

What Shall I Do

There is a question that's being asked in today's scripture passage that goes to the very essence of the gospel message, asking, "What must I do to have eternal life". And because God is presenting that question to us in these words, today's message is about the gospel, the "good news" of salvation.

And while yes, every message that God provides to us each Lord's Day should, and must have the gospel at its foundation, this message is especially filled with most all of the precious ingredients that brings each of us to salvation and eternal life.

And while I know that most all of us who come to our church each Sunday are already saved, we each still need to hear the "Old, Old Story" of the gospel over and over again. And not only for our own soul, but also and especially to remind us of our responsibility within the "Great Commission" from the Lord Jesus, the responsibility to go out from here and give this precious "good news" to others, so that they also can be saved.

So then, turn with me to the Book of Luke chapter 10 and follow along as I read, beginning in verse 25.

²⁵ . . . a certain lawyer stood up and tested Jesus, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

²⁶ Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?"

²⁷ So he answered and said, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'"

²⁸ And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." (Luke 10:25-28)

This account given here of a lawyer testing the Lord Jesus with a question about what he needed to do to inherit eternal life is such an integral part of the story that follows involving the good deed done by a Samaritan man who graciously stopped to help an injured fellow traveler, that we too often move directly into that part of the story and miss out on a very important truth that God wants us to know about.

This question by the lawyer is said here to be an attempt to test, even perhaps trick the Lord Jesus into saying something that would discredit Him. But though

that was the man's motive, this is still a question that both He, and you and I, need to consider.

In a similar circumstance, within today's evangelical circles, we often tend to give a quick and easy to understand answer about how to be saved. We tell a person that all they need to do to be saved is to go down to the front of the church, pray the "sinner's prayer" asking Jesus to come into their heart. And with that prayer, they are then saved. It all seems so simple. But is it really?

And the same could be said about this exchange between this lawyer and the Lord Jesus, that all this man or any person must do to have eternal life is to obey a few basic rules and instructions from the Book of the Law. And again, it all seems so simple, but is it really?

Several years after I first gave my heart to Christ and was saved, I began to have some questions about how the whole process of salvation really does take place. You might recall the story that I shared with you about my own moments of salvation, how I prayed that "sinner's prayer" over and over for no less than three months before God graciously reached into my heart and made me to know that He had saved me.

For that and other reasons, I have come to the conclusion that "getting saved" is not as simple a matter as some people think it to be, that "getting saved" is not just some "free will decision" a person decides to make and then it's done.

After realizing that to be true, I began to search these scriptures to see if it really was just me and my personal efforts that got me saved or if perhaps God was more involved long before I made what most Christians call a "decision to accept Him".

In those early years of my being a Christian, most all of the focus of my attention and study was guided by the assumption that my "free will" was the sole determining factor in most all of the choices and decisions that I made each day, even and especially beginning with that very first moment of decision to surrender my life to Christ.

But as I studied the scriptures, I more and more began to question how my mind was interpreting the words that I would read. And that is the question that Jesus

was asking this well-educated lawyer of the Old Testament scriptures when the man asked what he must do to have eternal life. Jesus

²⁶. . . said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of *it*?"
(Luke 10:26)

These questions that Jesus asked this man really should provoke curiosity within our own minds. The first question is fairly simple. It asks, "what are the actual words that are written in these scriptures?" But the second question is not as simple. That second question asks, "what is your reading of it? How does your mind interpret the words you are reading?"

And therein folks seems to lie all the many possibilities that each of our minds can contrive that those words that we read might possibly mean.

Simply put, two people, sitting side by side, reading the very same words of scripture, can actually arrive at two very different understandings of what the words they have read really mean.

And also, therein lies the simple reason why there are so many different churches and so many different denominations all across our land.

And this is why you and the person sitting in the pew next to you might actually have a different understanding of the scriptures that you read. And it should not be that way, but it is. And it's the same in every other church you and I might be sitting in right now.

This folks, is how God reveals me to me and how He reveals you to you. His simple truths are ever and always that incisive. They cut through our excuse-making and reveal simple truths to us.

And one of the unspoken truths that God is revealing to us is that we really do believe that we have the "free will" ability to clearly understand the words that we read and that we have the ability within ourselves to actually make good and right decisions about them.

That seemed so for this Jewish lawyer and that was part of the question that Jesus asked this lawyer when He said,

²⁶. . . "What is written in the law? What is your reading of *it*?" (Luke 10:26)

Recall again that the first and underlying question that the lawyer asked was, “What must he do to inherit eternal life?” And in response to Jesus’ question about what is written in the law, and then what his reading of it was, the lawyer said,

27. . . “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’” (Luke 10:27)

While these words from the lawyer are exactly right, he seems to be making the assumption that he or any person could, by the power of their own “free will” obey the words commanded there, that any person has the free will ability within their soul and spirit to “love god and love their neighbor” perfectly enough to get them into heaven.

And that seems also to be the assumption behind the words that you and I might say to people today when they ask a similar question about how to get saved. We say to them, “just bow your head and pray the simple words of the “sinner’s prayer” and you will be saved, that any and every person has the ability and the strength of soul and spirit to just turn from that sinful nature that drives and controls their every thought and behavior, and with just the few words of the “sinner’s prayer” everything will suddenly be made right with God.

But folks, while there is a lot of truth in those instructions being given, there is still so much, much more that needs to be understood by us, the first of which is that neither that Jewish lawyer then, nor we now, have the ability, by the strength of our own free will, to do what it takes to gain eternal life.

