

**Scriptures and Doctrine :: Can you be saved by good works and conscience?**

**Can you be saved by good works and conscience? - posted by Heydave (), on: 2014/9/1 15:58**

Following on from some posts on another discussion I want to ask.....

If you say a person can be saved by being 'good' and living by their conscience, why did Jesus die on the cross?

If you say those living good lives according to their conscience are saved by Jesus' death having never heard the gospel, wouldn't it be better that no one hears and remains in ignorance?

When Jesus said that He came for the sinners only and not the righteous, does He mean that there are those who have a righteousness acceptable to God and don't need to be saved?

**Re: Can you be saved by good works and conscience? - posted by Sidewalk (), on: 2014/9/1 18:03**

Having watched people over many years, I have become a bit cynical toward the evangelical standard protocol by which so many believe they are saved.

Why do they love the passages like "There is none righteous, no not one" which is more a lament than a Theological premise, and "Not by works lest any man should boast."

Great scriptures of course, and true indeed. But they are so easy to slap at someone instead of helping them see how destructive their personal habits are, how deeply rebellious their hearts are, how the fulfilling of personal lusts constitutes crimes against the kingdom of God.

We are left with a Christian population whose lives are dry fruit, indistinguishable from the world, void of visible righteousness- the very thing God is anxious to see in the people who carry the Name of His Son.

So many slide past John 15:22. "If I had not come and spoken to them, (Pharisees) they would not have sin. But now they have no excuse for their sin." Jesus Himself says here and on another passage that there were men without sin!

Jesus, by the standards of most modern Christendom, was a theological moron. He never acknowledged Original Sin, and even told the woman taken in adultery to "Go and sin no more." What audacity! Why, He had no right to such an unreasonable expectation!

We have come to believe that sin is normal, a natural condition of being human. Our favorite excuse... oops, I mean "passage" is "All have sinned and come short of the Glory of God."

We will go to great lengths to avoid being the righteousness of Christ, of living holy and apart, of bringing into social situations an aroma of Christ that shuts down coarse speech, mocking laughter, hurtful gossip, and the conniving of new sin.

James drove the reformers nuts, and still irritates their descendants today- "I will show you my faith by my works!"

No man will be saved who sins, knows it, and refuses the cleansing Blood of Jesus Christ. But without a genuine repentance and a living evidence of a righteous life, will that acceptance of Christ's sacrifice be only a mocking lie?

Righteousness performed just to bypass Christ and force the Father to accept me is just another form of selfishness and sin. Past sins and the weight of that guilt will never let a man be at true peace with God, every man must deal thoroughly and honestly with sin. Only the blood of Jesus can wash it away.

But the other side of that should be a sweet embracing of righteousness, visible to all, and totally refreshing in the regenerate man. Such a man will never give up and go back to sin, he will learn to hate it as he increases his love for Jesus.

**Re: - posted by TMK (), on: 2014/9/1 19:12**

quote: "Can you be saved by good works and conscience?"

God can save whomever He wants.

**Re: what our all powerful God cannot do. - posted by Sidewalk (), on: 2014/9/1 19:21**

God cannot save anyone He wants. Actually, He "wants" to save everybody, but cannot. If He could, the death of Jesus on the cross would have been His act of needless cruelty since there would have been, as Jesus asked in the garden, another way.

Jesus had to die because If God were to suspend the penalty of the law for one, He would be obligated to suspend it for everyone. His law, His justice, and His love would be meaningless.

It broke the Father's heart to see His Son die on the cross, but He shared the passion of Jesus despising the shame for the rich reward to come.

He had no other way to get us for Himself.

Yes, He loves us that much!

**Re: - posted by mattf12486, on: 2014/9/1 20:19**

Question: "Can a person be saved through general revelation?"

Answer: General revelation can be defined as "the revelation of God to all people, at all times, and in all places that reveals that God exists and that He is intelligent, powerful, and transcendent." Scriptures such as Psalm 19:1-4 and Romans 1:20 clearly state that certain things about God can be understood from His creation around us. Creation reveals God's power and majesty, but it does not reveal the plan of salvation through Christ. There is only salvation in Jesus' name (Acts 4:12); therefore, a person cannot be saved simply through general revelation. Usually, the question "Can a person be saved through general revelation?" is asked in relation to another question, "What happens to those who have never heard the gospel?"

Sadly, there are still parts of the world with absolutely no access to the Bible, to the gospel of Jesus Christ, or to any means of learning Christian truth. The question then arises, what happens to these people when they die? Is it fair for God to condemn a person who has never heard the gospel or of Jesus Christ? Some propose the idea that God judges those who have never heard based on how they responded to general revelation. The presumption is that, if a person truly believes what can be known about God through general revelation, God will judge the person based on that faith and allow the person entrance into heaven.

The problem is that Scripture declares that, unless a person is in Christ, he or she "stands condemned already" (John 3:18). Romans 3:10-12, quoting Psalm 14:3, pronounces the unregenerate nature to be universally sinful: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." According to Scripture, the knowledge of God is available (through general revelation), but mankind perverts it to his own liking. Romans 1:21-23 states, "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles." The status of those without God is one of rebellion, darkness, and idolatry.

Man rebels despite general revelation. Sinful man willfully rejects what can be known of God through nature and seeks ways to avoid the truth (see John 3:19). Since man does not naturally seek God, God must seek him—and that is exactly what He did, in the Person of Jesus Christ. Jesus came "to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

A good example of our need for the gospel is found in Acts 10. Cornelius knew about God and was "devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly" (Acts 10:2). Did God save Cornelius because of his devotion to God based on the limited knowledge he had? No. Cornelius needed to hear about Jesus. God inst

ructed Cornelius to contact the apostle Peter and invite him to come to Cornelius's home. Cornelius obeyed, and Peter came and presented the gospel to Cornelius and his family. Cornelius and his household believed in Jesus and were therefore saved (Acts 10:44-48). No one, not even a "good" man like Cornelius, is saved simply by believing that God exists or by honoring God in certain ways. The only way of salvation is the gospel of Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

General revelation can be seen as a universal call for people to acknowledge God's existence. But general revelation, by itself, is not enough to lead a person to salvation in Christ. That is why it is so important for us to proclaim the gospel throughout the whole world (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). Romans 10:14 declares, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" Faith in the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ is the only means of salvation (John 3:16).

