

07-08-12

Series: God's Economy

God's Economy (16)

Pastor Eddie Idefonso

[Matthew 19:16-22](#)

(Continuation from 06-24-12)

The Doctrine of God's Economy

How to Obtain Eternal Life ([Matthew 19:16-22](#))

The Request to Jesus

[Matthew 19:16 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁶ And someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?"

The Response by Jesus

[Matthew 19:17-19 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁷ And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is *only* One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."

¹⁸ *Then* he *said to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS;

¹⁹ HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

The Response to Jesus

[Matthew 19:20-22 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁰ The young man *said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?"

²¹ Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go *and* sell your possessions and give to *the* poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

²² But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.

Paul spends three full chapters of Romans declaring the sinfulness of man before he ever discusses the way of salvation. [John 1:17](#) declares, "The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ." Law always precedes grace; it is the tutor that leads to Christ ([Galatians 3:24](#)).

Jesus took the focus off the young man's felt religious and psychological needs and placed it on God. He tried to show the man that the real problem in his life was not his feeling of emptiness and incompleteness, legitimate and important as those feelings were. His great problem, from which those felt needs arose, was his separation from God and

07-08-12

Series: God's Economy

his total inability to reconcile himself with God. Scripture says, **“God is angry with the wicked every day”** ([Ps. 7:11](#) KJV). In himself this man not only fell far short of God's righteous standards but was, in fact, an enemy of God and under His wrath ([Romans 5:10](#); [Ephesians 2:3](#)). And God will not save those who try to come to Him harboring sin.

Evangelism or personal witnessing that does not confront people with their utter sinfulness and helplessness is not faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ, no matter how much His name and His Word may be invoked. A profession of Christ that does not include confession and repentance of sin does not bring salvation, no matter how much pleasant emotion may result. To tell an unbeliever that God has a wonderful plan for his life can be seriously misleading. If the unbeliever turns to Christ and is saved, God does indeed have a wonderful plan for him. But if he does not turn to Christ, God's only plan for him is damnation. In the same way it is misleading and dangerous to tell an unbeliever only that God loves him, without telling him that, in spite of that love, he is under God's wrath and sentenced to hell.

God's grace cannot be faithfully preached to unbelievers until His law is preached and man's corrupt nature is exposed. It is impossible for a person to fully realize his need for God's grace until he sees how terribly he has failed the standards of God's law. It is impossible for him to realize his need for mercy until he realizes the magnitude of his guilt. As **Samuel Bolton** wisely commented, **“When you see that men have been wounded by the law then it is time to pour in the gospel oil.”**

Instead of being wounded by the law however, the rich young ruler was self-satisfied in regard to the law. He diligently sought eternal life, but he sought it on his own terms and in his own power. He would not confess his sin and admit his spiritual poverty. Confession of sin and repentance from sin are utterly essential to salvation. John the Baptist began his ministry preaching repentance ([Matthew 3:2](#)), Jesus began His ministry preaching repentance ([Matthew 4:17](#)), and both Peter and Paul began their ministries preaching repentance ([Acts 2:38](#); [Acts 26:20](#)). Peter even used repentance as a synonym for salvation when he wrote that **“the Lord... is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance”** ([2 Peter 3:9](#)).

True conviction, confession, and repentance of sin are as much a work of the Holy Spirit as any other part of salvation ([John 6:44](#); [John 16:8-9](#)). They are divine works of grace, not pre-salvation works of human effort. But just as receiving Christ as Lord and Savior demands the action of the believer's will, so do confession and repentance. It is not that an unbeliever must understand everything about confession, repentance, or any other aspect of salvation. A person can genuinely receive Christ as Lord and Savior with very little knowledge about Him and the gospel. But genuine belief is characterized by willingness to do whatever the Lord requires, just as unbelief is characterized by unwillingness to do whatever He requires.

In another attempt to make the self-satisfied young ruler face his true spiritual condition, **Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions**

07-08-12

Series: God's Economy

and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

In this context, **complete** is used as a synonym for salvation, as it frequently is in the book of Hebrews, where the same basic Greek word is translated “**perfect**” (see [Hebrews 7:19](#); [Hebrews 10:1](#), [Hebrews 10:14](#); [Hebrews 12:23](#)). Jesus was saying, “If you truly desire eternal life, prove your sincerity by selling **your possessions and** giving what you have **to the poor.**” If he truly lived up to the Mosaic command to love his neighbor as himself, he would be willing to do what Jesus now commanded. His willingness to obey that command would not merit salvation but it would be evidence that he desired salvation above everything else, as a priceless treasure or a pearl of great value for which no sacrifice could be too great (see [Matthew 13:44-46](#)).

