

### *3 Jesus' Answer To The Direct Question On How To Obtain Eternal Life*

---

#### *Was Jesus Ever Point-Blank Asked How to Have Eternal Life?*

Twice Jesus was asked how to have eternal life. Once by a lawyer and once by a young rich man. Jesus both times answers that the key to salvation is to obey the Law, in particular the Ten Commandments. Jesus then explains to the apostles this means one must live a life based on self-denial which keeps on following Jesus.

What did Jesus precisely say to the rich young man?

Jesus told the young rich man that if you would “enter life,” obey the Ten Commandments. (Matthew 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-26.) Jesus recited these commands verbatim to the young man.<sup>1</sup> Here is the exchange:

(16) And behold, one came to him and said, ***Teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?*** (17) And he said unto him, Why askest thou me concerning that which is good? One there is who is good: but ***if thou wouldest enter into life, keep the commandments.*** (18) He saith unto him, Which? And Jesus said, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal,

---

1. Some think it is significant that the Sabbath command is not repeated. Some have developed an odd hermeneutic that if something is not repeated in the New, it is abolished. Why? Jesus said all the Law, to the least command, remains. (Matt. 5:13.)

Thou shalt not bear false witness, (19) Honor thy father and mother; and, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. (20) The young man saith unto him, All these things have I observed: what lack I yet? (21) Jesus said unto him, ***If thou wouldst be perfect, go, sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.*** (22) But when the young man heard the saying, he went away sorrowful; for he was one that had great possessions. (23) And Jesus said unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, It is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. (24) And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. (Matt 19:16-24)(ASV).

#### **Is Jesus' Teaching Us The Law Applies Heretical?**

That Jesus says this should not surprise us. The commonly heard idea in the Fable of Cheap Grace that the Law was abrogated for a New Testament believer is itself the clearest heresy.

What about Paul's language that the Law was abrogated? Luther in his youthful writings relied upon them, and he clearly thought the Law was abrogated. These passages in Luther's writings are frequently cited by evangelicals. However, the mature Luther recanted. Luther realized the lesson to the Young Rich Man and many other passages made it absurd to conclude that the Law had been abrogated. The mature Luther condemned as ***the worst heresy*** any view that countenances Jesus' coming abrogated the Law. Luther wrote in the *Antinomian Theses* (1537):

To abolish the Law is therefore to abolish the truth of God....[To] discard the Law would effectively put an end to our obedience to God.<sup>2</sup>

Why did Luther make this reversal? Because Luther realized that if any writing were ever joined to the New Testament that purported to teach the Law given Moses is abrogated, then such a text could not possibly be inspired text. It would be sheer heresy of the highest magnitude.

For the Law given Moses was said by God to be “ordinances” that shall be “everlasting for all generations.” (Ex. 27:21; 30:21; Lev. 6:18; 7:36; 10:9; 17:7; 23:14, 21, 41; 24:3; Num. 10:8.)

Anyone who seeks to seduce you from ever following the Law given Moses would be the mark of a false prophet. (Deut. 13:1-5.) If Jesus did so, then Jesus would be a false prophet.

If Jesus came to abrogate the Law, then Jesus could *not* be the Messiah who fulfilled the promise of a New Covenant. For God had said that when the New Testament arrived, it would come and “inscribe the Law (Torah) on our hearts.” (Jeremiah 31:31-33.) What does *inscribe the Law* mean? Isaiah said those who “know righteousness” are “the people *in whose heart is my Law....*” (Isaiah 51:7.)

Likewise, Isaiah explained Messiah would make the Law better known and practiced. When the Redeemer is sent to Israel to create a new covenant, God promises by Him “*these words that I have given you*” (the Law) “will be on your lips and on the lips of your children and your children’s children *forever.*” (Isaiah 59:21 NLT.)<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, Isaiah wrote that when His Servant (Messiah) comes, God “will *magnify the Law* (Torah), and make it honorable.” (Isaiah 42:21 ASV/KJV.)