Read more: <http://www.gotquestions.org/saved-general-revelation>.

**Re: John Piper on what happens to those who haven't heard - posted by mattf12486, on: 2014/9/1 20:44**

<http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-happens-to-those-who-have-never-heard-the-gospel>

**Re: - posted by TMK (), on: 2014/9/1 21:48**

"God cannot save anyone He wants."

Who does the saving?

**Re: Can you be saved by good works and conscience? - posted by ManOfGod (), on: 2014/9/2 0:05**

HeyDave, how are you? Hope all is well. Good questions. The Bible says Ye have not because ye ask not. It says again, ask and it shall be given you.

Sidewalk, your response was the bomb. I would consider that a "slam dunk."

Question: Can you be saved by good works and conscience?

Let's see what the Scripture says.

Matthew 19:16-21 KJV

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

The Rich man had good works, he was a nice guy no doubt. He hadn't killed anyone, hadn't committed adultery, had always honored his parents. He was a respectful, well behaved, morally right, dignified person. He had good works, but what he didn't have was salvation.

Jesus saw that although he was a good person who no doubt was faithful to the synagogue every sabbath, his heart was given to other gods. He trusted in himself and his money rather than trusting in God.

Jesus told him that if he was to be perfect and have treasure in heaven, he would have to sell all he had and follow Him. Not because having money was wrong but rather because the Bible says thou shalt have no other Gods before me, and the rich man was serving himself and not God. He had to fully surrender to Christ and follow Him, then he would be saved.

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Then there is Nicodemus, whom we read about in John 3. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a man who lived by the law of man and taught others to do so. He lived a very strict life, was a good moral person, no doubt was admired by many. But what does Jesus say to Nicodemus when He comes to him?

John 3:3 KJV

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

The first words of Jesus to this man aren't "you are a good person, you will enter heaven."

He didn't tell him, "just keep going to church and paying your tithes and you will be okay."

Keep in mind, this isn't a drunkard, an adulterer, a liar, or a thief. This is a man who was very religious. Yet when Jesus sees him, the first thing he tells him is You must be born again!!!

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One of the most perverted scriptures is Ephesians 2:8-9 KJV

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

We are not saved by OUR works, or by our righteousness. The Bible says our righteousness is as filthy rags! Salvation is by repentance and faith in Christ. Believing in Him for your hope and salvation. Most people stop at verse 9 but let's look at verse 10.

Ephesians 2:10 KJV

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

We are not saved by OUR works, but when we are saved we become a new creature created to do HIS works.

What are His works? Everything in the word of God.

Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God(Luke 4).

Jesus said if Ye love me, keep my commandments(john 14:15).

We are saved by placing our faith in Christ(which is doing what God wants) and we stay that way by our obedience to His Word.

That's why James said I will show you my faith by my works. He wasn't implying that He was doing what he thought was right but rather that his faith in Christ was evidenced by His obedience to and total dependence upon Christ. He worked the works of Christ.

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Good to hear from you all, hope everybody is doing well. Love you all. goodnight.

**Re: - posted by Heydave (), on: 2014/9/2 4:23**

Sidewalk, I like what you have written and find myself agreeing with most all you wrote, but you did not address the questions. Yes truth can be perverted and used to justify ungodliness, but that was not the question, it was on what basis is salvation given?

TMK, Well what a daft statement! Of course God can save who He wants, but He has decreed that it can be 'one way' only! Only in Christ are we saved.

Matt, Great points and examples given. I like the example of Cornelius you gave. Here is an interesting principle that I see

repeated through the bible. That is, Cornelius was a devout man that sought God and looked for truth. Therefore God revealed to him the way of salvation. As you said, he had to come through the only way, which is repentance and faith in Christ as his saviour.

Man of God, Like what you wrote and I agree. In the passage about the Rich young ruler the follow up conversation between Jesus and His disciples is very telling! The disciples are astonished when Jesus said of that man "how hard it is for a rich man to enter the Kingdom" and they said "Who then can be saved?" Jesus said "With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible." In other words it takes a work of God to bring someone to abandon all to follow Christ. A work of God to produce the new birth. We cannot birth ourselves anymore than a baby can decide it will be born.

**Re: - posted by Christinyou (), on: 2014/9/2 4:37**

Quote: "" Can you be saved by good works and conscience?""

NO!

1 John 5:9-13 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

How do we believe? Colossians 1:25-29 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: (((((To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:)))))) Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

Only one perfection of righteousness and that is The Mystery. ((((( present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.)))))) This is Salvation, if God make you perfect you are perfect indeed as is our freedom, If Christ shall make you free you are free indeed.

Romans 7:24-25 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

The flesh is "slew" by the Law and dies and is dead, Praise God. The Soul/mind will and emotions by the Spirit of Christ in us is life eternal and praise God it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. I must die that He might live in me, when I am dead and weak He is Strong in me.

Praise God I am going to die soon and shed this flesh that wars against the Spirit that is in me.

In Christ: Phillip

**Re: , on: 2014/9/2 12:18**

I think it's clear that Nicodemus and the Rich Young ruler would have been saved if Jesus had not spoken to them. They both came to Jesus desiring more light. Jesus gave them more light. At that point, in hearing the prophetic word, if they would have rejected it, they would have sinned and could have been lost (edit: well one did reject as far as we know, the other didn't). Yet God is merciful and would chase after them, esp when the apostles were baptized at Pentecost and after.

â€œâ€œâ€œ If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.â€œ (John 15:22, NASB95)

Jesus saying "with God all things are possible" could be referring to the continual conviction on the rich young rulers heart to face up to the prophetic word given, otherwise he would continue in disobedience...

**Re: Can you be saved by good works and conscience?, on: 2014/9/2 12:57**

and also if you say we shouldn't share the gospel with anyone to spare them, that's not true entirely. I would say only share the gospel according to the Spirit's leading, as God knows what he is doing and how things will turn out. he can cover it with grace also if you just share it unled, but he actually knows what is going to happen if you obey him in sharing a word with someone, or not. and if he says "pass over" he also knows the future if/when he will bring that person to repentance or not, through some other person/circumstance, etc.

