paul said, "Every time I give these Jews some information here into their perceptive mind, they listen to me, and they go negative toward Jesus Christ. They turn their back upon it, and consequently, that's it. When you're unsaved, it is God the Holy Spirit who comes in and carries you with the information. You don't have a living human spirit until you are born again. Therefore, you have no place in which to store God's viewpoint to be guiding your mind. But it is God the Holy Spirit who comes in here, and He acts as a human spirit for you until you accept Christ, and are born again, and are able to function on your own.

Well, the Jews missed everything. They had nothing but "gnosis" knowledge. The Jews were led simply to being arrogant and proud. Remember that that's what having "gnosis" does for you. If all you have is "gnosis," you are a prime candidate for arrogance. 1 Corinthians 1:8 says, "Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we have all knowledge (and the word there is "gnosis"). Knowledge puffs up, but love ("epignosis" knowledge) edifies." Plain old "gnosis" just makes you puffed up. You don't have anything when all you have is knowledge.

The apostle Paul shared this kind of knowledge with the Jews before he was saved. And you can go through several Scriptures, and you'll see what a zealous man he was with this "gnosis:" Acts 8:1, Acts 22:3, Acts 26:4-5, Galatians 1:14. All of those verses tell us that he was very zealous and very enthusiastic for his religion. But he says, "All I had was knowledge. I did not have the precious quality of full knowledge. Therefore, I did not know what I was doing." The Jews had a lot of "gnosis" knowledge, but they had no full "epignosis," so they were lost. They arrogantly were confident in their "gnosis" knowledge. They thought that they had a relationship with God through their Mosaic Law. They were deeply zealous, but they had doomed themselves to the lake of fire.

A lethal poison taken with a zealous conviction that it's safe is still going to kill you. You can take a lethal poison with all the conviction that this is all right to take, and you will die. The Jews were very zealous, but that did not protect them. The greater the intensity of zeal, as a matter of fact, without real divine viewpoint knowledge, the greater will be the damage that you will do to others and to yourself. It creates a mindless fanaticism.

So, coming back to Romans 10:3, Paul says, "For." This word "for" is the Greek word "gar." It is explaining here the mistake of the Jews: "Being ignorant." The word "ignorant" is "agnoeo." Paul uses a very strong word. It means "they just did not know." At no time did the Jews understand the issues. They were ignorant of what? They were ignorant of God's righteousness. And the word is "dikaiosune," which refers to God's absolute moral perfection. We call this His absolute righteousness. It is part of His essence. The Jews, believe it or not, did not grasp the nature of God's righteousness as being absolute. So, they thought they could match themselves to it. This is why we like to tell people who are not believers that you have to be as good as Jesus Christ to go to heaven. Now that usually sets them back on their heels, because they say, "That's ridiculous. Who can be as good as Jesus Christ?" But that is a way of conveying to them that you can be the best person in the world, but you're never going to be good enough to match to God's standard. And that's what Paul is saying here. They did not have an understanding of the nature of God. And that's unbelievable.

You and I read the same Old Testament Scriptures, and we see very clearly God's moral perfection. We see very clearly that the Bible says, "He is absolute righteousness." There is never anything wrong with God. He never does anything wrong. And we find it very strange that the Jews missed that completely. They thought that the only difference between their righteousness and God's was degree. They thought that God was just better than they were, but it was the same sort of thing. They didn't realize that it was totally different in kind. Human righteousness is relative – one person being better than the other.

So, Paul says, "For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness (His righteousness being absolute righteousness), and they going about." The word is "zeteo." "Zeteo" means "to seek:" "They went about seeking to establish." And the word "establish" is the Greek word for "stand" ("histemi"): "They, going about to be able to stand on something." Stand on what? "On their own righteousness." And the word is "idios." And this means their very own efforts. Jews produced a work righteousness with which they thought they would be able to enter heaven instead of accepting God's grace righteousness.

**The Old Sin Nature**

We translate this: "Since they did not know about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own." All human righteousness is the product of the sin nature. So, it is totally rejected by God. It is tainted by the fact that it flows through the sin nature. Here it is – the old sin nature.

**Asceticism**

The old sin nature has a side that expresses itself in asceticism: self-crucifixion; religious rituals; rolling the eyes upward to heave; or, folding your hands. You don't do all kinds of things in order to deny yourself so that God will be pleased with you.

**Lasciviousness**

On the other side, some old sin natures are characterized by lasciviousness. They're the kind that are always looking for something evil. Some people have an old sin nature that always wants to self-crucify itself. Others have an old sin nature that always wants to indulge itself in evil. There is a strong side to the sin nature, and a weak side. Out of the strong side comes human good. And out of the weak side come acts of sins. Now both sins and human good are what form the stream of evil that comes out of us.

