

Lost and Found
Romans 10:1-4
By Randy Wages
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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

- I. Introduction: Our primary text for today is Romans 10:1-4 and I've titled today's message "Lost and Found." I chose that title because I believe in these four verses, we have a clear, distinguishing description of both those who are spiritually lost and those who are spiritually saved – who are found (like the one lost sheep found by the shepherd in the Parable that was just read for us).

Lost and Found – I'm sure some of you have traveled and may have checked out of a hotel, but unintentionally left something behind. I have, and on some occasions I didn't miss the left-behind article until several days or even weeks later. But until you've discovered an item to be lost, you wouldn't even search for it. You don't recognize it's lost – that something's missing. But if and when you finally do, you'll begin to search for it if it's of any value at all to you. And eventually it might dawn on you to call the hotel where you'll be transferred to their Lost and Found department and where hopefully you find that which was lost. Well, there is a parallel to this in the spiritual conversion of each and every one whom God saves. We 1st must discover our spiritual state of having been lost, if we're to search and find (or more aptly, be found) so as to be counted among the spiritually saved.

And in these 1st 4 verses of Romans 10, God describes for us that which is true of every lost, but religious sinner. And being religious, they do not think they are lost – sinners who mistakenly think they know the way that leads to eternal life. And on the other hand we have a description that is true of every saved sinner – every true believer. Now I'm assuming that all who hear this message are religious to some degree or another or else you wouldn't be listening. And so as God challenges us in 2 Cor. 13:5, let's examine ourselves as to whether we be in the faith. This brief, but loaded passage that we'll consider this morning provides an excellent tool for us to do just that. In light of these verses consider, "Am I (are you) among those described here as religious but lost or is the description given here of true believers, true of you?" It's one or the other for each one of us.

Context: Well, before we dig in to these verses let me catch you up on the immediate context. Paul is writing this to believers in Rome and in the latter part of the preceding chapter 9, he quotes Isaiah, saying in verse 27 that, "***Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved.***"

He is telling his fellow Jewish believers that although there are many of us Jews, only a small number have been (and will be) blessed with true, God-given faith and repentance. He goes on then to contrast the believing Gentiles (who did not have the advantage of the Old Covenant Law of Moses) but whom he describes as having attained (or come to) the law of righteousness – contrasting them with the majority of the Jews who “followed after the law of righteousness” – referring to their attempts to keep the law, but of whom he says they did not attain (or come to) the law of righteousness.

And look with me at those last 2 verses of chapter 9. In verse 32 he addresses why (or how) this is so, saying, ***“Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; ³³As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him*** (that stumblingstone was a “him” – a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ) ***shall not be ashamed.”***

That word translated “ashamed” means confounded, as in perplexed. That means trusting in Christ and His imputed righteousness for all salvation (believing on Him who was a stumbling stone to most of the Jews) will prove to have been worthy of their trust – that will stand up at the judgment – they shall not be ashamed! Can you imagine how ashamed, how perplexed or confounded, many religious folks have been (and will be) when they die in full expectation of entering heaven’s eternal glory only to discover they had it all wrong – they thought they knew the way but were tragically mistaken? That is – they were lost and didn’t know it. Well, Paul begins to describe folks just like that in our text as we begin reading in Romans 10:1...

II. Text: Romans 10:1-4:

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. ²For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. ³For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. ⁴For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. Let’s dig into this a bit.

III. They are Lost! We see from verse 1 that Paul doesn’t take delight in sharing with his Jewish brethren in the faith how most of their fellow Jews were spiritually lost. And we know that because he begins by expressing his compassion for their eternal well-being, his heart’s desire and prayer that they might be saved. Likewise, any who preach the true Gospel of God’s grace (wherein His righteousness is revealed (according to Romans 1:16-17), do not relish or delight

in pointing out how the majority of so-called “Christendom” today fall in that same category, based on the exact same evidence set forth here. So we see the relevance of this to us goes way beyond just these Jews. And we only point these things out because we’re talking about folks we care about, friends and relatives, and we know that if they are to be saved, that they (like all who are saved) must at some point see how tragically mistaken they’ve been through the revelation of God-given faith and repentance so as to come to Christ and plead His righteousness alone for all their salvation. This is clearly Paul’s motivation as it pertains to the majority of his fellow Jews. And in that he desires and prays for their salvation, we can know 1st that he is speaking of those who need salvation – who are lost! So, 1) they are lost, but not only are they lost, but...