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (Ephesians 5:15-17, NASB95)

so you could just pray for that person, cry in your heart, and pass over him.

my thoughts

(btw i struggle with obeying myself. but I have come to be convinced by this perspective. wisdom without hypocrisy it says... sorry folks)

**Re: - posted by Heydave (), on: 2014/9/2 15:57**

Noah, I think you are a bit confused, well I am seriously confused about some of things you have written.

Do you seriously think that the Rich young ruler would be saved if Jesus had not spoken to him? You can't be serious! By your own reasoning, then Jesus got it wrong in speaking to him????

**Re: - posted by brothagary, on: 2014/9/2 16:05**

Thought i would share this well presented article

What About Those Who Never Hear The Gospel?

Romans 1:18-20

The subject for this morning is perhaps the most troubling question that Christians can face. The fate of those who never hear the gospel is both difficult and emotional. It's a tough question to think about because at its heart, it touches many people we know personally. Taken at its widest point, the question involves friends and neighbors who seem utterly resistant to any talk of spiritual things. They never come to church, they never read the Bible, they show no interest in learning more about Jesus Christ. And what about those millions of people in other lands who lack even the opportunity to say "No" to the gospel? The vision of millions—even billions—of people perishing in the fires of Hell is both awesome and terrifying. Is that vision right? Can it possibly be true? How can God allow such a thing to happen?

No wonder we are uneasy talking about this subject. No wonder we squirm whenever it comes up. Our head tells us one thing; our heart tells us another. On a subject as sensitive as this one, we desperately need to hear a clear word from God. The speculations of men will not suffice, not on something that involves the eternal destiny of over one-half of the world's population. Does the Bible offer any help in answering this question? What really happens to the people who die without ever hearing the gospel? Where do they go? How does God judge them?

Before we begin to answer that question, let's recast it in more personal terms.

The Man From Thailand



There's a man in Thailand, a rice farmer who lives about 85 miles outside of Bangkok. He lives with his wife and four children in a small village. Rice farming is all he has ever known. That's his whole life. From morning till night, year round, he works to grow enough rice to take care of his family. He's Buddhist like his father and grandfather before him. Although he's not educated, he knows enough to put slips of paper in the prayer wheel and he knows enough to go to the shrine and bring an offering for Buddha. That's the only religion he's ever known. Christianity is not even a word to him because no missionary has ever come to his village. When that man dies, will he go to Hell?

There is a student who has come to the University of Illinois from somewhere in Saudi Arabia. He's come to America to study economics and computer science. While he's here, he's learning the ways of capitalism. When he graduates, he's going back home where he will become a prosperous business man. He's going to sit at a computer terminal making deals all over the world. Before he's finished, he'll be a very wealthy man. But because he is a follower of Islam, five times a day, when the muezzin cries out, he will stop what he is doing, kneel with his face toward Mecca and say his prayers according to the Koran. He is a devout person, a moral person. He has many Christian friends although he doesn't really understand Christianity. He knows who Jesus is because Jesus is in the Koran, but to him Jesus is just a great prophet—not the Son of God. When that man dies, will he go to Hell?

He was born in 1947 in another part of the country. His parents didn't have any religious faith. When the 60s came, he was right there in the middle of all the political turmoil. In fact, he was a flaming radical, calling for the overthrow of the government. Now he's 45 years old and he's not a flaming anything. He lives at 100 Forest Place in Oak Park. He's not a Marxist anymore, he's too old for that. He's become a grown-up Yuppie capitalist. And he's never been to church a day in his life. Jesus to him is what Jimmy Swaggart talks about on TV. Each day he gets up, walks to the Lake Street El, and rides down to his job in the Loop. He's never, ever, not even one time, thought about that big stone church next door to him. He doesn't have any idea what they do there. And he doesn't care. When that man dies, will he go to Hell?

It's a good question, a hard question, and one that thoughtful Christians have pondered for generations. Just think about the numbers. The demographers tell us that the world population is now well over 5 billion people. If you take the most optimistic projections, there may be 1.6 billion Christians of all stripes and varieties. But that leaves 3.4 billion people who aren't Christians by any possible definition. They are Hindus, Buddhists, animists, followers of Confucius, or Muslims, or Jews, or secularists, or atheists, or simply nothing at all. What happens to them?

But let's focus the question even more. The missiologists tell us that of those 3.4 billion people who are not Christians, at least 2 billion of them are beyond the effective reach of any gospel message. Perhaps there is no broadcast in their language, or no Bible for them to read, or perhaps missionaries have never penetrated their culture, or no indigenous church exists in their people group. Think of it. Two billion people beyond the reach of the gospel—and this after 2000 years of Christianity. Thousands of those two billion die every day. What happens to them? Do they go to Hell?

Let me make one brief clarification. I am not talking about the case of those who hear the gospel and then for reasons of their own decide to say No to Jesus Christ. I presume we're all agreed that in such cases the person who deliberately says No to Jesus Christ goes to Hell. Furthermore, I am not speaking of children who die in infancy or those who are so mentally deficient that they are unable to believe. I presume we believe that such cases are covered by the grace of God. Our focus is much narrower: What happens to those who never hear a clear presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ? What happens to them?

### The Critical Question

That brings me to the critical question, which might be put this way: How can God send someone to Hell for not believing in Jesus, when that person has never heard of Him? My comment to that question is that it does seem unfair for God to do that. If a person has never heard of Jesus, what chance has he had to accept him or reject him? And if he's never had the chance, how can God judge him for rejecting Jesus? That doesn't sound right or fair. Would God really do a thing like that?

Before we go any further, let's isolate the key issue. We're talking about the "heathen" who never even hear the gospel. They may live in Thailand or Brazil or the Ukraine or Singapore. They may be young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, educated or illiterate. But they have one thing in common: They've never heard a clear presentation of the gospel. Here's the key issue: Are such people basically innocent in God's eyes or are they basically guilty

? Think carefully before you answer because your answer will eventually lead you back to the larger question. When you look at the teeming masses of the world wholly apart from the gospel, the Bible or Christianity in general, are they innocent or guilty in the eyes of God?

If we can get a clear answer to that question, we can get a firm grasp on the larger question—What about those who never hear the gospel? Romans 1:18-20 touches the key issue we must face. It tells us how God views the people of the world—including those who never hear the gospel.