Finally, Jesus, for His part, did everything possible to put the Law given Moses on our lips and in our hearts forever. Jesus said immediately after just referring to the “Law (given Moses) and the Prophets” (Matt. 5:17):

---

2. Martin Luther, *Antinomian Theses* (1537), reprinted as *Don't Tell Me That From Martin Luther's Antinomian Theses* (Minneapolis: Lutheran Press, 2004) at 32-34.

Whosoever therefore shall break **one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so**, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever **shall do and teach them**, the same shall be called **great in the kingdom of heaven**. (Matt. 5:19 KJV)

Thus, Luther had to acknowledge his youthful perception of Paul's writings — whether justifiable or not — led him into a false heresy that Jesus' coming abrogated the Law. This abrogation doctrine could not be true without making Jesus' words to the Young Rich Man sheer foolishness. And our Lord was anything but foolish.

### Commentators Who Get It Right

The *Bethel Church of God* observes below that Jesus' words to the Young Rich man are starkly different from the Gospel of Cheap Grace which predominates:

What are some of the necessary things one must do in order to gain **eternal life**? Notice this example: [Quotes Matt. 19:16-24.]

Keeping the commandments of God **certainly flies in the face of what many believe today**. Yet, Jesus was **very clear**. The Jewish people were adamant in observing the first four commandments, but lax in the last six. This is why

- 
3. All commentators agree Isaiah 59:21 is a promise of the New Covenant. Barnes says "these words" or "my words" means God's truth previously given "for the guidance and instruction of the church." Clarke, however, says this means the "words of Jesus." But Clarke overlooks the tense, which is a *past* tense. "These words" are words given prior to the coming of the Redeemer. Keil & Delitzsch concur, but they try to claim the prior "words" are the words of a covenant given to Abraham in Genesis 17:1 *et seq.* No one wants to accept the simplest solution: Isaiah is saying the same thing as Jeremiah. God intended the Law is on the lips and in the hearts of all those who belong to the New Covenant.

Jesus told this man what he should do. The law Jesus referred to was the Ten Commandments.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, our predominant teachers tell us the Law given Moses was abrogated. This is precisely one of the reasons why Bonhoeffer says the Cheap Grace Gospel is a “Christianity without Christ.” (*Cost of Discipleship, supra*, at 59.)

### Jesus Is Asked The Same Question & Answers The Same Way

There is no doubting Jesus’ point. On another occasion, a lawyer asked the identical question. ‘How do I obtain eternal life?’ Jesus answered the identical way, but even more clearly. He asked the lawyer to recite what the lawyer believed is necessary for eternal life. The lawyer answered that it is key to obey the two most elevated commands in the Law given Moses: love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. The lawyer correctly quoted these laws from the Law given Moses. Jesus then said the lawyer “answered correctly” and if he did them “you shall live.” (Luke 10:25-37.). The exchange went as follows:

(25) And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and made trial of him, saying, **Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?** (26) And he said unto him, **What is written in the law?** how readest thou? (27) And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. (28) And he said unto him, **Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.** (Luk 10:25-28)(ASV)

---

4. *The Teachings of Jesus—What We Should Do #11* <http://www.bethelcog.org/art0011.htm> (Bethel Church of God)(last accessed 7/5/06).

Jesus did not tell the lawyer that it was not possible to be obedient. Obedience was something God already promised was within grasp. (See the next section.) Jesus did not tell the young lawyer that something shy of obedience to the Law made you acceptable to God. Instead, Jesus said obedience to the Law, which hung on these two central commands, was the right path.

### **God's Word On Capacity Of Humans To Obey His Law**

Some claim it is contrary to human nature to obey God. Thus, God could not set as a condition of salvation that we must obey Him.

However, God in Deuteronomy 30:11 assures us obedience to these commands "is not too hard for thee, neither is it far off." (ASV.) Apostle John said: "And his commandments are not burdensome." (1 John 5:2-3.) As Jesus too says, "my burden is light." (Matt. 11:29-30.)

Thus, obeying God's Ten Commandments, which stem from the Two Greatest Commandments of the Law, are not too hard or burdensome if we call on the Lord for help. When Jesus points us in this direction, it is a direction God already promised we can follow.

---

### *Bonhoeffer Concur: Obedience To The Law Is Part of the Salvation Formula*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran Pastor killed by the Nazis, explains in his *The Cost of Discipleship* (1937) how *obedience* to the Law is part of Jesus' salvation formula. Bonhoeffer says we ignore Jesus at our peril.