- IV. They are religious: Secondly, we know from verse 2, that they are religious. Now we know that is not true of all lost folks. While I believe there is a sense in which the descriptions of verse 3 can be attributed to all who are lost, we know that not all who are lost are religious. Many have no interest whatsoever in religion. But these of whom Paul wrote, likely are similar to all who will hear this message, they had some religious interest. Paul put it this way, saying, “They have a zeal of God.” Paul could identify with that. He was so zealous before being saved, that in the name of his former religion, he was busy persecuting true Christians. That’s one of the things he cited in Philippians 3 as being that of which he once was proud and thought found him in favor with God, but of which he had since repented. Many of these devout Jews prayed and fasted and tithed their money, even over and above that which the law called for. Many strictly observed the ceremonial law they were under – their zeal was not in question.

I once fit into this category. I was zealous in my former religion, not playing church but serious about it. But like these that Paul describes here, I was lost – religious but lost. And as such, I don’t doubt at all the sincerity of most religious folks; however, as was once true of me, you can be sincerely religious and yet still be in a state of spiritual blindness – lost and not even know it.

- V. They lack knowledge: Now their problem didn’t lie in the fact that they were zealous and religious, but that their religious zeal was “not according to knowledge.” They lacked some vital knowledge – so vital that it is what identifies them as in need of salvation – of being lost, misguided religionists. And he doesn’t just say, “They’re missing something, hang around and maybe you’ll figure it out.” No, he immediately and precisely tells them exactly what they were missing – what knowledge they lacked as we read in verse 3 – they were ignorant of the righteousness of God.

VI. The Righteousness of God: What is the righteousness of God of which Paul says they were ignorant? We can know from verse 4 (which I believe is about as concise of a biblical definition of righteousness one can get) that he is referring to the justice-satisfying merit of Christ's obedience unto death on the cross – that righteousness which He came to establish (and did establish) in perfect satisfaction to the law and justice of God. Christ is the end (the completion, the fulfillment, the finishing) of the law for righteousness! And that is the righteousness of which most of the Jews were ignorant.

This righteousness is the same as Paul described back in Romans chapter 3. Look there with me beginning in verse 21: ***“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; ²²Even the righteousness of God which is by faith (or the faithfulness) of Jesus Christ unto all (I believe that is preached to all) and upon all them that believe: (that is put upon or imputed, put to their account) for there is no difference: ²³For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ²⁴Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: ²⁵Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation (i.e. – a sin-bearing, justice-satisfying sacrifice) through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission (the payment / forgiveness) of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; ²⁶To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: (the satisfaction to God's law and justice that Christ made, as it reads...) that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*** God can't just look over our sins. They must be dealt with according to God's strict justice. Christ had to be that vicarious, propitiatory sacrifice so as to pay the sin debt for all He saves and here we see that this is His righteousness so that God might be true to His character – be just and still save / justify them. That's His redemptive glory!

I believe that is what Paul is concisely restating in Romans 10:4, that ***“...Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.”***

VII. Verse 3 Un-divided: Now let's consider further the descriptions of lost sinners found in verse 3. And this verse needs to be considered as a whole and not divided up as if some religious folks might be ignorant of God's righteousness but not necessarily going about to establish one of their own. No, the religious but lost here are identified as (1) ***“being ignorant of God's righteousness, and (2 – and I believe by default are) going about to establish their own righteousness, (and so thereby it is concluded 3rdly, that they...) have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.”*** This is the explanation of why Paul knows them to be lost.

