

3 Rebuttal to Jesus' Answer To The Direct Question On How To Obtain Eternal Life

Leading Commentaries On Jesus' Words in Matthew 19:17

One of the ways to prove the force of a passage to mean one thing is to look at how weak and pathetic are the arguments to resist that meaning.

Now Jesus is blunt in this passage issue. He clearly states “but if thou wouldest *enter into life*, keep the commandments” (Matt. 19:17.) How can this be viewed other than as what it literally says?

Vincent Word Studies makes no comment on this aspect of verse 17. Likewise *Robertson's Word Pictures* ignores it. The Geneva Study Bible dares not touch it.

Adam Clarke's Commentary

Clarke takes a stab at this verse. He claims Jesus' coming abrogates the Law so this teaching in Matthew 19:17 is no longer literally true for Christians:

Keep the commandments - From this we may learn that God's great design, in giving his law to the Jews, was to lead them to the expectation and enjoyment of eternal life. But as all the law referred to Christ, and he became ***the end of the law for righteousness*** (justification) to all that believe, so he is to be received, in order to have the end accomplished which the law proposed.

In other words, for Clarke, Jesus' answer is no longer valid. Since the Law is ended, then Jesus' words that to 'enter life one must obey the Law' is abrogated. Jesus' words supposedly belong to a defunct dispensation. However, please note this directly contradicts the *words* and *message* of Jesus' Himself. It may be consistent with how people view the Fable of Cheap Grace. However, it surely is not consistent with the *words* of Jesus. Clarke is directly contradicting Jesus' message so as to uphold a different message than Jesus' taught. How can we do this when Jesus said that even if heaven and earth passed away, Jesus' words would not pass away? (Matt. 25:35.)

Barnes & Gill: Jesus Says One Thing But Means The Opposite

Barnes tries to take a bigger swing at Jesus' words. Let's take Barnes in two bite-size quotes. First, Barnes begins:

Keep the commandments - That is, do what God has commanded. He in the next verses informs him what he meant by the commandments. Jesus said this, doubtless, **to try him**, and to convince him that he had by no means kept the commandments, and that in supposing he had he was altogether deceived. The young man thought he had kept them, and **was relying on them for salvation**. It was of great importance, therefore, to convince him that he was, after all, a sinner.

Let's stop there. Barnes says Jesus tells the young man that if he wants to enter life, then obey the commandments, but that Jesus really meant the *opposite*. Jesus supposedly meant that if you trust in obedience to the commandments for salvation, you are trusting in the wrong thing. **Barnes has Jesus say one thing and mean the opposite**. Barnes goes on to explain what is forcing him to make such a nonsensical interpretation:

Christ did not mean to say that any man would be ***saved by the works of the law***, for the Bible teaches plainly that such will not be the case, Rom 3:20, Rom 3:28; Rom 4:6; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:9; 2Ti 1:9.

Barnes makes a slip here. He claims the *Bible* teaches by the works of the Law no one will be justified. However, Barnes is no longer expounding on Jesus' words and meaning. Instead, he retreats to writings ascribed to Paul. The validity of those writings must be post-poned until we completely understand Jesus' message. For if writings ascribed to Paul contradict Jesus, those writings must be regarded as corruptions of the New Testament text and have to be ignored or as proof of Paul's non-inspiration.¹ The contradiction does not justify *ever* dismissing Jesus' words in preference for Paul's words. (2 John 1:9.)

As a result, Barnes does not review what the *Bible* teaches. He is instead pitting what he thinks are words ascribed to Paul as if they ever could take precedence over the words of the Lord of the Universe delivered *in person*. Whenever such tension may be present, we must uphold Jesus. There is no option of disregarding the Lord of the Universe in preference for a mere man even if he were a prophet. As John the Baptist, who unquestionably was a prophet himself, wisely said once Jesus arrived:

He must increase, but I must decrease. He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is of the earth, and of the earth he speaketh: ***he that cometh from heaven is above all.*** John 3:30-31 ASV.

Thus, the words ascribed to Paul can never compare to the words of Jesus. They are on wholly different planes. Jesus' comes first. It is Jesus who has the exclusive right to call out His sheep. We will explore in depth later how the

1. See page 1 for further discussion.

Second Peter hermeneutic dictates we ignore any passage of Paul at variance even slightly with the words and message of Jesus.

Continuing With Barnes' Spin of Jesus' Words To The Young Man

Then Barnes continues. He implies that Jesus was pulling the young man's leg. Jesus is supposedly asking the young man to do something that was not possible *at all times* (*i.e.*, keep the law without fail). Barnes ignores the Law allowed *repentance* to fill in gaps in obedience. (Jesus in fact is going to give the young man a work worthy of repentance, *i.e.*, give his wealth away, as the next requirement to obtain eternal life.) Barnes claims Jesus was not trying to inform us about repentance from sin. Rather, Barnes claims that Jesus was giving the young man an impossible standard of 100% obedience where any single failure irreversibly causes loss of eternal life. Repentance was a hopeless alternative supposedly as well. Thus, Barnes says Jesus' intent was supposedly to *discourage concern of the young man to actually obey the Law*:

At the same time, however, it is true that if a man perfectly complied with the requirements of the law he would be saved, for there would be no reason why he should be condemned. Jesus, therefore, ***since he saw he was depending on his works***, told him that if he would enter into life that is, into heaven - ***he must keep the commandments***; if he was depending on them he must keep them ***perfectly***, and if this was done he would be saved. The reasons why Christ gave him this direction were, probably:

1. because it was his duty to keep them.

