

The way to eternal life

by Julianne Hamilton

It's true to say that most people want a 'good' life. Even though we all have different ideas about what is good or not good for us, we all desire 'good things' for ourselves. We may even think, 'If I live what I believe to be a good life and do good things, then I must be a good person. If I am a good person, then God will give me a "good life" and everything that I desire.' However, the Bible shows us that this approach is not the way that leads to eternal life.

There is nothing wrong with 'good things'. In the book of Matthew we read the story of the rich, young ruler who did a lot of 'good things'. This young man seemed to be everything that a young person could possibly want to be! He had authority, success, wealth, power and possibly even good looks, too. Jesus was impressed with him, but knew that he would not attain to eternal life if he continued with this approach.

He asked Jesus an important question. 'Good Teacher, what *good* things shall I do that I may have eternal life?' Matt 19:16. Jesus answered

him, saying, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good, except God alone. If you want to enter eternal life, obey the commandments.' The young man answered, 'Which one?' Jesus replied with quite a long list of dos and don'ts. 'Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't give false testimony, honour your father and mother, and love your neighbour as yourself.'

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Why did Jesus answer him with a long list of dos and don'ts? Why did He answer him this way? Well, Jesus knew that this rich, young ruler was committed to being a 'good' person. He was willing to do anything required of him to have eternal life! The young man answered Jesus, saying, 'All these I have kept since I was a boy!' And yet, he knew in his heart that this was still not enough. Why was his 'good' not

'good enough' for Jesus? What was he missing? Somewhere, he had missed the mark.

We read in the book of Proverbs that desire without the knowledge of God's way is not good, and when we do things our own way and are overhasty, we sin and miss the mark. Pro 19:2, Pro 9:10. It didn't matter that this young man desired what was 'good'. He still missed the mark, and his desire for 'good' was not 'good enough'. He had come to Jesus to get advice on how he could live a better life, and thereby be accepted by God. He did not understand that Jesus, who was the Holy One of God, was the only way to eternal life. To have eternal life, he would have to become a disciple of Jesus and cease from his own good works as the way by which he would attain to eternal life.

Sin is a deceitful master. Wherever God's word is preached, sin goes along with the word, making people excited about what God has promised. God has promised us eternal life and sonship. This rich, young ruler was very excited about God's word of promise. Sin motivated him to covet the good of God, which is eternal life. It produced in him every kind of covetous desire to have eternal life on his own terms. The Lord knew all this, and loved him. He offered him the way to eternal life through discipleship.

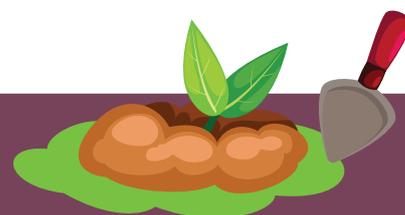
He said, 'If you want eternal life, then sell all that you have and give it to the poor, then come and follow Me.' This was too hard for the young ruler. His desire for earthly possessions, wealth and status was too great. He went away disappointed and sorrowful because he had

refused to do what Jesus asked of him. His disobedience brought him into judgement and resulted in sorrow. His problem was that He wanted eternal life without becoming a disciple of Jesus.

We, too, sin and miss the mark when we covet the good of God and desire to have it apart from knowing Him and becoming His disciples.

Just like the rich, young ruler, we can also covet what does not belong to us. We, too, sin and miss the mark when we covet the good of God and desire to have it apart from knowing Him and becoming His disciples. When we do this, we sin and come under the judgement of the law of God which says, 'You shall not covet!' At the point where we should be receiving eternal life through faith in God, we are deceived by sin through covetousness and, because of this, are brought under the judgement of God.

Sorrow and spiritual death are the result when we live this way and not as disciples of Christ. Religious living without discipleship is what Paul calls 'carnal living'. We are actually living as natural people, trying to be good by our own natural desires. Our natural desires are the desires of our flesh. The truth is, we are naturally human and fleshly and only want to have a good life. We want many things,



believing that if we have them, we will be happy and fulfilled. We believe that if we live a good life and keep the law, then God should bless us and give us what we want. This kind of thinking is Old Testament thinking. The Israelites who lived in the Old Testament times tried to keep God's law in their own strength but they didn't understand that sin was their master. Sin was the rich, young ruler's master, too. It reigned over him and so he, too, was spiritually dead and sorrowful. While sin was his master, Christ could never be so.

'You have the words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.' Joh 6:68-69.

If we are to live with Christ as our Master, then we must also die with Him to some things. We must die to all our earthly desires. We must die to trying to be good by fulfilling God's law in our own strength. We need to understand



that while we can agree with the law of God, and think it is 'good', we cannot live it by our own strength. Why is it necessary that we understand this? It is necessary because, as long as we try to fulfil God's law in our own strength, then sin is our master.

The story of the rich, young ruler teaches us that all of our 'own good' is just not 'good enough' for Jesus. Our own good works are not 'good enough' because they only produce sorrow, sin and death. They are actually not 'good works' but 'dead works'; and whenever we do them, we are 'dead' to Jesus and not made alive to God, together with Him. Col 2:13. Rom 6:11.

Jesus Christ, as the Holy One of God, is the Word of life. Joh 1:1,4. By this we mean that He, personally, is the way, the truth and the life. Joh 14:16. His disciple Peter said to Him, 'You have the words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.' Joh 6:68-70. It is only when we know Jesus and believe that He is the Holy One of God that we begin to understand that, in Him, every good thing is found. Phm 6. Jesus Christ is our 'good thing'! When we find Him, and are found in Him, we know that we have found the only 'good thing'. The apostle Paul further instructs us to keep that 'good thing' which was committed to us by God. 2Ti 1:14. Once we have found Him, we must not lose Him! We must remain connected to Him by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us! 2Ti 1:14. ■