Most everyone who considers themselves to be of the “Christian” faith will agree that only those who believe the Gospel shall be saved, perhaps because of their familiarity with the commission Christ gave to the disciples in Mark 16:15-16 where we read, **“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. ¹⁶He that believeth (the gospel) and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not (believeth not the gospel) shall be damned.”** So most profess belief in what they call the gospel. The problem lies in that the “gospel” so many believe is what the Bible calls another gospel – not God’s Gospel. We often quote Romans 1:16-17 where it is declared that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation – it is what is believed by those who are saved. But we can’t ignore vs. 17 which makes it clear that this is so because therein is the righteousness of God revealed. So it is impossible to believe God’s Gospel, while ignorant of God’s righteousness, because righteousness is what is revealed to those who believe God’s Gospel.

VIII. Ignorance of the Righteousness of God: What constitutes ignorance of this righteousness?

- A. Oblivious to it – Some are like myself in years past, oblivious to the righteousness of Christ revealed in the Gospel. Now I knew the word was in the Bible but for the most part my thoughts were limited to only considering righteousness as an attribute of God – describing how He was holy and just (a righteous God who does right) although I now know I didn’t truly even appreciate God’s attribute of righteousness in that sense. I didn’t think God would be so strict as to accept nothing less than the perfection which only Christ could and did render as Surety and Substitute for His sheep. Surely He wasn’t that righteous (or so I imagined).
- B. Their need for righteousness – Secondly, like many I also had no idea of my need for a perfect righteousness. Now I understood that I couldn’t obey enough or do enough good deeds to get me into heaven. I knew the Bible taught that salvation was by grace, not works and yet I thought my believing is what made the difference – is what differentiated me from the lost. In other words I made faith a work (even though I called it a gift from God) – a work that was somehow different and unique in that it was exempted from having to measure up to the standard of perfection required by a holy and righteous God. I didn’t know I needed a perfect righteousness. I thought Christ somehow made up the difference for my shortcomings if I’d just strike my end of the bargain by believing something about Him. We called that salvation by grace but thankfully it was later exposed to me that I was believing in salvation by works – a system of works which we called grace. So to be ignorant is to not know you need righteousness. If God brings you to see your desperate need for His righteousness – it’s because He’s revealed it to you by God-given faith and repentance under the preached Gospel of God’s sovereign grace wherein it is revealed.

C. Ignorant of the standard of judgment – To be ignorant of the righteousness of God is to be ignorant of it as the standard by which God shall judge us. As we quote so often from Acts 17:31, ***“Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”***

How righteous must we be? —as righteous as the Lord of glory. I can’t produce that. I can’t obey the precepts of God’s revealed will perfectly and I have nothing (not even my own death) that is sufficient to pay the debt due to the strict and holy justice of God due unto my sin. His righteousness must be somehow made mine, which brings me to the next aspect of how many are ignorant...

D. Imputed righteousness – For all the years I spent zealously practicing what I know now to have been my false religion, I had never even heard the term “imputed righteousness.” I never heard any emphasis on passages like Romans 4:6 where David is quoted as having described, ***“..the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,”*** Now if you could be convinced you need righteousness for acceptance before a holy God (which you do), but know nothing of the doctrine of imputation you would be left in despair and without hope. You would be one who knows you need something you have no hope of acquiring. Thankfully God the Holy Spirit doesn’t leave us there. He doesn’t truly convince us of sin without also convincing us of His justifying righteousness and how this is accounted unto those who are saved.

Consider: If you’re truly convinced of your need for righteousness, then it’s because you’re convinced of your sinfulness – so much so that if some preacher comes along and tries to answer your dilemma by directing you to look within yourself to find righteousness, suggesting that God (in ways we can’t understand) makes you inherently righteous within, gives you a righteous nature – well that just won’t work for you, not if God has done the convincing. You would have discovered that there is nothing that proceeds from yourself that isn’t tainted with sin.

To need the righteousness of God is to need a perfect, untainted, righteousness that answers fully the demands of God’s holy law and justice. You must have Christ’s righteousness put to your account, imputed to you, for nothing else will fit your need. Only by having righteousness imputed, can we who are sinners (in and of ourselves) be accepted as righteous before a holy God. Just as the sins of God’s elect were charged or imputed to Christ that He might bear the demerit (the guilt) due unto them and pay a penalty of such value so as to pay the debt due to the offense of all the sins of all God’s elect – sin against an infinitely holy God.