The following is how Bonhoeffer reads the story of Jesus' answering the young rich man's question on how to have eternal life. (Matt. 19:16-22.) Bonhoeffer says Jesus by quoting the Ten Commandments has changed it from an academic question to a call "to a simple *obedience* to the will of

God as it has been revealed.” (*Id.*, at 72.) Jesus reaffirms the Ten Commandments “as the commandments of God.” (*Id.*, at 73.) Jesus is saying that we must move on from purely academic questions, and “get on with the task of *obedience*.” (*Id.*, at 73.) It is “high time the young man began to hear the commandment and *obey* it.” (*Id.*, at 73.)

When the young rich man says he has obeyed all the commandments, Jesus tells him that he still lacks one thing to be “perfect.” Jesus tells him to sell all that he has and give it to the poor. Bonhoeffer says the point is unmistakable:

But it is an addition [to the salvation formula] which requires the ***abandonment of every previous attachment***. Until now perfection has always eluded his grasp....Only now, by following Christ, can he... practise it aright. (*Id.*, at 76.)

But the young man was attached to his many possessions, and did not heed Jesus’ call. He went away sorrowful. The young man did not make the commitment Jesus required. The young man *wanted grace* for eternal life, but *only if it came free*. Jesus said it was instead a *costly grace* — one that would cost the young man everything he possessed.

Bonhoeffer then excoriates the Christians who use Paul’s attack on legalism to undermine Jesus’ message:

We are excusing ourselves from single-minded obedience to the words of Jesus ***on the pretext [that this endorses] legalism***....(*Id.*, at 80.)

Bonhoeffer claims that we cannot “trifle” with Jesus’ words (*id.* at 81) by reinterpreting it to line up with our favorite doctrine of cheap grace:

[T]he whole word of the Scriptures summons us to follow Jesus. We must not do violence to the Scriptures by interpreting them in terms of an abstract principle, ***even if that principle be the doctrine of grace*** otherwise we shall end up in legalism. (*Id.*, at 84.)

Thus, Bonhoeffer saw obedience as crucial and integral to the salvation doctrine Jesus taught. Bonhoeffer even says if the bogeyman of legalism and grace-alone are used to refute Jesus, these bogeymen must die. The words of Jesus must live and be always boldly taught.

---

*The Additional Mention of Self-Denial & Following Jesus*

Jesus' message to the young rich man on how to obtain eternal life was combined with a further condition of self-denial and bearing your own suffering by following Jesus. (Matthew 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-26.)

Jesus told the young rich man that salvation did not depend solely on following the Ten Commandments.<sup>5</sup> In addition, salvation depended upon the young man denying himself (*viz.*, give away his wealth) and following Jesus.

Our Lord then explains His meaning immediately thereafter. He tells His twelve apostles that if you give up fathers, mothers, and brothers for Him, deny yourself, take up your cross, and “follow Me,” you “*shall* have eternal life.” (Matthew 19:27-29.) *See also*, Matthew 10:37-39.

It was as Jesus says elsewhere. Those who are following Him and are losing their life in this world to serve Him do so for “life eternal.” (John 12:25-26.) Again we hear the same thing when He says:

(38) And he that doth not take his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me. (39) He that ***findeth his life shall lose it***; and he that ***loseth his life*** for my sake ***shall find it***. (Mat 10:38-39, ASV)

---

5. When asked again how to have “eternal life” by a teacher of the Law, Jesus likewise told the teacher to obey the Law. (Luke 10:25-37.)

What was this self-denial about? It means not following your will but God's will. You have the same choice Jesus faced in the Garden of Gethemene.

And he went forward a little, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, **not as I will, but as thou wilt.** (Matt. 26:39, ASV.)

As Jesus denied Himself — the human flesh He was inside, we too must deny ourselves and follow God's directions, commands, and requirements.

Self-denial in this context means *obedience* to God, as Bonhoeffer points out. In context, Jesus specifically mentioned obedience to the Law given Moses, in particular the Ten Commandments.

