

THE RICH YOUNG RULER: THE PROBLEM OF ETERNAL LIFE MARK 10: 17–22

Introduction

This man is known as “the rich young ruler.” He is so called because of the combined picture gleaned from all three gospels.

=> He was rich (Mt. 19:22; Mk. 10:22; Lk. 18:23).

=> He was young (Mt. 19:20).

=> He was a ruler (Lk. 18:18).

He was a rare young man among the people of his day. This is seen in two facts.

1. He was conscientious, responsible, dependable — traits so often lacking in youth. He had already been placed into a position of leadership.
2. He was eagerly seeking eternal life — a spiritual matter often shunned by young people.

The dominant theme of the young man’s experience is his sincerity, his desperate search for eternal life. Jesus takes the man’s desperation and shocks the world. Desperation, sincerity, eagerness and seeking eternal life are not enough. To inherit eternal life takes much more than just being desperate to possess it. Man has a problem in seeking eternal life.

- I. Fact 1: Seeking Christ is not enough to receive eternal life (v. 17).
- II. Fact 2: to praise Christ is not enough to receive eternal life (v. 18).
- III. Fact 3: to be respectable is not enough to receive eternal life (vv. 19-20).
- IV. Fact 4: to be loved by Jesus is not enough to receive eternal life (v. 21).
- V. Fact 5: to give everything is required to receive eternal life (vv. 21-22).

I. *Mark 10:17 Seeking Jesus*

The scene was striking. A rich young man sought Jesus — sought Him with a sense of urgency and desperation seldom seen.

1. The man was *eager*, ever so eager: he ran up to Jesus.
 2. The man was *humble*: he cast himself to the ground, falling on his knees before Jesus, showing extreme reverence. He esteemed Jesus ever so highly. He bowed the knee to Him.
 3. The man was *respectful*: he addressed Jesus as “Good Teacher,” which was the proper and courteous address to a revered Rabbi or Teacher.
 4. The man was *concerned* about his spiritual welfare. He asked what he should do to inherit eternal life.
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The young man demonstrated how we should seek eternal life. He did exactly what we should do when we wish anything: seek it. We are to *seek* eternal life as the rich young ruler did. But in seeking, there is something critical. We must go to the right *source*. This is exactly what the rich young man did: (a) he approached Jesus, the Source of eternal life; and (b) he asked, confessing his need.

Note two things about the young man's seeking eternal life.

1. He believed that eternal life existed, that there was such a thing as eternal life. He believed there was life in another world, and he was sincere and eager (perhaps desperate) to receive it. He "ran up to him and fell on his knees" before Jesus.
2. He did a rare thing. He openly confessed his eager concern for eternal life. Few of the rich would ever confess an open concern as he did, and few of the young would ever consider it important enough at their young stage of life. He lacked and had need, and he knew it and openly confessed it. He was seeking for inner peace and a sense of completeness and fulfilment and satisfaction.

II. *Mark 10:18 Eternal Life and Praising Jesus*

The second fact to know about eternal life is this: to praise Jesus is not enough to receive eternal life. The young man had praised and honoured Jesus as much as a person could. He had eagerly sought and revered Jesus, not only kneeling before Him but also casting himself into the dust of the ground before Jesus. He addressed Jesus with as high a title as a man could address a revered teacher. He could not praise Jesus more. But note: the man's praise and honour of Jesus were not enough.

He called Jesus "Good Teacher," but by Teacher he meant *good Rabbi*. He was acknowledging that Jesus was an honourable person to be highly regarded. But he conceived Jesus to be *only* a highly regarded teacher. He did not consider Jesus to be the divine Son of God. He conceived Jesus to be but a mere man, not God. He thought Jesus was a man who had achieved unusual moral goodness and by such had become a *good Teacher*, one capable of teaching the great truths of God and life.

The person who seeks eternal life must acknowledge Jesus as God. The ruler called Jesus "Good Teacher." The word "good" was a word that was ascribed only to God. It was never used in reference to a man. This is critical to see, for it meant that the ruler was calling Jesus "good" in the sense that God would be called "good." He saw something in Jesus *like God*. It was not just flattery; he esteemed Jesus highly, probably believing or else coming close to believing Jesus' claim to be the Son of God.