## I. The Wrath of God on Sin 18a

The passage begins with a word that sounds strange and even unnatural to our ears. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven.” It’s the word “wrath” that grabs our attention. We’re accustomed to hearing about the love of God. We know about the grace of God. We sing about the mercy of God. We extol the glory of God. We ponder the holiness of God. But the wrath of God? We hardly ever mention it. There aren’t many hymns about God’s wrath. We’d much rather sing “Jesus loves me, this I know.” But you can’t read Romans 1 without coming face to face with the wrath of God.

When we think of wrath, we get the picture of an angry schoolteacher punishing her students or we think of an old man in heaven laughing as he throws thunderbolts down from heaven. But such images are far from the truth. The word translated wrath is the Greek word *orge*. It’s not the word used for a sudden angry outburst. Rather, the word refers to a settled hostility that remains constant over a long period of time. Here’s a working definition: God’s wrath is his settled hostility to everything that contradicts his holiness. As long as God is God, he cannot overlook sin. As long as God is God, he cannot stand by indifferently while his creation is destroyed. As long as God is God, he cannot dismiss lightly those who trample his holy will. As long as God is God, he cannot wink when men mock his name.

Verse 18 adds a crucial fact at this point: God’s wrath is revealed in response to man’s rejection of the truth. “Revealed” is in the present tense because it describes something that is always going on. The problem doesn’t start with God; it starts with man. Man rejects and God responds. It’s not as if he’s in heaven looking for people he can send to Hell. Such a view of God would be a monstrosity. But it is also true that our God will

not overlook sin. He won’t wink at it, laugh at it, or pretend it never happened. God’s wrath is always being revealed from heaven against those who mock his name and reject his truth. That’s a timeless truth that is fulfilled in every generation.

## II. The Rejection of Truth by Man 18b

Paul continues his indictment of the human race by saying that God’s wrath is revealed from heaven against all those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness and wickedness. The key word is “suppress.” It’s a word that means to deliberately reject the truth in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. This is an exceedingly strong statement. Paul here charges the entire human race with deliberately, willfully and knowingly turning away from God.

Let me say that in an even stronger fashion. In Paul’s theology everyone suppresses the truth about God to a greater or lesser extent. Unless that point be fully grasped, this passage loses its force. Paul is moving toward the conclusion in verse 20 that everyone in the world is “without excuse.” But that conclusion cannot stand unless everyone is guilty of some sort of deliberate disobedience. Note the order of Paul’s thinking:

- A. Men by nature suppress the truth about God.
- B. That suppression leads to ungodliness.
- C. Ungodliness leads on to wickedness.

The upshot is that Paul is teaching that moral perversion comes from perversion in faith. Or to say it another way, apostasy in doctrine leads eventually to apostasy in lifestyle. What you believe is how you live. And once you decide to turn y



our back on God, the end result is a river of wickedness flowing out of your life. The only thing damming that river is the constraint of your own conscience or the constraint of circumstances. Left to himself man always turns to wickedness. All ways. There are no exceptions.

Notice how it happens: First men reject the truth about God, then they turn away from God, then they turn to immorality. And the shocking truth is that this goes on all the time. Every baby born into this world comes in with a disposition that turns him away from the truth. Each man, each woman, the educated and the illiterate alike, all by nature suppress the truth about God. Left to your own devices, you will always turn to wickedness.

That's why "suppress" is in the present tense. Men by nature always and in every case suppress the truth about God. That's how you can have mass murderers who used to attend Sunday School and prostitutes who once sang in the church choir. This is true in every generation and every culture. It ultimately includes every individual on earth. All of us suppress the truth about God. All of us when left to ourselves will turn to wickedness. As hard as that may be for you to accept, it is exactly what the Apostle Paul is teaching.

But that raises one question: What is the "truth about God" that all men suppress? What truth is so universally obvious that everyone knows it? Paul answers that question in verses 19-20.

### III. The Revelation of God in Nature 19-20

As these verses make clear, there is a revelation of God in nature that every man sees and knows. It is clear enough so that no one can miss it and universal enough so that no one can claim to be ignorant of it. Nature reveals God in such a unmistakable way that even the most backward pygmy cannot fail to grasp its basic message. Paul basically says three things about the nature of this revelation of God in nature:

#### A. This Revelation is Clearly Seen. 19-20

Verse 19 says it two different times: "Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them." Then verse 20 says it again: "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen." There is something about God—a deposit of truth, if you will—which God has made so plain that no one can miss it. When Paul twice says that it is "plain to them," he is referring to the impact on the human conscience. Not only is the revelation clearly seen, but that revelation of God in nature impacts the human conscience. Men know there is a God because their conscience tells them so.

#### B. This Revelation is Always Available. 20a

In verse 20 Paul takes his argument a step farther. This plainly-seen revelation of God in nature has been available "since the creation of the world." That means Adam saw it, Cain saw it, Noah saw it, Abraham saw it, Jacob saw it, Moses saw it, David saw it, and every other person who has ever lived since the beginning of time saw it. Don't miss this point. It has massive implications for the question of whether the people of the world are innocent or guilty before God. Everyone knows something about God! No one has ever lived who missed this revelation. It doesn't matter whether they consciously thought about it or not. The truth was there for all to see, so plainly laid out that no one could miss it. That means it doesn't matter whether you were a headhunter on some South Pacific island or an upscale yuppie in downtown Chicago. No one could miss the truth about God—and no one has ever missed it because God made the truth about himself as plain as day.

#### C. This Revelation is Both Known and Understood. 20b

Now the noose gets a little tighter. In the second half of verse 20 Paul comments that the truth of God in nature has been "clearly seen, being understood from what has been made." Those two verbs are exceedingly important. "Clearly seen" means that everyone has seen something of God's handiwork in the world. "Understood" is even stronger. It means that the revelation of God in nature strikes the heart of every man. Please understand that Paul is not suggesting that nature contains a revelation about God which every man may see. That's not strong enough. To the contrary, Paul is saying that every man actually sees the revelation and every man actually understands it to some degree. Douglas Moo offers this explanation of the meaning of the Greek word translated "understood":

The reality and basic character of God are known to men because they "perceive" Him through the things He has made. How universal is this perception? The flow of Paul's argument makes any limitation impossible. Those who perceive the attributes of God in creation must be the same as those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness and are therefore liable to the wrath of God. (Romans 1-8, pp. 100-101)

The point is clear: Something about God "gets through" to every person. No one can ever say, "I didn't know" or "You didn't make it clear," because God made it abundantly and overwhelmingly clear. To summarize:

1. The truth about God is clearly seen in creation.
2. That truth is available to every person.
3. That truth "gets through" to every person.