Jesus' requirement that the rich young man give away his wealth to the poor was an obvious reference to repentance from sin. It was a work worthy of repentance.

---

*Leading Commentaries On Jesus' Words in Matthew 19:17*

What are the interpretations of Jesus' words to the rich young man about "eternal life"? In particular, what do commentators wed to the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace make of Jesus' statement: "but if thou wouldest **enter into life**, keep the commandments"? (Matt. 19:17.)

*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.<sup>6</sup> 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*.

---

6. See page 1 for further discussion.

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 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.<sup>7</sup>

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).<sup>8</sup>

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

---

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

8. 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.

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 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 in tact. 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.)<sup>9</sup>

---

9. See page 1 *et seq.*

*Bonhoeffer's Explanation Of The Law-Problem  
Raised By Jesus' Message to the Rich Young Man*

Bonhoeffer said Jesus is clear that the Law remains valid for the New Testament church in Matthew 5:17-20. How does he get around Fable of Cheap Grace? ***He ignores it.*** For Bonhoeffer, it is not necessary to defend relying upon Jesus only. He leaves it up to the cheap-grace pastor to explain why *would you ever* reject Jesus' words.

Bonhoeffer explains the ongoing relevance of the Law of Moses in preference for any other authority.

**Bonhoeffer Starts With The Meaning of Matthew 5:17-20**

Bonhoeffer first quotes Matthew 5:17-20. Jesus says there that whoever teaches obedience to the Law is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever teaches the smallest of commands need not be followed will be least in the kingdom of heaven. Bonhoeffer then explains the passage's import:

But now comes the surprise — the disciples are bound to the Old Testament Law. This has a double significance. First, it means adherence to the Law is quite different from the following of Christ, and secondly, it means any ***adherence to his person that disregards the law is equally removed from the following of Him.*** (*Id.*, at 121.)

Bonhoeffer means that Jesus' followers are not free to disregard the Law. It is a distinct obligation that Jesus imposes which is not satisfied by merely 'following' Jesus. This is true because Jesus makes a condition of following Him that His followers follow the Law, both the small and great commands. Bonhoeffer continues:

It is Jesus...who points to the Law....Because it is their Lord who does this, ***they are bound to acknowledge this.*** (*Id.*)

Bonhoeffer's point is subtle. Jesus is Lord. If He says it is so, who can gainsay him? As Paul says, "let every man be a liar, but God be true!" Jesus cannot be lying to us. If we find anyone who says the Law has been abrogated for one who claims to follow Jesus, then ***let such a person be the liar, but God (Jesus) be true.***

Bonhoeffer continues in the same vein.

The question inevitably arises. Which is our final authority? Christ or the Law? To which are we bound?...Now He [Jesus] tells us that ***to abandon the Law would be to separate ourselves from Him.*** What exactly does He mean?

#### **Step Two: Answer To The Young Rich Man**

Bonhoeffer says the meaning of Jesus is clear from our knowledge of His answer to the young rich man on how to "have eternal life." Bonhoeffer says:

The Law Jesus refers to is the Law of the old covenant, not a new law, but ***the same law He quoted to the young rich man*** and the lawyer when they [each asked how to have eternal life.] It becomes a new law only because it is Christ who binds His followers to it. (*Id.* at 121.)(Emphasis added.)

Thus, Bonhoeffer is nailing the point home: to be a Christian, Jesus said you must be one committed to following the whole law, the small and large commands. Somehow, a contrary view has poisoned Christianity. We now believe that if we follow Jesus' words we are engaging in heretical *legalism, i.e.*, a teaching that God wants obedience to the Law of Moses.

Bonhoeffer later returns to this odd development where Jesus' words stand in stark contrast to the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace.<sup>10</sup> Then Bonhoeffer has some scathing sarcasm for his opponents. Bonhoeffer mentions that when we give all to Christ, it includes a repentance from all

our sinful desires. We turn to God's Law for our new direction because Jesus commanded this. Then Bonhoeffer says the Modern Gospel rejects this, and developed a *rationalization* that one can become a Christian and keep on sinning (*i.e.*, disobeying the Law of God):

The breach with things of the world [which Jesus demands] is now branded [by the Modern Gospel] as a **legalistic** misinterpretation of the grace of God....Once again, justification of the sinner has become justification of sin. (*Id.*, at 97.)