2. because the young man depended on them, and he ought to understand what was required if he did - that they should be **kept perfectly**, or that **they were not kept at all**.

3. because he wanted to test him, to show him that he did not keep them, and thus to show him his need of a Saviour.

Gill says the same thing.

Our Lord answers according to the tenor of **the covenant of works**, under which this man was; and according to the law of God, which requires **perfect obedience** to it, as a righteousness, and a title to life; and in case of the **least failure**, curses and condemns to **everlasting death**;

Both Gill and Barnes are trying to imply that the Law given Moses meant that if you sin in the slightest, it is all over. You are damned to hell, irreversibly. Thus, without a flawless perfect obedience, your destiny is supposedly hell. Thus, if true, Jesus was pointing the young man to a path **that could not actually save him**, but only lead him to ultimate failure. Thus, Barnes and Gill imply that Jesus must have been pulling the young man's leg. Jesus was telling the young man that obedience to the Law could maintain a righteousness before God which Jesus knew was impossible. Thus, what Jesus supposedly was doing is showing the young man that obedience was the *wrong direction* to go in because obedience must be perfect for eternal life. Any failure supposedly means hell. Thus, obedience to the law is a hopeless endeavor to righteousness.

As another commentator put it even more clearly:

[E]ternal life is available by a **perfect** standard of righteous behavior such as the Mosaic Law, [but] **this is not possible with man**. So man's only recourse relative to eternal life is to trust alone in Christ alone.²

However, this is false. Jesus' point is not that the young man should follow a standard that was impossible. Jesus was merely repeating Deuteronomy 6:25 that said obedience to the Law maintains an imputed righteousness before God. This is not an impossible task. God in Deuteronomy 30:11 assures us obedience "is not too hard for thee, neither is it far off." (ASV.)

Moreover, Gill and Barnes are grossly misrepresenting the Law and the Prophets. They are suggesting that once you sin, you are irretrievably lost. However, the Law is not a dead end, as they assert. Instead, once you sinned, repentance from sin is always an option (unless you died too suddenly to repent).³

And thou, son of man, say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression; and as for the wickedness of the wicked, **he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness**; neither shall he that is righteous be able to live thereby in the day that he sinneth. (Eze 33:12)(ASV)

Ezekiel teaches when the righteous sin, they lose life, *i.e.*, eternal life. When the sinner repents, he lives, *i.e.*, he has eternal life. Nothing short of the grave is ever irreversible. Thus, when one obeys the Law, it is deemed to be imputed righteousness, so says Deuteronomy 6:25.

The principle of repentance from sin and restoration is also reflected in Deuteronomy 30:1-10, which states:

When all these things befall you...and **you return them to your heart...** and **you return to**

2. *Matthew 19:13-26, The Rich Young Ruler*, at <http://www.biblestudy-manuals.net/mt19v26.htm> (last accessed 6/17/06).

3. This is why Jesus always warned 'you do not know the day nor the hour' of His return. So He exhorted us to be always ready.

God...then God will turn your captivity and take you back in love...God will bring you back...God will return and gather you...then **you will return to hearing God's voice...**And God will again rejoice over you...**if you turn to God with all your heart and all your soul.** (Deut. 30:1-10).

Barnes and Gill are wrong to imply that Jesus was teaching an absolute *perfect* obedience to the Law was necessary **and** that if there was any failure, there was never any hope again. Jesus was not giving an impossible standard. Barnes and Gill are insisting Jesus' intention was the young man would give up seeking an imputed righteousness from obeying the Law despite God promising this precisely in Deuteronomy 6:25. This is nonsense.

Barnes and Gill are engaging in an **absolutely false caricature of God's word.** It is a blatant misrepresentation of God's Holy Scripture. **It also makes Jesus appear deceitful.** They make Jesus say one thing but mean exactly the opposite. How shameful that Barnes and Gill would endorse such a view of Jesus for the paltry purpose of maintaining the Fable of Cheap Grace.

Barnes is also suggesting that because salvation all runs to Jesus, the Law only has the *initial* function of showing us sin. Once we find Jesus, we do not need the Law to remind us of principles to follow and keep our saved condition intact. This is a spin that Barnes applies to Jesus' words to bring Jesus' words into line, somehow, with the Fable of Cheap Grace.

However, this is why knowing *all* of Jesus' doctrine is so key. It is especially important to know the contents of Jesus' reproof of the Pharisaical *lawless* teaching.

As will be discussed later, Jesus stated repeatedly that Christians must have a righteousness that exceeds the Pharisees "to enter the kingdom of God." (Matt. 5:20.)

Jesus faults the Pharisees for preaching only certain parts of the Law (*e.g.*, thou shall not commit adultery). Jesus says the Pharisees omit mention of other parts of the Law (*e.g.*, thou shall not lust/covet after your neighbor's wife). Jesus was not suggesting *ever* that salvation turned solely upon you finding Jesus *one time*, and thereafter your salvation never hinges on continuing obedience to the Law. Jesus expected you to follow His commands that taught you a righteousness that was lacking in the Pharisees' teachings. ***Jesus said what they omitted to teach from the Law was what was necessary for you to follow "to enter the kingdom of heaven."*** For example, in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said the Pharisees omitted teaching the Tenth of the Ten Commandments (*i.e.*, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife). Thus, unless you exceed this shallow teaching of the Pharisees, you could not ever hope to enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:20.)⁴

4. See page 1 *et seq.*