That explains why every culture on earth has some conception of a Supreme Being—however flawed it might be. Man was made to look for answers outside of himself. He is incurably religious in that sense. The French philosopher, Pascal, said that inside the heart of every man there is a "God-shaped vacuum." And Augustine said, "Lord, you have made us for yourself. Our hearts are restless until they find rest in you." Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God has put "eternity in the hearts of men," meaning that the longing for ultimate answers comes from God himself. God put that longing (the "God-shaped vacuum") inside the human heart to cause men to look to him.

That explains why atheism has never commanded the interest of a wide circle of people. Atheism is the most unnatural philosophy on the face of the earth. Idolatry is more natural than atheism because at least the idolator acknowledges a higher power outside of himself. For a man to be an atheist he must not only deny the truth about God that he sees in nature, he must also deliberately and repeatedly suppress the truth about God found in his own conscience. As so many others have said, in the end it takes more faith not to believe in God.

Seventy-five years ago a vast revolution swept across Russia, a revolution founded on the view of Karl Marx that religion was the opium of the masses—a drug to which fools turned because they couldn't face life on their own. For most of this century the communists did all they could to stamp the very idea of God out of public life in Russia. They confiscated the churches, closed the cathedrals, persecuted the pastors, and co-opted the priests. In St. Petersburg they turned the huge Kazan Cathedral into a Museum of Religion and Atheism. Three generations grew up learning that God did not exist and that religion was a blight on the face of the earth. But now the truth can be told. Throughout all their hardships, the Russian people maintained their bedrock faith in God. The true believers never gave up their faith, even in the darkest of hours. I have seen with my own eyes how the people of Russia are turning back to God! Now the schools are open to the preaching of the gospel, now the authorities are inviting Christians to minister in the hospitals and in the prisons. Now so many people want Bibles that it's hard to keep up with the demand.

Communism has fallen to the ash heap of history, but the gospel of Jesus Christ is stronger than ever. Why? How do you explain such a startling turn of events? 1. Atheism utterly failed to win the hearts of the people. Atheism is a negation, a purely negative philosophy of life. It has no power to move the hearts of men. 2. There is a hunger for God inside the human heart. When the communists tried to satisfy that hunger with the empty husk of atheism, it only increased the desire for the bread which comes down from heaven.

#### D. This Revelation Consists of Two Facts About God Every Person Knows. 20b

Only one question remains. Exactly what is it about God that is so clearly revealed in nature that no one can miss it? This is a crucial point in Paul's argument because his answer must apply to every person who ever lived. It must specifically apply to the "heathen" who never hears the gospel message. In answering that question, Paul says that there are two facts about God that every person knows.

1. There is an All-Powerful God Who Created the World.
2. That All-Powerful God is the Supreme Being of the

Universe.

Those two statements are a rough approximation of what Paul means when he mentions God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. His eternal power is evident in the magnitude and grandeur of creation. His divine nature may be seen from the variety and design of the world he made.

Do not miss the central point. You don't need the Bible to see and understand those things. You don't need to go to church to figure this out. You don't need the gospel to know there is a God who is the Supreme Being. These truths are so plainly revealed that the man in Thailand knows them even though no missionary has ever come his way. So does the Muslim student at the University of Illinois. So does the former 60s radical who walks by Calvary Memorial Church three times a week. These truths are so obvious that no one can miss them.

### Clues From My House

Let me illustrate. Suppose you were to visit my house while I was not there. How much could you learn about me and my family just by looking around? Well, the moment you walked in you might suspect we were from another part of the country because our living room has a southwestern flavor. If you noticed the painted egg from Russia and the mahogany from Haiti, you would know we have visited other countries. Although you might not know I was a pastor, you would certainly know I studied the Bible from seeing all the Bibles and commentaries strewn around the computer in the corner of our Dining Room. You would know someone at our house makes draperies because we've got a huge drapery table in the basement with fabric samples stacked up on the floor. When you went upstairs you would figure out that we have boys from looking at the baseball cards and the gloves and bats and balls. By counting the beds you would figure out that we probably have three boys. And if you looked for girls' clothing you wouldn't find any. But if you looked in my closet, you'd discover I'm tall just by looking at my suits.

There's a lot more a careful observer could discover about the Pritchard family just by rummaging around through our drawers and bookshelves. In the end, you'd know a lot about me although you wouldn't know me personally. The clues are everywhere for those who care to look.

This world is God's house. He's left clues everywhere about what kind of God he is. When you stand at the Grand Canyon, you can't help but be overwhelmed at the mighty power of God to create such magnificence. He must have had a mighty hand to scoop out the Royal Gorge in Colorado. He is as infinite as the dark recesses of the mighty Atlantic Ocean. Each snowflake testifies to his uniqueness. The changing colors of the Great Smoky Mountains proclaim his creativity.

The galaxies shout out, "He is there." The wildflowers sing together, "He is there." The rippling brooks join in, "He is there." The birds sing it, the lions roar it, the fish write it in the oceans—"He is there." All creation joins to sing his praise. The heavens declare it, the earth repeats it and the wind whispers it—"He is there." Deep cries out to deep, the mighty sequoia tells it to the eagle who soars overhead, the lamb and the wolf agree on this one thing—"He is there."

No one can miss the message. God has left his fingerprints all over this world. Truly, "This is my Father's world," and every rock, every twig, every river and every mountain bears his signature. He signed his name to everything he made. The earth is marked "Made By God" in letters so big that no one fails to see it.

### How Great Thou Art!

The words of the hymn made famous by George Beverly Shea say it well:

O Lord, My God, When I in awesome wonder

Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made;

I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,

Thy power throughout the universe displayed!  
When through the woods and forest glades I wander,  
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees,  
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,  
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze,  
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!  
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;  
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

To be more specific, there are three things every person can know just by studying creation:

1. The world as it stands didn't happen by chance or accident.
2. It must have been created by a Supreme Being.
3. He must have been a God of power, wisdom, order, design, and infinite creativity.

Only one more point remains. If everyone knows the truth about God, and if everyone suppresses the truth they know from nature, where does that leave the human race?