Bonhoeffer offered a re-interpretation of what the heresy of legalism *should* mean. It would be making the Law itself an idol, letting it take "God's place." But Bonhoeffer says such an error is low on the scale of errors. "The disciples were confronted [by Jesus] with the opposite danger of denying the Law its divinity and divorcing God from his Law." (*Id.*, at 122.)

Thus, we can see that Bonhoeffer refused to shy away from Jesus' words on the Law. Bonhoeffer refused to cower under the dominant Modern Gospel. He did not reject Jesus' view merely because such a view is everywhere mocked as *legalism*. Bonhoeffer refused to bow to the forced contorted readings of Jesus' words. This explains then why Bonhoeffer begins his book saying the *words of Jesus* have been so "overlaid with human ballast" that if Jesus Himself were here today delivering a sermon, His very words would be rejected by many Christians. (*Id.*, at 35.) We have put up a superstructure of "doctrinal elements" that make it far more difficult for people to accept Christ's message. (*Id.*, at 36).

---

10. Of course, this gospel principally relies upon Paul, but Bonhoeffer never identifies this elephant in the room.

*Commentaries That Agree With Bonhoeffer  
That Obedience to the Law Was the Means  
to Enter Life in Matthew 19:17*

There is one Protestant evangelical church that like Bonhoeffer takes Jesus' words seriously in Matthew 19:17 ("but if thou wouldest **enter into life**, keep the commandments") This is the *Active Bible Church of God* (ABCG) in Brisbane, Australia. However, this church tries to defend their views are compatible with the gospel of cheap grace. In an article entitled *The Mystery of Lawlessness*,<sup>11</sup> they see that *belief* is inextricably connected with *obedience*. The ABCG explains:

But what does it mean to truly believe in Him?  
***If we sincerely believe in Him, would we not do whatever He asks us to do?*** Did not Jesus say, "If anyone keeps My word he shall never see death" (John. 8:51)? What did Jesus say to do? In Matthew 19:16-17 someone came to Jesus, asking Him, "What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" ***His answer: "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."***

Thus, the ABCG lets Jesus explain Jesus' meaning. A refreshing change! Jesus says that the way to life is to obey the commandments, and promises if we keep His word we shall never see death.

However, then ABCG agrees we are saved by "faith apart from works of the Law," citing the cheap-grace refrain. Then, ABCG quickly flips back to Jesus. ABCG insists we still must be "concerned with works." The ABCG then cites Jude and a costly-grace verse ascribed to Paul (as they understand Romans 8:1, 4):

---

11. <http://www.abcg.org/nh/lawless.htm> (last accessed 6/17/06).

Jude mentioned that ungodly men had entered into the church, “Who turn the **grace of our God into licentiousness**” (Jude 4). Licentiousness can mean, “Unrestrained by law; lawless.” In other words, these ungodly men taught that **if we are under grace we need not have to keep the law**. Yet, this [license teaching] contradicts what we just read in Romans 8:1,4.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, here is a group that defends Jesus’ meaning, but then tries to interpret Jesus’ words as more important to follow than the refrains of the Gospel of Cheap Grace. This is truly a refreshing focus on Jesus’ words in order to deduce doctrine.

---

*Other Christians Are Shocked How Jesus Is So Different From The Gospel We Preach*

James Watkins is a Protestant professor and author, with a keen love of humor.<sup>13</sup>

In 2006, Watkins wrote an article entitled: “What Must I do to Inherit Eternal Life?”<sup>14</sup> In it, Watkins notes that Jesus is asked twice on how to have eternal life. Jesus was asked once by a scribe and once by a rich man. In response to the scribe, Jesus asks the scribe what does he think is the answer. Jesus then comments. The interchange goes like this.

---

12. “(1) There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death. (3) For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: (4) that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (Rom 8:1-4 ASV.)

13. See <http://watkins.gospelcom.net/bio.htm>. (accessed 5/29/2007).

14. See <http://watkins.gospelcom.net/faith.htm> (accessed 5/29/2007).

“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

He answered: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live” (Luke 10:25-28).