The ultimate test was whether or not the man was willing to obey the Lord. The real issue Jesus presented was, “**Will you do what I ask, no matter what? Who will be Lord in your life, you or Me?**” That hit a sensitive nerve. Jesus demands to be Lord, sovereign over all. There was no better way to find out if the man was ready to accept Christ's sovereignty than to ask him to give up his riches. The Lord challenged his wealth to force him to admit what was most valuable to him—Jesus Christ and eternal life or his money and possessions. The latter was clearly the man's priority and therefore for him salvation was forfeited.

The first part of Jesus' command was quite capable of being obeyed in the man's own power. But he refused to comply with it, not because he *could not* but because he *would not*. He not only failed to keep God's impossible commands but failed to keep this one that was easily possible, proving conclusively that he really did not want to do God's perfect will and be spiritually **complete**.

Mark tells us that as He gave the man that command, “**Jesus felt a love for him**” ([Mark 10:21](#)). The Lord must have felt for him as He did for Jerusalem as He looked out over that great city and cried, “**O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it**” ([Luke 13:34](#)). Jesus was approaching the time when He would shed His own blood for the sins of the rich young ruler, and for the sins of Jerusalem and of the whole world. But as much as He loved the man and desired for him not to perish, He could not save him while he refused to admit he was lost. The Lord can do nothing with a life that is not surrendered to Him, except to condemn it.

It is possible the man did not even hear Jesus say “**Come, follow Me.**” He was so dismayed by the command to sell his possessions and give to the poor that Jesus' call to discipleship did not register on his conscious mind. His call to discipleship always falls on deaf ears when there is unwillingness to give up everything for Him (see [Matthew 8:19-22](#)).

The young man did not want Jesus either as Savior or as Lord. He was not willing to give Him his sins to be forgiven or his life to be ruled. Therefore when he heard Jesus' statement, **he went away grieved; for he was one who owned much property.**

07-08-12

Series: God's Economy

Contrary to his own self-assessment, he did not live up to any of God's law but he was especially guilty in the area of materialism. The **property** he thought he **owned** really owned him, and he would rather be its servant than Jesus'.

He went away grieved because, although he came to Jesus for eternal life, he left without it. He did not desire it above the possessions of his present life. He wanted to gain salvation, but not as much as he wanted to keep his **property**.

Zaccheus was also a wealthy man. But when Jesus called him, "**he hurried and came down, and received Him gladly**" Spontaneously he volunteered to do essentially what Jesus commanded the rich young ruler to do. "**Half of my possessions I will give to the poor.**" Zaccheus said, "**and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.**" Jesus then told him, "**Today salvation has come to this house**" ([Luke 19:5-9](#)). Zaccheus was not saved because of his new-found generosity. Rather his new-found generosity was evidence that he was truly saved. As implied in the next verse, Zaccheus was saved because he confessed he was lost ([Luke 19:10](#)).

Although every sin must be forsaken for Christ's sake, there is often a certain sin or group of sins that a person finds particularly difficult to give up. For that **young man** it was love of his wealth and the prestige associated with it. Willingness to give up his **property** would not have saved him, but it would have revealed a heart that under the convicting work of the Holy Spirit was ready for salvation.

When Jesus declared, "**No one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions**" ([Luke 14:33](#)), He was not referring only to material possessions. For some people the supreme obstacle to salvation might be a career, an unsaved boyfriend or girlfriend, or some cherished sin. Many people who are materially destitute are just as far from the kingdom as the rich young ruler. Yet they must be willing to give up whatever they do possess, even if all they have left is pride, if they would be saved.

Salvation involves a commitment to forsake sin and to follow Jesus Christ at all costs. He will take disciples on no other terms. A person who does not "**confess with [his] mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in [his] heart that God raised Him from the dead,**" cannot be saved, "**for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation**" ([Romans 10:9-10](#)).