Now note what Jesus did. The man had called Him "good," a word used only in addressing God. Jesus asked the man, "Why do you call me good? God alone is good. Are you

saying I am God?” Jesus is unquestionably claiming to be God. He was saying, “If I am a mere man, a good teacher, then I am not good and do not have the words of eternal life. But if I am God, then you can truly call me good, and I do have the words of eternal life.” The point is this: Jesus told the man how to receive eternal life. He was claiming to be God, the One who could give eternal life to a person.

Jesus had to correct this gross error. He attempted to correct it by simply saying, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.” He was saying to the young man, “God alone is good. No man is good, not in comparison to God, not good enough to ever stand before God in righteousness. *If I am but a mere man*, a good teacher, then I am not ‘good’ and do not have the words to eternal life. *But if I am God*, then you can address me as ‘good,’ and I do have the words to eternal life.”

Note two things.

1. Jesus told the young man how to enter life, that is, how to receive eternal life. Therefore, Jesus was claiming to be God.
2. Jesus was correcting the young man. He was speaking these words forcefully: “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.” Jesus would not have the young man thinking of Him only as a man, no matter how preeminent a teacher the young man thought Him to be. He is God, God’s very own Son; and He is to be known and called the Son of God. Therefore, Jesus tried to lead the young man to acknowledge and honour Him as God. It was the only way the young man could ever receive eternal life.

John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

John 6:68 *Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”*

John 8:24 *“I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.”*

John 14:6-7 *Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”*

Acts 4:12 *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*

1 Tim 2:5-6 *For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men — the testimony given in its proper time.*

III. Mark 10:19–20 *Eternal Life and Self Righteousness — Respectability*

The third fact to know about eternal life is this: to be respectable is not enough to receive eternal life. Note a crucial point: the young man had asked, “What must I do?” He had a religion of works, not of faith. He thought man himself could secure eternal life by being good. He felt that if he could just keep some great rule or law and live a moral, clean life, then God would accept him. He believed that his acts of morality and good works just piled up a balance sheet and made him acceptable to God.

This was the man’s second major error. Again Jesus had to correct the man; He had to strike right at the root of the problem. The man was failing to love his neighbour as himself, and Jesus knew it. So Jesus told the young man very simply, “You know the commandments”; and He proceeded to quote five of the ten commandments, the five laws of respectability that had to do with his duty toward his neighbour (Exo. 20:12-16).

The man made the phenomenal claim that he had kept all five of the commandments that Jesus quoted. He, of course, had not kept them perfectly, not in God’s eyes, not in the spirit in which God intended them to be kept. He was not generous enough with others, not giving and helping like he should. Jesus was now ready to show him and lead him to do this. In summary, here is what Jesus had said to the rich young ruler: keep the commandments dealing with your neighbour — the ones especially needed by rulers and the rich — the ones so often misunderstood and neglected by rulers and the rich.

But the rich young ruler misunderstood God’s law: he had a tragic sense of self-righteousness.

1. He thought some commandments were more important than others.
2. He thought man could keep God’s law and build up a balance sheet with God, securing Gods acceptance.

Thought 1. “*What must I do*” to inherit eternal life? It is not the *good thing* or *things* that we do that give us eternal life.

Mat 5:20 “*For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*”

Mat 7:22-23 “*Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’*”

Gal 2:16 *Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.*

Eph 2:8-9 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.*

2 Tim 1:9 Who has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.

Titus 3:4-5 But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

IV. Mark 10:21 *Eternal Life and Love of Jesus Christ*

The fourth fact to know about eternal life is this: to be loved by Jesus is not enough to receive eternal life. Note the exact words, “Jesus looked at him and *loved* him.” Jesus’ eyes penetrated into the man’s innermost being and sensed a deep, deep longing and earnestness. The man’s longing and ache for eternal life touched Jesus deeply. Jesus was drawn to the man and loved him in a very, very special sense.