You can see that it is absolutely impossible for any human being to perform works that God can accept in order to let him come into heaven. That is because every good work you do comes out of the sin nature contamination, and it's evil in the sight of God. Our society is shot-through with human good works. It is shot-through with people who are do-goodism activists who are killing us, because what they are doing is evil, not because it is honoring to God, or that God approves it. They just don't understand the quality of the sin nature in man.

This is what the Jews did not grasp. Unsaved people have a completely distorted view of the righteousness demanded by God for entrance into heaven. No human being can even begin, by his own efforts, to approach God's standard of absolute righteousness. And I don't care how many sacraments you go through, and how many acts of penance you perform, or how much self-denial and self-crucifixion. It makes no difference. It's all coming out of this filthy stream. It's like drinking out of a sewer. And no matter how long you let it run, it's still polluted.

Human righteousness and God's righteousness are different in kind, not just in degree. And God's absolute righteousness can never be attained by the unsaved who can only function through this sin nature. No divine good works are actually possible.

So, the unsaved Jews lacked the full knowledge, which the Holy Spirit gives, so their zeal was merely religion. And that was produced by Satan. The world today is filled with religion, supposedly devoted to God. But in fact, it honors Satan. The only source of true knowledge about God and His requirements for salvation is the Bible. The Holy Spirit clarifies the gospel to the unsaved who is positive to Jesus Christ, so that the lost person receives that true "epignosis" knowledge that he needs for salvation.

**The Jews**

The Jews, in short, wouldn't believe the gospel. So, they stumbled over Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God, and consequently, the Holy Spirit gave them no true knowledge, which would have led them to salvation: "They, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. The word "not" is the strong word for "not." The word "submitted" is "hupotasso." We've had this before.

**Fall in Line Under the Authority**

You may remember that this is a military word, and it means "to fall in line under the authority of someone." This is the word that Peter uses when he says, "What's the relationship between a wife and her husband?" He says, "The relationship is that she is "hupotasso" to her husband. She is under the authority and leadership of her husband.

**Faith**

So, here Paul says, "These Jews would not submit themselves to the absolute righteousness that God demanded – God's righteousness." They did not subject themselves to God's righteousness. The Jews refused, in other words, the gift of absolute righteousness, which would be received by trusting Jesus as Savior. Paul tried to explain to them that God would not accept their human works, but they would not listen. We had this pointed out to us earlier by the apostle Paul in Romans 3:21-22, when Paul says, "But now the righteousness of God (absolute righteousness), apart from the Law (that is, from human doing) is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God (the absolute righteousness) which is by means of faith in Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe, for there is no difference."

Paul said, "I have made it very clear how you get to heaven." Even when the Jews did understand what Paul was saying about the difference between God's absolute righteousness and their limited, relative, human righteousness, they still pursue their own works as the way into heaven. They tried to justify themselves by their human works, and none of that meant anything to God, because it all fell short of absolute perfection.

Luke 16:15 points this out, where we read, "And He said unto them, 'You are they who justify yourselves before men. But God knows your hearts. For that which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God." And, of course, Paul himself, as a Jew, had to learn to abandon his own righteousness, and to accept God's divine good righteousness, as was pointed out in Philippians 3:9.

**Trust in Jesus Christ Alone**

Finally, we close our section with verse 4. It says again, "For Christ is the end." The word "for" is again that Greek word "gar," and it tells us an explanation. A summary explanation is coming. And that is how, through trusting in Jesus Christ alone, absolute righteousness is obtained by the lost sinner. The Jews missed this is completely. It says, "For Christ is the end." The word "end" is "telos" This word means "termination." It's the cessation of something. Jesus Christ is the termination of something.

Now in the Greek sentence, this comes number one. Aha! When we see that in Greek, we say, "This is what he wants you to concentrate on. This is the big point." Something is coming to an end. Something has been terminated. What is that something? It is "the law" – the "nomos." But in the Greek Bible, it does not say "*the* law," which would equal the Mosaic Law. He's not talking about the Mosaic Law, per se. That's included. But when he says, "law" without the word *"the,"* that tells us that he's talking about law as a system of human doing. So, what he is saying is that Jesus Christ is the terminal point for any system of good works for securing salvation. But what are most people taught? Jesus Christ is only part of the system for securing salvation. The rest is up to you. The rest is proving yourself. The rest is behaving. The rest is how you live.

However, Paul is making a very dramatic statement here. This is the end of the line, folks, for any system of human effort: "For Christ is the terminal point of any human works system. For." And the word "for" is the Greek word "eis," which here means "resulting in." He is the end of human doing, resulting in absolute righteousness for certain people – the righteousness required to enter into heaven. The comparison in verse 4 is between the righteousness of human doing and the righteousness of God, which comes as a gift of faith in Christ.