Watkins notes the scribe would answer differently today, quite unlike what Jesus affirms as correct.

Unfortunately, in the modern church, the expert in the law would have said, “Simply believe, have faith.”

Watkins is pointing out the incongruity between Jesus' statement about what is the *correct* answer to this key question versus how we normatively answer it today.

These passages caused Watkins to focus on what Jesus taught, as opposed to what anyone else taught, about salvation. Why? Because Jesus is *the way, truth and life*. Watkins explains:

So, armed with a yellow highlighter pen, I worked my way through the printed-in-red ***teachings of Jesus*** to understand what He taught we must do to inherit eternal life. After all, He is “the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through [Him]” (John 14:6).

Then Watkins explains how he was completely shocked when he found three passages where Jesus teaches salvation depends on more than faith. Watkins explained:

However, I was surprised (***actually shocked***), to find that three times more yellow-highlighted passages dealt with putting that faith into practice in tangible, practical ways.

---

## Conclusion

---

Please read the following passages carefully and ask yourself, ***must I go beyond simply faith to experience eternal life?***

First Watkins cites Luke 10:25-28, which is this interchange with the scribe just discussed. Then Watkins quotes the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25:34-46. Finally, Watkins cites the discussion of Jesus to the young rich man, citing Luke 18:18-22.

Once Watkins opened his mind to the issue presented by these verses, suddenly he recognizes a floodgate of similar passages. These blunt question and answer sessions with Jesus were not isolated. Jesus repeats the same answer over and over.

Then Watkins simply lets Jesus teach. Watkins finds topic after topic, and time after time, where Jesus links more than faith to salvation. He cites the salvation-formulas that are discussed throughout this book.

What is interesting is that Watkins was stimulated by the fact Jesus was asked the direct question on how to obtain eternal life. This passage became a key turning point for Watkins on how we need to answer the identical question today. Watkins pointed out that each time Jesus answered, He gave a law-based (obedience-based) answer. Also, the parable of the Sheep and the Goats was directly in line with that conclusion. Thus, we can see that here — in Watkins' case — seeing what Jesus taught in answering this direct question opened up his mind to see all the other times that Jesus says, in effect, the same thing.

---

## *Conclusion*

Thus, Jesus was asked directly how to have eternal life. He answered that obedience to the Law was how to have eternal life. Jesus did not address *faith* because in context, it appears, the man *believed* in Jesus. At least, the young rich man had a strong trust in Jesus. Otherwise, there is no expla-

nation why the man had *grief* when Jesus told him the cost to obtain salvation was so high. He wanted eternal life from Jesus, but only if it was free or easy. The man would only take the offer of eternal life if grace was cheap.

Jesus was telling the young man and ourselves that instead grace is costly. The man had to give away the very thing that was encumbering him with sin. Jesus gave him a work worthy of repentance that implied this young man's sin was greed. He lacked charity. Jesus demanded as a price for eternal life obedience to the principle of cutting off the possessions that were ensnaring him in sin. It was as Jesus elsewhere taught, you can go to heaven maimed or hell whole. (Mark 9:42-47.) For a person suffering from greed whose self-control is absent, the only solution is to give away all their wealth. Then they will learn charity.

The importance of this passage cannot be missed. James Watkins is a perfect example of the shock any Protestant drilled on 'faith-alone' will have when he truly digests this passage. When Jesus is your Master and you finally agree to *hear* Him, your normative beliefs crumble. In hindsight, you will realize our religious establishment is very similar to that of Jesus' day. Our establishment refuses to bow to Jesus' doctrine. It is as Bonhoeffer says, we have misunderstood Jesus like the religious leaders of old, and thereby crucified Jesus again.

Thus, the message to the young rich man and the scribe are key. In these passages, Jesus directly answered the question on how to obtain eternal life. These passages are something to never lose sight of. ***Jesus has answered the most important question of life.*** Yet, He answered differently than what we hear today. Watkins could not believe what he read. So he stopped in his tracks. Then Watkins triple and quadruple checked. Yet, the gospel message of Jesus time and time came up again with the same answer which Jesus gave the young rich man. Salvation is not by belief alone.