But note the crucial point: the love of Jesus for a man’s soul — even the very, very special love of Jesus for a man — was not enough to save the man. The man still lacked one thing.

Thought 1. The love of Christ is great, and it is touching and encouraging. But it is not enough. The Lord’s love cannot save us, not by itself, not against our will, not if we refuse to *surrender all* — all we are and all we have.

Mat 23:37 “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”

Prov 1:24 But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand.

Ezek 18:31 Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel?

V. Mark 10:21–22 *Eternal Life and Self-Denial, Cross*

The fifth fact to know about eternal life is this: to give everything is required to receive eternal life. *Giving everything* is the one thing lacking, the one thing that causes so many to lose eternal life. Jesus knew exactly what the young man needed. His rejection of Jesus showed this. He was hoarding wealth instead of distributing it. God had given wealth to him that he might be able to help others, but he was failing to love and help his neighbour as he should (Eph. 4:28).

What the young man needed to hear was just what Jesus said: “If you want to be perfect [receive heaven, really keep the commandments, as you say you have], then demonstrate

to all publicly and without question that you love your neighbour. Go and sell all you have, and give to the poor... and come *follow me*.”

In our struggle to protect the glorious truth that man is saved by grace and grace alone, we often forget and neglect another great truth: *to follow Christ is to serve and minister to our neighbour*. To follow Christ is to deny self completely — *all that we are and all that we have* (See *Cross and Discipleship*, Lk. 9:23). When we love our neighbour as ourselves, then we show that we truly love God. If we do not love and minister to our neighbour (above self), then we do not love God.

When we deny self and give all we are and have (1 Jn. 4:20), then and only then do we receive heaven; but more importantly, we receive treasure in heaven. To deny self, *to give all we are and have*, is a hard saying, but Christ demands it. Our attempt to soften it does not annul His demand (See *Unbelief, Lack of Faith*, Rom. 3:3).

The young man rejected Jesus for three reasons.

1. Unbelief: he was not willing to entrust his life to Jesus. There was some lack of belief that the Man Jesus standing before him was really God.
2. Self-righteousness and pride: his concept of religion was keeping laws and doing good in order to secure God’s acceptance. He felt that he, as well as other men, had the power and goodness to make God approve and accept him.
3. Love of the world: he was rich and was unwilling to give up the comfort and possessions he had obtained. He made the fatal mistake that so many make with wealth, power and fame.
 - a. He loved the things of the world more than he loved people. He preferred hoarding and extravagance, living sumptuously and comfortably to helping those who were so desperately needful.
 - b. He loved the things of the world more than he loved the hope of eternal life.
 - c. He loved the position, recognition, esteem and power of the earth more than he loved Christ.

Now, note a critical point: the subject of *giving all* is a sensitive subject, so sensitive that the words of Christ are seldom taken or preached at face value. The words of the Lord are *watered down* to mean no more than an ideal in the mind of a man — an ideal that is left up to every man to decide within his own selfish, deceptive, and corrupt heart. Is the man *willing to give all*? Then his willingness is said to be acceptable to God. The fact that he does not give all is said not to matter. However, the critical point seldom crosses the mind of men: the God of all men *can never justify keeping and storing and banking and hoarding and even holding back as long as a single need exists and is going unmet*.

If all men are truly God's by creation, then God is bound to expect all needs to be met; and He is bound to hold accountable the man who has and keeps, stores and banks, hoards and holds back. The point is easily understood by the honest and thinking person when he thinks about the issue. The thinking and honest person sees both the single person and the masses...

- who are starving
- who are without clothes, housing, medicine, treatment, education and skills
- who are lost from God and doomed eternally because they have never heard the gospel

Imagine the millions who have never heard about Christ even once. When the thinking person sees the picture and is honest, he can no longer refuse to accept Jesus' words at face value. Yet, so many do not think and so many refuse to be honest. So they continue to *spiritualize and idealize what Jesus was saying* to this young man. Why? Do we fear the strictness of what Christ says? Do we fear the reaction of people? Do we fear what we will have to give up? Do we lack the faith within to trust God?