Romans 3:20-21 and verse 28 talk about that contrast between a righteousness that God will give you, and a righteousness of your human doing. The relationship of Jesus Christ to the human good works, including the Mosaic Law method of salvation, is that he totally discredited that system. And that's verse 4 means. It's totally discredited as a system of getting to heaven. The works method, of course, of the Old Testament Mosaic Law never could get you to heaven. We've already learned that. It is a false idea that is prevalent in certain areas, even among Christians, that the old Jewish theocracy had a system of laws that you kept. And if you kept those rules, you got into heaven. That's the mistake the Jews made. But the Jewish theocracy never intended that through the Mosaic Law that you would enter heaven. You never were going to get into heaven by killing animals, or performing certain rituals, or circumcising your sons. That was all symbolic of spiritual truths. You got into heaven the way Abraham did. You believed in God who, someplace in the future, was going to provide the Savior that was going to cover your sins. And you trusted Him to give you that salvation as a gift. Then you got absolute righteousness.

Never forget that salvation from Adam onward was always by faith in a provision that God would make. It was never by confidence in something that man could produce to merit that salvation with God. And that's what verse 4 is trying to tell us – that with Jesus Christ, and what He did on the cross, that's all. You don't have to do anything. You never did have to do anything. But certainly, now it is very clear that he has discredited all human effort systems.

Notice another word that's important. It says, "For absolute righteousness to everyone." That's the Greek word "pas," which means "no exceptions." It indicates every single person who trusts in Christ is going to get in, with no exceptions. You need it on God's basis. You'll get the gift of eternal life. To everyone who does what, though? Now we're to the keyword: "believes." And that's the Greek word "pisteuo." The word "pisteuo" means "to trust." It refers here to trust in Christ as personal Savior. Jesus Christ terminated the human works system for securing salvation for everyone who trusts in Him. So, if you trust in Him, you're no longer hustling, running around to try to make it with God by your human efforts. That's what this verse means. If you trust in Christ, you're no longer hustling. And if you're trusting in Christ, somebody may ask you, "Are you going to heaven?" And you'll say, "Absolutely." But if you're not trusting in Christ, and someone asks you that, you'll say, "Boy, I sure hope so," because you're not sure. You're not sure whether you have hustled enough; whether you have performed enough; or, whether you have earned enough merit with God. So, the key here is to those who believe, running around trying to make it on your own is at an end.

For those who, like the Jews, refused to trust in Jesus Christ, there is no other option left but to try working your way into heaven. Either you're going to take it as a gift from God, or you are going to work your way in. In Mormonism; in Roman Catholicism; or, in many of these great denominations, you are told that Christ did something, but you have to earn what He did. You have to merit the merit of Christ. That's how the priest puts it. Until you have proven yourself worthy – that's how the Mormons love to put it. If you're proving yourself worthy of what Christ has done for you, you won't receive it. So, it is a combination of your works and His grace gift. But the Bible says, "No, if you're going to deal with Jesus Christ, then all human doing is at an end." If you're going to be engaged in human doing, then you cannot call upon Christ. The two exclude one another. Those who trust in Jesus Christ for salvation are no longer trying to bring their own righteousness to God.

I would remind you once more of that very strong statement that the prophet Isaiah makes in Isaiah 64:6 about our own righteousness, when he says, "But we all, as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. And all we do fades as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." All of our human good efforts are as filthy rags, and that's very strong language in Hebrew, as to what that is referring to.

Because the Jews do not trust in Jesus Christ for salvation, they are still, to this day, trying to earn a righteousness which is acceptable to God. So, for them, Jesus Christ is not the end of human self-effort. Millions of lost human beings are still pursuing salvation by good works produced by the old sin nature, and ending up in the lake of fire.

Paul's whole point in Romans 10:4 is this: That the one who trusts in Jesus Christ for salvation has thereby abandoned any program of seeking salvation by human good works. For the one who believes in Christ, all of that self-effort, and all of that trying to make it on your own is at an end.

Therefore, if you're still trying to make your way into heaven, you have not trusted in Christ. In Galatians 3:10-11, the apostle Paul puts it this way: "For as many as are under the works of the Law are under the curse. For it is written, 'Cursed is everyone that does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the Law, to do them. But that no man is justified by the Law (by human rights) in the sight of God, it is evident,' for." And then he quotes an Old Testament passage: "The just shall live by faith."

Galatians 3:24: "Wherefore, the Law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." The Law only showed us how really bad we were. When we read the Ten Commandments, and we realize that it's not only our outward actions that the Ten Commandments speak of, but our mental attitudes of hatred and lust and so on, then we are horrified to realize that there is no way the Law could do anything but show us our desperate need. It certainly could not carry us into heaven. It showed us that we had to turn to God, and receive this as a gift, because everything our sin nature produces is already under His judgment.

So, the question to you today: to which system of salvation have you committed yourself? And remember that everybody is on one or the other. You might say, "No, I haven't made a choice," but you're wrong. If you have not committed yourself to a salvation that is provided by Christ as a gift of His absolute righteousness, you have automatically placed yourself on the other side. The only other option there is, is to make it by how you live, and to hope that God will accept your lifestyle, and let you come into heaven. And that, I can assure you, is a vain and foolish hope: "Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved."

Dr. John E. Danish, 1988

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