And that He did in His death, in the shedding of His precious blood; likewise, God has imputed or charged to the account of every one for whom He lived and died, the merit of His accomplished work in satisfaction to justice – His righteousness. That is the essence of 2 Cor. 5:21.

That is the only righteousness that fits my need and it resides right now at the right hand of the Father in the Person of my Savior, my Surety, my Substitute, Jesus Christ, who is ever interceding on my behalf on that very basis – on the basis of that which He did for me – not based on the work of the Holy Spirit in me. The miraculous work of the Spirit in me is what has me (and keeps me) looking exclusively to what He did for me – for my salvation.

IX. Going about to establish their own righteousness: Now Paul adds that in their ignorance, they are going about to establish their own righteousness. That word translated “establish” means to “make stand” in the sight of God – in other words they presume to be able to do something that will stand up before God as their justifying righteousness. It is to imagine that salvation is at least in some way, and / or to some degree conditioned on the sinner (works) rather than seeing how all the conditions for salvation were fully met (and only met) by the doing and dying of the Savior (that’s grace). See, nothing we can do, or anything that we might credit God the H/S with doing through us meets that standard by which we’re judged – the perfect righteousness of Christ.

If you’re religious, but you’re not looking to Christ and His righteousness imputed as your only ground of salvation, then by necessity (whether you recognize it or not) you are going about to establish your own righteousness because if your plea (or basis for counting yourself saved) is anything other than Christ and His imputed righteousness, then the only thing left to plea or bank upon would be something done by, in, or through you the sinner. That is to attempt to place that which proceeds from you in rivalry with the finished work of Jesus Christ – the only righteousness God will accept.

And that’s not just simply being sadly mistaken, as all of us initially are by nature. It’s to be sinfully, rebelliously, sadly mistaken. It’s evil and opposed to the very glory of God in the Person and finished work of Christ. God tells us in Galatians 2:21b that “**...if righteousness come by the law, (i.e. – in your meeting a condition or requirement in order to be saved) then Christ is dead in vain.**” There’s the evil – to imagine salvation is conditioned on the sinner is to esteem the death of Jesus Christ as a vain thing.

X. Not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God: So Paul concludes verse 3 saying that they have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. Submission. Our Pastor has been leading us in a Bible study on the Sermon on the Mount, and as I consider this lack of submission, I'm reminded from the Beatitudes how those who are eternally blessed with salvation are described in Matthew 5:3 as "**Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.**" As Bill taught, meekness there denotes submission.

And notice that when one has been humbled so as to submit to the righteousness of God, they don't earn anything thereby— they inherit. I want an inheritance – that which my spotless Savior earned for me. You see to be submitted involves a humbling that is reflected in repentance from our dead works. Now are these descriptions relevant to us today? Who fits this description of not being submitted to the righteousness of God?

- A. Non-believing Jews -- Obviously it includes these non-believing Jews of whom Paul directs his remarks. To them, Christ was a stumbling stone, a rock of offense as we read and yet consider that they looked forward to a Messiah – just not one who would execute righteousness in the earth by which men are justified before God. But is this only descriptive of these unbelieving Jews?
- B. Arminians – The majority of the Jews didn't recognize Christ to be the Messiah – not this One who came to establish (and did establish) a justifying righteousness. Well, isn't that much like most who profess to be of the "christian" faith today? Just as the Jews professed belief in a Messiah, others profess belief in Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah – but it's not the Christ of the Bible, not the Christ who brought in this everlasting righteousness by which any for whom it was established were justified and shall in time be saved. The majority of religious folks in our part of the world believe as I once did – that Christ died for everyone who ever lived, including the multitudes the scriptures declare shall perish. It should have been obvious (but in my spiritual blindness it wasn't) – obvious that to believe Christ died for all automatically must have you looking for something else (not Christ) to make the real difference in your salvation since according to that doctrine, the doing and dying of Christ just didn't get the job done for those who perish. Many, if challenged about this will respond, "Oh, but you have got to believe to make what He did effectual."