Thought 1. God expects us to work so that we can have enough to help others (Eph. 4:28). We are to help as we are able, but we are to be *honest* about our ability to help.

Thought 2. Note a crucial point. God gives us *a talent* to use in taking care of our own needs, but after our needs are met, the talent entrusted to us is to be used to help others in their need.

Thought 3. The young man had a serious flaw — the very same flaw that exists within so many today: he did not believe heaven was glorious enough to *merit the giving up* of his possessions.

Luke 9:23 *Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*

Luke 11:41 *"But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you."*

Luke 12:33 *"Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys."*

Luke 19:8 *But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."*

Luke 6:38 *"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*

Acts 20:35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Rom 12:13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

1 Cor 13:3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

2 Cor 8:12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

Gal 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Eph 4:28 He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

1 Tim 6:17-18 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

Heb 13:16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Prov 11:25 A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.

Prov 22:9 A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor. ■

LUKE 09: 23 CROSS AND DISCIPLESHP

Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Luke 09:23

People in Jesus' day knew what it meant to "take up" a cross. They saw scores of criminals bear the cross to the place where they were to be executed, and they witnessed scores of crucifixions, some even by the side of the roads that led in and out of the cities.

The cross does not mean merely bearing one's particular hardship in life, such as poor health, abuse, unemployment, invalid parents, an unsaved spouse, a wayward child. The cross is always an instrument of death, not just an object to carry or bear. The Christian is to die mentally and actively. He is to deny himself daily. He is to let the mind of Christ, the mind of humbling himself to the point of death, be in him and fill his thoughts every day (Phil. 2:5-8; 2 Cor. 10:3-5). He is to put his will, his desires, his wants, his ambitions to death. In their stead, he is to follow Jesus and to do His will all day long. Note this is not negative, passive behaviour. It takes positive, active behaviour to *will*, to *deny self*, to *take up* one's *cross*, to *follow* Christ. A person has to act, work, get to it, be diligent, consistent, and enduring in order to die to self.

There are several ways the believer dies to self. Romans 6:11-13 spells out the ways as clearly as they can be.

Rom 6:11-13 *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. (see Rom. 6:2-10)*

1. The believer reckons or counts himself crucified with Christ.

Rom 6:11a *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin.*

Rom 6:6 *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.*

Gal 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Gal 5:24 *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*

2. The believer reckons or counts himself dead to sin, but alive to God.

Rom 6:11 *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

1 Pet 4:2 *As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.*

3. The believer does not let sin reign in his body.

Rom 6:12 *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.*

Col 3:5 *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*

4. The believer does not yield the parts of his body to sin, as instruments of wickedness.

Rom 6:13a *Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness.*

Rom 8:13 *For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

5. The believer yields himself to God — as much as those who are alive from the dead are yielded to God.

Rom 6:13b *But rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life.*

Rom 12:1 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.*

Rom 13:14 *Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

6. The believer yields his body members as instruments of righteousness.

Rom 6:13c *And offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.*

Gal 5:16 *So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

It should be noted that one's hardship or burden can bring a person to the place where the Lord can deal with him. It is then that the hardship becomes the cross and denial of self that Jesus is talking about. With an act of self-denial, the Christian can then count or reckon himself alive to God (Rom. 6:13). He can then follow Jesus. This is an act which can be described as committing all that one is and has to Christ. It is an act that needs to be repeated every day (see Mt. 10:38). □

ROMANS 03:03 UNBELIEF, LACK OF FAITH

*What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? **Romans 03:03***

This is one of two common but gross deceptions of men — that unbelief makes a thing ineffective and voids it. A man argues: “If I deny something, ignore it, refuse to accept it, push it out of my mind, it will not be, nor will it come to pass.” Some even think of God’s Word in this way. They think they can deny and reject some part of it and it will not be so. They accept the Scriptures that stress the love of God and allow them to live as they wish, but they reject the Scriptures that stress the supernatural and miraculous power of God and the desperate need of man to be saved from sin, death and an eternal hell. They reject the Scriptures that demand that man live responsibly.

***Mat 5:18** “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”*

***Luke 21:33** “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”*

***2 Tim 2:13** If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself. □*