Is Generosity Required for Salvation?
Scripture: Matthew 19
Code: BQ103013

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." 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; Honor your father and mother; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (19:17–19)

Jesus' response is even more amazing than the young man's request. **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."**

Instead of taking the young man at face value and asking him to "make a decision for Christ," Jesus went much deeper in searching out the state of his heart and tested his true purpose and motivation. Instead of rejoicing that the man was apparently willing to receive eternal life and encouraging him to simply pray a prayer or affirm his faith, Jesus asked him a question in return that was immensely disconcerting.

The Lord's abrupt and seemingly evasive words, **"Why are you asking Me about what is good?"** reveal that He could read the man's heart. He had asked about eternal life verbally, and his heart was longing to know what good work could bring him that life. Jesus' comment that **"there is only One who is good"** was perhaps a means of prying out of the man just who he thought Jesus was. Did he realize that the One whom he was asking **about what is good** was Himself **the One who is good**, namely, God? Had he come to Jesus for divine help because he believed Jesus Himself to be divine? Because the man made no response concerning the **only One who is good**, it seems certain that he viewed Jesus as no more than an especially gifted human teacher. He had indeed come to the right source for the answer to his question and the fulfillment of his need, but be did not recognize that Source for who He really was.

Jesus did not respond by immediately showing the way of salvation because the man was missing an essential quality. He lacked the sense of his own sinfulness, and Jesus had to point that out.

Jesus' next comment, **"If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments,"** was more than familiar to the man. Jews were taught all their lives that the way **into life** was through obedience to God's **commandments**. Leviticus 18:5 clearly refers to such a truth: "So you shall keep My statutes

and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the Lord" (cf. Ezek. 20:11). Perhaps Jesus was simply saying to the man, "You know what to do. Why are you asking Me? I haven't taught anything that is not already written in the Scriptures. You are a learned and devoted Jew and you know what God's law requires. Go do it."

Judged by the principles and strategy of much contemporary evangelism, Jesus seems to have made a serious and insensitive mistake. He not only did not take advantage of the man's obvious readiness to make a decision but He even seemed to be teaching righteousness by works.

But Jesus knew this man's heart was not ready to believe in Him, just as the hearts of many people who express great interest in Him are not ready to believe. The man had a deep longing for something important in his life that he knew was missing. He doubtlessly had anxiety and frustration and longed for peace, joy, hope, and assurance. He wanted all the inner blessings the Old Testament associated with spiritual life. He longed for God's blessings, but he did not long for God. He wanted to know what **good** things he should do, but he did not want to know **the only One who is good**.

Throughout history, and certainly in our own day, the church has witnessed many questionable principles and methods of evangelism, often exercised with sincerity and good intent. Undue emphasis on such external acts as raised hands, cards signed, and verbal decisions can lead many people-Christian workers and professed converts alike-into believing salvation has occurred when it has not. A premature and incomplete decision is not a decision Christ recognizes as valid.

The gospel is not a means of adding something better to what one already has, a means of supplementing human effort by divine. Nor is it simply a means of fulfilling psychological needs, no matter how real and significant they may be. Jesus did not die simply to make people feel better by relieving their frustrations and anxieties. And relief from such feelings is no certain evidence of salvation.

Many people are simply looking for solutions to their felt needs, but that is not enough to bring them to legitimate salvation. Jesus therefore did not offer any relief for the young man's felt needs. Instead, He gave an answer designed to confront him with the fact that he was a living offense to Holy God. Proper evangelism must lead a sinner to measure himself against the perfect law of God so he can see his deficiency. Salvation is for those who hate their sin.

The young ruler must have sounded more than a little perplexed as he asked, almost rhetorically, **"Which ones?"** The implication seems to be, "I have read the commandments many times. I memorized them when I was a small boy, and I have carefully kept them ever since. How could I have missed any? **Which ones** could you possibly have in mind?"

Jesus responded by quoting five of the Ten Commandments: to **not commit murder**, to **not commit adultery**, to **not steal**, to **not bear false witness**, and to **honor your father and mother** (see Ex. 20:12–16). He then added the second greatest commandment: **You shall love your neighbor as yourself** (Lev. 19:18; cf. Matt. 22:39).

No words of Scripture would have been more familiar to the young ruler than those. But again he missed Jesus' point. Just as he failed to recognize that the One to whom he spoke was Himself God and the source of eternal life, he also failed to see that those well-known commandments, and all the other commandments, could not provide the life to which they pointed. If a person were able to perfectly keep all the commandments throughout his entire life, he would indeed have life, just as Jesus had said (v. 17). What He was trying to show the man, however, is that no one is able to keep all the commandments perfectly, not even one of them.

The Lord did not mention the first four of the Ten Commandments, which center on man's attitude toward God (Ex. 20:3–11), or the first and greatest commandment, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5; cf. Matt. 22:38). Those commandments are even more impossible to keep than the ones Jesus quoted. The Lord therefore challenged the young ruler against the least impossible of the commandments, as it were.

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