#### E. This Universal Revelation of God in Nature Leaves Everyone Without Excuse. 20d

Paul's conclusion is simple indeed: The whole world is "without excuse." It is impossible to imagine a more complete condemnation of the human race. The indictment is so complete that it allows for no exceptions, no special cases. Everyone knows God through creation. Everyone suppresses the truth about God. Everyone is therefore without excuse. And that is why everyone stands under the wrath of God.

These words are trans-cultural and trans-generational. They are as true of the 20th-century materialist as they were of the 1st-century pagan. They are true of the Chicago yuppie and of the spear-chucking headhunter in some remote African village. What is true of one is true of the other. Both have known the truth of God. Both have suppressed that truth. Both are guilty before God. Both are under the wrath of God. Both stand in desperate need of the salvation provided in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Just in case anyone misses the point, let me state the teaching of this passage very plainly:

1. There is a universal revelation of God in nature which is universally rejected by mankind.
2. That universal rejection of truth by man leaves the human race without excuse before God.
3. The whole human race is therefore under the wrath of God, facing ultimate condemnation and eternal death in

Hell.

That, I think, brings us face to face with the key issue in this discussion. Are the people of the world (especially those who have never heard the gospel) basically innocent or basically guilty before God? Paul's answer is that they are basically guilty of rejecting the truth of God in creation. His words admit of no exceptions whatsoever.

Remember, if you take these words of Paul literally, you don't need to know the Bible in order to be condemned. You don't need to go to church or hear a gospel sermon or read the Four Spiritual Laws. You don't have to say No to Jesus Christ in order to be lost. Even though you never heard a sermon, or watched Billy Graham, or read the Bible for yourself, you are already condemned by rejecting the truth of God which has been revealed to all men.

Robert Mounce offers this helpful summary of the biblical teaching (Themes From Romans, p.12):

No one is excluded. No one can get away with saying, "I don't believe in God." As someone has said, "You can't turn out the light by closing your eyes." The heathen who has never heard the gospel or the name of Jesus is as responsible as anyone else. Not for failing to accept a message he has never heard, but for rejecting the knowledge of God revealed in creation. People do not suffer eternal exclusion from God for not having been born to the right parents in the right part of the world, but for rejecting that knowledge of God which is readily available for all. (Italics mine)

### The Critical Question

That brings us back to the ultimate question: How can God send someone to Hell for not believing in Jesus, when that person has never even heard of him? We introduced this question with the comment that it doesn't seem fair for God to do a thing like that. We are now in a position to state the matter in a stronger fashion. We can flatly say that it wouldn't be fair for God to do something like that. We know that God is a God of justice and righteousness. For him to send people to Hell for rejecting Jesus when they've never heard of him would be a miscarriage of justice on a scale that staggers the mind.

The key phrase is "for rejecting Jesus." The biblical teaching is explicit on this point. People don't go to Hell simply for rejecting Jesus; people go to Hell because they are sinners. Not believing in Jesus simply seals their fate. Romans 1:18-20 is telling us that the whole world is guilty before God wholly apart from the gospel of Christ. That means there is no such thing as a truly "innocent" person or a truly "innocent" heathen. People aren't innocent before God; they are morally guilty of rejecting the truth about God. When people who have never heard the gospel die, their eternal fate is not determined by whether or not they rejected Jesus. You can't reject a person you never knew in the first place. Let us say it again: People go to Hell because they are sinners, not because they are unbelievers. Refusing to believe in Jesus simply seals their fate.

### The Cancer of Sin

Perhaps an illustration can make this point clear. Let's suppose that our mythical farmer in Thailand gets sick and goes to the local doctor. After running some tests, the doctor comes to the farmer and says, "I've got some bad news. You've contracted incurable cancer. There's no treatment available that can help you." Let's also suppose that on the very same day researchers at the University of Chicago discover a cure of the precise kind of cancer that his man has. But the man knows nothing about the researchers and they know nothing about him. What will happen to that man in Thailand? In a few months he will be dead. Why did he die? He died because he had cancer, not because he didn't get the cure. Not getting the cure simply sealed his fate.

In the very same way, the whole world is dying of the cancer of sin. Some people are in very advanced stages while others will live for many more years. But all of them are ultimately terminal: The cancer of sin will kill each and every person. But a cure for sin was discovered 2000 years ago. It's called the blood of Jesus Christ. It's so powerful that it cures the cancer of sin in all its ugly forms. The sad part about this story is that even though the cure has been known for 2000 years, there are still over 2 billion people who know nothing about it. What's worse, most of them don't even know they are terminally ill with the cancer of sin. They're dying, and don't know it. When they die, what will be

the cause of their spiritual death? In each and every case the great Coroner of the Universe will write on the death certificate "Cancer of Sin." They don't die because they've never heard the gospel. They die because they are sick with sin. Not hearing the gospel simply seals their fate.

### Three Sobering Conclusions

That leads me to wrap up this message with three sobering conclusions.

1. Since God has clearly revealed himself to all men, no one is truly innocent in his eyes.

This is the inescapable conclusion of Paul's logic. No one is truly innocent before God. All are guilty to a greater or lesser degree. All mankind stands on death row. It's certainly true that those who hear the gospel and reject it are infinitely more guilty before God than those who never hear it at all. Our God is not capricious in the way he deals with men. The most fundamental principle of judgment is that God judges according to the light men receive. Those who receive only the light of creation will receive much less punishment than those who saw and rejected the bright light of the gospel of Christ. But that principle cannot overturn the larger point—no one is innocent before God.

### Light Leads to the Gospel

Perhaps at this point a brief word should be added in answer to the question asked by many thoughtful people. "Isn't it possible that the man in Thailand could have responded to God, turned away from his idols, and sought to know the true God of creation? What happens to that man? Wouldn't God accept his sincere repentance based as it is on the light of creation he received?" Two points need to be made in response. First, it's not at all clear from Romans 1 that anyone actually fits into this category. The idea of the "God-seeking" heathen who worships a God he does not know does not seem to fit into Paul's theology at all. But for the sake of argument, let us grant that such a person does exist. That leads me to the second point. Whenever a person responds to the light he receives, God responds by sending him more light. Light received means more light. Light rejected brings only darkness. Those are universal spiritual truths. However, in the Bible whenever a person responded to the light given him, God always responded by sending a preacher of the gospel. Acts 8 (Stephen and the Ethiopian eunuch) and Acts 10 (Peter and Cornelius) offer two clear examples. There is not one single suggestion in the New Testament that anyone can ever be saved apart from the preaching of the gospel. It is not "repentance" in and of itself that God wants. It is "repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ." No one has the slightest biblical ground to suggest that God will accept people apart from personal faith in Christ.