There are several very special truths given to us especially in the Book of Romans that should cause us to question the way that we read and understand these scriptures regarding salvation. One of the first scriptures that we need to understand is given to us in Romans chapter 3. And that is that, without the help and aid of God’s Holy Spirit, we are each and all helpless sinners. Verse 23,

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

And again, no, in an unsaved condition, we will not and we cannot simply stop and make a free will decision that we want to turn away from our sin and have Christ as our Savior. We do not have that ability. Those clearly given words in Romans 3, beginning in verse 10, tell us that.

10 As it is written:

There is none righteous, no, not one.
¹¹There is none who understands.
There is none who seeks after God.
¹²They have all turned aside.
They have together become unprofitable.
There is none who does good, no, not one.
(Romans 3:10-12)

Let's recall again, the underlying question that is being considered. Here in our passage, a Jewish lawyer had asked the Lord Jesus, "What must he do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus responded by asking him about what is written in the law. And Jesus' question to the man was not just about the words of scripture themselves, but also about what he understood those words to mean.

And that same question should be being asked of you and of me when we read these words that we have just read. What is our understanding of these words given here in Romans 3? What is our reading of them?

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

And then also, in an unsaved condition
¹⁰ . . . There is none righteous, no, not one.
¹¹There is none who understands.
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¹²They have all turned aside.
They have together become unprofitable.
There is none who does good, no, not one.
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How can a person, any person, with this depth of sin that God is saying that you and I have within us and controlling us, suddenly, of our own "free will" decide to turn away from that sin and make a free will decision to do as the Jewish lawyer said, "to love God and to love his neighbor", or as you and I might say, to "bow and pray the sinner's prayer and accept Jesus". Folks, according to these words, that simply cannot be the way salvation works. As these words of scripture clearly tell us, we are too wretchedly controlled by the sin within us for us to have the ability to do these things of our own free will.

And God amplifies that truth to us in the Book of Ephesians chapter 2, where He tells us that in our unsaved condition we are not only wretched sinners, we are

actually and completely “dead” in our sins. And folks, dead people cannot simply turn and make free will decisions. Dead people can’t do anything. And in our unsaved condition we are dead!

And so, as this Jewish lawyer asked, “What must he, we, you, I do to inherit eternal life?”

Thanks be to God He answers that question for us. Listen to these precious words given there in Ephesians chapter 2.

¹ And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, ⁷ that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:1-9)

Folks, these words tell us exactly how we got from where we were in our lost and sinful condition, to where we are now in our salvation. We were dead, completely dead and unable to do anything whatsoever of our own free will. And He, God, for reasons known only to Himself, reached into our dead heart and soul and made us alive. Verse 4,

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved). (Ephesians 2:4-5)

May we please understand these words. Dead people can't do anything. But God can. And it was God and God alone who reached His merciful hand into our heart and soul and made us alive, and gave us the free gift of salvation.

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Dear friends, God didn't just wake us up so that we could then exercise our free will faith to accept Jesus as our Savior. These words tell us that He first made us alive, gave us life, and then, praise be to God, after He made us alive, He then, by a gift of grace gave us faith to believe in Him.

After God has made us alive, it seems always to begin with stirrings of desire that begins to take place deep within our heart and our soul, a yearning to be different from the person we are, a yearning to be who God wants us to be. And though we are not able yet to know what is taking place within us, it is God's Holy Spirit already beginning His work within our soul.

We are told in John chapter 16 that it's the Holy Spirit who secretly works within us to convict us that the real underlying problem is caused by "sin", not just bad behaviors, not just bad habits, or some other bad response, but "sin", an actual violation of the laws of God.

And folks, for myself, I had never really understood that before. I had only been thinking of my bad behavior as being just that, bad behavior. I had not considered or even cared that I was violating the very person of our righteous God. But when the Holy Spirit brought that realization to me, I began to "fear" and to know that I really needed to change and be different. As the hymn refrains, "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fear relieved".

And that was when, somewhere within the secret councils of God, He reached into my heart and I began to repent, to truly feel sorry for my sins and want to turn completely away from them.

And looking back on that experience, I can clearly see that God The Father was busily doing His work of "drawing me" to the Lord Jesus to receive the next step of my journey, the blessed salvation of my soul.

Recall that Jesus said in John chapter 6, verse 44,

44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:44)

And then, as we are drawn to the Lord Jesus to receive His blessed salvation, He walks us through these precious steps given here in Romans chapter 10. Listen!

⁹ . . . if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with

your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. (Romans 10:9-10)

And this is our part of this life-changing transaction. While the Lord Jesus has done all of the work required to save us, we really do need to do our part. And this is our part. This is where we step forward and respond to God's blessed gift of faith. We must, "confess with our mouth, that Jesus is Lord, and believe in our heart that God raised him from the dead". It is then that we are saved. For it is with our heart that we believe and are justified, and it is with our mouth that we confess and are saved.

And folks, I want us to know clearly that no, I did not know all of these deeper things of God as I walked through these steps of salvation. All that I did was surrender my heart and soul to Christ, and that is when God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit walked me through all these steps that I needed to take to be saved. And He will do that with each and every person that He saves.

And folks, yes, this last step may take place within a person as they walk forward to pray that sinner's prayer. But we must know that according to the scriptures that we just studied, all those other first-steps had either already taken place or was taking place as a person walks forward.

As for this Jewish lawyer who asked Jesus this question about how to gain eternal life, may we simply hope that at some point in the future days of this man that he himself turned and surrendered his heart to the Lord Jesus and that He gained the precious salvation and eternal life that He so desperately needed.

May we pray.