

THE LAWYER AND THE RULER ... who asked the same question
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(LUKE 10: 25; 18: 18)

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" It is not possible to understand the implications of this text until we appreciate the effect of the preaching of Jesus. Against the uncertainty of the theological thought of His day, His utterances were as stars in a dark sky. The Sadducees and the Pharisees were opposed on the question of survival. The former said that death terminated existence ; the latter declared that death was an introduction to another world. And while these leaders argued, the ordinary wayfarer hardly knew what to believe. He saw loved ones taken from his side, but when he considered the possibility of reunion in another world, he could only hope for the best. Then Jesus came to preach in the villages of Galilee, and immediately His bold declarations stirred the hearts of Israel. The Sadducees detested the new doctrines, but the Pharisees were delighted ; and it would appear that from these religious camps, two representatives came to ask an identical question. The fact that they received different answers provides food for thought.

The Wise Lawyer

The Sadducees were annoyed. Their teachings were being discounted ; their enemies were jubilant. Something had to be done. A clever speaker must challenge the new Teacher. " And behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart . . . and thy neighbor as thyself. And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:25-29). Then the Lord Jesus told the story of the good Samaritan, and finally reminded the man of his duty to go and do likewise. At first, many evangelical teachers would denounce this teaching. Does a man obtain eternal life by fulfilling the requirements of the law? Does a man attain to the highest pinnacle of spiritual possession through self-achievement, when his best righteousness is said to be filthy rags?

The Wealthy Leader

" And a certain ruler asked him, saying Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said . . . Thou knowest the commandments . . . And the ruler said, All these have I kept from my youth up" (Luke 18:18-21). It is at this point that the one man differs from the other. How easy it would be to imagine the Lord Jesus saying. " Well done, young man ; you have excelled at your learning. Many people really believe that human merit will gain the highest awards in heaven. They say their virtue equals and even excels that of many other people. They keep the law, and challenge any teaching which denies their right to eternal security. Yet you realize this is not true. You are good, but not good enough. You are conscious of spiritual need." And as Christ looked at the departing lawyer, He could have said, "Now that man asked the same question, but his motives were different. If one suggested that he had personal need, he would treat the statement as an insult. He's a lawyer, an expert at discovering flaws in other people. He has yet to discover his own need. You, rich young ruler, know your need. Well done."

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The Wonderful Lord

The Saviour continued, " Yet lackest thou one thin,-: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me " (v. 22). Why did not Christ repeat the story of the good Samaritan to this ruler? And why did He not ask the lawyer to forsake all and follow Him? A little investigation reveals the fact that the answers to these questions supply a comprehensive view of the doctrines of God. The lawyer was told to keep the law, for if he conscientiously did this, his very nearness to God would beget a sense of personal need. The ruler had already discovered his need, and it only remained to find a remedy. He was given a new challenge, "Sell all that thou hast, and come, follow me." This was a test to ascertain whether or not he would permit the Lord to occupy the throne of his affections. Probably had he expressed willingness to obey the Master's command, he would have been sent home with a benediction. What must I do to inherit eternal life? I must recognize my need as a sinner, and then crown Christ Lord of my life.

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