Let me approach this from another angle. How much about God can you learn from creation? You can learn that he exists, that he is powerful, that he is wise, that he is the Supreme Being of the universe. But is that enough to save you? No! No one can be saved by studying nature or even by worshiping the God revealed in nature. They can only be damned. To put this in theological terms: Natural revelation cannot save anyone. It can only condemn. We need special revelation from God if we are going to heaven. That's why the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only hope for the world.

2. Since Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven, those who do not believe in him are lost forever.

Consider these familiar verses: Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me." (John 14:6) Peter said, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) Paul said, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." (I Corinthians 3:11) These are utterly exclusive claims for our Lord.

No other way

No other name

No other foundation

We have no right to water them down. Outside of Christ, there is no hope for the world. Outside of his name, no other name can save. We do the world no favor when we pretend that something else is true.

Therefore, we say with great sorrow and yet with deep biblical conviction, that those who do not believe in Jesus (whether or not they have ever heard of him) are lost forever.

3. Since the church was commanded to preach the gospel to every person, it is our own fault that after 2000 years, so many people have still never heard the Good News.

The discussion must eventually come back to our own responsibility. Many church members resist this point, preferring to endlessly argue about hypothetical cases. It's far easier to dream up reasons why the heathen aren't really lost than it is to face our own guilty consciences.

But if we were told to go, and then we didn't go, whose fault is it that millions die without Christ? You can't blame them for not hearing the message in the first place. The lost of the world are guilty of many things, but they aren't guilty of failing to hear the gospel. But the church of Jesus Christ is guilty before God of not taking the Great Commission seriously. We have sat by idly and let the world quite literally go to Hell. Then we theorize and speculate, hoping somehow that our theories will cover our guilt.

But God is not fooled by our speculations.

If What I Am Saying Is Not True

If what I am saying is not true, then Fred Stettler has wasted his life in Switzerland. If what I am saying is not true, then Dave Fox ought to come home from Guatemala. If what I am saying is not true, then Bob and Amber Leland were fools to go to Irian Jaya. If what I am saying is not true, then Dr. Aletta Bell should have stayed in America and made big money instead of working for peanuts in some hospital in India. If what I am saying is not true, then Eva Lodgaard has spent 45 years in the mountains of Kentucky for nothing.

If what I am saying is not true, then why in God's name did we let Sharon Dix go to Nepal last October? If there was some other hope for the people of Nepal, then why didn't we stop her? Sharon going to Nepal only makes sense if Jesus Christ is truly the only way to heaven. If what I am saying is not true, then why is April Jahns going to the hot desert sands of Niger this summer? Why give up a promising career to go to a godforsaken place like Galmi? It doesn't make sense if the people of Niger are okay just the way they are.

But if what I am saying is true, then the question is not, Why is April Jahns going to Niger? The real question is, Why are we staying here?

A Damnable Heresy

They tell us that universalism is gaining ground, even in evangelical circles. It's true. You read more and more articles in Christianity Today speculating on possible ways that people can be saved without hearing the gospel of Christ. But the teaching that men can be saved without believing the gospel is a damnable heresy. Damnable because though well-intentioned, it drains the church of its missionary zeal. Why should we ask our young people to lay down their lives for the gospel in some faraway land if there is even the slightest possibility that they can be saved without the gospel? I have read some of the arguments that proponents of the "more light" view like to make. It's pitiful to read their attempts to save the missionary enterprise while holding out hope that men can be saved without hearing the gospel. All I can say is that after reading their arguments, if I believed what they believe, it wouldn't inspire me to go across the street, much less to the ends of the earth.

Universalism in all its insidious forms is a deadly enemy of the gospel. Where it is believed, the missionary enterprise eventually grinds to a halt.

The Unanswerable Argument

I come at last to my final argument. I realize that some people will not be persuaded by the things I have said. For various reasons, they simply find it impossible to believe that millions and even billions of people are going to Hell. The thought



is so terrible, so horrifying, the specter so awful, that they resist that conclusion with all their might. If you fall into that camp, let me offer the one argument that to me is unanswerable:

If there really is some other way of salvation, then why did God send his Son to the earth? Few of us could understand deliberately offering up one of our children to die for the benefit of others. Who among us could ever conceive of offering up one of our children when there was some other way? But if there was some other way of salvation, then the death of Christ was the greatest tragedy in world history. More than that, it was an act of monstrous cruelty if there really was another way of salvation. In that case, God is not a God of love but a creature of monstrous evil. What else can you say about a God who would let his own Son die in vain?

But thank God, it is not true. There was no other way of salvation. From the bleeding heights of Calvary comes a message for the whole world: "It is finished." The work of salvation is complete. Nothing more needs to be done. Jesus has done the work. There is nothing left but to believe on his name and be saved.

I come now to my final few sentences. Since I know what I have said is considered controversial by some people, I do not ask you to take my word on such an important issue. Study the Scriptures for yourself. Ponder what God has said about the people of the world. Ask yourself, Is this really true? Then pray this prayer: "Lord, if it's true, what should I do?"

#### Additional Resources

Many other writers have considered this subject over the years. Listed below are some of the books I found especially helpful in preparing this message. R.C. Sproul has a very good treatment, as does David DeWitt. Although I do not endorse all his conclusions, Sir Norman Anderson has given us a great deal of helpful material on the various world religions and their relationship to Christ.

#### **Re: - posted by Heydave (), on: 2014/9/2 16:50**

Gary, that's a good article. I particularly liked the paragraph on more light, so I have copied that here in case the full article is a bit long for some.