And I know when I would reply that way, I did so without any sense of the evil, prideful, God-dishonoring suggestion that my faith was the real difference maker, not the doing and dying of Christ – that my faith could accomplish what took the doing and dying of the Lord of glory. That is faith in faith, not faith in Christ. And that is to be just as ignorant of, and just as not submitted to the one justifying righteousness of God (that which Christ alone could and did render) as these unbelieving Jews were of Paul's day, going about to establish a righteousness of their own.

C. Compromising Calvinists – Well, lastly there are those whose doctrine would seem more consistent with the gospel. I consider myself fortunate that I was introduced to the Gospel wherein His righteousness was revealed at the same time I began to learn what many call the doctrines of grace – what some refer to as Calvinistic doctrine.

And it amazed me to discover there were folks who were not mistaken as I had been about the sovereignty of God in salvation – of the doctrines of election and particular redemption. But at the time (being young in the faith) I was somewhat baffled that these doctrines apparently had not turned their world upside down like it did mine. And this was evident by their embracing others as spiritual brethren whose “gospel” doctrine was the same as that of which I had repented. See, I discovered I had been worshipping a god of my imagination, a counterfeit Jesus as God granted me faith and repentance – a complete change of heart and mind about who God was and how He saves sinners. And nothing but the imputed righteousness of Christ would do for me from then on.

My point is this – Paul didn’t say, “Well today brethren I want to teach you some deeper theology. I’d like to talk with you about why Christ came and what He accomplished in establishing righteousness, but don’t worry, even in your ignorance of these things you’re okay. You’re still a believer.” No – Paul couldn’t do that. He cared for these people and he could only have told them that if he actually believed that to be true. You don’t lie to your dearest friends and family about things pertaining to eternal life and death.

See, there are people who know a lot of true doctrine, including believing God to be sovereign, even sovereign in salvation as He is. And yet if they believe any are saved in ignorance of Christ’s righteousness, then they expose that they too remain ignorant of (and not submitted to) His justifying righteousness. They may not be oblivious to the biblical definition of terms like “righteousness” and “imputed righteousness” as I once was, but make no mistake, if you can count others saved who are ignorant of and not submitted to the righteousness of God as revealed in the Gospel, (and who by default are going about to establish their own righteousness), then that exposes the absence of a heart work, not a submission to His righteousness as the only ground of salvation, in spite of any other doctrinal head knowledge. A few verses down in Romans 10, Paul describes that which he and others preached this way in verse 9, ***“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*** (Now a lot of people stop there, but read on in verse 10)¹⁰***For with the heart (i.e. – your mind, your affections, your will) man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ¹¹For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.***” See, believing on Him, is believing unto righteousness.

XI. True believers: Back to our text in verse 4 Paul then describes what is true of everyone (not just some, but all) that believeth: ***For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*** Christ is the end (the completion, the fulfillment, the finishing) of the law for righteousness! That word translated “end” is derived from the same Greek word used by Christ in His last words on the cross, “It is finished.” And He finished it. He’s the end, the finishing of the law for righteousness – and that to every true believer!

XII. Closing:

It’s clear from this passage that if Christ isn’t the end of the law for righteousness to you, then you’re still going about to establish a righteousness of your own and have not submitted yourself unto the righteousness of God. And like Paul, our heart’s desire and prayer to God is that you might be saved.

How about you? Is Christ the end of the law for righteousness to you? Is His perfect satisfaction to God’s law and justice by His finished work on the cross all you need? Is it the only thing that will do for you and fit your need – that will find you, a sinner, justified before a holy God? Well, if it truly is, good news – God’s word says you’re saved. It’s that simple. He says this is true to everyone that believes on Him for their righteousness by which they are justified. And with that blood-bought gift of faith and repentance, one can honestly then sing that stanza from Amazing Grace, “I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see!”

Lost and Found!

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God’s grace found in the only infallible source, God’s word itself – the Bible.