#### Light Leads to the Gospel

Perhaps at this point a brief word should be added in answer to the question asked by many thoughtful people. "Isn't it possible that the man in Thailand could have responded to God, turned away from his idols, and sought to know the true God of creation? What happens to that man? Wouldn't God accept his sincere repentance based as it is on the light of creation he received?" Two points need to be made in response. First, it's not at all clear from Romans 1 that anyone actually fits into this category. The idea of the "God-seeking" heathen who worships a God he does not know does not seem to fit into Paul's theology at all. But for the sake of argument, let us grant that such a person does exist. That leads me to the second point. Whenever a person responds to the light he receives, God responds by sending him more light. Light received means more light. Light rejected brings only darkness. Those are universal spiritual truths. However, in the Bible whenever a person responded to the light given him, God always responded by sending a preacher of the gospel. Acts 8 (Stephen and the Ethiopian eunuch) and Acts 10 (Peter and Cornelius) offer two clear examples. There is not one single suggestion in the New Testament that anyone can ever be saved apart from the preaching of the gospel. It is not "repentance" in and of itself that God wants. It is "repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ." No one has the slightest biblical ground to suggest that God will accept people apart from personal faith in Christ.

**Re: , on: 2014/9/2 18:19**

Yes the rich young ruler was doing just fine, obeying all the ten commandments to the best of his knowledge. but being so blessed for doing good, he saw Jesus and his ministry and wanted more of God. well here comes the axe... or sword "sell all you possess and come follow me". God saying "I want more of you!"

Are you prepared to do whatever God is commanding you right now? I mean if you really opened up yourself to whatever God's will is, you'd be surprised how much he will want to lead you to do. lets talk about acts of faith and turn to Hebrews 11 shall we...

better to just pray and put your money in with bankers until you have the baptism in the holy spirit to go out and do God's will. Jesus ministry was only 10% of his life, yet so effective. extreme faithfulness and taking the cross

**Re: , on: 2014/9/2 18:48**

I want to bow out of both these threads. I'm just basically throwing around ideas that I've sought to understand. I really just want to pray and seek the Lord for him to heal me and bless me spiritually. God bless

Noah

**Re: - posted by mattf12486, on: 2014/9/2 20:55**

Brother, I would ask that you study the passage on the rich young ruler further. The rich young ruler was not obeying the commandments, because he didn't love God more than his money.

Question: "Why did Jesus tell the rich young ruler he could be saved by obeying the commandments?"

Answer: To understand Jesus's response to the rich young ruler's question "What must I do to be saved?" we must consider three things: the nature of the rich young ruler, the purpose of his question, and the essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ. At first glance, it appears that Jesus is saying that the young man, and by extension all people, must obey the commandments in order to be saved. But is that really what He was saying? Since the essence of the salvation message is that we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), why would Jesus offer the rich young ruler an "alternative plan"?

The story of the rich young ruler is found in all three of the synoptic Gospels, Matthew 19:16-23, Mark 10:17-22 and Luke 18:18-23. The man is described as a "ruler" which means a prince or magistrate of some sort. Since no Roman ruler would address Jesus as "teacher" or "master" it is assumed that this man was a ruler in the local synagogue. This man had "great wealth" (Luke 18:23), and the impact of wealth is the lesson Jesus was teaching to His disciples. He was using this man as an example of the corrupting power of riches and its detrimental effect on the desire for eternal life. The fact that the man was young (Matthew 19:20) and already wealthy would seem to indicate that he had enjoyed a life of riches and ease and had become accustomed to it. When he comes to Jesus asking about eternal life, Jesus uses the opportunity to teach about money, not about salvation by works.

The first thing Jesus says to the man's greeting "Good teacher," is to remind him that no one is good except God. Jesus was not denying His own divinity. Rather, He saw beneath the flattery to the man's heart which was self-seeking and self-promoting. He was attempting to curry favor with Jesus by falling on his knees before Him (Mark 10:17), complimenting Him, and ascribing to Him a divine attribute he never really believed Jesus possessed. Perhaps realizing his hypocrisy was perceived by Jesus, the man ignored His question, "why do you call me good? Only God is good." Jesus, knowing the man's heart and his self-righteousness, recited some of the Ten Commandments and told the man to obey them. This was not a refutation of His earlier teachings on salvation by faith. Jesus said this, no doubt, to try him and to convince him that he had by no means kept the commandments, and that in supposing he had he was deceiving himself. At this point, Jesus said the one thing that, knowing the man's heart, would convince him that he was, after all, a wretched sinner in desperate need of salvation. Jesus points out the young man's weak spot, his wealth.

The man's heart condition was made poignantly clear by Jesus's command that the man sell all and follow Him. His face fell and he went away sad because he could never part with his great wealth, not even in exchange for eternal life. By claiming he had kept the Law, the man was declaring that he had obeyed the first commandment to love the Lord supremely and above all things, including wealth. He was also saying he loved his neighbor more than himself. But if he loved God and fellow-creatures more than he did his property, he would be willing to give up his wealth to the service of

God and of man. But that was not the case. He had made an idol of his wealth and loved it more than God. He had not kept the commandments from his youth, nor had he kept them at all. He rejected even this last opportunity to do good with his treasures and seek his salvation by obeying God, choosing to turn away from the Savior and not renew his inquiry about eternal life. He probably never returned.

By His words to the rich young ruler, Christ did not mean to say that any man would be saved by the works of the law, for the Bible teaches plainly that such will not be the case (Romans 3:20, 28, 4:6; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:9; 2 Timothy 1:9). Rather, he was using the man's wealth which had corrupted his heart, as an example to the disciples and us.

Read more: <http://www.gotquestions.org/rich-young-ruler>.

**Re: - posted by ManOfG0d (), on: 2014/9/2 21:21**

NoahJD, are you having a good night? I just got off a long shift at work, but it has been a great day.

I have a question for you. When the young rich man went to Jesus what was the first thing he said?

Matthew 19:16 KJV

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

Do you know why he asked what good thing he could do to inherit eternal life? It was because He knew he that he didn't have it!! When Jesus told him what he had to do in order to have eternal life (be saved) he rejected the word of Lord.

He was not doing fine, he was living in Idolatry, and when Jesus confronted him about his condition, he turned his back on Him. This is not someone that is blessed but rather a self righteous religious person that did not accept the gospel. This is someone that is not saved, but rather deceived that they will be accepted by God because of the good that they have done and hoping it will outweigh the bad.

Our righteousness is as filthy rags. Isaiah 64:6.

Matthew 5:20 KJV

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Philippians 3:8-9 KJV

Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

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Hope everyone is doing well, love you all. God bless.

**Re: - posted by brothagary, on: 2014/9/3 0:58**

That article that i posted was from keep believing ministry's